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by R. W. DALY

WITH A PROP AND A PRAYER
by COLEMAN MEYER

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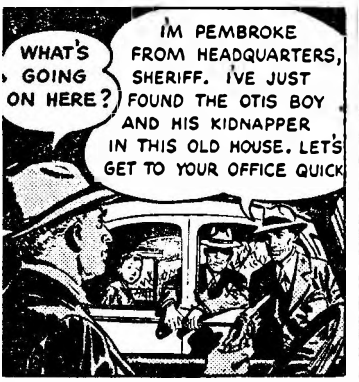

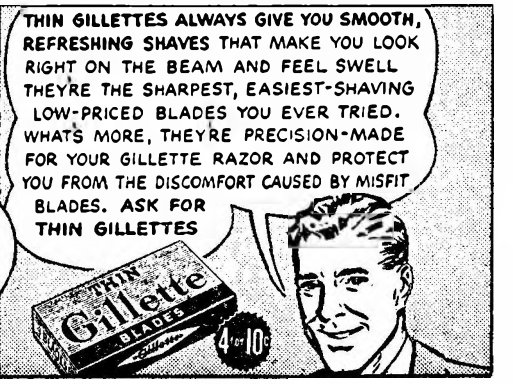

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Adventure
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NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

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THE SERIAL

THE FACT STORY

VERSE

DEPARTMENTS

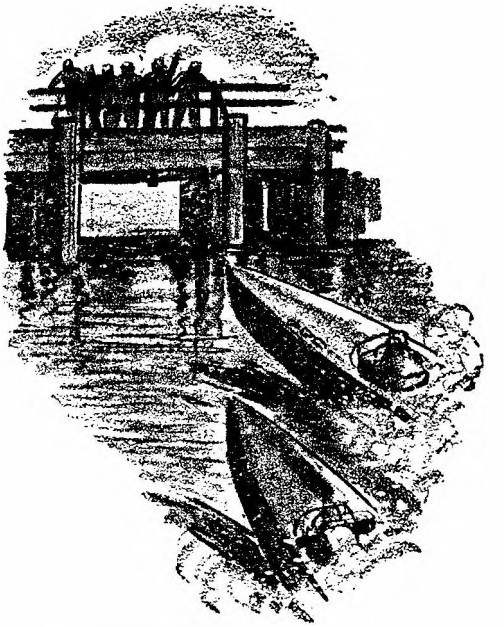
Cover painted for Adventure by Rafael DeSoto

Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

IT'S quite a leap from the dirt-track auto-racing background of Coleman Meyer's last two stories—"Adam Was a Chump" and "Indianapolis Bait"—to the setting for his yarn on page 36 of this issue. We asked the amphibious speed-demon author of "With a Prop and a Prayer" to bridge the gap for us and here's what he writes—



Miss Mimi in "With a Prop and a Prayer" isn't too much a creature of fiction. My bruises prove that.

And river racing—slough is really the better word—as it's practised around here, isn't too much a matter of fiction either. For a blue-chip thrill I don't think there's quite anything to equal it.

This scramble in "With a Prop . . . ." really started some fifteen or eighteen years ago, only then we ran it with outboards. It couldn't quite run annually as the supply of boats wasn't equal to the consumption. San Francisco Bay was always dotted with patient lads in jackets floating alongside a broken-up hull, waiting for a pick-up.

Just before the war we had a couple of trial runs in surveying the course preparatory to reviving the affair with inboard hydros and hot runabouts. And—if you happened to be possessed of a two-seater and could secure a complete neophyte for a passenger—you had an absolute assurance that you were carrying a case of high blood pressure and incipient heart failure.

There is just a little less than a thousand miles of waterway between the Sacramento-Stockton area and the Bay. The charts are superb marvels of bland impermanence ". . . . two and a tenth miles from the railroad bridge turn right at sunken rowboat. . . . One mile from slat pier turn left at Bull Durham sign. . . . At red windmill take left turning, etc. . . ." They're really printed that way! And if the windmill had burned down the prior year you'd usually find yourself in a blind channel with a mile a minute on your hands and no place to put it.

The one that gets your passenger hanging on the deck cleats (assuming it to be his first trip, of course) is a hot run down a ten foot slough with a five foot beam and the willows threatening any moment to clean you both right off the boat, a slough that ends a mile away, apparently at a very immovable bank. Only you—cunningly—know that it does *not* end and that there is a turning there that you can make in the bigger numbers assuming, a) that the red windmill hadn't burned down last year, b) that you are on course and c) that some lad isn't fishing for bass right around the corner!

That's a classic buggy ride. Nothing touches it for sport.

Inasmuch as I can foresee some decided dissent with such a positive statement perhaps I'd better hasten to say that there're few sports I've missed but of the ones I've tried it stands close to the roof.

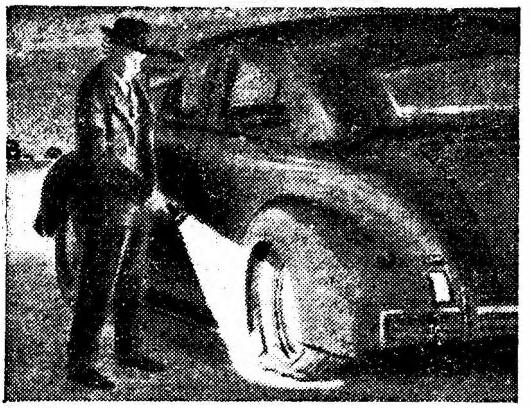
In court they make you qualify yourself as an expert. I can't be quite that presumptuous here but in looking back a few years I can remember a sample here and there of the things that are supposed to promote high blood pressure. I have an airplane at present and have been flying for a number of years. Ditto motorcycle. I put in a fair stint at dirt-track racing circa 1920-1930 with both two and four wheels until a combination of several accidents, a lovely but emphatic wife and a thinning of the locks distilled into a demand for quieter pursuits. Boating looked to be that—but I was green then!

There wasn't any more dirt-track racing for a few years until the lovely but emphatic wife went on a vacation and somebody ran a few stock-car races. A few days of mental brilliance on the part of a radio station's publicity department resulted in a front page ten-strike—they would broadcast an actual race right from the car itself! And on their staff they had an announcer that would just fill the bill. Besides you could always hire another announcer if you happened to lose one.

(Continued on page 8)

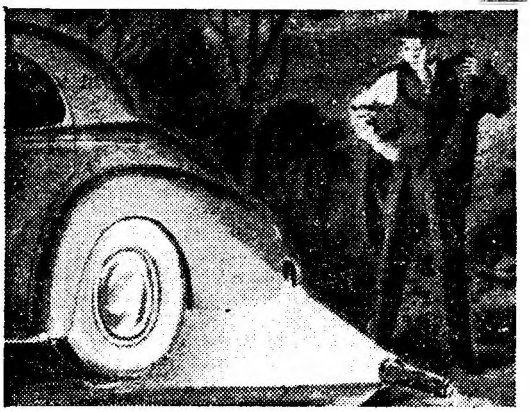
How to CHANGE A TIRE AT NIGHT...

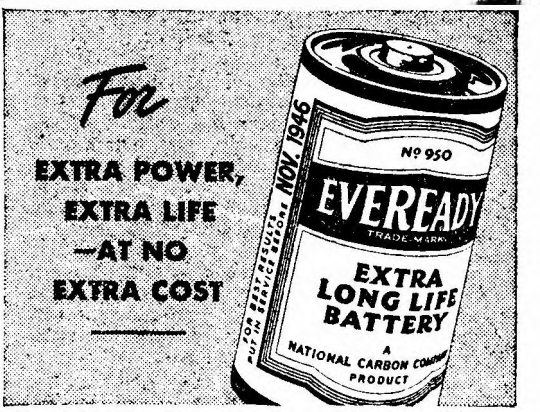
More Quickly—More Safely!



1 Most any motorist can change a tire. But few can change it at night with top speed, efficiency —and *safety!* Night-time tire-changing can be hazardous — but a little care and an "Eveready" flashlight can reduce the danger. First principle, says the American Automobile Association, is...

2 Park *off* the highway, if at all possible. Next best place is on a *straight* stretch of road where you can be seen for at least 500 feet. If you *must* park on a curve, a light should be set on the road some distance back. Be sure neither you nor a bystander blocks off the view of your tail-light!





3 Keep all your tire-changing tools tied or boxed *together,* where you can pick them up without searching or fumbling. Remove your spare before jacking up car — tugging at it later might push car off jack. If alone, set flashlight in convenient position.

4 In your car or at home—wherever you need a flashlight—rely only on "Eveready" batteries. For "Eveready" batteries have no equals... that's why you'll find them in *more* flashlights than any other battery in the world! Now that they're available again, there's no need to accept a substitute!

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(Continued from page 6)

That was in 1935 and a spell of work and some complicated engineering resulted in a very novel experiment. It was a fine idea except that the lovely but emphatic wife, returning a week ahead of time, tuned in her car radio a hundred miles from home, just in time to hear her husband (stretching a point, but what announcer doesn't?) intone ". . . . And now Ladies and Gentlemen—we are on the backstretch run. The speedometer is crawling steadily upward—80-85-90-100, etc. etc.! ! !" That put me out of the racing business and for good.

Circa 1936-1938 was building a streamlined shell for a racing motorcycle to take a crack at the world's two-wheeler speed record. Ernest Henne, the German, had put it over the 170 m.p.h mark and our wind-tunnel tests showed we had nearly 180. He still has it.

One result though was a few glorious days on the Bonneville Salt Flats while Capt. Easton and Thunderbolt's 357 miles an hour were there. Our fish-tailed job developed speed-wobble at 147 and we brought it home for further work. Then the rising tide of events crowded all such things into the background. We never got to go back.

The last few years have been the same as everyone else—doing what you could where you could. A punctured ear drum kept me out of Army Primary or Ferry so I did what flying I could for Civil Air Patrol.

None of this is meant to qualify these words as those of an expert on things of jeopardy. I really think that ski jumping might prove to be the tops but I can't stand up on the things long enough to find out.

Some of the fun of a hot boat no doubt comes from mental ease; you can smash your boat up pretty well and unless someone runs into you you don't stand much chance of becoming a hospital case. Then, too—small boats are so unpredictable.

Miss Mimi is a case in point. She has an instrument panel that wouldn't shame a B-29. She has an actual mile a minute and she handles like a dream. And she can be a little stinker—for no apparent reason. And when she is—you get wet.

DR. JAMES B. McCORD, co-author with John Scott Douglas of the article on Zulu medicine men on page 131, has had an unusual career and background. We asked his collaborator to introduce the distinguished medico at our *Camp-Fire* and here's what "Doug" writes—

"Zulu Medicine Is Magic" was written as an indirect result of ghost-writing the autobiography of a ship's doctor which is currently appearing in four editions—the original, a Literary Classics, the Spanish and British editions. The publisher of this book suggested that I see Dr. James B. McCord of Oakham, Mass., who attempted an autobiography telling of his forty years of medical practice among the Zulus but could not whip it into book form. I wrote Dr. McCord suggesting that we collaborate on the book and he gladly agreed, but long distance collaboration proved awkward and little was accomplished until I went east in '43 to do another book and had a chance to work directly with him.

I first met Dr. McCord when he visited New York. Then past seventy, he was snowy haired, very tall and strongly built, and straight as a pine. His smile had a quality of gentleness and warmth that went straight to your heart. And of all the fine men I've met, he was one of the few who impressed me with the thought: *Here is a great man.* This impression was strengthened when I knew him better and learned more of his life story. I stayed with the McCords at Oakham while taking extensive notes on his early life and his many years of African practice, and recently I had the pleasure of another visit with them while they were in California.

Space doesn't permit more than glancing reference to the events of Dr. McCord's full and colorful life.

He was born in Toulon, Illinois, in 1870. Boyhood reading of Stanley's travels in Africa made him dream of some day visiting the "Dark Continent." He found no means of realizing this dream until he met Margaret Mellen, daughter of a retired African missionary, at Oberlin College. Dr. Mellen had been chosen chieftain of a Zulu tribe at the death of their chieftain, and the girl was in her own right a Zulu princess. She spoke of the medical need of the Zulus and urged "Jim" McCord to go to Africa as a medical missionary. After graduation from medical college and his internship, Dr. McCord married Margaret Mellen and, following several years as a "horse-and-buggy" doctor, was asked to replace a retiring missionary doctor. The McCords and their children sailed for Africa the day the Boer War broke out.

His station was at a mission but he ranged widely, visiting native kraals—by foot at a steady four miles an hour over Natal's mountains, by horse, ox-cart, dug-out canoe and later, as roads improved, by bicycle and automobile. Dr. McCord found the mission too remote for great medical usefulness, so he rented a cottage in Durban and opened a dispensary. Even before it was ready to handle cases, natives (who believed they'd die of neglect at the government hospital) insisted that he do surgical work at the dispensary, and it soon was necessary to rent another cottage for a hospital.

The accommodations of both cottages were presently outgrown. Against the opposition of the white residents of Durban, and after expensive lawsuits, Dr. McCord opened the Zulu Nursing Home, in which he treated maternity cases and trained native nurses (a radical innovation in that

(Continued on page 140)

HERE COME THE DEMBROWS!

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Screenplay by Melvia Levy and Francis Edwards Faragoh
Produced by MICHEL KRAIKE
Directed by GEORGE SHERMAN

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GORDON GRANT

EPAULETTE ON THE SHOULDER

By

R. W. DALY

EVEN in shirtsleeves, the Honorable Mark Stephen Palmer, son and heir of Baron Bideford, and Lieutenant on His Majesty's twenty-eight-gun frigate, *Hinchinbrook*, found the heat intolerable. He pitied the soldiers who stood on the shore. They were fully equipped and clad in the uniform the Secretary of War considered suitable both for the arctic and the equator.

Relaxed in the sternsheets, Mark watched while red-faced sergeants barked orders and made inspections. He was fascinated by the uniformity of the soldiery's appearance, for his sailors wore whatever nondescript garb suited their individual fancy. Only officers in the Royal Navy were obliged to conform to a pattern of dress.

In turn, the veteran faces of the 79th Foot stared wistfully at the cool attire affected by the seamen. They were willing to exchange

★

Silently the jungle took its toll. The heat drove some to madness, others died of Indian arrows.

their trim appearance for comfort, however splendid their scarlet coats and pipe-clayed belts.

"Mr. Palmer, I presume?" a disinterested voice drawled.

Mark looked up. On the shore, close to the cutter, stood a tall, muscular officer of perhaps thirty. His lean face, long seared by the sun, was as brown as the mustache he sported. From carefully curled powdered wig to polished boots, he was a soldier who would have done credit to the Guards. On his broad shoulders he bore the twin epaulettes of a captain.

"At your service, sir," Mark replied, rising.

"M' name's Crandon," the soldier said. "I'm to ride with you."

As Mark turned to order his coxswain to carry their passenger to the boat, he was forestalled by a snap of the captain's fingers. At once a corporal rushed forward with another man, respectfully picked up the captain, and waded with him through the ripplets, depositing him, calm and dry, in the sternsheets. They stood rigidly at attention to learn if he desired further aid, and were dismissed by another snap of the fingers.

The performance nettled Mark. Crandon had accepted service as grandly as though he were being waited upon by slaves, disdaining even to thank his servitors. He settled into the sternsheets like a king upon a throne, and looked about him indolently. By the tent which was headquarters for the expedition, the joint commanders made their final arrangements. Crandon squinted at the tiny figure of the *Hinchinbrook's* commanding officer.

"Stab me!" he murmured carelessly. "Is the Navy led by boys?"

Mark faced him. "I beg to remind you, sir," he said quietly, "Captain Horatio Nelson is equal in rank to an Army colonel."

"Precisely," Crandon nodded. "Precisely. Yet he is scarcely old enough to be an ensign in my regiment."

Mark stiffened despite himself. "Be good enough to criticize matters within your cognizance, sir!" he said sharply.

Crandon raised an eyebrow and laughed. "Well spoken!" he applauded patronizingly. "I like spirit in a lad."

"Mr. Crandon," Mark rasped, "I beg to remind you we are equal in rank."

"Yes," Crandon shrugged sadly, "more's the pity. Age and garrison years mean nothing in a war."

Mark was nonplussed. True, there had been some discussion in the West Indian Station when Sir Peter Parker had posted the youthful Nelson into the *Hinchinbrook* many years before such a command ordinarily came to a lieutenant, but even the bitterest critics owned fairly that Nelson's proved ability merited the promotion. Mark found himself unable to find words which would explain the Navy's attitude toward a talented man, and this annoyed him.

He looked at the frigate rolling gently to her anchor in the harbor at the mouth of the San Juan River, and wished that the Yankees had been more tractable in submitting to Lord North's demands. Merely because a few stubborn patriots refused to pay tea taxes and insisted upon rebellion, he, the Honorable Mark Stephen Palmer, was obliged to associate with the Army, instead of being able to sport his lieutenant's uniform in the mansions of London.

JUST twenty, he was tall, wide of shoulder, and stout of limb. His frame bore evidence of good living, and with the loss of a few pounds, he would be a handsome man. Blond hair curling in the climate, he had a long, narrow head, set with frank, blue eyes. A year ashore, recuperating from a wound received during Keppel's action off Ushant, had whitened his skin, and removed from his face the hard alertness of his trade. He was the clay to be molded into a man.

Had Mark desired to blame anyone for being obliged to serve with the Army, he would have had to go higher than Captain Crandon. The true cause of his discomfiture was the Governor of Jamaica, General Dalling, who wanted to punish Spain for taking the part of the revolting colonists. Sitting in his mansion in Kingston, it was simple enough for the general to look over his charts, and place a baleful finger upon the dot that was Fort San Juan in Nicaragua. It cost him little effort to write to the Colonel of the 79th Foot and suggest that the Fort's capture would completely disrupt Spain's communications between Mexico and the Vice-Royalty of New Granada. The colonel, perforce, undertook to make his superior happy, and thus his veteran regiment moved down the Mosquito Coast.

This movement was assisted by the *Hinchinbrook*, which convoyed the transports to the assembly point at the mouth of the San Juan River. Here her duty actually ended, but Horatio Nelson lived by the spirit and not the word of his instructions. Learning that not one of the troops had ever ascended the treacherous river, and sharing the colonel's concern about the unreliability of Indian guides, Nelson volunteered to take the soldiers by water to their objective. This offer was gratefully accepted by the colonel who, mindful of the jungle, thoughtfully devolved the command of the expedition upon his junior, Major Polson.

Between them, Nelson and Polson made the decisions which were intended to prove that General Dalling was a successful strategist. Able to strip his frigate of only fifty men,

Nelson suggested that two hundred men could accomplish as much as eighteen hundred in that pestilential land, and Polson had agreed.

"Bring us to Fort San Juan," Polson said, "and some morning the Governor of Jamaica will have pleasant news with his breakfast eggs."

Having led an untroubled existence, Mark rarely thought for himself. First, his father had thought for him, then, as a midshipman, he had found that lieutenants supplied his father's place, while as a lieutenant himself, he learned that captains of Horatio Nelson's breed could be even more paternal than Lord Bideford. Thus, he neither knew nor cared why his commander had selected him from among the wardroom officers. This was excellent. He would have been chagrined had he heard that his captain had selected him because he was the lieutenant the *Hinchinbrook* could best do without.

His aplomb would have been shattered by Nelson's unflattering opinion of him, but Mark was insulated by habit against such a discovery. More or less like a sponge, he absorbed ideas from his comrades. Thanks to a vacant mind, he was vaguely aware of the reasons which had brought him into the frigate's black cutter. He realized that the expedition was somehow a part of the world war which had come when France signed an alliance with the illegal Continental Congress in 1778. His companions said that the attack on San Jose was sponsored by the politicians more for territorial hopes than military necessity. Everyone, even Mark, knew that the Spaniards had been negligible factors in wars ever since Drake had blasted their Armada. Except to gain colonies to replace those about to be lost, there was no cause to covet San Juan. Few *jejeune* gentlemen were unrealistic enough to expect to profit on the scale which had rewarded Sir Henry Morgan for the sack of Panama and Nombre de Dios. There was little gold in Nicaragua, and much land. It was the latter which motivated General Dalling.

Altogether ignorant, in his pride, of being merely a pawn of Empire, Mark impatiently waited for the boats to be loaded. Besides the frigate's pair of cutters, there was a score of clumsy craft, each with an English sailor and its own brown proprietors. The Indians were reputedly friendly, and their help was manifestly necessary if the expedition were to remain in the main stream of the river and not wander off for useless months into every tributary. However, Indians were not Britons, and unpredictable allies, interested in the venture exclusively for the cloth and iron with which they were paid, and Mark looked upon them with a skeptical eye. This suspicion was shared by Major Polson, who quietly gave orders to the responsible soldier in each boat to shoot quickly at the first hint of treachery.

Being unimaginative, Mark was anxious to get underway. This amused Captain Crandon, who, after several years in Central America, would have been just as pleased had the boats never shoved off. Bitterly acquainted with the horrors ahead of them, the captain could well smile pityingly at the youthful lieutenant at his side. However, his expression was ill chosen.

"May I inquire, sir," Mark asked acidly, "why you gape like a gibbon?"

"Ah," Crandon replied, "have you been in India? Or are they now exhibiting gibbons in London?"

His coolness chided Mark, who, being a gentleman, had the grace to flush. His opinion of Crandon was tinged with envy for a fellow who could manage to remain so serene in such a damnable climate. He violently slapped at a mosquito.

Crandon indicated the encampment with a sweep of a well-kept hand. "Look you well, Mr. Palmer," he advised. "Soon you will remember this as Paradise."

Mark stared as though he considered Crandon mad. The miserable troops left at the encampment were fortified against Spanish mischief, but there were no fortifications they could raise against the perils of the land. Merely waiting as a reserve for the expedition, day after day they would be decimated by insects, animals and reptiles.

"You don't believe me, Mr. Palmer," the captain said quietly. "Well, I wish I had your ignorance."

Mark's retort was cut short by the order for the troops to enter the boats. His cutter carried fourteen, besides her regular crew, and was cramped by baggage and ammunition. He was grateful that the commanders had decided to ship the siege artillery in the Indian craft, and nodded to his coxswain to get out oars.

HAD General Dalling been in Spanish pay, he could not have selected a less propitious time for the campaign. March was the harbinger of the wet season, but the heavy rains had not yet come, so that the land was long since parched for water, and the river was low. As though this were not a deterring navigational problem, the San Juan River annually received tons upon tons of sand washed out of the soil by the torrential rains to form banks and shoals haphazardly in its bed.

Reputedly, the journey from Fort San Juan to the sea required a day and a half, and nine from the sea to the Fort. There were reasons for the disparity in time, and any doubt as to the veracity of the Indian guides was soon dissipated. The boats went aground less than a mile from the encampment.

"Stab me!" Crandon muttered disgustedly, and glanced at Mark. "Don't you think you Navy chaps could do a bit of punting on the Thames before trying something like this? Damned if I see how a chap can foul up in the middle of a river!"

Mark was shocked by the insinuation that the Navy was incompetent. Having been in the service since early memory, he was upset to find a Briton was not convinced that the Navy was the most perfect organization in the world. Through the years, he had absorbed the esprit de corps which characterized the English sailor, and was unable to realize that he therefore had an air of superiority which was irritating to most people. He was unaware that the proud carriage of his head and shoulders could be deemed arrogant. He confidently believed that his Navy could carry off any venture, however daring or impossible, even such a venture as this, which plunged him into a jungle. This was a faith he considered universal, and now he found a heretic.

"Mr. Crandon," he said, "I shall be pleased to discuss your opinions of my service in private. This is not the place." He had been reared in the tradition that officers maintained a unified front before enlisted men, however they might detest or scorn each other.

Ahead, the Indian guides managed to explain the sudden presence of a sand bar, and the expedition took a devious route to clear the obstruction. Major Polson and Captain Nelson in the leading cutter took the grounding as a warning to beware of their allies.

Crandon held a different attitude. "Thank God for the Indians," he remarked. "At least with them we may get there."

The eyes of the men in the boat focused on Mark's face. The soldiers were too disciplined to show amusement, although their bold scrutiny was insolent enough. The seamen frankly looked to Mark to silence the detractor.

Mark was infuriated both by Crandon's audacity and the failure of his subtle challenge to produce an effect upon the men. Indeed, the challenge had been ignored as though it were never issued. The situation went beyond his experience. Usually an offensive chap was made tractable by an invitation to fight; that, according to Lord Bideford, was the sole value of the custom. Unfortunately, the Baron had never told his son what to with a man who was offensive but refused a challenge.

Strained by the necessity to think for himself, Mark repeated his offer to discuss the matter in private. Apparently, however, Captain Crandon possessed remarkable ears which heard only what he wished to hear, for the soldier gave no indication that he understood he was being called to account for his remarks.

"We'd have done better to have marched," Crandon observed, when Nelson's cutter grounded again, and the expedition was halted.

'Ye're at liberty to get out any time," Mark growled truculently.

Crandon looked about at the distant, steaming shores and shook his head. "Not just now, thank you. Later, perhaps."

Injudiciously, a few soldiers laughed, though the remark was not especially humorous. "Pipe down!" Mark roared. His anger at once sobered the men. He turned to the captain. "Mr. Crandon, is there any manner in which a gentleman may speak to you?"

The captain disdained reply, being intent upon the activities of the leading cutter, where Nelson was calmly studying an antiquated chart of the river, whilst his crew freed his boat. The scant hundred miles to their objective began to expand past the comforts of precise calculation. At sea, a boat crew could easily traverse a hundred miles in a day, were they offered a reasonable inducement. In the River San Juan, Nature mocked man's mathematics. The expedition had been underway for two hours, and should have covered ten miles; Mark would have been surprised had they advanced more than three.

He studied the violently lush shore, which was solid with green growth. Doubtless the natives had paths, and Crandon was an old hand on the Mosquito Coast. Mark looked at the soldier. The easy manner in which Crandon lounged was, in itself, an insult. The Royal Navy carried out its tasks in a formalized manner, and each activity had a ritual. Tradition decreed that boat crews and passengers be smart in appearance and bearing. Crandon was properly attired, but after his years in uniform, he could not have been ignorant of the behavior expected of him, and his posture was deliberately chosen.

Crandon was completely at ease, and Mark was infuriated by the suspicion that the captain could, if need be, actually march to the Fort. Entirely unfamiliar with his surroundings, Mark could not help feeling inferior to his passenger. This, he bitterly resented.

Mark knew he had only to report to Nelson to have the matter straightened out. Major Polson looked like a commander who would brook little nonsense from even a war-weary subordinate, no matter how valuable. At one time, he would have presented the problem to his commander and absolved himself from all concern. Now, however, in his own boat, he had sufficient taste of independence to want to handle Crandon in his own fashion. Perceiving that further talk would be futile, he prudently decided to keep his temper in check until the boats stopped for the evening. Then, ashore, he could persuade Mr. Crandon to retract certain statements. Of his ability to do this, he had no doubt. If necessary, he could strangle the soldier with his bare hands. He had the size

and strength to overpower Crandon, and in the desolation of Nicaragua, he found himself shedding the niceties of civilization.

UNAWARE of the accounting ahead of him, Captain Crandon continued throughout the afternoon to ridicule the Royal Navy. Mark's decision to remain silent ultimately produced sullenness on the faces of his men, and he wished he could have taken his coxswain into his confidence. He appeased his ire with images of the soldier's appearance the following morning, and confined his speech to necessary commands. Since Coxswain Sanderson had little more to do than follow the leading cutter, Mark was, as a consequence, almost mute. There was, however, enough purpose in his eyes to keep the soldiers civil, although Crandon remained oblivious of the big lieutenant's wrath.

Mark's disposition was not improved when the expedition reached inland past the sweep of ocean breezes, for hungry insects swarmed down upon their sweating prey. He slapped his face, neck and hands in a futile effort to stop the stings. There were more insects than he had ever imagined possible, and to halt their attacks, he would have needed a dozen hands. By the time the sun began to fall rapidly in the

west, he had abandoned the struggle, philosophically accepting the nuisance. He was not made happier by observing that Crandon was seemingly immune to the pests.

He began to wonder where the expedition was going to stop for the night, when the leading cutter abruptly swung toward the nearer shore. So far as Mark was able to note, the verdure extended out over the water, but as the boats drew close to the land, he saw there was indeed a small clearing. The boats touched mud thirty yards from shore, and with a certain amount of satisfaction, Mark ordered all hands out of the cutter.

If he was foolish enough to become bogged down in mud, Crandon was not. The captain snapped his fingers and mounted the shoulders of a brawny private, to be carried ingloriously but dry to the beach. Mark bit his lip, and turned his attention to getting the cutter to shore. It was a backbreaking job, and by the time Mark had attended to the other boats, he was exhausted. Setting foot on the fluid land, he was annoyed that the mossy undergrowth scarcely supported his heavy weight. Wistfully, he thought of the *Hinchinbrook*, swinging contentedly at her cable less than ten miles away.

Experienced in living under such conditions, the soldiers efficiently set about making a habitable campsite. Their long-bladed knives hacked savagely at brush and vine to make space in which to sling hammocks. Other veterans built fires to cook rations. Conscientiously, Mark made a final inspection of his boats before reporting them secure to Nelson.

When that gentleman was satisfied with the moorings, Mark was able to sit down on a log, which had been designated as the officers' mess. He was too tired to care about eating. His body was parched from the sun, but he had only an apathetic interest in the can of freshly boiled water held out to him by Sanderson. He wanted to do nothing except sleep.

And then Crandon appeared before him, and Mark's weariness vanished.

"I say," Crandon drawled, looking down at him, "you seem comfortable."

Mark stood up. There was no one within earshot. Nelson and Polson were peacefully dining beneath a bit of sail canvas, and the other officers were ravenously huddled over food tins.

"Mr. Crandon," Mark said carefully, "I demand an explanation of your conduct this day past."

The captain stared. "Well, now," he replied slowly, "where do you want me to begin?"

Mark shrugged. "For my part, there is no acceptable explanation."

Thoughtfully, Crandon drew his sword, and held it in his right hand, blade flat against his other palm. "I presume, Mr. Palmer, you wish to fight?"

"I must keep my self respect, sir!" Mark retorted.

"Well, then," Crandon said, "I advise you to be more careful." He lunged quickly forward as he spoke, sword circling up from the left in a vicious arc that cleared Mark's leg by a bare inch.

Outraged, Mark had his hanger in hand before the fellow could recover. "That was most unmannerly, Mr. Crandon," he blurted. "On guard!"

The captain laughed. "Sailors should stay out of jungles," he replied, then turned on his heel, and strode off, wiping his sword blade on a handful of leaves.

Wondering, Mark looked to his side. There, close to his left leg, writhed the severed segment of a thick, black snake, of a species he was to come to fear as the bushmaster.

CHAPTER II

TOOLS OF EMPIRE

AFTER a miserable night during which a *chubasco* blew violently from the north and battered the English with a heavy rain for more than an hour, Mark hauled his sodden bones out of his hammock. Thanks to an unimaginative nature, he had slept undisturbed by visions of his escape from death, and the incident merely made him wary of the ground about him as he set his feet down. He was confused between a feeling of gratitude

to his benefactor and the justified resentment toward a critic and, going to breakfast, was uncertain of his reaction to Crandon.

That worthy gentleman was busily cursing his men as they broke camp and prepared to resume their journey. He greeted Mark with a sardonic grin and patronizing nod of the head.

"Perhaps I should have mentioned that they drop out of trees, too," he remarked.

"Really?" Mark replied. "You're very familiar with reptilian life, Captain." Having delivered himself in an innuendo that brought smiles to the faces of a few soldiers, Mark walked on to where his sailors had a warm meal ready for him.

He was conscientiously attempting to stow away a portion of salt pork, when his commander briskly strode up and bade him good morning. Grateful for an excuse to forego the salt pork without offense to his coxswain, who had personally prepared the unsavory food for him, Mark stood up.

"This is not the life for a sailor," Captain Horatio Nelson said wryly. "We'll be fortunate not to break our constitutions in this cursed land."

Mark agreed fervently, although puzzled by such a gloomy sentiment from his dauntless leader.

"I want you to take the last in line," Nelson went on. "The guides inform me that we will make our best progress near the shore, where, if necessary, we can quit the boats and haul them. The Spanish must know that we are coming, so beware of ambush. If we are attacked, see that the native craft get clear to midchannel."

"Aye, aye, sir," Mark replied. The possibility of action had not occurred to him. He had assumed that the Spaniards would placidly await attack.

The diminutive captain peered up at his tall subordinate. "I understand that you stood too close to a snake," he remarked reprovingly. "Please do not be inconsiderate. I cannot afford to have you slain by any inhuman creature."

Mark flushed in the heat, wondering precisely what his commander had been told about the incident. He had an impulse to speak about Crandon, but fought it down.

"I am afraid that I have not informed you thoroughly of my policy while engaged in this business, Mr. Palmer. We will take orders and advice from the Army in everything except professional matters. These officers have spent years in this clime, and we can profit by their experience. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Mark said. "I understand." He would gladly have forfeited a year's salary to learn how much Nelson either suspected or knew. The little fellow was uncanny in his perceptions; indeed, some of his subordinates were willing to swear he could read minds.

"Very well, then," Nelson said, smiling. "Good sailing."

Mark stood watching the retreating figure of his commander until his coxswain coughed, and suggested that the salt pork was getting cold. Confronted afresh with the problem of handling Crandon, but with annoying restrictions, Mark sat down again, and zestlessly nibbled at the coarse meat. He could only hope that Major Polson had had a similar conversation with Crandon. After all, he was in an embarrassing position; whether he liked it or not, the chap had saved his life, and apparently everyone was acquainted with that fact.

He swore beneath his breath.

"It is rather old, sir," his coxswain said anxiously, "but I cooked it well."

Mark glanced at the men. Aboard the *Hinchinbrook*, Sanderson hadn't seemed to be particularly attached to him, yet only a short day away from the ship and the sailor had become almost devoted to him. He guessed shrewdly that he represented security and a normal way of life to the veteran seaman, who was properly disturbed by the unfamiliar world now surrounding them.

"This is excellent," Mark said quickly. "I was thinking that the war must be more pleasant elsewhere."

"Anywhere, sir!" Sanderson replied fervently.

Mark laughed. "Let's get squared away here and go to the boats."

About them, other groups reluctantly prepared to continue the journey, preferring even the slimy shore to the discomforts of the river.

A FEW minutes after the full light of dawn, the expedition was once again under way. Mark was sickened to see the blotched faces of his men. The insects had left their imprints. Every sailor and most of the soldiers had swollen, misshapen faces, and although unable to see his own visage, Mark knew by its throbbing that he presented the same appearance. His hands and wrists were covered with small, agonizing lumps.

Crandon looked at him. "After a week," he remarked drily, "you won't mind 'em. After two weeks, you'll remember you were bitten."

Mark stared at his companion. There was almost a conciliatory note in the chap's voice, as though he were ashamed of his previous incivility. Mark was willing to be as amiable as conditions warranted, and said, "Why, after two weeks?"

Crandon shook his head. " 'Tis a kindness to let you discover for yourself. Don't worry. You might not die."

Almost wishing for a return of the other's former tacituruity, rather than such funereal pronouncements, Mark carefully studied Captain Crandon of the 79th Foot. He was apparently one of those disappointed regulars who had seen the sap of his youth drain slowly away in the enervating West Indian service. He had buried most of the officers who had come out with him, and had read the last rites over more mass graves than he would care to remember. He could never return to England, for a winter north or south of twenty degrees latitude would freeze him into his shroud, and once he was paid off, he would, perforce, settle in the Caribbean.

It was the first time Mark had ever seriously bothered to attempt analysis of another man, and he found the experience almost alarming. He had been in this area for little more than a month. Trying to imagine himself after a year on the Mosquito Coast, Mark was nearly disposed to be tolerant of Crandon's attitude toward life and the Royal Navy. This was his first large step toward maturity.

Crandon was inclined to be instructive. "Mr. Palmer, make your men cover themselves as much as possible," he suggested. "Do not under any circumstances permit them to remove their shirts. That man there, without a watch-cap, had best have a handkerchief over his head if he wishes to return to the frigate."

Mark nodded to Sanderson, who looked inquiringly to see if the captain was going to be permitted to give orders. "Tell him," Mark said. Resentfully, the sailor wound a neckerchief about his shock of heavy hair. He pitied the man, for mindful of the previous day's sun, he had been longing for an opportunity to remove his own hat, to take advantage of whatever slight breeze might be admitted by the thick towering jungle. However, this was a matter in which Crandon could be expected to be an authority, and Mark was submissive to Nelson's instructions. If nothing else, Crandon was a seasoned campaigner, and desired to carry the maximum number of men to his objective; he must have learned at bitter cost that bare heads and tropical days were mutually destructive to human life.

"You must always remember," Crandon said, "everything is against us here."

Considerably cheered by these grim observations, Mark paid strict attention to the business of moving his heavy cutter in the wakes of the light Indian craft. Nelson kept close to the shore, occasionally swinging under the shade of overhanging trees. This was sufficient relief to cause Mark to wish the entire voyage could be so traveled.

Heedful of Nelson's warning, Mark kept an eye on the shore, although he was strongly attracted by the sights in the river itself. Scant feet below the cutter's keel, clear, bright sand sparkled into the somber patches of alluvial loam. When over the sand, Mark could see a dozen fish at a glance; over the soil, the water was ominously black.

Forward, his coxswain had posted a bowman who stood on the breasthook. The man was armed with a spear crudely made from a knife and a stout length of wood. He was ready to fend off logs with the haft or discourage reptiles with the blade. Mark appreciated Sanderson's enterprise when the bowman gave a shout and excitedly stabbed at a large bulk which came head-on at the cutter.

Instinctively, Mark ordered the precious sweeps up out of harm's way, as the huge reptile charged into the boat. Its weight jolted every man in the crew. Frantically, the bowman plunged his spear up and down. Then the boat's way carried her past the creature. Mark looked deep into a throat big enough to swallow his leg.

"Alligator," Crandon explained. "Fairly vicious."

"Fairly," Mark agreed. Despite the heat, his spine was chill.

For a half hour, the expedition moved slowly forward, and then Nelson's cutter grounded on a mudbank. Its crew went over the side, and with brute strength, dredged it ahead for several hundred yards. The procedure was followed by each craft in turn.

"A situation like this would be ideal for the Spaniards' purposes," Crandon observed.

Mark looked at his companion, convinced the man could cavil with an unexpected legacy, and was somehow ashamed of himself for stealing an involuntary glance at the nearby shore, although he was frankly relieved not to discern any betraying glints of sun on metal. They had many days ahead of them, and the Spaniards

could lay plans at leisure; were the Dons as indolent as reported, he did not think they would attack until the English had dragged themselves within reach of their outposts, yet he was infected by Crandon's pessimism, and uneasily watched for trouble.

Early in youth, Mark had become accustomed to death on the high seas. In Keppel's action off Ushant, he had fearlessly gone into battle, afraid only to fail in his duty. Now, he found himself being re-educated to new forms of death; from reptiles, disease, ambush, all of which struck swiftly and sometimes unseen. With each hour, he aged a month, as each hour shook his complacency and habits of thought. He was discovering that he knew very little.

For example, he saw nothing wrong when Sanderson permitted his men to remove the shoes which had been issued them by the Army. They wanted to comfort their feet, if nothing else, when they went into the water to tug at the cutter. Captain Crandon, however, violently objected.

"Stop them, Mr. Palmer!" the soldier cried, in a voice fairly close to rage.

Surprised past question by his vehemence, Mark passed the word.

"Please, sir," protested the stroke. "They hurt."

Mark sympathized with the man. Aboard ship, year in and year out, in almost all temperatures, the men went barefoot by tradition and choice. The skin of their feet was almost as tough as leather, and the shoes, which had been inexplicably forced upon them by Major Polson, were instruments of torture.

"Very well," Crandon said grimly to Mark, "let that one man take off his boots. He'll wish he hadn't."

DISTURBED by the pronouncement of doom, the stroke would thereupon have declined the privilege, had he not feared the ridicule of his mates. When, however, the time came for the cutter to be hauled over the mudbank, he went into the water with sufficient hesitancy to make Mark wish he hadn't yielded to the captain's desire to make an example.

For a long minute, the stroke bravely enjoyed the solace of water and mud. Suddenly, his honest face whitened, and he would have cried in pain, except for his manhood. Crandon laughed humorously, struck flint to a quick-match, and silently held the sputtering stick in his hand. When the task was finished, the man fairly leaped into the boat.

Mark bit his lip. The man's bare feet were covered by a swarming mess of worms about three inches long. In manifest agony, the man reached to pluck them off.

"Stop!" Crandon ordered brusquely. "Hold your right foot out over the gunwale."

Frantic with pain, the man obeyed. Impassively, Crandon carefully touched the match to each of the wriggling shapes, which, when singed, dropped promptly into the water. The entire crew watched the ceremony; the seamen with concern, the soldiers with disgust.

"These are leeches," the captain explained casually. "Pull 'em off and their heads stay in you and you die of poisoning. Leave 'em alone, and that many could suck every drop of blood from your body." While Mark used a starboard stroke to bring the cutter up to her place in the line, Crandon quietly completed his self-appointed task.

When the job was done, the sailor's feet ran scarlet. Efficiently, Crandon checked the bleeding, bound up the swelling feet, and gave the stroke a succinct lecture. "When you get an order, obey!"

The man was humble in his pain. "Yes, sir," he mumbled.

"Let him have a long drink," Crandon said to a sergeant sitting on the afterthwart, and turned to Mark. "The Navy should really have better discipline," he remarked caustically.

Although furious, Mark kept his peace. There was nothing he could say. Crandon was right. The man had suffered through his own im-

prudence. While he was galled by the realization, he had to admit to himself that except for Crandon, the entire group of seamen in his cutter might well have been killed by those miserable worms. In view of this, he had to be silent.

This episode and Crandon's final comment destroyed whatever tolerance Mark might have felt toward the captain. Twice the solider had made a fool of him, and that he could not abide. Bound to be grateful first for his own life and now for his men, Mark was nettled by Crandon's obvious superiority. The man's contempt for him was the more irksome because Mark was honestly unable to deny he had been deficient in the caution to be expected of a capable officer. Aboard the *Hinchinbrook*, he was adequate to every emergency; here, he did not seem to have even the barest intelligence necessary for survival.

Crandon could not be unaware of the turmoil boiling in the young lieutenant's mind, and in kindness could have appeased Mark's outraged feelings with a reminder that everyone had to learn the tricks of the jungle. Crandon, however, had long ceased considering other people's emotions.

"That man at Number Four is drinking more water than is good for him," he said abruptly.

Wearily, Mark told Sanderson to take care of the matter. He was content to let Crandon have another day of caustic imperiousness. The evening was coming, and this time there would be no snake to interrupt a settlement. Mark had learned that lesson well. Crandon would not surprise him again.

He fed his anger with the prospect of forcing Crandon to terms. As a hand with the pistol, he believed himself equal to any man, having spent many pounds on practice powder and ball. He was better than most with the sword. Thus, unless Crandon when challenged selected some ungentlemanly weapon, Mark anticipated victory. He decided to avoid killing the captain, grudgingly conceding that the soldier was valuable in the successful waging of the campaign, but he would humiliate Crandon. Thus, even inwardly, Mark put on a mask of complacency.

By noon, the expedition had progressed little more than two miles. The men, staring about while they listlessly ate a cold luncheon, expressed opinions which would have astounded General Dalling. Often as not, the sturdy tools of empire resent the decisions which enshrine them in history books and immolate their bodies in foreign soil. Gracelessly, they accepted the heat and the insects, and cursed the judges and press gangs which had sent them out of England.

Crandon surprised Mark by ignoring the whispered complaints. On the record of previous conduct, Mark would have expected the captain to fulminate like a volcano at the first sign of disaffection. "Let 'em talk," Crandon murmured. "Makes 'em feel somewhat better, and does no harm."

THE afternoon was a racking series of halts. The men plunged into the water, returned to the boats, scarcely had time to dry their clothes, and went into the water again. Despite precautions, leeches clung to some, and were removed only with difficulty. In the still, pressing air, the insects reigned as masters of the river; their constant nettling drove the men into an apathetic coma, wherein they saw in a red haze. Beneath sweat-sodden shirts, skin was coarse with a scale of salt from their own pores. Buttocks were raw from sliding across wooden thwarts.

Long before the sun dropped to the tops of the trees in the west, Mark was ready to take to the shore. He had not exerted himself, and now he merely sat quietly in the sternsheets as a passenger. Yet the sun had sucked strength from him until he felt too weak to lift his hand. He pitied his seamen, who had to strain themselves by moving the cutter, and harshly ordered the soldiers to share the work of dragging the heavy hulk through obstructions. The soldiers showed protest in their expressions, but Crandon curtly backed up Mark. The seamen found wan relief in having companions in misery.

Mark was unable to see clearly. His eyes were bleary with fatigue. He could almost have wished his heart would stop beating, for each pulse hammered in his brain. He felt he had been in the cutter forever, and longed to escape. He remembered the beach and his hammock with passionate longing.

The exposed portions of his skin were afire from stings and sunburn. He was parched to the marrow, and would willingly have drunk the tepid river water, except for a saving instinct which stayed his hand every time he bent over the side. The hair on his head was dank.

He peered at Crandon. The captain sat as coolly as though he were in England. His powdered wig rested serenely atop a dry, brown face, which seemed as fresh as though he had risen from bed short moments before. He appeared capable of a full day's march through the jungle. For no other reason, Mark could have hated him then.

Suddenly, one of the men in a boat ahead screamed. Dimly, Mark saw splashes in the water about it. All hands in his cutter turned to look. "Eyes in the boat!" he cackled. Slowly, he was obeyed. To his right, Captain Crandon stood upright in the sternsheets. "Get down!" Mark commanded. The soldier ignored him.

Maddened by heat, exhaustion and irrita-

tion, Mark rose to his feet, threw his arms about the captain, and sat down again, almost knocking Sanderson over the side. Crandon was helpless in his mighty arms, yet managed to keep his dignity until Mark released him. Not for an instant did the soldier's eyes leave the shore, until he found what he was searching for.

"Sergeant," he said calmly, completely oblivious to Mark's presence, "they are in yonder group of trees."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the sergeant, squinting in the direction indicated. "I see them."

Crandon turned to Mark. "Be so kind as to maintain your present course," he directed in a tone he would have employed to an inferior subaltern. "We are going to warm these devils."

Following the sergeant's crisp commands, a dozen soldiers turned toward the shore, and aimed their muskets. Mark was too astounded to do more than gape. The soldiers discharged a volley that split his eardrums. Acrid powder-smoke bit into the dry membranes of his nostrils and throat. A series of screams echoed from the beach.

"Eyes in the boat!" Mark cried in towering wrath.

"Eyes in the boat!" Crandon repeated jocularly. "Well done, Sergeant. Mr. Palmer, you may row us out of here." He smiled grimly. "Those Indian scouts will tell their masters we can't be turned back by arrows."

Mark glared at the captain. There was no way of telling how many lives had been saved by Crandon's prompt, decisive action, nor did Mark have any excuse for being placed at a loss by an ambush after having been warned by Nelson. He felt sick.

The expedition continued while there was still daylight. Cautiously, at sunset, Nelson led the boats to the other bank of the river, where the English made camp. Mark went immediately to his hammock as soon as his duties were done.

CHAPTER III

ISLAND REDOUBT

THE first day set the pattern of the week that followed. The boats made more progress by being dragged through mud than by being driven by oars or paddles. Men found they had never known limits either of their exhaustion or strength. A hundred times, they would have turned back except for their indomitable leaders.

Silently, the jungle took its toll. Some died of Indian arrows. a raving few swelled quickly under the sun after being infected by leeches hastily plucked from legs or feet, others were found dead by their comrades with the little marks of serpent fangs violent red against the purple of their poisoned bodies.

The heat drove a few to madness, and these were perforce bound and laid in boat bottoms, where they writhed in torture until merciful Nature choked their throats. The sparkling surface of the river blinded a wretch or two, who had to have hands tied behind them lest they pluck out their throbbing eyeballs.

Each day the commanders grimly read the last rites over sodden graves which would yield their dead to beasts of prey before corruption could rot flesh. Each day the Indians stolidly watched their white brothers wearily climb into the boats. Each day the English forgot their dead in wondering who would live to reach Fort San Juan.

Against omnipresent enemies, Mark was unable to spare any vindictiveness for Crandon. He became too concerned with living to bother with mere words. He reserved his settlement with the soldier until the end of the campaign, and devoted his energies to survival. It was not that he hated Crandon less, but feared the jungle more.

His powerful frame withering in the dank heat, Mark jettisoned other things besides fat. He abandoned his love of formality and the rituals of the service. He shed resentment at being instructed by Crandon, and would have taken advice from a veteran private. He abandoned his complacency, becoming avid for knowledge other than nautical. He scuttled indolence of mind, beginning to think for himself.

He learned much, quickly.

He discovered that Sanderson was capable of managing the boat, and needed no orders. Silently turning over command to his coxswain, Mark was then free to devote his entire attention to observing the shores. His ambush-sharpened eyes came to see the signs of teeming life, and his ears to interpret the weird cries. He knew by sight the beautiful egrets, herons, jacanas and gallinules, which swarmed in huge flocks over the river. He knew by sound the frightening screams of monkeys and the terrorizing roars of pumas. He was aware of the jungle when peopled only with natural creatures, and when bristling with human life as well.

He was not proud the afternoon he espied an ambush and had the sergeant take it under fire before the Indians could loose their deadly arrows. He felt that he would have had to be without vision in order to have missed the telltale warnings offered him.

He was, however, unaccountably pleased when Crandon smiled obliquely at him and said, "I propose that you take the right shore under surveillance, while I watch the left." There was a hint of approbation in the cap-

tain's voice, for he had not been the first to sight the menace. "You have excellent eyes, Mr. Palmer."

"All sailors do," Mark replied, shortly.

Crandon nodded thoughtfully. "So I have noticed," he said. For all the fatigue of the journey, he still seemed ready to take his company to evening parade. His face was cleanshaven, his uniform trim, and his wig properly arrayed and powdered. In some respects, he presented a ludicrous figure, bearing with his person the refinements of culture and civilization into the very heart of primeval desolation. He was not, however, to be ridiculed, for despite his personal habits, he still lived, while less punctilious men had died.

Although he preferred his shirtsleeves, Mark in other respects unconsciously modeled himself after the captain. Without reason, he began to bathe and shave daily after the expedition made camp, forced himself to eat more than a full meal, and fought off sleep until he had washed his shirt for the following morning. This discipline toughened his mind and then his body, so that Captain Horatio Nelson, speaking to his subordinate before retiring, sometimes marveled at the strain of excellence which coursed through the veins of England's aristocracy.

Slim, slight, peppery, Nelson was too forceful to be intimidated or overwhelmed by a mere jungle. He weathered every hazard and hardship with a resiliency coveted by men twice his weight, retaining his full faculties despite sun, bad food, tepid water, and rain-soaked sleep.

His was the iron will which refused to be balked by the first series of rapids encountered by the expedition. Fearsome were the waters which charged through rocks toward the muddy flats at the mouth of the river. Rounding the bend which brought them to view, the boats halted to look at the spectacle. Blandly, the Indians waited for their weak white brothers to put about, rather than face such might. Nelson, however, would never permit water to stop him.

It was manifestly impossible to make way in the middle of the channel, but rivers are rivers because of shores, and Nelson, without hesitation, headed for one which seemed the least troubled. When the straining sailors could not make way against the terrific pressure, Nelson forthwith ordered everyone out of the boats. All hands, including the Indians, bore the weight of the boats, as they were carried bodily, foot by foot, hour after hour, uphill to level and quieter water.

That first portage occupied the better part of a day, and covered less than a mile. In camp, the sodden, tired British were disheartened to learn that the rapids were the first of several, and at this stage, human beings rebelled.

MARK was swinging into his hammock, refreshed but not happy, when, in the dim light of sheltered campfires, he saw Crandon stroll toward the enlisted men's area. By then acquainted with the folly of moving about after dark, Mark impulsively snatched up his hanger, and unobtrusively followed.

Beyond the glow of the fires, he was terrified. Here he could not see the bushmaster or the fer-de-lance or the coral snake. He could blunder into underbrush and be seized by a boa or slashed by a palm viper. Invisible to him, a jaguar could mark him for his prey. Underfoot, a crocodile might take his leg.

He cursed his curiosity but kept on, treading cautiously, and carrying the point of his hanger before him to warn him of danger before his face. He felt very foolish until he reflected that Crandon was somewhere ahead of him, Crandon who knew even better than he the stupidity of wandering into the night. Crandon had a reason, and none that Mark could guess.

When he discerned the enlisted men's fires, carefully screened to landward so as to be undetectable from the river and diffused by the underbrush from the shore, Mark was relieved. His eyes, sharpened by years at sea, had no trouble in finding Crandon. The entire business was so mysterious that Mark did not expose himself, but quietly maneuvered to within earshot.

He was astounded by what his ears heard.

"Well, Sergeant," Crandon said to an old soldier who stood with a small group by the nearest fire, "is that what you want?"

"It is, sir," replied the sergeant. "We've had enough."

Crandon coolly glanced at the other men. "Are you with him?"

They murmured assent.

"Why do you select me?" Crandon asked. "Do I seem to be the leader of mutiny?"

"It's plain to us, sir, you think the show is foolish. You've all but said so a hundred times. We're all honest men, sir. I'll tell you plain, we don't want to die."

"Neither do I," Crandon said. "Tell that chap to my right to put down his musket."

Shamefaced, the sergeant obeyed, and explained, "We thought you might not understand, sir."

"Oh, I understand," Crandon replied. "I've had my bellyful of the jungle, too, you know."

"That's what I thought, sir," the sergeant said happily.

"Now, then," Crandon said briskly. "This seems to be your idea, Nichols. What do you propose?"

The sergeant was delighted. "Why, we'll just take care of the other officers tonight. Tomorrow, you take us back. You can tell the colonel anything you like, sir."

"Thanks," Crandon said dryly. "What will you tell the rest of the men?"

"Sir?" Nichols asked blankly.

"Stab me!" Crandon cried. "You have more than two hundred men who will know there has been foul play—or are they all with you?"

The sergeant shook his head. "No, sir," he said. "There's just us."

"Well," Crandon said caustically, "I'd trust eight of you to keep a secret, but not two hundred. Perhaps you had better leave this in my hands. If you can endure three days at the most, I believe I can manage to become senior officer by then. What say you?"

"Three days, sir?" Nichols asked. "Three days more?"

"Yes," Crandon replied firmly, "unless you want the world to know we are mutineers. What say you?"

Impressed by their own trustworthiness and swayed by the captain's arguments, the group forced acceptance upon Nichols. Mark stayed to hear no more, making the fearsome journey back to his hammock.

After his introduction to the jungle, Mark was dazed by the realization that man was still the most dangerous of all animals. All of his latent dislike of Crandon flowed into hatred. The chap had certainly played a cozy game. There he was, calmly conspiring to assassinate his fellows, while Nelson, Polson and the rest thought only of coming to grips with the Spaniards.

From the first, only Crandon had given evidence to the men that he deemed the expedition foolhardy. When the desperate characters among the troops cast about for a leader who could take them back to the encampment, who else could they select but the gentleman who had constantly belittled the efforts of the Navy? Crandon's display of self-interest had been bound to impress the men, who needed an officer to give their colonel a plausible reason for turning back; it would have been too suspicious for them to return alone.

As Crandon passed the fires on his way to his hammock, Mark involuntarily raised his pistol. A squeeze of the trigger, and the treachery would end. Mark knew the name of the ringleader, and swift justice could descend in the morning. He followed Crandon's figure as the soldier strode unconsciously into clearer light. Squinting along the barrel, Mark aimed a foot ahead, so that the captain would walk into the slug.

And then, reason intervened. A shot would alarm the camp. Crandon would be seen lying beside a fire. Mark could try to convey his information to his superiors, but he could not tell what action the mutineers might take. He lowered the pistol, and let Crandon pass. Bitterly, he watched the soldier make preparations for sleep.

"Damn you," he muttered, "you'll swing!"

Lying on his side, he kept an eye on Crandon and surrendered himself to thought. Crandon had assumed that three days would be sufficient time to make his way into command. Nelson and Polson were both superior in rank, therefore they would go. Mark smiled wryly. He was equal to Crandon, therefore he, too, would probably go. That, no doubt, was the reason for the three days' grace Crandon had demanded. The chap planned to dispose of his competitors at the rate of one a day. Mark had no difficulty in guessing who would be first. Crandon sat beside him. There would be ample opportunities for the captain to dispose of him, and death could be made to seem accidental. There were always reptiles in the river.

Mark shuddered. He spent a sleepless night.

AS dawn broke, he rose and quietly made his preparation for the day. Grimly, he overhauled his two pistols. The rain during the night had soaked the priming. Opening his case, he carefully placed fresh flints in the locks, and oiled the barrels. With a view toward irony, he loaded each with three balls, which would serve the dual purpose of blasting Crandon into hell and appropriately an-

Mark involuntarily raised his pistol . . . A squeeze of the trigger and Crandon's treachery would end.

swer for the men he had schemed to murder.

Eating quickly, Mark was in his cutter before the troops. He had forgotten the past, and looked upon the jungle as a scene of beauty. Heretofore, he had feared the unknown. Now he had an enemy face to face. He waited in the cutter for his crew. As each man went to his thwart, he painstakingly examined each face for a hint of disaffection. He found none. His seamen might grumble but they did not have the stomach for mutiny. The Royal Navy had a swift manner of dealing with that practice.

As the soldiers came to the shore, Mark had to conceal his surprise upon perceiving that Nichols had taken the place of Crandon's usual sergeant. Temperature notwithstanding, Mark felt a chill along his spine. Crandon meant to have a witness who would swear that whatever happened to Mr. Palmer had been accidental.

"Good morning," Crandon said cheerfully. "You don't seem to have slept well."

"I didn't," Mark said. Then, aware that his tone might cause suspicion, added, "My waterproof has given up its ghost."

"Too bad," Crandon remarked sympathetically. "Remind me to show you a little trick with leaves tonight."

Thinking that leaves could be used to conceal a body, Mark managed not to shudder. As the cutter cast off, and Sanderson respectfully began to con, Mark unobtrusively turned sideways, pistol butt near at hand. He saw Nichols staring broodingly at him.

"Nothing happened to your sergeant?" he said solicitously to Crandon.

"No," the captain replied easily. "I wanted Nichols along for variety's sake."

Mark said no more, having his own ideas on

the matter. He sat, alert for the first warning of treachery, prepared to act first and think later. His tension might have been obvious had not the San Juan produced another set of rapids within the hour. Pulling his breeches down over his boots and tying them tight with strips of leather, Mark waited for trouble.

Nothing happened.

Cursing, Crandon went over the side, and made no objections when Mark asked him to lend a hand forward, while he remained aft with Sanderson. Strapping a pistol under each armpit, Mark flung himself into the labor of moving the heavy cutter. Neither Crandon nor Nichols made a move to harm him, but he did not relax his vigilance.

They cleared the rapids by mid-afternoon, and gratefully piled back into the cutter. The first thing Mark did was to haul out his pistols and casually inspect their priming.

"Stab me!" Crandon remarked. "You should have been with Morgan."

Ignoring the comment, Mark next removed his boots, noted gratefully that they had foiled the leeches, and emptying them over the side, replaced them. As the water evaporated from his clothing, he felt deliciously cool, but he did not let his senses lull him. His covert scrutiny finally caused Crandon to laugh wryly.

"I know, my friend. Me beauty's gone. Wait until we pass these cursed rapids. I have a fresh set of linen and breeches."

"Your wig, sir," Mark replied, "is impeccable."

" 'Tis all I have left," Crandon said. "Thank you, sir."

A week before, Mark would have given much for such friendly bantering. Now he circumspectly considered that Crandon probably wished to soften him for the kill, and doubled his caution.

He was almost disappointed to realize that Sanderson was heading toward the shore. The day had passed, and with it, Crandon's best opportunities. Mark could not recall any time when Crandon could have had a clear chance at him, but he knew the man had sufficient enterprise to create his own occasion. For some reason Mark was anxious to know Crandon had chosen not to attack him.

Mulling over the unexpected forbearance, Mark suddenly flushed. He had presumed too much in thinking Crandon would trifle with him when larger obstacles existed. The captain would first take care of either of the commanders. Relieved with regard to himself, Mark swept through the evening routine, and retired to his hammock for a watchful night. He had directed Sanderson to sling it in a place where he had a clear view of the commanders' tent, and close enough to make his pistol balls deadly.

Even through the violence of the *chubasco*, he maintained his vigil. The rain extinguished the fires, but as his eyes became accustomed to darkness, sufficient light was reflected from the nearby river for him to make out any shape that moved. A dozen times he mistook a treetrunk for a human shape, and a dozen times his pistols were ready.

Thus he spent the night. Morning found him cramped, puzzled, and weak with fatigue. Lack of sleep made his eyes blur when Sanderson arrived to cook his breakfast, but he grimly solaced himself with the reflection that Nelson at least had slept both soundly and safely.

Again in his cutter, Mark waited for Crandon. The fellow bore an untroubled countenance almost as though he were not plotting the gravest crime in military law. Mark admired the *sangfroid* with which Crandon carried himself.

"The Indians say we have only one more set of rapids," Crandon announced. "They had best be right."

Mark grunted noncommittally. He had more important things to worry about than the river. When, after a few hours of travel, the boats reached the final barricade of Nature, he was less concerned with the portage than he was with the activities of two of his passengers.

However, a new foe made an appearance.

AT the very head of the tumbling water, lay the rocky little island of San Bartolome. It was not unusual in itself, being like many others the expedition had passed, forbidding and desolate, as constant flooding ripped away the soil to which vegetation might cling. It was unusual because the Spaniards had raised a high walled redoubt to act as outpost for Fort San Juan, twenty miles further up the river. Garrisoned with a score of men, and armed with a dozen swivels, the tiny fortification was made formidable by the turbulence of the waters surging past its periphery. Grape from the guns could reach to either shore, and, if the Spaniards knew their business, the redoubt was well-nigh invulnerable.

While the expedition halted, boats weighing down the shoulders of the swearing enlisted men, Mark stared at San Bartolome. To him, the toil of days past had been useless. He resented having been brought so far only to be confronted with disaster. Gloomily, he understood why the Spaniards had suffered them to struggle uncontested for fifty miles. They had every reason to trust in San Bartolome.

They would have been better advised to have placed their trust in God. Horatio Nelson was a man who believed redoubts were built only to be taken, and was undismayed by San Bartolome. He sent word for Mark to bring the black cutter to the van, and patiently waited for stumbling seamen and soldiers to

bear the heavy craft through a waist-high torrent.

"Mr. Palmer," he said, when Mark had finally reported, "after your men have rested, we will storm that works." Mark could not restrain a doubtful glance, whereupon Nelson laughed gaily. "Come, now, Mr. Palmer! This is much the same as surf. Take care to stem the tide, and do not broach."

"Of course, sir," Crandon suggested sardonically, "we could land our artillery out of their range and blow that wretched heap to rubble."

"Indeed, Mr. Crandon?" replied Nelson crisply. "Perhaps you had best survey those swamps again. I greatly doubt they would support your ordnance. The Dons selected this island, and they must have had enemy artillery in mind."

"Unquestionably," Polson interjected heartily. "That shore is quicksand, Crandon."

Nelson glanced at Mark, whose crew apprehensively held their cutter against the powerful river. "Let's get on with the business," he said, and immediately clambered over his boat's gunwale. Perforce, Mark obeyed. Before his crew could get out oars, his cutter was swept a hundred yards downstream.

"Ye'll need more brawn," Crandon said, quietly. "Nichols, bear a hand."

With the soldiers doubling the manpower on the sweeps, the English made dreary progress against the spuming water. Mark blessed his coxswain, as Sanderson again and again countered a swirl which could have overturned the cutter. On San Bartolome, the alert Spaniards waited at their swivels, slow-matches sending spirals of smoke into the air above the redoubt.

At two hundred yards, the Spaniards took the cutters under fire. Their first salvo of grape fell short, but the splashes failed to hearten Mark. Even the most inept gunners in the world would have opportunity to reload several times before the pair of cutters made the island. The Spaniards accordingly took their time. The next ragged salvo spattered about the boats, and by a miracle harmed no one.

"I'm glad that isn't our Navy shootin' at us," Crandon observed, grinning.

Mark did not accept the compliment. With firing going on, Crandon could easily strike, and Mark refused to be taken off his guard. Tight-lipped, he fondled his pistols.

A seaman without peer, Nelson managed to coerce the river into working for him. Propelled by an eddy discerned by his keen eye, his cutter surged for the island and grounded before the over-confident Spaniards could let loose their swivels. Nimbly, the diminutive leader leaped over the side, lost his low-cut boots in the sucking mud, and in his stocking feet dashed for the redoubt, followed by a scrambling handful of seamen and soldiers.

Thus, Mark's cutter received the Spaniard's full salute, and suffered a hit which raked along her port gunwale, snapping off several sweeps and a man's hand before whistling past Crandon's chest. While Mark cursed, Sanderson capably balanced his oarsmen and charged into the same eddy which Nelson had employed.

The black cutter dashed for the shore and plunged into the mud.

Crandon was transformed from a lazy dandy into an engine of war. He was through the mud and on the beach before Mark could get over the side. While Sanderson coolly took steps to secure the cutter, Mark stumbled after the captain, his boatload hot on his heels. His foot hit a rock in the mud, and he ignominiously sprawled onto his face. Seamen and marines swept past him.

When he wiped the slime from his eyes, Nelson had boarded the redoubt, and the proud flag of Spain came fluttering down. Fuming, Mark staggered forward to the rocky shore, and strode to the battery. He glanced around the battlefield, seeing, to his surprise, only one casualty, a pitifully slumped soldier.

He considered it most ironic that the corpse's face was that of Sergeant Nichols, the organizer of mutiny, without whom Crandon would be foolish to proceed. Delighted by the turn of fate, he was able to bear the jocular remarks his commander made about his appearance.

While Nelson good-naturedly suggested that Mark transfer to the Infantry, Crandon stood to one side, smiling. Even this, Mark was able to tolerate, smiling knowingly in return.

CHAPTER IV

MALARIAL NIGHTMARE

AFTER the rapids at San Bartolome, the twenty miles to the Fort of San Juan were easily traveled. Nelson, never impetuous in the face of the unknown, took care to conserve his men at the last, and let them cover the distance in two days. The river narrowed and had a swift current, but as compensation, there were no more shallows, and the expedition was able to keep out of range of possible Indian arrows.

Well aware of the folly of attempting to assault a fortress from boats, Nelson agreed with Polson that their force should land a couple of miles away from San Juan, and complete the journey on foot. At this stage of the campaign, Major Polson assumed full command. The Navy had fulfilled its commitment, and San Juan lay before the veterans of the 79th Foot.

Mark felt that the *Hinchinbrook's* men could withdraw honorably. The 79th would be able to seize San Juan without further assistance,

and the Indians could easily transport them back to the mouth of the river, having the current to work for them on the return trip. He looked upon the last camp-site as the end of the most horrible period of his life, and went to his hammock happy in the thought that within three days he would once more be in his bunk aboard the frigate.

Now that the Fort was all but taken, he was certain Crandon would be unable to do further mischief, and resolved to denounce the fellow in a letter to his colonel. Satisfied that this would dispose of Crandon, he peacefully went to sleep, for the first genuine night's rest in several days.

He awoke in the morning to find the camp bustling with activity. Soldiers overhauled their flintlocks, rolled packs, and polished bayonets. Seamen mended their clothing, scrubbed hammocks, and trimmed their hair. Too excited to eat breakfast, he was nonetheless surprised that the faithful Sanderson had not prepared an unsavory mess for him, and forgave his coxswain when he perceived him at work on the cutter's seams.

Strolling to the overturned boat, he lent Sanderson a hand. He was busy paying a seam when Nelson's well-known voice startled him. "We won't be needing that for some time, Mr. Palmer."

Mark stared. His captain was accompanied by Major Polson, else he might have impertinently requested explicit information. "Sir?" he murmured uncertainly.

"I have decided we will go with the troops," Nelson said. "Consult with Mr. Crandon for the proper equipment of our men."

"Aye, aye, sir," Mark replied automatically, and stood by the boat as the commanders moved off. His bright world was gone. He glanced at the jungle. Heretofore he had seen only the very fringe of that mad tangle; now he would see its heart. The prospect crushed his spirits. Dejectedly, he laid down his hammer, and began to clean his hands.

Sanderson coughed. "Beg pardon, sir," he said respectfully. "I think we should finish the show. If we don't, the Army will take the credit."

Mark smiled wanly at the encouragement. "That's true," he said. "Muster the crew at nine."

"Aye, aye, sir!" Sanderson replied cheerfully.

Going to find Crandon, Mark wondered how he could have known his coxswain for so long without appreciating him. If nothing else, as a result of this expedition he was learning to observe more than a sailor's physique. In the future, if he lived to return to the *Hinchinbrook*, he would find in his men the same human qualities which inspirited his messmates.

Immaculately uniformed, Captain Crandon was powdering his wig when Mark appoached him. "Hullo," the soldier said carelessly, as Mark hove into his view. "I assume you want the facts o' life."

"I am ordered, sir, to confer with you," Mark remarked stiffly. "Otherwise I would not speak to you."

Crandon's eyes narrowed. "I'm not certain that is an agreeable attitude," he said sharply.

"Make of it what you will," Mark replied. "What have you to tell me?"

Crandon eyed him thoughtfully, pursed his lips, and cocked an eyebrow. "What the devil ails you, me lad?"

"Look into your conscience, sir. Now, what have you to tell me?"

Frowning, Crandon studied him thoroughly. "My conscience is clear," he said finally. "I would you were as plain-spoken as the day we met."

"Sir," Mark said impatiently. "I am ordered to confer with you."

"Oh, the devil with it!" Crandon cried, spun on his heel, and strode off to his troops.

Grimly, Mark ignored the fellow's back, hunted up a lieutenant, and was given the information which was vital to the seamen's health. He didn't give a damn what Crandon

might think of him. As far as he was concerned, Crandon was not worthy of a gentleman's consideration. The fellow was a traitor to his flag, and despite his fine airs, would grace a gibbet ere the *Hinchinbrook* quit Nicaragua.

Mark did not for a moment doubt that his evidence would hang Crandon. Was he not the heir of Lord Bideford? His word was as true as steel. Even those who deemed him vacuously stupid admitted he was honest. If the fellow denied his accusations, there were still other witnesses, who, he was certain, an Army court could persuade to substantiate his story. He had to admire the captain's aplomb in claiming a clear conscience, but not even Crandon was clever enough to sustain falsehood throughout a properly run trial.

A sudden notion reconciled Mark to continuing with the expedition. There was always the chance that Crandon might be slain. This, Mark fiercely decided, would be too good for the scoundrel. By being present at the storming of the Fort, he could see to it that Crandon was kept as safe as a guardian could keep him. And then, too, Crandon might let slip in public some hint of disaffection.

Almost contentedly, Mark went to the muster of his seamen and briefly advised them to have eyes at all angles of their heads, for that, in substance, was the warning given him by the lieutenant. The seamen presented a swashbuckling appearance with blanket rolls over their shoulders, cutlasses on hips, and watch-caps bobbing down to necks. Mark carefully inspected them to make certain they exposed as little skin as possible, cautioned each man to be alert for the short but deadly green palm vipers. He then dismissed them to await the orders to march.

IMMEDIATELY after the noon meal, the English fell into column of twos and got underway. The commanders were again at the van, while Mark with Crandon brought up the rear. The Indians, who had managed to avoid over-exertion on the river, found themselves called upon to demonstrate their woodsmanship. This consisted in swinging machetes with maximum effect and minimum effort, and the progress of the force was measured by the speed of their swinging blades.

At last the seamen were able to enjoy themselves at the expense of the soldiers, who, in teams, were constrained to haul along their artillery and ammunition cases. Being in a body at the rear of the column, they profited by the boots and slashes of their predecessors, who made a path in the virgin jungle. The seamen almost had a promenade, and were not sorry that the noises and shouts of the soldiers frightened away deadly reptiles and animals.

They had the grace to avert their eyes when they passed the bloated body of a soldier beside whom lay the torn, beautiful fragments of a tiny coral snake. They circumspectly avoided the gently moving spread of moss and nearby trampled soil which indicated that one man had narrowly escaped a sinkhole. They did not comment or inquire when an ashen-faced soldier stumbled through their ranks, headed for the camp-site on the river.

The seamen knew they were far from their element, and were careful not to offend their hosts.

Mark, however, did not suffer from restraint. He marched side by side with Crandon, and did not speak, even in reply to direct questions. The captain, at last on familiar grounds, was tacitly willing to forget his hasty anger and impart some of his knowledge, but his attempts at friendliness went unrewarded. From time to time, Mark gave him a baleful eye, which was not encouraging.

"Stab me!" Crandon said at last. "Ye're an odd fish." He shrewdly studied the red, sweating, proud face of his companion. "Do y' know," he said suddenly, "white is very conspicuous at night?"

To Mark, the remark was senseless, and unworthy of even a scornful glance. A child of seven would have been able to make the same observation. He dismissed it with the others.

Crandon fell silent. Mark was grimly pleased to note that the steaming jungle played havoc with the soldier's grooming. Crandon began to sweat like any other human being as the humid vapors of the underbrush swirled under a broiling sun. His carefully kept uniform sagged dankly. His wig trailed streaks of powder. The ends of his mustache drooped. Mud spattered his polished boots, and his breeches were green with slime.

He carried himself, however, with jaunty grace, and Mark was impressed to see that Crandon bore his own gear upon his back. Such was the simple type of action which endeared a subaltern to his men. On a march, a man was soon in a frame of mind wherein he resented the weight of his own equipment, much less an ounce of an officer's property. This, Mark realized grimly, was one of the reasons the mutineers had selected Crandon from among the other officers, and he quickly changed his good opinion of the captain.

As an open gesture of disassociation, Mark slowed his stride and let Crandon walk ahead of him. The soldier gave him an inquiring glance, but said nothing. The movement was not wasted upon the seamen, who thoroughly approved. Sanderson unobtrusively made his way to his leader's side. Mark acknowledged his presence with a wry grin.

"Not like Kent, is it?" he remarked.

He was busy paying a seam when Nelson's voice startled him. "We won't be needing that for some time, Mr. Palmer."

"No, sir!" Sanderson said fervently, eyeing their surroundings with fierce hatred. "I'd give my soul for the old girl. Never thought I'd say that, Mr. Palmer."

Crandon was twenty paces ahead and beyond range of their voices.

"Sir," Sanderson hesitated, "I've wanted to speak to you about him—"

"Who?" Mark interrupted. "Mr. Crandon?"

"Yes, sir." Sanderson nodded.

"Well?" Mark demanded sharply. "What about him?"

Sanderson's ruddy face was a conflict of discipline and righteousness. "Maybe I shouldn't say it of an officer, Mr. Palmer, but I think Mr. Crandon shot Sergeant Nichols back there on the island. It probably was an accident, sir. Maybe I shouldn't mention it."

Mark was electrified. This could be the final evidence in his case against the captain. "Why do you think Mr. Crandon shot him?" he asked quickly.

His eagerness calmed Sanderson's fears of being presumptuous. "You were covering the assult with musketeers, sir, and watching the redoubt, so you couldn't have seen," Sanderson began tactfully. "Mr. Crandon was at the head of our troops. At the foot of the battery, he turned to shout at them. Sergeant Nichols was close behind him. Mr. Crandon was waving his pistol, and it fired. Sergeant Nichols fell." The coxswain paused. "I was looking, sir, and I didn't see any Spaniards shoot."

"Did anyone else notice?" Mark asked anxiously.

"Yes, sir."

"Good," Mark said in hearty satisfaction. "Good!"

Relieved, Sanderson wiped his sweaty face. "Then it was right to tell you, sir?"

"Not only right," Mark replied cryptically, "I'm obliged to you, Sanderson." He was very pleased.

Unaware of the noose tightening around his throat, Crandon stalked serenely along the narrow trail hacked into the wilderness. Mark wondered if the fellow would go as calmly to the gallows.

"You know, sir," Sanderson said, "you don't look well."

Intent upon Crandon, Mark only grunted. With his coxswain's troubled gaze on him, Mark was conscious that the jungle had abruptly cooled. His sweating body was comforted by a wave of cold that exhilarated his spirits. In fact, he indulged himself in a shiver of delight. His head was clearer than it had been since he had left the *Hinchinbrook*, and his senses were more acute.

THUS, although two hundred men had passed beneath the boa, Mark was the first to perceive its sinuous bulk swaying down from a branch athwart the path. With lightning calculation, Mark saw that Crandon was possibly the reptile's prey. Unthinkingly, he pulled out a pistol, aimed and fired. The boa plunged to the ground. Crandon was stunned by the sight. Mark drew his other pistol, and carefully blew off the creature's large, fanged head.

He walked forward, cautiously avoiding the thrashing coils. "There," he said to Crandon, "I believe that repays you."

Crandon looked at him appraisingly. "Chances were it would have waited for the last man," he said. "Chances were it wanted me. In either case, thank you."

"Don't mention it," Mark replied casually. "You're a valuable man, sir." He shuddered involuntarily.

Crandon grasped his hand and keenly looked into his face. "Are you cold?" he demanded.

"That, sir, is my affair," Mark said airily.

Crandon turned to Sanderson, who, with the rest of the seamen, was gaping at the shattered boa. "Cut two poles," he commanded briskly. "Put down three blankets."

"These are my men," Mark interjected.

"Be quick!" the captain barked at Sanderson. "He has malaria!"

Despite Mark's protests, the coxswain obeyed. Under Crandon's expert direction, the sailors rigged a stretcher, while Crandon held Mark rigid. Then, still struggling with a body suddenly drained of strength, Mark shuddered violently. The warmth of the stretcher became the most irresistible thing in the world. Not unwillingly, he permitted himself to be placed on a blanket.

A pair of sturdy seamen carried the stretcher, tenderly avoiding any jolts. Mark clutched the blankets, and croaked for another. Then, before Sanderson could accommodate him, Mark was seized with an onslaught of fever which burned into his very marrow. He plucked off the blankets that covered him, and sought to rip the shirt from his broiling chest. Crandon leaned over and held his hands.

"Take my canteen," he said to Sanderson. "Moisten cloths and pack them about his head and shoulders."

"Aye, aye, sir," Sanderson replied respectfully. Crandon acted with the self-assurance of long familiarity with the disease.

"He will be like this for three or four hours," Crandon explained. "He feels as though he is in an oven. When he begins to perspire heavily, he will return to normal. Watch carefully, now. You will have to take care of all your men like this."

"All, sir?"

"Yes, all," Crandon assured the worried coxswain. "Even you."

Dubiously, Sanderson looked down at the agonized figure of his leader. Malaria was not an attractive disease. Nor did he care to learn that if he were fortunate, attacks would occur every third day instead of daily. He went back among the seamen, looking at each for symptoms, and was discouraged to find more than a dozen staggering with a comrade's arm for support. Before he, too, succumbed, Sanderson set about to ease their distress. The promenade had become a nightmare.

In his stretcher, Mark lived through hell, and saw Crandon's face as that of the devil. "You murderer!" he muttered deliriously. "You killed him. You killed Sergeant Nichols."

Somberly, the captain looked down at him. "Yes," he admitted. "I killed him. Try to sleep."

"I'll see you hanged!" Mark cried. "You killed Sergeant Nichols!"

"Try to sleep," Crandon urged gently. "We'll talk about Nichols later."

"I'll see you hanged," Mark muttered again and again until coma relieved him of consciousness.

Throughout the remainder of the march to Fort San Juan, Crandon stayed at Mark's side, and cared for him as patiently as he would have tended his own brother.

CHAPTER V

BARRIERS DOWN

SWIMMING out of a nightmare world, Mark opened his eyes, and stared up at the glistening leaves that were the overhead of his shelter. He lay helpless in a hammock rigged between supports of a crude lean-to erected by the jungle-wise soldiers of the 79th Foot. Heavy rain pounded and battered the sturdy structure. Sodden with sweat, he feebly pushed the blankets to one side, and let the cool air comfort his tortured skin. He looked about. He was alone.

With an effort, he twisted his head so that he could see out of the lean-to. The rain came down with a solid violence that limited his vision to a dozen paces. Fuming at his weakness, he struggled to turn himself on his side, and managed it after sacrificing most of his strength.

Numbly, he lifted a hand and stared at the large framework of bones. The flesh had wasted away from his fingers. He glanced down at his naked chest where his skin hung in folds. He laughed bitterly, thinking of his comrades on the *Hinchinbrook* who had urged him to lose weight. He had done so, with a vengeance.

He touched his face. By the growth of his beard, he guessed he had been delirious for at least a week. He rubbed his cheek and felt the bone. His face was gaunt, and a wry smile hurt him when he involuntarily tried to imagine the image he would now cut in the drawing rooms of London. He would not have been surprised had Lady Bideford herself failed to recognize him.

Listless, miserable, he settled down to wait for someone to come to him. He hoped that Nelson, Sanderson and the men were not in his situation. He wouldn't have wanted even Crandon to feel his present desolation.

The thought of Crandon made him frown. He remembered that just before he had lapsed into virtual unconsciousness. Crandon had said something about Nichols. Mark fought to recall the words. His memory had suffered and as he groped into its recesses, a figure suddenly stumbled into view and interrupted him.

A man wrapped in sailcloth stubbornly wrestled with the thick mud to come toward the lean-to. Mark squinted. The man was Sanderson. Mark greeted him with a smile of gladness.

"Good morning, Sanderson!" he croaked.

The coxswain plunged beneath the protection of the lean-to and disgustedly flung off his impromptu raincoat. "Thank God, sir!" he said heartily. "Ye're awake at last!"

Mark grimaced. "Not that it matters," he replied.

"All of us felt that way at first, sir," Sanderson said encouragingly. "Here, I brought this, hoping you'd be able to take it." He produced a pan of steaming broth, and lifted a spoonful to Mark's lips.

Sniffing the aroma, Mark grinned. "Amazing what can be done with salt pork," he remarked, and gratefully sipped the invigorating fluid. He said no more until the pan was empty, and he could feel a trickle of strength flowing into his shrunken muscles. "You said you all felt this way at first. How are the men?"

Sanderson was busy fumbling inside his shirt. "Some good, some bad, sir. Malaria has had everyone down at one time or another. Some it took worse than others. You've had it about the worst." He triumphantly nodded his head, and produced a tiny bottle. "Here, sir, try this," he suggested slyly.

Still ravenous despite a full stomach, Mark obligingly took a draft from the bottle, and almost choked as fiery rum cut into his throat. "Damme!" he sputtered. "Rum!"

"Yes, sir," Sanderson said anxiously. "I brought a bit of it along—just for medicine, Mr. Palmer."

"Well," Mark growled in mock anger, "give me another swig and we'll forget the regulations." Relieved, his coxswain held up the bottle again, and Mark drained the last drop. The liquor pursued the broth into his vitals and changed his attitude on life. "Well, now," Mark said, letting his head fall back limply, "that's better."

Carefully, Sanderson corked the bottle and placed it inside his shirt. "The captain wanted to know when you were able to talk, sir," he said, turning to go.

"Wait," Mark answered, "you might tell me what has happened."

Sanderson made a face. "This is hell, Mr. Palmer," he said bluntly. "We're camped behind a ridge away from the Spanish batteries. The Fort is less than a mile behind you. The soldiers are digging trenches toward the walls, and the captain has us manning the guns. It rains all the time, so we shoot whenever the weather clears for an instant. Damp rot is in everything, clothes, leather, everything. We can't keep our steel from rusting."

"Why dig approaches?" Mark asked. "Is San Juan so formidable?"

"No, sir," Sanderson replied. "It doesn't look like a real Fort at all. The major wanted to dig, so the soldiers are digging."

Mark bit his lip. "Very well," he said. "That will do for the present." He pulled a blanket over him. Once he would have scorned to express gratitude for service given him by an enlisted man; service was his due by birth and rank. But no one had ordered Sanderson to come out in the torrential rain to give Mr. Palmer some broth and a drink. The coxswain had acted voluntarily, and Mark was humbly appreciative. "I want to thank you," he said simply. "I'll never forget your kindness, Sanderson."

The coxswain was embarrassed, his big hands awkwardly fumbling with the soup pan. An officer didn't speak with such sincerity to a rating; it was exactly as though they were equal, one man speaking to another. This thanks was not a matter of form, but came from the heart. "Anything I did, sir, is all right," he replied gently. "Mr. Crandon, sir, he did more. He sat with you nights, and kept your covers on or bathed you when you were hot. He's the one to thank, sir. He knew what to do and did it. I just came around once in a while."

Abruptly, he dashed out of the lean-to into the rain.

HIS brain in a turmoil, Mark watched his faithful sailor vanish. The information about Crandon's part in his recovery caught him completely unprepared. He did not know what to think. Nights of sleep were precious in Nicaragua, yet Crandon had sacrificed them for him. Such deeds were expected of parents, but not of strangers, particularly one who had been hostile to the bargain. He did not have time to clear up his confession, for the energetic figure of Horatio Nelson suddenly came in out of the rain.

"Well, now," Nelson said pleasantly, "this is splendid. Welcome aboard, Mr. Palmer. I was afraid we would lose you."

"Sailors die at sea, sir," Mark replied.

"So they do!" Nelson chuckled. Looking about, he espied a stool and dragged it over to the hammock. Sitting down, he seemed entirely at ease. The jungle hardships had only intensified his vigor, and as other men grew weak, Nelson, living upon a spiritual flame devoted to his nation's cause, grew stronger. His frail constitution was utterly subservient to his will, and thus he towered over men twice his bulk, who withered in the tropics.

"What of the campaign, sir?" Mark asked. "I hope it's nearly over."

"Not quite," Nelson answered. "I trust you will be on your feet in time to see the final assault." He studied his lieutenant. "Major Polson and I disagreed on the mode of reducing the Fort. What with dysentery and pestilence decimating our force, I believed we should have attacked at once. The major wished to push up approaches, rather than lose a few lives in direct assault. I endeavored to show him that in the end we would lose fewer men to shot than to disease, but he is in command here, so I engaged to erect and man our batteries." He sighed. "I tell you this, Mr. Palmer, that you may justify my part in this expedition should I fall when we do attack. That should be within a few days, after the Colonel of the 79th sends reinforcements."

"Reinforcements, sir?"

Nelson shrugged his shoulders. "Yes. Our force, thanks to the wet season, is now too feeble to attempt to storm the Fort. We have established communication with our base, and expect reinforcements daily."

"I'll be happy to leave here, sir," Mark sighed.

"I too, Mr. Palmer, once we have done our duty."

Mark studied his commander, finding it difficult to believe that the animated face before him belong to a man only a few months older than he. "Sir," he said slowly, "what is your opinion of Mr. Crandon?"

Nelson seemed surprised by such a personal question. "Why," he replied, "I consider him

to be a most proficient officer. If for no other reason, I would esteem him for bringing you through your illness."

"It is true, then," Mark murmured. "He did tend me."

"Like a brother." Nelson rose. "Well, Mr. Palmer, I must return to the battery. Join me when you are able."

"Aye, aye, sir," Mark said.

Nelson laid a comforting hand on his shoulder for a moment, and then was gone as quickly as he had come.

While the rain hurtled down from the skies, Mark lay in his hammock. He had the leisure to think and found that it was not painful. His brain was clear and he remembered all that had happened before. He was puzzled by two things and set about straightening them out.

First, he did not understand why Crandon had so readily admitted to having slain Nichols. Without the slightest hesitation, Crandon had confessed to killing his sergeant deliberately. This, in the presence of witnesses, was foolish, unless Crandon knew he had nothing to fear from the disclosure. His hostility ameliorated by gratitude, Mark tried to place himself in Crandon's position. Why, he groped to learn, would a man acknowledge the murder of another?

This question harried Mark's poor wits. That Sergeant Nichols merited death did not enter the problem; the sergeant had forfeited his life to the State from the moment he had fomented his mutiny, and would, after a proper court-martial, have hanged. Yet he had not been brought to trial; had died in a wretched little skirmish at the hands of his leader.

Throughout the afternoon, Mark grappled with the motives of a man he had once detested, and in trying to understand him, slowly began to understand himself. In those hours, he was unconsciously becoming a mature adult, no longer dependent upon others for guidance or intelligence. He had come much further than San Juan on this expedition.

Sanderson brought him another bowl of broth and another bit of rum, and Mark took a recess from his unaccustomed work to gossip with his coxswain. Sanderson amazed him with the diversity of his human qualities, and from him Mark perceived that he could never in the future regard a man of lower rank as a name alone. Sanderson had loyalty, wit, kindness, and a sharp eye, and reveling in the newwon confidence of his lieutenant, entertained Mark with stories which illustrated that there was more than one way to look at a ship than from the wardroom. Mark actually missed the fellow when Sanderson picked up his pan and bottle and tactfully remarked he had best leave Mr. Palmer to his rest.

Again alone, Mark did not sleep, returning to his investigation of Crandon's motives. Night fell, and he still was dissatisfied with his conclusions. Staring out the lean-to, and noting the fires glowing in the other shelters made distant by the rain, he was struck by something Crandon had said. What was it? "White is very conspicuous at night"? Of course! Mark grinned triumphantly.

Crandon had seen him that night! Crandon knew that Mark was aware of the mutiny. Knowing this, Crandon could admit to killing Sergeant Nichols because Mark, of all people, was sensible of the merits of removing the sergeant from the Army. Crandon feared nothing from Mark, and, indeed, probably accepted Mark's accusation as a compliment to his judicious action in the matter.

Mark cursed himself. He did not know the answer to the second question on his mind, and did not dare examine it. He had been curious to know why Crandon had nursed him with such tenderness, but abandoned speculation. The action was enough.

He rested in his hammock, eyes fixed upon the muddy path without, hoping that Crandon would come to see him. He waited in vain. The soldier did not come. During his vigil, concentrating upon Crandon, Mark realized more and more how much they were alike. Where Crandon was arrogant in knowledge, Mark was arrogant in ignorance. While Crandon was proud of his achievements, Mark was proud of his service. As Crandon hotly rejected correction, Mark leaped to challenge the slightest criticism. Mark now freely bowed to Crandon as his superior, and hoped to have him as his friend.

IN the next two days, however, Crandon did not come. Mark regained sufficient energy to sit upon the stool in his lean-to. Thus he saw the column of reinforcements plod dolefully into the camp. Disinterestedly, he watched them halt in the mud while their captain conferred with Major Polson. They had arrived during the afternoon lull, and anxiously looked about for shelter from the deluge which would soon engulf them.

A short time later, Mark observed the diminutive person of his captain struggling toward his lean-to, and quickly groomed himself. Nelson bore an expression uncommon to his face. Mark marveled to see his captain in the throes of extreme dejection.

"Mr. Palmer," Horatio Nelson said without preamble, "I regret to inform you I must withdraw from the campaign. I have just received orders from the admiral to report to the *Janus* as her commanding officer."

Mark was stunned. "But, sir!" he said weakly.

"Be assured I do not enjoy leaving this work

unfinished," Nelson said bitterly. "It isn't fair to thrust responsibility upon you in your weakened condition. Were it not for your health, I would not mind so much."

Proudly, Mark straightened his back. "Sir," he replied, "I will be on duty in the morning."

Nelson smiled gently. "Mr. Palmer, I brought you with me because I considered you the least capable officer aboard. Our past hardships have reversed my once unflattering opinion of you. I find you worthy of esteem in all respects, and will leave our men in your hands without fear for their future. Should we meet again, I will be honored to have you serve with me."

Mark was silent, overwhelmed by praise from Horatio Nelson.

"Now, then," the captain said briskly, "with these reinforcements, Major Polson intends to attack tomorrow. Once the Fort is taken, our share is done. I trust you will be following me down the river within two days. Do not remain here longer than our seamen are needed to serve the guns. Enough will die as 'tis without pestilence."

Nelson held out his hand and clasped Mark's. "Good luck," he said warmly, then patted Mark on a gaunt shoulder, and left. Quietly, Mark turned, picked up his pistols and hanger, slung a coat over his back, and set out to inspect his new command.

He was exhausted by the time he reached the first battery. His appearance among the tired men brought grins to their faces, and they crowded about him, as he sat down on a dismounted gun. Briefly, he explained that their captain had received urgent orders and had to leave them. Their response to the news gratified him beyond words.

"Bless you, sir," a gunner offered, "he's well out of it. We'll manage all right without 'im."

Mark mutely accepted the telescope held out to him by the rating in charge of the battery. With it he studied their objective. Fort San Juan crowned a ridge which dominated the river on one side and controlled the land on the others. The Fort was not in a class with Valenciennes and Strasbourg, which Vauban had raised up against armies, but it served its ends well enough, discouraging piratical raids and Indian uprisings. The Spaniards had thoughtfully hacked down the jungle so that their heavy guns had clear areas of fire, and it was this which had induced Major Polson to follow the dictates of formal warfare.

Nelson had carefully planned his batteries, so that maximum use was made of the light guns that soldiers had dragged to the siege. The seamen, trained to fire on the downroll of a pitching ship, found land gunnery ridiculously simple, and every time the rain ceased, they systematically reduced the embrasures scowling down at them. What with sodden powder and rusting shot, their performance was rightly regarded by the burrowing soldiers as miraculous. Since the Spaniards concentrated their artillery effort upon the batteries, spurning the parallels, the soldiers said a prayer for the Royal Navy.

While Mark stood studying the Fort, Major Polson walked up to him.

"Delighted to see you again, Mr. Palmer," the major said crisply. "We attack tomorrow afternoon, when the rain breaks. We have only a few yards to go from our approaches, but a hot fire from your guns will be appreciated."

At one time in his life, Mark would have been thrilled by such an order. But that had been a lifetime before, when, aboard the *Hinchinbrook*, he was still unsinged by the rigors of a hard campaign. As it was, he bore his responsibility lightly. "You shall have a hot fire, sir," he promised.

"Good," Polson grunted. "Too bad your captain cannot be here for the finale. He has been of great assistance to us. He deserves to be in at the kill."

THAT evening, having made his preparations for the following day, Mark wearily groped through the rain to his shelter. Sanderson had a fire going for him, and a supper ready. Shivering with malaria, Mark forced himself to eat, but he could not rest. The next night might well prove too late for him to make amends with Crandon, and so, when he had sufficient strength, he battled the rain again.

Crandon shared a lean-to with his two subalterns. The three officers were grouped about an improvised table when Mark discreetly coughed from the entrance.

"Come in!" Crandon called.

Mark entered, standing just within the lean-to while he shook the water from his coat. Impassively, the trio waited for him to explain his presence. Their scrutiny made him uncomfortable.

"Sir," he began hesitantly, "I have come to apologize for my conduct toward you. I wish—"

"Wait, Mr. Palmer," interrupted Crandon. "Won't you be seated?"

Gratefully, Mark took a stool, and started again. "I wish—"

"Mr. Palmer," the captain cut in, "let us not speak of apologies lest we launch an interminable discussion. I, too, owe you one."

"Very well," Mark said gratefully. "As you wish."

Crandon smiled at his comrades. "Gentlemen," he said, "today I received a packet from Major Williston. I believe this is as good a time as any to open it." He reached into his rucksack and drew out a package which proved to contain a bottle. In short order, the cork was withdrawn, and the precious liquor passed from hand to hand.

"Aside from my coxswain's private hoard," Mark observed, "this is probably the only rum in camp."

"Stab me!" objected a subaltern. "All of my non-commissioned officers have a bottle or two. Where do you suppose Sanderson got his?"

Crandon proposed a game of whist, and so, in the midst of desolation, they spent a pleasant evening. Barriers down, Mark discovered that Crandon was a worthy gentleman, amiable, courtly, and humorous. Perhaps the prospect of ending a siege which had been so costly in debilitation and disease exhilarated them. Perhaps they were delighted by the end of caustic ridicule. Whatever the cause, by the time all hands decided to retire, Crandon and Mark were friends.

As Mark prepared to leave, Crandon helped him into his coat.

"You know," he said quietly, "I didn't know how to approach you. What with challenges and all, I didn't know how to explain I was sorry for my earlier rudeness. You see, I was disgruntled because I had been promised a leave before this show turned up, and I was anxious to visit Jamaica."

"I understand," Mark said. "She must be beautiful."

"She is," Crandon affirmed, and paused. "You rather discouraged me with that fuss about Sergeant Nichols. I saw you that night I was offered the leadership of the mutiny, and thought you would appreciate why I had to accept. It was either that or be killed. As for arresting Nichols the next day, well, he was popular with the men, and there might have been bloodshed. I decided to keep him under my personal surveillance and grasped the chance to crush the mutiny by shooting him. Major Polson agreed it was the best course."

"Major Polson agreed!" Mark gasped. "He knew?"

"Of course," Crandon answered in surprise. "I reported to him that very night. In a way, it was a kindness to Nichols. He was saved the disgrace of a court. Poor Nichols! He was just out here too long."

"What about the others?"

Crandon shrugged. "There was no mutiny without Nichols. After he was gone, there didn't seem to be much point in persecuting the other misguided lads. They knew and accepted my justice. The incident will be forgotten in the regiment."

"Good," Mark said. "See you tomorrow."

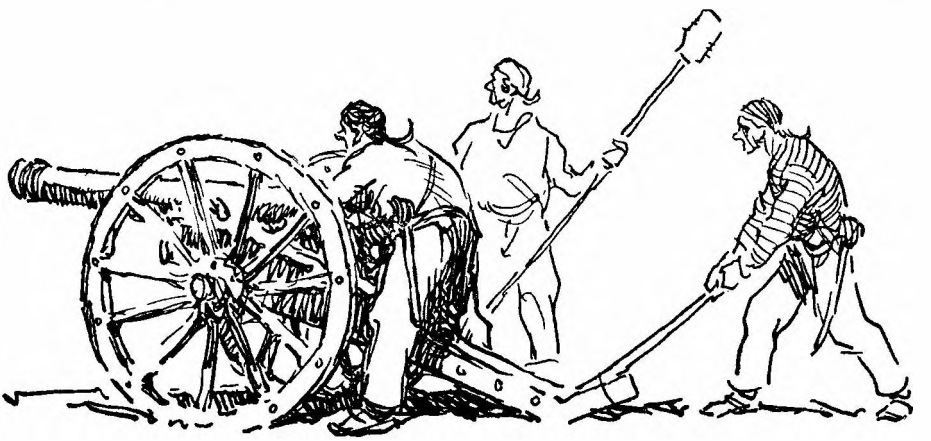
"Righto, Mark," Crandon replied. "Keep those Dons busy!"

Mark was as good as his word. The instant the rain permitted his seamen to leave their hovels in the batteries, he laid down a withering barrage of grape which discouraged the Spaniards from attempting to use their guns. Under the curtain of fire, the 79th Foot scurried from the laboriously winnowed approaches, raced across the scant yards to the Fort, and within the hour had the Union Jack flying over San Juan.

English casualties were light. The conquest was simple. Yet in the garrison duty which followed, the regiment lost some fifteen hundred men to the inexorable lust of yellow fever.

Mark and his men escaped these calamities. Three days after the surrender, he brought the two cutters alongside the *Hinchinbrook*. His big frame scarcely more than a skeleton, he proudly walked aboard at the head of his men and reported to Captain Cuthbert Collingwood, who had succeeded Horatio Nelson.

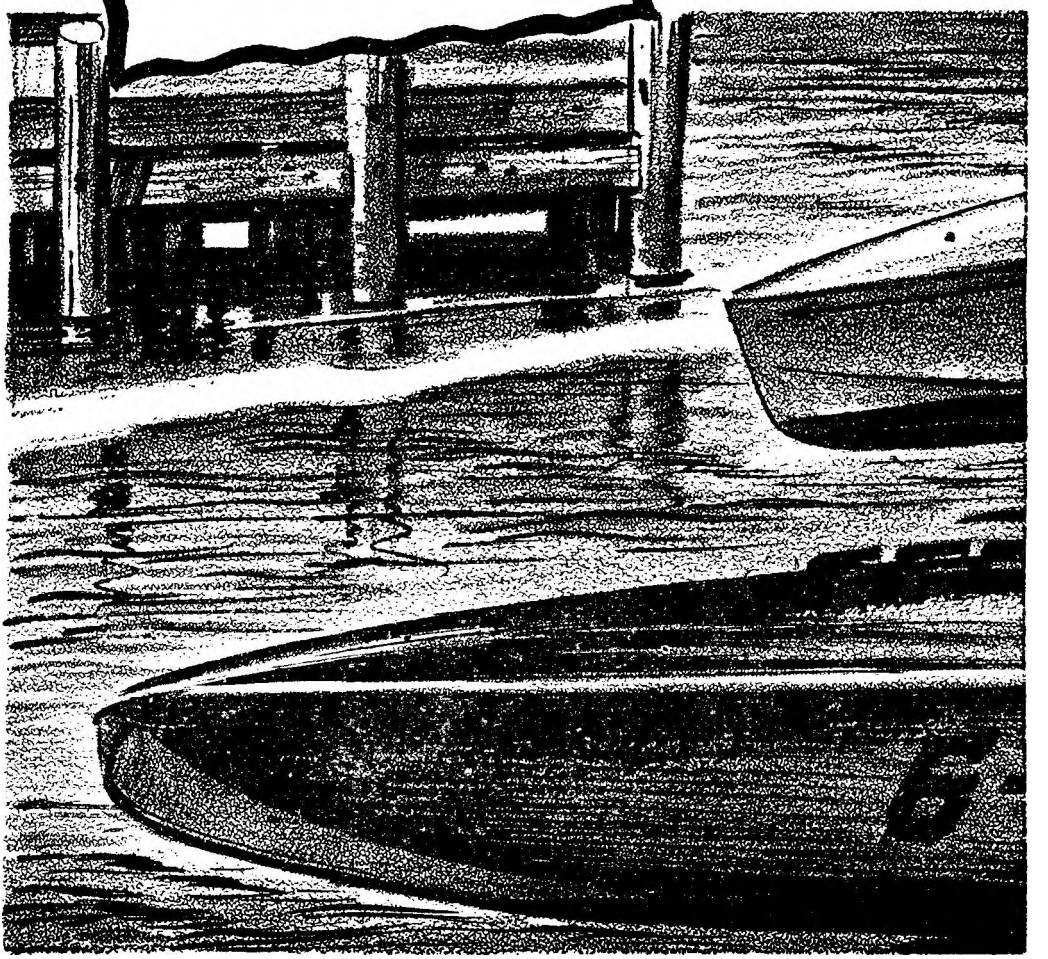
Whenever, in the years that followed, the Honorable Mark Stephen Palmer, later Lord Bideford, heard mention in the wardroom of the ill-advised campaign to take Central America, he did not join in the discussion, but went to his desk to write a letter to an old friend of his, who, retired from the Army, lived quietly and happily on the Island of Jamaica.



WITH A PROP AND A PRAYER

By COLEMAN MEYER

Side rubbing side, the 'Beam *and* Mimi *screamed on. Then, yards ahead, the lone opening in the bridge loomed.*



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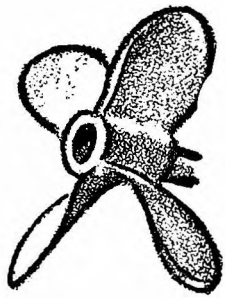
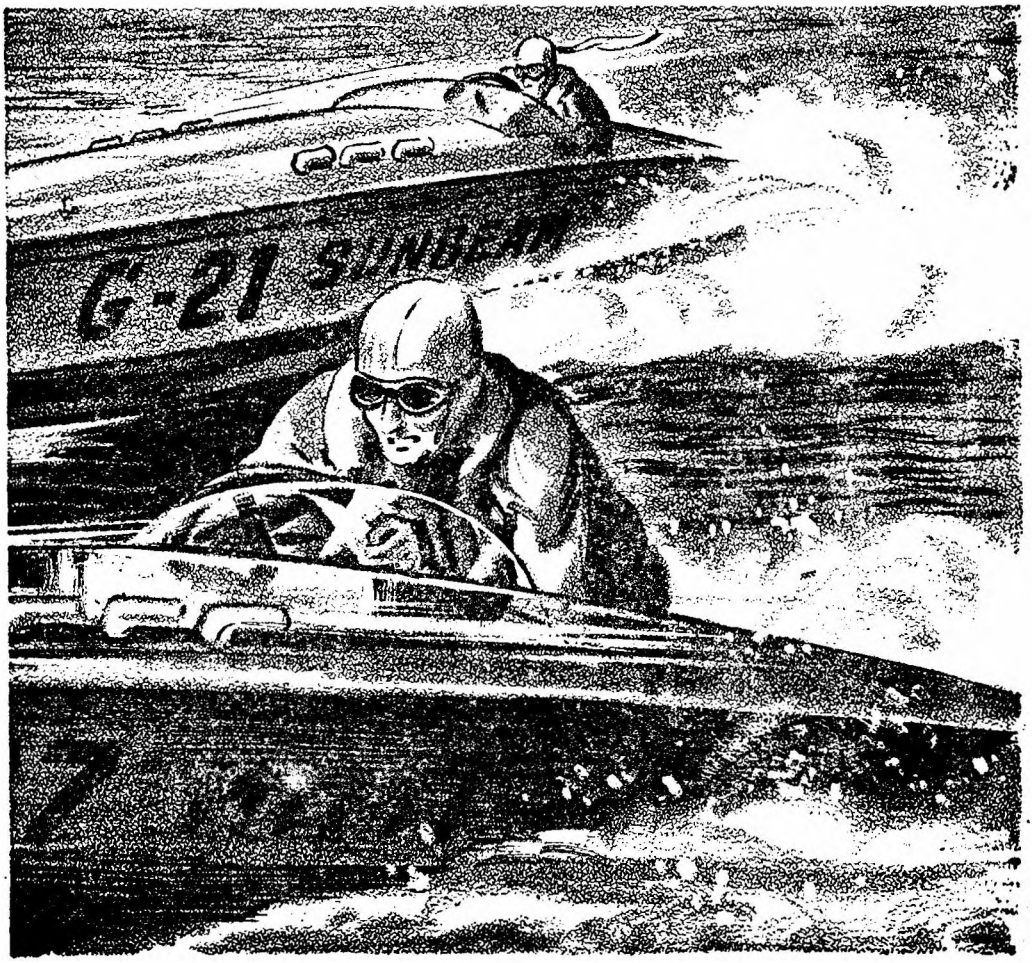


SHIPS are but boards, sailors but men..." I think it was Shakespeare who passed that one on. Personally I'd only give him half marks on it. He might have been right on the second but he scored a clean miss on the first.

Maybe he had sleek clipper hulls in mind when he wrote that, knife-nosed and with flowering canvas. Certainly he didn't have *Miss Mimi* as inspiration for his pen.

This isn't much of a story for there isn't any conversation in it, conversation, that is, in the accepted sense of the word. I did some talking but *Mimi* hasn't much to say, ever.

But she has all of the other things that go with a proper female make-up—a sweet, deceptive docility that most married men are familiar with, an imperiousness that gets her her own way despite your desires and even the desires of common sense. And then she has those unstable loyalties for lost causes that you find in many of her sex, the thing that keeps



a woman waiting while a guy is trying to get time off for good behavior.

The Stockton-San Francisco race was a sample of lost causes.

When they're under a hundred feet you call 'em boats. And she didn't have a single mast or a piece of flowering canvas. In fact all she had was three short and noisy stacks that peeped from either side of the huge blister which housed her bellowing engine.

She was sixteen feet of black and red and chrome and engine; ebony hull in hand-rubbed lacquer, flaming cardinal red bottom and brilliant chrome fittings, with a tiny, cramped cockpit that left the posterior of her pilot hanging half over the stern in a rubber-padded bucket seat simply because she was too full of engine and instruments and controls to worry much about her driver. All she had beyond that was a tiny step amidships that emphasized the red of her non-trip chines. Oh, yes—and she had better than seventy miles an hour.

I'm a monkey wrench sailor myself and therefore am improperly frowned upon by all the devotees of genoa jibs and luffing to the larboard. To hear them tell it, I don't know what a thrill is until I've jibbed a boom or done something with the spinnaker. I don't know where the larboard is and I wouldn't know a spinnaker unless there was an olive in the glass, but I do know that the guy who shoots these terms at me never went in for river racing in a sixteen-foot screeching package of red-and-black-and-chrome dynamite with nothing but a three-eighths piece of plywood between you and water that is knocking for admission at nearly eighty miles an hour.

And they've never swept a narrow slough-turn at five thousand feet a minute with nothing more than the prop in the water and a prayer in their hearts that nothing heavier than a toothpick is floating on the other side. For they've never seen a bottom stripped the way you take the skin from a banana.

As I said, I couldn't find the jib if I had the boat plans in my hand. But I could find the compression ratio and I know what carburetor jets it takes to wave the tachometer at better than 5000 revolutions per minute. And I know just how far up on the chines I can go in a mile-a-minute turn—that is, I know how much she'll stand for.

Maybe some boats are like the Bard's description—wood and screws and metal. *Mimi* was different. She had character. When she rode the wash wake of a lead boat she'd either ride the bank of water as steadily as a railroad car or, if it suited her fancy and she didn't like the driver, she'd slide off the top of the bank into the outer trough and give you the damnedest scare you ever had in your life. And all of this would be with the same control motion, just wheel pressure gently strained to hold inside rudder for the turn. So, you see, it must have been her temper.

Duke Harmon drove her at the Vallejo half-mile races with easy, three-buoy turns. Duke was a good driver but rough on a boat. I'd seen him cave bottoms before. And she dumped him upside down on a dead-ahead straightaway with no more cross-chop than a bathtub.

There were those who pointed wisely to the twisted fin, that vertical metal plate that hangs from the bottom just ahead of the step and forms a pivot point for the rudder. They said he must have hit something and the twist just half-rolled him. I knew better. For I knew *Mimi*.

Al York wedged himself in her bucket seat at the Lake Tahoe regatta. Al's a nice sort of kid but hasn't that nasty streak in him that makes a good racing driver. He shouldn't even have placed himself with the bunch of maniacs who were there. And yet she rode him into second place with some of the smoothest cornering in wake-churned water that I've ever seen. Al drifted to the dock and told me he never touched the wheel on the turns, just held inside pressure.

Silly! No. I don't think so.

Take the Stockton-San Francisco race. Maybe you know where it's run. In case you don't, it's about ninety miles of water race-course that runs from the broad waters of the main channel at Stockton for just enough miles to get you bedded down, and dives off into some thirty odd miles of narrow river and slough that twists and turns and become progressively narrower as your taste for this kind of racing simmers down to a lemon-flavored, mouth puckering wonderment over whether you can possibly make the next corner.

WE IDLED at the starting line. Jerry Crane and I. Jerry owns *Sunbeam*, another sixteen feet of engine and propeller and instruments. And he sat in the same little overhanging bucket seat with half of him over the stern board. It's a handicap affair with the slower boats off at varying intervals, based from the speed of the hot stuff, and some of the fifty-mile-an-hour rafts had as much as twenty minutes for leeway.

One ball was down on the dock string. That told us it was five minutes more for the scratch boats. And we were the only two scratch boats.

We floated around and fiddled, fiddled with the levers, cinched on the safety belt that wedges you into the three-inch pad of foam rubber covering the seat. It doesn't do much good; sixteen footers beat you black and blue anyhow.

I fumbled with the small board that pulls up

from the side and then flips flat to show the clipped-down chart. Sure, you know the course but you need a fast check now and then. There isn't much time to wipe your goggles and look for a railroad bridge at seventy miles an hour.

Either I would win or Jerry would win. It just had to figure out that way. Under the bulging blister of *Sunbeam* was the same V-8 that was cradled beneath a similar blister on *Miss Mimi*. Mine was steamed up to 125 horsepower. I guess his was likewise. Jerry was as smooth as they came and his cornering left nothing to be desired. But *Sunbeam* was wood and metal and screws. *Mimi* loved to race.

The one-minute ball came down on the dock and Jerry waved a hand. I nodded and reached for the starter button. You don't run engines at the line—not in race-bred boats. They don't have water-pumps, and cooling is only through two tiny scoops just ahead of the step. *Mimi's* engine caught, she roiled water for a moment, then bit the rudder and swung, facing the other way. I heard *Sunbeam* bubble and we idled in the opposite direction from the starting line for perhaps thirty seconds.

I held up my hand and Jerry's white-helmeted head nodded. Both boats turned slowly back toward the starting line.

His hands went up over his head in a clasping gesture. I did likewise. Then I pulled my goggles down, snapped the belt lock. My eyes took in the instrument panel—the water gauge for the right bank of cylinders was crawling upward and was matched by the pointer for the left bank. Oil pressure hung at fifty pounds. Then the sweep-second hand of the clock showed fifteen seconds. I came down slowly on the throttle.

Miss Mimi pushed water ahead, nose buried deep. I stared through the tiny windshield, over the huge black blister and nodded with satisfaction as the six stacks showed the faint blue haze of good oiling. The tachometer idled up to 800 and then the final ball dropped.

One hundred twenty-five horsepower hit her prop with a bellow that sent the gulls a-wing from the cruisers assembled at the starting line. Her nose shot straight up for just a second and then she leveled for the channel.

There was nothing but the tail end of the step and perhaps an inch of the stern in the water. In forty seconds the water speedometer was crawling over the sixty mark and heading for the seventies. The tach was reaching for 5000 and the six stacks were screeching out notes in my ears.

There was plenty of room and this wasn't the place to get excited about racing. I pulled

alongside *Sunbeam* and we both watched as the synchronism of noise seemed to bend in the dock pilings as we flashed by riverside anchorages.

Hull down, flat on the water, running as though on solid-bedded rails, we streaked down the channel. Ahead, the limitless reaches of tules converged at a point that was always farther than my vision, while on the side they merged in a continuous pattern of green and white like figured linoleum standing edgewise.

Thundering under a high tension tower that carried wires over the channel, I checked my chart with a hasty glance and made a position mark. We had about six minutes before we really went to work. I saw Jerry's helmeted head duck toward his cockpit and knew that he was doing the same.

My eyes subconsciously took in the panel and I saw the water heat on the right bank dropping slightly. My fingers reached up and adjusted the water entrance valve, closing it slightly. The heat came up instantly. Good engines run good only when they're hot. That's why amateurs lose races.

We flashed by a cruiser coming in the opposite direction. There wasn't even time to answer the waving hands from the deck. They were doing perhaps twelve or fourteen upstream. Add that to seventy or so the other way and you have a passing moment of better than eighty miles an hour. It doesn't take long.

I checked my watch. So far it was a gentlemanly ride.

In two minutes no holds would be barred.

You don't take the main river on this course. Instead you left turn for the slough country and head for Middle River. It's narrow. Too narrow to hold two boats at any one place. And then—there's the bridge.

I held my foot down on the throttle, took another gander at the sweep-second hand.

A wake appeared ahead. We were catching the first of the handicap boats. I reached and patted the black blister. "Come on, girl. We're in it in a moment!"

Mimi's nose clicked-clicked as we slapped over the wake. We rode the outer edge of it for a moment. It started to steepen so we turned for the flat center. Then I put my foot down. All the way.

The *'Beam* was two lengths behind, balanced right on the crest of the curving wave behind us. It's the fastest spot on a race-course because you have less boat in the water. But it takes a good man to hold it. Jerry was a good man.

We were on the crest now and right ahead of us loomed that hazy stern of a boat. *Mimi* poised herself. We closed the distance with seven-league boots.

Suddenly there was a hell of a roar in my ears and water obscured everything! Jerry had come off our crest in the rear, plunged down the hill of water and taken both of us in a wild swoop!

The guy in the boat ahead couldn't see and lifted his foot abruptly. His stern smashed straight at us out of a wall of spray. I wrenched the wheel hard left and *Mimi* stood almost on her side.

I guess that's all that got us through. The hole between this guy and the bank wasn't wide enough for our beam. It was wide enough for our depth. *Mimi's* prop came clear and I leashed the engine before it tore the shaft out.

We settled with a heaving lunge, lurched to the other side and *Mimi* shook herself as I banged the throttle to the mat. It all happened in seconds and in seconds a pleasant ride had brewed right down to the solids of this business—bitter racing. I cursed to myself as I mopped my goggles with a free hand. Jerry and the *'Beam* had caught us napping. Now it was a stern chase. I reached for the blister again. "Sorry, girl. There's a long way to go, though. We'll take charge of *him.*"

It was a damn poor position, though—behind the hottest boat and in the narrowest water. It wasn't as though you could stake it all on one wide open charge after him, soak up the water and fly it blind for a few moments just to get through and out where it was clear. No. The *'Beam* was hot and we'd have to inch it up the hard way.

Then we hit the slough.

It's nowhere near as wide as a city street. Perhaps no wider than a good wide sidewalk in places. Towering tules shut our vision from everything but this green, rippling pathway. You come blasting down a straightaway heading directly for a bank that to all appearances is the end. Only you know, if you're on course, that there's a turn there. And you hope you can make the turn.

We let the *'Beam* go for a moment. Just one turn ahead to get some flat water to run in. The water speedo hung in the seventies and *Mimi* laid her crimson heels right on the streak of foam that marked the course of the *'Beam* and settled down to business.

The first two corners were classics. We took the first from the inner bank. *Mimi* dropped on her side, rode the chine around and tore down half the tules in the county coming out. Half a foot more and we'd have been dry-land sailing on the opposite bank. The second was rougher water. *Mimi* hesitated a moment before banking and we skidded halfway across the narrow path.

I threw up my goggles hastily for the bank-crash, held inside rudder, and kept the throttle wide open. I guess I was hollering at the same time. *Mimi* would have to do the rest. And she did.

The crimson bottom broke suction from the skid, lifted on the chine and we banked so steeply that I put my hand toward the water for support. It was an amateur's gesture but I couldn't help it. I thought we were rolling.

Jerry's stern appeared on the next short straightaway. The water got rougher. *Mimi* plunged and snorted as her plywood bottom bent under the sledgehammer impact of water as solid as concrete. The blister that housed her engine groaned as the hull twisted beneath it.

I did some thinking. It was almost as if *Mimi* were thinking, too. She seemed to be leaping for the spray-obscured transom of the thundering boat ahead. Somebody had to do some thinking, for the bridge was coming up.

IT WAS a low, piling-supported affair that connected two of the slough islands. The tide was high and that meant six feet of clearance vertical and the only hole was between two pile sets. About ten feet wide at the best. You came into it from a short right-hand turn that gave no time for a sighting run.

"Come on, Baby! This is it!"

Mimi bent to her task. Better than seventy by the water speedo, better than five thousand on the tach. I bent down behind the tiny windshield, found it blurry with water, brought my goggles back just above the top of it to take advantage of the lift in the airstream and wiped them hastily. The spray was smashing the top of my crash helmet like small hammers and I found it hard to hold my head steady.

We pulled up on the *'Beam's* stern slowly. I inched her for the crest and *Mimi* rode that narrow V of water, not much wider than the prop, with a delicate mincing step. We pulled up slightly faster, then much faster. Suddenly the crest disappeared as Jerry shut off for the turn!

Mimi's nose plunged straight for the bottom as the step of the hull lost the almost inadequate lift that had been supporting it! The whole river rolled up from the nose, smashed at the blister, rolled over the top and broke into an explosion of water as it hit the windshield.

There wasn't any vision. Somehow I remembered that the turn was right and tucked in right wheel, gulping through the white, wet cloud that broke over me. The belt tightened, and mingled with the engine roar was the sound of wood splintering. My head struck the cowl edge and I had to let go of the wheel to push myself erect. *Mimi* had to run herself.

There was another moment of confusion, grinding and pitching. I suddenly found myself almost tangling arms with Jerry Crane as we rubbed and lurched against each other.

Side rubbing side, the *'Beam* and *Mimi* screamed on, the white cloud vanishing as abruptly as it had formed. Then, yards ahead the lone opening in the bridge loomed!

I left the throttle floored. Somebody had to shut off and it wasn't going to be us! Jerry's grim face was staring ahead and *Sunbeam* never lost a note. The bridge came up with a sickening rapidity.

Then—with female incongruity—*Mimi* settled things.

Her engine quit with an abruptness and

finality that was noisier than full-throttle revolutions. The *'Beam* smashed through the hole and was gone. We coasted the other few yards through while we still had rudder control. Then *Mimi's* nose tipped skyward.

You learn a few things after you've been racing a while, and before she was full tipped I had the belt unfastened and was snapping at the blister latches. Her hood is hinged at the front and two motions served to heave it forward. A scooping motion at the tool pouch produced a small bottle of ignition proofing, a compound that will start them, soaking wet. It was cellophane sealed and I didn't bother with a knife, just rolled it behind my teeth and split the cap covering. Thirty seconds of dabbing at the ignition switch and a hasty swipe at the distributor, plus some profane bellowing, and I had the hood down. I punched the started button.

She ground for a moment. Nothing happened. I pumped the throttle frantically, could hear the noise of *Sunbeam* dying in the distance. Then, as though nothing had happened, her engine caught with a full-throated, full-throttle roar that slammed me back in the seat.

I was really talking to myself now. No. I was talking to both of us. "You did it! Dammit! O.K. O.K. Now you're gonna run for it!"

And run for it we did. I've never had such a ride. *Mimi* seemed sincerely sorry and laid for the turns with a smooth precision that was docility and finesse to the final degree.

Ten years I've been herding race boats. And I balled up all those ten years into one wad and threw them into every corner. Brush the tules on the inside turn. Gouge out half the bank on the opposite side coming out.

There's a place above Farrar's Park that's as right angle as they come. No wider than a sidewalk, as square as a carpenter's angle. It could be made at thirty, might be made at forty and, if you wanted to drive over your head, the gods might smile on you at fifty. So we hit it at a mile a minute!

The bank has tules. It's soft dirt and perpendicular. And we left the print of *Mimi's* side on that grassy side for half a block!

It was paying off, though. Rough water was appearing again. Save ten seconds on ten corners will net you a mile and a half in distance. I was dripping wet. It could have been water. I think it was sweat. Farrar's Bridge, second and last before the open channel that led to San Francisco, was coming up. And the first guy through it might be the first guy in San Francisco—if the bay wasn't rough.

The channel widens above Farrar's, widens and straightens. It's a bridge like the one above, only higher. You've got ten feet vertical and about the same sideways.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Try it sometime from a two-mile straightaway run. You've got five feet of boat and ten feet of hole. And you've got to fit it through that hole at close to eighty miles an hour. If you don't, you haven't got a boat. Just matchwood.

We caught the *'Beam* as we pulled into the wide channel. Bear in mind we didn't catch her with speed. We just caught her with luck and cornering. We leveled out. Jerry turned his helmeted head and grinned as we inched up alongside. The noise was terrific. There wasn't anything more I could do now. *Mimi's* engine was wide open. So was the *'Beam's*. Somebody was going to lose a couple of minutes and a couple of miles—and he was going to lose it right here at the bridge.

"Come on, Baby! Come on!" I reached up and closed off the water to both banks slightly. Maybe a little more heat would raise that stubborn tach. In forty-eight seconds we covered one mile of the two. And we hadn't gained an inch!

I thought rapidly. We had fifty miles to go beyond the bridge—all open water. I hated like hell to lick her engine. It had to carry us a long way yet. But we needed that two minutes. "Here goes, Baby!" I kicked both banks to full water open and reached for the mixture control.

It's a gamble any way you look at it. Full water drops the cylinder heat. The mixture control is a slide that opens in the manifold for more air. It leans the mixture out dangerously, so dangerously that I've seen the sparkplugs blow clear out of the cylinders, and valves curl up instantly, like potato chips. But just for one moment, passing through that point of almost full lean mixture, they go as if you've been hit by a PT boat.

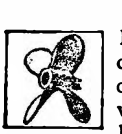
The bridge came closer. God! That hole looked small! I looked at Jerry. He grinned at me, but never lifted his foot a fraction.

I pulled the mixture to full lean.

Mimi jumped—almost out of the water. The tach hand jumped crazily. The water speedo needle wobbled. I eased right wheel and prayed that my aim was good. Then I just couldn't take it and shut my eyes.

There was a moment when all the noise of the six days of creation smote my ears. The piling caught the staccato shriek of her engines and flung it back to the hull. Then we were through the hole.

I slammed the mixture back to full rich, set the water inlets. Then I remembered—and breathed. I *was* wringing wet now. And I *knew* it wasn't water.



IT WAS nine minutes to the main channel and I was gleeful as we crossed New York Slough. There was no wind and the main river, broad as a valley, was as smooth as a four-lane highway. I cut around No. 8

buoy marker, set her nose for the Antioch Bridge and cocked an ear to the engine.

There seemed to be no damage, so I hung out into the seventy-mile breeze and peered at the right side. The top plank was splintered at the mid-ship from the collision at the first bridge. I pulled the computer off the board and ran a distance check. We had about six minutes to Antioch, eighteen more to the railroad bridge that spanned the vast Carquinez Strait and then four more to the towering Carquinez span. Wide water, all of it. Then, ten minutes more through San Pablo Bay and we'd find out what the score was.

Miss Mimi reached for distance like a P-38. We caught eleven boats in the stretch between the Antioch and Carquinez bridges. I scratched a tiny mark on the chart board for each one. There were fourteen entrants. Counting Jerry and myself, it left one unaccounted for. Perhaps he'd broken up in the sloughs, got lost or had any one of half a dozen racing accidents. Still it left you uneasy until you could account for him. Perhaps he *was* ahead. I inched in another hundred revs.

San Pablo Bay was mirror smooth and we ate it up, thirteen miles in just over ten minutes. I looked behind and caught the *'Beam* in the distance. Maybe two minutes back—and that's not enough.

We made San Pablo Point in a long, swooping turn that curved a half-mile wake behind us. Then I stifled a curse as I caught San Francisco Bay in the afternoon sun.

Feather tufts of white were appearing here and there. Suddenly *Miss Mimi* appeared terribly small. "Pretty soon, girl. Come six minutes and she's gonna knock your teeth out!" Her only answer was to take off from a light swell and land like a seaplane on the other side. A hasty look showed the *'Beam* getting larger. I reluctantly used the last of the throttle for what smooth water remained.

It was about ten minutes instead of seven or six. Ten minutes before we swept out from behind the protecting flank of Angel Island. The impact was like running into a stone wall.

Three and a half miles away was the haven of the St. Francis Yacht Harbor. Two minutes and a fraction at racing rate. And between it was a protecting bulwark of tufted waves.

I got off the throttle hastily, even so too late. We plunged over the top of a wave and buried the nose in the next one. It took full throttle and 125 horses to lift the weight of water and she shuddered coming up. I swallowed my heart to put it back where it belonged.

With sixteen feet of racing boat you drive this water only one way—with horsepower and a prayer. The horsepower holds the nose down and the prayer holds the bottom on, if you're lucky and He's listening.

I gauged the troughs, took the next one at 3000 revs. We leaped completely over the following crest, hit with a shuddering impact in the trough and submarined halfway through the third crest. *Mimi's* hull twisted and groaned. The next was at 2000. We soared off the top, leaped the uneasy valley beneath the keel and slammed the step squarely on top of the crest!

I snatched a hasty look astern while we were airborne. The *'Beam* was rocketing from crest to crest in great leaps—and gaining ground! I remembered she had a two-ply bottom!

The next five minutes was a nightmare. Forty miles an hour from crest to crest and it took just that to span the boiling wave tops. *Mimi* was taking it like a Trojan and I was working like a madman. They were twenty feet apart. Three and half miles of them and every one was just like dropping twelve hundred pounds of boat on a cement sidewalk; take-off from crest top, full closed throttle in the air, a moment of closed eyes awaiting the sickening impact that said we'd landed, then a full stamp of the gun to lift her for the next.

Mimi's bottom screeched and groaned. Gaps big enough to fit your fingers in would appear in the deck planking, then close on the next flailing smash. I talked to her—when I could get my breath. "Stay in there pitching, baby! Come on, girl! Just a little more now!"

The hood hinge broke halfway across and the rear latches pulled up. It reared in the wind, struck my crash helmet heavily and bobbed upside-down astern. *Mimi's* naked engine snarled in front of me. It had to be good now. One wave would drown the engine and perhaps me with it.

The chart board broke adrift and I spared a frightening instant to wrench it clear from my feet and toss it overboard.

Lift, close gun—smash! Full gun, lift—and smash! Every landing shook something loose inside me.

We had a thousand yards to go when I caught sight of *Sunbeam* out of the corner of my eye. She was making heavy weather, too, but she was heavier and could leap the same gap at a higher speed. I could see the flags that marked the entrance to the projecting arm of the St. Francis breakwater.

Then I suddenly became conscious of the fact that my feet were in water up to my ankles! The realization of what was happening to *Mimi's* fire engine bottom made me sick inside. I reached for the safety belt clamp. That's when it happened.

We were in mid-air. *Mimi* slammed full center on the crest. I heard something crunch. The impact heaved me forward, my hand instinctively clung to the belt clamp and the belt opened. My head smashed the instrument panel.

The engine snarled full throttle. Automatically, my foot came up. But the engine didn't seem to notice.

I was being shaken like a rag doll in the cockpit. We leaped off the wave top. The wide-open engine nearly jumped from the bed as the prop cleared the water. Airborne, we cleared two crests in a mighty leap. *Mimi* wrenched and groaned as the burying prop hit with full power, then cleared two more of the tufted heads in another dizzy bound.

The thousand yards closed in seconds. Every protruding joint in my body was bruised from hitting things as my wet fingers failed to retain their clutch on anything solid. The wheel eluded them time and again.

Mimi made the breakwater. And she made it by herself. She made it in those seven-league leaps, arrow-straight for the opening without a hand on the wheel and guided only by her own good racing sense. She leveled as the protecting arm of the jetty smoothed the water as if it had been suddenly solidified with smooth cement.

I finally caught the wheel halfway through the crowded harbor, kicked frantically at the unresponding throttle pedal. Bruised fingers found the tiny ignition switch. *Mimi's* stern went down, we pushed a huge wave ahead and, nose high, she wedged between a small cruiser and a pile in a mooring slip, her chrome bow bit pointed ludicrously at the sky.

IT WAS an hour before things quit jumping inside me. I found myself in the yacht club lounge with a Scotch and soda in my hand.

Harvey Hansen of the Regatta Committee was looking down at me. "A lucky guy, Kent, a lucky guy," he was saying, shaking his head. "I don't see how you made it."

I was too sore and beaten to care. "How's *Miss Mimi?*"

"She's all right. We cradled her up on the dock."

"She's O.K.?"

"Yeah." He nodded. "Outside of the fact that she has no more bottom than a barbecue grate! There's nothing but ribs from the step forward. She came in without enough bottom to float a cake of soap! Smart work, boy, smart work! If you'd have shut her off that last jump that took the bottom out—shut her even a fraction, anything that would have dropped the nose another inch—we'd be dragging the bottom of San Francisco Bay for the both of you right now!"

"If I'd have shut her off . . ."

Aching as I was, I hobbled out to the dock. *Mimi* was surrounded by a crowd, canted sideways on her skeg. I looked inside—and looked right through her naked bottom.

I told Harvey about it afterward. He raised his eyebrows and murmured something about the hull twisting and stretching out the throttle linkage and maybe somehow jamming it wide open.

I don't know about that. Maybe there are a lot of explanations. All I know is that I reached in there and pressed the foot throttle. The pedal spring was on and it went down and came up! Full closed and full open!

Maybe Shakespeare thinks they're nothing but boards. I can't agree. For my money small boats are smart.

YOUNG MAN WITH A JINX

It got so that every time Dan Edmonds served a ticket on someone, the guy died.

By GILBERT HAMMOND

ILLUSTRATED BY J. CAMPBELL FARREN

I GOT the facts on the Edmonds Fatal Touch case from Trooper Edmonds himself and from Norman Beaker, who used to live in the same town as Edmonds. I don't think Edmonds will shoot me for telling about it now, but Beaker might. Not that there's anything wrong with Beaker—except a deadly fear of what people might say. The way he acts you'd think he was managing director of a mission society—which he is. Then, too, he's married to a woman who thinks she once did something that wasn't quite respectable and has been trying to make up for it ever since, so you can work it out from there. Anyhow, it's all in the public domain, and besides the names are faked.

Plenty of people in Sneedville could tell you about that slug-happy July when Edmonds and his "fatal touch" got hotter than the weather. A young reporter started things off one day at the State Police barracks.

Dan Edmonds was making out a report when this chap cracked, "Boy, I hope you never get married."

"Why?" said Edmonds. He was a big, blond, easy-going cop, and good-natured even with strange reporters. This one hadn't been around long.

"On account of that jinx you've got," said the reporter, whose name was enough like Chivers for me to write it down that way.

"What jinx?" Edmonds asked.

"Three in a row. It doesn't bother you any, but it sure is sudden death to other people. I guess that's the kind of jinx to have, though, if you've got to have one."

Edmonds started scowling hard at the report he was socking out on an old Remington. It was about Mrs. Paul Felston, thirty-seven, who'd been found dead in her home at 1173 Crescent Terrace, Potterton, of shotgun wounds in the head. Investigation indicated suicide or accident—it didn't make much difference which. The only odd part of it was that Edmonds had given her a summons for speeding the Sunday before. Now she was dead and couldn't answer it. If the same sort of thing hadn't happened in the two traffic cases Edmonds had written tickets on just before this one, there'd have been nothing to get worried about. And even that might not have bothered him, except that he *was* going to get married, and in less than two weeks, too. Chivers didn't know about that. He kept rattling along.

"There was this young Baxter fellow. Got so drunk worrying what his old man would say about the ticket you gave him that he drove off the Lower Falls Bridge the night before answering it. And that Polish farmer, Wasalowski. Hanging from a beam in the cellar when you went around to find out why he didn't show in court. Now this babe. What do you do to 'em anyhow?"

"Get out from behind the rail," said Edmonds.

"Huh?" said Chivers, with his mouth open.

"I said get out from behind the rail. You guys know damn well you're not supposed to come back here. Get out or I'll help you." Chivers got out.

Of course, from this distance it's quite clear what a bad mistake that was. It only made Chivers think he really had something. Result was, he did a feature for Saturday's Sneedville *Republican* on "Has Trooper Edmonds the Fatal Touch?" The city editor passed it because all it did was give the old teaser build-up to three cases already on the police records. By that time, Trooper Edmonds was himself again anyhow, and gagged the whole thing off. Only that wasn't the way his girl-friend took it.

This Mary Cornish was a very nice, very pretty girl, who was very conscientious about every little thing, but she didn't have whimsy. With the wedding only ten days off, she went up in the air like a V-2 and came down on her beloved betrothed harder than that.

"This is disgraceful," she boiled. "I'm not going to have people saying I'm marrying a jinx. You go around and see the little puppy who wrote that and demand a retraction."

Mary had the idea so often found in small towns—that everything funnels through individual reporters, and editors only do editorials.

Dan Edmonds grinned a mite foolishly, and said, "No use doing that. There's nothing to retract. It all happened. All this guy did was dream up a jinx somewhere. He didn't say he interviewed the jinx."

"That makes no difference. He's written a lot of scandalous nonsense, hasn't he? You make him write a public apology for printing an outrageous write-up like that. You're a State trooper, I should think you'd know how to make him . . ."

And so on. Edmonds knew he couldn't do it Mary's way, but he was a cagy sort and after listening to her for a while, he finally nodded and said, "All right, I'll go and see him." Mary was somewhat mollified.

Dan wasn't kidding. He went to see Chivers, all right, but not to tear his head off as you might expect. He reported back to Mary a couple of days later and he must have been a bit proud of the cute way he'd handled things.

"It's all fixed," he said. "I got around obstacles. This Chivers, he can't retract the story, but—"

"What *can* he do, then?"

"Wait a minute. He can make things retract themselves, and it will be even better."

"How?"

"Like this. I served three traffic tickets in a row and every person I gave one to died. If I've got a jinx, the fourth one would die, too, isn't that right?"

"It's all nonsense about a jinx."

"Anyhow, we worked it out. If the fourth one doesn't die, it breaks the jinx. And the fourth one won't die."

"How do you know?"

"The odds are 'way against it in any case. But I've got it sewed up better than that. The fourth one is going to be Chivers."

"That—"

"Sure. By agreement. I've already slapped a parking ticket on him. He got an O.K. from his boss and I got one from mine. The captain was burned up over the story, too. Figures some nitwit might die of shock the next time I hand out a ticket. So this Chivers'll sort of horse up a story today about getting a ticket from Fatal Touch Edmonds, the man with the jinx, and another story after he answers it, proving there's no jinx. Everybody gets a laugh, the Saturday story is forgotten, and the whole thing works out all around."

Mary had a head on her and she saw that this was a smart scheme. There was a young city editor on the Sneedville *Republican* in those days who sold the paper the idea that it was all strictly legitimate, even highly amusing, and the AP was sure to go for it and mention the *Republican*. The only objection came from Mary, and it was just a mild afterthought.

"What if Chivers *does* die?" she asked.

Dan laughed, and said, "He'll live—if I have to shoot him."

IT WORKED up quite well. The summons was made returnable in a week. Chivers wrote a merry piece on it. Everything, as of the night of the second Tuesday in July, was cozy and getting cozier; wedding plans were coming along nicely and the whole plot was a tribute to the powers of the human intellect to restore a derailed fate to the main line of traffic.

That was Tuesday night. I'm not going to try to ham up any dramatic suspense for what happened Wednesday night because I want to save the space for an eternal truth, *viz:* that the makings of a dramatic blowoff are so commonplace in appearance, you'll never know from looking life down the muzzle whether the gun is loaded or not. Which is nothing to worry about unless you're buying a house, raising a family, working for a living or getting married.

Wednesday nights, once a month, the Community Forum ran a lecture in the City Hall auditorium, which Mary attended because she was hoping to be the wife of a future superintendent, not a pensioned-off trooper. The speaker this time was a man with a name like G. Henry Acorn, and he was one of the last of the real Chautauqua breed, with honorary degrees that I can't remember and a message that I can. He had some kind of a canned lecture that ranged all over everything from collectivism to ceramics, and he called the piece "Bushels of Rubies."

In it he went on about the marvelous unity of the universe and how the slightest action by anyone had a definite bearing on everyone else, even if we couldn't see the connection, and how it was up to everybody to see that the destiny he was carrying around for somebody else was a good destiny and not a bad destiny.

After the lecture, Mary was going over this particular ruby in a placid sort of way when suddenly something came up and hit her a terrific belt. It was a name—"Chivers!"

Mary had never seen Chivers, knew next to nothing about him and all that she did know was bad. Still, what right did she and Dan have to go kicking around Chivers' destiny? Especially—Mary being a girl who worked with the percentages—if Chivers' destiny kicked her back? What made her so sure the jinx was nonsense? Or that Chivers wouldn't actually drop dead? If he did, she couldn't marry Dan Edmonds because then she'd be the next one to go. Chivers had said that himself, or something like it.

Well, think it over. If it doesn't hit you the same way it might not be on account of too much sense but not enough imagination. But letting that be for the moment, Mary began asking Dan questions when he came off duty late Wednesday night. How was Chivers feeling these days? Was he cheerful or peaked? Was he riding around much in autos? Did he

drink or smoke in bed or cross against the lights or did his fixtures leak, and things like that.

"I don't know," said Dan, who was getting moody under all this. "I haven't seen the guy since I put the tag on him."

"Well, why don't you? It means as much to you as to him."

"I can't do that. It would look foolish. I've called on him once and that'll have to hold."

He was stubborn on that, no matter how much Mary jittered at him. She even got her widowed mother and a couple of working sisters to make with the heat. Finally she demanded. 'Will you just *be* here if I invite him to call?"

"No," said Dan, "that's even worse."

"Well," said Mary, "remember that I asked you. I can see I'll have to do this all alone and maybe I'm being very silly, but this means too much to both of us. One of us has to be a fool and I'm elected. I'm going to keep an eye on him till court sits Monday morning."

"Meaning I don't call around until then?"

"By phone, Danny boy, only by phone—but be sure you remember to ring. You're sweet, Danny, but you don't know what to do when a gal gets intuitions. Only till Monday. Now come over and sit down and be nice."

Dan was nice about being nice and nice about not being around to be nice. He had his reasons, but they weren't so clear then. Chivers took up the invitation all right, and the record shows what happened from Friday night to sometime after midnight Monday. Most of the Q-and-A is missing because it's hard now to recapture the half-flip, half-pedantic, racy, solemn, bespectacled, reckless, frightened kid reporter that was Chivers—a serious soul who wanted to be devastating, making all the mistakes he had brains enough to make and keeping the scoreboard hot, which was all to his credit.

First of all, he got a warning from Mary.

"I wouldn't be so funny, Mr. Chivers, about Dan's jinx. Jinx is just slang. There are forces. We don't understand them, but we know they're there. One destiny acts on another. I don't know what kind of destinies acted on Dan. Maybe he's just a carrier—"

"Sort of Fate's Typhoid Mary?"

"Understand, I don't believe it. After it's all over we'll have a good, merry laugh, but until then—"

"After it's over you won't laugh. You'll have time to be really sore then. You'll stick hatpins into me."

"If I'm in a position to laugh," said Mary, giving him a brooding look that chilled five clinical points off his thermal reading, "I'll laugh." And she added, skeptically, "I hope we'll all be *here* to laugh. By the way, it's raining out. Have you an umbrella?"

"No."

"I'll lend you one. Don't smirk. George Washington died of getting wet so I guess you're not immune. You can return this tomorrow night. Cheer up, nothing's going to happen. It's just smart to be safe. And for God's sake," she yelped as he left, "don't get hit by anything."

Thursday and Friday nights, Chivers took the same gaff. Mary worked to save him, and on the other hand to find out why he was so bent on staying alive, from his own point of view. When he broke down and described his scheme for an organic legal concept that would abolish injustice forever, she liked the idea and thought it was just the sort of thing that could have made him famous; then she'd sigh and go into a black spell.

Chivers tried to quip it off, but just the same he'd go to bed wearing the pall of doom for a nightshirt. He'd lie awake thinking those three A.M. thoughts, and if you've ever had them you won't need to ask what was happening to Chivers.

By Saturday morning he wouldn't step off a curb if he saw a bicycle three blocks away. Saturday afternoon he had stopped eating for fear of ptomaine, and drinking for fear of convulsions. Sunday morning he was trying to hide his safety razor so he wouldn't remember where he had put it and figuring out how to turn off the main gas line in the cellar. Sunday night he was feeling too sick and shaky even to go out. He phoned Mary to say he wasn't doing so well and wasn't coming over that night.

"No, it's *not* the jinx," he said with a laugh as hollow as a funeral drum. "Just a touch of bubonic plague, I imagine. I'll be on hand in the morning bright and early."

"What's your house number?" asked Mary.

"Four-eleven Stone Street. Why?"

"I'm coming over. I've been afraid of this all along."

"Look, I'm perfectly all right. I—"

But he was talking to himself.

HALF an hour before court sat Monday morning, Dan Edmonds paced the corridors, purveying the merry badinage and putting on a big front of beaming gay confidence.

Half an hour after court sat, Dan Edmonds was the wreck of what was once a trooper.

For fifteen minutes the clerk had been bawling for Chivers. And—just as you guessed—there . . . was . . . no . . . Chivers.

"All right, so what?" argued Trooper Sam Fusagi, getting the rehabilitation work started early. "So the guy played dirty. So he pulled the Dutch act, probably. What did you expect? A guy who would write a thing like that in the first place would be louse enough to knock himself off just to make it stick. Only you don't have to go to hell in a hack just to please him. Anyway, let's get it over with. Cut

the body down, or whatever the hell it is."

"Yeah," said Dan, jerking himself together, "got to finish the inning, anyhow. Just confidentially and between us, though, I never felt sicker."

"I know. That's the business."

Twenty minutes later, they had invaded Chivers' one-room-and-kitchenette. It didn't take much time not to find a body. Then Dan noticed an envelope on the mantelpiece. On it was typed: TO THE CITY DESK, VIA STATE POLICE IF NECESSARY.

"Oh, oh," said Trooper Fusagi, "the note. I knew it. Drag the reservoir."

Dan looked grim and plenty scared as he opened it up. Then he said, "It's not a note, it's a story . By Chivers. For today's *Republican*. It's marked, 'Jinx.'"

"He ain't kidding. Give with the recitation."

In a flattened-out voice, Dan read it off. Boiled down, it went like this—

"Mystery and zero-hour elopement added piquant new garments to the 'jinx' of State Trooper Daniel A. Edmonds as the reporter slated to test his 'fatal touch' and the girl the trooper was to have married Wednesday vanished in the pre-dawn blackness early today—completely and together.

"Investigation showed that Ernest Chivers had checked out of his apartment some time after midnight. With him went Miss Mary Cornish, the trooper's pretty, brunette fiancée.

"Chivers left word that he had only the friendliest feelings for Trooper Edmonds, that he and Miss Cornish were to wed immediately, and that their abrupt decision to elope was due to 'circumstances over which neither had any control'. This cryptic remark was left unexplained, aside from a hint that neither could explain it themselves. There was no clue as to their destination."

"There you are," said Fusagi. "Dirtier than I thought."

Dan didn't say a word. He took the story straight over to the *Republican* office and put it down on the city editor's desk, with just a look and nothing else.

The city editor no sooner gandered the lead paragraph than he began spluttering. The *Republican* never authorized Chivers to go this far. The *Republican* deeply regretted. The *Republican* emphatically deplored. The *Republican* would even be glad to help find Chivers.

"No," said Dan, "I'm not looking for him. All I wanted to know is that he's alive. Just run the story—run the story."

"How about Miss Cornish?"

"I guess she's made up her mind. I wasn't the guy for her. Just my destiny, I guess. Naturally, it's a severe blow. I'll just have to try and forget. However, life has to go on—even life with a jinx."

He gave the city editor a solemn, deadpan stare, said good-by, and left.

Every once in a while, for years after, I'd think of that look. Because I was the city editor. When I ran across Edmonds recently he was doing fine as chief of company police for a big shipyard. He'd never written another ticket, never married, never met up with the jinx again and looked happy.

Just a little later, in the same city, I bumped into another old acquaintance. Beaker, but when I called him Chivers he nearly turned backflips and implored me please to never, never. He didn't mind for himself, but he had a good spot with good money and exerted an influence.

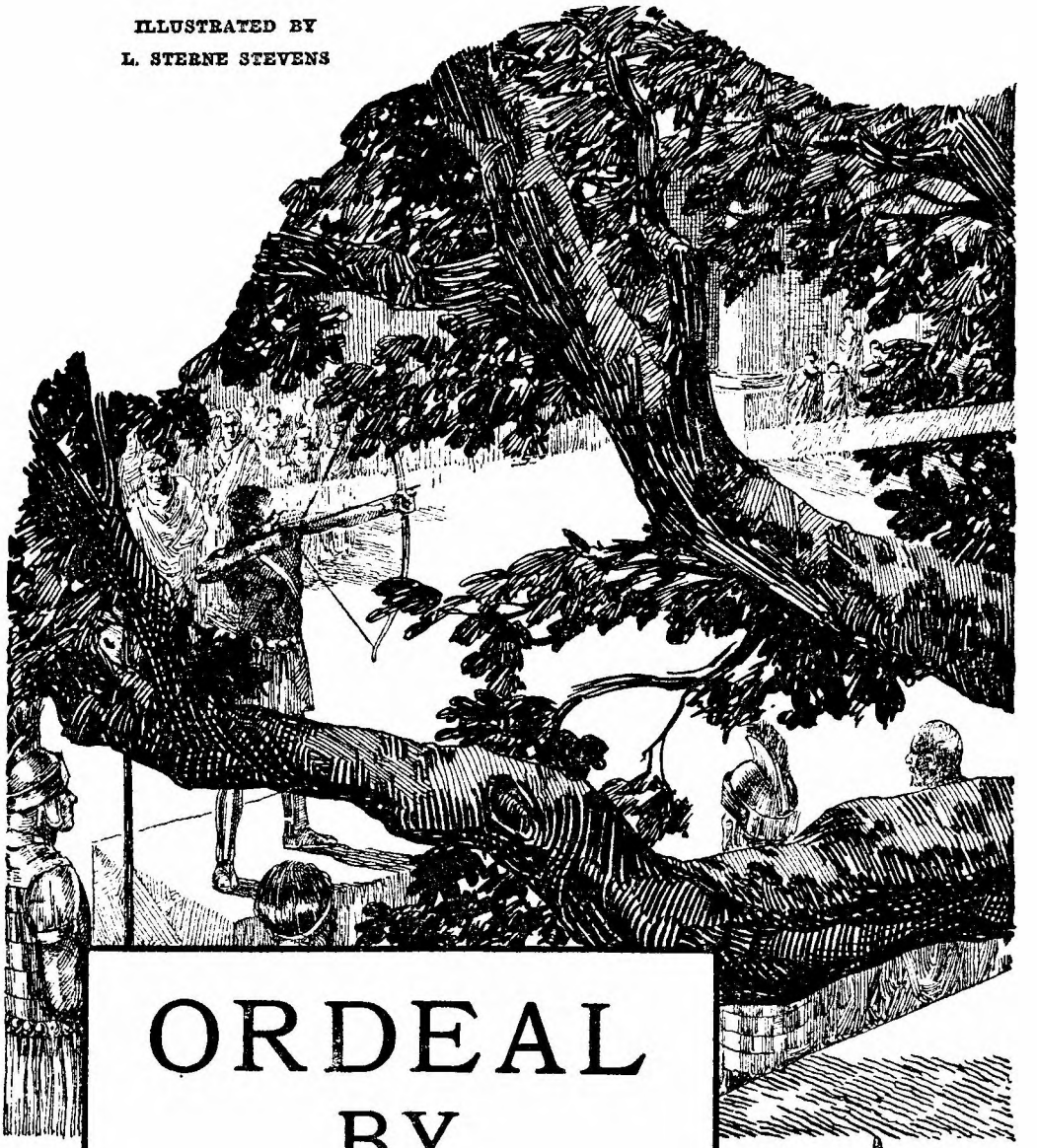
I said, "What on, destinies?"

He grinned in a sick way and said yes, Mary would never be happy unless she was watching the intricate interplay of respectable destinies; she'd made a responsible character out of him and he'd never been so happy. Except just once. That was when he'd been a raw kid reporter and hadn't understood the real crosses of life.

"So it didn't count, then," he hawed. "This is enduring." When he heard what he said he got the green look of a guy whose ulcers are biting and walked away fast.

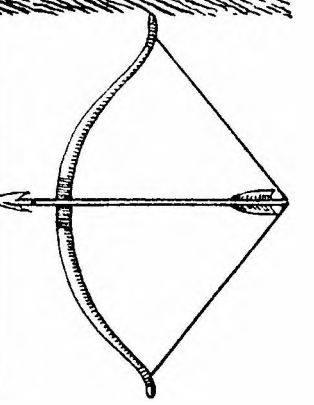
I started this by calling it "young man with a jinx", and I meant Edmonds. I'm still sure about the jinx, but not about Edmonds. Something doesn't add up. One of these days I'll get things right.

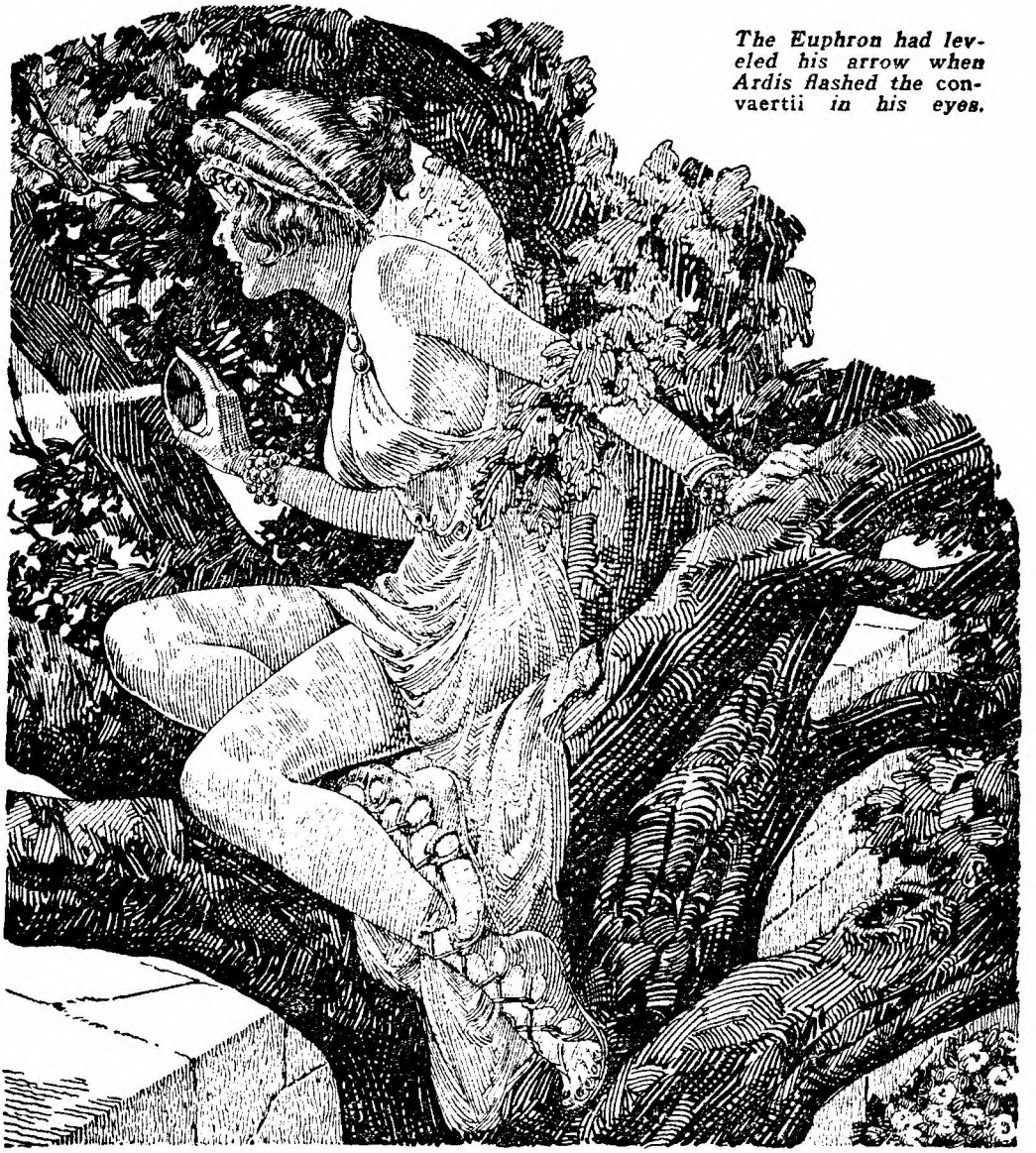
ILLUSTRATED BY
L. STERNE STEVENS



ORDEAL BY ARROW

By
VICTOR HOLMES





The Euphron had leveled his arrow when Ardis flashed the convaertii *in his eyes.*

FOR more than two decades, Marcus Quirinus had kept the borders of the Tragae for his Emperor. He had kept them by force, when need be. And that had been often and to the liking of Marcus, for he was a soldier and a patrician who believed in the Law to its final jot and was convinced that the Law was made to be enforced rather than obeyed. Battle was meat to him, and victory was drink. In every thought and every sinew he was a hard man. Even now, as he sat rigid in his carved ivory chair on the dais, the firelight burnishing his bald head, he seemed a molded piece of bronze statutary which those in the crowded hall either reverenced or ignored.

Among the least impressed was his daughter, Ardis. High above from a balcony, her elbow on the white stone of the banister, she looked down upon her father's captives.

"Why must I stay up here like a dove in her cote with the wolf at hand?" she complained.

From the shadows behind, where a dark shape loomed against the draperies, there came a chuckle. "The Tragae might eat you, my little hummer," a man's gruff voice replied.

"You're here to protect me," the girl pouted.

Again the dark shape chuckled, and it sounded as though a wine slave were rapping his knuckles on an empty tun. "Be content, child," the voice admonished patronizingly.

"You can see the Tragae well enough from here. That should be sufficient for a woman."

Ardis sighed and shook her black curls. "But I can't *hear* anything," she said. "It's like looking into a mirror. You can see their lips move. You know they are talking. But you can't hear what they are saying. Tantalus himself bore no worse anguish than a woman who can see and not hear."

"And Tantalus bore no worse anguish than the poor old soldier who for his sins—blessed be the gods—is chained to your girdle to hear your unending complaints," the shadow grumbled.

The girl's eyebrows arched, her mouth puckering in rueful dismay. "We've tossed a draw, Leo," she said. "But does it seem fair that I must live *all* my life in my father's house on the frontier? Dalca, daughter of Lucus, travels with her father to Lybernum and Capistrae and other places where there's something to do besides weave and instruct the slaves and go to the temple. Yet even here, when excitement strikes—as tonight, with Father flaunting his captured Tragae—I must keep my hidden perch with you as dull company and strain my eyes to glimpse what they're about."

"I've noticed you straining your eyes," Leo agreed dryly. "They seem to strain on that shaggy young barbarian by the Caius column."

"He's no barbarian!" Ardis spoke hotly. Then she bit her lip at the rasp of Leo's laughter. "Just because he is not of our breed, you call him 'barbarian.' He looks strong and brave and well gotten to me."

"Keep on, little hornet," Leo rallied. "You'll be having him the immortal Phoebus in disguise."

"Who is he?" she said.

"They call him Bartemus."

FINGERING the soft wool of her flowing sleeve, Ardis gazed down at the young man. He sat eating among his countrymen at the foot of the column. About his loins he wore a clout of black fur. Despite the chain fettering his wrists, he clutched a meaty mutton bone, which he raised now and then to tear at with his strong white teeth. His was a high brow from which the sleek brown hair streamed backward on broad shoulders. His nose was a bit long, and his flashing dark eyes—darting hither and yon about the hall—gave him the air of a hawk seeking but an instant's release to bolt and be gone. Withal his restless glance, his face was undismayed by the ill fortune that beset him, and he sat as straight and bold as though it were he on the ivory chair from which Marcus Quirinus grimly watched his captives.

"Bartemus . . ." the girl breathed. She noticed the strips of lighter tan across his chest where breastlettes had hidden his flesh from the sun. She saw the smooth, supple muscles with which the mountain and forest had tailored him. "He is good to look upon," she said to herself. "Bartemus . . . strangely, in part, like my own name."

"You say he is one of the princes of the Tragae?" Ardis asked her guardian.

"Yes," said the shadow. "Third in line, I've heard tell, when it comes to their crown—but always first in line when there's fighting."

"I wish Father had never taken him," the girl lamented.

Only silence answered her.

"I said I wish Father had never taken him," she repeated.

Leo spoke from the middle of a yawn. "That's what the weaker sex always says when it goes by a handsome man's appearance. I have no doubt your Bartemus would find small favor upon close acquaintance. He might even snap at you, duckling, like one of his bear cousins I've seen roaming the Tragaean depths."

"I think he'd have the odor of fir trees in his hair," the girl said softly. "And the flint of rocky crags in his eye when he was angry. And no doubt he can run and leap like the Cymbir . . ."

"By the gods!" exclaimed Leo, striding forth from concealment. "That's enough, child. He's a savage and a captive. I'll hear no more."

Ardis was undismayed. Sweetly, she turned her gaze upon the hulking man whose polished breastplate glistened in the gleam from the hearth below. He bore a Captain of the Guard's crossed spears upon his helmet. From his belt hung a dagger, and a scabbard housed the short razor-whetted two-edged sword that the general's soldiery had made a weapon of terror in the border provinces. Ardis gazed up into the man's leathery face, warped with his disapproval.

"You'll hear no more of what?" she asked.

Leo shuffled his sandals against the floor. "Your girlish prattle," he said, and raised a gnarled hand to tug agitatedly at one of the fierce mustachios drooping like snowy hemlock boughs from his upper lip.

Ardis smiled, half to herself. "I'm not a girl any more, Leo. Under the Law, I became a woman in the month of Jaesor. Straightaway, the Law permitted me a woman's thoughts and feelings. Three moons ago, no. Tonight, yes. Are you above the Law, Leo?"

The old soldier's stolid wits failed to capture her logic. "You are my general's child," he said. "I shall be true to my general."

Ardis nipped contemplatively at her fingertip. Mischievous lights danced in her eyes, but she spoke disarmingly.

"I suppose the general loves you," she said.

"He has honored me by saying as much upon occasion."

"But does he love you better than the Law?"

Leo's eyes suddenly were wary. "Whence do you lead?" he demanded.

Ardis laughed. "Does my father love you better than the Law?" she insisted.

"The general loves no one better than the Law," said Leo.

"Then," Ardis ordered quickly, "go down into the hall, my motheaten tiger, and bring Prince Bartemus to me."

The old soldier stood paralyzed. A stark white scar at the end of his nose turned purple as his face paled, then turned white again in the flush that accompanied returning reason.

"What!" he choked.

"I said to go down into the hall and bring Prince Bartemus to me."

"No!" said Leo.

"Shall I plead?" asked Ardis.

"Order or plead—it matters not!" The old soldier, arms folded defiantly across his chest, blew fiercely through his mustachios. "Should I open the gate and invite the panther in?"

"Then," said Ardis with equal resolution, "I am forced to further attack."

Leo's simmering apprehension thickened. He regarded the girl uneasily, as though beneath the cat's stare the mouse had begun to sharpen its claws.

"Leo," the girl went on, her voice cloying with honeyed innocence, "who was the woman I saw leaving your quarters at dawn three days past?"

For a split instant, the old soldier was dumb, but he quickly donned a grotesque mask of innocence.

"A woman?" he said. "Why, child, there would be no woman leaving old Leo's door at dawn."

"She was a woman with a blue veil," Ardis reminded him. "A comely woman, in truth. I was standing at my window. She dropped her veil and I saw you reach through your door and hand it to her, Leo. Your sentry let her out through the gate."

Perspiration beaded the man's forehead.

"She was a market slave," he said. "She wanted but permission to go early to the wharves to buy from the first catch."

"And would the sentry swear the same if Father put him to the torture?"

"Your father!" Leo stared at the girl with disbelief. "You wouldn't tell your father, child."

"The Law says that on pain of death no officer of the general's bodyguard may deal intimately with the townsfolk."

Leo's watery blue eyes appealed. "Since before your mother died, I have served you," he said pathetically. But Ardis found no pity.

"The Law is the Law," she insisted. "We must uphold it."

With the back of his hand, Leo wiped the sweat from his jowls.

"And if I bring you the young barbarian?" he suggested.

Ardis smiled. "We'll send the slave after her fish."

ARDIS listened to Leo's sandals clump down the marble steps. She saw him enter the hall below and edge carefully around its circumference until he stood behind the pillar against which Bartemus rested. Having finished his meal, the young Tragaean sat quietly among his countrymen. On the dais, Marcus Quirinus was surrounded by a babble of tradesmen gathered to discuss the safety of caravan routes now that the Tragae were cleared. Sheltered by the Caius column, Leo reached out and touched his quarry. Ardis caught her breath as Bartemus glanced backward, only to return an indifferent gaze to the hall. Again, Leo summoned the prisoner. Bartemus saw the captain put finger to his lips and beckon. And as Ardis watched the young Tragaean rise and steal quietly in pursuit of his beckoner, she felt her breath quicken.

The two men disappeared through a doorway beside the dais. The girl's fingers were numb upon the cold banister. Her heart beat like the wild tripping hoofs of a panicked doe—half in fear, half in exultation at her audacity. She strained to listen for stealthy feet upon the steps, but it was through the shadowed draperies behind that the men came. Before she realized it, Bartemus stood before her. And she, who was so confident with Leo, knew not what to say.

Leo's displeasure was still apparent. "Here is your barbarian," he grumbled, and the young Tragaean prince reddened.

"A captive for the moment, dog!" he muttered, flaying his guide scornfully with his eyes. Then he turned to Ardis, where his swift roving glance—born of disdain—died of approval. And Ardis was as pleased with her own survey. There was defiance in his gaze, but not disdain. Hers was gentle with curious friendliness.

"You know our language . . ." she ventured.

Her captive's bow was stiff. "The better to fight you with, lady."

Quizzically, Ardis regarded Bartemus. "Are we then still enemies?" she reasoned. "Why not be friends? You are defeated."

"Defeated!" The Tragaean's eyes flashed to the sharpness of his laughter. "Your sluggish legions took only our forest patrols . . ."

The girl's upraised hand quelled Leo's angry interjection.

"Are you then a forester?" she asked.

"When it serves my country." Bartemus spoke grimly. "Marcus Quirinus knows me. And he shall know me again."

"I know," said Ardis. "How came my father to take you?"

"Your father!" Impulsively, Bartemus stepped forward. "Is Marcus Quirinus your father?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I am Ardis, his daughter."

Bartemus' tight lips relaxed into a smile. And when he smiled, Ardis saw nothing but young man; the hawk had vanished. "To think that old Marcus could have a daughter such as you. But then we have a saying among the Tragae: 'Only the granite can beget the gold.'"

"My father *is* all granite," Ardis agreed. "He is strong, and he is stubborn. Perhaps he will keep you captive a long time." Then she dropped her glance guiltily, realizing how much she wished that very thing.

She looked up to find the Tragaean's dark eyes strangely tender.

"I leave tomorrow," he said.

"Tomorrow!"

"I have demanded Ordeal by Arrow!"

The girl could not speak. Her sight misted. She clutched for support at the banister.

"The arrow . . ." she gasped. "You can't . . ."

"Your Law permits it," said Bartemus. "It is my chance to escape."

"But no one escapes the arrow," said Ardis. "Better to live a captive than die like a stricken hare with a shaft in your back."

As she spoke, she grasped his arm to press her entreaty. Bartemus considered the slender white fingers for a moment. Then he gently dislodged them.

"Tell me," he said, "about this Ordeal by Arrow. What is it really like?"

"You didn't know?" she asked incredulously.

"Only by rumor."

"Which is not strange," interupted Leo from his shadow. "In all my years on the border I recall only two who have lived to tell of it. And neither, my young friend, was a Tragaean."

"I shall be the first, then," said Bartemus. "But I should like to know what I face."

"Here," said Ardis. And taking his hand, she led him closer to the banister. "See the tall Euphron near the spit? The one with a peacock plume? Tomorrow when the rope smoulders its fourth knot, they will take you into the Place of Augustin. It lies hard by, beyond our garden wall and before the Temple of Paal. There, they will strike your chains—"

"That," breathed Bartemus, "is my greatest wish. Free my hands and they will fashion fuller freedom."

"You will be free," said Ardis, "except that behind you on a block of stone will stand yonder Euphron, bow in hand and quiver at his back. Straight before you lies the street called Aeopus. At its farther end the city's gates stand wide open. Beyond are your mountains. They will bid you run . . ."

"I am fleet," said Bartemus.

"A slave strikes a gong twelve times. He strikes quickly. At his eighth stroke, the Euphron nocks his shaft. At the twelfth, he lets fly. And he shoots until you fall."

"And if I fall not?"

"Once beyond range, the border is open," Ardis promised. "No one may interfere . . ."

"And the Euphron," added Leo, "receives a half-score lashes for each shaft that missed its mark."

Bartemus spoke soberly. "For once," he said, "the Goddess of Rumor has not borne a bastard. Yonder Euphron has a stern eye and a well-hinged arm. But I shall make it."

"I shall pray before the altar of Paal at dawn tomorrow," said Ardis.

BARTEMUS touched her hair, the links of his chain clanking as he lifted his hand. "You want me to win?" he said, and his voice was full of wonder.

"Yes," said Ardis. "With all my heart."

"Why?"

Ardis flushed. Confused, she drew her robe more closely about her throat. She felt Bartemus draw her gaze. "I know not why," she said, and her hand pressed tight upon her heart's tumult.

"I know why," said Bartemus. "I know why. It is good. The lightning strikes, and the green tree glows with fire. You give me another cause to win freedom tomorrow."

Ardis felt the quick bite of jealousy, a tarter jealousy than she had ever savored before. Foolish, perhaps, but strangely pleasant to the taste.

"And what are your other causes?" she asked.

Bartemus was pleased. "They are many." He smiled. "My homeland comes first. Even above you and my father and mother and my eldest brother. Much above—"

A raucous snore interrupted. On his bench, Leo was asleep—head on one shoulder, helmet tilted askew, mustachios rising and falling to the flail of his self-made tempest.

"Zorg!" exclaimed Bartemus. "I should slay him for taking no better care of my treasure." But Ardis caught the quick twinkle in his eye.

"He tires easily nowadays," she said. "Come. Tell me about the Tragae . . ."

Gently, Bartemus drew the draperies about Leo until only the old soldier's head protruded. Then he led Ardis to a bench at the balcony's farther end. The hearth fire below clothed them in semi-darkness. Her head sought his shoulder. Her hands shared his chains. And Bartemus told her of home—a country of limitless expanse, but divided by petty bickerings and provincial prejudice. A country with frontier ranges so high and deep that Marcus Quirinus' soldiery had never seen their end. With rolling hills beyond the moun-

tains subsiding into grassy flatlands where *estirs* of cattle grazed, and where massive cities were built of timber and *druig*, a kind of clay. Some of the Tragae were nomads. Others were tradesmen and city dwellers. Nearest the frontier were the forest and mountain people with whom Bartemus had been riding when captured. All were Tragae and it was all their land —but sharded into petty hatreds, and weak.

The homesick eyes of Bartemus looked far beyond the walls of the great hall. "Some day," he said, "We will all be united. Ronno, my eldest brother, is the politician who will persuade by argument. Dulpaen, the next, is the scholar who will teach and persuade by reason. I am the warrior who will persuade by force. And there is much fighting to be done."

Ardis sighed. "I am used to menfolk gone to war, but I shall always hate it."

Bartemus' lips were at her hair. "You, too, will serve the cause," he said. "If men had no women to come home to, they might never stop fighting."

"In which case," said Ardis, forthrightly, "the race would soon become peaceful anyway; it would become extinct."

"By the gods!" exclaimed Bartemus in mock dismay. "Am I to be burdened with a philosophizing creature? Let philosophy be and tend my household, lady. For philosophy we'll capture a Greek."

Ardis' soft laughter was drowned in a clatter. Leo's helmet had fallen from his head. The old soldier, sleepily cursing, struggled with the draperies. Ardis and Bartemus hastened to his rescue. Freed, he glared at them, and Ardis put a finger upon his lips to stem his outraged harangue.

"Say nothing," she commanded. "Your prisoner is safe. There! Hear the stir below?"

Leo approached the banister. "Come," he said to Bartemus. "Marcus Quirinus retires. Soon, they will tally the captives."

For a long bitter moment, Ardis clung to the Tragaean.

"Tomorrow!" Her voice caught. "I had almost forgotten tomorrow."

"Let it be *my* concern," said Bartemus. Then he reached into the fur clout at his middle and brought forth an object that glittered in the firelight. "Here is a token," he said.

Ardis examined the gift curiously. "Is it a mirror?" she asked.

"Something like a mirror," Bartemus agreed. "It is a disc of polished silver, somewhat hollowed. We call it a *convaertii*. It catches the sun and throws it as directed. We use it as a means of signaling."

Leo, shuffling impatiently at the head of the steps, cleared his throat.

Ardis fondled the disc in her two hands.

"I shall keep it always," she said.

Bartemus bent closer. "Daughter of Marcus," he whispered, "watch northeastward to Mount Torrais at dusk tomorrow. Our watchpost is hidden there among the rocks. I shall speak to you with the keeper's *convaertii*."

"I shall watch," promised Ardis.

"And if the light shines," said Bartemus, "we shall meet at timberline on the Phaedian mule route at the dawn of the second day."

"I shall come," Ardis whispered.

"Pray for me," Bartemus reminded her.

"All night I shall pray," she said.

With a swift touch of his hand, he was gone.

IT IS women who keep the *hard* watches: A man gone to war . . . a sick child . . . labor . . . a dead hope still too much alive to entomb . . . Those are the *hard* watches—alone in a room where the very silence feeds the inner humming of the ear, where chill paralyzes the knee, and the voice husks to impotent soliloquies—alone except for Fate cracking his knuckles outside the door and the hideous mute monster of Whatmaybe leering from his dark corner.

That was the watch that Ardis kept. Leo had gone to his house by the gate. Marcus Quirinus no doubt slumbered soundly upon his hard couch in his bare apartment. Even Bartemus, for all she knew, slumbered, too. From time to time, Ardis sought her balcony to peer down into the dark hall where the fire glared and snapped from beneath its huge backlog like a dog driven into its kennel. From the dark there arose the sound of many men breathing, and the smell of sweat and fatigue and damp wool. Somewhere among the sleeping forms she knew Bartemus was stretched, but she could not distinguish him. At times she hoped he slept; at others she felt the vigil light within her breast must burn in his. Yet, knowing men, she reasoned that Bartemus probably was gulping the deep draughts of sleep that would bring him strength. Nursing the rush light at her tiny altar of Paal, caressing the *convaertii* as though it were a relic, she prayed only to rise, and rose but to pray again.

Alone, she feared the dawn, yet watched for it. And when it came, she greeted it anxiously from her open window. She watched the sleepy guard at the gate smother his fire with wet straw and saw the smoke climb a straight ladder. It would be a windless day . . . a bowman's day. She watched the townsfolk in the road—yawning, tousled stragglers at first, then a throng pushing and shoving and stumbling over each other's heels in the narrow street on their way to the market. She studied them with the dread knowledge that in but a little time they would push and shove and stumble over each other's heels to witness the Ordeal by Arrow.

Almost before she knew it, the sun had

straddled the low foothills behind the lake. The *convaertii* caught it and tossed it against the inner shadow of the wall. On impulse, Ardis shot its dazzling beam at the guard, who turned curiously, then tossed up his hands in an angry gesture. She smiled as he rubbed his eyes. Then her smile vanished. And, with it, she vanished from her window.

Ardis was alone in the garden when the trumpets sounded. In the lower hall that morning Leo had found her and she had sent him away.

"Stay inside the walls," he had warned, "and I'll bring you comfort when it's over."

Hearing the trumpets and the trample of feet in the soldiers' courtyard, she ran to a huge walnut in the middle of the sheltered garden which tossed its thick branches above the wall. Pausing only a moment to learn if she were seen, Ardis lifted her robe and twined it about her waist. Then she clambered up the tree.

The rough bark tore the soft flesh of her knees and thighs, but she did not feel it. Soon she was hidden among the leaves. High up she climbed, then settled herself in a crotch where the trunk supported her and a vista opened onto the paved temple square where the eager townsfolk were penned back by a cordon of sentries.

Even as she settled herself, Marcus Quirinus and his procession came into view. Ardis sobbed when she saw Bartemus. But her sob was laced with pride. Neither to the right nor to the left did he look. Nor did he heed the craning crowd's ribald jeers. Marcus Quirinus led his soldiers to the temple steps, then ascended with his *annunciator* to the portals. Paternally, he viewed the crowd while the Ordeal was proclaimed.

Ardis head the *clink-clink* of the armorer's hammer striking Bartemus free. The tall, black Euphron had climbed to his block of stone. There he stood grinning, the crowd's pedestaled hero for the moment. His shoulder muscles bunched as he tested his polished bow. Then from its quiver, he withdrew a long, naked arrow. Slowly and maliciously, he trimmed its feather and fingered the point. Behind him, on the pavement, a slave lifted high a huge brass gong and rubbed it with his thumb to make the vibrant humming of the metal buzz like swarming bees. The *annunciator* finished. There was a swirl among the soldiery, and Bartemus stood free.

The young prince flexed his arms and danced upon his toes for an instant to welcome the blood. But his eyes were fastened upon the city gates, and Ardis knew that he saw the mountains beyond . . . and home . . . and, perhaps, she thought, he saw the daughter of Marcus Quirinus waiting for him upon the farthermost peak. Even as the slave raised his fist and smote the gong, Bartemus lingered for an instant.

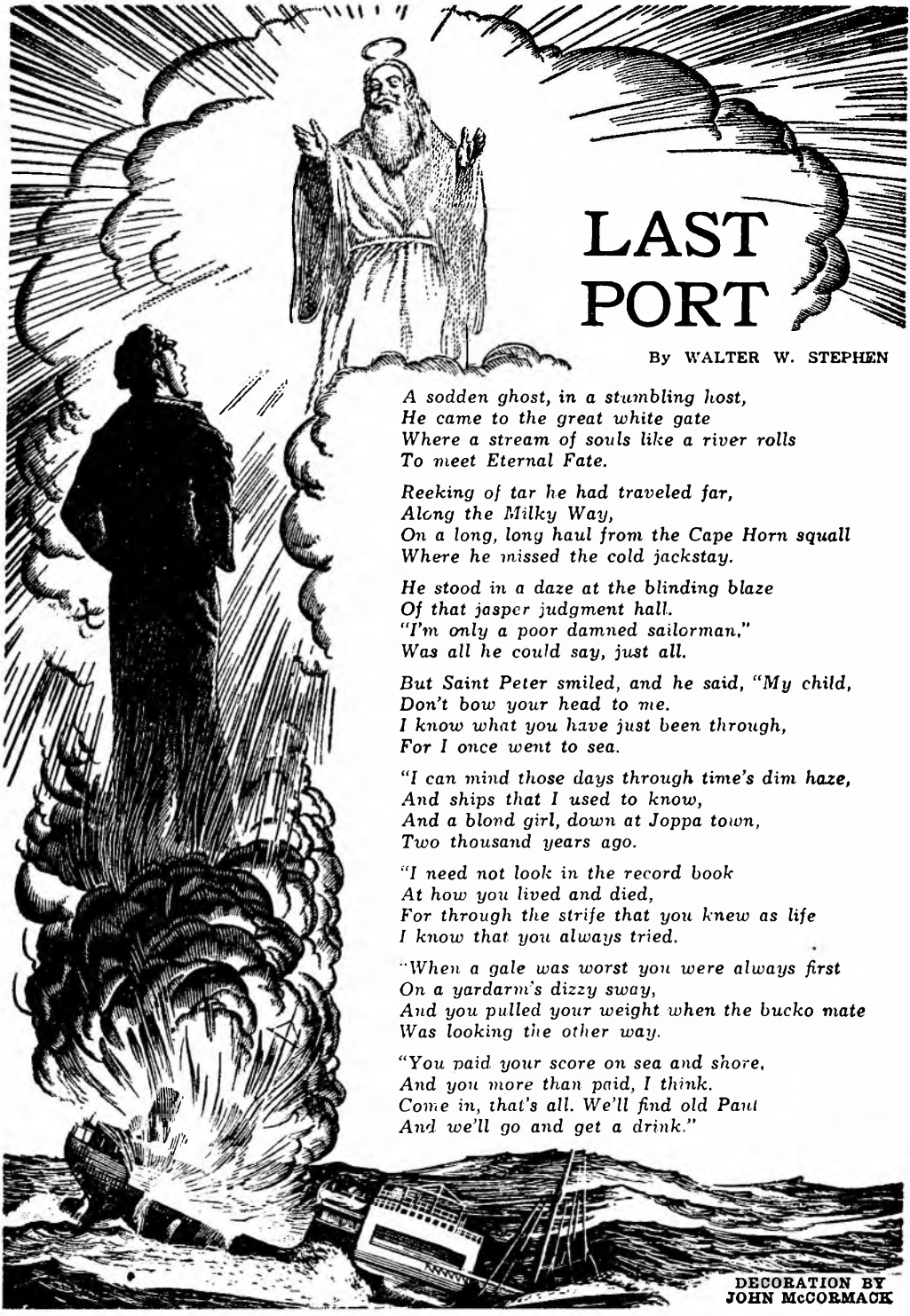
"Run!" shrieked Ardis, but her voice was swallowed by the clamor of the crowd. "Paal!" she cried. "Give him wings!"

Bartemus was running. Ardis took no count of the gong's strokes, but she saw the Euphron calmly nocking his arrow. The huge black tensed his cord. Ardis, fighting the impulse to send her glance with Bartemus, raised her *convaertii*. She was the daughter of Marcus Quirinus now. Her hand was steady. Her face was set. Her courage had waited only to be summoned.

The Euphron had leveled his arrow and drawn it to the tip. Confident, he waited. Then, plucking the sun from out of the branches, the *convaertii* dashed it full into the archer's leveled eye. He could not stop the shaft. Blinded, his bow swerved and his arrow sped wild. The crowd roared its anger and disappointment. Swiftly, the Euphron drew another arrow. Again, as he shot, the *convaertii* smote him. The crowd surged forward, its anger centered upon the hapless Euphron, who, frightened and dismayed, vainly strove to pull once more his mighty bow.

For the first time, Ardis dared look down the street of Aeopus. Far toward the city gates, running as though the wind lifted his heels, Bartemus left the city behind him. Ardis clung to the walnut's sturdy trunk and sobbed her relief . . .

It was past noon when she finally climbed down from her shelter. Once, Leo had come into the garden with her name on his lips, but she had not replied. Now she went to find him. She had contrived an errand to take him in search of the Phaedian traders' camp beyond the city. She wanted to be alone—happily alone—when she climbed to the battlements at dusk to watch the sun set in a blaze of glory on Mount Torrais.



LAST PORT

By WALTER W. STEPHEN

A sodden ghost, in a stumbling host,
He came to the great white gate
Where a stream of souls like a river rolls
To meet Eternal Fate.

Reeking of tar he had traveled far,
Along the Milky Way,
On a long, long haul from the Cape Horn squall
Where he missed the cold jackstay.

He stood in a daze at the blinding blaze
Of that jasper judgment hall.
"I'm only a poor damned sailorman,"
Was all he could say, just all.

But Saint Peter smiled, and he said, "My child,
Don't bow your head to me.
I know what you have just been through,
For I once went to sea.

"I can mind those days through time's dim haze,
And ships that I used to know,
And a blond girl, down at Joppa town,
Two thousand years ago.

"I need not look in the record book
At how you lived and died,
For through the strife that you knew as life
I know that you always tried.

"When a gale was worst you were always first
On a yardarm's dizzy sway,
And you pulled your weight when the bucko mate
Was looking the other way.

"You paid your score on sea and shore,
And you more than paid, I think.
Come in, that's all. We'll find old Paul
And we'll go and get a drink."

DECORATION BY JOHN McCORMACK

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

TEAK

FOR THE CAPTAIN'S MISSUS

By

REESE WOLFE

CAPTAIN CAREY handed the glasses over to his chief mate and leaned heavily on the *Sulu Star's* dodger, still peering ahead. "You're right, Mr. Totten. She's adrift. Can you make out her name?"

"It's been painted out on her stern, sir." The mate shifted the glasses. "Nothing on the bow either."

"Can't we speak her on the radio?"

"Sparks says he can't get a peep out of her."

Captain Carey grunted. "Funny thing. War's over, but a sight like that can still make a man jumpy, eh?"

Mr. Totten nodded gravely.

Beside the tall, spare frame of the mate who had the mournful expression of a Saint Bernard, Captain Carey strongly suggested the sturdy breed of an English bull. An old English bull. For the war at sea and all it could do to a man was in his eyes.

"Queer thing," he began, "no sign of damage or—" He broke off, and stepping briskly to the engine-room telegraph, rang down the engines. He was uneasy in his mind about it, but there was nothing else to do. This unexpected maneuver, he reflected, would undoubtedly upset the engine watch. With Apia their next port of call they had a right to expect to be left unmolested by the bridge for another week, and he waited with some tolerance for an answering ring. They were

It was a short, bone-crunching blow to the chin, swung from the level of the table, and it sent the German sprawling.

through with the war, all of them. Once again they were a peaceful ship on a peaceful mission. What fighting remained in the world, he mused, was not for him. The trouble in China . . . Trouble in Java . . . He was leaving it all behind. He was going home . . .

The answering jangle of the telegraph ended his reverie, and a shrill whistle brought him to the speaking tube. A voice sounded hollowly in the tube, "What the hell's goin' on up there? Don't you know the war's over!"

"This happens to be Captain Carey," he replied icily. "We've sighted a drifting ship. Stand by."

As he rejoined Mr. Totten on the bridge wing a flag fluttered to the signal truck of the drifting vessel. "She's in trouble, all right," he said to the mate. "Fetch me the megaphone."

Riding high above her marks, with a smokeless stack, the stranger had a dead, awkward look. But as the *Sulu Star's* drift brought her closer abeam, Captain Carey could make out a handful of men lining her bridge rail. He raised his megaphone. "Who are you?"

"*Dinteldyke!*" came the answering hail. "From Batavia!"

"Why the devil don't you answer our radio?"

"It's out of commission! Stand by, please. We'll send over a boat!"

A small boat was promptly swung out, and four pairs of oars flashed in the late afternoon sun. Captain Carey counted a dozen men in the heavily loaded craft. "Something queer here," he growled to the mate. "The crowd in that boat's big enough to swamp her."

MR. TOTTEN hurried off to see about the pilot ladder, and presently the first of the visitors, a big, red-faced man, swung over the side. He stood in the well deck a moment, swiftly taking in the deck cargo of teak, the handful of curious seamen gathering at the rail, the officers watching from the bridge. His uniform was devoid of any insignia whatsoever. Finally his gaze rested on Captain Carey waiting for him at the top of the bridge ladder.

"I am Captain Korf," he called up to him with only a trace of accent. "We are in trouble, Captain. The dynamos. I need help." As he spoke, the other occupants of the small boat clambered one by one over the side.

Captain Carey frowned. "How long have you been adrift?"

"This is the fourth day."

"That's funny. You should've had help before this. There's generally an Australian patrol boat hanging around in these latitudes."

Captain Korf shrugged and climbed up to the bridge deck, followed by another officer whom he introduced as Mr. Wachter. "First we break down," he explained, "then our radio goes out. Bad luck comes in bunches, eh, Captain?"

Captain Carey examined him shrewdly. His ship might be a merchant ship but Korf was no merchant skipper. Neither he nor Wachter needed any insignia to reveal them as military men. It was stamped all over them. "I'll radio Port Moresby," he said, then turned to the mate. "Mr. Totten—"

"One moment, Captain." Korf's voice was sharp. "Before you do that I would like a word with you. Alone."

Captain Carey jerked his head in the direction of the saloon cabin and led the way. As he stepped inside he said over his shoulder, "You're Dutch, I suppose, being from Batavia?" There was no reply and he looked around. Framed in the doorway stood Captain Korf. Behind him was Mr. Wachter. Both men held heavy automatics.

"Just stand where you are," Korf said quietly. "I do not wish trouble—for either of us."

Captain Carey chewed his lip, inwardly raging at his own gullibility. "So you aren't broke down after all," he said hoarsely. "What do you want?"

"I need coal—badly, Captain—and food. My crew is starving. If you will give me what I want there will be no trouble."

"Nazis, huh? So you've turned pirate, robbing peaceful ships on the high seas!"

Korf smiled with his lips only. "Have it your own way, Captain. We are a ship without a country. With me it is a matter of life or death. For you, if you are wise, it will be live and let live."

"I suppose you realize you're pirating an American ship?"

"Believe me I know." Korf's smile had a hint of triumph in it. "I have been waiting for you." He turned abruptly and gave an order to Wachter. He was all business now. To Captain Carey he said, "You will instruct your chief engineer to extinguish the fires immediately. Smoke attracts undesirable attention. I am sending a man to—ah—assist with your radio."

"Korf, you must be crazy!" Captain Carey exploded. "You can't get away with this. The war's over. When my government hears of this—"

"Not all the fighting is over, Captain. You should know that. You have just come from Batavia. Who knows?" He shrugged. "Perhaps you have been running contraband. I can make a formal search if you like. You could enter that in your log. It might look better for both of us when you get home, eh?"

"Contraband! What's contraband about a deck load of teak logs and a cargo of rubber and coffee? Now I know you're crazy!"

The German's little blue eyes grew flinty. "You have my orders," he snapped. "I must remind you that haste is imperative while the sea is calm."

Captain Carey followed him out on deck. He observed that two more boatloads of armed seamen were coming aboard. Mr. Totten, looked dazed and white around the lips, took his orders without a word, and commenced the job of getting fenders rigged for coming alongside the German ship. Floating up from the region of the coal bunkers came the profane voice of Mr. Donahue, the chief engineer, raised in helpless protest.

It was a bitter moment for the skipper of the *Sulu Star*. It hurt his pride, too, to wind things up this way. Through four years of war he'd delivered his cargoes safely. And now, with a cargo of his own. . .

His thoughts went to his wife. He and Mary were alone now that the boy was grown and had a third mate's ticket he was eager to use. After all these years Mary had certainly earned the right to plan their new home, built just as she wanted it. It was to be as sturdy as any ship, and the teak he was bringing home with special permission of the Line, was to go into it.

She'd laughed at his idea of bringing teak logs all the way from Java as typical of a sailor's impractical notions about shoreside affairs. But he'd stood firm. "We want quality, Mary," he'd insisted. "Something solid. And when we're gone it'll be something we can be proud to leave the boy." In the end she was as pleased with the idea as he was. And now, on this last trip, with a pension in the offing and a bonus for a perfect record. . .

Captain Korf's strident voice wrenched him back to a consideration of the job at hand. Muttering an oath, he climbed wearily to the bridge.

IN THE swift tropic twilight, electric clusters were rigged on deck, and the methodical rape of the *Sulu Star* began. Her stores and her coffee cargo were seized upon hungrily. But the slow, monotonous task of transferring her fuel with jury rigged lines dragged on into the night.

In the chartroom under the glare of a desk lamp, Captain Carey's features, lined with deep concentration, were all but obscured in a haze of tobacco smoke. Spread before him was a litter of charts and tide tables. He'd been studying them a long time. An idea, just the ghost of an idea concerning these labyrinthine seas, was nagging at his memory. When Mr. Totten hurried in he scarcely glanced at him.

"Weather's kicking up, sir."

He unclenched his teeth from his pipestem. "Where's Korf?"

"On the foredeck."

Captain Carey strode to an open window in the wheelhouse. "Korf!" he called down to him. "We're due for a blow. I'll have to get clear!"

"Not yet, Captain."

"When they come they come fast in these waters," he warned. "Then neither of us will have a ship."

"I said not yet," the German repeated.

Captain Carey knew the futility of argument with a man like Korf. But thirty-odd years spent in sail and steam, picking his way over the shallows of the Great Barrier Reef, had made a cautious man of him. His recent calculations of their drift goaded him to an anger born of desperation. "I'm giving orders right now for a full head of steam," he called down to the German. "Understand?"

"For steam, yes. But to cast off, no."

"If this blow keeps up I'm going to cut loose from you. It's suicide any other way!"

Korf didn't answer him.

A moment later, a heavy ground swell added its weight to the choppy sea, and a grinding together of the two ships' plates brought Mr. Totten hurrying out to join the captain at the window.

"I didn't think those fenders'd hold up," he muttered. "There's a real push in this wind."

"This settles it!" Captain Carey shouted to the German, and clattered down to the foredeck where he found Korf already giving orders for the two vessels to sheer off. "Thought you'd come to your senses," he growled.

"It is most unfortunate," said Korf. "It means we must continue the work of unloading in lifeboats."

"What!"

"An unpleasant business, yes?" His teeth showed white under the glare of the cargo lamps. "You see now how absolutely necessary it is that I have your supplies."

"You won't get 'em in lifeboats. Not in this sea."

"I can try."

"Look here, Korf"—he took a deep breath, trying to steady his voice for what he was about to say— "let's be sensible about this thing. Both of us. You've got me over a barrel, all right. But what you propose doing will cost you the lives of some of your men and most of the supplies. There's a better way of doing it than that."

Korf eyed him suspiciously. "Yes?"

"I'll be honest with you. What I want to do is save my ship. But you can get what you want, too, if you'll take shelter in the Louisiades while you finish the job. Five or six hours north will put us into a nest of uninhabited islands. We can anchor in a sheltering cove up there till this blows over."

Korf considered the proposition a moment, watching the captain narrowly. Finally he said, "I think not. Six hours' sailing is a long time, and time is very valuable to me. Also, I am not familiar with those waters."

Captain Carey's face remained expressionless, giving no hint of his withering hopes. "I know 'em well," he said. "You can follow me in. Remember, I'm no more anxious to lose my ship than you are."

Again there was a long pause while each man took the other's measure. A rising note of wind sang in the rigging, and they had to steady themselves at the rail. Korf muttered something in German and spat on the deck. Finally he snapped, "*Ja*—good. We try it."

Captain Carey grunted his satisfaction.

"I will follow you," the German said, "but I will leave twenty men, armed, and my chief officer, Mr. Wachter, in charge here. You will follow his orders. If at the end of six hours we are not at the destination you speak of, you will heave to and wait for my further orders." He turned briskly to the ladder. "Now you will show me your charts."

In the chartroom Captain Carey traced a course to the Louisiades. "We'll lay our course for Tagula," he said. "There's a good channel, here, through the reefs in the Calvados Chain. We'll anchor inside here. There's plenty of room and deep water."

Korf made some notes on the back of an envelope. "Very well." He stared hard at Captain Carey. "In view of the circumstances," he said slowly, "you can appreciate the extreme danger in which you place yourself should you fail to obey my orders or any signals I send from my ship. That is clear, of course?"

"Of course."

Captain Carey watched the small boat pitch through the open space of water, returning Korf to his own vessel. Soon after Wachter appeared on the *Sulu Star's* bridge to take up his position conveniently near the helmsman, a long, sobbing blast from the German ship's whistle rolled across the water in the darkness. There was an answering blast from the *Sulu Star*. The engine-room telegraph jangled its response, and they were under way.

MR. TOTTEN climbed up to the bridge for his early morning watch and found Wachter still at his post near the wheel. In the reflected glow of the binnacle the German's features showed the strain of a sleepless night. Ploughing, now, into the shelter of the Calvados Chain, the wind had dropped and a warm tropic breeze fanned through a corner window.

"That you, Mr. Totten?"

The mate had been so unsettled by the swarm of armed guards posted about the ship that when the skipper spoke from the gloom of the corner window, he jumped.

"Yes, sir."

"Go up and take a round of sights. Put a man in the chains, too. Have him take soundings at ten-minute intervals." He turned to Wachter. "You!"

"*Ja?*"

"Don't '*ja*' me," the captain growled. "You trot along to the radio shack and send a message to Korf. Tell your man up there to say we'll be a little overdue but we'll turn east into the channel inside another hour. Got it?"

"Anudder hour ve turn east into channel?"

"Yes."

Wachter called through the door to one of the guards, and leaning down to the binnacle light, scribbled on a slip of paper. With voluble instructions he sent the guard off with the note.

Captain Carey glanced at his watch and turned back to the window. He'd been making frequent references to his watch in the past hour. When two bells sounded he glanced across at Mr. Totten, who upon completing his sights had taken up his position at the window in the opposite corner of the wheelhouse. A dusty pattern of stars in the eastern sky was growing pale with the first tints of dawn. The captain nervously cleared his throat. "Slow ahead."

"Slow ahead, sir." Mr. Totten swung the engine-room telegraph lever and was answered promptly by a stuttering ring.

Ahead, against the pink sky, loomed a vaguely outlined backdrop of jungle growth. Along its outer ramparts the seawash of a flood tide broke in creamy phosphorescence, making a glowing line of demarcation between the sea and the coral reef.

"Now then, Totten"—the captain's voice was tense— "see if you can take a close bearing off the point yonder. You, Wachter, run along aft and send up a flare. I don't want 'em running us down astern."

In a wide sweep, at slow bell, they turned and felt their way along the white-fanged reef into the channel mouth. Trailing her in, the *Sulu Star's* high-riding captor rolled in the swells astern. The southeast breeze dwindled as they eased into the shelter of an inner lagoon, as if the embracing arms of the jungle had reached out and choked it off. Through calm water they steamed in a tight half circle around the shoreline until they faced the channel mouth again. As Korf nudged his vessel alongside, the morning sun flamed over the eastern reefs, and like a dawn salute the thunder of the two ships' let-go cables shattered the ancient silence of the place.

Immediately, Korf's voice bawled across the water, "You will rig your fenders and come in closer!"

Once again steam brought the winches to life, cargo booms were swung out, and the work began anew of stripping the captive ship.

Under deck plates heated by the hammering sun the sweltering crews, stung to back-breaking action by the lashing tongues of Korf and his officers, labored in the holds. Along with the steady transfer of fuel went the stores and that portion of the cargo considered useful by the Germans. All through that day, all night, and into the next day, the work went on. Toward mid-afternoon of the third day very little remained to be shifted unless, as Captain Carey reflected uneasily, Korf should decide to pirate his private cargo of teak logs.

The teak . . . His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. There were several tons of the heavy, ponderous stuff . . . In another moment he was strolling onto the foredeck in search of Korf.

"I suppose," he remarked to the German as casually as he could, "you'll leave me enough fuel to make Port Moresby?"

"That is for you to worry about, Captain. I will need all possible fuel."

"You're leaving me in a tight spot, Korf, with my radio crippled." He mopped his face with a bandana; then, pausing to make sure the other was watching him, he cast an elaborately sly glance at his cargo of teak. Korf didn't miss it. "In a pinch," the captain added as if half to himself, "I guess I can find something for my boilers."

"I repeat," Korf snapped, "I will need all possible fuel." He shouted an order to one of his officers, and soon the *Sulu Star's* pounding winches were swinging the captain's precious cargo across to the other ship.

Captain Carey turned away with a calm if not downright pleased look on his face, and made his way aft. He observed that his own deck had risen above the main deck of the larger vessel. Water was lapping above the German's load line, while the rusty sides of the *Sulu Star* stood naked and exposed.

Back in his cabin he whistled the engine room and was informed that there was hardly sufficient fuel remaining to steam for more than an hour or two. Then he sent for the mate.

"How are those sails coming along, Mr. Totten?"

"They're ready, such as they are." He shook his head gloomily. "Took every tarp on the ship and still it wasn't enough."

"What speed d'you figure we can make with 'em?"

"We're pretty light, of course." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "In a good stiff wind such as we had the other day she might do a couple of knots. Maybe three, if the current's right."

"Good," said Captain Carey cheerfully. "Korf's about ready. Now remember, not a move till you see me signal from the center window of the wheelhouse. Understand?"

The mate's sad Saint Bernard eyes grew sadder as he nodded and went out.

UP IN the wheelhouse, seeing that all was clear, Captain Carey went into the chartroom and closed the door behind him. He removed a bundle of signal flags from the locker and laid them out on the table. Then he returned to his quarters.

The sun had completed its swing and sent its last burning shafts through the towering palms on the western shore before the crew of looters scrambled back aboard their own ship. The *Sulu Star's* windlass was grinding home the anchor when Korf stamped into the wheelhouse to make his last demand.

Captain Carey was waiting for him.

"So," said Korf, "it is finished. All but one thing. As you know, I have no charts for these waters. You will have to give me yours, Captain."

"I've got duplicates," the captain replied, spreading a chart on the table, "but I've made a few corrections. Now, if you'll look right here—"

Korf leaned over the chart as Captain Carey expected he would. It was a short, bone-crunching blow to the chin, swung from the level of the table, and it sent the German sprawling. His head smacked against the opposite bulkhead and he lay motionless. Captain Carey, snatching up the signal flags he'd had in readiness, bound the German's wrists and ankles and stuffed a flag in his mouth. Viewing his handiwork with satisfaction, he stepped briskly out of the chartroom and locked the door.

From the center window of the wheelhouse he nodded down to the waiting mate. Mr. Totten, white-faced and round-eyed, made a quick motion with his arms to the alert crew. The last remaining lines were cast off, and the ship shuddered with the sudden turning of her propeller.

For a long, agonizing moment Captain Carey watched while the strip of water between the vessels widened. A foot. . . Two feet. . . Three feet. The propeller, half out of the water, churned noisily as the lightened ship slowly, painfully slowly, gathered way. Peering through the quickening dusk, he saw figures racing for the bridge of the other ship. "Halt!" cried a guttural voice. "Halt, or I fire!" Faintly, he heard the sound of running feet, of angrily shouted orders.

A pistol cracked. Then a burst of machine-gun fire spattered the bridge with steel. The other ship was under way, now, with the water boiling at her stern. But she was too heavy

(Continued on page 145)

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

THE STORY THUS FAR:

WHEN the Air Transport Command's C-47, in which he is being ferried from his fighter base in Burma to a new one in Cheng-tu in China, crashes in the Tibetan Himalayas, COLONEL RICHARD HALE of the American Air Force is, so far as he knows, the sole survivor. Caught in a frightful, javelin-shaped cloud of wind and fog and snow which blows eternally from one of those lofty, ice-clad peaks, the plane is literally wrenched apart in mid-air. Parachuting to the desolate "roof of the

The lake seethed and churned below them . . . and the rim of rocks was crawling with a frantic stream of camels and men.

WHITE JAVELIN

By NICK BODDIE WILLIAMS

world" RICK breaks a leg while examining the wreckage of the transport in which lie the crumpled bodies of the crew and passengers. Only WONG TEH-FU, a Chinese diplomatic functionary on some mysterious, urgent mission, is missing. There is slim chance, however, that he can still be alive.

In the wrecked transport Hale finds a photograph of a beautiful oval-faced, ikon-like girl. He doesn't know to which of the dead men it belonged but he appropriates it and it becomes a saving symbol to him on his long trek out of the mountains—the picture being his only contact with civilization. Stolid Tibetan natives whose language he cannot understand fashion a crude litter for him and transport him back to Ambrugarh, his Burma base. Time and again these loutish, half-savage porters start to turn back, leave the crippled flier to be frozen in the hills, but Rick discovers he has a strange ability to persuade them to continue when he orates at them in portentous tones in his own language. He feeds them every fragment of poetry, every speech he's ever committed to memory, words ranging all the way from Mother Goose to the Gettysburg Address and after listening they carry him on.

At last, emaciated, babbling, half-mad, still clutching the photograph to which he talks incessantly, they reach Ambrugarh. From there, after a much too brief period of convalescence and recuperation, Rick is summoned to Washington. No reason is given the still sick man for the call and the base medicos are outraged that he should have to go before he's well but orders from big brass in the Pentagon can't be ignored. Just before he boards his transport for the long flight home a coolie, working on the air strip, takes three pot shots at him with a pistol. A guard kills the native before any explanation of the seemingly senseless attempt can be had.

Shaken and on the verge of collapse Rick arrives in the capital only to be discharged from the service abruptly, with no explanation of why he was summoned to Washington, or of his dismissal. Outside the Pentagon he is accosted by SAUL ALLERDYCE, fabulous behind-the-scenes manipulator of international affairs, who knows all about Rick's Tibetan adventure and tries to persuade him to return there on a mysterious mission. Allerdyce has a photograph of the same girl whose picture Rick found in the wrecked plane. He tells Rick she is TIAN SHAN, "the face of evil" around whom a great pan-Asiatic movement led by the shaman, OGDAI KHAN, is to focus. Russia and China both have stakes in the game of Asian politics. The former's interests, insofar as they relate to Ogdai Khan's messianic movement, are in the hands of GOMBCHIEV, a scarfaced bear of a man; China's were watched by Wong, who is presumed to have died in the plane crash. Allerdyce tells Rick he is the man to watch over American interests, which parallel those of peace-loving people all over the world, and that anyone who could manage to get out of Tibet as he did can find Tian Shan and when he does find her will "know what to do." It sounds crazy to Rick and he refuses to listen to Allerdyce, despite his promise to see that Rick will be taken back in the Air Force if he accepts.

Leaving Allerdyce's hotel Rick is trailed by a man he recognizes must be Gombchiev, the Russian. The guy slugs him and steals the photograph, leaves Rick draped over a toilet seat in the station washroom. Deciding to play along with Allerdyce after all Rick finds that he has been murdered in the brief interval since Rick left him. MARTIN WALSH, Allerdyce's man, who has been masquerading as Rick's taxi-driver, clears Rick of being implicated in the murder and arranges his return flight to Tibet, briefing him on the country and political situation. He is flown back by JO BRENT, lovely red-headed Wasp, and parachutes once more to the "roof of the world."

He is captured by Tian Shan's caravan on its way to join Ogdai Khan. The girl begs Rick to help her, get her away from the messiah. But he doubts her sincerity, even as she makes love to him, and when she shoots her Mongol bodyguard in order that Rick may exchange clothes with him and ride along disguised in the caravan, he knows she is playing some sort of double game. However, she helps him escape, and he stumbles off in the snow. Half-frozen, he slips into unconsciousness dreaming of Jo Brent, the red-headed Wasp, and realizes he loves her, that their amorous kidding on the long flight to Asia has been the real thing.

He wakes to find himself in a tent with Wong, the Chinese who he thought had perished in the plane crash, and in a minute Jo Brent is brought in. She has had a crack-up, smashed her plane. Wong, knowing that Hale is the only white man who can recognize Tian Shan, demands that Rick aid him in getting to her before Gombchiev. He wants to know how close Rick has been to Tian Shan, tries to pump Hale about her, and the flyer laughs in his face. He knows something has Wong buffaloed, that he has a winning card to play himself if he can only identify what it is.

PART III

LAUGHING in Wong's face that way, Rick felt, was just about as slick a bluff as anything he'd ever pulled in poker. He hadn't any real idea what was in Wong's mind, except that something troubled Wong. Something that had to do with Jo Brent and

himself. But by laughing at him Rick had made Wong think he knew where the trouble lay. It was that delicate a bluff, just a balancing of doubts in Wong's too-sensitive mind.

But the trouble with bluff was that the bluffer never knew where it would end. A bluffer put his trust in chance. Something, always, must happen favorably if it was to work. It threw all probabilities and calculations high in the air. And that was where Rick felt he was. Floating high again, just as he'd been while dangling from his parachute. But he was going to land! He had to retain that certainty, that confidence. As Wong had said, it was the genius of Americans to be irrational. To insist that killing must be done in passion, to justify a war by clamoring for peace. And still to be sincere about it.

"Except," Rick thought, "when I was making love to Jo."

Or had that been phoniness? Of course he'd built the scene for Wong to hear, each step of it, counting upon the shock that Wong would get when he gave with the line about Tian Shan. But was what he had said—the way he'd said it and the way he'd felt—simply a skillful scene for Wong? He had not known what Wong might do. He had not known what was ahead for Jo. He'd played each instant of that interlude for what the instant held—Jo's arms, Jo's lips, the consciousness that Wong was listening. And then the laugh. The truth and bluff were interwoven now in hopeless confusion.

One thing he did know. Wong must be desperate. Only a very desperate man could order them to march into this storm. Rick had seen snow piled up before, but never snow piled quite so endlessly—without a road, without a house or farm or fence or tree. Just snow, knee-deep, packed down upon the gravel of this wasteland. This, Rick thought, must be the frozen Asiatic version of the Christian hell.

They'd strapped him carefully upon a camel's back. Somewhere else in this long line, struggling into the ugliness of night, Jo Brent must be. And somewhere worried Wong must be so perched, hiding behind that cautious face of his the fear that must be driving him. And somewhere further yet, a march ahead of them, in this same blizzard, camped or marching, was Tian Shan. Rick could imagine her, that cool, clean profile turned against this snow, all of the fury of her caravan swirling around her as it struggled north, toward its rendezvouz with Ogdai Khan.

A shrill voice startled him. "Comfortable, Colonel?"

It was Wong. The Chinese, swaddled in fur, looked grotesque on his camel's back. He'd come up from behind, threading along the line of march that stretched into the darkness

Only a very desperate man could order them to march into this storm.

toward the south. Rick was not sure which seemed more comical, Wong or his baffled, sad-eyed camel, lurching through the drifts.

"I'm living, Wong."

"You are to be congratulated. Miss Brent sends her love."

"That chafe you, Wong?"

"Oh, no. I understand these little attachments. I merely thought that you would wish to know she is unharmed."

"Thanks," Rick Hale snapped. The sudden floundering of his camel made him grab with his bandaged hand against the saddle-like contraption they had bound him to. He winced.

"I thought," Wong said, "you might need this." He held toward Rick the pistol they had taken from the holster underneath his arm. He made that smile come back across his tight-pinched face again. "You see, I don't anticipate you trying to leave us."

"No, Wong. Not strapped like this."

"The snow," Wong said, "makes an effective prison. But even in a prison there can be

disturbances. We're moving blindly now. Those who surround Tian Shan will shoot at what approaches them. She had with her, my men surmise, perhaps a hundred mounted guards?"

"Perhaps," Rick said. "Or double that."

"Two hundred, then. She travels very lightly. I can cope with two hundred men. But I don't wish, just yet, to lose you Colonel, even through an accident—such as a fakir on a landing-strip."

"Thank you. So very much."

"You may prove useful. Take good care of yourself."

"Thanks, Wong." His camel stumbled and went down, catching itself upon its knees. Rick lurched against the thongs that pinioned him, grabbing with both hands. He cursed while men came running through the dark. The pain of it was lost in his sense of absurd and utter helplessness. Trussed like a saddle-bag. Dumped down into the snow. "Thanks, Wong," he said between his teeth. "Thank you so very, very much."

The camel, staggering, was getting up. It made a bitter humanly unhappy noise. Rick lurched again. The pain was shooting upward from his bandaged hand. It was as if he held it flat upon a white-hot stove. It ought to be a thing that he could jerk away from. But he could not. It spread. Above his shoulder, through the chest and down. Burning into his stomach now. The muscles of his body ached from fighting back at it. His teeth were working at his lips now as he braced. He'd make it now. He would pull through, if only because of the rage that came with pain.

The caravan was moving on, boring into the wall of snow that sheeted downward through the night. A tunnel into nowhere. A wild, fantastic dream made horrible by padded sounds. The cries of camels and the cries of men, all padded by the strange acoustics of the falling snow.

Rick Hale, vaguely, almost uncomprehendingly, looked down. His hand still clutched the pistol Wong had given him. It was a fact that was a little difficult to grasp. Yet there was comfort in it. Strange, unreasoning comfort that struck a spark against the part of him that fought on in this hopelessness. Something that was the way Jo Brent's cry had been.

"All right!" he cried aloud. "All right!"

After that, he was not very sure of anything. Hours afterward—or was it really hours? —the snow thinned out and stopped. There had been comfort in the snow. It shut the space away from him. It shut the bitter darkness out. But now, as if a wall were broken, night came rushing in. A blackness that swooped toward him from all sides and from above. Only below, and murkily, where snow picked up a gleam that must come from starshine, was there light. That too was crazy, unbelievable: that light should come up at him from below. Through hearing them so long, he'd lost his consciousness of sounds. They were the same always—the crunching of his camel's awkward feet, the slipping of the camel there in front of him, and of the one behind. The numb, bewildered cries of struggling men, driving this caravan where caravans were not supposed to go. And over all of it, despite these cries, these crunchings and the bumping sounds that men in motion make, there seemed to be a brooding silence as of death crouching like a feline beast, teeth bared, prepared to spring. The imminence of it was in the darkness that had closed on them. And in the trampled snow.

CHAPTER XI

THE CAMEL AND THE STRAW

SLOWLY it came to Rick that something now had changed. It took a while for him to get the feel of it—and then it came. This slope was different. They were no longer going up. They were descending. Somewhere they had reached a pass. Not like those passes deep within the southern mountains of Tibet, no narrow gorge cut in the earth, but still a pass. A crest, a watershed, from which in both directions these endless waste plains of gravel sloped. Now they were going down again. That must be why the snow had stopped. Rick tried to call back to his memory the maps that Martin Walsh—Saul Allerdyce's man—had worked to fix in him.

"The Chimen Tagh."

He heard again that voice of Martin Walsh's, patient and tired, briefing him monotonously.

"The Chimen Tagh—you'll skirt the edge of it. Hell of a place. Just snow and badlands. You'll be pretty high. You watch out there. A mantrap. Fools go there. Or men who've got a dirty job, like you have." And Martin Walsh had marked it plainly on the map. "When you hit that, you'll be in Sinkiang. When you come down from it, you'll face the Altyn Tagh. And that—well, brother, that's a fence. Past that, if you get past, you hit the heart of Asia. Desert waste. A sink. A pit behind the mountains. Cradle of man, sort of—Lop-Nor, and all those long-dead cities. Watch out there!"

The voice died in Rick's memory. That nasal, petulant voice faded out. The night came swooping in again. But in Rick's brain the pigeon tracks that marked a mountain range upon a map stayed clear. The Chimen Tagh. The edge of it.

He was at last in Sinkiang.

So all right, he was in Sinkiang. What had Wong said? "These Asiatic borders are—shall we say fluid?" What difference could a brown

line on a map, back there in Washington, make in this land, this night, this God-forsaken waste?

It was then that his camel fell again. There was something unendurable in it this time. It fell completely. Not down upon its padded knees, but flat, its belly sprawling in the slush. Its legs simply gave out and it collapsed.

After the first sharp shock of pain, Rick felt only the blinding rage that came with it. He just lay there. The caravan piled up. Camels came slopping through the snow and then circled around, jerking and grunting idiotically, until the snarl of it was like a mass of scum caught in a whirlpool, spinning senselessly. And he, Rick Hale, was lying helpless in the center of it.

Everything had stopped. The line in front was shifting sideways as a worm, cut in the middle, squirms. And all that marched behind was writhing stupidly ahead into the churning mass. Camels and men, made numb, made miserable, lost order and were dumped into the vile stupidity of it. Somewhere a cry sounded.

"I want," Rick raged, "just to get up. Just to get on my feet again."

Fury reduced his thoughts to that simplicity. If only he could get upon his feet. If only he could scramble from this heaving, used-up beast, lying pathetically upon the snow. The thing became repulsive to him. A beast, a sick and dying, helpless beast. And he was roped to it, as if their fates were bound together.

We! he thought. He and the beast. He and the camel which had borne him. Down—and roped. He beat his heels into the panting flanks beneath him, furious that they could not respond. He heard his voice raised in a strangled, half-lost cry. He had to get away from it. He had to get free—

"A little patience, Colonel Hale."

Wong had come up. His face was bleak. He, too, looked beaten. All except the glittering eyes.

"I'm very sorry, Colonel Hale. We'll cut you loose."

"Get me," Rick said, "off of this dying thing."

Then he saw Jo. Something was wrong with her. It wasn't how they had laced her upon her camel, though that too seemed wrong. It was her face, her eyes. There was in them a look of pity, something shamed. And Rick Hale knew that it was his own fury which had shamed her. His own blind rage, his loathing for the stricken camel he was strapped upon. Yet he could not escape from that. If she despised him for it, that would have to be. He must get off. He must get free from this—

"Wong, damn you—"

A man was sawing at his thongs. His legs came loose and shaking, he shoved himself out from the camel's back. He stepped sideways into the snow. The softness of it startled him. It was too soft. He couldn't get his feet down into it. And then he fell.

HE COULD not possibly have lain face-down for more than three or four seconds before hands snatched him up. Yet in the seconds that he'd lain, prostrate, unable to rise, feeling the deadness that was in his legs, the horror of the camel's panting flesh went out of him, and something much more terrible, a wave of kindredship, a realization that he too could sprawl and lie there like a dying thing, gasping and spent, swept over him. He got up shaking, staring at the beast.

Wong called some orders in Chinese. The men who had dismounted slashed the ropes which bound the camel's load. Expertly now, moving as if to make up for the paralyzing confusion of the caravan's halt, they parceled out the load, shifting it to the backs of other camels in the line. The stricken beast lay bare.

"Colonel, you'll get another mount," said Wong. "We've had to march so far, so swiftly, and under such inclement conditions, that these things must happen. Camels, unfortunately, can bear only so much. We'll go on now."

Rick saw Jo's eyes. He did not trust himself to look at her. He turned toward the camel.

"Go on?"

"At once. Please don't distress yourself about the camel. It will die."

"Look, Wong, you don't do that. You don't go off and leave it lying here to die."

Wong shrugged. "It is a means of transportation. That is all."

"No, that's not all. Put it away. You can't leave it alone like this, here in the night and snow. No, Wong!"

"Colonel, you're sentimental. Please go with my man."

Rick stood stock still. The camel swung its head toward him on its curved and drooping neck. Its eyelids, fringed with lashes as a human's were, blinked. And there were tears. Enormous tears. The beast was crying. A sound was coming from its ugly, gaping mouth. A broken sound. A hopeless, sick, discarded sound.

"Colonel, you are my guest. But we are short on time. Go with my man, or I shall have to order—"

Rick fired close up into the camel's brain. The whole, vast body gave a startled heave as if to get upon its feet. And then once more it flattened out upon the snow and shuddered finally.

The shot was like a sudden electric impulse on the caravan. The men around Rick stiffened, braced, and stood there tense. Their eyes were on the pistol in his hand. Somewhere, behind the ones who were in front,

there was a soft and scrabbling sound, as of men reaching for their saddle bags, getting guns. Men startled and afraid, but with that kind of hot, impulsive fear that drives them to strike at the thing they dread. Rick held the pistol tightly in his hand. The grip of it was reassuring. He, Rick Hale, could also strike at them. And that same fear, that hot electric terror which had seized these men, was searing out the cautions of his brain. He who moved first—he who struck first—

though it were a cloak, leaving him naked there before the gaping crowd. And then he saw the camel lying dead. Somehow, that cleared Rick's brain.

He raised his eyes, seeing distinctly for the first time all the chaos of the interrupted caravan, the brown and black of it against the snow, lit by the flaring torches. He had not known how desolate it was. Five hundred men

Wong's voice, precise and chill, cut through to him. "Heroics, Colonel—now, shall we get on?"

Jo Brent cried out but now it was too late. He could not even see her through the haze that spread across his eyes. And yet he felt a kind of exaltation, knowing she was there. Let her see this! Let this last flash of fire wipe out the shame that he'd seen in her eyes. Now—

Wong's voice, precise and chill, cut through to him. "Heroics, Colonel—now, shall we get on?"

Rick was a long time answering. His mood of passion and exaltation dropped away as

and scores and scores of beasts, and yet only a tiny patch upon this wasteland in the snow. And all of it now focussed on the sprawling body of the camel he had killed. A camel—that was all. And only instants earlier he'd stood prepared to throw his life away—his own, and possibly Jo Brent's, and all that Allerdyce had planned and all that Martin Walsh had warned him of—all that, instants before, had lain in balance with a dying camel.

"All right," he said. "Let's get on, Wong."

AFTER that, Rick felt disaster marching down with them. It was the camel. He realized the morbidness of it, but as they jolted, sliding in the mushy footing, downward toward the trough before the Altyn Tagh, it was the camel that kept coming back at him. Rick could not drive it from his mind. That curved, drooping, piteous neck, that cry within its throat and those enormous tears, beseeching tears, made yet more terrible by the beast's ungainliness, were stamped upon the tissue of Rick's brain. Something, he knew, was going to happen to Wong's caravan.

When finally it came, it was an almost incredible relief.

At dawn the caravan was forced to stop. Its night of marching had worn out the camels and at last they balked. The way that camels balked was not like that of mules, not from contrariness but from exhaustion, when they knew that to go on meant to fall. And when they balked, their drivers did not try to goad them on. It meant, imperatively, that they must rest.

They'd reached the valley floor. Ahead of them, flung upward like a demon's rampart, rose the Altyn Tagh, a saw-toothed mass of ranges each towering above the one in front of it until it seemed a sea of stone, a tidal wave of stone so staggering to see that resting at the foot of it seemed in itself an impertinence. And yet for centuries these caravans had come to it and had gone on, crawling like lice across this backbone of the earth's crust that swept westward in the many ranges of the Kuen Luns, and back toward the sea, toward Central China's plains, diminishing. The sun, pushing through mist, obliqued its dismal light along the valleys toward the west.

"Well, brother, that's a fence!" Back there in Washington, jabbing a pencil at a map, that was the way that Martin Walsh had spoken of it.

A fence—

Rick Hale, released, slumped by the men who guarded him. It was then that he saw Jo Brent, riding with Wong. He got up carefully as their camels stopped. They'd been far back along the line of march.

Jo's hands hung nervelessly, the strain of fighting back exhaustion showing in the darkness of her eyes.

Rick cursed himself.

This girl had struggled just as far as he, endured as much. She'd piloted a plane across an ocean and a continent, and almost half across another—and here he, Rick Hale, was pitying himself!

Tough guy, he thought. *Extremely tough—*

"I'm very sorry, Colonel." It was Wong, speaking a little faintly now. "It's cruel for all of us. I read your thoughts—they are the thoughts of every one of us. A little sleep, a little food. No matter what we start to seek, we are reduced in time to seeking only these."

Rick tried to rise to it. "You put it in a nutshell, Wong."

"Nutshell?" asked Wong. "Oh, yes—that's apt. There are so many things that I would like to put into a nutshell, Colonel Hale. For one—no more bravado, please. None of us doubts your courage, but death comes so quickly in the ordinary run of things. Let's not precipitate it. Let us move warily upon it."

"All right, Wong."

The Chinese raised his eyes toward the Altyn Tagh. "I think," he said at last, "that when we move toward it again, you'd best ride nearer to Miss Brent. I have tried to discover what Allerdyce designed. I think that I have grasped it. Now—the sleep."

So Wong had come to some kind of decision. And because of it was commanding Rick to ride near Jo. What did that portend?

Somehow, Rick could not think that it meant violence. Wong simply did not go for violence if there was any other way. Even in this im-

placable pursuit of Tian Shan, Wong was attempting somehow to force her to strike at him. What could possibly be in that devious mind of his now?

Rick slept and when he woke, the sun was well past the meridian. The temporary camp was breaking up. As Rick opened his eyes, Wong and Jo Brent were standing there. Behind them stood a deadpan Chinese with a tommygun.

"Get up, Colonel."

Rick crouched, eyes focussed on the tommygun.

"Well, Wong?"

"Get up, that's all." Wong was regarding him appraisingly. "You've done so well this far. In China only coolies can endure the grim privations you have undergone, and then—I borrow this expression from Miss Brent—bounce back. You've bounced, I see."

Slowly, Rick got to his feet. "You didn't bring a tommygun to tell me that."

"No," Wong replied. He pressed his chin downward upon his chest. "No, I did not. The tommygun—" he reached for it—"will be for you. I've come to think that there is nothing quite so precious in this caravan as your Miss Brent."

It was an astonishing statement. Rick listened to the echo of it in his mind. There was no overtone of irony. Wong wasn't being playful. Nor was there any threat in how he held the gun toward Rick.

"Loaded?"

"Why give an unloaded gun to you?"

"All right," Rick said. He made a quick examination. Then, feeling his way through the unspoken complexities of this, and realizing that he was not to get an explanation from Wong, he tried Jo. Better to make it light. Make it seem trivial.

"Well, precious. What's the pitch?"

Jo's eyes were misting up again. She turned her back upon him. Wrath and tears, and somehow, Rick Hale knew, contempt. The thought of that ran tiny needles through his flesh.

"Just stay very close to her," said Wong. "That is the pitch."

RICK had no choice in that, for when the caravan again got under way, Jo Brent was riding immediately in front of him. The camels were in single file, close together, snaking toward a deep declivity that coiled along a river bank. The river was dry but only on this shelf of trail was progress possible. The riverbed itself was choked with slabs of reddish sandstone, piled crazily by waters plunging downward in the early thaws. A man might drag himself on foot through that, but not a caravan.

Rick watched Jo's back. He'd never seen so uncompromising a back. Jo Brent was boiling mad. And it was he, Rick Hale, who'd brought her to the boiling point. What in the devil had she got to be so sore about. He'd said, "Well, precious." Was that so bad?

"All right. Let's get it over with," he said. "It was a rotten thing to do—make love to you so Wong could overhear. I'm three parts skunk. Maybe four. I'm sorry, Jo. So let's stop pouting at each other."

"I'm not pouting!"

"Come on, Jo! I said I'm sorry. You know I had to do it, don't you? Or was it that? Mind telling me—"

"I'll tell you, chum." Her back was twisting now—and this was Jo again. "You're just about to get your ears pinned back."

Rick tried a grin. "I know—the tommygun. Also, whatever's eating on my dear friend Wong. But that's not now—what's now is you and me. Smile for me, Jo."

"The smile department has closed for the day. And no overtime."

"I'm going to love you, Jo. There's such romance in how you pass the time of day. I'm going to worship you. If ever I get off this camel."

"No, dear. You'll love only the constant flapping of your mouth. Oh, cut the corny small talk, Rick." She motioned with one hand. "Look down. Is this a cocktail lounge?"

Rick looked. And then his knees dug in his camel's sides. "It's not."

"Not quite, beloved. You used to be an airplane man yourself. How far down does it go?"

The shelf, still following the river course, was climbing steeply on the wall of the gorge. And now only the gorge itself was visible. The riverbed was lost below. The multiple ranges of the Altyn Tagh were lost. All that Rick saw, except the shelf, was that sweep of the gorge below, and the sheer wall of it rising into the sky.

"I'd guess a thousand feet. That's not much in a plane."

"It is to fall. And that camel's no plane. You've never had to shoot a plane. You've never lost your senses in pity for a plane."

"The camel," Rick said with his lips, making no sound. And it was back again. The camel that he'd shot when they were coming down across the snow, down from the Chimen Tagh. And suddenly, obsessing him, a parallel came to his mind. He'd shot the camel much as Tian Shan had fired into the Mongol who had been her bodyguard. The action of it was the same. Once each of them had decided that death must come, they had accomplished it. It was, he felt, quibbling to say that each had acted for a different reason, he out of pity and Tian Shan because it was essential to her hopes. The acts, the final acts, had been identical. Deci-

sion, and then death. And had it actually been pity when he shot the camel? Or revulsion from the thing? Sickness with all of this? The degradation of succumbing to the snow and weariness and the proximity of death, this masquerading in a murdered Mongol's clothes? And then that kiss of Tian Shan's. And her arms, so lately busy with the pistol butt, encircling him. He had not tried to get away from that. He had not dared. He had—he recognized the truth of it at last—not wished to get away from it.

"It's different," said Jo. "This way, a thousand feet is different."

"Yes," Rick Hale said. "It's different. I don't like riding camels, Jo. I don't like mountains intimately close to me. I want a featherbed and something tall and cool to drink in it. The life of Reilly—that's for me. I wasn't cut out for this kind of work. A simple, honest bum. That's me at heart. How did I let that no-good Martin Walsh inveigle me—"

"Don't you remember?"

"Yes."

He remembered all right, but he preferred just now to let it slide. The shelf was widening The abyss of the gorge was now no longer visible. They'd curved away from it, creeping along a ridge that wormed upward into a soggy bank of fog. The front part of the caravan was climbing into that. It was a sight that made no earthly sense at all. Camels kept straining upward until finally their heads would disappear into the fog. And then their necks would knife into it, then all of them would seem to slide upward into that gray, dense blanket that was hanging there.

"Elijahs," Rick said, "riding many chariots."

"Rick, stop it!"

"You're still cantankerous. Why?"

"I hate to see a man I'm fond of blow his top."

"I had a pretty good excuse, I thought."

"There just aren't any good excuses, Rick. You know that. One poof, flying a plane, and you know where you are. Excuses aren't worth a damn after you're dead."

"After you're dead—"

The fog enveloped them. Its chill was instant. Almost like Jo's words. After you're dead! So she'd thought of him as dead. He stared in front of him, able to see only the camel's waddling rump. Jo Brent was swallowed in the fog.

A long time after that the camels stopped. It was then that Rick understood how much the caravan depended on the camels' sense of herd. Sloughing into that fog, they must have lost all visual contact now and then, able to see only the stone beneath their drooping heads, and yet they'd kept that line closed up until this stop. He was gaining respect for camels.

They were no longer on a ridge. They'd crossed a lip of rock, projecting upward like a crater's rim, into a sort of pan of gravel, sloping downward now from the way that they had come. Wong joined them presently.

"Another camp," he explained. "This is a lake bed, Colonel. Further down from us, a hundred feet or more, there is a sheet of water. All this was once a lake, although most of it has broken through the rim somewhere. A very beautiful lake, blue when there's sun. But salt." He paused a moment, smiling at his little geographical speech. He pushed his tongue against his lips, making them bulge. Rick heard his breath. It quickened suddenly. "I have some news for you—we're turning back. Not until dawn, because we cannot risk the shelf by night, and night will reach us in an hour. You can imagine, Colonel, how dangerous this march would be, the fog compounded by the night. Then we would be the pawns of chance, and chance is something we prefer to leave to you Americans—"

"Wong," Rick cut in, "the wind still comes out of your mouth."

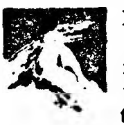
"When one has held one's breath so long," said Wong, "it is essential to exhale. I recall a visit at Manila where, for coins tossed in the sea, the harbor boys would dive. When they came up—"

"Why don't you try that, Wong? Come up."

The Chinese smiled. He did not hurry it. The sound of it, the way he let his lips caress the words, was droll. But not the meaning of it. It was a triumph that he made no effort to conceal. The gleam of it was in his eyes. He said, dragging it out: "Colonel—we've got Tian Shan."

CHAPTER XII

VENGEANCE OF THE ALTYN TAGH



IN that moment of Wong's triumph, the fog lifted from the mountain's top, not completely, but thinning out, rising above them and then hanging there, as if it threatened to descend again. Rick Hale stood perfectly still and tried to listen to his thoughts, but there was too much chaos in them. Too much shock—too much that was immediately imponderable.

"I want you to look at her," Wong was continuing. "You had the photograph in your possession for so long—"

"You're not sure, Wong?"

"Oh, yes. I'm positive. We've been so very close behind her on this march. And I, too, saw the photograph—the braided golden hair, the wide-set eyes. A childhood photograph, of course." Again, pausing, he pushed his tongue against his lips, perhaps exploring where he'd bitten them. When he next spoke,

his voice was like the cracking of a rifle shot. "Colonel, how near were you to Tian Shan when you were in her camp?"

Wong had guessed close. Rick caught the implication of the question. Better to stall, better to duck an actual answer. Get in motion now, quickly. "Let's go, Wong."

"How near, Colonel?"

"If I see Tian Shan, I think I can identify her."

"That's not an answer."

"It's all that I can give you. It's all you'll get. I don't insist on seeing her. You've got her, haven't you? If you've got her, as neatly as you've got me, Wong, it does no good for me to see her. You'll do what you want with both of us."

"With both of you?" Wong asked, and smiled. "You bracket it?"

"Stop fencing, Wong. You know I'm damn well sick of this. All that I want now is to get out of it. If seeing her will speed it up, let's go. Or let's shut up about it."

Wong considered that. There was, in what Rick Hale had said, a lot of sound and fury. But no sense. Wong weighed it carefully. At last, he seemed to have made up his mind.

"We'll go," he said.

He led the way, picking a path along the graveled lake bed toward the farther rim of it. The fog came sagging back upon them as they walked. Rick kept his grip on Jo Brent's arm, making her keep in step with him. They were moving downward now, passing the jumble of the caravan, the camels resting, eating now, the men working to raise their tents against the biting cold. It was no different from any other stop they'd made, except in Wong's excited stride. And now his voice had taken on that quick and mincing tone.

"She did not realize we were so close to her," he explained. "The rest of them were gone. Only Tian Shan and seven men had not yet passed down from the lake bed. Seven—now dead. As you may see."

Rick saw, all right. The bodies of the seven lay grotesquely on the gravel beside the tent, as if the fog had pressed too heavily upon them, crushing them. Wong's vanguard must have come upon them suddenly, shooting them as they knotted closely by the tent, to shield Tian Shan. None of them, glimpsed hastily, seemed marked, except for the huge Mongol whom Rick had seen lift Tian Shan onto her camel. There was a hole between his eyes. Those eyes, open, were shadowed with his blood.

"In there," commanded Wong. "Go in."

Jo Brent stood still. Wong seemed to wait. His quick breathing was abated now, his mouth a little open in his egg-thin face. It was a game, some kind of game. Rick felt it in that watchfulness.

"Go in," said Wong. Only the twitching of his right hand's little finger, like an excited cat's tail, was betraying him. He said, again, more sharply now: "Go in."

Rick stared at Jo. She stood there rigidly. She too was waiting, watching, guessing now. All of them guessing now. All of them wondering.

"Colonel," said Wong, softly, "go in. Go in!"

Rick walked into the tent.

She lay face down upon a heap of dirty clothes. Her arms were crossed beneath her face, her slender body twisted, resting on one hip. One knee was drawn beneath her, upward toward her chest. And she was sobbing soundlessly.

"Tian Shan," Rick said, whispering it.

She didn't move. Only that sound of sobbing answered him. He glanced behind him. Wong had not followed him. Wong was using that favorite dodge of his, plastering his ear against the outside of the tent. Rick moved, cautious, until he was beside her. Then he knelt. His hand went out until it touched the sob-wracked shoulder.

"Tian Shan," he whispered.

Her arms convulsively pressed close around her face. A golden braid pulled loose. The braid was like a child's, as neat as that. And all that sobbing, as if the desperate hardness he had seen in her had broken finally. As if that will of hers, that driving force that could be evil, was gone now. A frightened child again, the tow-head of the Presbyterian mission photograph. He slid his arm beneath her quickly, lifting her. Her hands covered her face, as if she could not bear to look at him. Tian Shan, who had been so imperious, trapped now, beaten, afraid. Until quite suddenly she flung both arms around his neck and clung to him, the wetness of her tears making him damp. He pressed his lips against her ear. "I'll get you out," he whispered. "Don't give up, Tian Shan. I'll get you out—some way."

He tried to lift her chin, trying to see those eyes of hers again, wanting to see, to touch, to know again. And in that instant, far away, something collapsed, crashing down.

IT was at first more like a shuddering of the earth, as if the shock of it were unendurable. That ceased abruptly, then there came a grinding as of mountains jerking at their roots. A roar came out of nowhere. The girl within his arms went stiff. Outside, someone was screaming all at once, but it was lost in this tremendous burst of roaring that kept billowing, swelling into his ears, into his brain, into the squeezing pit that was his stomach.

The earth beneath the tent jerked out from under him, and then he saw the tilt of it,

which had been down, swing crazily, rise up. A vast, incomprehensible swaying motion rocked him and he sprawled, made sick, bewildered by it, scrabbling. The roar kept rising from the earth.

"Rick! Rick!"

Jo's voice. A scream again. And more of them, not Jo's. The girl, wrenched loose from him, jumped back upon her feet, both hands in horror blotting out her face. But no sobs now. Only a strange inhuman groaning, inarticulate, a wordless gasping out of terror. Rick tried to rise, feeling that hideous, whirling sense of nausea. He tried to roll, to crawl. Then as he reeled, the tent came sagging down. Its folds left him completely blind. He clawed at it, hearing the girl's inhuman cries not far from him, and then Jo's voice again somewhere outside, more wildly now.

And there was something new. A rushing sibilance. In it was something that sent frenzy up his spine, a lost reflex of man when he was beast, a horror of descending waters. He spun, fell again. Raging, he hurled his body forward. Something snapped and he stumbled from the trap that was the tent.

Jo Brent's hands caught him as he blundered free. It was a blind thing that they did. Never a word, not hearing anything, neither the screams of men or roaring of the earth or that strange groaning in the tent—hearing at last no sound at all, but remembering one, they ran, together driven by a terror that was new to them, and yet instinctive. Hands clenched, they staggered upward toward the lake rim while the earth rocked endlessly.

A splashing came against their legs, then rising swiftly upward. Rick scooped Jo, running, leaping with her, feeling the water as it rose to swallow him. Around his hips and almost instantly up to the pits of his arms. He gulped for air and felt the sting of water in his mouth. He pushed, shoving into the clear again, finding at last the rim of rock.

All that passed within these minutes was without sequence in Rick's mind. Wong's triumph and the sobbing girl, the sudden quaking of the earth and then the tent, ensnaring him, and then Jo Brent waiting until she caught his hand. Each was a flash of forming memory, but not yet clear, as if the fog upon the mountain were within his head. For shock was following too swiftly on each shock preceding it. Now, as they fell across the outer rim of rock, the rushing sibilance drowned out the earth's protesting roar. Water was seething deep across the lake bed, down from them, rising in jumps, perceptibly. Not as it rises in a glass when poured, but in a pan when tilted. That was exactly what was happening. The level of the mountain's top, smashed by these constant shudderings of earth, was shifting in a way to send the lake, which had lain down beneath the altitude of the camp, across this crater-like depression, up and across, engulfing it.

The tent was gone. Where it had stood, the water churned. A pole spewed up, then fell into the lake and roiled away. And nothing else came up. The tent, down there, beneath the water, was a trap. After the lake came, nothing could have gotten out.

The trembling of the earth was lessening. Yet it still heaved at them, each shock convulsively jamming against the crust that was still quivering. It was like waves of pain, each new one adding to the tide of it without surcease until—

Well, you'd black out. When you could bear no more, you'd blow a fuse. Behind your consciousness there was that hope, that you would blow a fuse and feel no more of it. But when? How much more would you have to take, until—

The lake boiled in the new bed it had found. The rim of rocks was crawling with a frantic stream of men. Camels and men, stupid from scrambling upward from the lake. Men now like ants. Destroy the delicate precision that they knew and they were spinning, blind, insensate little things. Destroy their ordered way, and they were lost.

The fog was coming down again. And with it, night. Rick felt Jo Brent move free from him. It was then that he sat down suddenly. She did not speak to him, but through the fog her hand came groping until it was touching at his face.

"Thanks, Jo."

He wasn't sure why he said that. It reached his lips without the need of thought. A nerveless apathy seized on him, a dull sensation of defeat. He'd lost. The long, long game of stud that he'd begun back there, back when he stood beside the wreckage of the transport plane, back in Tibet, was done and he had lost. The bluff was finished. All that, which for these months had driven him, beaten him along a path he did not choose, was done with now. The fakir on the landing strip at Ambrugarh, his colonel's eagles and the prim urbanity of Allerdyce, the crunching feet of Gombchiev, and Jo—Jo's gauntleted hand snatching away her flying helmet, baring that fiery head of hers—and Tian Shan killing to spare his life, and all that struggling with the wind from Sinkiang, the javelin of cloud flung angrily across the sky of Central Asia—all of it. Done! And he had lost.

"Was it," asked Jo, "Tian Shan?"

It startled him. He tried to hear again that strange, inhuman cry of fear, that inarticulate sound she'd made when she was crouching in the tent the lake had swallowed up. Down there. Beneath that water. Tian Shan?

He'd seen her braided hair, her hands. His lips had touched her ear. He'd felt her tears.

He knew again that giddy, mad impulse to get her out of it. He'd tried so hard to lift her chin.

"I don't know, Jo. It must have been. Who else—"

THE earth was shuddering again, nervous with aftershock. There came again that rumbling of the mountain's queasy bowels. As it began, a chorus that was like a howl went up. The men upon the rim of rock around the lake were crawling frantically, seeking to hide, seeking to run, and with no place to hide them from this quaking terror that was everywhere. Panic. The shameful thing that turned men into animals. It sickened Rick. The line between panic and courage was so thin. For these same men, now milling, terrified, had dared the driven snows of the Chimen Tagh, the jagged gorge and mists.

He raised his eyes. Wong stood before him, made gray by the swirling fog. As if, by sorcery, he had materialized from it. Wong's face was smeared. His cheek was split wide open and the blood was coming out of it. He'd pressed a fingertip upon the wound, one finger raised as Rick had seen the finger of a Buddha squatting in a Burmese temple.

"Colonel, we must go now."

The voice was dead, the way one would expect a voice to come out of a squatting Buddha. From beyond.

"The pass behind us has collapsed," said Wong. "We must go on. I don't think that we dare to pass the night beside this lake. You must—" The finger dropped. The wound made Wong's face seem pathetic now. There was in him a death-like weariness. "You must do what you can for your Miss Brent."

"Yes, Wong."

The Chinese hesitated. "One thing more. I understand at last what Allerdyce intended. He was incredibly astute. And a great man. It will take time, but some day all of us will understand. Perhaps, when that day comes—we can play ball."

Then he was gone, back through the mists, moving to whip some order from his shattered caravan. It was, Rick felt, a valedictory. A message that Wong wanted him to take with him. And back of it, distinct, lay the conviction that Tian Shan was dead. No other way did it make any sense at all, and even so, there was so much in it that Rick could not yet grasp. What Allerdyce intended? A great man?

Wong, Rick Hale knew, had listened outside the tent. Wong was convinced that Tian Shan was dead. Wong must have overheard him whispering. Even before Rick went into the tent, Wong had been almost sure. Now it was done. And Wong had said his valedictory.

Only a man with iron in his nerves could have got order out of that manic depression that was the caravan. Perhaps the fog helped, cutting each man from the contagion of the others' fears. A line was forming by the lake's edge. Camels, whimpering, and shaken men, those who'd escaped the rushing waters of the lake, a ragged line, but moving inexorably through the night, driven by Wong, a little man with blood upon his face. Forward a while, along the rim of rock, then down, and all that time the breast of the Altyn Tagh was shuddering beneath them constantly.

Hours passed. Somewhere ahead of Rick a grating sound of stone, then frightened feet, and a hoarse scream, rising at once to that shrill pitch that comes when hope is gone. A scream that whistled then out of the depths. Down there, below them in the night, a man was hurtling through the final seconds that he'd live. A man's misstep.

More hours. And with the dawn, they halted for a while. Their eyelids closed, and something that was not sleep came upon them. They arose from it more desperately exhausted than when they had stopped. But now the terror of the mountain's mass was driving them, the terror of those quaking heights, of trails that could collapse into the gorges. The Altyn Tagh, taking its vengeance on the impertinent. Driving them on. Driving them down.

The following dawn came startlingly to Richard Hale for the sun came up into his face.

"Look, Jo!"

It was breath-taking, seeing that. He had not realized how long a time had passed since he had seen the sun. But now the red, astonishing curved rim of it burst from a flattened horizon. They seemed to be still high above it, working down the last range of the Altyn Tagh. Not heading northeastward, as Rick had thought, but toward the west, into the Kum-tagh Desert as it led toward Kan-suh province. Backward to China on the upper route, the old silk route. Then Rick remembered—Tian Shan was dead. And Wong had made his little speech: "Perhaps, when that day comes—we can play ball."

"Looks like it's over, Jo."

That thought, repetitive, brought lethargy. He wanted sleep. He wanted to go down into the desert now, the friendly brown and yellow of it warming him after these days of slogging through the snow and mist. He wanted to lie there and feel the sun. And then, after a while, to rise again and go toward the east, riding with Jo Brent back through all that ravaged, endless land, back across the long reach of the sea. Back home!

There was a meaning in this sunrise on the Kum-tagh Desert that was more than just the beginning of another day. This was The Day.

This was the very first beginning of what actually, in later years, he'd think of as his life. This was—

And that was when he heard the rifle shot.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAUGHING BEAR

THAT was all there was to it, a single shot. But somehow, in those jagged foothills, the echo of it went clanging and multiplying into a hundred shots, each answering the other, the way a clap of thunder dies away, with countless angry murmurings. And the effect of it, too, was like that of a sudden thunderclap. It stopped them. It made them stare, as if watching fearfully for the lightning which must already have forked through the sky. There was a stillness, a hush. And nothing moved.

Possibly that interval of waiting was only a moment. No more than the interval between the crack of the shot and a quick, gushing scream, a strangling scream somewhere down the line of the caravan. That scream broke their immobility. It did more than that. Within an instant the shot shattered the yellow pleasantness of the Kum-tagh Desert and it came to seem what it really was, a waste of sand and a profusion of sand-blasted rock, a contorted land that was parched and pregnant with danger. A single rifle shot and a scream, and the peace that had come to Richard Hale was gone. The dream was gone and he knew, instinctively, the way he had known when invisible men were watching him, that the snare was closing upon him again. He was not out of it. It had seemed so easy a moment before, and now again he could feel the chills go burning up his spine and it was not easy. It was going to be bad again. He caught his breath and held it. The line of his lips thinned out.

"Get down!" Jo snapped. "You're a pigeon up there."

He slid from the camel's back. Twisting, his foot caught in the saddle just enough to spin him head down toward the trail, and he flung his arms in front of him. The full weight of his body plunged upon his bandaged hand. As he rolled, the sweat of pain was bursting from his pores. His teeth met in his lower lip.

"Watch out for the camel, Rick!"

He rolled. The hooves, churning, were smashing murderously around his head. He looked up at the camel's massive underbelly as it plunged, feeling the weight of that as if it were upon him, crushing him. And then the camel whirled, away from him, and started lumbering up the trail, into the mountains.

Rick scrambled toward the rock that sheltered Jo. He made it just as another rifle shot came echoing. Bouncing around, from ridge to ridge, answering itself. Until the answer got confused beyond the possibility of echo. It was, Rick knew, not echo now. It was a volley. Then something chattered nastily.

The automatic gun above broke suddenly into a rolling, steady crash.

The caravan had spread out quickly through the rocks. Only the camels, wheeling stupidly, were visible against the mottled colors of the desert floor. The men had dropped. Somewhere, down there with them, was Wong, the little man who'd made his valedictory. What was he making now? As if to answer that, a tiny puff of smoke plumed up below, then instants later came the barking of the rifle.

All this fire was scattering, as if two lines of men, still far apart, were feeling for each other through the desert's glare. That nasty chatter from an automatic gun came catchily, in bursts, itself still tentative, as if the gunner had not found his target yet. Exploratory fire. Rick tried to place it.

"Look up," Jo said. "It's there."

He saw it then. It was above them on a shoulder of the range, between them and the trail back to the Altyn Tagh. But it was firing down into the area where Wong's caravan had dispersed. Those little bursts, trying to flush Wong's men out from the rocks. That meant an ambush. Someone up there had waited while the caravan was passing and then had opened fire. Wong's caravan was caught between the line before them on the

desert floor and that gun ambushed in their rear.

Jo lay chin-flat. The gun above was getting busier. Near them a camel leaped, making a crazy dance. It crumpled suddenly, its side chewed open as if huge, invisible teeth had clamped on it. The wound was like the biting of a set of monster teeth, the punctures spaced like that. The camel made no sound. All that it did was crumple in that silent, instant, punctured death.

"They're killing everything that moves," Jo said. "That's what this is, a massacre. That's what they mean for us. That's what that man up there—"

Rick said, "Move back, they're enfilading us. Move back, try to get down—"

Rick was crawling rapidly. The way to do it, he was sure, was to inch forward. That was the way they did it in those manuals. But what he had to do was to get his sights upon the man up there. The book was out. He had to do it very fast because it was like coming up after a dive. You kept your poise while you were going down, but once you started up—once you'd lost the momentum of the dive—you had to do it fast. All he could see above him was the barrel of the automatic gun, thrust out and glinting where the rising sun was striking it. He kept crawling toward his right, edging a little toward the desert floor, trying to get the man behind the automatic gun in silhouette.

Wong's men were pouring back. They were running hard, not stopping to fire, but running like crazy men.

She pushed, crawfishing toward the slope that dropped down from the trail. The firing now was thickening. The puffs of smoke, like dust kicked up, like yuccas blooming, were moving toward each other on the desert floor. And still it was a half-seen game, the men who fired the rifles keeping under cover as they worked, those little puffs the only sign of them. All very silently, except for their guns.

THE gun was well placed. Whoever had stationed it there had done an effective job, a fine military job, for it had that field of fire up the trail as well as down it and the man who was firing it was not exposed. All that there was, that Rick could see, was that barrel jumping when it was pumping metal down into the backs of Wong's men, trying to drive them out and push them

toward that other line of plumes. And it was doing that. The two lines were converging. It was driving Wong's men.

It would have been interesting to watch, professionally. But the trouble with that was that at any moment the man with the automatic rifle might see Rick, crawling down there, still trying for a shot, and it was going to be a question of who saw who first. Once Rick had committed himself by going into the open, moving downward to his right, he was, as Jo had said, a pigeon. Unless he got that first shot.

He kept working down, crawling fast and falling flat alternately, and watching that barrel jumping with each burst. He'd gone a long way, maybe twenty yards. He was coming up from his face when he heard Jo's voice.

"They're breaking, Rick. Down there."

It wasn't what she said but that she was so close to him that scared him. She'd stayed behind the slope where it fell away from the trail, and she'd worked her way along with him, ten feet behind him all that time. How she'd done that he couldn't guess, for the slope was not gradual. He wouldn't want, himself, to go sliding down that.

"For God's sake, Jo—"

"They're coming back toward us, Rick."

The automatic gun above broke suddenly into a rolling, steady crash. Not exploratory now. This was what it wanted now. Wong's men were crawling back along the trail, crawling up, face into it. Sitting ducks. And they were getting hit.

Whoever had planned this thing had worked it out. They'd got Wong's caravan into a box of fire, the slope on one side and the breast of the range on the other, that line of rifles and probably automatic fire down there, and this automatic gun behind. With better terrain it could not have lasted long, and even with what there was it wasn't going to last much longer. The man above was chopping them down so perfectly, so rapidly. And that was what got him.

Rick saw him rise up. It was the excitement of such perfection that brought him to

his feet. He had to see it. He had to get one satisfying look before he finished it. And he was beautifully silhouetted against the red sky of the dawn.

Then Rick let him have it.

The man fell forward. His body came flopping down the face of the bluff and landed just back from the trail. The gun was still wedged up there on the rock.

Wong's men were pouring back. They were running hard, not stopping to fire, but running like crazy men, now that the automatic fire was off their backs. They were getting close to Rick. He could guess what was their thought—get back into the mountains, up the trail, until they found a place where they could make a better stand. It was the first thing that a mountain man would think, and these were mountain men, picked for this job. But the men below, the men who were pressing after them, who'd lain there in the desert, were firing steadily. It slowed up their pursuit but it made fewer to pursue. Both sides were playing smart.

It was then that he saw Wong. The Chinese was scrambling toward him up the trail and motioning for him not to shoot. Packed as it was, Wong's men above and those others below, it was impossible to risk it yet. He had to wait. Or run. He called for Jo.

She didn't answer. He tried again, gripping the handle of the gun. And when he still got no reply, he turned and ran toward the slope.

"Jo!" he yelled. "Jo!"

He couldn't find her on the slope. The gunfire on the trail was getting very close to him. If they were going to run, the time was now.

"Jo Brent!" he raged.

He couldn't crouch there any longer now. Within another minute there would be no chance. He had to go. Maybe she'd gone already, seeing what was coming.

"Jo! Jo Brent—"

And then he gasped. Far down, and motionless, her body lay crooked against a projecting rock. The dust was rising where she'd slid. He braced. He tried to walk down to it, jabbing with his feet into the rubble of the slope. It went well for a half of it, then all at once he gained momentum and his feet, jabbing, overshot. It sent him diving outward in a bounce. He came down on his hands again, that bandaged hand of his, and then, striking his head, feeling the tommygun go clattering away from him, he knew that he was going out.

Out like a fat and fragile light bulb. Out!

INTO the shadow of unconsciousness he must have taken the thought that he must drag himself into reality again. But what snapped him back was the sound of enormous laughter. That was the way that it sounded, enormous. It had the swell of beef behind it and an immense capacity for mirth. It was, in a way, like singing—like very good singing, a heldentenor bursting the muscles of his belly with that enormous, sensual mirth.

"Any," a voice roared mockingly, "old minute now."

Rick Hale sat up. It was Gombchiev, all right. Gombchiev was standing there in front of him, almost astride of him, with his gigantic legs planted apart, both of his fists jammed on his hips. The sightless eye—the opaque, dead-fish eye—was what Rick saw. And then the scar, and that huge, square-cut head, the face of it a massive, granite-looking thing. You couldn't think a man that big could move. He wasn't actually a man at all—he was Colossus. Stone. Except that even now the muscles of his belly shook. Laughter, silent now, but quaking deep in him. The guy who was a cat, the bear of Sinkiang.

"Sure thing," he purred, working the words out of his lips. And then he roared again, splitting himself with laughter.

Rick tried to push himself to his feet. It wasn't, evidently, what he was supposed to do. Gombchiev pawed out, his boot gentle upon Rick's chest, and pressed him down. A bear would do that kind of playful thing.

"Not yet," purred Gombchiev. "Lie back. You've got—what is it yet?—bats in your belfry?"

Then he was roaring thunderously.

Some things were straightening out within Rick's brain. He was lying upon the sand, the Kum-tagh Desert's floor. He could not yet quite orient himself in it. The Altyn Tagh, the trail, the slope—Jo!

He came up then. He was upon his haunches, staring up at Gombchiev. "The kid?" he said.

"The kid? The red-haired one? Hokay—the kid, hokay!"

Screamingly funny, all of it. Yet through it there was something that was not amusing Gombchiev. When he stopped laughing there was something in his scar-divided face.

"What have you done with her?"

"Washed her," grinned Gombchiev. He let it lie a moment, then he said: "She needed it. She fell down in the dirt. Now you stand up—give me your hand." He reached to help, grinning again. "This time, no toilet seat. A colonel hanging on a toilet seat—a very funny thing."

"Yes, wasn't it?"

Gombchiev dragged him erect. "Didn't you think?"

"I thought. Where's Jo Brent?"

"The red-haired kid?" His lips kept pushing out these idioms. He got them fast. His ear for them was very good. Only his lips were bad for them, forcing an accent into

them that made them seem almost comical. Almost. "She's here. Hokay. Inside the tent. The sun gets hot. I'll put you in the tent. You did not fall as far, you're not so hurt. You were harder to get."

Rick rocked. He thought that he was going out again, but Gombchiev steadied him. Gombchiev was watching him. The desert's glare was getting easier to take. Rick saw what was around him now.

It was a camp. Different from Wong's but still an Asiatic camp. The tents were felt, but box-like rather than conical. The men were different. High-cheeked and broad-faced, as Wong's men had been, but browner than Wong's men. Tartar or Cossack, probably. Ponies instead of camels. And a car—really a car. A heavy, awkward half-track, American make, a leftover from lend-lease, sitting squat and ugly in this Central Asia camp. There were no uniforms.

Less than a mile away Rick saw the slope down which he'd plunged. Behind it reared the Altyn Tagh. But Gombchiev had moved back from the shade of that, into the open desert.

"Defense," he said. "This makes us much more difficult to attack. I—what?—dislike a hotfoot."

Again he roared.

It was infectious, that gargantuan bellylaugh of his. He had that trick that some comedians have of making people laugh despite themselves. Perhaps the very corniness of it. Or just the fact that any man so huge, looking so ominous, could think that he was cute. Gombchiev, of course, was making jokes entirely for himself. Rick was, he knew, an incidental thing. Not actually an audience. Gombchiev was laughing at himself. And for himself.

"This is the tent," he said, shoving at Rick. "The little kid. You'll see. Hokay enough—and washed."

Rick ducked the sand flap at the entrance. The tent was large. Jo Brent was far across it, lying on a folding cot. Her eyes were closed. She did not move. Rick turned.

The Russian shook his head. "Morphine," he said. "She needed it. You can't—" That sly look flickered in his one good eye while he was feeling for the phrase. "You can't kick them around through Central Asia, Colonel Hale. It's not your woman's kind of country. Why did you do it?"

So it was starting again. Questions—

Rick went on tiptoe to Jo's cot and bent above her, feeling for her pulse. Her face was blanched, the copper-colored hair around her temples wet. One cheek was badly groundburned from her fall, but as Gombchiev had said, it had been washed, the dirt and grit removed. The scratches showed up palely red against the clearness of her skin. Her lips

Gombchiev's men were different from Wong's—Tartar or Cossack, probably.

were parted as the breath went heavily between them. That jauntiness of hers was gone. She seemed fragile and drawn, a darkness of the upper eyelids that was almost blue. Poor kid, he thought, trying to be so tough.

He turned to Gombchiev. "I'd like," he said, "to sleep."

The Russian grinned. "You mean, lie down to sleep. You are already sleeping, Hale—upon your feet. I'll put a cot for you in here. A man as weary as yourself cannot be frivolous."

"You're not really so very funny, Gombchiev."

"No," said the Russian. "I am not. What gave you that idea?"

CHAPTER XIV

BLACKOUT

THE Russian shrugged. "It was one of those things," he said.

Rick looked quickly across the table to Jo Brent. Outside the tent, the wind of Sinkiang was whimpering; the stearine candles made a jerky

light. They had finished dinner. Canned breast of pheasant and boiled rice, canned fruit, liqueurs and coffee—Gombchiev traveled well. After Wong's caravan, it seemed a feast. The two days of jolting northward in the half-track had sharpened them for it, and Jo had made concessions. Her bright copper hair, brushed vigorously, was piled upon her head and knotted. Only a doll—or Jo—could possibly have gotten by with the slightly outlandish coiffure.

"I saw a woman," Gombchiev went on. "A woman on a camel. Not a Mongol woman, not a Chinese. Not Asiatic. That much, through my glasses, I could see. I was anticipating Tian Shan. And time—that is the thing that counts with Tian Shan. I have learned that. You do not have much time to think—time was expiring. Once they had gotten well into the desert, there would be a race. A race with Tian Shan is bad. I know—I've lost them. So I attacked." His right eye closed. Only his left, its milky scar tissue catching a dull glow from the candles, kept on staring openly, unseeingly at them. It was entirely possible that he knew he was doing that. It was not pleasant. But his voice was jovial. "And it was Wong. My poor friend Wong. If I had known—but as I say, time was expiring. Time was unkind to Wong. He is one of the world's unfortunates."

Rick's eyes caught Jo's uneasy glance.

"He has no luck," continued Gombchiev. "He must make up for it with perseverance. That, he does. It is a Chinese trait, and admirable. It works." He ashed his cigarette into his liqueur glass. It went out with a sharp, somehow disturbing hiss. He lifted the stained butt between his thick fingers and stared hard at it. But only with the left eye, open, cold, utterly dead. And then his scarred face split with that enormous, strong, infectious grin of his. "You say she drowned?" he asked.

Questions. The second day of them. And still so polite. But Rick had seen that man behind the automatic rifle chopping up Wong's men. That had not seemed polite at all. That had been ruthless. And meticulously planned. All this good-natured exterior of Gombchiev's was camouflage. The laughter and the idioms. The huge and hearty man. What was inside of him might not be cruel for the hell of it, but it was absolutely purposeful. What was inside of him was like machinery. It planned. It executed icily. It was not anything that he, Rick Hale, could be coy with.

"She drowned," he said.

"Let me go over it again. She was inside the tent with you—"

"That's right, that's what I said. Inside the tent, and then the earthquake hit. The tent collapsed on us. I heard her groaning—"

"Injured?"

"Not that I know of. Terrified, I thought. Or maybe a tent pole struck her."

Gombchiev smacked his lips. "Colonel, what gives? How's that—what gives?"

"That's pre-war, Gombchiev."

"Sorry." He pulled his bearish body forward on the table. "Let me put it this way. I can check these things. I have a few of Wong's Chinese, the worse for battle but still capable of talking to me. So why, Colonel, must you lie to me?"

"Your English is improving, Gombchiev."

"When I'm annoyed, I cannot remember how to speak amusingly. Why do you tell me that you heard Tian Shan groan? Merely to make a story out of it?"

Rick shook his head, forcing a smile. "I heard her groan."

"And she had not been injured?"

"Damn it, no! Can't you get that into your head?"

Jo slashed a match against the table's surface. Rick could almost hear her saying, "One poof, and you know where you are." O.K. So he'd simmer down. He made a smile for Gombchiev. "I said she groaned. Why should I lie about it? What makes it so important to you, Gombchiev? You don't question the fact she drowned. All that you hammer at is that she groaned. Let's turn our cards up, Gombchiev. If that's important, tell me why."

"She did not speak while you were in the tent?"

"Why should she speak to me?"

"Didn't you speak?"

"I called her name. I wasn't there to make a conversation with her. Simply to identify her from my memory of the photograph."

"Did you do that?"

"I'd swear—"

"That means you can't be positive. A man who says I'd swear means that he doesn't know. He merely thinks. She spoke no word at all to you? No word at all?"

It was beginning to get dangerous. What was it Gombchiev was trying to find? He could not know that Rick had been alone with Tian Shan back in Tibet, when she had shot the Mongol. Yet that seemed what Gombchiev was hammering at. That business about whether Tian Shan had spoken to him, that was aiming back toward that time in Tian Shan's tent. But the groan—the angle of the groan! What was it? Easy. Soft-footed, Hale. Out-cat the cat.

"Look, Gombchiev. When I went in—when Wong sent me into the tent there in the lake bed—Tian Shan was crying. Making a sobbing sound. I called her name, and that was when the earthquake came. The tent collapsed on us. She stood there covering her face with both her hands—"

"You did not see her face?"

"Once and for all, I did not see her face. That is, not clearly. She had it covered with her hands, and then she stood there groaning. That's all there is to it. She was scared to death. Hell, I was scared to death. And not two minutes later she was drowned."

out, leaving his cubic face a dirty gray. He shrugged. "I think you both need rest," he said at last. "We move again at three this morning. Thank you, Miss Brent, for looking very beautiful for me. And thank you, Colonel Hale—though it's not colonel any more, is it? You do forgive me for the toilet seat?"

"That's it," Gombchiev said. "Until you pull the string on me. I love Americans."

Gombchiev leaned back. Only his hands remained upon the table, gripping the edge of it. The muscles of his thumbs, between the thumbs and pointing fingers, suddenly were bulging out. Like small, hard eggs. The scar across his left eye flamed. The eye itself stayed oysterish. Between his lips he pushed the words, "She drowned."

"Yes, Gombchiev. Tangled in that tent, she didn't have a chance."

The Russian was getting up. The scar died

"Sure, Gombchiev. Until the day when I can pull the string on you."

The Russian stared. Then all at once he made that grin. He gurgled thickly in his throat, then roared. His head went back and all his giant's strength went into it, enormous laughter. He was drunk with it.

"That's it," he cried. "That's it. Until you

pull the string on me, that's it. I love Americans."

Jo Brent sat motionless. Gombchiev turned instantly and started out, still making rumbling noises in his throat. Rick got up, waiting until Gombchiev was gone, then he looked down at Jo. She hadn't budged. He said, "Well, get it off your chest."

"What is he after, Rick?"

"How would I know?"

"Don't you? You ought to see your face when you try to lie out of something."

"It got that way," he said, "beating the rap on Mama's marmalade. And I might add, I used to beat it."

"With Mama, possibly. But not your old Aunt Jo. And not with Tovarisch Gombchiev."

"What did he get?"

"Something. It's probable you don't know."

"It's highly probable. Because I don't know anything. Just what I said. How's my face doing now?"

"You're marmalade from ear to ear." She got up from the table. "Gombchiev said we'd move at three. I need the sleep. If you don't mind, I'll just crawl in my sack—"

"The sight of that," he said, "would kill me, dear. I'm going out on the balcony. Be crawled when I get back."

"Yes, Galahad. Want me to blow the candles out?"

"Do, dear."

"Goodnight," she said.

"Goodnight, love." He turned abruptly, going to the exit. Then he stopped. "I wasn't kidding, Jo."

Something was in her face, something that hurt. A bitterness. "Was this another of your justly famous interludes? For Gombchiev, his ear pinned to the tent?"

"This was," he said, "for something pearlier. Sweet dreams, sweetheart."

Her arm swung hard and something crashed, a bottle making bits and pieces of itself. Rick went out fast.

OUTSIDE the wind was with him instantly. There was a bite to it, the sting of sand driven across the chilling desert air. Rick turned his back to that, walking a few slow steps, cautious, knowing that somewhere from this darkness he was watched. Despite Gombchiev's feigned informality, there was precision in this camp that ruled out any idea that its personnel was civilian. There would be guards, though sentries was a better word for them. There would be guards, watching.

No tent was near his own. The camp was spread out well. Perhaps it was a trick of Gombchiev's, to give them rope to see if they wanted to hang themselves. But Gombchiev would not have been eavesdropping outside the tent. That was not his style. What Gombchiev wanted to know, he'd get by hammering. Rick knew. He could feel yet the tingling of his nerves while Gombchiev was working on him in the tent, just after dinner. And Jo was right, Gombchiev had gotten something. That was the meaning of the bulging of the muscles of his thumbs. That was what lay behind the sudden flaming of that scar. And that was why, after a day's hard driving toward the north, the halftrack going at the ponies' maximum, they were to start again at three. Gombchiev had gotten something definite about Tian Shan.

How much? And what?

"Somnambulism, Hale?"

The voice was soft. Rick stopped, searching the dark. Then something glowed—the firepoint of a cigarette.

"I'd hoped," said Gombchiev, "that you'd come out. Not that the virtue of your Valkyrie is my concern—"

"Lay off that, Gombchiev."

The Russian laughed. "The idlest curiosity—I simply wished to know. Well, marry her. Connubial bliss is probably your metier. And that perplexes me—why Allerdyce picked you."

"You know Americans," Rick jabbed. "Irrational."

"I know Americans. And I knew Allerdyce. I also know slightly your taxi-driving friend, the self-effacing Martin Walsh. At Bolling Field that day, when I was—what?—putting the slug on you, the fact that he was near the scene was worrisome. No, Hale—your use of English is not good. The word is not irrational. Unorthodox, perhaps—"

"I'm really getting sleepy, Gombchiev."

"Have you no interest in what is to become of you?"

"I think I know. Tian Shan is dead. The show's kaputt. You'll dump me and Miss Brent some place that we can get out from. I've finally caught on to how these things are done in Sinkiang. Nobody's hand ever quite shows. Russia and China—"

"Our ally, Colonel. Signed so very recently."

"But geopolitics goes on. Wong filled me in on some of this. What were you really after, Gombchiev?"

"Peace. With teeth. Our teeth."

"And what did China really hope to get?"

"Just peace."

"Suppose you translate that into terms of Tian Shan and Ogdai Khan."

"Preventive action, Hale. No army possibly could frighten us. But only idiots disdain the dangers of hysteria. The poison of hysteria, which can creep through a people's veins where bombs and cannon cannot get at it. We can't conveniently obliterate six hundred million people, Hale. You understand that Tian

Shan's followers won't aggregate a fraction of that number yet. It is too early. But drop a germ into a dish of agar. Soon—"

"The agar squirms. That was the briefing that I got."

"Then brief me, please—though I don't think you know. Why were you sent? Why was it Allerdyce pried into Central Asia?"

"In just one word?" Rick mocked.

The Russian grinned. "All right, then—peace. With or without the teeth. That's what you think, Hale, isn't it? That's what—" He sucked his cigarette, then flipped it in a skittering arc. "I've got to think. For only that fits in. I must base what I do on that. I accept the chance."

"I don't quite get you, Gombchiev."

A huge hand reached out through the night. The fingers closed upon Rick's arm. He knew how helpless he was in that grip.

"You don't quite need to get me, Colonel. This isn't—what?—your racket. This is for me and Allerdyce and Martin Walsh and Wong. Goodnight. And try to sleep a little."

"One thing," Rick said. "I want to know about that groaning in the tent."

"Goodnight."

It was as if a door had slammed. Gombchiev was gone, his feet making a crunching sound upon the desert sand, as if a behemoth were walking very cautiously, but purposefully. Swallowed within the night of Sinkiang.

It was not nice. Something was wrong with it. Gombchiev no longer interested in talking of the groaning in the tent. And then, the all-too-obvious absence of the guards. Gombchiev, Rick knew, was pushing him. Gombchiev, saying "I must base what I do on that." What must he do? And here in Sinkiang?

Rick searched his mind for the picture of a map. The little pigeon tracks that were the Altyn Tagh. The stippled area of the Kum-tagh Desert. They'd been headed that day toward the Ghashiun Gobi, slicing northeastward toward Urumchi and beyond to Russian Turkestan. Wong was back there, either returning through the Altyn Tagh into Tibet, or coming out again into the Kum-tagh, heading for Kan-suh. Without his camels he was going to find it rough. Or with them, pal. With or without. This might be China's province, this Sinkiang, but in the spaces of its deserts it was anyone's. Because a band of men, on foot, might struggle on for days and weeks and never find the mark of other living men. If they could struggle on for days and weeks.

And somewhere in this God-forsaken vastness there was still a name—a name without a face, the brain behind the javelin that had been Tian Shan. She had been marching northward toward a junction with Ogdai Khan. Rick had forgotten Ogdai for a while.

Allerdyce had said, "Behind this girl—" And Allerdyce had said, "You get out only through a face."

Those phrases, creeping back into his memory, brought startling connotations now. *You get out only through a face!* He had not seen that face, not since Tibet, and what had happened in Tibet had certainly not been a way of getting out. He had not seen the face inside the tent upon the Altyn Tagh. That was what Gombchiev had hammered at—that and the groaning. That shadow of a doubt, that chance out of a million that the girl whom he had held, whom he had whispered to there in the tent, the girl who'd groaned her inarticulate terror —was not Tian Shan.

He had not seen her face!

That possibility threw all that had passed since into a new, uneasy light. What now could be the meaning of Gombchiev's "For only that fits in?" Fits in with what? They had just mentioned peace. Something—Rick groped for it—must fit with that. Something that made peace possible, or—if Gombchiev was working for a different end—made it impossible. Whatever it was it meant something very definite, some course of action which had been determined by Gombchiev's reaction earlier, when Rick had seen the muscles of his thumbs bulge out.

Then, all at once, standing there in the night, Rick saw within his memory again the man behind the automatic rifle, methodically spewing jacketed steel into Wong's men. A predetermined course. That had been what had fitted in with Gombchiev's trap for Tian Shan —death for Ogdai's javelin.

Continuous chains of thought, all interlocked. Somewhere in it, Rick knew, there was the link that was himself. It seemed to be the link that bothered all of them. And always—always it had bothered Richard Hale. "By then, you'll know what you must do." Those words of Allerdyce's, returning now, took on disturbing, fresh nuances. Where was the guidance that he'd thought he'd have? He had not very long to wait for it. By three o'clock—

RICK went back into the tent. Jo Brent was lying with the bag pulled up around her chin. She hadn't undressed, after all. The candles still were flickering.

Rick whispered, "Jo?"

She didn't move. He stood there watching her, hearing the whimpering wind of Sinkiang, watching the stearine candles sucking fire into themselves.

At three o'clock. At three, when something would fit in. At three—

Rick's face was wet. He realized it suddenly. His face was dripping wet and in his right hand's palm there was an oily sliminess. He

just stood there. Waiting, sweating, listening. And watching Jo Brent's slow, untroubled breathing move the sleeping bag that covered her. He could not take it any longer standing there like that. He moved across the tent and blew the candles out.

Now it was worse. That stickiness was spreading over his body. Sweat—stand in the dark and sweat it out, Count sixty, pal. That made a minute, didn't it? And string those minutes, sixty of them, in a row, and then you'd have an hour. And then string those until the hour was three. That made a watch of it. Try that. Try it. Count very slowly, steadily—

Had it been Jo? That moving something that he heard inside the tent, was it Jo turning in her sleeping bag? Or was it back the other way, behind him, toward the exit from the tent? And where was that? The dark had made a mole of him. A mole, a stupid, burrowing thing, now burrowing deep into the sliminess of fear. Raise up your fists. Strike, Rick! Now!

It throttled him. His hands were up, pawing into dark, when this thing slid around his neck and cut into his throat. And that was all it did. No blows, no pinioning of his arms. Only that thin, sharp line of force that crushed into his adam's apple and was strangling him. A rope, a wire—

He was going backward now, toppling. He was falling backward in the dark and his throat was on fire and somewhere he heard something that was like a scream, except that all at once it stopped, as if shut off. That must be Jo. He caught himself and tried to jerk around to get at this thing that was strangling him, and then it slashed the very life's breath out of him and sent him spiraling into a lapping darkness that enveloped him.

Some day, Rick Hale thought afterward, he was going to try to write it down in black and white how a raw-hide thong felt on your throat in the dark.

It felt as if he'd swallowed barbed wire. It was that sore. When he was conscious of feeling again, that was the first thought he had. He was trying very hard to swallow, but whether it was air he had to have, or water, or just to get rid of the swollen thing that was his tongue, he wasn't sure. He didn't have to

It was nearly dawn when they halted again. They had reached another of those round watch-towers with its cluster of ruined buildings.

be sure. All that he had to do—and it was a compulsion—was to swallow.

Some time later he realized that his position was unusual. Perhaps it was the saliva getting in his nose that made him understand that. Or the slapping of his face against warm flesh. Though not exactly flesh, for it seemed bristly.

It was bewildering and it went on for a long time before he got it figured out. He was lying across a jogging horse. His arms were tied, and later on he discovered that his legs were tied, and he was lying jack-knifed there, like a half-filled sack of potatoes, with the spine of the horse punching him in the stomach every time he flopped.

Those punches kept coming, not so hard but monotonously, until he was bracing himself against them, trying to push out with his belly muscles against the next one. It began to nauseate him. He thought how it was going to be if he got sick, his throat already raw the way it was. He set his teeth against that. And that made it a cinch—when he set his teeth he felt how brittle they seemed, it worked out wrong and he was sick.

That was just as bad as he had thought that it would be. As bad as it could possibly be. Until he began to feel the wind. It wasn't cold enough to numb him. Just cold enough to make him shudder with the uncontrollable chill of it. The shakes, and nausea, and a throat that was like an amateur fire-eater who'd slipped up.

Maybe, he thought, *I'll die.* But you couldn't feel this bad if you were going to die. Only a man who's going to live could feel so miserably ill.

He was never sure that he was actually conscious. These sensations kept fading out and fading in again, and he'd be sick and then he'd shake, and then be sick until it was no more than muscular contraction. And loathing for the warm and bristly smell and feel of horse.

CHAPTER XV

"TIME WILL LOSE CONSEQUENCE"

THE dawn was coming when they took him down. He tried to focus but he was too ill for that. All that he knew—and at the moment he was very grateful to them for it—was that three men were carrying him, doing it with delightful gentleness, and presently they passed in through a narrow hole in something dark. They laid him on the earth. He knew it was earth because, fumbling with him there in the dark, they put him down upon his side and as he rolled, the taste of earth—a peculiarly foul sort of earth—got in his mouth.

He seemed to be inside some kind of structure that gave him the impression of a hole. The smell of it was dust, a very fine dust with a mustiness as of dry-rotted wood. In the dark, invisible, the three men squatted silently. After a while he felt a rim of metal on his lips. They were lifting his head. They were pouring water down his throat. The water was brackish and there was something revolting in its stagnant, earthy taste as though it had stood for a long time somewhere. But it was water and had the virtue of all water—it was wet.

He heard somewhere the soft, dust-cushioned padding of their feet, and finally a damp and pasty mess was pressed against his mouth. Gritty, as of pulverized grain. He was supposed to eat it and he tried. He got some of it down. It scratched the swollen membrane of his throat, but it went down and stayed. More of that stagnant water then, and after that they just sat there, silent in the dark.

The dark grew warm and finally hot. Aridly hot. The musty air lay on him almost tangibly. He became aware of something else, a smell of rancid fat. He guessed that was the silent men beside him in the dark.

If they would only grunt or shuffle around, or scratch themselves, it might not be quite so unbearable. If they would touch him, say, or punch him in the nose—

"All right. What do you want? You stinking, tongue-tied—"

For a while he cursed. It helped to lie there inventing vile enormities to charge them with. Very methodically, in conversational tone, he kept it up until the hot air baked his throat. Then he lay still.

Maybe he slept. He knew he had when at last they lifted him and went out through the narrow hole. The wind was blowing cool again and it was night.

For the first time, Rick saw the men distinctly. They were tall, slender men, dark-skinned. There was a slight effeminacy in the way they moved, a litheness of their limbs that was like the easy motion of a graceful, athletic girl. But they were bearded. They wore long, heavy garments of tan, cotton stuff. Very solemn men they were, never speaking. Not even when they slashed the bonds around his feet.

The structure where they'd squatted throughout the day was round and tower-like, almost forty feet high, the top of it crumbled. At any distance it would appear to be a vast ant-heap. Around it clustered others of these mud-and-timber structures, some of them almost flattened back into the desert earth. But from another which was well-preserved a fourth man now issued, leading a horse. The exit was just large enough to let the animal squeeze through. When five horses were brought from the structure Rick understood how carefully these men were traveling. They moved only by night, concealing themselves throughout the day—no fires, no tethered horses, nothing to indicate a camp, nothing to slow them down except himself.

They lifted Rick onto a horse, one of them taking its guide rope as they themselves mounted. They pivoted toward the north and started going at a jog.

Hour after hour of that, with never a word, never a stop. Only the sound of their horses' hooves. Northward and west. The slope of the land was down into a vast, almost imperceptible trough. They followed a shallowish declivity with sand hills piled along one side of it, the course of a long-vanished river. At intervals along the banks the dried and broken stumps of trees projected from the sand, as if it once had been a strip of forested land.

It was nearly dawn when they halted again. They had reached another of those round watch-towers with its cluster of ruined buildings. A day's—or a night's—ride apart through this desolation of sand and pinkish clay and lost rivers and broken stump-forests. Rick Hale could hear again that half-bored monotone of Martin Walsh's as he marked a map: "Past that, if you get past, you hit the heart of Asia. Desert waste. A sink. A pit behind the mountains. Cradle of man, sort of. Lop-Nor, and all those long-dead cities—"

And this was it. Cradle of man. And a sorry-looking cradle now. Man must have had a dismal babyhood. A crumbling tower of mud, a dozen little mounds with sand-chewed timbers sticking crazily out, the kind of thing, no more than magnified, that children build with clay.

You go inside the tower, pal. You squat, you stare into the dark, you wait for night again. You're a lizard, pal, hiding beneath a rotten plank. You, Richard Hale, you who had wings. Remember? And here you are, a lizard crouching with four rancid gentlemen

with beards, somewhere beyond the last fringe of the world that anybody gives a rap about. Remember Washington? New York? Dallas and San Francisco?

Remember Jo? Remember, she was sleeping in that tent? You blew the candles out and then these funny-paper villains snagged your throat. Remember Allerdyce? Remember how the knife was sticking in his back? Remember—

Yes. He could remember all of it, but all disjointedly. Lizards don't think. The brainpan of a lizard is quite small. You don't need brains to lie still in the dark. You just lie there and let your tongue loll out. And bake. Your eyes close only when they burn, which isn't really sleep. You feel eternal. Then you've gone back—you're back where man began, back in that time when Lop-Nor wasn't just a pile of crumbling dirt. You've gone way back. You're elemental, Dr. Watson. Sleep—

All right, so he was talking to himself. He stirred, sluggish, astounded that the night had come again. And that they rode again, the tireless jog that ate the desert miles. Hour after hour.

A FLAT and scummy sheet of water lay in front of them. They skirted that, riding through marshes that were horse-high in reeds. There was a salty, swamp-slime smell to it. And then, abruptly, they reined up One of them fixed a cloth across Rick's eyes. When next they moved, the sound of water sloshing marked the horses' passage. Rick felt the tepid, thick slime of it rising on his legs. The crash of reeds, continuous, like some giant chewing steadily on sugar cane. And finally, again, the crunch of sand.

His horse had ceased to move. Hands that he could not see were lifting him, giving his body that grotesque unbalance that a blindfold gives a man. They put him down and led him for a while on foot. He could remember stumbling once, then catching with bound hands at something hard. something that felt like satinned wood. They made him lie supine again. Then they took the blindfold off and left him. In the dark.

He'd gotten used to dark. It made little difference whether they were crouching at his side or not. Only the rancid fatty stench was missing now, for they had never spoken, not once that he could hear, since they had taken him from Gombchiev's camp. But with his arms still bound, and in the hopeless distances of this land, he did not think of escaping from them. He knew, without thinking, that he could never possibly have managed it. And there was something else that was a little vague but always in his brain—this was the way that Richard Hale, enduring what he must, was going to get out. They'd move at him. They'd pry and poke at him until—sometime, somehow—that moment finally would come when he would know what he must do. A sink. A pit behind the mountains, this was it. This place, this hour was what the whole deal was about.

He knew—

Something had touched his face. The shock of it shut off his breath. Almost at once, his muscles ached with the incredible tension of it. Something—something that had not been with him in these long hours of lying torpid in the dark—had touched his face.

A man could hold his breath only so long. He had to release it. He tried to let it come out through his nose, in tiny soundless bursts, but that made it almost immediately impossible to hold it any longer. He had to have air. He had to gulp it, a great quantity of it. And the sound of that was a rasp.

A scream, close to him, deafened him. Then all at once it was like madness, a giant heave of his body as he tried to roll, to get away from that screaming in the dark. He got his deadened knees beneath him and shoved up, twisting, straining his eyes to see. He hurtled forward, and then his foot struck something that was shapeless and was yielding under him. He kicked to get away from that. And then he fell. He grappled with the shapeless, screaming thing beneath him, reaching upward with his pinioned arms to strike at it. Claws dug at him, raking his chin and cheeks and toward his eyes. He drove his forearm into something that seemed hard and forced it up.

The screaming stopped at once. He was killing it now. He was strangling it. Beast or man—

He stopped and got away from it. He knew now that it could not be an animal. He'd had his forearm underneath a chin, against a human throat. He'd gone crazy, wanting to kill it, unhinged by all that screaming in the dark. He was almost back now, almost down to the level of that elemental man who'd murdered before he had a brain with which to think about it. He was very close to where a man breaks with the centuries of civilizing he'd had since he was a beast himself. He was almost there. Almost a beast himself.

"Rick!"

It was a whispered cry. He opened his eyes. The dark was diluting to gray shadow, light slanting from above. He was crouching on his haunches, his arms antenna-like in front of him. He must have seemed a horrible, maniacal thing. Those pinioned arms, one of them bandaged filthily, and that blind groping as he crouched. He must, Rick Hale knew suddenly, have seemed like something that could only happen in the dark. Five feet away from him, flung back against a wall, Jo Brent was holding both her hands crossed on her throat.

Rick couldn't move at first. He just crouched there and stared at her. He had so far to climb from where he'd been. Go slowly, Hale. So very far to climb toward human decency.

Her hands came down. She said, "Next time I want a third man in the ring. Would you mind sitting some place? And take that mad-dog gleam out of your eyes."

All right, he'd try.

"How's that?"

"Much humaner."

"I'm sorry, Jo. I didn't know that it was you."

"I certainly hope you didn't. I'd be screaming still if I thought that you did."

"Please don't. It's not so damn funny, Jo. They brought you through the desert?"

"Well, call it that. Dragged me, I'd say."

"You get it, don't you, Jo? What it's about—why we're—"

She wasn't listening. Her eyes were seeing past him. Looking at someone standing back of him. He just sat there, his arms held fixedly in front of him, feeling that sweaty slickness in the palm of his right hand. Waiting again.

Waiting again. And trapped.

THEY were in a room that must have been fifty feet long, at the back end of it, against the wall. The light which had come with dawn was entering through a slit window high above their heads. There were no other windows, and until Rick turned, he did not know that there was only one exit, a doorway, covered by a sheet of felt. The walls were built from earthen bricks, looking like over-cooked and dirty slabs of bread. The floor was wood, very rough, where the halves of trees had been adzed to give a surface. There was wooden trim on the walls where the timbers which shored them up showed through. The wooden strips were carved into flower and swastika designs. But all of it—the walls, the floor, the wooden trim—was gnawed by time and weather, pitted and filmed with dust.

The room was cool, but in it was that strange, dry, ancient smell that Rick had noticed in the watch towers earlier, a mustiness that was offensive like the smell of tombs.

The place was bare—no table, no chairs or benches, none of the clutter that fills up a house. But it was not empty. There was something in it that crowded it—a pressure that was very sudden, as if someone had turned a valve somewhere and loosed a force within that hall that was malignant. Slowly, toward that force, Rick turned.

The man behind him did not move. Even his eyes, lost in the bulging fat of his huge face, were motionless. He stood with his feet primly

"You were," he said, "so slow in coming to me, Colonel Hale."

He said it reproachfully. There was something caressing in the way he said it that seemed much more dangerous and revolting than the words themselves. And yet it was a marvelous voice—thick as though it came through phlegm, but with a nervous quality that was exciting, contagious.

"You were so slow, Colonel, and there were so many times when I thought that you might

"You were," he said reproachfully, "so slow in coming to me, Colonel Hale."

together, his gross body sheathed in yellow silk, his arms crossed on the vastness of his stomach. An immense heap of man, a hippopotamus of a man, his nostrils wide and round and the bridge of his nose sunken back to the level of his dark, slit eyes. His lips were thinned until they seemed to be simply another of the creases in his face—a crease with teeth. Beneath his mouth a grayish hank of beard straggled down toward the yellow silk. He seemed completely slothful, almost immobile in his billowing fat.

"How do you do?" he said.

His voice was thick. There was no accent at all and no expression. A lumpish man. A clod. And yet there was that smothering force about him, that gross malignancy. The eyes, the sunken nose, the brutish beard—and now the voice.

not come to me. You move among dying men without dying yourself. Yet I don't doubt that you are susceptible to death, as your Mr. Allerdyce was. As that poor, lovely child upon the Altyn Tagh was susceptible to it. You remember that, don't you, Colonel Hale? I, too, must remember it—now that you have come to me."

He sighed as he said this, moistening his lips, and as he finished, smiled. He was moving backwards now, not turning to do it, but shifting each foot behind the other invisibly beneath his robe, gliding, as if on skates. He kept the wet smile on his lips, fixed there, until he reached the felt that hung across the door.

"Lou-Lan is situated," he then said, "below sea level and the climate may seem sultry to you, but the place will interest you. This edifice was built in the year 329 by your Christian

Ogdai Khan

reckoning. That is a long time for a building made of earth and wood to stand. It attests to the preservative nature of Lou-Lan, or possibly to the isolation of the place. It can be said that in Lou-Lan time loses consequence. It will lose consequence for you, Colonel Hale, now that you've come to me. Time will lose consequence."

He backed into the flap of felt. It bulged, then slid around him and dropped back in place. Rick Hale stood motionless. He could not bring himself to move. It was as if that gross malignancy was still within the hall, as if that thick, caressing voice droned on. A voice hypnotic in the danger it implied. He felt the nervous, messianic power of it, with time, as Ogdai Khan had said, losing its consequence.

"So I'd—know what to do?"

In that instant, a distant thrum of motors came to him.

CHAPTER XVI

A BRAIN FOR MESSIAHS

THE sound of motors blasting through the sky did something for Rick Hale that nothing else on earth, at that particular moment, could have done. He had forgotten how exquisite it could be—the powerful, exhilarating roar, the off-beat stutter that meant speed and flight, the lifting of a wing, the rush of air, the smell of grease, the indefinable aroma of insulated wire.

It all came back to him, pumping into his veins as eager motors pump their fuel. He felt the thrill of it spread through his body like the flame that motors feed upon. He heard that distant thunder fade and then come back, knifing toward this sink-hole through the sky. Coming toward them now, and roaring.

"Jo!"

She'd gotten up. Her lips compressed, her chin raised to him as she moved, her arms held out.

"Yes, Jo!"

She tried to rip the bindings off his arms but he could bear to wait no longer and he whirled, his arms still bound, and ran toward the door with Jo behind him, both of them knowing that the plane was there, over them. They struck the flap of felt together, plunging out, their eyes searching the dawn sky for the plane. And then they stopped.

Ogdai Khan had stood there pressed against the outside wall. Now he was blocking them, that globular and toadlike bulk of his vast body gliding toward them silently. The crease that was his mouth was open now, so that his teeth showed. All so silently. But there were other men, a throng of them dispersed against the walls of these dirt buildings that were clustered, not along a street but semicircularly, as if Lou-Lan had once been walled along a river bank. Hundreds of men, Turkis and Kirghiz and Mongolian types, no homogeneity, except that they were Asiatics. Men without women—the chosen, the dedicated.

Rick Hale recoiled. The plane's scream was already fading back into that muffled sputtering. And they were here again, pressed back into the mustiness of this dead hall.

"No," Ogdai said.

They backed away from him. He followed slothfully, not hurrying, not looking back when two of those dark, slender, bearded men moved just inside the door.

"No," Ogdai said, his arms clasped loosely on his belly. "No."

Rick Hale could feel the sweat come back into his palms. The plane was gone. He could not even hear the echo of it now. But it had given him something that Ogdai could not take away from him. Something that those two nights of riding through the desert had drained out of him—

"Oh, yes," he said. He pushed Jo Brent behind him as he backed away. "You know now, don't you, Ogdai? Time regains its consequence."

"No, Colonel. It does not."

"Oh, yes, it does. They've spotted you. All this claptrap of isolated cities doesn't serve you now. Lou-Lan, Lop-Nor, nice hideouts in the camel days, but wake up, pal. You're in another century. They've spotted you and they'll be back, and just one plane with fifty-calibers sit-

ting down outside this dump can smash it. You know that, don't you, Ogdai? That's why that fat of yours is quivering. A plane—"

"A plane," said Ogdai, "cannot land upon a marsh. I'm sorry, Colonel."

"You really are. You know they'll land somewhere that's close enough. You know it won't be long before they reach you now. They'll cut you off, they'll close on you, and all that you can do is squat here in this swamp until they come. You're not much of a problem militarily. You're small potatoes, after all. You've had your fun, playing messiah while the world was fighting major plagues, but now, Ogdai, the DDT, the bug exterminator. Tough!"

"Colonel, you frighten me." His lips pressed hard upon his teeth, splaying into a smile. "I wonder now if it were worth my while to have checkmated Allerdyce. You speak of so much power—of planes, of fifty-calibers, major plagues. Was it worth while to reach into America and checkmate Allerdyce? And my poor, feeble thrust at you at Ambrugarh. I should have known, I should have realized. Now I am terrified. All my endeavors—tracing meticulously that photograph of Tian Shan, moving my simple men about the earth, moving my fat and quivering body endlessly through Asia, making my little contacts from India through Mongolia—were they worth while? When one plane passing idly overhead destroys them all." He moved forward, gliding. "Colonel, I'm sorry. That plane flies over Lou-Lan every day. The Russians do it for intimidation purposes. But it is aimed at their new allies, the Chinese. They do not dream that I am here."

WAS it a bluff? Was Ogdai, too, to try his hand at stud? But what was he to gain by bluffing Rick Hale? Or confusing him? Ogdai had pressed so tightly to the wall while the plane was overhead. And now, in his own way, Ogdai was talking big. It meant something. It stalled something. Give him a sucker bait and see.

"So it was you at Ambrugarh?"

Ogdai was bland. "Shall we say one of my apostles? Surely, Colonel, you can't believe I do these things myself? You can't imagine how immense my task is. You can't, perhaps, conceive of any work so vast finding its nerve center in so insignificant a man. A simple fat man, wandering these wastes. But I have found that one thinks better with less pomp. And my duty is to think. Nor simply for the sake of thought itself, as is the Asiatic custom, but for a purpose. Toward an end. There is so much to anticipate. So much to plan. Even the maintenance of this little caravanserai in Lou-Lan requires much planning—relay stations toward Yarkand and toward Hami, toward Lhassa and Urumchi, toward any point I might need to send men. The constant shifting of a thousand persons unobtrusively. And without a bureaucracy. With all the reins playing out of my hands. For I am not a messiah—I am an employer of messiahs, a brain for my messiahs. To think, that is my task. To plan. To know. I do these well."

"All of your thinking," Rick said, "didn't save Tian Shan."

The fat man's gliding motion stopped. His moist lips opened and then closed. "Tell me," he said, "how did she die?"

"She drowned."

"That was the way I understood it. And just before that, she was in your arms?"

"You keep a lot of snoopers, don't you, Ogdai?"

"Colonel, why did you take her in your arms? All that Wong wanted you to do was to give your opinion of her identity."

"What was it, Ogdai, that you let them leave her there?"

"It would do you no good to know that, Colonel. These matters—forgive me—are done with for you. Only blind luck has brought you here. Your luck at Ambrugarh, and again when Wong found you unconscious in the snow. Your luck in getting from the tent upon the Altyn Tagh. Your luck upon the Kum-tagh Desert, when Gombchiev tried to ambush Tian Shan. The very sheerest luck, all of it, Colonel. And I don't like to deal with lucky men. I know how to treat with a man who thinks, but men who act emotionally, who base their actions utterly in luck, confuse me. Why did you take her in your arms?"

"That worries you?"

"A fat man never worries. I am simply curious."

Jo Brent, silent until this moment, watching Ogdai Khan, now touched Rick's arm. It stopped him from replying.

She said, "We'll make a bargain with you. Why did Gombchiev let you take us from his camp? You tell us that, and Rick will tell you why Tian Shan was in his arms."

Ogdai turned back to Rick. "Agreed?"

"Not much of a bargain," Rick said. "Gombchiev loves his traps. We were a trap for you."

"And I have got the cheese from it," Ogdai said quietly.

"That's all you've got. That's all you're going to get. Even Miss Brent, whose feminine curiosity sometimes gets her down, can't bargain more than what you've got from me."

"I think," said Ogdai, "that she can. Can't you, Miss Brent?"

"Ask him," Jo snapped. "I'm out of this."

"Oh, no, Miss Brent, you're not quite out of this. You're very deeply into this, I think." He motioned to the men beside the door. "Suppose we see. Let's test your bargaining power. Let's take you away from Colonel Hale, and see—"

Rick said, "You know so much, Ogdai. You keep so many snoopers in so many places. Miss Brent couldn't help you."

"I think she can. Well, shall she go? Or will you tell me why Tian Shan was in your arms?"

"You ought to know."

The fat face squeezed. When next he spoke, the thickness of his voice made it seem indistinct. "Why was it? Why?"

"She was a lovely woman."

Ogdai screamed. It burst out of him with explosive, shrill hysteria. He stood dead still, his slitted eyes shut tight, his thin lips wet with spittle as the scream wrenched out of him. It seemed torn from the quaking mass of him. He just stood there, screaming.

The scream went on and on between quick, sucking gasps of breath. His hands still rested passively upon his robe, but now the fingers of them slowly curled, digging inward into his palms. The two guards finally reached out and touched his arms. At that, Ogdai collapsed, straight down, as if the fat of him were melting suddenly. The guards somehow held up all that enormous bulk of flesh, then staggering, they moved him bodily out through the door, the screaming even then continuing.

"GOOD God," Rick said. "What piled him up? All that I said—"

Jo's hand gripped his arm. "She was a lovely woman. That translates into something to him, Rick. First Gombchiev, now Ogdai Khan, both wacky on that business in the tent. What happened in that tent that means so much to them?"

"Nothing happened in the tent. She just stood there, groaning, and when I put my arms around her—"

"Why?"

"Look, Jo—not you! Don't play detective with me, Jo. And don't make bargains for me, Jo. That last one started all of this. I had the guy fenced in—"

"Why did you put your arms around her, Rick? That's it, that's the key to it. You don't put your arms around every lovely woman. You might try to, but you don't, and not women like Tian Shan. Don't you see, Rick? They know exactly what you did. They know exactly what you said—"

"All right. I said I'd get her out of it."

"But why? You've got to tell me why. I don't want your secrets, the thing you're doing for Martin Walsh, but this is about a woman, Rick, and you putting your arms around her. That's what gets them. And that's what gets me. Why?"

"Because she was one of us, Jo. Gray eyes, blonde hair, a face as white as yours. And she was sobbing—"

"Rick! You're lying to me, Rick."

"All right. I'm lying to you."

"You said you didn't see her face. Now it's gray eyes."

"I'm lying to you," he rapped angrily.

"And botching the job. What really happened, Rick? What could have happened that could make a man like Ogdai scream like that?"

"Ogdai's the screaming kind, that's all. You must have noticed that."

"All right," she said. She jerked away from him, her lips set tight. "I'm in this mess with you by choice. I didn't have to fly that plane for Martin Walsh. I asked for it—but brother, if I'd known the kind of mess that it was going to be, I—"

"I suppose," he said, "I have turned out to be a louse?"

"I'll take your word for that." Then she turned quickly back to him. "Oh, Rick! I'm sorry now. I've got no business butting into this. I'm just an ex-Wasp who was hired to fly a plane. I'll stick to that. Please don't be mad at me. Don't sulk at me. Of course I blew. I'm—scared. Maybe I'm jealous, some, but most I'm scared. That horrible old man!"

"Mind unbinding my arms?"

"Oh, Rick, your poor arms." She worked until she got him free, then watched, frowning, until he raised the bandaged left. "Does it hurt, Rick?"

"Not any worse than sin. It must be healing, itching like it does. Look, Jo—look up."

He kissed her.

"Well," she said. And a long time afterward, "They're back again."

The two bearded men were standing by the door.

"How long?" Rick said.

"Oh, right along. They're studying your technique. Mind putting that good arm of yours around me, Rick? And keep it there. I don't think that we're going to be alone so long. Not with just those two. That screaming meant—"

"Suppose we sit," Rick snapped. "I'm tired of waiting for the guy."

"All this was waiting? Just killing time?"

"Sure, it was waiting. Damn it, no! Don't mix me up. Don't throw your sex around. Don't—Holy Cats! I've got it!"

She stared at him.

"That's it!" he cried. "I've got it now—why Ogdai screamed. It cooks our goose, baby, unless—"

"What, Rick?"

"Sit tight," he said. "Shut up and just sit there. Don't call me Rick. Don't look at me. Just sit there with that crabapple grimace on your puss."

"What's the matter with you, Rick?"

He shook his head at her. "You're like all the rest of these service janes, you Wasps. You're tough enough until the flap is on, then you yell for a man."

"You crazy, Rick? You don't make sense."

"I know," he snapped. "I should be putty in your dainty hands. Maybe I could. Maybe, some day if we get back, if I can find a weekend free for you—"

Her palm lashed out. He took it flat across the eyes. The corners of his mouth pulled down. "Well, sugarfoot," he said, and shrugged.

She sat there staring straight in front of her. After a while she stretched out on the floor.

Rick Hale was sure that he had got it straight. Now he knew why Ogdai could never let him go. Ogdai would have to finish him. He felt quite sure that Ogdai had not wanted to do that. He'd wanted some way out of doing it. But now—now he could not, dared not. Now he must risk the greater thing that worried all of them—had worried Wong and Gombchiev and Ogdai now—not why Rick Hale was chosen to be sent, but what lay back of sending him. Was there, in this, some intricate new twisting of American policy? A probing finger thrusting into Asia, seeming so stupid and so innocent? What lay behind it all? And what came after Rick?

These were the questions which had made Gombchiev and Wong feel timorous. These rattled Ogdai Khan. But now Ogdai must take his chances on these greater possibilities. Ogdai, despite himself, would have to finish Rick Hale and Jo Brent.

That thought seemed sluggish in Rick's mind. He blinked, seeing the two men at the door in double focus. What was it Wong had said? No matter what we start to seek, we are reduced in time to seeking only sleep. And food.

So that was it? His brain was silly with the hunger that was gnawing him. And sleep was stealing into every nerve. When had he last slept? Actually? Not that heat-sodden daze in which he'd crossed the desert to Lou-Lan, but actually? Two days? Three days?

Poor Jo, he thought. She too had felt like this, and then he'd stood there making nasty cracks. He'd actually contrived to make her slap his face. Nice going, Rick. Incredibly nice going. Too bad that all this practising to be a heel would go to waste. For now, Ogdai—

THE next thing Rick knew, Jo Brent was shaking him. She was doing it very persistently, and he was pretending that he could not feel it. Maybe she'd go away and he could sink back into the pleasant torpor from which she'd aroused him. He wanted to sink back into it. He could not remember anything so pleasant. He'd been dreaming—he'd been standing on that landing strip at Ambrugarh, soon after he'd first gotten there from the States, and the boys were shooting the juice into his P-51. He'd felt the vibrating beauty of it running up his arm as he put his hand upon the wing. He'd watched the blue flame, and he'd thought, now I'm going up. Now the squadron is going up there, the first time, up there where the Japs won't get. My squadron, my men, my plane. He'd felt so proud of it all and so scared that he couldn't quite trust himself, and so he'd climbed into his plane without a damned word, feeling that terrific living vibration shooting through his nerves. And then all of that had blurred, and Jo Brent was shaking him.

"In a minute," he mumbled.

He could remember saying that when he was a boy, back in Columbus, down in Georgia, when his mother was shaking him to get him up for school. He had lain in bed, the seal of sleep upon his lids, and he had said, to stall her off, "In a minute, in a minute—"

"It's the plane again, Rick."

Instantly, he understood. It must have been crouching in the depths of his mind all the time he slept, must have been the substance of the dream, and now, when he heard Jo Brent whisper it, he knew. He sat up, blinking at the dark. He hadn't anticipated the dark and for a moment it bewildered him. But he could hear the plane, its motors mouthing through the sky.

"They're still at the door." Jo whispered.

"Who's at the door?"

"The guards."

"The hell with them!"

The plane came immediately over them. It was searching, Rick knew. He'd done it too often not to recognize the way of it. It was hedge-hopping, hunting for a beam of light or a sign of movement on the ground beneath. He could sense the splitting tension of the pilot in the plane, trying to see down through the night, striving in that one instant that he'd be above Lou-Lan to find it on the desert floor. But he did not know which instant it would be. He'd be upon it and over it and past it in seconds, and out again above the marshes or the desert, and unless he caught a light he'd never know.

The pilot knew only approximately where to search. It was worse than a needle in a haystack, hunting for a blacked-out town at night. And searching for Lou-Lan would be infinitely tougher than an ordinary town. A few brown heaps of weatherbeaten mud, and Ogdai would be sure there was no light.

Ogdai! Ogdai! "To think, to plan, to know. I do these well." But Ogdai had been screaming earlier. Rick thought he knew Ogdai—a brain, but under heavy pressure it refused to work. It was the way it was with electric power. Let it build up until a condenser gets too heavily overcharged, and then it pops. And then there was a temporary equilibrium, with nothing happening. That was the kind of man that Ogdai was.

"It's coming back. He must have dropped a flare," Jo whispered.

Rick put his arm out, feeling for her in the dark. She slid inside of it. She pressed up close to him, not slack. All of her body was like that, tensed in the dark, waiting while they heard that amazing splatter that a plane makes when it banks. It was coming back. Rick's hand was gripping hers as they heard that. He loosed it now. He was getting set. He was getting his toes tightly upon the floor. The roar of the motors was tearing into him, ripping the last dull phlegm of sleep out of his brain. It was coming now. It was above them, thundering.

Then it was gone again.

They couldn't do that. They couldn't keep on roaring over and beyond like that. It couldn't happen. Not again. He couldn't possibly stand any more of that. Not building up again like that—

The explosion stunned him. It wasn't the force of it that he felt, for the force was somewhere else inside Lou-Lan. But the shock of it, the absolutely unexpected smash of it against his nerves, knocked him off balance and he sprawled. It was as if someone were pounding at the earth with giant hammers, each blow separate, instants apart. A stick of bombs. The punch of them, that thick and solid crump, was gouging earth.

"Get on your feet, Jo."

She was standing then, clutching his arm. In front of him somewhere the two men shuffled by the door. If he should drive into them suddenly, butting his weight into their slender bodies, then they'd move. Somehow he realized the silliness of that. The plane was overhead, not here with him, and getting out would get him nowhere in this desert, with Ogdai's men still swarming through it. It was no dice, unless—

Unless this meant that other men were moving on Lou-Lan. In that case this would be the time to break outside, now that the shock of bombs was fresh upon Lou-Lan. And on Ogdai. Would he be screaming now? No, not for this. He'd know exactly what to do about a thing like this. It was a possibility that he would have foreseen.

"The plane!"

Again. So low this time that it seemed to be plunging into them. There would be flame upon the earth to guide it now. And that was what Rick figured must be happening. He heard the sudden, ugly coughing of the plane's guns punctuating the roar. It must be beautiful. It must be out of this world to be up there, pressing the button on this flaming pile of dirt, making the desert night go hot with fire, the guns spitting those chunks of metal down convergingly. If he was going to make a break for it, the time was now. He gripped Jo's hand. He knew she couldn't hear him shout, and so he yanked, dragging her after him across the darkness of the hall, then stopping, quickly patting her, trying to make her understand, to wait for him, and then bracing himself to plunge against the men he could not see in front of him. The time was now. Hop to it, Hale!

Something barked. It made small holes of blue fire in the dark. It came from where he thought the door should be. And somewhere in the dark in front of him he heard a gasping, drowning sound. Then something thumped. Something leaped from the hall into the flap of felt, then stopped and spun around, made visible by yellow flame beyond. And there was more of that blue fire, making small holes. The spinning figure dropped.

"Richard?"

The voice was cool. The timber of it sent cold shivers through him. He had known, but now the fact, the proof of it, was stunning. He moved toward the door, stumbled on something soft, stepped over it and stopped.

"Tian Shan."

CHAPTER XVII

JUST TWO

SHE stood there in the dark beside the wall. He saw the sub-machine gun underneath her arm, and then the crumpled body of the second of those two men who'd shuffled at the door. Beyond her, down the slope toward the marsh, the sullen red of bomb fires burned upward into the night. The red glow was upon Tian Shan, tipping with fire the pale gold of her hair. He saw the slim, exquisite outline of her head and throat, only half visible, the shadow masking her, making her seem, even now, aloof from him and in the shadow unattainable. And then he heard again the mad roar of plane motors, coming back.

"Now, Richard! Along this wall. Move fast."

"Jo!" he called. "Jo!"

Tian Shan's hand caught at him. "The girl?"

"Jo Brent—"

"No, Richard—you and I. Only we two can get away."

A stick of bombs splashed close. Dirt spurted up behind the hall, a black smear in the redness of the night. Inside the hall, timbers and bricks shook loose and clattered down.

"Jo Brent!" Rick yelled, starting into the hall. Then he felt something that dug hard into the small part of his back.

"No, Richard Hale. Just you and I."

He brushed the gun away. "Cut it out, Tian Shan. The girl goes with me. I got her into this, and now—"

"Ogdai will know I've gone," she said, "and something that you said to Ogdai has changed things. I can't go back. This is our last chance, Richard. Go with me now—with me alone—or I go by myself."

The plane was overhead, making its happy, killing chatter, spitting shells. Tian Shan could not have heard him if he'd yelled. He saw her face more sharply now. Her mouth was set. There was within her eyes that cold, decisive look that he had seen before she killed her Mongol guard. She could do that to him as easily. It wasn't anything that he could brush aside. She could do that.

"I'm not," he said, "leaving Jo Brent. Think you can make it by yourself?"

"Richard!"

"So long," he yelled at her. He whirled and leaped inside the hall. Again he stumbled on the body of the guard. "Jo Brent! Jo!" He kept that up, floundering, until his foot struck something else.

He dropped, feeling the clothes upon the body, groping for the face. "Jo, honey—Jo!"

She lay there limp. The blackness of the room crushed in upon him suddenly. Instants, and he'd thought of the things that it could be. One of those fifties coming through the roof. A chunk of bomb steel. Tian Shan's tommygun. He scooped her in his arms, steadied himself, then turned and ran. He got outside, staring into the bomb fires, burdened with Jo's inert weight, choosing his way. Again he heard that gulping crump of bombs. Flame spouted up, closely again. The long chance now. He'd have to guess. And if he made a wrong one—

"This way, Richard Hale."

He saw Tian Shan crouching far along the wall. She'd waited there. And now she ran. "Well, here we go," he said aloud. "I'd know what I must do. And this is it. I follow Tian Shan. I bet my pile upon the face of evil. Look, Allerdyce. Damn you, watch this!"

(To be concluded)

By
E. HOFFMANN
PRICE

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK KRAMER

A JEEP FOR HAKAMOTO

Arms folded, he stepped out, as lordly as any white man five foot six can be.

THOUGH the general wasn't awfully tall, Pete Barstow had to raise his chin to look him in the eye as he said, "You're getting sick of seeing me, and I am getting sick of the old army run-around, which makes us even."

"You're wrong, Pete, I'm never too busy for a word with one of the men who—"

Barstow's lean face twisted ironically. "Skip it, General." He dug into the pocket of his khaki shirt to get a sweat-stained official paper, and read in the tone which the army considered proper for publishing citations and orders: *"The President directs me to offer his sincere thanks for your loyal and patriotic—"* Barstow's natural voice carried on, "Meanwhile, I get a run-around each time I offer cash money for one of those jeeps rotting in the sea air, going to hell faster'n my plantation. See what I mean?"

Barstow pointed at the acres of tarpaulin-covered automotive equipment in the park

which skirted the Parang-Malabang Highway. His gesture included the corrugated iron warehouses of Polloc Harbor, and government transports lying at anchor in Illana Bay. "Surplus, all kinds of it. No matter how you service it, it's getting no better fast. It needs use, and I'm the guy that can use it."

The general let out a long breath. He hitched up his sun-bleached khaki slacks, and sat on his heels as easily as a Filipino. He was an old-timer who'd got his handful of stars the hard way. After a right-left glance, he saw that there were no aides standing by, nor any public relations officers to hand him a prepared statement.

"It takes time to find loopholes in the regulations. Meanwhile, you are getting by, aren't you?"

"Hiring *cargadores* to carry crude rubber to Parang isn't so bad, and I could boat it down the river to Cotabato. The tough part is working the agitators and rollers by hand. All this yelping about needing natural rubber, and rehabilitating the industries of the Islands, but what is anyone doing about us fellows who can produce? Nothing—that's what they are doing. How long do I wait till someone bolos the red-tape you tell me about? Does the book say you have to discriminate against me because I was a guerrilla instead of regular army?"

"I did not make the tape, nor color it," the general answered, wearily and patiently; he was twice Barstow's age, and for a moment, he fully looked it. Then the sparkle came back to his sun-squinted eyes, and his voice crackled. "I am not discriminating against you, though guerrillas are beginning to smell, and they'll end up being as big a nuisance as the Japs."

"You telling *me*? That Datu Hassan, for instance—well, skip it. What I came to let you know is, if I had five thousand bucks, U.S. cash, I could buy any truck in this park. Every son of a ——— and his brother is peddling government property right under your nose, and I get left because I want to get it on the level." He winked a bitter gray eye. "I haven't the dough to come by it crooked."

The general pulled a long face, then nodded to admit, unofficially, that Barstow was right. For a moment they regarded each other, career soldier and wartime Jap-stalker. Both were angular of face and figure, sweated lean by Mindanao's humidity and heat, burned brown by the sun. Beneath leather-tan was the yellow tinge left by atabrine they'd taken instead of quinine. It tainted even the whites of the eyes.

"You're about the size of a native," the general observed, in the tone of one who has pondered so long that he wants to air his thoughts. "And I bet your shoes are three sizes larger than before the war. Toes still spread out from wearing *chinelas*."

"*Chinelas*, my ———! Barefooted the past two years. Ate every *carabao* and *caromata* pony the Japs didn't grab, so we ran out of hides for sandals."

"Didn't try Skibby-hides, did you?"

"What in ———'s holy name you getting at, General?"

"You speak Maguindanao Moro and a couple other dialects, and your nose isn't too big to pass in a crowd of natives."

"Yes, and I was commissioned in the A.U.S. and mustered out and I got that pretty compliment, only—"

"Confidentially, Pete, have you any good guesses where Lieutenant General Enyo Hakamoto is hiding?"

Nearly everyone, native or American, had a rough idea as to where the number one war criminal had dug in to dodge courtmartial for his atrocities in Zamboanga and Iloilo. However, the unexplored areas of interior Mindanao cover a lot of ground, and a few yellow-bellies need only a small hole. Barstow did have logical and pointed notions on the subject, but from pure cussedness, he retorted, "No more than I got an idea when you'll cough up."

"You have a hunch."

"Could I make a guess the Army's not made already, or the constabulary, or government undercover men?"

"You guerrillas learned so much about the interior that nobody collected the hundred thousand pesos on your head. Now Hakamoto is running the same game on us, and he's harder to find because he is not hitting back. So—"

"Set a thief to catch a thief?"

"You're feeling sour."

"General, ever hear the story about the guy that was courting the Spanish barber's daughter, and when the guy asked how about marrying the girl, the barber asked him, 'Where do you get shaved?' The guy said, 'I shave myself.' The barber got sore and said, 'Well then, you can—'"

The general coughed. "I've heard that one. So I am to find that Skibby myself?"

BARSTOW got up off his heels. "Not to be rude, sir, but you get my idea. I am too busy running my plantation by hand to fool around doing Army jobs. And thanks—"

"Wait a minute!"

Barstow turned, hitched his thumbs in his belt. "Yes, sir?"

"If you were a civilian employee, and lost a jeep while hunting Hakamoto, it could be surveyed."

"*Surveyed?*"

"Surveying," the general explained, "is when a board of officers investigates the loss or destruction of government property to decide

whether or not the person responsible was justified, and also, was engaged in a mission for the public good."

"Unless that Skibby is dead, he's hiding . . . say, you got something. Sign me up, I'll sign for the bus."

The general chuckled. "Not that simple, not *quite*. You'd lose it within the hour, send in your resignation, and then send me a check to pay for it."

"You really think I'd be that lowdown?"

"Be a fool if you weren't. Anyhow, my idea is that you'll be in country where nothing on wheels could roll a mile. But when you come back with Hakamoto on the hoof, and all set for courtmartial, the records'll show that a vehicle had been issued, and had been lost in the performance of duty. It'll be surveyed. I give you my word that no one'll ever question how come you're using it to haul rubber to Parang."

Barstow frowned. "Low pay for a tough job."

"You'll get captain's pay and allowances. You'll be doing the army a great service, to say nothing of furthering the cause of justice and humanity. A splendid example of postwar patriotism."

"You must memorize that PRO crap. I bet you talk it in your sleep. The war's over, General."

Barstow, taking half a dozen brisk strides to the rear, considered that the interview had ended in a draw, but the general called after him, "If you change your mind, bring Hakamoto to Parang. The offer will stand good."

Barstow faced about. "Pay and allowance starting as of today? How about the men I take with me?"

"You'd hardly go alone, but don't pad the payroll too much." The general winked. "Considering red tape, we can do a lot if we're both reasonable."

Though tempted, Barstow was also stubborn. "I'm having some more of running a plantation by hand."

However, telling a general to go to hell, an ambition Barstow had cherished ever since the Army landed in Mindanao, fell flat when he reached the edge of the reservation. Twenty natives who had been sitting on their heels, chewing and spitting, got up to ask with eager confidence which shamed him, "*Señor*, how long we wait for the jeep?"

"Pick up your loads and walk. I'm walking with you."

He saw loyally concealed disappointment as they obeyed. Most of them bent under *bejuco* hampers. A few carried their burdens divided, and balanced, Chinese style, on the ends of *pinga*-poles. Though he had made no promises, they took it for granted that when Barstow went out for anything, he brought it back.

While the *cargadores* had not expected to

"Señor, how long we wait for the jeep?"

ride, they had told all the gossips along the way that the boss would be leading them in a jeep. There would now have to be embarrassing explanations.

The knotty-legged porters wore ragged shirts, and pants which scarcely reached the knee: shreds which loved the remains of the waist band, else the scraps would have gone A.W.O.L. a long time ago.

The men of the nipa-thatched villages outside of Parang had G.I. slacks, G.I. shirts, G.I. hats. Shapely brown girls wore skirts and camisas made of mattress ticking, of towels, and of QM sheets from hospitals. The army didn't have sufficient guardhouses or MP's to take care of soldiers who peddled government property for souvenirs. And after four years of Jap occupation, the natives needed the contraband they got.

A '42 Ford whisked past. The driver was nattily dressed. The *mestiza* lovely beside him looked like a fashion plate.

"*Bu-la-nini-mo!*" one of the porters yelled, and another, "*Putangnamo!*" Some, preferring Spanish, had remarks equally offensive; and one made what was clearly a lewd and obscene gesture on seeing that some folks still had money. Whether or not they were Jap-lovers, or profiteers not yet nailed by the law, it was clear that they knew how to get things—which was why Datu Hassan and other ex-guerrillas had declined to disarm. They, too, were going to get in on the gravy.

Barstow, plodding along, quit trying to figure how seriously his loss of "face" would affect those who worked for him. The guerrilla mountaineers wouldn't stop with shouted insults; and when they honed up the krisses and came down into the valley to share the wealth, it would be bad for innocent bystanders.

"Peace, my ———!" he grumbled, "It's going to be a madhouse worse'n after the Spaniards folded, and every Moro with a corporal's guard got the notion of being sultan."

CHAPTER II

PESO POLITICS

HIGHWAY ONE skirted the rugged mountains which made the northern wall of the broad Cotabato Valley. Ragang's volcanic cone rose more than nine thousand feet above the sea; nearby were Makaturing and Latukan, buttressing the high plateau where the Lake Lanao Moros lived, a people who must have got their disposition from those fuming peaks. These and the Maguindanao Moros had boloed and krissed every Jap they could ambush, and once back into the long-abandoned ways of hell-raising, they couldn't subside because of anything as trifling as V-J Day. And the chief of these one-time patriots was Datu Hassan. Ever since Islam came to Mindanao, centuries ago, there has been a Datu Hassan to pillage fellow Moslems, or the Spaniard, or the Americano, or the Jap.

Parrots squawked and scolded. Pigeons zoomed from dense growth along the north of the highway as Barstow and his men tramped along. To the south spread rice fields, and stretches of cogon. Men and women dragged wooden ploughs, since there were no carabaos left. Welcoming a rest, the farmers paused to hail Barstow, and to chat with his porters.

"Datu Hassan," they would ask, "has he robbed you yet?"

"He doesn't like rubber," Barstow answered, optimistically. "How about your rice?"

"Praise the Saints, he leaves enough to eat till the next harvest."

"More than the Japs left, *compadre*."

Presently, two truck loads of khaki-clad constabulary came roaring up the highway. They were armed for the field; stern, business-like fellows, sent out on a mission known best to the Governor of Cotabato, and perhaps, though not necessarily, to the General. Barstow wondered if these would finally be afoot, to sift the jungle and the blow-holes of volcanic wastes, looking for Hakamoto.

"That's a career for them," he decided. "I'd be an idiot giving 'em competition."

Three days' march brought Barstow to his plantation, which was north of the crocodile-infested Liguasan Marsh, and not far from Kabakan.

Ragged *taos* were grubbing out the tall grass which choked the evenly spaced rubber trees. Bit by bit, three years of neglect were being wiped out. Barstow, squinting at newly liberated trees, cursed from seeing the scars of over-tapping. For a while, the enemy had got crude rubber, and at a deadly rate, so that now there were broad gaps in the rows, showing how ants and swift decay had liquidated trees weakened and killed by the greedy invader.

In the processing shed, a jerry-built agitator creaked and screeched as it stirred freshly collected latex. Acetic acid fumes came from coagulating vats. Garcia, the foreman, came to report, "*Señor*, we have make the rolling thing work. Now it is sheets of crepe rubber, wait, I show you, it looks good, the smoking house is work better too."

This encouraged Barstow. He had made the march to Parang, he had told his men, to get a jeep—which he had—but more than that, he had gone to see how the gang would work during his absence. The result surprised him, and pleasantly.

A nipa-thatched shed with *suali* matting walls was full of crepe rubber, smoke-darkened but sound. The sheets, imprinted with the pattern of rollers, were the size and shape of doormats; they hung like towels from a clothesline.

"*'Sta 'ueno, 'sta 'ueno!* All this by hand power?"

"*Si, si.* The windlass-wench, what you call her, she turns good as by carabao. But with the jeep to make power, how much better."

"What's been happening while we were gone?"

The foreman told of the births and deaths, and elaborately; he appreciated Barstow's interest in native doings. And for all his itching to find out, officially, about the jeep which had not arrived, he did justice to gossip. After a pause for breath, and a longer one for dramatic effect, he started anew: "And what else you think, *señor*? After they fire the mayor's son from the tax collector's office, after they yell dirty names at the mayor's wife, after the mayor's daughter don't get married to the senator's son, Jaime. Then what you think?"

Barstow pulled a long face and a ponderous frown, and not entirely for effect. The mayor of Kabakan, Don Teofilo, had collaborated with the Japs, but it had been pretty well established that he'd slickered the invaders as much as possible, to help his people. Now he was being crucified, not for what he had done or left undone, but because liberation had not brought prosperity. And Don Teofilo was a good guy. During the guerrilla days, he'd helped Barstow out of a number of tough spots.

"So they're cracking down on Don Teofilo—that's bad, he got me out of a couple tough spots. Someone knife him?"

"No, *señor*. He is gone."

"Resigned?"

"No, he just walk out, with people calling him dirty names, only he folds his arms, he does not look right, he does not look left, he

keeps going, until they quit throwing things at him."

Barstow took a deep breath. For a Filipino to walk out that way was one step short of suicide; the man wasn't abandoning his family, position, and one-time friends, he was saying good-bye to life, taking an indirect route, instead of taking a shot at himself.

"That's bad, Garcia, very bad. I have to see his wife and—"

"That will be good, *señor,* showing Don Teofilo has one friend. Maybe someone can find him, and he comes back."

"Of course, he will," Barstow replied, because it was the proper, rather than the truthful thing. "If someone is friendly to his family." Then, "I have some bad news, too."

"Not too bad, *señor?*"

"We walked back. There is no jeep for us. Stolen ones cost too much."

"You ask the general himself? He was at home?"

"It is against the law to sell or give away."

Silence. Then, "*Señor,* we do well by hand."

"Better than I thought, Garcia. Very well."

Barstow looked them all in the eye. They were with him, despite disappointment at his not having outpointed the general.

The group had barely begun to break up when from a distance came a shouting and screeching. A high velocity slug made a *pop* from smacking the air. Rifles whacked. "Arisakas," Barstow thought, during his dive for cover. "Springfields, too."

"*Aaaaaaah buguy!*" The war-cry of Moros charging into action drowned the panic of plantation hands scattering for safety. Before the single volley stopped echoing, Barstow was alone in the curing shed. He got up, rubbed a bruise. No use running. Arms folded, he stepped out, as lordly as any white man five foot six can be.

THE rifle-armed natives who dashed into view wore black-and-yellow turbans which exposed the crown of the head. Some wore G.I. shirts and pants. All bristled with wavy-bladed krisses. Many carried Japanese Nambu pistols. A few were barefooted, though most of them had shoes taken from enemy dead.

The leader, a Moro little past thirty, had a crimson silk jacket. His jodhpur-style pants were sapphire blue. He rode a shaggy stallion little larger than a Shetland pony. Beside him trotted an attendant carrying a yellow parasol with gilt fringes: the symbol of royalty.

After some easy guessing, Barstow said in Spanish, "Good evening, Datu Hassan." A magnificent gesture. "The place is yours. Please dismount. I am sorry that my people made such fools of themselves, running."

Though the Moro saddle, shaped something like a modified sawbuck, was probably killing Datu Hassan, he sat straight. His nostrils flared, and his eyes gleamed; he held his head high, and sniffed the air as though hoping to find trouble. All in all, he had much in common with his mount, a creature small of size but enormous in cussedness.

"You are Señor Barstow?"

"*Su seguro servidor que sus manos besa,*" Barstow responded ceremoniously, and to salve his self-esteem and American propriety, crossed the fingers of his left hand and thought, "Like hell I'd kiss your hands, you beetle-browed son of a ———!" Then, "*Es su casa de usted.* Be pleased to dismount. Let me offer you a bit of something."

He waved toward the tin-roofed bungalow and the cook shack from which came the savory smell of peppers and stewing venison

The *datu* dismounted. His first steps proved that he had not ridden far, else he'd be limping. The horse was purely for prestige.

"I am sorry," the Moro answered, "but we have many calls to make. This is only to pay respects. You are a prominent planter. To pass by would have been insulting."

Nevertheless, he had time to accept six cans of salmon which Barstow dug up. In return, the *datu* gave Barstow half a dozen "pig tail" cigars, and of a quality which had disappeared from the open market. The next remark gave a hint as to how Datu Hassan came by such luxuries. "*Señor,* I must levy a tax of sheet rubber."

Barstow saw no sense in pulling a long face, so, in Moro fashion, he accepted without complaint what he was unable to fight. "May it profit you," he said, amiably. "You are welcome."

Datu Hassan smiled appreciatively and understandingly; the twinkle in his deep-set eyes showed clearly that he recognized a man after his own heart. "*Señor,* I do this to redeem the currency I issued during the war. Is that not so, Kassim?"

A gray-haired man with red skull-cap and silver-rimmed spectacles, plainly the *datu's* secretary, answered gravely, "That is indeed so, Señor Barstow. His Highness being a man of honor, sells the rubbers and rice and tobacco, to buy back the money he printed."

"I understand," Barstow said. "With your permission, I get something from the house, something I forgot."

"Permission and blessing," the aspirant to royalty answered. "Go with him, Kassim."

Barstow quickly returned with a handful of the guerrilla currency which Datu Hassan had mimeographed somewhere in the mountains. The secretary, seeing the wad, said proudly, "I make the typewriting myself, and the Arabic writings also, and the picture of Mt. Apo."

"It is as fine as engraving," Barstow told him, with considerable exaggeration. "And His Highness will buy it back with American dollars?"

"Or with Philippine pesos."

Barstow then went to the prince and offered him the roll. He pointed to the heap of sheet rubber which the guerrillas had brought from the shed. "Let me save you some time. I'll buy my rubber back, and you'll have that much less currency to redeem, later on."

For an instant, he feared he'd gone too far with his logic. He heard the foreman's sharp, short catch of breath. The faces of the *datu's* followers changed perceptibly. Then he caught the twinkle in the deep-set eyes, and was fairly sure that there would not be a swish of the kris.

"Thank you, *señor*," the *datu* answered, gravely. "But, saving your presence, it would not be honorable for me to take back my own money. No, I must buy it back with pesos, as I promised. Taking the money signed by my own hand, that would be robbery. Naturally—" An amiable smile. "You did not understand."

"Naturally not, your Highness. Is it true that you plan to be Sultan of Mindanao?"

"Allah plans, not man. But can I disarm, simply because the eaters of filth, the sons of unclean mothers, the monkey men, have gone? I stay, because people trusted me and—"

Barstow cut into the impressive pause, "And gave you supplies for the money you printed?"

"Yes. Just that. So I trust in Him who makes burdens light."

The *datu* mounted up, and followed the men who were marching away with every scrap of Barstow's rubber.

Garcia began to sputter, "That brother of lewd sisters! That father of many little pigs. He leaves us nothing."

Barstow smiled bleakly. "He left us the machinery to handle what the tappers bring in tomorrow."

Pacífico, the chief porter, chimed in, "Wait till the army and the constabulary get that brother of an old goat."

Barstow sat down and picked up a stick with which he drew a line on the ground. "Listen, all of you. Datu Hassan is playing it like a sultan because no one's crossed him. Just one machine gun serenade and he'll forget he's a patriot. He'll forget he has currency to redeem. The next time, his men won't shoot high to warn us. And half of us'll get krissed."

"That is the Holy Truth, *señor*. But he knows you for a Jap-killer, he respects you, it won't be too bad with us."

Seeing the facts, Barstow gave them to his men: "We can't keep on raising rubber for Datu Hassan. We can't sit here till soldiers and constabulary finish him. We'll be starved out. Farmers all short of rice, nothing but *camotes* to eat, and not a peseta to buy anything."

They agreed with him, and he saw the exchange of glances which meant, "We'd better look for another job, and quick." It was merely a question of someone's picking a polite way of breaking the news. The pointed looks were centering on Garcia, who didn't want the honor. But he'd crack under pressure, then or the following day.

Barstow said, "There is another way. I said the general could not sell me a jeep. So I made a bet with him. If he loses the bet, then the government has to let him pay."

"That is true, *señor*. A general who does not pay, he has no honor. And the government loses face."

"What is the bet, *señor?*"

"He bets a jeep that I can't find the Jap general, Hakamoto, and bring him to Parang. He'll pay us and give us chow while we're hunting. We get that whether we find the monkey-man or not. Garcia, see how many men will go with me."

The foreman was happy again, and so was the chief of porters. Garcia said, "As many as you need, *señor*, maybe twice as many. Getting grub and money to win a bet is very good."

THREE days' march up the Pulangi River toward the unexplored corner of Cotabato Province should have been a sure cure for insomnia, but Barstow was getting no better than a succession of catnaps as he huddled up to a smudge fire. Its overall result convinced him that mosquitoes liked smoked meat, and didn't mind the fumes.

He couldn't decide whether their buzzing was worse than their bite, and what made it even more maddening was the unbroken *plop-plop-plop* of condensing mist that fell from the trees in big drops. It was the sound, not the added moisture, for he was already soaked.

This was guerrilla routine, old stuff; but plantation life had softened him. His legs burned and itched from the bites of finger-sized leeches he'd loosened with the business end of a cigarette. He was hungry. Three pigeons stewed with fern tips didn't go far with six men. If the game shortage continued, he and the five who had set out to find Hakamoto would soon be as starved as he hoped the Jap was.

Meanwhile, Garcia would be bringing G.I. rations from Parang. These, hauled by truck to Kibawi, were to be smuggled across the river and cached to make a supply base hidden from snoopers. If the bamboo telegraph got wind of the Jap hunt, rumors would spread faster than Barstow could comb the country.

In a region so thinly populated, there should not be a game shortage. That there was one worried Barstow, and far more than did the emptiness of his stomach. Something had been

happening since he and his guerrillas had come down from Mt. Malambo to enjoy the beautiful new world that was to follow V-J Day. And the freshly deserted village, early that morning, began to gain unpleasant significance. A settlement you could just above cover with a Chinaman's hat—Moro, judging from the patterns of the *suali* matting walls. Something was on the move.

In his half sleep, he tried to recall the faces and the voices in the villages he and his five, carrying packs like *cargadores*, had passed the first day. Everyone had acted naturally, or so he'd thought. Now, neither dreaming nor awake, he was trying to pick the liars, pick the double talk that had sounded so reassuring.

He must have been asleep when a persistent tickling at his ear reached through the fever of mosquito welts, for he went cold. He caught the butt of his pistol, and from habit so strong that it was instinct, he waited, not moving, yet ready for anything.

The smudge gave barely enough glow for him to recognize the broad, flat nose and pock-marked face of Pacífico.

"Andrés came in," he whispered. "Something moves—" Pacífico indicated the downstream direction. "There, and up that way, too."

Barstow smothered the smudge with wet grass. In the gloom he got his Japanese rifle, one of the thirty he had kept hidden in the plantation bungalow. He pulled his sarong down, and adjusted his Moro turban. Though trees blocked out the stars, the taste of the air told him that dawn was not far off. Already, monkeys were changing the tone of night-long complaint. They were glad because the pythons' hunting hours would soon be over.

There was no sound of deer on the way to drink, and there were no wild pigs.

"Where's Andrés?"

"He goes to tell Miguel and—"

A man cut in from two yards' distance, "I have told them, they come in." Andrés added, "What I think is, Datu Hassan goes the way we do."

That would explain the game shortage.

Then came other answers.

Downstream, a Springfield smacked. A submachine gun chewed the jungle. A burst answered from the south. Another from the north. Pigeon wings drummed and whirred. Barstow's handful scattered without command or question. Plantation days had become a memory. Once more, it was every man for himself. Each knew the general direction of advance, and eventually they'd assemble on the planned route.

First, however, they'd have to escape what had almost hemmed them in, closing at once from downstream, from north, and from south.

No Moro war-cries, only vague stirrings in the undergrowth, and the complaint of parrots.

Early that morning, the deserted village began to gain unpleasant significance — something was on the move.

Barstow, taking peace for granted, had scattered his men mainly to avoid leaving the conspicuous trace of half a dozen camping in one spot. Constabulary, he guessed as he followed a game trail, were hunting Datu Hassan.

Constabulary attacking at dawn. No time to talk. A tommy gun snarled. Two grenades boomed. Trigger happy, and not a bad idea, if you're trying to convince a Moro that it's time to quit levying tribute.

THE murky gray light was the color of the swirling mists. Barstow, now alone, had more than ever to find cover. He didn't want to explain his mission. As he read the sounds, he began to realize that there was an increasingly good chance of not getting a chance to talk. Out in the bondoks, anyone in his right mind shoots first, and debates later.

A cordon, all right. It was closing faster, since further stealth would be wasted. Andrés, Pacífico, and the others were drawing fire. There seemed to be a crescent-shaped line, closing in well ahead of Barstow. He saw no chance of getting to the river.

He couldn't risk hiding in fern clusters or beneath uprooted trees. The searchers were beating the brush. Every so often, a grenade let go. The hunters were taking no chances. Apparently they were more interested in liquidating a nuisance than in making an arrest. Rifle slung from his shoulder, Barstow grabbed one of the tough lianas which trailed from a banuyo tree and "walked" himself up the bole, reaching the first branches some twenty feet from the ground.

He secured his rifle and pistol to a branch, then wormed his way out on a limb. Below, the rattan underbrush crackled and rustled. Presently, he got glimpses of constabulary, and heard their voices; but he could not catch what they were saying. It was very much like a game drive. Now that he was out of sight, and well above the show, it struck him as amusing, all this care and determination to bag nothing. His men must have got clear, for which he was glad.

The sounds stopped. Barstow's area became an island of silence. The sun was reaching down into low hanging mists. Steam rose from ferns and the damp earth. He became uneasy from growing certainty that something was wrong, and getting worse. He began to doubt that he had actually glimpsed the cordon, though the sounds could not have been hallucination. His skin began to twitch. He knew that he was under intent observation. Regardless of the improbability, he was unable to deny the growing conviction that he was cornered.

A volley slashed the leaves that hid him. "Come down, or we'll cut you in half."

The command was in Lanao Moro, spoken by a man who didn't know the dialect any too well. However, Barstow was sure he knew precisely what he was doing, and *how* he was going to do it.

Barstow countered in Spanish, "*Que pasa?* What's all this? Quit shooting."

"Come down! No argument."

Barstow backed toward the bole. The descent of the liana made him a tempting target to men who probably didn't enjoy outdoor life a bit more than he did. When he dropped to the ground, he kept his hands high, and repeated, "What's all this?"

Two grim little men with submachine guns came from cover. Behind them was a constabulary captain who spent several seconds giving the prisoner a silent investigation. Finally he spoke.

"Who are you?"

"Muhammad Muda."

"Young Muhammad, eh? What are you doing?"

"Looking for my people. Back there, they were gone. When I came from the coast."

They took his dagger and bolo. Lucky he'd left rifle and pistol up in the tree, or he would have some explaining to do. The captain took him for one of the Maguindanao Moros, on the evidence of turban and sarong, his speech, his stature and complexion. The eyes were a false note, but one word would explain them: *mestizo.*

For the next few minutes, Barstow answered questions about the village whose missing inhabitants he was seeking. Luckily, he knew the name of the place, and from the number of shacks, he made a sensible guess as to the population.

But the captain said, "That's a lie. You and the five fellows with you are strangers. Where's Datu Hassan?"

"I don't know."

"You warned him we were coming. Which way did he go?"

"I don't know anything about him."

"You might remember if I staked you over an ant-hill," the captain observed, casually. "You're a fool thinking you can keep us off his trail. If you want your bones picked, that's your business."

There were plenty of ants. They ate till only bones remained. A sixteen hundred pound carabao didn't last much longer than a man. The captain wasn't bluffing. Whatever happened, miles off the highway, was the captain's business. He would write what he pleased in his report book.

Barstow said, "I don't know anything about Datu Hassan. Maybe he has gone this way, and scared my people from the village."

The captain pondered. Then, "Sergeant, put him under guard, and carry on."

CHAPTER III

BAMBOO BOOBY-TRAP

AS they approached the spot which Moreno had picked for camping, Barstow noted two small knolls, perhaps a yard in diameter, and a little more than a foot high; these humps were covered with small pebbles and pellets of earth. The ants which came up were red, and more than three eighths of an inch long, with large heads, and ferocious nippers. Moreno might have picked the camp site for other reasons. . . .

Then several men began digging. Being buried to the chin near an ant-hill had niceties that being staked over it lacked. It was not a question of whether or not to talk. The only debatable point was, what yarn, short of the truth, would satisfy the methodical captain?

The whole story would give the constabulary a splendid start toward rounding up General Hakamoto. Whether in cash or high prestige, such a capture would pay off a lot better than would the immediate infliction of punishment on Datu.

It had taken the U. S. Army and Philippine Scouts some years, back in 1914, to get Jikiri cornered; and that bandit's following had been no more than a handful of desperadoes hated by the natives who had at first applauded him. The way Datu Hassan played it, looting discreetly and without more violence than the situation required, he'd become and he'd remain a hero with those too poor to have anything at stake.

No one expected Captain Moreno to come back with Datu Hassan under guard. Evidence of having shot up a detachment of his men would be satisfactory. So, one word about the search for Hakamoto would blow Barstow up like a kamikaze plane.

Captain Moreno stood by, watching the digging. He was a smooth-faced young fellow with a stubborn jaw. A good-looking chap with level eyes, all business. He didn't do things for fun, but for results. His expression changed a little when he eyed Barstow and read the prisoner's interest in the digging.

"You're no *mestizo*. Fine imitation, you pass in a crowd, but you don't make the face changes, you don't have the thinking. What are you?"

"What do you think, Captain? I'm still wondering how you spotted that tree."

Moreno almost smiled, then shook his head. "A simple way. Not footprints. Otherwise, why ask you where is Datu Hassan?"

"Well, why ask me? I don't know."

Moreno half-turned, clasped his hands, looked for a moment at the ants, whose scouts had come to investigate—and then at the trench. The ground was too rocky for a burial of the post-hole type.

Abruptly, he faced Barstow. "You are a sunshiner, another no-good *bugao*." He snorted contemptuously. "This trench is for a latrine. Quit worrying, Fulano, you're going to Parang under guard."

Barstow, doing his best to look happy, hoped he'd fooled Moreno. Going to Parang would publicize his identity and purpose. Before he could get on the job again, this corner of Cotabato would be swarming with Hakamoto-hunters. They'd be shooting at each other, demanding each other's surrender. The general wasn't the only one who figured that Barstow had a sound idea as to the Jap's hideout.

Toward evening, the constabulary patrols swung back to camp. A few, sounding off before they could be silenced, as good as told Barstow that the *datu's* trail had been lost; that, indeed, the entire party had left the highway solely to investigate the yarn about six "outsiders" heading up the Pulangi Valley.

"Shut up," Moreno said, "this Fulano talks better English than you do. You educated idiots, quit being so proud of yourselves." Then, to Barstow: "Some day we'll get all of you no-good bastards. You're a nuisance to us, and a disgrace to Americans."

"Is going native so low down, Captain?"

"Natives are trying to go up, trying to get some of the good things of American ways; though they make fools of themselves sometimes doing it, they're trying. You sunshiners are so low your own people disown you. If I weren't civilized myself, I'd put you where you belong—in that latrine."

The captain of course was about right regarding sunshiners. Barstow shrugged and said, "Aw, skip it, natives lead a simple comfortable life, I like it. This bejuco is cutting my wrists, ease up on it a bit. You might've brought handcuffs."

Moreno spat. "I was looking for a man who'd come down fighting, no matter how many guns covered him."

THEY gave Barstow some field rations, eased his wrist bonds, but hobbled his ankles. While slapping at mosquitoes did no good, being unable to slap made things worse. A constabulary private, who looked more like an ape than any human Barstow had ever seen, squatted beside him and said, amiably, "Hold still, I take off the leeches—they oughtn't even drink a sunshiner's blood."

He borrowed a cigarette and set to work. One by one, the finger-sized pests let go. He flipped them into the glowing smudge. Finally, he gave Barstow three drags of the *Isabela*, whose smoke was like burning rags and blast furnace fumes.

"Gracias, compadre, I'll remember you when I'm king."

The low-browed private grinned merrily. *"Es nada."*

By now the constabulary had finished cutting bamboo stakes which, laced together with bejuco, made barricades as effective as barbed wire. While they had given up finding Datu Hassan, they were not simple enough to assume that the Moro might not be lurking to bush-whack them.

Fighting bejuco bonds was futile work. The strands were flexible as fishing line, and wire-tough. With each twist, they bit in. Nothing short of a knife could slice them.

His only hope was the everlasting drizzle and forest mist. Bejuco stretched from moisture; the drying out. that afternoon, had so contracted the stuff that Moreno had agreed to ease up a bit. So Barstow welcomed the dismal *drip-drop-drip,* and air so dense that one could almost squeeze water from a handful of it.

He had spotted the bamboo barriers, and the men posted behind them. From the inside, hurdling would be easy; from the outside, it was sure impalement. The worst of all was the cunning tangle of julat-anay vine, whose claws snagged whatever grazed it. One jerk would rustle the rattan leaves to which it had been secured. The entire area had been fixed with primitive booby-traps.

Barstow's painful progress was interrupted by the crackling as of half a dozen rifles at once. From another quarter came a second fusillade. This was somewhat high, with bullets whining and zinging from branches. The sound of Japanese rifles, and the Moro war cry, *Aaaaaaah—buguy!"* got faster response than any bugle call.

He had no chance to observe how the sleeping captain rolled to face the threat; how his men grabbed rifles, and without yelling or excitement. He had no chance to observe anything but sound, for one of the men darting and snaking about in the gloom, crouched beside Barstow, with a knife.

"This way," he said, yanking him to his feet.

They were beyond the bamboo obstacles before the constabulary answered the third volley. Pacífico had returned. Later, when the now distant shooting had stopped, he explained, "We got clear, we kept clear, we waited around their camp. Seeing everything. Then two small fires, in each we throw a clip of shells, for noise. Four of us, we each shoot two-three times. So, it is easy for me to come in by the back door to get you."

Andrés came up to say, "Here is the rifle and pistol. You are smart, not being caught with them."

"Been shot for a guerrilla sure," Barstow admitted.

They made a camp without any smudges. Thinking back, he remembered the direction of the breeze at dawn, and the little man who borrowed a cigarette to de-leech him, and had given him a few drags, but had taken none himself. He said to Pacífico, "I bet that fellow caught the smudge-smell on me. I was smoked as a ham, and soaked with dew."

They agreed, which ended the post-mortem. Barstow carried on, "We still don't know why that village was empty and all the camotes rooted up."

Andrés wagged his head. "Those constabulary quit too quick. Upstream where I hide awhile, there is a camp not very old. Moro camp, and big. One night camp. They come from over the river—" He pointed. "To go that way."

Barstow cursed. "Heading our direction. They'll find Hakamoto if they beat the bondoks for game. Suppose you can trail them?"

"Sure, but what for?"

"To do him a favor."

The men pulled long faces. They wanted none of Datu Hassan.

"Finding him, that is easy. Leaving him, what you think, will he let us go?"

Pacífico added, as the objectors waited for Barstow's answer, "People he doesn't trust, he does not lock up."

A slicing gesture made a convincing final argument, but Barstow said, "I'm going to try it. A warning's a warning, and he's a gentleman in his way."

FROM the crater lip of an extinct volcano, Barstow saw enough of Datu Hassan's camp to know the risks. Pacífico said, "No women, no childen, this is bad."

"We've got no women or children with us either. I'm going."

Andrés blocked his descent. "This time, what can we do for you?"

"Make tracks for home." He looked them eye to eye. "That is what I mean."

Pacífico fished in his pack and found a pencil stub and a soggy notebook. "You will write it to the general at Parang?"

He wrote, so that they'd not lose face for abandoning him. "Here it is. You have families. You'd be crazy to stick."

He side-stepped, slid a little on the lavender-gray pumice, then got back on the trace of a path.

At the foot of the cone, where scrubby growth had almost swallowed him, Pacífico called, "We go with you."

Seeing that they had followed him, Barstow answered, "You wait, till I get permission for you to come in. It'll be better that way."

He followed a game trail, part of Mindanao's natural highway system, used by man and beast alike. The instinct of the latter followed contours and picked the best routes, so that

an engineer could hardly improve except by grading.

Barstow walked slowly, and with no attempt at stealth. He carried a staff he'd cut with his bolo. Presently, as the sounds of the encampment became barely audible above the buzz and chatter of forest life, he noted a bejuco creeper that was not quite natural in its straightness, and the color was a bit off. Reaching well out with his staff, he snagged the vine. There was hardly enough resistance to be noticeable.

Then a slight tautness, and the *spang* of a monstrous bow-string; a short-hafted spear thumped three inches deep into an iron-hard molave bole. The shaft vibrated from the drive. The deep note of the string still lingered. The trap could hardly have missed anyone following the path. Barstow tugged and wrenched until he salvaged the spear without separating shaft and head. The latter was hand forged, of ore from the deposits that dotted the island.

He discarded his staff, and used the spear instead, twirling it jauntily as he went.

The next trap he hurdled instead of springing it.

Then he raised his voice and hailed the camp.

He barely kept from jumping when an answer came from behind him. The grizzled men who leveled rifles from the hip had something of the jungle cat about them. Since Mindanao had neither tiger nor leopard, these turbaned Moros supplied the lack.

"The peace upon you, and blessings," Barstow said.

They didn't answer. They may have seen and remembered him from the day of the raid, and so knew he was not entitled to offer Moslem salutation. Or else—

But the alternative was one he had to face out. He repeated, "The peace upon you."

One gestured to indicate, "Forward, march." Barstow obeyed, and in a sweat not related to heat or humidity. Their withholding the answer to salutation, and their sending him ahead, instead of leading the way, showed that he had not won guest status, or even toleration.

Walking boldly, as he now had to, made the booby-trapped path more dangerous than ever. Seeming afraid would be equally dangerous. But he twirled the spear, and was glad that they could not see his face. He was ready to buckle at the knees when he finally smelled horses, and smoke, and the spices of cookery.

The approaches were barricaded, though Datu Hassan had nothing resembling a *cota*. A fierce-eyed stallion, saddled and caparisoned in yellow, snorted and pawed as Barstow approached the bamboo shelter at the further edge of the clearing. In front of the wickiup was the yellow parasol. Datu Hassan sat with several old men.

Kassim, the secretary, had his gear with him, a sharpened reed, paper, a dish with ink-soaked silk-waste. There was another who had charge of a silver casket somewhat smaller, though deeper than a cigar box. This contained the betel nut, the lime, the tobacco and the spices which kept the retinue chewing and spitting during their waking moments.

Datu Hassan smoked a long cigar. He flicked the ash into the small, clear fire over which a brass pot gave off the smell of peppery stew.

"The peace upon you," Barstow said.

Though the *datu's* face showed recognition, he neither rejected nor accepted the visitor's courtesy. Barstow offered him the spear. "A present, Your Highness."

Datu Hassan smiled a little. He recognized the shape, and the carving of the haft. Barstow's escort had stepped aside. Meanwhile, armed men, all ragged and march-stained, began to gather, though at a respectful distance.

"What do you want?"

The attendant, not yet knowing whether or not to accept the ironically offered gift, eyed the *datu,* and got no sign. Barstow risked a fast move, all or nothing. He side-stepped, exclaimed, "In the name of Allah." He dipped knuckle-deep into the pot, and whisked steaming stew into his mouth.

When he could speak, which was before he stopped being surprised at still being in one piece, he gasped, "Swallowed some."

The *datu* relaxed. So did everyone. "Sit down. Have a smoke, now that you have eaten."

BECAUSE of that food, even though stolen, he had won three days of life. Provided, that Datu Hassan chose to be an orthodox Moslem.

"Let my men eat first," Barstow demanded. "I come to ask permission for them to follow me."

"They want to?"

"Why not? Your men follow you."

The *datu* spoke to his guard. Several went toward the trail.

When, finally, Pacífico and the others came in, under arms, things looked better. Barstow took a chew of betel nut and settled down to telling about the constabulary. He concluded, "First they thought we were some of your men. Then they figured me for a sunshiner."

"And you come so they can trail you to me."

"No. They ended by being sure I was no one you'd have around you. I was only small size game, something to take back instead of nothing."

The *datu's* counsellors began to see it Barstow's way. "Constabulary heading south from Bukidnon sent us to cover," the guerrilla said, finally. "But what are you doing here?"

"I came to warn you."

"All the way from your plantation?"

"Of course not. I didn't know you'd be here. But—" Barstow looked his man squarely in the eye. "The times aren't right for rubber, so I'm prospecting. For a platinum placer."

There was one, at the headwaters of the Malitabug. Not even a mining engineer could flatly deny that Mt. Malambo region had such deposits. And Barstow had prospected before the war.

"May Allah make you rich."

"May he increase your wealth." Then, "I heard some constabulary talk. Two companies are on the way from Davao Province, coming up Highway One."

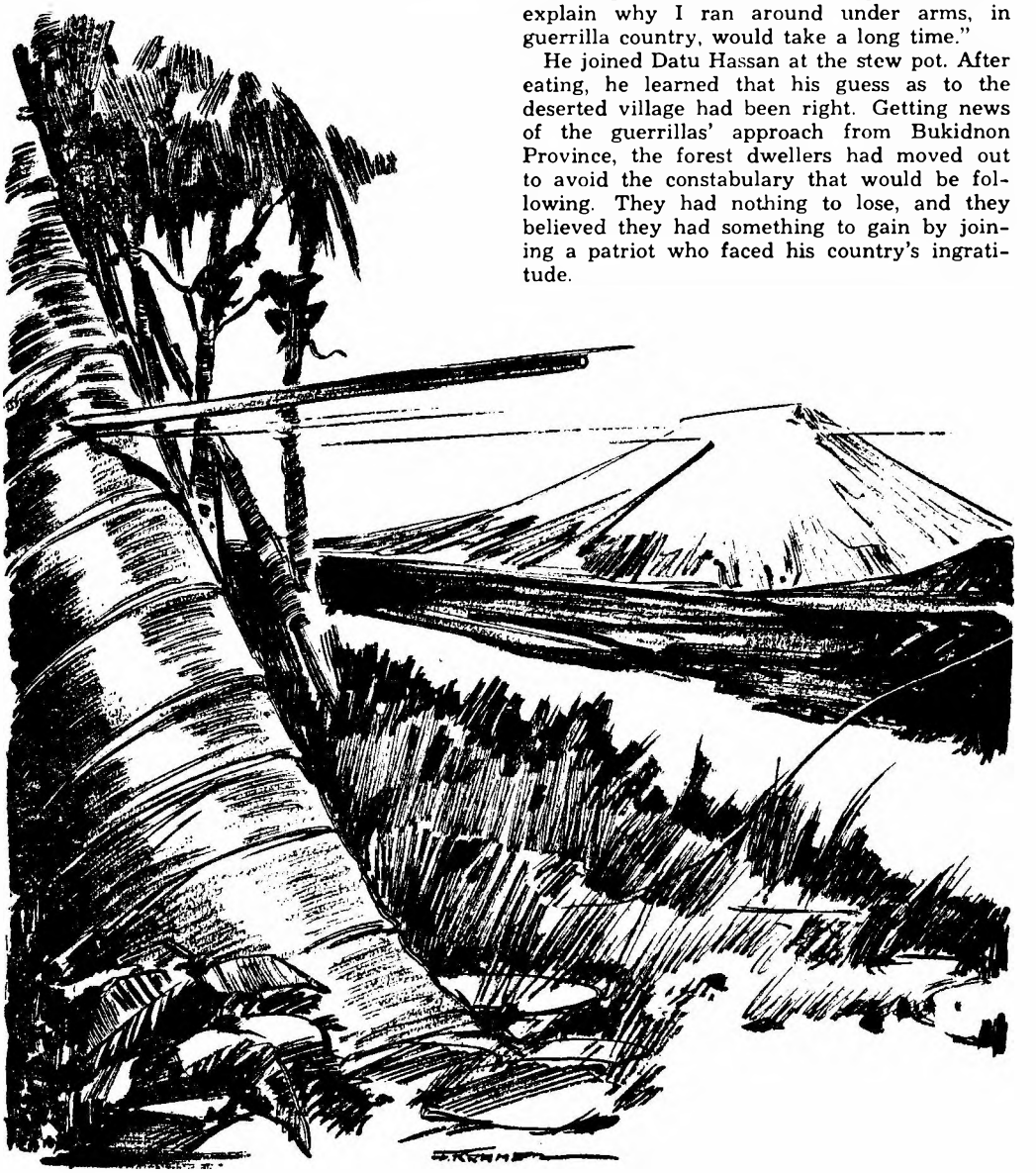
"Where are they going?"

No use overdoing it, so he answered, "I couldn't get everything. You can guess as well as I can. If you are wrong, then it is not my fault."

"You risked being shot while escaping," the *datu* said, "just to warn me?"

"No. To get away, I risked getting shot. You marched hard and fast to keep from an all-out fight." This last was not tactful, but he took the *datu's* look without flinching. "I had reasons for not being taken to Parang and questioned. To explain why I ran around under arms, in guerrilla country, would take a long time."

He joined Datu Hassan at the stew pot. After eating, he learned that his guess as to the deserted village had been right. Getting news of the guerrillas' approach from Bukidnon Province, the forest dwellers had moved out to avoid the constabulary that would be following. They had nothing to lose, and they believed they had something to gain by joining a patriot who faced his country's ingratitude.



There was the spang of a monstrous bow-string, and a short-shafted spear thumped three inches deep into the tree.

Datu Hassan smoked a long cigar.

"So you see," Datu Hassan said, "people still believe in me."

"Let me do you another favor. Something for you to hear, and nobody else." When the retinue had been dismissed, Barstow continued. "You'll end by making enemies. The people on the coast outnumber you. The war is over, and they're forgetting everything but chow and something to wear. They're thinking of political jobs, and elections."

"The Hukbalahaps, in Luzon—"

"Sure, eighty thousand Huks. Do you think they'll keep the friends they've got now? After they've lived off the country for a year, after a few of their hotheads burn a few barrios, or take too many supplies from one place, they'll end up the way the Japs did—cornered, hunted, starved out."

"I am redeeming my currency. What else can I do?"

"Remember Jikiri?"

"That cut-throat!"

"He started with people liking him. One mistake made the next one."

Datu Hassan thoughtfully listened to mention of old-timers rounded up before he and Barstow had been born. In their day, they had been powers in Mindanao. But Philippine Scouts had settled them when the people had wearied of one-time heroes.

A plane made a small black spot against the sky. It was so high that its note was not heard. Barstow pointed, and said nothing. Others, flying lower, would finally begin spying out the unexplored areas. Neither Jikiri nor the Datu Hassan of thirty years previous had contended with such merciless observation.

"Your talk is honest," the guerrilla admitted, after a long silence. "Except that you're talking for your plantation."

"All right, I am. You leave the farmers enough to eat, but you took all my rubber."

"There was a vinta going out. The next trip, I was going to collect nothing from you."

"That leaves me in worse shape than the farmers."

When he left Datu Hassan to join his men, they asked, "Which way does he go? What did you tell him?"

"I gave him something to think about. What it'll make him do is more than I can guess. We're still wearing our heads because we spent a couple years in the bondoks the way he did, dodging Skibbies and hunting them. But he'll get out of this corner."

"You told him about trouble from the west?"

"And from the south, too." Seeing Pacífico's eyes widen, he added, "If there aren't any coming up Highway One to put on a squeeze, there should be. Finally there will be."

"Then if they come soon enough, we'll be caught between them and him?"

Barstow grimaced. "That's just it. And the plane that went overhead made him think of parachute troops."

"They want him that bad?"

"Ask someone who knows everything he's done. As far as we know, he hasn't been too bad, and getting him out of Bukidnon may be enough. Or, they may be out to finish him."

CHAPTER IV

INFIDEL'S WIT

LATE that afternoon, the Moros brought a prisoner into camp. The sight of him made Barstow realize that his own reception had been cordial compared to this man's. Julat-anay had slashed his legs. His once white pants were shredded. Instead of a hat, he had a strip torn from his shirt wrapped about his head—a bandage, Barstow concluded, for the man had wounds and bruises which the jungle had not inflicted.

When he stumbled, his captors yanked him upright by the cord which secured his hands. Dirt and blood masked his face. His eyes had a glassy look. He moved like a mechanical toy.

One of the captors had slung from the shoulder a web belt with holstered pistol, and a canteen. Another had half a dozen bandoliers of cartridges, an excess which the men in the *datu's* encampment did not duplicate. When Barstow noted that several carried two rifles apiece, he knew that a party of armed civilians had been cut down to one survivor.

Andrés read the prisoner's face, and whispered, "*'Zus, Mar'y, Z'ep!* That's Don Teofilo—"

"The mayor of Kabakan? You're crazy."

Barstow stared, then said, "That *is* Don Teofilo! Poor devil!"

Pacífico's eyes gleamed. "Now we see something. You know why he is not cut in half?"

Don Teofilo, like many minor and major officials, had carried water on both shoulders, yessing the Japs and secretly doing the best he could for his countrymen—as Barstow saw it, a chore more dangerous than taking to the bondoks to be a guerrilla. Now, because of the abuse heaped on his family, he had run out—and into this.

The Moros were flinging dirt, manure, rocks. They spat cuds of betel. They called the prisoner a spy. A collaborator, putting up a convincing story of being a misunderstood patriot, had a chance of appealing to Datu Hassan—but not a spy.

That the *datu's* outposts brought the prisoner in for a hearing was not from any urge to give what an Anglo-Saxon would call a fair trial. They brought the man for another cause entirely: out of respect to Datu Hassan, whose yellow parasol symbolized the royal prerogative of giving life or death. This was the ancient Malay tradition. Its observance told Barstow how strong this ex-guerrilla had become. And as he looked at that stern face with its deep-set eyes, he was sorry, because the idea of the yellow parasol was archaic as the bearer's honest belief that levying "tribute" was more honorable than repudiating currency. He was sorry because a good man bucked the times, a venture which he did not recognize for what it was.

To kill in wrath or in battle, that was any man's right; to order death, that was the *datu's* right. The hairline difference had won Don Teofilo an agonizing hour or two, and might in the end win him worse than Captain Moreno had promised a supposed sunshiner.

Barstow didn't want to be around when it happened.

Pacífico sensed this, and he was troubled. He whispered, "To leave now, that insults the *datu.*"

"It would."

Andrés added his bit: "It looks like you believe in that man. Like you don't believe in Datu Hassan."

Barstow was thinking so intensely he ached. They hadn't started questioning the prisoner. The ex-mayor had crumpled, or a rock had stunned him. One dumped a jar of water on him. Another prodded him in the rump with a kris.

Barstow said, "Don Teofilo is looking for the Jap. He must be in a tight spot, wanting to hide out with that starving pack."

The five looked at him with eyes which clearly showed that this was something which had not occurred to them; one said, "That can be, what kind of a bandit would that clown be?"

A Moro prodded him in the rump with a kris.

"You know what?" Pacífico resumed, "if he knows for sure—if he knows, right to the one little hole in the ground, he knows more than you know."

Barstow nodded. "If I can get him out of this, one of you can follow. The rest of us stay with the *datu.*"

"Maybe he'll not understand?"

Barstow shrugged and spat a red jet of betel juice, then got up to join the circle of those who waited for the muttering, mumbling captive to regain his wits.

"Datu Hassan, I risked my life to bring you news, and I brought you a present. You gave me no present."

"You ran from constabulary, for yourself."

Barstow pointed at the spear. "That is a trap you set. Not the constabulary. You offered me death, and I gave you friendship. And a present."

"My own spear," was the frowning answer.

"Ask your old men, whether that spear was yours, after it failed you."

The Moro's face changed, and he conceded, "I do not have to ask. You bought the spear by offering your life. It was yours, and you gave it to me. A gift, and news."

He clapped his hands. Honor demanded a return gift. But Barstow said, "I had no choice about the spear. Is it right for you to have choice in what you give me?"

Kassim looked up from his writing gear. Though he was too grave to smile, appreciation showed in his eyes, and his toothless mouth eased up. Being a scholar, he relished hair-

splitting. For centuries, Mindanao men and Sulu men had gone all the way to Egypt to study the Holy and Exalted Koran, in the University of el Azhar. And this was all in the Arabic tradition.

"The infidel is right," Kassim said. "It is plain that Allah loves him."

"And Allah loves the generous," Barstow boldly cut in.

Kassim and the dignitary who had charge of the betel box exchanged a slanting glance, one of interest and approval.

Without looking, the guerrilla leader knew that he was being whipsawed. Old men, learned men, one of them with a nose that clearly revealed his Arab blood, waited to see if he acquitted himself in the tradition of a Moslem prince. And since constabulary had given him some rugged hours, Datu Hassan had more than ever to act the prince. Though the yellow parasol was the token of right to give judgment of life or death, there was this beneath it all: the *datu's* every thought and saying and act had to prove that right.

To cut an infidel down was in itself meritorious, but to strike by way of evading an infidel's wit—that was unprincely.

"Name the gift," Datu Hassan answered.

The old men nodded their satisfaction, as he knew they would. He had showed his royal recklessness by not asking what the gift would be. Datu Hassan smiled a little, and Barstow knew that the issue balanced on the bridge between Paradise and the Moslem hell, al Sirat, whose width was less than a razor's edge.

Ask—and boldly—But to go from man's boldness to fool's presumption, that could be fatal.

Barstow said, "Give me that man's life."

Kassim said, "That is fair, Datu Hassan. He offered his life to your spear, and Allah gave it back."

"If he is a spy," Barstow said, "would you stay here until he took the story to Parang?"

Datu Hassan smiled, with an effort, but redeemed himself by making the entire matter something trivial. His old men had undercut him—so, princely, he showed that they'd been only hair-splitting scholars.

"Not enough to call a gift. Throw dice, make it sport."

"A gambler is worse than a hundred drunkards."

Where argument would have failed, a proverb served. "Take him," the *datu* said, goodnaturedly. "Go now, before your guest-right is over. The next time—"

He made a gesture which left no doubt that it referred to more than Don Teofilo's head. The collaborationist had risen to a crouch. He was dazed, yet not enough to be entirely without understanding. Barstow cut the wrist bonds, spoke to his men. They caught the mayor under the arms, and raised him.

Barstow remained where he stood.

"You may go," the *datu* said.

"What is a gift without a blessing?"

"Go, with Allah's blessing, and the peace."

"And the peace on you who stay."

A guide led them beyond the final booby trap which guarded the guerrilla camp. Then Don Teofilo collapsed, and Barstow said, shakily, "I could pretty nearly do that myself. Pick him up, hustle him along—a prince can change his mind a lot quicker than he can his shirt."

THERE were rations now, for the *cargadores* had come from Kibawi, and Barstow was at the edge of the waste which furnished cover for Hakamoto. Stunted trees found bare foothold in lava which had frozen in long black tongues, in jagged pinnacles, in broad fields all slashed by treacherous ravines and honeycombed with blowholes. On the further side was a dead cone partially overgrown with trees. The latest flow had gushed from the base instead of blasting out the central plug of lava.

Barstow studied the approach to a spring whose water was close to the freezing point. He eyed the wheat-sized granules of blackish-brown cinder, and the nearby edge of a flow of lava the color and shape of coal lumps.

"Bird droppings. Not even animal tracks."

Pacífico sized it up. "How could a man come here and not leave prints?"

Andrés answered, "By dragging something over the loose cinders."

"But here in this home of fire devils, who'd be afraid to leave tracks. Who'd expect to be hunted?"

"*Quien sabe?* Some would, others would not."

Which was right. There might, or might not, be Japs hiding near the spring. Barstow turned to Don Teofilo, who since his rescue had made good recovery. "What do you say?"

The fugitive mayor shrugged, and looked dejected. "You wasted your nerve, saving me." A wan smile. "Now, if I'd gone to the Japs, so your men could follow me, then I'd be useful to you."

The collaborator's yarn rang true. He said that with twenty trusted men, he had set out to hunt Hakamoto to prove, once for all, that he had never been in sympathy with the Japs. And when, near the edge of the lava flow, he could have taken advantage of Barstow's carefully prepared "accident" to give him a chance to join the hiding Japs, he had done nothing of the sort. Finally, he had declined Barstow's offer of escort to the Pulangi, where river dwellers would give him a dugout for a swift trip downstream and to the safety of the highway.

"I have lost my men, the only friends who

still believed in me, and I accomplished nothing. So I go on with you."

"To help me, I suppose?"

The mayor grimaced. "If I could, yes. But look, if you find him, I get credit for being with you. My people who hate me would then respect me. I don't need to steal credit from you, not even if I could."

It added up, Barstow told himself, as he again recapitulated the details he knew, and had heard concerning Don Teofilo. The sharp-faced little man looked genuine. His features were delicate. A person not aware of the folly of judging by appearances would take him for a scholar, or an artist. Anything but a man of action. A sensitive face, a fragile seeming body; the sort of person who would shrink equally from turning open traitor, or from facing the hardships of jungle life to hide from the enemy.

Don Teofilo had more mind than spirit; with too much imagination, he had overestimated the dangers of defying the enemy; overestimated the hardships of taking to the bondoks; overestimated, finally, his wits with which he had expected to fool the Japs while secretly keeping the respect of his people.

Too much imagination. Now, Datu Hassan—he'd defied the Japs, and he was all set to fight both army and constabulary. Average him with Don Teofilo, and the result would be two good men.

Barstow regarded the delicate little mayor, and wondered at the man's eyes, which had changed since that day he had been dragged to face the judgment of Malay royalty. Barstow was disturbed by what he could not read; it made him uneasy, the conviction that he was missing something important.

He said, finally, "You were afraid my men wouldn't let you live to reach the Pulangi, once they got you out of my sight?"

"That is half true," was the candid answer. Then, smiling, "Don't suspect me, *señor*. If I had been trying to get help from Hakamoto, or if I had been trying to help him, couldn't I have led you into a trap? Or, yesterday, couldn't I have gone to warn him, or lead him back to surprise you—if I liked Japs, and if I knew exactly where he is?"

Barstow nodded. "Even for a Jap lover, it'd be hard for you to sell me to Hakamoto."

Don Teofilo spat. "You still believe people don't do such things, *señor?*"

"Maybe I've no imagination. Anyway, you've really not got a good guess where he is?"

"Somewhere in these lava beds, yes. *Seguramente*. I talked to Japs, almost up to the last day. They asked me if I could be sure of doing well with the Americanos. I said yes, so they didn't tell me enough to help now."

"Then we'll hunt the yellow-bellied son of a———! With a fine-toothed comb."

The floor cracked, with a sound like the shivering of glass, and dropped him into a pocket.

AND hunt they did; a search whose unreality kept Barstow from ever fully believing that he was awake. This was not like those blind quests whose rightness was periodically clinched by the blast of booby trap, the warning whack of a sniper's bullet, or the grunt of a man crumpling up, winged by a shot whose report came in seconds later. Here there was nothing but lava baking under the open sun, lava drenched by rains, lava slippery with mists.

He was crawling along the ragged bottom of a channel, wondering how many Purple Hearts a man rated for being slashed and gouged by shards of obsidian. The floor cracked, with a sound like the shivering of glass. The ceiling of a bubble had given away, dropping him into a pocket. His rifle clattered after him. Pacífico loosened a gun sling. Andrés helped him, and they got Barstow out of a trap from which he might never have emerged.

He wiped off the fresh flow of blood. "Damn well like being shaken up in a sack of razor blades," he growled. "Top looked solid, too."

Pacífico's broad nostrils flared. "I smell it again."

"Smell what?"

"That stink. The Jap stink, with no washing."

Barstow whiffed the air. "Mmmm . . . hmmm, got it. You said, *again?*"

"*Si.*"

"Where before?"

"By that way."

They painfully backtracked to the fork of the "Y" whose branches they were exploring. "You fellows do it better'n I do. What's your notion?"

Pacífico frowned, crawled up the branch, pausing every yard or so. When he finally gestured, Barstow joined him. "You get it now, no?"

He caught the reek of sweat and filth and sickness and hunger confined, somewhere, in a cramped and unaired space. "That crack?" He pointed at the black wall. "There."

"*Si.*" Pacifico whispered now. "Somewhere under the ground. Air leaks out here, she leaks out over there. But find the hole for crawling into."

Like a surveyor plotting a point by resection, Barstow tried to arrive at a guess which his men might make more accurately by instinct. His heart came up into his throat when, toward the close of day, he found a "subway" tube, an almost perfectly circular bore a dozen feet in diameter, and running at a gentle slope. A broken ceiling had exposed the tunnel. Just short of the point where subterranean visibility failed, there was a perceptible curve to the left.

No telling how far it reached. Whether a hundred feet, or several miles, could be decided only by exploration.

It was cool here, and dry. Far ahead, water whispered furtively. Barstow lit a cigarette. The smoke pulled off from vertical. It wavered. Near the top of the bore, it flattened to parallel the ceiling.

They went back to the entrance. Debris blocked progress in the opposite direction. Above, the air was still.

"No—it moves that way, a little—" Barstow pointed.

"The wrong way for how the smoke moves down there."

Some considerable cavern, Barstow reasoned, was "breathing." The rise of warm air. The flow of water. He said to his companions, "I'll wait here tonight. You go back to camp. Make some noise. Wherever they are, they might've heard us floundering around in the 'Y.' Gripe a lot."

"That is easy," Andrés said, regarding his slashed shins. "What do you do here alone?"

"Listen. And sniff."

"Maybe they come out by dark to set traps for birds."

Barstow fingered the grip of his bolo. "I'd been thinking of that myself. If the others've found something interesting, come back and let me know if it's really important. Otherwise, stay put, you'll make noise anyway you get here."

They left him. It was plain from their faces that while they were at home in the jungle, this eerie stretch of desolation was no place for Christian or Moslem. The ground which had once gushed fire was still full of devils. Unless you had an *anting-anting* designed especially for the locality, you'd better stay away at night. That nobody had offered to watch with him told Barstow a good deal.

BECAUSE of the elevation, it became chilly as darkness covered the upland waste. When the lava's sun-heated outer layer began to shrink, small, cracking sounds told of movement in the gloom; each click, tinkle, smack, furtive and thin, startled Barstow, leaving him always uncertain whether nature or lurking men were at work. His sense of smell became blunted by chemical scent which tainted the wind that swept dunes of cinder; dunes and ridges whose original brown-black was now marked in reptilian patterns of terra cotta, and ivory, and dull scarlet. Rain had combined with volcanic by-products to make acids which caused the changes of color.

"No such thing as a dead volcano," he told himself, during the moments when he had to relax or else blunt his senses by concentration too sustained. "Alive when it's red hot and fuming, alive when it's cooling, life still sneaking around when it's dead."

Sprouting seeds and growing saplings dug in to pry and break. Finally, there'd be fertile soil, and a new cycle. He began to understand why the natives were uneasy in country that looked so dead, yet was intensely alive.

He remembered his moment of panic, some years previous, when he'd gone down into an extinct crater to prospect for sulphur. Sudden mists had swooped down to hide the sun. They'd concealed crevasses from which a man could never escape. He got sudden and horrible understanding of why the Bagobos had told him that mountain devils carried men away. Later, an old planter had given him the straight of it: the peak usually was mist-capped, so that anyone lured by temporary brightness had a grand chance of staying there in the steamy throat.

The subway tube began to "exhale." He got the Jap scent clearly now. There were sounds which could well be vocal. If the Skibbies were coming out to reconnoiter—

He shook his head, once he had let go of his bolo, and dismissed the notion which had clawed at him. Playing one-man army was out of date, and he had come to take a man alive, a man whose outrages had made it improper that he should be cleanly sliced in half. Beside, that man's capture was feeding plantation hands who would otherwise not be eating.

No one was coming out. This subway tube was perhaps like those other openings in the lava layer—a leak, not an exit. Instead of waiting, go in and find out.

Barstow began to creep. The gigantic pipe was clean. From the laws of its formation, it

could give away only overhead. It was not like the treacherous bubbles elsewhere in the field. Neither would there be any wells made by tall lauan trunks which had resisted the hot flow until it solidified, after which they had burned out, leaving circular bores five feet in diameter, and often as deep as eighty feet. According to the geologist's explanation of how a subway tube was shaped, Barstow was safe fram fatal freaks.

He never lost touch with the side, so he knew that there were no branches to trick him on his return. According to all laws, there should be none, but he took no chances.

The stench of cramped habitation became stronger. This was the reek of filth, of sickness, and of hunger; and Barstow liked it, because it was fitting.

For a moment it came to him that it would be bad, taking Hakamoto to the coast. "They'd feed the son of a ———," he thought, grudgingly, "they'd give him a bath, they'd give him good grub, they'd doctor the leech-bite ulcers. Finally they'd hang him with a nice new *abacá* rope. Maybe."

He got the voices more clearly now.

A chunk of lava clattered to the floor. The ceiling was scaling off. The sound was sharp, yet the voices did not change. The men ahead of him were accustomed to disintegration. *Pling-plang-plonk*—someone was tuning the three strings of a *samisen;* in the jungle, the instrument would long since have fallen apart. They still had heart for music. More than that, they were unafraid, and unsuspecting.

He reached ahead, and palmed a shard of lava. And another. A cave-in blocked him. The ceiling, however, was intact. He could see no stars.

A suggestion of reflected glow showed that there was space between cave-in and the top of the tunnel. The blocks were big. After minutes of feeling his way, he risked the first step up. Presently, a second and, more than he could possibly have expected, a third, and without starting a noisy slide.

Pling-plong-plang—

The *samisen* still sounded sickly, but the musician was on the right track. It had one more tune in it, and so did he. Barstow caught a glimpse of him, and the others near the embers. The Japs wore dirty gray kimonos.

Five sitting. Others, beyond the reach of the murky glow, lay on the floor. There were stacked arms, and haversacks, but no samurai swords in sight to give Barstow a hint.

Pling-plank-plonk—

The two grenades tempted Barstow. *Samisen* music infuriated him beyond all measure. Gesture and words took shape in his mind before he made any move: "Your last tune, you Skibby———!"

Instead, he retreated, to pace the distance to the opening in the ceiling, so that by daylight, he could set a surface course and strike the entrance which the enemy used. As he went, the musician began to pluck the strings, and quavering voices joined the jarring sounds which a Jap calls music. . . .

CHAPTER V

HOT LAVA AND LEAD

THE reason a trick is known as "old" is because it has worked, and still works, and no worse for everyone's knowing it. New tricks, on the other hand, are not evidence of their discoverer's cleverness. They mean merely that someone is trying a device which was long ago tried, and forgotten because it usually failed.

Then, too, Barstow remembered how on three successive days, three of his guerrillas had reached for a booby trap baited with a can of Spam. The third man, had he lived, would have explained in the same terms his predecessors would have used, had they lived: "But, this was different, it did not look like a trap."

So Barstow was trying a fine old gag which men have used ever since the discovery of the art of killing by remote control. He lay there, baking in the sun; it was at his back, so that glare, and the heat-devils dancing about the lava would make him almost invisible, even if he had not taken shelter behind the rim of a jumbled stretch.

Pacífico crouched beside him. Instead of watching the entrance to the Jap tunnel, he squinted at a spot toward the rear, and perhaps thirty degrees off Barstow's line of sight.

"Andrés does it well," he whispered, finally.

"Huh. No one's come out of the rat-hole yet."

Barstow heard the clatter of rock purposely dislodged. Later, there was a gurgle of water. Pacífico finally reported, "Now he moves the rifle and lights the cigarette."

Studied—calculated—skillfully timed exposure finally convinced an invisible Jap that Andrés was a bit careless, but far from dumb. Barstow caught the dim glint of a gun barrel. The dirty greenish mustard of uniform cloth, and of helmet, shaped up in the line of sight. Despite the black-brown of the background, this target was no gallery problem. He held his breath, took up the trigger creep—

Whack!

No ricochet. Target slumped.

And then, somewhat off the line of sight, a light machine gun probed the crevices of Barstow's shelter. Fragments of lava and of bullet-jackets chewed his face.

"The sons of ———!" he snarled, "they wouldn't fire at our dummy rig, I snapped at theirs!"

"Both use nice old trick, *señor*, can't both win same play."

Smack!

Andrés, having yanked the dummy to cover, got in a shot. Lava rattled, and the machine gunner quit searching. Barstow grinned and blinked. "All day, to get one Skibby."

Far out over the lava beds, an hour later, rifle fire chattered and slugs whined. And there was a third hot spot, completing a fairly regular triangle. Here, toward sunset, a grenade boomed.

Once darkness fell. Barstow and Pacífico snaked from their glass-lined ditch, and crept forward to counterattack or escape. The other two groups would be doing the same. Underground, the *samisen* made metallic discords. *Plink-plank-plonk.*

Barstow didn't have enough men to block two exits and rush the third. Furthermore, the Japs weren't fighting for a jeep, and they were not looking forward to going home, though they might make some such attempt, if they survived the present demand for prisoners. No doubt at all that if they lived long enough, they could finally work their way into Davao Province, which for years had had 20,000 Japanese hemp growers. And once the search eased off, they could expect to find fishing boats for the homeward cruise from Davao Gulf.

So, having tipped his hand, Barstow had to keep Hakamoto bottled up. He could not spare any men as runners to go to Kabakan; to do

He could feel their eyes as he slashed with his freshly-honed bolo.

so would, judging from all signs, give the enemy the advantage they needed for making a break. He had a tiger by the tail, and he could not let go.

It was going to settle down to who had the most rations, and at the risk of an enemy sortie which he'd not be able to stop, Barstow sent two men out to hunt in the jungle which surrounded the lava beds.

"And see if there's sulphur in that dead cone," he told them. "Bring back all you can carry, if there's no game."

The hunters came back with a deer scarcely larger than a lamb. They had haversacks packed with needle-like crystals of sulphur exhaled from the porous earth near a hotspring. There were also chunks of sulphur which had solidified in a pumice matrix.

"Is lots there," they told him. "Easy to pick up."

While not as good as satchel charges of TNT, or several thousand gallons of high test gas to pour into the tunnel, sulphur fumes were vermin killers, if you got a good concentration.

Barstow cut bejuco and twisted the wiry strands into ropes; he cut bamboo and trees which were springy enough to serve his purpose. Finally, just at the fringe of the jungle, he set up the catapult which was to heave the stink-bomb made of sulphur and grass. But before risking the hard-won fuel, he made a dummy, using grass and mud lashed together with vines.

THE trial cast was discouraging. The missile was too big for its weight. Judging from its performance, the fumigator would have to make a dead center hit, for it could not be depended on to roll true. The impact knocked it out of shape.

It took ten men to bend the catapult for a cast. Lots of power for a good ball. Then he got it: those volcanic "bombs" which had been spewed up during the last eruption. They were like monstrous plum puddings checked on the outside with a pattern which resembled a pineapple. Under this checked skin was a solid layer. The center was hollow. Some of the "bombs" had broken to bits on landing. Others had lost less than a quarter of their shell. They were far lighter than they looked.

That night, the men not on watch went to the dunes to roll the smallest bombs back to camp. All were entire but one, and this one had lost but a trifling part of its shell.

In the morning, Barstow sighted his weapon. Despite the weight of the missile, the bejuco cords which kept the catapult leveled off was

so taut it vibrated like a G-string. The men crouched behind him. They forgot to chew or spit. He could feel their eyes as he slashed with his freshly-honed bolo.

There was a smack, and the hiss of the cord as it whipped. The pudding-colored ball went up, up, up—higher than he could have hoped. It hovered for an instant, and traced the downward sweep of the parabola.

The crash made the lava floor shake.

"Right on the mark!" Pacífico yelled. "Like a sharpshooter. Now the fire, give them the sulphur smoke, the wind is right."

The bomb filled with sulphur did offer tempting possibilities. Once the liquid fire got a good start, the bursting of the shell in the tunnel mouth would splash the entrance for yards; nor could the enemy come near enough to put it out, since the fumes would be unbearable and deadly. Barstow, however, shook his head, and continued staring at the depression in the waste.

"Heave another."

They grunted, they wrestled, they tugged and levered the catapult; they sweated another "bomb" into place, and watched it climb slowly up, hover, start creeping down, picking up speed, until, finally, it had the smashing velocity to shake the lava bed.

"*Bueno!*" they howled, as they danced about. "Some more, and the hole is blocked, the roof is broke down by the edge, no?"

Barstow grinned contentedly. "Half a dozen more of these, and we've got a cave-in. And only two holes to guard. We'll get down to one hole, and then comes the sulphur."

A bomb with little more than three quarters of its shell was next on the catapult. The hollow center had about the same relation to the shell that the space inside a child's rubber ball would have, if the rubber were perhaps four times the usual thickness. So, when Barstow stuffed this space with dry cogon grass and layers of sulphur, he had a substantial charge of fuel, yet not enough gain in weight to affect the ballistics.

The fumes drove the crew to cover. Barstow held his breath. His eyes burned and smarted when he bounded in to strike. He was unable to see anything through the rush of tears. But Pacífico's yell told him he'd scored again.

"Look, look!" another shouted. "Is no smoke come up! Is all pull down the tunnel, with the wind."

Andrés pointed. "Way over, over there—see some smoke come out from a crack?"

"Take your word for that."

A rifle whacked. From across the lava bed came a triumphant screech. Apparently a jittery Jap lookout, getting a snootful of sulphur smoke, had made a false move—his last move, judging from the gleeful howl which came across the lava beds.

"I think we got something this time," Barstow told his men. "Fill up the near rat-hole, then we'll move to sight in on the next one."

Pacífico had an idea. "Domingo, here, he can shoot with bow and arrow."

"Handy, all right," Barstow admitted. "But—"

Domingo grinned. "With burning arrows, into the other hole. Burning with sulphur, *señor*. A little bamboo piece like the finger, all loaded up. This worries them while the rocks keep falling, no?"

"You've got something. Get going, make yourself a bow."

Andrés yelped as though stung. "*Señor*, if we fill up this hole where the wind pulls the smoke down strong—how is the wind for the other holes, is it strong enough?"

"Fill this one, then you can walk up and pour it in by hand. They can't shoot past the rocks, but the smoke and fire will run in—I don't know why I didn't think of that from the first."

A WHITE flag fluttered from an Arisaka barrel poked up from the lava bed. The air was charged with sulphur. Barstow coughed and choked. His vision blurred. Fumes trickled up out of cracks a quarter of a mile from the crawling blue fire which crept down through the heap of volcanic bombs, and inched further and further into the tunnel. He said to Don Teofilo, "You talk their lingo a bit, tell 'em to come up for honorable surrender."

The ex-mayor coughed and spat. "Yes, I know a few words, but—" A peculiar ferocity gleamed in his eyes. "When I learned some of their talk, they did not know surrender in their own language. Only Visayan and Spanish and Tagalog—"

"And Maguindanao." Barstow's smile for a moment mirrored something that was pulling Don Toefilo's face into a new shape. "They offered me honorable surrender, lots of times. Well, do your best, tell 'em to send up a monkey that talks American."

"Americano?"

"Sure. That talk will choke 'em worse than sulphur, and that's what's good for 'em."

Don Teofilo started to get up from cover. Barstow jerked him down. "You idiot, they might plug you."

The collaborationist gave him a queer look. He picked up the small white flag he had dropped, and this time, Barstow did not stop him. He whispered to Andrés, as Don Teofilo clambered into the open, "Maybe the poor devil doesn't care, he's lost too much."

"Clearly, he has." Then, "You, there, Domingo! Keep your head down."

Rifles were lined up. Others, in a crevasse that made a sharp angle with Barstow's shelter, were covering the spot where the flag wig-

wagged. Three men were ready with grenades. They had worked their way out to a dangerously shallow place. They were poised as thought hoping for treachery to give them excuse to heave.

"Only one," Barstow yelled. "Don't waste the eggs."

This was passed down the line.

The collaborationist was marching over the lava bed like an adjutant at parade, except that his legs had an unmilitary spring. Though carrying himself almost stiffly straight, he seemed to be pouncing. Barstow's memory went back home; he remembered an old and battered tom-cat who after a three days' recuperation had left the house. Head high, stiff-legged, and snarling deep in his throat, he went out to settle a feud. The old fellow must have found what he sought, for he never came back.

And now Barstow knew what had been odd about Don Teofilo: during the siege, the ex-mayor had been shaping his thoughts until it seemed that he had finally become one with the cat who had gone out for a decision.

Teofilo halted, and called in Skibby chatter. There was an answer. A brown hand reached to pluck the flag from the Arisaka barrel. A man in ragged uniform scrambled into sight, and raised both hands as soon as he lurched over the debris.

Perhaps five paces apart, they faced each other, Jap and Jap-lover, to parley. The man went back. After some minutes, a colonel came up. He was doing his best not to sneeze; his face twisted and twitched from his effort.

He wore good-looking boots. His uniform was clean. The long-hilted samurai sword gleamed. He let Teofilo blindfold him, and then went with a guiding hand at his elbow.

"Sir, this is Colonel Ogama, Imperial Japanese Infantry," Teofilo announced, when he had halted his man in front of Barstow.

Barstow said, "Let him talk to Pacífico."

The Jap stiffened from the snub which intended to and did sell him the idea that the commander of the besiegers would talk to no one less than Lieutenant General Hakamoto—if, indeed, to him. Then Ogama bowed, and Pacífico addressed him in English. The Jap answered in that language, and did very well with it.

"Tell General Hakamoto," Pacífico commanded, "to come in uniform, wearing only a sword, no pistol, nothing but sword. And hands up. Twenty steps in front of everybody else. Others come after him. Hands up. Not carrying nothing. Not wearing shoes, not wearing pants, not wearing coats, not wearing nothing. Only identification tags."

"This is not honorable surrender," Ogama objected.

"Maybe better staying for more smoke. And more rocks to fill last hole. Go back with eyes open, not looking back. One looking back—"

Andrés pulled the cocking piece of his rifle.

"Clearly understood," Ogama said. "Presenting terms to General Hakamoto. First I request permission for everyone to stand above ground long enough for stopping sulphur smoke coughing and watering of eyes. Sneeze is most unmilitary."

Pacífico glanced at Barstow, who saw no harm in such a confession; if face was so important, let them have it. He gave his spokesman a nod, and Pacífico said, "Stand in full sight while waiting."

"Request permission to wear shoes. Walking barefoot on hot lava is painful."

"American and Filipino prisoners made painful walks," Pacífico retorted. "Barefooted men don't make quick moves. No shoes. Anyone leaving line of march is shot for trying escape. Clearly understand?"

"Clearly understand."

"Prisoner, about face. Forward march."

The colonel obeyed.

PRESENTLY, through the dancing air, Barstow watched the Skibbies clamber into view. One was in full uniform. The others were peeled down to the buff. He began to regret his concession to Hakamoto's dignity; he had made it only to keep the general from having too much cause for suicide, which would be difficult to prevent on the march. There were several spots from which a Jap could leap into a ravine and take a pair of guards with him.

Perhaps Hakamoto had already lost sufficient face to call for some false move which would touch off the trigger-happy Filipinos. Barstow looked at the group near him, and down the line of crouching men. He did not like their faces. The expression was different from their intentness before battle, or their fury while in it. The eagerness and anticipation Barstow saw in posture and face worried him; he could not get the eyes of even one man.

Nostril twitch . . . a lip-licking . . . a mouth tightening . . . puckering of a beetle-brow . . . he wondered just what he would or could do if his men decided to hold a jungle trial, and execute the sentence at some handy ant-hill.

He was thinking, "I was a chump, figuring they'd come all this way for pay and grub and helping me get a jeep. They're the last guys on earth who'd want Hakamoto to get a trial and a comfortable hanging. And with five men knocked off by that sniper, they're not full of sweetness and light."

He was about to call, "Steady, fellows. Don't shoot unless you're sure it's a false move—wait for my command!" when he swallowed the unshaped words. Any such speech would

give them whatever ideas they didn't already have.

Funny business, worrying about Hakamoto's hide. But now that he had succeeded, he actually did want it to be according to his bargain: Hakamoto, on the hoof. He saw clearly now what had thus far meant nothing to him—that a fair trial would discredit Hakamoto in the eyes of whatever percentage of decent Japs the country did contain, and there were bound to be some. Trying the man instead of cutting him down would be incredible and baffling to the monkey-minds of the nation; the first new idea in centuries might penetrate a few Skibby skulls.

"So many of 'em still alive, we'll have to live with 'em, somehow, whether we like it or not."

He watched Hakamoto march out from the group. At his twentieth pace, the soldiers stepped out, thirty of them, in two lines. They began to sing, and march in cadence. Barstow gritted his teeth. If just one guerrilla disliked glee-club effects, that jingle-jangle would stop in a burst of slugs.

Pacífico's whisper was metallic: "Did not order no singing. What is come next?"

Barstow glanced about. "Where's Don Teofilo?"

"Quien sabe, señor?"

Barstow got a chill as he glanced right-left, and saw that the collaborator was no longer at hand.

"Find him. But don't make any quick moves."

Pacífico's pock-marked face showed understanding that dismayed Barstow, it confirmed his fear. A Filipino who has lost face is unpredictable. To have concentrated on a Jap's humiliation had been an error.

"No quick moves—*si, si,* that is understood."

Pacífico checked himself, and cursed. Barstow started violently. They were all jumpy. General Hakamoto had stumbled. He took a header. The line of naked Japs behind him wavered as if not knowing whether to halt in place, continue the march, or break ranks to offer respectful assistance.

According to the report rendered at the parley, there were two colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, five majors, eight captains; the rest, trusted enlisted men of the staff, all confused by not being as close to their superior as regulations prescribed.

The man in uniform sprawled athwart his long samurai sword. The ivory hilt and the gold and lacquer of the scabbard gleamed against the lava. The shoulder tabs were bright red patches. He clawed at the sacred weapon of his caste, and unscrambled himself. Barstow relaxed. The lurch had frightened him, even before he had realized that there had been no shot.

Then came what was not as much of a surprise as General Hakamoto had intended, but it was a beautiful heave, done with skill and strength and precision. The gesture was complete before Barstow fairly sensed that a grenade was on the way.

Pacífico shrieked, *"Putangnamo!"* and jerked his pistol. Two men scrambled for cover. Barstow was torn by several needs—to stop Pacífico, to keep his men in check, and to duck the missile.

A lot happened at once. The sputtering grenade fell a bit short, made a high bounce, landing behind Barstow. Musketry blazed from both sides. A man pounced out into the open. He carried a bolo polished and honed until it glittered like an archangel's flaming sword. His howl was nothing human. His gait was more like a panther's than any man's should be.

Barstow caught all this, while whirling. He scooped the fuming grenade, and with scarcely a pause in pivoting, he heaved. There was only one direction possible. The blast came in mid-flight, adding screeching fragments to the whine and whistle of guerrilla bullets, the yelling of the naked Japs as they rolled on the lava.

Oddly, Hakamoto was still on his feet. He buckled, straightened, drew the samurai blade, and cried, *"Banzai!"*

Barstow leaped the barrier and bawled out furiously, "Quit that shooting, you crazy ———s!"

They quit. The Jap's tunic was blood-splotched. He staggered. He spat blood. He made aimless passes with the long, straight blade. But this walking corpse was not what checked guerrilla answer to Jap treachery; that the rest of the enemy were naked and empty-handed could never have frozen their fury.

What stopped the outburst was the man who pounced like a human cat—Don Teofilo, making for the end of the line of Japs. He had a mark, and he was screaming words that sounded strange, coming from a thin little man with the face of a poet.

"Plumb nuts," Barstow gasped, as Teofilo made his final bound, and slashed.

Naked Japs came up, howling. They hurled hunks of lava.

They formed a wedge. The man who had run *amok* had more meat before him than he could hew down. A melon-sized piece of lava smashed him, knocked him staggering back, but he screamed and leaped forward, and slashed again. A man fell in two pieces.

Guerrillas with fixed bayonets came from cover, but stood far back. No one in his right mind gets within a mile of a Malay run *amok*—except to blast him down. No one wanted to spoil Teofilo's redemption.

The man in uniform pitched forward. The

Don Teofilo pounced like a human cat, slashing naked Japs with his bolo.

sword clanged as it skated over the rocks. The one-man *banzai* charge lay face down, clawing and kicking and twitching, trying to get the ivory grip, trying to get at least one man, or to draw another bullet.

Barstow risked what his men would not—getting near the Christian "*jurmentado.*" Pacífico, rifle at the ready, finally followed.

They beat and clubbed the Japs senseless. Teofilo was somewhere under a heap of them. "Come here and give me a hand," Barstow yelled.

That broke the Malays' awe at having seen one of their kind seek death and honor at one stroke. They yanked groggy Japs right and left, as though they were cordwood.

"Pacífico, see what you can do for Hakamoto—you go with him—watch him, he may have something else—see if we can fix him up—"

Then Teofilo sat up. He was battered and slashed, but he smiled. Despite broken teeth and rock-smashed face, he managed to speak clearly, and happily.

"This—*ado* here." He pointed. "That is Hakamoto. I go to kill him—to show my friends—I do not love Japs—"

"Which, for ———'s sweet sake, which?"

"That one—that one— You see, I know him—the pictures in the paper, they do not look like him too much—that one in uniform, he does not look like him, but how you can tell the difference? Me, I can."

"Take him away," Barstow commanded. "Maybe Teofilo didn't do such a good job."

So he set to work patching the general whose human barricade had saved him from Teofilo's bolo. Later, Barstow looked at the identification tag worn by the man in uniform, and recognized the Japanese symbols of rank. The oblong of gold was engraved with two characters which read, "*Chusho*"—lieutenant general. It was worn from long use, and could not have been prepared for the occasion. It was clear that one of the general's staff had planned to fake a glorious death for his chief, so that the actual Hakamoto, herded along as an enlisted man, would entirely evade identification.

CHAPTER VI

THE BUTCHER OF ZAMBOANGA

WITH his own hands, Barstow fed Hakamoto, and doctored his wounds; for both chores, he used supplies salvaged from the underground refuge, once the fumes had thinned. He would not trust any of Hakamoto's staff to prepare any of the Japanese rations, lest they poison him as proof of devotion.

Pickled *daikon* . . . sugared beans . . . dried squid . . . salted plums. . .

Hakamoto's eyes twinkled with malicious mirth as he watched his captor's solicitude. He said in English which had little foreign accent, "This is happy omen, Captain Barstow, with so many delicacies saved for me, one is missing."

Barstow regarded the rugged, wrinkled face of the butcher of Zamboanga; but for the man's record, it would have been difficult to dislike him. There was nothing funny about the general. He had good teeth, and they didn't flare out like a row of tombstones in the moonlight. He needed no glasses, and he wore none. The bristling moustache, sprinkled with gray, was compact enough to add an iron touch to the squarish features.

"What's missing, General?"

"The cigar prescribed by American custom. Before execution."

He chuckled in grim good humor.

This fellow wouldn't pine away in captivity. His wounds would heal. He was in good spirits, so good that Barstow began to wonder what might be lurking along the way to the nearest town. Pacífico suggested, "He can stand it to be carried by two *cargadores*. Let the monkeys haul rations. We tie them in a row, with bejuco around the neck."

Barstow had buried the Japanese dead. The survivors had gaped wonderingly when a streamlined squad fired a volley over the common grave, just as they had over that of their own comrades. Hakamoto nodded his approval.

Then he said, "Very kind of you to salvage the uniform my heroic aide-de-camp wore. Let me put it on."

"You should have put it on when you had a chance, General."

The hard face clouded. "He volunteered. It was my duty to accept. A general is more valuable."

"That is not what your propaganda notes told the men at Corregidor and Bataan when MacArthur was ordered to leave them. Sorry, General."

He didn't want constabulary to recognize and grab his prize.

They got ready in the morning, to beat their way back. A few of the prisoners carried wounded comrades; others carried rations, while a few shouldered bundles of records which Barstow figured would serve the court-martial. Hakamoto, he learned, had indeed looked forward to eventual escape from Mindanao. He clearly got satisfaction out of proving that his plan had been sound, upset only by an enemy's cunning and valor.

Unlike the Germans Barstow had read about, this butcher neither whined nor alibied nor blustered; he had dignity and composure. He didn't claim to be a splendid man, kindly and misunderstood; he didn't rant about what his people would do the next time; he didn't run off at the mouth about not really having been defeated at all.

"Soldiers are severe, Captain Barstow. Your own guerrillas were not cherry blossoms wafted by the wind. It was not extravagance that made me authorize one hundred thousand pesos reward for your head. How much is offered for mine?"

Barstow chuckled. "Not a peseta." Then, seeing the man's leathery face darken, he added, "Nothing but honor."

Hakamoto looked pleased. "Ah . . . yes, I understand. Yes, you deserve honor."

Having doctored and fed him for more than a week, Barstow could not help telling a small-sized lie. He'd known from the start that this chore would be worth far more than captain's pay, and a jeep as bonus—even estimating a jeep at five thousand bucks U. S. And with the men he had lost, he began to feel squeamish about the reward he had earned. He told himself, as they left the sparsely wooded fringe of the lava beds to bore into lush forest, that he'd been working to keep his gang from the way of outlawry, during the time it would take the government to whittle Datu Hassan into shape; that he'd been working for more than merely his plantation.

He began to regret that he'd not finished Hakamoto during the wrath and confusion following the grenade throw. Or he could have

handed Don Teofilo a pistol. Still, the ex-mayor had died content, in the assurance that he had been vindicated, and that his family would be redeemed from disgrace.

This last made Barstow's success more palatable. It had been a curious experience, finally taking a prisoner. The ex-guerillas seemed still puzzled by the novelty. Judging from their chatter, they begin to feel that their already tarnishing glory had won a new polish.

With constabulary on the prowl, getting Hakamoto to the coast might become a chore; but if Captain Moreno did cut in, to seize the prisoner and grab the glory, the general wouldn't squirm out on a technicality. However, Barstow wanted to do a clean job. Hakamoto on the hoof. He liked that summing up, and figured that in a couple days, the prisoner would be able to walk. When his men heard him report, "Smoked out and delivered, sir," they'd stick through hell and high water. They'd help him fox that pest of a Datu Hassan by smuggling rubber down the river, enough to keep things going until the patriot retired all his currency, or was himself taken out of circulation.

Most important, they'd not be tempted by Datu Hassan's example to go on the patriot-trail themselves; preventing banditry had it all over the messy business of stopping it.

They set out but before the porters had begun to get their burdens shaken down, Barstow was without warning yanked back into the present.

RIFLE-ARMED Moros blocked his way. Their blend of native and military dress was comical, but nothing else about them was. Barstow yelled to his men, "Take it easy, this looks like something we've done before."

Pacífico passed the word along. Andrés muttered, "*Señor*, this looks like something new, by God."

The Moros, though business-like, were not truculent. "Datu Hassan," they said, "wants to see you. The trail, both sides, we have it covered. This is friendly, you understand. But—"

"Datu Hassan is a man of firm character?"

"That is precisely the way to say it."

Barstow shrugged. He whispered to Andrés, then said to the chief of the bushwhackers, "My men won't make trouble. See that yours don't. I don't like constabulary either."

The man showed his betel-blackened teeth in a grin. "Constabulary does not like us, either. They still hunt us along Libuganon River, not knowing we come this way."

Standard operating practice. He wondered how many men the *datu* had used as bait. He suspected, from the contented looks of his escort, that this encounter was not purely coincidental. Resistance would have got him nothing but total extermination. Looking back, he saw enough Moros popping up from cover to justify his hunch.

When he reached the clearing where Datu Hasan's party waited, Barstow made more deductions, none of them pleasant. The Moro chieftain was spick and span; horse, gilt parasol, silk pants, silver-mounted kris, and burnished box for chewing mixture, everything perfect. The *datu* greeted him ceremoniously, and after inviting him to sit down under a grass-thatched shelter, he said, "You are right. We did not hurry to cut you off. We have been waiting for you to finish your work in the lava beds."

"That's right," Barstow agreed, cheerily. "I got just that idea when I saw how fresh your men looked. You let us go, and followed us."

The *datu* fingered his chin. If he lived long enough, he'd grow a beard—a fairly good one, if he had sufficient Arab blood. "That is true, Captain Barstow. This is my territory. So I waited to collect taxes. General Hakamoto is—hmmm—no, not a mineral product, not plantation product, but still—"

Barstow grimaced, then accepted a chew. "Something I dug up, and now you're asking for a share?"

"I read old papers—no, not I with my own eyes, but Kassim—" He pointed to the secretary. "Reads American for me. How your government waits for a man to get rich, then takes nine parts and leaves him one."

"But I went out to get him for honor."

The *datu* smiled, bowed gracefully. "Honor is easy to divide. Money, it is useless stuff. What has it done for me, except now I have to redeem it. People are fools. If they had given me supplies free, would I have to tax them to make good my paper?"

"You ought to write a financial column."

The secretary had to explain this quip, and he did a nice job, for the *datu* said, "If your people could read it in Arabic, yes. But look, do you not do just as I do? The old man has said to me, the Americanos print bonds to get money to fight. They won't give the army guns for nothing. Now, the government loots them to redeem the bonds. Much better, giving things free the first time, then loot the enemy if you need something."

"How'll we divide up? Got only one general."

"Eat first. Yes, bring in all your men. This is to celebrate." He leaned forward, lowered his voice. "I have a surprise for you."

"What? Carabao fight—cockfight—stallion fight?"

"Even better. But I do not tell you now. Eat first."

Like an invitation to the White House, this was a command.

Barstow went back to lead captors and captives into hospitality. The *datu* had financial problems, and problems of espionage and of supply, to handle. Judging from the runners who came in and went out, there was somewhere in the Mt. Malambo area a permanent settlement, probably a *cota* in which, some day, Datu Hassan and his crew would die with weapons in hand.

"No funny work, Andrés," Barstow said, when he rejoined his men. "You, Pacífico, tell them to like it."

"But, *señor,* he is going to keep General Hakamoto."

"I want some of you fellows to get home keeping your heads. Heroes are out of date."

THE surprise was not revealed untill after Barstow's arrival at Datu Hassan's *cota.* When he saw the palisade which girdled the settlement, he knew that the *datu* meant business. Approximately enough, he had picked the crater of a volcano.

The peak rose no more than six or seven hundred feet above the plateau, but the oval crater was a bowl nearly a quarter of a mile in diameter. It had been extinct so long that the floor was almost level, and like the outer slope, well wooded, and difficult to pick from the air.

The palisade at the rim was made of two circles of stakes, with rammed earth between. This was pierced by tubes of bamboo, through which rifles could be leveled to cover the approaches. A tougher setup than Bud Dajo or Bud Bagsak, Barstow decided, who had seen those famous *cotas,* and had talked to oldtimers who had taken them.

In the bowl was a village of bamboo houses. Black-haired women peeped from doorways. Half-naked children played in the central square.

"Constabulary," Datu Hassan announced, as he sat on the veranḍah of his house, "don't want to find this."

"There's an army, Datu Hassan."

"That would make civil war. You see how that would sound, in Panay, in Mindoro, in Luzon, all over? Civil war in Mindanao—all the other people, with no food and no money, they also start civil wars. Governments are to collect money, this they cannot do when there is war in every province.

"The Americano soldiers are all homesick. The Filipino soldier, does he want to fight Filipinos? No. So, it is for tactfulness they call me a bandit, and send constabulary, of which there are not enough."

He paused to light a pig-tail cigar, and offered Barstow one.

"Once I redeem my money, then taxes will be light. I will have honor, too."

"For capturing Hakamoto?"

"That will help. You smoked him out, but I, I have him. Now, the surprise."

"I am surprised already," Barstow cut in, "that those Jap soldiers are still alive."

"They are your share. You get honor for taking Hakamoto's staff back to Parang."

Across the square, the general was under guard, and bound securely with withes. Sentries stood outside the shelter. Men with drawn blades squatted beside the captive. Not even the women and children ventured nearer than a dozen yards. Deadline in the *datu's* capital was interpreted literally.

Liberating Hakamoto and making for Highway Number One promised to be a tougher chore than had been smoking him out of his tunnel. Barstow glanced toward the far corner of the plaza, where his men, being Christians, kept to themselves. Pacífico squatted near a heap of medical supplies taken from the Japs, who had taken them from the U. S. Army. There were morphine ampoules, powerful sedatives, anaesthetics; but doping the guards here was just as nearly impossible as it had been on the march. Barstow, however, was thinking and looking—the only two things now possible without arousing suspicion.

That afternoon, he sat through fencing matches, for no matter how many Jap rifles the Moros had captured, they loved the wavy-bladed kris and two-handed kampilan for the final decision. Of wrestling or boxing, there was none—because Moro honor demanded the immediate death of anyone so grossly insulting a grown man as to strike or touch him with bare hands, or maul him about.

Later, they brought out a mare, and two shaggy stallions. The savage little beasts broke from their grooms, squealed, reared, struck at each other with their hooves. They wheeled, they snorted, they bit and slashed, sparring and shifting for advantage. Chunks of hide were trampled into blood-splashed earth; the two were drenched with sweat, and steaming. But neither would quit.

"No surrender here," Barstow said to the *datu,* but he got no answer.

Datu Hassan leaned forward, swaying, twitching in sympathy with the ferocious fighters. His followers crouched on the ground. They seemed to be getting red-eyed, though that might have been glamor of the slanting sun, for the palisade now cast its shadow more than halfway across the bowl. Barstow began to get uneasy. Every man in the guerrilla army had placed bets. Plungers had wagered their last bit of hard money, their shoes, their extra garments, their extra wives, or perhaps the only wife. If anyone ran *amok,* his first move would be toward strangers, unless rage made him so blind that everyone looked alike.

The stallions were loose-legged now, and

ready to buckle. They wobbled as they paused for breath. Each knew that one more charge would settle things. For the moment, neither was equal to it. Breath rattled and wheezed. They blew bloody foam at each other. Red foam fell of its own weight from the heaving flanks. The spectators began placing more bets, hedging those made before the duel. Allah! But this was magnificence next to that of being in a fight one's self.

Hakamoto's guards had quit their posts. There was no *datu* who could enforce discipline at a fiesta. Barstow flashed a slanting glance at his host; master and men were absent from their bodies, and living in the battered hulks of horse-flesh.

With the air heavy from blood and sweat, and all those flaring nostrils drinking it in, Hakamoto's fate became clear—his finish would be the climax of the celebration.

Lacking carabaos, they couldn't lash the Jap to the crescent-sweeping horns of one of the battlers, to see how long he'd last in what generally resembled what would happen if two light tanks engaged in a butting and pushing match. No carabaos, so one old Moro custom would be skipped. But there were lots of others.

Barstow inched himself backward, intending to have a word with Pacífico and Andrés, but he didn't get far. The guards who had gathered behind him made it clear that he'd better stay put. Datu twisted about a bit, and smiled a little.

"Hakamoto is not in the hut," he said. "I was afraid you'd try something that would keep me from protecting a guest. Hakamoto is staked out for the ants. You'll hear him soon."

Barstow looked at the stallions. Any moment now, they'd be at it, the black and the bay, though both were now nearly the same color, that of dirt and blood.

"I'll bet you a jeep against Hakamoto."

"You have no jeep.'

"I will have, if I deliver Hakamoto to the army in Parang."

"If you win, it is simple, but if you lose, how do you pay?"

ANTS didn't set to work immediately. It often took their scouts some time to marshal the consuming army. But Barstow began to wonder whether the wheezing, sobbing, whistling sounds were made entirely by winded stallions. He squirmed from thinking of the butcher of Zamboanga, with a hundred thousand ants crawling over him, crawling into his ears, into his nostrils, and into his mouth, which would be kept open with blocks. Many a time, while wobbly from hunger, shaking from fever, hiding for his life, he'd figured nothing could restore him more quickly than

Black-haired women peeped from doorways.

staking Hakamoto and the officer in charge of the Bataan march to the biggest ant-hills in the islands. Now he didn't like the idea.

Crazy business, wondering how he could save his one-time prisoner. He'd have a mutiny on his hands. His own men would say, "This is better than many jeeps." And if he said, "But I doctored and fed him, I can't very well let the ants eat him," they'd figure the boss had gone loco—a nice man, but still, not quite right . . .

"I'll get the jeep. If the general won't come across, I'll buy one."

Datu Hassan didn't ask for security. You'd better be a man of your word. He said, "All for honor, yes, I understand. But—you remember, I ask you to gamble for the head of Don Teofilo, and what do you say?"

Barstow didn't answer.

The *datu* continued, "I gave a Filipino life to you, for a present. You are not generous and make me a present of one Jap. How is this?"

Moro logic was bitter.

"A jeep, Datu Hassan. Look, you've got honor with your own people, they've seen the Jap marched into your camp. Everyone knows. Parang is another world, what happens there is nothing to your people, your friends. You ride a jeep, and lead your horse. It is more comfortable, it looks bigger, too. Our biggest

The Jap, stripped and spread-eagled, was lashed to hardwood stakes.

generals have their pictures taken riding in a jeep."

"That is true," the *datu* admitted. "And you bet me one jeep?"

"I bet you one jeep."

He heard sounds now which he knew neither horse had made. His own skin was twitching. He was half sick from thinking of the Jap being peeled down, bit by bit.

"On the black stallion?" said the *datu*.

The warriors were circling now, though with dogged desperation, rather than fury. The mare whinnied seductively. The bay pricked up his ears. The other had no ears left. He was frightfully slashed about the forequarters, and he dragged a leg.

"On the black?" the smiling Moro prompted.

"On the black," Barstow said, knowing that he'd been a sucker, bucking an expert at his own game.

"But I promised Hakamoto honorable surrender. If the man in Parang is a heel, I'll pay off. Myself."

The stallions were clashing again. Harder than ever to tell which was which. Neither had

enough mane left for a fly swatter. The black slipped. The bay made a hoarse, trumpeting sound and gave his final effort. He should have knocked his enemy flat, crushed his ribs, trampled him into the ground, and he would have, if he had landed. But the black recovered quickly enough to get clear. He mastered his dragging leg. He reared and slashed. Bones crunched. His triumphant cry drowned the cheering, and the curses of those who watched.

Then he crumpled in a twitching heap.

Barstow came near doing the same.

The bay, however, was done.

The *datu* gestured, and the big war gongs boomed a brazen note neither like drum nor bell. His guards rushed out to the closing ring of spectators. The gong stopped abruptly, and before the voices silenced by the tremendous noise could be raised again, the *datu's* right-hand man called, "No bets are paid. No bets are paid. Both lost."

Howls of fury. More drums.

Then, "No bets are paid. The mare is still lonesome."

This convinced them, the logic was clear. Then Datu Hassan said to Barstow, "The black —yes—he moved from the battle, living longest, but—what did he win? And there'd been a general riot with a dozen or twenty men killed, if he'd been called winner."

"Nice business!" Barstow retorted. "Word of a *datu*."

"You promised Hakamoto honorable surrender, no? You let me take him to save your men. Word of a captain."

Barstow went with Datu Hassan to the space beyond the plaza, where Hakamoto was staked out. The gamblers, kept from each other's throats by their leader's logic, would soon be placing bets as to how long the Jap would last. Barstow saw his own men, in a compact cluster, not shouldering the crowd, and not being shouldered by it; but they were gradually pinched out to stay in back. Barstow, however, profited by his company, and got inside the circle.

The Jap, stripped and spread-eagled, was lashed to hardwood stakes. His body twitched in jerks, as though electric shocks followed each other so fast that the subsiding tremor caused by one was started anew by the next. His skin crawled and rippled like that of a horse trying to dislodge a fly it could not brush off. The ants had not yet arrived in force. Much of his body was still free of them. His wounds, not even barely healed, attracted one army.

The block between Hakamoto's teeth, Barstow told himself, and the intolerable tension of the corded throat, made those unhuman sounds. The whole business was so unreal that his wave of nausea subsided, and he saw clearly. He watched a guard pound a loosened stake. The wire-tough strands rippled and went taut.

Barstow was thinking, "Pretty soon, he won't know what's happening, and it'll make no difference."

Only, he could not be too sure of that.

Then he did it. He bounced out of the front rank, and toward the captive. Perhaps because he was too quick, perhaps because his name as a Jap hunter made them think he demanded, and the *datu* conceded, a final word of mockery, no one stopped him.

He said. "Honorable surrender, Hakamoto."

The Jap's eyes shifted. There was sanity and recognition. For this Barstow was glad. He drew his pistol and fired one shot to the ear. He was on his feet and facing the *datu* before the Moros could react to their surprise.

"No bets are paid. Both lost," he said, and holstered his gun.

He let out a quavering breath, and walked straight for the *datu*. No one said a word. There was going to be too much to see and hear.

For perhaps ten seconds he endured Datu Hassan's eye before he was sure that he would not be pegged down in Hakamoto's place. "My horse walked, yours couldn't."

"That is right," the Moro answered. "But I had to save the lives of my men."

He offered his hand. "Now go, and go fast."

"With your blessing?"

"With my blessing."

He did not add, "And stay out of my territory." There was no need to.

AS HE neared Kabakan, Barstow shaped the message he had to give to Don Teofilo's widow—the only success story he was bringing out of the unexplored territory, and that one hard to tell.

"Someone is there now, a general," Pacífico said, when they were within a hundred yards of the mayor's house.

Four jeeps were parked along the row of banana shrubs which screened the house. Soldiers squatted beside three. The lead vehicle had a red flag with two stars. Barstow's men, having put away their rifles, attracted no attention—just a file of especially ragged *taos*. They wore straw hats now, instead of conspicuous Moro turbans. Thieves had gutted Barstow's bungalow, so that he had not even a clean suit of whites for his call.

A familiar form in khaki stepped from the garden, and to the road. Two officers followed him. As he cleared the entrance, the general halted, faced about. He bowed, and saluted, and said something in a voice which did not carry far enough for Barstow to hear, and this was an odd way for him to address anyone.

Then, dodging two pigs, and scattering some

chickens, the general crossed the little footbridge which spanned the drainage ditch. He saw Barstow, and stopped. "Oh, hello, Pete."

"How!" A gesture toward the flag on the jeep. "Only two?"

"We're all being demoted." He chuckled. "When I was a buck private, even one star looked fairly big." Then, to the officers with him, "Chapman, Graves, I want you to meet Captain Barstow. The man who smoked Lieutenant General Hakamoto out of hiding."

Barstow was surprised. "How'd you find out, sir?"

"Datu Hassan sent me Hakamoto's head, and a message telling me that he was maintaining peace, law, order, and friendliness for Americans throughout his territory. This in writing, and a lot of interesting odds and ends in talk. His runners made better time than you did."

"We were herding Hakamoto's staff. They're in the constabulary jug in town. I was coming down this way to tell Don Teofilo's widow how he cleared his name and all that."

"Sorry I beat you to it. I got that story, too, and acted on it. The P. C. Government will give him a civilian citation, and the family—"

"Uh-huh. it means a lot to them, all right. Well, then, I got nothing to say. I did my damndest. What the hell. Thanks anyway, and if you'll O.K. my voucher in Parang—"

"Hey, wait a minute." The general chuckled, and then laughed. The officers, who had discreetly stepped back, came up like well-trained seals, for he had beckoned. "Look at this fellow, gentlemen, look at him! He thinks I really wanted him to bring Hakamoto back *alive*. After all, Barstow, I had to tell you to bring in a prisoner. I knew your men were smart enough to be sure he'd be shot while escaping. Can your man there drive?"

"Ever see a Filipino who couldn't?"

"Take two jeeps. Two can be surveyed as easily as one. You've saved the government a headache, and every soldier and native in the islands the gripe of seeing Hakamoto get off with—well, a life sentence, or thirty-forty years, or something inadequate."

"Ah—um—what will you use—"

"Hell's fire, my boy, there's plenty of other transportation, we won't be afoot. Take 'em, they're surveyed. Good luck to you."

And so, despite his narrow escape, Barstow did venture back into Datu Hassan's territory; and his message assured him of an audience. When he saw the *datu*, he said, "You and I have been friends in war, now let's be friends in peace. The general gave me two jeeps. I can use both, but I'll give you one, and tell you how to make it redeem your currency."

"How is that, Captain? Soldiers steal them and sell them for only ten thousand pesos. Now I have much more currency than that still to redeem. By Allah, that war cost a lot."

Barstow whispered confidentially, "Hold a lottery. Raffle the jeep. You can sell a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand pesos' worth of tickets. You see how much easier it will be to raise money that way than—"

The *datu* smiled, and stroked the area where he might some day grow a beard. "Easier than, for instance, collecting sheet rubber?"

"Something like that, Your Highness."

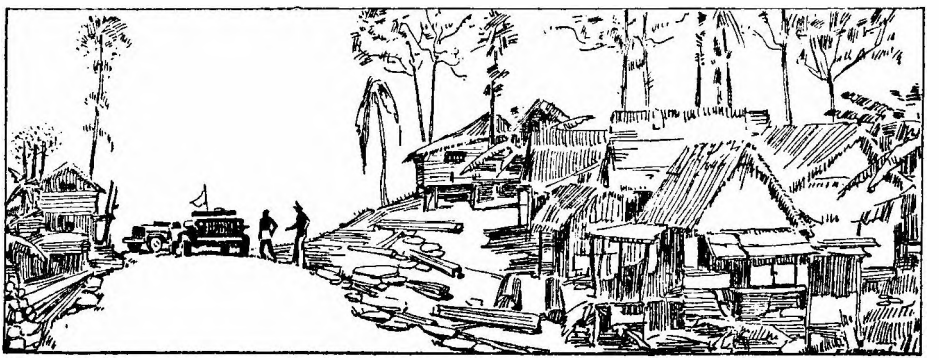
The *datu's* eyes now had a faraway look. "Frankly, and I do not mind tell you, no *cota* can be hidden from bombers. You know best how it is to be punished with planes. Now if there were nothing but constabulary—but God is great." He turned to his secretary. "Take note, Kassim, and let it be done as ordered. Captain Barstow is tax exempt from now on. Also, print some raffle tickets."

The *datu* got up, to end the audience. "Captain Barstow, my secretary will go back with you to arrange all this. I feel better. I see clearly now that every note will be redeemed."

The man was clearly relieved of worry. He looked almost boyish. Barstow said, with a wink, "You might tell Kassim to plan the drawing very carefully. If someone who is grateful to you for favors happened to win it, and gave it to you later—"

The *datu* nodded. This was no winking or smiling matter.

"Naturally, Captain Barstow. In God's name, who else *would* get such a valuable thing? Now, go, and with my blessing."



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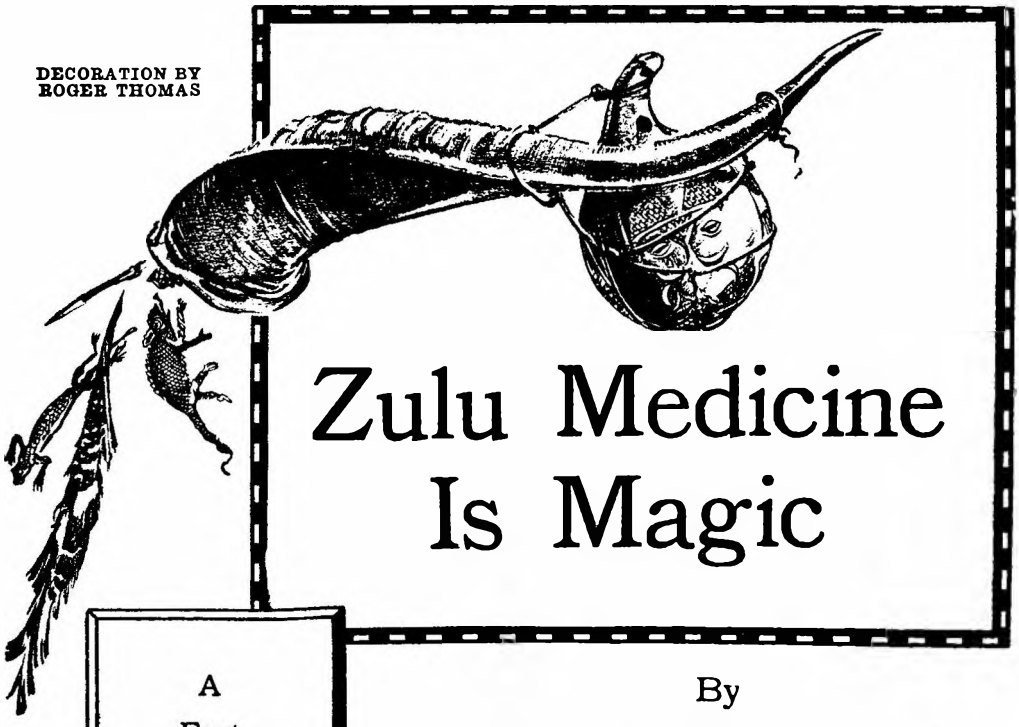

Zulu Medicine Is Magic

A Fact Story

By JAMES B. McCORD, M. D.
as told to
John Scott Douglas

STRICTLY speaking the Zulus have three types of medical men. The witch doctor deals with the satanic forces of magic; the herbalist prepares "medicines," some harmless purgatives and emetics, others highly poisonous; and the "smeller-out" detects the "scent of evil," and points out the person whose witchcraft is responsible for disease.

The witch doctor, however, has branched into the compounding of medicine; the smeller-out, no longer able to condemn to death a person accused of witchcraft, bolsters his sagging prestige by becoming something of a witch doctor and an herbalist; and the true Zulu herbalist exists only in fiction. Herbalists share the native belief that sickness is caused by witchcraft, magic or poisons, and "smell out" disease and attempt its cure with charms as well as medicines.

One day as I was visiting patients, a native assistant hurried into the ward and informed me that an unconscious native had been brought to the McCord Zulu Hospital in a ricksha.

"His appearance puzzles me, Doctor."

"Place him in the isolation ward," I directed.

I stepped outside to learn what I could from the ricksha boy. The young man standing between the shafts, rubbing one long, white-washed leg against the other to brush off flies, was Garvana, whose infected foot I had recently treated. The large horns fastened to his head bobbed when I asked if he knew the sick man.

"He is Makuba, a laborer on the docks. He asked me to take him to the train, Doctor, but when I reached the station, he was dead."

Familiar with the Zulus' inability to distinguish between an unconscious state and death, I asked if Makuba was going home to be treated by his witch doctor.

"Yes," Garvana answered. "He said his doctor knew more of the diseases of black men than a white doctor."

An examination proved that Makuba was stricken with bacillary dysentery. It strikes with greater severity among the natives of South Africa than the amoebic type, often causing death within a few days. I promptly

instituted treatment with such old-fashioned remedies as Epsom's salts, acid with bismuth, and opiates. But I was really depending upon monsonia ovata, a drug that Dutch doctors in South Africa find most effective for bacillary dysentery. Though I've never seen it mentioned in medical books, it proved effective in nearly every case.

Makuba responded to the treatment. Within a few days he was sitting up, conscious yet still hazy-minded. He could not take his eyes from the pretty native nurses in their starched uniforms. He greeted me with a flashing smile the morning he realized he was alive and not in the Zulu equivalent of Heaven. From then on, he made rapid progress.

He stopped at my office the day he was leaving the hospital, tried to speak and then, with tears in his eyes, turned away.

"You wished to say goodbye?"

Makuba shook his head. "Why didn't I know of this place before? If my father and brothers had come here, they'd still be alive!"

Sensing my sympathy, he told me how his older brother had come to Durban to work as a wharf roustabout. He lived in a dormitory slum building where sanitary conditions were inexcusably bad. Becoming sick, the brother returned home to be treated by his witch doctor. He died within a few hours. A second brother contracted dysentery and also died after taking the witch doctor's "powerful medicine." Very shortly the father and the third brother passed away in the same manner.

Makuba must have contracted dysentery while nursing his father, for he fell ill within a few days after starting work in Durban. Since four men had died within a few hours after taking the witch doctor's medicine, it, rather than dysentery, appeared responsible.

I spoke to my friend, the district surgeon at Port Shepstone, near Makuba's kraal, but he had already exhumed the bodies of the father and the last brother to die, performing post-mortem examinations. Both men had died from a strong corrosive poison which had burned away the lining of their alimentary canals. The local magistrate had been notified and the witch doctor was about to be tried on manslaughter charges when the district surgeon died. It was then too late for a second post-mortem, so the case was dropped.

AS an isolated instance of a witch doctor administering a deadly brew through ignorance, these cases would deserve only passing mention. During the forty years that I practiced medicine among the Zulus of South Africa, however, I became familiar with many similar cases, and had an opportunity to observe first-hand the enormous amount of mischief that these ignorant practitioners of witchcraft inflict upon their people. Unquestionably witch doctors' magic brews, ignorant surgery and superstitious treatment of disease and injury have wrought far more harm than good. But a medical need can't be filled by a vacuum and the witch doctor will continue practicing his black arts until there is adequate medical care for the Zulus.

Witch doctors undoubtedly use many strong drugs, some quite unfamiliar to us. One day, for example, a native appeared at the hospital with his salivary glands flowing so freely that he swallowed constantly as he spoke. The "strong medicine" his witch doctor had given him for constipation had affected him like a poison, in the end acting as a purgative and clearing itself from his system. Since further treatment was unnecessary, I put him to bed for observation, and then examined the stalk he had brought.

Contrary to their usual custom, his witch doctor mixed the medicine before his patient and the man recognized a stalk which went into it. After his seizure, the native cut a short section to show me. Now I'm no botanist, but the stalk looked like sugar cane. To identify it, I touched my tongue to the raw core. The biting sensation in my taste glands showed my mistake; I spat quickly to avoid being poisoned.

The pungent sensation spread over my tongue and down into my throat, accompanied by a heavy mucus discharge so irritating that swallowing was difficult. Saliva no longer able to pass down my throat accumulated until it flowed from my mouth. Seeing patients in that condition was impossible, so I went home. The biting sensation in tongue and mouth grew sharper, the mucus flow heavier. I couldn't eat or sleep, and was obliged to spend the night with my head on a chair and my mouth over a bucket, drooling like a baby. The novel and alarming symptoms abated by morning and I suffered from nothing worse than a sleepless night.

I threw the stalk into a waste receptacle that morning, but I should have had it identified, for I know of no drug producing such an effect. The use of unfamiliar drugs by witch doctors, however, isn't uncommon, as I learned from other experiences.

A native girl was carrying my baby daughter Laura to her play pen one afternoon when a native boy stepped from behind a bush and blew a powder into the nurse's face. The girl recognized him as Charlie, a neighbor's garden boy, who had twice tried to speak to her. She assumed he'd bought a love philtre at the native market to change her indifference.

The nurse and Laura were soon running high temperatures and had to be put to bed. I asked the police to find the boy, and, that failing, sought the herbalist who had sold the love potion, hoping to learn what it consisted of so

that I could give an antidote. This attempt also failed.

It's doubtful if the routine measures I took to reduce the girls' fevers explained the drop in their temperatures two days later. The drug-induced fever had probably run its course. To this day I know of no powder which can raise temperature merely by breathing it.

I was more successful in learning what went into another love philtre brought to our kitchen door by a Zulu boy. He handed the bottle to our kitchen girl, Nyesa, asking her to mix the love charm with the food of another kitchen girl who had spurned his attentions.

Nyesa wisely brought the bottle to my wife, and Margaret sent it to a Durban chemist for analysis. He reported that the "love potion" contained sufficient poison to kill 25 people. The boy was horrified to learn how close he'd come to killing the girl he loved.

Now it may seem strange to class love charms with medicine, but not to a Zulu. He believes magic will cure either an aching heart or an ailing body, and in either case the concoction is mixed by an herbalist who has no pharmaceutical knowledge and therefore no way of knowing whether his dosage contains poison.

Many cases come before the white magistrates of Natal and the Native High Court of fatal poisonings, sometimes within an hour or less after a patient has taken an herbalist's or witch doctor's "medicine." There are few convictions, for the native medicine man pleads that he was doing the best he knew. And this is lamentably true. Natives seldom hold it against their witch doctor if his concoction kills a relative. They believe the witchcraft causing the sickness was stronger than the medicine.

Medical missionaries are familiar with many cases of this nature never coming to trial because of the small chance of conviction. My friend Reverend Johannes Astrup once asked me to examine a boy whose ears had been filled with poison by a witch doctor to cure brain fever. I could do nothing because part of the ear had been destroyed by a strong corrosive and the child was permanently deaf.

Witch doctors apparently distrust the curative powers of their own medicines, because they prefer to bring ailing members of their own families to white doctors. Among my patients one day was a woman wearing the distinctive dress of the smeller-out. Black clay was rubbed into her hair and it straggled about her face like Medusa's snakes. Across her chest hung her badge of office: two bands of goat skin, hair side out, and crossed in front.

I said, "*Sa ku bona, Sangoma.*" (Good morning, witch doctor.)

She smiled with pleasure at having her profession recognized, and told me that her little girl was ill. After examining the child and giving the mother some medicine for her, I asked how she "smelled out" those practicing witchcraft and causing sickness. In the old days a tribe was lined up and the smeller-out would sniff each one to discover the witch; the witch would then be put to death. She declared that she grew nervous and hysterical when she smelled the guilty man or woman.

"But," the old wretch added, "in those days if there was anyone who had done me an injury or whom I disliked, I accused that person."

And she laughed heartily, thinking it a great joke to have condemned to death enemies innocent of any wrongdoing.

WHITE man's law deprives the smeller-out of the power of sending supposed witches to their death, so they are now much like other witch doctors, working with charms and spells, performing surgery, and making medicines. In addition to herbs and roots, the witch doctor formerly found parts of the human body effective, particularly if his victim was killed by twisting the neck until it broke. In an article *Native Superstition in its Relation to Crime,* Justice C. G. Jackson of the Native High Court cites six murders committed in recent years by witch doctors requiring parts of the human body to prepare strong medicine. Unsympathetic courts, however, are causing the practice to disappear.

To give these devils their due, the witch doctor is sometimes roughly effective with enemata to clean out the system and emetics to produce vomiting. Unfortunately they treat tuberculosis and diphtheria the same way.

There is a primitive logic in many of their preparations. Witch doctors believe the fat of the more powerful beasts will cure illness, lion fat being especially favored because of the lion's strength.

Patients bleeding from nose or mouth are given medicine compounded of the bark of the Umdlebe tree (which has a blood-red sap), parts of an animal which bleeds freely when touched, and the flesh of any animal having much blood, such as the lion or ox. After burning the mixture, the powdery ash is divided into three parts to be taken internally, on the tongue, and by introduction into cuts.

Nervousness and fear are treated with medicine made from the heart and eyes of a lion, an animal supposedly devoid of fear. A python's flesh is believed to prevent spread of disease by holding anything together with its constrictive power. A small bone from a dog is strapped on a broken leg to mend it. Twitching of the flesh and spasms are treated with medicine composed of a small beetle, the *imfingezi,* which curls into a ball if touched; and of sea-anemone, worms and leaves that fold at night.

All these and other preparations are carried

by the witch doctor in the antelope horns and gourds dangling from his neck, serving both as his medicine bottles and the sign of his calling.

Once, while preparing a paper on native remedies for the Durban Medical Society, I purchased numerous medicines at the native market and found that they consisted of (among other ingredients) pieces of crocodile skin, the feathers and skin of vultures, powdered cuttlefish, powdered dried flesh of snakes, horse hair, porcupine quills, bits of bark, insects, and partially burned lizards.

Mafukuke Ngcobo, an herbalist who modernized the Zulu pharmaceutical business by introducing European drugs, concocted a remarkable panacea, called "Uzifonzonke," which translated means "hunted in the blood, and fought there where it found any trouble." Ngcobo asserted that it cured chest troubles, swellings, pains in the bones, stitches in the stomach, and other ailments. The medicine was iodine and water.

The witch doctor performs surgery at times, particularly in childbirth cases, his complete ignorance of anatomy making this course dangerous for the patient. His most frequent surgical operation, however, is a cut made with a rusty knife, piece of bottle or a short spear, into which he introduces a counter-irritant. Headaches, for example, are "cured" by cutting through the scalp and applying a drug so irritating that the original distress is forgotten.

A patient of this sort came to my house many years ago. The sick man's face and hands twitched, and the symptoms he described sounded like Jacksonian epilepsy. After making a brief examination, I was convinced that the twitching was caused by a depressed skull fracture, the result of a falling stone while Dabula worked in a mine. I had no place to operate then, and suggested that the man go to the government hospital, but he refused to leave and at length I summoned my wife.

I placed a kitchen table on the latticed back verandah and Dabula's friends lifted him onto it. The instruments needed for a trephining operation were sterilized by the time Margaret arrived. As she prepared to give ether, Dabula murmured, "I want a big scraping."

His head was scarred where Zulu witch doctors had cut through the skin and periosteum to scrape the bone and apply counter-irritants. He thought that scraping a larger area would end his epileptic seizures. There was a well-substantiated theory that irritations of the motor surfaces of the brain caused the Jacksonian type of epilepsy; the cicatrices adherent to the depressed portion of bone might increase the irritation.

When Dabula was unconscious, I raised the scalp and periosteum in a flap, dissected the adhesions with a ring-shaped saw known as a trephine as I worked, and then started a groove in the skull. Trephining was awkward because of the depression and irregularity of the injured skull, but at last a circle was completed and a small "button" of bone ready to be pried out. After its removal, the pulsating dura mater (the covering of the brain) was visible. Working more easily now that there was an opening, I nipped off the irregular bits of depressed bone pressing on the brain, and stopped the bleeding of the skull with pressure.

I decided not to replace the button of bone, which might act like a foreign body, and cause complications. Instead I covered the hole with the periosteum, drawing it together and securing it before replacing the flap of skin.

Dabula visited the dispensary for several years, and in time the periosteum had regenerated bone to fill in the small skull opening and his epileptic seizures ceased. Not every native who has a "big scraping" by his witch doctor is as lucky.

Undoubtedly the witch doctor relies partially upon tricks not unlike those of a stage magician to convince his patients. They strengthen their hold on native credulity by such tricks as hiding articles and then "smelling out" their location. Sickness is often attributed to swallowing a snake; I've talked with people who have seen witch doctors verify this diagnosis by cutting a small incision and then releasing a tiny snake concealed in one hand. The patient believes the snake came from his own body.

Despite such hokus-pokus, I'm certain witch doctors possess certain psychic powers. Shortly after opening my first small hospital in Durban, I performed operations on two witch doctors late one afternoon. The female witch doctor was placed in the women's ward, and the male witch doctor in the men's ward. Neither was informed of the other's presence, yet they both rolled and tossed and were unable to sleep. Finally the man dragged his blankets outside.

"There is an evil presence in the hospital," he explained, when I found him lying in the yard next morning. "I could not sleep there."

After he'd paid his fee and gone away, I stepped into the women's ward to ask the female witch doctor how she'd spent the night.

"I rested poorly at first," she admitted. "But when a man left during the night, I felt at peace. He must have been very evil."

They may both have been right!

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

A HAMMOCK as is a hammock!

Query:—Quite a few years ago, when I first read William Beebe's accounts of the South American jungles, I was struck by his insistence that the most comfortable method of sleeping in the open was the native Indian hammock. Inasmuch as every hammock that I had ever met resulted in a semi-permanent C-warp in the sleeper's spinal column, I was a bit incredulous.

From time to time, on weekend trips into the Adirondacks or on other expeditions on which I had to bunk on the ground, without benefit of boughs, air mattresses, or other such comforts, I have thought of Mr. Beebe's hammocks and wondered if they might not have a place in our part of the world. I bought Gregory Mason's book, "South of Yesterday," and found the flaw in my reasoning: i.e., that one sleeps across the hammock, at right angles to the suspension, with the edges curling over the head and feet.

Mason seems to feel that the most comfortable hammocks, as well as the handsomest, are made by the Colombian Indians. My questions, then, are these: (1) if I want to buy such a dyed cotton hammock, to try out on future camping trips, where can I get one; (2) how much will it cost; (3) how about the matter of size? Mason speaks of the best hammocks as being "tailored" to fit, and points out that the average Indian is smaller than a white man and that the latter needs an over-size hammock. I am about 5 feet 11, and I wonder how much leeway would be needed and what width I should look for in a hammock—7 feet, 8 feet, or what?

If the cost runs very high I will probably have to drop the idea, as there are other, cheaper experiments that I can make. The Mohawk Valley Hiking Club, of which I am a member, has designed much of its own equipment, including tents and sleeping bags, but the compression of down under the body in a down sleeping bag reduces the insulation and cuts down the effectiveness in very cold weather. We have been trying various suspension devices which will permit the down to remain fluffed out on the under side of the bag, and maybe experience with a hammock will add a few ideas. At any rate, I'd like to try it.

As a matter of fact, it occurs to me that the weight of such a hammock might be enough to put it in the same class with air mattresses, gasoline stoves, portable radios, pack refrigerators, and other gadgets which I can do very well without on a camping trip. I have not the slightest desire to run up the weight of my pack for the sole purpose of enjoying the comfort of floating on a cloud. Can you tell me, roughly, what such hammocks weigh? Perhaps the whole matter can be dropped—although there remains the possibility of using a hammock as an auxiliary bed in a permanent camp, or when one is attending an outdoor conference where bunks are few and poison ivy plentiful.

I will greatly appreciate any information you can give me. As a matter of fact, if you have your own preferences in the matter of make, don't think that I am completely guided by Mason's recommendation of the Colombian variety. I am just curious and trying to discover a few answers.

—P. Schuyler Miller,
Scotia, N. Y.

Reply by Edgar Young:—All through Mexico, Central America, Panama, and South America down to the lower end of the south temperate zone, one finds various ways of sleeping. A number of years

ago I aided the Mellon Institute of Pittsburgh with a contribution when they were making a study of how people slept in every country of the world, and I remember mentioning the baked clay shelves upon which Quichuas sleep in the high plateaus of the Andes, which I rate as the hardest damned (and I use the word advisedly) bed in the world and possibly the lousiest and chinchiest. The floored beds used by even cultured families in Brazil are a close second on hardness, and the pole grids used by certain upper Amazon Indians are a close competitor. I have also seen Bogre Indians in the upper Iguazzu country in Brazil sleeping up in trees, standing on limbs with their arms about the tree and if they have not changed their customs not a man or woman wears a shred of clothes. The gaucho of the southern pampas sleeps on the ground with his saddle for a pillow and his poncho for cover if needed, the greased Yahgans sleep in a pile inside a quickly thrown up sod windbreak, but the llanero of northern South America carries his hammock and swings it between two trees as he follows the herd for months through the seas of tall llano grass.

There are excellent hammocks in Mexico made of maguey fiber, hammocks in Guatemala and Salvador that the owners are proud of, in Honduras the natives are veritable hammock fiends and native travellers carry their own when travelling. Nicaragua can make a showing as can also Panama, and various sections of South America have individuated specimens, but to really get into a discussion of the subject one must finally, by elimination, arrive at speaking of the so-called Guayaquil Hammock. The name is a slight misnomer. Panama hats got their name years ago because they were sold in Panama. These hats are made by Indians on the northern coast of Ecuador and were made for trade with the highland Indians who wear them for cold weather in the snowy Andes and it was by accident they were introduced to civilization. Thus, also, the Guayaquil Hammock, which is called that because they are offered for sale in Guayaquil, the main port of Ecuador which is forty miles upstream from the mouth of the Guayas River. It was once the worst pest-hole in the world but now it's much better, in fact fairly safe to visit. The uplands of Ecuador are healthy, ideal. It is always Spring in some sections and the people are very nice to be among. The Guayaquil Hammock may be found for sale in Guayaquil. We get our best chocolate from there.

I do not want to father a tall tale but these hammocks are easily the grandpappies of the whole hammock tribe. In Guayaquil I slept in one which was hung in the back porch of a hotel which covered a whole city block and next day I took several persons to admire the size and workmanship of this long hammock which was as finely made as any Panama hat and seemed to be made of the same fiber. A man who had spent years there said the one I had slept in was just a baby and he had seen forty men sleeping in a larger one. A Spaniard who had walked from Rio de Janeiro to Guayaquil spoke up and said a hammock which would accommodate only forty sleepers was small and on his way through the jungles on his long jaunt he had paused with a tribe of Indians in the Amazon basin and that the entire tribe, men, women, and children, slept in one hammock and that he slept in with them. He had arrived on the tramp, broke, but had made good as a local business man and he dared anyone to make the trip with him and see hammocks that amounted to something. Later, I crossed bridges across chasms in the Andes in Peru which were suspended from cables made of the same, or a similar, fiber. Some of these cables had been there for long periods and entire packtrains crossed them with no apparent strain although the cables were no larger than my leg. The Indians in this section do not sleep in hammocks, however, to any extent.

I confess I do not know precisely where they are made. I spent time along the northern Ecuadorian coast where the so-called Panama hats are made and while I saw thousands of hats in process of construction I did not see any hammocks being made although I did see hammocks in the huts and slept in a small, good one. They could easily be made there and some possibly are but I will hazard the guess they come across the Andes from the upper Amazon in exchange for Panama hats. I was over at Iquitos later and I saw Indian runners arriving with packs of Panamas to trade at the stores and I imagine some of them took hammocks back on the return trip. The longest of the hammocks roll up into a small package for the weave is very fine. This gets me into trouble for the weave is good enough to have been made by the Panama hat makers and I do not know any tribe of Indians in the whole Amazon basin who are capable of doing so perfect a weave. The Indians, moreover, in the vicinity of Iquitos sleep on grids with their bare feet sticking out over a smouldering fire, but as there is two hundred thousand miles of unexplored country roundabout it is possible that I missed a few sections, and I have the word of the tramp in Guayaquil that he did see them in use. I am quite sure these particular hammocks are not made in any section of Colombia. All of which has little bearing on your questions which I will try to answer definitely.

1. They are not cotton but fiber, possibly from a palm, or palmleaf. You could possibly arrange with the purser or some employe on a through Panama R.R. boat which runs from New York to Quayaquil to buy one down there for you. The smallest one you will be able to get will be about twenty-five feet long. The price will depend.

2. The local price is not very high, just as it is for Panamas, and if the purser got some resident American to do the buying he might pick a small one up cheap. Set a maximum price.

3. I am speaking of the best hammocks in South America. Mason is possibly speaking of some product of a small remote tribe. While I do not wish to stultify his information my advice to him is to really sleep in a hammock. I had tried all the little dinky ones and I do not mention them in the same category with the Guayaquil or *guayaquil*, type. A U. S. navy hammock is better than any small one.

If you will write the Pan American Union, Washington, D. C., and ask for the name of the U. S. consul or consular agent in Guayaquil and hop an air-mail letter down to him, asking specifically about prices of these hammocks, also writing a similar letter to the same persons in Iquitos, Peru, I think you could manage to have one bought down there and shipped up to you. The Department of Commerce Latin American Directory gives the names of local merchants down there and what they deal in but these books are only possessed by the largest libraries and boards of trade and you would have to get someone in New York or Washington to dig the names out for you.

DOLLARS for China.

Query:—What is a Trade Dollar and how do you distinguish it?

—Claudia Tittle
105 Pierce Ave.,
Yakima, Wash.

Reply by William L. Clark:—Trade Dollars were made between the years 1873 and 1885. The last seven dates were struck for collectors only and not for general circulation. These dollars were made for use in China, but the venture was not particularly successful and they were recalled from circulation to be redeemed at face value for a given length of time, after which they would have only their bullion value. The obverse of the coin has the seated figure of Liberty above the date, and the reverse has in the center an eagle with United States of America above and Trade Dollar below.

TALLY-HO!

Query:—Several members of our club are looking into the subject of foxhounds due to the fact that there is a very marked increase in the fox population in this region and because furs are selling high. I might also add that the county has put a $3 bounty on foxes, which adds to the incentive for hunting them.

The question arises as to what kind of foxhound is to be recommended so I have been requested to look into the subject and render a report. I have searched for information on the subject at length but to date have no information worth while.

Therefore would you kindly inform me as to how one would identify—aside from the mood of the man that raised the dog—the following: Birdsong, July, Goodman and Walker fox hounds and also the characteristics of each strain in the field.

Dr. Paul M. Parker, Sec'y
Moravia-Locke Sportsmen's Ass'n
14 E. Cayuga St.

Reply by Freeman Lloyd:—In reply to your inquiries regarding hounds of the several American foxhound strains. The great majority of these are so mixed up in their breedings that I feel you might have considerable difficulty in securing a pack or several hounds of exactly the same breeding unless your Association decides to go to very considerable expense. I know of no lucid or fully particularized description of each strain of American foxhound, but such might be available. I feel sure *The Chase Magazine*, Lexington, Kentucky, would be pleased to give you further information.

Although the late General Roger D. Williams in his "Horse and Hound," published in 1905 in Lexington, gives particulars of the early histories of the Birdsong, July, Walker and other strains, he is not precise in his statements regarding the different builds of privately-owned packs. Mr. Birdsong of Georgia, in the early 1840's used the Henry hound in crossing with his native pack of Redbones, the result being the Birdsong. The latter was the foundation stock of many of the modern strains of the early part of this century.

The July strain originated in Georgia, and derive their name from July, a hound that was procured from Mr. Nimrod Gosnell of Maryland by Mr. Miles Harris in 1866. Williams says that the July strain in his time had quite a percentage of greyhound blood in them. This greyhound blood was used as late as 1880, increasing the speed to the detriment of other qualities equally desirable in a hound. The Walker strain, bred in Madison County, Kentucky, in 1905, had been owned and maintained by the Walker family for over 100 years.

Should your Club decide on acquiring a pack of foxhounds, you are advised to purchase as many as you may require and properly maintain, hounds of a like variety from the same kennel; such hounds, too, to be of a like height—the dog hounds being a couple of inches higher at the shoulder than the bitches. Let the color or markings be similar: and the formation of heads and ears alike. Also, choose hounds that have the same kind of stiff hairs underneath the tail or "brush" at the upward bend of the caudal appendage. The clean or whip tail may point to greyhound or pointer dog blood. For good scenting powers choose wide-faced, big-nostrilled hounds, and for voice or tonguing, pick those with loose skin under the throat.

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

✱*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtailed drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society Broadway at 156th N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities. Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACCREAGH, care of *Adventure.* **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits, Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1—*Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure.*

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of *Adventure.*

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure.*

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping* — A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Onto., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure.* **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 720 W. New York Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.* **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 8)

day). In time the McCord Zulu Hospital was built to accommodate 300 patients; a wing was added within a few years, and other additions and improvements have been frequently made since then, so that today it ranks among the world's foremost native hospitals.

When Dr. McCord retired in 1940, his work had won such support that some of the most prominent citizens of Durban served on the hospital board and no opposition remained. The hospital is now partly self-supporting and partly government supported, and is under the able supervision of Dr. Allan B. Taylor, whom Dr. McCord brought to Africa after the first World War.

In his years of African practice Dr. McCord could always feel the shadow of the native witch doctor. Much of his work was undoing the mischief wrought by these ignorant practitioners of the black arts. The Zulus, knowing nothing of science, regarded a white doctor in the same light as their witch doctor, with the added handicap that "he knows nothing of the black man's diseases." Even in diagnosing a malady, a white doctor is expected to describe the symptoms with little help from his patient because it is customary for the witch doctor to do so. Slowly the tide of change is sweeping over Natal and the days of the witch doctor are waning.

I might mention in passing that the paper shortage has postponed work on Dr. McCord's book, as on others, but I hope his great life story can be told when the paper pinch has relaxed. Meanwhile, we collaborated on the article on Zulu medicine for *Adventure*.

WHEN we confessed to R. W. Daly our complete lack of familiarity with events in Nelson's early Central American career and asked for a bit of background, the author of "Epaulette on the Shoulder" wrote back—

> It's not surprising to learn you're not posted on the British Nicaraguan expedition of 1780. Since the venture was unsuccessful, little has been written about it by the British, though there is abundant material in Spanish.
>
> The whole affair is interesting to the naval historian merely because it was here that Nelson was changed into an invalid forever constitutionally ill. He never fully recovered. The force and determination of his spirit becomes, therefore, even more remarkable. In his case, "the spirit is willing," was enough to surmount the mere compass of a feeble body, and seen in this light, his later accomplishments are all the more remarkable.
>
> Despite the expedition's obscurity today, men died during it just as dead as they did on such better-known battlefields as Waterloo. Before the venture was over, some eighteen hundred men had been committed to it, of whom not more than three hundred and eighty survived. Of the *Hinchinbrook's* crew of two hundred, one hundred and forty-five perished. These casualties were almost exclusively due to climate; very, very few were due to enemy action.

Mr. Daly, who has been trying to get things cleared away for a year's postgraduate work at Yale and Loyola, adds parenthetically—

> *Adventure's* checks for "Cleared for Action" (which concluded in the April issue) and "Epaulette on the Shoulder," you'll be interested to know, clinch my present drive to get that damned degree out of my system, although my wife is somewhat scornful of a character who would persist in studying when a typewriter offers such, and I quote, "easy money." Needless to say, I've gotten nowhere with my attempts to explain that writing is WORK, although I did manage to talk her into going to college for 15 hours credit, and taking a course in *Creative Writing*. So far, however, she has only mentally outlined her plot for a short story, still hasn't gotten around to writing it, and still doesn't appreciate me. (Sniff!)

Maybe Mr. Daly doesn't talk long or loudly enough to the distaff side about those stories he *didn't* sell us! Such were few and far between, we'll have to admit, but an occasional one had to be bounced. Bring 'em up every morning for breakfast-table conversation and sprinkle 'em copiously through the day's chit-chat for a couple of weeks, Bob, and watch appreciation grow in the better half by leaps and bounds!

THREE new names to add to the roster of our Writers' Brigade this month—a brace of yarn-spinners and a balladeer. We'll let them introduce themselves in the order of their appearance on our contents page.

Gilbert Hammond, whose "Young Man with a Jinx" you'll find on page 45, says—

> I've done most of my writing in the past twenty years on newspaper payrolls, but at various times have erupted into magazines with profit and hope to do more of same in the future.
>
> Have worked on New York City and Boston dailies and was managing editor of an afternoon paper in Vermont when this country went to war. Subsequently I was a war correspondent with the Boston *Traveler* and went cross-channel on a U.S. Coast Guard rescue boat with the British-Canadian troops in the first few days of the invasion. Best claim to distinction since getting back is that I wrote only one war story and then threw it away.
>
> Until recently, I was on the New York

World-Telegram, but have shut down for reconversion as the rush of events in these extraordinary times indicate. Meaning a choice of activities and a chance to think.

The idea for "Young Man with a Jinx" came from a newspaper report of a State trooper last spring in upstate New York who thought he was hoodooed in his handing out of traffic tickets. The development of the yarn, of course, was my own imagination at work.

KENNETH KITCH, whose "Ordeal by Arrow" appears on page 50 under his writing-name, Victor Holmes, turns out to be a fellow brother-in-bondage. He says, without any beating about the literary bush—

Editors are among humanity's least pleasant personalities. No matter what you do, you never can please them. They sit around and look wise and say yes-and-no and never really get anything done except send out rejection slips. I know. I'm an editor. I happen to edit *Sun-Up,* Southwide home and garden magazine published at San Antonio, Texas.

I wrote "Ordeal by Arrow" because, I suppose—it is, incidentally the first chapter of a contemplated novel—I never quite recovered from a fatal boyish fascination for Robin Hood and pirates and Alexander the Great, and King Arthur. Let the psychiatrists make the most of it. And I hope that Bill and my six-year-old Katherine Ann will grow up to develop the same love for the land of derring-do . . . There's no better way in the world to slide away from your troubles than to stretch out of an evening with a volume of heroic lore. I credit my yearning for this type of entertainment to my sixth grade teacher—who, in a moment of hallucination, decided that I was to be Sir Guanfall—or was it Launfal?—in our school play. I carried a white rose in one hand, my mother's wash boiler lid in the other, and had a most wonderful time . . .

Later, when I taught English Literature to another generation, I took considerable pride in my success at inoculating other youngsters with the same love of romance . . . although I was a flop when it came to stirring the emotions over Browning and Thackeray, thereby failing to attain general recognition as a superior English Literature teacher.

My life has been a general mixture of teaching, newspaper and magazine work. I've taught journalism and English and history and athletics . . . had a period as sports writer with various dailies . . . worked on telegraph desks . . . was an editor with the Associated Press, bless its chaste and stoic soul . . . edited a trade magazine and now am editing *Sun-Up.*

I've written a number of magazine feature articles, a little fiction now and then, a book for Macmillans "Salt of the Earth," and when ever my wife and children go on a trip, I write poetry. My greatest poetic masterpiece is a wonderfully-done six-page epic which I know is great poetry because no one will publish it. A hundred years from now, school children probably will have to stay in after school and learn the second stanza.

WALTER W. STEPHEN, who gives us "Last Port" on page 57, introduces himself succinctly thuswise—

Born, Mobile, Ala., fifty-five years ago. My father was a Presbyterian minister, a person very much like the father of W. C. Tuttle's immortal character, Hashknife Hartly. He never picked an easy place, and my early life was spent in a succession of interesting and somewhat frontier surroundings.

Spent part of every year in Mobile at my grandfather's old French house. Was sailing a catboat at the age of 12 and when I was older had some salt water experience, mostly on schooners.

Chemical engineer at college. Chief chemist and metallurgist for an iron and steel company when first World War began. Went into army shortly after this happened and dug some good ditches. Returned, due to physical disabilities and went to work for chemical company that now employs me, during 1918. Was research chemist and chief chemist for plant at Anniston, Ala. and later looked after personnel, fire and protection departments. For past five years have been concerned with protection of half dozen or so of plants for Monsanto Chemical Co.

E. HOFFMANN PRICE, anent his novelette "A Jeep for Hakamoto" on page 98, sends the following notation—

We are so accustomed to associating rubber with the Netherlands East Indies and Malaya that writing about a rubber planter in Mindanao may result in *Camp-Fire's* getting a few how-come queries in the mail. So, anticipating—

As a matter of fact. rubber has been produced for some years in Zamboanga Province; on Basilan Island, south of Zamboanga; and a large rubber company had, before the war, an experimental plantation near Kabakan, in Cotabato Province. Both soil and climate are entirely right; that the Philippine Commonwealth didn't have a substantial rubber industry years ago is due only to artificial reasons, such as tariffs, cartels, and other finagling on a national and international scale.

Guerrillas were, as you doubtless know, issuing currency. The Commonwealth is considering the redemption of the paper issued by established or accredited guerrilla leaders. Inevitably, the idea of printing currency would have been taken up by leaders who, while they may have harassed the Japs, spent a good deal of their time harassing their fellow Filipinos by forcing the acceptance of home-made paper money

at the point of gun and edge of kris—and for purely private purposes. My old friend, Machinist's Mate John Garen (John and I used to repair Model T Fords for the Osage Indians, on a barter basis, as oil royalties had by then pooped out)—anyway, John came back from the Islands with some guerrilla currency which had been mimeographed, and conformed generally to the description of our Datu Hassan's paper money. Considering the process, the stuff looked very good: typewriter and stylus, skillfully handled, did the job.

I have given what I believe to be, and what a number of old-timers admit is, a representative picture of the post-war guerrilla's psychology. The guerrilla is already a problem in the Islands. He ranges from misguided patriot who refuses to disarm, to outright bandit shaking down the public and getting support by pointing to his war record, which may or may not have been creditable.

My old friend, Major C. C. Staples, who commanded Filipino troops in campaigns against Mindanao trouble makers (such as Datu Hassan) back in the old days, and knows the breed in all its primitive splendor and cussedness, insists I am guilty of magnificent understatement in the closing scenes of "A Jeep for Hakamoto." The Moro is a fanatic gambler; the fiesta should have been marked by a dozen brawls, and a number of casualties. He admits however that a super-datu COULD have had all bets called off without precipitating an all out riot with every man in the place drawing a kris to arbitrate matters. Our hero got away with his "rescue" of Hakamoto simply because of his audacity: the spectators figured the man was crazy, and since madmen are under the protection of Allah, they didn't cut him down.

WE PREDICTED, you'll recall, that E. E. Halleran's article on marksmanship in the January issue would arouse considerable comment, pro and con, from the shootin'-iron fraternity. L. P. Holmes, of Napa, Calif., has first crack at the target with the following interesting letter—

In general, I agree most heartily with E. E. Halleran's contentions in his "Plumb Center" article. However, I believe even Mr. Halleran himself drew a slightly long bow in the shooting ability he credits to Wild Bill Hickok. More about that later.

There is, without question, more pure bunk and bologny tied up with tales of amazing marksmanship, past, present and future, than just about any other controversial subject. This is largely due to the average citizen's abysmal ignorance of ballistics, and of the inherent mechanical capabilities of any given gun or weapon. How many times we read of a shooting performance put on by some Dead-eye Dick that is beyond the mechanical capabilities of the very gun he was using! Which makes as much sense as if we claimed to have traveled two hundred miles an hour in a tin lizzie. It just isn't mechanically possible. Old lizzie simply hasn't got that much speed in her make-up.

I doubt very much that Hickok could put six quick shots from his six-gun into a three inch circle at fifty yards, because I do not believe that in his day a six-gun with that much inherent accuracy was to be had. And I definitely do not believe that Hickok could pick off flying crows with a rifle with any regularity. He might have done it ONCE, by some lucky chance. But to infer that he, or any other man who ever lived, or ever will live, could do that sort of thing regularly is bunk—of the purest ray serene. And to state that Hickok NEVER missed, is more bunk. The man who never misses, never shoots—and I mean—NEVER!

Other things enter into the ability to shoot in actual gun battle, than mere ability itself. Nor is it a question of courage or cowardice. For lack of something better, let's call it nerve control. Some men are just naturally better than others when the chips are down. In sports we call them "money players." They are at their best when the going is tough. So it was, no doubt, with the more notorious gun fighters of the Old West. On the average they probably were no better shots, nor even as good, as were some of the men they downed. They were simply cooler and more deadly when the issue was starkly, live or die.

As a writer of Western stories myself, I admit to occasionally laying it on a bit thick when my hero drags his trusty hogleg and starts to clean up. Which is because, after all is said and done, I have to get the guy through at least reasonably in one piece, whilst disposing of the villain. That is poetic license, isn't it?

There are limits to this sort of thing, however. Credibility never hurt any story. I am remembering a series that ran at one time from the pen of a very noted author. The central character, the hero of it all, was a gent who had set out to get even with a flock of tough ones who had done his old daddy dirt. Each one, as he finally caught up with them, he ear marked, by shooting a hole through their respective ears with a .45. I had to chuckle over that one. The only conclusion I could arrive at was that these luckless gents all possessed jack-ass ears. Certainly a .45 slug would not shoot a hole through a human ear—it would simply remove said ear completely.

And about that Louisiana Kid shooting off a marshal's trigger finger twice, hand running—well, I'll have to reach for the salt shaker on that one, so-called history notwithstanding.

We passed the above along to Mr. Halleran and here's his answer—

Dear Mr. Holmes:

Your note, forwarded by *Adventure*, has just reached me. When I saw the maga-

zine's name on the envelope I had bright visions of some starry eyed Western fan taking me to task for debunking his heroes. It was a pleasure to find that a writer of your experience completely agrees with me. You do, you know. The only difference between your expression of the case and the one I batted out is that I made a conscious effort to soft pedal the situation a little. Even in Westerns a fellow can't be too much of a Leftist—if he wants to eat.

My bow to the abilities of Hickok was my concession to convention. I quote the best authorities available, always making the same mental reservations so well expressed in your letter. Even a miracle man can't make shots which his gun won't perform. The claims I mentioned regarding Hickok's skill are serious claims of reasonably fair biographers. I assume no other responsibility. Perhaps the article gave the impression that I, personally, believe them. Just between the two of us—I don't.

The same thing is true of that Louisiana Kid comment. I quoted Richard Harding Davis—without giving the old boy credit. His stuff was generally pretty much down to earth so I've got a suspicion it really happened. Which does not mean I believe the Kid could do it again.

Even on the matter of wasted lead in the Lincoln County War I don't mean to imply that this was particularly bad by comparison to War records. Wars, however, are fought by men who hold no place in the archives as super-shots. The important thing is that gun specialists in Lincoln County did little better than hastily drilled rookies in this respect. Which brings us right back to your discussion of nerve etc. That's the crux of the whole matter, I'm sure.

If this sounds entirely too chummy for a discussion of a controversial issue I might take one exception to your note. You don't believe that Wild Bill could kill flying crows with a rifle—as a regular item of exercise. That's the one thing I'm inclined to believe in all the long list of fabulous gun stories I've read. Why? Because on several occasions I have shot flying birds with a .22. I don't claim that I could have done it regularly but I've done it. Who knows what practice might do for a fellow? I can dream, can't I?

Anyway, it's all good fun. Thanks for the courtesy of commenting on the article; it was a real pleasure to find that it attracted the attention of someone who knows the ropes.

P.S.—After writing the above I began to wonder about the exact source of that item I mentioned as having come from Richard Harding Davis. My curiosity led to embarrassment. I looked it up and found the following:

" . . . shot the thumb off his right hand as it rested on the trigger. Farnham shifted his pistol to his left hand with which he shot equally well, but before he could fire the Kid shot the thumb off that hand too."

Since the only time I could conceive of a pistol shooter using his thumb on the trigger would be in the event of attempted suicide I'm considerably shaken in my estimate of Mr. D's trustworthiness as a reporter. Perhaps he meant that the thumbs were on the hammers—as was usually the case—but he shore don't say so!

I can still be stubborn on Wild Bill. No less an authority than Wyatt Earp—himself no slouch—hands the palm to Bill. Let's keep a few illusions!

Cordially,
E. E. Halleran

IT'S NOT often we hear from our women readers—even more seldom that one writes to point out an error. So we were particularly glad to get the following from alert Mrs. P. M. Ruleau of Mountain View, Arkansas which we promptly passed along to the author who'd been caught by her eagle eye—

Gentlemen:

Nice going in John Richard Young's "El Gaucho" in the December '45 issue, BUT why pass up the Morgan horse when mentioning those rare breeds which have but five lumbar vertebrae? And I shouldn't be surprised if the much abused and probably bred out of existence Plains pony (mustang to most folks) didn't come up short a vertebra. They were entitled to, inasmuch as they, too, stemmed from the Arab and Barb.

An ancient—and disgusted horsewoman,
—Marion Ruleau.

Here's Author Young's reply—contrite as it should be when he hasn't a leg to stand on!

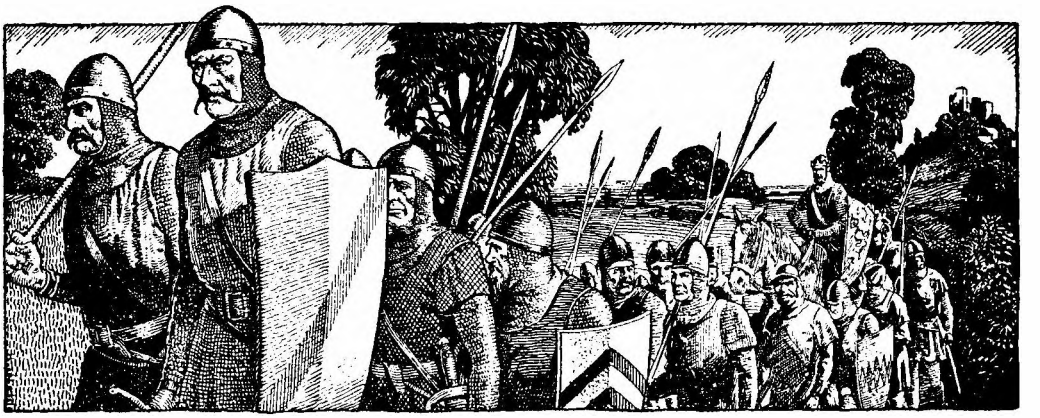
Dear Mrs. Ruleau:

The editor of *Adventure* has forwarded to me your letter of Dec. 3 asking why the lug who wrote "El Gaucho" skipped the Morgan horse when mentioning those rare breeds that have but five lumbar vertebrae. Since I am that lug, I wish—oh, how I wish!—I knew why he skipped the Morgan. My only feeble excuse is that my typewriter is still rather *bronco* and needs further training—or a more watchful trainer. If I'd left out the last sentence of the paragraph you refer to, I'd have been OK. But no, I had to do it up brown. Knowing that the Morgan has only five vertebrae, but with my mind on the criollo, the Arab and the Barb, I pulled a boner; a boner almost equal to Ben Franklin's stunt of cutting *two* holes in his shop-door so that both his cat and her kitten could walk in and out.

I am glad that you wrote about this. If ever the article is reprinted I'll see that that tail end sentence is lopped off.

Thank you for catching us up, Mrs. R. and we'll try to keep our lumbar vertebrae in order hereafter!—K.S.W.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

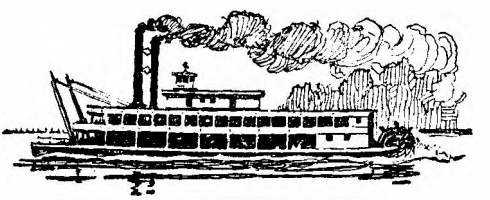


Next month you'll meet Brian Fitz-Brian—a mongrel if there ever was one (his Welsh blood gave him a good singing voice—his Norse strain unusual stature and brawn—the English in him the thick-headedness that kept him from knowing when he was licked and let him go blundering right along when another man more sensible would curl up and die) and travel with him to Ireland in the invasion of that sorry land by the Geraldines, Edmund de St. Erne, and others in the years 1169-71.

"SWORD LAND"

By HENRY JOHN COLYTON

—opens in the teeth of an east wind that tossed icy spray over the ramparts of Dun Cathach and broke a ship in two on the black rocks that the natives call the Teeth of Leir. A drunk pilot, seven horses, twenty-six men at arms, three knights, two hogsheads of salt herrings and a chaplain—all wallowing in the sea at once—to perform the damndest amphibious operation ever attempted on a hostile shore. . . . This great new serial by the author of "The Pilgrim and the Pirate"—it concludes in the October issue—is the finest entertainment of its kind we've been able to offer in many a month!



Gordon MacCreagh returns with "Job Across Jordan"—another stirring adventure of Mike MacIlvain, cloak-and-dagger diplomat-extraordinary in the turbulent Middle-East. . . . Nard Jones introduces us—in "Comcomly and the King George Woman"—to that blasted reprobate of a Chinook who ruled the roost as top savage along the lower Columbia River back when Fort Astoria was the center of the fur trade. . . . Robert H. Wall, Jr. brings back Me and Stinky in "Don't Be Bitter"—as hilarious a piece of misplaced advice as was ever offered to a chained-to-the Pacific GI whose only idea is to get HOME! . . . Plus additional fine short stories of Australia, Occupied Germany, the Northwoods. . . . An unusual fact story by Nat McKelvey about the United States Army Camel Corps . . . And the usual informative departments and reader services you can expect to find each month only in—

(Continued from page 63)

laden to gather way rapidly; and her quarry, lavishly squandering every bucketful of steam in her boilers, widened the gap between them with every turn of her thrashing wheel.

At the door of the wheelhouse, eyes straining ahead, Captain Carey called to the helmsman. "Left rudder. . . Left a little more. . . Now right rudder. . . Steady, son. . . Steady as she goes!" He glanced over at the mate, who was gripping the bridge rail with both hands, peering aft. "Are they close?"

Mr. Totten made a feeble gesture. "They're coming up fast."

Both men watched the ripple at the German's bows mount to a white crest. The *Sulu Star* was in the channel through the reefs now, and Korf's ship was rapidly overhauling them. "The tide's right for it," the captain muttered, chewing the stem of his unlighted pipe. "It's got to be!" After that, neither man spoke, eyes riveted on the looming shape astern.

And then, with the tormenting slowness of a man dragging his legs in a nightmare, the pursuing ship's masts paused and wobbled crazily. For an instant Captain Carey thought he saw the ship plunge ahead again as if in the clear; but instead, there was a grinding lift of her bows, she heeled sharply, and abruptly lost way.

Mr. Totten was the first to find his voice. "Grounded!" he croaked. "She's hard aground!"

"Like a tiderock in a seaway!" the captain agreed, and ducked into the wheelhouse to give the helmsman directions. Following him in, the mate said worriedly, "But on the next high tide, if they jettisoned some of their cargo—"

"Mr. Totten," he interrupted, "the teeth in that coral cut the guts out of her bottom."

"You certainly had the tides figured out, sir." The mate chuckled with admiration. "It was just high enough to get 'em in over the reef the other morning, and tonight it was low enough to keep 'em there."

Captain Carey scratched his nose judiciously. "I think maybe it was it was my contraband teak," he said, eyes twinkling. "It added just the little bit of extra draft that put 'em down deep enough in the water to strike solid." Getting down to business he added, "Now get up those sails of yours and we'll see what's what. Even if we get the gale I'm counting on outside, it'll be a long haul to Port Moresby at two knots. And we've still got the trip back."

"Back, sir?"

"Certainly." Unlocking the chartroom door where Korf still lay on the deck, he said over his shoulder, "You didn't think for a minute, did you, that I aimed to leave my teak behind for those Krauts?"

THE END

LOST TRAILS

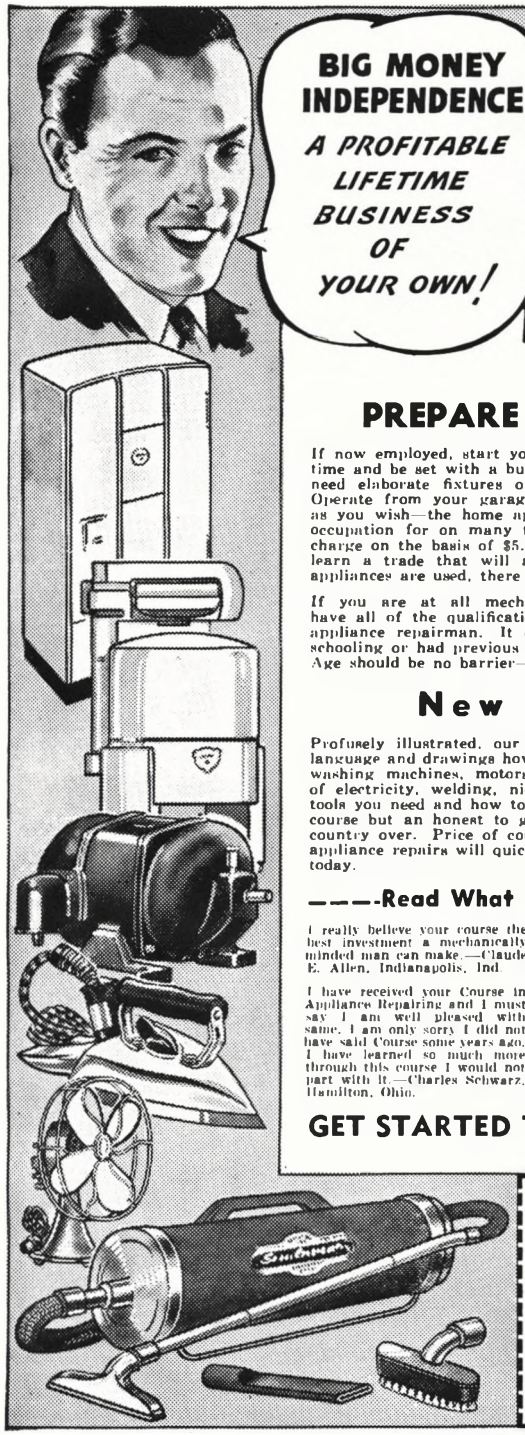
NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing about Frederick Earl Morton, son of Robert A. Morton, born September 1, 1887. He was last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Please write to U. Grant Morton, Bennett Lake Road, Route 3, Fenton, Michigan.

Will anyone who served with Corporal William Yarian, Company B, 297th Engineer (C) Battalion in France, please write to his mother, Mrs. H. Yarian, 28411 Rollcrest Road, Route 1, Farmington, Michigan.

I would like to locate William Hefferon, Sr. He served in the Navy in World War I, worked in a shipyard in Newport News, and has lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and St. Louis, Missouri, where he was last seen. I am just back from service in the Marines and would like to locate my father. William Hefferon, Jr., 2716a South 7th Street, St. Louis 18, Missouri.

Does anyone who served in the 745th Ordnance in the Philippines from December 7th, 1941 to March, 1942, know what has become of Pvt. George Lyle Kendoll? Any information will be appreciated by Stephen Boyer, 52 Roca Street, Ashland, Oregon.



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I am a mechanic for the Western Union Telegraph Co. Three days after receiving the lessons in refrigeration I earned the exact cost of the course.—Henry S. Lee, Washington, D. C.

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