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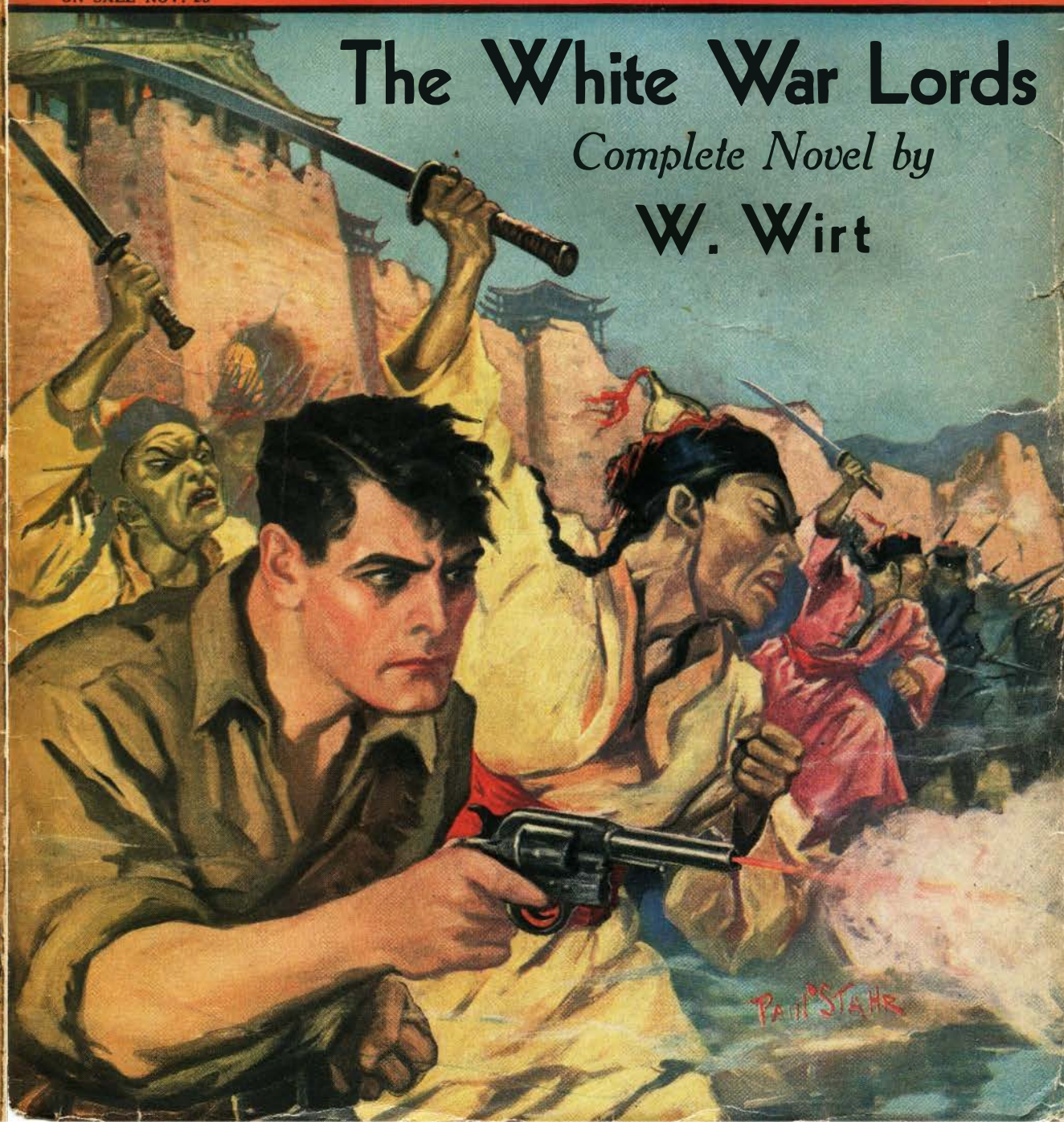
WEEKLY

The White War Lords

Complete Novel by

W. Wirt



DEC. 9, 1933 ARGOSY 10¢

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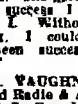

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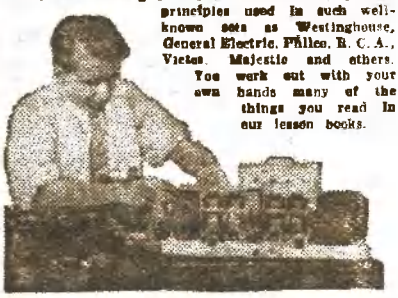

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VOLUME 243 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 9, 1933 NUMBER 2

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In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

The White War Lords

By W. WIRT

Author of "Ammunition Up!" "The Face in the Rock," etc.

Jimmie Cordie and his soldiers of fortune, on a rescue mission, did not know about that Japanese trap

Complete Novel

The Japs stared, then drew their revolvers

CHAPTER I.

INTO DANGER.

A STRONG column of the Big Swords rode towards the foothills of the mountains of northwest Manchukuo.

They were on their way to the Big Sword headquarters in the hills after, as one of the Manchu officers said, "lessoning" the Japanese in regards to leaving only two regiments to guard an important railroad center.

With the column rode five Americans and one Englishman, six of the most famous soldiers of fortune in the Orient. The Big Swords, as far as the riders went, wore no special uniform. The infantry regiments and the artillery wore uniforms but the Manchu swordsmen and the men of other races who made up the cavalry wore about what they pleased to protect themselves from the cold of the hills. All the Manchus wore, under their outer robes, the silk, sleeveless fighting shirt of the Manchu swordsman. When they charged they discarded the robes.

The soldiers of fortune all wore heavy leather riding trousers, leather tunics, fur and leather caps with ear muffs and high laced boots of split cowhide.

Around their waists were cartridge belts from which hung holstered .45 Colt revolvers, and all wore shoulder belts full of 30-30 Winchester cartridges.

The rifles were carried in sheaths hooked to the saddles. They were all lean, hard-bitten men with weatherbeaten faces and calm, cold eyes.

Captain James Cordie, ex-Foreign Legion sergeant and captain of machine gun company, A. E. F., slim, wiry, black eyed and tight lipped; second in command of all Big Swords, rode at the head of the column with two of the Manchu nobles of the House of Chi.

Gone was the Afghan disguise

"I think we had better make it to the river, Tseng," he said, "and hole up there for a week. The wounded can't stand the trip through the pass of the lower mountain the way they are."

"I think so also, honorable elder brother. A week at the river will make them once more well and strong." They spoke in Pushtu, the universal language of the border.

"All right, we'll give them the week."

The advance patrols were called in and the column turned left towards the river Kokong.

"What the hell now?" demanded a big, red-headed man riding with the machine gun section. "What are we turnin' left for? 'Tis not the way to the pass." He was Red Dolan, ex-Foreign Legion and lieutenant of military police, A. E. F. No matter where Jimmie Cordie was one did not have to look far to find Red Dolan.

A man riding beside Red, who looked to be about as broad as he was long, with an unmistakable Semitic face, answered, "Dere is a drug store down on de corner. Maybeso Jimmie has got it de headache und vants to get a powder. Vot do you care, Irish bummer?"

He was the famous Fighting Yid, Jimmie Cordie's first sergeant in France. The Yid's real name was Abraham Cohen, born on Hester Street, New York City, but few people knew it.

"What? I asked ye a civil question, didn't I, ye Yid scut? And how do ye answer me? Ye answered me wid scorn and contempt, ye cross between a mon-

key-faced gibbon and a black and white kitty. Sorry the day Jimmie ever detailed the likes av ye wid a Dolan."

"A Dolan," answered the Yid with a smirk, "should be proud to be detailed mit a Cohen. De Cohens alvays took it care of de Dolans. Vonce, vay back in de dim past, dare vas a Cohen who vos a king in—"

"A king? A Cohen a king? Listen to me, ye beneath notice, flat faced duck av a Hester Street—"

A tall, lanky, sorrowful faced man crowded his horse between the horses of Red and the Yid. "Gimme room. Gangway for a befth deck cook and third admiral of the Swiss navy. Why the turn to the left?" He was the Boston Bean, ex-Foreign Legion and captain of artillery, A. E. F.

"An' what the hell business is it av yours?" demanded Red, promptly. "If ye must know, ye Bosting codfish, there is a drug store down on the corner and Jimmie has the headache. We're goin' down there to get him a powder. Now ye know all about it."

The Boston Bean, down in the Massachusetts Social Register as John Cabot Winthrop, sighed deeply. "It certainly is hell and high water that a perfect gentleman like myself has to put up with the gutter sweepings of Cork. I ask a—"

"Dot is just vot I vos sayin', Beany," interrupted the Yid. "I started to tell it dis Irisher about de Cohens und de—"

"The both av ye," Red said as he tightened his reins, "can go to hell wid my compliments. I'm goin' up wid Jimmie."

The column reached the river and made camp. There were quite a few wounded and it took a little time to make them comfortable. The second day, Jimmie Cordie walked over to where Red, the Bean and the Yid were sitting in the shade of a tree at the river bank.

"I'm going to make a little social call," he said. "Want to go along, Yid?"

"Sure do I, Jimmie. Who ve going to call on?"

"I'll go wid ye, Jimmie darlin'," Red said. "What the hell is the idea av takin' this Yid monkey callin'? He don't know how to act wid roughnecks, let alone anywhere else. I'll go wid ye."

"Better leave both Mr. Dolan and Mr. Cohen at home, Jeems, me good man," the Boston Bean put in. "I'll go with you to maintain the honor of the family. If there weren't ham the Yid would probably raise chain lightning and Red—the good Lord knows what he would do—eat his pie with a knife and think the—"

"Oh, I would, would I? Well, listen to me, ye long legged cross between a jack-snipe and a—"

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "I'd take a chance with either one of them, Bean-eater, but at the moment I'm going to take the Yid. You are in charge of the wounded and Red has got to keep still for a few days with that leg of his. How is it, Terence Aloysius?"

"Aw, hell, the leg av me is all right. 'Tis only a scratch, Jimmie. I'll go wid ye."

"You will not. I'm going over and see Changchau. His city is up the river about thirty miles. It's the first chance I've had to drop in and say 'How.' Come on, Yid."

"Jimmie, is he the lad that was in Tonkin the time we was there?"

"Yeah. He fought for old General Kai-shi-Lung, remember?"

"I do—an' a game little banty he is. Are ye takin' enough av an escort, ye reckless shrimp av the world?"

"I'm takin' the Yid. He's enough escort, isn't he?"

"That scut av the world? He is not. Wan Dolan is worth fwenty-wan Yids like him any time."

"Oi, says it you, dot's all. Says it you. Von Cohen can—"

"Go on, Yid, get ready. Never mind about the Cohens and the Dolans. Red, you let the Bean attend to that leg while I'm gone. You hear me?"

THE city of the War Lord Changchau was not a large one, but it was walled in a strategic place on the river and therefore easy to defend.

Changchau was a young man and took more chances than an older man would. He opened his city to all kinds of caravans, coming and going from the hills, so that his people could make some money selling supplies and what not.

Most war lords only opened their gates to those they knew and were sure of, but Changchau opened his gates to all traders. He was confident that his rifle regiments and battery could shoot any out of his city that he did not want in it.

He welcomed Jimmie Cordie and the Fighting Yid and the small escort of Big Swords that came with them, some thirty-five men, with open arms. He had been in a more than tight place down in Tonkin where it looked very much as if his ancestors on high were going to have a chance to welcome him to his reserved seat among them. Jimmie Cordie had gone in with a machine gun and saved Changchau's bacon. The young Chinese fighting man never forgot it, and when Jimmie dismounted he literally fell on Jimmie's neck and kissed his collar.

The honor guard paraded through the city, Changchau riding between Jimmie and the Yid towards the palace.

As the parade passed an inn, several of the men who had come in with a caravan were sitting around outside. For the most part they were Kirghiz tribesmen, the real thing. But two of the men who watched the parade, although as dirty and hairy looking as the others, and dressed in equally sloppy sheepskins and various skin rags, were far from being Kirghiz. They were Major Shima and Captain Noto of the Japanese Military Intelligence who had been on the eastern slope of the mountains, in Red territory, to find out what they could about Red massing of troops.

"Look—it is Captain Cordie and the Fighting Yid of the Big Swords!" Major Shima said softly. "If we could only kill them both here in the city of Changchau, Colonel Nagayo would see to it that we both were stepped up—maybe to colonels."

"I see them. But—how could we, major? We are lucky to be this far on our way to headquarters. I know that the colonel would give much if the men who flouted him were—"

"Ease back, Captain Noto, towards that little shack. We will try and plan. It may be that we can send both of the mongrels to the outer darkness. Once we have done so, we can get away from the city easily enough and leave the Kirghiz to, shall I say, explain matters to this young fool who thinks he is a war lord."

JIMMIE CORDIE and the Yid were wined and dined by Changchau and invited to listen to the singing girls and watch the dancers. The standing of Changchau was greatly enhanced among his officers and men by the presence as friends of the two famous soldiers of fortune who led the Big Swords and he made the most of it. Not that he wouldn't have given Jimmie Cordie anything he had, but if his officers and men knew that he had close relations with the powerful, dreaded Big Swords, why, that was quite all right also.

At last, before Changchau could call for the singers and dancers, Jimmie Cordie called a halt.

"No, little brother. We have ridden hard all day and are very tired. You have filled us with food and drink. Now we would sleep, knowing that we sleep in safety, surrounded by your rifles."

Changchau promptly agreed and escorted Jimmie and the Yid to the stone house close to the palace where the Big Sword escort was already settled down for the night. The Big Swords had picketed their horses on the right side of the house and were sitting around camp fires as Jimmie and the Yid came up.

Jimmie, who drank very little, had turned his glass upside down early in the evening. The Yid, who liked his liquor, had kept his glass right side up, and as a result, while he knew what it was all about, was very close to being "three sheets in the wind."

"My, dis is a svell place, ain't it, Jimmie?" he asked, as he and Jimmie stepped into the room on the ground floor that Changchau had ordered made ready for his distinguished guests.

"Yeah, boy. Take that couch over there, Yid. Chinese hospitality leaves nothing to be desired, does it?"

"Vell, I vould have liked to have seen it de dancing girls und listened to de—"

Jimmie laughed "You've seen, and heard, and had plenty, Mister Cohen. Get to bed. We've got some riding to do in the morning."

"Oi, vot do ve have to go back so soon for? Changchau tells it me dot in de morning he vill break out some of dot Fu-kan brandy for my special benefit. Maybeso ve stay a little vile, ain't it?"

"And maybeso we don't, old kid. Go to sleep, and if you snore, there will be a new face in the Yid angel chorus by morning."

THE two Japanese intelligence officers sat with an old Chinese woman in a house not far from the inn. A few, seemingly indifferent questions put to one of the girls at the inn had brought out the fact that the old woman and her family of children and grandchildren had lived in the stone house where the "foreign devils" were now quartered. The Lord Changchau, on his arrival from the south, had said that the family was too near the palace and so had moved them.

Both Japanese officers could speak Chinese, and after feeling their way, had put a few silver coins in the old woman's hand. To her, the coins meant that during the winter she could have many luxuries that she had longed for, but had never been able to attain. They outweighed any loyalty she had to China or her war lord or anything else, for that matter. The Japanese intelligence officers very soon found that out, and once they did, told her that they were not Kirghiz but men of Nippon who had come to see to it that all poor people became rich and powerful, and so on.

The old woman did not care whether they were men of Nippon or men of the moon; she had coins in her hand.

"Say what you wish me to do," she snarled. "Do not beat around the bush so much. Tell me, and if I can do it, will there be more coins?"

"This then, old mother of many sons. The men of the Lord Changchau who now guard the stone house, do they know you?"

"That I do not know until I see them. I have lived here always, and most of the men who fight for the Lord Changchau know me. It may be that some of the men he brought with him from the south do not."

"It is not far from here. Will you go and see if you know the officer of the guard or any of them?"

"Yes, I will go. Wait here for me."

Not more than ten minutes later the old woman was back. "Yes, I know the officer, and also the men under him. He is Kai Lu, whom I have known since he was born. What now?"

"This, venerable one. Have you any clothes belonging to your sons or grandsons that will fit us?"

The old woman looked at the two Japanese for a moment, then answered, "Yes, I have clothes that will fit you. What of it?"

"Have you also four of your sons or grandsons within call? I mean those who are now men?"

"Yes, four or twice that many."

"Will they obey you without question?"

"Yes."

"If you, with six of your sons and grandsons, came up to the officer of the guard and told him that you had come to remove some foodstuffs that you had stored in the cellar of the house, would he believe you and let you in the house?"

"Yes, Kai Lu would believe me and let me in to get the foodstuffs—but there is no food there, and when we came out, empty handed, what then?"

Major Shima smiled. "Truly you are clever, mother of great fighting men and students."

As a matter of fact he had not figured further than the getting in of Captain Noto and himself and their getting out by themselves after driving knives into the hearts of Captain Cordie and the Fighting Yid. Whoever helped them get in was to get out the best way they could. And what happened to them afterwards was a matter of no concern to the Japanese.

Major Shima's brain was well trained, fast and clever, and there was hardly a pause between sentences as he kept on with, "Your six sons and grandsons will carry under their robes empty sacks. Once in the cellar the sacks can be filled with dirt. There is your food to bring out."

"But there are Manchu swordsmen sitting around camp fires close to the house. What of them?"

"They may come forward and ask the officer of the guard what you want. If they do he will tell them that you formerly lived in the house and wish to go in and get some foodstuffs left there. It is very simple, old mother. Why should not the Manchu swordsmen believe it?"

"I do not know. You are doing the planning, not I. If they believe and we go in, what then?"

"I will tell you. We wish to talk to the two foreign devils and offer them much money to join us in the fight we are making for the poor people. This we could not do openly, because if your war lord knew that we were not Kirghiz but men of Nippon we would be slain. He is for the rich and powerful people as we are for the poor and needy. We cannot go up to the foreign devils and tell them who we are as long as there are any Manchus or Chinese close enough to them to hear what we say. This way we can talk to them with safety."

The old woman grunted and opened her hand to look once more on the coins. "Cover my other hand also with coins and I will do as you wish. I take my sons and grandsons into danger and it is worth much more money. If the Lord Changchau finds out that through me you talked to the foreign devils, there will be much pain suffered by me and mine."

"This we will do," answered Major Shima. "We will cover your other hand now with coins and, if the matter goes smoothly, when we are back here we will cover both of them again."

"Cover it, then." The old woman opened her hand. "I will get clothes and call my sons and grandsons."

CHAPTER II.

ASSASSINS.

THE Yid could not get to sleep. It may have been the liquor or it may have been the thought of what he was missing in regards to the singing and dancing girls, or both. Anyway, he could not sleep. Finally he sat up and looked over to where Jimmie Cordie lay on another couch.

"Jimmie, you avake?" the Yid asked softly. Getting no answer the Yid got up and walked over to a window. The moon was out and it was almost as light as day outside. In the room it was a little darker, but still light enough to see fairly well.

The Yid could see the embers of the camp fires and the Big Swords lying near, their saddles for pillows. There were no lights in the palace, at least on the side that the Yid could see. Everything looked peaceful and quiet.

"Dey take it de sidevalks in about ten o'clock in dis man's town," the Yid announced to the world in general. "I vish I knew it vare—dere is somevon sneaking up de hall."

The Yid had been noted on the Western Front for his more than acute hearing. It was claimed by his admirers that the Fighting Yid could hear a German blow his nose ten miles away on a stormy night, which was more or less of an exaggeration. Even so, there was no question that the Yid could hear better than most men.

He started over to wake Jimmie Cordie, moving as quickly as a big bear.

The plan formed by Major Shima had worked perfectly. A Manchu officer of the Big Swords had walked over as the old woman and her party reached the officer of the guard. The two Japs were in the middle, and with their heads capped and held as far down as possible without exciting comment, they passed readily as Chinese, because neither the officer of the guard nor the Manchu were at all suspicious.

The Chinese officer explained, "This old woman and her family used to live here and have come to get some foodstuffs stored in the cellar."

"Do not let them disturb the war lords who are sleeping," the Manchu answered as he turned away. "They should have come in the daytime."

"She says that she could not get her sons and grandsons then."

That sounded all right to the Manchu, as it had sounded to the Chinese officer.

The party, led by the old woman, went into the house through a shed in the rear.

The Yid touched Jimmie on the shoulder. "Jimmie, vake up. Ve are going to have it callers. Jimmie—vake up."

Like most men who live always in an atmosphere of danger, Jimmie Cordie was a light sleeper, and had the faculty of waking instantly with a clear brain. He was awake before the Yid started to talk. The touch on his shoulder did it.

He was on his feet beside the Yid as the Yid muttered the last "vake up."

Neither Jimmie nor the Yid had undressed. They had taken off their cartridge belts and put them at the head of the couches. They had no more idea of being subject to attack than they did that they were to make one. Even so, their .45 Colts in the holsters were within reach of their hands as they lay on the couches.

Now, the Yid was away from his couch, and Jimmie Cordie, the way the Yid was standing, could not, as he got to his feet, reach for his Colt.

As a matter of fact, he did not think of doing it. What he thought was that Changchau had sent some message or some liquor for the Yid, or that some Big Sword officer wanted to see him. There was not much time to think anything between the time he got on his feet and the opening of the door.

He and the Yid saw two men dressed in Chinese robes come softly into the room. Both men had daggers in their right hands. To Jimmie and the Yid they were two Chinese assassins who expected to find their prey fast asleep.

The room was lighter than the hall, and the two Japanese had to take a split second to get their eyes adjusted. That was long enough to enable the Yid to grab up one of the silken pillows Jimmie had been lying on, crouch and hurl himself straight at them. The pillow was to take the dagger thrust the Yid knew would come.

MAJOR SHIMA stepped forward to take the charge of the Yid, the dagger held as a sword. Captain Noto, his dagger held point down, rushed at Jimmie Cordie. They had both seen the two soldiers of fortune standing by the couch, and both knew that instead of quietly putting their daggers into the hearts of sleeping men, they had a fight on their hands. And this much can be said of the two Japs, they went right in.

The Yid swung at the dagger with the pillow while he was off his feet in the flying tackle. The pillow missed because Major Shima, who was pretty fast himself, lowered the dagger blade. In doing it, though, he had to bend his wrist downward and raise his elbow up. It was an awkward position to thrust from and with the Fighting Yid arriving full force, awkward positions were to be avoided.

The Jap major did get the dagger point up, and did start a thrust, but that was all he had time to do before the Yid's body hit him. The dagger point went between the Yid's right side and arm, and the edge cut through the heavy tough leather of the Yid's tunic and cut the Yid's side just enough to draw blood.

The next second Major Shima went down, the Yid on top of him and the Yid's right hand closed on the right wrist of Major Shima. "I got him, Jimmie! Lie still, Mistaire Knifeman, or poppa vill break it de— Oi! let it go de—"

Jimmie Cordie had enough to do on his own account without paying any attention to the Yid. As Captain Noto rushed him, Jimmie stepped away from the couch and started to circle with light, mincing steps. The Jap captain struck at him twice and missed both times. Most men who use a dagger know that if it is held as a sword is held there is that much more reach to it. But Captain Noto either did not know it or would rather use the downward stroke, longer reach or no longer reach.

As he raised the dagger for a third try, Jimmie Cordie swayed in and his right fist flashed up in an uppercut. If it had landed, Captain Noto of the Japanese intelligence would have taken a rapid journey to the land of Nod. But it did not land. The little Jap captain was, as the Yid would say, "dare like a duck himself, ain't it?" He moved his head back the fraction of an inch and struck at Jimmie like a copperhead.

Jimmie Cordie, as he missed, turned a little and tried for a neck hold. He did not get it, and the dagger point went into his shoulder. Not as deep as Captain Noto intended, because Jimmie's turn swung the shoulder out an inch or

so. But it went deep enough to tell Jimmie Cordie that he had better not miss again if he wanted to remain among the living. He brought his right knee up as hard as he could—and this time he did not miss.

Captain Noto groaned with anguish and the dagger fell from his hand.

Jimmie lunged against the would-be assassin and this time got a hold. Up to the moment he did not know that the man was anything but a Chinese. He did right after as his hold was broken and one clamped on him. That ju-jutsu hold told him that it was a Jap and another thing told him the same. Captain Noto snarled something in Japanese as his left hand began to press on Jimmie's Adam's-apple.

The Yid and Major Shima were staging a messy fight over in one corner. The major had let go his knife, because the Yid's grip had stopped all blood from coming up in the major's right hand.

The blood that Jimmie was losing through the shoulder wound weakened him, and Captain Noto threw him off, then staggered to his feet. Jimmie lit on the side of the couch and fell over it.

As he did there came a shout from outside to the right, and a command was given. Another command was yelled from the front of the house.

Major Shima bit his lower lip until the blood spurted out, to withstand the pain of the Yid's hold, and with a superhuman effort put a hold on the Yid's neck that put the Yid out of commission.

The Jap major got to his feet. "The alarm! We will be taken here like rats in a trap! To the window, Captain Noto! See if the way—"

Captain Noto was at the window before the major finished the command. "The Big Swords run towards the rear and front! All of them! The way is clear, Major Shima. First will we do what we—"

The sound of running feet in the hall came clearly.

"No time! Quick! Outside! We try for the wall. If we can make the hills we—"

Captain Noto was out the window and Major Shima stopped talking and followed.

Jimmie Cordie got to his feet, his head swimming, and went around the couch after his gun. As he stopped for it the door opened and Big Swords crowded into the room.

"SAY what is to be done to these degraded ones. To them and to all their relations to the ninth degree. Remembering before you pronounce sentence that they have brought unmerited disgrace upon me, your war brother."

Jimmie Cordie looked at the line of prisoners that stood in front of the stone house. Then he looked at the impassive face and eyes of Changchau. In the line there stood the old woman, her sons and grandsons and the Chinese officer of the guard, Kai Lu.

He knew that they could expect about as much mercy from Changchau as from a hungry tiger. That they had been fooled by the Japanese would make no difference. Then he looked at the Yid who stood beside him.

It was morning and Jimmie's shoulder had been treated and bandaged. The Yid was as ever with the exception of a very sore throat and ears that looked as if they had been rubbed with sandpaper.

"How about it, Yid?"

"Vot de hell are you putting it up to me for?" demanded the Yid. "Do I look it like a guy dot vants to see people boiled mit oil or skinned alive? Look at de relations back of de line."

Back of the line of prisoners there stood a terrified bunch of men, women and children.

Jimmie Cordie was in a bad box and he knew it. He knew that if he asked for mercy it would be construed as weakness on his part by Changchau and the Chinese and the Big Swords present, and that word would soon spread that "The Big Sword officers were as weak women. They ask for mercy towards those who try to slay them." And that impression was the last thing Jimmie Cordie wanted to be circulated. The fact that the Big Swords were dreaded for their ruthlessness kept many a bandit leader in his place. And yet — there were the gray faces and lips of the women and children who had committed no fault.

He looked at the line as if making up

his mind just what form of torture to start off with—praying for an "out" at the same time. His eyes reached those of the Chinese officer, Kai Lu, and the out came to him. There was something about Kai Lu's eyes that reminded Jimmie Cordie of a Chinese slave of Sahet Khan, the khan of the fierce, warlike Uryankhes Tartars. Jimmie knew that to the Chinese of the border cities, the Uryankhes were as demons.

"I will take them all," he said curtly, "and sell them to my blood brother, Sahet Khan of the Uryankhes Tartars. He knows how to treat degraded ones such as these." He spoke in Pushtu, loud enough for those in the line to hear. The old woman started wailing, and the relations in the rear joined in on general principles, not knowing what had been said.

That doom was entirely satisfactory to Changchau, the Manchus and the people of the city, and quite in keeping with the Big Sword reputation. "To be sold to the Uryankhes Tartars! Aie! What a fate! Better by far the torture at home than that which the Uryankhes would inflict. Aie! Aie!"

"Vot de hell und high vater is de idea in doin' dot?" demanded the Yid in English. "De Uryankhes vill skin dem alive und make it saddle—" Jimmie Cordie had turned and looked at the Yid. After a moment the Yid said loudly in Pushtu, "That is what we will do. We will sell them to the Uryankhes who will properly punish them."

"And the dogs of the Kirghiz who allowed the little mongrels of Nippon to join their caravan?" asked Changchau smoothly. "They are now being guarded by my swords."

"Put them outside your gates, unharmed," Jimmie ordered. "They know nothing of Nippon or of what the men of Nippon planned to do. You cannot afford a blood feud with the Kirghiz, Changchau. Because the men of Nippon came in with them, you have the right to put them out, fearing that there may be more of the men of Nippon among them. This the Big Swords will uphold against all in your behalf."

"You are right, war brother. There is no need of a blood—"

An officer came up and saluted. "The parties sent out to find the ones who escaped have come in, lord. There is no trace found."

The old woman and her relations were sent to the Uryankhes Tartars under escort of Big Swords. There is no question but what she and the relations passed some bad hours as far as worrying went before Sahet Khan laughed and ordered them all escorted to a Chinese city in the Kuen Lun range. This was after the Big Sword escort had started back.

Jimmie Cordie had sent a note written in English which he knew Sahet Khan spoke and read, asking that the Chinese be sent "in all honor" to the Chinese city and there turned loose after the war lord had been warned to treat them kindly.

And with that settled, Jimmie and the Yid headed back for their comrades, escorted by an honor guard of Changchau's finest men.

CHAPTER III.

"OUT SWORDS!"

A CHINESE youth stood in front of a table in the headquarters tent of the main Big Sword encampment in the heart of the mountains.

At the table sat Chang-Lung Liang, leader of the Big Swords, head of the Manchu House of Chi.

The grim old face of the Manchu noble was as impassive as the face of a stone idol as he listened to the plea of the youth.

Behind Chang-Lung Liang stood several of the elder nobles of the House of Chi.

To the Japanese in Manchuria, or as they have renamed it, Manchukuo, the Big Swords were as a thorn in the side. The Japanese could handle any and all Chinese war lords who dared trying to block Japanese occupation of the country. But when it came to the Big Swords, the Japanese had to use all their strength if they wished to hold any territory within the sphere of Big Sword operations.

Jimmie Cordie had known and liked Chang-Lung Liang before the Manchu had become leader of the Big Swords,

and when Chang sent for him to come and help fight the Japanese, Jimmie came, bringing with him the other soldiers of fortune.

The Chinese youth, after he had been escorted into the tent, had bowed low and then tried to keep his knees from trembling. To him it was as if he had been put into a cage full of leopards. His grandparents had told him tales of the Manchus and now he, Kiong, stood close to them.

"You have my permission to speak, little one," Chang had said, not unkindly.

"I—I bear a message to you, mighty ruler of the world."

"Deliver the message and—do not tremble so, little one. You are safe with us. There are none here to hurt you. Be brave and speak the message firmly. You are under my protection."

That calmed the youth down a little and he began again. "I bear you a message, mighty lord, from the Lord Hukau, who holds the walled city of Fung-hwan. The words the Lord Hukau put in my mouth to utter are these: 'I fought for China, sparing nothing that I owned that would help me fight. I fought the men of Nippon at Sin-shan, at Tieling, at Pinyo, at Shol-choto and at Tsitsihar. I fought them always until my army became less than a regiment. Then I was first tricked and then deserted by my allies.

"'I retreated to my city of Fung-hwan, followed by a pioneer regiment of Nippon. From a wounded officer of Nippon, whom I captured, I learned that the colonel of the regiment had been ordered to bring me to Nippon headquarters, dead or alive. I reached my city of Fung-hwan ahead of the Nippon regiment and am holding it.

"'But I cannot withstand the attack much longer. There are many women and children and old men who must be fed and cared for. My ancestors for a thousand years were vassals of the House of Chi, and lived under the protection of the House of Chi's banner. Now, I, Hukau, call piteously on the House of Chi to protect me, its vassal. Come quickly with the swords of Chi or we in Fung-hwan die at the hands of the mongrels of Nippon.'"

"The city is surrounded, little one?" asked Chang.

"Yes, resplendent one at whose command sharp swords are drawn."

"By how many of the little men of Nippon?"

"Why—I do not know exactly, ruler of the world. I heard the Lord Hukau say to an officer that there must be at least three thousand of the men of Nippon in the first charge they made against the walls."

"What guns have they?"

"That I do not know, lord. I saw, from a slit in the wall, some guns mounted on wheels that were moved from place to place."

"How did you escape from the city?"

"I went through a hole in the wall when night came. Then I crawled on my belly until I had passed through the lines of the men of Nippon. Then I rose and ran, lord of all swords."

"You have done well, little one. You may tell all men that I, Chang-Lung Liang, head of the House of Chi, said so. It is true that the ancestors of your lord were vassals of the House of Chi, and so he is entitled to protection. The House of Chi will give it to him. Captain Ting-chau, step forward. You will take this youth to a place where he may rest and receive care. You have my permission to depart."

After the Manchu officer had left the tent with the Chinese youth, Chang turned in his chair and looked at the remaining officers. Finally he said, "Step forward, Colonel Chuang Tzu—and you also, Major Lao Tzu."

Two of the Manchu officers stepped forward, two brothers. Colonel Chuang Tzu was the elder by six or seven years.

"I will honor you by sending you on a mission. This because of your excellent swordplay in the last engagement. You will take with you fifty swords of the House of Chi and locate Captain Cordie's flying column which is near the River Kokong where it dips towards the sea in the foothills. You will say to Captain Cordie that I ask that he go at once to the relief of the walled city of Fung-hwan which is being attacked by a Nippon pioneer regiment. He will destroy the little men of Nippon and bring

all men, women and children in the city here. The War Lord Hukau and his fighting men may also come here if they desire to fight under my banner. If they do not, they may go elsewhere. Say to Captain Cordie that this is a matter that concerns the honor of the House of Chi. That is all. You have my permission to depart."

"WE have them," a Black Mountain Uzbeg said gleefully. "We have them now. When they reach the cleared space below the spring we will put them to the sword."

Another Uzbeg beside him grunted as he looked through a cleverly arranged pile of dead branches at the fast approaching column of Manchus. "You are right, we have them. Let them get well into the clearing so that none may run away."

"You are young yet," the first speaker answered scornfully, "and do not know Manchus. Learn this: Manchus do not run away. They stand and fight to the death, always. Draw back and pass the word that no attack is to be made before I rise. The dog brother that rises before I do will answer to me."

One hundred and fifty Uzbegs watched fifty-two Manchu swordsmen come up the mountainside towards a spring that one of the Manchus knew was there.

And Major Shima and Captain Noto, at the mouth of a little cave above the spring, also watched the Manchus. The two Japanese intelligence officers had escaped from the city and got to the hills by the grace of the gods of luck.

The Uzbegs did not know the Japs were there and the Japs did not know there was an Uzbeg within a hundred miles. So they both calmly watched the Manchus who did not know about either Jap or Uzbeg.

"If they come up to the spring," Captain Noto said, "we will be much better off in the cave. They will probably get a drink and then be on their way."

"I hope so," Major Shima answered. "It would be too bad if we were taken now after—in the cave, quick! We can see from there and still remain hidden."

Around the Manchus, completely circling them, there had risen Uzbegs, swords in hand.

The young Manchu colonel shouted, "Out swords! A wedge! I take the point!"

The Manchus did not have time to complete the wedge. The Uzbegs charged, yelling and shouting with glee. A good many of the shouts changed into death rattles as Manchu swords slashed home.

It was given the two Japanese intelligence officers, in the year of our Lord 1933, to see a sword fight in the hills between Manchus and Uzbegs. It was as if time had swung back a thousand years before guns and gunpowder were thought of.

The Uzbegs fought noisily, shouting threats to the Manchus and encouragement to each other. The Manchus fought silently, their lips tight, their eyes calm and cold, their faces impassive.

Man for man, the Manchus could have destroyed the Uzbegs who had unlimited strength but very little swordplay. But the Manchus were outnumbered three to one. In less than a half an hour there was a little circle of twenty Manchus, and around it there raged some fifty Uzbegs. All of the Manchus in the circle were wounded more or less, but their grim young faces were still impassive, and their eyes as cold as death itself and their lips tight.

"By the gods! What a fight!" Captain Noto said. "I have never seen such swordplay. It may be that the—no—the circle is broken!"

The Uzbegs had broken the circle and the fight became a mad swirl, then suddenly there was no more fighting.

Not an Uzbeg was on his feet, and of the Manchus, one man stood on his, swaying back and forth, bloody sword in hand.

He was Major Lao Tzu, honor graduate of the School of Swords.

HIS wounds were not serious, consisting of several cuts where Uzbeg points had reached him. In the final flurry he had been struck on the head by a sword hilt in the hand of another Manchu who did not see him as the sword was swung up. The blow

made him dizzy, but not so dizzy that he could not trick the Uzbeg in front of him into raising his sword for a parry. As it came up and out the Manchu blade cut through the Uzbeg heart.

"One left," Major Shima said, wetting his lips with his tongue. "One Manchu left and no—"

"See, he steadies himself and is—he is looking for something."

"He lifts a body in his arms and—he comes to the spring."

"We will ease down and hide behind those rocks. After we see what he intends to do we will take him. It may be that we can learn from him whether or not there are more Manchus between us and the river."

Major Lao Tzu carried his brother, who was mortally wounded, to the spring and there placed him gently on the ground.

As he started for the spring his brother raised himself on an elbow.

"No," he said distinctly, although there was blood trickling from his mouth. "No. Leave me and start at once for—"

"But Chuang, you are wounded, and will go on high if I do not bind your wounds. I cannot leave you to—"

"Attention — Major Lao Tzu. I speak—as Colonel Chuang Tzu and—and also as your elder brother. You will at once make your way to Captain—Cordie, and—the darkness comes. Hold me tight, Lao. I—I—no, I will not go—until—"

As he said "Captain Cordie" the Japanese officers looked at each other and smiled.

The young Manchu knelt and lifted his brother into his arms.

"That is better. I—command you to go—to go to Captain Cordie and deliver to him the message—from—from—the Lord Chang. Say it that I may know—you have it correct. Quickly, Major Lao Tzu. I—sink—fast."

Major Lao Tzu repeated the message word for word, and the two Japanese intelligence officers heard it word for word.

"That—is—it. I go now to the chieftains, knowing that you—my brother—will— Out swords!"

The head of Colonel Chuang Tzu fell back as his gallant spirit left his body.

His brother looked down at the still face and sightless eyes for a moment, then eased the body to the ground and stood up. He looked down again for a moment, then saluted and said, "As you order, colonel."

After which he turned and went down the hill.

"Quiet," Major Shima said, as Captain Noto made a move as if to rise.

"But, I do not understand. Are you going to let him deliver that message to the Big Swords?"

"Certainly. He will deliver the message to Captain Cordie and at the same time we will deliver it to Colonel Nagayo who is at Haun with the Seventh Division. We will both get a step up, captain. It means a forced march for us but we win our way to Haun come what may."

CHAPTER IV.

BAD NEWS.

THE Fighting Yid, no matter where he was, could always produce cards and poker chips, and now, in the Big Sword camp at the river, he was banking a game of stud poker and at the moment, dealing.

"Come on, Red," the Boston Bean said, "it's your bet. Your eights are high. Why don't you do your sleeping in bed?"

"Don't rush me, Beany. I know 'tis my bet, but I misdoubt that Yid gibbon. He has an ace showin' and I think he has wan in the hole."

The Boston Bean looked at the Yid. "He better not have. The last five times he's dealt he's turned up an ace. I have a feeling that the sixth time will be fatal to Mister Cohen."

"Oi," mourned the Yid, "am I being accused of cheatingk at my time of life? Tell it to de Codfisher, Mistaire Dolan, dot I haven't a chick dot vould do such a trick."

"I will like hell, ye Hester Street scut. If ye turn up an ace this time it is me that will play the 'Wearin' Av the Green' on the coco av ye. Ye would

cheat the grandmother av ye outta her specs if ye had to give them to her first."

A big, lean, broad shouldered man laughed. "They are jealous of your superior skill, Yid." He was George Grigsby, ex-Foreign Legion and major of infantry, A. E. F.

"I'll bet two dollars on me eights, and wid it goes the warnin' that there will be wan less Yid clutterin' up the earth if ye have an ace in the hole, ye flat faced duck."

Jimmie Cordie came into the tent; with him was a slim, boyish looking man, John Cecil Carewe, ex-flight commander of a British air squadron.

"It looks as if the Yid were running true to form," Jimmie said with a grin. "Deal me in the next hand. I'll take those chips away from him so fast he will catch cold."

"How is your shoulder, Jimmie?" Grigsby asked.

"All right, thank you, George. It didn't go very deep. Anyway, it won't prevent me from cleaning Mr. Cohen."

As Jimmie sat down, a Manchu officer came in and saluted. Jimmie rose and returned the salute.

"Yes, Hsai?"

"Major Lao Tzu has just arrived, Captain Cordie. He is very weak from loss of blood and want of food, but insists that he deliver a message to you from the Lord Chang."

"I will go at once with you to Major Lao Tzu."

After Jimmie and the officer left the tent Red announced, "Something has come up."

"I think you are quite correct, Terence Aloysius, me good man," the Bean answered. "I also think our happy days of idle dalliance are over for the nonce."

"Whatever the hell that is. Why don't ye speak United States instead of that Bosting lingo, ye bean eater? And wance more, quit callin' me that 'me good man' thing or I'll take ye apart."

"Vait, let's play it de hand out, den I cash in," the Yid said.

They played the hand and the Yid won, not with a pair of aces, but with a pair of tens. "I don't need it aces to vin from a lot of suckaires like you," he stated as he raked in the chips. Which statement started an argument that lasted some time.

MAJOR LAO TZU delivered the message and then told what had happened to the Manchus of the flying column. After that he passed out of the picture for twenty-four hours.

"We will carry the wounded in litters," Jimmie Cordie said to the Manchu officers of the Big Swords. "Send men into the timber to cut sufficient poles and branches. We move out in two hours, gentlemen. Look out for Lao Tzu, will you, Carewe? Red, and you, Yid, get to the guns. Bean, take over the ammunition and supplies. Make it snappy, old kids. We're going to say good morning to Misto Jap at Fung-hwan in the cold gray dawn."

"Oi! How far is it, Jimmie?" asked the Yid.

"Fifty-odd miles, straight up and down, Mr. Cohen."

"Such a business. I am good for it, but I think dot maybeso Mrs. Dolan's little boy Red vill fall by de vayside, ain't it?"

"What! Me? Fall by the—"

"Tell him about it on the way to the guns," Jimmie interrupted. "And don't stop work while you are doing it, either. There are women and children behind the walls of Fung-hwan, don't forget that little thing."

"'Tis right ye are, Jimmie darlin'. Come on, ye cross between a gibbon and a black and white kitty, what are ye standin' there for?"

The Big Swords went through the hills. Not exactly straight up and down as Jimmie had said, but any mountain that could be climbed was climbed, and there was no hunting for easy paths. There were wounded and guns to be carried, plus ammunition and food. It was hard, gruelling work, and it wasn't long before Red and the Yid stopped telling each other things and buckled down to keeping the guns up where they ought to be.

Twice in the early part of the night there had come sudden whirlwind attacks on the column by hillmen who thought in the darkness they might have a chance. Each time the attack was met

by the Big Swords and the attackers routed without hardly slowing up the march. The Big Swords in the column were picked men, and the soldiers of fortune, knowing that every minute counted, strutted their stuff.

The column went over the hills like a fire sweeps through dry timber, and anything in the way got out or perished.

ABOUT two o'clock in the morning two Manchus of the far-flung advance guard brought in an elderly Chinese.

The story the Chinese told was this: He was fleeing before a Japanese army that was coming up from the south. At first, when he left his village he had tried to make An-si-fan to the west, but the Japs were there. He had doubled back and tried for Dadchin to the east, but the Japs were there also. To hear him tell it, the Japs were moving an army corps north.

Jimmie Cordie, knowing Chinese, discounted the number of Japanese troops, but knew that there must be a strong force heading, if not for Fung-hwan, at least in that direction. And if the Japs had no knowledge of Big Swords being in the immediate vicinity, their advance patrol would without question hear and very soon afterwards see the fight between the Big Swords and the Jap pioneer regiment at Fung-hwan—unless the Big Swords got there, mopped up on the pioneer regiment and then got the people of the city into the hills before even the patrols got near enough to hear and see. And Jimmie Cordie was under no delusions as to what it takes to mop up on any Jap regiment, pioneer or otherwise.

"When you fled your village where were the men of Nippon, venerable one?" he asked, one of the Manchus translating into Chinese.

"Within two miles, mighty captain."

"And your village is how far south of Fung-hwan?"

"Thirty miles, ruler of the world."

"Were the men of Nippon on the march?"

"When I fled, resplendent one. But when I came close to Dadchin, they had halted and made camp."

"Well, that will help some. I hope to high heaven they'll make a night of it. Ask him if he wants to stick with us or whether he'd rather be on his way. Tell him we are going to fight the men of Nippon."

The old Chinese promptly answered that he would rather be on his way as he was much too old to even look upon fighting, let alone try to do any of it.

After Jimmie had ordered that the Chinese be escorted to the north of the column, given food and turned loose, he said, "Well, for some unknown reason Misto Jap is taking a little stroll northward and by *muy malo* luck, Fung-hwan lies right smack in the path of the said stroll."

Jimmie had no way of knowing that instead of being by "very bad luck," the Japanese "stroll" was being made because of two Japanese intelligence officers and Colonel Nagayo of the intelligence.

This colonel had, in the past, twice tried for the soldiers of fortune who officered the Big Swords—and both times had been out-tricked and outfought by them. It had become a personal matter with him, and also with several other intelligence and military police officers, this trying to rub out Jimmie Cordie and his outfit. Not only for revenge, but because they thought that without the adventurers, Chang-Lung Liang and the Big Swords could be destroyed.

"We've got to get to Fung-hwan, chase the Japs away, get the populace out and into the hills before Misto Jap arrives in force or it will be just too bad—for us."

"That will all take time, Jimmie," Grigsby answered. "If they break camp at dawn, their advance guard will sight Fung-hwan by three or four o'clock. The Japs march fast and stay right with it. I don't know the country, but if it is like this, that's the outside time limit. And you know how much time it takes to get Chinese started out of a city where they have been born and raised. They want to take all the chickens and puppy dogs and kittens along."

"I know, George, yet the only thing we can do is to make the try."

"Dot ain't so good, either," the Yid

said. "If ve make it de try de Japs is liable to catch us in de open between de city und de hills mit de vomen and children. Know vot dey vould do? Dey vould open fire on de whole cheese. I don't care for myself, und I hope dey do catch it Mistaire Dolan, de Irish gonif, in de open. But for de—"

"Oh, ye do? Ye hope they—"

"Put a jaw tackle on, Red. You're right, Yid, about that open fire thing. If we could get to a place where we could hole up, we might hold them back long enough for this bird to get his people to the hills, but if there was any way they could get around us they'd leave enough men to—"

"Too many 'ifs,' Jeems," the Boston Bean interrupted. "The old gentleman said that the Japs reached from An-si-fan to Dadchin. That means half a division, at least. The only thing we can do is—"

"To stop this damn wah-wah and get there," put in Red. "Is this an old ladies' debatin' society or is it a Big Sword column wid us leadin' it? To hell wid all 'ifs' or anything else. There's women and childers there. Let's go and get 'em out. To hell wid the little pink-toed banties. If they get in our way we'll slap 'em outta it."

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "Three cheers for the Dolans. Red has cleared the atmosphere. Get your running clothes on, gents. What you've had up to date is nothing to what you are going to get from this time on. The war cry will be 'to hell wid the little pink-toed banties.' *Allons, mes enfants! Boutez en avant!*"

WHEN the "push forward" started, the Yid eased alongside Red.

"Jimmie forgot to add it somethink to the three cheers for de Dolans. I vill add it for him, only instead of de vell known tiger—I add it de Bronx cheer—dere you are, Mistaire Dolan."

The noise the Yid made started Red on an oration concerning past and present Cohens, from the first one down to the Fighting Yid, that lasted at least a half hour.

It was five o'clock in the morning when the Boston Bean, looking cautiously around a rock up on the comb of a hill, said to Jimmie Cordie, "We made her, Jeems, me good man."

"We did," answered Jimmie, "and now that we have, we'd better get down there. It looks as if the Japs were going over the walls."

The walled city of Fung-hwan lay on a slope of ground that reached from the bank of a little river to a towering mountain. On three sides of the city the hills came to within a thousand yards. It had been built in the days when men fought only with swords, lances and bows and arrows, and in those days the walls had been, plus the fighting men inside, ample to protect it. But now, guns placed in the hills could knock the city into a cocked hat without any trouble.

The few guns the Jap pioneer regiment had with it had done a lot of damage, but were not heavy enough to make a breach in the walls. And the War Lord Hukau was still holding, in spite of repeated Japanese attacks. But his men were falling fast and Japs were beginning to come over the walls into the city. Up to the time the Boston Bean spoke, they had come over only to meet death. Hukau knew it was only a question of time before he would have no more men with which to stop the "little men of Nippon."

He did not know whether or not his call for help had got through to Chang-Lung Liang, and if it had, whether the Big Swords could reach him in time to save his city. But he fought, he and his men, as a she-bear fights at the mouth of her cave, to protect her young.

"The next charge, war brother," he said to an officer beside him, "will be the last. See, they form to come on all sides."

"I see, Lord Hukau. Truly, as you say it will be the—"

Machine and rapid fire guns opened on the Japanese from the hills to the north. And a moment later, down from the hills swept a charge of Big Swords.

The Japanese were scattered out, divided into four units. The unit that was nearest turned and faced the fire from the hills and the Big Sword charge. There was no confusion or wavering. The Jap officers snarled a few commands

and the unit tightened up to receive the charge.

It was a bad jam to be in and the Japs knew it from the officers down to the latest recruit. If they remained scattered out they had no chance to repel the charge. If they bunched, they offered that much better target for the machine and rapid fire guns. The guns were far away in the hills, and the charge was coming closer every second. The Jap officers knew that once the charge contacted, the guns would stop firing, so they met the charge, hoping that they could destroy it and then take the guns.

But the guns, operated by the Yid, the Bean, Red Dolan and Grigsby, veteran gunners all, and ranked among the first ten machine gunners in the Orient, with Jimmie Cordie and Carewe at the rapid fire guns, practically put the unit out of commission before the charge got halfway to it. And the Big Swords in the charge finished the job.

The two units to the east and west came around the walls on the double, and without a second's hesitation lowered their bayonets and charged the Big Swords. The Jap machine guns and rapid firers opened up. It became a regular Kilkenny cat fight inside of two minutes. Detachments of Big Swords were sent from the hills to take the Jap guns. They did, but few of the Big Swords came back to tell about it. The Big Sword guns had to quit firing because of the mixing up of Jap and Big Swords in a swirling dance of death.

THE fourth Jap unit, on the far side, started for the fight, on the run. But they had quite a ways to go before they cleared the wall. As they reached almost to the corner, a party of ten or twelve Jap cavalrymen rode out of the sparse timber along the river.

They beckoned frantically and two of them spurred their horses up to the unit commander. There was a few moments' talk, and then the unit, led by the two riders, ran for the timber. Not a retreat because, according to the Japanese, they never retreat. It was a "rearward" movement.

The cavalrymen had told of the Seventh Division advance guard being within four miles, and of the entire division being within ten. The Japs had not, as Jimmie Cordie had hoped they would, made a night of it. They had camped for a couple of hours, eaten and rested, and then resumed the march.

Jimmie Cordie lowered his glasses. "Did you see that, George?"

"See what, Jimmie?"

"Some Jap cavalry came out of the timber by the river and a couple of them rode up to the unit coming around the wall. Then they all high-balled it to the timber."

Grigsby smiled. "I reckon the well known wolf is at the door. Three guesses, Jimmie, whether they camped last night or not."

"I don't need three. One will be plenty. If they don't outnumber us too badly we may be able to hold 'em off until Hukau can get to the hills with his people."

"I wouldn't bank too much on it, old kid. We can try it but—there go the Big Swords towards the city gates."

"That's her. Well, three Jap units have called it a day. Let's go, George. Time is of the well known essence, now."

The War Lord Hukau threw the gates of the city he had defended so well open to the Big Swords and they marched in. A few minutes later he stood with Jimmie Cordie and the other Big Sword officers, in the once beautiful flower garden in front of his palace.

"We have no time to talk about anything, Hukau," Jimmie Cordie said curtly in Pushtu. "There is a large force of Japanese moving up. Some of their advance cavalry is in the woods to the south at this minute. Get your civilian population together at once. In the hills we can hold the Japs back until you get to the Big Sword encampment."

"I have some fifteen hundred men, women and children here, Captain Cordie, and it will take some time to get them ready to march."

"It must be done with all possible speed, Hukau. They must leave everything here but the bare—"

An officer ran up. "The little men of Nippon come back, lord. From the river, the timber and the passes. See, they are already in the hills."

Jimmie Cordie looked up at the hills and saw Japanese guns being placed. "Get your people underground, Hukau. It will be raining steel in a few minutes. How is your food and water supply?"

"I have plenty of both, Captain Cordie. The water comes from deep wells inside the walls, and before I came I ordered that all foodstuffs in the territory be brought into the city."

"All right. We have iron rations for two weeks so we will not have to draw on your supply. Get the food underground as far as possible. Japanese shells will be hunting for it very soon. How's your ammunition?"

"I have very little left, Captain Cordie."

"Hold your men in reserve for hand to hand fighting. We'll see what we can do to keep Misto Jap out."

CHAPTER V.

BESIEGED.

THE Japanese seemed in no hurry to attack. They placed their heavy guns in positions that commanded the city and their regiments kept well out of machine gun range. Jimmie Cordie and the Boston Bean, with two-pound rapid fire guns, shooting high explosive shells, tried for some of the guns, but the Japs put up heavy barricades of timber and went on about their business.

Finally Jimmie laughed. "No use wasting shells. I think we had better send Red up to slap 'em outta the way."

"Listen, Jimmie," Grigsby said, "we better try to get word to Chang that we are bottled up here in Fung-hwan by what looks like at least half of the Japanese Seventh Division. Once the Japs open fire they'll make this place look like the wreck of the Old Ninety-seven in an hour. And our ammunition won't last forever."

"To-night we'll try it. Two to Chang and two to the Uryankhes Tartars."

"Vot could be sveeter?" asked the Yid. "De Uryankhes smack dem in de hills und all de Big Swords on de right and left. Ve vould have it a grand stand seat und—"

The Jap guns opened fire so the soldiers of fortune never knew what the "und" was. And it wasn't much longer than Grigsby had said before the city of Fung-hwan looked like the wreck of the Old Ninety-seven plus the wreck of several more trains. About noon the shelling stopped and the Japs sent a feeling-out charge. It was met by careful, accurate machine gun and rifle fire and wiped out before it got halfway to the wall. Then the big guns opened again, this time concentrating on the wall fronting the hills.

Like almost all of the old Chinese walled cities, Fung-hwan was honeycombed underground with passages and rooms. The Chinese did not dare to build outside the walls, and so, as their families and possessions grew, they got additional space by going below for it.

The Yid and the Bean, being more or less cursed with the uneasy foot, started out on an exploration trip.

There wasn't much to see, except Chinese crowded into rooms and wide passages and storerooms of food and whatnot until they came to what amounted to a big cave. At the entrance stood four or five Chinese soldiers, one of whom could speak some English.

"Vot is in dere?" the Yid demanded.

"The animals of the Lold Hukau, mighty genelal."

"Animals? Vot kind of animals? Has he got it a menagerie?"

"I do not know what a menagelie is, lesplendent one who leads the all powerful Big Swords."

"The resplendent one means animals who have been captured and tamed, little brother," explained the Bean.

"Yes, thele is a menagelie hele. Leopalds, wolves, beals and two tigels—also snakes flom India and other places."

"Ain't dot something, Beany? Und ve go in for nothing. Is it light enough to see dem?"

"We can make it light with tolches, leadel of millions."

"Do it den."

THAT Japanese guns were piling the city up over their heads into heaps of ruins, and that the city was entirely surrounded by men who would win promotion by producing the

dead bodies of the soldiers of fortune—and intended to do it—made no difference to the Yid and the Bean. There was a menagerie to be seen, so they went in to see it.

Finally they came to a space, away from the other cages, where two big brown bears were chained by collar chains to stakes. When the Yid and the Bean, with the head keeper of the animals, who had come forward to greet them, halted, the bears got up on their hind feet and began a little shuffling dance.

"They ale tlained beals," the keeper said proudly. "Vely well tlained, but not vely fliendly, except to the Lold Hukau and me."

"My, dey is big suckaires, ain't dey?" the Yid said. "Go in und shake hands mit dem, Beany."

"What will you bet I dasn't?" answered the Bean, who loved animals, and as Grigsby said, "had a hand over them."

"Vot? I got it ten smackers dot says you von't, Mistaire Vinthrop. Von vill get you de ten if you shake it de hand of de big baby on de left."

"Get the ten out, my distinguished friend from Hester Street."

"Vait, Codfisher! I esk you!" The Yid said, for once in his life alarmed. "Don't did it. I vos only kiddingk."

"Caleful, lold," warned the keeper. "They ale not to be—"

The Boston Bean had taken two slow steps forward and then stood absolutely still. He was well within reach of both bears. They stopped their dance and both snarled. The Bean stood as if carved out of stone. The Yid's .45 Colt appeared in his right hand as if put there by magic.

"No," the keeper said calmly, not raising his voice. "It is too late. You could not kill them both in time. Stand still. It may be that the blave one can—" again he stopped talking to watch.

Both bears went down on their fore paws, still snarling, and one of them, the biggest one, reached out and sniffed at the Bean's leg, then at his hand. The other backed away about a foot and then rose. The snarl of the one who sniffed changed into a querulous whine for a moment, then the Yid and the keeper saw something that really made the Yid's eyes pop with surprise. The bear rose up, put his paws on the Bean's shoulders and began lapping the Bean's face. The Bean slowly raised his right hand and cautiously scratched the ear of the nearest bear.

The other bear came up, his snarling stopped, took a couple of sniffs, rose on his hind paws and began the dance again.

"Vell—for de love of Mike!" the Yid said. "Dey think it dot de Beaneater is anodder bear."

"No," answered the keeper. "They smell a fliend, that is all, mighty one. A fliend who is unaflaid."

The Bean lifted the bear's paws and pushed the bear away, then gravely began the little shuffling dance himself. The bear watched him for a moment, then began to dance.

"Get it a collar und chain for de third bear. His name is Beany. In all my life I never seen it anythink like dot before."

The Bean danced over to the Yid and the keeper, then stood still.

"Produce the ten, Mister Cohen."

"I vill not. I bet it ten smackers dot you vould shake hands mit. All you did vos to dance. Give it me de von smacker."

"Well—you true son of all the Cohens. All right, I'll shake hands with both of them."

"Vait," the Yid said hastily. "Vait." He reached in a rear pocket and brought out a roll of bills. "I vos only standing it on de technicalities. Here is de ten mit my compliments."

"Yeah?" the Bean took the ten and put it in his pocket. "This will teach you not to dare old man Winthrop to shake hands with a bear."

AFTER they got back to where the rest of the adventurers were, the Yid told them about the Bean and the bears.

"Better not take any more chances, Codfish," Jimmie said. "We need your services at the moment. If those bears had got fussy about your coming to their dance uninvited, there would be one less machine gun go into action—not to mention the way we would feel about the

Codfish Duke of Massachusetts being distributed around inside of two bears."

Suddenly he announced, "She's stopped. Get to your guns, gents. They'll try for us in earnest this time. No fooling around, Yid. That goes for you also, Codfish. Straight shooting and no fancy shots. Stay on your angles."

As they ran for their guns, the Yid asked peevishly, "Vy is it dot every time Jimmie says dot to us? Anyvon vould think dot ve do nothingk but take it pot shots."

"It may be, Mister Cohen, that he has caught us doing that little thing once in a while," answered the Bean gravely.

It is an easy thing to knock a walled city into ruins and to batter holes in a wall with big shells. But to take that city with infantry that must cross an open space to reach it is a horse of another color.

The guns put down a barrage but had to lift it sooner or later, and through it had come steel jacketed bullets from machine guns operated by men who were just as good scrappers as the Japs, if not better. And when the barrage lifted, Big Sword rifles opened up. Hukau's men crouched just back of the wall, waiting for any of the Japanese who got over.

But none did, that charge. When it was over, Jimmie Cordie looked at the ammunition left.

"Holy cats! Two or three more like that one and we'd do the rest of the fighting with swords and bayonets. And our little playmates don't seem to have any ideas about going home, either. How is your arm, Bean? I saw you favoring it a minute ago."

"Not so bad, Jeems. The bandage slipped and it started bleeding a little. I'm all right."

"Ye are not," Red stated firmly. "Come wid me, Beany darlin', and I'll fix it for ye. Does it hurt ye bad? Rest it on the shoulder av me."

"It is not that bad, thank you, Red, old-timer. Tighten this bandage and I'll be set."

"I'll twist the arm off ye if ye don't come wid me and let me fix it right, ye Codfish scut."

"That being the case, I guess I'll go with you, Mister Dolan."

As the Bean and Red walked away Jimmie said, "George, we'll try to run their lines as soon as it gets dark. It is the only chance we have. They are out to mop up on us this time, no foolin'."

"I say, you chaps, I'll make the try if you like," Carewe offered. "I'm not nearly as good with a machine gun as you jolly old blighters are and—"

"Oh, yes you are, Jonathan, just as good. And another thing, the Manchus are better than any of us, wiggling through lines. Thanks for the offer just the same. If Misto Jap isn't elbow to elbow, one of the four messengers may make the ripple. We'll instruct them all that Chang is to call upon Sahet Khan for help in my name or Sahet Khan is to call on Chang, and they are to gang up before attacking. If the Big Swords and the Uryankhes do get together I don't think that the whole Seventh Jap Division can stop them getting to us."

"Und if dey don't," the Yid said cheerfully, "ve fight it out mit de little pink toed banties right here."

"By request," Jimmie grinned.

"Right," Carewe said. "The giddy pink toed banties will know they've been in a fight after they have mopped up, what, what, what?"

"Doubly correct, Jonathan me lad," Jimmie answered. "And in the meantime we will—listen! Yeah, I thought so. *Adios, amigos, vaya con Dios.* Old man Cordie's son Jimmie is on his way to hole up, *pronto.*"

They all started for hole-ups, and it is a good thing for them that they did. A Japanese shell landed within ten feet of where they had been standing before any of them got a hundred feet away.

CHAPTER VI.

A WILY SCHEME.

ABOUT midnight four Manchus slipped through holes in the walls. Two went south and two north—and an hour later their bodies lay in a row in front of Colonel Nagayo of the Japanese Intelligence and several of the Japanese line officers.

"So," Colonel Nagayo said, a smile on his lips. "Captain Cordie, the Yan-

kee mongrel, sought to send word of his being caught in a trap to Chang-Lung Liang. That means that at last he has lost his cocksureness."

"The two that were slain at the river were heading away from the Big Sword encampment, colonel," a major volunteered. "More towards the territory of the Uryankhes Tartars."

"What difference does it make?" snarled Colonel Nagayo. "Now the bodies of the Manchus, who think themselves superior to all other races, lie here at our feet. We have the Yankee curs and the Englishman, Carewe, at last in a trap where their tricks will not avail."

A young Japanese captain stepped forward and saluted smartly.

Colonel Nagayo barely returned the salute as he rasped, "What is it, Captain Nugata?"

"This, colonel. When Major Kiushu spoke of the Uryankhes Tartars, it reminded me of something."

"And you, a captain of infantry, take up my time to tell me what it reminded you of, do you?" sneered Colonel Nagayo.

The young officer's face flushed but he answered, "I remembered that I had heard that Captain Cordie of the Big Swords had undergone the blood brotherhood rites with Sahet Khan of the Uryankhes Tartars."

"I know that, Captain Nugata—as does every other well informed officer. What of it?"

"May I ask you a few questions, colonel? They will aid me in making my plan clear."

"I have no time to waste answering—yes, you may ask me a few questions, Captain Nugata. See to it that they are pertinent ones."

"Captain Cordie believes that the Uryankhes Tartars would come to his rescue if they knew his need?"

"He knows that the Uryankhes Tartars would, Captain Nugata."

"Then, if to-night he heard the Tartar yells in the hills and machine gun and rifle fire answering, what would he think?"

Colonel Nagayo stared at the young captain for a moment, then his lips parted in a smile. His voice was much more pleasant as he answered, "He would think that his friends the Uryankhes were coming to the rescue, Captain Nugata."

"We have three cavalry regiments, colonel. Could they not, for the moment, be Uryankhes Tartars? If finally they broke through our lines and rode to the city walls, what would Captain Cordie do?"

"He would open the gates for them. But the first weak point in your plan, Captain Nugata, is that the Uryankhes Tartars would come to his rescue with many more riders than three thousand odd."

"Would he not think that his messengers had met, say a flying column of Uryankhes Tartars on their way home or, it may be, on their way to scout out what the presence of so many Nippon troops this far north means? Knowing the Uryankhes Tartars as he must know them, would he not think that they would at once ride to the rescue, regardless of odds against them?"

Colonel Nagayo studied for a minute, then answered, "Yes, he would think that, Captain Nugata."

"And so, thinking that, he would open the gates for all of them that got through our lines, knowing that if he did not, we would destroy them."

"Yes, he would open the gates for them. You have strengthened the first weak point, Captain Nugata. Let me see if you can also strengthen the second weak point. Transform our cavalry into Uryankhes Tartars. Remembering that the Uryankhes Tartars are big, hairy men."

"Why, that is not—is not up to me, colonel. There are officers present who have had experience in camouflage that—"

The colonel of one of the cavalry regiments stepped forward, his eyes shining. Here was a chance to win glory and promotion. "I can make my regiment look like the Uryankhes Tartars," he stated. "Stirrups can be shortened, many rope bridles can be substituted, sheepskin coats can be worn, hay and straw can be used to bind the feet and legs and—and hair from the tails and manes of our horses will make us as hairy as the Tar-

tars. In the darkness who can detect us? I have men, and so have Colonels Figami and Jamada, who can speak—and yell—the Tartar language. Once inside the gates we, the cavalry will take the city and the mongrel adventurers."

Colonel Nagayo was not quite as sure as the cavalry colonel about the last statement. He had had two or three bitter experiences with the Big Swords, and he knew how they could and would fight.

"If you can hold the gates open and keep the Big Swords occupied until the infantry gets there, colonel, you will have done your part. Let us plan, gentlemen. Whatever is done must be done before the break of dawn. Captain Nugata, I will request that you be detailed to me, as reward for your suggestion and also request that you be advanced to the rank of major. Now, the regiments must be scattered through the passes and the timber. After the units break through our lines, they come together and ride for the gates, yelling and shouting. There must be many riderless horses with them and . . ."

THE night was a dark one, most of the time. The moon was out, but heavy clouds were passing between it and the earth. Every once in a while, as one cloud cleared the moon and before another came, the moonlight made things fairly light.

Jimmie Cordie, Hukau, Red Dolan, Carewe and several Manchu officers were on the wall over the gates which were made of heavy timber reinforced with thick copper bands. Leading into the city from the gates there was a fairly wide street that only went a hundred feet or so, dead-ending at a stone wall in which there were two smaller gates. Shells might batter down the big gate, but there were other gates and walls to demolish and take before entering the city proper.

Machine gunfire and a moment afterwards rifle fire was heard to the north.

"Some one has stirred our little playmates up," Jimmie said with a grin. "Maybeso a black and white kitty has—hear that? Uryankhes Tartars! Listen! The Manchus must have met them and—"

"They're comin' in all the passes!" Red interrupted. "Will ye listen to them tellin' the little pink toed banties all about it!"

Yells and shouts could be heard plainly, getting more and more distinct every moment. Machine guns opened fire all along the Japanese northern lines.

"Wait a minute, Red," Jimmie Cordie interrupted, "I want to listen to—"

The moon shone brightly for a minute, long enough for the men on the wall to see, coming out of one of the lower passes, a group of some two hundred riders who were standing in their stirrups, yelling and waving swords about their heads. With the group were thirty or forty riderless horses.

There is no question but what, in the distance and moonlight, the Japanese cavalry looked like Tartars. The cavalry colonel had certainly spared no pains in the camouflage.

"Jimmie! Here they come! Let's go out and meet them."

"What did you say, Red?" Jimmie answered, absently. "I was—"

Clouds came over the moon again and Jimmie stopped talking for a moment, listening to the yells that now came from several of the passes that led to the mouth of the one main pass to the hills.

"Jimmie! Order the gates open. What the hell is the matter wid ye?"

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "I've been taking a little cat nap, Red. Open the gates, Hukau, and light—" The moon came out again and Jimmie looked up at it. "Never mind about bonfires on the wall. Lady moon is going to furnish us light for a little while."

The Japanese had set the stage well, and each unit played its part as if trained for days instead of minutes. As the synthetic Uryankhes Tartars came out in the open they were followed by Japanese infantry who fired on them. Men threw themselves from the saddles as if wounded or dead. Machine and rapid fire guns kept up an incessant fire and back in the hills was more yelling.

NOW the Jap riders, two thousand odd, bunched as they cleared the hills and in a disorderly column rode for the gates, shouting and yelling.

"See, the gates are open to us," a Jap officer said to the officer who rode on his right. "We have tricked them."

"Once in, we will do more than trick them—"

He did not live to finish his sentence. A blasting fire from machine guns, rapid fire guns and rifles opened on the Japanese from the walls of the city.

It turned the fast riding, shouting column into a bloody shambles of dead and dying men and horses. And the city gates closed.

There was silence in the hills for a moment, and then every Japanese gun opened up. In half an hour the shelling stopped and regiment after regiment charged on all sides.

It was dawn before the Japanese realized that, as yet, they could not put a man over the walls and the attack ceased.

Red Dolan came up to Jimmie Cordie. "Jimmie, how did ye know they wasn't the wild men?"

"Well, first, Mister Dolan, you will admit that the Uryankhes Tartars are big, deep chested men?"

"I will. What has that got to do wid it, ye shrimp av the world?"

"I'll do the questioning, Terence Aloysius. You do the answering. Second, have you ever heard a Uryankhes Tartar shout, 'Ho, brothers! Cut! Slash! Slay!'?"

"I dunno whether I have or not. I have heard many wild men yell, if that's what ye mean."

"Well, the Uryankhes Tartars and the Altai and the rest of the hillmen are big, and as I said, deep chested men. When they shout or yell it sounds like the bass of a pipe organ all het up. There are no reedy tenors among the Tartars.

"At first the yells sounded all right to me, because I was thinking of something else. Then I caught a note or two that did not sound sweet at all to me. They were more like the squeak of a dying titmouse than they were like a Uryankhes Tartar roar. Then, when they began pouring out of all the small passes and the timber and whatnot, that didn't look at all good to me, either."

"Why didn't it?"

"Well, the small passes here lead to the mouth of the main pass no matter what side they are on. The Uryankhes Tartars would come down the main pass to get at the Japs and—listen, Red, the Uryankhes only charge one way, and that is straight ahead. They don't scatter out and try for weak points in a line. They would come down the main pass hell for leather with the one idea of riding over whatever was between them and their objective, and they'd stick together also. They wouldn't try to get through other passes or do anything else trained troops would do. They'd only think of where they wanted to go and head for it. Are you keeping up with me, Mister Dolan?"

"I am. Go on."

JIMMIE said, "Fine. Now I will tell you what made me doubly suspicious. There was too much machine gun and rifle fire in the hills, and the Japs that showed and fired on the riders did not empty enough saddles. Misto Jap doesn't miss like that, Red. Are you fully informed now why I opened fire?"

"I am. Lucky for us that ye knew the difference between the het up bass of an organ and the squeak av a titmouse, ye small sized, half pint av nothin'."

Jimmie Cordie laughed, "Go on away from me, you red-headed ape. I've got to get busy."

Red grinned and left to see if he could locate the Boston Bean and the Yid.

Jimmie Cordie walked over to where Grigsby was superintending some repairs on the east wall.

"I didn't think Misto Jap had it in him," he said as he sat down. "From now on we'll have to watch our step, George."

Grigsby smiled. "He had me fooled, Jimmie. I would have received the Uryankhes Tartars with open arms—and got a bayonet between them for my hospitality. It was clever, at that."

"Yeah, darn good and clever. But the gent that planned it forgot or didn't know a couple of small things. Like planning the perfect crime, I guess. There is always something that slips. I wish to high heaven we could think of something that would decoy our gentle

little boy friends down on the next street for a day or so."

"So do I. We are losing men fast, Jimmie."

At eight o'clock in the morning the Japanese guns opened fire for a few minutes. Then they suddenly were still and a small party came out of the nearest timber, carrying the bodies of four men. They advanced on the double for a hundred yards or so, laid the bodies down in a row, and ran back to the shelter of the timber.

Jimmie Cordie, who had been watching through his glasses, lowered them. "The Nine Red Gods decided against us," he announced. The bodies were the bodies of the four Manchus who had tried to run the Jap lines.

As he said it, the guns opened again, this time all of them at once.

The attack that came, after hours of bombardment, was repulsed, but not until quite a few Japs had got into the city through the holes in the walls. They were met and destroyed by Manchu swords, led by Tseng Wang.

"I guess dey have quit foolingk around mit us," the Yid said as he cleaned his machine gun. "Are you going to send it out some more messengers, Jimmie? Maybeso I could make it to de river und svim under water past de Japs. Vonce I got in de hills I could make it to de Uryankhes, I bet you."

"I'm afraid you couldn't swim under water long enough to get by them, Yid. No, if Manchus can't win through, any one of us wouldn't stand a chance. Only thing we can do is to ask for volunteers among them to try it again to-night."

"Oi, Jimmie! I have thought it of something."

"Well, for Pete's sake, open up."

"Vait till I go und talk mit de Codfisher. Den I tell you. Maybeso it vould vork."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRAZY AFGHAN.

THE Yid found the Boston Bean, who had disappeared right after the Jap attack had been stopped, down where the Bean spent most of his odd moments, with the two big bears. By now they had accepted the Bean as a royal playfellow. The Bean could put them through a series of tricks that made the head trainer shake his head in astonishment.

"Come avay from dem," the Yid commanded. "I vant to talk mit you for a minute."

"Some other time, Mister Cohen, if you please. I am very busy and—"

"I don't please. Dis is strictly business, Codfisher, und Jimmie is vaiting."

"That's different. Good-by Grizzly and Polar."

"Vot de hell do you call it dem dat for?" demanded the Yid as he and the Bean hunted for a place to sit down.

"Because they are not that kind of bears," explained the Bean gravely.

"You know vat I think? I think dot you are goofy—und at dot, it vill help if you are."

"Help what?"

"Vot you are going to did, Beany."

"Oh, yeah? And what am I going to do, Mister Cohen?"

"Listen now und don't interrupt poppa until he is all through. You remember de time dot ve vos in Sanshu mit de var lord Hing-San ven de birthday celebrations of his son vos being held?"

"Very well, indeed, Mister Cohen. I remember also that you got hold of some brandy and got pie-eyed drunk. Double shame on you for doing 'er, also."

"I did not," protested the Yid. "I vos sick, dot's all. But dot is neither here nor dere. You remember de emir of de vorld dot came mit de trained bears?"

"I remember the bears. Do you mean the goofy Afghan that owned them?"

"Yes, de emir of de vorld. Anyway dot is vot he said he vos. Remember how de Chinks made it vay for him because he vos a goofy?"

"Blame few people will hurt a crazy man, Yid. A good many races think he is under the protection of the gods who have taken some of his brain for their own use."

"Vell," said the Yid slowly. "Maybeso de Japs vouldn't hurt—or stop—a goofy, either."

"Maybe they wouldn't. But what has

that to do with what you said was—" The Bean stopped talking for a moment, then grinned and said, "Maybeso can do, Yid. Let's go talk to Jeems."

Jimmie, Red Dolan, Carewe and Grigsby listened to the Yid and the Bean and finally Jimmie shook his head. "I don't think you'd have the chance of a lame dog in a running match, Codfish. The Japs would knock you and the bears off the Christmas tree first and then wonder if you possibly might have been crazy afterwards.

"I don't doubt for a moment but what you can play the part of a goofy Afghan, but—can you dress yourself up to look like one?"

"Why can't he?" demanded Red. "Right now he is a goofy Beaneater from Bosting, and 'tis not much difference between a—"

"Listen, you red-headed ape, is this the time to get funny? The Bean is offering to bet his life that he can get through the Japs as a crazy Afghan with two bears. It's a hundred to one shot that he can't do any such thing. Do me a favor and go somewhere and think that over if you can't keep that mouth of yours shut."

"'Tis right ye are, Jimmie darlin'. Don't try it, Beany. Ye know how much we all think av—I'm shut, Jimmie."

"I don't think the odds are that bad, Jeems," the Boston Bean said. "If the Japs are like other people, the odds are in my favor that they will pass me along with a laugh."

"That's just it. I don't think they are—in lots of ways. Maybeso civilians, yes. But not the military, old kid. They are all soldier and nothing else. And personally I can't see them passing any one or anything along through battle lines."

"But you don't know that they will not pass a crazy Afghan with a couple of trained bears through, do you?"

"No. I don't know that, Codfish."

"Well, then, why not try it?"

"Because in making the try—which I think is a useless one—we would probably lose the famous Codfish Duke of Massachusetts."

"Which does not amount to a tinker's dam against the fact that if it works the lives of women and children may be saved."

FOR a long minute there was silence after the Bean said that. The faces of the soldiers of fortune became grim and impersonal as did their eyes.

Jimmie Cordie, looking straight at the Bean, began to whistle softly, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emanuel's veins. And sinners—" When he got that far he stopped whistling and said, "That's right, John. Your life or any of our lives do not amount to a tinker's dam, if women and children are to be saved. I vote that you try it."

"So do I," Grigsby said quietly.

"And I," Carewe said.

"'Tis a hard thing to say," Red began, "knowin' that ye go to the death av ye, Beany darlin'. Me vote is like the rest. Go and try it, and may all the good saints take care of ye."

As the Yid and the Bean went underground, the Yid said cheerfully, "Vell, ve put it over, didn't ve, Codfisher?"

"We did. Do you remember how the emir of the world looked? I mean in general?"

"I do, mit great clearness. He vos tall und skinny, like you, mit long straggly black hair falling all over his face und eyes und a couple of feathers sticking in it, held dere by a ivory comb. His face und hands vos dirty und his clothes vos a collection of rags dot an old clothes man vould turn de nose up at. Und on his feet vos a pair of old sandals held dere by string, und on his—"

"That's plenty to start off with. Let's see how close we can come up to it, including the sandals before we go any further. We can get the black hair from a Chinese woman.

"The Japs used horsehair, but we will go them one better."

IT was quite a little later when the Yid announced to Jimmie Cordie and the rest, "Ve are ready for de inspection. Come mit to de menagerie."

They went "mit" to the menagerie, and when they arrived in front of the bears, Red said, "Holy Saints! If that is Beany, he is more of a goofy Afghan than the real wan is."

The Boston Bean's architectural lines had helped a lot in making him look like a goofy Afghan or a goofy hillman of any breed. He and the Yid had commandeered any and all things they thought were needed both for the main part of the costume and for artistic touches.

All in all, the Codfish Duke from the top of his head to his toes looked the part.

Right after Red spoke, the Bean let out a howl that was a cross between the scream of a hungry mountain lion and the wail of a northern wolf telling the moon of his sorrows. Then he began yelling in Pushtu, "Way! Way for the emir of the world and his children! Kneel in front of me, slaves! Kneel or my children shall devour you! I am the emir of the world, and all men are my slaves! Way! Way for the emir and his children! We go to the birthday festival of the son of the Khan of the Altai Tartars!"

And while he was yelling it, he and the bears were doing the little shuffling dance.

As the Bean and the bears, the Bean holding them by the collar chains, were ready to go through a hole in the wall that faced the river, Jimmie Cordie said, "Don't start, Codfish, until you hear us cut loose. And then wait a minute or two. The river bank looked clear dead ahead this afternoon, and it may be clear yet. If you get that far you've jumped the first hurdle. Maybeso the Japs along the river will scatter out a little to take a looksee at what is going on in front. That's all, Bean. Good huntin', old kid."

"I'll make 'er, Jeems, me good man. And if I don't, I'll wait with Put for the rest of the gang to show up. Never mind any farewell speeches. Get going on that sortie thing. This darkness may not hold. I'll be seeing you."

"Not wan damn step will I go," Red declared, "until I have said this. Good luck, and may all the saints take care av ye, Beany darlin'. 'Tis a stout feller ye are, when all is said and done."

"Und dot goes for me," the Yid added.

"And for me"—"And for me," Carewe and Grigsby said.

"And also for me," Jimmie Cordie stated. "Let's go!"

THE gates of the city suddenly were flung open and a column of the Big Swords came out. As the column cleared the gates, machine guns opened from the walls, concentrating on a pass from which Japanese infantry had issued during the day. The Japanese machine guns instantly answered and flares were sent up.

"The dogs try to cut their way to the hills," a young Japanese officer said to another.

"We will stop them before they have come a hundred yards. Truly they have gone mad when they think they can reach our lines."

"The machine gunfire from the walls shows that the ones Colonel Nagayo wants so badly are not with—here comes the Taiku regiment! To your post, Lieutenant Akita."

The Big Swords column advanced rapidly almost up to the Japanese flares, then as the Taiku regiment deployed so that the column might have room to get well inside the lines before the Japs closed the gap, they swerved to the left, turned, and ran back to the gates and into the city.

"What kind of maneuver was that?" asked the Japanese officer, puzzled. "They lost many men by our machine gunfire, and yet—they did not even try to close with us. I thought that the Big Swords were mostly Manchus who always charged home."

"The Manchus do charge home—unless ordered otherwise. The Yankee mongrels who are trapped in the city are trying some kind of a trick. It will fail, as ours failed, whatever it is. This time we have them in a place where tricks will not work," an officer answered.

The Japanese officer was wrong; the trick had worked. The Japanese unit on guard at the river bank directly in front of the south wall had run along the bank until they could see the flares and there they had stood for a few minutes. And while they were doing it, the Bean and the bears reached the bank of the river. There he waded in up to his neck, and after a little coaxing, got

both bears in the water for a moment or so, then came out and started up the river bank.

The bears, delighted at being in the open once more, tugged at the chains and the emir of the world had all he could do to hold them.

He had not gone two hundred yards before there came a snarled command from the darkness ahead. His Japanese was absolutely nil, but any man who has served in any army knows a command to halt when he hears it, no matter what language it is delivered in.

The Bean halted and let out a yell that Jimmie Cordie and the others heard in the city.

Then he began his "Way! Way for the emir of the world." For a moment or more there was silence in the darkness ahead and then a flare turned the darkness into the light of day.

The Bean danced up to the flare with the bears, still yowling about who he was and what would happen if way were not made for him. And before he got very far he and the bears were inside a ring composed of Japanese bayonets. The Bean, as he drew breath, thought, "By golly, they didn't shoot. I've got 'em!"

A non-commissioned officer, his revolver full on the Bean, demanded in Pushtu: "Who are you, and how did you get to the river bank?"

The bears did not like the ring of sharp points that surrounded them, and also did not like the smell of the men back of the points. They both looked at the Bean and then began snarling.

"You see?" he yelled. "You see, slaves? My children are getting angry. Beware! Beware! Soon I will order them to eat you up. I am the emir of the world and at my command the stars and the moon will fall to crush you! Down on your knees, slaves, and worship me and my children who are kings of all kings! Bring food at once and drink that we may refresh ourselves."

He heard several of the Japs say one word, which he hoped was "crazy" in Japanese.

The non-commissioned officer gave a curt order and the circle widened out as he stepped forward. Not so far forward as to be within reach of the bears.

"Where do you come from, brainless one?"

"From everywhere!" yelled the Bean. "From the sun! From the moon! From the lowest depths of hell—where I will send you very soon! From the river where I swam for miles with my children."

"You swam up the river, you and your children? I see you are wet. It may be that is the way you came through our lines. And where are you going—emir of the world?"

"I go to the Altai Tartars who are slaves of mine, as you are! Down on your knees and worship me! I am—"

ONE of the bears made a lunge at the Jap who stepped quickly back, raising his revolver, which he had lowered. The Bean had hard work for a second or so, calming down the bear. He did it, though, and then began to dance. After a little hesitation the bears joined in. The Japanese soldiers crowded closer.

An officer pushed his way through them, looked at the Bean and the bears, then demanded, "What is the meaning of this, Sergeant Shin-ju?"

"If the captain please, this crazy Afghan and the bears suddenly appeared on the river bank. I have been trying to find out where he came from. He tells of swimming up the river and of his being on his way to the Altai Tartars. I did not order that he be slain because, as the captain sees, he is crazy."

"The noise he is making will wake Colonel Kona, and then he will receive short shrift, crazy or not. Calm him down and take him to the guardhouse for the rest of the night. In the morning the colonel will decide what to do with him."

The Bean was gravely dancing with the bears, knowing that his fate was being discussed. He thought that he had better do no more yelling at the moment.

The non-commissioned officer saluted, the captain returned the salute and walked away. As the non-com turned to the Bean, the emir of the world said to himself, "Here she comes."

"Come with me. You and your children shall receive shelter and food."

"Three cheers for that," the Bean said to himself, then aloud answered, "I will honor you, slave. Lead the way!"

Once in the guardhouse, which was a big one-room log cabin the Bean felt that the three cheers had been called for a little prematurely. And he felt it more strongly after food and water had been brought and he heard the heavy door lock after the two Jap soldiers who had served it.

He had got this far without being killed but it wasn't so very far, at that.

The bears seemed quite content, both of them curling up and going to sleep. The emir of the world stayed awake, putting in the time regretting that in his younger days he had not taken up the study of the Japanese language. If he had he might have known what the Jap captain said to the non-com.

ABOUT four o'clock in the morning the door opened and several Japanese officers came in. None of them had any suspicion that the crazy Afghan was a synthetic one. They wanted to see him and the bears for the same reason the soldiers did—anything to break the monotony of guard duty.

The Bean rose and let out a yowl that surpassed all his previous ones. He knew that this was the crucial moment and if he did not make it stick now he would never get another chance.

"You dare to come unsummoned into my presence, slaves! I will order the moon and the stars to fall upon—" that was the last of the Bean's impersonation. Both bears woke up and rose on their hind legs snarling. The Bean reached down to get hold of the chains and as he did, the biggest bear made a pass at him, whether in play or in earnest he did not know.

The claws raked the top of the Bean's head and carried away with them the dirty fillet of cloth that helped hold the black hair in place. The hair had been glued to the Bean's scalp by the Yid and then the narrow strip of cloth had been added in a way that did not prevent the hair from falling around the Bean's face. And with the cloth there went most of the hair.

The Jap officers stepped back and drew their revolvers. One of them shouted, "The Boston Bean!" and fired point blank at the Codfish Duke of Massachusetts. By mischance he had been one of the Jap officers who had attempted to take the soldiers of fortune once before and had been wounded by the Bean at close quarters. He had never forgotten the Bean's face, both front and profile and now he recognized him.

One of the bears had started after the Japs and the bullet meant for the Bean hit the bear in a fleshy part of the shoulder. The bear roared his protest and charged with outstretched paws.

The other, without a second's hesitation, also roared a challenge and charged. The Jap officer flung himself backwards and in doing so overturned the oil lamp that set on a wall shelf.

The charge of two big bears is not to be faced in any room by men armed with revolvers and the Japs knew it. They backed to the door, emptying their guns as they did so. The bullets hit but did not stop the bears any more than a stone thrown by a child would. The bullets did not have the power to penetrate to a vital spot. They only made the bears more infuriated. Two of the officers failed to get out and both died there, their bodies torn open by steel-like claws.

The bears, roaring defiance, charged out after the officers and the guardhouse began to blaze. Soldiers came running up with bayoneted rifles and there in the darkness, until flares were lighted, there began a bear fight that the Japs talked about for quite a while afterwards.

The bears were big and their vital parts well cushioned with fat and muscle and, like all bears, scrappers when they once got started. They took bayonets and rifle and revolver bullets for a long time before they went down to stay down and Jap after Jap who got too close went down before the bears did. It was a messy, noisy fight, the Japs shrilling encouragement to each other above the roars of the bears and the gunfire.

Jimmie Cordie, standing near a pile of rock that had once been a temple near the south wall, listened intently for a moment, then said to Grigsby who was there with him, "I guess we celebrated the Bean getting through a little too soon,

George. He was either holed up or the Japs were looking him over. The bears are trying to lick the Jap army by the sounds. I guess it means that the odds were too great for the Codfish Duke."

"I'm afraid it does, Jimmie. He was a brave— They attack again!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HAND TO HAND.

THE Japanese had decided that the breaches blown in the walls were large enough. Now they were going to take the city and wipe out the Big Swords and the Chinese who defended it. And this time they got to the walls and through the holes in spite of the withering fire that spat defiance at them.

Jimmie Cordie ordered flares and big bonfires lighted along the walls and on top of piles of ruins. He knew that the Jap guns in the hills could not open fire for fear of hitting their own men once the Japs had got to the walls and he wanted light enough to, as he told Tseng Wang, "give the swords of the House of Chi a chance to see the little men of Nippon die by Manchu swordplay."

To the Japanese on the hills it looked to be a city on fire surrounded far out by a ring of darkness from which emerged a steady stream of bayonets.

There were two large breaches in the wall, both some hundred feet wide, and many smaller ones. Jimmie Cordie placed machine guns and what rapid fire guns he had at both of the lower breaches and at the smaller, Hukau's riflemen. The Big Swords were split up into units and placed all along the walls.

The Yid and Red were at one of the breaches with the machine guns, Grigsby and Carewe at the other. Several of the Manchus had been taught how to operate rapid fire guns and machine guns and now, as Jimmie Cordie put all reserve guns in commission, had a chance to show how much they had learned from the experts who had been their teachers.

The Japs came through and over the walls like men hurrying to what they knew would be a gay, pleasant party.

But in doing it they took losses that would have staggered any commander who did not firmly believe that soldiers were made to be killed in battle.

Red and the Yid had been told about what Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby had heard, Red and the Yid being underground asleep at the time of the bear fight. Carewe had heard most of it from his post of duty.

The first Japs through the large breaches did not hesitate a second. They charged the machine guns. But their charge was met by Manchu swordsmen before they reached the guns. At the smaller holes the Japs shot and bayoneted their way through Hukau's men, only to meet the Big Swords.

Those of the Japs who came over the walls, as they jumped to the ground, also faced the Big Swords.

Grigsby and Carewe fought their guns, as did the Manchus, calmly and coldly, as if they were on the target range. Jimmie Cordie went from place to place, a smile and a jest on his lips and in his eyes—and a Colt .45 in his right hand. In the Orient, whenever soldiers of fortune gathered for a little chin-chin and the talk veered around to good shooting, some one, sooner or later would ask, "Did you ever see Jimmie Cordie strut his stuff with a .45 when he got down to business? That bird can shoot the eye outta a needle at two hundred yards." Which was a slight exaggeration but there was no question about Jimmie Cordie being a first class shot.

RED and the Yid also fought their guns, but neither calmly nor coldly. Red was almost berserk and as he fired was yelling, "So ye got Beany, did ye? Ye ganged up on him and pulled him down. I'll make ye wish a wolf had stolen ye from the cradle!"

The Yid was talking but not good naturedly as he generally talked while fighting. This time he was, as he said later, "damn good und mad mit dem." His talk was a running comment on what he thought of all Japanese and how much he would love to send them all to the southwest corner of the hot place and then order a northeast gale to blow.

Finally Red jammed his gun, whether purposely or not there was no way of telling. "Now I'll get me a sword," he

yelled, gone all the way berserk, as he stood up. "'Tis what I wanted all the time."

He did not have any trouble in finding a sword. There were more than a few Manchu swords on the ground or still held in the lifeless hands of their owners. Once Red had one in his hand he let out a wild Irish yell and joined the nearest Manchu unit.

The Yid stayed with his machine gun for a minute or so and then as an infantry company came through the breach and started up the pile of rocks, the Yid, without waiting to see if Manchu swords came to block the Japs off, slid down the other side of the pile and hunted for a sword himself. He found one and joined Red Dolan.

Jimmie Cordie, as the machine guns stopped, ran up to see what had happened. He got there just in time to see the swords close with the Jap company, the Yid and Red right in front.

More Japanese were coming through, company after company now, and Jimmie saw that there was no hope to get to either machine gun and try to stop them. He ran back to where a Big Sword reserve was being held on that side and brought them up along the wall to the breach. Then, leading them, he started for the other end of the breach, right through a Jap company.

The Big Swords won through and then turned and faced the coming Jap.

The night was sultry and the air pressed down like a wet blanket. As the Japs charged the sword line, there came first lightning and right after it seemed as if the heavens had opened. A cloudburst in the Thian Shan puts everything within range out of commission and a good deal of everything except the hills under water. It put out all flares and bonfires and stopped all fighting as promptly as turning off a radio dial stops a program. Any living thing caught in it has all it can do to keep on breathing.

The Japs between the walls and the hills dropped and hugged the ground until water coming down the hills and the passes forced them to get up and try for higher ground. Some made the foothills, but many did not.

The Japs in the city crouched under any shelter they could find and the Big Swords did the same, sometimes Japs and Big Swords together. It seemed like a million years to all caught in it before it stopped suddenly and the sun came out.

There were two feet of water covering the cleared space between the city and the hills, rushing towards the river which was already over its banks. The Jap guns in the hills were out of commission, temporarily at least, some of them washed down into gorges and ravines.

The Jap camps were a mess and a good deal of their equipment had been carried away or ruined. All in all, the "little pink toed banties" had plenty to think of besides taking a city, even if the city did hold the Big Swords and the soldiers of fortune who led them.

In the city, as the sun came out, the Japanese caught there and the Big Swords fought it out. That was all the Japs could—and wanted—to do. But they were as badly outnumbered now as the city's defenders had been outnumbered during the attack.

JIMMIE CORDIE, Grigsby and Carewe stood and watched the innumerable duels, sword against bayonet. Red and the Yid hung together and did not stop to count whether they faced two Japs or twenty-two. Any Japs they saw, they charged. And the hurtling charge of a two hundred and thirty pound Irishman gone berserk, a Manchu sword in his hand, plus a Yid whose hands when clinched reached below his knees, also with a sword in his hand and "damn good und mad mit dem," was not a good thing to face. The Japanese infantrymen, mostly young men, faced it through without giving back a step and did the best they could for themselves.

A Japanese officer, with five or six men, caught in an angle made by two great stones that had fallen from a temple, emptied his revolver at Red and the Yid as they came raging up. He hit both of them, the Yid in the chest, high up and Red in the left arm and shoulder. But Red was beyond caring about what hit him and the Fighting Yid, even while he was coughing blood, kept right on. They both were out to avenge the Boston

Bean and they meant to keep right on doing it until they died. The Jap officer's remaining shots went wild as Red and the Yid reached him and the soldiers with him.

"Look at them," Jimmie Cordie said coldly. "Both of those apes left their guns during battle. I hope to hell and high water they both get—"

"Steady, Jimmie," Grigsby drawled. "It is the Yid and Red you are talking about, oldtimer."

Jimmie Cordie turned and looked at Grigsby through narrowed eyes. Then he laughed. "That's right, George. They are—the Yid and Red. I'll reverse the English on that hope. I hope to hell and high water they both get through playing with swords unhurt. But they are due for a—"

"I say! There goes Red down and—the Yid on top of him!" interrupted Carewe, as he started for the angle. He did not beat Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby there by a foot and he was a much lighter man.

The duelling was over in another half an hour. There were no Japanese left to carry it on. Of the Big Swords there were, all told, able to fight, three hundred men. Of Hukau's Chinese, some two hundred. The Japanese had put out of commission all but two of the machine guns and all the rapid fire guns. Of the soldiers of fortune, Red and the Yid were wounded, the Yid seriously. Jimmie Cordie, Grigsby and Carewe were unhurt in any way. Tseng Wang had a bayonet hole through his right arm.

Jimmie Cordie, after Red and the Yid had been given first aid and made as comfortable as possible, asked Red, "Why did you leave your gun, Red?"

"She jammed on me, Jimmie darlin'. I was thinkin' av Beany and didn't watch the step av me."

"I see. Fair enough, old kid. Try for some sleep."

The Yid was unconscious and so could not explain why he had left his gun. The bullet that entered his chest had, as far as Jimmie and Grigsby could judge, just grazed the top of his left lung. They were both good first aid men and both had years of experience with wounds, on themselves and on others.

"That bullet is still in him," Jimmie had said when they went to work on the Yid. "Turn him over."

One thing that was always carried and guarded as if it were their mother by all the soldiers of fortune was a combination first aid and surgical kit. They could all use it, Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby with more skill than the rest. They operated on the Yid and got the bullet that was within an inch of his skin in the back as calmly and coldly, and accurately, as if they had been surgeons all their lives.

The Yid came to as they were finishing and gasped, as he lay face down on an improvised operating table. "Vot de hell do you think you are didding? Get it avay from me before I—"

"Lie still, Abie," Jimmie said distinctly. "You've been shot and George and I are operating on you. Stay put, old kid Cohen."

The Fighting Yid lived up to his name right there. He spat out some blood, then said, "O. K., Jimmie. I am put."

CHAPTER IX.

NAGAYO'S THREAT.

WHEN the bears went out of the guardhouse after the Jap officers the Boston Bean was right behind them, not with any idea of joining them in their attempt to mop up on the Japanese army but with the hope that during the confusion he could get away.

Once outside the door he crouched and ran along the side of the building. As he cleared it, two Japanese soldiers running to get into the fight bumped into him. The Boston Bean knew what it was all about, who he was and what he was trying to do. The two little Japs, just arrived from outpost duty, did not know any of the whys and wherefores. So the Bean had a decided edge on them. He kicked at one and landed in a place that made the Jap forget all about any desire to find out why bears were in camp.

The other Jap was too surprised to get into any position of defense and the Bean knocked him out by a right uppercut to the point of the jaw.

Then the Bean ran for the river. More Japs were coming up from all sides and the Bean found himself more or less in the same class as a football player with the ball trying to get through the opposing team without any interference to clear the way for him. One advantage he had was that the Japs coming up, like the two he had put out of commission, had no idea who he was or what he was trying to do. All they knew was that something hard bumped into them and was gone.

His luck held until he reached the river bank and then a flare was lighted that showed him up as plainly as if it were high noon.

The Bean was getting set to dive into the water when the light came. Before he could, three or four Japs loosed off at him with their rifles.

He straightened up, whirled around once or twice, let out an unearthly screech and fell into the river all spraddled out.

Soldiers ran up and stood on the bank, their rifles ready, waiting for some noise to fire at, but none came.

"He is dead and floating downstream," one of them said at last.

"Who was he?" another asked.

"I do not know. He looked like an Afghan."

In the morning several Japanese officers stood lined up in front of Colonel Nagayo.

"Yes, sir, I am sure it was Captain Winthrop, who was known as the Boston Bean," the lieutenant who had recognized the Bean said positively.

"And your men are equally as sure that they killed him at the river bank, captain?" Colonel Nagayo asked a captain.

"Yes, sir. Four of them fired point blank at him. He screamed, whirled around, then fell into the river and sank as a stone sinks." The captain, through his men, wanted credit for killing one of the soldiers of fortune and so stretched it a little.

"Why did they not recover the body?"

"They tried to, colonel, diving for it several times and as soon as I came up I sent out boats searching the banks for it on either side. But it had either lodged in a deep hole or the current had carried it below where the search ended."

"You brought the bear skins?"

"As you ordered, colonel."

"You may return to your commands."

The officer saluted and filed out, glad to get out of the sight of the intelligence colonel who could, if he wished, have any of them detailed to him for special duty —and the Jap officers detailed on that kind of duty to Colonel Nagayo seldom came back to their regiments.

AFTER the operation on the Yid, Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby went up on the north wall to get some fresh air.

"The Yid has certainly got plenty of what it takes," Jimmie said. "He never even let out one yelp and it must have hurt like blazes."

"That's right, Jimmie. If infection does not set in he has a fair chance of getting well."

Jimmie Cordie looked around at the hills and the river, then at Grigsby and laughed.

"Did you say a fair chance, George? They ought to be starting the last act pretty soon."

"You find the wait between acts tiresome, don't you, Jeems?"

"Yeah, I always did. I wish we could get the women and kids out of here some way. If we could I'd sit and wait for Misto Jap with a song in my heart. The way we've mussed him up won't make him any too gentle when he gets to them."

"If wishes were horses, beggars might ride, old timer. All we can do is to stand them off as long as we can and after that—who knows?"

"That's her, George. As a rescue column we turned out to be a fine lot of one-armed paper hangers. If there had been half an ounce of brains in the entire outfit we wouldn't have got caught like rats in a trap. We should have tried to hold them in the open until Hukau made the hills."

Grigsby smiled. "That is the first time I ever heard you talk about water that has passed under the bridge, Jimmie. What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I guess it is the com-

bination of the Codfish and the women and children."

"What is written—is written. The Nine Red Gods decided against us in the matter of the Bean, and for us in the Tartar thing and the cloudburst. Another hour and the Japs would have mopped up. As it is we are still on our feet and we hold the city, and not a woman or child has been harmed."

"Well, I hope the Red Gods also decide the next round in our favor. I think the best thing we can do is to plug up all but one underground entrance and hold it as long as we can. It's a cinch we can't hold Misto Jap out of the city. Let's go and see— There goes a flag of truce up. See it? Over to the left in front of that clump of timber."

The flag of truce was answered by one from the wall above the city gates. Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby stepped outside the gates and waited. They saw a Japanese officer advance through the mud and water that was still on the ground between the city and the hills on that side.

He was followed by two soldiers who carried burdens on their backs.

"It's Colonel Nagayo," Jimmie announced. "He's bringing us the bear skins."

The Japanese colonel halted about three feet away from the two soldiers of fortune who stood there looking at him out of calm, impassive eyes. He neither saluted nor bowed. The men put the skins on the ground. "I bring to you, Captain Cordie, the skins of two bears. Also the news that Captain John Cabot Winthrop is dead."

"Thank you for the bear skins, colonel," Jimmie answered smoothly. "It is sad news you bring us regarding Captain Winthrop. We heard the bear fight last night and so have been more or less prepared for the news regarding Captain Winthrop. Why did you not also bring us his body? And—have you seen any Uryankhes Tartars around?"

"I am keeping it as, shall I say, Exhibit A," the Japanese colonel lied calmly, ignoring the question about the Tartars. "I hope very soon to have Exhibits B, C, D, E and F, to go with it. Then I will return to Tsitsihar and show all of the exhibits to some people who will be much interested in them."

JIMMIE CORDIE smiled. "There is an old saying in my country, Colonel Nagayo, 'Catch your rabbit before you cook him.' If there's anything else you wish to tell—or ask us?"

"I have brought you the skins and the news about Captain Winthrop to show you that it is impossible for you to get word to the Big Swords or any one else who might be foolish enough to try and rescue you."

"And now that we have been fully convinced of that, what?"

"This. If you wish, you may surrender. You, Major Grigsby, Captains Dolan, Cohen and Carewe. Because you, Captain Cordie, refrained from killing me once I will see to it that you get a fair trial at Tsitsihar."

"I am afraid our ideas of what constitutes a fair trial are far apart, colonel. Let us say we surrender. How about the Big Swords in the city?"

"They will be executed to the last man."

"And the Lord Hukau and his people?"

"They will be lessoned and afterwards, those that are still alive will be permitted to go where they choose."

"And all we get for deserting them is a fair trial at Tsitsihar. I'm afraid your bribe isn't attractive enough, colonel. Can't you raise it a notch or two? Say, we get a verdict of not guilty and commissions of lieutenant general in the Japanese army—and five millions in gold."

Colonel Nagayo's face became white as he struggled to restrain his temper. "You jest, Captain Cordie. You jest, knowing that you are within—"

"It's an old Yank custom, colonel. I think that we, the exhibits B, C, D, E and F, will stay right where we are and get our lesson with the Lord Hukau and his people. Send the teachers any time, colonel. And, please try to arrange matters so that you can come with them. I would like to get you lined up with my sights before the lesson starts."

"I will come, Captain Cordie. I—I—" he snarled an order to the two soldiers,

turned on his heel, and literally ran for the hills followed by the two men.

"You got him all fussed up, Jeems," Grigsby said with a grin.

"I tried to," Jimmie answered.

CHAPTER X.

THE HIDDEN SHAFT.

RED slowly made his way along until he found Carewe, who was talking to Tseng Wang.

"Come wid me, Carewe," he coaxed. "I want to go below and see the menagerie." His arm and shoulder were bandaged.

Carewe excused himself to Tseng Wang and tucked a hand under Red's good shoulder. "Right, old dear. Carry on."

Red, once below, did not seem to be able to find anything that amused him for more than a minute or two and Carewe was just on the point of suggesting that Red get back to his bed when they came to the entrance of quite a large room, lighted by candles. In the room, around a table, sat four of the temple priests. On the table was a teapot and cups and saucers and little Chinese cakes. Red was fond of the cakes if he was not of the tea. His face lighted up.

The priests rose and bowed as Red and Carewe entered and one of them said something, gesturing towards two unoccupied chairs. He spoke in Chinese which neither Red nor Carewe understood but any one could have understood the gesture. It was an invitation to sit down and join them at tea.

"I don't understand the lingo av ye," Red said as he sat down and reached for a cake, "but I'll join ye just the same."

The priests smiled and nodded and one of them placed the cakes nearer Red and another put cups and saucers in front of them both, then slid the teapot over to where they could reach it.

"I don't want none av that stuff," Red growled. "Have ye no wine or brandy?"

"Oh, I say, old chap. We're guests and mustn't have them thinking we don't know the rules of—"

"To hell wid all rules. I want— I beg the pardon av ye, Carewe, and av them. Pour me some av the damn—av the fine tea and I'll be drinkin' it to their health. Since Beany went I'm like a dog wid the distemper. I know better, Carewe. Sure the Dolans was kings wance in Ireland wid grand palaces to live in. Manners was taught the young scuts av the family by—by— I can't go on wid it. All I am is Red Dolan and Beany is gone and the Yid is like to go any minute, and, what the hell is keepin' ye from pourin' me tea?"

"She's poured, old topper. I say, Red, tighten your belt a hole or two. We have to carry on, you know."

"Am I not doin' it as a Dolan should? Me and Jimmie and ye and—"

The Japanese guns opened fire.

The priests, Red and Carewe listened for a moment, then Red said, "'Tis a fine thing to have to stay down here and listen to that widout a chance to answer back at all, at all. Why the hell don't they come and fight it out, man to man?"

"They'll be along sooner or later, Red. We better be getting back—" A Jap shell came through the roof, hit a corner and exploded. It was a three inch shell that landed in the city at just the right angle to go through a small hole in the roof.

Red and Carewe, being veterans, reacted instantly as the shell came through the roof. They fell sideways from their chairs and rolled to the wall.

The priests sat where they were and were killed by shell fragments. Red and Carewe were not made safe by what they had done but it helped their chances and neither of them was hit.

Red got to his feet, his shoulder and arm hurting him badly, and started an oration that took in all branches of the Japanese army and the artillery in particular.

CAREWE took the fall, roll and escape from hurt in silence. He got to his feet and started over to the bodies of the priests to see if any of them was alive. About half way he halted. "I say, Red, look what the giddy old shell did. It blew the wall down and opened up another room. There is a shaft in it. The cribbing comes up beyond the floor and—"

"What the hell do I care about shafts wid cribbin' or widout cribbin'?" Red demanded, feeling gingerly of his arm. "The arm av me is—keep away from it, Carewe. Maybe it will cave under ye and—wait, ye little divil, I'll go wid ye."

They walked over to the shaft and looked down it. There was a rusty iron ladder attached to one side.

"Maybeso it's where the Chink keeps the treasure av him," Red said. "I wonder how far down she goes."

The War Lord Hukau came into the other room. He had heard the noise of the exploding shell and had come to see what damage it had done. With him were two of his officers. He saw Red and Carewe and came over to the shaft.

"Do you know of this shaft, Lord Hukau?" Carewe asked in Pushtu.

"No, Captain Carewe. I have never heard of it or seen it before. It may be a deep well dug by some of my mother's ancestors many years ago."

"I say, let's go down and see where it leads to," Carewe said. "Come with me, Lord Hukau. Red, you had better stay here, the air may be bad."

"I will like hell. If ye go I go, Carewe."

Hukau did not evince any great readiness to go down the shaft. Neither did the officers who were with him. "It may be," he said, "that the hole and what it leads to are guarded by the spirits of those who dug it. I—I do not wish to meet spirits in a dark hole and—it is not because I am afraid but because I do not wish to offend them." It was plain to be seen that he was very much afraid and so were the officers with him.

"Come on with us," Red answered, scornfully. "We'll protect you against all the spirits there are in the hole."

"Who can protect even himself against the spirits? You think I, Hukau, am afraid? Lead the way then; I will follow."

CAREWE felt sorry for him, knowing how much the Chinese dreaded going into a strange hole in the ground of any kind. If they knew who dug it and for what, it was different, but any strange hole might hold something that was guarded by evil spirits and no Chinese cares anything about meeting spirits, evil or otherwise.

"I know you are not afraid, leader of many brave soldiers," Carewe said. "It is that you do not feel worthy of meeting the spirits who may guard this hole. Stay here and Captain Dolan and I will go down and see to where the hole leads and report to you."

"That will be best," Hukau answered, much relieved. "You and Captain Dolan being of another race, are far superior to all spirits. I will await your report here."

They started down and the ladder, in spite of its rusty look, held firmly. Twenty feet below the cellar the shaft ended and a tunnel started from the north side.

They played their flashlights into the tunnel for a moment, then Red said, "Look how she's timbered, Carewe. Whoever did that knows how to hold ground."

"My word, I should say so. Let's carry on."

They walked along the tunnel for fully half a mile before Carewe said, "I say, we must be right under the jolly old Japs, right now."

"If we had plenty av ammunition and the bunch av us was all here wid the Brownings I'd wish she opened up in the middle av the little scuts. But Beany is gone and the Yid is about to—come on, what are ye waitin' for?"

They went at least another half mile and then came to a shaft that also had a ladder in it.

Their flashlights showed that about fifteen feet up there was some kind of a covering over the shaft.

"Well, up we go," Red said. "Let me go first this time. I'll see what I can do about opening the damn thing."

"Red, listen, old top, your shoulder and arm are in no condition to do any shoving. Let me go first. Whatever it is may not be secured."

"I have enough left to do what I have to do," Red answered, "shoulder or no shoulder, me bucko. Go ahead if ye want to. If ye can't move it maybe I can."

Carewe climbed up and pushed against the cover with his right hand. It gave readily, falling back like a trap door.

"It opened, Red," he called back. "Come on up."

"What do ye think I'm doin', stayin' down to make tea?" Red grunted. His wounds had made him more or less like a grizzly with the toothache.

The shaft opened in the rear room of a little stone temple that was hidden on three sides by ridges. And close to it ran the main pass leading into the mountains.

"HOLY mackinaw!" Red said as he looked out of a slit in the wall. "'Tis far beyond the lines av the little scuts we are, Carewe. Let's go back and tell Jimmie."

"Go first, Red. I'll put the cover back in place," Carewe answered.

They went back through the tunnel as far as the shaft. Red, who was a little ahead, halted as his flashlight played on an uneven wall of rock that filled the shaft from the floor to the roof of the tunnel.

"What the hell now?" he demanded. "Has it caved in on us? The damn thing was—look, Carewe!"

The head of a man protruded from under a big rock and close beside it the legs of another man showed. A foot or so away an arm stuck out between two jagged slabs of stone.

"I see, Red," Carewe answered, quietly. "It is Hukau and his two officers."

"They must have been comin' down when she caved in on them. How the hell are we—"

"The shaft did not cave, Red. Those slabs of stone are from the wall of the room. Hukau and his officers were killed and thrown down and then the rock piled on top of them."

"What? 'Tis right ye are, Carewe. I can see it now by the way the rocks lie. Who would do that? 'Tis a fine thing to happen when we—Carewe, how are we to get out?"

"I don't know, Red. If the rocks go all the way up I don't think we are going to get out, this way. Have you a knife on you, by any chance?"

"I have. Ye want it?"

"Yes. I may be able to cut a roof timber away and use it for a pry. We may be able to pry out some of the rocks. If the rest settle down and we can get them out one by one, we—"

"Here's the knife. Go and get the pry. I'll try to move this wan at the corner."

Red couldn't budge the rock and neither could Carewe get any results from the pry. Finally he put it down. "No use, Red. We are just using up our strength."

"'Tis a fine jam to be in. Here we are in a tunnel leadin' to the hills and Jimmie up above not knowin' anything about it. Bad luck to the misbegotten scuts that killed the Chinks and filled—"

"There is only one way I know of to get back, Red," Carewe interrupted, "and that is to go back to the temple, wait until dark and then try to run the Jap lines. The four Manchus tried it and failed, the Boston Bean tried it and failed, now we'll try it. If one of us gets through Jimmie can open this shaft up and take the—"

"'Tis right ye are, Carewe. Come on."

"No hurry, Red. We can't make the try before dark. I say, who could have killed Hukau and—"

"If I knew I'd tell ye but I don't any more than ye do. Come on, Carewe. The air is better up at the temple. Down here I can hardly breathe."

"All right, Red, let's go."

CHAPTER XI.

CAREWE'S DASH.

THEY went back to the shrine and after closing the exit with the cover found a place close to the roof of the temple where they could see over some of the country without being seen.

"How dark has it got to be before we start?" Red demanded impatiently after a little while.

"As black as we think it is going to get, old dear. See those Jap guns down there? No—to your left on that rock ledge. Look directly over them. What do you see?"

"I don't see nawthin'. What do ye see, Mister Eagle-Eye?"

Carewe turned and looked at Red. "I say, old bean, are you all right?" Red's

face was flushed and his eyes looked like two burnt holes in a blanket.

"I am. The shoulder and arm av me is raisin' hell and I feel hot but I'm all right. Get on wid it. What do ye see? How many times have I to ask ye?"

"I see water coming down one of the ravines bringing trees and whatnot with it. The cloudburst must have—"

"I see it now meself."

"Well, the water is going down to the—"

"Speaking av water, I wish I had a drink av ice-water. 'Tis burnin' up I am inside."

"Stay here and take it easy. I'll see if I can find some, old topper."

He found a well just back of the temple and in the temple a stone bowl in front of one of the idols. He rinsed the bowl out several times, then filled it and brought it to Red.

"'Tis what I wanted," Red said after he had taken a long drink. "Pour the rest over me. 'Tis a good man ye are of the inches av ye, Carewe. I feel better already. By night I'll be as good as new."

But by night Red Dolan was not as good as new. He was decidedly the worse for wear. His fever was raging and his entire side and arm felt, as he said to Carewe, "like somewan was using the shoulder and arm av me to build fires in."

CAREWE knew that Red could no more try to run the Japanese lines with any chance of success than he could take a running hop, skip and a jump from where he was and land in the city. And, as it grew dark, he started in to convince Red of that fact.

Finally Red said, "Go on wid ye, then. I'll stay here. But, if by daylight Jimmie does not come through the tunnel, I'll know ye have failed and then, by all the saints above, I'll start meself."

"Right. I'll leave you plenty of water and—"

"Leave it and be gone. Ye talk too damn much—all the time. Who the hell do ye think— I'm sorry, Carewe. Ye know how much I think av ye. Go on, ye little cock av the world. Ye can make it. Don't think av me at all. Think av the little golden wans and av Jimmie."

Carewe got the water for Red and did what he could to make him comfortable, which wasn't much.

As he started, Red said, "I have nawthin' on me to stand off any scuts that might come. The gat av me is on me bed far back in the city."

Carewe took off his belt from which hung a holstered .45 Colt.

"I'll leave mine with you, Red."

"Will ye not need it?"

Carewe smiled. "If I'm caught, Red, a .45 Colt could not clear the way for me. Good-by, oldtimer. Easy does it, remember."

"Good-by, Carewe. Good luck to ye. If ye don't make it, I'll try it—and if I don't make it, 'tis joining the Codfish we'll—what the hell are ye standin' around for? Go on about the business av ye."

Carewe, as soon as he got outside the temple, stood still for a moment. It was pitch dark, a darkness that seemed to be as thick as a London fog. Carewe like most flyers, could orient himself. He stood there and in his brain drew a straight line to the Jap guns and from them to the water in the ravine. Then he started for the guns.

"MISTO JAP must be taking time out," Jimmie Cordie said about four o'clock in the morning as he sat with Grigsby and Tseng Wang on the wall near the largest breach.

"He probably has enough to do getting back in shape. The cloudburst must have wrecked him more or less. The Yid says that he intends getting up very shortly."

"Yeah? Well, what Mr. Cohen says and what Mr. Cohen will do, are horses of two—"

Tseng Wang rose. "One comes," he said softly, "through the mud and water."

Jimmie Cordie and Grigsby also rose and Jimmie answered, "Your ears must be more than—I hear it now. Whoever it is, is trying for this breach in the wall."

"He is close," Tseng Wang announced a minute afterwards, and he drew his sword.

Both Jimmie Cordie and George Grigsby drew their Colts and then, with

their left hands, their flashlights. "Put it on him, George," Jimmie commanded a moment later.

Two flashlights picked up a running figure about fifty feet away. "It's a—for the love of Mike! It's Carewe! How the heck did he get out and—come on, Jonathan, old kid."

Carewe came on, and when he arrived, sat down on a rock and gasped for breath.

"Red and I—Red and I went down—my word, I can't—get the giddy—old breath."

"Take your time," Jimmie answered. "Draw a long one and hold it for a minute. That will ease you up."

"I'm all right now. Red and I—"

"Where is Red?"

"Holed up in a temple way up in the hills."

"Wounded?"

"Not any more than he was, Jimmie. We—yesterday—we went . . ."

It took Carewe some time to tell it all. He had got to the Jap guns without meeting or hearing anything. He couldn't see anything and neither could any one else outside of the light cast by a camp fire or flashlight. Around the guns were the tents of the artillerymen and several fires. He had gone to the left, then swung back on his line for the ravine.

As he cleared some scrub timber he could see other camp fires along the ravine on both sides. He headed to the right and got well above them, and then turned left again and reached the water. There was an uprooted tree grounded on the bank. He got in among the branches and pushed it out into the water. To hear him tell it, that was all there was to it. Duck soup all the way.

The tree floated down, grounding every now and then. He would push it off, and as he said, "resume the jolly old voyage." Finally the tree floated out of the hills and grounded for good where the water became shallow. From there he had started for the city and made it, on foot.

"Well," Jimmie Cordie said, "there is only one explanation. The god of luck had tight hold of your hand, Jonathan. Tseng Wang, detail a working party of Big Swords. We'll clear out the shaft. Just who would have such a strong interest in keeping the shaft a secret that they would kill Hukau and his officers is beyond me."

"YOU'RE in the wrong pew," Jimmie said a little later as he, Grigsby, Tseng Wang, Carewe and a party of Big Swords entered the room where the shell had exploded. It was lighted by many torches.

Carewe looked around, puzzled. There was no sign of a wall blown out and no dead bodies of priests. Instead there were ten live priests conducting some ceremonial in front of an altar that stretched from wall to wall. Among them the high priest.

"No, Jimmie. I am sure this is the room. Smell the h. e.?"

"That doesn't mean anything. It could have come through any of those cracks in the—you're right, Carewe. There is a piece of the shell bedded in the wall."

"The wall was blown out where the altar is. I am sure of that, Jimmie."

"Yeah? Maybeso the priests can explain about Hukau and his officers. Tseng Wang, have that altar moved to one side."

Tseng Wang, who had been looking at the priest through cold, scornful eyes, snarled an order. To a Manchu, a Chinese priest is as a snake. Ever since the Manchus took China the intrigues of the priests caused them more trouble than anything else, and all Manchus remember it.

As some of the Big Swords advanced, the high priest held up his right hand and shrilly ordered them back. When he saw they ignored the order he whipped a sword out from under his robe and ran in front of the altar.

The rest of the priests also produced swords and ranged themselves in a line in front of the high priest.

"So that's it," Jimmie Cordie said. "Cut the way through them, Tseng Wang." He was thinking of the women and children that for some reason the priests would keep in a city that was being shelled.

The priests did not last as long as it would take to tell. They fell, dead or

wounded, under Manchu swords as better swordsmen than they have fallen. The altar was moved, and behind it was the room in which was the shaft.

"They did it for some reason," Jimmie Cordie said. "See if you can persuade one of the wounded to tell you why, Tseng Wang."

Tseng Wang went over to a wounded priest, lifted him up and pinned him against the wall. "Speak, dog of a priest. Quickly, unless you wish the death of disembowelment. Why were the Lord Hukau and his officers slain and the shaft filled with rock?"

The priest's eyes closed so that he might not see the grim face and menacing eyes of the Manchu. He stammered out something in Chinese. Tseng Wang let go of him and he fell to the floor.

"The priests built the tunnel many years ago. They intended using it if it became necessary to escape from the city, carrying with them treasure they had accumulated during many years. No war lord who held the city ever knew of the tunnel. The priests held it secret for their own use. They had decided that the time had come to escape just before the shell blew the wall down. They were afraid that the Lord Hukau would use the tunnel to get the people of the city away and they would have to go also, exposing their treasure.

"After the foreign devils had gone down into the tunnel, they slew the Lord Hukau and his officers and threw the bodies into the shaft, afterwards filling up the shaft with rocks to force the foreign devils to leave by the temple exit. They thought that the men of Nippon would surely kill the foreign devils. Later, as the men of Nippon attacked, they were going to clear the shaft and escape through it."

"I see. Leaving the women and children here and the men who were defending the city for the men of Nippon to slay. As priests they were a fine bunch of copperhead snakes. Get the shaft cleared."

The shaft was cleared and the bodies of Hukau and his officers brought up. Then Jimmie Cordie and some of the Big Swords went through and got Red.

"So he made it, did he, the little gamecock?" Red said. "'Tis glad I am to see ye, Jimmie darlin'. The fever av me has gone down and . . ."

CHAPTER XII.

DISCOVERED.

THE Japanese held off from any attack during the day; why, only the Japs knew. It might have been, as Grigsby said, that they were getting back in shape.

As soon as it became dark, an advance guard was sent through the tunnel and then the old men, women and children were passed along into the tunnel by strong arms.

Jimmie Cordie, with a machine gun and some of the Big Swords, remained at the shaft mouth until every living human being was in the tunnel or outside the shrine, then blocked up the space where the wall had been blown out with great rocks and went down the shaft.

There was not the slightest indication that the Japanese were aware of what was going on. And they were not aware of it, either, until the Nine Red Gods sat in the game again.

Two Japanese non-commissioned officers, commanding squads engaged in getting the guns back in shape and also retrieving any camp equipment that had been washed down to lower levels by the storm, had found a large flask of brandy which had belonged to an officer. One of them pocketed it, and after they had been relieved they walked into the timber to drink in peace without having to share their find with other non-coms.

They passed the sentries with a snarled countersign and avoided the outer patrols. At last when they thought they were far enough out they sat down, their backs to a tree, and took a drink. Being converts to the theory that half a blanket was worse than none at all, they took another.

After which they began talking of Nippon and their homes. One of them had a poetic strain in him, and very soon, after another drink, began to recite poetry. All of a sudden he got the idea that he could not recite properly while surrounded by trees. He needed wider,

clearer space. The top of the hill was what he needed, he decided after another pull at the bottle.

They got to the top of the hill and the would-be poet recited poetry to his heart's content. At least, he did until the flask was empty Then they started down, neither of them any too steady on their feet.

The Nine Red Gods must have decided to give the Japanese a round because the path the two Jap non-commissioned officers followed led to a lower ridge that ran along the main pass.

"KEEP going right up the pass," Jimmie ordered the Manchu in command of the vanguard. "About three miles from here you will come to a pass leading to the right. Take it and keep on going. It leads to the Mountain of the Birds. From there to the Big Sword encampment the—"

"I know the way, Captain Cordie."

"All right. Get going. If you meet attack we'll come up and—"

Two of the Chinese bearers, who were carrying part of a machine gun, dropped it. One had stumbled and let go his hold, and the other, not being prepared, let go his also to save himself from falling.

The gun part fell on a rock, making quite a noise. A split second afterwards two flashlights played on the machine gun part and then on Jimmie Cordie and the men near him. Right after the light went out and there came the sound of running feet, going down the hill.

The two Japs had gotten to the ridge and had heard the sound of marching feet.

At first they thought it was one of their regiments going into the hills for some reason. They dropped to their hands and knees and got closer to the pass. Close enough to hear the gun part drop. They played their flashlights down on the pass. What they saw sobered both of them. They got up and started down the hill as fast as they could run.

"We can catch the runners, Captain Cordie," a young Manchu officer said eagerly.

"Go and do it."

Four or five Manchus ran up the side of the pass. Before they got to the top the two Jap non-coms began shouting the alarm at the top of their voices. It was not a full minute before the Jap shouts were answered, and then there came other shouts, and right after, bugle calls.

"Tseng Wang, take with you all Big Swords but one hundred who will stay here with me. My orders to Hsai are canceled. You will start the column up the pass that leads to the left just before the pass opens to the right. It leads to the encampment of the Uryankhes Tartars, which is much nearer than the Big Swords encampment. Say to the officer you designate to command the vanguard that he is to tell Sahet Khan that I, Captain Cordie, his blood brother, ask him to protect the old men, women and children until the Lord Chang-Lung Liang comes for them. That he is to be friends with the Lord Chang, for whom he knows I fight.

"You will, after the column is in the pass to the left, close it to the little men of Nippon, and as soon as the column has reached the upper pass and starts to descend into the valley, that pass is also to be closed by Manchu swords of Chi who are in the vanguard. One officer is to go with the column. The Uryankhes will see the column as soon as it starts down. Is that plain to you, Tseng Wang?"

"Yes, Captain Cordie, it is plain. The entrance to the pass on the left is to be closed to the mongrels of Nippon, and also the entrance to the upper pass. They shall be closed, O lieutenant of the head of the House of Chi. Is it permitted that I ask a question?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"We will close this pass right here for as long as we can, Tseng Wang. Captains Dolan, Carewe and Grigsby remain here with me. You will take Captain Cohen with—"

THE Yid's litter had been brought up by Grigsby and Carewe. As Jimmie said "Captain Cohen" the Yid sat up.

"Nothing diddingk," he said firmly. "Captain Cohen stays right here mit de gang und don't go novere else."

"He does like—" Jimmie began when Grigsby interrupted. "Let him stay, Jimmie."

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "At that, why not, if he wants to. Stick around, Abie."

"I intend to," answered the Yid with a grin. "I can shoot it a gat if I can't take von of de guns."

"Get started, Tseng Wang. We'll fuss around with the little men of Nippon."

The Manchu saluted, ordered five of the Big Sword officers and the swordsmen they commanded to remain with Captain Cordie, then ran up the pass.

"We won't last ten minutes here, Jimmie," Grigsby said. "Let's go up the pass a little ways and see if we can find a better place."

"From what I hear we better make it snappy. Misto Jap is wide awake. Come on."

Four hundred odd yards up, the pass curved sharply to the left and the walls narrowed and became much steeper. It was evident that many years ago the pass had been the bed of a swift river. On both walls there were cut-in places, some large and some small, where the current had worn away the softer rock. The moon had come from behind the clouds, and now, as Jimmie looked at the sides, it was fairly light.

"See that place on the left?" he asked. "It was made to order for a last stand thing. We'll place the machine guns there and the swordsmen can hole up below in the smaller one. The Japs can't get at us on either side or in front until they come around the curve, and there is not much room to line up for a charge. We will get set up there and wait for Misto Jap to poke his nose around the curve. At which time we will shoot it off for him."

"I say, can't the flaming blighters get into the pass beyond us, leaving a detachment to keep us holed up?" Carewe asked.

"No, Jonathan. At least not for two days. I hunted all over this country with the Uryankhes, and as far as I know no passes lead into this one either from the left or the right except the small ones below us and those that lead to the Big Swords and the Tartar encampment. And to get to those two without coming up this one means heap plenty climbing up and down and the bridging of more than a few precipices.

"Three miles as the crow flies may mean fifty miles on foot in this man's mountains. There are passes that run parallel to this, but none that come into it except the two I've mentioned. To get above us in this pass the Japs would have to get to the pass on the left. And to get there without using this pass is some job. If we can stop them for three or four hours right here, and the Big Swords can hold them a little while at the mouth of the other passes, the column will win through."

"Sure we will stop the duck-faced scuts," Red said. "Come on, let's get up there. What are ye waiting for?"

"I was explaining the topography to our old friend, Jonathan Carewe, Mr. Dolan. Start up if you are in a hurry."

"Ye better be in a hurry yerself. Hear that below us?"

"I do—and it leads me to believe you are right about hurrying, Mr. Dolan."

THE Yid, once he was on the cut-in, and made comfortable with his back to the wall, demanded, "Give it to me a 30-30. I can hold it under de arm and against de rock. I am still mad at dem."

"Don't get too ambitious," Jimmie answered. "You're here, aren't you? Be content with that. The jar would open that wound of yours and you'd bleed to death, you Yid chimpanzee."

"Vot de hell difference does it make if I do? I get it a few Japs in de meanvile."

"Yeah? Well, you don't get a 30-30 just the same, and I've a darn good mind to take that .45 away from you I saw Red tuck under the blanket before we started."

"Vot? Und leave it me mit nothingk? Oi, mine persecuted race! Jimmie, you ain't got it de heart to did it. I vill be good—no foolingk. I vill just sit it here und vatch until it comes de finish."

"All right, Abie. I'll take your word for it. We won't have any time to do

any first aiding, remember that, old kid Cohen."

"I wonder what is holdin' the banties," Red said. "They should be here by now. Listen to them maneuvering around below. To hear all the bugles sounding off ye'd think they was afraid of an attack themselves."

"Holy cats! You've nicked it, Red. That's what they are afraid of. Those gents that put the flashes on us only saw some Manchu swordsmen and us and part of a machine gun. I'll bet the Japs think they are due for an attack from the hills and are reforming their lines. Go down and tell them it's only us, Red, and that we're waiting for them up here."

"I will not. Let the banties find it out for themselves. I wish Beany was here."

"So do we all, Red. Well, if you won't go, old man Cordie's son Jimmie is going to cork up and get a little sleep. Wake me if the doorbell rings."

"We will, Jimmie darlin'. Who is to fight the guns?"

"Not you, you red-headed ape. You might jam yours to get a chance to jazz around with a sword. I'll fight one and George will fight the other. Carewe will help me and you can help George. Any further questions you have to ask, Mister Dolan, ask them of my friend Mr. Grigsby."

"'Tis a sad thing to be accused av jammin' a gun in battle. Sorry the day I hear ye say it, Jimmie Cordie. For many the long year have I been wid ye and never have ye—"

"You mean sorry the night, Mister Dolan. Well, didn't you?"

"Didn't I what?"

"You know what I mean. Didn't you jam that gun on purpose?"

"Jimmie, listen to me. Since ye ask me outright, I dunno. I was pullin' trigger and thinking av poor Bean and wishin' for a sword so that I could get to close quarters wid them that got him, and—I dunno, Jimmie darlin', maybe I did pull so fast that I knew she'd jam."

"That's coming clean, Red. If you did, you did it subconsciously, and that lets you out. Forget it, Terence Aloysius."

"I will, then. What does that—that—subconscious thing mean, Jimmie darlin'?"

"Ask George to explain it. I'm going to sleep."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST STAND.

THE Japanese were, as Red said, afraid of an attack. The two non-coms told of seeing Manchu swordsmen and other men they did not recognize and of seeing a machine gun part. The Japs jumped to the conclusion that word had got to the Big Swords or to the Tartars that they knew Jimmie Cordie was allied with. So the Japs did exactly what any other force would have done. They reformed their lines to face the hills.

No outfit, civilized or otherwise, cares about getting tangled up in the hills with hillmen. There is no room to maneuver men, and less room to quickly place guns in commanding positions. The Japs were no exception to the rule. The few times any of their regiments had got any distance into the hills, they had been badly cut up. The commanding officers knew that the Big Swords and the Tartars and other fighting tribes had only one thought when trained troops were seen in the hills, and that was, "there is food and drink for our swords."

While the Japanese were not exactly in the hills, strictly speaking, they were close enough to cause them to change their battle front as quickly as possible.

They did not have any idea at all that the men seen by the non-coms had come from the city of Fung-hwan. And so, for at least an hour, they awaited an attack that did not come. At last they cautiously advanced a couple of regiments to flush up whoever was in the hills.

The only place they succeeded in getting contact was in the main pass. The two companies that went up the pass were suddenly greeted with machine gun-fire and a Manchu sword charge. The few Japs that got back reported that the Big Swords were in force there.

This still further puzzled the Japs, as

they could not figure out why the Big Swords would all be in one pass and not spread out over the hills and in the other passes. So they decided to wait until daylight before investigating further.

If Jimmie Cordie had known of that decision he could have withdrawn up the pass and been well on his way to the Uryankhes before the sun came up—but he didn't. As far as he knew the Japs might any moment come up the pass in force, so he stayed right where he was.

In the morning the ruined city was still, so still that it finally dawned on the Japs that it was deserted.

A detachment was sent to it and not long afterwards the officer in command reported that there was not a man, woman or child in the city of Funghwan.

"But how—how could they have come through our lines?" asked a well meaning but not very bright colonel. "They have neither planes—"

"A tunnel," snarled Colonel Nagayo, almost beside himself with rage. "A tunnel that put them beyond our lines. It is they that were seen in the pass! Not the Big Swords or the Tartars! Captain Cordie and the other mongrels think they can hold the pass against us while the Chinese escape to the Big Swords! And we wait here for a Big Sword attack. Lieutenant General Mayoro, I ask in the name of the intelligence division that the pass be taken promptly!"

A CRACK regiment was sent up the pass with orders to mop up, and while doing it, take the white men prisoners if possible.

The advance company of the regiment trotted briskly up the pass until it came to the curve and started around it, then came to a halt and looked around. It was the last look for a good many of them. Two machine guns opened fire, and after a moment or so there came, as the machine guns stopped, a charge of Manchu swordsmen. The Japanese, thrown into confusion by the machine gun fire, fought as they always do, bravely. But before the second company got to within a hundred yards of the curve, the first company had ceased to exist.

The Manchu swordsmen went back to their hiding place, but not all of them. Fifteen of them had fallen.

"That's knockin' the pink toed little divils off the Christmas tree," Red announced. "We can do that all day, can't we, Jimmie?"

"Well, here is a sum in simple arithmetic for you, Mr. Dolan. If we lose fifteen Big Swords and use two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition to stop Jap Company Number One, what number Jap company will arrive right after all the Big Swords and all the ammunition have been used up? Before you answer, take a look at the ammunition."

"I never was good at arithmetic. What the hell do I care what the number av the company is? By now the women and childer ought to be wid the friend av ye."

"That's right, Red. They ought to be there or close to there. If we can hold Misto Jap for a little while now it's a cinch that they'll get to Uryankhes territory. The column, I mean, not the Japs."

"We know what ye mean, Jimmie. Well, what's to stop us holding the Japs for as long as we want?"

"Oi," the Yid said, "how I lofe it you, Irish bummer. Come over here und I vill smack it you on de forehead mit de kiss of respect."

"Ye will what? Jimmie, the Yid scut is gettin' better—praise to all the saints in paradise. Did ye hear what he said to me, the Hester Street gibbon? Are ye really feelin' better, Abie darlin'?"

"I am, much better. Ven company number twenty-von gets it here, I vill go down and cakevalk dem back to de mines all by myself."

Jimmie Cordie laughed. "Wait until company eighty-eight gets here, Yid. You'll have that much more strength."

"Jimmie, do you think this is the last stand av us?"

"Yeah, boy. We couldn't run now if we wanted to, and—"

"Who the hell wants to run, ye shrimp av the world? There is no run in any of us and well ye know it, Jimmie Cordie."

"Did I say there was, you big ape?"

"I seen it de Irish gonif run once," the Yid asserted. "My, how he did pick it dem up and lay dem down."

"Well, ye Yid black and white kitty! Here I was worried to the heart av me about ye, and now, now ye say I ran."

"You remember it dot time in Shanghai dot you und me und anodder feller got it into de fan-tan house by mistake? Vere de two big Chink vomen came it at us mit de brooms? You made it de first hundred yards in nothingk flat—und de next hundred in less."

"Aw, hell, who wouldn't run from a couple of women wid brooms? 'Tis not what I mean and well ye—"

"Listen, Yid," Jimmie Cordie said, "you are doing altogether too much talking. You're liable to open that—here comes company number two!"

The Japanese companies kept right on coming and would have come two at a time if the pass had been wide enough.

And as they showed they were met with machine gunfire and then sword charges. But the swordsmen became fewer and fewer, and so did the belts of ammunition for the machine guns.

In three hours there were left of the swordsmen fifteen, and of belts for the machine guns two.

THERE was a lull between Jap companies for some unknown reason and during it Red said, "Think av something, Jimmie. Ye always have before."

"I only wish I could, Mister Dolan. Remember the story about the pitcher that went to the well once too often? I'm afraid I've used my thinker once too often. About all I can get as a connected thought is 'I hope the column has got to the Uryankhes Tartars by this time,' over and over again. And if it hasn't, after the Japs clean up on us they still have the Manchu swords to go through in two places. Why think of anything, Red? Do you want to live forever?"

"Sure he does," put in the Yid. "He is afraid of going to de hot place mit de rest of de Dolans."

"Here they come!" Jimmie Cordie interrupted. "Hold your swords back," to the Manchu officer. "We'll let them come right up after us this time."

The Japanese did that coming up thing, without a second's hesitation. They came up with bayonets fixed, the officers with revolvers spitting flame and lead.

But they met swords of steel and .45 Colt bullets. The machine gun stayed the upward rush for a moment or two, then several Japanese soldiers below fired at Grigsby and Carewe who were now operating it. Both men were hit and fell away from the gun.

"Did ye see that, Jimmie?" Red asked as he reloaded his Colt. "George and Carewe are gone."

"They may only be wounded, Red. Stay with it, old kid."

The Fighting Yid had in some way got to his feet. He stood, his back to the wall, using his Colt .45 and talking now as ever.

The Manchus were fighting like they always fight, to the death. Jimmie Cordie and Red Dolan stood as if on parade and shot with deadly accuracy. Rifle bullets were singing the death song close to them now.

Nearer and nearer came the bayonets of the Japanese, and as they got close, the rifle fire stopped for fear of hitting Japs.

"So long, Red," Jimmie said calmly, "I hope we both go to the same—"

The thunder of countless hoofs came to their ears and mingled with it the wild, full throated, menacing yell of Uryankhes Tartars charging home.

The Japs heard it and stopped, then turned and executed one of their rearward movements, a very fast rearward movement indeed.

Down the pass, filling it from side to side, came the Uryankhes, led by Sahet Khan. He had brought with him ten thousand of the fiercest, most dreaded fighting men of the hills, to rescue his blood brother, Jimmie Cordie. The Uryankhes fight any and all at any and all times, and to them the Japanese, for all their guns, big and little, were small men to be slashed at and ridden over. The Jap regiment in the pass went down under Tartar swords and horses' hoofs. And the Tartars kept right on.

As Sahet Khan rode past, Red whispered. "'Tis goofy I am, Jimmie darlin', and seein' ghosts. Beany was ridin' wid Sahet Khan. 'Tis back he has come from the land av spirits to—"

"Snap out of it, Red. That was the Codfish Duke."

"I'm just after tellin' ye it was. He looked as lifelike as—"

"Red! Come to, you idiot! The Bean escaped, you double fool! He escaped in some way and got to Sahet Khan instead of the Big Swords. You look as if—well, for Pete's sake! Listen to that! That's not Jap artillery. That's Big Sword stuff. Well—" Jimmie Cordie sat down on a rock. "As long as the Big Swords and the Uryankhes have come to take our place at the party, I guess we can sit down for a minute."

"Oi, Jimmie!" yelled the Yid. "George und Carewe both tried to get it up!"

THE Japanese stood right to it and took the charge of the Uryankhes Tartars as they take all charges. But they were spread out, and regiments were more or less in other regiments' way when it came to stopping a charge that came out of a pass. Ten thousand Uryankhes on horseback, who don't care what they charge and firmly think that if they die in battle they are more than lucky, are a lot of Tartars to stop and the Japanese found it out up there near the city of Fung-hwan that day.

And suddenly, from hills higher than the ones on which Japanese guns were mounted, there came a terrific artillery fire, and in addition to that, Big Sword regiments with fixed bayonets charged up from the river and from the east and west and on the Jap guns.

The Bean, as soon as he could swing wide, went back to the pass.

As he arrived, Red said, "What the hell do ye mean by bein' alive, ye long-legged shrimp from Bosting? 'Tis hopin' ye was dead, we all was. How dare ye be alive and kickin'?"

"I hate like the dickens to disappoint you, Mister Dolan. Where did you get it, Yid?"

"I got a bullet in de chest. It ain't nothingk, Codfisher. My, I am glad to see you vonce more. Never mind dot red-headed Irish bum. He vos cryin' all de time about you."

"Well, ye Yid, monkey faced—"

"Get over here," called Jimmie. "George and Carewe are coming back to life."

Sahet Khan and the Manchu noble Chang-Lung Liang who led the Big Swords, were old campaigners, and soon saw that they could not whip the Japs in the open. They finally got their men in hand and retreated to the hills. There the Tartars and the Big Swords snarled defiance to the Japs and dared them to come into the hills and fight it out.

The Japanese were quite content where they were.

Chang-Lung Liang and Sahet Khan rode up to where Jimmie Cordie was giving Grigsby and Carewe first aid. Both men had been badly but not fatally wounded.

Jimmie looked up. "The women and children, Sahet Khan?"

"They are safe, blood brother."

Chang-Lung Liang looked down at Jimmie Cordie, who was kneeling beside Carewe. "You have once more fulfilled a trust, resplendent one. Again shall the golden scroll of the House of Chi be opened and the further debt to you be engraved on the sheets."

Jimmie Cordie grinned as he answered, "I think there are quite a few other names that ought to be engraved above mine, mighty one. That of Captain Winthrop among the first."

That night the Uryankhes Tartars and the Big Swords started for their encampments, leaving a fringe of men to bluff the Japs into thinking that they still awaited attack.

It did not come, and late the next day the Japanese moved to the south—without even the bearskins to show for their loss in men and equipment.

Red rode up alongside the Boston Bean. "Jimmie says that wid care and good luck, George and Carewe will pull through, Beany. Tell me about the trip av ye to the wild men—emir av the world."

"Go talk to Mr. Cohen," the Bean answered loftily. "Us emirs don't hold no truck with red-headed apes, me good man."

Red sighed happily before he began telling just what he thought about the Codfish Duke of Massachusetts.

THE END.

Herries choked off her startled outcry

The Terror of Algiers

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Solomon in the Catacombs," "Jade from Swatow," etc.

Shrewd old John Solomon wouldn't tell even his young American ally what he guessed about those African "suicide" murders

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT happened in Algiers, where almost anything can happen. John Herries, ex-aviator and buyer for an American firm, might have thought less about the mysterious death of that Frenchman had it not been that two others had died in exactly the same manner. The three men appeared to have committed suicide, but the parallel details of their deaths indicated, unmistakably, murder.

Herries saw a definite connection between the last two cases (the first victim had been the Count de Chausson, a retired military man belonging to a wealthy family). Herries had been traveling on a French steamer bound for Algiers. A stranger named Leconte, evidently terrorized by something or some one, had furtively accosted him the day before they were due in port. He pleaded with Herries to take charge of a certain envelope during the remainder of the voyage, returning it to him when they landed.

A few hours later Herries started to retire, and chanced upon an extraordinarily beautiful young woman, in the act of leaving his cabin. He refused to let her go; but though his effects had been gone through, nothing was stolen, and he could do nothing about the matter. She refused to talk, refused also to give

This story began last week

her right name; but later he learned that she was Mlle. Zelie Vassal. Obviously, she had been hunting for the envelope given to him by Leconte.

Next morning, Herries learned that during the night Leconte had been shot to death, presumably by his own hand. Not knowing what else to do, he opened the envelope entrusted to his care, and found therein a simple camera negative, addressed to one A. M. Parker, St. George's Hotel.

His first move upon landing was to hunt up the unknown Parker—only to find that the individual in question was a Miss Alice Parker. Only a week previous the girl's father, an American architect, had been murdered under circumstances closely resembling those surrounding the death of Leconte. She disclaimed all knowledge of the negative, except that Leconte had been commissioned to get it from her father's safety-deposit box in Marseilles.

Herries persuaded her to let him have several prints made from the negative, and when this was done, he realized for the first time just how anxious was the Vassal woman's partner, a notorious gambler named Nick Zontroff, to get hold of the negative. Several unsuccessful attempts, both by force and by bribery, were made to make Herries give the film up. Then he placed prints and negative in an envelope and mailed them to himself, hoping to outwit Zontroff.

Then he met Alice Parker's friend, the mysterious little cockney, John Solomon, and learned that the Prefect of Police, who had promised to follow up a clew on the death of Alice Parker's father, was the fourth man to be killed—another "suicide."

From Solomon, Herries also learned that his own life was in grave danger.

CHAPTER III *(Continued).*

A HOUSE OF LUXURY.

I SAT there for another half hour before the village postman showed up with his little black box of letters and pen and inkpot. Then I was at the desk before him—sure enough, along came my letter. I grabbed it from the clerk, turned to the lift, and went up to my room.

So far, I had not unpacked a thing.

With the door locked, I tore open the envelope I had addressed to myself earlier in the day, and took out the film and the two prints. Then I unpacked my bag, very thoughtfully, had a quick shower in the immense tiled bathroom, and got into fresh clothes. I had plenty to think about, too. That hotel room was about as wide open as the sky. A balcony went clear around each floor, opening into every room, and I knew by experience that the Arab maids were likely to come walking unconcernedly in at all hours, without bothering to use the doors. Anybody could go walking anywhere in that hotel.

As for the prints, the vague figure puzzled me no longer. The picture showed a middle-aged and rather ugly lady, and beside her, standing with a smirk on his gorilla's face, Nick Zontroff.

Here, beyond question, was an answer to everything—that is, one sort of answer. At least, I had an inkling of who was behind the deviltry going on in Algiers. This picture was of some enormous value to Nick Zontroff. The reason was something else again. Why a snapshot of himself, in the company of a most unattractive woman, should be cause for the hottest kind of intrigue and the most dastardly sort of murder was impossible to tell. What I had seen of Bijou, the Vassal woman, and the young officer, however, linked up with this picture in running the trail directly to Zontroff. But unfortunately, not so far as the law was concerned.

I was thinking of this as I struggled into a clean shirt. When a sharp knock

came at the door, it opened to admit the desk clerk in person, who bowed profoundly to me.

"*M'sieu'!* It is M. Zontroff, who requests that you accompany him for a ride."

Instead of *taking* me for a ride, he was offering one; but I had the uneasy suspicion that it might amount to the same thing.

There were a number of things I might have done; so I did none of them, and merely told the clerk that I would be down as soon as I could dress.

He departed. I finished dressing, as I was about to leave, catching up the film that had caused all this trouble and shoving it into my pocket. Cigarettes, money, a clean handkerchief, and I was ready.

Civilization had so far improved on French custom at this hotel that a guest might use the "lift" to go down as well as up. When I stepped out into the narrow lobby, the clerk motioned to the door. I stepped outside, to see a huge Minerva, about the biggest thing on wheels in all Algiers. Sitting back grandly in the tonneau was the gorilla Zontroff, alone.

His chauffeur held open the door for me, he himself held out his hand, and I climbed in. It was not quite four-thirty, so I had plenty of time for a drive.

"Well, well, my friend!" he exclaimed in his throaty, carrying voice. "You see, I keep my promise! We are going for a little drive.—You are well?"

"Usually," I responded, sinking back beside him.

The car started off, heading for Mustapha Supérieur.

"I am delighted to see you again," I said politely.

"Yes?" he returned, giving me a look. "You have heard of me, perhaps?"

"Never in my life, before we met this noon," I said. "But I have something that belongs to you, obviously. I recognized it as such. Here it is."

I took out the film and handed it to him.

If he had been sitting ten thousand feet up in a perfectly clear sky, and tracer bullets had suddenly begun to smoke around him, he could not have been more astonished. For a minute or so he was utterly incapable of speech or motion. All he could do was sit there and gape.

I pretended not to notice his stupefaction.

"I've had the devil's own time over that picture," I said. "I started to throw it away, then I took a look at it and recognized you. A lot of people seemed to know I had it, for some reason. They've been buzzing around all afternoon. Since the man in the picture is evidently you, I kept it for you."

He took out a silk handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his face, with its flat nose and square-cut, retreating chin. Then he reached out and grabbed me. It was just a quick, impulsive hug, but for a minute I thought I was gone.

"Listen, my friend," he said, seeming to grope for words. "You—*mon Dieu!* It is incredible. Incredible!—You are right. Other people wanted that picture. You understand, it compromised a lady! And now—now! Wait a minute."

HE roared at the chauffeur, who drew in to the curb. Zontroff pulled out matches, struck one, and touched it to the film. His huge,

hairy fingers were positively shaking. Then he turned to me.

"Now you come with me," he said, in a grim, determined manner. "You are my friend; I owe you something. Say no more! We must not talk here. Wait."

Again he roared, probably in Bulgar, and the swarthy chauffeur threw in his gears. We shot away at a mad speed, paying absolutely no attention to any restrictions. When an Arab gendarme whistled after us, Zontroff merely spat a curse at him. He clapped me on the knee and shoved a cigar at me. Then we were out of the boulevard, swinging into one of those lovely hill roads that pierce the heights behind Algiers, where fairy villas cling to the hillsides above ancient farms once worked by Christian slaves.

Zontroff broke into song, rumbling some queer melody. His eyes were shining, his fists beating time. He was like a man drunk, but he was drunk with sheer jubilation, and not with wine. Somehow, that picture had meant an enormous lot to him. The explanation he had given was obviously false.

Suddenly he turned to me, beaming.

"And to think," he observed, "that I considered you clever, when you were only stupidly honest! You are a rare man, my friend.—What do you want most in the world? Money? Beautiful women? Wine? You shall have them all.—Jewels? You shall have the finest in the world! What do you most desire?"

"Some American cigarettes," I said gravely.

Zontroff rolled his eyes at me, then broke into a roar of laughter.

"You shall have them as well," he said, when he could speak again. He wiped tears of laughter from his eyes. "Look! There is my house."

It was a huge place on a hilltop, for which we were racing full speed. As we drew around the last curve, we passed between massive gates where two men, evidently guards, saluted us. The walls, stretching to either hand, were eight feet high, and enormously thick—those striking walls of northern Africa that are seen everywhere. Before us appeared the house, a massive structure of huge size, glittering with tile work and mosaic. We came to a halt beneath a porte-cochère, and a servant in black-and-scarlet livery opened the car door.

"Send Boris to me in the library, instantly," barked Zontroff.

I followed him into a house the magnificence of which was astonishing. The rooms were large, and furnished with a gaudy, ornate splendor beyond description. Some French decorator had evidently been given a free hand, and he had made the most of it.

We passed through these gorgeous rooms and came into a large library, evidently the personal room of my host, and the place where he was most at home. It was rather untidy, with the air of being much used.

A valet appeared, took our things, and bowed respectfully as Zontroff gave him orders.

I glanced around the room. Instead of the usual tiled walls, the place was paneled with oak. There were easy chairs, a big, flat-topped desk, tantalus and smoking outfits. And on the walls hung old masters—three or four of them. A huge fireplace was at one end of the room, and at the other a wide, immense window giving an outlook over the gardens and the green valleys beyond.

"This is a house of luxury, my friend," said Zontroff proudly. "The air is cooled. It has everything money can— Ah! You, Boris!"

He turned, as a thin, cadaverous, snake-eyed man appeared and bowed.

Zontroff flew out at him, with no regard whatever for my presence.

"You fool, Boris! In five minutes I have done what all your fools could not do.—Call them off, do you understand? M. Herries is my guest. Whatever he desires is his."

Boris bowed. "Very well, excellency. The native whom we found last night in the garden—"

"Yes, yes!" broke in Zontroff. "He has talked?"

"He will not talk, excellency."

"I shall come at once." Zontroff turned to me. "My friend, make yourself at home. Coffee will be served. I shall return in a few moments, if you will excuse me."

I nodded, and he strode off with Boris, his huge, ungainly figure shambling over the floor with tremendous rapidity. He looked and acted constantly more like a gorilla.

NOW I had to take a long chance, and I concluded that there was no time like the present. On the desk was a telephone, and taking it from the rack, I heard the welcome voice of a feminine French operator. I gave the number of the St. George Hotel, and presently had Alice Parker.

"Herries speaking," I said. "And in a hurry.—Can you reach our friend Solomon?"

"Why, yes," she said in surprise.

"Do it quick. Tell him to get into my room at my hotel; he'll be able to work it somehow. There are two pictures on the dresser. Tell him to get them and keep them until we see him to-night. He can learn at the hotel who called and got me. I can't talk more now. So long."

I hung up—and just in time, too. I had no more than lighted a cigarette when one of the gaudily liveried servants came in with a huge silver tray bearing coffee and liqueurs. I paid no attention to him, but strolled around the room looking at the pictures and the view. This was a library which contained no books whatever.

When I was alone again I made a closer examination, hoping for some light on Zontroff. I got none. Somehow the thought of what I had just done made me shiver. If that telephone conversation had been overheard. Still, it was unlikely. This was Zontroff's private line, and he would not allow any tampering. An instant later the telephone buzzed softly. Going to the desk, I picked up the instrument and spoke with his deep rumbling growl.

"Excellency!" came the response in French. "This is Montjoy, at the *bureau*. Countess de Chausson is here now, in the other room. She has brought the money, but she will not give it to me until the letters are placed in her hands. She threatens, is hysterical, blames us for the death of her husband. She is dangerous. Shall I give her the letters and close the affair?"

"Yes," I said.

"Very well, excellency."

I turned from the desk, grinning to myself. I had fooled that little rat, and no mistake. Then I sobered swiftly, as his words and what they inferred came back to my mind.

At the office, eh? Evidently Zontroff had an office in the city. And who was this Countess de Chausson? I thought of what Alice had said about

the retired colonel and aristocrat who had presumably shot himself a few weeks back. The same, possibly. Letters and money — why, it sounded a whole lot like blackmail, for a fact!

AT this instant a faint sound reached me, froze me where I stood. It was a scream, coming from somewhere. Faint as it was, the sound was terrible—indescribably eloquent of horror. I thought of the native who had been found in the garden and who had refused to talk. As a rule, my nerves are pretty good, but that scream jangled them badly, somehow.

Sitting down to the tray, I poured out some black coffee and drank it. The strong stuff pulled me together in a jiffy. Luckily, too, for as I was pouring more, there came a swish of silken skirts, and I looked up to see the Vassal woman entering the room. At sight of me she stopped dead, in the utmost astonishment; then she recovered and came forward, smiling.

"Why, it is Mr. Herries!" she exclaimed, putting out her hand to me as I rose. "Of all people! I'm delighted to see you again so soon."

"The delight, I assure you, is mutual," I said, holding a chair for her.

She seemed quite at home here, and was wearing a magnificent afternoon gown, a gossamer scarf wound about her shoulders. Her position in the household was clear enough to me, but she made it clearer.

"I expected to find M. Zontroff here," she said. "You know, I am his social secretary. He is quite careless about engagements, and is due for dinner to-night at the governor's palace. Did he bring you home with him?"

Before I could reply, Zontroff himself appeared, a frown on his gorilla-face. It vanished at sight of us, and he came forward, rubbing his hands.

"Ah, Zelie, my dear!" he exclaimed. "Some coffee, if you please. Your American friend has become my guest. He has rendered me a great service—an inestimable service! Now I am going to show him my appreciation in some small way.—Pour the coffee, by all means."

As he said these words, the lady gave me a look. It was a cool, appraising sort of look, and it warned me. I knew perfectly well that she would disabuse Zontroff of the notion that I was a stupidly honest sort of person. The big gorilla himself might be duped, but not this woman. She had brains enough for a dozen.

Zontroff crossed to the opposite wall, pressed a spring, and slid back a panel to expose the face of a wall-safe. I noticed that he turned a couple of switches. Undoubtedly that safe had electrical safeguards, to use the word literally. Then he opened the door, took something out, and closed up the whole thing again before turning back to us.

Zelie Vassal, to use her full name, was demurely pouring coffee.

Zontroff held out a small plush case to me, a beaming grin on his ugly face.

"M. Herries, you refused to-day to be bribed with forty thousand francs," he said. "Here is a present for you, therefore; a testimonial of my appreciation, and worth three times that sum."

I took the box and opened it. Inside was a magnificent ring, set with three superb diamonds.

"But, my dear sir—"

"No protests! Put it on. Let us see if it fits!" he exclaimed eagerly. "You shall wear it in memory of our friendship."

I saw the woman's face assume an expression of the most intense astonishment at these words, but he saw nothing at all. He pressed the ring onto my third finger, where it fitted, and then slapped me on the back.

"Now, let us relax—talk—chat—be merry!" he exclaimed, dropping into a chair. "Ah! This is good coffee. It is my weakness, this good Nosi Bé coffee of Algiers!"

I had another cup, and we followed it with a liqueur. Afterward, I remembered that Zelie Vassal, had poured that drink, and I remembered her quiet, dangerous smiling glance as I drained the glass. It was some time afterward—a long time afterward, in fact, before I could remember anything. For that drink knocked me out cold . . .

CHAPTER IV.

BLACKMAIL RING.

IT was late the next morning when I awakened. I knew it was next morning, for the *Courrier d'Afrique* lay beside me on the bed, with the date showing plainly.

By degrees I came awake and realized my position. I lay in a gorgeous little room, blazing with morning sunlight; silken walls, a high, carved bed, everything most ornate and luxurious. I was even wearing silk pajamas. A tray on a bedside table held coffee and rolls, covered over. Except for a heavy head, I felt quite myself, and a swallow of coffee brought me around in good shape.

The diamond ring was still on my finger.—But it was certainly the next morning, and I had entirely missed my dinner engagement with Alice.

"Damn it!" I exclaimed, after trying to remember. "That Vassal woman doped me, and no mistake. She's a smart one, right enough. She probably laid me out, and has been trying to convince Zontroff that I tricked him. H-m! We'll see later. Meantime—"

I opened up the folded newspaper. On the front page was the announcement of the death of the prefect, and this gave me a jolt. The whole paper was full of it, in fact, and also of Leconte's suicide aboard the boat. In the whole first column there was a screaming editorial about all this; it went on to recount the suicide of the American architect, Parker, and of the Count de Chausson, retired colonel of Tirailleurs. The writer of that editorial had been scared stiff, too! I read part of his eloquence:

> Four persons of prominence—suicides in exactly the same manner! Ladies and gentlemen, it is formidable! It gives one to pause. What manner of epidemic has come upon Algiers, that this should be so?
>
> An epidemic, certainly. Any one of us may retire at night, and be found with a pistol in cold fingers at morning. This madness comes upon the most unlikely victims. The Prefect of Police, an estimable gentleman, who had no enemies, and who was happy in his domestic affairs, respected and honored, is the latest victim. Another, a few hours earlier, out at sea.
>
> An epidemic, then! A terrible epidemic, my good readers—one of which we are to stand in deadly fear.

It went on in the same way for a column. There were interviews with prominent physicians and others, in regard to possible suicide epidemics; there were suicide statistics, special articles, and so forth. The religious and social aspect of suicide, too, was taken up.

"By George!" I muttered, throwing

aside the paper. "Anybody who waded through all that mess would be inclined to suicide when he got through! Algiers will have suicide on the brain if it keeps up."

There was a peal of thin, silvery laughter, then silence. I looked around. Certainly I was alone in the room. Adjoining was a gorgeously tiled bathroom, but the door was open and I could see that it was empty. With a sudden chill feeling, I leaned over and poured more coffee, and drank it.

Some one was watching me, and I knew now who it was. This room was probably arranged so that a person on the outside could see and hear what went on inside. I was thinking this when my door opened and into the room swaggered Zelie Vassal, hands on hips, flinging a smile at me. She was wearing a fluffy, magnificent negligée that must have cost a small fortune.

"Good morning, my honest American!" she exclaimed brightly. "You slept well?"

"Perfectly, thanks," I said. "But what do you mean by coming into my bedroom without a chaperon, you shameless woman?"

She laughed delightedly at that, took a cigarette from the dresser and lighted it.

"It wouldn't be the first time, would it?" she demanded. "Well, my friend, since I have learned that it is impossible to vamp you—as you told me yourself—you can feel perfectly safe. I merely came to ask you a question."

"Oh!" I said. "Then go right ahead. I want to dress."

"Don't mind me, I beg of you."

She came forward and perched herself on the foot of my bed and looked at me. Her smile had vanished now, and when I met her eyes, I had the same sensation of acute danger that I had felt aboard the boat.

"Your question?" I said.

"A simple one," she replied, and took the cigarette from her lips. "Just what is your game?"

I sat up in bed and showed the ring on my hand.

"This," I said. "Isn't it a beauty?"

She made a quick, angry gesture.

"Come, don't try evasion. I assure you, I mean to get at the truth, and you know perfectly well that you can't fool me. Why were you on the boat? Why did you take the envelope from Leconte? Why did you go direct to the girl, then keep the film yourself? Bah! If you come clean you may save your life, my fine fellow. If not, you know what you'll get. You've tricked him, all right, but I've opened his eyes. He's out learning the truth now.—Buying a camera, indeed! You were getting copies made of that picture! That's why you handed over the film as if you had been a simpleton! Well, what's your game? Answer me!"

TO tell the truth, that was something of a relief. I did not have the brains or the desire to do any fencing with this cat. She was a bad one, as I had known from the start. If Zontroff was really visiting that photographer, he would quickly find out the truth.

Coolly throwing back the elegant covers, I swung my legs out of bed and yawned.

"Zelie," I said, "you've hit the bull's-eye, all right. We might as well come clean, as soon as I get a cigarette to keep you company."

I went to the dresser, took a cigarette from the open box there, and lit it. Then I turned to her, after a glance out the window which showed me all

I needed to know. She was still sitting there on the edge of the bed, puffing at her cigarette and watching me with a triumphant glitter in her eyes.

"You'll talk, will you?" she asked.

"Of course," I said negligently. "You don't think I want to be one of those suicides, do you?"

Her lips curved in a thin, cruel smile. "You've guessed that, too, eh? Well, where are you from? The Paris prefecture?"

"Exactly," I said. Reaching over to the dresser, I took up an ash tray and set it on the bed beside her. "We must be considerate of these sumptuous silken quilts, by all means—"

She never suspected a thing, never had a hint of warning. With one hand I took her around her throat, with the other tipped up her feet. She fell backward on the bed—and I held her there.

She never uttered a single squawk, for I had made sure of a good grip.

It was not simple, by a good deal. I have an uncommon lot of strength in my hands and arms, but if I had not sunk my fingers in her flesh I would never have managed it. The woman fought like a tigress. She squirmed, twisted, kicked, shoved her cigarette into my cheek, tore strips of skin from my shoulder and arm with her claws—and then collapsed. She was blue in the face — strangled — when I loosed my grip. For a moment I thought she was dead, until I felt her heart beat and saw her breast rise and fall with quick breaths.

Then I lost no time. Towels from the bathroom served to bind her good and tight and stuff a temporary gag between her teeth. As I worked I found a small pistol in her gown pocket, and appropriated it with thanks. When I had her trussed up, I shoved her into bed and drew up the bedclothes, hiding everything but a bit of her forehead and a wisp of her hair. To any casual glance it would look as though it was I who was lying there sleeping.

Shutting the door, I made a dive for my clothes. Bleeding in a dozen places, and with my cheek burned, I was awake now and no mistake. It was late in the morning—eleven, said my watch. Zontroff was gone, according to her, but he would be back quickly enough after he had talked a bit with that photographer, who, of course, would cough up the truth when Zontroff got after him.

Dressing hurriedly, pocketing the little pistol supplied by the lady, I locked the door, took all the cigarettes I could find, and went to the window. Any escape through that house, with its many servants, was quite hopeless. Beneath the window, however, was the sloping tile roof of the porte-cochère at the side of the house, with the gardens beyond. There was not a soul in sight. Until Zontroff returned. I figured, no one would be trying to prevent my escape.

The next moment I was out on those tiles. Their serrated edges gave me a grip, and lying flat, I worked my way down by degrees. My mind was running fast all the while, too. I had no hankering to face Zontroff when he learned how I had tricked him. His gratitude over the presentation of the coveted film, his diamond gift, had been pretty crude and raw, and he would be just as crude in his fury. I was beginning to feel the dope they had given me now, and I was not in any shape to stand up to that gorilla.

Suddenly my foot went out over nothing. I was at the edge of the roof. There was nothing to hang on by except the tiles. I slid down and down,

then let go, and went with a rush, to land sprawling. The shock was heavy enough to leave me dizzy for a moment. When I scrambled to my feet and found no damage done, I started down the drive toward the entrance gates, feeling considerably pleased with myself.

THERE was a man at the gates; no Arab, but apparently another of the swarthy Slavs who served Zontroff. He was sitting on a stool at one side of the massive iron grilles, smoking a pipe and eyeing me without apparent concern as I approached him. Lighting a cigarette, I made my approach as casual as possible. I nodded amiably to him; he stood up and touched his cap.

"Open the gates, if you please," I said.

"*M'sieu'* has a pass?"

"No," I said. "Didn't Boris tell you that I was M. Zontroff's guest? Open them."

He took the pipe from his mouth, puzzled. I saw that he was a slow, dull-witted rascal.

"But *m'sieu'* must know the gates can be opened only when I see a pass," he said resolutely. "Boris has told me nothing."

"Then I'll show you my pass," I said.

And with that I let him have a neat uppercut that took him under the chin and flopped him over on his face. He had been so busy talking and listening that he had not observed me getting planted for the blow.

Though he was not knocked out, he was past doing any damage. I frisked him quickly, found a big automatic that I tossed among the bushes, and turned to the iron gates. These opened by a handle on the inner side. I swung them ajar and walked out and down the road that curved around the hill.

So that was that. And now, if I could get safely back to Algiers, I had some information that would be of vital interest to somebody—undoubtedly to the police. If Solomon had got the message from me and had sense enough to hang on to those prints, we might learn something from them.

Looking back at it, I can see now that I was still far from realizing even a small portion of the whole ghastly truth.

I padded along the road for a while, without the least idea of my whereabouts. Those hillside roads above Algiers form a perfect maze, with lordly villas and scrubby native farms on every hand, and I had never explored them to any extent. I was on almost the last elbow-curve of the hillside, when, looking down at the road directly below, I saw a big Minerva flashing upward. Zontroff's car.

The wall on my left had a huge breach, half stopped by specimens of the enormous cactus which one sees growing everywhere in northern Africa. I scrambled through the breach in a hurry, and stayed there until the Minerva had purred past up the hill, then I came back into the road. Now I made time to the road below, a main road that ambled along through a charming little valley. I had gone only a few hundred yards, in the unhappy knowledge that all hell would be let loose after me any minute now, when I turned a curve and came slap upon a big Rolls Royce drawn up beside the road. The hood was up and a chauffeur was tinkering with the engine.

"So 'ere you are, sir!" exclaimed a familiar voice. "Dang it, Ahmed, 'op out o' that! — In with you, Mr. Herries—and werry smart about it!"

There was Solomon, sitting on the back seat, holding the door open as though he had been expecting me! And the chauffeur, banging down his hood, leaped to his seat and squirmed under the wheel like a flash.

FOR an instant I was too stupefied to move, then I scrambled into the big car. Solomon slammed the door and caught my arm, pressing me down.

"On the floor!" he exclaimed, his wheezy voice urgent. "And stay there!"

I sprawled out at his feet, as the car hummed and whirred into speed. Just what was up I did not know, and for the moment I did not care. I heard a voice call something, then Solomon leaned far over me for a moment. There was a crash, a tinkle of broken glass, and splinters fell around my face. From behind us I heard the sharp, whiplike report of a rifle, then another; but by this time we were going at tremendous speed.

"All right now, sir."

I got up on the seat beside Solomon, who was wiping his face with a handkerchief. The rear window of the car, above his head, was shattered.

"Bullet?" I asked. "Who was it?"

He looked at me, and his blue eyes twinkled.

"I'm 'oping as 'ow you can tell me that, sir," he exclaimed. "Werry close shave it was, too, and werry lucky as I 'appened to be keeping me eye on this wicinity."

He picked up the speaking tube beside him and spoke rapidly in Arabic to the chauffeur. The man, in front, nodded his head and sent us shooting at incredible speed into a cross road. We went around on two wheels, righted, and kept going.

"Dang it!" observed Solomon mildly. "Now that 'ere Zontroff will 'ave me number and will know as I'm a fighting 'im! Well, it might be a 'ole lot worse, as the old gent said when 'e buried 'is third."

"Did you get those pictures?"

Solomon nodded, but he did not reply. The Arab chauffeur took a hill road before us at an utterly mad speed, and I saw that the pudgy little cockney was highly nervous. Then we struck the level highway at the crest, and went sweeping along like a bird in flight.

"What beats me," I said, "is how you happened to be waiting for me!—Or so it seemed."

"I was waiting for one o' me own men, sir," rejoined Solomon in his oddly apologetic tone. "An Arab, 'e was; and yesterday 'e found a way to get inside that 'ere 'ouse and lot."

"Oh!" I said.

Solomon gave me a look.

"That man—" I continued. "He was looking over the place for you, was he? Well, you won't see him again."

I told him what had happened on the previous afternoon, and about the scream I had heard. Solomon said nothing at all. His face remained quite blank.

"Of course," I added, "it doesn't sound credible in the least. I don't really think he was tortured or killed, but it did look that way."

"Of course he was," said Solomon. "Dang it! Ain't we dealing with the worst lot o' cut-throats and murderers in Europe?"

Then he lapsed into silence, got out his tobacco plug and knife, and whittled off enough to fill his clay pipe. When the car stopped, he had just finished the job.

I knew where we were now. We rolled up to a beautiful little old building, all agleam with tiles in the noonday sun, and alighted. This was no other than the Window of the World, a superbly situated roadhouse, as we would call it in America—a de luxe affair perched on the summits overlooking Algiers.

"We're all right 'ere.—They'll be a looking every place else for us," observed Solomon, as he joined me. "We'll 'ave a bite to eat on the terrace. You go right ahead, sir, and I'll do a bit of telephoning and then join you for a talk."

I made my way to the terrace, where servants were already laying a table for us. Lighting one of Zontroff's cigarettes, I looked out over the city and the bay below. It was a magnificent view, one of the most beautiful sights to be found anywhere, embracing the whole sweep of Algiers, the bay, the shores beyond; but it only made the recent happenings seem more unreal and incredible to me. I could not believe that the whole adventure in Zontroff's house had not been a dream.

But—just who was this man Solomon? What was he?

AS though my mental queries had summoned him, like a genie, he appeared, puffing at his old pipe. With a wheezy sigh, he sank into a chair at the table. I joined him, and he glanced at his watch.

"We 'ave twenty minutes, sir, before luncheon," he said. "Will you be so good as to tell me all about it? 'Ow you come to go off with that 'ere Zontroff, and so on. There ain't nothing like gettin' off on the right foot, so to speak, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid."

I complied. He never once spoke or changed expression as I recounted my adventure, but sat there puffing at his pipe, staring out over the city and bay as though he did not hear a word I was saying. He scarcely glanced at the ring on my hand, and seemed lost in utter abstraction.

"Of course," I said in conclusion, "it looks as though this Zontroff is at the head of a murder ring—a blackmailer. We can't get any proof of it. If we go to the police with—"

"It ain't their business!" broke in Solomon suddenly. "Dang it! 'Alf the police themselves are 'is agents—just like that!"

"But that's preposterous!" I said. "Aside from the French police, there's the native section. It's absurd!"

"No, it ain't no such thing!" contradicted Solomon brusquely.

"Well, what the devil is behind it all?" I said. "Is my guess right?"

His blank blue eyes swung around to me, with a troubled look.

"I don't know, sir," he responded. "You know the old saying as 'ow dead men tell no tales. That's it, sir. It's werry 'ard to put your finger on proper ewidence.—Let me see that 'ere pistol you took from 'er, Mr. Herries."

I produced the little pistol, and a handsome little weapon it was!—silver mounted, beautifully chased. Solomon examined it, then his eyes widened a little, as he pointed to some initials engraved on the silver butt.

"Did you see this, sir?"

I had not seen it; had not carefully examined the weapon previously. The initials were "L. M. de M." Solomon came to his feet, a flash of sudden energy in his manner.

"I'll 'ave to telephone," he said swiftly. "You wait 'ere. If I ain't mistook, we've got the 'ole blessed game in our 'ands right 'ere!"

He hurried away, leaving me perplexed and wondering. Then I saw a folded paper which he had been playing with, and which he had left on the table, with the pistol to weight it down. I picked it up and unfolded it, out of idle curiosity; and then, as I read it, I received a hard jolt.

The paper had been signed by the Governor General. It stated that M. John Solomon had the entire confidence of the government, and that all police, military or civil or native, were to obey his orders implicitly. In the way its phrases were couched, in the absolute authority it placed in the hands of Solomon, this document was perfectly astounding. I could not believe my eyes until I had read it over again and again.

In the midst of my amazement, a filthy old Arab came sidling out on the terrace. He hitched up his ragged burnoose, gave me a look, and crouched down against the wall in silence. Thinking him some employee of the place, perhaps, I paid him no attention.

Presently Solomon appeared. He uttered a sharp exclamation; the Arab rose and spoke rapidly to him. Solomon answered—all in Arabic. Then the Arab departed.

"Dang it!" Solomon sank into his chair, mopping perspiration from his pudgy face. "Dang it, sir, you were right! That 'ere man o' mine was found this morning with 'is belly ripped up. You know 'ow these 'ere Arabs use their knives. He's dead, and lying beside the 'ighway. But this 'ere pistol—well, that was a werry big stroke of luck, sir! It's give me all I wanted to know."

"About Zontroff?" I asked.

"About everything," said Solomon. "Or it will before werry long. There's a gent named Louis Marie de Monsereau, a werry rich and 'igh-placed gent, too; and 'e will be along 'ere in less'n an hour to talk to us. That 'ere pistol was made for 'im—just like a pistol was made for poor Mr. Parker, with 'is initials and everything."

I whistled suddenly, as I perceived the unfolding of Zontroff's deviltry.

"Read that paper," I said. "Does it mean what it says?"

Solomon chuckled wheezily. "Just like that, sir. I'm a gettin' on in years, but I'm still good for something, as the old gent said when 'e took 'is third."

"You're a detective, then?"

"Dang it, no!" exclaimed Solomon, with an irritated flash in his eye. "But if I was you, sir, I'd go into the washroom and fix it up a bit. You can borrow a razor from the man there. 'Cause why, Miss Parker will be along any minute now, and I'm a getting 'ungry."

I stared at him for a moment, then rose and departed hastily.

CHAPTER V.

FOUR TRUSTED MEN.

THE ensuing luncheon provided the most amazing half hour I had ever experienced—and I think Alice Parker felt the same way about it. Amazing, of course, in what it revealed of the pudgy little cockney. This man Solomon revealed himself to us quite frankly, yet left us more mystified than ever. He had all the powers of an undercover man for the French government, but he was no Frenchman. He was nothing, in fact, except a retired old gentleman who was now being forced into activity against his will. Or so it appeared. He spoke Arabic fluently, and French very well, indeed. He mentioned stag-

gering sums of money as though they were nothing; and since he was not the bluffing type, we knew that he must have enormous means at his disposal.

During luncheon, beyond briefly sketching what had happened, for the benefit of Alice Parker, we did not enter into any discussion. Solomon promised full information as soon as M. de Monsereau got here and talked with us. He made only one definite statement, when Alice spoke of bringing the police into it.

"This 'ere ain't no job for the police. 'Cause why, they ain't to be trusted," he said, rather sharply. "I've took on the job, and if so be as Mr. Herries will give me a 'and—"

"Count me in," I said quickly.

"Thank 'e kindly, sir. You'll 'ave plenty to do. When I get 'ome I'll 'ave reports from the prefecture at Paris, and I may know more. We ain't yet found where that photograph comes into it, remember."

"Then you can't arrest the gang?" I demanded, rather skeptically.

"No, sir. If we was to regard the law, we'd be nowhere, just like that. We 'ave to fight these murderers with their own weapons. So let it go at that."

As he had said to us, he was not interested in bringing Zontroff to justice, but rather in exterminating a nest of snakes. This was refreshing and logical; it promised to be interesting. Also, mind, we were in a country which has two faces. For over a century, Algiers has been part of France. But behind the closed, massive doors bearing the name of Allah — *not* the "hand of Fatmah," as fool tourists call it—plenty of things go on that would be amazing if made known. The Frenchman's house is his castle, but the Arab's house is his empire.

We had finished luncheon when a big car rolled up, and presently Monsereau walked in—a thin, elegant, nervous man of sixty, who clearly did not know just what to expect.

Alice left the three of us alone, and Solomon quietly showed Monsereau the documents revealing his authority, then showed him the engraved pistol.

At sight of this, Monsereau became pale as death.

"Now, *m'sieu'*," went on Solomon in French, "we must know all about it. We are not the police, and so what you say will be held in strictest confidence. As you see, you have been slated for death. I must know why—all about it!"

"I was afraid of this!" exclaimed the Frenchman, dropping into a chair. "The suicide epidemic—good God! They warned me that I would go like the others."

"Who did? Zontroff?"

"I never heard of him," said Monsereau. "No, it was the man in the office of the Suburban Development Company. I think his name was Montjoy. He hinted that with this suicide epidemic, things were uncertain. His voice, his eyes, spoke of more than his words. I knew it was a threat, but I dared do nothing."

Solomon calmly tucked tobacco into his pipe, and gave me a look. I spoke up.

"So it was blackmail, then? How much have you given them?"

"All the ready money I could raise—twenty thousand francs," said Monsereau wretchedly. "But they demanded more. They wanted land. I turned over my property in the hills, my farm. They demanded my apartment house in the city. *Mon Dieu!* It belongs to my wife, and I could not do it. It is all she would have left. I

refused. Then they hinted, as I say. They said that if I were to die, they would get it from my widow, you understand. And it is true. She would have to—"

HE checked himself suddenly. He had gone to pieces, a nervous wreck, but he did not want to say more.

"We must know what hold they have on you," I told him. "Come, man! None of this will become public. This talk is confidential, upon my word of honor! Nothing else can save you from death. It is very probable that we can get back something, too.—Is it some affair of a woman?"

"No," said Monsereau, in miserable shape now. "It is our son. He is a captain in the commissary department. Two years ago he got into trouble over his accounts, falsified his papers, and so forth. I have influence; I managed to keep the matter quiet, and to make good the defalcation. No one knew of it. Now he is all right—entirely. He has even been promoted. But somehow they learned about it. That Montjoy had the actual papers. He showed them to me, you understand. He said the company must make the matter public.—It would kill me; it would send my son into prison; and my poor wife—"

Monsereau broke down and his voice died out. Solomon leaned over and patted him on the knee. I poured him a drink. He needed it.

"You understand," said Solomon to me in French, "that such testimony as this could not be brought into court against these men? That is why this is not an affair for the police."

I nodded. This Monsereau, too, had never heard of Zontroff. I began to see more clearly now why Solomon, if he meant to fight the backmail gang, had to do it in his own fashion.

"Let me advise you to go away—to-day," said Solomon to the broken old man. "Take your wife and go on a journey. Come back in a week's time, and you will be in no more danger. You need not worry about your son's case. Montjoy will not make it public."

He had another shot of cognac, and departed. Alice Parker rejoined us, heard what had transpired, and then we proceeded to canvass the situation. Solomon was of the opinion that a gigantic blackmail ring existed here, extending into all walks of life. The Suburban Development Company was a large concern, owning enormous tracts of land all through Algeria, and now we knew how they had obtained possession of so much land, not to mention money. Montjoy had probably been at work here for a couple of years before Zontroff came to Algeria to live. This sort of thing beat horse racing or baccarat for big and steady money.

On the other hand, there had been no question of blackmail in Parker's case. Apparently, all that Zontroff wanted from him was that photograph. But as yet we did not know why. Alice had found nothing among her father's effects or papers to explain the mystery. She knew that during their stay in Marseilles her father had been summoned to the bedside of some dying man—some one he had known casually in Paris—and she had thought it was some trainer from the race tracks. Her father had gone to the invalid in a petulant humor, and he had returned greatly agitated. That was all she knew.

"Good!" I said. "This chap gave your father the picture. Somehow it

meant a grip on Zontroff. Your father went right to the bank, and left the thing there. Later, Zontroff learned that your father had the picture.—Well, that clears things up a bit, anyhow! And now, Solomon, just what sort of a program have you in mind against this outfit?"

The little cockney puffed at his pipe.

"And what would you do, sir, if you was a doing of it?" he asked, a twinkle in his eye.

I looked at my watch. It was just two o'clock.

"Me?" I repeated. "Why, I'd take about four men whom I could trust, and I'd walk into Montjoy's office in about thirty minutes and clean it out, regardless of law or order. We'd have blackjacks and pistols—and we'd use them."

"Well, sir, you go right ahead, then," said Solomon calmly. "I'll supply the four men. I can get them by telephone, 'ere and now. Take that 'ere new car o' mine. Ahmed will run you down to the city and he can pick them up. Then you can come back with 'im to me own 'ouse and report, just like that."

"Are you joking?" I demanded.

"I don't joke, sir," he returned with a singular gravity. "Them 'ere four men will know where Montjoy's office is, and all about it."

"Yes?" I said sarcastically. "You'll raise them up out of the ground, will you?"

"Are you a backing down?" he demanded, while Alice looked from one to the other of us.

"No," I said angrily. "I'll do it with pleasure—if you're serious."

"Then call that 'ere chauffeur in 'ere, sir," he replied.

I did so. This Ahmed was a tall, fine looking young chap; his bronzed features eager. Solomon addressed him in Arabic, and he grinned and saluted.

Solomon turned to me.

"The quicker the better, sir," he said. "There ain't no time like the present, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousekeeper. And don't forget to *'it 'ard*—but not too 'ard."

"Right," I said. "Good-by, Alice; see you later. Come on, Ahmed."

I strode out to the car. Ahmed slipped under the wheel, and I climbed up beside him. A moment later we were whirling away.

"Know where to meet the four men?" I asked in French.

He merely nodded, and I asked no more questions.

NOW, this rapid fire project was by no means so mad as it might seem. As yet, Zontroff was not organized for defense; he did not anticipate any active enemy. Zelie Vassal might tell him that I was from the Paris perfecture, if she believed as much, which I doubted. Within a few hours, at most, he would be ready for anything — and the time to get in a blow was now.

I could quite see Solomon's point in not dragging in the police. Little could be effected that way, for we had little legal evidence, and victims like Monsereau would not come into court. Within another hour or two, Solomon expected to have full information from Paris—but there was the time element again. The first hard blow is always the one that counts the most.

My theoretical proposal had been promptly turned into cold fact by Solomon. He was a shrewd old chap, and no mistake. Any ordinary raid on Montjoy's office would effect nothing. It had to be a sharp, swift, brutal and

absolutely unscrupulous affair. Then we would have a chance of securing evidence or other information. In dealing with men outside the law, we must use extra-legal means. That was the one thing that could strike fear into reptiles like Zontroff and his gang, who were doubtless fairly well protected against the law. The other fellow must always be hit where he leasts expects it.

The Rolls was a unique sort of car, and was marked by a bullet, to boot. Ahmed reached under the seat and pulled out a big checked-plaid cap, far too large for me, and a big red handkerchief. I donned the cap, pulling it down over my eyes; I tied the handkerchief around my neck, turned up my coat collar, and looked like a different man. Ahmed grinned widely at sight of me.

We circled around to the south, and presently I recognized the Algerian Bois de Boulogne; then we were shooting down into the city from Mustapha Supérieur. Probably Zontroff had a good many eyes out looking for me, but no one would recognize me in this garb.

Ahmed slammed on the brakes. We squealed to a halt on the big curve, by the tram station in front of the Scottish Church. Four men, apparently well-dressed Arabs, were waiting there, one of them carrying a parcel under his arm. As we halted, they jumped forward. I got down, opened the rear door, and they followed me inside the car. Ahmed started up at once.

"Where to?" he called back through the speaking tube. One of the four, a handsome, grinning rascal, flashed me a smile and made answer in French.

"Rue André Gide—the little street off Rue Michelet, down the hill."

"Where is this office?" I demanded. "Do you know its situation?"

"But yes, *m'sieu'*," said the Arab. "On the second floor of a modern building for offices. There is a large outer room where a man sits at the telephone, with chairs for waiting. Inside is a second room, smaller, into which ladies are shown when they call. Two clerks are here. The private office of M. Montjoy is beyond this."

The man with the parcel opened it, to display five automatic pistols and as many deadly little blackjacks. One of each was handed to me.

I was, for an instant, pretty well dazed by this display of magic on Solomon's part, until I realized that we had been some time getting here from the Window of the World. However, there was no time to lose.

"Your name?" I asked the cheerful devil who was evidently leader.

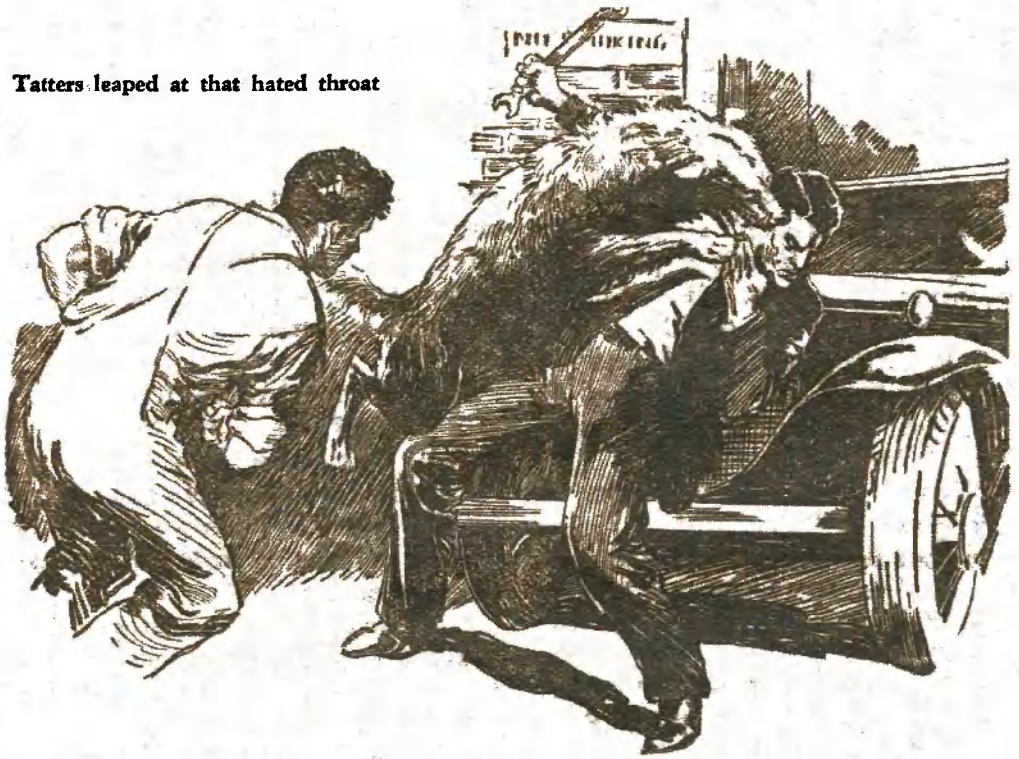
"Dris, *m'sieu'*."

"Very well, Dris. You stick with me and go straight into the private office. If the outer office holds any people, tell off two of your men to pull guns and keep them quiet until our return. If not, all three come after us. Designate one of your men to knock the telephone man in the head. There is to be no talk whatever."

Presently we swung out of the wide Rue Michelet and into a narrow street. We circled a short block and came to rest before a building of three stories, with shops on the street front and offices above. By the "second" floor, of course, Dris had meant the third, American style. A stairway between two shops led to the floors above.

We piled out, and I led the way. At the head of the stairs our objective appeared—a door marked "Suburban Development Company."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Tatters leaped at that hated throat

"Look Behind You!"

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

Tatters was a one-man dog—and not even Garageman Gratton's boss could win the big mongrel away without a struggle

"MAYBE there's better lookers," concluded Gratton, as he rumpled the ears of the shaggy, rangy mongrel that sprawled at his feet in the garage doorway, "though he looks plenty good to me. But I'm here to say there isn't a wiser dog this side of the Atlantic. Besides—Tatters is my pal. There's the whole thing in one mouthful of words."

The big mongrel wagged his stump of a tail at the sound of his own name; then he drowsed again, shifting his shaggy head so that it lay athwart Gratton's boot.

The motion brought into sight, through the piles of rusty throat fur, a magnificent collar. It was fully four inches wide, made of thick maroon leather studded with brass bosses and equipped with an ornate clasp. The collar would have suited better the neck of a champion Great Dane, rather than this overgrown crossbreed whose intrinsic cash value was perhaps ninety cents. On Tatters the collar had the look of a sable scarf worn with a soiled calico dress.

Gratton's visitor, a fellow mechanic from a mile-distant filling station, stooped to peer more closely.

"That neckband must have set you back a good slice of your week's pay," he commented. "I thought you said you was saving up to buy a share in a garage somewheres. If—"

"It didn't," said Gratton, tersely. "And I am. It didn't set me back a plugged dime. It was a present to Tatters from the boss. Kind of pretty, isn't it? Tatters is as proud as Punch, over it. That fancy clasp is getting a little loose, though. I'll have to fix that, when I get around to it. You see, Mr. Brayle—"

"Pete Brayle bought that collar for —for *your* dog!" exclaimed the visitor. "Cut out the comedy! Brayle never spent a nickel on anybody but himself. And that classy collar must have cost—"

"Mr. Brayle gave it to me," insisted Gratton. "Gave it to Tatters. Same thing. I'll own up I was some surprised, myself. He didn't seem to me like that kind of man. But he did it.—You never can tell what any human is li'ble to do for a dog he takes a fancy to. And Mr. Brayle sure took the biggest liking to Tatters of any one I ever saw."

"Last time I was here—just after you landed this job with him—you said Brayle was kind of sore at having Tatters hanging around the garage. You said he didn't like dogs."

"He didn't. But he does now. He got strong for Tatters, here, ever since the good old purp found his way back to the garage all by himself, the time he fell out of the truck, over beyond Heckerville. I was driving fast, and I never missed him. But I told Mr. Brayle the dog would find his way back all right. I said he always did.—Tatters is clever that way. Some dogs are. It's what I heard a feller call 'homing instinct,' once.—And sure enough, when we got back to the garage here was Tatters waiting to welcome us. That made a terrible hit with Mr. Brayle. From then on, he's been mighty fond of Tatters, even if Tatters can't seem to get overfond of him. Mr. Brayle even takes him on some of those all-day rides of his, drumming up trade. He says Tatters is better comp'ny than a human."

"'DRUMMING up trade trade,' hey? It seems to me he'd make more cash sticking on the job here at his own place than to go hustling for it. Traipsing round the country to drum up trade for a garage is a new one on me."

"It isn't for the garage. Mr. Brayle's got both the county agency and the Ontario agency for the Defiance Motor Accessories Company. He goes from one burg to another, persuading dealers to handle the Defiance people's line. Makes a lot more money that way, he says, than by this place."

"Hmph! Then I should think he could afford more than just one assistant, here. He keeps you hustling overtime, and he's making a slave out of you, just because you're easy. If I was you, I'd strike for double pay; or else make him hire an extra man. It's just his meanness, the fat old skinflint!"

"Maybe, yes. Maybe, no. Maybe it's nobody's business. With jobs so scarce and such a swad of good men out of work, I'm not going to be fool enough to risk mine. Besides, he pays me mighty well; and he likes Tatters, and—"

"How about the movies this evening?"

"Can't. It's my night on the late shift. I—"

"The one-man late shift, hey? Well,

if you're content, it's no misfortune of mine. So long."

Left alone in the doorway, Gratton finished his supper; then shook the remaining contents of his dinner pail onto a sheet of newspaper and snapped his fingers to Tatters. The dog had been awaiting the signal. He jumped up eagerly and began to eat. Despite his bulk and seeming awkwardness, the crossbreed devoured his food daintily, scattering none off the paper. This was one of the myriad minor accomplishments which his master had taught him. Gratton looked on in approval.

The glass door of the garage's little cubbyhole office swung wide. Out strolled a man whose height and breadth had all but filled the tiny office to overflowing. As he came forward, Gratton looked up, apprehensive lest his employer might have overheard the visitor's unenthusiastic words concerning him. But Peter Brayle gave no sign.

"I thought you'd gone home long ago," said Gratton, rolling up the sheet of greasy paper and getting to his feet.

"I was waiting for a long distance call," returned Brayle, in a voice as big as his body. "It just came through. By the way, Gratton," he went on, stooping to pat Tatters, an attention which the dog endured with no atom of the gay affection which a caress from his own master always called forth, "by the way, I'm sorry to make you come to work at eight, to-morrow, after you'll have been on the late shift to-night, but I've got to run across to Pawle, in the morning, to tackle two new prospects I've lined up. That was the phone call I was waiting for. So I'll have to ask you to be here early. You can have the afternoon off. You don't mind if I take Tatters along, for company, do you?"

"Sure," assented Gratton. "Take him along. It's a change for him, from sticking around here all day. Sure."

"Thanks. By the way, that friend of yours who was jawing out here a few minutes ago—didn't he say you ought to strike for a raise? Oh, that's all right," Brayle hurried on, forestalling Gratton's mumble of embarrassment. "I wasn't listening. I just happened to catch a word or two, while I was waiting in there for my call. It got me to thinking. You're working pretty long hours and you're doing pretty good work. And you've got a following of your own, among my customers. Next week, and from then on, there'll be an extra five-spot on Saturdays, for you. Good night."

Perhaps to avoid listening to Gratton's thanks, Brayle strode off into the gathering dusk. Gratton stared after him with shining eyes.

"Tatters," he said aloud, to his dog, "Tatters, there goes one white man! I'm proud to work for him."

As if in reply, the lanky crossbreed yawned cavernously, and with a sound which, in a human, might have been mistaken for one of contemptuous dissent.

AT eight, next morning, Peter Brayle set forth in his trig little roadster. On the seat beside him rode Tatters. The dog sat high and proudly. Whether or not he cared for his seat-mate's companionship, it was evident that the dog was delighted at the prospect of a drive.

Gratton smiled to himself at the crossbreed's smug, toplofty air. Then he went back to his work. The village of Pawle was just across the Canadian border, a bare fifteen miles away. Brayle expected to get home by noon; as he had promised his assistant the

afternoon off, in return for the double shift.

At about eleven o'clock a stocky, middle-aged man dropped in at the garage and asked to see Brayle. Gratton told the stranger the boss would be back in an hour or so at most, and asked if he would call again or if he cared to leave a message.

The stranger seemed genuinely disappointed at missing the garage owner. He was an affable chap and fell into easy chat with Gratton. He greeted with flattering interest the very trivial news that Brayle had driven across the border to Pawle. He sat around for a time on a keg, seeming to ask practically no questions, yet eliciting much information, such as it was.

Gratton was mildly pleased to have his own morning labors lightened by such good company. He was sorry when, at last, the stranger said he must be going. The man's name was easy to remember, too, to tell Brayle. The name was Smith—William Smith.

Brayle drove into the garage almost on the dot of noon. His wide face was clouded.

"Gratton," he began, unhappily, as the roadster halted, "I'm ashamed to come back here to you. I've—well, I've lost Tatters again! I let him stroll around, a few minutes, while I was ladling out a sales talk. When I came out of the shop he was gone. I hunted everywhere for him. And I— Say, Gratton, I wouldn't have had this happen for a hundred dollars! You trusted him to my care; and you think such a whale of a lot of him.—And so do I, for that matter."

"Don't worry yourself about him, Mr. Brayle," said Gratton, touched by his employer's chagrin. "Old Tatters will take care of himself, all right, all right. He always does. Most likely, he got tired of waiting for you and started back home. It's only fifteen miles. He'll be along presently. He has sense enough to keep out of the way of cars, and he has too much sense to tire himself out by galloping. He'll just loaf along; and presently he'll be here. Don't worry."

"It's fine of you to take it that way," said Brayle, gratefully. "If he doesn't come soon I'll go out and look for him. This is the second time he's given me the slip, in Pawle. Even though he got back safely the other time, I'm sore on myself for not being more careful, to-day. Next time, I'll tie him in the car when I go into any shop. That is, if you'll trust me with him again. By the way, Gratton, I meant to tell you this morning. Mrs. Van Leouw wants that limousine of hers towed here to have the timer adjusted. I told her I'd send for it at noon to-day. Suppose you just buzz up there and tow it in. You can get back by one, and still have your afternoon off. Hurry, won't you?"

WHEN Gratton towed the limousine into the garage yard, a minute or so before one o'clock, Tatters was lying in the doorway. At sight of his master, the dog jumped up and began to caper merrily toward him.

"You were right," called Brayle, coming out of his office. "And I'm mighty glad you were. You hadn't been gone ten minutes before the grand old dog came trotting in and began looking around for you. Now chase along, the two of you. Have a good time on your afternoon off."

Brayle went back into his office. Not until he himself went to bed that night did Gratton chance to remember that he had not told Brayle about the visit

of the conversational William Smith. Oh, well, it didn't matter. Gratton had told Smith when Brayle was expected back. No doubt the pleasant-spoken man had called again, later in the day.

On Brayle's next business trip to Pawle, Tatters rode beside him again, on the roadster's seat. As usual, Tatters was eagerly happy over the prospect of the jaunt. And as before, the urbane Mr. William Smith strolled into the garage a little later in the morning. Again, he was disappointed at missing Brayle. And again he showed real interest in the petty news that Brayle had crossed the border. For perhaps half an hour, Smith sat chatting. Then, promising to come back, he went away.

It was mid morning when the telephone jangled. Gratton answered the summons, to find Peter Brayle on the far end of the wire.

"Gratton!" fairly shouted the boss. "I'm in a jam. A fool car ran into me, here at Heckerville, not ten minutes after I had crossed back into the States. It was the other man's fault, but the hick cops have run us both in. I've phoned for bail, and it'll be along in an hour or so; I'll be back home in less than two hours. But there's something I want you to do in a rush. I want you to drive over to the Defiance factory at Gusepple, and see if that case of parts is ready. I'm in a big hurry for it. It was due, yesterday. Drop everything and start *now!* Good-bye."

The big man's big voice vibrated with excitement tinged with something that sounded like terror. There could be no possible mistaking the stark urgency of its command.

Gratton was puzzled. It was not like his calmly self-assured employer to show such perturbation at a minor mishap like a motor arrest. It was still less like him to exhibit fevered anxiety for a case of motor parts which he surely could not need in any mad haste.

The trip to the factory at Gusepple was a full two-hour trip. There and back would take four full hours out of that day. That meant the garage must be shut until Brayle should get back. Well, Brayle was the boss—and orders were orders!

Gratton went out into the yard where the light truck was kept.

BUT before he could board the truck, a rakish sport car drew up at the garage door. Its occupants were two sunburned young women in sports clothes. They hailed Gratton by name. Reluctantly he came forward, recognizing them as the daughters of immensely rich old Mrs. Van Leouw.

Long and ardently Brayle had craved the exclusive motor custom of this Van Leouw family; whose cars were legion and were forever getting out of order. Of late, several of their minor jobs had come to the Brayle garage. Such work had been performed quickly and skillfully. There was hope that at this rate the Van Leouws would transfer all their custom from a garage man whose methods they had grown to dislike, and turn it all over to Brayle.

Now Gratton must either disobey his employer's orders to drive at once to the Defiance factory, or else he must risk offending the all-desirable Van Leouws by refusing to wait on them. His quandary deepened when he learned that the repair job on their racer would take the better part of an hour to complete. He thought fast, and he decided he would be serving Brayle's interests far better by mending the Van Leouw car than by getting

the case of parts. At most, he would lose only an hour. In either event, he was in for a rebuke from Brayle.

Just as the two sports-clothed damsels were driving their newly-imported racer out of the yard, Tatters trotted in from the road and frisked joyously up to his master.

Apparently the dog had once more tired of waiting for Brayle, and had come home. Evidently, too, part of his journey had been through cross-country short cuts, for his thick coat was fairly bristling with burrs, and his legs were body-deep in black mud.

"Tatters," reproved Gratton, "you're a right disgraceful spectacle. Take shame to yourself! If I let you go along with me, you'll muddy up the truck. Yet if I leave you here you'll muddy up the floor and you'll strew burrs all over it. Well, five minutes more or less won't make any difference, now. I'll spend that time making you look less like a scarecrow. Come on inside."

The garage was not large. It consisted of a single none too spacious room with a concrete floor; a room whose farthest corner was partitioned into Brayle's tiny glass-doored office.

Gratton drew a pail of water, found a handful of rags and a broken-toothed comb, and brought them to the center of the floor.

At sight of these loathed preparations, Tatters backed modestly away, and seemed to be considering a bolt for freedom.

"Come here, you old ruffian!" commanded Gratton. "If you hate to be washed, then you ought not to get yourself dirty."

Slowly, miserably, the dog obeyed. On his stomach he slunk along the concrete toward his master and toward the abhorred bath. He made appealing little gestures with his muddy forepaws as he advance, and his mouth twisted into horrible expressions of grief. Gratton disregarded these mute entreaties, and set to work with a will, swabbing the dirty paws and legs with the wet rags.

"Chest and throat all black mud, too!" he grumbled. "Splashed up on them when you took a short cut through a swamp, hey?—Off comes your fine collar, too, if I want to get your throat clean. Off it comes. I—"

THE man fell silent; he stared down at the wide collar in his hands. Its elaborate catch had been almost dangerously loose for more than a month, and Gratton had meant to repair it. But now it was so tight that he had had trouble in unfastening it. Moreover, it was an almost brand-new catch. It did not seem to have been used a half-dozen times, at most.

"Perhaps the old one came off," mused Gratton, "and the boss was able to buy a new catch, up at Pawle. But—"

Again he fell silent as he turned the collar over and over in his hands. He remembered clearly that its strip of pale chamois lining had been soiled and puckered by much wear and by swims, the last time he had taken it off to bathe Tatters. But this lining was immaculately clean—clean and palpably *new*.

Once more Gratton turned the collar from side to side. One of the brass bosses on the maroon leather surface of Tatter's collar had fallen off, and another was dented. But now every boss on this collar was in place, and none had a dent in it.

"This—why, this isn't your collar at all, Tatters!" exclaimed Gratton. "And yet it isn't one that Mr. Brayle

could have bought at any shop this morning. It's been worn before, that's plain, but not very often. It—"

Tatters's collar had been thick, by reason of the padding between the leather and the chamois lining. But now Gratton noted that it was more than twice as thick as formerly and that the stuffing had gathered into lumps and ridges here and there.

His wondering eye fell once more on the lining. Where the chamois had been neatly machine-stitched to the leather at the upper and lower edges, now only one of the two edges were thus stitched. The other edge was merely basted to its moorings. Awkwardly basted, at that, even though very strongly, and by stout shoemaker's thread.

Long the man stood pondering. Then he took out his knife and began to sever the basting threads. When the last of them was cut, he laid open the strip of chamois. Inside, close packed, end to end, lay two ten-inch oilskin envelopes, bulging full.

Laying one of these on a bench, Gratton opened the other by undoing the line of snappers which held its top. Out came an oblong of cotton wool. Gratton could feel, through the soft substance, a double line of lumps. Carefully he divided the cotton. In its center lay embedded a score of fairly large and more than usually brilliant diamonds. They seemed to generate light from within themselves; light that pulsated through the gloom of the garage and dazzled their dumfounded discoverer.

Presently, the man restored the cotton and its precious contents to the oilskin envelope, and laid it on the bench. He picked up the second and fatter oilskin. There was no lumpiness in this. It was packed as fatly as a sausage skin. With much caution, he opened it. It was stuffed tight with a fluffy snow-white powder.

Memories of newspaper feature stories worked their way into Gratton's horrified memory; feature stories setting forth the smuggling activities at the Canadian and Mexican borders and the tireless efforts of the United States secret service to check them. Recollection of one such account flashed over him as he saw the white powder. From his dry throat came the one gasping word:

"Dope!"

IF his brain had been dazed to undue slowness at first, now it fairly raced. The tangled skeins of seemingly unimportant happenings wove themselves with bewildering speed and accuracy into a clear pattern.

Thrice, Peter Brayle had taken Tatters across the border with him. The first two times he claimed to have lost the dog, and both times Tatters had arrived at the garage about an hour behind Brayle. Brayle had managed to send Gratton away on some errand, so as to be alone when the dog should return—alone, to take off the contraband-stuffed collar and to replace the original collar on the animal's throat.

Yes, and doubtless, he must have arranged for a confederate on the Canada side, to keep Tatters tied up until Brayle should have had more than an hour's start; then to let him loose, to reach home at a time when Brayle should be there and Gratton should not.

Gratton recalled vividly, now, that at the outset Brayle had disliked having the mongrel at the garage — until he had learned of Tatters's unerring homing instinct. That must have given him his idea. In his effusive way, he had

set himself to make friends with the dog; he had had a duplicate collar made. It was all sickeningly logical, now that the clew lay at hand. An accomplice in Canada awaited the periodic comings of man and dog. Into the trick collar the contraband was packed, and the other collar was pocketed by Brayle, to be put back on Tatters after the dog's return. In case of suspicion and of search at the border, Brayle thus had nothing incriminating on him.

Gratton realized the keen brilliance and simplicity of the scheme. With ordinary good luck, the game might have gone on indefinitely. But to-day Brayle had had the misfortune to collide with another motorist, and had been jailed. Presumably, his confederate had known nothing of this and had released the dog at the agreed time.

At last Gratton understood that note of frantic terror in his employer's voice, when Brayle had telephoned him. The man had wanted him to be well out of the way when Tatters returned; he had wanted to send Gratton far enough so he could not get back to the garage again until Brayle himself should have arrived and changed the collars.

Presently, as he stood there, Gratton's face began to grow dark with the hot blood that pounded in his temples. He was of placid temper, as a rule. Never had he heard the grimly wise adage, *"Beware the anger of a patient man"*; but at this moment, he was justifying a hundredfold the truth of that old warning.

Strangely enough, his wrath grew hottest over the part which Brayle had caused Tatters to play in the dirty scheme, and at the man's pretended affection for the dog. Tatters was so clean of heart, so fine, such a splendid pal to his lonely young master! And now this blackguard had dragged the dog into his foul dope smuggling!

Worse, the newspapers had told of dogs that were trained to run contraband between Belguim and France, and of how they were hunted down by the law as though they were rabid, and were shot on sight. If the Federal authorities should find that Tatters was a canine smuggler they would probably kill him, as a preventive measure. Yes, they would track the grand old fellow down and kill him.

Hotter and more fiercely, the blood pounded in Gratton's temples. Then of a sudden he went calm. After a moment of wordless thought, he got into his ramshackle little runabout, jamming the trick collar inside the breast of his dungaree shirt. At a snap of his fingers, Tatters sprang to the ragged seat beside him; and the car set off.

PETER BRAYLE drove into the garage cranky and nervous. He glanced about him. Gratton was gone. That was good. It would be hours before the assistant could get back from the Defiance factory. Now to get hold of Tatters, and to switch collars!

He whistled loudly, and yet more loudly. But the dog was not there. Brayle scowled. Always, Tatters hung around the garage except when he was out with Gratton or with the boss. By Brayle's reckoning, the accomplice up at Pawle should have set the mongrel free in time for him to have returned before now.

Brayle started for the telephone in the cubbyhole office; but halfway to the glass door, he stopped. Into the garage Gratton was driving — driving

the runabout, not the truck. On the seat beside him rode Tatters, and the dog wore no collar. Brayle gaped, stupefied.

Gratton climbed down from his seat, and went back to the garage doors. These he shut. Then, crossing to the office, he ordered Tatters inside it and closed the door behind him. The assistant's face was bone white; his mouth was a lipless gash; his eyes smoldered queerly. With bewilderment, Brayle watched his preparations and sought to read his new expression.

At last Gratton spoke. Moving slowly toward Brayle, he said:

"I've shut Tatters in there to make it fairer for you. Not that you deserve it, after the filthy risks you made him run.—Now shut up!"—forestalling a blustering interruption. "I know the whole rotten thing. I've grinned when I've read about booze-running. Jewel smuggling didn't jar me much, either. But there isn't a decent man on God's green earth who doesn't see red when he thinks of dope smuggling. You've used me, and you've used my dog, to help you get dope spread all over the country. That's more damnable than to spread smallpox germs! That isn't on the free list, Brayle, and there's only one way I can make you pay the bill which you owe Tatters and me."

His voice was deadly quiet, almost muffled, but that quiet voice, and the smolder in Gratton's half-shut eyes held Peter Brayle momentarily speechless and without motion.

Gratton broke the spell by striking his employer's wide face heavily with his open palm.

"Fight!" he snarled, springing at the big man.

Instead, Brayle leaped back with an agility not to be expected in one so bulky. As he leaped, he whipped his right hand to his hip. Then he was standing still, covering Gratton with a squat automatic pistol, a very toad of a weapon. In his gaze was stark murder.

"Look behind you!" shrilled Gratton, in wild excitement.

The ruse was old. If Brayle had been his wontedly cool self, it might not have served. But instinctively, he glanced backward—only for the fraction of a second, but long enough for a lightning-quick swipe of Gratton's fist to knock the pistol out of his hand. Gratton kicked the fallen weapon toward the doors.

Then the two men came together with a breath-taking shock. In a trice, they had become primal brutes. Brayle was a good half head taller, and forty pounds heavier than Gratton. But he had taken on fat, and his once mighty muscles were soft. His wind was bad.

Gratton, however, had the advantage of youth, speed, wiriness, and perfect physical condition. Moreover, he had boxed many friendly bouts, and he had a born fighter's instincts. Thus, his fury was blended with science and with wise caution. He attacked, fiercely, in whirlwind fashion. Yet he did not lay himself open foolishly to the heavier man's assault.

BACK and forth across the oil-flecked concrete floor the battle raged. The fighters caromed off cars; their impact opened the shut outer doors; their feet slipped and stamped on the treacherous oil smears. The thud of fists on human flesh echoed from the low roof.

From the tiny office came the roaring of Tatters as the dog tore vainly at the wooden lower panels of the glass door, striving to come to his master's aid.

Then a left-hander to the wind and a right hook to the mouth sent Brayle reeling. His toe slithered on a patch of grease. He crashed backward against the running board of a car on which Gratton had been at work that morning. From there he sprawled to the floor.

His opponent stepped back to let him rise, while the dog's yells and growls continued to echo from the office. Slowly, painfully, Brayle began to get up. As he rose, his hand slipped behind him again, and this time it groped for a heavy wrench that had been left on the running board of the car. Swinging this formidable weapon aloft, he bounded to his feet and hurled himself at the unarmed Gratton.

Even as Brayle sprang, Tatters sprang, too. Finding that he could not break down the wooden paneling of the office door, the dog had drawn back and gathered for a jump. Now, there was a multiple tinkle and a crash of broken glass. Through the glazed upper half of the door flashed the mongrel. He bled from cuts where the broken glass and sash had scored him in passing, but he had no time now to think of these superficial hurts.

Through the air like a flung spear whizzed the mighty dog. His flying body smote Peter Brayle's shoulder, almost knocking the man off balance again. His curved white eye-teeth shore deep, and all but met in the man's plump shoulder flesh.

Brayle staggered at the impact, but he kept his head. With his left hand he seized Tatters by the hairy throat. Swiftly, yet with methodical precision, his right hand wielded the six-pound wrench Down swished the weapon, driven by all Brayle's force toward the the skull of the ravening dog.

But the iron did not reach its mark. This because Gratton rushed in and struck the blow aside. Only partly deflected, the wrench-head smote Gratton glancingly on the right arm, numbing it to the shoulder.

Pushing Tatters aside with his free hand, and yelling to the dog to keep out of the fight, Gratton ran into a clinch. Before his numbed arm would let him gain his hold, a jaw smash from Brayle's fist sent him reeling. Back he dashed to the fight, seeking to bore in.

But Brayle was no longer there. The big man had taken full advantage of the second's respite given him by his punishing blow to the jaw, and had darted across the room toward the partly opened garage doors. Just before he reached them he stooped and caught up the automatic pistol, kicked there by Gratton. As the younger man charged at him, the automatic confronted him once more.

Again in the level eyes of his adversary, Gratton read murder. He knew that Brayle could not afford to let him live, with the secret he had blundered on. He knew that red hatred was reenforcing logic, in goading Brayle to shoot him down.

With a glance, he measured the distance between his foe and himself. No, there was no chance of diving in and trying to disarm Brayle. He was wholly at the slayer's mercy—at the mercy of the merciless. The shot would hardly be likely to rouse attention from the road outside. At nightfall, the victim's body could be driven, weighted, to the river.

Brayle's finger tightened on the trigger, slowly, in a luxury of deliberation.

"LOOK behind you!" shrilled Gratton once more.

A smile of tired scorn curled Brayle's fat mouth, a mouth swollen

and bleeding. Gratton could see that Brayle was wondering in derisive contempt why his assistant should try to fool him a second time with that trick.

The finger pressed tighter on the trigger.

Then two sinewy arms were flung about Brayle from behind, pinioning him, and the pistol went off resoundingly. The bullet crashed through the shingle roof, and the next moment the weapon was torn away from its wielder.

Strong fingers gripped his plump wrists in expert fashion. There was a click; and his wrists were neatly handcuffed behind his back.

He was spun about and allowed to stand alone. Three State troopers filled the doorway, and in front of them, panting from his expertly quick exertions in subduing Brayle, stood that pleasant conversationalist, Mr. William Smith, better known to the authorities in Washington as Roy McKeogh, a star officer in the secret service.

At present, Mr. Smith-McKeogh was more conversational than pleasant. Glowering at the disheveled Gratton, he demanded:

"What does this mean, you young idiot? We told you to come here, ahead of us, while we got the place surrounded and while the warrant was made out.

"We told you to hold Brayle in talk till we got here, if he had come back.—Is this the way you hold a man in talk?"

"I'm not under your orders," sullenly retorted Gratton. "When I took that dog collar to the State Police and told them my story, and then told it to you, after they'd phoned for you—then I had done my duty, and *all* my duty. It was up to me to pay my debt and Tatters's debt—mostly Tatters's—in the only satisfying way it could be paid.—And I paid it!" he ended, with a glance at his bloody, bruised and reeling adversary.

"If we hadn't showed up just when did," countered McKeogh, "it would have been paid the other way around. You tackled an armed man twice your size. What did you expect?"

"I expected to pay a debt. I told you that. It couldn't be paid just by sicking the law onto him."

"H'm!" said McKeogh, a reluctant grin twitching his craggy lips. "Well, you sure got out of the red, to judge by the way he looks. And you're due to get out of the red, financially, too, if you happen to be in it. Do you know the size of the government reward coming to you for this day's work?"

"No. And it doesn't concern me. I won't claim it, and I won't take it. I'll ask them to turn it over to some relief association. I won't touch blood money.—I don't need it, either. With what I've put by, and with the nice following I've got here, I'm going to take over the lease on this garage and run it myself. There's good cash in it, for the right man. I've figured that out.—And I'm the right kind of man."

"You concede that, hey?" laughed McKeogh. "Going to play a lone hand here, are you?"

"No. With a side partner. The dandiest side-kick any guy ever had. You've met him. His name is Tatters. 'Gratton & Tatters' has a fine sound to it.

"And the firm is going to be just as fine as it sounds. Isn't it, Tatters?—Say! Stop scratching that flea and come over here and shake hands with your new partner!"

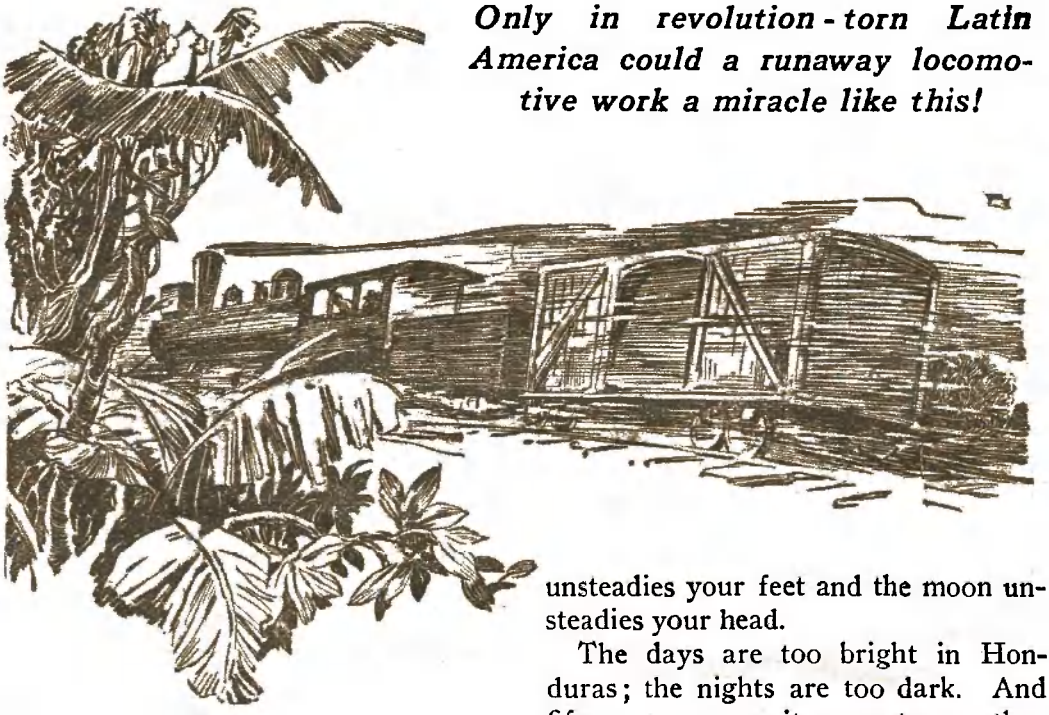
THE END.

Graveyard Limited

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Mediterranean Cruise," "Last Minute," etc.

Only in revolution-torn Latin America could a runaway locomotive work a miracle like this!



CHAPTER I.

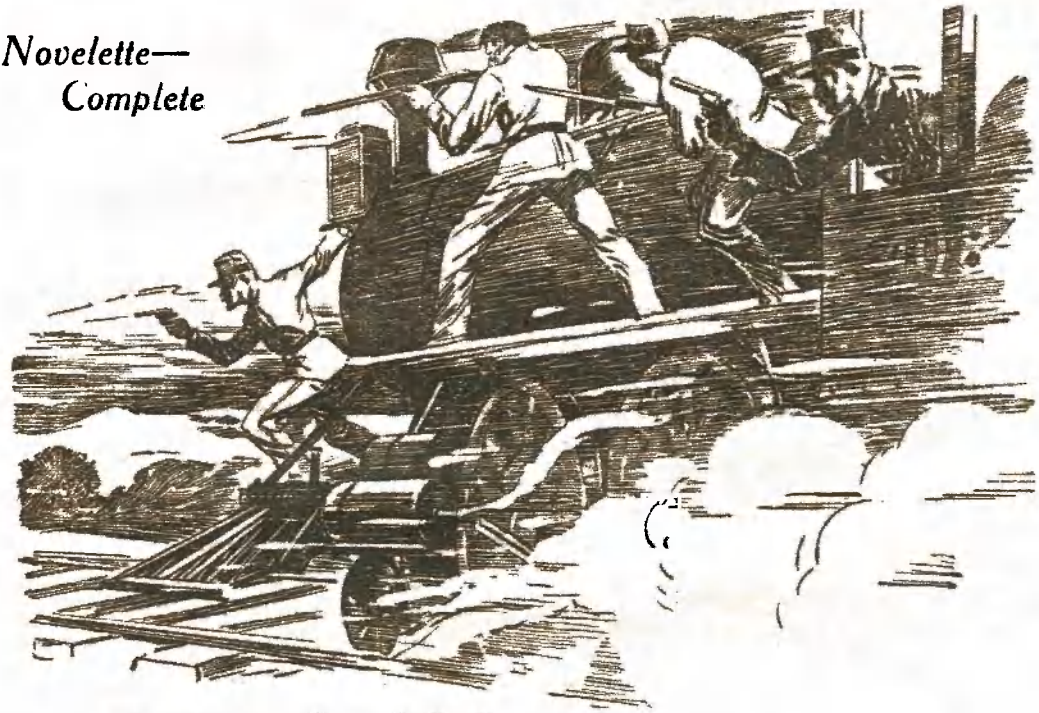
THE MIDNIGHT RUN.

THIS could have happened only in Honduras, where the jungled mountains tower like silent, dark monuments under the sky, where brown men hack each other to ribbons that you may have your banana split at the Greek's for five cents cheaper than at the Red Band Drug Store, where sugar can grow amidst a welter of deadly fever; where the marimba's melody can inspire the machete's savage swish, where the village of Gracias à Dios nestles high and stinking against the frontier stars while the town of Puerto Paloma crouches steaming on the bay, where the sun unsteadies your feet and the moon unsteadies your head.

The days are too bright in Honduras; the nights are too dark. And fifteen years ago, it seems to me, they were even brighter and darker.

Those were the days when the Central American Fruit Company owned all the bananas around Gracias à Dios and railroaded them down to Puerto Paloma to get them stowed on ships for New Orleans. There was a big sugar plantation on the coast, near the end of the line; and Guiterre Miguel Wençeslao Saavedra was a pompous lieutenant in the Honduran regular army. Puerto Paloma and Gracias à Dios were shanty towns populated with blacks, Indians, halfbreeds, riff-raff Spigs, and all the racial colors of Joseph's coat. You could count the white men on three fingers, namely: Big Dan Bonesteel, Doc Foster—not the same as "went to Glo'ster," but

Novelette—
Complete



Those wild Hondurans were gaining fast

the beery-breathed medico who sewed up knife cuts in the banana camps—and me.

Big Dan Bonesteel was tall as a tree, with corn-yellow hair, with hands that could bend a brake-rod into a horseshoe, with grease in his ears, and a rueful smile on his lips. Doc Foster was a fat little man in untidy whites, a sun helmet with the crown stove in, and with the apple-cheeked face of a cherub on a church window and the agile brain of a whiskey bottle. I was younger than I am now, and my hair was a whole lot darker.

Translated to English, Honduras meant — and still means — "The waves." The waves. I want you to know that the railroad running the eighty-four miles between that God-lost, banana-infested mountain village of Gracias à Dios and the waterfront of Puerto Paloma was "wavy." A Coney Island roller coaster could have learned some new wrinkles from that single, rusty, narrow, scrap-iron, crazy-bedded thread of track. And if you wanted the wildest ride in your life, all you had to do was go galloping upgrade from Puerto Paloma with a string of empties cracking the whip behind your tender. If you wanted the fastest ride you ever had, you'd rock down from Gracias à Dios at fifty, with the box cars stuffed with green bananas, with flat wheels banging, with sparks flying from the rails, and spikes jumping out of the rotted ties; you'd go shrieking across the sugar cane field and hammering up the dock, with just time to catch the last fruit boat for New Orleans.

Anything might be on the track to switch you into the Hereafter—anything from an old crone skinning a pig to a pile of coconuts thrown down by monkeys from the palm trees; from a dead horse to a brown baby paring its

chubby toenails with a banana knife. Or, like as not, a washout from the tropical rains. Or a section of track missing—torn up by the Carib Indians who thought the strangers were up in Gracias à Dios hunting a legendary treasure—silver beads hidden somewhere thereabouts by their ancestors. And if that wasn't enough, the Hondurans were always flagging the train to hand up a new set of rules and regulations just made by the latest president in the latest revolution.

There was a pair of engines—Number One and Number Two—antediluvian relics from the museums. Noah had brewed tea in them on the Ark, and the C. A. F. C. had bought them at a dime a piece, after the Civil War. Big, bony engines with crooked wheels under skinny bodies, with spreading cow-catchers and enormous fan-top stacks; with cozy little cabs crowded with soot, grease, flame, oilcans, cinders, oaths and a heat to peel the skin off your flesh while the coal tender racketed along behind and a Negro fireman named Olaf Jorgensen hurled scoops of coal at the crimson mouth of the firedoor. It was hot in tropical Honduras. It was hotter in an engine cab.

BIG DAN BONESTEEL ran the engines, and Big Dan was the sort of "hogger" who could fasten a coffee pot to a roller skate and send the thing highballing. Now and again, he'd let me drive an engine up to Gracias à Dios, but I knew little more than how to start and stop the contraptions. Big Dan knew every bolt and joint on those wrecks; he could take them apart and put them together and make them tick the way a Swiss tinkers with a watch and makes it go. While Number Two reposed in the Gracias à Dios roundhouse for coaling and watering, Big Dan grabbed Number One and raced for Puerto Paloma with a load of bananas. Then he roared back with empties for the mountain terminal, picked up the fresh locomotive with the fresh load of bananas, and thundered back to Puerto Paloma.

I could guess why, nine years before, Doc Foster had retired to that hooligan outpost. The mosquito-ridden coasts are alive with renegade medicos, and inland towns are likely to offer a better chance. Why Big Dan had drifted in there with him I couldn't guess. Big Dan was nobody's beachcomber, and he could have been cutting time any run on the New York Central. Here he was in that jungle hole, at thirty a week—every day but "Domingo"—and living in a shack up in Gracias à Dios, with nothing to do during off hours but sit around shaking with malaria or playing pinochle with Doc, or sneaking off for a lonely stroll in the jungle. His first run was at 7 A.M.—when the boat was in—and his last was midnight. The "Graveyard Limited," Big Dan called that final run; and I confess it used to give me a queer little chill.

You know the echo of a train whistle, streaking off through dark like the wail of a banshee—*whooo—whooo—whoooeeeee!* You should have heard it as Big Dan could play it, rocking the rails at fifty, through those mountain jungles. You know the crash of the midnight express, slamming crimson and black through the dark. You should have seen Big Dan's banana train taking the grooves across Honduras, along the cliff and down the gorge and across the cane, where the silence had lain unbroken for a thousand years. There were no bright-

colored signal towers, no cheerful green and red lights. Just the jungle, standing around in a way that would make you creep, with lush vegetation close-pressed along the track and vines and palms and timber wrapped in starshine and purple velvet. Fire and sparks and smoke rushing down through tropic black.

"If I'm ever a corpse," Big Dan would smile that rueful smile, "it'll be on that graveyard run. This job'll be the death of me yet!"

This isn't a railroad story, you see. It's the story of that astounding death—a thing that could have happened only in Honduras. If I live to be two thousand, I'll never forget the night the phone rang in the banana company's office and a woman's voice snapped out of the receiver:

"Mr. Jones, you come right up here at once. Bonesteel's *dead!*"

"Big Dan?" I yelled with emotion. "Big Dan's dead?"

But she'd shut off—and besides, I'm getting ahead of the story. I forgot to mention that Big Dan was married. Two years before, he'd gone up to Belize on a vacation and gotten himself fuddled with Bacardi rum, and he'd come back with a wife.

CHAPTER II.

THE OTHER WORLD.

YOU should have seen that big engineer's eyes when he stalked into the office to tell Doc and me about her. We thought he had married a *señorita,* one of those marble-skinned Spanish girls with eyes like dark pools, with lacquered hair, cool white hands and a shy, slim figure in a Latin shawl and a rare lace mantilla. Then he rushed out to bring in his bride; and Doc Foster, who never spilled a drop unless it was down his throat, poured a tumbler of Hollands across his lap.

She had a jaw—and *feet.* Her hair was like cotton thread, fastened under a flat hat such as social workers wear. Her dress was black, and there was a grim set to her face. Her shoulders were as square as a schoolmarm's. You understood that she had been teaching. You gleaned that impression from the thin black mustache on her tight upper lip and the disapproval in her eyes, behind pinch spectacles that were attached to a black ribbon, and the black ribbon attached to a little gold *fleur-de-lys* on her chest. She stood on flat-heeled shoes, and in one hand she held a straw suitcase, in the other a mesh bag filled with black books. Lord! Framed against the white sunlight of Honduras, she was like something in iron. She must have been at least forty.

I could hear Doc Foster gurgling under his breath, and I got up on stiff legs. "Well—congratulations."

Mrs. Bonesteel cut short Big Dan's introductions with a sharp, unsmiling nod, a glare at Doc and a sniff at me that said, "Tramps!" Her next gesture snatched the glass from Big Dan's fingers, and before the poor fellow could protest she had him, figuratively speaking, by the ear and was marching him out of there.

"I want you to understand, Dan Bonesteel, that I'll tolerate none of this hoodlumism and drinking!"

When bride and groom were departed, I looked at Doc and Doc looked at me. The doctor appeared to be sick. The apples in his cheeks had gone from ripe to green. He tipped back his helmet and swore.

"Now trepan me with a meat-ax!"

he burst out. "I should have known better than to let that fathead maniac go away on his vacation alone. Why, the fool ought to travel with a night nurse. Confound it, he'll ruin everything!"

Just what he'd ruined, other than his bachelorhood, I couldn't comprehend. The unregenerate physician, Foster, always mingled medical terms with solid invective.

"Sew up a sponge in me if I thought *this* would happen! Good Lord! Married!— To *that!*" He mopped his face savagely. "Well, it couldn't have happened anywhere but Honduras!"

I knew what Doc Foster meant. In Honduras, as I've stated, the days are too bright and the nights too dark. Bonesteel had lived too long alone, up there in that mountain outpost. Given a break back to civilization, he'd lost his head and married the first white woman he'd seen in seven years. Still, it wasn't the first time that some wild, rawhide frontiersman had gone off on a spree and come back determined to settle down.

"Romantic!" Doc Foster sneered. "Got the mind of a boy. She must out-date him by five years."

ANOTHER complex, Doc pronounced it. I thought I understood. The tropic stars can do more for a woman, a little Spanish music and warm air and a glass of Bacardi added, than five hundred tons of make-up. Big Dan's would be a dog-like devotion, wanting home and love and that sort of thing. I know he worshipped her for at least a week. Then began that rueful little smile in the corner of his mouth. A simple fellow, Big Dan; a mechanic at heart. The awakening must have been abysmal.

"You think you're going down to Puerto Paloma and drink with those scoundrels, Jones and Foster? Well, let me tell you, you can stay home Sundays and dig a new well on our compound!"

Oh—"I won't have that rascally physician around *this* house!" Or "If you really loved your wife—and I'm trying so hard—"

Then maybe a burst of metallic sobs. She'd been married before, you see. Doc Foster informed me with a growl:

"Her husband was vice consul in Belize. Probably a blind man, and died of falling down the back stairs, tryin' to sneak out."

In Gracias à Dios, lost up there in the mountains, Big Dan couldn't sneak out. He couldn't chew tobacco, either, or do a lot of other things he'd always done. Mrs. Bonesteel called him simply "Bonesteel," with a tinge of scorn to the appellation; and if, in final stubbornness, he refused compliance with one of her many demands, the vigilant woman had a "heart attack" handy, because of his brutal conduct, or a violent sick headache that lasted three days.

Obediently, he set about digging the well and repairing the roof, but it was hard to slave all day on a Sunday, after a solid week of hauling bananas, down there in the tropics, where the heat curled everybody and everything except Mrs. Bonesteel's hair, and where the nights were like a bath of morphine.

"And if you had a decent man's ambition you'd get me out of here and go to America and run a *real* locomotive—"

Big Dan was patient, in his dogged way. "You leave my locomotives alone. Them's good engines." He protested he wasn't ready to go to

America. If she'd only wait till he got enough money . . .

"Money? At thirty dollars a week?" You should have heard that sneer, as I heard it more than once.

Big Dan would shake his head. "But I told you before we was married—"

"Oh!" The woman would clap a hand to her forehead. "If my health were only better—"

Her health was perfect; and she was one of those females who was addicted to fads. Vegetarian diet—and Big Dan must eat no meat, either. And cold water. But I think the spiritualism was the heaviest straw.

CAN you see Big Dan, plugging up the dark path from the roundhouse, laden with sweat and grease, that first night home? To find a dinner of cold potatoes waiting, and his bride ensconced in a spiritualistic séance! The lamps of the bungalow turned low, the only sound the buzzing of mosquitoes and the nocturnal chirp of tree frogs, and in the air that unaccountable smell of rotting coconut husks that spoils the breeze around Honduran towns. Mrs. Bonesteel sitting bolt upright in the shadows of her chosen corner; books by Oliver Lodge and Conan Doyle and the Fox Sisters strewn at her boots; her hands clutched together in her lap; face clenched and eyes shut in a medium trance.

Trying to establish communication with her dead first husband, she told him. To an earthy fellow like Big Dan, used to fighting in the open and downing hot meals, it must have been a shock. It must have given him a turn.

"You're too pigheaded, too soulless to understand the psychic forces in the outer world." She was quick to show the contempt that one immersed in the occult, invited into the "inner circle," displays toward slow-witted humanity. "You and that criminal doctor friend of yours—won't have the man around here—are too utterly material to see beyond the cosmic void."

"Psychic forces?—Cosmic void?" You can imagine the abashed railroad engineer scratching his scalp, looking at his wife with puzzled, half-frightened blue eyes. And then, for the ensuing six months, coming home to a bungalow steadily filling with books from psychical research societies in England; strange pamphlets from heaven knew where; and queerish photographs of faces, misty under clouds of steam.

"That's not steam, you fool!—That's an aura."

"That there?—I mean, it looks like a ghost—"

"You would!—G h o s t, indeed! That's your cheap little worldly, superstitious mind. I told you to read that book I gave you, Bonesteel, and I see you haven't so much as done me the courtesy of opening it.—That's no ghost. That's an ectoplasmic emanation from the soul of one gone Beyond. Called from the after-world by Renard, the great French medium. If you only took the trouble to try to understand your wife, you'd know that I'm on the verge of attaining mediumistic power. Already I have heard the voices, have spoken with the dead, and some day may raise the dead, calling the spirit—"

His smile must have been rueful, then, the idea finally penetrating the flywheels, cogs, piston-rods, steam-boxes, bolts and gauges of his, you might say "one-track," locomotive engineer's mind. His wife! Talking with the dead. Good Lord! Then he

couldn't get away from it, even after he was gone. And *raise* the dead . . .

Doc Foster, who happened in, bluff and uninvited, to overhear this conversation—you can fancy the medical man's snort of professional disgust at what he termed "feminine hysteria"—told me that Big Dan shaded a trifle pale. And I think this trend to the domestic lecturings clicked something in the back of the big engineer's head. The man gave up.

Mrs. Bonesteel shut herself away from what little world there was in that miserable banana outpost, and wrapped herself in a mystic, and at the same time grim-jawed, mantle of spiritualism. Big Dan dolefully returned to his first loves, Engines One and Two, and the hard grind of freighting bananas. Doc Foster and I spent our nights off, in secret annoyance at each other's tiresome company, drinking to the fate of our lost *compadre;* and Big Dan spent his nights off digging new wells in new dry seasons, in patching the roof or in dodging Mrs. Bonesteel's diatribes.

And the nights are too dark in Honduras. Apes sing strangely at the moon—unearthly monkey cries—and the jungled mountains seem to be waiting.

It was about this time that I heard Big Dan say the job would be the death of him yet; and not long after that, Mrs. Bonesteel phoned to tell me he was dead.

CHAPTER III.

HOUSE OF THE DEAD.

I COULDN'T believe it. It was Saturday night, and not an hour earlier I'd heard the coughing of Big Dan's engine, finished with its midnight run, as it backed up the siding on the edge of the village. Big Dan dead! In an end-of-the-world hole like that, hemmed in by mountain night and by the sort of silence that fingers your face, death has a terrible sound.

Hurrying across the village, past tin-roofed warehouses, native shacks, thatch-topped Indian huts and up the black-swaddled path to Big Dan's bungalow, I was swamped with a blue loneliness. What had finished the big chap? A machete leaping out of the dark? A burst of steam? A bullet?

A squad of parrot-eyed Honduran soldiers had camped in the village that day, I remembered. Could one of those crack-brained fools have potshot the engineer? What happened to people when they died, anyway? Mrs. Bonesteel could snarl about souls translated into invisible quivers that floated about in space. With that round, lemon-colored moon creeping around a shoulder of cliff, I didn't like to think about it; I didn't want to go up to Big Dan's bungalow and meet his gloomy widow.

The village that night seemed alive with secret excitement. It was one of those nights when you hear boards cracking in the heat and the darkness walking. In the honkytonks the guitars had stopped. Hut windows were black, and I had a feeling of shadows scurrying past me.

Poor Dan! What did these Spigs care? Just another *Gringo* out of the way.—What did anybody care? I tried to think of something to say to Mrs. Bonesteel, and couldn't think of anything. Death is the last word, in a place like that.

The woman was standing in her doorway, arms akimbo, rigid as a granite mortician. Worse than that, for she'd draped herself in black, with

a loose black veil thrown aside from her face; and in the dim, amber light stealing from the inner room, her chiseled features were as unnatural as those of a mannish female impersonator playing doorman to a tomb.

"Mrs. Bonesteel," I faltered, "this is—is—"

"He's in there." She nodded her jaw over her shoulder, and her voice was made of wood. "Couldn't you get here sooner? You're the head of this filthy banana camp."

She was a terrifying person, at that time of night. Either she was actually turning to stone, holding like iron under terrific emotional strain, or she was one of those women who fainted at nothing, who never shed a tear. I tell you, it was somber. Her eyes, without glasses, were as dry as bits of obsidian. She'd expressed a desire that I stay away from there, and I hadn't seen her in a couple of months; and so the sight of her, that night, with my nerves already unstrung, rattled my spine.

For a flash I wondered if she'd killed Big Dan; but she was glaring at me as if the fault were mine.

"I—I'm sorry," I muttered.

"Why sorry?" she came back, in that séance tone. "He has gone to a better world. We are taking him away, and you've got to help."

THEN I got another shock. There was a smell of whiskey in the doorway, and I saw Doc Foster standing there. Whether his eyes were glassy from grief or alcohol I couldn't tell, but his sleeves were rolled up on stubby, pale arms, and his manner was revoltingly brisk. I glared at the man in angry astonishment. That fat little crocodile! Apparently, he was no more perturbed by the presence of death than Mrs. Bonesteel. And Big Dan had been Doc Foster's friend.

"I've just finished the autopsy, madame," said Foster, clearing his throat professionally. "He died of apoplexy induced by sudden fever. Oh, Jones." He switched to me, his voice lowering. "Ha—glad you've come—this is—well, sad to say the least. Poor Bonesteel! Well, it was over in a minute. A wretched business."

He voiced the suspicion of a hiccup. "Dan was out in the compound digging a well, not half hour ago. He was waist deep in the ditch. I was watching from my shack. Suddenly I saw him throw up his arms and go down. I rushed over, of course, but he was lying at the bottom of the ditch. Stone dead. Gone.—Apoplexy, yes. Like that. Whiff.—Well, he—he'd had a fever. Must have caught it down in the cane somewhere. Resistance lowered by not having enough solid food, I should say, and it got him. I've just finished the autopsy—"

Autopsy? If he said that word again, in that offhand tone, I'd kill the little brute! You'd have thought Big Dan was just another interesting specimen for that doctor; an entertaining case. I could have wrung some feeling into the beachcombing physician's fat neck. With a soiled handkerchief, he mopped the accordion pleats on the back of his neck, and started to roll down his sleeves.

"Naturally—er—and Mrs. Bonesteel agrees with me—we've got to get him out of here. The—uh—heat, you know."

"I won't have Bonesteel buried in this God-forsaken spot!" his widow announced grimly. "God knows I can at least give my husband a decent burial—and a stone. I was telling him only last week, if anything happened

to him on that wretched railroad—oh, being an engineer's wife is a life of constant sorrow and worry—he must have a respectable resting place. I shall take him to New Orleans."

"We're going to take him down on the train," Foster nodded. "We've got just about enough time to catch the last boat before next week."

Remember, the jungle was standing around whispering, and there were the mountains, looming purple against the stars, and the moon beginning to paint yellow and black down the cliffs. Mrs. Bonesteel's face was like a mask in gray stone, framed in mourner's weeds. The frowsy doctor rolling down his cuffs. Then the woman, staring off at nothing, and muttering:

"I shall try to establish communication with Bonesteel. If the power—the power would only come!—We must concentrate. The dead shall rise again—"

But the room inside was worse. The single lamp was low, a bluish flame was fluttering close down on the wick. Chair-legs creaked in the heat and shadows lay in crazy patterns across walls and floor. Big Dan, lying there on the cot, his inert frame wrapped in a white sheet, mummified and silent. Muffled in that shroud from foot to forehead, with just the top of his brow showing, and with one arm hanging down with the hand dangling free, the skin as green as house paint.

Doc Foster, dodging in front of me, yelped: "Don't go near! It was *yellow* fever.—Contagion!"

Mrs. Bonesteel gave a sudden squawk in the doorway; there was the sound of running boots coming out of night, a faint haze of dust, firecracker Spanish dialect, an arm shoving the woman aside, and a figure in gaudy uniform standing on the threshold.

"I am Guiterre Miguel Wençeslao Saavedra, lieutenant of the Honduran regular army. And these, *señores*, are my men."

Cat-like whispers stiff with authority, and fierce, lizard-quick, accusing eyes.

"Word has come to me of the Americano dying of contagion," the Honduran officer continued. "I refer you to the new ruling of President Pastore's government, Article Twelve, Section Nine, Constitutional Amendment Four Thousand Seven, Law On Public Health. And I place you under arrest for not informing authorities of this case at once. Furthermore, I demand the body of the corpse for disposal as contagious, in immediate bonfire!"

I shall not soon forget what happened then!

CHAPTER IV.

FUNERAL TRAIN.

"BONFIRE!" Mrs. Bonesteel whirled on the shrimpish Honduran with the astounding ferocity which large women so often develop. Her bark was as angry as a dog's. "You mean you're going to cremate my husband?—Burn his body?"

The officer drew himself up to a height. "It is the law."

"Not *my* husband's body, you're not!" She knotted a fist. "Bonesteel was my husband, and no picayune Spaniard is going to tell *me* what to do with him! He belongs to the spirit world now, and his soul is translated to the non-corporeal. I am," she chanted in the voice of a rune, "working on a new theory, one of my own conception, and if the Master Spirit

wills it, I shall talk with Bonesteel's departed soul and ask it to return to its earthly body—"

It was enough to rattle my teeth, that woman talking such unearthly mediumistic patter, the mummy-wrapped figure on the cot with its green hand and green forehead. Doc Foster looked badly, too. Standing behind me, he was making strangling noises in his throat; sweat was sprouting in shiny drops on his cheeks. The lieutenant and the men banded at his back began to mutter. I don't suppose they understood a word the woman was droning.

Guiterre Miguel Wençeslao Saavedra moved forward. "I must demand that the *señora* stand aside—"

He didn't know Mrs. Bonesteel. She swept out a hand and knocked the officer a slam against the wall that shook the roof and took a good deal of the bombast out of his doublet. She wasn't the sort to stand aside for anybody.

The Honduran officer howled like a kicked wildcat. And the next thing I knew a batch of barefoot soldiers were crowding through the door, Mrs. Bonesteel was whirling in the midst of bedlam, the lieutenant was trying to draw the saber from the scabbard caught between his legs, and there was hell to pay. In that room of death the uproar was fantastic and terrible.

"Fight them!" the woman screamed. "Fight the rats!"

She waded through the tangle, fists striking out, eyes blazing. Holy St. Mackerel, didn't they blaze! The Latin temper blew sky high, and four Hondurans threw themselves on top of me. Some one was rattling handcuff chains. The lieutenant was shrieking:

"Arrest them! In the name of Law!"

A chair broke, crackling. Dust boiled up off the carpet. Trampling feet and flying fists. Doc Foster took a gun butt on the chin, tumbled backwards and sprawled howling atop the body on the cot.

"The back door!" Mrs. Bonesteel squalled above the din. "The back door!"

A gun crashed like a cannon, and the lamp on the table popped to a thousand fragments, plunging that hot, close room into darkness and oily smoke. I could hear the soldiers howling like tigers.

"Caracoles!" "Por Dios!" "Carramba!"

Mrs. Bonesteel screaming, "No filthy little Spaniard—"

THE back door. We were out of there, running across the compound, the woman coming behind me with long strides, the army coming behind the woman, Doc Foster up ahead, his short legs rabbiting, and hugged in his sweating arms that body wrapped in its white sheet.

I was sick, I can tell you. As long as I live, I never hope to see anything like that. Doc Foster lugging Big Dan's body. That locomotive engineer had stood six feet, remember; and the corrupted little physician was carrying him off through the night as he might have carried a child—for all the world like a grave robber hotfooting it out of a cemetery with his ghoulish burden, the police bringing up the rear.

We plunged through a mass of banana plants, through a thicket of coconut palms, their white boles wizardish in moonlight, and down a reeking alley. That whole dreadful village was racketing like a canning factory. A batch of half naked men spilled around a corner. Indians, joining the rumpus!

"Get the *Gringo!*"—"Stop thief!"—"*Bandido!*" Yells traveled up the mountain, splitting the blackness with frantic echoes. All Honduras was after us now.

"The railroad!" Mrs. Bonesteel screeched.

I don't know how we outdistanced them, how we got on that train. Olaf Jorgensen had nursed steam up in the engines—as a general rule, we kept them hot all night—but the Negro fireman was nowhere in sight when we got to the siding. Though I did think I saw a pair of eyes, as big as white eggs, watching the rush from under the loading platform. Number One stood there, steaming drowsily, with one loaded banana car hooked to the tender. We got aboard—the body, Doc, Mrs. Bonesteel and I. I don't know how. I remember Doc darting like a gnome around the cow-catcher, to throw the switch that would get us on the main line. I remember, too, the indomitable woman beating on my shoulders.

"Get up in that engine and drive!" she screamed.

"I'm no engineer!" I protested, with nerves. "I'm a plantation manager."

"You get up in there and run that thing!" she commanded.

Well, I did know how to throw the throttle. Shades of Casey Jones! My first yank had the wheels spinning on the track like buzz saws. But Doc did something with a lever that released sand. The flanges took hold; Number One jumped forward with a neck-cracking jolt, sprang out of the siding, shot across the switch leaning over like a ship, thundered down the open road.

"Go it, you fool!" Doc's shout was almost jubilant. "Let her blow! Operate! We got just time to make the boat!"

I slammed the throttle, and the drivers pounded full blast. The track dropped straight ahead for a mile, a silvery highway in the moonlight, black-green jungle walls sheer on either side. Steam blowing like whales' spouts from the boxes, pistons hammering, smoke streaking like ink from the stack, we tore down that river of jungle moonlight. Yes, and we'd forgotten to light the headlamp!

Gales of wind ripped through the open windows of the cab; the floor bounced in a way to hurl me off my sideseat, so that I had to hang on with white hands. I could hear metal clanging, see Doc Foster, bent double, his renegade helmet tipped over his eyes and his face painted a wild crimson in the flame of the firedoor, stoking like a madman. It was hot in that cab—hotter than a furnace. Sweat ran from every pore in my face; yet it was like icewater. Talk about a graveyard run!

That train with its single box car crashing a downhill hole through tropic night was *it!* I could look back over my shoulder, you understand; and there on the deck of the tender, her widow's weeds blowing like black wings from her shoulders, her face like gray granite, her body balanced against the sway of the car, Mrs. Bonesteel hovered over the white-wrapped body, stark and stiff.

THE woman turned her head as I looked, and shrieked:

"Hurry, you fool! Hurry!—The other engine! They're coming after us!"

Can you get a picture of the thing? That pounding six-wheeler rolling down the loose track. That scamp of a doctor playing Vulcan with the coal scoop. Iron and smoke, banging and

clanging, the stack spouting red light like the chimney of a blast furnace. Me, hanging white and half-witted in the cab window. The woman crouching on the deck of the coal car, veils streaming, rocky face bared to the moon, eyes opalescent, over the shrouded body like the black statue of Charon—Angel of Death—conducting a passenger to the Land of Shades. Wow!

And that other train, as I saw it when we rounded the curve, hammering and whistling in red hot pursuit. Engine Number Two, whip-cracking its string of empties, wild faces, fists, guns hanging from the cab windows and the tender, the brown men like so many monkeys on the decks of the box cars.

We were moving, I can promise you that! The jungle was tearing past my face in a black streak. Two miles down the line, in sudden desperation, I yanked the whistle cord—*Whoooo-whooo-whoooeeee!*—but the goat I had spied on the tracks never had time to get off, and we weren't stopping. The animal must have soared five hundred feet, twisting high in the air against the yellow moon.

Mrs. Bonesteel shouted, "They're getting closer!"

A bullet went *ping!* and ricochetted off the sill under my elbow. I pulled in my ears, then. That Honduran lieutenant behind us meant business. Hondurans have no particular fondness for North Americans, especially when the Hondurans outnumber them twenty to one. There must have been sixty Indians, besides that squad of comic opera soldiers, hanging and shrieking on that train behind us. The Indians brandished machetes and the soldiers waved guns. Those soldiers were mad—tough customers. The lieutenant was mad, too. Spanish officers don't like to be slapped in the face. I could imagine how the telegraph wires that made a liquid fence alongside the track were buzzing this piece of news, and I wondered what sort of reception we were in for in Puerto Paloma.

Doc cursed at my elbow, leaning out of the cab and shaking a fist aft.

"Give her all the juice she can take! They're gettin' up on us! We're pullin' a loaded car, that's why! You don't want 'em to burn poor old Dan—"

Poor old Dan! I thought of the chap wrapped in that white sheet, stiff and stark atop the swaying tender, and I choked. Doc whirled, grabbed a funnel of sand, poured it into the fire-door to clear the flue. Smoke sped from the stack in an inky hurricane.

Mrs. Bonesteel was half blotted out by the streaming fog. Hair blew in a thicket over her face, her cheeks were streaked as with a minstrel's burnt cork, but not with tears. There wasn't a tear in the woman. Standing there atop the tender in smoke and moonlight, she moved her lips in a sort of mumbo-jumbo, and every once in a while she'd move her hands and make a pass over the sheet-wrapped body at her feet. Somehow, the thing got in my back teeth and made them chatter.

"You ought to get her into that box car!" I yelled at Doc. "She'll fall off or get hit.—They're shooting!"

"Can't!" Doc hollered. "Car's loaded to the roof with bananas—"

CHAPTER V.

RAISING THE DEAD.

WE took an S curve in a way that made the hair on my scalp stand at attention; we thundered through a narrow gorge, tore

across a wooden trestle and dashed a straight five miles in as many minutes, with my heart like a lump of dough in my mouth. The cab was a young inferno of heat, cinders, spattering oil and deafening noise. Ten miles. Twenty miles. Thirty. Yet on the long curves where the jungle was chopped clear, I could see Number Two walloping along behind us in a blur of fireglow and iron.

Red holes in the night. The firefly twinkle of popping guns.

"Hurry!" the woman came out of a trance and screamed at me. "Faster! They're gaining on us!"

We couldn't go any faster. Number One would have blown to pieces if we had tried it. The throttle was down to the last notch.

We came to a place where the track was overshadowed by tall palms. I poked my head from the window in terror, trying to see, and the wind almost blasted my face away. Downhill at sixty, and we seemed to be rocketing in mid air, ripping through Stygian black on a thundering firebrand. You think that engine wasn't rocking?

"Faster! Faster!—They're gaining!" came the scream.

We were pounding on an upgrade. Doc turned from the steam indicator, threw down his shovel. Head to foot, he was as black as tar, streaming coaldust and grease.

"I ought to unhook that banana car—"

"No, no!" I shrieked. "It would kill the lot of them—"

"They're almost up to us!—I'll fix those consumptive paretic cretins!"

He scrambled out of the cab, across the coal bins and up to the tender's deck; he stooped low and ran to the box car. Under the braking wheel there was a little door in the car's square face. Doc opened the door, yanked out three bunches of green bananas.

"Help me!" he shrieked at Mrs. Bonesteel.

I won't soon forget the woman's answer, her voice lifted above the bellow of the engine.

"Don't interrupt!" she cried. "I'm *concentrating!* I'm trying to communicate with Bonesteel."

Doc must have gone crazy. Clutching those banana stems in his arms, he crawled to the top of the box car, wormed his way aft, and sat there in the smoke and wind and moonlight, peeling bananas—*peeling green bananas.* There was Number Two's headlight, closing in behind like a huge white eye—and the little fat man ripping skins from the fruit. Crazy?—Like a fox.

I could have yelled. He was throwing those skinned bananas on the track! Three bunches, and three bunches more. White meat and green skins scattered across the rails in the vacuum behind us. I could hear the wild, crescendo whine of Number Two's skidding drivewheels, the blast of that engine's exhaust, the bawl of rage from its train crew. There was Doc, squatting atop the box car, tossing bananas like some outlandish, gamin sparrow scattering crumbs from a roof. I won't forget that sight. Or the roaring of the baffled locomotive behind us. You know the sound? The blast of a freight engine struggling on greasy rails, trying to pull a heavy train, drivers spinning?

We pulled away, and the headlight faded, the din died in our rear. Twenty miles more, cutting the grooves across Honduras, eating the miles in the pitch black of the jungle. Didn't we get

away from that other train? But tearing a tunnel down the night, alone this way, with Doc stoking the fire and the woman standing over the white mummy of Big Dan on the tender, was almost worse. Every mile it was worse. Over my shoulder I could see her standing there, a black image above the white, making passes with her hands and her lips going.

"We'll make the boat!" Doc hollered. "Look at the mileage. Only fifteen more to go."

BUT we had more than that to go. We crashed the night to shatters through a narrow ravine, started to blast around a sweeping curve, and I heard a sound that got me by the throat. *Whooo-whooo-whoooeee!* That was the train behind us. They'd sanded the track, cleared the garbage and were coming ahead full steam. And that wasn't the third of it. My old Number One took the curve like an iron airplane, stormed out onto a straight stretch, and smack to the middle of hell. I mean *hell*.

"Look!" Doc's screech came out of his mouth like the wail of a jackal.

But I didn't have to look. I could see, all right. You could see for miles. As bright as day, and the sky painted crimson as dawn and hot as tropical noon. Only it wasn't day. Before I could yank the lever, that runaway engine shot straight into the middle of Hades in a wild, blazing heat to singe your eyebrows. Burning sugar; the cane, as far as your eye could see, was on fire. Flame licking and leaping and billowing in all directions, and the track going straight through the middle of it—and we were on the track! And at that same desperate minute a little valve snapped above the firebox; something hacked a cough in the engine's middle; and the wheels hammered to a stop.

"Don't back up!" Doc squalled.

"They're coming after us!" the woman shrieked. "Go ahead!"

"We can't go at *all!*" I screeched. "It's broken *down!*"

And with one voice they screamed,

"Oh, my God! If Big Dan was only here!"

Can you see us, stalled in the heart of that crimson, flaming field, with the tracks as red as electric wires ahead and behind; fire capering across the roadbed and blue flames licking along the ties? Can you smell the burning sugar and hear the crackling blaze-roar and the echo of those two simultaneous screams?

But, then, can you see what I saw? The white-wrapped body of the big engineer stretched at the woman's feet! One outflung arm and green hand—all clear as day in the volcanic brilliance of the cane fires.

That dead arm began to move! I tell you, I saw it move across the sooty iron deck, and lift green fingers to fumble across the sheet-swathed face. I wanted to yell, but my throat tied itself in a granny knot. I couldn't gasp a sound. Fire shouted around the stalled train, some distance away sounded the phantom echo of a locomotive whistle; and in the red glare of nightmare the white, mummy figure moved and slowly raised its head. Slowly the spectral figure sat upright. The fingers pulled the shroud away; and Big Dan Bonesteel sat staring, his forehead the color of dying grass, his face enameled scarlet, his eyes batted wide in his head.

"Where am I? Voices—I heard voices!" The wizardish cry strangled into a shout. "What's wrong with that engine—?"

"I've done it!" Mrs. Bonesteel screamed. "I've raised the dead!"

I don't know what Doc and I were doing. I know that sepulchral being atop the tender soared to its feet, whipped off the sheet and tossed it into the coal bin; then it came springing for the cab to knock me flat on the floor with a green hand. I could see that terrible hand snatch a hammer from under the driver's seat, pound and claw at the broken valve above the firebox.

The hammer flew through the window. The green hand grabbed the throttle. The engine belched a roar, sprang forward on the track. Embers and flame walls shot past the cab on either side, as that impossible express train went slamming straight through the heart of the roaring field, shaking and rocking and thundering.

A last rush of red heat, and we were whistling through cool dark, banging across the switches on the outskirts of Puerto Paloma, past a railroad shed where dim men yelled, then out on a dock where the calm white wall of a fruit boat loomed above the tracks. Doc was yelling and the woman was yelling. Big Dan was sitting on the seat in the cab window, clutching the throttle in his pea-green hands. I lay on the floor, stiff as a board.

BUT don't, as I did for weeks after, go peeking under your bed every night and starting with a whinney every time you hear a train whistle echoing under the moon. It was the sort of thing that could have happened only in Honduras. Only in Honduras would an engineer race his train through a field of burning sugar to scare into convulsions the police, who'd fired the cane. I won't forget the howls of those terrified soldiers on the dock, or the sight of the Honduran general who vanished up the wharf, smaller and smaller, like a clown cop in a slapstick movie. Only in Honduras would a fruit boat lower a gangway down its calm white wall, ship's officers shouting and funnel blowing.

The woman in black sprinted across the tracks with the fat little doctor and an engineer with green hands chasing after; and Mrs. Bonesteel made a picture running for that gangway. Don't ever think she didn't. Half way up the gangplank she halted, whirling on the pair who had tried to catch her.

"Don't try to stop me!" The voice bursting from that sooty face would have halted an army. "I'm going to England.—I shall take my story to the world!" One black finger pointed at the moon. "My life belongs to those gone Beyond. I have raised the dead!"

The voice of her husband would have raised the dead, I promise you.

"Wait!" he screeched. "My sheet! I threw it in the coal car. Where's my *sheet?*"

Mrs. Bonesteel was at the high rail. "I threw it into that burning field, you fool!" she screamed through cupped palms. "Contagious!"

Plop! The engineer went down. I was crawling from the cab, and I saw him fall. The white ship slid along the wharf, and Mrs. Bonesteel stood at the rail, stark and black, moonshine making cold satellites of the glasses pinched to her nose, her finger fixed pointing at the sky.

NO man was there to see us carry the body off that wharf. When we staggered into the banana office I wanted a good big drink. I smashed the neck from a bottle, and poured brown whiskey through Big Dan's teeth. Then I slopped the rest of it through my own.

The engineer sat upright on the floor the next moment, smiling his rueful smile.

"Gotta do something to get this green house paint off my hands," he told us dolefully.

"Too bad it wasn't Paris green!" Doc Foster snapped, pacing the room. "Paris green in the pit of that woman's neurotic stomach.—Throwin' the sheet away like that!"

"And with all that silver wrapped up in the feet of that shroud!" the incredible engineer groaned. "Say, I thought I *would* die when I shoveled up those silver beads at the bottom of that well. Musta been worth a fortune.—Maybe we should of told her, Doc, instead of playin' possum an' having her think I was dead, and me tryin' to sneak off on the boat as a corpse. Th' fortune's gone, all right, but—" the rueful smile broadened to an urchin grin—"I reckon the wife is, too.—Gee, give me a hand, will you, Jones, an' help me off'n this floor?"

"I wouldn't touch either of you!" I let them have it. "You're contagious!"

Only in Honduras, I repeat, could the thing have happened. Those beach-combing, bushwhacking scoundrels!—And on the strength of his supernatural return from the dead, Big Dan got the religious element behind him and made himself vice president at the next election! Doc Foster became secretary of the Honduran army, and the first job *he* did was to fire one Guiterre Miguel Wenceslao Saavedra.

Mrs. Bonesteel now calls herself by another name and coins a fortune as the latest fad among spirit mediums in Europe. I spent a year hunting that treasure in that burned-out cane field, but I didn't find it.

The days are too bright in Honduras; the nights are too dark.

THE END.

Bloodhounds Help Prisoner Escape

WHILE for centuries bloodhounds have been used to recapture runaway prisoners, it remained for a clever Negro in an Arkansas convict camp to reverse this age-old procedure.

As is the custom, at this camp were a number of bloodhounds kept for the purpose of preventing escapes. These were in care of a Negro trusty who fed them, and who made friends with them.

Finally, seizing the opportunity for which he had been waiting, he escaped. As a matter of course the hounds were set on his trail. As they did not return to their masters the pursuit seemed hopeless, but two days later the pursuers stumbled upon the convict asleep in the woods, surrounded by the pack of dogs—also taking a nap.

On being approached by the guards, the dogs refused to let them take the Negro, and had to be clubbed into submission before they would permit him to be retaken.

When they returned to the camp the man was removed from his association with the dogs to prevent a recurrence of the same sort of thing.

However, when a few weeks later the man attempted to escape again, the dogs, remembering their friend, again refused to catch him and the guards had to fire on the man to stop him. *Earl B. Powell.*

The Outlaws of Mars

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE
Author of "The Swordsman of Mars," "Jan of the Jungle," etc.

Unjustly accused of murdering a prince on Mars, Earth-man Jerry Morgan is offered a chance to live—as a slave

Shadows darkened the sun; it was a slave raid!

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Captain Jerry Morgan, expert swordsman, left the American Army, his scientist uncle, Dr. Richard Morgan, had no difficulty in persuading the adventurous young man to take a trip to Mars in a space ship, directed by mental telepathy. Dr. Morgan had, for some time, been in mental accord with a Martian scientist, Lal Vak.

Jerry arrived in Raliad, largest city of Mars and capital of the empire of Kalsivar, where buildings rise thousands of feet into the sky. He found himself on the huge roof of the imperial palace,

This story began in the Argosy for November 25.

residence of Numin Vil, the emperor, and Princess Junia Sovil.

Before Lal Vak could get in touch with him, Jerry was arrested as a spy and was taken before Numin Vil. Junia interceded for him, although Thoor Movil, nephew of Numin Vil and head spy for the emperor, demanded that he be beheaded. Lal Vak arrived, however, and gained a forty day stay of execution, during which time Jerry could learn the Martian language and present his defense.

Jerry fell in love with Junia, and she returned his love. His troubles were many, though, for it soon became apparent that Thoor Movil was determined to have him murdered, Thoor Movil being an unsuccessful suitor for Junia's hand. The affair was complicated when Nisha Novil, pretty sister of Thoor Movil, also fell in love with Jerry and he did not return her love.

One night, just before Jerry's final trial, Shiev Zovil, Junia's dissolute brother, attacked Manith Zovil, prince of a neighboring empire, and was killed by the visitor, who had befriended Jerry. Thoor Movil accused Jerry of the killing and Junia believed him guilty. He was suddenly seized and taken to the apartment of Nisha Novil.

CHAPTER XI.

SLAVERY.

JERRY succumbed to the inevitable and gave up his struggles. He lay immobile, until his wrists and ankles grew numb from the tightly drawn bonds. Then suddenly, to his surprise, he heard a throaty contralto voice that was strangely familiar —the voice of Nisha.

"Remove the cloak, Jeth," she said, "and cut his bonds. My brother's men have gone."

The cloak dragged from his head, Jerry blinked in the unaccustomed rays of a light globe which hung above him, and flexed his numb limbs. He was in a small chamber, evidently the dressing room of Thoor's sister.

A burly, brown-skinned guard stood beside him, and another stood watch at the door. Nisha, herself, was looking down at him.

"I hope my men have not injured you," she said solicitously. "They acted in the emergency, under my commands, in order to save your life. The emergency has passed, but you are still in great danger. However, if you are willing to do as I tell you, it may be that I will be able to save you."

"You have been most kind," Jerry told her. "What do you want me to do?"

"Thoor's men are searching the palace—in fact, the whole city—for you," she said. "They guessed that you had escaped by way of the balcony, and my brother came in to tell me to be on the lookout for you. While he was talking to me I saw you on my balcony —saw you leap, grasp a vine and draw yourself up to Junia's balcony. I set my two faithful men, here, to watch for you and bring you to me unharmed but incapable of attempting to escape. And it is well that I did so, because Thoor's soldiers came through my apartment a moment later and searched the balcony. By telling them I had not seen you, which was true enough, I prevented their searching this dressing room.

"I have planned an escape for you, but it will involve a complete change in your appearance."

Going to a dressing table near by, she selected two small flasks which she handed to Jerry. "This," she said, indicating the first, "will dye your hair jet black. And this," pointing to the second, "will make your skin the same shade of brown as my guards'. I will go outside while they help you."

As soon as she departed, the two men assisted Jerry to strip from head to foot. Then one set about applying the black dye to his sandy hair, while the other painted his skin with the brown liquid. Gazing into the burnished gold mirror, Jerry was astounded at the rapid transformation wrought in his appearance. In less than five minutes he was, to all appearances, a racial brother of the two brown men.

One of them brought him a coarse gray breech clout and headcloak, and a pair of gray boots—the clothing of a slave. Quickly donning these, he again surveyed himself in the mirror. He looked exactly like one of the thousands of brown-skinned slaves he had seen employed in the palace. A small blue and orange emblem, stitched to all of his garments, announced that they, and their wearer, were the property of Nisha Novil. After he had transferred the contents of the pouch attached to his former belt to the plain gray pouch he now wore, he was ready.

ONE of the guards went out and a moment later Nisha entered the room. She dismissed the other guard, and glanced at Jerry.

"Your disguise seems perfect," she said after a careful inspection. "Your name is now Gudo. As Gudo, the slave, you'll shortly be conducted hence in a band of fifty of my slaves, who go to work on the new canal that Numin Vil is building. Every slaveholder in Kalsivar is required to send one-tenth of his male slaves to work for one senil, or tenth of a Martian year, on the project, and this is my tithe. It fortunately happened that they were to leave to-night, to relieve the fifty who have been working there for the last senil, and who will return to my service."

"Your highness is most kind," said Jerry. "Were it not for you, I would most certainly be on my way to execution by now, if not already dead."

"At the end of the senil," she went on, "you will be returned to my country estate on the Corvid Canal. I will be waiting there for you, and together we will make plans for the future. Please understand that I am not pretending altruism or a disinterested friendship. Let us have no pretensions between us. I love you madly, and would rather see you dead than in the arms of another. It is only because I hope to win you that I have intervened to save your life. You will have one senil in which to think it over, and it is my hope that perhaps you may learn to—to care for me."

She spoke so calmly, so dispassionately, that Jerry could scarcely believe this was the fiery, temperamental girl who had alternately caressed and clawed him only a short time before. She handed him a full flask of the black dye, one of the brown stain, and a third which contained a clear liquid.

"You may be traced, and find it necessary to change your disguise," she said. "A few drops of this liquid added to a basin of water will make a solution that will instantly restore your hair and skin to their natural color.

"In a moment more you must leave. You will be going into danger, and perhaps to your death, though Deza knows I have done everything possible for your safety." She moved closer. "Can you—will you take me in your arms—hold me for just a moment? Let me feel your lips on mine just once—willingly? A senil is so long—and if fate should take you from me, there will be, at least, this memory."

Jerry couldn't resist an appeal like that from the girl to whom he owed his very life.

"I can and will, Nisha," he replied, suiting his actions to his words. Then, holding her away from him and looking down into her lovelit eyes, he added: "I like your candor. You're a girl in a million. It is a pity that love is not a thing we can command like a slave, or call to heel like a dalf."

"I know," she replied, a wealth of meaning in her tone. Then she turned and called the guards. When they entered she said:

"You have your instructions, and will carry them out at once."

"Come, Gudo," said one, taking Jerry's arm.

"Good-by, highness," said Jerry.

"Farewell. I will always love you," she replied, with a look of longing in her eyes.

Then he passed out the door between the two warriors.

Jerry's conductors led him through a series of rooms and corridors into a large chamber, where an aggregation of gray-clad, brown-skinned slaves waited, guarded by a company of white warriors. A scribe took down his assumed name and the name of his owner, and he was herded in with the others.

THEY were kept standing there for some time, their ranks constantly swelled by newly arrived slaves. But presently the influx ceased, and Jerry noticed some sign of activity at the other end of the hall. Then he saw that a group of soldiers was painting a number on the foreheads of the slaves, with red pigment, and thrusting them, feet first, into a hole in the wall.

He was greatly puzzled by this at first, but presently his own turn came, and the riddle was solved. With the painted number still wet on his forehead, he was thrust into the dark hole. Instantly he shot downward at a steep angle, with a rapidly increasing acceleration, in an incredibly slippery tube about four feet in diameter. Though he was in total darkness, he could gage the various turnings of the tube by noticing which wall he was tilted against.

At first he descended in a series of spirals, but presently this changed to a steep, straight incline, in which his body moved with such velocity that he could feel a pressure in his eardrums. Then, gradually, this leveled out, slowly checking his momentum, until he presently shot out under the roof of a low shed, to land on a padded platform. Here two guards, waiting to receive him, glanced at the painted number on his forehead and turned him over to another guard, who conducted him to a place where a group of his fellows waited.

By the dim light of the farther moon—for the nearer, brighter luminary had now set—he saw that they were on a dock which fronted a canal. Moored to the dock, directly in front of him, was a strange craft. It was long and low, and roofed over in the manner of a whaleback steamer, but with blocks of translucent material through which the rays from its baridium globes shone forth. But the strangest thing about it was its propulsive mechanism, the visible part of which consisted of eight pairs of huge-jointed metal legs, each tipped with a webbed foot much like that of a duck. Obviously the craft actually swam on the surface of the canal like a waterfowl.

He saw a demonstration of this a moment later when a similar boat

passed, and was astounded at the smoothness and speed with which these mechanical legs could propel the craft over the water.

For some time he and his fellow slaves stood shivering on the dock in the chill of the early morning, boots drawn up and headcloaks dropped to their knees. But presently they were herded aboard the vessel and into several large compartments, each of which was heated by a globular contrivance which stood in the middle of the floor.

As soon as they entered the compartments there was a rush to get near the heating globe, and those who succeeded lay down to sleep in its genial warmth. But any place in the compartment was far warmer than the dock outside, and Jerry, wearied by his adventures and exertions and weakened by his wound, was glad to curl up against the outside wall and close his eyes. He felt the boat gliding smoothly away from the dock under the propulsion of its mechanical, webbed feet. But he was too drowsy to be even interested.

A moment later the sleep of utter exhaustion claimed him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RAID.

JERRY was awakened by a sharp kick in the ribs. A guard was standing over him.

"It is time to eat, slave," he said gruffly, and passed on to kick the next man awake.

Following the guard came a line of slaves bearing large trays of food and drink. The food consisted of a stew in which were combined fish, flesh and vegetables cut into small pieces and seasoned with a peppery condiment. The beverage was the omnipresent pulcho. Jerry ate his stew in the manner of his companions, by drinking the thin gravy and scooping up the rest with his fingers. Then he slowly sipped his cup of pulcho, and was ready with the others to hand cup and bowl back to the slaves who came to collect the dishes.

The heating globe had been turned off, but its place was more than taken by the sun, which was already halfway to the zenith. Had it not been for the fresh breeze that whipped in through the ventilators it would have been uncomfortably warm in the interior of the craft.

Jerry arose and looked curiously out at the passing scenery. On one side of the canal he saw a wall, topped by small buildings at regular intervals, and patrolled by sentries. On the other side a series of broad terraces led downward to another canal, and another series progressed upward to a third. The terraces were covered with cultivated gardens and orchards, and dotted here and there with cylindrical buildings constructed from blocks of iridescent crystal in various colors and patterns—evidently the dwellings of the Martian agriculturalists.

The purpose of these three canals in a single excavation was plain enough. The two upper and outer canals each watered the system of terraces below it. Approximately fifty per cent of the irrigation water from these two would be accounted for by soakage, evaporation, and the needs of the plant life they supported. The rest must seep into the drainage canal at the bottom. The total excavation was about fifteen miles in width. Each canal was approximately a mile in width, and each system of terraces six miles.

The canals were dotted with craft of various sizes and kinds. All of the

larger boats were propelled, like the one on which he rode, by mechanical webbed feet, but some of the smaller ones had sails, and others were paddled like canoes. The smaller craft seemed mostly to be engaged in the occupation of fishing, in which nets, lines and spears were all employed. And Jerry was startled to see some of the fishermen leave their boats, carrying their spears or nets with them, and walk on the surface of the water.

Presently, when he came near enough to one to observe how it was done, he saw that the fellow wore inflated, boat-shaped water shoes, on which he glided about with the ease of a skilled terrestrial ice skater.

THE sun had reached the zenith when the canal on which they were traveling suddenly came to a junction with another. Jerry had learned from Lal Vak that Raliad was in the southern hemisphere, and only about twenty-five degrees from the equator. As they had been traveling northward at a considerable speed, he judged that they must be quite near the equator, and verified this by looking at his shadow, which had shortened to almost nothing. The junction of the triple canals was effected by connecting the two upper channels of each by means of four viaducts in the form of a square. These viaducts, each fifteen miles in length and a mile in width, were supported on tremendous arches high above the terraces and the two intersecting drainage canals.

The boat on which they rode turned to the left in the farthest transverse channel, and after skirting the wall for several miles drew up at a dock. The doors were flung open and the guards herded the slaves out onto the wharf, where they were turned over to a new group of guards who had evidently been waiting to receive them. Here an officer took the records and called the roll to see that all were accounted for.

This done, they were marched through a tunnel in the thick wall. They came out on a rather fragile wooden platform, which hung on the edge of the wall like a swallow's nest, fully two miles above the ground. Directly below them was the waterless central channel of a great triple canal, evidently an extension of the one on which they had been traveling, but still under construction.

As far as Jerry could see, this tremendous excavation stretched northward, and he grew curious as to how such a mighty engineering feat could be accomplished. He saw men at work on the terraces, evidently leveling them off and getting them into shape. But the excavating, at this point, had all been completed.

Supported and reënforced by thick steel cables, a causeway of the resilient red-brown material used in paving, slanted down from the platform to the bottom of the depression. And on this some twoscore multiped vehicles waited. Under the direction of the guards, the slaves mounted the saddles. When all were aboard, the vehicles scampered down the swaying, trembling causeway.

Despite the skill of its driver, the one in which Jerry rode would have been jounced off several times into the yawning abyss beneath had it not been for the cables which formed a protecting railing on either side. And the Earth-man, despite the fact that he clung tightly to his saddle, was nearly hurled off into the depths each time this happened.

He heaved a sigh of relief when

they were once more on solid footing. They were now in the dry bed of the central drainage canal, which was composed of solid rock, so smooth that it looked almost as if it had been planed. And here, the multiped vehicles gave an example of the speed of which they were capable, the drivers pushing their levers as far forward as they would go. The banks of the canal, and the terraces with their busy workmen, literally hurtled past them, and the pressure of the wind in their faces made it necessary to hang on with might and main, to keep from being swept from their seats.

MILE after mile of dry channel and barren terraces reeled past them with a monotonous sameness, until mid-afternoon. Then the vehicles suddenly slowed down and Jerry caught his first glimpse of the digging of a Martian canal. But it was not what he had expected.

At first he thought he saw two lines of huge beasts converging from the center of the excavation in a huge, extended V, snapping and tearing at the wall of earth, rock and sand before them. But in a moment he saw that they were not beasts, but machines, with jointed metal legs and mighty steel jaws. These huge machines, each operated by a single slave mounted in a saddle on its back, bit and swallowed until they had filled their capacious interiors, then turned and climbed the banks to disappear over the tops, while others returned, empty and voracious once more, whence they had gone.

Interspersed among the machines at regular intervals were armed overseers, directing the work, each driving a small six-legged vehicle.

Behind the line of devouring metal beasts was another row with the same type of body and legs, but with shovel-shaped, underslung lower jaws. These jaws created a terrific din as with sharp, rapid blows like those of trip hammers they planed off the jagged fragments. When filled, they, like the others, backed away from the line and climbed the slope to get rid of their loads, while other, empty machines scuttled in to take their places.

Some distance behind the scene of operations and pitched upon the newly planed terraces at either side of the central channel the work camp was situated. It consisted of about a thousand large, round portable dwellings with dome-shaped tops, made from furry pelts which would turn back the heat of the sun by day, and retard the radiation of heat at night.

The vehicle in which Jerry rode turned and scrambled up the bank to the tent city at the right. It was followed by nine others. The remaining machines climbed the left bank.

They came to a halt in front of a tent, before which a man wearing the orange and black of nobility sat on a swinging divan. An officer handed him a sheaf of papers, which he conned for a few moments. Then he returned them and waved his hand.

Instantly, the guards ordered all the slaves out of the saddles. Then they were drawn up in squads and marched through the camp, up the side of the terrace to the very top. Here they crossed a temporary bridge, stretched on steel cables across the empty upper channel. There were four more similar bridges for the use of the digging machines, which swarmed across them in endless chains. They emptied their loads of rubble on the outer bank by the simple expedient of opening their metal mouths, lowering them, and tilt-

ing their bodies up at the rear. This done, they turned about and scampered back for more provender in so lifelike a manner that Jerry had to fight against the illusion that the slaves were riding beasts rather than operating machines.

THE Earth-man and his companions were issued implements and put to work at once, reducing and leveling the piles of rubble regurgitated by the machines. The implement given Jerry was a heavy pole about eight feet in length with a thick iron disk on one end. This was used like a rake or hoe, to spread the material about. Then, with the shaft held perpendicularly, it was employed to tamp and pack the surface until it was firm and level.

It was hard work, even for Jerry with his Earth-trained muscles. And he could realize how much more difficult it must be for the slaves around him, whose muscles were attuned to the gravity of Mars. The sun's rays beat down relentlessly upon them from overhead, adding to the discomfort of their hot, perspiring bodies. And the guards just as relentlessly urged them on with spear points whenever they lagged.

Men who dropped from exhaustion and were unable to rise, even under such painful urging, were ruthlessly kicked down the embankment, to be buried beneath the constantly growing deposit of rubble.

Jerry worked at the end of his squad, every member of which was a brown man. Next to him was a squad of white men, and one of them, a tremendous fellow over seven feet tall and muscled in proportion, was his nearest neighbor. This powerful giant made play of his work, laughing and chatting with guards and workmen alike, as he spread the rubble about and tamped it into place. Presently he called out to Jerry:

"Ho, slave of Nisha Novil. At last you palace dalfs will have to do a man's work."

Jerry grinned back at him. "It must be that you like it, since you call it man's work," he answered.

"Not I," said the giant, "but because necessity compels—"

He paused in the midst of his speech and looked upward, a startled expression on his face. At the same instant a shadow darkened the sun above them. Then something struck Jerry behind the knees and he fell backward into a large net with metal meshes. The giant turned to flee, but the net caught him also, and he was swept back on top of the Earth-man.

As the two men sought to disentangle themselves, the ground receded rapidly beneath them.

Looking up, Jerry saw that the net which held them, dangling and helpless, hung from two chains which depended from both sides of a grotesque flying monster with membranous wings, a fur-covered body, long legs covered with yellow scales, and a flat, duck-like bill armed with sharp triangular teeth. The chains were fastened to the sides of a saddle of gray metal, on which sat a brown warrior who was hurling javelins at the guards below.

A glance around showed that at least five hundred of these flying monsters had attacked the camp, and all were now rising with slaves and guards struggling in their nets.

"What is this? Where are they taking us?" Jerry asked his giant companion.

"A slave raid," the latter replied.

"Deza help us, for we are in the clutches of Sarkis the Torturer!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SARKIS THE TORTURER.

THE raiding party, having struck like an eagle in a sheepfold, flew rapidly away, its victims dangling helplessly in the nets. For some time Jerry watched the turmoil in the swiftly receding excavation camp. Then he turned to his giant comrade in captivity.

"I have heard of this Sarkis the Torturer," he said. "An outlaw, I believe. But what can he want with us?"

"He wants fighting men, and victims for sacrifice," replied the big fellow, leaning back against the meshes. "This raid will provide both."

"How both?"

"The captives will be put to the test. Those who can use a sword and are willing to join the outlaws and worship the Sun God will be spared. The others will be reserved for sacrifice. I hear that the fiend who calls himself Sarkis sacrifices fifteen men each day. But why do you ask all these questions? It seems that you, who have been a palace slave, should know more of these things than I, a poor fisherman, condemned for a crime he did not commit." He glanced sharply at Jerry for a moment, then exclaimed: "Ah, I see the reason now! You are not what you seem, but a white man in disguise. Who are you?"

Jerry looked down at his chest, and instantly saw what had betrayed him. Two of the strips of jembal applied by Nisha to the scratches she had made on his body had been rubbed off in the scuffle. And along the edges of the scratches his unstained white skin showed. He looked searchingly at the giant, and the latter returned his gaze, friendly but curious.

"Since you know this much, I may as well tell you all," he said. "I am Jerry Morgan of the planet Earth, which you call Dhu Gong. I got into trouble in the palace, and had to leave hurriedly in this disguise."

"I have heard of you," said the big man, a look of admiration now sparkling in his eyes, "and of your duel with Arsad, Rad of Dhoor. Since you slew the best swordsman in all Kalsivar, I do not think you will have difficulty qualifying for the service of Sarkis—that is, if you care to join the outlaws."

"I hadn't thought of it," Jerry told him, "but it might not be a bad idea. I'm an outlaw, myself, sentenced to be flayed alive and sprinkled with fire powder, whatever that is."

"Fire powder is a material we use to light fires with," said the giant. "It is made from baridium, the same substance used in manufacturing our lights, and ignites when wet."

"Odd stuff," replied Jerry, "and scarcely a comfortable thing to have sprinkled on one. But tell me, who are you, and how did you happen to be doing a slave's work? You said you were a fisherman, I believe."

"I am Yewd, the fisherman," said the giant, "and was accused of stealing a boat. I was innocent, but an enemy brought false witness, and the seven judges sentenced me to work a year on the excavations with the band of felons you saw me with."

"Then I presume that, like myself, you have no cause to love the government," said Jerry.

"You are a man of sound judgment and rare discrimination," laughed Yewd. "In a nation where justice is

a mockery, on what side should any real man fight? But unfortunately, I have not the skill with the sword which is likely to save me from becoming a sacrifice to the Sun God."

"Perhaps I can find a way to save you from that fate," said Jerry. "And in the meantime, I hope you will be willing to forget that I am Jerry Morgan, and remember that I am Gudo, the slave."

"That I will," said Yewd, heartily. "But what are you going to do about those white streaks?"

"I'll fix them easily enough," Jerry told him. Noting that the scratches had healed beneath the coating of jembal, he removed the gum from all the others except the sword wound in his side, which he did not dare to disturb as yet. Then he took the bottle of brown liquid from his pouch and stained all the white lines. "How does it look?" he asked.

"A perfect match, Gudo," said Yewd. "That is great stuff if you want to change your complexion. At present I am satisfied with mine."

HIS disguise completed once more, Jerry looked down at the landscape beneath them. It was a vast rolling desert of ochre-yellow sand, sparsely dotted by patches of thorny creepers with large red flowers. From time to time he caught sight of other bits of odd vegetation, prominent among which were limbless trees with scaly trunks, topped by bell-shaped tufts of needle-like foliage. Insects he saw, too, of astounding size. And queer desert beasts, birds and reptiles, some of which appeared quite formidable.

"Wherever they are taking us," he told his companion, "it must be a long way into the desert."

"The Torturer and his outlaws have many secret lairs," said Yewd, "and some of them must be in the desert. But gawrs require much water, and I'll wager that this time we are being taken to one of the wild marshes of the district."

"Gawrs?"

"Yes. The creatures that are carrying us. Haven't you noticed their webbed feet? They swim as well as fly."

Jerry looked up at the monster that supported their net, and saw that it was indeed web-footed.

And it soon became evident that Yewd's prediction was correct, for the flock of gawrs with its dangling captives presently sailed over a sheer precipice which edged what had evidently once been the shore of an ancient ocean. Now it was a sloping sandy beach which led down to a marsh, in which a number of small lakes reflected the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. Around the shores of several of these lakes were the portable fur huts of a large armed encampment, dimly seen through a haze of smoke from the thousands of cooking fires.

The lakes were dotted with swimming gawrs with their wings chained down to prevent their flying away. Armed sentinels were posted on the bluffs and in a wide circle all about the camp. And a score of them constantly soared high overhead, keeping a watch on the country for miles around.

At sight of the returning raiding party, a great shout went up from the camp. Then a number of warriors caught up their spears and hurried to an open space among the huts, where they formed a large ring bristling with weapons. One of the raiders dropped to the center of this ring until the net rested on the ground, while the gawr hovered overhead.

Two soldiers, who had detached themselves from the ring, came forward and ordered the three captives out of the net. One, evidently too dazed to move, was prodded by a spear, whereupon he rose and stumbled after his companions. One by one the gawrs descended, hovered and flew away, until all the nets had been emptied, and the prisoners stood, surrounded by a ring of spearmen.

The captured men were a motley group, consisting of white, brown and black men. But the spearmen who surrounded them were equally diversified as to color, and more so as to their clothing and ornaments, which made it evident that they represented no less than a score of different tribal groups. Jerry noticed, however, that they had one thing in common. Hanging suspended on the chest of each, in place of the customary medallion worn by the Martians he had previously seen, was a clear crystal disk about six inches in diameter.

The Earth-man nudged his giant companion.

"What are those disks for?" he asked.

"Symbols of their religion," Yewd replied, "and magic instruments with which they light their fires in the daytime. They are worshipers of Sarkis, the Sun God. At night, of course, they must use fire powder like the rest of us."

Magic instruments—and for lighting fires. Jerry instantly recognized them for large magnifying glasses, but he said nothing to his companion. Evidently Yewd believed in magic, and an explanation, just at this time, would be too involved. He noticed a stir in the crowd behind the spearman, and heard cries of:

"Way for His Holy Majesty! Shield your eyes from the blinding glory of Sarkis, Lord of the Day and Vil of the Worlds."

A PATH opened up in the crowd of warriors, all of whom instantly raised their hands before their eyes to salute a most repulsive looking thing which was being carried through that human land. It was on a divan that topped a gilded platform, borne on the backs of a score of slaves. The thing was obviously a man, large and muscular. But his face was concealed by a most hideous mask of burnished gold, fastened to a headpiece on which a thick mat of golden threads formed a bristling, leonine mane.

The sharp hooked nose of the mask was covered with red lacquer, and the lips, down-drawn in a twisted sneer, were blue against a background of yellow fangs. From behind the oval slits in the black-ringed eye-sockets a pair of glittering eyes looked forth. The garments were of royal peacock blue, and those parts of the body which would normally have been exposed—torso, legs, arms and hands—were covered with a finely woven golden mesh which made it impossible to tell the color of the man himself. He wore a richly jeweled, gold hilted sword and dagger. And on his chest there hung a large crystal disk, fully twelve inches in diameter.

At a sign from the masked figure on the divan, the slaves lowered the platform to the ground and stood with folded arms on either side of it.

The Torturer rose, and standing in front of his divan, spoke in weird, sepulchral tones that echoed hollowly in the golden confines of his mask.

"The sacrifice comes first," he said. "Then we will make trial of the prisoners."

At this, a number of the spearmen herded the prisoners back to a spot at the left of the divan. Then a lane opened in the lines opposite it, and through this came a hundred slaves, staggering under the weight of a large metal platform on which five broad steps had been built. On each step reclined a man, bound in place by chains tightly drawn around neck, waist and ankles. Suspended above them on two poles by means of short shafts which allowed it to be turned in any direction, was a tremendous crystal disk.

This disk, as the slaves lowered their burden to the ground, had its edge turned toward the sun. But as soon as the platform had been placed in position, the Torturer raised his hand, and at this signal two men in yellow robes sprang up beside the poles and swung the disk around, manipulating it until they had focused the sun's rays in a brilliant spot of blue-white light, on the floor of the platform just in front of the lowest step.

This done, the masked figure raised both hands. Instantly the surrounding multitude began a slow, eerie chant in a minor key, which reminded Jerry of a dirge. And he saw that it was indeed a dirge for the five doomed men chained to the steps. The metal floor of the platform had already become red hot at the point where the light focused, and that point was slowly traveling toward the lowermost step as the planet's axial rotation caused the sun to sink lower and lower in the west.

WITH an expression of horror on his features the man on the lowest step watched the oncoming spot. As it drew close to him, his skin was seen to redden from the heat it radiated, and he writhed in his chains in a fruitless effort to escape it. But it moved on, steadily and inexorably. Suddenly he shrieked, as the white-hot light touched his side. The chanting grew louder, and in a moment more the agonized shrieking ceased, as the concentrated sun rays burned through a vital spot.

The brilliant, blinding spot traveled onward. One after another the remaining men shrieked and were silent. The chanting ceased. The smoking platform with its grisly burdens was carried away.

The two yellow robed men advanced so they faced both the masked figure on the platform and the sun.

"Thus, O Sarkis, Lord of the Day and Vil of the Worlds, do thy humble servants greet thee at thy rising, hail thee at thy meridian, and speed thee at thy setting, in accordance with the ancient custom," they said, raising their hands before their eyes.

The Torturer dismissed them with a gesture.

"Now we will examine the prisoners," he announced, seating himself once more upon the divan.

Four men, bareheaded and naked to the waist, emerged from behind the platform. They stepped in front of the divan and saluted. Two were white, one wearing an orange cincture trimmed with black, and the other a plain black cincture. The third and fourth men were brown-skinned and wore the gray of slaves. A short, squat black man, also wearing the gray of a slave, now approached the man in orange and black, and held out to him a sheaf containing a dozen swords. The fellow selected one, and Jerry saw that its sides, instead of being saw-edged, were smooth and dull, while its point was tipped by a small oval bulb.

The black passed similar swords to the other three men.

In the meantime, one of the captives, a brown slave, was marched up in front of the Torturer. He saluted, and took a sword from the black.

The Torturer leaned forward and looked at him appraisingly.

"We have here swordsmen of the first, second, third and fourth grades," he said. "If you would avoid the sacrificial altar you must defeat at least a fourth grade swordsman. This will make you a common warrior, and you need go no further. But if you are ambitious and would be an officer, a harb, then you must defeat our swordsman of the third grade. Defeat the swordsman of the second grade, and you will be made a jen. And if you can best our swordsman of the first grade, you will be made a jendus. Defeat at any stage will render you a victim for the sacrifice. Which swordsman do you choose to fight first?"

"I choose the swordsman of the fourth grade, may it please your holy majesty," replied the slave in a small, frightened voice.

And as soon as the two contestants had crossed their weapons Jerry saw that there was good reason for the slave's fear. His antagonist had him at the second thrust, marking him over the heart with a spot of red pigment which squeezed out of the bulb on the end of the sword.

"To the sacrifice pens," ordered Sarkis, in his hollow, sepulchral tones, "and bring the next prisoner."

MAN after man was brought forward. Some, like the unfortunate slave who had gone first, were unable to defeat the swordsman of the lowest grade, and so went to the sacrifice pens. Most of those who won the first duel were satisfied to stop there and enlist in the army of Sarkis as common soldiers. But there were a few who aspired to higher honors. One of these became a harb, and stopped there. Another aspired to be a jen, but was defeated by the swordsman of the second grade, and was dragged, struggling and protesting, to the sacrifice pens.

When the fourth grade swordsman had fought ten duels, he was replaced by another. The swordsmen of the upper grades had so little fencing to do that it was unnecessary to relieve them. Some fifty-odd men had fought, and a sixth swordsman of the fourth grade was testing, when Yewd, who stood just in front of Jerry, was called.

"Farewell, Gudo, my friend," he whispered to Jerry. "If it were to be a spear or javelin, I would have a chance. But with a sword I am all but helpless."

A shout went up from the crowd at sight of Yewd's giant thews, and it was obvious that they expected him to win an easy victory. But as soon as he had a sword in his hand, his clumsiness and unfamiliarity with that weapon was instantly apparent. His brown-skinned opponent grinned, played with him for a moment, and then marked him twice on the chest. The crowd hooted him derisively as the unfortunate was led away to the sacrifice pens.

Jerry's turn was next. The surrounding warriors, now in a cruel mood, hooted him as derisively as they had Yewd. But when he selected a weapon, tested its balance, and whipped it about with the ease and grace of a practiced swordsman, they grew silent.

The swordsman of the fourth rank advanced with weapon in readiness, but

Jerry lowered his own point and held up his hand.

"Wait," he said. "I would not waste the time of his holy majesty."

"What is this, slave?" asked the masked figure on the throne.

"With your majesty's permission, I will engage only the swordsman of the first grade," said Jerry. "I have seen the fencing of these others, and they would furnish but poor sport for me. But none has yet tried the mettle of this jendus."

"Why, this is bold talk for a slave," said Sarkis. "But braggarts who cannot make good their boasting do not long survive among us. Have at him, then. You know the penalty for defeat."

Only too well did Jerry know the penalty. With a shudder, he remembered that white-hot spot of light—the scorched remains of the victims severed in twain by concentrated rays of sunlight.

The jendus, who by his colors was a noble of high degree as well as an expert swordsman, smiled contemptuously at what he thought was an untrained brown slave who had the temerity to challenge him.

But Jerry returned his look with a frank, bold smile as they crossed swords.

CHAPTER XIV.

FLIGHT.

JERRY found his antagonist a swordsman of unusual talent. And as he fought there for his life, before the hideously masked Torturer and his motley horde of outlaws, there were many times when he was only able to save himself from the touch that would have sent him to the sacrifice pen by the marvelous agility which his Earth-trained muscles afforded him on Mars.

And it was this same factor which, in the end, gave him the advantage. For his opponent, evidently fearful of the derision of the horde, pressed him so fiercely that he tired himself. Jerry's superior strength, in the meantime, kept him from growing weary, and in time he was able to take the offensive. Soon he was only playing with the man who had been the idol of the Torturer's warriors. But it was dangerous amusement, and he quickly put an end to it by marking the chest of the jendus just above the heart.

The face of the latter was a study in mixed emotions—surprise, chagrin, and hurt vanity. He looked down at the red smudge on his chest as if he could not believe in its actuality and expected it to disappear any moment.

But Jerry's attention was distracted from him by the voice of the masked man on the divan.

"You have made good your boast, slave," he said, "and we are ready to appoint you a jendus in our army if you will prove your devotion to our cause by truthfully answering any questions I may put to you. Fail to do so, and there is still the sacrifice pens. What is your name?"

"Men call me Gudo, the slave," Jerry replied.

"Slave of whom?"

"Of Her Highness Nisha Novil."

"Ah! And you mean to tell me that her highness would send a swordsman of your ability to work on the canal?"

"That was where she sent me, your majesty."

"Are you of the brown race of Kalsivar?"

"If I am not," said Jerry with a smile, "what am I?"

"That is what I mean to find out—in a moment," said Sarkis, his eyes glinting meaningly through the eye slits of his mask. He turned to a slave and issued a curt order. The latter dashed away, returning a moment later with a large basin of water. The Torturer took a small flask from his pouch, and uncorking it, poured several drops of a clear liquid into the water. After stirring it with his dagger he beckoned to Jerry.

"Come and stand before me," he commanded.

The Earth-man did as directed, puzzled meanwhile by the Torturer's strange actions.

Taking the basin from the slave's hands, Sarkis commanded: "Remove your headcloak."

As soon as he had complied, Jerry was drenched from head to foot by the contents of that basin. To his surprise and horror, he saw that wherever the water had touched, his skin had resumed its normal color. He knew that the Torturer must have used the same chemical as that which Nisha had given him to bring back his own complexion, and that his hair, as well as his skin, must have been affected by the preparation.

"And now," said the Torturer, a note of exultation in his hollow tones, "who are you?"

"I am Jerry Morgan of Earth," replied Jerry boldly.

"And not the slave of Nisha Novil?"

"No."

"Nor yet a member of the brown race of Kalsivar. Nor do men call you Gudo. You have lied to me, and you know the penalty." He signed to the guards, two of whom instantly sprang in to seize Jerry's arms. "To the sacrifice pens with him. And see that he is the first victim to greet the great Lord Sun at his rising to-morrow."

JERRY was hustled away through the jeering crowd to the gate of a large inclosure, surrounded by a stone wall thirty feet in height. A guard opened the gate, and he was hurled through by his burly conductors with such violence that he stumbled and fell on his face in the midst of the gathering of unfortunates who stood or sat disconsolately about, awaiting the horrible fate to which the Torturer had condemned them.

A big hand reached out to help him to his feet. It was the hand of Yewd, the fisherman.

"I did not think to see you here," said the giant, "and with your rightful color restored. This Sarkis must be a wizard, in very truth."

"At least he is a good guesser," replied Jerry, "or what is more probable, is some one who saw me at the court of Numin Vil. His voice seemed familiar, but the mask disguised it."

"There may be some truth in that," agreed Yewd, "for I have heard that the Torturer spends much time away from his army, and that he comes and goes alone in his great metal flying machine, which resembles a gawr but is ten times bigger. Each time he leaves, he flies straight toward the sun until his craft is lost to view, and gives out that he is returning to his home in the sun."

"I'm afraid he would need a better insulated suit and mask than the ones he is wearing for a visit to the sun," said Jerry. "Can it be possible that his people actually believe he goes there?"

"Many of them do," replied Yewd. "Others, I am convinced, only pretend. They have joined forces with him

because he has always been victorious, and because his raids on the canal settlements and smaller cities afford much loot."

While they were talking the last of the victims from the raid was thrust into the pen. And shortly thereafter, night fell with the suddenness common to Mars, where there is little light refraction in the thin dry atmosphere, and consequently no perceptible twilight. The pen was plunged into instant darkness, for neither of the moons had yet risen, and the light of the stars, though they appeared brilliant enough against the velvety black of the sky, was no appreciable aid to visibility in the inclosure.

Presently the sound of singing and revelry grew rampant about them, and it was obvious that the pulcho was flowing freely among the outlaws. Here and there one of the higher trees would reflect the yellow gleam of a campfire against the black background of the sky. But within the pen of doomed men was only darkness, horror and despair. Not one of the victims was given so much as a drink of water, and the gate remained barred.

In the deeper shadow of the wall, Jerry was carrying on a whispered conversation with Yewd.

"You say the pen is on the edge of the lake, and that the gawrs swim riderless only a short distance from the shore?" he asked.

"If they remain as they were before I was brought hither," the giant replied. "But I don't see how it will be possible for you to leap to the top of the wall."

"That is a detail you must take on faith," the Earth-man told him. "In any event, we are all doomed men, and an attempt to escape cannot put us in worse case."

"You are right," agreed Yewd. "Let us then pass the word among the others, and see who is willing to make the attempt with us."

"Tell them to take off their belts and give them to you," Jerry said, "and I will do likewise. Twenty belts will easily reach over the top of the wall and to the ground on the other side. I'll meet you here when we have made the rounds."

A FEW moments later Yewd and Jerry collided in the darkness.

"Have you some belts?" asked the Earth-man.

"More than we need," the giant replied. "I have twenty-seven."

"And I have thirty-two," Jerry told him. "We will construct two lines. Every man is coming with us, and thus we will be able to get them over the wall with more speed."

As soon as the two long chains of belts had been fastened together, Yewd cleared a path for Jerry. Absolute silence had been enjoined upon all, but there was a subdued murmur of wonder as they heard the Earth-man run and spring, and a moment later saw him outlined against the background of stars as he drew himself up onto the wall.

The end of each chain of belts had been hooked to the back of his own belt. But he left them there for a moment, as he paused to cast a swift, cautious look around him. There were no guards between him and the water's edge, and far out on the gleaming water he saw a group of dark masses which he knew must be the riderless gawrs, each sleeping as it floated, with its hideous head tucked beneath a fettered wing. Most of the campfires had burned down to beds of glowing coals, but the sounds of revelry had grown

louder, and there was the mixed medley of songs, maudlin laughter and drunken quarrels.

Assured that the way was clear, Jerry swiftly unhooked the two chains of belts, and lowered one on each side of him until ten belts had passed each hand and he knew that the ground had been reached. Then he gave one line a gentle shake, after which he gripped it with both hands and braced himself on the opposite side of the wall. A heavy weight was thrown on that chain of belts, but Jerry's powerful Earthly muscles were more than capable of supporting it. And in a few moments the giant Yewd was on the wall beside him.

Yewd jerked a signal to the men beneath him, and as soon as the line grew taut, descended on the other side, where he grasped the ends of both lines.

Retaining his seat on the top of the wall, Jerry directed operations by signaling to those below each time a man had reached the top of the wall on either line, until he had counted sixty, and the pit was emptied. Then, drawing up the ends of the lines, he dropped them on the outside, and letting himself down as low as possible by hanging onto the outer rim of the wall, dropped after them.

He alighted on the ground with knees bent, and consequently with very little jar, the soft sand muffling the sound almost to nothingness in comparison to the clangor of the roistering outlaws.

Silently the men resumed their belts, and then, forming a great human chain by clasping hands in the dark, they silently advanced to the water's edge. Here they paused for a moment, while Yewd whispered the final instructions.

"Remember, not a sound or a splash," he cautioned. "It may be that we will become separated from one cause or another. If so, our place of rendezvous will be the southern end of the Tarvaho Marsh. Pass the word along, then swim out, seize the gawr nearest you, and fly straight north."

THE human chain broke into its units, with the exception of Yewd and Jerry. Because the latter knew nothing whatever about managing a gawr, the two had decided to attempt to make their escape on the same bird-beast. They accordingly waded into the water hand in hand, and then swam shoulder to shoulder, straight out to where the herd of huge, shadowy hulks floated on the silvery surface of the lagoon.

A short swim brought them to the side of a great bird-beast which snorted and shook its head as the two men climbed to its back. Yewd, seated in front, unsnapped the ends of the two chains which trammeled the creature's wings by being hooked through perforations in the membrane around one of the wing-bones. The double purpose of these chains became evident to Jerry when, a moment later, the giant fisherman snapped one to his own belt and the other to that of the Earth-man.

"It is customary for a rider to attach both chains to his belt each time he mounts a gawr," explained Yewd, "to prevent his falling to the ground in case he slips from his saddle. But since there are two of us, we must be content with one chain each."

There was a light rod, fastened at one end to a short rope which was hooked around the gawr's neck, and at the other, to the pommel of the saddle. The giant now raised the rod, whereupon the great bird-beast swam swiftly forward, then took to the air with a mighty flapping of wings. This

was the signal which had been agreed upon for the others to take off. And their advent into the air was followed by a mighty splashing and flapping all about them.

It was followed, too, by shouts from several of the sentinels who had heard the noise and thought the bird-beasts had been attacked by some of the monster saurians which were known to inhabit the marsh.

But before the mounted guards had reached the remainder of the herd with their baridium torches, to learn the cause of the commotion, the sixty stolen gawrs were silently winging their way northward in the darkness, high above the marsh. Even then, they did not imagine that the sacrificial victims had escaped, but were unanimous in their opinion that a raiding party had descended and stolen sixty of their mounts. Pursuit parties were instantly organized, to fly in all directions, as it was impossible to tell which way the fugitives had gone.

In the meantime Jerry and his party flew steadily toward the north, unable to see each other in the darkness and guided solely by the blazing stellar constellations overhead, with which every Martian is familiar. For on Mars a cloud is a rarity, except it be a cloud of dust or sand, unless one happens to be in either the north or south polar region at the proper season.

Presently, however, the nearer moon popped above the western horizon, and by its light Jerry saw that the gawr which he and Yewd bestrode had fallen quite a distance behind the other bird-beasts.

"Looks as if we are going to be late for the rendezvous," he told his companion.

"The creature has a double, nay a treble burden," replied Yewd. "I weigh as much as two average men, and you are not small, by any means."

They lagged farther and farther behind until, by the time the farther moon had risen in the east, their fellow fugitives were out of sight. Shortly thereafter the beast began flying erratically, as if almost completely exhausted—then fluttered groundward despite Yewd's frantic tugs at the guiding rod. Although they were now flying over the desert, far to the north of the marsh where Sarkis was encamped, the bird-beast, with its unerring instinct for the location of water, had selected a small, tree-covered oasis at which to land.

AS soon as it alighted it folded its wings, ran in under the trees and splashed into a shallow pool, where it knelt, taking sips of water from time to time and refusing to rise or move.

Yewd unsnapped the ends of the chains from his and Jerry's belts—then fastened them to the gawr's wings.

"We may as well dismount and get some rest, ourselves," he said, "while the gawr is resting. It will not stir from this place until it has fully recovered from its fatigue."

They accordingly got down from the saddle and stretched themselves out on the sand beneath the thick canopy of trees. Scarcely had they done so when Jerry saw baridium torches flashing overhead, and looking up, saw a large party of flying warriors, evidently the outlaws of Sarkis, who were pursuing the fugitives.

"Deza be praised!" exclaimed Yewd, who had looked up at the same time. "We have been miraculously preserved from capture by the sudden weariness of our bird-beast, and the thick foliage above this oasis. Had it

continued to fly with us at the rate we were traveling we should soon have been overhauled."

When the last of their pursuers had passed, Jerry settled down once more in his bed of sand, and with his head-cloak dropped about him and his boots drawn up to combat the chill of the night air, was soon asleep.

He was awakened by a slanting shaft of bright sunlight, which had penetrated the surrounding foliage and shone directly in his face. Sitting up and looking about him, he saw that Yewd had already arisen and was standing beside the pool looking at the gawr, which had slumped over in a most unnatural position, with its neck stretched out and its head resting on the bank.

"What's wrong?" he asked, springing up.

"Come and see for yourself," Yewd told him. "We are in sore straits."

Hurrying to the giant's side, Jerry saw that the bird-beast was motionless, apparently dead. Blood had drooled down from the corners of its beak to form a congealing, bluish red pool upon the bank.

"What killed it?" Jerry asked.

Yewd pointed to the place where neck and body joined. From this spot several sharp spines projected through the skin, and much blood had drained down into the water.

"It swallowed a dagger fish," said the giant. "Must have been dying when we mounted it back at the marsh. The wonder is that the creature carried us this far."

"Looks as if we'll have to walk the rest of the way," the Earth-man observed.

"It looks as if we are doomed," Yewd replied. "For between us and the Tarvaho Marsh is an immense stretch of trackless desert, inhabited by fierce beasts, hostile tribes and deadly insects."

CHAPTER XV.

OUTLAW CHIEF.

JERRY looked up at his giant companion and smiled grimly.

"Last night we were in the sacrifice pen of the Torturer," he said. "Every man in that pen considered himself doomed. I was condemned to die at sunrise this morning. But I am alive and free. What is our present predicament, compared to that from which we have just escaped? Don't give up hope. We'll find a way to win through yet."

"Although I can see no ray of hope, you somehow give me courage," said Yewd. "At least we have weapons. There is a sheaf of javelins fastened to the saddle. And though I am no swordsman, I modestly confess that few men are my equal with spear or javelin. One has to be quick and accurate to spear fish, and I have speared thousands."

He climbed up, removed the sheaf of javelins from the saddle, and after passing one of the multi-barbed weapons to Jerry, slung the rest over his back.

"It is unfortunate that we have no water bottles to take with us," said Jerry. "But we had best drink our fill from the pool before we start, blood or no blood. Too bad we have to leave this gawr here to rot and pollute the water."

"The gawr will be gone before the sun reaches the meridian," said Yewd, pointing a finger skyward. "Look."

Jerry gazed upward and saw, circling high above them, what he at first

took for large birds. But on closer inspection, he saw that they were tremendous insects, each with two pairs of wings. Their bodies were shaped much like those of dragonflies, and their heads, with their compound, many faceted, goggling eyes, were armed with tremendous mandibles.

"What are they?" Jerry asked.

"Desert flesh flies," the giant replied. "As soon as we leave they will descend. And when they have finished, there will be nothing left but the metal parts of the saddle and harness. They are cowardly creatures, and keep well out of the way of living things, but as soon as something dies they seem to have a delicate sixth sense that apprises them of it. They are hideous, disgusting things. But after all, scavengers have their uses."

"True," replied Jerry. "And now shall we start?"

"I am ready," said the giant.

And so they set off across the rolling dunes of ochre-yellow sand.

When noon arrived both men were tired and thirsty, but there was no sight of even one of the tall conifers with bell shaped, tufted foliage which usually announced an oasis and pool.

Presently they came to a gently sloping hillsides, strewn with gray bowlders, and by mutual consent, decided to pause for a rest.

Jerry sank down on one of the bowlders, and to his surprise, found it soft and yielding. With suddenly aroused curiosity he pricked it with the point of his javelin and a clear viscous liquid welled forth.

"Look, Yewd!" he exclaimed. "Here is a stone that bleeds. On my world we have a saying: 'You can't get blood out of a stone.' But here, it seems that anything can happen."

The giant looked, then dipped a finger into the sticky liquid and tasted it.

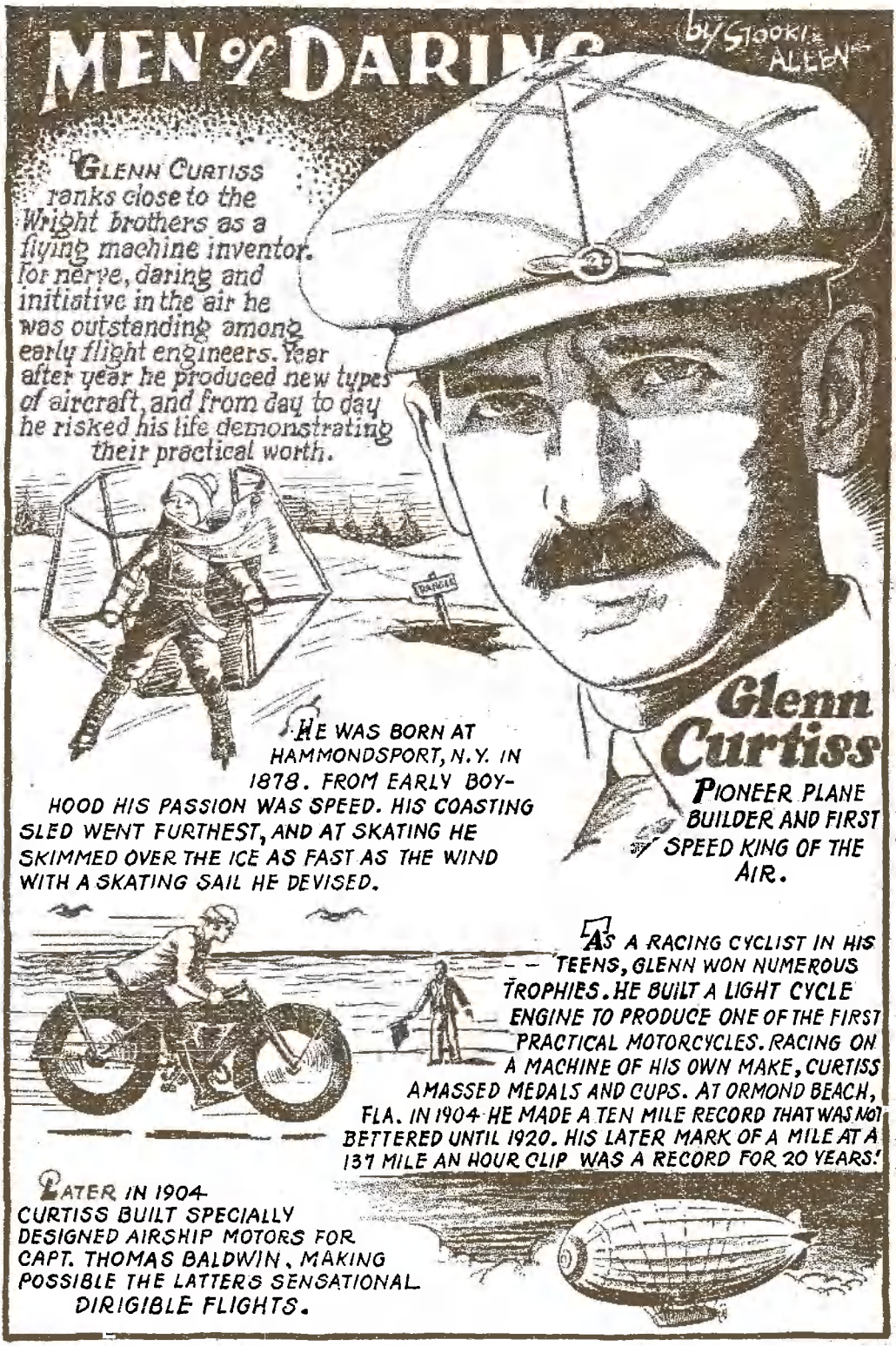
"Deza be thanked!" he exclaimed. "These are not stones, but fungoid plants that we call torfals. Had you not made this discovery we might have died from hunger and thirst in the midst of plenty. But this liquid supplies a balanced ration of food and water."

Jerry tasted the liquid. It was sweet and slightly acid, with a syrupy consistency, and a flavor that reminded him both of bananas and muskmelons. Pressing on the skin around the incision he had made, he drank his fill. Yewd, meanwhile, had tapped another torfal, and was drinking thirstily.

When both had finished they arose, refreshed, and each taking as many medium sized torfals as he could conveniently carry, they plodded on into the afternoon.

The sun was midway toward the horizon when suddenly, upon crossing an unusually high ridge of sand, they came to a large oasis where the waters of a small lake gleamed among the tree trunks. With glad cries, they hurried toward it. But they had scarcely entered its grateful shade, when they heard shouts, cries, and the clash of weapons from some distance beyond. They judged from the sounds that a considerable force of men was engaged in some sort of cavalry battle, but because of the intervening trees and shrubbery, were unable to see the contest. Here was a serious situation for Jerry and Yewd. They were hidden for the moment, but they were in grave danger of being discovered. And, whatever the identity of the fighters, the two fugitives knew that they must reconnoiter them, for the scene of battle lay between them and their destination.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

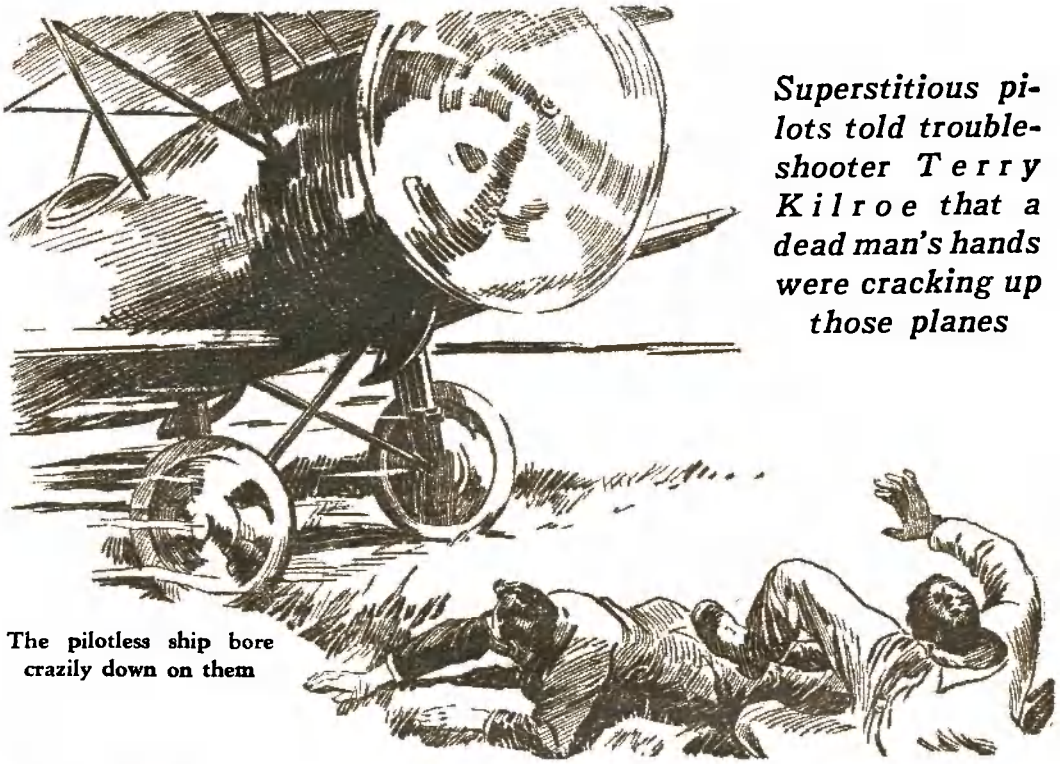


This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

Next Week: Johnny Cordes, Gotham's Star Detective

Phantom Pilot

By WILL McMORROW



Superstitious pilots told trouble-shooter Terry Kilroe that a dead man's hands were cracking up those planes

The pilotless ship bore crazily down on them

"SOUNDS like a lotta blah to me!"

Kilroe, new field laborer at the Ballinger Air School, reached a knuckled hand across the counter for his coffee cup, and grinned amiably at the mechanic beside him.

"Just because the field gets some bum breaks don't mean there's anything soopernatural about it. A guy gets the jitters an' cracks up a crate, an' right away everybody begins to see things. What they call morale. I been in the army, myself, one time."

"Yeah? You tell us."

The mechanic—Kilroe knew him only as Runty—was not impressed. Even an apprentice from the "trouble-block" might feel a superior contempt for a grass-cutting groundling, raw to the flying trade. Especially a specimen like this Kilroe, who looked as if he had done all his flying off the rear-end of freights, and who seemed to have about as much speed to him as a pre-war "pusher" with loose gaskets.

Which was exactly the impression Terry Kilroe, undercover partner of Jenks & Kilroe, Industrial Engineers, liked to convey. An indolent fellow on the surface, red-headed, raw-boned, loud of voice and heavy of hand as Kilroe was, it would have taken a keener observer than Runty to detect beneath the surface the trained watchfulness and steel-nerved skill of the surgeon. Kilroe thought of himself as a "business doctor," rather than an

efficiency expert. As a master of men's lives and destinies, Kilroe was time and again called in for an emergency operation, to locate the hidden trouble and cut swiftly to cure it.

And there was something decidedly wrong with Ballinger Air School.

"If you'd spent more time about flyin' lots, Red, maybe you'd be sooperstitious, too," Runty continued. "That right, Happy?"

Happy Jack Shaw nodded agreeably, and went ahead rolling his sizzling hot dogs. A heavy, baldish fellow with a face as large and impassive as a slab of veal, he ran his road stand concession with a minimum of disagreement.

A man, Kilroe noted, not given to heated argument.

"Right over there by Hangar Seven." Runty pointed a grease-smudged finger. "That's where Bill Ferguson smacked down a brand new Willoughby-Ketch job, two weeks ago; an' what that cost the boss ain't nobody's business! If it weren't phony, how come a guy should go haywire with a run like that to set her down in?"

Kilroe swung around on his stool and looked over the field. A line of low buildings—office, machine shop, store rooms and white-painted ground school—fronted a macadamized road wherein students' autos and field sidecar bikes were parked underneath a billowing wind vane. Forming a right angle were the stark shells of the numbered hangars, before which throbbed half a dozen blue and red two-seaters, wasp-like in their sharp outlines. Beyond the last hangar—Number Seven—stretched the broad smoothness of Long Island meadows. Plenty of room to land the heaviest of ships. Kilroe, having spent the morning going over the weed-grown edges on a rattling tractor, could appreciate that.

"Stripped the gear offen the bottom, splintered the prop, hashed up the panels an' fuselage, scrapped a motor with only ten hours on it—an' sent a stude to the hospital with a busted collarbone. An' you know how them dude flyers like accidents.—Swell stuff for the school. Broad daylight, too.—You tell us how come!"

"Fried," Kilroe suggested.

He was watching, with a bored interest of the born loafer, Happy Jack's culinary efforts.

"In their own fat!" Happy Jack boasted. "They don't come no better."

"He means Ferguson," Runty snorted. "Stewed! That's what Jessup cracked, too, when the big shot give Bill Ferguson the air, but the department inspectors didn't find no booze on Ferguson, or they'd washed up his ticket. Anyways, Ferguson wasn't no lush.—He was kinda dazed; said he cut his gun to slip in easy, an all of a sudden the ship went crazy an' busted right for the hangar before he could waggle a fin. Like somebody reached out an' give her the juice. Ain't that so, Happy?"

HAPPY JACK sliced rolls stolidly. "That's what he said. But I don't believe in no dead men's hands runnin' ships. When a guy's dead, he's dead. I seen 'em pick Jimmy Dunn outa his ship that time, an' they had to get the crank shaft outa his chest."

The "business doctor" stirred his coffee slowly. "How did he crash?"

"You never know." Happy Jack shook his head. "Somethin' like Ferguson's trouble, I guess. The boys got an idea, like Runty says, that Dunn

has come back in the sperrit an' is tryin' to fly ships again.—An' him in his grave six weeks ago."

"Well, how d'ye account for that crack-up last week in Number Four?" Runty demanded. "Hangar locked up an' the watchman right outside, an' Jimmy Dunn's old ship—the one we rebuilt—goes screwy all by itself an' tangles up with a stude's pet cabin coop.—Tighten up on that one an' make it sound natural!"

"Mebbe you're right, Runty," Happy Jack conceded readily. "I ain't one to venture my opinion. All I know is, it's bad medicine for all of us. Jessup says the students is gettin' scarce, with the rep this school is gettin', an' if Ballinger should close up I'd have to shift to."

"Hey, you two! What do you think you are—a mayor's reception committee?"

It was Jessup—chief instructor—a sleek, movie-hero type of pilot, tailor-made and addicted to sardonic humor.

"You, Runty! Climb off the band stand and wheel out that old hearse in Number Six. The Jennie you were tuning up yesterday. I've got to show it off to one of the wreckin' crew."

Which was Jessup's way of referring to the estimable student body.

Runty wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jumper and slid from the stool.

"Boss aim to sell it?" he asked.

"No. He's going to fly the Atlantic. He'll need you to make speeches for him and pose for photographs. Take Roscoe Turner there with you to crank up. Scram!"

"Nuts to him," Runty mumbled as he toddled across the field beside the tall Kilroe, "an' a couple of piston-rings. He's one of them old-time war babies that struts his stuff with the gal-studes an' thinks he's the works. Him an' Ballinger has had plenty run-ins lately."

"How come?" Kilroe ground his cigarette underfoot before entering the hangar, in obedience to field rules.

"He don't seem to want to get his feet offen the ground enough. Acts like a guy that's got the wind up about all these accidents. I guess he'd rather play safe an' pose around the office. Here's old whiskers."

He slapped the smooth, white surface of a wing with affectionate familiarity. It was a biplane of war vintage; with a wide spread, it was clumsy to wheel around.

"Nothin' in the cockpit but an altimeter, an' oil gauge an' a trust in God. Them was the happy days.—Hey! You figure on ridin' while I push?"

KILROE withdrew his head from the interior of the cockpit and climbed down again from the wing. Slowly, like a man with something on his mind.

"Just lookin' her over," he explained. "Kind of ancient."

"No ship ain't no older than the motor in it," Runty vouchsafed, "an' this one is sweet. Now, if you ain't got no more questions, grab hold of that prop when I climb aboard an' do like I tell you."

Runty's black-smudged face peered from the cockpit.

A curious guy, this Kilroe. Pokin' around askin' questions at the "trouble-block" like he never seen a motor before. Always ready to chew the fat instead of goin' to work. Good-natured, but dumb.

"Keep clear now," Runty cautioned authoritatively. "We don't want no more accidents around this field. I

tuned this windmill myself, an' it's rearin'. When you bend that blade, swing clear because it'll pop.—Contact!"

Kilroe threw his weight on the blade and followed through, clear of the gleaming disc as the motor awoke roaringly. Runty taxied out into the sunlight and climbed down, cocking a professional ear to the idling motor.

"Neat, hey? When it comes to gadgets, I guess little old Runty—"

The rumble of the motor suddenly swelled deafeningly, and the ship edged forward with gathering speed. Runty wheeled, open-mouthed.

"What in blazes—?"

There was no time for discussion of whys and wherefores. Kilroe tackled him just in time, threw him aside from the whirling blades, himself atop as the wing sped over their heads, barely grazing them in its swift passage.

They struggled to their feet in a whirlwind of dust kicked up by the dragging tail skid and the blast from the propeller. Through the haze, Kilroe could see Jessup in mid field, wildly waving his arms. Then Jessup took to his heels as the runaway ship rocked toward him, careening down the broad field.

"Who gave her the gas?" Runty spluttered. "Who—?"

He followed Kilroe's long legs, racing in pursuit of the ship; a lost race now, with the biplane speeded up to forty miles an hour. It bumped on an uneven rise in the ground, swerved drunkenly, and headed for a cluster of ships waiting in line on the "tee." From the lookout tower behind, the fire siren was bellowing to clear the field. Pilots tumbled hastily aboard the planes at the "tee" to taxi out of the path of the oncoming ship.

It struck the nearest one a glancing blow that carried away the victim's rudder, swung again crazily in a wide circle, with a crumpled wing dragging, and like a living thing possessed with hate, bore down directly on Kilroe and the mechanic.

There was no time now to run back to the protection of the hangar, a hundred yards away. And the "business doctor" had no hankering to turn his back on those murderous copper-tipped blades. He waited, crouching, ready to throw himself down again or dodge. The mad ship zig-zagged in a path as impossible to foretell as the buzzing of a stricken hornet. But it did not at all remind Kilroe of anything as harmless as a hornet. In those few seconds he had a grimly humorous appreciation of the feeling a toreador must have in awaiting a charging bull; he almost caught himself humming the appropriate operatic phrases.

Then the ship leaped straight for them, and Kilroe grabbed for the grass underfoot.

A thunder of racing engine overhead, a tug from the sharp edge of a splintered wing-skid that ripped his coat from collar to tail, and the runaway had passed. From a patch of trees on the edge of the field came an explosive impact; the next moment flames leaped greedily twenty feet into the air, searing bark and leaves, enveloping the doomed ship in a suicidal furnace.

"YOU all right?"

Kilroe helped the dazed Runty to his feet.

The mechanic nodded. "Who the merry hell started all that?"

"Nobody." The "business doctor" rubbed his homely crag of a nose and looked toward the blazing pyre toward which sidecars and a clanging red

truck were already converging. "Nobody.—They used to be a song by that name."

He looked about for his hat, a battered felt now more nondescript than ever.

"*When I was in a railroad wreck,*" he crooned hoarsely, "*who took that en-gyne offen my neck? No-o-body.*"

"As a singer," Runty said unappreciatively, "you got several bad knocks in your motor. Try it on Ballinger. He'll just feel like opera right now."

Kilroe felt in his overalls for a match. "Opera, Runty, ain't to be sneered at. I seen one about an Eyetalian guy named I. Pigliatchi—*I* standing for Ignatius, I guess. A guy done a lam with his wife, Ignatius bein' a fall guy in a circus, an' he went around singin', an' finally he laughed hisself to death. But that guy could sing better when he was corkin' off than I can right now."

"You're tellin' me!" Runty explored a lump on his head. "Mebbe you know the words an' music for that mess over there."

"Sure. All you need is the tune, Runty. Here comes a batch of words now."

Jessup's car slowed beside them.

"Well," the chief instructor's lips twisted into a sour smile, "I've heard of crack-ups in my time, but you two guys are the first I've ever met that could crash a ship without ever taking it off the ground. Pile in. Ballinger is tuning up for you."

They sped toward the white line of buildings. "And he's around eighteen hundred revolutions right now," Jessup added. "You go in first, big boy—and park your cigarette outside. You can pick it up on the run when you get through."

But Terry Kilroe still had the fag-end drooping from his mouth as he slouched in a chair opposite Ballinger.

"Well?" the latter demanded. "Are we getting anywhere?"

A nervous, worrisome type, Ballinger; thin, middle-aged, sparsely gray—and getting grayer and more worrisome daily as the morale and prestige of Ballinger Air School, advertised as "safest beneath the blue," went haywire before his eyes.

"Slowly," Kilroe observed. "Can't afford to make mistakes."

Ballinger looked at the rangy, slow-motion industrial engineer disapprovingly. Ballinger prided himself on being a judge of men, and he regretted that he had picked on Jenks & Kilroe to solve his problems, rather than an efficiency expert more familiar with aviation technique. This fellow hadn't even been up in a ship yet, and all he seemed to do was loaf around and gossip with the men.

"We've got to get some action, Kilroe, or I might as well close up shop."

"You're getting it," Kilroe jerked his head toward the smouldering ruin visible through the office window. "Likewise, some party or parties—name bein' unknown to the plaintiff—came near rubbin' out a certain horse doctor named Kilroe.—But that's all in the day's work. That mechanic who was in here a minute ago—"

"He won't be here again," Ballinger said decidedly. "I'm paying him off.—Just damned carelessness on his part."

"Better leave him stick," Kilroe counseled. "If you start firing the help it will crab my play. Besides, he wasn't anywhere near that gas throttle when the ship went nuts. I can swear that nobody touched that throttle."

Ballinger sat back. "Are you try-

ing to tell me that you take any stock in that nonsense about a dead man's hand—?"

"If I thought that, you'd be wastin' a hundred bucks a day. There's a hand workin' here all right, but it isn't a dead one—by a long shot. I specialize in hands, and I'm on the lookout for this one."

HE fished out of his pocket a square of white airplane linen, stiff with "dope" and not much larger than a dollar bill. On the edge were the grease-smudged marks of four fingers, blurred in outline.

"This is the hand. Maybe dead men don't tell tales, but they don't leave telltale finger marks behind them, either. I was lucky to find this before the crash."

"Where did you—"

"In the cockpit of that Jenny we rolled out to-day. Somebody cut this chunk of linen out and patched the hole again, but they forgot this. An' it wasn't done by Runty, because I was hangin' around all the time he was workin'. That's the hand that's caused trouble, an' when I find it—"

His mouth tightened, and for the moment he was not the lazy, good-humored, rather vague person Ballinger had pictured, but a much harder and more decisive Kilroe.

"When I find it," he repeated, "I'll find the hand that has had a knife at your throat here; the hand that's ruining your business and that sent Pilot Jimmy Dunn into his casket."

"Good Lord, Kilroe! That means murder—here on my field!"

"Check!" Kilroe, his usual slow-moving self again, unjointed himself by sections from the chair and stood up. "In my trade, Mr. Ballinger, murder's no novelty. We don't know much about aviation, but we see a helluva lot of human nature; an' a wrong guy is a wrong guy, keepin' books or makin' women's hairnets or runnin' a dirigible. It's all the same stuff. In every business there's three deadly sins—laziness, hatred and greed. All we gotta do is locate the right one. You run along if you have to, an' I'll mope around. I gotta feelin' I can break this thing."

"But why," Ballinger frowned, "why am I being picked on?"

"Maybe you're not. I can't tell you—yet. If I was a movie detective I could give you plenty of swell reasons, just like I would have a whole laboratory in my vest pocket an' would be able to identify fingerprints on this scrap, where there ain't any. But I'm just a horse doctor with an occasional hunch.—Where do you keep your field-records; your pilots' logs, your books for the ships, and all that?"

Ballinger pointed to the open safe.

"I'll look 'em over," Kilroe said. "They actually fly the same ship, don't they?"

"Except for overhauling, of course. They like to know their ship. You'll find a pretty complete history there."

"When does the watchman come on?" Kilroe looked up from his reading as Ballinger prepared to leave.

"At seven. But there's always some one around. Jessup will be here for a while. He's testing out that new Buffalo-Bobolink of mine."

"Okay. I'll keep him company. By the way, good man, isn't he?"

Ballinger hesitated in the doorway. "Well—yes. Excellent pilot."

"I notice," Kilroe tapped an open book, "he don't fly much lately—since these troubles began."

"He's been a little under the weather. We don't insist on a pilot

flying when he's not fit. In fact, he's asked for a leave of absence."

Kilroe nodded and returned to his records.

HALF an hour later he pushed the papers aside and leaned back in his chair, one red-haired hand caressing his cartilaginous nose. It was a gesture which the "business doctor" favored for inducing thought.

"Simple as that," he grunted. "I wonder if it'll jell as easy?"

He consulted an old-fashioned nickel-plated watch and dialed the desk phone intently.

"Kilroe. Got my message?—Good. Dig up everything you can about Jessup. *J* for *joker*. Got it? . . . Kelly Field, 1918; later the 410th Aero. Try the boys at the Ace Club on Fifty-Eighth Street. They'll know. How he came to quit an' wherefore. I'll stand by for a call back. Then jump down here—an' make it snappy."

It was getting toward dusk, though light enough on the field, when Kilroe stepped from the office. Like a man awaiting a train, with nothing but time to waste, he strolled toward the machine shop. The last decrepit car had lurched its mechanics away from the parking space before the shop. In the zone of lingering sunlight above the field a solitary ship droned in wide-sweeping spirals. Inside the shop the disemboweled motors on the testing-blocks gave the effect of a mechanical dissecting room. Some were shrouded in tarpaulins, like grotesque statues waiting to be unveiled. Others, newly slung from ships, hung forlornly in chains. On the walls were huge, colored charts of the insides of motors. Gross-sections, ignition systems and carburetors, enlarged to the size of hogsheads.

Kilroe scowled disdainfully at the intricate patterns and trod out his smouldering butt.

"Might as well be written in Chink. Now what kind of a fool gadget—"

He rubbed his hand across an oily crank case and pressed the imprints of four fingers on the square of airplane linen, examining it as if comparing the contours, then returned the scrap to his pocket.

After that he wandered toward the mountainous hangars, glanced in the open door of Number Seven, whistled a tuneless ditty out of the corner of his mouth, and still whistling, retraced his steps toward the hot dog stand beyond the roadway.

An aimless fellow, born to waste time, even if it was his own, after working hours.—So Happy Jack might have thought. The latter's placid face, so like a smooth slab of veal, showed over his counter as he sat waiting patiently for a stray customer.

"Kinda late, ain't you?" he queried, pouring Kilroe's coffee.

"Kinda. I gotta wait to put the boss's ship to bed. Jessup is givin' her a test. Some excitement this afternoon, hey?"

Happy Jack shook his head soberly. "Bad! Runty was tellin' me about it. He musta made the same mistake as poor Ferguson did, an' shoved the gun on 'stead of off. It's a wonder you boys wasn't both fired."

"Well, we wasn't," Kilroe winked knowingly. "An' I know why, too. It's because the boss has got a good notion where the trouble is comin' from. There's a guy out to get him, an' Ballinger knows it.—But maybe I'm talkin' outa turn."

He shook his head.

"You can tell me," Happy Jack invited. "I ain't a talker."

"Well," Kilroe lowered his raucous voice, "I ain't sayin' where I heard it, an' maybe I wasn't supposed to be listenin', but the guy Ballinger thinks is out to bust up this dump an' grab off the studes for hisself—"

THE roar of a motor overhead cut him off. Ballinger's blue sport plane banked sharply, missed the trees at the far end of the field by seeming inches, and slid neatly down for a three-point landing. Jessup's helmeted head leaned from the cockpit as he taxied toward the open hangar.

Kilroe jerked his head meaningly. "Talkin' of the devil! He ain't so swanky to-night. Usually he sets 'em down with a dead stick, to show how good he is."

"I've noticed that, too."

Happy Jack swabbed his counter with a slow, rotary motion.

"If Ballinger thinks that, why don't he do something about it?"

"Maybe he ain't got the goods on him," Kilroe hazarded, indifferently. "Kinda serious to accuse a guy of ruinin' ships unless you can prove it. Anyway, Jessup is takin' a vacation, an' I gotta hunch Ballinger—"

Happy Jack's wet hand closed tightly on Kilroe's wrist. "Ballinger's right! I been noticin' a few things around here myself, because I got a business to protect, an' if a swine like that—"

He looked toward the hangar, his flabby face set in hard lines; then he turned quickly back to the field laborer.

"What's he doin' in there now? How do we know he ain't up to some trick? Him an' Ballinger's had plenty arguments. Everybody knows that. He's got a motive, ain't he?" He appraised the homely, indolent figure lounging at the counter. "Suppose we check up on him now, before he gets away. Game?"

"I dunno," Kilroe squirmed. "Startin' something I can't finish—"

"You don't have to show up, only as a witness," the concessionaire reassured him. "I'll take the rap if I'm wrong.—Wait a minute."

He vanished into the rear room of his shack and reappeared in a moment or two.

"Let's go. He prob'ly thinks he's got the place to himself.—Circle around by the shop an' I'll take the other side an' go in first. I'll give you a shout."

The "business doctor" obeyed. If there was anything strange in the idea of a subordinate tractor hand stalking the chief pilot in his own hangar on such flimsy suspicion, this particular field laborer did not seem to be aware of it.

The tiny blue biplane was idling, a few yards in front of the hangar, where Jessup had left it. Happy Jack Shaw, quick on his feet for all his weight, slid past the ship, and crouching, darted into the cavernous interior of Number Seven as Kilroe closed in from the other side.

He reached the open door in a few strides, but not before a startled shout and a scuffle had apprised him that Happy Jack had gone into action. There was still light enough in the hangar for him to make out the figures of the two men. They were down between the ships, Jessup beneath, and there did not seem to be much fight left in that individual.

"Lay off!" Kilroe called sharply, and wrenched the concessionaire's hands loose. "Tryin' to kill the guy—"

"Kill him?" Shaw swayed heavily to his feet, his bald head bent down

toward the semi-conscious pilot. "Yes. Why not? We've got him—got him right." His fingers were gripping spasmodically at the empty air. "Got the goods on him," he said thickly. "Caught him right. Look what he had. Tinkerin' at the motor.—I dunno what it is."

He held out his hand. Something tiny and metallic glistened in the broad palm. Kilroe took the thing—it looked like a small-caliber cartridge with a spring attached—and slipped it into his pocket.

"Thanks, Happy! That just about fills the bill.—Ferguson!"

FROM the shadows of the nearest cockpit a young man, broad of shoulder and tousled of hair, dropped lightly to the floor. Happy Jack looked from one to the other.

"Get it all?" Kilroe jerked over his shoulders to Ferguson.

"You bet! Saw him pull it out of his own pocket when Jessup—Watch it!"

Kilroe had been watching it alertly. He ducked and leaped for the revolver that had whipped gleamingly into view as Happy Jack backed for the door. The gun blasted deafeningly in the big hangar, wafting Kilroe's shapeless felt hat from his head and drawing a cry of pain from Jessup, before the "business doctor's" hand closed on the barrel, wrenching it free.

"Grab him, Ferg—"

But Ferguson was a shade too late. Shaw was out the door and racing for the blue sport plane. What he meant to accomplish—how manage to land that ship on some strange field in dark of evening—Kilroe could not guess. But the man was a pilot; that much Terry Kilroe already knew; and he was a man to take desperate chances.

The concessionaire was over the side, the motor roaring, while Kilroe was still ten feet away. That handicap Kilroe made in a headlong leap, as the plane was already in motion. His hand closed on the rudder, slipped on the smooth surface as the propeller blast caught him, and he tumbled draggingly to the ground.

Something rattled into action, like a machine gun, and Ferguson shot into view on Jessup's field sidecar.

"Hop on! We can make it before he gets up flyin' speed—"

The rest of that speech was whirled behind them in a fifty-mile gale as Ferguson fed the gas.

Kilroe, crouched in the speeding bathtub, figured the chances. They were gaining slowly, rocking madly in the wake of the plane. If they overtook it before it took off, it would be Kilroe's job to get aboard. Ferguson could not abandon a motorcycle going at that speed. And if Terry Kilroe, unfamilar with airplanes, did manage to make the cockpit and the ship zoomed up at that moment, carrying him with it . . .

He dismissed that thought hurriedly.

They nosed abreast of the fugitive, swerved in, sped along, neck and neck. Kilroe pocketed the pistol, jumped with outstretched arms, felt his hands close on a sharp flying wire that burned his palms. But his feet were on the wing.

The sudden weight of his body dragged the wing slightly, throwing the ship in a skidding circle to the left and relieving the wing pressure that was tearing at him. Crooking his elbow about a strut, he tugged the gun free from his fluttering coat and emptied it at random toward the rubber-tired wheels of the bouncing landing gear. Three times his finger pressed the

trigger, the explosions drowned in the roar of the motor. Then the wing dipped suddenly, in a shower of grass roots, and the plane nosed a splintered "prop" into the ground, throwing Kilroe clear.

He picked himself up and helped Ferguson lift Shaw's limp figure from the cockpit. The concessionaire's forehead was cut, where it had collided violently with the cowl.

"Better tie him up with his own belt an' make sure," Kilroe advised, "while I put in a call for the cops. He'd strike quick as a copperhead, that guy."

ON the way back to the office the "business doctor" met Jessup emerging from the hangar. He looked sick.

"What's it all about?" he whined. "I never did anything to him."

"Yeah?" Kilroe scowled. "Never met him, I guess. He happened to be doin' time in Leavenworth for embezzlement of funds when you were court-martialed outa the Army. His name ought to be Pigliatchi—but it ain't, being Shattuck. Which is like Shaw, the SH bein' silent like in *shadow*. An' he's been shadowin' you since he got sprung. He's the guy whose woman you run away with, an' it's too bad he didn't cop you good, for the trouble you caused everybody. He'll come around in a minute.—Like to meet him personal again?"

But Jessup evidently did not.

The second call Kilroe put in was for Ballinger.

"Kilroe. Signin' off now, an' I think everything will be all right. So-called Happy Jack was the wrecker. —Yeah. Happy. *H* as in *hate*—an' a cold customer, too. He aimed to rub out Jessup an' play safe, too, so he tinkered with the motors with a fusible gadget of his own invention. When the engines got heated up they stayed open, and wouldn't stay shut down for more than a few seconds. An' that caught 'em when they were landing. Except Jessup, who began to suspicion some guy was gunnin' for him an' took to landing with a dead stick."

"I don't see how Jessup—" Ballinger began.

"That's what your records showed. Every ship that was wrecked was one Jessup was scheduled to fly—only he didn't. Dunn got caught that way, an' Ferguson, too. By the way, Ferguson gave me some help on this, lookin' up Jessup's past performances. You'd ought to put his name down for chief pilot, 'count of Jessup bein' stooped over to-night an' gettin' shot in a delicate place—one that would make him fly standin' up. But he's through here, anyway."

Ballinger snorted. "You can bet he is! How did that gadget work?"

"Got me. Ferguson could explain it to you. Somethin' about a butterfly valve. It's all Chink to me. But I knew there was somethin', an' I suspicioned who was doin' it. Only I couldn't put my hands on any one, burned ships bein' like dead men about tellin' secrets. So I let Shaw think he could frame Jessup, as a last chance, an' Shaw up an' handed me one of his gadgets himself. I got wise because that scrap of fabric was fingerprinted with a special kind of grease. I tested it out, an' you don't use that kind in your machine shop."

"A special grease?"

"Yeah." Kilroe grinned. "It don't take an aviator to recognize it. It's the kind that comes from a roadside fruit known as the hot dog."

THE END.

Men of Power

By ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

Ranger Steve Berg's enemies did not even stop at murder in their drive to seize a northern forest empire

Even the water was fighting against Berg

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

FOREST RANGER STEVE BERG was sent into the wilds along the Canadian border in order to make a final survey for the proposed development project of Inter-Nation Power Company. Politically influential Everett Meecham owned this company, and behind him were the millions of Norris Estates. But when Steve Berg encountered old Felix D'Anglet and his daughter Georgia (who with her brother Paul and her sister Alesa were reputedly part Chippewa Indian), he learned that if the development went through whole forests would be flooded and the local inhabitants left practically homeless. And although he felt a certain disloyalty toward Elaine Bradford, who lived in Washington and whose influence with her senator father had been responsible for Berg's advancement, he reported negatively upon Meecham's plan.

Fighting against the depredations of Meecham's imported roughnecks, Berg sided with one Will Reed, leader of a movement to preserve the forests. Their most dangerous opponent was a French Canadian, Gene La Shar, who was allied with Meecham. La Shar had turned killer, and while on the Canadian side had murdered a man named Sarbae and wounded two others, a lawyer named Stocker and Jude Whipple, who was Berg's woods assistant. La Shar was wanted by a Mounty named Laythe, provided the killer was ever injudicious enough to recross the Canadian line.

Later, while Stocker and Whipple were in the hospital, Whipple witnessed the murder of Stocker, by Meecham and La Shar and a third, unidentified man. Stocker had known things that would be disadvantageous to Meecham.

In returning to this country in which

This story began in the Argosy for November 4.

he had grown up as a boy, Steve Berg had a secret mission of his own. An orphan, he had hoped to find some clew to his parentage—and he had found that his father was Stephen Norris, supposedly killed in a forest fire. That made the Norris Estates, which Meecham now controlled, rightfully Steve's.

Cray, the local forest superintendent, had certain selfish axes to grind, and to some extent succeeded in gumming up the works for Steve by playing with the Meecham interests. So much so that Tom Allen, Steve's superior at Washington, in desperation set out for the scene of the trouble, accompanied by a group of senators. However, foreseeing the difficulties ahead of Steve, Will Reed, the forest preservationist, engaged a clever legal adviser named Mason.

Then Meecham and La Shar contrived to incite a lynch mob against Berg, claiming that Steve had murdered Stocker. Berg was forced to try to flee in a plane piloted by one Willis, who had originally been hired by Meecham, but who now pulled with Berg and Reed. As they were taking off in Willis's seaplane, hoping to fly to warn the D'Anglets that Meecham planned to take their island by force, a mishap occurred. Berg was thrown into the water.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FIGHTING CHANCE.

THE waves that had battered Steve Berg from his hold on the pontoons were vicious only when sheared by the racing floats. As he fought to the surface he was strangling, but more from the water he had breathed while on the pontoon than from the plunge.

A bullet bounced from the surface of the choppy lake. McVickar wasn't trying to capture Steve Berg; he was trying to finish him.

Berg went under as he saw McVickar sight the gun again; but he clawed to the surface instinctively, and as he fought upward he thought of a crippled duck being put out of its misery by a hunter. One shot, a moment of numbness, then pain—and a folding of waters as he sank. And this murder would be highly legal, of course, for he had resisted arrest.

The racket of a motor was in his ears as he reached the surface this time, and saw the plane come swinging toward him. Willis bent from pontoon to reach out his hand.

"Reach up, quick!" commanded the pilot.

Berg felt a lion's paw grip, a desperate heave, and then they stood for a fraction of a second, balancing. The momentum of the plane was carrying them back toward McVickar.

"Inside!" ordered Willis, thrusting Berg ahead of him.

The motor broke into a roar, and they swerved to climb.

"Soused and shot at," said Willis, with a grin. "Our own Little Nell in the Big Drink. Sorry, Steve, I was sure you'd followed me into the cabin when we jumped from the dock. Are your bellows clear of lake water now?"

"I'm breathing again," said Berg. "But my powder's wet."

He knew that Willis was apologizing for accidentally putting his life in jeopardy.

Wind streamed past the cabin. Steve Berg shivered in his wet clothing, then grew warmer and relaxed a little, finally dozed. Willis's call brought him to alertness.

"Here's Razzberries-on-t h e-Hudson," shouted the pilot. "The mayor, the council and two thousand mutt dogs, the committee of welcome.—Say, it'd be just my luck to bump into old Sergeant Laythe here, an' get interned for life!"

The plane barged up to touch pon-

toons to the shoreline. The eyes of the Indians regarded them with flat hostility. Dogs bristled and growled, children swarmed near cabins and through service berry thickets, high-cheeked women with squatty figures, dowdy and unkempt, hustled from shack to bark lodge and back to shack.

Her people—Paul's people! If all other barriers were removed, Steve wondered if this would be a final barrier.

"Why didn't Paul come?" demanded the head man as Berg finished telling of La Shar, moving to attack. "We think if this is so, Paul would have come."

"But Paul doesn't even know that Meecham's men are on the way," protested Berg.

"You this new Norris," said the head man shaking his head skeptically. "You own power business. We not trust power men."

"Cut it, Steve," said Willis sharply. "I'll take you to D'Anglet's, and then bring Paul back here to rally the redskins. Old Doubting Thomas here'll have to see Paul before he'll budge."

But before they left Berg persuaded the red men to sell him some dry clothing.

AS the plane sped from the Indian village, the Chippewas were huddled in excited talk. The big ship left the lake, crossed a swamp, skimmed spruce forests. Abruptly the engine coughed, sputtered, stopped. Willis's hand dived to the instrument board. For a moment the propeller whirred again, then quit, dead. The plane slanted down.

"She's conked," called Willis. "Little lake ahead. I'll pancake her. Hold on, and say a few words."

Seconds tolled, wind rushed, they seemed to be brushing the trees, fanning the willows and dogwood along the lake shore. The pontoons slid past a stretch of muskeg, slapped the water, while Willis held to the controls. They stopped, pontoons rooted lightly into the muskeg moss that lined the farther shore.

"My chuckle-h e a d e d n e s s, of course," declared Willis solemnly. "But you'll recall, Mr. Berg-Norris, that we were speeded out of town by an official committee headed by the R i g h t Onery Sheriff McVickar. Actually, I was so overwhelmed by his attentions that I forgot all about gas in the tank."

"Any idea where we are, Willis?"

"This puddle is called Atikwa Lake on the map."

"How do we get out of here?"

"Do we? Seems to me I remember a joke about the fellow stuck on a sandbar, and not a bartender in sight. Well, we're stuck on muskeg, and not a spiggot to be had.—A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a puncheon of petrol!"

"But we've got to go on."

"Now you know, I've got a hunch we'll take root here," said Willis, pointing down the river. "I see Sergeant Laythe's outboard canoe. A Canadian hoosegow'll be my castle in Spain."

The canoe carrying Laythe of the Royal Mounted sidled up to a pontoon.

"I warned you," shouted Laythe as he cut off his motor. "You think you can set that sky scow down on His Majesty's lakes—"

"This isn't a lake; this is His Majesty's mudpuddle," p r o t e s t e d Willis. "What's a measly little mudpuddle to the king!"

"None of your sassy tongue!" bawled Laythe. "If you've got clearance papers by proper port of entry,

officials, I'll not say a word; but if ye ain't—"

"Listen here, sergeant," broke in Berg. "If you'll listen."

"Make it a good story—not too tall—not too thick," warned Laythe, his eyes twinkling a bit.

RAPIDLY Berg outlined what was happening. The sergeant smoked, studied the lake shore, knocked ashes from the bowl of his pipe, watched a floppy heron settle in a spike-topped spruce. He was indifferent, apparently. But twice he asked searching questions.

"That explains why the Indians have been about to swarm," he said dryly, as Berg finished.

"Old Sketicism, their leader, was trying to make up his mind which way to jump, when he left the village," said Willis. "But he probably doesn't change his mind oftener than he does his shirt, and that makes both his raiment and his ideas plain lousy."

"You say La Shar is personally leading this outfit?" asked Laythe significantly.

"Say, that island's on the American side—all of it," declared Willis. "You've got to stay on your own side of the fence. I'll write my Congressman, if you come over in my Uncle Sam's back yard.—So there!"

"Aye. But the river on the Canadian side of that island is Canadian water; and if he gets one foot past the line, he's mine," declared Laythe. "Half the river below that island is on the Canadian side, even if the line does skirt the northeast shoreline of the island and put it all on the American side. La Shar might make the mistake of getting his feet wet on the wrong side of the river."

"But La Shar'll hit D'Anglet's without warning, and swamp the guard they've got now," protested Berg quickly. "If he's intrenched there, with all his gang, no one can touch him. We've got to reach D'Anglet so he can get ready to defend the place."

"Good idea," said Laythe. "But this scalawag of a pilot is interned. He's out of gas, and he can't get away unless he can find a bit somewhere. And there isn't a darned bit that I know of in this whole country, except a couple of five-gallon cans of high test over on Nancy Lake. That's just over three miles along the old loggin' road, from the outlet of this lake. Just them two cans cached there by the fire patrol planes as emergency fuel. They're near a blazed, fire-killed spruce, on the west side of the lake.

"But mind, that's His Majesty's property," he warned, pointing his pipe stem at Willis. "If any one took it and it was found out, there'd be the devil to pay. Course, I reckon no one will be in there, short of at least ten days." His eyes danced, back of his shaggy brows, as he watched the pilot.

"I get you," said Willis. "But this lake's so darned small I couldn't get a plane into the air, with two men in the cabin. Have a hard time getting up alone, and it'll take at least two hours to get that gas from Nancy Lake."

Laythe pulled his motor canoe to the end of the pontoon.

"Get in," he ordered Berg. "I may be a damn sentimentalist, but if you can stop Meecham's scheme, I'll do what I can to help you. The Great Engineer made this lake system and its river channels good enough for me and I'd hate to live to see the day when a hound like Meecham would turn their waters into his stinkin' reservoirs."

He shoved the canoe out a few feet, then turned to Willis.

"Mind," he said fiercely, "you're interned, y'hear? If I come back to this lake and find you here, I'll run you all the way to Toronto."

AS they entered the little river that was the outlet to the lake, Berg looked back and saw Willis thrashing through the brush toward the old tote road.

If Willis got off this lake without cracking, he'd be flying to D'Anglet's if time permitted. If he didn't, he'd go south to meet Reed and Mason at Superior.

"I'll probably get busted if any one learns about this," growled Laythe as they crossed the first portage. "But I'll risk giving you a fighting chance."

A fighting chance was about all Berg had. The sound of the motor became a crazy drum of war, a rhythm of strife filled with savage throbbing.

As they swept along forest waterways he kept telling himself that he was on his way to a meeting with La Shar.

Recollections were sharp, vivid. There was the red fleck of paint, near the birch bark warning on Lookout Lake; the shadow-filled living room at D'Anglet's, and La Shar dragging Georgia to him; the moment of tight-locked battle in that same room, when La Shar had tried to crush his skull with that blow from the heavy old pistol; the hours at Sarbae's while Stocker lay wounded and Sarbae dead; the shadow of La Shar, foreboding and threatening, against the store window as he whipped the mob to violence; and Jude's declaration that La Shar had been a party to the killing of old Stocker—kindly, trusting, honest old Stocker.

A fighting chance, and an opportunity to balance scores with Gene La Shar! That was all Steve Berg wanted!

CHAPTER XVIII.

OVER THE LINE.

AS darkness closed in they came to the river end of the portage, into the stream below D'Anglet's. Laythe cached the motor.

"Paddle up," he said. "The motor might start rifle fire."

"Seems quiet."

"Well, there's another angle," he suggested. "Better for me if it's not known I've put you on the island. It'll be better to show up officially to-morrow."

"You'll be here in the morning?"

"I'll be watching the racket from my side of the International Boundary," said Laythe.

As they pulled up the slow current, Berg recalled that night when he had traveled this stretch of water with Paul and Georgia. As then, peace now wrapped night robes around the forest, and solitude brooded. He thought of the daylight trip over this water trail, when he and Paul had set out trailing La Shar and Georgia had whispered for him to come back to her. That was what he was doing now.

Laythe edged the canoe to the landing.

"Good hunting," called Laythe softly, and slid away.

Berg was alone in the whispering night. He started slowly along the dock. No light burned in the big log house. Even Toby, the husky dog, was still. But Berg felt that it was a false quiet before the storm. To-morrow might bring a tempest.

He stepped from the end of the dock and started past the boat house.

Instinctively his body tensed. Mass attack leaped from ambush. Before he could yell, he was down and being smothered in the linty folds of a blanket, while four men ensnared his arms and grappled at his thrashing legs. For a moment he strained, then gave up.

He might yell, but he could be heard not more than ten feet away. He was swathed so that he had little chance to fight free.

A door opened and he was dumped upon a floor. He struggled out of the blanket. Flash light rays dazzled his night-wide eyes. He heard some one whispering beyond the light, then abruptly the heavy door slammed in his face and a bolt fell. His outstretched hand touched damp, cold sawdust, and he realized that he was in the ice house, with its foot-thick walls, heavily planked and packed with sawdust.

Who had pitched him into this place? Was La Shar already in possession here? The thought sent him hammering at the door with his fists. Then he calmed. It was more likely D'Anglet's Chippewa guards had downed him. He had reached the island, but here he was, helpless and mute. He'd have to await developments.

He gathered the blanket around him, huddled into a dry corner, and then long hours of the steady drive through which he had passed slowly settled down their burden of fatigue. He slept, almost without moving.

SHOUTING, then several men yelling, and the sound of feet pounding near the ice house door. More shouting, and the voice of a big caliber rifle, brought Steve Berg jerking out of sleep stupor. Befuddlement that held him for the first seconds of turmoil slipped away. He jumped to his feet. His memory cleared. This noise meant that La Shar was attacking. He threw his weight against the door, and a fresh racket burst wildly outside. His attack on the door was futile.

He turned away, baffled, then went clawing and scrambling up over the insecure sawdust. Under the eaves he had seen a door in the roof by which the upper layers of ice were stored.

The roof door was fastened inside by a piece of twisted wire. He wrenched the fastening free, braced, shoved. The door flopped open.

He floundered through, crouched for a moment on the roof. Below him a Chippewa carrying a rifle dived into the brush and ran toward the American side, where the attack was breaking. There was fighting, spilling at the river's edge.

Mixed with sounds of strife was the pounding roar of a plane motor. He looked up, expecting to see the red flash of Willis's big ship, but he recognized the silver wings of one of Meecham's ships. The Man of Power had come to witness the conquest of the island and personally to take possession. The future of this entire region depended on whether or not he succeeded.

Berg jumped to the ground, ran to the big house and into the deserted living room, then on to the library. As he ran through this doorway, he called for Felix. Almost at his feet Georgia sprang from a kneeling position where she had been taking ammunition from a paneled cupboard.

For an instant both stood poised in defensive surprise.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I came to warn you against La Shar's coming," he replied.

"I can't believe it," she said slowly. "You're here leading Meecham's men so you can take possession for yourself, Stephen Norris—for yourself and that Bradford girl!"

"That's not so."

"I can't believe you."

"I don't ask you to.—Where's Felix and Paul?"

She hesitated. In that slow second new shouting sounded over the island. Gunfire burst in vicious, chattering laughter. Both turned to look out the barred window. Below, on the slopes of the island, the main battle ground was in view.

The fiercest fighting was at the lower end of the island, where little groups of Chippewas, howling and shooting, were turning back a canoe party coming up the river near the boat house. There were only a score of men in that attacking party.

"Look!" commanded the girl at his side.

La Shar was coming toward the island, by walking a ledge, directly across the rapids. Now, in late season, the rapids were no longer deep and dangerous.

Back of La Shar was the main body of Meecham's roughnecks.

This side attack was the real menace. The hullabaloo at the lower tip of the island was only to draw the defenders away from the place.

"Find Felix and Paul," ordered Berg as he started toward the door. "Get men back here to the house and barricade yourselves. I'll hold La Shar until you can get back here. Don't let them get possession here.—Quick!"

HE started across the big living room, diving to meet La Shar. That gang must be blocked, and one man could stop a hundred, for only a single attacker could approach, across the ledge.

He heard Georgia running a pace behind him. Again he called to her to get Felix and Paul. Then he was slipping down the mossy bank just as La Shar, gaining the island shore, turned to yell orders for his men to follow him.

Both men were off balance as Berg lunged. He saw that first look of consternation in La Shar's eyes, and then they were tumbling down the rocky brink.

La Shar struggled up, cursing. Berg hit. They stumbled into the edge of the river. Above them the rapids curled and tumbled over the half exposed rocks that stood like worn teeth above the ledges.

Armed men started along that one water-washed path which La Shar had found across the half dry rapids. La Shar pulled an automatic pistol from a shoulder holster. Berg leaped. Meecham's agents must not get hold of this island. La Shar must be stopped.

The gun blazed as he hit. He caught the weapon arm of La Shar and threw it high. The next shot sang toward the sky. Then La Shar wrenched free and brought the heavy gun crashing down in an effort to brain Berg. It stunned—grazed—cut. Berg felt the blood start from a gash near his temple. Then they were swaying a moment as they wrestled for the gun.

A rifle shot bellowed and echoed in the forest-walled cleft.

"Don't shoot," yelled La Shar in panic. "Hey, get over here!"

If his men tried to down Berg now it would peril La Shar. They must overwhelm the forest man by their numbers.

A challenging shout broke from the forest on the island side; not a few

men but many. Berg wondered if La Shar had landed a third party at the upper end of the island, but there was no chance to find out about that.

La Shar broke free, staggered out a few feet on a ledge.

"Let him have it!" he screamed.

Rifles belched from the mainland side. Berg felt the hot whisper of death as bullets tore air by his head. They were trying to slaughter him in his tracks now.

Let them! Whatever they did, he'd get La Shar first!

He pitched headlong, arms tangling with La Shar's legs as they fell into a cauldron pool under the ledge. For a moment they were below the smother. As they came up, dripping, La Shar's hands were gunless. La Shar came snarling, his fingers hooking and reaching. Berg hit squarely. La Shar toppled, but grabbed as he fell, dragging Berg over the next ledge.

Berg was up first. As he stood exposed, weaving an instant over the next brink, a plane swept low above the rapids, roaring like a thousand winds. —Meecham hadn't landed then. No, there was a red flash as the plane banked; it was Willis's ship.

IN that moment when the plane skimmed by, Berg saw why the Meecham men were not crossing that water-covered ledge from mainland to island. Crouching back of a rock, Georgia D'Anglet had trained a repeating sporting rifle on that ledge. She was backing him in this fight.

He smashed at La Shar. On the island there suddenly broke a fresh burst of rifle fire that sent La Shar's men scrambling.

Alone on the rocky steps of the rapids, La Shar and Berg fought. But there were rifle sights ready to line on the man who stood like a lone target after the other had fallen.

La Shar came roaring. It was a life staked against a life, and he knew it. They clinched as Berg tried to break free to hit him, and in that clinch Berg felt for the first time the crushing power of La Shar's great shoulder muscles. When they fell into a pool, La Shar tried to squeeze the breath from him and hold him under water until he strangled.

Berg kicked, but the waters hampered the movement of his feet. He reached, gouged, felt a shudder of pain in La Shar. It was a dirty fighting trick—but this was life or death. They crawled on hands and knees, with heads above the water for a moment, then were down again. This time Berg got a lungful of air before he went under.

La Shar's big hands reached for his throat. Water and fingers—his head was bursting.

He lost La Shar as they parted under the water surface. His eyes were bleary, his head splitting, as they got into the air again. He staggered toward the island shore. La Shar slammed into him from behind. They staggered over a little ledge.

They were below the falls now; they had pounded all the way down to the river level below, and now they rocked along the shore on the island side. Yelling, mixed with cheering, came from the brush screens on the island.

"Sock him, cowboy!"

It was Willis's voice. That plane had been his, then. Queer, to Berg everything seemed far away now, voices and all. Just himself and La Shar, fighting down below the rocky gullet of the river, slipping, dancing, weaving along this unsure footing of the river's marge. He felt suddenly

tired. This fight had gone long enough.—No, it was to the finish.

LA SHAR came weaving. He hit. It was a soggy blow. La Shar pitched away, trying to gather himself for a new rush. Beyond him Berg saw the docks at the lower point of the island. La Shar stooped, straightened with a stone in his big hand, and attacked. Berg dodged heavily, slipped, and both fell to wallow in the water, hands gripping for wind or any other hold that would maim—numb—paralyze.

Berg wrenched loose; he stood up. La Shar struggled up in front of him. They crashed, sprawled among rocks, got to knees, and slugged groggily. They were near the smooth, open space at the lower end of the island, and close to the boat house. They had come all around that side of the lower point of the island. If only La Shar could be driven up to that open space and solid footing. . . .

Berg lunged and pushed; and they fell, but got up and shuffled a grim dance on the mossy rocks. La Shar's face was filthy with stringy water weeds plastered there as they had rolled in a shallow pool of stagnant shore water. He looked as if he wore a clinging green beard; he was actually comical. — But why couldn't Berg laugh?—Laugh? Of course not, this was the fight he had been approaching for days. No time to laugh now. Still, La Shar did look funny.

He slammed into La Shar. His fists hit flesh.

La Shar fell away, ripping the tangled green stuff from his chin. That made his chin seem bare. Berg hit it, and red showed against the specks of green that still clung to La Shar's jaw. La Shar was bleeding.

Berg felt sick and mad. Sticky, salty ooze was on his own lips. Blood, too. He smashed again, at that point where he saw red on La Shar's jaw. Fresh blood was the flavor of this mad, red war.

Again he heard Willis cheering, and above his cheers echoed the whoop of Jude Whipple's voice.

Something had happened. Just in that moment when he had hit La Shar on that bare spot on his chin a change had come to the island. They were not fighting there any more. Every one seemed to be following along the shore as he drove La Shar.

He hit, plunged, dove at La Shar; hit again, and plunged. He struck, and they staggered from that bare space at the boat house to the end of the dock. There was the edge of the river that flowed on the Canadian side of D'Anglet's island. For some reason, he realized that he ought to drive La Shar into Canada. What was it?—Some reason. . . .

"Drive him, boys!" he heard the call of Laythe. "One foot over the boundary, Steve, and—"

That was it! Laythe was waiting; he couldn't disappoint Laythe.

La Shar was weaving before him. He must drive La Shar. . . .

La Shar bawled profanely. He understood, then.

"I'll kill you!" blubbered La Shar.

He slobbered. He bunched and dived. It was a madman that charged Berg, but his thoughts had cleared now. The international boundary — and Laythe waiting! He struck and hit cleanly.

THERE were blows; fists striking on flesh; pounding; pounding—and La Shar weaving and staggering back—always back. Toward

the racing chute where the waters on the Canadian side tore down the great trough of rock.

La Shar glanced out of his puffed eyes, saw Laythe hazily, and smashed again at Steve Berg. La Shar was whimpering now; he saw a noose on the Canadian side, and a man in a scarlet tunic who would lead him to the scaffold.

"Sock him for me, Steve!" yelled Jude Whipple.

But his voice sounded far away, mixed with a strange roaring, the sound of rapids, and La Shar's blubbering.

They were on the edge of the river. Groggily Berg saw Laythe waiting in the canoe.

"Just one foot over—"

He struck, and La Shar fell. He waited for him to get up. He bent to jerk him to his feet so he could knock him over the line.

La Shar would run now, with the fear of the noose driving him. Berg wasn't quite sure whether or not his own feet were on solid rock. But he struck, and La Shar staggered, turned and pitched in a stumbling trot, but caught himself.

Still four paces; and Laythe waiting—waiting!

Through eyes that were blinding with the crimson that continued to drip from the wound at his temple; his knees sagging; every ounce of his fighting will forcing him to keep his feet during these last vital seconds; Steve Berg plowed after. Step by step, as La Shar went blindly stumbling and falling toward the far edge of the island. Across that line, and he'd have to answer for the death of Sarbae.

But something had tricked Steve Berg. He had thought it was only four paces. But it was miles—*miles!*

La Shar almost went down. His hands were up as though he would tear a blindfold from his eyes. Back of Berg was a lifting clamor of many voices, as he slogged and slid, fighting to keep his balance on the rocky shore.

He reached to grab a waterside alder. His hands lacked feeling. He slipped to his knees; looked blearily to where La Shar was still on his feet. Would this fight end this way? La Shar up, and himself down?

He saw La Shar trip on the rocks, and pitch forward, arms outflung blindly. He saw the splash of water as the big woodsman bully struck the stream flowing past the Canadian side of D'Anglet's island. And he saw Laythe dip his paddle, saw the canoe slide along beside La Shar and Laythe's fingers tangle in the wet shirt of his man.

A fresh roaring racket bombarded Berg as his fingers loosened on the alder. He tried to reach out to keep from falling flat, but his arms crumpled and he slipped wearily to inertness.

CHAPTER XIX.

MEECHAM'S END.

STEVE BERG regathered his senses with a groggy rush. The blustering voice of Everett Meecham was in his ears. There was a fat row on; otherwise, Meecham would never have lost his quiet, chilled-steel voice.

Looking out through the boat house door from where he sat on a mat of tarpaulins, Berg saw Meecham trying to jerk from the grip of a chunky man.

"I've got influence in Tamarack County, sheriff, and I want you to know that I'll leave this island when and how I please," stormed Meecham. "I'm Everett Meecham, manager of

the Norris Estates.—You hear what I'm saying? Well then, let me go!"

Recollection of the fight came sweeping over Berg. La Shar hadn't won. Nor had Meecham won his fight yet. Some one moved beside him. Berg rolled a little, and faced Paul D'Anglet's steady, dark eyes. Paul had a wet cloth in his hands. Berg knew the Indian had been wet-packing his forehead.

"You're all right?" said Paul.

"Got most my senses back.—What's going on?"

"See for yourself," admonished Paul. He got up and stalked through the door.

Berg sat up, held his hurting head in his hands a moment, looked out the door. Beyond the sheriff and Meecham was Reed, smiling dryly, and with him was Clint Mason. Willis and Jude Whipple, both grinning, were near a crowd of Chippewas gathered around Felix D'Anglet and the head man of the village. The Indians had come after all. That accounted for the cheering on the island as Berg and La Shar had fought down the rapids. And that was what had held La Shar's men from coming over the ledge, too. Paul spoke to Reed.

Reed nodded.

"The law will back me—" began Meecham in his loud voice.

"Not any more, Meecham," cut in Reed quickly. "You've been served with the court order issued in Tamarack County—this county—recognizing the claim to heirship of Stephen Norris Junior—"

"Impostor!—He's a fake!" shouted Meecham, his face reddening.

"La Shar knew well enough who Steve Berg was the day he came in here," said Reed. "He knew enough to realize that if he didn't kill Berg the plans he had made would fail. And you know yourself—"

"You can't prove anything by La Shar," said Meecham, wildly. "He's on his way to hang—for being a fool and killing Sarbae.—La Shar might have proof, but try and get it. Only a living witness, swearing that this man is really Stephen Norris's son, will make his claim stick in court.—You say Stocker could do that? Well, Stocker's dead—and you can't hang that on me either. This Jude Whipple's the only witness, and he's trying to swear falsely against La Shar and me, just to make trouble. You can't prove anything! This warrant arresting me for killing Stocker is bosh."

STEVE BERG got to his feet a bit unsteadily. He staggered to the door, each step a little more certain, stronger than the one before it. He stopped there, holding to the door frame.

"There, in the boathouse, is the son of Stephen Norris," said Paul's steady voice suddenly. "I know."

"You're crazy too!" burst out Meecham.

"No, I know," said Paul. "I am the Chippewa who left him with the fire lookout, Nels Berg—after your hired killer, Meecham, murdered his father and mother and tried to kill me when I came back to the portage for them!"

"You can't prove it!" Meecham's voice suddenly squawked oddly, as though his throat was gripped by his own fear. "You can't find any one I hired to kill the Norrises!"

"Because you had the man who killed them murdered," said Paul D'Anglet, his dark gaze unflinching and damning. "You killed that man so he could never talk, and you killed

him in such a way that Stocker was accused. Then you drove Stocker out of the country. No one—not even Felix—knew I had gone with Mr. Norris that day. So I kept quiet, until now."

"Look here," said Reed, stepping up to Paul. "Why didn't you tell this before?"

Paul smiled and shrugged slightly. "While Meecham still had power over this country? I would have died, too. I had been near enough to death when his man chased me that day. And when this forest man came, he came here as an enemy; and afterward I was not sure—until we found Stocker.

"I have waited a long time to tell, but now the time has come," said the Indian.

"A lie!" declared Meecham, desperately. "A rank conspiracy!" He was sweating. "There's no evidence in the world that can prove this is young Norris."

"There is," said Paul, firmly. "Two pieces of fire burned through his shirt that day, one on top of his left shoulder—a round spot. The other was longer, and it was low on his right shoulder blade. They burned deep. If this is the son of Stephen Norris that I left with Nels Berg's wife, those fire brands will tell."

An odd, still expectancy held the group.

"Take off your shirt, Steve," ordered Jude Whipple. As Jude helped slip the garment from him, the woodsman talked in low, exultant tones. "We've got him, boy! We've got the deadwood on Meecham, sure as shootin'. He's in a corner, and the corner all buttoned up."

"I thought they'd finished you when you disappeared, Jude," said Berg.

"When I left you at the hotel?—Lordy, no! That's when I heard the voice of that third fellow, who was in the hospital that night with Meecham and La Shar. I heard him talking as he walked past the hotel; an' I shadowed him an' found out who he was. He's in the jug now, an' he's confessed."

"That just about sinks Meecham, I guess," observed Willis, who had come to stand just beside Jude. "He hasn't heard all that good news yet. Old Sherlock Whipple, the backwoods sleuth!"

THE last of the torn shirt pulled away. Steve Berg raised fingers to touch the old scars he had carried from that day of the red gauntlet of the woods.

The others gathered closer and looked.

"A put up job!" declared Meecham. But his voice was hollow. "Sheriff, I've changed my mind. I'll fly out of here and you can go in my plane—to Tamarack. We'll get this business cleaned up at once. Is that satisfactory?"

"That's a good suggestion, officer," said Reed, quickly. "The court of this country is in session this morning."

"And fifteen minutes after I've appeared in court I'll be out on bail; and when I get loose I'll start something!" fumed Meecham defiantly.

Meecham and his pilot and the sheriff walked out on the dock and to the plane.

"Stepping into his own trap," said Reed in a low voice to Steve Berg. "There's an injunction awaiting him in that court, removing him from managership of the Norris Estates. And he'll find there, too, that the third man that Jude recognized by his voice has

confessed all the details of that Stocker murder and names Meecham as the one who actually held the knife. I didn't think it a good policy to tell him that right here. The international boundary's too near, and if he escaped he'd be fairly safe on the other side."

The roar of Meecham's plane shattered through the sounds of the river and the rising talk.

It sped down the channel, lifted, circled for height, straightened, then swung into a circle again, as though the pilot was still climbing at a thousand feet elevation before laying his course to Tamarack.

"Say, that pilot's throwing a fit!" exclaimed Willis suddenly. "Something's gone haywire!"

High against the blue the plane was slipping and diving. Below, talk stopped as though razor-sheared. The plane caught itself, righted, squared away; and from it fell the squirming, twisting mite of a human figure, spinning awkwardly—over, over and over. Its tiny arms reached futilely into the air for support that was not there.

"The sheriff—they've tossed him out and they're headed for Canada," breathed Reed.

"But the plane wouldn't be coming back here if they'd ditched him and were heading for Canada," said Willis quickly.

SILENTLY, all watched as the plane bounced up the river again and stopped at the landing. White-faced and bewildered, the sheriff got out. Back of him was the pilot, his face pinched, his lips blue.

"Meecham jumped," whispered the sheriff. "He asked what evidence we had against him in this Stocker murder, and I told him the fellow that Whipple had cornered had confessed. I think Meecham went crazy then. He offered the pilot and me fifty thousand dollars just to set him down in Canada. Then he attacked me, and I pulled a gun. We were all fighting—and he got the door open and jumped!"

The sheriff mopped his glistening forehead.

The pilot lit a cigarette with a hand that shook. Every one in the group was striving to understand that the figure that had stood for ruthless power—the big man who had imposed his will on this country for years—had abruptly turned into that futile, falling midget they had watched for dragging seconds as it plunged earthward. Meecham, the man of power, had suddenly become a helpless, crushed, human gnat on the spinning sphere of the earth as it hurtled through space toward an Eternity which no man could foretell.

The odd stillness of the moment broke, and every one talked. Willis and the other pilot agreed to put their planes in the air to search for Meecham's body.

Steve Berg insisted on going with Willis; his old forest service training prompted that move. And he went, despite the protests of Reed and Mason, who insisted there was more important business to consider.

"Can't wait!" said Berg positively. "I know this country as well as Willis, and I can help."

It was well past noon when they came winging back to D'Anglet Island, Willis's big plane leading. Just before they had turned back, both planes had set down near the Sawmill-Lookout portage.

"Lookout Lake's swallowed him," Willis had declared positively. "There's maybe a hundred feet of water over him right this minute. We

could spot him from the sky, if he was on land."

STEVE BERG had stolen away a moment, to stand near the old pine on the portage. He smiled, slowly, wistfully, as he walked to the cairn. Norris—Stephen Norris, Junior. He spoke the name aloud; and above him the old pine murmured as his eyes blurred and his heart filled. He had come back to claim his own, he had kept his tryst, met his trust.

He'd be worthy of those who slept here.

He was still wrapped wholly in his thoughts as the plane swooped in. He did not see the third plane, snubbed to the dock, until he stepped from the cabin of the red plane. Then he met Cray, trotting toward him.

"Where have you been?" demanded Cray. "Didn't I tell you to stay in town? You'll suffer for not paying heed to official business! Associate Forester Allen and the chairman of the Senatorial Committee have come out here. They're just beyond the boathouse. I'd hate to be in your shoes—a member of the forest service not paying attention to business. But remember, I warned you plenty!"

"I've been talking to Reed," said grizzled, shaggy-headed old Tom Allen as he shook hands. "I figure we might as well fold up our investigation and go back home until you get this Norris Estates business straightened out, Steve.—Of course, we'll loose you from the service."

He hadn't thought of that. It struck him with a sharp pang. Even with men like Cray in it, the forest service also had its Tom Allens. Steve Berg nodded slowly. He felt he was saying farewell to the old service, as he shook hands again with Allen just before their plane left the wharf. New work lay ahead.

"We've saved lunch for you," said Reed as the roar of the plane with government officials dimmed. "And then we've got to jump into fifty dozen things that must be taken care of immediately. Meecham's death must be reported—there are plenty of witnesses. Then you must give Mason and me power of attorney, and Mason has a dozen other things to clear up. The minor heirs who have kept Meecham on as manager of the Norris Estates as a trust might cause trouble if we are unable to move swiftly. But we'll consolidate our position at once. We can prove your identity now in any court. Paul D'Anglet's proof, with Stocker's deposition and Nels Berg's story told to a court, will fix that. While you eat, we'll get this business going."

There was a certain awkwardness when he signed his name as Stephen Norris for the first time.

"You'll get used to that quickly enough," declared Reed, laughing a little and showing a fresh stack of papers across the big box at which they sat. "Here's a lot to practice on."

He fought to keep his attention on Mason's talk; but through it all was running the warning that he must see Georgia D'Anglet, must find her soon, without delay. He had not seen Paul, nor Felix—not even the Chippewas—since he had come back from Lookout. Mentally, he struggled to get loose and to hurry to her. Now she would have to listen to what he was bound to tell her.

"That finishes that," said Mason, as he finally picked up the papers he had fished out from pockets of a fat brief case. "Willis can fly us out and come back for you, Steve."

"We can take the silver-winged plane. It's being paid for by Norris Estates funds," suggested Reed. "Leave Willis for Steve. He can afford a pilot of his own now."

HE saw them head into the late afternoon sky, and turned from the dock. He dodged Willis and Jude as they came down the path from the house. The pilot and the woodsman went out on the dock, found seats, and waited. Old Jude and the devil-may-care pilot—there would be a place for them both in the new set-up of the Norris Estates.

He was caught in a back-surge of thought. Occasionally he had thought of himself as Stephen Norris, during the hours while he had been caught in a snarl of difficulties, but it had been a nebulous, far-away thought. It was incredible, yet it was true. And in a new surge he was swept on a new crest of triumph.

Meecham's schemes were doomed. The forest would be cropped; the young trees would come on to make a continuous yield; the wild life would not be driven, bewildered, from flooded shorelines; the Chippewas could still live in the village of their fathers. Waterpower would be developed, but on the basis that great forested watersheds—and the swamps, the thick mats of forest duff—would hold back the waters to feed them steadily down to power turbines throughout the seasons. Visions caught and held Berg for seconds.

And then, drumming at him came that other command. He had won over Meecham, but he had lost, if Georgia D'Anglet refused to share victory with him.

He turned, as the voice of Paul D'Anglet spoke close beside him.

"Felix wants to see you in the big room," said Paul, phlegmatically.

"What about?"

"He's got something to say," said Paul, and turned to walk up the path where shadows were long.

As he followed, knowing by Paul's uncompromising back that questions would not be answered, he felt a presentiment that when he entered that big room he would face another crisis—more vital, more important, than any he had yet gone through.

CHAPTER XX.

BELIEF.

PAUL was well ahead of him as they came to the heavy log portal.

Stepping into the room, he felt afresh the touch of feudalistic law that ruled here. The dim corners were packed with it, the room hushed by its presence.

Felix D'Anglet rose from where he sat in the heavy old chair back of the massive table. His face was more hawk-like and his eyes seemed to have retreated deeper into his skull, though they burned with steady determination as his head lifted proudly. Paul took his position a pace back of the old man. The three men were alone in the room. The house was strangely hushed.

"Sir," began D'Anglet, in hurried formality. "My son Paul identifies you as the son of Stephen Norris, and regardless of what may happen afterward, I have no right to attempt to retain this island and the surrounding lands any longer. Here is a deed which I have just drawn, transferring all to you. I held this property against Meecham, believing his claim felonious; but even though you have deceived us, and are in alliance with the

Bradfords, and even though you may go on with the plans of Inter-Nation Power, I still have no right to keep this land from you."

Felix laid the paper on the table. His slim hand trembled. He pivoted quickly, nodded to Paul, and without a word the two strode through the door. As Felix D'Anglet left the room it seemed as though those pompous ghosts of the tradition which he lived suddenly gathered about him and trooped out, leaving the house a dead building. For a moment, Steve Berg could not move. It was as though an unseen power, a royal reserve, kept him from calling out to Felix to stop; there was a magnificent tragedy in the moment.

Then came sweeping over him the full force of Felix's statement. Felix believed that Stephen Norris was allied with the Bradfords. Georgia had told him what had happened at Sarbae's. Evidently Felix had not talked with Reed or Whipple.

Berg flung out of the door, caught Felix by the arm and swung him around in the path.

"Look here, I don't want this!" he cried, thrusting the deed back at Felix. "I want—"

"Take it and be done!" said Felix fiercely. "Do you think it is easy for us to leave here?"

Felix swung to start down the pathway, but with a quick move Stephen Norris blocked the path. With vicious jerks he tore to ribbons the document he held and tossed them away.

"Where's Georgia?" he demanded. "You've heard her story and believed it; but now she must listen to the truth. I'm not going on with the Inter-Nation's scheme. I've fought for you—and you will not believe in me."

He was suddenly bitter. "Where is she?" he demanded, harshly.

"I don't know.—In the kitchen maybe," mumbled Felix D'Anglet, his hands clasping and unclasping as though he strove to reach out and grip a new thought.

Bewilderment showed plainly in his eyes. He had fought trickery and scheming for so long . . .

STEPHEN NORRIS ran, as he crossed the big living room toward the kitchen. He pushed through the door, careening into the fat, black hulk of old Susan.

"Where's Georgia?" he demanded.

"Lawd Massa!" exclaimed Susan. Then she scowled. "Oh, it's yo'!—Elijah, huh?— Yo' Judas Iscariot!"

"Where is she?" he repeated, impatiently.

"Ast Alesa," said Susan, defiantly. "She's jes' outside de do'. Gettin' ready to git away from heah, so we is. —Yo' kin have yo' ol' island!"

He went through the door Susan had indicated. The Indian girl regarded him with steady calm. He had the feeling that he was transparent and that she was looking directly through him.

Alesa shrugged and smiled, ever so slightly.

"She has declared she will never see you," said Alesa slowly, as though she was thinking as she talked. "But this is her pride speaking, not her heart. You must make her ears listen and her heart understand. She saw a lie at Sarbae's.—But I know now, as I look at you. You have love for only one woman, and my sister for only one man. Your one woman is Georgia; you are her one man."

"Where is she?" again asked Stephen Norris.

"Over near the rapids, where she found you. She is saying good-bye to

The People—and she's crying, while Felix can't see her, for she is the one who is driving us from this island."

He whirled and went slamming through the bush. He shoved past pines, and finally through a tight stand of young fir. Standing above the rapids was Georgia. He almost caught her before she realized he was near. Her eyes were wet.

"What do you want?" she demanded fiercely. "What have you got to say to me?"

"I've got a lot to say," he said, suddenly determined.

"Men don't fight for something unless there is a woman to share it," she cried bitterly. "You came up here because of that other woman, that smooth, silky—"

"But I'm staying because of you!" he broke in hotly. "Georgia—I love you!"

"You forget," she said bitterly. "Paul is my brother; Alesa my sister. Chippewas, both of them."

"That makes no difference!" he said savagely. "If every drop of blood in your veins is pure Chippewa, it still will make no difference.—I love you. Do you hear? Listen to me!"

He grabbed her by the shoulders, shook her slightly. There was a tender vehemence in his grip.

"You're not entirely sane," she declared, slowly. "Part of this is reaction from the struggle you've been through.—When you get back to the city, you'll remember Paul and Alesa. You're slightly mad." She tore away from his fingers.

He laughed. "*Sane?*" he cried. "No, I'm a fanatic. Cray says so. Yes, I'm mad. I'm as crazy as— Do you believe it?"

He laughed again, for he had seen her veiled gaze, melting and yearning; had seen the beginning of belief come creeping in.

"I'll show you how crazy I am! You'll not believe what I say—what your eyes see—but you'll believe—"

He reached out, caught her arm. She made a quick move to tear away—stopped.

FOR an instant they stood, not even a whisper between them. Wind sang in the pines; there was the chorus of rapids lifting in a wilderness chant; and the great peace of the wilderness woods, the burning magnificence of cloudy sunset, the laughing glint of free waters, following age-scoured channels to the northern sea.

Her arms reached out hungrily. Her dreams were coming true. Not dreams of a magnolia by a white gate, of a porticoed southern home, of singing in the Negro quarters; but a dream that she had lost and had now recaptured. A man in a ragged shirt; a man who was strong; a fighter; but one who was tender and gentle as he whispered and his hand tangled in her silky hair. When his fingers reached up to tilt her face to meet his, he was a man filled with power; a woodsman who loved her, and who was saying over and over that he always would.

"Wait!" she said a moment later. "I must tell you now. Paul is a half brother, Alesa a half sister. Their mother was a daughter of a Chippewa chief, and she was Felix's first wife. My mother—his second wife—was a Southerner, a Gaylord of Georgia. I am—"

"I don't care who you are!" he said impatiently. "I want you!"

The river clapped hands and chuckled. The faint choir of The People in the Rapids began the chant of a wilderness eventide. The wind song

in the pines joined with a gay whispering. The thickets along the river began a new fluttering, as though unseen woods spirits were hurrying to carry the news throughout the forest. Breeze pranksters tossed wisps of spray gaily over the two who stood at the river's edge, two who were mindful only of the fact that they had found each other. . . .

THE END.

Horse Rustlers

JACKSON'S HOLE, Montana, was famous as a hideout for early-day horse thieves. The Hole is thirty-five miles long, half as wide and completely surrounded by mountain ranges; the only entrances are two narrow passes. It was named for the notorious horse thief, Teton Jackson, who made his headquarters there.

An Englishman named Anderson had a large horse ranch near Teton Pass, which led to the Hole. He was the principal victim of the Jackson's Hole horse thieves, and he decided to rid that section of them. He learned their system, which was to herd the stolen horses into the Hole all summer, work over their brands, then in the fall drive them to Salt Lake City and other points to be sold.

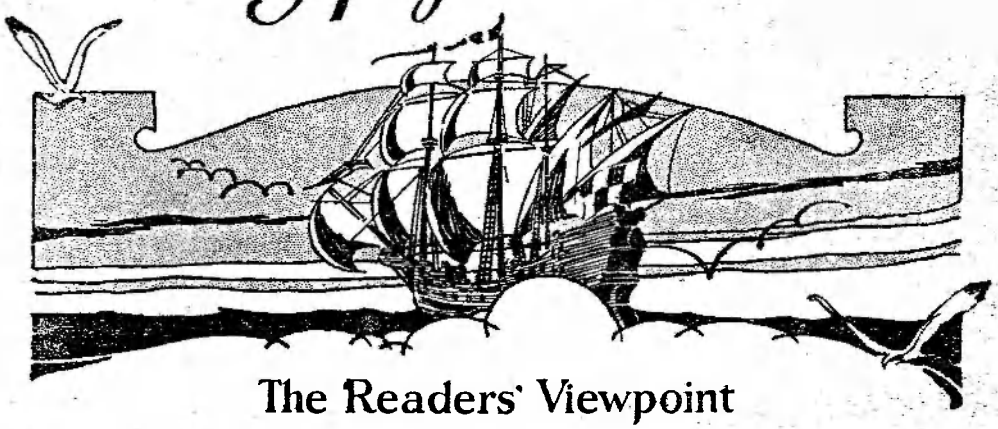
In the fall Anderson gathered together twenty of the best pistol shots in that section, had them appointed deputy sheriffs, then started war on the rustlers who worked under the leadership of two men known as Spencer and Bennett. The new deputy sheriffs organized into small parties and hid themselves near at the mouths of the passes. Whenever a bunch of the stolen horses were driven out, the deputies would follow them until they were miles away from Jackson's Hole, then take the rustlers dead or alive. When winter set in and filled the passes with snow the deputies had recovered over a hundred horses and killed or captured eighteen rustlers, but neither Spencer nor Bennett was in the lot. They were still in Jackson's Hole.

During the early part of March, Anderson started out with half a dozen deputies to get Spencer and Bennett. It was in the early morning when Anderson and his deputies came upon a set of buildings in the Hole; consisting of corrals, stable and a cabin. Surrounding the buildings the deputies called upon the occupants to surrender. Bennett and Spencer answered with a shower of bullets from the cabin and the stable.

Bennett finally threw the cabin door open and stood there firing his rifle. He succeeded in wounding one of the deputies, but one of Anderson's shots killed him. The shooting from the cabin now ceased, but it was renewed from the stable. Working his way carefully to the cabin, Anderson entered it through a back window. There was no one inside and in the center of the floor there was a hole. Anderson carefully lowered himself into it, and found a passageway that led towards the stable, where Spencer was. Spencer heard Anderson creeping towards him and whirled to shoot, but he was too late. Anderson shot him through the heart.

F. H. Sidney.

Argonotes



The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

TRUTH, the proverb goes, is stranger than fiction. And that is the motto of a new department which will start in ARGOSY next week—"Stranger than Fiction," a weekly page of surprising, odd, amusing, interesting, and out-of-the-way bits of fact from all over the world, conducted by John S. Stuart. Let us know how you like it!

MORE information about night vision:

Terra Alta, W. Va.

In regard to darkness vision, please allow me to further the theory as I see it.

The human eye does not see uninterrupted vision, but the vision is oscillating, much like an alternating electric current. Between the periods of oscillation one is totally blind. However, these oscillations occur so frequently that one cannot notice the interruptions. One can be said to be blind half the time. This is where my theory of darkness vision comes in. In the vision of the person blessed with sight in darkness the oscillations are much faster than those persons of ordinary sight. As in television, the more picture units per second, the better is the view. So it is with the human eye.

I, too, have always been able to see well in the dark and a lantern serves to blind me rather than to aid me. I am forced to wear glasses because of near-sightedness. I find that as darkness increases, my eye defect decreases and I can see almost as well in the dark without my spectacles as with them. In daytime, in removing my spectacles to look at an object, I have a vision equal to about a three power magnifying glass.

Probably the hardest dark to get accustomed to that I have ever come across, is the darkness encountered upon first entering a cave. A friend of mine and I explored a cave last year and, as it was daylight when we entered, the light of both our flashlights seemingly did no good at all. However, after waiting a few minutes we were able to see better and, by the time we were ready to come out again, we found that by turning off the flashlights, the light of the entrance seemed to illuminate the cave for several hundred feet back, although the passage was filled with turns.

Another interesting thing about some people is their ability to "feel" the nearness of objects in the dark without actually seeing them. It is a measure of sixth sense and is developed in blind people to large extent. I developed a certain amount of it before I found out that my eyesight was so bad, only it came in useful to me in daytime as well as night.

D. WAYNE WOLFE.

A BARREL of fun:

Bayonne, N. J.

I have often wanted to write in and tell of the many enjoyable moments I've had in reading the ARGOSY, but I never had the courage.

It was back in 1920 that I bought my first ARGOSY and I have read them without interruption ever since. In 1925, I had the good luck

to go to a farm in Randolph, Massachusetts. I went to the grain house one day for chicken feed and came upon a barrel filled with copies of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY. I looked further and found a barrel with the *Golden Argosy*. I read all those books that summer and also interested my cousin enough so that he started to read them. I feel that this experience makes me an old reader.

When it comes to picking favorite authors and types of stories, I am "stumped." I read all the stories in the book. I like adventure stories, while science-fiction stories appeal to my engineering side. (Oh, yes, I forgot to say I am supposed to be an engineer.)

I really didn't think I could write so much, so I'll close by saying I'll read the old ARGOSY, no matter what they call it, as long as the stories are of the present quality.

ANTHONY C. BRUNO.

CONVICT ship:

Baltimore, Md.

William Merriam Rouse's story, "The Iron Maiden," reminds me of the convict ship Success. You see, I live in Baltimore and when the ship was here several years ago I went on board it for a sightseeing trip. They had the Iron Maiden and all the other instruments of torture that the English used up until the latter part of the last century. The cells on the ship were supposed to be in their original condition and they even had replicas of some of the famous convicts who inhabited the ship.

Even more than a hundred years after these tortures had been forgotten they were still a pretty gruesome sight, at least to me.

HENRY NORDIN.

P. S. T. S. Stribling's "Railroad" is certainly one fine story.

MARCO POLO also heard desert whispers:

Paris, Mo.

I started buying ARGOSY about five years ago because it had a serial ending every week, so naturally I am sorry to see this feature changed. However, by this time ARGOSY has become a regular weekly event with me to be taken and enjoyed much as Sunday dinner. If one issue (either ARGOSY or dinner) is not quite up to standard I don't "cuss" the cook, or editor as the case may be, but wait for the next, knowing that the average will run high.

I have always enjoyed the "Whispering" tales by Erle S. Gardner. However, he is not the first to write of these "Whispers" by about seven hundred years. A few days ago I was reading the "Travels of Marco Polo," and came across this passage:

"But there is a marvelous thing related of this desert, which is that when travelers are on the move by night, and one of them chances to lag behind or fall asleep or the like, when he tries to gain his company again he will hear spirits talking, and will suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name; and thus shall a traveler oftentimes be led astray—"

Marco Polo goes on at some length about these spirits. In fact, he has a good start for a story, but leaves it and goes wandering off to some place called Shai-chau. I wonder if you could persuade Mr. Gardner to finish it.

Well—good luck, may you never be becalmed.

SAM SMIZER.

THE first novel of the C. C. C. foresters:

Sinnamahoning, Pa.

Just finished reading the first novel ever written about the C. C. C., "Wooden Soldiers," by Frank Richardson Pierce, and I think it is a corker because there is so much reality in it such as the fights and the different characters and actions of the men found in these camps.

At present I am stationed with Co. 369 C. C. C. and I think it will give the public a very good idea of what the camps are like and encourage the young men that didn't join when they had a chance, to do so now.

Of course they would not be so lucky as *Chuck Brady* and become a logger, but it would give the young men a chance to build themselves up both in mind and character just as the hero of the story did.

I am sure that after reading the story every red-blooded young man will wish that he was a wooden soldier and they can, because at the end of this month Uncle Sam will be recruiting again.

Well, I will blow taps now hoping to read more stories like it by the same author.

KENNETH POLLOCK.

SURPRISES:

College Station,
Maryville, Tenn.

Congratulations on the cover design illustrating "The Purple Ball." It is one of the most striking and unique covers you have had in a long time. Let us have more of this artist's work. Not that I mean to slight Stahr, for I think he is your "stahr" artist, but variety is the spice of life.

"The White Indian" again demonstrates Max Brand's versatility. It is one of the best pieces that he has ever written and ARGOSY printed. But when are we going to get some of those non-Western stories of Brand that you promised? His Western tales are excellent, but I shall never forget "The Sword Lover," "Kain" (there was a *story*), "His Third Master," and "The Stranger at the Gate."

Why have you stopped giving forecasts of the stories to appear during the next month or two? I get almost as much pleasure in the anticipation of your stories as I get in the actual reading of them. Please resume those forecasts, and let us have as much of a hint of future stories as possible.

"The Fire Planet" was a distinct surprise, coming from Ray Cummings. His stories have been rather poor recently, but this latest one is one of his best. I think he should stick to interplanetary stories, since he seems to do better with them.

"The Kingdom of Hell" is the best story I have read this year, with "The Sapphire Death" coming as a very close second. Have some more novels by Roscoe in the near future. I hope that we shall get more of *Peter the Brazen*, even though he was about to marry *Susan* in the last story.

Of the more recent stories, I especially enjoyed "The Lost Land of Atzlan," "Railroad," "Tarantula Tower," "A Show of Hands," "Isle of the Meteor," "Burning Billions," and "Night-Birds." Give us more of *Gillian Hazeltine*, *The Roadrunner*, *Bob Zane*, *Bill* and *Jim*, *Singapore Sammy*, and *Terry Kilroe*. And where is A. Merritt? We've had two stories by him last year, but not a single one this year.

MICHAEL FOGARIS.

Looking Ahead!

The Red Pacer

A young Westerner risks his home, his life, and even his honor for the red stallion, an outlaw of the plains. And the horse leads him into startling adventures in this novel by a famous writer new to ARGOSY—

George Owen Baxter

Buyer Beware

Bill Peepe becomes a Hollywood theater owner. A novelette by

Fred MacIsaac

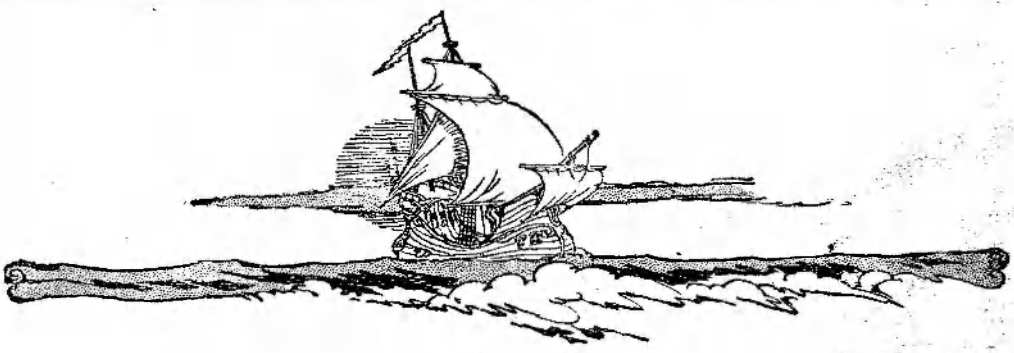
The Pavilion of Mahmud

Inspector Van Tromp and an East Indies mystery. A novelette by

R. V. Gery

A NEW WEEKLY FEATURE—"STRANGER THAN FICTION"

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—DECEMBER 16



I WANT MEN

for TEA and COFFEE ROUTES

ESTABLISHED ROUTES PAY UP TO

PAY begins at once where you call on established neighborhood routes. No capital or experience required. If you are a good, honest person, willing to follow my simple instructions on distributing trial packages to waiting route customers, I can offer you a bona fide chance to make up to $60.00 a week right to start for full time work, or up to $3.00 to $5.00 a day just for spare time. The work is pleasant, the hours are right, and the job is steady. I am opening my mammoth factory to full capacity and I am in need of Route Managers at once.

Have A Permanent Route With Big Weekly Cash Income

My Tea and Coffee Routes pay best because I supply people with the things they need daily to live—Tea, Coffee, Extracts, Spices, and other Kitchen Necessities. Your job is to handle all the money, make delivery of goods, and you keep a big share of the cash you take in for yourself. I'll furnish you with hundreds of fine premiums and other amazing special bargain offers just to give away with Tea, Coffee, and other fine Food Products. Hundreds of people are now waiting to be served in many localities.

START WORK AT ONCE

My amazing new Tea and Coffee Route Plans provide for your having immediate cash earnings. If you are honest and reliable and willing to take good care of one of these Routes you are eligible for this job. You start work right in your own locality, right near where you live. There is nothing hard or difficult about this work. There will be no red tape connected with this job. You don't have to buy a lot of high priced equipment to start with.

EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL UNNECESSARY

I am not nearly as much interested in your experience as your showing a willingness to follow a few plain, simple instructions. I will tell you all the inside workings of my nationwide, "home owned" Tea and Coffee Route Plan. I'll explain just how you go about distributing advertising material and trial packages to people where your route is located. There is no stock to carry—no store rent to pay—no capital needed.

OPENINGS FOR WOMEN

I have good jobs for women. Neighborhood Tea and Coffee Routes pay up to $5.00 a day full time and as high as $5.00 a day for spare time. The work is light and pleasant. Mrs. Carrie McCalmant, Nebr., says she has never let her earnings run below $50.00 a week. Mrs. Jewel Hackett, here in Ohio, made $33.00 in seven hours. These exceptional earnings prove the amazing possibilities of my offer to women.

NO LIMIT TO THIS OFFER

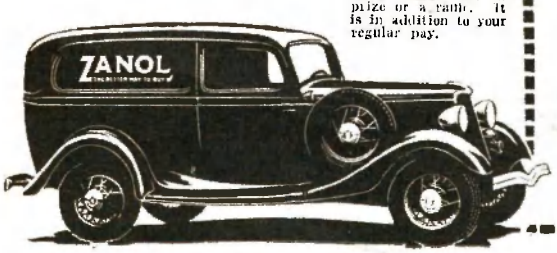
This is one job where your pay at the end of the week is not limited. If you are honest, conscientious, and willing to listen to reason, I won't put any limit on your earnings. You will have steady work day in and day out. No danger of lay-offs—no chance of getting fired. That's the kind of work I am offering you now.

SEND NO MONEY—JUST NAME

I want people right away to handle Routes and look after my business. Don't send money—just your name—so I can lay all the facts before you and then you can decide if the work and pay are satisfactory. Send name on coupon or penny postcard. Costs nothing. Do it today.

FREE FORDS

I furnish my producing Route Managers with 8-Cylinder Ford Tudor Sedans free to ride in. This is an extra bonus—not a prize or a ramp. It is in addition to your regular pay.



SOME VACANCIES ALREADY FILLED

My Tea and Coffee Routes are not an experiment. Others are making big money—why not you? If you have been working part time or for poor wages, this is your opportunity to get cash immediately to pay your bills and live well. Here's what some have already done. Wm. E. Berkhimer, Pa., cleared $20.00 in one day and as high as $90.00 in one week. Stanford Berg, $25.00 in one week. Wm. H. Newcomb, N. Y., $24.00 in one day; $80.00 in one week. G. V. Budaus, Tex., jumped his income from $20.00 a week to $65.00 a week. These exceptional earnings are proof of the amazing possibilities of my offer. Hundreds of other Route Managers have written me like this. Better send me your name today.

FOOD ROUTE COUPON

ALBERT MILLS, Route Manager
1188 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Tell me about your Tea and Coffee Route Plan and how I can get started making up to $60.00 a week at once.

Name .....

Address .....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

BLONDES:

FADED HAIR IS OLD HAIR!

MAKE YOUR HAIR RADIANTLY, YOUTHFULLY BEAUTIFUL WITH MARCHAND'S

EVEN if you are only 21. If your blonde hair has become faded or darkened—IT'S OLD LOOKING. It lacks the allure and fresh loveliness it should have—AND CAN HAVE!

Blondes! Keep your hair radiantly, *youthfully*, beautiful with Marchand's Golden Hair Wash. Pretty hair is your birthright. Enjoy all the admiration (and envy) it can bring you!

Marchand's will make your hair an even, lustrous shade that you'll like—one that's becoming to you. Try a single "secret" treatment to see for yourself. Marchand's works in a conservative REFINED way. You can lighten hair just the tiniest shade. No one else need know—it will be your "secret." New hair growing in can be matched. Hair that has always been dark can also be beautified if lightened with Marchand's. Not a dye. Complete directions on bottle makes it simple to do yourself.

Make Dark Hair On Arms and Legs Unnoticeable With Marchand's

Have smooth, dainty arms. Wear the sheerest hose. Use Marchand's because it avoids the two great disadvantages of other methods. 1 It does not make the skin hard and stubbly. 2. It does not promote a coarse re-growth of hair. Marchand's is quick, inexpensive and effective.

IMPORTANT—For the right results, get the genuine. Be careful of substitutes or imitations. See that the label spells—

MARCHAND'S GOLDEN HAIR WASH

ASK YOUR DRUGGIST OR GET BY MAIL

For a regular size bottle, fill in coupon, mail with 45c (coins, money order or stamps) to C. Marchand Co., 251 West 19th St., New York City.

Dept. 1-F

Your Name . . . .

Address . . . . City . . State .

Druggist's Name . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .