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VOL. III, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

September, 1932

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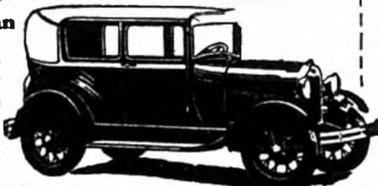
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The Devil from



Thrills and Excitement in a Perilous

CHAPTER I

Escape

THE hot, sultry night air, with its heavy blanket of humidity settling down over St. Laurent du Marino, was suddenly broken by a tower of white lightning, breaking somewhere in the darkness overhead and sending darting, grotesque flashes of white in every direction.

For a brief second the squalid water front was lighted with the brilliancy of a noonday sun. Then darkness came and after the dark-

ness, thunder, ear-splitting thunder that roared and then lost its echoes in the dark jungles behind the town.

And then the *chubasco*, the fierce squall that breaks over French Guiana without warning, descended upon the town.

Jim Conklin had turned off the Rue de Grasse and had started for the water front, where his motor launch was moored, when the storm hit. He had no illusions about the fury of a *chubasco*; neither had he any illusions about the urgent necessity to get out of St. Laurent du Marino, the cesspool of Devil's Is-

A Complete Book-Length Novel

Devil's Island



Attempt at Escape from a Living Death!

land, where the *libres* from Devil's Island, the world's worst penal colony, roamed the streets, broken creatures, inhumanly degraded, physically and mentally, most of them, with the soul of the damned, trying hopelessly to claw a bare existence out of nothing, condemned to die a slow, terrible death of starvation and mental disintegration.

A week before Jim Conklin had arrived in St. Laurent du Marino. He had been commissioned by a large lumber concern to go far into the interior of French Guiana for a survey of the great mahogany

forests, with the possibility of developing these limitless tracts of rare wood.

The north coast of South America—Venezuela, Colombia, British Guiana and Ecuador, was not new to Conklin. For five years he had gone far inland in these countries, making surveys and gathering engineering and industrial data. He knew the dangers that lurked in such expeditions.

But this had been the first time he had wandered into French Guiana. He had been prepared for certain things, but for nothing like he saw

by **GEORGE ALLAN MOFFATT**

in St. Laurent. He had heard of the *libres*, the poor devils who have served their time on Devil's Island and then are turned loose on the mainland to grub for such living as they can steal or beg. He had heard of these pathetic creatures, but he had no idea that they would be there by the thousands.

And because they were, he realized that unless he got back to his camp, which was ten miles down the Marino River, there would be little left of his supplies or his Indian guides and helpers.

Three hours in St. Laurent du Marino gave him that information. The governor of the town, Colonel Le Duc, had told him of the dangers in establishing a camp within ten miles of the town, that the *libres*, starving and desperate, wandered, at will, in the swampy forests and through the outskirts of the jungles, looking for food or anything they could steal; and it wouldn't be long until it was known that his camp was close by, and in a very short time there would be nothing left of his supplies unless he was there to protect them.

BUT now the *chubasco* had come and there would be no chance to get down the river in his launch until the storm had passed.

The storm increased in its fury. Conklin ran across the open ground from Rue De Grasse to an old warehouse, near which his launch was moored. He got to the warehouse, with his clothes, his hair and his body drenched and soaked.

There were no sides to the building, only a rickety roof that threatened to go up in the air with the force of the wind. Standing in the center of the warehouse, Conklin was free from the rain.

He struggled to light a cigarette.

The wind blew out match after match, but finally he succeeded. Outside, towering flashes of lightning continued to emblazon the water front; but after the lightning came the Stygian-like darkness. The thunder roared and rent the air; the wind drove the rain against the shed with a relentless fury.

With each flash he could see around him bales of cotton and boxes and around these human forms, shuddering helplessly, groveled on the floor in fear and trembling.

Helpless, desperate creatures, the scum of the world's criminal class, cast out by France to die a slow, certain death in this God-forsaken hole of the world.

CONKLIN looked to the north. Not many miles away was the famed Devil's Island, and its companion islands. He knew that on a clear day, the dark, gray shores of that sinister place could be seen by the mainland.

The thought of it made him shudder a little. He was accustomed to brutality and cruelty, but this got on his nerves.

Then he turned his thoughts to the possibility of getting down the river in the storm. He had left the camp in charge of five Escumarca Indians. At the first sight of marauding *libres* the Indians would flee, for the Escumarca Indian, having seen the depths to which the outcast men would go for food and lust, shunned them as if they were the most poisonous of snakes.

The storm continued in its fury.

His cigarette went out. A gust of wind blew it from his mouth. He did not try to light another. His body was chilled with the soaked clothes and the cutting wind. Heat and cold were the two extremes in the tropics. He shivered and tried

to put his coat collar up, but that did little good.

Then came a blinding flash of lightning. It seemed that the heavens had opened up and flooded the water and the land with a dazzling brilliancy.

In front of him was the small harbor, with its white-capped waves, lurching and heaving with the wind; to his right was the mouth of the black Marino River, gaping and forbidding, its dark waters rolling ominously.

THE lightning continued. It did not pass as did the other flashes. Conklin looked out into the harbor again.

He saw something bobbing up and down on a white-capped wave. It was a canoe, a sixteen-foot, native canoe.

The lightning died away and darkness followed and then came a clap of thunder that seemed to move the very earth he stood on.

A canoe out in the harbor in the storm! This fact puzzled Conklin. He knew the natives well enough to know that they could tell well in advance when a *chubasco* was about to break loose, and certainly no native would ever be caught out in the open sea during such a storm. It was almost certain death.

Another blinding flash of lightning came. Conklin saw the canoe again, and this time he saw something that made him run to the edge of the wharf and stare out in the harbor in amazement.

In that canoe was a woman. In that one passing flare of light he had seen her face, her waving hair, and her white arms working frantically back and forth.

She was not a native girl. His glance told him that much. She was a white girl and her canoe in

the second blaze of light was only a few feet away from the wharf.

The darkness that followed seemed to last endlessly to Conklin. The thunder roared and shook the warehouse. Then came another flash.

He saw the canoe riding on another white-capped wave. He saw the girl struggling to keep the canoe from going back out to sea; he saw her losing her battle.

Then darkness came and shut her off from view.

The singular battle in the storm puzzled him. He was accustomed to seeing strange things in those far-away holes of civilization, but a white girl battling for life in an open native canoe in the small harbor of St. Laurent du Marino was something different.

Suddenly he heard a piercing scream, a scream which rose above the noise of the rain and the wind.

Then the lightning flared again.

The girl was out in the water, struggling hopelessly to keep her head above the waves.

She was not alone. She was trying to hold someone up at her side.

Conklin waited no longer. With a leap he dove into the churning waters and headed straight for the spot where he had seen the girl.

He was an expert swimmer, but the waves brushed him back as if he were a straw. He dove down and tried swimming under water to break the force of the waves.

HE made some headway in this manner, and when he came to the surface, a flash of lightning lit the water all around him.

Not three feet away from him was the girl. Her right arm was around someone. Conklin could not make out if it were a man or a woman. The girl was trying desperately to swim with her left arm.

With two powerful strokes, he was at her side. The coal black darkness closed over him. A clap of thunder deafened him. Then the rain cut his face and the wind sent a wave over him and the girl and the person she was holding.

Conklin's right arm went around the girl's body.

"Float on your back," he yelled desperately. "Don't struggle. I can get you to shore."

The girl obeyed him without a word. She lay on her back and Conklin began the uphill fight against the waves to get her and the other person back to the wharf.

IT was a struggle that required almost superhuman strength. Twice Conklin's arms and body numbed and he felt himself slipping back out to sea. Each time, the girl, sensing the waning strength of Conklin, turned on her side and carried on the struggle, letting Conklin float on his back and gather his strength again.

It was a gruelling, silent, bitter struggle, but somehow Conklin reached shore, many yards below the old warehouse. He dragged himself and the girl and the man, for Conklin now knew that the third party was a man, on a low sandy beach, not far below where his motor launch was straining and lurching against the rope that held it to the moorings.

The storm had died down a little. The rain still fell, but it did not whip against Conklin's face with the fury of before; the lightning still blazed in the skies, but the thunder was not so loud or so deafening.

He stumbled up on the beach and fell on his stomach, exhausted and a little dazed. In the flashes of lightning he saw the face of the girl. That dazed him a little more.

She was young, still in her twenties, with a slim, graceful body. Her hair was a golden auburn; her face was finely featured and carried all the marks of breeding, culture and education. This much he saw in those passing flashes of light.

She looked at him with her eyes wide open and a little frightened. Her face was pale and her lower lip was quivering.

In the same light Conklin saw the man at her side. There was no mistaking what the man was. There was the gray-blue uniform of Devil's Island prison; there was the death-like pallor that comes to the face of all men in that hell-hole of death.

He was not a man, in the sense of age. He was young, not more than twenty-one or two; and his pale, lifeless face was thin and sensitive and highly intelligent.

As Conklin lay on the beach, trying to catch his breath and assemble a little strength in his body, his mind tried to work rapidly. But it didn't. He knew what he was faced with and the danger it carried to him.

The boy was an escaped convict from Devil's Island. Who the girl was remained a mystery; but there was no mystery as to what she was doing.

NO doubt she had started across the ocean from the island, hoping to strike the mainland at some spot and escape with the boy through the jungles; but the storm had carried them into the harbor at St. Laurent du Marino, into the very mouth of hell, for now there could be no hope of escape.

Conklin got to his feet. The rain had ceased falling and the wind was dying away mournfully in the dense foliage of the jungle. The lightning flashed weakly and no longer lighted

the darkness with any great brilliancy.

The girl was standing near him. Neither of them had said a word since landing on the beach.

It was dark now, and he could hear her deep breathing. On the ground near his feet he knew the boy still lay on his side.

He had no idea whether the girl was French or Spanish. It was improbable that she would be an American.

He spoke to her in English.

"I know it's a tough break for you," he said slowly. "It would have been better if the storm had carried you back to Devil's Island. This town is the hell-hole of the world, and you can't expect much mercy here. And you can't get away now."

The girl gave a sharp, dry laugh. There was bitterness and hatred behind that laugh.

"There's a motor launch up the shore a few yards." She spoke in perfect English. "You walk ahead of me and don't make any moves to turn around. I think you're an American and human, but that can't make any difference now. We're going down the Marino River in that launch."

Conklin felt the point of a revolver press against his ribs.

He knew from the tone of that voice that the finger on the trigger would move quickly if he disobeyed any part of that order.

CHAPTER II

A Night Attack

JIM CONKLIN stood still and felt the revolver press tighter and tighter against his ribs.

The girl said:

"You walk straight for the launch.

The lightning will guide us. We will bring up the rear."

Her voice was cool and collected. There was nothing hysterical, nothing frightened in the way she talked.

She added quietly:

"And if you make any funny moves, I'll have to pull the trigger. I have no other choice."

Conklin realized that very well, just as he realized that fate had thrown him into a mess loaded with about every danger he wished, just at that time, to avoid.

Assisting a prisoner to escape from Devil's Island wasn't looked upon by the French government in any favorable light.

In fact, it carried with it a very long prison sentence in itself, and Conklin was in French Guiana through the courtesy of the French and a move like this would not only land him in prison, but should he, by good luck and a great deal of money, escape the prison sentence, it would ruin his standing as an engineer and start him out on some other means of making a living.

It didn't take long for these thoughts to pass through his mind. He knew them without much mental effort; but what he didn't know was how he was going to get out of the mess.

THERE was no doubt in his mind that the girl, whoever she was, would pull that trigger in a second. Yet he was willing to take a chance on that, but even taking the chance carried with it some very embarrassing complications.

A pistol shot would bring the police down to the beach. The girl and her escaped convict friend would be caught and Conklin would have a great deal of explaining to do.

He could, however, explain things away easier than throwing his lot

with the girl. He might even get away without a shot being fired.

He took two steps forward. The revolver left his ribs. A flash of lightning darted across the skies; then darkness again.

Conklin stopped abruptly, threw his body to the right and went down on his hands and knees. Before the girl had time to move her gun or follow his form in the darkness, Conklin came up under her and the gun and the girl went down to the ground.

SORRY," Conklin said easily. "Damned sorry to have to do this, but you shouldn't put a gun in a man's ribs. It isn't a nice thing for a young girl to do."

He couldn't see the girl. His groping hand in the dark had found the gun.

For a moment only silence followed his words. Then came the low, subdued sobs somewhere down on the ground. The sobs continued and Conklin stood over the girl, feeling pretty much like a brute and a cad.

Then a form came crashing through the air and hit him. It was a feeble blow and Conklin's right went out and struck something. He knew it was the boy that had come through the darkness at him. He could still hear the sobs of the girl. She had not gotten up from the ground.

The boy staggered back from the effect of Conklin's blow. He gave a guttural curse and was at Conklin again. His weak body hit Conklin's side and then fell to the ground.

The girl said weakly from her position on the ground:

"It's no use, Paul. We can't fight any more."

There was a note of such utter despair in her voice that Conklin felt a heart wrench.

"The motor launch over there is mine," he said. "You can have it and go wherever you wish. I'll get down to camp some way. But you better hurry. And good luck to you."

The shrill, weird blast of a siren started far back in the town; it rose to a shrieking, uncanny pitch and then others followed. Searchlights sent their powerful rays out in the harbor. The shrieking of sirens increased until it seemed that the jungles and every part of the country around the town was filled with them.

Lights darted over the beach. Somewhere in the distance, far across the waters of the harbor, came the heavy booming of guns.

They were the guns from Devil's Island, sending out the alarm that a prisoner had escaped.

The beach was suddenly alive with voices of men running to and fro. The rays of a searchlight fell on Conklin.

He saw the girl standing near him, her face distorted with pain and terror. The boy was groveling on the ground like an insane person.

The girl looked at Conklin and said: "It's the alarm. We are too late."

"Yes, too late," Conklin replied hoarsely. "And it looks like I'm too late."

A BULLET clipped the sand at his feet. The searchlight remained on them. Voices were rushing down the beach. Another bullet cut the air to the right of the girl.

Conklin looked at the girl. Her lips moved slowly.

"Please—please believe in me and help me," she murmured. "Please help me."

Voices were near them. Another

searchlight had focused its blinding rays on them.

Conklin took one look at the body on the ground and then said to the girl:

"Get in my motor launch. I'll bring the boy along."

The girl disappeared in the darkness, running wildly for the launch. Conklin reached down and grabbed the boy around the waist and started after her.

But two forms broke out of the darkness and surrounded him. They were French gendarmes. One of them yelled: "*Halte!*"

THE other brought a long rifle down level with Conklin's heart.

Conklin had no chance to use his gun, and he wouldn't have used it had it been free. Shooting a gendarme was out of the question.

He dropped to his knees with the speed of a tiger. The boy went to the ground with him and Conklin shook his right arm free from the body.

All this had happened in the matter of a second, too rapidly for the gendarmes to grasp fully what Conklin had done.

Then Conklin caught the gendarme by the leg, pulled his feet out from under him and, lunging forward, crushed the man to the ground. Conklin raised up quickly and caught the second gendarme with a left upper-cut to the jaw.

The gendarme fell to the ground, face forward, with a muffled groan. The other got up in time to catch a right swing to the jaw and fell over the form lying on the ground and didn't as much as groan.

Conklin grabbed the boy's arms and pulled him after him. A bullet whizzed past Conklin's head, but he was in the darkness now and other bullets went over his head.

But the searchlight followed him. It fell on the launch. Conklin saw the girl standing up in the boat waving at them.

Conklin fell into the launch, pulling the boy over with him. Three forms came out of the darkness. Revolvers were leveled at him. Conklin pulled the girl down on her face and fell on the bottom of the boat with her. The three bullets cut the air above their heads.

Two dark forms came over the side of the boat. In the next second Conklin grappled with them. As he did, he was conscious that they were moving. The engine was roaring and he could feel the boat cutting the waves. He had no idea where they were going or who was behind the steering wheel.

And he had no time to find out.

A powerful pair of arms had him pinned down to the bottom of the launch. Near him someone else was struggling.

With a supreme lunge of his legs and his body, he broke the hold on him and he and the man rolled over and over. Conklin was powerful and tough and in trim condition, but he soon saw that he was grappling with a person possessing an equal amount of strength.

The beams of a searchlight flashed over the boat and behind him Conklin could hear the rapid chug of a powerful motor launch in pursuit.

HIS assailant caught him with a nasty left in the face. Conklin answered the blow with a paralyzing right to the man's stomach. The man groaned and his body went limp.

Conklin gave him no time to regain his strength. With a supreme effort, he raised the inert body high in the air and pushed it overboard.

Then he turned to meet the onrush of the second man that had

boarded the boat and had, apparently, been grappling with the boy. This chap was smaller and more easily handled.

Conklin caught him by the waist and in the next second he had followed his companion into the waters of the Marino River.

The motor launch was cutting through the water at top speed, going deeper and deeper into the dark and forbidding jungles without headlight or without anything to guide it.

Far in the rear the motor launch in pursuit was chugging away. Its bright headlight lighted the dense foliage along the Marino River. A few shots came from the boat, but it soon gave up the chase.

CONKLIN realized only too well why they gave up the chase. "Let a convict get in the jungles and he is lost," was a saying in St. Laurent that was only too true.

He went up to the front of the boat and took the steering wheel from the girl. He slowed the launch down a little and turned on the headlight.

In front of them the blackish water of the jungle river loomed sinister and uninviting; crocodiles flopped along the shores. A giant bird of some kind gave forth an eerie scream and the life of the jungle groaned and chirped and growled threateningly.

Conklin kept the boat in the middle of the river. Behind them were no sounds.

The girl sat by his side, huddled deeply in the seat. Many minutes passed and she said nothing. Conklin's mind was too occupied with certain conflicting thoughts to say anything. The boy lay at the bottom of the launch. He groaned a little now and then.

Finally the girl said:

"They are not following us any more?"

Conklin gave a hard laugh.

"No, they are not following us—now."

"But—but I don't understand. Why do they let us get away without following?"

Conklin turned and looked at the girl. The light from the dashboard reflected feebly on her. Conklin could see the perfect contour of her face; he could see the charming hair down over her back and shoulders in wild disorder. He could see the shape of her thin and graceful body.

Who was she? This thought crowded all other thoughts out of his mind. It seemed that he was in a dream, that the *chubasco*, the girl in the canoe, the fight with the gendarmes was all a strange dream. There was nothing real or possible about it.

The girl was too good-looking for reality in that hell-hole of civilization.

She laid her hand on his arm. Her voice was soft and tender.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Terribly sorry to have gotten you in this mess. And you came out to save my life in the harbor."

HER words and her action of touching his arm brought him back to bitter reality with a start.

"Perhaps I haven't saved it yet," he laughed.

"But why aren't they following us?" she questioned, turning around and looking behind.

"There are better ways of getting escaped convicts than chasing them in old-fashioned motor launches," Conklin said. "As long as we were headed for the jungle they didn't

worry—and I guess they haven't much reason to."

"Why? We are free from them."

He looked at her and smiled.

"Free?" he said hoarsely. "Free for what? Death? That's all we're free for. There isn't one chance in ten million that we'll ever get out of these damned jungles alive."

CHAPTER III

The Death Journey

CONKLIN'S camp was pitched in a small glade near the Marino River, near the junction where the Cunimarca River runs into the Marino.

The camp consisted of three tents, one built specially to be used as a sleeping place and an office for himself. The other two were for the natives and supplies.

The tents were back from the river, hidden from the water by giant mahogany trees. He had been in the jungles long enough to know the dangers of making camp along river banks.

It was close to eleven o'clock when Conklin's launch coasted up along the bank near his camp. He jumped out of the boat quickly, pulling the mooring rope with him.

The girl remained in the launch, working over the boy, whose face was cut and badly bruised from his feeble attempts to grapple with the gendarme. He was too weak to walk alone and she had to help him to shore.

The stifling humidity which always followed a storm in the jungles, pervaded everything. The night was dark. Low clouds swept across the skies and once in a while the rays of the hidden moon would break through the fleeing clouds and cast a bluish light over the rain-soaked foliage.

The reek of the drenched and decaying shore filled the air with a heavy and deadening smell. Water animals, crocodiles and huge snakes splashed in the river, and somewhere in the distance came the low screaming of a jaguar.

Conklin started up the path to his camp, without waiting for either of his new-found companions. The fact that he could see no light from the river caused him concern.

The camp was about fifty feet back from the river. He ran along the narrow little path and came to the two giant mahogany trees that stood over his tents.

All was dark and silent.

Conklin saw no tents, heard no sign of life.

He had a flashlight, taken from his launch, and he cast its light on the ground.

What he saw caused him to give a cry of anger. It looked like a cyclone had hit the camp. Boxes were broken and the contents scattered in every direction. The tents were pulled down and the canvas torn in shreds.

Lying on his face, not five feet from Conklin, was one of his Indian guides. He knew without examining the body that the man was dead, but he walked up to the Indian and turned the body over with his toe.

The Indian's throat was cut and his head had been lying in a pool of blood and his face was soaked with the blood.

HE turned the Indian back on his face and walked over to a large box and stared mutely at it.

The girl's voice sounded behind him.

"Was—was this your camp?" she asked. "What has happened to it?"

Conklin could not suppress a bitter laugh.

"About what will happen to us before we get very far," he answered. "It looks like the *libres* got here before we did—or before the storm broke."

The girl looked around and said nothing. She shuddered a little and her face paled.

"We'll get a little rice if there is any left and get away from here," Conklin continued. "We'll need food before we start the endless trek through the jungles."

He searched a number of broken boxes, keeping his flashlight away from the body of the dead Indian. He found a little tea and some rice and some cold meat.

THE rice and the meat and the tea, Conklin realized with a sinking heart, were merely the left-overs dropped or overlooked by the mob of half-starved *libres*.

He didn't blame these poor devils, crazed by fear and hunger, forced to wander through the jungles like animals, yet not equipped by nature to fight for a living from the jungles like the animals. He couldn't, deep in his heart, blame them; but he knew that the plunder of his camp had removed any remote hope that had existed for him and the strange girl and the escaped convict to get out of the jungles alive.

"We have food and supplies along the shore near Simamarie," the girl said weakly. "You know that is directly across from Devil's Island and that is where we were headed when the storm drove us out of our course."

"It might as well be in heaven," Conklin laughed. "Every foot of the coast line will be guarded. Our only hope is to drive deep in the jungles and trust to God and His kindness to rescue us. He's never done that for anyone else in this God-forsaken

hole and I guess He won't do it for us."

The girl said nothing. Conklin gathered some wood and found several pans.

"We'll go back in the woods a little way and cook some food," he said. "That boy needs food and rest."

Conklin found an open place, hidden from the river by a ledge of rocks, some distance back of the camp. He hurriedly started a fire and boiled some rice and made tea.

The meal was eaten in silence. The fire was allowed to burn low, because of the countless insects.

He and the girl ate sparingly of the rice and meat, but the boy ate ravenously, ate as if he hadn't had food for weeks. Conklin gave him the greater part of the meat and two large dishes of rice. When the food was gone, Conklin gave him a drink of whisky.

The color seemed to come back to his youthful face and his eyes lost that sullen, dead look.

The girl sat near the fire, holding her knees with her arms. She stared silently into the fire, her pale face twitching and tense; her hair still hanging over her shoulders in a disordered mass.

Conklin noticed that her dress was of a dark blue material that is seldom seen in the jungles.

"All right, we might as well get acquainted," Conklin said. "We'll be together for some time, provided the *libres* or the natives or the fever doesn't get us too quickly. My name is Conklin—Jim Conklin. I was, up to a few hours ago, a rather successful engineer. I don't know just what I am now."

THE girl looked at him and smiled wearily. Conklin couldn't keep his eyes off her face. It was, he

thought, about the most charming face he had ever looked into.

"My name? Oh, yes. It is Grace, Grace Sturgeon," she said softly. "That is my brother, Paul Sturgeon."

Conklin looked at the boy. He saw at once the family resemblance and wondered why he had not seen it before.

"I suppose you want to know how we came to be in the harbor," Grace Sturgeon continued. "It is quite a simple story. I was trying to get my brother away from Devil's Island."

"Yes, I've gathered that much already," Conklin laughed. "But your name, Sturgeon. Are you Americans?"

"Yes, our home is in New York City."

BUT your brother, how did he come to get on Devil's Island?"

"That's a rather long story, and a very complicated one," Grace replied. "I'll give you the high spots hurriedly. Our mother was French and a great deal of our life has been spent in France. Paul was educated there, and after mother died, he stayed there. He was born in Paris, and had the right of French citizenship. Our father died when we were very young, and I lived with an aunt in New York.

"Three years ago Paul was finishing his studies in Paris. He lived with an aunt. She was a very rich woman. Then one night she was murdered, her jewels were stolen and a great amount of money. She was very French in her way. She didn't trust the banks and foolishly kept large sums in the house.

"Paul was arrested and tried for the murder. The case was purely circumstantial against him. He was the only person in the house with her at the time of the murder, or rather the only person known to be

in the house. The jury found him guilty. We spent a fortune fighting the case, and all we could do was to get his sentence to Devil's Island commuted to three years. And day before yesterday his three years were up."

Grace looked at her brother. The sullen and dead-like look had come back into his eyes. Conklin saw that it would be some time before the boy would be himself again, that he was still in the stupor of the horrors and hardships he had suffered.

"But if his time was up, why all this dramatic escape?" Conklin demanded. "Why didn't you take your brother home and get him in health again?"

Grace smiled bitterly.

"Take him home and get his health back," she said. "You don't understand that for every three years you spend on Devil's Island, you have to spend two years as a *libre* in a hole like St. Laurent. As long as Paul was on Devil's Island he was safe, but the minute he would have been sent to St. Laurent, his death warrant would have been sealed and delivered to him."

"I don't understand," Conklin said.

"There is more to the story of the murder than I have told you," Grace replied. "The aunt was murdered by a very famous international crook and one of his henchmen. This henchman's name was Patoni, a gangster in a small-time way and a sneaking coward.

HE worked his way into our aunt's home as a butler so that he could murder our aunt and place the blame on Paul. He and Pierre Coulter, the crook that engineered the job, expected Paul to get a much heavier sentence. They framed it to look like Paul committed the murder, but in the three years that have

passed, we have worked on the case and know just how it was done.

"Patoni did the murder, and we can prove it, but we have to have Paul free and in his right senses before we can do it.

"Coulter and Patoni know that; so what has happened? Patoni is in St. Laurent.

"He went there after Paul was sent to Devil's Island. He has used the money he got from the jewels and his share of the cash stolen from our aunt's house to work up a big business in the slavery that is practiced among the *libres* at St. Laurent.

COULTER is powerful, more powerful in many ways than we are, and it was arranged that Paul would be sent to St. Laurent as a *libre* and be farmed out to Patoni, who, of course, goes by an altogether different name at St. Laurent. Well, you know what that would mean. A slow, certain death of starvation and insanity for Paul. They could not murder him. That would be too dangerous. They chose a death that would be natural and cause no suspicion. Now you know why I tried to escape with Paul when his time was up on Devil's Island."

Conklin said nothing. He stared in the fire. A few dying coals remained red; the rest of the wood was smothered in a cloud of smoke. All around him the silence of the forest was broken by the endless animal life that moved and fought and died every night in the dense and decaying foliage.

He thought how simple was the life of an animal; how simple was the theory of existence for them, killing to live and doing it openly and in a natural way. How different was mankind. Mankind killed to live, but what cruelty and what bru-

ality was shrouded around that struggle for existence.

He looked at Paul. His pale, sunken face was only a shadow in the dying embers of the fire. Conklin was conscious that those sunken eyes were on him, those eyes that looked out at the world with the sullen hatred of an animal that has been caged up and starved for three years.

Conklin got up, kicked the fire out and picked up the pans.

"We'd better be moving on," he said. "We can't stay any one place too long."

"But where are we going and what are we going to do?" Grace demanded. "Can't we get out of the jungle and get to the coast?"

"Sure we can get to the coast," Conklin gave a tired laugh. "All we have to do is keep going south until we come to the Tumac-Hummac mountains, some four hundred miles from here and then cut over the coast to Brazil. In all about a thousand miles through jungles no white man has ever traversed."

The death-like silence of the jungle was broken by a weird human call. It came from somewhere beyond the river, sounding like the call of the Western Indians. The echoes of the call died down; then came its answer, a mile up the river, a weird inhuman answer.

Grace shuddered and drew closer to Conklin. Out in the jungle, away from all form of civilization, she seemed like a helpless little child.

THE Indian runners have started already," Conklin said. "In five hours every Indian tribe in French Guiana and Dutch Guiana will be notified that a convict has escaped in the jungles. These cursed woods and swamps and deep bushes will become alive with Indians looking for us. The French government is very

generous with the Indians. They get a hundred francs for the return of the convict."

The call sounded again, this time far away. Conklin and Grace waited in silence to hear the answering call. None came.

Grace shuddered and walked over to Paul, who was still sitting on a log staring stupidly at the little smoke coming up from the fire. She took him by the arm and led him over to Conklin.

"We are ready to go," she said.

"Fine," Conklin replied quickly. "Fortunately there is medicine and food in the launch and firearms. We'll go up the river until within several miles of the first Indian compound, and then we'll try our luck in the jungles."

CHAPTER IV

Patoni's Warning

MONSIEUR GASTON FERRAND sat slumped comfortably in a rickety chair behind the battered desk of his office. It was an early hour of the morning, far too early for any other form of life to show up in the town of St. Laurent du Marino.

From the window of his little office, near a rambling warehouse at the water front, he could see the harbor and a long stretch of old, half-broken-down shacks. The harbor was lifeless. One or two ships were anchored out in the deep water, but there was no sign of life on them.

The warehouses basked lazily in the morning sun, for seldom did any one appear for work at St. Laurent du Marino before ten in the morning, and it was then a little after seven-thirty.

But Monsieur Ferrand worked

while others slept and loafed. That was one of the reasons for his very extraordinary success in the two and a half years he had been in the town.

The heat of the morning was beginning to enter the little office, and although Monsieur Ferrand was a small, scrawny-built man, with no surplus flesh on his body, he felt the heavy heat of the place keenly. Two fans, sitting in opposite corners of the office, hummed dismally and tried to throw out a little cool air.

But the fans did little good, other than to blow papers around the room. The sweat was beginning to pour down the mahogany-colored forehead and cheeks, and dripping through the close-cropped black beard of Monsieur Ferrand.

He wore only a soiled pair of cotton trousers and a thin saturated cotton shirt open at the neck. On his feet were cool native sandals.

Ostensibly Monsieur Ferrand was an exporter of mahogany and sugar. He had a certain standing among the official French population, for he was under contract from the French government to get out as much mahogany from the limitless forests that stretched far away into the unknown parts of French Guiana as his funds and the labor of the *libres* would permit.

AND therein lay the secret of his sudden wealth.

But it must be said that Monsieur Ferrand cut and shipped very little mahogany or exported much sugar. This was only a cloak to hide his real business, a cloak that covered his activities from the French government, located in far-away France and not very much concerned with what went on in St. Laurent du Marino or what happened to the hardened criminals that France

wanted away from the mother country.

And so Monsieur Ferrand trafficked freely and with no interference with the poor white souls, who served their time at Devil's Island and were turned loose on the main coast to eke out such an existence as was possible.

They had no money, no friends, no hope for food; so they often permitted themselves to be sold into human slavery that they might eat a little and have a place to sleep. Small merchants, contractors, and often colored plantation owners, who liked their labor cheap, would buy these poor condemned souls as if they were only so much flesh and blood.

AND Monsieur Ferrand found it both profitable and safe to sell these *libres* to the highest bidder, sometimes getting five hundred francs and sometimes getting as low as fifty.

It didn't matter which to Monsieur Ferrand. His profit was always great, giving the poor *libre* a few francs and keeping the remainder himself.

It was a sordid, degrading business, trafficking in the souls of poor human beings; but Monsieur Ferrand was not bothered with the niceties of life and he liked the business very much. In the two years and a half he had been at St. Laurent du Marino his bank account showed over a million francs to the good.

But there was another reason why he was at St. Laurent du Marino, and the opened letter on his desk deals with that.

It was a tip-off from a petty official at Devil's Island that prisoner Number 546 would be released on that day and sent, at Monsieur's re-

quest and bribe, to St. Laurent du Marino as a *libre*.

This letter had come the day before, and with this letter had come another dealing, in a far more personal matter, with prisoner Number 546 and Monsieur Ferrand's future peace of mind.

The letter read:

PATONI:

The kid will leave Devil's Island about the time this letter reaches you, and I am depending on you taking care of him in the proper manner.

The Sturgeon family have spent a good-sized fortune investigating the murder of that old woman and they are now in a position, when the kid is free and back in his normal mind again, to establish the fact you did the job.

The importance of you taking the proper care to see that he dies quickly is obvious. We can't bump him for reasons you understand. It would stir up too much stink and Paris police are still suspicious of you and such a move would react badly.

You will be the one that will be the real sufferer if the kid ever gets away alive. This is my last warning to you, and if you fail, you'll have to pay the price with your head.

SPIKE COULTER.

Monsieur Ferrand, alias Mr. Patoni, read the letter several times, smiled, and folded it up, touched a match to it and watched it burn.

The kid would be taken care of all right. He had seen to that with a great deal of care and a little expense. He had bribed the petty official at Devil's Island to be sure that Paul Sturgeon was sent to St. Laurent du Marino. He had made all the necessary arrangements to have Paul taken care of the minute he reached land.

THE French police were not overly particular what happened to the *libres*, and Paul would be spirited away to a plantation far in the jungles, a plantation owned and operated by a brutal negro, and there would be no questions asked.

One month in that hell-hole, without quinine, without proper food, and with a lash on his back every day—one month of that and Paul Sturgeon would be dead. And there could be no questions asked.

The fans hummed eerily in the stuffy office. Patoni leaned back in the chair and smoked in a pleasant and happy frame of mind. He was conscious of the danger if Paul Sturgeon ever got free; he knew very well that another investigation of the murder of the old woman would disclose a very important clue the first investigation hadn't done.

In less than a month Paul would be dead.

THE sweat streamed down his face as the day's heat began to increase, but this was one day Monsieur Ferrand, alias Patoni, didn't mind the heat. He was in an affable frame of mind.

The sound of a footstep on the narrow steps leading up to his office broke the stillness of the morning. Patoni sat up straight, his black eyes closing a little and the indolent ease leaving his face in a flash. His nostrils distended a little; his face took on the brutality that it usually wore.

With one sweep of his arm he swept the opened letters in a drawer. From the drawer he took out an automatic and settled back in his chair to wait for his unknown visitor.

There was a light knock on the door.

Patoni called out: "*Entrez.*"

The door opened slowly and the bulky form of a huge half-caste entered the room, cap in hand and face twisted with fear.

Patoni gave a laugh of relief and slipped the automatic back in the drawer.

"Imbecile," he cried. "Why don't

you call out your name when you want to enter my office. What brings you here at this hour in the morning?"

The half-caste stared at him helplessly. The perspiration was pouring down the colored face in gushing streams. The burly negro pulled at his cap and said nothing.

Patoni rose slowly from his chair, face darkening and his hands twitching nervously.

"Are you dumb, you imbecile," he cried. "What do you want and why aren't you looking out for Prisoner 546?"

The frightened half-caste slunk away from Patoni and crouched against the wall, his hands pulling frantically at the cap. He knew the murderous look in Patoni's eyes; he knew with what ease and little excuse Patoni murdered those that displeased him. He had seen too much of the man's actions among the *libres* to discount the venomous look that had come to his eyes.

Finally he muttered:

"It's about Prisoner 546, Monsieur, that I wish to speak."

"All right, speak, fool. Where is he? Has he been sent to the jungle plantation?"

The half-caste shuddered a little.

The Prisoner 546, Monsieur, has escaped," he said in a voice trembling with fear. "He escaped last night. That was what the sirens were blowing for."

PATONI fell back in his chair, a lifeless chunk of human flesh. His face went a putty gray, his jaw muscles worked convulsively, his hands went up in the air, closing and unclosing like dirty brown talons.

The half-caste started forward, but Patoni waved him back with a helpless gesture of his hand. The night

before he had heard the sirens shriek but such things as that never interested him. He didn't care if a thousand prisoners escaped from Devil's Island; there would be thousands to take their place.

But 546 had escaped! Paul Sturgeon was free!

These thoughts raced through his mind like a whirlpool. He couldn't get the thoughts logical or in order.

HIS mouth went dry and he wet his lips. Finally, he managed to say:

"You come here at this hour of the morning. You say 546 has escaped. Fool, son of a miserable dog, I told you that under no considerations must anything happen to 546. Now you come and say he has escaped. Escaped from where and where did he go?"

The Negro trembled and stood crouching against the wall, his eyes terrified, as if he expected any second Patoni would reach in the drawer for the automatic and kill him.

"Monsieur, have patience, I will tell you what I have learned," he stammered. "Prisoner 546 escaped from Devil's Island last night as they were preparing the *libres* for shipment over here. A girl assisted him to escape. They left the Island after dark in a native canoe."

"But where is he? Where is he?" cried Patoni.

"If the Monsieur will let me finish, I will tell all," the half-caste continued. "Prisoner 546 was taken from the Island by a girl, believed to be his sister. They left in a native canoe and the *chubasco* of last night drove them into this Harbor.

"The police located them with a searchlight on the beach, but there

was an American who helped them escape down the Marino River."

Patoni's body relaxed a little. He was getting control of himself again.

"An American?" he asked. "Tell me more. Who was he?"

"An engineer, Monsieur, who had a camp down the Marino River."

"And he helped them escape to the jungles?"

"Yes, they went down the river. They are in the jungles now. I learned this morning that the American's camp was rifled by the *libres* while he was in town and they are without food or supplies."

Patoni took a cigarette out and lighted it. He stared at the desk for a moment.

"And the Indians along the river, have they all been notified?" he asked casually.

"Yes, Monsieur, the runners went out last night to all the Indian tribes. I think, Monsieur, that the prisoner 546 will soon be captured—or killed."

Patoni smiled grimly. He got up and arranged his papers on the desk.

"He will be killed, Pedro," he said. "You will go at once and arrange for an extended stay in the jungles. Have the boats loaded with a month's supply of food and ten Indians to go with us. We are leaving at once."

Pedro bowed and backed to the door.

"And send a runner at once to Chief Lafrumma of the Escumarca Indians and tell him that Monsieur Ferrand will pay ten thousand francs for the dead body of the prisoner."

PATONI snapped the words out in a tone that caused Pedro to shrink from him.

"In ten hours Chief Lafrumma can have five thousand Indians scouring the jungles for our young friend," Patoni sneered. "Ten thousand francs

for his dead body. Have the boats ready in an hour. Maybe you can earn that ten thousand francs, Pedro."

Pedro said nothing. He slunk out of the door and disappeared.

CHAPTER V

The River's Clue

THE bulky form of Pedro had not disappeared through the door when Patoni got into action.

His mind was still numbed by the news of Paul Sturgeon's escape. It came to him as a crushing, overwhelming blow; but as the first shock wore off, and more rational reasoning returned, Patoni realized two things of extreme importance:

The first, was the simple fact that Paul had about one chance in fifty thousand of getting out of the jungle alive; the second, was the fact that his escape, if handled properly, would close once and forever any chance of reopening the investigation about the murder.

The more Patoni thought about the news, the better it seemed to fit into the scheme of things.

But first he had to make sure that Paul never got out of the interior alive.

When he left his office, he went directly to the home of Colonel Le Duc. Monsieur Ferrand was not on good terms with the Governor of the town. Colonel Le Duc didn't look on the trafficking in the *libres* with any great favor, but there was little he could do about it, except to form a pronounced dislike for Monsieur Ferrand and his kind.

Patoni, however, cared little what Colonel Le Duc thought about him. He simply wanted to make sure that every precaution had been taken by the colonel's office to assure the cap-

ture or death of the escaped prisoner.

He didn't ask for the colonel. He talked with one of the under officials, the man who handled all such matters, and who was receptive to a nice bribe. It took Patoni only a few minutes to fix that matter up.

When he left the colonel's house he knew that more than usual efforts would be made to capture prisoner 546 and that all the coast towns would be notified and a good-sized reward posted.

Then he swung around the Cercle National, stopped in several places where information could easily be distributed, and said a few words about a ten-thousand-franc reward for the escaped prisoner, who was in the jungles.

At the end of the hour, when he walked down to the water front where Pedro had the boats loaded, Patoni had the satisfaction of knowing that his few words around the Cercle National had borne fruit.

In that one brief hour it seemed that all St. Laurent du Marino had taken a new lease on life. *Libres* darted here and there; there was an atmosphere of subdued excitement.

Ten thousand francs was life and freedom for any *libre* and like wild-fire the word had passed around town. It swept through the outskirts of the jungles where the convicts wandered aimlessly, looking for a bit of food or a place to sleep.

Patoni noted all this with satisfaction as he walked down to his motor launch.

PEDRO had everything in order. Three large *Bongos*, the large native canoe, floated lazily behind the launch. Each *Bongo* was loaded with food and supplies and Indians, each Indian an expert guide in the jungle.

Patoni wasted no time at the water front. Five minutes after he arrived, the flotilla of *Bongos*, pulled by the motor launch, started down the Marino River.

An hour later the flotilla arrived at a place where Conklin's camp had been. Patoni made a quick inspection of the camp, saw that all food and supplies had been taken, and then went back to the launch and gave orders to continue down stream.

THE fact that Conklin's motor launch was gone indicated to Patoni that the escaping party had taken the launch down the river, leaving it at some spot near an Indian Compound, and then striking off in the jungles.

Patoni's motor launch chugged lazily as it drove through the blackish waters of the river. The humid, oppressive heat covered the river like a damp, stifling blanket. Crocodiles flopped lazily along the shores; the dense undergrowth on each side of them, green and matted as if woven by human hands, was strangely silent.

Patoni's eyes darted nervously from one side of the river to the other. All the numbness of the blow the news gave him had left. His mind was working rapidly now. His small black eyes flashed and his dark face was set and brutal.

For three hours he continued down the river. The motor launch went at half speed. The *Bongos*, loaded with the silent and grim forms of the Indians, floated behind the launch.

At the end of the three hours Patoni knew that they were coming to the first Indian Compound and he throttled his boat down slower and scanned each side of the river for some sign of Conklin's launch.

He realized the one great danger

of his plan. If the escaping party was in too great a hurry to sink the launch, and let it float down the river, there was only one chance in a hundred that it would float to shore near the spot where they deserted it. And that spot was the important thing for him to find.

Patoni himself knew the jungle well. The Indians he had with him could follow any trail with the speed of an animal.

If he could find the trail where the party left the river, it would only be a matter of a day or less until he could catch up with them.

And then, Patoni smiled grimly to himself. A bullet in the back from an ambush, fired by himself. That would end everything and save the ten thousand francs for himself. Patoni didn't like to part with money, and this thought gave him pleasure.

He wondered who the American engineer was that had assisted them in the escape; whether he was working for the Sturgeon family. The little information he got in St. Laurent du Marino simply gave him the man's name.

It was the American that worried him a great deal. Left alone in the jungles, Paul, weakened and mentally stunned from his three years on Devil's Island, and his sister, a stranger to jungles—the two could not last a day.

BUT the American engineer with them. That was different. Patoni had a wholesome respect for Americans and what they could do. Yet he realized that without supplies, and with every Indian in the jungles after them, it would take more than an American to get them safely through to some port on the coast.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, Patoni's eyes searched each

side of the river for some sign of a breakage through the dense undergrowth.

He found it at a sharp bend in the river, only a mile from the first Indian village. At this point the shore spread out in the river, a flat, sandy bar, without undergrowth or bushes.

Three or four crocodiles were sprawled out on the bar and they showed no inclination to move as Patoni guided his motor boat up to them.

IT WASN'T the sand bar or the crocodiles that attracted him to that part of the shore. It was a blue piece of cloth, hanging on a dwarfed tree that caught his attention.

It was a piece of cloth that came from no Indian and they were too far down stream for *libre* to leave such a piece of cloth. Three shots from a heavy shotgun frightened the crocodiles away and Patoni jumped out of the boat and an up to the tree.

His first glance at the blue cloth told him that it came from a woman's dress. He looked on the ground. There were the footprints of a woman's shoe, mixed in with footprints of two men.

Patoni waved for Indians to unload.

The unloading was done quickly, with Patoni giving curt and loud orders.

He followed the footprints a little way into the wild foliage, followed them far enough to assure himself that he was on the right trail.

Then he went back to where the Indians were unloading the *Bongos*. Pedro was yelling orders at the Indians.

Patoni said to him:

"I will take five Indians with me.

I think we'll have 546 in a few hours, not more than a day; but you take the launch and the remainder of the Indians and go down the river to Chief Lafrumma's village. Get every Indian in the villages to work."

Pedro nodded and went on assisting in the unloading.

Twenty minutes later, Patoni accompanied by five Indians, three carrying supplies and two acting as guides started on the trail, left by Conklin and Grace.

CHAPTER VI

Jungle Death

CONKLIN walked across the stretch of open land, where swamp grass went far above his waist, and stopped in front of a great wall of trees that skirted the jungle forest.

Behind him Grace moved slowly, pushing the high reeds away from her face with her two hands. The grass came nearly up to her shoulders and her face was bleeding and cut. Paul followed her, walking as if he were in a daze.

The sullen look had not left his eyes; he still moved and acted as if he were in a trance. The grass did not seem to bother him; his mind seemed to be ten thousand miles away.

For two days now the three of them had fought and struggled through the jungle. It had been a silent, desperate struggle and few words had been spoken by any of them.

After leaving the launch to float down the river, the night of the escape, they had taken what few supplies they had been able to salvage from the wreck of Conklin's camp and plunged into the jungle.

The food supplies had amounted to a little rice, some flour, and

enough tea for several meals. The rice lasted for the second day, and the tea gave out the night of the first day. They had a little flour left. That was all.

In the launch Conklin had a good supply of firearms and ammunition, and each was armed with a rifle and two revolvers. Also there had been a supply of quinine in the boat, a thing more important than food.

Enough mosquito-netting had been salvaged from the camp to give them a little protection at night from the endless hordes of bugs and flies that infest French Guiana.

But the netting afforded them only a limited protection. As they beat their way through the high grass and weeds, the yatebui crawled over their bodies and the polvorines devoured their faces and necks. These insects, the most powerful in any jungle, drove them on in a half crazed and helpless condition.

THE first night had not been so bad. They followed a long stretch of high land, where the insects existed in small quantities. That morning when daybreak came, they had made camp in an open place and cooked a little of their food and then slept in the torrid heat until noon.

At noon on the second day, they had eaten the last of their rice, and drank their last tea. Conklin had worried a great deal, the first day, about Paul and how he could stand the jungles in his weakened condition, but before the day was over, he realized that it was not Paul, but Grace he would have to worry about.

Three years on Devil's Island had immuned Paul to the heat and the insects. He stood the first day and the second day without any ill effects.

But with Grace, it was different. The jungle was new to her, and the two days had played havoc with her. The grass cut the delicate skin of her face until it was black, and coated with caked blood; the insects drove her into hysterics and the heat made her eyes glassy and her breathing heavy and labored.

HOWEVER, she struggled on, her lips set and her eyes glazed and red. No word of complaint came from her lips. Twice she stumbled and fell and Conklin took her up in his arms and carried her until she had regained her strength.

She tried feebly to smile at him, but her attempt was sickly and forced. Conklin realized that another day and it would be the end, unless they came to a high spot where she could rest. Carefully, he administered the quinine, hypodermically, in her arm. The fever was the greatest danger to her now.

When they came to the forest, Conklin stopped. In front of him the great tree trunks rose in regiments, bearing aloft a thatch of green, so close and interwoven, that not one ray of sunlight was permitted to filter through. Inside the forest, dark and silent, a church-like gloom prevailed.

Around the base of the great trees, the verdure grew matted and thick, impact and impenetrable. Here and there a trail broke through the mass of green, small tunnel-like trails, made by animals and some by Indians.

Conklin's keen eye detected the animal trails and the Indian trails. Up to that time they had not seen any Indians, but Conklin knew that was because they had not passed through Indian territory.

He had stuck close to the lowlands, with the endless small lakes

and streams, and the tall swamp growths, that kept both animals and human beings away from there.

But now the lowlands were passed; the forest was the sign of higher land—and Indians.

Conklin had not been able to formulate any definite plan for their trekking, largely because he knew any plan would be useless. They were, at best, a thousand miles from any possible avenue of escape.

TO the East lay Brazil and the coast, but to get there, a thousand miles through impassable jungles, where no white man had ever trod, would have to be traversed; to the west, across Dutch Guiana and British Guiana, lay Venezuela, the ultimate haven of refuge for escaping convicts.

But to reach there, was almost as impossible as to reach the Brazilian coast. Well equipped and seasoned travelers might make it, but three people without supplies, hunted in every corner of the jungle, and one of these three a girl, untrained and unseasoned to the horrors of the deep jungle—that was absurd and out of the question.

When Conklin left his launch, he had struck eastward into the jungles. There had been no purpose behind that direction. It just happened that the sand bar was on the east side of the river.

His one plan, a vague and indefinable one, was to strike through the jungles until he came to some Indian tribe out of reach of the French influence, but to do that, he realized, they would have to travel many, many miles.

And now, already, only a few miles from the river, they were out of food, and Grace was near the point of exhaustion.

Conklin thought of these things

as he stood looking at the regiment of giant trees, with their heavy-matted masses of green at the base of trunks and over the tops. The sinister gloom within the forest was eerie and forbidding.

Grace stood by his side. Her blue dress was torn to bits and hung on her slim body in tatters. She stood, holding her hand over her right shoulder, to keep her breast covered.

She looked up at him with glazed eyes. Her lips smiled a little. Conklin patted her on the shoulder, and said:

"Tough, isn't it, but you're brave—too damned brave."

She looked around at Paul, who stood a little way from them. His blue gray prison garb had withstood the weeds better than Grace's dress. His eyes looked at Conklin without any expression.

"The forest looks cool," Grace said wearily. "I'm tired and would like to sleep."

"We'll go a little way into the forest and make a camp," Conklin answered. "Maybe I can get some food along a stream. I've eaten braised alligator tail and it isn't bad. Tastes like flaked cod fish."

GRACE smiled again, and ran her fingers over her eyes.

"The heat is terrible," she murmured. "And the insects. I think sometimes I'll go crazy, but don't worry, I won't. I can keep going for a long time yet—if I only get a little sleep."

Conklin wanted to tell her the truth, tell her that from now on there would be little sleep, that it would be driving on and on into the jungle, further and further away from civilization, until somewhere and sometime the end would come to each of them in its own separate way.

But he couldn't tell her the truth. He said:

"You can get some sleep, and then we'll go on."

He started into the forest, not waiting for her reply. He followed a low-ceilinged, tunnel-like trail, made by the animals, and he had to bend his head down nearly a foot to dodge the green verdure above him.

Grace followed, with Paul bringing up the rear.

After a while, the trail became larger, and soon they were in the midst of the great forest, with the matted green on the sides and over their heads, giving away to more open spaces.

AT times they could see far into the giant trees. No sunlight came through the top of the forest, and even though a noon-day sun blazed mercilessly outside, the forest was as dark evening.

Conklin walked slowly. The silence was disturbing, but he knew the dangers that lay behind that silence, just as he knew that swift death lurked in every bush from animal of reptilian form. He knew also that death from Indians now threatened at every step.

The three of them walked close together. The intense heat of the sun was gone, but in the shadowy darkness of the woods, a muggy, humid heat stifled them and caused the perspiration to run freely over their bodies.

Monkeys clambered through the trees overhead and looked down at them and chattered in the short, barking manner of their race. Beautifully plumaged birds flew from tree to tree above them.

There was a grandeur and a beauty to the jungle forest that did not escape them, despite their weariness

and dangers and pain from insects. There was something majestic in the silence of the great trees, something a little awesome in the terror of that silence.

They came to a river, a shallow jungle river that wound in many curves through the forest. Conklin waded out in the middle of it, and started down stream. Without a word, Grace plunged into the filthy, black water and followed, with Paul always at her back.

All day long Conklin had followed rivers down stream, hoping to throw any pursuers off his trail. He followed this river about two hundred yards on its downward course, and then walked up on the bank and plunged again into the forest.

He came, after a while, to a little hill, rising about twenty feet high in a clearing. It looked more like a mound than a hill, with its flat top and short, dwarfed trees growing on it.

"Here is where we will camp," he said. "It will give us some protection, not much, but its the best we can do."

THE three of them walked up to the top of the mound. The short, dwarfed trees gave a little shade and the mugginess of the forest did not seem to be so great.

Grace fell down on the grass, utterly exhausted. In a few minutes she was asleep.

Conklin said to Paul:

"Watch her. I'll go and see if I can kill a tapir or something we can eat."

Paul nodded in his sullen and dazed-like manner. His eyes, however, were becoming a little brighter and his thin sensitive face carried more expression.

Conklin had good luck, hunting. He shot a large tapir, close to the

mound. He skinned the animal where he had killed it, cut off three large steaks from the hind quarters and left the carcass for the jaguars and other animals.

He hurried back to the mound to find Grace still sleeping, and Paul standing over her, with his rifle arched in his right elbow.

Conklin had realized the great danger the shot in the forest would be, that it could be heard for a great distance; but food was necessary and they had to take the chance.

BUT he didn't start a fire at once. He lay down on the grass, had Paul do the same thing, and waited. They waited for the greater part of an hour, during which time Grace continued to sleep.

Then Conklin got up, built a small fire, and stuck the tapir steaks on sticks and roasted the meat.

As soon as the meat was done, he kicked the fire out, wakened Grace, and the three of them ate in silence. The meat was burned and smoky, but they ate it greedily, and then Conklin passed out the remaining water in his canteen.

The darkness was slowly gathering around them. The food made them tired and sleepy and Conklin relaxed a little in his nervous watching of the jungle around them.

He lay back on the grass, realizing that bodily weariness was fast getting possession of him. Grace sat up and stared into the fire. Paul walked around restlessly.

If Conklin had not relaxed in those few minutes, he would have seen the dark and shadowy forms that crept to the edge of the clearing darting here and there behind the trees. He would have seen a small man, still dressed in soiled cotton trousers and a white cotton shirt, wearing the large white hat

of the jungle, lean against a tree; seen him raise his rifle up slowly, and aim at Paul's restless body as Paul moved to and fro in front of Grace and Conklin.

But he didn't see these things.

A minute later he heard the forest roar with the discharge of a powerful rifle. He saw Paul's body stiffen, sway in mid air, and then plunge head long to the ground.

CHAPTER VII

Fight on the Mound

CONKLIN moved with the speed of a tiger. He moved on his stomach, knowing full well that his head a foot over the dwarfed trees would mean death.

He heard Grace scream, and from the corner of his eyes, he saw her fling herself on her brother's body. But Conklin wasted no time looking at her or at Paul.

His eyes took in the forest in one glance. He saw a form leave one tree and start for another. His automatic blazed and the form crumpled to the ground. Another form moved among the trees and his automatic barked again. He heard a scream but saw no body fall to the ground.

And then the deep silence of the jungle settled over everything. His eyes searched every tree but no forms moved.

For some minutes he watched the clearing and the trees; then he turned and yelled to Grace:

"Get a rifle and watch the other side. We'll be surrounded in a minute."

Paul was lying face down on the ground. The side of his head was red from blood and there was a pool of red under his face.

Grace was tugging at his arm, crying out something to him. Conklin crawled over to where the body lay.

"Watch the clearing and I'll take

care of Paul's wound," he said. "It's better to die fighting than to be captured by these damned Indians. Take a rifle with you and plug away at anything you see."

Grace looked at him. Her lower lip was quivering.

"It—it— isn't necessary to examine his wound," she said. "He's dead. And I don't think he was killed by an Indian. Indians don't shoot that way and up this far they don't have guns."

Conklin nodded.

"You're right, but we can't get caught napping now," he replied. "We might as well make it as hot as we can for your friend, Patoni."

"We will," Grace whispered.

Conklin looked at her quickly. The sound of her voice was not pleasant to hear, even though it was only in a whisper. There was something inhumanly bitter in it, something too bitter for hate or anger.

GRACE crawled away from Conklin and took up a rifle. As she did, a bullet whizzed over the trees.

After the shot came, the sound of the weird human call far away in the forest. It was the Indian call Grace and Conklin had heard the night of the escape. Somewhere near them came the answering call. It was piercing and caused even Conklin to shudder.

He paid no attention to Paul. He grabbed a rifle and went to the other side of the mound.

Grace's gun fired twice. There was no answering cry.

Conklin waited, with his two revolvers lying on the ground near him and his rifle ready for action.

An Indian moved in the woods in front of him. His rifle barked and the form disappeared. Another form darted between the trees some distance away. Conklin took another pot shot.

But he soon gave that up. He knew that those forms were merely the advance guard of a body of Indians and that the main attack would not take place for several minutes.

He moved back a few feet, so that he could take in both sides as well as the front.

THEN for what seemed countless hours he waited. The darkness in the forest was deepening, and the first signs of night were showing under the great trees, with their matted green tops and heavy foliage at their base.

No sounds came from them. He could see Grace lying flat behind a fallen tree, waiting for the attack.

"Don't fire until they come out in the clearing," Conklin yelled at her. "We might as well make every shot count."

"They'll wait until it is dark," she answered in a cold, lifeless voice. "There is one man among them that is not an Indian, and I know he won't show himself until it is dark."

Conklin said nothing. He scanned the woods carefully. No form moved in those deepening shadows; no sound came to break the eerie stillness of the coming night. The shots had frightened all animal life away, all but the insects, and they buzzed around overhead with a droning sound, but Conklin paid no attention to them.

In those long minutes of waiting, he tried to review the strange events that placed him on that mound waiting for the final attack that meant certain death. It all seemed like a weird dream to him; nothing about it was real.

Three days ago he was an engineer with an important job. Now he was an outcast who, even though he were free, would have to hide from the law of French Guiana. His reputation

in all the North South American Countries as an engineer was gone forever.

But somehow he didn't worry about that. He thought of Grace and her soft, delicate face, her slim body and the grace of her hands and the sound of her voice. Yet was she real? Was she, too, a part of the strange dream?

These thoughts ran wildly through his mind. He looked in her direction. She was lying behind that old log, with her rifle against her shoulder. The body of Paul lay sprawled face first not three feet from Conklin.

Grace's voice woke him from his reverie.

"The're coming, hundreds of them," she cried. "Look to your right."

Her rifle started to fire, rapidly but with a sureness that indicated no hysterics behind her actions.

Conklin looked to his right.

It seemed to him that the woods, the clearing, and the very air was filled with Indians. They came running in a crouching position across the clearing.

He dropped his rifle and grabbed his two automatics. Firing carefully, wasting no shots, he emptied the two magazines and for every shot he had the satisfaction of seeing an Indian fall.

But they were coming in all directions. His twelve shots stopped that oncoming wave for a moment and he snatched his rifle and fired carefully into the wave on his left.

The line wavered a minute and then came on.

AND the next second Indians swarmed up the sides of the mound and fell over the dwarfed trees.

Conklin stood up and swung the butt of his rifle to the right and left. The Indians were armed with knives and spears. A spear hit his shoulder, glanced off, and then another spear

came hurling through the air and missed his head a fraction of an inch.

He heard Grace give a pitiful scream. He swerved and ran across the top of the mound to her side. Three Indians were pressing her to the ground, with spears pricking her body.

Paul's two automatics lay on the ground near Grace. Conklin snatched them up and fired three shots point blank into the Indians. They crumpled to the ground.

Then Conklin swerved quickly to meet the rush from his rear. His automatic barked six times, six fast, sure times, and six Indians tumbled head first and fell at his feet.

But that was the end for Conklin as far as the fight was concerned.

Powerful arms grabbed him from the rear and bore his body to the ground. He heard Grace scream again as the arms pressed him down, but he could not struggle against the power that was gripping him from the rear.

He was rolled over on his stomach. His arms were jerked high up on his back, and then he felt stout cords being tied around his wrists.

When that was over, a foot kicked him in the ribs, and he rolled over on his back. He turned his head. Lying near him was Grace, her arms tied behind her back.

HER face was white but flushed with spots of red. She smiled weakly at him. He smiled back.

"I guess it's over now," he said. "It was over when we started, but it was worth the try anyway."

Her eyes watered. She smiled again and said: "Thanks. That's terribly kind of you to say that."

Then she cried softly.

Conklin said:

"It's no use crying now and don't cry about me."

The Indians standing over him

started to jabber in a strange language to him. He knew many of the Indian dialects, but this one was foreign to any he had known.

The Indians themselves were strange-looking. They were tall, bronzed men, with little rings in their ears, which was something unusual for Indians in that part of South America.

They suddenly stopped talking. They backed away and a tall, powerfully built Indian stood over Conklin. Conklin knew that this one was the Chief or a very high official in the tribe. His face was hard and brutal; he wore a headgear made out of feathers, and the rings in his ears were large and costly-looking.

HE looked down at Conklin, grinned maliciously, and then said something in the strange Indian language. Conklin realized that he was addressing him, but he had no idea what he was saying.

Then a voice behind the chief spoke in English.

"The Chief is telling you, my friend, that they will take you and the charming girl to the village where they can kill you in much better style."

The man's voice had a sneer to it. Conklin strained his head to see the man.

Grace had witnessed the scene with the chief and listened to his words without saying anything; but suddenly she gave a half insane laugh, a laugh that was piercing and cold.

"I thought it would be you, Mr. Patoni," she said. "I knew it was you that fired the shot that killed Paul."

And then Patoni walked out from behind the Chief. His small and scrawny body strutted, and his dark face wore a leering smile as he looked down at Grace.

"Miss Sturgeon," he said. "You

should be careful what you say to me now. "Your life is in my hands."

Grace laughed again.

"If that is so, Patoni, won't you please fire a bullet through my head right now," she said. "It would be the only kind of kind act you ever did in your life."

Patoni looked at Conklin.

"Mr. Conklin, you were a fool to get mixed up in this," he sneered. "But a fool never lives long in these parts."

"A fool dead is often better off than a murderer alive," Conklin shot back at him.

PATONI'S face convulsed with anger and hatred. His right foot went out and caught Conklin on the side of the face.

Then he turned and said something to the Chief, who had stood back and grinned at Patoni's words.

The chief shouted orders to the Indians around him, and they reached down and picked Grace and Conklin up and put them on their feet.

Two Indians got behind each of them and pointed spears in their backs and probed them on.

Patoni shouted some order in the Indian language and the Indians stopped, and Grace and Conklin looked around.

Patoni was looking down at the inert form of Paul, still lying on his face. The blood had caked under his head, and the deathlike whiteness of his skin looked ghastly in comparison to the dark red of the caked blood.

"So you thought you could escape and get me, eh?" Patoni said.

"Well, we'll leave your body here for the animals to make a good meal tonight."

He gave Paul's body a kick, gave a cruel laugh, and shouted something to the Indians.

Conklin heard Grace groan. He looked at her. She was staring at the

body of Paul. All color had left her face. Her body swayed and then she fell to the ground in a dead faint.

Two Indians picked her up. A spear was pushed in Conklin's back, and then the procession started out for the Indian village.

CHAPTER VIII

The Death Fire

FOR hours that seemed like ages to Conklin, he walked through the great forest, with a spear at his back and an Indian walking ahead of him, holding a burning torch high in the air. The torch lighted the darkness of the wood weirdly, throwing grotesque shadows in all directions.

Behind him came Grace. Her strength was fast ebbing away, and often she would stumble and faint and have to be carried. She came out of her first faint after the procession had gone less than a mile, and the Indians made her walk.

But she soon stumbled again and had to be carried, her strength gone and her mind in a stupor.

The Chief and Patoni brought up the rear with a few Indians. The bulk of the Indians had remained at the mound to take care of the dead and wounded.

The weird procession, with the lighted torches, wound through the forest over a trail that looked to be centuries old. They left the woods at one point and followed a stretch of high land, and then plunged into a deep jungle, always following the well-beaten trail.

At last the sound of barking dogs greeted them. The procession turned off the well trod path and followed a narrow trail through high grass, and then came to a clearing in a small woods.

Beyond this clearing lay the Indian village. It was but a clutter of

thatched huts, with narrow and dirty streets.

Indian women came running out to greet them. A hundred dogs barked and followed the women. Conklin was too dazed, too weary to take note of what he saw or what went on around him.

The procession stopped and the Chief walked ahead. For some minutes Conklin and Grace stood at the edge of the village, with the women gathering around them, chattering and pointing at them and giggling like sixteen-year-old girls.

They were buxom-looking women, with few clothes on and with heavy, stolid-looking faces. Little babies hung around their legs and looked at the two white people with small eyes wide open with wonder.

The Chief returned and said a few words to the Indians guarding Grace and Conklin and then they were hustled along and thrown in an old hut near the center of the village.

FOR some time they lay on the dirt floor of the hut, their hands still tied tightly behind them. Finally, Conklin pulled himself to his feet and walked over to where Grace lay.

The interior of the place was dark. A little light from a huge fire somewhere out in the village, a fire that had just been lighted, broke through the little window of the hut and enabled Conklin to see Grace lying on the floor.

He knelt down and said:

"You must be brave and you must not give up hope."

She groaned a little and turned over on her back and looked up at Conklin.

"It was easy to be brave while Paul lived," she answered. "But now what is there to be brave for? What is there to live for?"

Conklin bit his lip. He had trouble

finding an answer for that, but he finally replied:

"You must not give up hope. There is much to live for; you are young and there is the person that killed Paul."

"Yes, the person that killed Paul, but Paul is dead and what is there to save. I am alone in the world now."

Conklin got up slowly. He had trouble getting up and down with his hands tied behind him. He walked to the window of the hut and looked out.

A great fire was burning in the center of the village. The Indians were running around in an excited and wild manner. Women were wailing from somewhere near the fire; other women were running and dancing and throwing their hands high in the air. No men were in sight.

Conklin turned away from the window and went back to Grace.

"I think we are in a village of Escumarca Indians," he said. "If that is so, we are near the Marino River and there is always a chance if we are near a river. It is far better that we try to escape than wait for the death they are planning. The Escumarca Indian is famed for his cruelty."

Grace said nothing. She looked up at him. In the shadowy light he could see the soft outline of her face.

Someone entered the hut. Conklin turned to see who it was and two Indians came up and grabbed him and threw him to the floor and cut the cords that bound his wrists. Then they went over to Grace, turned her over on her back and cut the cords around her hands.

WITHOUT a word or a sign they marched out of the hut. Conklin walked back and forth swinging his arms to start the circulation through his numbed wrists. Grace sat up and rubbed her wrists.

"They're getting friendly now," Conklin laughed. "They always do before the sacrifice takes place."

Grace got to her feet, staggered a little, and then walked over to Conklin. She held onto his arm to keep from falling.

"Mr. Conklin," she said slowly. "I want you to know that I appreciate—"

Conklin laughed, took her chin between his thumb and forefinger and raised it high in the air.

"I'm not dead and you're not dead," he answered. "So there isn't anything to appreciate or anything to feel sorry about. I'm going to tell you a little secret. I don't give a damn about my job, or about anything. I'm glad I jumped in the harbor and pulled you out and came up here with you. No matter what happens, I'm glad I came."

SHE leaned against him, her head coming a little under his shoulder. He put his arm around her waist and they stood silent, staring out of the window at the great fire.

"What are the women doing?" Grace asked.

"Mourning for their dead husbands, the Indians we killed at the mound," Conklin said quietly.

Grace's body quivered a little, and she leaned heavily against Conklin. His arm remained around her. They both watched the women wailing for their departed dead and said nothing.

Finally Grace whispered: "It's not always nice to be a human being, is it?"

"Not always," Conklin replied. "It's the human in them that cries out for what they have lost. An animal is more philosophical."

The wailing increased to a deafening din. Men appeared, carrying bundles wrapped in white cloth. The bundles were thrown on the fire.

Grace shuddered and turned away. Conklin turned with her.

"I guess cremation is not a modern science after all," he said. "Those are the bodies of the dead being thrown on the fire."

Two women appeared at the door of the hut. They were carrying earthen bowls and one had a lighted torch. The torch was placed in the center of the hut and the bowls sat near it.

The women backed out of the door without a word.

"Food," Conklin said. "It looks like they are going to feed us well before offering our bodies up in a holy sacrifice."

The wailing of the women outside increased. Grace looked at Conklin and her face was pale and her eyes frightened.

"That's terrible," she said. "Won't they ever stop?"

"I hope so. What about some food?"

The bowls were filled with a white mush like food. Conklin sampled it.

"Rice mush," he announced. "A rare delicacy among the Indians. We must be honored guests."

But Grace took none of it. Conklin tried to eat a little, but the wailing outside continued and he pushed the bowl away from him. He sat in the middle of the floor, smoking a cigarette.

GRACE sat close by his side, with her knees in her arms, and her eyes staring at the floor.

After a while the wailing died down and an oppressive silence fell over the village. The fire continued to burn, with its gruesome fuel keeping the flames going.

Then the fire died down and only a smoking mass of ashes was left. Grace sat huddled close to Conklin. Finally she went to sleep on his

shoulder and he laid her down on a mat and threw grass cover over her.

Then he went to the window and stared at the smoldering ashes of the fire. He wondered how soon his bones would be in that same fire.

CHAPTER IX

Patoni Pays a Call

THE next three days passed quietly and in a strange manner for Grace and Conklin. They were treated with a consideration that only the most honored guest or even a God would be shown in the village.

After the first night, Grace was given a hut to herself, three women to attend to her every want, and the most delicate and tasty Indian food to eat. Her torn dress had been replaced with a white robe, interwoven with gold lace. Her bruised and cut face was treated with special herbs and the cuts healed quickly.

Conklin remained in the hut they had used the first night. Two Indians remained with him, serving him food and drink and jumping quickly at any sign from him. He was not given a gold interlaced robe, but he was given the freedom of the village and when he walked out on the dirty streets, Indian women flocked after him, jabbering in their strange language and pointing at him.

He saw nothing of Patoni, but a big half caste Negro moved among the Indians. The half caste watched Conklin with an eagle eye and two large automatics hung at his side.

The freedom of the village and the attention given them was, Conklin knew, a part of the strange ritual of the Escumarca Indians when they prepared their victims for a sacrifice to their gods.

This ritual exists among most Indian tribes of Central America and

the northern part of South America, dating back to the days of the Aztec Indians, who made gods out of victims and gave the most beautiful of their maidens in marriage to those who were offered up to the Aztec god on the famous sacrificial stone.

Conklin knew all this, but what worried him was the date of the ceremony disposing of them. In the center of the village stood a small square. It was here that the great cremation fire had burned for the Indians killed at the mound.

Near this square stood a rudely constructed temple and weirdly dressed medicine men, with their grotesque headgear of flowing feathers and bodies naked and painted in hideous colors, came and went from the temple. A platform of some kind was being built in the square.

Even though the life of the village seemed to move with the calm sincerity of the Indian's every-day life, Conklin sensed the feeling of some great subdued excitement among the Indians. The Indian men paid no attention to him, but the women followed him and the children tagged at his feet as if he were the greatest of the great.

He saw nothing of the tall and brutal faced Chief that had stood over him at the mound.

THOUGHTS of escape naturally occupied the greater part of Conklin's time. The platform being constructed in the square and the coming and going of the medicine men didn't interest him. It was a little too morbid, and far too depressing, to think about.

A break from the village in the day time, with Grace, would be utterly out of the question. A hundred Indian warriors guarded every possible outlet and the hundred dogs that tagged at his feet when he took a

walk would warn them any minute of his getaway.

The village, Conklin figured, was some fifty or seventy-five miles in the interior and close to the Marino River. All around were impassable jungles and the river itself was out of the question, even though they had canoes. The Indians would capture them before they got ten miles.

Then there was another very disturbing thought about escape. Where would he and Grace go? He couldn't go back to St. Laurent du Marino. Immediate arrest and a long sentence to Devil's Island would follow for his assisting in the escape of a convict.

The only hope lay over the Tumac—Humac mountains and that was as absurd as trying to fly to the moon.

Conklin realized that their situation was utterly hopeless, but he never so much as intimated this much to Grace.

HE saw her every day. She was permitted to come to his hut, to walk around the village with him if she wished. However, she remained inside. The curiosity of the native women and the filth and the sordidness of the village were repellent to her.

A very subtle change had come over her. Her face flushed and the paleness left her cheeks, but she was silent and morose. She talked a great deal about Paul and his death and about her coming death as if she welcomed it and looked on it as a great deliverance.

Only when she and Conklin would be alone would she talk of escape. She would huddle close to him, her eyes a little frightened, and listen to his plans with interest. His plans were always wild and fantastic sounding; they were that way because he had not formulated a definite one.

Early on the morning of the third day Grace came to his hut at an early hour. He was still asleep when she entered.

Dressed in the long white robe, her golden hair falling wildly over her shoulders, and her finely featured face a mask of thoughts and emotions, she looked to Conklin like some Indian goddess from a story.

HE sat up and rubbed his eyes and stared at her.

"Patoni has returned," she said quietly. "I saw him this morning talking to the Chief. There was a big half caste Negro with him."

"Then the ceremony will be coming off soon," Conklin laughed. "The platform out there is about finished."

"Yes, it is to come off tomorrow morning," Grace answered. "I spoke French to one of my women in waiting and she answered me in that language. It seems that she lived in St. Laurent du Marino for a little while."

"That's interesting. And what did she say about the ceremony?"

"It is to be a sacrifice to the Sun God. So it has to be in the day time."

"Bloody or painless death."

"We will be stretched high on the platform, which revolves, and then the dance of the Sun will begin and we will be killed slowly with spears from the dancers and all the time our bodies will be turning on two great wheels. These wheels are in the temple."

"Not a very pleasant death. Do you prefer that to death in the jungles?"

"I think I would like very much to die in the jungles, to go back to that mound where Paul's body is and bury him. I would like to die near him."

"We can make a break tonight. We may not get far, but we can try."

Grace shook her head.

"Tonight the dance begins. The

Indians will dance all night long and in the morning when the sun comes up, they will kill us."

"Your lady in waiting has told you that?"

"Yes, she has told me everything and she wants to help us escape."

Conklin shrugged and lit a cigarette.

"She can help all right, but we can't make a break until dark. We wouldn't get ten feet away from the village in daylight."

"We will go this evening," Grace said. "The dance begins at about eight o'clock and then we will be tied and forced to watch the dance all night from the platform. It will get dark an hour before that. In that hour we will try to make our escape."

"We have to have food."

THE woman will supply all that. She will make it possible for us to sneak out of the village."

"Then we'll make a break for it tonight before the Sun dance starts." Conklin got to his feet. "I don't know where we will go, but we will go somewhere."

Grace looked up at him with pleading eyes, her lower lips quivering.

"We will go back to the mound," she said softly. "The woman has told me how to get there."

"But we can't take the Indian trail. It will be alive with Indians."

"There is a short cut, a trail the Indians do not use and we will take that."

Conklin looked down at her white face and smiled.

"We'll take any trail you wish, Grace," he said. "We'll do anything you say."

She smiled back at him weakly and said: "Thanks."

"No thanks coming," Conklin laughed. "But you've got to get some other robe than this white thing. You

could be seen a mile in that. Have your lady in waiting give you a native dress."

"That has all be attended to. Everything will be ready, and I will come to your hut sometime this afternoon and give you instructions."

A dog started barking at the door. Someone cursed in French and then Patoni strutted into the room, wearing his soiled cotton trousers and his dirty white cotton shirt open at the neck. A huge pith helmet was on his head.

GRACE shrank away from him and gave a cry of fright. Conklin put his arm around her, drew her to him, and glared at Patoni.

Patoni grinned maliciously, strutted around them, and then said:

"The girl looks nice in the Sun God robe. They always put that on the person they are going to kill."

"What do you want?" Conklin said hoarsely. "We prefer to remain alone."

Patoni laughed. A coarse, blubbering laugh.

"I just want a friendly little talk with the girl," he said. "Maybe, she and I can come to terms and she won't be killed."

Grace pulled herself loose from Conklin's arms and walked up to Patoni.

"You can save your words, Mr. Patoni," she said. "There are no terms we can agree on. I do not talk to a murderer—and the murderer of my brother."

Patoni gave another coarse, blubbering laugh and sat down on the floor.

"Sit down," he said. "Maybe, when I get through describing how these savages are going to kill you, you'll talk to a murderer. And I might fix it up to get your boy friend out of the mess, too. I might."

"Thanks for your offer of help,

Patoni," Conklin said quietly. "But it doesn't interest me."

Patoni shrugged and picked up a lump of dirt and threw it out of the window.

"Anyway you can sit down and talk," he answered. "I think Miss Sturgeon will be interested in some of the things I'm going to say. It's about the murder of her aunt."

Conklin sat down. Grace remained standing a moment, but Conklin motioned for her to sit down by him and she did.

"Great little ceremony these savages have for their Sun God," Patoni laughed. His black eyes were boring into Grace like two steel drills.

"Great little ceremony, Miss Sturgeon. I wouldn't miss it for anything. Impressive, wonderful in its cruel and savage beauty. It's one of the great ceremonies of the Indian tribes in this part of the world. Know what they're going to do with you?"

"Yes, I know—" Grace started to answer.

BUT Conklin interrupted her quickly.

"We have figured out that they are going to put us on that platform and kill us," he said hurriedly, pressing Grace's hand to tell her not to mention the woman who had told her. "I rather think it will be a brutal affair, but the beauty of it all, as you say, may take some of the horror away from it for us."

Patoni sneered at him.

"There won't be much beauty with you hanging on a big wheel, with fifty nails in your body and you going around and around, dying a slow death of living hell. No beauty to that, Mr. Conklin."

Conklin smiled at him.

"Perhaps, not," he answered. "But what else do you want to talk about? What are the terms you mentioned?"

GRACE gave him a quick, bitter look, but Conklin pressed her hand again and she lapsed back in a mask-like silence.

"Sure, the terms," Patoni laughed. "I'm going to be frank with you both. I can afford to be, because you'll be dead in twenty-four hours unless you come to my terms."

"All right, what are your terms," Conklin interrupted. "We know all about the death business."

Patoni's face twisted with anger and brutality and craftiness.

"Don't like to hear about that death, eh?" he sneered. "Well, it'll be a great sight and I came all the way up the river to see it. I love the grandeur of it. I—"

Conklin interrupted him again. This time his voice was cold and hard.

"If you want to talk terms, talk; if not, get the hell out of here. I wouldn't mind dying right here choking the life out of your miserable body. It would be better than waiting for the big wheel to kill me."

Patoni's hand went to his automatic.

Conklin said: "Your gun won't do much good here, Patoni. These savages don't like to have people kill their victims and if you pull that gun, you'll never get out of this village alive. You know that."

Patoni shrugged and smiled. His hand left the automatic.

"You want to know my terms," he answered. "All right, here they are. I bumped that old dame off in Paris. Miss Sturgeon knows that, and she thinks if she can reopen the case, I might get convicted. Well, I framed that kid brother of hers in good shape, but I made one bonehead and the cops have been worrying about that."

"The gun that croaked the old lady was my gun and they weren't able to hook the ownership of that gun on the kid, but there was enough other evidence to send him to Devil's Island.

Miss Sturgeon's family have spent a fortune trying to trace that gun and it worries me a little.

"The fact the kid escaped from Devil's Island and the fact he is now dead makes things pretty safe for me. If he had lived and got his mind back again and gone back to Paris, he could have talked and told the cops something about that gun and it wouldn't have been well for me. Get me. That's why I had to bump the kid off. Self defense."

Patoni looked up at Conklin and grinned.

Then he continued:

"The kid is dead and the girl here won't live long, but there are other members of her family and they might cause a little trouble. Not much. See. Now what I want is to know just how much the girl here knows about that gun and I want her to sign a little statement to the effect that the gun was her brother's. Just a casual precaution. That's all."

Conklin stared at Patoni when he stopped talking.

"And if Miss Sturgeon will give you all that information and sign this paper, you will see that she gets out of here alive," he asked.

THAT'S it exactly. Have her sign that paper and give me the dope on the gun, and I'll do what I can to get her out of here alive."

Conklin laughed, looked at Grace, and then said to Patoni:

"You really mean, Mr. Patoni, that you will have Miss Sturgeon sign this paper and give you the information and then you will make doubly sure that she is killed. That is really what you mean, isn't it?"

Patoni jumped to his feet. His face went a putty gray. His cheeks twisted and his eyes flashed murder.

"You dog," he yelled. "You and the girl will die the death of a thou-

sand hells. I've tried to help you. I offered you a chance—"

CONKLIN got to his feet, walked up to Patoni, and said in a hoarse voice:

"We don't want your help, Mr. Patoni. Not a damn bit of it. Now get out of here."

And then his right fist went out and caught Patoni square under the chin. The scrawny body rose a little in the air, went backwards, and fell in a heap at the door.

His gun came out of his pocket and it was pointed at Conklin.

"Go ahead and shoot, Patoni. It would be an act of kindness if you would kill me now—a double act of kindness because you would never get out of this village alive."

Patoni got to his feet slowly. His face was still a putty gray, but his eyes looked at Conklin in a crafty, cunning way.

"You win this time, Conklin," he said. "But you won't win tomorrow morning and I'll be there to watch the ceremony."

Two Indians came to the door. They were excited and spoke to Patoni in rapid, guttural grunts.

Patoni's body seemed to twist in a convulsive motion. His jaw dropped and his black eyes lost their cunning and were terror-stricken.

He said something to the Indians. They made motions with their hands. Conklin and Grace could not understand the motion.

They put their hands down to the ground, raised them up, and then made a motion that something was gone.

Patoni stood terror-stricken in the doorway. His body swayed a little and his jaw gaped open.

Then he rushed out of the doorway and the Indians followed.

"What happened now?" Conklin

said. "Something that has frightened that rat pretty badly."

"The Indians were motioning to the ground, as if to say that something was gone," Grace said. "They made a motion with their hands to describe something round, like—like a mound."

She gave a quick cry, grabbed Conklin's arm and cried:

"The mound—the mound, do you think—is it possible—" Conklin patted her cheek and smiled.

"Anything is possible as long as you don't give up hope."

CHAPTER X

Mystery of the Mound

THE village suddenly became alive with bustling activity.

Drums started to beat and Indians ran in every direction. It was a mêlée of running Indians carrying long spears, shouting loudly in all directions.

Then out of the running and shouting there came some semblance of order. Conklin and Grace stood at the door of the hut. Out in the square the Chief of the village strutted and lined two hundred warriors in two long lines.

He shouted at them in a loud, excited voice. They waved their spears and yelled and then started off on a dog trot for the jungles. Half of them went one way; the other half the other.

Patoni was nowhere in sight. After the departure of the warriors silence fell over everything again. A few dogs barked after the departing warriors, but soon these barks ceased and the village went back to its sleepy and indolent life and there were no sounds to break the stillness that pervaded everything.

Conklin said:

"It looks like another war. What is all the excitement about?"

GRACE laughed. All the indifference to danger, all the making of emotions and thoughts left her. Her eyes sparkled and her face was animated and excited.

"I'll be over this afternoon and give you final instructions about tonight," he said. "People are foolish to give up hope, aren't they."

Before Conklin had a chance to answer her, she ran across the street and back to her hut.

Conklin felt a sickening feeling come over him when he thought of the small slender hope that had revived her spirits. The hope was so small that it was foolish to even consider it.

He walked inside the thatched house and sat down and smoked his last cigarette.

The silence that had settled over the village after the Indians left was soon broken. Dogs started to bark at the edge of the compound. Warriors came running back, straggling back in ones and twos.

The Chief was out in the square, seated on a high bench. The returning warriors would run up to him, fall on their face, and then jabber in their Indian tongue.

This went on all morning. At noon there was a lull.

Conklin remained in his hut, sometimes standing at the doorway, sometimes looking out of the window, but the greater part of the time, lying on the mat bed, trying to think.

He greatly preferred the attempt to escape, and the possibility of being killed in that attempt, to waiting for the slow death on the great wheel. He tried to reason out some logical plan of action when he and Grace got free of the village that night, but none came to him.

Only the endless jungles, with the terrifying insects to bite at their skin, the insufferable heat, starvation—those were the only things he

could think of and he knew there was no way to escape from them.

While thinking of these things he went to sleep. He had no idea how long he slept. He was awakened by someone pulling at his arm. He opened his eyes and looked up at Grace.

"Everything is ready," she cried. Her eyes sparkled and the color had come back to her cheeks. "I was right about the mound. The Indians discovered that Paul's body was removed from there and that is why Patoni looked so terror-stricken and that is why all the warriors have gone into the jungles. My women told me all that."

Conklin didn't sit up. He lay on his back and looked up at Grace and said nothing.

THERE were many things he could have said. He could have told Grace that the mere fact Paul's body was gone from the mound was no indication that he was alive, that, in all probability, some animal, a jaguar perhaps, had found the body and dragged it away to the animal's den where it could be eaten in peace.

He could have told her that bodies never lie in the jungles long. And that even, though his wound had not been fatal, he had no chance to live in the muggy, torrid land, where death lurked in every side. He was wounded and had no food and no firearms. It would be an endless struggle on through the woods and swamps until death released him from the pain and suffering of the jungles.

But he didn't say any of these things. The joy that shone in Grace's face was too great for him to kill.

"You know it might have only been a flesh wound," she cried. "We didn't have a chance to examine it closely. I was so stunned that I believed him

dead and you didn't have time to examine it."

"It is possible," Conklin said quietly. "But it is strange that the Indians would have let three days go by without discovering it. But anything is possible in the jungles and we can always hope."

A frown crossed over Grace's face.

"Then why was Patoni so frightened when he heard the news," she said. "Why are all the warriors going into the jungles looking for him. They are afraid that he is alive—and he is alive. I know he is and somehow he'll get out of the jungles."

CONKLIN sat up and brushed his hair back.

It was on the tip of his tongue to ask her where Paul could go to get out of the jungle, since he was a hunted man, but he didn't ask that question.

He simply said:

"Anything is possible in the jungles."

Grace sat down beside him and took his hand.

"Now, listen to me carefully." She talked in an eager, excited voice. "Tonight when the first shades of darkness fall, we are going to escape from this village. Everything is ready. We will leave from my hut, crawl along the ground to the outskirts of the village and then we will be free."

"It sounds easy," Conklin laughed. "But what about the dogs and the women and the babies and the men. Are we going to crawl under their feet?"

Grace laughed. She was in a merry frame of mind.

"You haven't let me finish," she protested. "An hour before the dance begins every dog and every baby and every woman will be off the streets. That is the hour of prayer.

The woman explained this all to me. We don't have to crawl. We can make a run for it. I will have food, plenty of it, and I know what trail to take to get back to the mound."

"But why the mound?" Conklin asked. "We'd better stay away from there. We better go at this intelligently. Our only remote hope of escape is down the river. We would have to take our chances boarding a boat at St. Laurent, though that chance is very, very remote."

Grace shook her head slowly. The color left her cheeks and her face took on that mask-like expression.

"We will go back to the mound," she said softly. "We will make sure about Paul's body. If some animal has dragged it away, we can tell that. If he is dead there—well, I should like to die near him, to feel that he wasn't all alone out in that terrible jungle."

Conklin patted her hand and said:

"We'll go to the mound. What time do we leave?"

GRACE jumped up quickly. The mask-like expression left her face.

"In about an hour," she said. "I'll be waiting for you at my hut. I will be alone. The two women will be in their own places praying and we'll leave from my hut and escape from here and from that terrible death. Leave everything to me. I know what to do and where to go when we leave the village."

Conklin got up and smiled at her.

"I'll be there when the first signs of darkness clear up," he said. "I'll wait until everybody is praying, because I don't like dogs when I'm running away."

"In about an hour," Grace said and disappeared out of the hut.

Conklin walked over to the window that looked out on the square.

The crudely built platform was all finished. There were two chairs on the form. Conklin wondered if those were for him and Grace. A medicine man, painted in hideous colors came out of the temple and hopped over to the platform and inspected it and then raised his hands to the sun.

CONKLIN felt a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. He didn't know which would be the worse hell—the wheel of death or dying slowly in the jungles.

There was no more running around of the warriors in the square. The men were returning in small bodies, but the Chief no longer had his wooden throne out on the square and the returning warriors went to their huts and did not come out again.

The sun was fast sinking in the west. It looked big and red and queer. Shadows of twilight were beginning to fall around the thatched houses.

Conklin went back and sat down on the mat and waited for shadows to grow into darkness.

Outside everything was strangely silent. There were no barking dogs, no screaming children. The incessant chatter of women passing his hut stopped.

Over everything spread a sinister, ominous silence.

Conklin waited for an hour. The interior of the hut grew dark and outside the twilight turned to night.

He got up slowly, smiled grimly to himself, and then started for the door. He smiled as man smiles when he walks into a living death, for Conklin realized that the mad plunge into the jungles for him and Grace was nothing more than that.

But he shook his head quickly to chase away that feeling. His body tensed, ready for action, when he walked to the door.

He wondered if Grace would have everything ready.

The silence of everything seemed a little uncanny. It all seemed too easy, this walking out of his hut and escaping into the jungles. There was something wrong somewhere, but he couldn't place his finger on it.

He walked to the door, peered out into the darkened streets, and then walked out of the hut.

But he didn't get far. Two dark forms seemed to rise from the ground. They were all Indians and they had long spears in their hands.

Slowly the spears went to Conklin's body and he was pushed rudely back into the hut.

CHAPTER XI

Escape and Capture

A WEIRD, uncanny chant-like sound rose up from the square. The sound came through the little window of the hut.

The dance of the Sun God was about to begin.

In the darkness of the hut Conklin could see the tall forms of the Indians, holding their spears at his body. The chant raised in volume.

And then Conklin got into action. Dropping to the ground, his body shot up under the nearest Indian and with a superhuman effort Conklin raised the startled warrior high in the air and threw him down on the hard dirt floor. The body of the Indian hit the floor with a dull thud and lay there, dazed and vaguely outlined in the shadows, inert and still.

The second Indian started for Conklin, but his right shot out and caught the Indian flush on the chin and he went down with a groan.

Conklin was out of the hut in a flash, across the street, and over to Grace's hut.

Only one dark form stood by the doorway of Grace's place. Conklin sneaked up behind him, got the Indian's neck in the crook of his arm and then the Indian went backward with a stifled groan and lay on the ground, making no move or sign of life.

Grace appeared at the door dressed in a brown native woman's dress. Conklin gave her no chance to say anything. He grabbed her arm and pulled her out of the hut and down the street.

The street was deserted. Behind them the chant of the Temple increased in sound.

At the edge of the village Conklin stopped.

Grace gasped.

"This way. Down this little path."

Conklin asked no questions. He started down the path and together they plunged into the Stygian-like darkness of the jungles.

But as they did they heard, back in the village, the dull sound of drums beating. At first the sounds were low, but they increased to a wild, hysterical beating.

CRIES followed the beating of the drums. The village was suddenly lighted up with a hundred torches.

Conklin and Grace ran down the narrow little path as fast as Grace could go. Neither of them looked around. Conklin could not see the path for the darkness, but he plunged madly on, holding Grace's hand, knowing that their only hope lay in speed and getting as far away from the village as possible before the pursuit started.

Plunging down the dark path, Conklin suddenly fell headlong into a large patch of grass. The path had taken a turn at that point and the grass was down a little hill, and Conklin had run over that hill.

Grace fell down with him. They lay, huddled together in the grass, trying to get their breath.

A little to the rear they could see many torches coming down the path. The burning torches moved up and down and looked strange coming through the darkness, as if moving alone.

GRACE and Conklin lay huddled in the grass until the procession of trotting Indians had passed them. The procession turned abruptly and Conklin could see, by the movement of the torches, that the path was made up of many curves.

"Your lady-in-waiting has funny ideas about people and prayers," Conklin said. "I had to bust the heads of two savages to get out of my hut and one was waiting for you outside your door. I thought it all sounded too easy."

"It was Patoni's work," Grace said. "They had been watching us ever since they discovered that the body of Paul had disappeared. The Indian woman warned me and she did all she could. What are we going to do now?"

"Use some sense and stay where we are. The jungles will be covered with Indians, and any move we make will be certain capture."

"But we can't stay here."

"And we can't move. We're in a bad fix."

The procession of lights came back. Just before the Indians got to the turn in the path, near where Grace and Conklin lay in the grass, the lights stopped; then they started off in every direction, each light going its own way.

"They're scattering through the grass," Conklin whispered. "Lie still and don't move. Maybe the Lord will help us out once."

The Indians began beating the

grass. A light came toward Grace and Conklin and on each side of the light loomed a dark form.

"Two men are going with each light bearer," Conklin said. "That makes it very simple to scare us out of the grass."

The light came within three feet of them. They huddled together and got as close to the ground as possible. They could hear the bodies of the Indians moving through the grass. The light was about a yard to their right. One Indian passed within inches of their heads.

They lay prone on the ground for many minutes after the lights had passed. There were other lights in the grass. Many of them. Indians were yelling back and forth.

FOR nearly a half hour this beating of the grass continued; then the lights disappeared over a hill.

Conklin got up quickly.

"We'll have to make a run for it and better stick to the path," he said. "We couldn't get far on the grass, and they would hear us."

As he stood up he could see countless lights scattered on all sides.

The drums were beating wildly back in the village.

Grace got up and stood leaning against him.

"There isn't any place to run," she gasped. "There are thousands of lights in the grass."

"We'll try the path. Come on."

Conklin walked up the little hill and got on the path, with Grace holding his hand.

They moved down the path slowly. They had great difficulty in following its winding curves, and after a time they got off it and fell into the grass.

Lights bobbed up all around them. They could hear the yells of the Indians near them.

Slowly and with bodies tense, they moved down the path.

They came to a hill and walked down it and found themselves in a woods. The darkness was intense; there were no lights around among the trees.

THE sounds of the beating drums came to them indistinctly. Now and then they could hear the cry of an Indian in the rear.

They relaxed the tenseness of their bodies.

Conklin whispered:

"We've passed the first line and I don't know when we'll meet the second line of torches. We're not free yet."

"We've gotten—"

Grace never finished those words. Forms, many of them, sprang out from the trees and surrounded them.

There was no chance for any struggle, any fight. They were thrown on the ground and a minute later they were going back to the village on the shoulders of powerful Indians.

The Indians carrying them gave out loud, exultant cries. Torches came from all directions and before they had gone very far there were a hundred warriors following behind them, holding their torches high in the air and yelling like maniacs.

The number increased as they neared the village.

When they entered the narrow streets, a seething, screaming, yelling mass surrounded them. The drums ceased beating. From the Temple came the weird and eerie chant of the dance of the Sun God.

Grace was put up on the platform first. She was bound in a huge chair, her arms tied and her ankles strapped to the floor. A heavy belt was put around her waist.

Conklin was placed in a chair by

her side, his hands and ankles bound in the same way and the heavy strap around his waist.

He could see the white outlines of Grace's face, but he didn't look at it long. He stared ahead at the seething mass of savages in the square.

CHAPTER XII

The Dance of Death

THROUGH the endless hours of the night Grace and Conklin sat strapped on the platform watching the weird inhuman spectacle of the Dance of the Sun God.

Without rest, without any diminishing in the frenzy that had seized the natives, the dance went on through the long hours, a terrifying, brutal, savage thing. But even strapped to the chair, waiting for the death that was to come to him when the sun rose in the morning, Conklin could not miss the savage beauty of the inhuman dance.

Screeching and screaming, worked up to an emotional insanity that was inhuman in its wildness, the savages danced and wiggled and screamed around the platform, throwing their arms high in the air and turning their hideous faces up to Grace and Conklin.

The chief sat on a special wooden throne near the dance and watched it silently. He was the only savage not worked up to an emotional insanity.

Conklin's body ached but the scene below him held his awed attention. Sometimes he would glance over at Grace. Once she was looking at him. Her face was twisted with pain, but she smiled weakly and he smiled back.

At last the rays of dawn began to break over the jungle. The dance increased in its frenzy. Indians, fall-

ing exhausted from the night's wild dance, were lying around the square, but those still on their feet screamed louder and danced with a renewed frenzy.

The yelling and screaming developed into a weird, inhuman wailing. Those lying on the ground rose to their feet and took part in the dance, wailing and throwing their hands up to the sky.

Conklin saw four tall Indians go into the doors of the Temple. The wailing increased; it rose to a monotonous dull roar of human voices. The Indians were crouching low as they danced back and forth in front of Conklin and Grace.

The doors to the Temple opened and four Indians came out, carrying a huge wheel. The wheel was about six feet in diameter and sat on a platform that rose three feet from the ground. The Indians put the wheel on the ground and ran back into the Temple.

Other Indians rushed up to the platform and untied Grace and carried her down to the wheel. She was strapped to the wheel, her hands high over her head and her feet spread far apart. A heavy leather strap was tied around her waist.

THE four Indians came out of the Temple carrying a similar wheel. Conklin was taken from the platform and tied to the second wheel in the same manner as Grace.

The first rays of the sun were darting through the low hanging mist of the jungle.

Drums began to beat, frantically and inhumanly. The moans of the natives changed to wild, barking cries.

The two great wheels were raised in the air, with Grace and Conklin hanging on them by the straps that held their hands and ankles.

Then the sun dance began.

The frenzy of the night had been tame compared to the dance of the Sun God. The sun was rising rapidly over the gray mist; the mist was dying away and the green foliage of the swamp appeared.

For a moment Grace and Conklin remained upright on the wheels; then the great wheels began to turn slowly. It took several minutes for the first revolution of the wheel to go around. Then the wheel stopped for a second.

In that second Conklin saw something to make his blood boil and his lips to press between his teeth until blood came.

Standing at the edge of the square was Patoni. A big half caste negro stood near him. Patoni's eyes met Conklin's.

The dark face of Patoni broke into a malicious smile. He waved his hand at Conklin.

But the great wheel started to turn again, slowly at first and then rapidly.

Conklin saw no more. His head reeled; thoughts and sights blurred. He heard the yelling of the natives; he heard a spear pierce the wood of the wheel. A pain shot through his leg.

HE tried to look at Grace. But suddenly everything went black. The wheel was whirling rapidly.

He was conscious that it was slowing down. There was a shot somewhere in the square; then another. Yells and cries followed.

The wheel stopped, with Conklin's head up. He opened his eyes.

The sight he saw was something he was never to forget.

Libres, ragged, dirty, were there by the hundreds, armed with machetes, old-fashioned shotguns and ancient knives. With wild vells they

were slashing and killing the Indians, now too exhausted from the night's wild revelry to put up much resistance.

THE battle was over in a few minutes. The Indians ran in every direction, with *libres* chasing them and killing the exhausted savages before they could get to the edge of the jungle. A few made the jungle, and escaped, but not many.

Conklin watched the battle in a daze. What were the *libres* doing there? His dazed mind refused to act.

The great wheel was being lowered to the ground. Someone was untying the cords around his hands and ankles. A knife slashed the wide strap around his waist.

Something hot was put in Conklin's mouth. It went down his throat, warmed his body. He opened his eyes, blinked them stupidly and closed them again.

Finally he opened his eyes slowly.

Standing over him was Paul Sturgeon.

"You're not looking at a ghost," Paul laughed.

Conklin stared at him. All the sullen and dead-like look was gone from Paul's face and eyes. His sensitive and well-formed face was keen and alert.

"No, I'm not a ghost," he said. "It's a long story. The bullet only nipped my head, and I was out for a little while. I came to when the Indians were carrying you and Grace away. I knew I couldn't be any help to you if I were taken prisoner; so I played possum until I got a chance to make my get-away. Somehow I got back to the river. It took me two days.

"I found these *libres* out looking for me, but Grace had very kindly provided me with fifty thousand

francs when we escaped, and I used this against Patoni's ten thousand, and I got a nice little army together. We came up here as soon as we could, and I guess we were hardly too early."

Conklin sat up and looked around. Grace was lying on the ground near him. Her eyes were closed and a native woman was working over her.

Conklin recognized her as the lady-in-waiting that had helped her.

"Grace will be all right in a few minutes," Paul said.

Grace suddenly opened her eyes, looked at Paul, and then closed her eyes again.

"Thinks she sees a ghost, too," Paul laughed. "The bullet brought me back to my senses. I don't remember much about the escape from the Island or our trip to the jungle."

Grace opened her eyes again, gave a little cry, and Paul fell to her side and took her in his arms.

They didn't say anything for a long time, and then slowly Paul explained to her what had happened.

"I knew you were alive, Paul," she murmured. "I knew it all the time when I heard that your body had disappeared."

A loud yelling in the square caused them to look up. A large gang of *libres* were dragging a man across the square.

They brought him up to the wheels and Conklin saw that it was Patoni. The *libres* kicked and jeered in French at the man that had sold many of them into slavery.

"*A la Morte,*" they began to yell.

Two of them grabbed Patoni and laid him across the death wheel. He screamed and kicked and pleaded and begged, offering them anything if they did not kill him.

But his entreaties made no impression.

Then Paul stepped in. When Patoni saw him, he fell on his knees, grasped Paul around the legs, and screamed:

"Save me—save me—I killed your aunt—I'll confess if you only save me. Please—please save me."

Conklin got up and pushed the *libres* away. Paul explained something to them in French and they cheered.

Then Paul said to Patoni:

"I'll save your miserable life for the guillotine if you will tell the truth about the murder of my aunt.

"I'll tell everything—everything," he screamed.

"We better have it in writing," Conklin suggested. "I've got a fountain pen and some paper in my pocket. Always carry that with me."

"We'll go in the Temple for the ceremony," Paul said. "We'll have to get Grace out of the sun."

Fifteen minutes later the four came out of the Temple, Grace hanging on to Paul, and Conklin pushing Patoni ahead of them. In Paul's pocket was a confession, signed by Patoni, of the murder.

OUT in the square the *libres* were plundering everything they could find, including the dead bodies of the Indians.

Conklin and Paul and Grace, with Patoni going ahead, walked away from the gruesome sight.

Out of sight of the square they stopped.

"I found your motor launch. It's down on the Marino River, three miles from here," Paul said. "We better start down the river at once."

Conklin smiled.

"A little complicated for me," he said. "And it won't go well for Grace. You see, assisting a prisoner to escape is a serious crime in the eyes of the French, even though that

prisoner has a confession freeing him. We're alive, but not better off than we were."

Patoni gave a quick cry and started to flee. Conklin caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back.

Then he saw what Patoni saw, and he felt like fleeing himself.

Coming across the square was a tall man, dressed in the uniform of a French colonel. A number of French troops were with him, while the cries of the *libres* indicated that other French troops were rounding them up and taking their arms from them.

THE French colonel walked up to Grace and Paul and Conklin and smiled.

Conklin recognized him as Colonel Le Duc, commander of St. Laurent. He wanted to flee; he knew this would be the end of the mad escape for him.

The colonel smiled at him and said: "Monsieur Conklin, greetings. We came up the river to arrest the man you have there, Monsieur Ferrand, better known to you as Patoni. I have orders to arrest him for the murder of Madame Chailluet of Paris, for which Paul Sturgeon was forced to serve a sentence on Devil's Island."

Patoni cringed away from the colonel. Two French soldiers grabbed him by the arms and pulled him away.

Colonel Le Duc smiled at Grace. "We have a special escort and a special boat to take you back to St. Laurent," he said.

Conklin looked at Grace. He didn't quite get the colonel's meaning. He gave the colonel a questioning look.

"As a very honored guest of the French Republic, I assure you, Mademoiselle," he hastened to explain. "We admire great bravery

when we see it, especially when it is a girl. You did a brave thing to rescue your brother from the clutches of a dog like Monsieur Ferrand. I hope to clean St. Laurent out of all his kind.

THE little matter of your helping your brother to escape has been fixed up. I persuaded the French government that it was not an escape, that your brother had served his time, and that you only brought your brother over to the mainland."

Conklin asked: "And what about me?"

Colonel Le Duc smiled.

"You were very free with your fists, Monsieur Conklin," he said. "But we have forgotten that. If you call at my office in several days we'll talk about that concession of mahogany your company is interested in. Any man that helps us rid French Guiana of a dog like Monsieur Ferrand is entitled to a large concession."

The colonel bowed and walked away.

Grace turned to Conklin and smiled.

Paul said: "I'll go talk to the colonel."

When he was gone, Grace said to Conklin:

"You ought to know a great deal about these jungles now."

He smiled, took her chin between his thumb and forefinger.

"There's always a lot we can learn from the jungles—and about mahogany and about women. I told you I didn't give a damn about my job or mahogany or anything; that I was glad I came with you. Well, I still am, and I hate to leave you."

"Leave me," Grace laughed. "You're never going to leave me—never."

And she gave a little laugh and fell into his arms.

The White Giant



The Professor Grasps the Secret of Dev Sefid and Becomes a Man of Terror for a Day

By PAUL REGARD

Author of "Kwa of the Jungle," "The Haunted Legacy," etc.

A COUPLE of dead lizards, lying there on his laboratory table at the side of a goldfish bowl in which he'd been keeping them, reminded Professor Godey that this experiment of his might end in his own death as well. He was sorry that they were dead.

They'd been bright little creatures, friendly and playful. There was something human about them, especially now—human victims of an accident; their forefeet were like little hands. Small as they were, they

filled the big laboratory with a sense of death—the mystery of death.

Godey was alone. Long ago he'd turned out all the other lights in the laboratory except the one just above his table. The big room was filled with confusing shadows. There was a lot of glass about—chemical apparatus, show-cases, globes and jars containing specimens. The glass threw a faint reflection, gave an illusion of eyes.

The ghostly effect was intensified by the silence. The whole university

seemed to be deserted—a deserted university in the heart of a deserted city. There was no sound even from the surrounding streets of New York.

He sat there watching the retort in front of him. It was an open glass retort over a circlet of clear blue flame. The silence was such that he could hear the faint, minute cackle of the flame.

He shouldn't have tried the stuff on the lizards, he told himself, until the retort had boiled for the seventh time. He turned again to the manuscript at his elbow surrounded by its barricade of old books.

It looked like a patch of ordinary parchment. As a matter of fact it was parchment made of human skin. It was incredibly ancient. It had been found in a rock cave of the Himalayas.

The writing on it—pale brown with squares of faint color, yellow, pink, and green—was in Zenzar, the oldest known language in the world.

Again he read:

"From the Book of Dzan—the Formula of Dev Sefid."

Godey was probably the one man in America who could have read it. He was the son of a missionary and himself had been born in Ladak. Who had sent him this grisly treasure? He could only guess—some naked yogi, back from a pilgrimage into the Himalayas.

ANYWAY, the mysterious parcel, posted somewhere in the heart of Asia, had found him here in the heart of New York.

"The Book of Dzan," he knew, was a book of ancient magic. "The formula of Dev Sefid" he'd made out to be a combination of chemistry and incantation. He'd heard of Dev Sefid. Dev Sefid was merely one of the primitive gods of Hindustan—

one of the hundred thousand. His name, translated, signified "The White Giant."

But what was the White Giant's formula?

He was bent on finding out.

THERE were parts of the formula that had to be chanted. He began the chant in a strained whisper. Like many primitive languages the Zenzar was music as much as it was ordinary speech—each word a note requiring a certain pitch and a certain inflection.

There was a science of sound that modern scientists were just beginning to discover—a science of vibrations that ran back to the birth of the world.

Gradually, Godey became aware of a note not his own. He listened, while beads of perspiration came out on his dome-like forehead.

Again he repeated a fragment of the formula. Again he heard that note he'd heard before. It was as if some other voice was replying to his own. The note was like a minute "oh," long drawn out and ending on an "m":

"O-o-o-o—m-m—"

His eyes came to the retort and saw that the liquid there was in movement. Hitherto it had been milky. Now it was translucent—it might have consisted of melted opals.

It wasn't boiling, exactly. But in the brilliant depths of it, every now and then, a little whirlpool appeared. The whirlpools swam to the surface. Expiring there they emitted the sound he had heard:

"O-o-o-o-o-m!"

The liquid had begun an incantation of its own.

Godey forgot the incantation that he himself had been repeating. Instead, he spoke in a strangled whisper:

"Life!"

Then again:

"It's the word of life!"

For the moment he was so overcome that he could say no more. He couldn't move. He could only think, see visions. He himself had always been a physical weakling, with too much brain and not enough body.

Life, it seemed to him now, was something that had always been denied him on account of this. Ever since he'd been a boy he'd been rejected on account of his weakness—by boys, girls, men, women.

Had he found now some formula of life—some formula for an elixir of life?

In the silence of the laboratory and the sleeping university it was as if the voice of Dev Sefid himself were now droning awake—the voice of that great White Giant, Life itself, chanting a Song of Life.

HE was taking the retort from the burner when the cleaning-crew started to take possession of the place. He'd been so absorbed that he hadn't heard them enter.

The first he knew of their presence was when all the lights went on and there was an outburst of conversation and laughter which, to Godey's overwrought nerves, sounded like the roar of a mob.

The cleaning-crew comprised about a dozen women, none of them very young, but all of them hardy. A tough lot, the professor had always considered them.

It wasn't the first time that they'd broken in on him like this. And so far they'd never failed to put him out.

After all, they had their work to do; and the night time was the only time they had to do it in—roughly between midnight and dawn. They were like a gang of marauders, armed with mops and brooms, pails, and even a sort of rapid-fire gun in

the shape of a heavy vacuum cleaner.

AS a rule, Godey would not have thought of stopping them, or even of interfering with them in any way, about as much as if they'd been a herd of wild elephants.

But tonight it was different. He'd had that moment of exaltation. They would not know what he was distilling. When the sudden uproar made him spill a little of the liquid he let out an unexpected roar of his own.

There was a momentary silence.

Then Godey was placing the retort on the table as he began to shake. It wasn't fear that was making him shake. It was something else.

The leader of the cleaning-crew had started forward. Apart from her sex she'd have made a good wrestler. Her bare arms showed muscles that bulged. Her face was broader at the bottom than it was at the top. She came to a stand when she saw that Godey was coming her way.

"Sorry, Professor," she said, but she didn't look sorry—she was staring at Godey hard. "But I suppose you'll have to be leaving."

"I don't care to be disturbed."

"It's past midnight."

"There are other parts of the building you may clean."

The woman still eyed Godey for a minute longer. She knew that he hadn't been in the University very long. She turned to her squad.

"Go on, girls," she told them. "Get busy. I guess the professor won't mind."

"I do mind," Godey screamed. "Out, I tell you! Out, or—"

He heard himself curse. He was witness to himself snatching up a bottle which he threatened to hurl like a bomb. For a time he must have lost his senses completely. It

couldn't have been for so very long.

He could remember later that the women had run—all of them, including their leader—and that he'd chased them. He'd chased them out of the main door into the corridor. It was himself who'd slammed the door and locked it after them.

In the swift silence and the return of darkness that followed their going he recovered himself somewhat. But there'd come to him a curious return of elation. He'd cursed. He'd showed fight.

As he looked at the bottle in his hand—the one he'd been ready to hurl—he laughed. He saw that it was a bottle of carbolic acid. There would have been a pretty mix-up if the fight had come to that.

HE put the bottle back in place. He went to a water-tap in a far corner of the great room and there laved his hands and face. There was a feeling upon him that this night something monumental had happened to himself and the world he lived in. He drew a cup of water.

"Dev Sefid!"

There, for a moment, at least, he'd been the White Giant himself. He dared not think of the possibilities. He looked over at his table.

He was on his way back when he stopped and stared.

He was neither drunk nor dreaming—he was sure of that. But as he stood there with the cup of water shaking in his hand and a cold splash of horror, as if spilling down his limbs, he was seeing something—so he told himself—that no human living eyes had ever seen before.

Was he crazy? Had he suddenly become a victim of delusions?

In that case, the wonder—the scientific wonder of it—would be hardly less. For a part of his brain, at any rate, was still rational.

He tested it. In a flash he could

remember everything—answer every question that he asked himself. He was Bertram Godey—Dr. Bertram Godey, twenty-eight.

This was Columbia University—the research laboratory—where he had a right to be, although it must now have been well past midnight. He'd just made what soon would be acclaimed as the outstanding discovery of the age.

Yet all this dimmed.

BEFORE his eyes—how near or far he couldn't tell—he saw a pair of dinosaurs, grotesquely huge, reared upright and grappling with each other in what he saw at once was a battle to the death.

One had caught the other by the throat. There was blood, what appeared to be coagulated masses of it. He noted the detail. The blood didn't flow except sluggishly, as if it were too thick to flow. Before it fell, it formed huge globules, like toy balloons.

It was probably this detail that brought him his needed flash of understanding. These were those two lizards of his he'd thought were dead. He'd been looking at them through their empty bowl. The bowl had served as a magnifying glass. But, even so, a good deal of the mystery and something of the horror remained.

It was clear that during his brief absence the lizards had come back to life.

But what else had happened to them? What had transformed them into demons when they'd been so mild?

Godey knew. It was something of the same fierce frenzy that had taken possession of himself just now. He remembered that jolt of liquid he'd spilled when the cleaners came in. The lizards also had come in con-

tact with the formula of Dev Sefid.

He came creeping up to his table and stood there for a while watching the combat—looking at the container with the cooling liquid—gazing at the fighting lizards again.

But the battle was almost over. The one that had got its enemy by the throat had now thrown it down. It was still holding the loser by the throat. Now it was trying to claw the victim's body open.

GODEY put out his hand to pull the victor away. In an instant the winning lizard had released its victim and was attacking him instead. It had coiled like a snake. Its spring was like that of a piece of steel. It was a reptile supposed to have but a vestige of teeth.

It may have had no teeth at all. But there was a clamp to its jaws like that of a pair of forceps.

Godey let out a cry of pain. He tried to shake himself free. The lizard writhed and held.

He seized it and jerked it loose. A bit of flesh came with it. There was a flow of blood, a flare of red-hot pain.

Whether it was pain or excitement that caused him to do so, it doesn't really matter. It may have been just accident—or fate. But in that bleary, hazy moment when he'd just freed himself of the lizard he'd thrust his wounded finger into the cooling retort.

His thought had been to thrust it into the cup of water he'd placed on the table.

He found out what he'd done in no unmistakable way. From his first contact with the liquid there came surging up into his blood a sort of fire. It was a burning and yet it wasn't a pain. He could feel it reach his heart. His heart had become like the engine of a power-

house. He could feel that he was growing heavier, harder. Yet he was filled with an elastic strength.

THERE was something else.

Once more the lights flashed on and there was a sound of voices. As Godey turned and looked toward the door, he saw that the cleaning squad was back again, this time headed by the night watchman of the building, a man he'd always feared and detested.

But now the only thing Godey felt at sight of him was a thrill of unholy satisfaction.

The night watchman was a big man, beefy and tough. He must have weighed two hundred pounds at least. He had the contempt of all big men for little ones. He came prowling up the central aisle with his nightstick in one hand and his steel time-punch in the other, while the women stood near the door and watched.

They'd warned him that the little professor was crazy—or drunk. He hadn't gone very far before he saw the professor coming his way. He stopped and waited.

Godey'd always been apologetic, too polite. The big man eyed him.

"The cleanin' squad wants to get to work," he began, and he intentionally made his voice sound insolent.

To his complete surprise the little professor came straight up to him and stared him in the face.

It was a stare that continued for perhaps five seconds. Not a word. And the night watchman felt a gust of rage.

"What's the matter here?" he growled.

"This!" said Godey, in voice that the other didn't recognize, and something struck the watchman in the chest. It was as if he'd been poked

by a piston-rod. He went back reeling.

He would have fallen if he hadn't found support. He brought up against a glass-fronted instrument case. He would have crashed on through. The steel frame was all that saved him.

The watchman saw red. He clutched his nightstick and straightened up, swollen, glowering.

"What are you going to do with that stick?" Godey asked.

THE watchman swung at him. Godey merely laughed. He met the stick half-way with his bare hand, stopping it. In a moment he'd snatched it free, breaking the raw-hide thong with which it was held to the watchman's arm as if the thong had been a cotton thread.

"Why don't you hit me?" Godey gibed.

The big man swung at him again, this time with his clock-punch. It was an even uglier weapon than the nightstick—a heavy bit of steel with a handle.

Godey apparently made not the slightest effort to avoid the blow. Yet he wasn't there when it should have landed. His footwork had been as deft as that of a shadow—faster than the eye.

What was more, while the big watchman was still unbalanced by his swing at empty air, Godey had caught him from behind—one hand to his collar and another lower down.

There was a gust of wonder from the cleaning-crew. It was an outburst with some terror in it, yet more of fascination, marvel, and admiration. For a moment they were seeing the big night watchman lifted bodily, held there. They saw the impending crash. He came down sitting.

There was a lull. The big night watchman wasn't the only one who'd been stunned. So was that big Amazon who was the captain of the cleaners. So were the members of her crew.

In a way, but differently, Godey was a little stunned himself. He'd performed a miracle. At least he'd done something that would have seemed a miracle at some former time in his life. Yet he'd done it so easily—it had seemed so natural—that it seemed impossible to him that he should ever have doubted his ability to do it before.

WILL you leave me alone?" he asked softly.

He wasn't even out of breath. His voice was cool. It was chilly, rather—smooth and hard.

He heard a gush of frightened assent. He turned his back and started back in the direction he'd come from.

He found that he was still carrying the watchman's club. He turned with an idea of giving it back. But he saw the women gathered about their fallen hero. They were prying him up. They were leading him away. He slid the club after them along the floor and laughed to see them jump.

It wasn't, Godey perceived, that he'd merely received some sudden gift of superhuman, god-like strength. The perception came to him swiftly and yet, so to speak, by jumps, as soon as he was alone again.

The big room had become a place of smells, where before he would have detected no smells at all. He could smell that departing crowd of his enemies.

It was a scent at once human and faunal—there was something of the human jungle about it, which, curiously enough, he found not to be

unpleasant. But a little urging and he might have followed it up.

He stood there taking note of other scents. Carbolic acid. Prussic acid. These were blares of smell. But the lesser odors reached him just as unmistakably—the moist sweetness of soap at the distant wash-basin, the delicate tang of old varnish. While he was doing this he became aware that his hearing had undergone a similar enhancement.

There was an ocean of sound, both far and near.

Yet he wasn't submerged. He could select what he wanted to listen to as easily as he could select what he wanted to see with his eyes. With his eyes he could read a book or look at the stars. It was something like that now with his ears.

For a while longer he stood there listening to his recent enemies—and smelling them—although they were off somewhere in another part of the building. They were not coming back any more this night. They were calling him crazy—hoping that, come daylight, he'd be dead. They made him laugh.

But gradually, instead of this, he was listening to the great ocean of sound from the outer world—the whisper of a million voices, the spider-web music of orchestras, the tread of a myriad wheels. These merged in a tidal note, almost a tidal song. . . .

"Life!" Godey whispered. "It's calling. I smell it. I hear it. I'm strong."

HE'D already turned out all the lights in the place. He could leave everything as it was until he returned. He knew, now, that nothing would be disturbed. Still, it would be wiser, he guessed, that he keep his going secret.

He stepped over to one of the dark windows overlooking the street and opened it. The street was Broadway, but here deserted. And the window but a scant thirty feet above the pavement.

Without a moment's hesitation, Godey slipped over the sill. As lightly as a cat he reached the ground.

IT was this same night that the John Q. Huey Association was giving its annual ball. The association didn't have a very good reputation. But Huey was something of a political power and the police stayed away.

Anyway, Huey had enough huskies of his own to serve as bouncers; and, in a general way, the members of the association were not the sort who do their fighting with either a knife or a gun. Fist, boot, rock, or a club—sure, and when you will. But they didn't fight like women. They fought like men.

The ball was being held in the Bon Ton Social Parlors, 13 Arthur's Place. Arthur's Place was a diagonal bit of alley between two streets, with a garage for heavy trucks on one side and a couple of small factories occupying most of the other side.

Between the two factories was the old two-story building with a speak-easy-lunchroom on the ground floor and the ballroom on the floor above.

It was, in a general way, no place for a stranger either to look for or to find if he did look for it, especially at night.

But Godey found it.

He'd headed for it almost instinctively the moment he'd found himself in the open air on the deserted sidewalk. It was from this direction that he'd caught the strand of nearest music, the scent of a hot

and intoxicating life. And it wasn't so far from the University—not more than half a mile, downhill.

He'd ghosted down the entire distance at a slinking run, silent as a wolf, some wolf-like thrill seeming to run through his body from heel to head. And, wolf-like, pausing now and then to listen and sniff the air, making sure that the trail was hot.

HE was standing in front of No. 13 before he really stopped. The place was lit up and resonant with life, both upstairs and down. The rest of the alley was dark.

For the first time it occurred to Godey that he'd not only left the laboratory without a hat and in his old working-coat, but that also he had no money in his pocket. It merely occurred to him. It caused him no distress.

The only thing that really held him was that he was undecided which was tempting him more, the lower floor or the upper. From one came the smell of food and drink, from the other an alluring scent of animal heat and artful perfumes. From both came a matted web of voices and laughter, a steady beat of music.

His delay was brief. He couldn't have been standing there more than a pair of seconds before the door of the lunchroom was jerked open and half a dozen men came tumbling out. Two of them were in a clinch, gouging and silent. The others howled.

In an instant Godey was in the midst of a mob. The two who were clinched had fallen against him. The rest of the mob mixed in. It was a free for all.

"Why, this is wonderful," said Godey, and he lifted his right to a chin. "Great!"—and he crossed with his left.

He was aware that someone had kicked him and then let out a curse of pain.

"Thanks!" said Godey, and he also kicked.

ALMOST before he knew what had happened he was free again—for the moment no one was in front of him at all but a square-built lad with a snub nose and a heavy chin. The stranger swung.

Something—perhaps the memory of that kick he'd received—told Godey to wait, to take it, and see what happened. He jerked himself rigid just as the swing landed on the side of his head.

It was a blow that should have been a knockout. Godey had stopped it, and stopped it with his head. Yet he'd hardly felt it. The man who'd hit him looked as if he was going to faint.

Godey grabbed him.

"Cheese it!" the other pleaded. "I've bust me mit."

The six had swelled to a dozen, and the dozen surrounded Godey as he pushed on into the lunchroom.

The man with the broken hand—the hand he'd smashed as though against a block of concrete when he landed on Godey's jaw—was raving and sticking close.

Some of the others—those Godey had hit were staggering, supported by friends.

Godey found a place at the bar where his back was too close to the wall for an attack from behind. Not that he was afraid. He wanted to miss nothing, that was all. He ordered a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

There was a buzz in the room. It was a roar to Godey's sensitive hearing. But he could analyze all that was being said. They were telling about what had happened in

the street—praising him, threatening to kill him, wondering who he was.

FORTY cents," said the big man back of the bar.

"You'll have to charge it," said Godey.

He saw the look of horrified amazement in the bartender's round face. He saw the man reaching for something under the bar.

There were cries of warning, then a sudden hush. The bartender relaxed. And he and everyone else, Godey included, had turned to look in the direction of the door.

John Q. Huey himself was standing there—founder of this association, political chief of the neighborhood, and looking it. He was a large man with small, bright eyes and a double chin. He'd been a fist and knee fighter himself in his earlier days. Now he was rich and could hire his fighting done. But he was still the leader.

He'd seen at a glance that he'd arrived just in time to stave off a battle, and a battle here would have meant a destruction of property. His property. He owned it.

But for the moment he said not a word. His small eyes swept the place—his whole presence hard and cruel and as full of menace as that of a bull rhinoceros. Then he'd assumed a gloss of geniality as he rocked toward the bar. He was dressed in expensive clothes. In spite of the late hour he was freshly barbered.

There was a hubbub of salutation—"Howdy, Chief!" "Good evening, Mr. Huey!"

To all of which Mr. Huey replied with amiable grunts and a few motions of his hands.

But again there was a lull as Mr. Huey laboriously straddled a stool at the bar.

"I said you'd have to charge it," Godey spoke up.

The chief gave Godey a deceptive smile. "Who is he?" he asked, from the corner of his mouth.

There was a storm of replies—the beginning of a storm. Godey himself stopped this. He'd reached across the bar and taken the bartender by the shirt in the middle of his back. He held the man powerless and dragged him closer.

"I said," he repeated, "you'd have to charge it."

The bartender's desperate eyes were on his chief. He must have got a signal.

"Okay," he grunted. "We're chargin' it."

He was filled with murder as Godey released him, but the presence of the big chief compelled delay.

Huey had continued to look at Godey. Godey met his look.

"Do you live in this district?" the chief asked.

"No."

"This is a neighborhood affair."

"What of it?"

"Now that you've had something to eat you ought to be going."

"I'm going," said Godey, and he left his place at the bar. "I'm going upstairs to the dance."

THE announcement was met by an outburst of jeers, insults, threats. Even before Mr. Huey's arrival the place had begun to be crowded. Those upstairs had heard about the fight and had come pressing down—plenty of women among them, mostly young. News that the leader was there had swelled the crowd.

What the crowd saw was easy to tell. It was a crowd with few inhibitions. They saw a smallish man, frail-looking, with a bookkeeper's head, decently dressed except for a shabby alpaca coat. Yet, almost

quick as their eyes, the rumor sped round.

HE was a fighting demon. He'd knocked out four or five. He must have been able to take punishment like a cast-iron post. He didn't show a scar.

The most generally accepted guess was that he'd escaped from an asylum. He conveyed that touch of awe that dangerous lunatics are apt to convey.

Godey smiled. He'd caught some of those fleeting remarks about his sanity.

"Listen!" he shouted.

They listened.

"I implore you," he went on, "not to think that I'm demented—not 'bughouse!' as you put it. That would spoil all the fun!"

There were cries of "Rats!" "Give him the run!"

"I appeal to the ladies!" Godey insisted, forced to raise his voice again.

At this there was another roar. They were calling him "Oscar" and "Clarence." A gangling youth, a full head taller than Godey, got the start of a laugh by coming up to him with a mincing air. Quick as light—without even looking at him—Godey slapped him against the wall. He seemed to stick there, amazed and discouraged.

"And don't call me 'Oscar,'" said Godey; "or 'Clarence.' I suppose you may call me what I really am." He paused, and in the silence he pronounced that ancient, sacred name: "Dev Sefid!"

"What are youse," Mr. Huey bel-
lowed; "a Turk?"

"Dev Sefid," Godey corrected him gently; "'the White Giant.'"

There was a sudden riot, spontaneous as a clap of thunder. There was no telling how it began—some snap

of tension, even a gust of humor, a push and a sway.

Godey found himself as if swimming through a human surf—cool, collected, sure of himself, as a swimmer ought to be. He found himself at the foot of a flight of stairs. Half-way up the stairs a girl reeled into his arms. He carried her the rest of the way.

He found himself in the ballroom, with the girl still in his arms. And just then the band began to play. The bandmaster must have been a man of ready wit. He knew how to stop a riot, or at least to put some order in it.

The girl had come out of her swoon. She looked up at Godey with a shudder of fear and admiration.

"My dance?" he asked.

"Yes, dance!" she whispered. She was saying something else. No one with ears less fine than Dev Sefid's could have caught her bated message. It came to Godey on the rhythm of a rumba. ". . . Kill you! They're plotting—to beat you to death."

NOT even yet had Godey had the one supreme thrill of this night. He may have thought he had, but he hadn't. It was still to come.

He continued to dance with the girl he'd found on the stairs. And there'd been plenty of evidence, had any been needed, that that warning of hers was no false alarm.

Godey noted the evidence. Most of the older people had gone. There were fewer girls about. There appeared to be more men. Once or twice there had been sporadic movements to mob him. He'd been forced to knock a number of the more bel-
ligerent persons down and out—three, four, he couldn't remember; he didn't much care.

He was Dev Sefid, the 'White

Giant. And his situation was so novel that he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

LIFE! Something that he'd never known before! The respect and fear of men! A girl in his arms!

She wanted to keep on dancing. He knew why. The moment they stopped, the moment he should be alone, and the rush would be on.

Biff! Bang! Blood! And there was more than a possibility now that someone would have a gun. Would Dev Sefid be able to stop a high-powered modern bullet?

Godey decided to find out.

"I won't be shielded by a woman any longer," he told the girl. "Wait for me—and watch!"

He'd brought his partner close to the band and he signaled the leader to stop. Then, while the packed crowd stared, he kissed the girl and faced the room.

"I defy you!" he began.

He began it. But even before this brief phrase was out he was conscious of some terrible change. His power had run out. He was like a drained bottle.

He felt a shivering wave of fear—sickening, stifling, as if he were sinking in a frozen sea. He wanted to call for help. He wanted to explain.

He wasn't the only one who'd become aware of that sudden change. The mob had been as quick to perceive it as he had himself. In an instant he would have been beaten to a pulp. It was a vision of his end that he had time to foresee.

For, after all, he did escape death. He even escaped injury.

Now, just as the crowd was bending forward, there came another sort of rush, and a complex shout went up: "The cops!"

A squad of policemen had erupted from the stairs like a blue volcano.

It is said that it was John Q. Huey himself who'd put in a call for the reserves. After all, he didn't want a murder committed on the premises.

Godey found himself down in the dark alley of Arthur's Place between two stalwarts clothed in blue.

"Who are you?" one of them asked.

"Just a research man," Godey answered humbly.

"All right, beat it," said the cop with a grin. "There's one thing sure, you're no White Giant."

What the cop said came like a message to Godey. It came to him like an occult message straight out of the Abyss of Wisdom. He respected it as such.

Just before dawn he let himself into the research building of the University with a pass-key. No one saw him. Not even the night watchman appeared to be about.

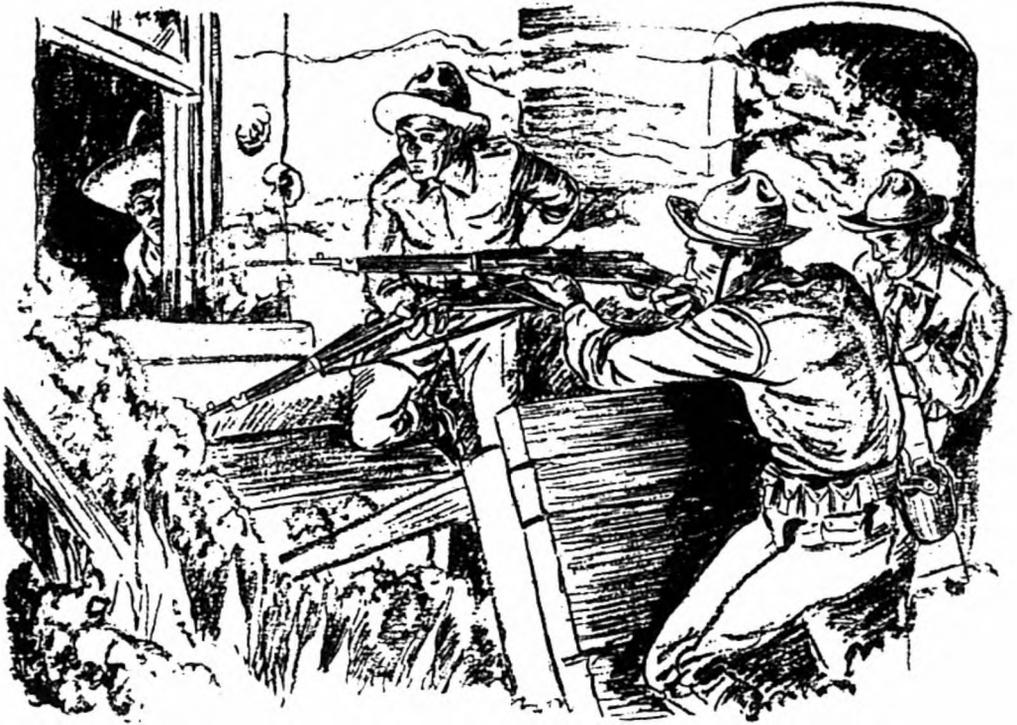
In the laboratory he found everything as he'd left it.

HE meditated there for a while. After all, the world had traveled far since the days of Dev Sefid. There had been enough of Dev Sefids in the world. That was what the world was sick of.

Finally, he carefully carried the retort with the magic formula in it over to the sink and there emptied it and rinsed out the receptacle. After that, fortified, and without a qualm, he wrapped up the human-skin parchment and the two dead lizards and dropped them down the chute of an incinerator.

Anyway, he mused, he'd won the respect of the watchman and the women who cleaned the place. And—yes!—there was a faint tingling about his cheeks, he'd kissed a girl whose name he didn't even know.

FIRE *and* SWORD



Captain Napoleon Bonaparte Brody's Men Take Things Into their Own Hands in this Story of Mexican Border Trouble

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "The Scarlet Killer," "The Corral of Death," etc.

FORTUNATELY Laidlaw had sense enough not to fire. He stared over the edge of the small hillock down to where the waters of the Rio Grande swirled over the ford and up along the trail on the Mexican side to where that long column of sombrero-topped horsemen came riding carelessly down from the hills.

They were some six or seven hundred yards away. Laidlaw rose, tucking his gun beneath his arm and doubled back among the

cottonwood trees to the clearing where twelve horses browsed on the picket line and twelve men lounged about in the afternoon sun.

The peacefulness of that scene was rudely interrupted by his warning cry. Sergeant Gannet hurried forth in his shirt sleeves, buckling on his cartridge belt.

"Yep, Sarge, a whole gang of Greasers. . . . Oh, about forty or fifty of them I guess, comin' this way at a walk!"

"That'll be Sancho Ferrero," com-

mented Sergeant Gannet calmly enough, then raised his voice in command, "you, Green and Witherspoon, get busy and saddle all them horses and pack everything in the saddle bags! The rest of you follow me!"

And as the two men designated began feverishly to slam on blankets and saddles, Sergeant Gannet led his clump of men to the cottonwoods at the edge of the grove.

The Mexicans were in plain view by now. Sergeant Gannet was right, for Sancho Ferrero himself led them, the Mexican bandit leader resplendent in a suit of black velvet, trimmed with silver and looking very jaunty and arrogant despite the fact that he was being driven out of Chihuahua by the Mexican authorities.

Not to be daunted by this, Sancho was leading his pack of lean and hungry bandits across the Rio Grande, intending to do a little gentlemanly looting, murder a few gringos if need be, and recross farther down the border into more salubrious parts of his own country.

It was a nice scheme and would have gone through without a hitch had it not been for the untimely and unexpected presence of Sergeant Gannet and his twelve men at the ford.

SERGEANT GANNET being a hard-boiled veteran of many battles knew the value of holding his fire. And thus it was that the Mexicans rode down to the river edge and were half way across before there came a brisk and business-like gale of rifle fire from the cottonwood trees above them, a storm of lead which emptied many saddles and sent the riderless horses plunging and squealing back into the crowded masses of Ferrero's forces.

The bandits scattered like swallows, losing themselves in the groves

of cottonwood trees on the Mexican side of the river. They quickly advertised their presence here by the brisk crackle of rifle fire.

Bullets began to whine over the heads of the handful of soldiers, thudding into cottonwood trees and sending down showers of leaves and bits of branches.

"Don't shoot at nothin' you can't see!" ordered Sergeant Gannet, a command that immediately reduced the American return fire to an occasional shot. Emboldened by the weakening of the American rifle fire, the bandits increased their efforts until the whole Mexican side of the river seemed to be spouting lead.

"We're all right here," stated Sergeant Gannet judicially, "as long as they don't cross the river higher up and come in on our flank."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a burst of rifle fire came from their right on their own side of the river and several bullets splattered among the trees.

"Time to drag-tail out of here!" called Sergeant Gannet and pulled his men back towards the horses.

SOME alert bandit must have sighted the move, for a sudden yell went up from the other side of the river and men began to splash across the ford, firing as they came. Sergeant Gannet grunted and swore as he reached the clearing again and found that the two men he had left behind had only succeeded in saddling about half the horses.

The bandits were now coming from across the river and down through the cottonwoods above them on the right. Sending forward half his force to complete the saddling of the horses Sergeant Gannet turned at bay with the remainder of his men and poured in a hot fire at the Mexicans who danced and crouched in the cottonwoods all around them.

The storm of lead had the effect of making the bandits stop for a few seconds. In that short time the remainder of the horses were saddled.

"Duck for the horses!" shouted Sergeant Gannet. His men turned and streaked it across the clearing, piling into the saddles as the Mexicans came on, yelling like a pack of wolves.

It was nip and tuck getting out of that clearing but the troopers rode low in the saddle and streaked it up the trail, away from the river, quickly getting a convenient grove of cottonwoods between them and the enemy.

IN the few minutes that it took the bandits to bring up their horses and pile into the saddles again the troopers had put a good thousand yards between themselves and the enemy. It was not until they had cleared this distance that Sergeant Gannet found that he had two wounded men on his hands, Wither- spoon with a flesh wound through the thigh and Johnson with a hole drilled through his shoulder.

Both men had been able to climb into the saddles but both were bleeding profusely and needed attention.

"We got a good forty miles to go to the main camp," grunted Sergeant Gannet, "but I guess we ain't goin' to be able to make it. We got to haul in somewhere and hold them Greaser bandits off."

About two miles ahead of them on the trail was Glovers Ranch and the thought of its stout adobe walls put fresh courage into the sergeant. Placing a man on either side of each wounded trooper he put his horses into a gallop and headed for the ranch.

Ferrero's wolves yapped at their heels all the way. The two wounded men reeled in the saddle but were

held in place somehow until at last they reached the borders of the ranch.

Galloping through the corral, the small band of troopers burst into the patio, their horses sliding on their haunches as they were brought to an abrupt halt while the men flung themselves out of their saddles and hurried to the windows, cramming cartridge clips into magazines as they found firing points in the deserted building and began a cool and steady fire against the encircling bandits.

"It's time we was gettin' somebody to ride up to Sierra Blanca and get the troop down here," said Sergeant Gannet during a lull in the firing. "Anybody want to go up?"

"I got a good horse, Sarge," Laidlaw spoke up. "I can git there all right but what good will it do us after I git there? That dopey skipper of ours will hem and haw around for half an hour and then he'll head forth, amblin' along at a walk. You know *that* guy!"

"Yep, I know him," grunted Sergeant Gannet morosely, "he'll talk the hind leg off a mountain battery jackass and he'll mootch down here slower than a gang of sore-footed doughboys.

"Nope, Captain Brody ain't much to count on, but maybe Lutenant Bird 'll jazz him up a little bit. Anyways, it's our only chance, so get goin'."

SO it was that Laidlaw made preparations to depart, going about the business glumly, for none of them had too much confidence in Captain Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, their talkative troop commander.

In spite of his gloom, however, Laidlaw led his horse out to the rear of the ranch house, leaped into the saddle and galloped through the corral, receiving only a scattering and

ragged volley as he swung out on the mesa.

His very boldness surprised and startled the Mexicans but after firing a few shots after him they let him go and made no effort to pursue the lone trooper.

Weary hours passed before night came. The bandits, unseen except for an occasional form that rose and ran forward a few steps only to disappear again, were working closer and closer.

Their rifle flashes lit up the darkness, twinkling around the ranch house like fireflies. It was Janisek who first broke the news.

"Got any cartridges, Sarge?" he asked calling from his post by the window to the south, "I'm about cleaned out."

"How many you got?" asked Sergeant Gannet swiftly.

"'Bout four."

"Hang on to 'em—how many you got—and you—?" Gannet made a rapid count. The average was about four or five for each man and the bandits were growing bolder with the approach of night. Four or five cartridges meant a few seconds of rapid fire. And the pistol ammunition was in no better shape, for they had exhausted that in the running fight from the river post. There was little left the American troopers except their clubbed rifles.

The bandits were creeping up now within a few yards of the house. A dry irrigation ditch gave them shelter at one side and a wagon-shed provided cover at the other. The fire from these two points was steadily growing heavier as Ferrero's men concentrated at both places.

THE white ribbon of roadway stretched across the mesa, twisting and turning through cactus and outcropping rock. A black dot suddenly appeared on it, a dot coming

from the direction of the Rio Grande.

Had anyone from the cavalry camp used a pair of powerful glasses they would have seen the dot resolve itself into a weary and sweaty trooper, riding a foam-flecked horse whose breath was coming in labored spasms.

Had the glasses been even more powerful they might have seen that the trooper rode with the reins in his right hand—and wondered what was the matter with the left arm dangling so uselessly at his side. They might have wondered why the trooper swayed so precariously in his saddle.

But no one in the cavalry camp five miles away noticed the black dot.

* * *

"Lieutenant, never move in war without full and complete knowledge of the enemy. It was to a strict observance of this maxim that the great Napoleon owed his phenomenal success as a military leader!" Captain Brody placed his hand in his blouse and raised his paunchy figure on its toes, gazing owlishly at his lanky lieutenant.

"Yes, Captain," returned Bird, trying not to let his voice express his weariness.

Three weeks of the unrelieved society of Captain Brody, Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, Captain Nth Cavalry, U. S. A. as he signed official papers, had driven Bird to vague thoughts of suicide or manslaughter as the only relief from the clatter of his captain's tongue.

The only two officers with a troop of cavalry along the Mexican border, they were thrown entirely too closely together for Bird's peace of mind. The lieutenant must listen when the captain talks. And Napoleon Bonaparte Brody loved the sound of his own voice. Morning, noon and night, its impressive cadence rang in his lieutenant's ears.

"And Lieutenant, remember what I have told you so often," Bird sighed to himself and looked out over the mesa, "that it was the great Napoleon's attention to details that led to his success—I am sorry to say it, Lieutenant, but you are a little careless as to details," and the paunchy little captain waved an admonitory forefinger at his subordinate.

YES, Captain," repeated Bird, clamping his jaws firmly together to stifle the yawn that was struggling for expression. Brody waddled back and forth in front of the 'dobe shack that they used for combined sleeping quarters, mess and living rooms, his hands behind him, his head bent forward, his brow clouded with weighty thoughts, quite in the approved manner of Napoleon, his great namesake whom he tried to emulate.

The very much fed-up lieutenant gazed with lack-lustre eyes down the troop street, its neat tents ranged in order, gazing to the far end where the golden sorrel horses dozed fitfully in the heat of the afternoon sun.

If he could only get out on another patrol again and put a few miles between himself and this human talking machine!

Again he sighed as the captain resumed his discourse, and thought of the farthest outpost down there among the cottonwood trees on the Rio Grande and envied Sergeant Gannet his command, so comfortingly far from the sound of the captain's voice, a voice that went on and on like an endless ribbon of road that had no turning.

The road down there by the picket line led to Bosque Bonita, forty miles away on the river. He stared at it longingly, his eye following its winding course over the mesa until it disappeared behind the out-jutting

shoulder of a tall butte nearly five miles away.

As he nodded in bored assent to Captain Brody's steady stream of remarks, his eye picked up a black speck coming out from behind the butte and advancing up the road.

His conscious mind dwelt on this phenomenon, trying to reason out who it might be and why he should be coming up to the main camp at this hour, while his subconscious mind noted that Captain Brody was now entering into a long and exhaustive discourse on the strategy of the campaign of Marengo, a subject good for at least another hour as he knew by previous experience.

Again he studied that tiny speck coming along the road towards the camp, figuring out that the captain's discourse about the campaign of Marengo would come to an end just about the time that the lone rider struck camp.

Now Captain Brody was talking about the bridge of Lodi. Bird nodded, he knew all about that bridge at Lodi and wondered if Napoleon ever talked interminably to his staff officers, forced to listen whether they would or no.

When his attention wandered back to the lone rider he noticed with a start of surprise that the horseman had advanced a considerable distance in so short a time, and reasoned that the man must be pushing his horse for all it was worth.

The captain's voice droned along, occasional words registering on Bird's consciousness, but his brain was mainly occupied in wondering what could be the necessity of riding a good cavalry horse so fast under the broiling Texas sun.

DOWN in the orderly tent, First Sergeant Mueller, conscientious old Prussian that he was, busied himself in checking up some ration re-

turns, scorning the heat that beat down on the brown-toned canvas, although the sweat was running off his red face as he labored with the blunt stub of a pencil at the forms before him.

The men were seeking what relief they could from the heat, being for the most part stretched out on their bunks. The stable detail languidly broke out some bales of hay and filled nosebags at the end of the picket line, the horses suddenly becoming vastly interested in these activities, so that noses were raised, ears pointed up and hoofs pawing impatiently all along the double line of gleaming sorrels.

Sergeant Mueller glanced up at a big alarm clock ticking noisily on the field desk before him and rose, blowing at the bronze whistle attached to a chain from his shirt pocket.

THE lethargic soldiers rose wearily and made their way to the picket line, gathering in halter shanks and leading the horses, four abreast, down to the watering trough where they plunged silky muzzles into the warmish alkaline water and drank deeply.

"Move oudt dere und make itd snabby!" Mueller's voice bellowed down the line of tents, for no particular reason except that a good "top kick" always bellows at intervals, probably in obedience to some unwritten army tradition that requires intermittent stentorian activity from a first sergeant.

Up where the scarlet and white troop guidon drooped lazily on its staff before the officers' shack, Captain Napoleon Bonaparte Brody's voice droned on.

Bird slouched back in his canvas chair, only keeping awake by dint of watching the lone horseman steadily

eat up the distance between himself and the camp.

The horse was becoming wearied and had slackened down its gait. Bird sat up alertly, forgetting the captain behind him.

THE man on the horse seemed to be swaying in the saddle. Muttering some excuse to his chief, Bird stepped into the shack and came out with his field glasses, taking them from their brown leather case, adjusting the focus as he trained them on the approaching horseman.

Man and horse leaped immediately into his field of vision, startlingly clear and distinctly seen through the powerful glasses.

Captain Brody, wrapped in his subject, paid no attention to his lieutenant's activities and did not notice Bird rise.

"Just a minute, Captain," said Bird, "I have to speak to Sergeant Mueller a moment," and he was gone, striding towards where the burly top sergeant supervised the putting on of nosebags and the breaking out of the fragrant bales of timothy hay.

Bird's voice betrayed no trace of excitement as he returned Mueller's salute and pointed down the road to where the lone horseman could be seen not half a mile away.

"Turn out a couple of men and a non-commissioned officer, don't wait to saddle, and send them to meet that man coming, hurry!" Sergeant Mueller turned swiftly on his heel.

"Corporal Smithers! Gratton! Turner!" the men addressed raised their heads, "take oudt your horses, bare-pack und go und meet that feller comin' the road oop.

"Make itd snabby!" The men moved swiftly to their appointed tasks, taking time only to slip on a watering bridle before they vaulted on their horses and sped away in a cloud of

dust, watched curiously by the rest of the troop.

"Getd busy!" roared Sergeant Mueller, and the troop obediently resumed its activities.

"There's something stirring," said Bird quietly, "I picked up that fellow through my field glasses. He's wounded in the shoulder. His horse has a cut along the flank from a bullet. Better rush the men's supper."

Mueller saluted, his face wooden and impassive and bellowed across to the cook shack, where the leisurely cooks even now were dragging out steaming pots and pans and a great mound of sliced bread.

There was a roar and clatter in response as the men hurried for their mess kits. Under Mueller's flailing tongue the cooks made quick work of serving and groups of men gathered wherever they could find shade, holding filled mess kits in one hand and tin cups in the other.

Bird watched men and horses, the men sensing that something was astir and wasting no time over emptying their mess kits, the horses tossing their nosebags high in the air in an effort to get out the last few oats.

Captain Brody sat contemplative, in front of the adobe shack, not observing the stir going on in camp and especially not observing the return of Corporal Smithers at a gallop to rein up before Bird and dismount.

SIR, there's hell poppin'," Smithers eyes were wide with excitement. "Sergeant Gannet's outfit's been druv outa Bosque Bonita, and a hull gang o' Greasers follered 'em. Sergeant Gannet retreated back to that there 'dobe ranch house where they caught up with him, and he had to duck into shelter.

"They've got the place surrounded and Gannet's fightin' like everything. Laidlaw here," and he pointed back

to where the wounded messenger was being helped down from his blood-flecked horse, "makes a getaway and carries the message through!"

SERGEANT MUELLER stood by, taking it all in. The tall lieutenant looked at him. The old first sergeant shrugged his shoulders and his glance strayed up towards the scarlet and white guidon where Captain Brody still sat, wrapped in contemplation.

"He vill valk der horses all der vay dere," opined Sergeant Mueller, referring to Captain Napoleon Bonaparte Brody's somewhat weird manner of keeping his troop at a walk at all times, despite the well-known ability of cavalry to cover ground rapidly at the trot, "und ve vill get dere too late, yah, Loodenant?" Bird nodded in agreement.

"At the rate our good captain marches we won't get there before tomorrow morning some time," commented Bird thoughtfully.

"Yah, py der time ve vill get dere, all iss kaput. For vy iss dere captain always walking mit der troop? Dot valking it iss goot for der infantry but id iss *nicht* goot for der cavalry."

"You said a mouthful, Sergeant. But he's the troop commander and as long as he's leading us we've got to march at the walk," returned Bird, pacing back and forth, a thoughtful frown on his forehead.

"*Ja Wohl*, Loodenant, as long as he iss leading us," said the sergeant with peculiar emphasis.

The lieutenant looked up sharply.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, noddings, noddings," explained the sergeant blandly, "but maybe ve could fix it so der captain von't lead der troop!"

Bird looked at him quizzically.

"What are you trying to do, suggest a violation of all the articles of war, Sergeant?"

"Oh, no, noddings like dot, Loodenant, noddings like dot, but pretty soon it will be dark. Und der captain he vill talk and he vill talk und he vill pay no attention to noddings; maype ve can do sometings und he vill not know!"

AND Lieutenant Bird listened while Sergeant Mueller unfolded his scheme.

"Yeah, maybe it'll work," said Bird dubiously, as the old sergeant concluded, "it means a court martial for me if it doesn't work. But we've got to try and get down there on time to save those men and this seems to be the only way."

"Ja, dot iss der only vay," nodded Mueller sagely, "oddervise ve valk und he valk mit der horses and ven ve do get dere it iss too late and der iss noddings but beatings apout the bush unt time vastings. Ja, I tink ve better do it.

"You vill agree, Loodenant, ja? Goot!" and he strode away to prepare the men, muttering something under his breath about "dot verdamnte Napoleon."

Captain Brody blinked behind his horn-rimmed glasses when Bird reported the news of the danger to Sergeant Gannet's command.

After some deep cogitation he agreed that the only thing to do was to move out immediately, but he issued no orders nevertheless, for the moment.

"Mind you," he stated, "I believe with the great Napoleon that one should not move into battle without full and complete knowledge of the enemy. We will approach this place and gather the most complete information, and, as a result of that, we will take such action as seems suitable. You will order the troop to saddle up and form, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir," Bird nodded and walked away, the troop was already saddled

and waiting. The guidon sergeant rode up, pulled the guidon from its position and placed the butt of its staff in the leather boot attached to his right stirrup. The men of the troop rapidly lined up and dressed on the brilliant bit of bunting as the officers' horses were brought up and they mounted.

From one side the troop looked like one horse and man, so straight was the line.

". . . Presend und accounted for!" saluted Mueller.

"Prepare to mount—Mount!" came the commands as the one line split rapidly into two, every man swinging up at the same instant, ranks were formed and the troop stood waiting.

"Right by two's—E-e-e-ow!" came the long drawn note of the cavalry command and the troop filed out in sedate column of twos, the scarlet and white guidon fluttering at its head, Captain Brody and Lieutenant Bird riding side by side as "Route Order" was given.

The sun was losing some of its vigor, the mesa was beginning to fade from its harsh colors into the tenderer shades of dusk when Bird leaned over and interrupted the captain's flow of words.

"Pardon me, sir, but hadn't we better get our advance guard?" he asked very respectfully. The captain looked annoyed.

"Yes, yes, indeed," he answered absently, "send it out."

WE may run into trouble, wouldn't it be wiser if I took command of the advance guard?" suggested Bird.

"Why, er, yes," assented the captain, a little uncertainly, and more than a little regretful at seeing his audience depart. But as Bird pulled his slender-legged thoroughbred mare wide of the column, Sergeant

Mueller moved up and took his place beside the captain who continued his conversation without interruption.

"First platoon—Trot—Y-e-e-o-o-w!" Bird's voice rang back through the column. The leading platoon—some thirty sabres, moved out at the increased gait, passing around Captain Brody whose phlegmatic horse pricked up his flapping ears and showed a momentary ambition to follow his companions, spanking by smoothly, the men rising and falling to the trot, spurs, sabres and curb chains jingling in musical cadence.

Bird gazed back at the compact column of horsemen following him and sighed with relief as the distance widened between them and the main body of the troop.

Dropping off two troopers as connecting files, he pressed on, Starlight, his thoroughbred mare, striding forward very steadfastly as though she knew that a long march lay ahead.

After putting about eight hundred yards between himself and the main troop, Bird slowed down to a walk, the column settling down behind him very sedately.

"Form advance guard—Y-e-e-o-o-w!" he barked. The leading two troopers moved out straight to the front at a gallop, the next set of twos followed along at a trot to act as connecting files, the next two sets of men galloped off to the right and left flanks respectively, all of them, as soon as they had reached their proper distance, settling down to the gait of the column. The advance guard now moved forward with a broad spearhead of men covering front and flanks.

The sun was retiring from the scene in a final blaze of glory that changed the mesa into a sea of crimson, which faded into soft dusky lavenders and purples as dusk descended over the plain.

Darkness was upon them and with the coming of darkness Bird resolved to put Sergeant Mueller's plan into effect. It was a risky thing that he was about to attempt and he visualized himself playing the leading role in a one act drama called *The Court Martial*.

The thought was none too pleasant, for he well knew that he would not stand the ghost of a show in trying to explain his actions to a group of stern-faced judges.

Unlawful assumption of command, disobedience of orders and insubordination were only a few of the charges that he would have to answer to if things went wrong.

But on the other hand there were Sergeant Gannet and his men battling for life against a heavy pack of Mexican bandits. Outnumbered and short of ammunition he knew that those beleaguered men stood little chance.

THE thought of them nerved him to go ahead with the only plan that would get reinforcements to Sergeant Gannet in time. A velvety darkness had now settled on the mesa.

He could not see the men riding ahead and could only sense the presence of the platoon riding behind him.

"Here goes!" he said to himself, drawing in his breath.

Turning over the command of the advance guard to his sergeant he swung Starlight about on her haunches, then loosened rein and tightened spur until she surged into her long, swinging gallop, playing lightly with the bits as she skimmed over the ground like a leaf in the wind, back towards the main body of the troop and Captain Brody.

But Bird did not turn her into where Captain Brody rode, instead he circled around the marching men and horses, coming up behind

them in the darkness until he had arrived up to within five or six files behind where the captain rode, all unconscious, holding forth at great length to Sergeant Mueller.

That stolid Teuton rode along solemnly, saying little until he heard a stir and movement behind him. Then he began a noisy fit of coughing, while his horse danced about, crowding the captain and effectually engaging his attention.

Behind the five or six leading sets of twos Bird very quietly rode in, signaling to the men in rear to follow him. Unknown to Captain Brody, nearly forty of his troopers filed silently off into the darkness behind the lieutenant.

Once they were beyond ear-shot, Bird gave the command "trot" in a low tone and the forty followed after as he pressed forward into the darkness ahead. In a few minutes they had come up with the first platoon in the advance guard.

Bird had now some seventy sabres behind him.

"Pass the word back—Trot—March!" he commanded. The order rippled back through the column. The seventy men pushed their horses into the trot.

The connecting files in rear were left back to protect the advance of the small squad left under Captain Brody. The men out on the spear-shaped advance guard were drawn in nearer.

Captain Brody rode along, his horse at a walk, talking to Sergeant Mueller, the ten or twelve men in rear following them—meanwhile Bird moved forward rapidly with the bulk of the troop—thinking of those men fighting off the bandits some ten miles ahead.

STARLIGHT moved at a steady trot, striking out, ears and nose pointing forward as though realizing

to the full the responsibility that rested upon her of setting a smooth gait that could be followed by the troop without any heart-breaking jamming up and losing distance in the rear.

The long column of horsemen, silent except for the subdued musical jingle of bit and spur, flowed swiftly along, undulating like a huge snake as it followed the haphazard turns of the twisting mesa road.

Bird rode quietly at the head, glancing backward occasionally to see how the outfit was marching, but for the most part peering forward into the darkness, that formless void ahead which held the adobe ranch house where men of his troop were fighting for their lives against heavy odds.

IT was a small enough ranch house, a four room affair with heavy adobe walls surrounding the central patio. Ordinarily it was a quiet enough place but the tranquillity of this spot with its patch of green and its comforting cottonwoods had been disturbed by the steady crackling of rifles all through the late afternoon and into the night.

A steady rattle of rifle fire from outside, the vicious whir of bullets coming through the shattered windows, the thud and smack as they hit wall and ceiling, provided a medley of sound above which rose an occasional high-pitched yell from the attackers.

At long intervals there came a sullen roar from the rifle of one of the defenders. It was like the bark of some wounded animal, well nigh done to death, but still putting up a fight.

Inside the ranch house two more men were down, one of them coughing blood with a chest wound and another with an arm dangling,

smashed and useless. The faces of the remaining men were grim.

And the grimmest face of all was that of Sergeant Gannet who, checking up on the remaining ammunition, had collected a total of eight cartridges. As though this was not sufficiently bad in itself, another worry had taken possession of him. He glanced at the other men to see if they had noticed a new factor in the situation.

"Seems to me Ah smell smoke!" announced Jennings, a long, lean Tennessean posted at the rear door.

Sergeant Gannet said nothing. He had been smelling it for some time and now he could see it—dim whirls of bluish vapor eddying and circling in the room.

A loud exultant yell went up from the enemy outside and then came a silence and a momentary lull in the firing.

In that silence they heard a crackling sound as of flames licking hungrily through sun-dried shingles. Outside, the corrals and yards began to be lighted up by a fitful red glare, a dim reflection of which began to show itself inside the ranch house.

"It's the roof!" said someone. They looked at each other grimly, those soldiers. As they watched, the eddying coils of bluish vapor grew thicker and heavier and they began to notice that the air was growing appreciably warmer.

THEY stared morosely out the windows, Gannet studying that ditch so near at hand behind which lay the bandits ready to pour a hail of bullets at the defenders the moment they were driven out by the smoke and the flames.

To add to their troubles the fire from the burning building made it as light as day, so light that it would be impossible to escape unseen.

Louder and louder grew the crack-

ling of the timbers overhead. A sudden rift of flame opened in the ceiling above them and flaming sparks dropped through.

The hungry tongue of flame licked downward viciously and suddenly the ceiling overhead was afire. By now the smoke was growing so dense that their eyes were smarting and they could scarcely breathe.

"Crowd over here by the door," called Gannet and his men lurched through the murk of swirling smoke and gathered around him, carrying the badly wounded man along.

"Ain't nothin' to do but to make a run for it," gasped the sergeant coughing as the acrid smoke hit his lungs. "they're goin' to git the most of us at that, but maybe one or two of us can git away."

THE men listened to him in grim silence.

As though aware of the intentions of the defenders, the bandits outside resumed their firing, this time with redoubled force and nearer at hand. A flaming beam crashed through into the room the soldiers had just cleared.

"Let's go!" said the sergeant and his men backed out of the inferno of smoke and flame into the patio where their horses, maddened with fright, were rearing and plunging like wild animals.

It was Bird who first saw the glare against the sky as he was trotting steadily forward. Putting his troop at the gallop he swept up a slight rise. His heart fell as there broke upon his vision the view of the distant ranch house, a column of smoke and flames spouting upwards on its roof.

"By God, we're too late after all!" he said to himself for it was inconceivable that men could live in that volcano of flame. Nevertheless his face set into grim lines as he saw

dark figures moving about the ranch house in the glare of the flames.

"We're too late to save our men," he growled, "but we're not too late to clean up on those blankety blank Greasers!"

Every man in that troop was afflicted with the same hopelessness as to the fate of Sergeant Gannet and his men, but every man felt a sweep of rage go over him and a desire to slaughter the bandits.

As the troop paused a minute on the hillcrest there came to Bird's ears a distant tap, tapping of rifle fire. He straightened out in his saddle as though he had been shot.

"By God, they're still fightin'!" he yelled exultantly. Behind him rode the trumpeter, his instrument swinging from his shoulder by a yellow cord.

"Blow something! Blow anything to let 'em know we are coming!" yelled Bird.

The trumpeter placed the mouth-piece to his lips. High and clear, exultant and fearless the bronze notes rang forth in the stirring clamor of the "Call to Arms!"

"Gallop!—Y-e-e-e-o-o-w!" came the word. There was a second's flurry down the line of the troop—then a surge forward and a steady, exultant thunder as seventy horses broke into the gallop.

DOWN in the patio of the ranch house Sergeant Gannet and his men fought with their maddened horses, every man's face set and grim, all determined to give a good account of themselves before they fell in face of the certain destruction that awaited them.

Suddenly Gannet raised his head. Above the sound of rattling rifles and crackling fire came another note—a high, clear call that sent a thrill through every man of them as the imperative notes of the "Call to

Arms" fell on their ears. The trumpet note rang sweet and clear like the voice of the beloved heard suddenly after long absence, like a burst of music down an empty street, it fell on their strained hearing like rain on parched ground.

"The damn bums!" said Gannet hoarsely—"They got here at last!" and his voice cracked.

If the notes of that trumpet were sweet to the ears of the defenders, they fell like the crack of doom itself on the hearing of the bandits.

Their rifles ceased barking at once. Like frightened rabbits they scurried out of their ditch. Running to their horses, they mounted hastily and milled around, all of them peering about in vast uncertainty.

Bird galloped swiftly on Starlight, the good mare floating over the ground, the rest of the troop thundering behind them—a long column of horsemen hurrying through the night.

Checking Starlight, he raised his whistle to his lips—blew a long blast and signaled. Immediately the head of the column slowed down—the rest of them swept up in a long curve of galloping horses. What had been a long column took swift shape as a line of horses topped by eager men.

Another signal and the moonlight flashed coldly blue on steel as seventy sabres rose like one weapon and settled into place.

Ahead of them, every man in the troop saw the huddled group of bandit horsemen clearly outlined in the light from the burning ranch house.

Like a resistless wave the steel-tipped line of horsemen rushed across the mesa—and struck the bandit force.

THE shock sounded like the crash of a great comber against a cliff. Moonlight and firelight flashed from

hungry blades, blades that rose and fell pitilessly.

Soldiers and bandits became inextricably mixed for a few dizzying seconds. The soldiers fought silently—the bandits yelled. Then came a shrill blast of a whistle the steel-armed horsemen withdrew from the mêlée, gathered like a storm cloud and struck again, breaking and shattering the bandit force, driving and overwhelming them.

Its remnants, scattered and fled, lone horsemen and little groups fleeing in all directions, leaving behind them still figures of men and animals dotting the mesa.

* * *

"I thought I heard a trumpet," Captain Brody, riding along with Sergeant Mueller at his side and his handful of men behind him, interrupted himself for a second and listened.

"*Nein*—no, notd so! Captdain!" Mueller hastily disagreed.

"Just imagination I suppose," returned Brody tranquilly and went on with his learned explanation of Napoleon's theory of interior lines. An hour dragged along, his voice rose and fell.

Clouds were obscuring the moon and the mesa was again in darkness.

Sergeant Mueller's quick ear heard a stir and movement in the darkness

far off to the right, a sound that traveled to the rear and seemed to ally itself with the troop.

Looking backward he saw that the little squad of men had lengthened out again into a troop.

LIEUTENANT BIRD appeared out of the darkness ahead. Sergeant Mueller heaved a vast sigh, equally compounded of relief and fatigue.

"*Gott sei dank!*" he muttered and shook his head in dazed fashion, his whole bearing that of a man whose patience has been tried to the limit, his ears still ringing with the unceasing flow of Brody's voice.

"Yes, Lieutenant," Brody shook a foreboding head at his lieutenant. "I was just telling Sergeant Mueller of Napoleon's great attention to details. That's a thing you will have to watch, Lieutenant, you show a tendency to be careless of details."

Bird nodded. The cloud still obscured the moon. Under its welcome darkness he yawned.

The road wound away, an interminable white ribbon twisting and curving over the mesa, towards a battle already won an hour ago. The captain wound along, his voice rising and falling as interminable as the road, talking of battles won a century ago.

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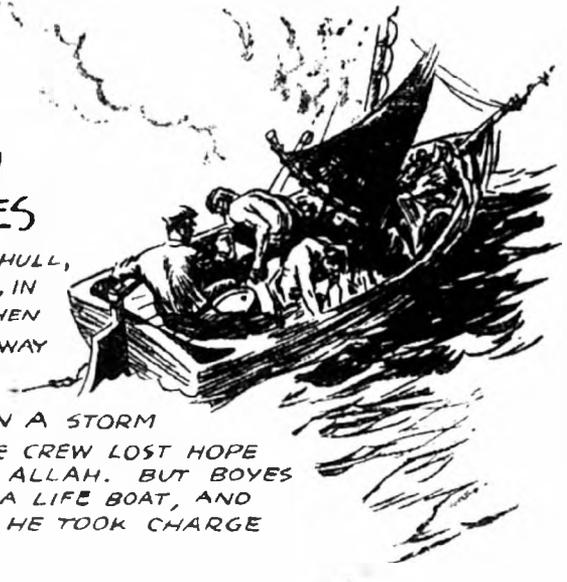
A
KING AT
TWENTY-
FIVE!



JOHN
BOYES

BORN IN HULL,
ENGLAND, IN
1873. WHEN
16 HE RAN AWAY

TO SEA. DRIFTING
TO ZANZIBAR, HE JOINED
AN ARAB DHOW. ONE DAY IN A STORM
THE BOAT WAS WRECKED. THE CREW LOST HOPE
AND PRAYED FURIOUSLY TO ALLAH. BUT BOYES
BUSIED HIMSELF PREPARING A LIFE BOAT, AND
EQUIPPING IT WITH A SAIL. HE TOOK CHARGE
AND SAVED
EVERYONE



LATER HE JOINED THE MATAHELAND
MOUNTED POLICE, FIGHTING THROUGH
TWO MATABLE WARS. HE GAINED A
REPUTATION FOR GREAT DARING.
ONCE, SHOT FROM HIS HORSE
AND GIVEN UP FOR DEAD,
HE MIRACULOUSLY
RECOVERED
AND WENT
ON FIGHTING.



This is the Original Illustrated Adventure

THE CROWN COLONY WAS BUILDING A RAILROAD TO UGANDA, AND BOYES BECAME DISTINGUISHED AS A "LION MAN," BECAUSE OF THE HELP HE GAVE AUTHORITIES IN KILLING LIONS WHO WERE ATTACKING LABORERS. ARMED WITH A GUN, HE FACED LIONS SINGLE-HANDED AND HIS AIM WAS ALWAYS TRUE.



WHEN HE RODE INTO THE HILLS ON A DONKEY, THE HILL NATIVES, KNOWING NEITHER LIONS NOR DONKEYS, BELIEVED HE WAS RIDING A LION. AFTER A FEW MONTHS OF OUT-WITTING NATIVES WHO SOUGHT HIS LIFE, ONE NIGHT BOYES DECIDED TO DEMONSTRATE HIS POWER. WHILE SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES HE, SINGLE HANDED, CAPTURED THEIR CHIEF AND FORCED HIM TO ORDER THE TRIBES TO QUIT FIGHTING AND DISPERSE



THE TRIBES RECOGNIZED BOYES' VALOR AND MADE HIM KING — A KING AT TWENTY-FIVE! RULING A MILLION SAVAGES!



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LAKE
of
Flaming
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PART THREE

SYNOPSIS

Robert Stanley, Bostonian, is a wealthy tea plantation owner in Assam, located between Tibet and India. Assam is dominated by ancient ritual. Tarvin, overseer of the plantation, is maddened by the heat and his superstition, and murders Stanley. Tarvin also kidnaps Stanley's little daughter, Doreen.

Mrs. Stanley and a young son return to America. Twenty years later Robert Stanley, Jr., comes to the plantation. Ferguson, now in charge, is unfriendly in his attitude. Robert is attacked by an ape and overcomes the animal. But there is something strange about the attack—Robert suspects foul play and Ferguson will explain nothing. How could an ape open the door of his house, ponders Stanley.

While visiting the English agent, Creighton, in Assam, Robert meets MacGraw and Somers. A poisoned arrow darts into the agent's office. MacGraw, the one most friendly to Stanley, explains that it is a native arrow and means approaching death.

Stanley feels that he is quite unpopular in Assam.

MacGraw becomes his friend, accompanies him home. Robert finds an old wo-



man in his room fastening a frog to the leg of his bed. She says: "To Nizam Ghat—there you will find her." A few moments later, outside the house, an arrow puts an end to the life of the old woman.

MacGraw explains she has been practicing Frog Magic, and the words she spoke were a message to Stanley, telling him that he must go to Nizam Ghat, a place no white man has ever been.

MacGraw and Robert find Ferguson beating a young native girl, Leci. They rescue her. Bob discharges Ferguson. The girl's sweetheart, Rheko, befriends Robert and tells him of a secret trail of Ferguson's through the jungle, unknown to natives and whites alike.

Young Rheko secures a Mishmi Man well-versed in Frog Magic. The frog jumps, and shows the direction in which Ferguson has gone.

In this hidden path, a caravan having been organized, an old crumbled fortress is discovered. Within are large cases, most of them marked with Robert's own name. They contain food, gunpowder, and newspaper clippings regarding the death of Robert's father.

Ferguson and some Nagas enter; fight against Bob and Mac. Ferguson is killed. Mac looks through papers in the old cases, and tells Bob he believes his sister is still living, a captive of the Northern tribes.

Weird Adventure and Jungle Superstition



Suddenly the Magic Man appears and says it is destined that the two friends seek her—and go to the Lake of Flaming Death. Mac had thought this lake only a mythical one. It was further prophesized that Bob would return safely, but that Mac would never return.

Now go on with the story.

CHAPTER VII

The Trek

FAR into the night, Bob worked like mad, packing supplies and ammunition for the journey which no white man and few natives other than the *Nagas*, *Abors*, and *Mishmis* had ever undertaken. While he went about his preparations, Mac was down at the native quarters, asking discreet questions and searching for men with enough endurance and courage to accompany them on their perilous undertaking.

It was well past midnight, when Bob had completed his labors, and

still Mac had not returned. Bob had contemplated going down to the long line of palm-thatched huts in search of him when the door opened, and the Irishman, wearing an expression of concern, entered.

"Well," greeted Bob. "What luck?"

Mac sighed and threw himself upon a chair.

"Fair enough," he said. "I had a little trouble getting enough boys with guts enough to brave the jungle. They're not afraid of the physical things, it's the gods and the magic that scares them off."

Two days ago Bob would have laughed at the idea of a man being afraid of magic, but the things he had seen had banished his attitude of mockery.

"Then," continued Mac. "It's going to be even a harder journey than I had thought. It seems that the trail of Ferguson must stop some-

where nearby the old fort. From then on, there's nothing save thick, almost impenetrable jungle. Our only chance is to follow an elephant herd. Let them break trail for us until we hit the rhinoceros paths to the north."

Bob tapped a worried forefinger on the arm of his chair.

"That makes it rather hit and miss, doesn't it?" he observed. "It'll be just a matter of luck to reach the Lake of Flaming Death."

RHEKO tells me that we can reach the rhinoceros paths, though it may take weeks. The hunters follow the elephants and sooner or later they're bound to come out somewhere in the North. Then, I guess we've got to trust to luck, unless we can get close enough to a tribesman to ask directions."

"Well," said Bob. "Let's go to bed. It's probably the last decent night's rest we'll get for a long, long time."

"Unless we meet a *Naga* arrow," said Mac grimly. "Then we'll be able to sleep till resurrection."

With which cheerful thought they retired.

With such a lack of white men in the vicinity Bob gave up all idea of attempting to work the plantation in his absence. He put the headman of the native village in charge and wrote a curt note to Creighton to keep an eye on things, but beyond that he made no effort to keep things going.

Early the following morning, before the merciless sun had ascended to his throne in the heavens, the caravan began its journey. With Rheko's aid, Mac had selected a score of the best fighting men in the village to accompany them and carry the heavy load that such an arduous journey demanded.

The procession crashed into the

jungle at the point where Ferguson's private trail began. It was easy going until they reached the old battlement where they had been the day before, but at that juncture they were up against the jungle's mighty wall of foliage. With Rheko in the lead, they forced their way through the impeding growth and made slow and painful progress in search of the wild elephant herd which would break trail for them and lead them to the rhinoceros paths of the North.

THEY forged doggedly ahead, and had they not been so intent on what lay before them perhaps they might have seen occasional flashes of a lithe brown figure a scant half mile behind, who clung to their van with a persistency equaled only by their own. For little Leci, having been refused permission by Mac to accompany her gallant lover on his quest, had taken it upon herself to follow the caravan. A fact which caused Bob Stanley to thank the gods, ere his adventure was over.

Bob had no idea how far or how little mileage they had made when preparations were made for the night's camp. He ate heartily and then tucked himself in his sleeping blanket, and, thoroughly exhausted, passed off into a dreamless slumber.

For two days they trekked with no untoward event, save the danger of the jungle beasts which thus far had been beaten off by the alert vigil of the boys. At the end of the third day, Bob turned to Mac and said: "It isn't so difficult after all. We've had no trouble yet."

"Not yet," said Mac, a significant look in his eyes, and before the night was over, his hint had borne fruit.

The two white men sat before their flickering campfire after having consumed their evening meal. They were dead tired and conversation languished. Suddenly Mac sat bolt up-

right, then stooping, he applied his ear to the ground. Bob regarded him anxiously.

"What's wrong?"

"I thought I heard someone. I can hear the patter of feet in the brush."

Bob listened intently, his hand tightly gripping his rifle the while. Then from the growth of the jungle something brown flickered into his vision. Alarmed he raised his rifle. A warning hiss from Mac made him pause.

"It's an *Abor*. Don't shoot. We'll have the whole band on us. Let's try parleying."

He rose and faced the slim brown figure that drew fearlessly toward the fire. He spoke a word of welcome in the Assam dialect. The native made no reply. He drew himself up haughtily, then throwing back his head uttered a sharp ejaculation.

The result of this single spoken word was astounding. The innocuous bushes which Bob could have sworn concealed nothing more alarming than some small jungle mammal suddenly disgorged a host of savages, painted luridly and bearing their full armament of spears and arrows.

Like a well-trained army they surrounded the entire party, taking even Rheko by complete surprise.

Bob glanced at Mac, despair mirrored in his eyes.

"Is this the end so soon?" he asked resignedly.

Mac shrugged. "It's a massacre unless something unforeseen happens," he replied. "I'll try to talk to them."

HE commenced a long and pointless harangue with a stalwart native who stood near-by and appeared to be the leader of the tribe. Bob did not understand what he was saying, but he could tell by the adamant expression on the brown

man's face that Mac was making but little headway with his flowery words.

Relentless purpose was stamped indelibly in the *Abor's* eyes. Mac finished speaking and looked at him hopefully, but the savage disregarded him entirely. He turned and spoke to his men, and slowly the circle of warriors that surrounded the little encampment closed in, their spears gripped firmly, and no mercy in their little black eyes.

BOB gripped his rifle, swung it up and prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. Mac reached grimly for the revolver that was strapped at his side. The *Abor* warriors approached, unawed by the white men's gesture.

Then, when it seemed that absolute annihilation was imminent, Mac suddenly was seized with a spark of inspiration. His hand fell from the holster at his side, and swiftly he stooped over the fire and plucked two brands from the blaze.

For a moment the *Abors* hesitated, suspicious of this strange move, and in that momentary hesitation, Mac grasped his chance and gambled his histrionic ability against their lives.

He formed a rude cross with the burning faggots and held them high above his head.

"Look," he cried in Assamese. "We are called to Her—Her, in the Lake of Flaming Death!"

Bob, though not understanding the Irishman's words, realized the stark drama in the situation. The speech had an electric effect on the natives. The leader stared at Mac transfixed, then silently he dropped his spear to the ground, and falling on his knees bowed his head until it touched the damp grass of the jungle's floor.

The remainder of his tribe slowly followed suit, until no one was left standing save the members of Bob's

party. Hastily Mac told Bob what he had done. He tossed the burning brands back to the fire and a moment later the savages rose to their feet. The leader approached Mac.

"We shall lead you to the rhinoceros paths," he said. "We shall take you there when the sun ascends. If you go to Her, we dare not stand in your path."

And with that he turned and silently made his way back to the darkness of the jungle, his men slinking away behind him.

Bob looked up from the fire. "Well," he said, in a tone of bewilderment. "How do you figure that?"

Mac questioned Rheko, inasmuch all," he replied. "I just made a lucky stab. That's all. But it seemed to impress them. It was a close call though."

"Too close for comfort," said Bob. "But I guess we won't have any more trouble from the *Abors*."

"There are still the *Nagas*," said Mac. "And they won't be so easy."

"Sufficiently unto the day," quoted Bob. "And now I'm getting some sleep. I don't want to keep the boys waiting in the morning when they come to break the trail for us."

BUT he did. When they awoke the following morning the camp was alive with the *Abors* waiting patiently for those for whom She had sent to take the trail that led to the Lake of Flaming Death.

Mac questioned Rheko, inasmuch as the rhinoceros hunter was an *Abor* himself, but could get little information out of him, save that she was a powerful *Naga* goddess whom even the *Abors* feared.

Yet the *Abors* were as good as their word. And for three long days they stayed at the head of the procession. On the morning of the third day, the jungle broke into a clearing, and there were the rhi-

noceros trails, which led into the grim north where no white man had ever traveled. Then the *Abors* disappeared as mysteriously as they had come; slinking off into the jungle, saying no word. They had done their duty for Her, and now, without waiting for a word of thanks, they had vanished again.

DAYS passed, as the little caravan proceeded along the trail of the rhinoceros. All about them lay the jungle, still and dark and impenetrable, concealing a thousand evil sinister secrets, hiding a thousand and dangerous threats. Still, they went on and on, doggedly fighting through the impeding brush, daring the peril which surrounded them, always drawing nearer and nearer their flaming objective.

Then came the day that a *Naga* arrow crossed their path. Bob marching at Mac's side in their usual position at the center of the procession, heard a weird agonized cry from the rear. Swiftly the two white men turned, the rifles lifted and ready for the attack.

Behind them one of the native boys had fallen to the ground, a bloody feather-tipped arrow sticking from his throat. When Mac examined him he was beyond human aid.

"The head hunters, probably," said Mac gravely. "We should be in their country by now. We must double our vigilance."

And when they made camp that night, the truth of Mac's warning became even more apparent.

Bob sat smoking before the discreet fire, chatting idly with Mac. The natives were sitting before a smaller fire of their own, jibbering animatedly, but somehow their talk lacked something. There was an air of apprehension over the entire camp. Bob regarded his partner with worried eyes.

"You think the boys are getting nervous, now that we're so close?" he asked.

Mac shrugged and raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?" he countered. "I'm getting nervous myself. That arrow this afternoon didn't improve things either."

"Well," said Bob. "We'll soon be there, then it's over, thank God."

"Then it starts, you mean," said Mac. "If the lake is all that it's supposed to be, I haven't the slightest idea how we'll cross it. Then we're due to run into the *Nagas* at any moment now, and heaven only knows how they'll regard our little expedition."

BOB rose in front of the fire and stretched himself.

"I'm going to sleep, anyway," he announced. "At least there doesn't seem to be any danger right now."

As if in direct refutation of his words, a peculiar singing sound came through the air, and a red-tipped arrow hurtled past his head and buried itself in the heart of the roaring fire.

Mac sprang to his feet and jerked frantically at his belt for his revolver. Bob, startled beyond immediate action, turned and stared at the point from which the arrow had come.

Standing tall and splendid in the center of a natural arch made by a pair of gigantic trees, stood the immobile bronze figure of a *Mishmi* head-hunter. Already he had fitted a second arrow to his bow, and was drawing a bead on Bob Stanley.

Mac let go one shot with his pistol, but in the gloom and at the distance it had no effect.

Bob, standing between the fire and the savage was a perfect target. The *Mishmi* drew back his right hand calmly. Bob stared transfixed, his muscles momentarily paralyzed.

Mac shouted in alarm.

"Duck, you fool. Get down!"

BUT the warning was unnecessary. From behind the *Mishmi* warrior a lithe brown figure suddenly appeared and seemed to catapult itself through the air. Just as the savage released his bow, the springing flash of brown landed on his shoulders.

In that second Bob broke through the daze that held him in its thrall and both he and Mac dashed madly to the spot where a pair of brown bodies struggled. The *Mishmi's* arrow lay imbedded harmlessly in the ground a few feet from the point where he now wrestled and thrashed about with his adversary, who had taken him by complete surprise.

The white men arrived panting, and Mac drawing his revolver shouted a command in dialect. The two natives arose. Bob stepped forward toward the figure of the smaller.

"That's the fellow who saved my life," he said. "Talk to him for me."

Mac stared at the small lithe figure, then his face broke into a grin.

"Say 'it yourself," he said. "It's Leci!"

"Leci!" Bob moved closer and as he bent down toward the brown face he recognized the familiar features of Rheko's sweetheart. He seized her little hand and shook it as heartily as if she had been more fortunate in the matter of color.

Mac turned a half humorous face to her, but at the same time took care that the captive head-hunter did not move beyond the range of his weapon.

"And how did you get here?" he demanded. "Didn't I forbid you to come? How dare you disobey my orders?"

The native girl hung her head in shame and made no answer. Bob placed a hand on her head.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Leci," he said. "I'm damned glad you did come. Now if you'll run over to that small fire you'll find your rhinoceros hunter."

Leci looked up at him and smiled ingenuously, then with a little whimper of joy she ran across the jungle floor to the hunter.

CHAPTER VIII

The Nagas

THEY crossed the Brahmapura; then marched far up the rhinoceros trails to the North. They fought their bitter way through the jungle, past the fierce mountain leopard who makes his home on Everest; through the peril of the king cobra whose wicked fangs hold horrible death.

Then one bright morning, through a clearing in the forest, there rose, far before them a mighty mountain, snow-capped and majestic it towered, its sublime height mocking the tallness of the jungle trees. Mac seized Bob's arm excitedly.

"Look!" he cried. "Everest! We're almost there!"

Bob stood stock still in his tracks and a thrill ran through his entire body, as he realized that they were the first white men who had ever beheld the mighty mountain from this spot, that Mac and himself were the only two who had ever come through these peril laden paths and lived to tell the tale.

And as he gazed enthralled at the hugest mountain in all the world, he suddenly heard a sharp explanation and a shot from Mac's rifle. Turning swiftly, he raised his own weapon. But before he could fire, he again heard the Irishman's weapon crack.

"Nagas," said Mac. "I just saw two of them in the brush. We must

be right in the heart of their country now. I think they're surrounding us."

He yelled in dialect to his men and they returned down the trail and stood in a huddled heap around the white men. Bob's keen eyes scanned every inch of the jungle, but he saw nothing.

"Are you sure, Mac?" he asked. "I can't see a thing except the same old trees and your orchids."

"I'm sure," said Mac without moving his eyes from a certain bush before him.

Then Rheko spoke gravely.

"They are here, Sahib. I can hear them. There are many. To fight with them is to die. To—"

A sudden flurry of arrows from the greenery before them seemed to corroborate his words. Mac's rifle cracked once more, and Rheko raised his spear and hurled it.

THEN Bob saw them. The brush of the jungle parted, and a host of brown lithe figures charged down upon the little cavalcade that thus far had conquered all the perils of the jungle.

His own weapon spoke sharply and a screeching *Naga* fell face downward. Spears hurtled through the air as the natives of their party leaped to rhythmic action. Two more *Nagas* went down.

But for each one that had fallen a score more leaped up to take their places. In an instant, the whole forest seemed filled with screaming brown men. The air seemed filled with arrows. Bob saw one of his boys sink to the ground, an arrow quivering in his heart.

The last round in his rifle cracked simultaneously with a report from Mac's weapon. Hastily he ripped open the breech and attempted to reload, but in another instant he felt his arms pinioned to his sides.

He struggled desperately, and as his head turned he caught a flash of Mac fighting hand to hand with half a dozen of the savages. For a moment the Irishman's red hair towered above the black craniums of the savages, then he went down, disappearing in a black mass of screaming struggling humanity.

Bob felt someone kick his feet from under him, and a moment later, he, too, lay supine and still beneath the weight of the foeman who piled upon him. Rough fibre scratched his wrists as expert hands bound him, then he was rudely jerked to his feet.

Then the entire gallant little company was led through the forest of color to the abode of the warlike Nagas.

"Well," Bob muttered glumly to Mac. "I guess this is the end. And when we had almost made it, too."

"Take heart," the older man counseled. "Remember, the *Mishmi* magic man predicted that you would succeed. Perhaps this is a stroke of luck. The Nagas may lead us to the Lake of Flaming Death. They certainly know where it is."

BLOOD red campfires threw their eerie rays into the heavens. The air was thick with the smell of unsavory cooking, and the nocturnal sounds of the jungle were subordinated to the excited chatter of the Nagas as they discussed the fate of their prisoners over their evening meal.

Despite the Irishman's words of encouragement Bob found but little solace. They lay tightly bound in a small palm-thatched shack of many unpleasant odors. Bob was hungry and his lips were arid.

The fires died down, as the evening meal was over. Then, as the full moon slowly began its nightly jour-

ney a trio of dark warriors entered the prisoners' quarters and curtly snapped something in dialect.

STRONG hands pulled Bob to his feet. Then a gleaming knife severed the fibre that bound his ankles. Another savage performed the same office for Mac, and the pair were hustled off toward a larger structure.

Bob felt far from complacent as they were hauled unceremoniously into the council chamber.

A little savage spoke in a thin voice, and as he jabbered Mac turned a hopeful face to Bob.

"It's one of their scouts," he whispered. "He's telling them that the *Abors* are whispering that we have been summoned by The One, in the Lake of Flaming Death. We've still a fighting chance."

The little man stopped speaking, and the headman glanced at the captives, and began.

Mac, drawing himself up, replied in sonorous phrases.

When he could, Mac whispered: "He asked me if it were true that we traveled to The One. I told him yes, that we were great magicians, almost as great as The One herself."

The headman nodded half convinced.

"Then, I ask you," he continued. "To work your magic on my warriors who lie inhabited with devils. Our witch doctors cannot drive them out. Make this magic, and your life is yours."

"Then," said Mac. "Tell your men to bring me the white chest they have taken from me. Give me a moment to prepare, then lead me to these warriors who are inhabited by the devils."

The headman nodded. "It is spoken," he said. "Return to him

the chest of which he speaks."

Five minutes later the pair of them were alone in a guarded hut with the supplies of medicines they had brought with them. Mac explained hastily to Bob the trend of the headman's conversation.

"Well, what are you going to do? What are these devils afflicted with?"

"Probably malaria. Aspirin and quinine will do the work. I'm sure."

Thrusting two small bottles in his pocket, he walked to the door and smiled.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go and make our magic."

Soon Mac knelt at the side of a native, and producing his quinine and aspirin forced the tablets down the man's throat. Then, remembering his rôle of a magic man, he waved his hands ludicrously over the man's stomach, and sang the first two bars of Auld Lang Syne.

The medicine worked quickly. And when Mac had reached the end of the line, his first patient already showed signs of improving. The headman bent down and spoke to him gravely, seemingly reassured by his answer.

Mac completing his rounds, bowed gravely and said: "My magic is done, oh, Headman. Let the warriors rest and the devils shall be gone."

"When the sun takes its place in the sky you shall be led to HER—in the Lake of Flaming Death. You shall sleep as guests tonight," was his answer.

CHAPTER IX

The Keeper of the Flames

A LONG trails that were invisible to their occidental eyes, the two adventurers were led toward the Lake of Flaming Death. Only Rheko and Leci accompanied them of their original party. The

others were dead, or lying ill with the fever in the Nagas camp. Scores of Naga warriors, led by the headman, broke the trail for them.

Then suddenly there sounded through the jungle a terrible roaring. The heat of the forest became more intense.

Abruptly the party came to the jungle's rim, and stood upon a rocky plain. Bob slightly in advance of Mac, turned and cried out.

"Look! The Lake. The Lake of Flaming Death!"

The Irishman ran up to his side and for a moment the pair of them stood transfixed, awed by the fiery majestic sight that met their gaze.

A veritable lake of flame shot upward out of the basin that commenced at the edge of the plain. Yet distinctly beneath the rolling licking tongues of fire, they could see the silver gleam of the water of the lake.

The Nagas fell to their knees and made gestures of obeisance. Bob and Mac stood frozen in their tracks at the barbaric splendor. At last the headman uttered a guttural word of command, and the savages rose slowly, and proceeded down the trail.

THEN from a crevice in the rocks, a tall emaciated bewhiskered figure appeared. Gravely he lifted his hands in greeting, and gravely the host of Nagas returned the gesture.

"That's funny," he observed. "I've never seen whiskers or beards on a Naga before."

The headman beckoned the white men to approach.

"The Keeper of the Flames," he said to Mac. "He guards the flaming lake which leads to Her."

Bob stared at the weird bewhiskered figure. He was the most peculiar human that ever the youth had seen. His skin was coal black, much blacker than the rest of the tribe,

and shriveled by the intense heat of the flames he guarded.

Yet, in his eyes there was a peculiar look, and his eyes under his black beetling brows, did not seem black.

Mac, Bob noticed, was also studying the apparition.

"Funny looking mug," commented the Irishman.

The headman was engaged in a lengthy colloquy with him. When the *Naga* finished talking, the strange bearded man turned his head slowly and looked at the strangers. Then to their utter amazement he spoke in slow but perfect English.

"You come to see Her," he said. "But why?"

"She has summoned us," replied Mac gravely. "She has summoned us with her magic."

"You lie," he said calmly. "What do you want here?"

Mac and Bob were rather taken aback at being given the lie direct from this filthy savage.

"We come," said Mac again, "to Her. I speak the truth."

DURING this conversation they had paid scant attention to Leci and her rhinoceros hunter who stood respectfully at the rear while the parley was taking place. Then suddenly ere a *Naga* could prevent the sacrilege, Leci sprang forward, her little hands clawing at the face of the bearded horror.

"I know you well," she screamed in English. "You are no *Naga*. You are white. You have beaten my brother to death. You are the Sahib Tarvin who caused death and agony in my family. You are—"

The outraged *Nagas* dragged her roughly away from their priest. Bob and Mac exchanged significant glances. The filthy renegade met their glances easily.

"I think it better," he said leading the way, "if we speak privately."

BOB examined their guide's face with searching eyes. No wonder he had appeared different than the natives. His eyes were Caucasian eyes, his features were white man's features.

The Keeper of the Flames seated himself on a rock hewn out like a chair. He looked up at the white men.

"Sit down," he said quietly.

Bob found himself gazing into the fanatical eyes of the madman who had killed his father.

"The girl was right," said the apparition. "I am Tarvin. I haven't seen a white man for years. And I won't see you two much longer. You see that?" He waved an arm toward the flaming lake. "Well, in the center of that is the thing you've come for. I imagine one of you is young Stanley. Am I right?"

"You're right," said Bob in a low tense voice. He sprang from his seat and lunged forward at Tarvin.

"Keep off," the madman cried, "keep off. One cry from me and the *Nagas* will tear you apart."

"He's right," said the Irishman quietly. "He's kingpin here. Let's hear what he has to say."

"Yes," continued Tarvin, "what you seek lies on an island in the center of that hell. You shall be compelled to go there and take the test of fire as the rest have taken it."

"What is the test?" asked Mac quietly.

"You shall swim through that," Tarvin shouted to make himself heard above the roar of the flames, "as the Tibetan maidens who we capture before the moonsoon swim through it. If you reach the island alive, the Goddess will spare your life."

"How many have ever come

through that hell alive?" asked Mac.

"None," he chuckled. "None. It is impossible unless I safeguard them. The *Nagas* will send you through to the Goddess. You have said she sent for you."

Mac lighted his pipe deliberately. His agile brain was working at top speed.

He questioned in the hope that Tarvin might give away some valuable information.

"And this Goddess, what does she think?"

"She thinks what I dictate. I have made her what she is. She dispenses magic to the *Nagas*, while I guard the flames and my own secret trail."

"Your secret trail?" Mac's eyes lighted with interest.

"My trail," said Tarvin proudly. "For native as I have become I still can beat the white man at his own game. It is I who run contraband through the jungle to China. It is the overseer at the Stanley plantation who sends the goods to me."

MAC caught Bob's eye. That last remark explained a number of things. So smuggling was Ferguson's game.

Bob was staring gloomily at the remote island alone in the center of the flaming lake.

Said Tarvin: "You shall be returned to the headman. He shall set you your task of swimming the Lake of Flaming Death, and I, the only living thing who can quench those flames, shall not aid. Come!"

"It is true," Tarvin said, on returning to the headman, "it is true that She has sent for them. They shall swim the lake without delay."

The headman bowed. "It is well."

Mac understanding the words, looked gloomily at the roaring conflagration through which they were

to be sent, and thought with foreboding of the *Mishmi* magic man's prediction back at Ferguson's fortress.

HE failed to notice Bob standing at one side talking earnestly to Rheko. He whispered in the Irishman's ear as he left the rhinoceros hunter's side.

"Tell him Rheko's to stay behind to look after our baggage. Then tell him that I will make mighty magic to quench the flames."

Mac stared at him in surprise. Tarvin shot a suspicious glance in their direction.

"Tell him quick," said Bob again.

Mac, not having the slightest idea what it was all about, rose to the emergency. He repeated Bob's words to the headman. Tarvin, hearing him, frowned. He glanced toward the lake and the flaming hell he saw there evidently reassured him. He smiled ironically.

"Go, my friend," he said, and there was a bitter jeer in his voice. "Make your great magic."

Bob beckoned to Mac and Leci and the pair of them followed him down to the rim of flame on the lake's shore. Mac, glancing around, failed to see Rheko anywhere. Whatever desperate game his partner was playing it was apparent that the rhinoceros hunter had some part in it.

As they reached the edge of the raging inferno every *Naga* eye was turned upon them. Little Leci clutched Bob's hand, and terror showed in her eyes.

Then suddenly Bob did a strange thing. Boldly he walked to the very edge of the flame. Despite the awful hellish heat he stood there for a moment. Then he spread his arms wide apart and bellowed the oddest words in the world, the last thing that Mac had ever expected to hear

while waiting on the very fringe of doom.

"Yes, we have no bananas, we have no bananas today."

MAC stared at him in utter and complete amazement. Had the terrible strain of their adventures gone to his partner's head? Was he now as cracked as the murderous Tarvin, who stood cackling behind them?

But if Mac was amazed at the two lines of the popular song which Bob had just shouted, he was utterly stupefied a moment later.

For as though in answer to the mad words he had just uttered, the shooting flame upon the lake suddenly became dimmer. It died down slowly, then in another minute, it vanished entirely.

Mac's own gasp of astonishment was eclipsed by the amazed murmur of the savages behind him. The Irishman stood there stupidly. Bob's sibilant whisper brought him back to reality.

"Come on; I'll explain afterward."

Bob's arms lifted themselves above his head and he plunged fearlessly into the Lake of Flaming Death, dragging the utterly bewildered Leci behind him.

Mac followed hastily, but before he leaped into the water, he could not refrain from glancing over his shoulder toward Tarvin. The hairy maniac's face was a distorted terrible thing. Mac shuddered, but a moment later was swimming easily beside Bob and Leci.

In a few moments the three of them walked slowly up the barren beach of the small island. In the center of it stood an elaborate palm-thatched shack.

Mac did not press his questioning regarding the mysterious cessation of the fire further at this point.

Here, finally, was the thing for which they had suffered such travail, such hardship. Eagerly they approached the hut—the home of the powerful, omnipotent Goddess of the Nagas.

Then Bob stood in the doorway, staring through misty, tear-blurred eyes at the figure who faced him from the far wall. It was a girl, bronzed, burned alike by the sun and the terrible flames that had poured for so long across the lake.

She had probably never seen a white man save Tarvin. She had probably never known anything save the Nagas, yet in her bearing as she faced them there was no sign of fear. Then she spoke clearly in Assamese.

Bob not comprehending what she said, was overcome with emotion as he stared at the sister that he had so long given up for dead. He crossed the room toward her.

"Doreen!" he said huskily.

SHE stared at him strangely without the slightest idea of the word or his meaning. As he placed his hand upon her arm she pushed him angrily away. Bob's heart sank. This interview was going to be much harder than he expected. He shot a glance over his shoulder to see Mac and Leci standing in the doorway.

"Let Leci talk to her," counseled the Irishman. "She's a woman and a native."

He spoke rapidly to Leci in her native tongue, then sent her into the room. He took Bob's arm and led him gently from the place.

"Don't get panicky, Bob," he said reassuringly. "You can't expect a girl who's lived with savages for twenty years to have the slightest idea who you are or what you want. Now, first, tell me about the bananas and the sudden collapse of the terrible Lake of Flaming Death."

Despite his tension Bob grinned.

"I got a big kick out of that," he admitted. "While you were chatting to Tarvin, I had a look around. Then all of a sudden the whole thing was amazingly clear. He's a fakir. This lake is surrounded by deposits of natural gas and oil. I noticed a valve, roughly made, it's true; then I realized the truth. Tarvin has the whole thing working with valves over the gas escapes. When he wants the lake to flame he opens them up and ignites them. When he wants them to die down he closes the valves. I tipped off Rheko how to close the valves when I gave him the signal. As soon as I shouted he was to turn them."

A light dawned in Mac's eyes. "But still why the bananas?"

"Well," grinned Bob, "I had to yell something, and that was the first thing I thought of."

SUDDENLY a wild pandemonium broke loose on the opposite shore.

Tarvin's voice, accustomed to fighting the roar of the flames, came loud and clear across the lake. Mac turned anxious eyes on his companion.

"He's talking to them, stirring them up against us. He's telling them that our magic has overcome the Goddess, that we plan to carry her off. They're listening to him, too. We're going to have a hell of a time getting out of here."

"Do you think they'll come over here after us?"

"Probably not. We're safe as long as we stay here. They wouldn't profane the sacred island by coming after us."

"He knows," said Bob, "that we'll try to take Doreen with us. So he tells them that we're going to steal their Goddess. Even if we get by here, we'd never get back through the jungle with every *Naga* in As-

sam after our blood and their Goddess."

CHAPTER X

Death—And Escape

LECI was approaching them. "I have spoken to her," she told Mac. "She is willing to leave with us. She is not happy here."

Mac translated these words to Bob, who nodded dolefully at the milling mob of natives on the shore.

"How the devil are we going to leave with that crazy outfit over there?"

Mac shrugged and returned to his better thoughts. Leci started away, and as she went she said something to Mac over her shoulder. The Irishman stared at her, then turned to Bob.

"She said," he translated, "that we mustn't worry. That something is going to happen shortly that will insure our safe return."

"Something's going to happen?" echoed Bob. "My God, hasn't enough happened already?"

"Look!" cried Mac, standing up and pointing toward the opposite shore.

Bob's eyes following the direction of the other's outflung arm, saw the rocky plain opposite suddenly become alive with natives.

"I can see it," he said grimly. "They seem to be calling out all the reserves to keep us here."

"Those aren't *Nagas*," said Mac. "They're *Abors*. There'll be hell to pay in a minute."

And there was. Shriill savage screams rose through the air, as the *Nagas* suddenly recognized their traditional enemies. The *Abors*, who had glided through the jungle to the Lake of Flaming Death, hurled them-

selves at the *Nagas*. The air on the opposite shore was alive with arrows.

Leci came running to them from the shack. "You see," she cried. "The *Abors*. My people. They will take us from here."

"I'm not so certain of that," said Mac. "If they know we're taking their God with us."

"This is no *Abor* God," said Leci. "*Abors* want lost God."

Mac turned to Bob. "I don't quite understand what Leci means, but let's get Doreen and cross the lake now. Perhaps the *Abors* will be friendly, and perhaps we can turn the tide of battle in their favor."

"Okay," said Bob. "Let's get started."

Leci and Bob returned to Doreen's shack. The native girl spoke to her tenderly, and Bob, his heart filled with a terrific emotion, put his arm about his sister and gently led her from the place. Whatever else she may have been, she knew no fear. She stared at Bob strangely, evidently trying to understand the strange story that Leci had poured into her ears.

THE trio of them were met outside by Mac, who shouted: "There's a war canoe on the east shore. We can all go over in that."

They veered around and proceeded in the indicated direction, where they beheld Mac seated in the stern of a huge hollow log. With little ceremony, the four of them started across the lake to the opposite shore where the *Nagas* and the *Abors* were still engaged in a struggle to the death.

Bob and Mac had left their rifles with their other dunnage in charge of Rheko. However, they did have their .38's, which hung at their belts. As the canoe came closer under their

powerful strokes, Bob saw what a terrible carnage was going on on the mainland.

"We'll leave the canoe and the girls down here under the rocks," he said. "All hell's loose up there."

Mac nodded and headed the vessel for the rocks. A moment later they had made fast the canoe, and instructing Leci to remain with Doreen until they returned, they slowly made their way up the bank.

BOB gazed at the horrible scene. Neither the *Nagas* nor the *Abors* ever fought according to the niceties of war. They fought to kill, and if a certain amount of torture could be put in before the victim died, so much the better.

The rocky plain was deluged and slippery with blood. Disemboweled warriors lay side by side with decapitated, gory men. And those that still lived screamed and shouted and flung themselves into the fray as though it would guarantee them admittance to their own particular brand of Valhalla.

Mac, eager to impress the *Abors*, in order that he could ask their help later, stood on a large rock and made himself heard above the horrible sound of the battle.

"*Abors*," he shouted. "We came to your aid."

Then, as a matter of effect, he took careful aim with his revolver and with the report, the *Naga* headman fell flat on his face.

The *Abors* encouraged by the fact that the white man with his magic weapons was on their side, shouted lustily and returned to the fray.

After their headman had fallen, the *Nagas* seemed suddenly to become listless. The fury of the attackers was in no wise abated, and abruptly the *Nagas* turned and flew across the plain.

Bob suddenly saw Rheko approaching. "We'd better let him talk to the Abors," he remarked to Mac.

When the Irishman failed to answer, Bob turned his head slightly. Then his sun-bronzed face turned pale beneath its tan. For Mac stood swaying at his side, steadying himself upon a rock, and protruding from his chest was a feathered arrow. He spoke with a terrific effort.

"You'd better pull this thing out," he said. "It hurts like hell."

Before Bob could come to his aid, he fell to his knees. Rheko rushed up. Between them they extracted the arrow from the Irishman's chest. Bob ripped the tunic open and attempted to staunch the flow of blood with his handkerchief. Mac shook his head dubiously.

"It's no go," he said weakly. "But look out for yourself. Send our rhinoceros hunting friend to talk to the Abors. Then send Leci to me. I want to talk to her before I die."

Bob rose to his feet, tears streaming down his face. Yet he hastened to do the other's bidding. Mac would prefer that to sentiment.

Sending Rheko to dicker with the Abors, Bob returned to Doreen and Leci at the shore of the lake. Hastily telling Leci that Mac wanted her, he began to talk slowly in English to his sister.

SHE who had been the Naga Goddess stared at him wonderingly, then when he came to one word it seemed to strike some atavistic chord of response.

"Mother," he said slowly.

"Moth-a," said the girl.

Bob's heart gave a great bound. The girl seemed to understand. That was probably the most used English word in her vocabulary at the time

she had been kidnaped. He talked to her rapidly; some words aroused something deep inside her. As he spoke he fought to keep his mind off Mac.

A little while later, Leci returned, telling him that Mac wanted him. He returned to his comrade.

Mac, lying prone on the rocky floor of the plain, smiled up at him ruefully.

"Sit down," he said in a weak voice. "I've some things to tell you."

BOB knelt at his side and averted his head so that the dying man would not see his pain and tears.

"First," went on Mac, "I've been talking to Leci and she's cleared up almost all of this mystery which has dogged us. It seems that the Abors never liked the Naga Goddess, which was your sister. But they were in abject fear of it. That's why that stunt of mine with the brands worked back on the trail there. They've always believed that the Nagas defeated them because of the Goddess. So they were delighted when they learned that we had come to take her away."

"Don't talk," said Bob. "Take it easy."

Mac shook his head. "I know I'm dying," he said gravely. "And I know some things I must tell you first."

He paused for a moment, then continued.

"The witch woman you found in your room that night had been taught by Tarvin, but she ran away from him and returned to her own people. She came to you to send you in search of your sister. I can't explain all that, because there's native magic mixed up in it somewhere."

"Do not move," said a croaking voice behind them. "Or I shall kill you."

Mac abruptly stopped speaking, and Bob, tense and trembling, stared straight ahead. A soft patter of naked feet came to their ears, and Tarvin, in all his filthy regalia confronted them. In his hand he held a spear the tip of which was stained dark red with poison.

"You shall die," he said. "Both of you by this spear. It has cost me my power. I have killed the father. I have killed the son."

His hairy hand drew the spear back. Bob's hand dropped to his holster, but he realized that he could never draw before that red tipped spear hurtled on its journey into his heart.

Tarvin's hand commenced its forward journey.

A single staccato crack rent the air. Tarvin, an expression of dazed stupefaction on his face, stumbled forward and his sinister weapon fell harmlessly from his hand. Bob glanced down at Mac who lay with an agonized expression on his face and a smoking revolver in his hand.

"I had my pistol here on the ground near at hand in case any danger threatened," he explained. "That's how I did it."

Bob was aware of a tremendous tugging at his heart strings. Here lay the man who had twice saved his life, who had stuck by him through thick and thin, who had come to the end of the trail with him.

HE leaned over and took the other's hand in his. He held it tightly.

"Listen, Mac," he said huskily. "You've been the best pal a friend ever had. If it hadn't been for you we never would have come through. You've saved my life at least twice. You've performed miracles. You've explained everything to me through your mastery of the dialect, things I never could have understood."

Mac shook his head and a strange

smile crossed his features. "There's one thing I haven't explained," he said in such a low voice that Bob had to bend forward to catch the words. "There's one thing no white man will ever explain."

"What's that?"

"The *Mishmi* magic man. You remember? He said that you would be successful, but that I would find my doom at the Lake of Flaming Death."

IT was true! Bob had completely forgotten the magic man's prediction. He bent forward again. Mac was speaking in a low jerky whisper.

"Bury—me—out—in—the—jungle—with—the—orchids. Let them—grow around my—grave. The orchids—the jungle's hearts of—gold. Let—me lie—amongst them for eternity."

The last word was a horrible gasp, and the Irishman's head fell back upon the rock. He lay still and pale in death, and sitting over him his friend and companion, suddenly buried his head in his hands and sobbed bitterly.

Three weeks later the depleted caravan that had wandered far into the hell that was Assam returned to the Stanley plantation. As Mac had explained, the *Abors* whose attack upon the *Nagas* was caused by their desire to get rid of the powerful Goddess, escorted Bob and Doreen back to their destination.

Rheko and Leci returned with them and were happy. And as the years passed Doreen Stanley forgot her weird experiences of the first twenty years of her life as instinct told her many things when she returned to her mother's arms.

Bob Stanley has lived on that far-flung plantation for a long time now. He is relatively happy, but occasionally, his thoughts turn to an orchid covered grave set deep in the heart of the jungle, and his heart becomes heavy within him.

A Complete Novelette of "Captain Trouble," an American Adventurer in the Orient Who Becomes a Symbol of Power and the Answer to a Prophecy



The Red Road to Shamballah

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "The Leopard Man," "The Fighting Fool," etc.

I

ALTHOUGH he was American—related on his father's side with Daniel Boone and on his mother's side with Nathan Hale—somewhere in the makeup of Pelham Rutledge Shattuck there was a strong streak of the Oriental as well. There must have been.

For all the time he sat his horse

there in the blackness of the great desert and looked at the strange blue flame in front of him he could feel the two currents at work in him.

The American part of him was telling him that the flame was natural—it was magnetic, electrical, or just some new form of luminous gas. But almost equally strong was his Oriental feeling that this was ghostly.

The little war-horse he rode was taking that blue light for no ordinary fact at any rate. The animal had reared back on its haunches. Shattuck could feel it tremble between his knees.

At first, there had been just that blue flame. It flickered in mid-air perhaps twenty paces in advance. Its evolution was swift. It became a pillar of blue light resting on the earth. This expanded. And now, in the center of the blue radiance, Shattuck saw the figure of a man.

Shattuck stared.

From the time of that childhood of his, passed at treaty ports up and down the Chinese coast, generally in the company of Chinese servants, he had been in contact with various sorts of magic.

What was this then—a *ro-long*?

Many were the tales he'd heard of *ro-longs*—those unfortunate dead brought back to life—boys, girls, men and women—to serve the unholy will of some vicious master.

Were such things possible? Sure they were possible!

But, even while this speculation, with a crowd of others, was racing through his mind, his eyes were telling him that this apparition, whatever it was, would be unable to hurt him if he only kept his nerve.

He quieted his horse. He took a mental survey of his surroundings.

He was in the midst of the Kara Kugen—the Black Hills of the Gobi. It was a region with such an evil reputation for ghostly dangers that even the wildest of the fighting nomads gave it a wide berth.

BACK of him was Kara Koto, that "Black City" he had come to find. Ahead of him there had been a battle in progress between rival factions of this lost city of the desert.

There was nothing to do but—face it out!

He could see now that the apparition before him—luminous, ghostly still—was that of a high-class lama. The head was shaven. The expression of the face was pensive.

THE nobility of this head and face gave Shattuck his first inkling as to the identity of this ghostly visitant. It was a surmise almost instantly strengthened when he saw the stranger's robe emerge from the blue light-haze that enveloped it and become what looked like a tissue of woven gold.

"The Living Buddha!" Shattuck cried, with reverential awe, and he swung down from the pony's back.

There were many "Bogdos," Living Buddhas, or Great Holy Ones, scattered throughout Central Asia. There was the old Bogdo of the Soaring Meditation, for example, whom Shattuck himself had met. It was that old holy man who had recommended that Shattuck make this pilgrimage to the great lost city of the Gobi—the Black City, Kara Koto.

Now Shattuck was beginning to guess why. The old man had wanted him to meet "the Shining One." The almost killing pilgrimage thus far into the region of the black sands had been a sort of test, an initiation.

"You are—He?" Shattuck gasped.

His excitement was such that he'd spoken in English. It was in English he heard the reply.

"I am He."

All languages were said to be alike to the Great One.

"I was sent here," said Shattuck, by the Bogdo of Samding—the Lamastery of the Soaring Meditation."

"I know."

"Just now, here in the desert, I

and my two companions met a Chinese lady. She called herself Miao Chen, the Goddess of Mercy."

"She was but an illusion, sent to test you."

"I killed a man. He called himself Kuan Yu, the War Lord."

"He also was but an illusion—to test your courage."

Awe is a peculiar thing—half fear, half exultation. Shattuck felt a surge of awe sweeping over him.

"But these others I saw," said Shattuck—"the band of warriors who followed Kuan Yu, and the Lang, those human wolves!"

"Illusions all. They've frightened others away from this place. They've not frightened you—nor your two companions, Juma, the Kirghiz robber, and Champela, the lama, whose father came from America."

"Holy One," Shattuck avowed, "you know, then, everything."

"Even to that title given you, my son, of 'the Fighting Fool.'"

ALL the time that the conversation had been carried on, thus far, Shattuck had continued to fit it in with all that he'd ever known. This was an apparition in front of him. He was certain of that. Yet the Gobi itself was real enough. He could feel the sand under his feet. So were his fatigue, hunger, thirst—and dirt!—real enough.

He'd been for so long without a bath that he could have passed for a "dokpa"—a fighting black lama, the sort who never washed.

The Living Buddah—or the apparition of the Living Buddah—who stood there almost within reach of his hand, looked at him for a while without word or movement.

He seemed to furnish his own light. Shattuck himself was standing in the fringe of this light—a blue radiance, soft but penetrating.

To test the light, Shattuck put out his soiled hand and looked at it. He straightened and doubled his fingers. He could see the callouses. He saw the smudges ground in from many campfires.

Ever since entering the region of the black sands, water had been at a premium. He and his two friends had suffered. The camels had suffered.

Yet—Shattuck also remembered this as he stood there now—each time the crisis seemed to mean death or defeat, a well had been found, a bit of marsh, even a live spring, and these in regions marked on all maps as having no water.

"Illusions!" said Shattuck.

"Illusions, my son!"

"I must have got into a state," said Shattuck, "where I can't tell what's real and what isn't real."

"You've stood the test so far," said the Living Buddah.

Shattuck felt that he was being studied—examined outside and in. Anyway, he was up against something that he'd been hearing about off and on practically ever since he could remember.

I HAD a dream," said Shattuck, "that even a Fighting Fool might be useful in the world just now. I told my dream to the old holy man of the Soaring Meditation. It was by his wish I was given the sword of Kubla Khan. With it I fought a battle and was almost killed. But I seem to have won great wealth—a string of camels, three hundred camel-loads of machine-guns and ammunition—"

"Wealth for yourself?"

"No, to fight with."

"To fight what for?"

"I don't know. I hope—for Shamballah."

"What do you know about Shamballah?"

"Only what I have heard—the empire of Maitreya, the coming King of the World."

The Shining Lama had continued to look at Shattuck quietly.

"Trouble," said the Shining One, "already casts a shadow over the face of the world. It is a sign of the end of the old world, the approach of the new. They call you Captain Trouble—Shadak Khan! And the road to Shamballah will be long and red, Shadak Khan. Are you sure you are ready to take it—with your sword of Kubla Khan?"

"Yes!"

"We'll meet again, Captain Trouble."

II

A SECOND later—and for a period after that—Pel Shattuck, alias Shadak Khan, wondered if he wasn't again a victim of illusion. Asia—all Asia—was the original Land of Illusion. There were shamans, fakirs, lamas of the old Red Sect, everywhere, who were not only master hypnotists but who dealt with even stranger powers.

Shattuck wondered what had happened.

A second ago he had been talking to that ghostly apparition of the Living Buddah—the greatest of all Living Buddahs. There came to Shattuck the impact of an idea that this might have been the original Buddah Himself—the great Gautama.

Now, even more suddenly than the apparition had shown itself, it was gone again.

Shattuck put out his hand. He couldn't see it. The darkness of the desert night was blacker than ever. The sudden inrush of this blackness

brought a sort of suffocation with it. It was like a blackness of utter despair.

But Shattuck pulled himself together. He still had the sword in his hand. He'd continued to hold it against his breast, in an attitude of respect.

He turned and groped for the little war-horse. The pony was gone. He remembered now. The pony was supposed to have been the one ridden by Kuan Yu, the great war-lord. Kuan Yu had been an illusion. So, then, had the horse itself been an illusion.

Shattuck thought of that vision of a girl—Miao Shen, painted, covered with silks and jewels, calling herself the Goddess of Mercy.

And the words of the Living Buddah, the Shining One, came back to him:

"She was but an illusion, sent to test you!"

Shattuck would have laughed, but his caked lips hurt. Still, his heart was throbbing with a sort of exhilaration. He'd stood some tests, even if they were illusions. He'd fought a war-lord. He'd resisted the blandishments of a Chinese goddess—and one, at that, with the highest reputation for beauty and sweetness.

He thought of his friends.

What had happened to them? He'd left them and the camels inside the ruined wall of the ancient, ruined city of Kara Koto—home of magic, home of a thousand legends, gateway—it was said—to the mysteries of Shamballah!

HAD they also been the victims of strange devils and gods during his absence?

As he stood there in the blackness he could hear nothing, see nothing, except the stars overhead. Were the

stars themselves nothing but illusions?

He pulled himself together. He raised his head and let out a call that he and his friends used:

"Ki-ho-ho!"

It couldn't have been very loud, but the cry slithered off into the vastness of the Gobi like a meteor of sound, the silence was such.

IT seemed as if a full minute must have passed before a reply came back. It came faintly, like an echo, and from a quarter opposite to the one from which he had been expecting it.

He tried it again.

This time there were two replies. From opposite directions! That was easy—Shattuck told himself. Juma and Champela had gone out to look for him. They'd taken opposite directions.

But the absurdity of this explanation occurred to him instantly. They wouldn't have gone out looking for him in the dark and made no sound. They wouldn't have left the camels unguarded. They wouldn't, that is, unless they also had been led away as he had been led away.

As he stood there in the almost solid black of a trough between two rolling dunes, a breath of air came in from the further blackness. It brought with it a scent that was unmistakable and unforgettable—musky, aromatic, a smell of temple incense that had somewhere, somehow, burrowed its way into the very depths of Shattuck's soul.

Illusion or no illusion, he started to trace it.

There was no difficulty in that. The faint breeze held steady, it strengthened.

Shattuck had traveled perhaps a hundred yards along the winding trough of the dunes when he was

aware that it was no longer so dark as it had been. Dawn, he guessed, could not be far off. Even now the sun, most likely, would be striking the high crests of the Tien Shan—the Heavenly Mountains of the Chinese—and reflecting its light out across the vast stretches of the Gobi.

He'd barely made this notation in his mind when he saw, dimly, a drift of shadows ahead of him, he heard a faint grind and shift of camel feet and gear. There could be no doubt about it.

A caravan was coming this way—a caravan strangely silent—a caravan traveling without bells, without other unnecessary sound of any kind.

III

SHATTUCK stooped and ran. It took but a few steps to take him around the curve of a dune. He stood there for a while in thought—measuring each second that passed, crowding into each second all that he could of planning, deduction, foresight.

Presently he crawled up the slope of sand to the top of the dune. It was still so dark that there was small chance of his being discovered, but he was as careful as any Apache on the scout.

He could see the caravan again—the camels moving nimbly as if urged to make speed. Each camel was heavily loaded. The mere contour of their shadowy forms and their movement was sufficient to advertise that.

In this part of the desert such a caravan could be headed for but a single place—that black and ruined city of Kara Koto.

Shattuck surveyed the dark horizon. He made out a black mass of different conformation than that of the undulating dunes. That would be Kara Koto with its crumbling walls.

Once Kara Koto had been one of the great cities of the world. The sands had buried it. It had lain buried for so many centuries that the mere existence of it had become a legend. Now, after all these centuries, the winds had shifted it out of its grave again.

WHY should this strange caravan be making for the dead city now?

There was only one answer. Kara Koto was not so dead as it seemed.

Why should the caravan be moving with such haste?

Manifestly to reach cover before daylight.

There came to Shattuck all that he had ever heard of or dreamed about in connection with Shamballah. Kara Koto, according to the gossip of half the world, was, in some way, the gateway to Shamballah.

More clearly and insistently yet, there came to Shattuck that strange conversation he'd had a little while ago with the spirit-presence of the Living Buddha. But this was no fresh illusion. Illusions were past.

He could foresee for himself and his friends all sorts of complications if he delayed where he was too long. Even now there was barely time for him to reach the ruined city before the caravan got there. If he failed in this, harm might come to old Juma and the mystic Champela.

Again he was running. He had chosen a direction that would bring him to the crest of a dune under which the caravan would have to pass.

It was almost day—*torang*, as they called it back in the hills—a white tail of light flaunting across the sky. It reminded him of a white-tailed horse he'd ridden, and the thought somehow gave him an extra dash of courage. It was like a good omen.

He straightened up with the sword

of Kubla Khan held aloft. Suddenly the dark was shot full of golden mist as the sun came up.

"Halt, down there!" he shouted. He managed to laugh.

At his first glance he saw that the camels were the finest he had ever seen. How many there were of them he couldn't even guess. Here among the dunes the trail wound round out of sight.

Both the camels and the men in charge of them—and then the dogs that swarmed along—were different from those of the Southern Gobi and the great caravan trails between China and Turkestan.

The camels were almost white and heavily wooled. The dogs were white. The men in charge and those who walked were dressed in white.

There was a strong prejudice against white animals and white clothing all through the Gobi. White was the color of Chinese mourning. Shattuck could imagine what sort of an impression a caravan like this might make on a superstitious native when glimpsed at night.

The caravan had halted. There were looks of fear, but more of wild amazement on the faces that Shattuck saw which were turned his way.

The faces were lean and brown. They were neither Chinese nor Mongolian. For the most part they were as aquiline as old Juma's face. Many of them were bearded.

SUDDENLY a name had flashed into Shattuck's thought.

These were the Agharti—the "subterranean people," as they were sometimes called; or the people of the Chud, meaning the "Wonder People," the "Miracle People"—one of the Lost Tribes, the people of Solomon, who'd kept alive through centuries the magic of Solomon, so some of the legends ran.

While their amazement still held them, Shattuck spoke again:

"Make ready a camel. I am to ride at your head."

There was some sort of a confab going on among those near the head camel. It was a splendid beast. There was hardly any load on it at all. Such as there was might have been mere personal equipment of sorts.

SOMEONE stepped a few paces from the others and called back: "Duke, who are you?"

"Lo, he who speaks to you," he called back, "is Shadak Khan, the new War Lord of the World. It is he who shall clear the long red road to Shamballah for the coming of the King Maitreya. He has but now spoken to the Wearer of the Shining Robe!"

If it had started out to be a bluff it hadn't ended as one.

Before Shattuck had spoken half a dozen words, it was as if the words had taken possession of himself. It was as if his "genius" were speaking for him. It was always the "genius" that possessed him when he had a fight on hand, when he was in a corner.

He was in a corner now—in a jam.

There was a swift whistle and a soft thud in the sand near his feet. He looked down and saw an arrow vibrating there, half-buried in the sand. A glance told him the direction it had come from. It meant that there could be no retreat.

He came closer to the halted caravan. Like that, at least, he had the brow of the sandhill back of him. He wouldn't be potted from behind. But, even so, he could hear the movement of runners back of him.

Not only that, he could see a gathering tenseness of the caravan men below. With every step he took he could see fresh details. There were other weapons in evidence than

spears and bows and arrows. Here and there a modern rifle gleamed. Rifles, as if carelessly, were pointed in his direction. These men were neither ignorant Mongolians nor superstitious Chinese. They were men to call a bluff.

"You hurry to your holes at sun-up like white rabbits," he said. "You need a leader."

It was a reference to the riderless camel that led the caravan.

Not a word was spoken in reply.

Shattuck slowly turned and looked at those who had run up back of him. They were all young men, tall and slender, black-eyed, black-haired, but of a color almost fair.

There was no hint of the Mongol about them, nothing Chinese. Most of them carried bows and arrows of an antique fashion. He met their concentrated glance and looked them over.

He knew his danger, but his thought was that with men like these a man with the will, the imagination, and—the "genius!"—might set about the conquest of the world.

He smiled at them slightly, but his teeth were set and his eyes were narrowed.

Once more he turned and started down the hill.

IV

WE have come into a land of spells and enchantment," said old Juma, softly. "But you also know powerful spells, Lamachi."

It was a way he had of addressing Champela. It was like calling him little old lama—Lamachi.

"I know powerful spells, Juma-la," Champela answered gently.

It was as if he'd called the old Kirghiz, "Mr. Juma," which was also a form of affectionate address. The two men, so different in other ways as well as that of their respective

ages, had a profound admiration for each other. It was a comradeship based on dangers shared, on something even of mystery.

If Champela, a mystic follower of "the Path," admired and loved this old warrior and robber, somewhat as a force in nature, like a tiger, like a turbulent mountain-stream, Juma, the bearded warrior, admired the young lama somewhat as he admired some distant, incomprehensible star.

They sat on the sand inside the ruined wall of Kara Koto. They'd come at last to the lost city of the Gobi. What next?

They'd been sitting here all the latter part of the night. How they'd come here neither was quite certain.

Juma held to the belief that they'd been led here by jinns. The jinns had appeared as an army of people with a beautiful Chinese maiden in their midst.

Even Shadak Khan—just "Dak" to Juma—had been bemused. He'd left them in charge of the camels and the maiden while he went back into the desert to settle some fight that seemed to be going on out there. He had not returned. It was almost dawn.

"Ai-ya-ya!" moaned Juma. "If Dak be lost—"

He beat his breast three hard knocks with his bony fist.

CHAMPELA sat very still. His shaven head of a lama was bare. He was as if unconscious of the penetrating desert cold. He'd let his heavy lama robe of red wool and even his silk undergarment slip from his shoulder. Both shoulder and right arm were bare. In the faint dawn-light his finely modeled face shone composed and white. On it was a look of satisfaction almost like that of someone who has had a happy death.

"Lamachi," Juma whispered, "what do you see?"

"A long white caravan," the mystic answered.

"A long white caravan," moaned Juma, "is a sign of death."

"There has been a death."

"Who?"

"The leader of the caravan."

"Dak?"

"No!"

JUMA snarled a laugh. "There'll be deaths enough—one for each of his fingers and toes—by Satan I swear it!—if they've murdered Dak—though I have to follow them to hell—"

The lama—half-American as he was, faintly smiled as he put out a hand to quiet the old man. The hand stayed where it was on Juma's knee, the fingers tightened.

"Juma," Champela whispered, "the caravan is near. And so is Shadak Khan. I can hear his thought. He is calling us. He is telling to get the camels ready. We are to join him . . ."

It was a prophecy, but, like most prophecies, it contained an element of the tragically unexpected.

Barely had they roused the camels and flung the light packs to their thinning backs when there was a rush and a howl like that of a rising wind. It was just at the point of day, and through that thin cold light Juma and Champela saw a mob of apelike creatures swing into sight.

They were men, all right, but nearly naked, covered with hair. There was an animal quality also in the way they herded. There was little sign of individual movement among them. They ran in a compact mass.

"The Chud!" cried Juma.

His eyes had brightened. He was shaking a little, but it was the tremor of a hound in the presence of game. From the pack of the nearest camel he'd slipped out a rifle.

"Hold!" said Champela.

It wasn't his opposition to killing that made him try to restrain the old warrior. It was a keener recognition of the danger involved. He also had heard of this tribe of the two so-called "subterranean peoples" living in the secret expanses of the Gobi—survivals of the inhabitants of the Gobi's buried cities.

There were two such peoples—the Chud and the Agharti. Under almost the same conditions the two peoples had drawn apart, although the old records had given them a common origin. The Chuds had gone down in the scale of evolution—down and black. While the Agharti had risen.

Even the camels seemed effected by the sudden apparition of the Chud. The animals had begun to moan, they tossed their heads and gnashed their teeth.

AT first it had seemed as if this swarm of subhuman people were making for the open desert through a breach in the wall. Then something it may have been the scent of the camels, brought them round. In an instant they'd all turned at once, were looking through the dim light to where the two companions and their four camels stood in the shadow of the city's ruined wall.

The Chud horde let out a sort of moaning howl that took on volume. They charged.

The Chud were armed. The arms they carried had come down from some long past age, but they were none the less effective for that—spears, maces, swords, knives of queer design. But, even in that breathless excitement of their charge, it could be seen that they were unused to the weapons.

Some brandished their weapons clumsily. Some even flung them away as if this were a race instead of a battle-charge.

Juma fired five shots into the thick

of the swarm as fast as he could pump the modern rifle he held. With an oath—when he discovered that the magazine was empty—he clubbed the weapon and ran a few steps forward to meet the rush.

BUT Champela was even faster. Champela had rushed ahead of the old Kirghiz warrior with his bare arm raised. He shouted some plea or command. He went down under a dozen blows.

He would have been trampled to death—or torn to death—by that infernal pack, if it hadn't been for Juma. Juma was like a giant among the gnomish Chud. He reared twice their height. He swung his clubbed rifle and there was a swath like that cut by a scythe. Only, the bloody harvest wouldn't stay down.

It writhed. It screeched. It rose again.

Even now, Juma, old warrior that he was, could tell that he and Champela were not the chief object of the attack. It was, perhaps, all that had saved them in this first rush.

The camels were what the Chud were after.

Juma, having fought his way free enough to lift Champela from the red welter at his feet, himself turned toward the camels.

The animals were in agony already—sprawling, roaring, choking—as the Chud swarmed over them, devouring them alive.

Champela revived as from a dash of cold horror. He flung himself at the uncanny butchers with bare hands. Juma was at his side. From some fallen enemy Juma had snatched an iron mace.

But the two of them were dragged down—strangled, blinded.

The last that either of them knew, just then, was the sound of a familiar voice.

V

AS Shattuck came down toward that white caravan standing in the early morning light of the desert he suffered from a single fear. Was this, after all, some other illusion that had been thrown up before his eyes?

There was enough about the appearance of everything he saw to make him believe that such might be the case.

The darkness had now turned to a sparkle of gold—a gold that was tinged with pink. In this glamorous light the camels were like creatures dreamed of by Sinbad. They were huge beasts. Their heavy coats were like a golden fleece. They had fine small heads and luminous eyes. Their trappings were of the finest—in polychromed leather, set with rough gems and some dark wood that was richly carved and polished.

No less extraordinary was the appearance of the men. Some of these had been riding as he started down the slope. These had slipped down from their mounts and now stood waiting.

Even the footmen, the camel-pullers, generally the lowest slaves of the desert, had a distinguished look about them, like high-class Arabs, but lighter. The general complexion was that of pale gold.

They were all dressed alike in cloaks of a general Mongolian cut, but white—evidently hand-woven from wool of their camels; and on their heads tall conical caps, also of wool, with earlaps, but no decorations, no jewels.

IN comparison with the meanest of these men, Shattuck knew that he himself must look like a tramp.

But something was beating inside of him, holding possession of him—

his genius, some higher self, call it what you will.

"Who speaks the language of Shadak Khan?" he asked, in the Northern dialect of China. It was the dialect he'd learned best as a child.

A group had formed about the lead camel. There was silence.

Thrust through the girth or pack-rope of this camel there was the usual spear with a flag attached such as the leaders of all caravans carry—one of the most ancient rites of the Gobi. The flag shook out in the breeze.

ON it Shattuck saw the symbol that he recognized. It was as if he'd swallowed a draught of some magic elixir.

"Who speaks the language of Shadak Khan?" he demanded again.

One of the elders of the group near the lead camel answered him:

"Sir, I do—if you be he—"

"If I be he! Do you know your banner?"—he pointed at the flag.

"That banner has been carried by our people," the old man said, "for more than half a thousand years. It's the banner of the great Chi Tsu!"

"Who rides the camel?"

"Chi Tsu—when he comes again!"

"He has come again," said Shattuck—or the genius that was speaking for him. "You shall know him by his sword!"

And he thrust the carved hilt of the sword he carried toward the group. But he wouldn't advance. Neither would he let them touch it. The group strained forward.

"Lo! Lo!"

It was almost a sob.

"The sign! The sign!"

From around the curve of the dunes other white-robed camel men came running. There was a rising shout.

"It's the sign of Chi Tsu!"

Now the cries and most of the speech were in some ancient dialect of Mandarin Chinese—the Kuan-hua—that Shattuck could understand. And also he could understand that reference of theirs to the sign of Chi Tsu.

For the sign on the flag and that on the hilt of his sword were the same and Chi Tsu was the old Chinese name of Kubla Khan.

"I am here!" Shattuck cried.

There was something about him—that genius of his that was shining out—shining through his rags and his dirt—that told all those who saw him and heard him that he—or his genius at least—was speaking the truth.

Some of those nearest him were already falling to their knees and bumping their heads against the sands.

"I am here!" Shattuck repeated. "No more as Kubla Khan. But as Shadak Khan! Come to clear the long red road—"

Through the tumult of sound about him he caught that swift staccato bark of Juma's rifle.

VI

IT was as if he'd been plucked by a spur. He went as tense as a bucking horse before its first leap, and in a moment he had leaped. He'd made a spring for the lead camel of the caravan.

"Follow me!" he shouted. "And victory to the Gods!"

"*Lha-gyal-lo!*"

That wasn't Chinese. It was a phrase he had picked up somewhere in the hills. But he knew what it meant. So, evidently, did a good many of those in this great white caravan.

They were repeating it like a battle-cry:

"*Lha-gyal-lo!*"

It was a cry that was to be repeated up and down the length and breadth of Asia as the battle-cry of Shadak Khan.

Lo, Kubla Khan—Gesher Khan—Shak Khan—Captain Trouble!—he was back again in the Gobi, and his battle-cry was this:

"*Lha-gyal-lo!*"

IT was only later that Shattuck learned that the lead camel of the caravan was one that had never before been ridden. It was a lordly beast, young and powerful and proud. Its name was Shen Lung—as one might say, "Dragon of the Winds."

Like the winds it ran now, all right—at the feel of that living weight on its back. It ran with the speed of the wild camels of the Gobi. Under that deceptive comparison of white wool there was a body as lean and tough as that of a bull moose.

Shen Lung was making a hurricane of his own as he shot his great weight forward.

There was a wind in Shattuck's face that almost stopped his breath. But, somehow, he had found the saddle. Still, he knew that it was by the grace of God—no less!—that the camel was on a familiar track. It was a track that led him over a high breach—banked up with sand—in the ruined walls of Kara Koto.

Almost from the first giddy slip into speed, Shen Lung had left the rest of the caravan far behind him.

Shattuck heard a diminishing shout in the wind. That shout was barely gone when he was hearing another. It was a different and complex roar that reached him from the ruined city.

The camel ran up a slope and had pitched down the other side. Shattuck was thrown, but as luck—or Destiny—would have it, he'd landed on his feet. He'd clung to his sword

—as every nerve of him would have clung to an arm or a leg.

And there before him he saw such a spectacle of slaughter that a shock of sickness hit him. It came with a stench of blood. He saw dead men lying about—wounded men crawling about like scotched baboons. But the thing that had really slugged him was the spectacle of a red feast in progress over his slaughtered camels.

It was the fear that smote him.

ONE glance had been enough for him to recognize these people. He'd heard a thousand weird and grisly tales of the Chud. These were the Chud. In their ravenous appetite for meat the Chud were cannibals. So many of the campfire tales of the Gobi had it—tales of travelers lured into lonely places and there torn to bits—eaten alive.

But who had ever seen the Chud and lived to tell of them afterward?

Once in a Chinese village Shattuck had seen what he'd taken to be a hairy idiot displayed like a bear in a cage. A Mongol with a horribly scarred face was exhibiting the wonder.

"The only Chud in captivity!"

Curious the memories that spin through the brain of a man in crowded moments.

The words of the Mongol barker came back. The Chuds ate human flesh. The Chuds lived in caves. The Chuds were a cross of bears and bats.

Shattuck caught the Chud nearest him by the hair and snatched him backward. He saw a grimace of insane rage and terror. Shattuck's sword was at the creature's throat. But the man was old.

"Where are the white gods, my friends?" Shattuck panted.

There was no answer.

Some delayed band of the Chud

came racing from among the ruins—fifty or a hundred. They made straight for Shattuck with a sort of gibbering shriek. The shriek sounded like wild laughter.

They were on him almost before he had time to fling the old man aside and he was caught in a turmoil of stench and demoniac riot that momentarily maddened him. From this he fought himself clear with the mad energy of a man caught in a whirlpool. Covered with blood he staggered clear.

All this an affair of seconds.

But seconds ago Shen Lung had swept over the wall with him into this stinking hell.

Where was Champela? Where was Juma? Had they been the first victims of this orgy?

He could see what had passed with the camels. He could tell by the way they had fallen—the way they looked even under this living cloak of human vermin squirming over them now. The beasts had been literally torn to pieces on their feet.

The sight and the smell—and also the fact, perhaps, that again he was free of an unaccustomed rider on his back—had brought Shen Lung, the great white camel, to a stand. Shen Lung stood there, sprawling, swaying slightly, a little stricken with the panic of what he perceived and this sudden separation from his mates.

All this was happening with a speed like that of an avalanche—deceptive, seemingly slow, but shrieking toward new catastrophe like a high-powered shell.

AT sight of the great white camel a mob of the Chud who'd been crowded from the earlier feast sprang at him with a howl of glee. One was quicker than the others—

covered with blood, armed with an antique scimitar.

Shattuck met him on the run and cut him just above the eyes. He sliced at others. He was horrified, raging. But he would no longer kill unless he had to. These weren't men. They were animals. They were the degenerate children of men.

He bawled that battle-cry of his—"Victory to the Gods!"—like a prayer, like a mantram, a word of power.

Lha-gyal-lo!"

It must have been a mantram like that.

His heart leaped as he saw two red shapes lying close together. Some way or other he cleaved a clear space about them.

"Champela!" he cried. "Juma!"

He was kneeling in the blood and slime at the side of his friends—he made a curious picture with something symbolic in it, half-Mercy, half-Murder, like the great Pan Ku, the Maker of the World Himself—when reinforcements got there.

There were other fast camels in the Agharti caravan, and the men to ride them, too, when the new incarnation of Kubla Khan was there.

THEY came over the ruined wall of Kara Koto in a white stampede—the camels, as was their wont, crazy to follow where their leader, Shen Lung, had already showed them the way.

The Agharti fighting men fell to work.

The Chud were beginning to scatter like sated rats. They were heavy with blood and filth. Most of them had abandoned their weapons.

"Don't kill!"

It was curious that the first order Shadak Khan ever gave to these new followers of his should be precisely that.

"Herd them!" Shattuck shouted. "Get them together! Pen them up!"

He turned again to his battered companions.

Shadak Khan or no Shadak Khan, he would have given all he'd dreamed of or ever hoped for to know that they'd still live.

VII

IN every victory some shadow to maintain the old balance of light and shadow, high and low, of *yin* and *yang*!

Shattuck meditated on *yin* and *yang* in the hours that followed. Now, "yin," according to Chinese philosophy, is the dark female principle that fumes up from the depth of the earth; "yang" the bright male principle of the sunlight.

Yet now the Agharti, who were a fine, brave people, were apparently headed for the center of the earth.

They'd made two litters, at their new Khan's direction, and on these they'd placed with infinite care his two followers, the warrior-chief and the lama-chief, Juma and Champela.

The Agharti's handling of the Chud had been exceeding swift. At that order of Shadak Khan's to spare the creatures it had become an affair of staves and camel-whips. Only the badly wounded of the Chud were dispatched, and these swiftly.

The remainder of the horde—all those who hadn't got away to the desert—were corraled like goats. Like goats they would be driven later into some rock-fortress of the Agharti far down under the ruins of Kara Koto.

Even in those first few minutes, while Shattuck was more occupied with the care of his friends than the wonders of these two lost tribes he'd somehow brought under his dominion, he was learning much about the

Chud and the Agharti. Both were, in fact, descendants of some early race. Both had become what the outside world had come to know as a "subterranean" people.

But only the Chud were truly subterranean. They subsisted on bats. They herded them. They followed the bat swarms in their mysterious migrations from cave to cave. The Chud did this as other nomads followed their flocks across the scant grasslands of desert and mountain.

THE Agharti, on the other hand, while keeping alive the secret cult of the ancient race, had maintained a connection with the outside world. There were emissaries of their race scattered everywhere throughout the world—watching, waiting for the return of the King of the world.

They sent an annual caravan to some place they called by the Russian name of "Belavoyde"—a name that meant "White Waters"—where they met some wandering division of their people who lived in the outside world. . . .

"These two we must save," said Shattuck—Shadak Khan. "With them—and the sword of Kubla Khan—the road to Shamballah lies open."

"They may live," said an elder of the Agharti, "if we can get them to the Temple."

The elder had the name of Li Ko-liang. It sounded like an incantation to Shattuck. In Li Ko-liang's pale-gold face he saw some quality of a benediction. He felt a breath of cleansing hope.

"Where is the Temple, Li Ko-liang?"

"The Temple, Khan, is in the Home of the Dragon, far down in the great cave."

"Far down in the earth, Father Li, will there not be too much *yin*?"

"Khan, where there is *yin* there is also *yang*."

"Let us make haste, then, but softly, to the Temple, Li Ko-liang."

They would have made a little for Shattuck himself, if he'd have permitted it, and carried him, since he wouldn't ride. He wouldn't ride because he wanted to walk beside those two litters in which his friends were carried.

And once more the great white camel, Shen Lung, hereafter the camel of Shadak Khan, took up the march.

They passed through the drifted ruins of Kara Koto to where a great rift opened under a tilted ledge of rock. The rift was the mouth of a cavernous descent that zigzagged downward into darkness.

Here, either from the camel-packs or from some secret hiding-place, a score or more of flambeaus were produced, and Shattuck caught the familiar odor of burning crude oil, although the smell had been disguised somewhat—and the flame also quickened, it seemed—by some other oil, the oil of sesame, perhaps.

The camels knew the place. They did not seem to mind the bobbing flames. For that matter, so far as Shattuck could judge, over half of the caravan must have been moving, easily, swiftly, in the dark.

The way down followed a descending ledge, smooth but often at a dizzy pitch. On one side there was a drop into darkness, on the other a wall of rock.

AND sometimes, after a shifting turn, the wall and the abyss had changed sides. The ceiling of this causeway to the "Home of the Dragon," as Li Ko-liang referred to it, had disappeared long ago not to appear again.

No one spoke. The white camels

padded softly. The white dogs, that had never barked since Shattuck had first seen them, trotted as if along a familiar lane.

One by one Shattuck saw the flam-
eaux disappear, and still there seemed to be no loss of light.

Then he saw, as they rounded another turn, what looked like a vast tapestry of woven fire against an expanse of wall. It looked like a tapestry in the course of being woven—the play of a thousand shuttles of clear flame playing back and forth, up and down. A lacelike pattern would be formed. It might hold for the time of a dozen breaths, then start to shift and play again.

He'd heard rumors about these "fire-halls" and "fire-writings" of the old sacred caves in various parts of Asia, but this was the first he had ever seen of them. His engineering mind was telling him that here was a seepage of oil or gas, probably mixed with water or something more volatile still.

"We are near the Temple, Khan," said Li Ko-liang, softly.

"Has the Temple a holy man, Father Li?" Shattuck asked.

"Yea, Khan," the elder whispered; "the holiest of all, even he of whom you spoke—He of the Shining Garment."

VIII

SHATTUCK had the sensation of having entered the greatest temple in the world. It was—the Temple!

They'd come into a cavern that seemed immeasurable, yet it was but one of a series of chambers through which they had passed. There'd been other fire-tapestries. Here and there a twisting column of flame as if flowered against the roof.

In the Temple there was a lake of

fire. It was, Shattuck judged, about a hundred yards in length and a half of that in breadth. But neither was this a mass or a solid sheet of flames. The water of the lake was visible.

Across this, back and forth, now rising into thin spirals and again sinking out of sight, twining and gliding like ten thousand luminous skaters, the fire played in a myriad of blue flames.

The lake lay against a wall that rose straight up and lost itself in the shadows overhead. This wall had been carved into a series of deep recesses or niches, and in each of these a god smiled down at the eternal fire.

The gods were colossal. But they were small attendants to the great central figure, that of Maitreya, the future King of the World.

Shattuck heard a whisper at his side:

"Him, O Shadak Khan, for whom you have come to prepare the way!"

He thought that it was Li Ko-liang who had whispered to him. But as he swiftly turned he discovered that for the moment he was standing alone. Then the memory in his brain told him that he'd heard the whisper in English.

He spoke aloud in English, careless of what those who heard him might think of it.

"That's right," he said. "I have come to prepare the way."

The great image of Maitreya also was smiling as the light flared up. Shattuck took it as a sort of promise as he turned to his friends. The promise was fulfilled.

WITHIN a week, both Juma and Champela were up and about again.

Sometimes by the sacred lake of fire and sometimes up in the sun, where the chastened Chud were now

working to clean up the ruins of Kara Koto, Shadak Khan sat with his two friends during their convalescence and talked about the coming regeneration of the world.

Throughout the world there was trouble. Captain Trouble would clear it away. After Captain Trouble had done his work—or maybe before that time—the King of the World would appear, and the world would know peace and plenty again.

But there were things closer and just as vital to talk about.

First, there was the rebuilding of Kara Koto.

"We've found a capital," said Shadak Khan. "And we've found a people. Also we've found a thing worth fighting for."

The three of them sat together

one day by the sacred lake of fire while a cold Gobi storm made the great Temple more than ever a desirable place to live in, when they were aware that a fourth had joined them.

"You've made a good start, Captain Trouble," said a quiet voice in English.

They looked up quickly.

They saw, dimly, the shape of the Living Buddha standing there.

"Great friend," said Shattuck softly, clutched by a sudden fear, "is all this also illusion?"

The Presence smiled. Just then he looked like the vast stone image of Maitreya. He shook his head.

"You've stood the test of illusion, Shadak Khan," he said. "And your work has just begun."

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GREY SAND



*What was the Mysterious, Magical Power of the
Medicine Man's Carved Stick in this
Story of New Guinea?*

By JOHN H. COMPTON

Author of "Justice," "China Flower," etc.

BLACK JACK HARDIGAN ran his muscular fingers through a wealth of grey sand. His eyes lit up as he turned to his assistant, Smudge Daniels, a young, wiry American.

"This stuff is okay, Smudge," he declared.

They were discussing the practicability of the acres of grey sand that stretched away before them. Black

Jack knew that the American Contracting Company, for which he worked, would welcome the news that this sand was to be found in New Guinea.

He laughed; he felt happy. Here, many miles up the Strickland River, which cuts across New Guinea from the upper reaches of the River Fly, he had found the sand. It was just the sort needed for the mixing of

the concrete for the new bridge down at the junction of the Strickland and the Fly.

"It's probably the one place in New Guinea where there's sand like this," he exulted. "Saves us all the trouble of bringing it out from Sydney. Ought to make the big job a bit easier."

SMUDGE whizzed one of his chiefs' red and white survey rods high into the air, catching it neatly as it fell. His freckled face was wreathed in a wide grin as he studied the happy expression on the countenance of the big American.

"This'll put us on velvet, Chief," he declared. "The company'll pay plenty for that stuff."

"Not so fast," Hardigan warned. "Before they can shift this sand they've got to get the concession from the Kalis. And that New Guinea tribe, Mister Smudge, is about the wildest in Papua, with a decided fancy for white men's heads."

Smudge made a wry face.

"Ugh! Never did fancy myself on a skewer, Chief, like a hunk o' dog meat. Still, we shouldn't worry. Ain't you got that magic stick to give to Kali?"

Hardigan nodded. He was no newcomer to New Guinea. In his previous years he had made some powerful enemies, but he had also made friends who were perhaps more powerful.

One of these, Giwi, the great murimuri, or medicine man, had given Hardigan one of his magic sticks. It was a piece of wood with mysterious carvings on it—a message in the secret language of the medicine doctors of New Guinea.

"With this, master," he had told Black Jack, "you can pass safely among the Kali tribe to Kali him-

self, who sits alone in his tribal house, never moving out of it.

"Most powerful among the murimuri men is Kali. He has no love for the white man, master, but because of this stick which Giwi gives thee, Kali will receive thee and do thee thy favor."

Standing there on the precious sand, just within the fringe of Kali's country, Black Jack and Smudge looked again at the strangely carved stick. The knobby end had been fashioned into a grotesque mask; the shaft was scored with strange markings; in the handle was a hole that Giwi had been at pains to make just big enough to fit Hardigan's fourth finger.

Idly Black Jack ran his finger through the hole.

"Remember how he wanted it to fit?" he chuckled.

"And didn't the old boy think we were crazy to go trekking around Papua for a bit of grey sand? Remember he said 'The white man is a fool, a child who plays with sand. Are there not leagues of sand by the coast?'"

They chuckled at the memory.

"Better be going," Hardigan suggested. "Just before dark we ought to reach that rope bridge across the ravine. There'll be Kali head-hunters on guard there, but we've got our passport. They won't make a pig-on-a-stick out of us, Smudge."

HE was glancing idly at the stick when a sharp crack sounded from the jungle fringe. The bullet struck the carved stick and it leaped like a live thing from his hand.

Hardigan wheeled. In a flash his hand went to his own rifle. A harsh voice came from the concealment. Whoever it was, they were well hidden.

"Hands off that gun, Hardigan!"

Black Jack hesitated. His courage was high, but he was no fool. A live man, even when a prisoner, still had a chance; a dead man was useless. His rifle described an arc and bedded down on the soft grass.

"You, too, fellow!" the voice said. Smudge hesitated and looked at Hardigan.

"Do what he says," Black Jack snapped.

Smudge grunted something unintelligible and followed suit. The voice went on:

"Now those Colts!" it ordered.

Hardigan and Smudge unholstered their revolvers and slung them after the rifles.

"That's better. Now up with your hands and no monkey business or you're dead men. That's fine; come on, Sam."

Out of the fringe came two white men covering them, followed by native carriers. Their faces were thick with beards of several days' growth. They were large and heavy-set, rifle armed, with cartridge belts slung over their shoulders.

THE foremost spoke and Hardigan recognized the voice of the one who had first commanded him.

"Keep 'em covered, Sam. I'll take care of that stick." He lowered his rifle and stepped across to where the stick had fallen. Recovering it, he chuckled softly.

"Tain't chipped much," he said. "Guess it can be used okay."

"What's the idea?" Hardigan asked calmly.

The fellow cackled and kicked at the grey sand.

"This," he replied, grinning. "Think I dunno what your company would pay for the concession? Think I dunno Giwl gave you this visiting card?" he waved the stick, "to give

to Kali. Guess we know okay, eh Sam?"

"Sure do, Loggy," Sam replied.

Hardigan's face was like granite.

"A dirty business," he barked angrily.

The one addressed as Loggy shrugged.

"Hard words don't break no bones, mister. Me 'n' Sam are gonna take this here stick to Kali 'n' get the concession; then we'll sell the rights to your company.

"We got some nice presents fer Kali, too." He jerked his head toward the big chest his men were carrying.

"Guess that'll be all the talkin' mister," he continued, and an unmistakable menace had crept into his voice. He pointed toward the jungle. "Gwan, get goin'!"

THE angry blood, rising swiftly, dyed Hardigan's neck an ominous red.

"What about our rifles?" he asked.

Loggy sneered.

"You c'n leave 'em here, Mister Black Jack. You're supposed to be so big you don't need a gun."

Hardigan fought for his self-control.

"That's nothing less than murder, you skunk!" he accused. "We'll need guns in this jungle with the head-hunters around. You know this country."

"You c'n keep on needin' guns," Loggy returned. "Guess I'm nobody's fool. Think I'm gonna let you have your guns so's you'll camp on my trail. Gwan, 'fore I get peeved!"

Hardigan looked at Smudge. He knew the perils of the Papuan jungle well; it was risk enough to be there with rifles. But without them, and without the carved stick, he would need to be a superman en-

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dowed with all sorts of luck, to get through.

He saw the look of restless energy in Smudge's eyes. He shook his head slowly, for he knew they'd be shot down mercilessly if they made even the slightest break. He swung to Loggy.

"You dirty, cheap crook! You don't give a man a dog's chance to live. But, don't worry, you haven't heard the last of us!" He turned on his heel. "Come on, Smudge."

Smudge Daniels stepped forward, but Loggy raised his rifle and covered him.

"Not so fast!" he said. "He's gonna stay with us. How do we know what was said on that stick? Mebbe Giwi mentioned something about this kid on it. Hustle along, now!" he finished.

Hardigan's face muscles moved, but he held his temper.

"So long, Smudge," he said. "I'll see you soon." Then he swung on his heel and brushed into the jungle. Hardigan did not go far. As soon as he was out of sight of the party he turned and crept to where he could watch them.

He saw them start off, Loggy holding his gun to Smudge who followed the blacks. The heavy iron casket was on the carriers' backs and Hardigan saw a long, coiling whip in Sam's hand, ever ready to stir the black porters ahead.

AS soon as they got going, Hardigan followed. He crept at a safe distance, for he could not hope to attack or be attacked without having any weapons. He knew, further, that they would not expect him to follow immediately; they would expect him to make for the white settlement as fast as he could.

But Hardigan followed. Through

the trees and brush he could see the party swinging along before him. He saw the carriers bent under the weight of the chest they were carrying—the chest with the presents for Kali.

Slowly and cautiously he followed. The more he saw the big box the more he got to thinking about it. There was one chance of turning the cards if he got the opportunity; but would he get the opportunity?

He squinted at the sunlight slanting through the feathered jungle tops. It would soon be dark; they must be near the ravine by this time. Maybe it *would* work; maybe the opportunity *would* come.

SUDDENLY there was a commotion ahead. Quickly he slipped through the jungle, flanked the party and came to the ravine. He looked down into the narrow chasm where the torrent tumbled about on the rocks many feet below.

Watching, he saw Loggy and Sam on the edge of the ravine, where the rope bridge went curving down into the gorge before sweeping up to the bridge ahead on the opposite bank.

Facing Loggy and Sam was a band of fuzzy-haired warriors, hideously painted, each man armed with a sling and broad-bladed stabbing spear. The Kali head-hunters.

He could see Loggy waving the carved stick as the renegades talked to the Kalis. Suddenly the warriors prostrated themselves. The magic of the stick was working; they were going to be allowed to cross the bridge.

The bridge was in two sections: one a foot-rope for the passage of men; the second an arrangement of pulleys which could haul the heavy baggage across. The big box was to be sent over first, and already the men were preparing it for the trip.

(Continued on page 117)

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DARKNESS fell with tropical swiftness as Hardigan moved out of his concealment. There was but the feeblest of moons, yet he moved ahead with sure-footed accuracy.

The edge of the ravine did not drop away abruptly into the depths; it sloped for some distance, and the rope which supported the pulleys sagged far below the level of the bridgeheads.

Moving along the slope, Hardigan made use of every bit of cover, the stunted trees and overhanging boulders, until he came to just below where the big box was being hooked to the cables.

The weight of the chest sagged the rope still further, and, as it slid over to where Black Jack crouched, the big surveyor reached out, gripped the ropes which bound the box, and drew his body up beneath the chest.

The next moment he was out over the ravine. The thunder of the torrent came dully up to him. He could picture in his mind the sharp pointed rocks below, and what would happen should his grip loosen. Or if the bridge should fail to hold.

The box moved forward slowly, hauled hand over hand by the Kalis on the footbridge. With the chest sinking below the bridgeheads, Black Jack was completely hidden. As it swung upward over the slope on the opposite bank he dropped off and promptly made for a huge boulder.

There he crouched, expecting at any moment to hear the outcry that would announce his discovery. But the darkness, and the fact that he was below those hauling the chest, screened him effectively.

He waited only until he was sure he was not observed, then he began to creep away from the bridgehead until he could cling to the edge of the ravine. From there he made his

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way in a narrow circle until he came up behind the fuzzy-headed Kalis supervising the crossing.

After a while he spotted the chest. It lay some distance in the rear of the Kalis. He wriggled his way toward it until he was concealed in its shadow. The box was not locked, simply secured by an iron rod running through loopholes, and having a dud padlock.

Stealthily Black Jack removed the rod and raised the lid. He caught the gleam of copper. Working swiftly he took out the contents, one by one, and dumped them in the bushes nearby. He heard Loggy shouting and realized that the last of the party was crossing by the rope bridge.

He wriggled into the now empty box, and brought the lid down, making sure he could raise it at any time. He trusted to the darkness that the iron rod would not be missed. He was forced to curl himself up in order to fit in the narrow space, and muttered a prayer that the Kali village was not far.

He crouched there, unable to make much out of the noises from the outside. Finally he heard voices and recognized that of Loggy's ordering the porters to lift the box. It was a critical moment and he felt his heart bound. But the box was lifted to the shoulders of the blacks without any protest other than the grunts they made beneath its weight.

THEN, from the swaying movement, Black Jack knew that so far his strategy had succeeded. He was on his way, and he grinned when he thought of the surprise that was in store for them.

He had fashioned no definite line of campaign. Even when he was discovered Loggy might try to bluff his way out, might prove that the

magic stick Giwi had given Hardigan was really his. Yet he knew one thing: Loggy did not know what was carved on the strange passport.

If it made no mention of how the carrier was to be identified; then it would be left to Kali to decide who was lying.

On and on they trudged; to Black Jack it seemed that they were on their way for hours. Occasionally he was forced to lift the lid enough to admit fresh air; they had not yet learned of his presence. Once he heard Loggy say to Smudge:

"Fine chief you've got. Just walked away and left you in the lurch. Believe me, kid, you'd better come in with Sam and me and tell Kali that we're partners."

Smudge was defiant.

"Say! What makes you think he's left? Why do you think they call him the big chief? He's too big for you; I'll bet he's not far behind."

Loggy laughed loudly.

"Betcha he don't get past them head-hunters at the ravine bridge. They'll make a nice pot o' soup outa him."

But Smudge was defiant.

"Let me tell you somethin'," he said. "Black Jack'll get you for this! And get you soon!" he finished with conviction.

A SMILE passed over Hardigan's features.

"You're not far wrong, Smudge, old boy," he muttered silently.

He lifted himself again, and this time peeped out through the meager crack. The trail was broadening now and directly ahead he saw the glare of Kali's watch fires.

Soon the party was swinging through the stockade gates. They headed for the big communal house where Kali, the famous, squatted from one year's end to another. The

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medicine man never moved out of the four-walled house; yet he exercised an iron rule throughout a great stretch in New Guinea.

As they approached him, Hardigan closed down the lid. He heard Loggy's greetings.

"Greetings, lord of the murimuris," he said.

There was silence for a moment, and Hardigan knew that he was passing over the stick. Then a thin, reedy voice, that seemed to come from the tomb itself, spoke. Hardigan knew it was Kali.

THE white man has come for the grey sand," Kali's voice said.

So he knew of their mission. Black Jack then knew that it was written on the stick by Giwi.

"Giwi is my friend, he saved my life," the voice of the medicine man went on. "Great is Giwi, who is a brother muri-muri. What he says so shall ye have. He speaks of a young man who also comes."

Loggy's voice replied:

"This is the fellow, just like a son to me."

Hardigan knew that Smudge was the object of the discussion and undoubtedly the object of a rifle in the renegade's hands. Slowly he lifted the cover and peeped out.

Kali squatted on a dais covered with skins. Older than the hills he looked, his face seamed with a hundred wrinkles. At first sight he seemed dead, a mummified figure, but closer inspection revealed two little, redly glowing eyes.

Behind him in the compound, Kali's head-hunters were gathered. Their faces were savage in the light of the fires; the flames seemed to bathe their spear blades in blood.

The skulls swinging at their hips were ominous. Skulls gleamed from

every part of the communal house. For a fleeting second Hardigan could picture his own head swinging there; and he didn't relish the picture very much.

THE grotesque stick was in Kali's hands. The masked head seemed to grin in the light from the guttering wicks which floated in the oil gourds. He could see Sam's rifle pointing discreetly toward Smudge's back.

Then Loggy spoke.

"I have brought some presents for Kali," he said.

"I want them not," the medicine man replied. "It is for Giwi that I do this. Yet, I will look at these presents."

Hardigan knew that the moment had arrived. As he heard them fumbling at the box lid he prepared himself, flung it open and jumped out. He bowed low before the medicine man.

"Greetings, O Kali," he cried, "and greetings to you, too, skunks. Hello, Smudge."

His assistant started, then recovered. The rifle prodded in his back.

Behind Hardigan, armed warriors had closed in. He felt his arms gripped as in a vice. Then the voice of Kali spoke.

"Greetings, white man from the box. What do ye here?"

Hardigan saw the cruel faces of the warriors peer at him. Their eyes were narrowed and they seemed anxious to take him away. He waited no longer.

"Kali," he said, almost crisply, "that carved stick was given to me by Giwi, who is my friend. These men," he indicated Loggy and Sam with a nod of the head, "stole it from me."

There was a snarl of anger from Loggy.

(Continued on page 122)

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"Giwi gave it to me," he protested. "He lies."

"They held me up and took the stick from me. See, there is the spot where this fellow's bullet chipped it when he shot it out of my hands."

He pointed to the mark on the stick. As it was new, it was apparent that it had been made after Giwi had carved his figures on it.

But Loggy was playing for big stakes and he did not let Black Jack's presence upset him.

"He's wrong," he said, much calmer. "He made that chip in the stick when he fired at me. He's been after that concession for a long time. Giwi knows what a rat he is, and refused him such a stick himself. Ask the boy," he finished dramatically.

There was a deathly silence. Hardigan saw that Sam's rifle was held in unflinching hands and he knew that the slightest denial on Smudge's part would mean instant death; they would have to fight their way out otherwise.

SMUDGE looked at Hardigan and Black Jack shook his head to indicate the uselessness of any rash act. Then he could see Smudge turn to Loggy, who was smiling, almost gloating, and finally to Kali himself. The muri-muri man's eyes were calculating.

"Well," he said, "tell me, my son."

Hardigan could see Smudge wet his lips. They moved without saying anything. Then, before he had a chance to reply, Hardigan said:

"It will do no good to ask him, O Kali. They would kill him instantly were he to tell the truth."

Kali turned and cast his beady eyes on Black Jack.

"You are only delaying thy fate," he said.

Then he crooned something and

(Concluded on page 124)

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(Concluded from page 122)

Hardigan could feel arms tighten on his, and he was being dragged away. The voice of Kali came again.

"Ye will be placed in cold water, white man," he said, "in pots upon the fire. The water will boil and thy flesh will become tender.

"Aie," he went on, "ye will cook until ye are nearly dead, then I will take thy head and my warriors thy body and—"

"Wait," shouted Hardigan. He had at first been fascinated by the crooning and the eyes of Kali; but when he saw Smudge square his shoulders and prepare to speak he shouted. It would be useless for that now—useless for Smudge to die, too.

O Kali," he said, "one more plea. Is there no way in which you can tell who rightfully owns the stick? Did not the great Giwi indicate some method?"

Kali relapsed into his mummified position. Then he said:

"Pass me thy right hand, O white man."

He spoke to Loggy and he passed over his hand, half hesitatingly.

Kali crooned something else and soon warriors were all around the party. Then the medicine man slipped the hole in the stick over Loggy's fourth finger. He then turned to Hardigan.

"Now thy right hand," he commanded.

He thrust Hardigan's fourth finger through the hole. A moment passed, a moment charged with doubt—and hope. Then the crooning voice of Kali was heard and four enormous warriors closed in around Loggy and Sam and Kali bowed his head in the direction of Hardigan.

"The stick fits only thy finger, O great white man. May the sand ye wish fulfill all thy hopes."

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THE GLOBE TROTTER



Thanks, globe trotters! Your letters about **KWA OF THE JUNGLE** have given us that great, peppy feeling that comes when an editor finds that his readers agree with him.

Remember, when we asked your reactions on this complete book-length novel by Paul Regard? We thought this story was a wow, but so different from anything else that we had published up to that time that—well, we wondered how you'd take it.

This letter, from a New York reader, is typical of how you took it:

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"I speak for many of your readers in my neighborhood. Many of us have read this story and all agree it's great.

"It surpasses many other types of stories. Let's have more."

Your letters encourage us to ask you, once again, to drop us a line. Now we know that you like stories like **KWA OF THE JUNGLE**. And we want to know whether you like still another type of story—

The pseudo-scientific type.

Write and tell us. If you think we ought to publish a story of this kind, we'll do so—and you'd be surprised what we have on tap in this line!

The June returns are in.

After tabulating and arranging all the coupons submitted in the June "Reader's Choice Contest," we find

that this is the way the June stories shape up, in your opinion:

1st—**PERIL IN THE WIND**,
by Henry Leyford

2nd—**DEATH'S ORCHIDS**,
by Lane Archer

3rd—**DEAD MAN'S FLIGHT**,
by Johnston Carroll

4th—**JUNGLE JOSS**,
by Paul Regard

5th—**THE LEOPARD MAN**,
by Perley Poore Sheehan

6th—**KEEPING THE PEACE**,
by Cole Weymouth

7th—**PIRATES AND GENTLEMEN**,
by Scott Morgan

Strangely enough, no single coupon listed the stories in exactly this order.

But the closest was that submitted by Terra McGowan, San Clemente, Cal., who therefore corrals the first prize.

Second money goes to Lawrence Davies, Meriden, Ct.

Third prize was won by George Rintamaki, Newberry, Mich.

And the five fourth prizes are awarded to the following lucky contestants:

David Glenn, Bessemer, Ala.;
Oliver R. Bechtold, Lancaster, Pa.;
William McFall, Everett, Wash.;
Charles Andrews, Arkansas City,
Ark.; W. E. Williams, Chicago, Ill.

Thanks to everyone who co-operated in this contest, which has taught



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THE EDITOR.

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20 SIMPLE WORDS WIN \$250.00 FOR SOMEONE, MAYBE YOU!

Nothing More for You to Do!

\$250 Prize given just for the winning answer to my question

There is no way you can lose. Simply, tell me how \$3,500.00 would help you right now, if I give it to you. The prize for the winning answer is \$250.00, with an added \$100.00 for promptness.

The mere fact of sending in a few words for this big \$250 cash prize qualifies you for the greater opportunity to

WIN \$3,500 CASH

Or a Studebaker-8 Sedan and \$2,000 Cash

This huge prize is extra and separate from the cash prize offered for the best answer to my question in only 20 words or less. No wonder me say that here's your opportunity to win a fortune. Just imagine! \$3,500.00 cash besides all coming to you at once. Think! How would \$3,500.00 cash help you right now? Would it help you start a business of

your own, pay off a mortgage on your home, buy new furniture or clothes? Maybe it would help you get an education. Consider all these things you could do with such a huge sum. Plan now—then write your answer—rush it to me at once. Yours may easily be the winner. All replies become the property of Richard Day, Manager.

Just Sending Answer Qualifies You for Opportunity to Win \$3,500.00

Some say I am wrong. They say that giving money to people will not help to bring back prosperity. They say that the people who get money from me will spend it foolishly. Now I want to find out. I am going to give away \$6,000.00. Someone is going to get \$3,500.00, all cash. If I gave you the \$3,500.00 what would YOU do with it? Tell me in 20 words or less. Just sending an answer qualifies you for the opportunity to win \$3,500.00. If you are prompt I'll send you a \$100.00 Cash Certificate AT ONCE! Here is an opportunity of a lifetime. Costs you nothing to win. Rush your answer today. Send no money—just tell me how \$3,500.00 would help you right now—if I gave you the \$3,500.00 that I have promised to give to some yet unknown deserving person.

Richard Day

Use Coupon or Write Letter with Your Answer

\$250.00 PRIZE COUPON

RICHARD DAY, Manager
909 Cheapside, Dept. W 701-R, Cincinnati, Ohio
Here's how \$3,500.00 cash would help me right now:
(Write your answer plainly here, in 20 words or less)

.....
.....
.....
.....
Name.....
Address.....
Town..... State.....
Date I read your offer.....

BE PROMPT! I Will Send You a \$100.00 Cash Certificate AT ONCE!

To make it worth your while to be prompt in sending in your answer to my question, I'll send you \$100.00 cash help you RIGHT NOW!—if you will see that your offer is postmarked not more than three days after you read

this offer I will send you a Cash Promptness Certificate entitling you to an extra \$100.00 in cash should your reply, in the opinion of the judges, win the \$250.00 cash prize offered above, making a cash prize of \$350.00 in all.

Rules

Only one answer accepted from a family. Use your own name. \$250.00 given for best answer in "How Would \$3,500.00 Cash Help You Right NOW?" Answers must be postmarked not later than October 1, 1932. Judges will consider answer only for practical value of the idea, construction and spelling. Neatness or ingenuity of submitting answer not considered. Duplicate prizes will be given in cases of duplicate winning answers.

Hundreds have won

Throughout the past year we have given financial help to hundreds of deserving people in all parts of the United States. . . . we have given away hundreds and thousands of dollars in prizes. Beemer won \$1,700. Harriet Robertson won \$1,100. Hundreds more made happy with huge prizes and cash awards. Now is YOUR opportunity—ACT TODAY!

RICHARD DAY, Manager
909 Cheapside, Dept. W 701-R, Cincinnati, Ohio

ALL YOUR FRIENDS USE Christmas Cards



EARN UP TO \$500 before CHRISTMAS..



Show the MIDGET CRAFT LINE OF PERSONAL GREETING CARDS & CHRISTMAS NECESSITIES

Would you like to earn \$500 in commission in your spare hours between now and Christmas? You can easily do it. Just call on your friends and show the beautiful Midget-Craft Line of Personal Greeting Cards and other Christmas Necessities.

Last year 2,968 ambitious men and women made money in this pleasant and easy way. This year even more will profit. Will you be one of them? It costs you nothing to try!

You will be welcome wherever you call with the 1932 Midget-Craft Line, because everyone needs Christmas Cards and you will offer the most exquisite array at prices that actually save money for your customers. They will thank you for calling, and recommend you to their friends.

You are paid big cash commissions the minute you write your orders - no waiting, no delay, no red tape.

Three Reasons Why Orders Are Easy With the Midget-Craft Line

- 1- Everyone is anxious to save money these 31 days, and Midget-Craft Prices are the lowest in America. A comparison proves it.
- 2- Beauty and Quality. Just wait until you see the exquisite Midget-Craft array. You and your customers will agree that it is the most attractive and appealing Available Line ever seen.
- 3- Midget-Craft Personal Cards are ENGRAVED with the sender's name. Engraving is not ordinary printing. It is *raised*, just like genuine engraving.

Some of the CHRISTMAS NECESSITIES created by MIDGET craftsmen

- Personal Greeting Cards
- 21-Card Christmas Box Assortment
- 12-Card Christmas Box Assortment
- Personal Gift Cards
- Gift-Wrapping Assortment
- Personal Stationers
- Personal Name Cards

Every Item a Profit-Winner!

Elaborate Selling Outfit FREE

You need not invest a single penny. We furnish everything FREE - an elaborate portfolio of beautiful Christmas Cards, an array of Christmas Gift Cards, a line of Personal Stationery, samples of Personal Name Cards, etc. In addition, we will send you a book of very valuable selling secrets which tells you how to make more money with less effort.

If you are sincere in your desire to earn a lot of money before Christmas, just mail the coupon below. There is no obligation. Act NOW, as only a limited number of Midget-Craft Representatives will be employed.

MIDGET CARD SHOP, INC.
Dept. 19 Harrisburg, Penna.



MAIL COUPON FOR *FREE* SELLING OUTFIT!

MIDGET CARD SHOP, Inc.
Dept. 19, Harrisburg, Penna.

I desire to earn up to \$500 before Christmas with the Midget-Craft Line. Rush application for elaborate Free Outfit.

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____

State _____