

STOPYOUR Rupture

Learn About My Perfected Unique Rupture Invention!

FIG.3 FIG.2

before Auto-matic Air Cush-ion is in plan

Shows perfected inven-tion in place. Note how edges are drawn togeth-er in normal position.

Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? Learn now about my perfected rupture invention. It has brought ease, comfort, and happiness to thousands by assisting Nature in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernia! You can imagine how happy these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report relief, comfort and cures! How would YOU like to be able to feel that same happiness-to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, PROOF of results and invention revelation!

Mysterious-Acting Device Binds and Draws the Broken Parts Together as You Would a Broken Limb!

Surprisingly - continually - my perfected Automatic Air Cushions draw the broken parts together allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most heavenly comfort and security. Look! No obnoxious springs or pads or metal girdles! No salves or plasters! My complete Appliance is feather-lite, durable, invisible, sanitary and CHEAP IN PRICE! Wouldn't YOU like to say "goodbye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . New happiness-with the help of Mother Nature and my mysterious-acting Air Cushion Appliance?

BROOKS APPLIAN

My invention is never sold in stores nor by agents. Beware of imitations! You can get it only from my U. S. factories or from my 33 foreign offices! And I'll send it to you on trial. If you don't like it-if it doesn't "work"-it costs you NOTHING. But don't buy now. Get the facts about it FIRST! Write me today. I'll answer in plain, sealed envelope with amazing information Free. Stop Your Rupture Worries-send coupon now!

COUPON QUICK MAIL For Free Rupture Revelations!

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	CONFIDENTIAL COUPON	-
	for RUPTURE SUFFERERS	
	H. C. BROOKS,	

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City	State
State whether for	Man . Woman . or Child



THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. VI, No. 3

I. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

August, 1933

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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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Just Sending Answer Qualified You for Opportunity to

WIN \$3,500.00

Some say I am wrong. They say that the people who get money from me will spend it foolishly. Now I want to find out. I am going to give away over \$6,000.00. Someone is going to get \$3,500.00 All Cash. If I gave you the \$3,500.00 what would YOU do with it? Tell me in 20 words or less. Think, NOW, How You Would Spend \$3,500.00! Would you start a business—invest in bonds—pay off a mortgage, or buy new furniture? Just sending an answer qualifies you for the opportunity to win \$3,500.00. If you are prompt I'll send you a \$1,000.00 Cash Certificate AT ONCE! Here is an opportunity of a lifetime. Bush your answer today. Yours may be a winner.

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I am going to give \$3,500.00 to some deserving
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You may be the one to get it! But, before I
give it to anyone I would like to know that the
money will be used wisely. What will you do
with this fortune if I give it to you? Just answer,
this question—tell me in a sentence of 20 words
or less what you would do with the \$3,500.00—
nothing more to do toward the \$250.00 cach
prise! Sounds easy? It is easy! Nothing "fancy"
is needed—just tell me in plain words what you
would do with the \$3,00.00.

20 Simple Words Win \$250.00

Nothing more for you to do! Costs nothing to win—nothing to buy—no selling. This \$250.00 Prize given just for an answer to

There is no way you can lose. Simply tell me what YOU will do with \$3,500.00 if I give it to you. The prize for the winning answer is \$250.00. Just sending an answer qualifies you for an opportunity to win \$3,500.00 in final prize distribution. Think what an amazing opportunity—why, many people work hard for a life-time without ever having such a vast amount of money as you may now win.

Money as you may now wan.

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be postmarked not later than Sept. 16, 1933. Judges will
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ADDRESS
TOWN STATE

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Experience Unnecessary-No Costly Machine to Buy

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Pays Distributors Tremendous Profits

An enormous profit on small investment! Everyone likes this tasty tidbit any time of the day. 5 and 10 cent bags of Magic Cheese Chips sell like wildfire. Sales often run up to handreds of dollars daily.

MEN, WOMEN EVERYWHERE Start at Scratch, Build Up to 1,000 Pound a Month Businesses

Men and women succeed alike—on emper-salesmanship—so skill—on canvessing.
E. Weller, California, starts wish 10 pounds, uses profets to build up to 30 pounds, then 60 pounds, then places standing order for 150 pounds EVERY THREE DAYS!
ALL PAID FOR OUT OF PROFITS! One of the largest bakery chain systems in the U.S. bids for exclusive rights in 200 citles, but we had already allowed exclusive rights to others, except 10 9 cities which they garbe eagerly. But 130 pounds are allo for each store! J. F. Kaudson, living to a small New York city, where, "RUSH ONE HUNDRED TWENTY POUNDS. OUR TRADE WILL REQUIRE UPWARD OF FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS MONTHLY." Large Pacific Coast coacters when, "INCREASE STANDING ORDER TO ONE HUNDRED PITTY POUNDS WEEKLY. SHIP TODAY SURE THIRTY POUNDS ADDITIONAL EXPRESS." Long distance calls, selegrams flooding in from everywhere—we've had our plant working twenty-four bours a day to meet the demand! No hard times for MAGIC CHEESE CH.PS!

YOU DON'T INVEST A RED CENT

sanil you have sold yourself on the possibilities. You must sell yourself first before we permit you to invest, and our movel plan enables you to decide without cost! Then you can start with \$8.50 investment, put back the enormous profits, building up without another penny lovestment if you wish!

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We furnish everything—advertising, display mands, etc. Don't was until it's too less to get the FIRST BIG PROFITS to year locality. Mail the compon as once for complete details and share the enormous profits immediately!

FLUFF-O MPG. CO.

Dept, U-5

St. Louis, Me.

NEW NOW!

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VIRGIN TERRITORY EVERYWHERE

Hundreds of successful businesses now operating. Thousands of open territories. Hundreds of cities open —thousands of small towns. Immediate success possible anywhere. Write today.

SEND for ACTUAL PHOTO-COPIES of OBDERS from MAGIC CHIP DEALERS

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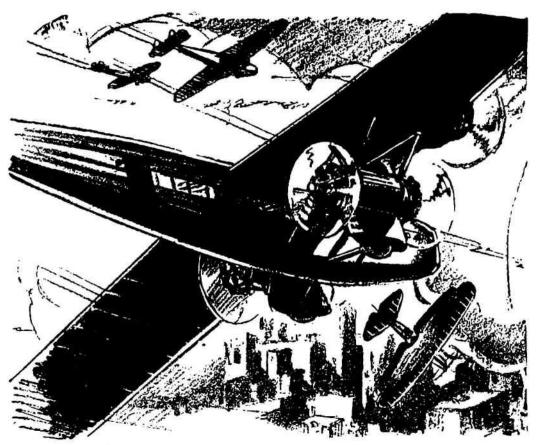
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FLUFF-O MFG. CO. Dept. U-5

St. Louis, Mo.

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Japan Invades the United States! A New and Mighty
Force of Death and Destruction Threatens Millions
of Lives! Read this Most Gripping of all Novels
For A Prophetic Picture of the Devastation
that the Next War May Bring!

A Complete Book-Length Novel By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

Author of "Pawns of Murder," "The Beautiful Saton," etc.

CHAPTER I

Death in the Desert

HE UNDERSLUNG Lockheed monoplane thrummed across the desert at two hundred miles an hour. Slumped down in the cockpit, his eyes subconsciously watching the instrument board, Dirck Strenger clutched the joy-stick and gave himself up to reflection upon the momentous incidents of the past twenty-four hours.

He had known when William



Lither, chief of the very important if little-known branch of the United States Secret Service, the President's secret corps, had picked him, that life would be different thereafter. Instead of tracking narcotic rings, capturing counterfeiters or engaging in the prosaic work of Treasury Department sleuthing, he knew that a great field of adventure in international intrigue would open before him. And being young, very strong and possessed of a keen analytical mind, he was thankful for the

Even Lither's words: "Remember, lad, you'll get no credit if you succeed and no help if you get in trouble," had not worried him, for that was the lot of a Secret Service man at best. But that he would, so soon, be drawn into a web of cunning which might end in another bloody war, was a contingency he had not looked forward to so soon.

He recalled vividly yesterday's conference in the chief's office in the War, Navy and State Building. When he had arrived Lither was already talking to a man who was introduced to him simply as the President's representative. He had a great bald head and thin, sagging face upon which gravity lay heavily. He remembered the way he talked in the sonorous voice of an orator.

What he had said was shocking, almost unbelievable: "In the first place, you gentlemen may as well know that within seventy-two hours, unless a miracle is wrought, the United States will be at war with Japan. The situation tonight is this: Japan has received our first note expressing regret over the massacre of the hundred and ten Japanese merchants in Manila and offering suitable reparation as well as speedy punishment of those guilty.

"We know now, for a fact, established by our own Secret Service, that the massacre was a deliberate plot on the part of Baron Shagi, their new Soviet Dictator, to raise the issue of war. Our proposition was not only refused, but they laid down a counter proposition so terrible that if Japan goes through with it, war must ensue. Under normal conditions, Japan is in no position to finance a long war—and Shagi would not be as belligerent as he is.

BUT he must have—or thinks he has—a new device or invention which he thinks will win a quick, cheap victory over us. Forcing us to capitulation without a long drawn out struggle.

"Whatever he has up his sleeve, we cannot afford to overlook a possibility. And the President has frankly told me he wants to know definitely what we face before he answers this present note and precipitates immediate war."

"How much time have we?" Lither had asked.

"The usual note in such cases as this is answered within seventy-two hours," came the quiet reply. Lither and Dirck looked at each other in stark dismay. Seventy-two hours! Why, it seemed less than minutes in such a case. The problem obviously demanded a man to go to Tokio. And Tokio was two weeks away by fastest transportation.

After the President's representa-

tive had departed Lither and Dirck had decided upon a plan. It didn't seem much of a plan, now that he looked back upon it.

"The Empress of Asia," Lither had said, "is due at Honolulu day after tomorrow. A swift destroyer can catch her. I've arranged for that. You'll board her at San Pedro and, disguised as an Englishman, see what you can find at Tokio. I'll hop to the west coast myself and see what I can pick up in the Jap colony there. Shagi has banished a lot of influential leaders. I've recalled Joe Crumrine from Nogales and he'll pick us up at Winslow, Arizona."

THE older, beefier man with his great round moon face paused, and a frown knitted his brows.

"Dammit, lad, we're bound to find out what secret Shagi has. No military secret ever lasted long when a man wanted to learn what it was. God!" he cried suddenly, "suppose it were a new deadly gas that they could fog the nation with—kill us all like poisoned rats."

"How could they get it over here?" asked Dirck. "We've got a fleet, and an army."

"Planes!" said Lither.

And with that devastating thought he left Dirck to prepare for the transcontinental trip. Lither, although a flyer, took the American Air Transport cross-country Ford, more for covering up movement than anything else. He got away quickly, was flown to Indianapolis by an army pursuit ship. Dirck, delayed by preparations for a protracted absence, departed many hours later.

But even now, as he peered over the cowling, he expected momentarily to see the tri-motored Ford, for his Lockheed flew two miles to the Ford's one and he would beat it into Winslow with minutes to spare. Beneath his underslung wing the brown desert flowed at even pace. It was hot down there, five thousand feet below, where the carpet of mesquite and greasewood shimmered with heat waves. The club-like shadows of the Arizona giant cactus lengthened to the east as the dying sun, redly hot, drooped toward the horizon of the mountains. A bounding jackrabbit made alkali dust balls that floated away on the wind.

Up here, however, it was cool, and Dirck had pulled the isinglass windshield high to throw up the hurricane of the slipstream.

HE had no expectation of tragedy, no warning of the horrid deed that he would witness.

So he was unprepared for what followed, when shortly before five o'clock he sighted the great hawk-like shape of the transcontinental Ford winging along about a thousand feet below him.

Somehow the moment of that sight lived forever in his memory. The great hole in the hills that was the Crater of the Gods, was off the starboard wing. Winslow lay forty miles ahead. Likely enough "Spike" Donovan, the co-pilot of the Ford, was just putting through a call for time and weather conditions.

Dirck's Lockheed sped closer. He moved the stick slightly and veered toward the all-metal Ford, intending to give Lither a wave. He was actually within twenty-five yards of the Ford when the tragedy began.

It seemed nothing alarming at first. Of a sudden, as Dirck watched, the three motors stopped. Simply stopped. One moment they revved up their maximum, the propellers a whirl of glistening light. The next the three blades stood practically still.

Dirck muttered an exclamation. Three motors, perfectly groomed tornadoes, to stop at once was impossible. Yet they did. Quickly he himself throttled down to bare flying speed, the fast Lockheed leaped ahead of the Ford. He saw it veer, hesitate and fall off on one wing, then nose over. "Forced landing," muttered Dirck into his slipstream. But that wasn't so bad. The desert here was flat as a carpet. Then—

"My God!" Dirck rubbed his eyes as if he could not believe what he saw. He cried aloud.

The staunch Ford suddenly seemed to disintegrate. The wings folded back against the fuselage as a dog's cars lay back to his head. The fuselage became a twisted thing that shook like rubber. No sooner had Dirck observed this phenomenon than it passed. Yet the bent and twisted Ford did not resume normal shape. Instead, it now plunged with the speed of light toward the carpet below.

"Nc!" cried Dirck, watching with eyes of horror. His own hand mechanically threw the Lockheed into a half roll that dipped at once into a vertical dive. Though the Lockheed shrieked toward the earth at a terrific speed, still it did not drop as fast as the tons of helpless metal that had been the Ford.

"Lither! Bill. My God, no-no!"

THE earth, like a whirlpool of brown molasses came up to smother him. Mechanically he kicked the Lockheed into a vertical bank, shot around the doomed Ford, his body working back and forth in the upholstered cockpit, as if he bodily would prevent the great mass of metal from crashing into the earth.

What had happened? He could not know. Some one was struggling desperately at the controls, for he saw the Ford's nose attempt to lift. Once, twice. The earth was beating up at him now like a gigantic brown panel.

With a wrench he brought the stick back into his stomach, saw that he would re-dress right, and watched that last desperate attempt to level off the Ford for a safe landing.

The attempt failed. True, the Ford flattened enough to get her wheels down, but the speed of the fall swept them off. She smashed into the ground, bounded, struck again, then nosed over and rolled on, tail over cabin until the whole was a twisted mass of junk, resembling a ball of tinfoil that a boy has made.

Regardless of risk, Dirck made a cross-wind landing, blew the gun and taxied within fifty feet of the mass of crumpled metal that had left a trail of its pieces for a hundred yards. There was no movement from the stricken ship. Even as he climbed out of the fuselage, Dirck thanked God that no tongue of orange flame had leaped from the wreckage. At least the occupants were spared the torture of burning alive. The switch had been cut.

Leaving his own motor running, he raced across the mesquite, to the melancholy wreckage. The duralumin metal had balled and bent until he could not even see the loading door. Yet he found a hole in the fuselage, reached through for the glass-encased are and began chopping madly to open up a place of entry.

From within came no sound.

As he swung, he called out: "Bill! Lither! Spike!"

There came no answer. Only the solid ticking of his own motor. He worked desperately. Presently he had hacked a sufficient opening for him to crawl within.

A moan of anguish came through his clenched teeth, and his stomach rolled and bounded. But he fought off the desire to vomit. Before him stretched a charnel house that would have upset the strongest.

Amidst battered and twisted seats, bits of glass and wreckage, a woman lay horribly dead. Under her protecting body, lay a little girl of seven or so, whose little golden head had been severed by a rasping strip of metal. Beyond these two lay the white-jacketed steward. His head, smashed flat on top, oozed a horrible mixture of blood and brains.

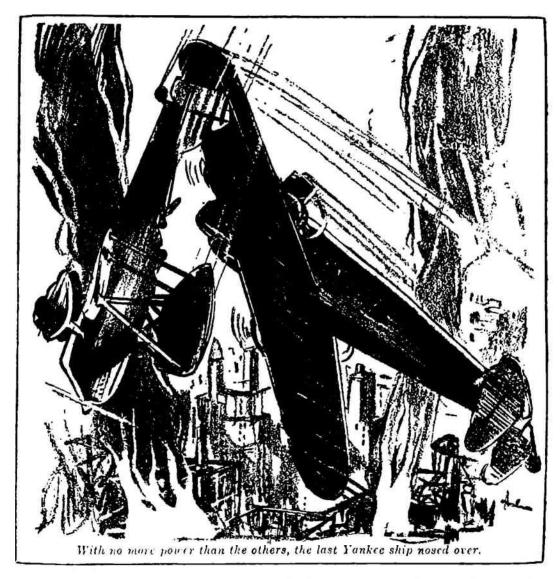
TWO other men were there, both surrounded by feeble barricades of wicker and pillows, yet both dead, one with a broken neck, his dead face a mask of most terrible fright. The other was also dead, yet his body was unmarred. Only the fact that his head practically touched his haunches betrayed that his back had been broken. Yet none of these was his chief, Bill Lither.

Throwing broken scats out of his way, hacking through bent metal, Dirck worked his way forward toward the pilot's cabin.

He did not call out now. That deathly silence, these signs of death made him speechless. He was fighting forward but not with much hope. And so he presently broke through the little steward's cabin and into the pilot house. Jimmy Johnston, the chief pilot, and Spike Donovan, lay almost side by side. They were dead—but with not a mark on them. Still no sign of Bill Lither. Had he then failed to come?

"Oh, Lord, I hope he missed the ship," muttered Dirck.

He lifted the bodies as gently as he could and gave a tight-lipped moan of anguish. There was the square built body of Bill Lither beneath. In his clenched hands still reposed the aileron wheel. Then it had been he who had tried to bring the doomed Ford down. Dirck did not stop to inquire as to why it



should have been Bill guiding the bus on that last slip to earth. The mystery of this would have to wait. His hands went over Bill's chest and he exclaimed.

He had found a feeble heart-beat and regardless of all else now, dragged Bill out into the warm air, produced a flask of tequila and pumped some of the pure white liquor into Bill's throat.

"Snap out of it, Bill, old fellow," he cried.

In handling Bill he found the abdomen punctured by a dagger-like strip of duralumin. Both legs were broken, one arm dangled helplessly. The man was doomed to die and Dirck knew it.

As he worked, he called, "Bill! Answer me, Bill. What happened here?"

Minutes passed. Bill Lither's breathing grew more stentorous, more laboring. Dirck's eyes were wet. Bill Lither who had fought his way out of many a scrape, shot it out with a dozen desperate men, to die like this.

Then of a sudden the even gray eyes of Lither opened. He was breathing with difficulty, yet into those eyes sprung a determination that bespoke an iron will behind.

"Dirck!" the word was barely audible.

Dirck leaned down.

"Listen," came the hoarse whisper.
"I'm finished. Haven't much time.
Don't go to Japan. Stay right here.
Secret in this neighborhood. I
know."

"How, Bill?" Dirck shook his head.
"Never mind wasting your strength
to talk. I'll put you in the Lockheed
and fly—there's a chance—"

The steel-gray eyes stopped him. "No chance for me. I'm finished. But I got a clue. Listen! The Ford flying five thousand feet. Even keel. Speed hundred and a quarter. Motors stopped. No backfire—must have been ignition. Johnston leaned forward to ignition switch—and died, looked like electrocution. Spike Donovan took dual control, reached for switch—and died. And then plane seemed to melt. Looked and shook like a rubber plane.

"I climbed into control room and tried to bring her down—failed. Somebody—the Japs—did something to plane. That's Shagi's secret. You gotta find out what it is. Good luck, boy. Dirck, I trained you—you'll do it—boy—oh—I hurt—I'm—"

HIS mouth merely dropped agape as the muscles holding the jaw relaxed in death.

And no amount of tequila or implorings by Dirck moved the slack figure again.

For a second Dirck forgot himself. He and Bill Lither had been more than just operative and chief. They had been friends. And Dirck, despite his outer mask of impassiveness was very human.

So he cried, and, crying still, swore to find out this mysterious thing that had wrecked the Ford and killed Bill Lither.

CHAPTER II

Some Clues

HE SUN had been up an hour. Already the vast, desolate stretch of mesquite and greasewood was beginning to waver in the eddies of heat waves. Dirck Strenger stood once again beside the crumpled ruins of the transcontinental Ford. Near-by were two crates, his own Lockheed and Joe Crumrine's Curtiss Hawk. Joe stood some feet away from Dirck, thoughtfully inhaling on a cigarette. The smoke of it ascended straight, promising a day of great heat and no wind.

Long since, the bodies of those smashed in the wreckage had been removed to Winslow. Dirck had spent the night arguing with American Air Transport officials about a public statement.

"I don't care if poor Jimmy does have to take the blame," Dirck said. "You can't tell the truth. You've got to blame it on his failure—for a while at least. When I get at the bottom of this mystery, then we can clear old Jimmy."

And finally he had succeeded. So now, with Joe Crumrine to help him he was attacking the mystery of what had crashed the Ford, knowing that there would be no interference.

Joe spoke after a while. "I don't get it, Dirck." He was the youngest of the special corps operators, with a thick head of ash-blonde hair and a reckless hand on the joy-stick. "All you got to do is look at that scrap heap and see that something melted the duralumin. Look here—all these ridges have smoothed out."

Dirck had already seen the strange melted look. Yet he was thinking of the telephonic message from Washington. The President's spokesman had said in effect that some one had deliberately crashed the plane to kill shrewd old Bill Lither. Dirck wasn't so sure. But he was sure of one thing—his orders.

"You'll have to play a lone hand,"
the representative of the President
had said, "until further notice you
are in charge of the corps. Spare no
expense, ask anything, but learn the
truth. The President will not prepare his reply until we have the
facts from you."

"The truth," he muttered aloud.
"Will we ever know it?"

"I took a look around," said Joe.

"And I can't see anything wrong."

"How about the motors?"

"I only looked at the starboard wing motor. Seemed all right."

"Bill spoke of ignition trouble," said Dirck, turning to the wrecked cabin.

He walked a distance of twenty yards or so to where the port motor, ripped off in the crash, lay balled in ruin. Spark plugs had been knocked off, but the wiring and magneto were intact. Dirck looked at this, opening the slot that led to the brushes in the magneto. What he saw made him exclaim aloud.

"Joe, come and look at this."

JOE did so and gave utterance to a long, shrill whistle.

"Holy smoke!" he muttered. "The winding and armatures are fused."

Certainly enough the intricate wiring that wound the magnetoes was a shapeless mass of melted metal.

"That explains why she didn't catch on fire," said Dirck more to himself than to Joe. "There was never a spark. And—the three motors stopped at once. Something, Joe, fused those wires all at once on three motors. They stopped simultaneously. I saw that. And the switch was still on."

"But how was it done?"

Dirck smiled grimly. "When we know that we'll know enough to

knock this dictator Shagi into a cocked hat."

"You think he was responsible?"
Dirck nodded. He was busy now, examining the interior of the bent casing that had housed the motor. He was looking for traces of some instrument that, put in there and operated by a time arrangement, would have stopped the motors. But he saw nothing.

Joe following this, commented: "You can't explain that plane melting by something hidden within there."

"That's true," admitted Dirck. Then suddenly he exclaimed.

"Some kind of a ray-radio ray," he cried.

Joe reflected upon this suggestion. "Maybe," he admitted, "but why weren't you crashed the same way? You told me you were flying within twenty yards or so on the same leve! with the Ford. And a radio ray—supposing somebody had one—would have melted your crate as well as the Ford."

That was obviously true so Dirck did not even comment. He appeared to be turning over something in his mind.

"By God!" he exclaimed suddenly.
"It was a ray. Bill said that Jimmy and Spike were both dead—both dead after touching the ignition switch. The ray wave electrocuted them."

HE dove in through the hole that he had cut the afternoon previous and rummaged through the flying cabin. Joe, crying out as he cut himself on a raw strip of duralumin, followed. Both saw the fused ignition switch, and ripping loose the instrument board—none too securely in place anyway—they saw the ignition wires leading to the distributor melted with bits of burned insulation still clinging to them.

Both looked at each other silently after this.

"Whew!" exclaimed Joe. "If it was a radio ray—and by the Lord Harry, I guess it was—it must have been a directed ray."

Dirck nodded, yet doubting with growing incredulity that such a device could exist. They pondered in silence, Dirck racking his brain. Then suddenly memory struck a familiar chord and he gave a quick start.

"Joshua A. Felix!" he exclaimed. "That's the man."

JOE squatted on his haunches, looked up. "Joshua A. Felix," he repeated. "Hell, man, he's been dead five years."

Dirck shook his head. "Not on your life. Remember, after he invented the cross-country tank, he started out to make some kind of gas, got a shot of it himself and had to come out here to live? He went into some sort of retreat in the mountains. Let me see—where the devil was it? Oh, I remember—Dog-leg. About ninety miles north of Winslow in the mountains."

"Well, even so," said Joe, "where does he figure?"

Dirck frowned. "I hate to admit it, but old Felix—he was always a little eccentric—tried for years to figure out a radio beam that would supply power to electric motors in airplanes. Flunked it, they said, and the army gave him the grand laugh. Old General Markham was chief of staff then. And he practically had ordered old Felix out of his office. My hunch is that Felix stumbled onto this radio ray that melts and sold out to Baron Hiro Shagi."

"Wow!" Joe looked sober. "Our air fleet wouldn't be a bit of good would it? And—if that's so—all our battle wagons fitted with electric turbines couldn't turn a propeller after they'd had a shot of this ray. Boy, this is serious."

Dirck smiled grimly. How serious even Joe did not yet know. Dirck's brain turned rapidly over this new development. He might be wrong, yet his theory was worth a try.

"Twist that crate of yours," he said in rapid decision. "The only answer to this is to talk with old Felix himself. If he's sold out this ray to Shagi, then he'll have to develop an answer—some sort of insulation against it because, by God, if we don't have an answer, Shagi is going to win one hell of a fine war, and the Philippines are going to have a new owner."

As he spoke, he himself, trotted across to the Lockheed. He wound the inertia starter for Joe, who then reciprocated. Both motors were revved up rapidly.

"Follow me," said Dirck when the engines again idled. "The spot is an out-of-way hole about five miles north of Dog-leg right in the mountains. I can find it."

He threw forward the throttle and as soon as the Lockheed trembled into motion, pushed the stick forward and got his tail off. A few seconds later, skimming and bumping through the sage brush and mesquite the Lockheed got herself running and zoomed up the sky in a climbing turn and nosed for altitude. Dirck leveled off at five thousand, looked around and, finding Joe squatting on his tail, gave the crate a wide gun.

Their course north took them directly over the Crater of the Gods.

Dirck, busy with his thoughts and trying to twist the clues into a coherent theory, took but little notice of them, although the sight was one to wring a cry of admiration from the least artistic. Springing fullmade from (the plain of the desert was the huge rock cone, three thousand feet above the level of the desert. Once it had been a volcano and the cone's sides were rough with lava.

Yet the hollow center, a thousand feet below the top edge of the cone seemed, from this height, to be level as a concrete floor. The inside facing of the cone, however, rough and shadow-spotted, marking tions. Once the earth here had spewed forth fire and flame and melted rock, building this mountain where none had been before, building of itself. Dirck had seen it many times before, because Transcontinental Air routes passed almost over it, indeed, made a sight of it for their passengers.

It floated to the rear behind his underslung wing and before him stretched only a flat, arid desert, burnt brown, dried, desolate and dangerous. Dirck pulled out his mapholder, and unrolled a chart of Arizona. He pin-pricked his location by the Crater of the Gods, drew his line on Dog-leg and set a straight course for the mountains.

STEADILY, monotonously, his four hundred horsepower motor droned, and the steel propeller thundered a song of power and flung back a man-made hurricane that caused Dirck to draw the isinglass roof over his cockpit. With nothing to do but watch his instruments, he gave himself up to conjecture.

It was a wild hunch he was playing on Felix, and if he were wrong, he would certainly swear over the minutes lost. Yet was it coincidence that Felix should have been working on a power ray in this very country, and then have some secret radio ray of destruction suddenly bring down a stout Ford? Hardly.

And suppose Felix had invented such a ray and sold it to Shagi? And suppose he remained so bitter against the United States that he would refuse to supply the antidote, presuming there was one? Dirck smiled again grimly, his lips flat and cruel. Then Felix, willy-nilly, would take a trip to Washington and things would happen that the crabbed old fool wouldn't like.

A flood of memory about old Felix came back to him. Dirck chiefly remembered him as an eccentric genius who, despite his apparent unbalanced doings, held recognition as the greatest American inventor since Edison. Odd tales were afloat about him. He was a publicity hound for one thing, loved to get himself into the newspapers. Dirck often thought that the old man was not as eccentric as he appeared to be, doing silly deeds just for newspaper notoriety.

THERE was, for instance, the hat. Felix boasted that he had had but three hats in his life. Though the rest of his clothing might be conservative enough his hat resembled that of a tramp. Felt, it was, with a safety pin through the crown, the whole jammed down over his ears. Just the year before Felix had retired to the west, he had purchased a new hat in Washington, some one having stolen the other as a souvenir.

Dirck grinned at the recollection of the old, white-haired man deliberately going up Pennsylvania Avenue to a position at the foot of Capitol Hill and there stomping and treading on the new hat until it was mashed to no shape. The safety pin went into the crown, the hat was pulled down—and no one would ever have known he had just purchased a hat.

There was also Felix's bitter enmity against the United States in general and the army staff in particular following their refusal to accept as standard equipment an electric gun that would shoot high voltage fifty yards. How the old inventor had stormed and ranted in the newspapers. For another man to have said such things about his country would have been to invite jail. But they merely laughed at Felix.

Would they laugh now, however, if the old man had invented a radio ray that would cost the United States a war and the loss of the Philippines to say nothing of world disgrace? Making of Shagi a world dictator?

THUS Dirck's thoughts sped as the great motor thrummed and spit blue flame from its exhaust pipes and hurtled through the air at a hundred and eighty miles an hour, north.

Like projectiles the two planes throbbed across the miles and presently, Dirck, looking down beyond his port wing, saw a rambling white house perched on an inaccessible crag. There were other buildings, too. From his height he could make out the town of Dog-leg several miles beyond and knew this must be Felix's retreat. Indeed, he was sure, for he now remembered having seen an air photograph of the mountain retreat.

There was no possible landing place near the house, but as he kicked the left rudder and made a slow spinning nose dive, he saw that a patch of field lay at the foot of the crag. A moment later, catching a drift of smoke for wind direction, he fish-tailed into the field, gave full top rudder and dropped the Lockheed with scarcely a hundred foot run. No sooner had he taxied out of the way than Joe also screamed in. They stood for a moment gazing up at the rambling structure that sprawled on the knob.

"Reminds you of those old castles in France," commented Joe.

Dirck made no reply to this. Instead, he asked suddenly: "Got your gun?"

Joe pulled out a .38 Colt automatic and hefted it in his palm. "Have never used it yet. But there's always hope."

Dirck himself had a similar automatic. So now, placing it in his side pocket, the two operatives climbed the cut-in walk to the top. Dirck had rather expected to be shouted at, for Felix was notoriously angry when anyone tried to see him. His hermit's life here had warped his magnificent brain even more than ever.

But there came no sound from the house. Dirck approached cautiously toward the immense screened-in veranda that stretched the length of the house. He had made up his mind to one thing: if Felix showed fight, old as he was, Dirck would drag him bodily to Washington.

"You handle the servant, Joe," he muttered cautiously. "An old chap named Howard. Sort of a companion to Felix and crazy as he is. We may have to do things up here that we won't like. Felix won't confess easily. But they've got to be done."

"You know best," was Joe's sole comment.

By now they had reached the screen door to the porch. It was unlocked and they went within. The heavy front door, however, was locked. On its face it bore a heavy brass knocker.

DIRCK lifted it, hammered with it, and heard the banging echoes within. But there came no voices, no sound of movement; indeed, a silence as of the grave hung about the whole place. Here in the mountains where the air is clear and there are no other noises, the banging

could be heard for a mile. Yet from within came no sign.

For five minutes Dirck kept it up. Then he shouted. "Mr. Felix."

And Joe, more impudently, yelled: "Hey, Felix, step on the gas."

Came no sound. Then they circled the house. There were no signs of recent occupancy. A few clothes hung on a line. And the door to Felix's laboratory about fifty yards from the main structure, stood open.

"Maybe he's working," Dirck suggested and they went to the laboratory. It was a building some seventy feet in length by thirty wide. The roof was of steel frame covered with glass, and beyond were two heavy duty electric generators run by gasoline motors.

Dirck paused on the threshold. Within was an amazing, bewildering amount of apparatus to which he could put no name. Retorts, Bunsen burners filled one table. Electrical machines of every variety littered the floors and tables.

"Humph!" muttered Dirck. "Maybe the old fellow has gone to town."

He pushed on within, rounded a table that held a large radio apparatus of some kind—and stepped back in horror.

There on the floor, hidden from him before, were two men. Two old men with white hair stained crimson. It took but a single glance to see that they were dead. And as Dirck looked he recognized Joshua A. Felix and his man-servant, Howard.

They had both been murdered!

CHAPTER III

A Startling Denouement

POR THE space of a moment the two stood motionless and silent before this mute testimony of violence.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Joe, bending

over the two sprawled bodies. "Deader'n coots."

Dirck shrugged.

"Of course," he marmured. "We might have expected this."

Saying this, he bent over the body of Joshua A. Felix. Old Felix's head had been bashed in with a heavy blunt instrument. And the weapon was not far away, a heavy Stillson wrench, its claws still bright with new blood. Howard, the servant, had been shot—deliberately—for the vest he wore was charred from the flame of a gun muzzle held close.

The aged servant had flung out a hand that lay limp across Felix's breast, as, even in death, he would protect his master from the inevitable doom. Dirck knelt beside the old inventor, hoping for a possible clue.

As his hand touched the neck, he drew it back as if stung and cried out.

"My God! He's still warm. Feel!
I'll bet he hasn't been dead a half
hour."

Joe, all animation now, put out a hand gingerly and muttered an agreement.

DIRCK got to his feet and composed himself after this shock. Here was something into which he could bite the teeth of his wit. Here was a mystery that conformed to pattern. Two men but recently killed; the problem to find their murderer. And he sensed then, although it was but a hunch, that when he found those who had killed Felix and his servant, he would also find the answer to that crashed Ford lying out in the desert.

Dirck Strenger was an operative of the so-called intuitive or flash type. Given the juxtaposition of certain facts concerning his case, he had many times leaped the gap of reasoning through a strange mental process and arrived at a theory which ultimately put him on the right trail. He was apt, by this method, to make many mistakes; to appear at times to be losing ground, and he doubtless would make many more mistakes, but his bull-dog tenacity and patience overcame such obstacles as his method of work entailed and in the long run his intuitive method succeeded.

As his mind now raced over the succession of incidents, there came to him one of these flashes of intuition. The inspiration came as he placed the details of the crashed Ford alongside the cold-blooded murder of Felix and his servant. As to motive, he had no doubt they were related; but as he scanned the facts closely he saw here no logical pattern, no orderly succession of events building to a given end.

And the intuition expressed itself in a quick word of command to Joe Crumrine.

"Search Howard's and Felix's body with a fine tooth comb," he said briskly. "I've got a hunch, Joe, a hunch that the enemy has made one ghastly error in this crime. And through that error we're going to win."

He did not go into explanation, nor did Joe Crumrine demand it. He had already learned sufficiently of Dirck Strenger's methods to know that there was no explanation until the clues themselves gave it. So he set to work at once, gritting his teeth at the distasteful job, but nonetheless ransacking the dead men's clothing.

Dirck, on the other hand, began to roam over the laboratory. He was seeking but one clue, and if he found it, then all his intuitions would be proven. As has been said, the long, low building, was crammed with mechanical and electrical appliances of all kinds. There were several tables filled with them. Bits of radio equipment, condensers, wet batteries and groups of dry cells. With true eccentricity Felix had permitted none to tamper with this stuff. And, as a result, the spots on the tables not littered with material were laden with a thick coating of alkali dust.

Starting at the rear of the room, Dirck examined each table. He worked forward, touching nothing, but letting nothing escape a careful eye. An exclamation from Joe interrupted his progress at the third table.

"Say," exclaimed the younger operative, "old Felix wasn't any traitor. Here's a sort of notebook or daily journal. I can hardly make out the writing—they're hen tracks but—"

"Let me see it," cried Dirck and grabbed the thin, narrow book. Eagerly he scanned the almost illegible pen scratches.

Trained to read difficult writing, what he made out caused him to exclaim aloud.

YAMADA is no longer to be trusted," he read. "I caught him today in the laboratory, snooping around the radio ray projection apparatus. I'll fire him tomorrow, although he is a splendid cook." There was a small space, then this: "I fired him at once. Fool that I was, I should have known that such an expert cook would not be working for sixty dollars a month so far from his kind. He was Shagi's spy, of course. I must get in touch with the War Department at once."

The entry was dated as of May fourth, exactly ten days ago.

"I knew the Japs had a hand in this." muttered Dirck, and avidly thumbed the book for more information. There were thousands of words written in it, some in algebraic computations, others references, evidently formulae, for ohms, watts, volts and like technical terms figured generally. Under date of six months previous, Dirck came upon the item he sought. A general statement, but significant.

"The chief trouble with radio has been to control the wave. A radio wave now is like the wave from a stone flung into a still pond. Waves, each one weaker than the last, go in all directions, lapping every inch of shore. The answer to modern-day requirements is a beam ray instead of a wave. An instrument that will focus radio emanations so that the sender can, with accuracy, reach out with the beam and touch any given point.

FROM this solution will come planes powered by electric engines of tremendous horsepower, animated by a radio beam directed to it. Conversely, there could also be a beam of destruction. What form that will take will be determined by my experiments."

Joe listened phlegmatically while Dirck read this aloud.

"Well, if the old boy turned loose such a beam—that's what happened to the Ford."

"But what is the beam?" demanded Dirck impatiently. "We know it did something, the how and why and eventual use remain secrets yet. And that is what we must know."

"Let's go into the house for some chow." said the practical Joe. "My stomach thinks my throat is cut."

Dirck waved aside the pleasantry and returned to the table where he had left off. He was surer, now, than ever, that he was pursuing the right course. And this was proved ten minutes later when he came to the fourth experimental table.

Upon this, squarely in the middle, was an oblong square of emptiness that had no dust. Obviously some-

thing about four feet wide by six feet long had rested there recently. That it was gone now held significance.

"Joe," said Dirck suddenly, "have you still got that fool watch with the compass on the back?"

"Why, sure. And why call it a fool-"

"Does the compass work?"
"Of course."

Dirck pointed to the center of the vacant spot. "Put it down there."

Joe started to protest, and then seeing the grim expression on Dirck's face, changed his mind and silently laid down a heavy gold watch with a compass on the back, a present from the air-mail pilots he had left to join the inner Secret Service.

"Check me if I'm wrong," said Dirck, studying the gyrating needle that presently slowed down. "The Crater of the Gods lies directly southeast from here—on that line," he pointed. "Right?"

"Right," said Joe, now serious.

"As I recall," Dirck went on, "the Ford was south by southeast of the Crater of the Gods when the accident happened. Remember, in getting here we had to fly right over the old volcano."

HE took the pencil and from the compass needle drew a straight line on the table, lengthening the bearing established. Then he nodded.

"Joe, take that fire ax over there and smash through the stucco wall here." he strode to a point on the east wall and made a black mark with his pencil.

. "The guy's gone goofy," muttered Joe, but complied.

The rending crash of the ax soon tore through the plaster and stucco, revealing, as Dirck had expected, steel reinforcing girders. He had Joe clear these of debris, and then turned a keen eye on them.

"God!" he muttered. "So that was how it happened."

"What happened?"

"The crashing of the Ford. Look at that. Does it appear familiar?"

Joe looked at the reinforcing girder. For a width of two feet it had melted and then frozen very like the metal parts of the crushed Ford.

YEEPERS!" gasped Joe. "I get you, big shot. On that table where there ain't any dust was where the radio ray machine sat. The radio ray went through this wall and knocked over the Ford. The dirty scut"—he glanced down at the dead Felix—"trying an experiment, I suppose, and forgot he might kill somebody. Couldn't control the length."

Slowly Dirck shook his head. "Felix, poor devil, was trying the experiment, all right," he responded, "but under duress. It's my opinion he has been a prisoner since yesterday, perhaps longer. Under compulsion, he was forced to show how this ray machine worked. His captors—Shagi's men, doubtless, came when Yamada betrayed the secret—and not realizing the power of the ray had him try it on something close."

He paused and bent over to scrutinize the floor. Quick as a flash he pounced on several bright objects.

"And here's proof I'm right," he cried triumphantly, "here's melted metal. Steel, I should say." He glanced upward and found a bit of string still dangling from a point where the wall joined the ceiling. "Something hanging from that, you see, and destroyed by the machine because of such close proximity. But the beam going on through the wall, frizzled the Ford. And Shagi's men had not intended that. It was a tragic error—but it may save America."

Joe followed this reasoning while he lit a cigarette. "Okay," he said, "suppose you're right—what of it?"

"I told you," replied Dirck, "that I thought a mistake was made. It was. The crashing of that Ford with its suspicious clues, has tipped us to what Shagi is up to. We know what we're looking for. Doubtless this morning when Shagi's men heard of the strange crash and knew they had done it, they took Felix's machine, killed him and Howard and took it on the lam.

"Perhaps they had intended to keep Felix alive, but this accident forced their hands. All we've got to do is find out where they've hidden out, arrest them, destroy the machine and Shagi will execute an about face."

"Splendid reasoning, Strenger—San," said a pleasant mocking voice.
"The only flaw is that we have not yet fled. Please raise your hands so my men will not be tempted to hurt your honorable bodies."

At these startling words, the two Secret Service men turned, hands darting instinctively for their weapons. But they instantly raised their hands over their heads, because there crowded into the door, were three short, ugly-looking Japs with business-like Winchesters all aimed for their hearts.

And in front of them, or rather, to one side, just out of the line of fire, was the weirdest Japanese that Dirck Strenger or Joe Crumrine had ever gazed upon.

MOST Japanese are short and broadly built. This one was tall, Dirck could have sworn he was seven feet high. He had great shoulders that tapered to slender flanks and thin legs, now encased in brown leather puttees. These things Dirck saw in the first fleeting

glimpse. Then his eyes raised to the terrible face.

It was indeed a terrible face, one that would haunt midnight dreams. Two livid scars crossed the left cheek like an X, running from temple and ear to nose and chin. Smallpox had ravaged the rest of the face until it was pitted with little holes. The ends of a few black whiskers projected here and there.

It was not until you encountered the eyes that you saw beyond the brigand appearance and realized the power of this strange man. Eyes as black as ink spots, eyes that glowed like black pearls, eyes of intelligence, cruelty, eyes of a man you might encounter in an asylum for dementia praecox. Merciless eyes. And then as Dirck felt the shock of the man's personality he knew he stood before a man who worshiped power, fought for it, killed for it, and got it.

A leader.

The towering Japanese withstood this scrutiny without saying a word. Indeed, a small ironical smile twisted the thin lips.

"Who-who are you?" asked Dirck, compelled at length to break the stark silence.

The man bowed gracefully from his hips. "Some call me the descendant of Confucius. Others call me the God of the Samurai, and still others call me Daimyo, and others Shogum. My enemies refer to me as Shita no nagai, a man of long tongue. To the world, I am known as Hiro Shagi—leader of Soviet Japan."

Dirck started despite himself, took a step backward. The merciless dictator of Japan.

Here-in America!

What did this mean? It was incredible, unbelievable—yet it was so!

CHAPTER IV

Prisoners of Peril

A FULL dramatic silence followed the enunciation of a name that the East held in dread and that had aroused war alarms among the Occidental powers.

Hiro Shagi was then thirty-nine years of age and at the pinnacle of his power. Many stories were afloat as to his origin. It was hinted that he was the son of a Chinese mandarin and a Japanese geisha girl—a no-caste son who had wrought against his poor birth to lift himself to the heights of world power. He it was who overthrew Prince Yi's army, organized the starved peasants of Japan and marched on Tokio, even as Mussolini had marched on Rome.

He had opened graneries, fed the peasants, saw that the only answer to Japan's population problem was colonies and deliberately sought to make Manchuria a Japanese province. He had run afoul of the Soviet government of Russia but out-maneuvered them and had a partial suc-He usually worked through intermediaries, and was rarely seen in person, yet had held the Tokio citizens spell-bound with the magic of his voice. He was acclaimed by adherents as a man of destiny, a leader who would win world power and bend the world to his will.

All these stray thoughts flashed through Dirck's mind as he stood facing the man who could at a word plunge America into war. Dirck's chief bewilderment arose the dictator's presence in America. Why was he not in Japan during this supreme crisis, out of which war might come? Why did he stoop to murder here in the bleak mountains of Arizona? Though Dirck did not get the answer then,

he was to get it later, and the answer would stun him as nothing else in this pox of mystery had done.

Meantime, Hiro Shagi, smiling the artificial Japanese smile that is the acme of politeness even to an enemy, walked with stately tread further into the room.

"Bounteous Siva," he murmured.
"When I stand on the threshold of a momentous decision, he sends the answer to the problem—stop," he broke off sharply and pointed a finger at Joe. "Keep your honorable hands from your weapons, Yankeesan. I have no wish to kill you—now. You will be of great aid to me."

JOE and Dirck exchanged puzzled glances over this cryptic utterance. But Shagi ignored it, turned to the leader of the three men at the door and barked a few words in the clickey, sonorous monosyllables of Japan.

This man promptly deserted the door and thoroughly searched the Americans, removing all weapons.

"You are a clever person, Strenger-San," said Shagi in his pleasant voice. "From the small number of clues available you have deduced correctly what had happened. The wreckage of the transcontinental plane was an accident upon which I had not planned. But since you who have grasped the truth are in my hands, I can go ahead with my plans for immediate war."

"What do you mean?" cried Dirck.
"I mean that I shall make war
now—today perhaps—surely tomorrow."

"But you have not received an answer from America to your last note," said Dirck.

Shagi smiled and his black eyes seemed to blaze. "Am I a fool that I wait for the inevitable? Do you not suppose that when I had that

impossible note prepared I did not know what your reply would be? Of course I did. I am not a me-ushi. I meant war, but had intended to delay another week. Now it is not necessary. I have the planes."

"Planes!" repeated Joe, puzzled.
"Planes," asserted the dictator.
"Yours and Strenger-San's, in addition to the two I have managed to obtain here."

Dirck laughed. "You will make war with four planes. You must be a creator of miracles."

Shagi shook his head gravely, a strange gesture contrasted with the mechanical smile on his thin lips, through which yellow teeth gleamed.

"No, the miracle maker is there," he pointed to Felix. "I was sorry that he had to die. I had meant for him much honor in my own country. But, left to himself, he was really a patriot, you know—he might have developed an answer to my weapon. That could not be tolerated. And so he joins his ancestors—a great man whom America neglected."

Quite calmly, as if after all he were confiding his facts to dead men, he gave a brief resumé of what had happened. He did this, it appeared to Dirck, as if he rather admired the deduction Dirck had made on such small evidence.

AND all that he said bore out what Dirck had guessed at in his intuitive flash. Yamada had been planted as a spy soon after Shagi came into power, for it appeared that Shagi himself had been much in America and knew of the experiments which Felix was making. The half-caste dictator even went so far as to say that he had intended to make war on America when the latter country had opposed Shagi's intention of seizing Manchuria as a Japanese province.

He had intended war then, because

Yamada had sent a report that the radio ray machine was a fact. Then Shagi prepared to steal it, defied the American government in his note, but was forced to back water when Yamada reported that the machine had been a failure and burned out. This time he had come himself. Personally, he said, he would make war on the United States.

Dirck listened intently but was still at a loss to know what Shagi planned. Yet he did not at the time feel overly worried. Four planes were nothing; they could quickly be wiped out by a single American pursuit squadron. Shagi was either crazy or power had gone to his head.

SOMETHING of what he was thinking must have been expressed upon his impassive face for Shagi, still smiling, said: "You think I am insane. Ah, well, genius is not normal and I am a genius. Yet I promise you this, Strenger-San. Within forty-eight hours of my declaration of war American will capitulate without reservations You will surrender the Philippines, you will pay a three-billion dollar indemnity. That already I know. What comes after, rests in the lap of Siva."

Dirck listened in amazed silence and incredulity. The indemnity was bad enough. But to predict that the United States would surrender in forty-eight hours was the raving of a maniac. However, he made no comment.

"We must go," said Shagi suddenly. "You will submit to binding."

He barked more monotonous monosyllables and rope was forthcoming, to truss the two Americans hand and foot. They were bodily carried out and down the steep slope. Here, beside their own two ships, were a Sikorsky amphibian and a huge Fokker six-motor ship, capable of carrying thirty persons. They had been there even when Dirck and Joe arrived, but cleverly camouflaged by brush piled around them. Into the Fokker they were carried and dumped on the floor.

EVEN so, however, they could, through the side windows, see the smoke and livid flame leaping from the rambling house that Joshua A. Felix had built here in this mountain.

In an hour or so, no trace of the great crime would remain. And Dirck remembered with a groan that it would be hours, perhaps days, before there was any uncasiness concerning himself or Joe Crumrine. Undercover men are not missed until it is usually too late to do them any good.

Dirck and Joe now saw more Japanese, an even dozen, small, black-headed men with bright eyes like buttons and clicking tongues. They bustled around, two with helmets getting into Dirck's and Joe's crates, while others wound the inertla starters. Shagi himself came to the Fokker job and took a seat near the two Americans. Even sitting, he towered nearly to the top of the cockpit.

"We have not a long ride," he said pleasantly, "and then if you will give me your paroles the unpleasant ropes will be removed from your honorable bodies."

"Like hell!" muttered Joe.

"We give nothing," said Dirck.

Shagi shrugged. "As you like. However, I assure you your resistance will be of no avail. Three days hence I shall show you newspapers pleading for mercy from my hands. And I shall," he added rather arrogantly, "give full mercy. Death should only be inflicted when necessity demands."

The self-starters on the Fokker whined and one after another the double-banked motors caught, sputtered and settled down to the warming-up process. This noise precluded all conversation, so Dirck and Joe devoted themselves to their thoughts. These were not pleasant. They had failed; this Japanese held the trump hand, and although neither could imagine what form this bold warfare against America would take, they had uneasy suspicions that Shagi was not talking for bluff.

DRESENTLY the six tornado I motors roared at full speed. The huge transport crate began to bump along the ground. It ran a long way almost to the end of the bowl that this meadow made. Then it lifted itself into the air like a protesting hen, and glided on a gentle climb up the sky. From the position of the sun, Dirck determined the direction after a half-bank had pulled the crate onto its course. They were moving south by southeast. And on either side came the Lockheed and the Curtiss jobs, while directly behind, the huge Sikorsky amphibian stuttered steadily along.

The air was jumpy; and the heavy crate lifted and sagged jerkily, swinging the two helpless Americans this way and that. So it came about that Dirck partly turned, saw behind him a large oblong black box. Its dimensions, as he instantly determined, were of a size with the bare spot on the table in Felix's laboratory.

This, then, was the source of the radio beam that had destroyed the Ford. This was Joshua A. Felix's contribution to destruction. Beside it squatted two black-headed Japanese with Winchester rifles. Whatever Shagi's scheme was, it hinged on the dreadful power in this box. But even as Dirck admitted this, he

failed to understand how such a power ray, strong as it was, could bring the United States to its knees in three days. How did Hiro Shagi plan to use it?

He fell to reflecting about this. The steady drone of the motors in his ears flung a wall around his thoughts and gave him time to think clearly. The United States had five hundred combat planes of all sizes and descriptions. Even with a melting ray that would fuse ignition, it would take more than three days to destroy these. Suppose, then, that they were destroyed.

What would follow? Likely enough Shagi would make an attack upon the two fleets. Just how badly the power ray could fuse the heavy sheets of protecting steel on these battleships, he did not know. But probably badly. And those operated by electric turbines would be, of course, helpless.

Perhaps—he started erect at this—perhaps the Japanese battle fleet was already en route to America. Perhaps it was convoying transports crammed with soldiers. With the American fleet, the first line of defense, rendered helpless by this ray, what could oppose a landing in force? Nothing.

DIRCK gave another start and smothered a groan. Suppose the United States tried to oppose a landing or an invasion. Good God. Machine-guns would be fused, heavy artillery made inaccurate, rifles spoiled by the ray that melted steel. Dirck shuddered at the appalling array of consequences that would follow this ray's use. And having one model of the machine, the Japanese, faithful imitators of occidental improvements, would have no difficulty in devising as many more as they needed.

And yet-and yet, even if all this

were to happen as Dirck visualized it, the United States would not tamely surrender in these days. It would take longer than three days to bring about such consequences. Shagi, then, must have some other mysterious means of attack which Dirck had not thought of. But what? This Dirck could not answer.

But as he lay there, rolling with the heave of the heavy transport plane, watching the brilliantly blue sky weave, a terrible picture of helpless American soldiers, their rifles uscless their protecting machine-guns powerless, their artillery unable to fire, came to him. He could see them butchered, aye, slaughtered in thousands by a perhaps smaller army perfectly equipped with killing instruments.

Then and there formed in Dirck's mind a determination to destroy that oblong black box. Felix was deadmurdered. His laboratory was now in ashes. The notebook had contained no formulae for the building of another such box as reposed there, else Shagi would have taken it. And with this experimental box destroyed, the secret of its destructive power would be lost to the And Dirck would gladly have it so, for as he thought then: "A man possessing such power is nearly akin to God."

H is reflections were suddenly interrupted by the sudden noseover of the transport plane. They had, then, reached their destination.

He strained himself to see where they were, wondering where Shagi had found a hideout so complete as to be able to spring this surprise. Where could he hide a dozen desperate men and four big planes?

The answer was soon given.

The transport bus circled downward from eight thousand feet, handled none too cleverly by the Japanese at the joy-stick. Of a sudden it nosed through a wall of rocks. As it banked to come around into the wind, Dirck was enabled to look downward to the ground. He stifled an exclamation of surprise.

The transport crate was about to make a landing on the lava smooth floor of the Crater of the Gods!

CHAPTER V

Destruction to America

NE by one as trimly as a military flight of combat ships, the four planes came into the wind and sat down on the lava crater. Wind and erosion had made the volcano crater floor as smooth as concrete for the swift run of the landing. Almost at once, however, following orders from the Dictator Shagi, the ships turned and taxied straight to the crater wall.

"What the hell!" muttered Joe.
"They can't hide these crates in here. This is on the direct transcontinental run. Anybody could look in and see them."

Dirck was inclined to agree. But Shagi, who had overheard, smiled and said: "You forget the great caves. Regard."

Out of the ground, it seemed, came Japanese men, an even two dozen of them. When the motors ceased to roar, these seized upon the wings of the four ships and hustled them straight ahead. And now Dirck, sitting up, saw that the dark shadows he had once observed from the sky were in truth huge cavities in the side of the crater. Work had been done to smooth down the roughness of their floors so that now the four ships ran smoothly into a huge cavern big enough, as Joe remarked, to house a Goodyear blimp.

Pulled well in, canvas curtains

were dropped behind them to hide the glint of metal, and Dirck knew that anyone passing close, yes, anyone even coming to the crater itself, would never find these hiding places.

Presently, a short, stocky Jap unfastened their leg ropes. Another with a rifle stood over them. Then at Shagi's polite order, they descended from the cabin and were marched to a smaller cave that gave off the big one which did duty as a hangar.

AS Dirck entered he bit down on an exclamation of surprise. Here was a cave that would house a hundred men. Alcohol stoves that gave off no smoke served for heating "Kioki," the famous Japanese dish. Already pots of rice were steaming on the little heaters. Rough pallets of blankets and boards were laid out regularly with wooden head rests for sleeping.

"My mobilization," smiled Shagi pleasantly, "is practically complete."

"So I notice," murmured Dirck. Then suddenly he swung on Shagi. "But I don't understand why you bring us here. We are enemies. We shall escape if we can. And I do not see how our presence is necessary to your plan, whatever it may be."

Shagi went across the floor, and they followed. With a pair of small chop-stick made of orange wood, he lifted huge mouthfuls of rice from the pot and dexterously filled his mouth. Through this he talked.

"Siva has stood by my side," he remarked. "I needed two small planes for protection. I had intended to steal them. You have furnished them. And you," he added, "will be necessary later when I demand the surrender of the United States."

"Impossible," said Dirck, but there was no great heart in his words. But the dictator merely smiled

again. "You will soon learn. Let me suggest some of this kioki, This meat in soy bean sauce is exquisite. I have a good cook."

Forks were supplied and the two ate. While they did so they watched the unceasing activity of this strange half-caste Shagi. Men came and went, always there were shortly bitten sentences followed by the hissing intake of breath, the smile and the bow. One man came several times with messages, and Dirck, following his departure with his eyes, saw him go to a small cell where a small aerial was raised.

Wireless!

Shagi caught the glance.

"Short wave lengths, Strenger-San," he said. "I am in constant communication by relay with my subordinates in Tokio. Also with my fleet."

"And what fleet?" asked Dirck.

Again Shagi smiled. "There is no harm in your knowing. It is steaming tonight for Honolulu. My fleet of auxiliary cruisers lies off Manila. I have just sent what is usually termed an ultimatum to your President. I will not wait on its reply. I shall attack tonight or tomorrow at dawn and give America a taste of what is to come. One taste, I assure you, will be sufficient. Surrender will follow."

"Says you," muttered Joe.
"I have said," admitted Shagi.

WHEN, at a call, he withdrew for a moment. Joe turned to Dirck. "What the hell is he up to? He can't win a war with four lousy planes. And our Honolulu coast defense guns will blow his fleet out of the water. Pearl Harbor is no slouch at firing, fellah."

Dirck shook his head grimly. He was racking his brain to discover Shagi's mode of attack. Shagi, who had so many openings to use Felix's

devices, was apparently using none of them. If a plane had been prepared to fly offshore into the Pacific with the radio beam machine, Dirck could have understood.

But apparently, indeed, in fact, the machine had not been removed from the cabin of the Fokker. Instead, men were busy with wires and conduits and a vast quantity of wet cells and some sort of generator, which was being hooked up with three of the Fokker six-motors. Then as he watched, the other three of the tandem motors were hooked in.

THIS, of course, was understandable. Shagi was merely supplying a power plant for Felix's machine. And as Dirck knew, with six motors generating fifty-five hundred horse-power, the dictator would have plenty for his purpose.

There was an air of haste about all this preparation. The efficient little Japanese ran back and forth, shouted gutturally, yet there was no confusion.

"My God!" breathed Dirck, after a while, "wherever he's going, he's going tonight."

"Well," returned Joe cheerfully, "so much the better for us. We'll only have about half as many guys to put out when we make our getaway."

"Unfortunately," said Dirck, "we're going with him."

"Going with him where?"

"Ah," sighed Dirck, "if I only knew that I'd know a lot."

"But, say," muttered Joe, "we gotta bust this thing up, pronto. We can't be letting this guy, dictator or not, get away with something that'll hurt the country."

Dirck did not reply, for at this juncture Shagi returned. "I am sorry," he hissed, "but it is time that you prepared. A baka sho, a fool, has confused matters. But now we

must go, for we must be there by daylight."

"What time is it?" asked Dirck innocently.

"It is now three o'clock in the afternoon," was the reply.

Dirck did some rapid calculating. Be somewhere by daylight which was fourteen hours hence. Where could these busses go in fourteen hours?

The Fokker, he estimated, had a cruising range of two thousand miles; Shagi could go many places—New York, Mexico, San Francisco, Canada.

"Do not try to play a damasu, a trick," warned Shagi, as they stood up. "I do not wish to kill you, for you are needful. But rather than have my plans ruined, you will die very swiftly. If you do not play false, I promise you your freedom within thirty-six hours."

This made even a bigger mystery in Dirck's mind. He swore at his helplessness. What could Shagi plan that he calmly told them they would be free within thirty-six hours?

"Man," muttered Joe, "if he ever turns us loose we'll have a fleet of bombers blow the Crater of the Gods ofi the map."

"They would never fly within fifty miles of it," declared Shagi unexpectedly. "So I do not fear having you free. I hope, if you remain sensible and are free, that you will tell every one what you saw on this voyage, particularly your President. It will help no end."

"Ah, man" sighed Joe, "I give up."

THE ropes on their arms were changed for bright, shiny hand-cuffs. They were then led to the Fokker machine and once again entered, this time to be seated on the two forward passenger seats. Here their handcuffs were chained to the holding rail, their feet were cuffed and chained to the foot rail. Thus

hopelessly trussed, they could only watch and wait.

The same Japanese pilot sat in the chief pilot's chair, and beside him sat another man, probably a relief pilot. Besides this crew, two other men were in the rear of the cabin. standing watch over the radio beam machine. When this was completed, Shagi made a dignified entrance and sat nearly in the center. Dirck saw that a knife switch had been wired up to Shagi's seat. The dictator had a large automatic strapped to him, as did the pilots. Two rifles stood in the corner of the cabin within easy reach of the mechanics.

NOW," cried Shagi in a voice strangely excited for one of such usual phlegm and impassivity, "you will see Shagi make war. You will see terror spread through the United States. You will see a hundred and fifty million people horror-stricken and begging on their knees for a quick peace."

Dirck and Joe said nothing.

"You will see us rise to the supremacy that the East was intended for. You will see me master of the world. None can oppose me now."

"Aw, rats," muttered Joe.

Dirck, however, maintained a grave face. He saw at once that if Shagi had a weakness it was one of boasting. Like all men with humble beginnings who have climbed to unexpected eminence he was guilty of an overbloated egotism that expressed itself in boasting. He marked the trait mentally to take advantage of it.

"Since we are helpless you can tell us where we go."

At this second the six motors began to roar. Although he could hear nothing, he saw the propellers on the Sikorsky flail rapidly into whorls of light. And Dirck's and Joe's crates, regassed and looked over, now began to taxi into position. The great flight was on. Would Shagi fall for his trap and reveal the destination?

The dictator laughed, the sound lost in the sudden blipping of the motors. When they died down to a mere tick-tock idling, he called triumphantly: "We go, Strenger-San, to New York. Sayo! Sayo! We go to New York. Taki u Seneru."

As if this were the signal, the four Japanese in the cabin cried: "Hei, Hei! New York."

The motors suddenly thrummed a mad song of power. Unleashed the great plane waddled across the smooth expanse of lava floor. And presently the ship lifted, banked for a break in the rim of the crater and roared on through the afternoon heat. Shagi's military strategy was started; the war was on. Dirck groaned. What in God's name did the man plan? He was to know soon, to his everlasting horror.

CHAPTER VI

What Happened In New York

T WAS the half hour before dawn when New York, although never really quiet and asleep, is less noisy and a semi-silence broods over the great sprawled metropolis. Trucks filled with food to feed the teeming millions lumber through the streets. The great light-splashed spot of Broadway, Times Square, is almost dark, and but few persons walk through the streets.

On the roof of the Paramount Building the great white ball had not yet turned red for the counting of five o'clock. The turning beam of Fourteenth Street was dark, and the vast, tall structures of the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building and others were huge

monoliths of darkness and silence.

The eastern sky was not yet lighted with the promise of day. A great ocean liner, her port holes atwinkle, came up the outer bay to Quarantine, there to lay until the port doctor, pilot and special customs men could come aboard. On Long Island, Roosevelt Field was blotted out by darkness, for no airmail ships were to take off until six or thereabouts. A slight mist, a combination of fog and soft coal fires, settled low, yet did not hide the city view from above.

IN another half hour or hour New York would awake to another day. From out of their apartments so akin to the cells in a honey comb, millions would come, to vanish into subway, clevated and commuting train and New York would roar once more to the effort of a working day.

Policemen stood on corners near their reporting boxes, or stepped into an areaway to catch a few sweet drags from a forbidden cigarette. Night workers looked forward to the moment when they could return home to sleep through the day. The great octuple presses of New York's newspapers had ceased to grind out the news. The day's issue was already on newsstands. All of them bore screaming headlines announcing the new arrogant insult of the Japanese Dictator.

And thus, while coast artillerymen slept and the vast city lay under a blanket of darkness, four airplanes sawed wood high above the Pennsylvania Pocono Mountains. No lights gleamed at their wing tips. The only sign of their presence was the blue flames leaping from the exhausts.

In the seat from which he had not moved since the Fokker lifted from the Crater of the Gods, Hiro Shagi sat brooding, glancing on occasion at the wrist watch which he displayed with almost feminine pride. In the control cabin the relief pilot sat at the stick, his black, buttony eyes fastened to the instrument board. The other pilot watched the chart on the clips, drew a line on occasion and barked to his companion the wind drift, air speed and present position.

Beside the Fokker came the Sikorsky amphibian, and ranged around were the two lighter ships. Joe was asleep. Young and healthy, he resisted the call of the rest until his heavy eyelids drooped despite his efforts. But Dirck, watchful, alert, had been tugging at his steel bonds for hours, testing, trying, seeking a method of wresting himself loose. All he had done so far was to cut his wrists.

The suspense that gripped him was agony itself. He had learned nothing else from Shagi on the trip, yet an insufferable dread had gripped him since the dictator had announced New York as the destination. He knew as well as any graduate of the staff college at Fort Leavenworth how helpless New York and the east coast was.

He realized, as well as General Metcalf, that a smart enemy striking in Connecticut, New York Massachusetts could practically wreck every munition center the United States had. Within a radius of a thousand square miles was the hub of American war industries. Clothing, shell, powder, guns and rifles were all made in this area. Did Shagi then, plan first to render the United States helpless to defend?

He dismissed the possibility from his mind because it did not jibe with what the half-crazed dictator had said. The Jap spoke of terror, horror, death. That could only mean wholesale carnage.

slaughter. But how? For the twentieth time he asked himself how such carnage would be wrought.

He felt the ship nose over, his body shifted forward as the transient plane dove downward. The mountains, then, were behind. They must be swinging across the Jersey flats. New York was but minutes away.

As if to verify this guess, the sky which had been dark and brooding now lighted in the east. Dirty streaks of gray rose above the horizon gradually spreading. The ground below which had been a black expanse save for the bead-like twinkle of occasional lights, could be seen. Rapidly the light grew stronger. Dirck saw the confused grouping of big cities. Elizabeth, Newark, Jersey City.

AH, yes, there was New York Bay, and there was the island of Manhattan sticking down between the East and North Rivers like a bloated tongue. At the lower end the great buildings jutted skyward, buried their flanks one into the other. Farther uptown, he made out the Empire State Building, with its Zeppelin landing platform a thousand feet above the street level.

Even as he looked the chromiumplated spire of the Chrysler Building looking like a spear point, began to shimmer with the coming of day. They were over the lower bay now. A police boat looking like a scooting water bug shot along leaving inverted V's of ripples behind.

And now of a sudden the sun, a dulled copper ball through the slight mist, popped out of the Jersey coast.

Its feeble rays reflected from the huge all-metal wing of the Fokker. Direk wondered now what would happen. Thirteen hours of flying time had elapsed. The tanks had been exhausted by the trip, and he

knew that the reserve fuel supply had been turned on now for a half hour.

Yet the Fokker did not bank around for a landing on Long Island for gas and oil. Instead, Shagi, looking a pale saffron in the early light, moved forward, put on a helmet with telephone receivers in the ears and hooked in the wire with the pilot. Dirck could see his mouth move, but could not hear what was said. The Fokker roared straight ahead over the deep canyons of New York's streets.

Dirck nudged Joe awake, aware that the final act of Shagi's drama was about to be played. Joe raised his drooping head, swallowed once or twice and tried to clear his eyes.

Then of a sudden, with no other warning the terrible tragedy began.

Of a sudden Hiro Shagi, lips skinned back from his long ugly teeth, his eyes blazing with a lust that made of him a savage primitive killer, leaned forward and shrieked several staccato orders. Obediently the big Fokker banked, nosed over a bit more until the altimeter showed thirteen hundred feet. In the dictator's hand was a small button attached to a black insulated wire.

The two Japanese in the rear leaped upon the radio ray machine. A weird, ghastly green glow suddenly illumined the interior of the cabin, and despite the steady beat of the three motors, Dirck plainly heard a growling whine-like buzz that reminded him of a hissing snake about to strike.

EVEN yet he was in doubt as to what Shagi planned. But not for long.

At a sharp command from Shagi the six tornado motors died away. The early dawn wind shrieked in the bracing. Voices that had been dulled a second ago, now leaped into a loud monosyllabic clatter.

The two men in the rear, wrestling furiously with Felix's radio machine began to hum in a wild, enthusiastic roar, the Kimi ga yo, the Japanese national anthem.

One pilot shouted: "Now they shall have the inujini, the death of dogs."

THE huge Fokker, dipping in a shallow glide, seemed to wind its way over the huge skyscrapers that poked inquisitive spires into the sky. Shagi, sighting carefully, picked out the Empire State Building that reared itself a thousand feet in the air from the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. Its spire with its Zeppelin platform caught the early morning light and glistened with dew.

The Fokker headed for it, still dipping in a glide. Dirck began to fear for a collision. But such was not to be the case.

Shagi, trembling as he balanced himself to the uneven bumping of the giant transport plane, watched and studied, sighted and moved his lips with silent figuring.

Closer and closer came the greatest building in New York. The silvery streaks of chromium ran from the pyramided base right up seemingly to them. The Japanese pilot was keeping the controls sensitive. The ship was passing actually from the East River straight across Thirty-fourth Street.

Dirck could see small dots on the street no bigger than a collection of ants.

"What's he gonna do?" asked Joe, his voice touched with an awed fright.

"God knows," said Dirck, yet in his heart he felt murder, death, desolation coming. A futile fury at his helplessness gripped him. Of a sudden, Shagi flung back his head. "Now!" he screamed.

The Fokker had practically reached the juncture of Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. At the screamed word, the pilot pushed forward the control stick. The Fokker nosed deeper into an almost vertical dive. It was actually diving into the square where the streets intersected, aimed at the base of the Empire State Building.

At the same second Dirck saw Shagi's finger punch home the button of the cord.

There came no sound. There was no flash, no detonation, no sound at all save the scream of the wind in the Fokker's rig.

Yet Dirck yelled out in terrible terror. His shout, blended with Joe's terrific cry, seemed a requiem for the dead.

The Empire State Building, a thousand feet high, a block square at the base, was beginning to sway and fall!

CHAPTER VII

Destruction In New York

IRCK sat absolutely motionless, like a dead man, his manacled hands fastened to the seat ahead had joined palms as if in prayer. Joe gibbered, unnerved, shaken, terrified.

And before their eyes, a gigantic building that seemed as solid as the mountains themselves, weaved like a pendulum. Each weave to the right was longer. Each staggering bow to the left went a little farther. It was as if the huge building instead of being made of structural steel and concrete, were made of rubber, a rubber building that had been flicked with a boy's thumb so that it wiggled back and forth.

"Teik u seneru baka aho!" shouted

Shagi, and released the button in his

It was time for the order to rise, for if the building swerved but slightly in its direction of fall to destruction the plane would be smashed beneath its billions of tons of weight.

The motors suddenly roared, the plane tilted the nose and began to climb, going south over the canyon of Fifth Avenue nine hundred feet up.

The shout of Shagi broke the spell of stricken terror on Dirck. Yet he could not take his eyes from that building, weaving — weaving — dropping.

A ND then, even as he looked, it broke at the ground. The bending, rubbery movement stopped. Like a gigantic monolith whose base has been smashed it toppled almost directly north. At first the fall seemed gentle, languid. But as the huge mass picked up speed, it seemed to drop with the speed of light.

From the climbing angle and his seat Dirck saw every second of the tragic end. Like a toppling stick the great building held its straight lines until it struck the top of a twelve-story building some five hundred feet up the street. Then it began to disintegrate.

Even above the howling roar of the thrashing motors came the deafening crash of its fall. In an instant the Fokker seemed caught in a maelstrom. It bounced, dived, was flung this way and that like a chip in a hurricane. The pilot wrestled mightily with it, the flailing props bit upon the displaced air. Then a sudden upward gush of wind sent it flying a thousand feet upward so swiftly that Dirck's stomach seemed left behind and he was afflicted with nausea.

Tremendous reports louder than the explosion of any gun ever made thudded through the drone of the motors. A dust pall thicker than any fog settled around them, making of the day a saffron illumination. So thick was it that all sight of the horrible destruction caused was lost.

Dirck and Joe were as two insane men. They tore at the manacles until their wrists were stripped of flesh and the cuffs were sticky with blood. They shouted, howled, twisted and turned their bodies, kicked madly with their feet.

And upon Hiro Shagi they heaped curses until they hung breathless. It did them no good so far as getting free was concerned, but it gave them an outlet for the emotions aroused, an outlet without which they might have gone mad.

On the other hand, Shagi was the picture of triumphant savagery. A wild, primitive song bubbled from his lips. He was carried away by his success. The song, having a single monotonous beat, came like a chant from the stone age. The two Japanese behind pounded each other in delight and even the reserve pilot gave utterance to clicking shrieks that marked his happiness over this event.

Meantime, the Fokker shot downward, circled for a moment over Madison Square Park, then pushed straight on until the Woolworth Building lay on the right and the Battery straight ahead.

MANY times Dirck and Joe had seen the great monument to five and ten-cent pieces when flying into Roosevelt Field, and always they had admired it. It was more like a cathedral than a building dedicated to commerce. Its huge spire reaching some nine hundred feet into the air, had the gothic lines of the Canterbury Cathedral. It seemed to

stand knee-deep in the surrounding buildings that reared themselves but some twenty or thirty stories from the street level.

Over there he saw Wall Street; and there Broad; he recognized the new Stock Exchange, a Greek temple raised to business.

A harsh shout from Shagi recalled Dirck's attention to new tragedy. He saw once again that dangerous button in Shagi's hand. Once again he heard the sharply bitten directions, and of a sudden there were no motors and the Fokker was dipping low into City Hall Park. In the morning sun—for the dust was not so thick here—the gilded dome of the World Building, seemed a blaze of light.

No." cried Dirck involuntarily.
"You mustn't—not that. People are at work. Thousands will be killed. Other buildings will be smashed to the earth. You must not."

Shagi turned upon him, his grim face savage with the lust of power.

"Thousands must die," he cried in a terrible voice. "Thousands of civilians must pay the penalty for the insolence of your government. I shall destroy New York, wipe it from the map, reduce it to the flatness of a prairie field unless your government asks for peace. From here I go to Washington. The capitol itself shall be flattened to earth."

As he spoke these words he swung swiftly, glanced ahead through the projecting panes of glass and saw that the Woolworth Building was but four hundred yards away. Coming in from the angle of City Hall Park, the base was perfectly visible. Dirck understood at that second how the destruction was wrought.

The whole secret flashed before him. The melting of the Ford, the fusing of the magneto wires. Shagi, knowing that America's great skyscrapers were constructed of structural steel, realized the power against them of the weapon that he had stolen from Felix. The application of the radio beam upon the supporting girders made them as jelly, and the ponderous weight of the building did the rest. No longer supported, it simply fell.

"Hei!" cried Shagi, as the Fokker nosed over into a vertical dive. For a split second Dirck saw tiny dots like ants in the street below running, running madly for cover against this terrible agency of death. So, already the word had spread from the north that some strange devil was destroying New York.

"Yah!" shouted Shagi; he sighted along his field glass and pressed home the button.

"Ah, God! don't!" Dirck's cry was instinctive.

Madly, frantically he tore at the seat bar through which his hands were cuffed. The skin was rubbed off down to the bone and new blood flowed. Yet he could not wrench free. Oh, for a single second at the controls. He would throw this death-dealing machine into such a spin that no one, not even himself, could pull it out.

Beside him cursing frantically, Joe was writhing in torment.

"Ah, you rat!" he howled. "You lousy half-bred rat. As God is my judge I'll kill you for this."

"Yah!" cried Shagi again, ignoring the wild writhings of the two Americans.

HE had kept his finger pressed on the button, and the greenish glow still pervaded the cabin, fighting out the yellow sunlight. There came the slight smell of burning rubber insulation.

And then of a sudden, Shagi yelled "Inujini!"

Once again Dirck was stricken dumb and paralyzed by the fearful sight of a magnificent building beginning to totter. Back and forth it weaved, like a building in a hideous nightmare.

This one was going quicker than the Empire State. A harshly bitter order from Shagi started the three motors to revving madly and the Fokker poked her nose skyward. Falling to the weakest side as a tree falls under a woodman's ax, the Woolworth Building gave two feeble weaves and then like a giant monster toppled, straight as a ramrod to the east. The tower broke from the main base, skidded loose and dropped like a billion-ton hammer upon the buildings to the east.

ONCE again Dirck, petrified at this wanton destruction, heard the staccato explosions that made the earth and air tremble like an earthquake. Up shot a pall of dust and riding the displaced air the Fokker bounced almost another thousand feet.

Joe was crying, sobbing hysterically, shaking his head like a wounded bull, while tears coursed down his face. Dirck did not cry, he was too stunned for that. But his dilated eyes piercing through the fog of dust seemed to visualize the destruction wrought below.

He could see other buildings ground to pumice dust by the heavy tower. He could see thousands of people buried forever under ruins that themselves would mount five hundred feet high. He could feel the demoralization, the panic, the mad exodus from New York's lower East Side into which the tip of the Woolworth tower had doubtless plunged.

God! No wonder Shagi said the United States would capitulate. This was not war, this was massacre. This was not battle between armies recruited and armed, but war against women and children and old men. This was war against a people. And Dirck knew then that rather than have a million or more people destroyed the United States must surrender. The government would be forced to by the people themselves.

He came out of this trance to find the Fokker banking wing under three thousand feet up, driving through the pall of dust, straight north. With something akin to panic in his heart Dirck sensed the next destination. They would attack the Chrysler Building which would smash down into Pershing Square and destroy untold thousands of helpless people.

How right his deduction was, was proved in the next few minutes. The Fokker broke from the pall of dust beyond Canal Street, crossed the slanting Broadway and picked up Fourth Avenue. Following this it roared northward at a hundred miles an hour. To the right was the Sikorsky amphibian and bringing up the rear were Joe's and Dirck's single-seaters.

DUT there was something new ${f D}$ about these three planes now. Through the broken glass of the cabins stuck the black snouts of machine-guns. And the single-seaters had sub-machine-guns with extra trays of ammunition. So! Shagi was taking no chances on having the Fokker accidentally shot down. Able at a second's notice to fuse the wiring of an attacking plane, there still remained the possibility of a headlong attack by a dozen planes, which might overwhelm him or attack from the flank, so he was taking no chances.

The wisdom of Shagi's action was demonstrated within a few minutes. Madison Square Park lay under the left wing, when from the east, the direction of Governor's Island and Roosevelt Field, came three V's of combat planes and they came like the wind. Fifteen Curtiss Falcons and driving at such an angle that they were bound to cut off Shagi in his attempt to reach and destroy the Chrysler Building.

Joe cried out joyfully at sight of the trim formations. Dirck held his breath in agony of grief. He knew many of the youngsters who sat in those ships, gripping their joysticks, staring through the ring sights of their Brownings. They likely were in pyjamas, hastily called from bed to meet this menace, this wild man who destroyed monoliths as if they were made of straw.

THEY figured simply, those youngsters. They had come to shoot down every plane and had no idea of the terrible weapon which they were opposing. And Dirck knew, a ghastly feeling in his chest, that prosently they would be all dead.

The young Secret Service agent was leaning forward now, his back as stiff as a ramrod. Somehow he had managed to insert a knuckle of his right hand into his mouth and suddenly became aware of a sharp pain there. He took it out and saw that his teeth, biting down in his despair, had bitten through almost to the bone.

A howled order from Shagi brought his eyes back to the ghastly tragedy.

He reeled in his seat as the Fokker banked right wing under and drove like a courser toward the three flights of combat planes. These Americans had been flying two flights side by side, the third above and back. But now, as the four ships of Shagi's flight turned and drove boldly for them, they dispersed as if by magic. One flight came head on, and Shagi shrieked with joy. The other two went, one to the left, one to the right, and banking in sharply the fifteen planes converged on the four.

Shagi shouted to the relief pilot, who instantly shoved home a plug in the instrument board, picked up a mouthpiece and barked into it. Shagi himself, standing upright, swaying with the lift and fall of the Fokker, cried out to the pilot. With sinking heart Dirck watched the nose of the Fokker point squarely at the flight.

"Hei!" shouted Hiro Shagi, and the dictator pressed home the button.

The result was tragic. The fight was taking place less than three thousand feet above the skyscrapera below. And as the deadly ray with its fiery strength beat upon the five planes directly ahead, they seemed to halt in their onward rush as if hitting against a stone wall.

For a second the five planes wavered. Then three of them fell off on the left wing, the other two merely dipped their noses gently and began to glide to earth. Dirck knew what had happened. The first three pilots hearing their engines go dead had reached for the switch. The heat ray, possessing volts of power, had electrocuted them in their seats. The three combat planes, as he watched, began to spin. Faster! Faster! They dove downward, finally losing their wings and sending the fuselages like javelins to pierce into the towering buildings below.

THE remaining two continued their shallow glide toward the Long Island meadows. But the ratio was too small. They had but one choice, the East River, and Dirck saw with relief that they would just about make it. If they had sufficient altitude, they could

bail out in their parachutes and trust to Providence to cut themselves clear and swim ashore.

He felt a violent swerve of the Fokker. At the same second with humming whines machine-gun slugs bit through the all-metal sides, ricocheting like angry bees. The two surviving flights had attacked. Dirck cried out with hope. No matter if a stray slug struck him, if they could only hit the radio beam machine or destroy this Fokker, then nothing else mattered.

HE looked ahead. All was confusion now. The remaining ten American planes, diving, zooming, banking and rolling like porpoises, were charging in on the small group of Shagi's ships.

Tracer bullets were drawing parabolas of living fire across the intervening air. Above the roar of the motors came the staccato rip of fired machine-guns.

The Americans, however, were not doing the only firing. Shagi's co-horts were giving a good account of themselves. The Sikorsky amphibian was spitting a leaden hail from front, sides and back. One machinegun snout poked through the cabin floor was throwing a fistful of slugs and tracers at an American ship zooming upward at two miles a minute to attack underneath. Dirck could see the Jap tracers vanish into the whirl of light that was the American's propeller.

There came a sharp puff of smoke. A streak of living saffron flame leaped out. For a brief second the Curtiss combat crate hung by her nose. Then she fell off sideways, hesitated helplessly, and turning her nose gloomily toward the ground, began to burn furiously. Dirck watched, fascinated.

Then his breath escaped him in a sigh of relief, for a black-garbed figure hurled itself from the blazing plane and dropped like a plummet. It hurtled downward a full thousand feet before the chute opened. The young pilot was clear of the blazing plane that began to spin, then haul up in a stall, only to nose over for another spin. He would probably be killed, smashed against buildings, but at least he would not be burned to death.

Meantime, the fight raged with the fearless courage of Jap and Thousands of American opposed. black ants-terrorized people-gathered in the streets below to witness the merciless fight. With a sigh Dirck saw his pet Lockheed drop, the nose shot to pieces, the engine exploded. The Fokker, still with occasional bullets smacking through her, had driven nacelle on into the fight. And one after another of the American ships either sideslipped into a tight spin or else glided away helpless through lack of power to continue.

Slugs mashed into the Fokker's starboard motor and it hesitated, but finally began to roar again, though with a ragged exhaust that bespoke dead cylinders.

As nearly as Dirck could judge the Sikorsky accounted for three American planes, and then of a sudden it darted ahead to protect the Fokker from a mad Yank who, feeling that a mysterious power opposed him, took the final desperate venture and drove his combat plane at two hundred miles an hour straight for the Fokker.

GOOD man!" breathed Dirck, discregarding the fact that such a collision would mean his own instant death. He watched the biplane's thin wings cut the air, could even see the knobbed head of the pilot holding his ship as a gunner holds a rifle to the kill.

The distance between the ships lessened every second. And then it was that the Sikorsky, slower and engaged with two American ships, broke off the combat and with a crude lunge through the air flung itself in front of the Fokker.

Shagi screamed a wild order and the excited Japanese pilot crossed the controls and twisted the Fokker partly out of harm's way. Above the wild shriek of a half dozen motors came a stunning detonation.

A flash of fire like the breath of hell itself lighted the sky. Two ships colliding at two hundred miles an hour made a frightful impact. The two ships seemed to vanish. One second two planes in welded tragedy hung in the sky. The next, a rain of fragments, human flesh, motors and bits of fabric floated down the sky to the streets below.

A LOW gasp escaped Joe. All the steel of his body vanished. He slumped forward in a dead faint.

Shagi gave a cry of triumph and with a vertical bank shot back to sink three American planes with one press of the button. The Curtiss Hawk that Joe had flown to Winslow now eased off on a gentle glide and made, apparently for the Hudson River. Of the fifteen American planes which had attacked a few moments previous, only three were in the air. But they had not given up.

There was never a doubt of their intentions. Suspecting some hidden weapon, they did not fly in formation. Instead, they came in from three different angles, deliberately driving their ships for collision.

Shagi cried out in alarm. The pilot whose name, it appeared, was Hogi, banked straight toward the closest. A second's press of the button and Hogi banked again. But not until a living stream of golden tracer beat into the cabin and caught

the relief pilot squarely in the back. One horrid scream broke from his lips and then he fell, and the rest of the burst smashed the cabin windows.

A gale of wind came through the opening. But Shagi, bracing himself with one hand, screamed another order, and Dirck found himself looking into the propeller wash of the second ship, the one whose burst had killed the relief pilot.

Once again the American plane seemed to stop in the air.

"Kaya!" howled Shagi.

THE Fokker nosed over in a vertical dive. Yet quick as it was another burst of slugs swept the cabin. Dirck felt a hot iron drawn across his left arm just above the elbow and watched in fascination the window to his left smash into a thousand pieces and a stream of molten fire pass through as the tracers crashed home.

The Fokker was too huge to stunt, but Hogi, knowing the desperateness of the situation, hauled back with all his strength on the control bar. The Fokker screamed up the sky, wheeled on its back, then rolled slowly over. Shagi had accomplished his purpose. The surviving American bus was in the line of ray. Shagi pressed the button while the Japs behind moved a deadly copper switch.

With no more power than the others the last Yankee ship nosed over, then fell into a sharp, flat spin. Dirck knew that the pilot tinkering with his ignition ship had died and fallen against the joy-stick. So he was dead, and his combat ship like a floating tomb, slipped down the sky to ultimate destruction.

Shagi, no longer impassive, yelled, "Banzai!" An order silenced the motors while he peered out to make sure no more American planes flew the sky.

Then he cried: "North, north. I hold America in the hollow of my hand."

The Fokker's nacelle pointed to the gleaming javelin-like spire of the Chrysler Building.

CHAPTER VIII

Stakes of a Million Lives

HE Fokker was prodding a hole through the air, roaring along the peaks of the Palisades at her maximum speed of a hundred and twenty miles an hour. Shagi, the Dictator of Japan, sat relaxed, his slant eyes closed. The single pilot was now paying special attention to his instruments, watching anxiously the gas gauges on the emergency tanks.

Dirck had not moved a muscle for more than thirty minutes. The sight he had seen when the Fokker destroyed the Chrysler Building had almost stunned his senses. He was not aware of his bloody wrists, his bitten lips, the steady sting of the flesh wound through his arm.

All that he could see was the gigantic ruins of the Empire State Building, its base burying Thirty-fourth Street five hundred feet deep with debris, its peak mashed into the ruins of that magnificent building that had once been the Astor Library at the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway. The ruins had mushroomed into Fifth Avenue. The crash had cut a swath of destruction five or six hundred yards wide and a thousand feet long.

Other buildings, toppled by this gigantic hammer, had fallen upon other buildings, and so, as one upright domino, tipping against another, knocks over a round twenty of them, so had the Empire State Building crushed fifty others.

Dirck's mind reeled to think of the

destruction, the monetary loss, the practical suspension of business. He remembered the last terrible sight of the Ritz-Carlton, the Commodore and the Biltmore Hotel on Pershing Square smashed into oblivion, carrying with them thousands of lives. The Grand Central Station was buried beneath four hundred feet of crushed concrete.

Three buildings attacked and a hundred more smashed. The casualty list would run into thousands—and the end was not yet. Shagi had said that this was but a taste, an initial show. If America did not surrender he would raze New York.

Suddenly Dirck's dazed thoughts were broken in upon by the sudden piquing of the Fokker. It was gliding down into the midst of the Catskills. Dirck nodded to himself. A likely hiding place this, and cunningly chosen. In the midst of these woods with a suitable field for a take-off the Fokker could hide out indefinitely. And likely enough Shagi, preparing for all eventualities, had secreted here extra stores of gasoline and oil and spare parts.

THIS was true. No sooner had the L big wheels of the Fokker settled upon the ground in a neat threepoint landing, than out of the woods beyond the big four-acre field men came running. Yellow men! Japanese, short, broad, eyes bright like buttons, "banzais" ringing from their lips. They hustled the plane across the field into a niche in the woods and banked cut branches above and in front of it. Cruising American scouts could not find it here. Dirck also saw two other smaller planes similarly buried. Shagi had overlooked nothing.

It was not until he and Joe had been unfastened from their rails, their handcuffs removed and their cuts bandaged that Shagi with customary Japanese politeness invited them into a small wood hut for a drink of saki, the Japanese white rice wine. Joe refused surlily, but Dirck, having a wider vision of the debacle which threatened America, pretended to comply eagerly. The hot wine, heated almost to boiling as the Japanese like it, was strong, and gave him the courage to approach this strange monster with the subtlety needed to find out what was planned for the future.

Hiro Shagi was most complacent. "Banzai!" he exclaimed, and downed the hot liquor in a gulp. "So, Strenger-San, you see how I make war. I have said in thirty-six hours that America will be on her knees. Listen to what I have written to your President."

HE picked up a sheet of paper upon which was awkwardly scrawled a lengthy message. He read, in his sonorous voice: "Honorable Sir: You will have heard by now from others of your honorable staff the news that Shagi has made war. We are at war. I have attacked your city of New York and you know now the power that I wield. Yet I am not one to destroy life or material needlessly.

"So I make you this proposal: Pay to Japan three billions of dollars gold. Deed to us the Philippine Islands, to do with as we like. From Mexico we shall take the Peninsula of Southern California for colonizing purposes. In your answer to this note you must promise solemnly that such settlements as we make there will under no conditions be changed later. You must reply to this note within twenty-four hours.

"If you fail to comply with these demands or delay the answer beyond the specified time, I shall send other planes to destroy New York completely. Other planes will make similar attacks on Chicago, Detroit, Washington, St. Louis, Indianapolis and continue their attacks until not one building above six stories stands erect in America.

"I shall destroy a million or more of your inhabitants. I shall ruin your commerce, ruin your business, and finally if you still do not comply, I shall make of America a province in which I shall be the power of life and death.

"If you comply with these demands I promise you no further attacks upon any of your cities or people, and will withdraw from your country—Hiro Shagi."

Joe and Dirck listened in amazement to the impudent message. When a half-caste who looked pure Caucasian came and took the message with a box, they settled back in their seats. Shagi departed soon after with a click of the tongue and an artificial smile. He still had not explained for what reason he kept these two alive, for what reason he had forced them to witness the appalling destruction.

The messenger whose name was Dole, came back shortly after noon, bringing with him several newspapers obtained at Blauvelt.

DELIBERATELY Hiro Shagi saw that Dirck and Joe were supplied with copies. The front pages shrieked the news in headlines that seemed four inches thick.

"HIRO SHAGI MAKES SUDDEN ATTACK UPON NEW YORK"

Below it said: "Halfcaste Dictator using new and secret weapon destroys Empire State Building, Chrysler Building and Woolworth Building with loss of two hundred thousand lives and billions in money. Whole city disorganized and thousands fleeing in panic. Military officials puzzled at weapon which demolishes huge skyscrapers."

There was more, much more, the whole front pages blazed with black type, screaming out the message of terror. It spoke of mobilization of the National Guard troops already patrolling the streets to prevent looting. City employees and volunteers were combing the ruins to recover bodies and save lives.

The afternoon waned and Dole went to Blauvelt and came back with other newspapers. Shagi's note must have been telegraphed to Washington and immediately made public, either at the White House or by the telegraph operators, for it blazoned its way across the front page in a heavy box.

Furthermore, much more seriously, the Evening Globe demanded that the terms be met.

"Three billions of dollars is a small sum compared to the destruction of property already created, to say nothing of what will follow. The disorganization to business in this sudden attack, is costing billions a day. And as there seems to be no protection against this mysterious weapon, we must comply. The Philippines have always been a financial burden upon the rest of the nation, and we lose nothing but our pride in giving them away. And our pride as compared to our sovereignty is as nothing."

"They're in a blue funk," muttered Dirck.

JOE shook his head impatiently. "Can you blame them? What is to prevent this maniac from destroying every soul in America?"

Dirck looked up grimly. "You and I," he replied softly.

"How?" Joe was incredulous.

"I don't know," said Dirck slowly.

"All I know is that we must beat this man—you and I, Joe. We must. No matter the cost."

"Felix's machine is the secret,"

muttered Joe. "If we could drive an axe into it, this baby wouldn't have a leg to stand on."

The determination to escape and in some fashion gain access to the radio beam machine kept the two alert all that day. But at nightfall they had to confess to each other that the chances were few indeed. Their efforts merely taught them how thorough Hiro Shagi had been in his preparations.

A ROUND the wooden hut, camouflaged on top with tree limbs, where the deadly instrument was housed, Shagi had thrown a guard of four men who were changed every two hours. Inside the hut, men, evidently electrical experts, worked in desperate haste to construct three more of the machines. Two guards, armed with rifles, unblinkingly watched the two Americans. There was no hope of escape.

Dirck was familiar enough with radio to know that building identical machines was not difficult. The principle of the melting ray was the same as ordinary short wave length broadcasting with the additional feature of narrowing and directing the departing wave. Somehow, Felix had learned how to make a round cone of the discharged electrical impulse, and this very conizing gave to the ray a terrific power, power to take the toughness from steel and make of it a substance with no greater strength than putty.

With his two extra airplanes over which mechanics were already working, Shagi could make simultaneous attacks upon three vast cities. Though the United States Air Service—reliable, efficient and fearless—might bend all its energies to strafing this back-knifing attack, they would be powerless, and doomed to die.

Dirck knew more and more as the

day passed, that, melodramatic as it sounded, the destinies of the United States, the lives of thousands of people, the saving from destruction of millions of dollars worth of property rested with him and Joe. Yet he did not know how he could escape.

And late that night he received a new blow.

WITH the cat-like silence that was his characteristic, Shagi slid into the hut where the two Americans were bound fast to a pallet of straw and blankets and ordered the guards to release Joe.

"You have wondered," he said with his mechanical smile, "why I have saved your lives. Now you will understand. The United States has not yet commented upon my message. I am sending you"—pointing to Joe—"to New York and you shall explain to them the power that I wield, describe the destruction which you saw, and tell them forcibly that further refusal will only cause a million people to die needlessly."

Joe flared. "I won't go."

Shagi drew in his breath with a hissing sigh. "You will go," he said calmly. "You will either go alive to tell what I say, or you will go dead with your hands holding your severed head and my message pinned to your breast. I shall brook no insolence now."

He barked an order to his men. Joe's hands were again trussed, but his legs left untied. A blindfold was put on his eyes. Already Dirck could hear the irregular exhaust of a warming up plane. They would, then, take Joe some miles away by plane, deposit him blindfolded and helpless where he would be found.

After that—well, Dirck did not know. All he realized was that he was to be left alone to fight this monster and his gang. And then, his alert mind struck upon a plan, a stratagem. To carry it out he must die, but that seemed less than nothing as compared to the results.

"Stick it out, Dirck," whispered Joe during a second when no one was close. "I'll find this place again and I'll bring enough bombers to blow it to hell."

Dirck nodded cheerfully, although he knew Shagi would leave this place within twenty-four hours, and Dirck doubted if Joe could get back with help in time. But he let no inkling of his desperate plan appear on his impassive face. And when he said good-by to Joe, he never let his voice quaver, though he knew, or thought he knew, that this was the last time he would ever see Joe alive. His plan called for death to himself; and he was more than willing to pay the price.

And presently they took Joe out and Dirck was left alone.

CHAPTER IX

To the Death

IRO SHAGI'S ultimatum had been sent at three o'clock in the afternoon. Joe had gone that night; and from stray words dropped by Shagi, Dirck decided that Joe had been picked up in time to tell what he knew of the world outlaw.

So he was not surprised when, at two-thirty in the morning, Shagi came into the hut, his dark brown face agleam with anger, his black pools of eyes flashing lightnings.

"They refuse," he said, the very restraint of his words emphasizing the cauldron of hatred that boiled within him. "They refuse. Every airplane in the United States is searching for me. The nation has been divided into small squares and every square has a searching plane."

He laughed, and the sound made Dirck shudder. "But they shall pay. At three o'clock I leave here, and tonight three American cities will be in ruins. What I do not destroy, fire will. They will surrender or I shall destroy them all."

Dirck regarded him and with an effort made his voice calm. "If they refuse now, why do you think they will surrender later?"

Shagi strode restlessly up and down the room, a narrow bit of ivory bending back and forth between his strong fingers.

"Your people will demand peace." he declared. "The military regime wants to fight it out. But I do not make war on armies or navies. I make war on civilians, and civilians are not prepared for war; they are afraid of it. And when a million people die tonight, your president must surrender to me or face a revolution that will leave America in anarchy."

Dirck felt that this might be so. Men fighting for the lives of their wives and children, would demand that Shagi's terms be met.

However, he laughed ironically and said: "You don't know Americans."

He heard the camouflaging branches pulled off the three-planes, heard the shouts of the ground crew as gasoline and oil were poured in for long flights.

Though Shagi had said nothing about the two extra radio beam machines, he heard them pulled out and placed in the planes. He even heard a long, clicking dialogue by Shagi which he deduced to be an instruction to subordinates as to how to operate the radio beams.

The time had come to put Dirck's plan in operation. He had merely been roped to the pallet and during the long hours of the night and morning, he had worked slowly at his bonds and had loosened them so

far as to know he could free himself of them.

He was interrupted by the arrival of the Japanese dictator.

"You shall make the trip with me," declared Shagi. "You shall witness the total destruction of New York. I shall start at the Battery and work north. I have sent warning for all people to leave their houses, for tomorrow they will have none. And then, by you, I shall send my final ultimatum. If it is not accepted, I will continue war and demoralize the United States."

DIRCK said nothing; the man's boasting merely verified facts as Dirck knew them.

And so, presently his legs were unbound, and a guard with a rifle prodded him out into the open clearing. He saw what he expected. The three airplanes that composed Shagi's deadly fleet, were lined up, mechanics swarming over them for the final check-up. In each cabin reposed a radio beam machine, with two Japanese to operate it, another to press the button, a fourth to pilot the ship.

The Fokker was the closest ship. Dirck saw with some surprise that Shagi's preparations had even gone so far as spare engines, for the one damaged in the fight over New York had been removed, and another substituted. A mechanic was adjusting the pitch of the prop.

The two Japanese at the radio beam machine of the Fokker were not inside, and turning, Dirck, saw them tinkering with some huge wet batteries. He felt of the rope around his wrists. It was loose. But unobtrusively he jerked at it until he felt sure he could slip the yoke of it at any second.

There was no time to lose. He saw one of the Japanese guards approaching with the handcuffs that had bound him and Joe in helpless fury on the first voyage of destruction. He waited a few seconds more. The mechanic on the starboard engine climbed down, went into the cabin and pressed the starter. The engine flailed into life, and with a throttle adjustment timed the revolutions of the new engine with the other two which were already idling.

THEN the mechanic climbed down the small ladder and went to Shagi bowing and clicking.

Shagi turned and approached the Fokker. The man with the gleaming handcuffs broke into a trot. The other two ships had their crew aboard, and it was obvious that the expedition only awaited Shagi's climbing aboard.

Yet Dirck was not hurried. A slip now meant death, worse than death, for nothing then could save the millions of people in peril of their lives. He turned casually to find his guard, the rifle in the crook of his arm, watching the approach of the master.

Quickly now Dirck slipped his bonds. With a sudden motion his right fist thudded out, struck the guard at the base of the skull in what is known as the rabbit punch. Without a sound the man plunged forward on his face.

On the instant Dirck ran madly for the Fokker. Behind him a shout went up, a shout of alarm, of fear, of fury. He heard Shagi's sonorous voice cry out. Almost instantly a patter of fired weapons shattered the silence.

But though these slugs broke windows in the Fokker, they did not stop Dirck Strenger. He had crossed that intervening space in a twinkling. One leap through the cabin carried him to the control seat, a wicker affair like a chair. An out-thrust hand pushed wide open the three throttles that controlled the motors.

Upon the air burst the frightful din of tornado motors roaring wide open. Before Dirck had so much as the chance to clasp the wheel stick, the Fokker was rocking across the field, its tail-skid dragging and sending up a cloud of dust.

Rapidly Dirck thrust the stick forward, the tail-skid left the ground and the Fokker began swifter and swifter to course toward the high bank of green fields at the end of the field.

Bullets thudded through the duraluminum walls and with a prodigious spurt a short, stocky Japanese dashed forward and clasped at the opening where the door should have closed. He held a pistol, but due to the rapidly increasing speed of the Fokker dare not release his hand to fire it. He hung on.

Dirck cursed. The man's weight would probably cause the Fokker to plunge into the woods and smash into bits. He could feel the Fokker tugging to rise, and pressed hard left with the stick to keep the right wing from dragging. Each second shortened his chance of a take-off.

With a desperate curse he hauled back on the stick. The Fokker gave a convulsive hop, settled back, then bounced again, and then with the woods fairly staring him in the face, lifted and began slowly to waddle up to the sky.

THE Japanese still hung to the opened door. His mouth was opened, his yellow teeth gleaming, and his eyes held that desperate look of a fanatic determined to kill himself if by so doing he could destroy another.

A scraping sound. The undercarriage of the Fokker touching tree limbs. The nose started to dip, yet Dirck held her grimly in the highest climbing angle she would stand.

Onward and upward now went the

Fokker. One hundred feet. Two hundred feet! Dirck looked downward and behind. The other two planes were already off the ground, climbing swiftly. Dirck had a sudden sinking of the heart. Shagi was aboard one of those planes. They also possessed the radio beam machine, copied from the original model, and once they got within range of him, the Fokker would fall in melted ruin.

At the same moment the Japanese hanging grimly to the door, hooked his feet in some fashion and releasing the curl of the elbow of the hand that held the automatic, he raised it and fired.

The spurt of orange flame cut across the cabin, the slug whanged by Dirck and through the windshield. A miss, yet the man was preparing to fire again. He could not miss all six shots. Dirck cast another glance behind. Still less than seconds in which to act. Of a sudden he flung on the stabilizer holding the climbing angle.

Whang! A slug nicked the aileron wheel. Another speared through Dirck's clothing. A third caught him in the hip and half flung him across the cabin.

YET this was fortunate, for it threw him out of the direct range of the discharging automatic. And when he picked himself up, the Japanese, still with the wide-eyed stare of the fanatic was shifting his aim to fire again. How the man managed to hang on so long with the slip-stream tearing at him, was a miracle. Yet he did so, and as Dirck lunged across the cabin he saw the black snout pointed at him for the final fatal burst.

Dirck then did a simple thing. Like a man sliding into second base, he lunged ahead, feet forward, sliding on the cabin floor. His outstretched feet struck the Japanese in the face. With a desperate yell, succeeded almost instantly by a faint cry of "Banzai," the man lost his hold. Dirck, catching himself at the door to keep from sliding out into space, had a momentary glimpse of a black kicking figure hurtling down into the green mass of trees.

Then he picked himself up, found his left leg barely able to hold his weight and crawled to the control seat.

Behind him the lighter ships were gaining rapidly. Even as he looked he saw one of them point up in a vertical zoom that brought the nose of the ship squarely onto the Fokker.

Shagi was going to turn loose the radio beam.

CHAPTER X

The Strangest Battle in the World

IRCK realized the grave peril. He understood that he had but one chance to live and defeat Shagi's purpose. That was to keep the Fokker out of range of the enemy's radio beam and try himself, if possible, to use the weird machine that rested back there on the floor. He had already released the stabilizer and now, as the pursuing ship behind nosed up, he crossed the controls of the giant three-motore'd plane and prayed that she would stunt.

Loggy, heavy after the lighter, speedier Lockheed, the ship slowly answered the impulses of her crossed top rudder and the down-pulled aileron. The nose went over, lazily she flopped on her back, hung there for an instant, then fell off in a vertical dive. Even this maneuver barely helped her, for Dirck, watching the wings, saw the tip end become, apparently, a glutinous mass.

But the removal of the melting ray hardened it almost at once and as he dove downward, he pulled back on the stick, cornered it, and came in on a sharp angling bank to aim directly for the Boeing.

At another time he could have smiled at the result, for Shagi, knowing the power of the ray, and thinking Dirck meant to attack, sheered off sharply and zoomed up the sky in an attempt to throw the American off range.

It was exactly the opportunity Dirck craved, for the second Japanese plane did likewise. Instantly he flung on the stabilizer, ran as best he could with his wounded leg to the back of the cabin and flung up the cover of the radio death ray.

What he saw was simplicity itself. There was a switch that threw the current into the anodes. Here were two dials, one for direction of the wave and the other for control of the width. The whole was, likely enough by Shagi, hooked up to the button on the end of the insulated wire. Doubtless, Shagi had intentions of having the pilot, with the machine hooked up and ready, aim the ship as combat planes are aimed and then press the button to release the melting wave.

ALL this, now, worked in favor of Dirck. He flung home the switch, saw the anodes light brightly green, felt but did not hear a powerful hum. He quickly adjusted the width dial to twenty yards, fixed the direction dial so the wave would be thrown straight ahead. With the switch home, he had now but to sit in his seat, aim the Fokker and press the button. The radio beam would do the rest.

Yet even as he had done this and once more removed the stabilizer and seated himself, he knew he was still under a terrific handicap. The six-motored Fokker, all metal, a veritable liner of the air, was too heavy

to stunt; it had not the speed of the two pursuers and unless a miracle took place one or the other of Shagi's crates would get the radio beam on him first.

Then nothing could follow but death below.

He glanced at the altimeter. It read eight thousand feet. But he knew it had not been adjusted to the mountains and was not surprised to see a peak ahead over which he would have to climb. Beyond that might be sufficient open air for him to maneuver in.

He looked around the sky as he had once done when a combat pilot.

The two enemy ships, miles of air between them, were cautiously banking around behind and below him, their obvious intention to drive at him simultaneously from both flanks.

Dirck nodded his head; a small sigh escaped through his clenched teeth. It was a clever move and one that might succeed. The ships swept up on him quickly, for he was still climbing for altitide to get over the mountain peak ahead. What to do?

He suddenly yanked the control post hard right. A vertical bank with the possibility of a side-slip into the mountain slope followed. But he dared not wait. He saw a chance, a bare chance of tricking Shagi and it was too good to waste. As he roared around the wide bank, the nacelle of the Fokker pointed squarely at the ship on his left. He did not know the distance these radio beams could be flung, but here was a chance to find out. He pressed the button.

THE Shagi plane, angling, did not hesitate. But its sudden zoom told him that while not strong enough to do destruction at the distance, the wave had been felt. The pilot was zooming to get out of range. This

cost it distance, flung it off the target and gave Dirck time to turn his attention to the second plane.

It was well he did so, for coming in at a speed of a hundred and fifty miles an hour, it literally leaped across the intervening space.

Dirck nosed the Fokker down, swept back on the stick just as the undercarriage swept the topmost branches of the green conifers growing on the slope below.

He shot down at an angle until the heavy Fokker had picked up tremendous speed. Then with a haul back on the stick he poked her nose at the sky. With an almost human howl the six roaring motors hauled the heavy ship in a skyward zoom.

HE leveled her off just as he was beginning to hang on the props. The maneuver had flung him squarely at right angles to the pursuing ship which, tearing on at terrific speed, could do no more than bank away from him. But he was close, very close. And the black button in his right hand sunk into the slot to the hilt.

The result was instantaneous.

The enemy crate seemed to halt in mid-air. It wings crumpled, but being of fabric with duralumin bracing, did not fall off. They merely flopped down like a hound's ears. The ship went on for perhaps five hundred yards and then fell backward on its tail, did a half-spin, nosed over and crashed at terrific speed straight for the pine forest below. Dirck had one glimpse of its fuselage, minus the wings now diving like a javelin into the green depths. Then he had flicked past, banked sharply and turned for the final ship, the most dangerous plane, that held Hiro Shagi, world dictator.

Success had crowned Dirck's effort, but it was only a beginning.

With Shagi still alive, with a radio beam machine still on the other plane, he had actually accomplished no more than reducing the odds against him. At least it would be an even fight, save for the fact that Shagi's crate had twice the speed of this heavy Fokker.

As he banked around two miles away from the cautious Shagi he became aware of black dots like a flock of crows to the right. Yet they were not crows, as he knew. They were combat planes, summoned either by a searcher or some alarm from the ground.

Dirck wished to warn them away, but there was no way possible, and besides as he saw Shagi's ship wheel like a swooping hawk to close in on an eagle, he had no time.

Now began a tiganic struggle. The pilot of Shagi's plane was a clever one; he knew every trick and maneuver moreover, he had a light cabin job that handled more quickly, turned faster and stunted better than the heavier transport plane of Dirck's. Furthermore, Dirck's leg was giving out on him. His right foot against the rudder pedal was nearly paralyzed; and he suffered excruciating agony.

THE radio beam, as Dirck had discovered, was effective up to a thousand yards; beyond that it would not function. From this fact he understood why Shagi had risked everything to nose into New York's canyon to attack the huge buildings at the base.

The fact now kept the two planes circling cautiously a mile apart, watching and maneuvering for an opening by which to roar swiftly in, discharging the radio beam, and get away before the other plane had a similar opportunity to kill.

Meantime, as Dirck could see by occasional glances, the combat squadron from the south was winging rapidly to the scene. They came boldly like flights of geese, their V formation not changing a hair's breadth. Dirck recognized them from the precision of the flight; the United States Marine crack combat group. This squadron, with ropes tied to each other's wings, had off the ground together, stunted together in the air and flown in all maneuvers and landed without once breaking one of the connecting ropes.

They were intrepid flyers, dangerous, of course, against their own kind, but as children led to the slaughter in bucking Shagi's radio beam that would destroy them all in one blast.

Closer and closer they came. The angle of their approach would make them attack Shagi first, who lay now a mile to the south of the banking Fokker. Minutes, aye, seconds, lay between these brave youngsters and instant oblivion.

DIRCK watched a second longer, for when a man decides to get himself killed he does not do so recklessly, but with thought. He reasoned that with Shagi crashed, America's peril was gone. Why sacrifice these youngsters just to watch for an opportunity to kill off the dictator and save his own life?

In sudden decision Dirck cornered the stick, made a forty-five degree bank and, after leveling off, with all six motors churning wide open, he drove headlong for Hiro Shagi's plane. Dirck's eyes were but slits, his mouth was tight, his hands on the control pillar strong as steel. Not a variation did he make. His thumb hovered over the little black button and with slight shifts of the aileron wheel and an occasional kick at the rudder, he kept the nacelle pointed at Shagi's ship.

Below him like a green flood the thickly studded mountainside swept by. In those trees below lay oblivion, death, but safety for a million people.

SHAGI'S pilot had turned to blast away at the Marine squadron. But someone aboard must have seen Dirck's move, for the ship suddenly banked sharply, half wheeled earthward in a vertical dive. The obvious intention was to zoom at Dirck from beneath.

Diving meant sharp danger for Dirck, yet he never hesitated. The huge Fokker monoplane shricked down the sky. Bullets began to break through the duralumin hull. The Marine squadron, knowing nothing of what was happening, was opening fire on him, seeing here only enemies.

Down, down and still farther down shot Shagi's ship. With the speed it had attained and wide open motor, it could zoom a thousand feet in less than seconds. Much too fast for Dirck.

Yet the Japanese pilot was playing into Dirck's hands. Already Dirck leveled off. The huge Fokker squatted with the force of the dive. Then the wings gripped the air and she began to shoot ahead.

Shagi zoomed. Too late, the Japanese pilot saw the danger, that he would zoom right into Dirck's radio beam. With some sort of twist to the joy-stick the Japanese pilot laid the crate on her side, kicked top rudder and made a swift turn that bore straight into Dirck.

The two ships were less than four hundred feet apart when both leveled off and they tore at each other like ferocious wolves.

Carefully Dirck tilted the nacelle with a touch of the stick. His thumb went home.

"Now," he breathed. "It's done." At the same instant his motors

quit. The Fokker around him shook like loose jelly. The wings fell back with a crash against the cabin. The fuselage twisted into a crazy mass, the six-wing motors suspended by cradles that had become as putty fell loose and plunged two thousand feet to earth.

Dirck released the now useless stick and peered out at Shagi's ship. Had he chosen death only to fail now? He looked. Then he laughed, a high screaming laugh that was one of joy and relief.

"Let's go," he shouted recklessly, and folded his arms.

Shagi's plane, minus her wings, with a motor that was a mass of melted steel, was dropping like a spear toward the green pine forest beneath. Shagi was done for, and that being so, Dirck sat quietly and watched the mountain side plunge up at him to smash him to bits.

CHAPTER XI

Conclusion

OE CRUMRINE pounded on the pilot's back. "Open her up," he screamed into the man's ear, "or get to hell out of that seat and let a guy fly that knows how."

The radio man at the right jerked at Joe's arm, pulled his head down and screamed above the roar of the master. "Marine Captain Christian has radioed the location. There's some kind of a fight between the enemy machines."

"That's Dirck," shouted Joe. "He's got loose and is fighting it out. Hurry! Hurry!"

The Travelair cabin job was hurrying, sweeping up the Hudson River at a hundred and sixty miles an hour.

But to Joe it was a crawl. Despite the fact that he had been compelled to leave Dirck, it irked him to think of leaving a pal, a brother operative, in danger of his life.

He hung over the wireless reception instrument, face pale, lips white, reiterating: "What now? What's the Gyrene say?"

The operator shook his head. Nothing new was coming in.

A BOVE West Point the Travelair cut in north by northwest and now the radio operator suddenly paled.

"God!" he muttered.

"What is it?" Joe pounded him on the back. "Speak, quickly!"

"Two of the enemy planes attacked each other just as the Marine squadron arrived. One fell without any wings into a pine forest. The other melted away, a Fokker job, the sender says, and crashed on the mountain side."

"Crashed!" The word was mouthed rather than spoken by Joe.

He knew what had happened. Dirck had escaped, and rather than have the Marine flyers killed like so many sheep had turned his own Fokker into the deadly radio beam. Even as he had killed Shagi, so had Shagi killed him. The Secret Service operative had sacrificed his life to end the menace.

"Ah, God!" muttered Joe. "He was a man-Dirck."

The Travelair tore onward, and presently was skimming at eight thousand feet above the Catskills. From here it was not far. Soon the circling specks of the Marine squadron were seen. They grew larger.

Joe sat stunned. He paid no attention to anything. The menace to the United States was removed, and despite the danger of the menace, the price of Dirck Strenger's life seemed too much to pay.

He saw, presently, as he lifted his head from his hands, that the Marine squadron had separated. But eight ships were still in the sky, and these were fish-tailing it for a distant landing field. "Follow on," he ordered the pilot lifelessly.

As he sat, a picture of sorrow and dejection, he recalled all that had happened since, blindfolded, he had been dumped from a plane near the Tarrytown highway.

HE remembered the hysteria that had invaded the nation. Never as long as he lived would he forget the endless lines of motor cars that jammed every road. Men, women and children hung in them. Thousands fleeing on foot, reminded him of the devastated areas of the World War in years agone.

The sight of motor cars smashed, their occupants killed. The sight of a deserted New York where people fled from subway entrance to subway entrance like rats from holes. He remembered the thousands who had crowded into the subways in the hope of being saved, crowded in so thickly that trains had stopped. The endless streams of humanity passing through the Hudson tubes.

And the thousands of olive-drab soldiers patrolling the streets, sticking in the shadow of the gigantic skyscrapers, although knowing that at any second they would be buried under tons of ruins.

Dirck had saved the nation from all that. The nation was aghast, but it would recover—at the price of two good lives. He thought of Lither, who had died, of the taciturn spokesman for the President, of the thousands of telegrams, yes, some said a million, that poured into Washington threatening revolution if the President did not at once accept the terms of Hiro Shagi.

Dirck Strenger had saved them from all that.

And in doing so Dirck had died. He felt the Travelair suddenly pique for the long glide, and glanced out of the cabin window. He gave a start. The field below, he was sure, was the one which Shagi had taken for his headquarters. He saw Marine combat ships being hastily hauled out of the way so that the Travelair could have a clear field to land. He caught a wisp of signal smoke, felt the Travelair bank to come into the wind and then the pilot sat her down and she came to a halt with screeching brakes.

Joe leaped through the door, raced to a natty Marine pilot puffing on a cigarette. "Dirck Strenger," he cried. "What of him?"

The pilot shrugged. "Never heard of him."

"He was piloting the Fokker that crashed Shagi."

"Oh, him! Man, he fell like a ton of brick. Four of our fellows are up in the woods looking for him. Ought to be back any minute—there they come now."

Out of the patch of woods to the east four dots appeared, carrying a shapeless bundle.

Joe ran, ran as he had never run before. His breath came in gasps. He gained on the little group, and hardly was he within shouting distance than he cried out: "Is he—is he—dead?"

The leader, a man with captain's bars pinned to his forest-green tunic, shook his head.

"Both legs broken, a bullet wound in the hip and a broken arm and a cut in his head. If he has any luck at all he should pull through."

JOE began to cry, and he cried all the way back to the little hut of Shagi's where he and Dirck had been kept prisoners. Here Dirck, pale as a ghost, legs at crooked angles, lay senseless. A bit of liquor was procured and with this they presently revived him.

is good."

"Shagi dead?" was his first weak query.

"We've got the body," answered the Marine briefly. "Dead as hell."

"And the machines?"

"Smashed into a thousand pieces."
Dirck let his head fall back.
"Thank God," he said slowly. "That
was an instrument too close to being
god-like for humanity to possess.
Its secret died with Felix, and now
it will never be known. And that

GRUFFLY the others echoed him.

The truth was kept from the public who never really knew what caused the crashing of the buildings.

And Dirck, ten days later, ensconsed in the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, read with a deep satisfaction the hasty apology of the newly formed Japanese Government. It was a complete disavowal of Shagi and all his works, an utter, abject apology which the United States perforce accepted at once.

And so, presently when Dirck could walk once more, he and Joe Crumrine went one night at eight o'clock to the Army, Navy and State Building. Once again the side door of the White House opened to permit a muffled figure to swing swiftly across the road.

This man entered the room where Dirck, still rather pale, and Joe Crumrine sat.

The muffled man this time did not lay aside his clothing. Nor did he speak long. But it was to the point.

"In the name of the nation," said the muffled man, "the President extends his thanks. You know the rules of the service in his secret corps. No credit if you succeed, no recognition if you die. So you must accept these thanks and know that the President is praying tonight in thankfulness of the blow that was spared America. And he has asked me to give you each this ring."

His thin, clawlike hand slid from under his cloak. He extended two simple gold rings upon which was engraved the scal of the United States. Inside were Dirck's and Joe's names.

"You will not wear these ever in public," ordered the muffled man.

Silently they took the rings and slipped them into their pockets. The muffled man went as far as the door, and here he paused.

"You are fully recovered?" This to Dirck.

THE latter nodded. "Then I am bidden to inform you that it is the President's wish that you take over the duties of poor Lither and become head of the secret corps, and recruit another from the ranks of the aerial branch."

"Accepted," said Dirck simply.

"And, since you have accepted," continued the muffled man, "you are ordered to be here tomorrow night at nine o'clock for conference with me. It is understood?"

"A new mission?" asked Dirck.

"Үев."

"We'll be here."

"Then I bid you good-night," and the muffled man glided noiselessly through the door.

Joe took a breath. "Boy, there ain't much rest in this job."

Dirck grinned. "No, the secret war continues, world without end. But it's a great game!"

"I'll tell the world," assented Joe.

Next Month: RED SILVER, by Jackson Cole. A Complete Book-Length Novel of Pulse-Stirring Adventure in the Wild Black Sierras of Spain. Don't Miss It!

Guerrilla Brand



Moments Packed With Peril in an Exciting Struggle Against Desperate Mexican Bandits

By JACKSON COLE

Author of "Pearls of Peril," "Gun Justice," etc.

OLD hands from a cold deck—but they're hot tamales, eh?" cried Rory McCrory, his blazing hazel eyes boring into the smoldering black-opal eyes in the mahogany face across the table. "Let me corral all the cock-eyed chips till I get excited, and then you call 'em all back to Poppa! Cold decks in the sleeves, in the pants, in the boots! Reckon that half-bushel hat o' yours is full of 'em! But you can't kid a red-headed McCrory—not all the time!"

The swart face of the Mexican.

three-quarters Indian, had scarcely changed, but its deep-set eyes glowed like coals. He shifted the gaudy serape that was draped over his right shoulder, and uncovered the hilt of the bowie knife which rested handily in the folds of the rainbow sash about his ample waist.

He could chuck that knife, Rory knew, right into a man's heart or neck, as swift and sure as an arrow. Or he could stick or slash with it, right across the narrow table, with the deft hand of a butcher.

With calm, cool insolence the

Mexican lifted the bottle of tequila and poured a drink for himself. Rory had sampled and rejected the liquor, saying that it would be better in the gas tank of his car.

"Pick up your cards!" Rory said sharply. "You got what you wanted, didn't you? What is it this time, a

royal flush?"

I AM—what you call—a gentleman!" the Mexican bandit announced haughtily. "I am a general, of the Revolution! And you would say, then, that I cheat, Señor?"

He leaned back from the table as he spoke, and hooked the thumb of his right hand into a fold of the sash, close to the hilt of the knife.

Rory's right hand was itching to reach for the .45 Bisley Colt in the holster on his right hip, but he knew Mexicans—especially when they were dark red with Indian blood.

The bandit was a big fellow, getting fat from heavy eating and drinking, but his kind had inherited the craft and cunning, and the lightning quickness of motion, of the Plumed Serpent.

Rory had no chance to work his holster into position for a jerk that would fetch the gun out blazing; he might even fumble the draw in a fatal split-second; but that gleaming knife was ready, resting loosely in the sash, and it would flash out like the fangs of the rattler.

So Rory yawned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, no, you don't cheat, General," he sighed wearily. "You just pick 'em out and hand 'em to yourself—and you don't care who sees you do it. No, that isn't cheating!"

"Yankee pig!" cried the bandit, "you insult General José María Bustamante!"

His eyes blazing, he lurched forward across the table in his fury, and the tense hand glided like a snake's head toward the hilt of the knife.

Rory lurched forward, too, and the hand which could not travel fast enough to that holstered gun, traveled in another direction. His clenched fist shot up and out, with muscle and brawn behind it, and hooked the burly Mexican on his jutting lower jaw.

Back he went, as if hit by a sledge hammer—back into his chair. And the chair was hurled back against the wall with a crash. General José María Bustamante's hand groped uncertainly for the knife, and his eyes rolled in his head like a dying man's, as he tried dazedly to see his assailant and recover his equilibrium.

But now the .45 Bisley Colt was yanked from its holster, with its muzzle trained to blast the heart out of the bandit.

"Grab some air—'way up high!"
Rory commanded fiercely. "Make
one more move for that pig-sticker
and I'll blow you higher than Popocatepetl!"

The Mexican's brown hand was on the knife, and he was gathering his scattered senses together by sheer will power, but the Colt was so big and so close that courage flopped, and the hands shot into the air.

RORY reached across the table and plucked the knife from the sash with his left hand, then frisked his captive and took a seven-inch barreled .38, all nickel and ivory, from a shoulder holster under the velveteen bolero jacket.

"Yankee coyote!" muttered José. "Always the double-cross. You come to this inn for eat and drink—you make friends with me—and then the double-cross!

"But you make for yourself suicide!" he added with a cunning gleam in his eye. "All alone, you pull the seex-gun on the general of the Revolution. You attack the ar-r-r-rmy of the Revolution!"

"Yes, I know you're a big shot, José," Rory chuckled. "General Bustamante, horse thief and field marshal of guerrillas! But your army is a long way off, José, and we're stopping here in this nice, quiet little village. You start anything now, and I'll be making you just a historical guy for folks to read about.

"I'm arresting you as a plain, low-down horse thief, and I'm going to take you down to Durango, to the police. I trailed you from Nazas this morning, and I didn't see anything of your army or your Revolution. This is the first news broadcast I've heard about your cockeyed revolution."

YOU will hear plenty!" growled the general, with ominous dignity. "All Durango—all Chihauhua! —the people will rise—they are rising! I shall be president!"

He heaved a sigh of weariness and eased his strained arms by letting them sag at the shoulders.

"Keep 'em up!" snapped the American. "The presidential candidate is charged with horse stealing, so the revolution is off. Forty-four yearling polo ponies, run off William McCrory's hacienda!"

"It is war!" José declared proudly. "Ponies are needed for the cavalry of the Revolution. I am the general, so I requisition the ponies for my ar-r-rmy. Be careful, Señor, how you speak of horse stealing to one who shall be the president!"

"I've got the general and the horse thief!" said Rory, "and I'm perfectly satisfied. And you—you old fox I—reported in Sonora this morning, traveling north!"

"Quien sabe? Perhaps I am in Sonora," said José, with a grin of savage humor.

"Perhaps you are," said Rory;
"I've heard about your black magic
—or yellow magic! All you 'breeds
look alike, anyhow. They say Pancho Villa had half a dozen ringers.
He could be in Mexico City, and
lead a border raid up north the same
day. My brother, Señor William
McCrory, didn't fall for the Sonora
alibi, however, and he's looking for
you right now with a troop of
rurales. I was headed for his
hacienda when I spotted you riding
out of Nazas."

"And you came all the way to this inn to play the treacherous trick upon me—to take me by surprise!"

"I don't like to make mistakes," said Rory. "I didn't want to drag you to the police at Durango, and then find that I had nabbed some poor village caballero. I knew you would crow, like any gamecock if I gave you a little time. And you did, José! Already you've crowed about stealing the ponies, and you've built up the whole case for the prosecution."

"You do not like to make mistakes, Señor, but you have made one!" Bustamante remarked portentously. "You think I am your prisoner? You think I have fear of you and your seex-gun?

"Ha, ha! I laugh at you! Two guns and my knife you have—yet you are my prisoner! To escape from the dungeon of San de Ulloa, that would be more easy, Señor, than for you to escape from me here."

A LL right, I can laugh, too, José," said Rory. "You are a funny guy! Do you get all your dreams from mescal and tequila, or do you hit the poppy pipe? You are all alone with me in this peaceful little pueblo, yet you're still seeing armies and things—and I reckon you get a kick out of it. Trouble is, the rural guard is just as hard boiled with a hombre.

for dreaming he has an army, as they would be if he had one."

José laughed, and the grin that was left on his face was wolfish.

"Wait and see, amigo! You are the brother of Señor William Mc-Crory. He is rich. I shall take the big ransom, if I permit you to live. But I shall put my brand upon you, you Yankee maverick!—the brand of the guerrilla, General José María Bustamante y Robredo!"

He clapped his hands, and a Mexican peon of doubtful age came to the door of the room, and halted with a nervous start as he saw Rory's gun. His face was wrinkled and weatherbeaten, but his blueblack Indian hair, bobbed at the neck, was without a trace of gray.

RORY observed him alertly, watching for signs of hostility, and discovered that he had no ears. The straight, coarse hair hung close to the head, over scars where the ears had been.

"Excellencia!" muttered the man, bobbing his head in a salute to José, then continued to regard Rory with a dull, but apprehensive eye, as a dog might watch a man with a whip.

"Pedro, attend me!" the bandit said grandly. "I will give orders to the men of the pueblo. You shall take them for me."

"Si, Señor-Excellencia!"

"You observe, Señor McCrory,"
José murmured suavely, "that my
faithful Pedro is branded. He committed a crime, and he is branded
that all men may know of his crime.
He disobeyed my orders, and he was
branded. Now he is a faithful servant, and he will never disobey another command.

"My brand, you will see, Señor, is not easy to change. It is better than the brand of the hot iron, for it cannot be changed by a double-cross, like the brand on a maverick's hide. You can only change my brand by cutting off the head, Señor McCrory. A man's ears are not easy to put back."

Pedro stood waiting.

"Go!" said Bustamante. "Give orders to all the pueblo, that men and horses shall be ready for my command when the moon rises. We ride tonight to the fine hacienda, where there are more good horses—and much meat and wine also."

"Come, José!" Rory said impatiently, "we've got to be shoving off. The only hacienda you are riding to is the calaboose at Nazas, and then the court at Durango. You've got a fine imagination, and you're pretty well hopped up on tequila; but you can't bluff me with your tales about cropping ears and commanding armies and things."

"Wait and see!" muttered Bustamante ominously. "The Revolution, it has commenced. There will be no rich men, no more big haciendas. Your brother comes to Mexico to have a great range for his horses and cattle, and the vaquero of Durango gets not so much pay as the cowboy of Texas. Your brother is caballero, an oppressor of the poor. I shall divide his hacienda among the peons, also his horses and his money.

"Your brother, then, and you also, I shall brand with the guerrilla's brand!"

THE pueblo was little more than a single street of stone and adobe houses, with palm-thatched roofs. As in nearly all Mexican villages of that class, there was little activity around the houses in the heat of the day. Children and goats were in the street, but the men and women were resting and keeping cool.

Now, all at once, however, Rory looked out the window, and saw

with surprise that men were crowding into the street.

"Get up, José!" Rory said sharply.
"It's time for us to start along. I'm
not afraid that any one will stop
me, but I don't want to be bothered
with any public meetings, and I
don't want to hear you make any
more speeches."

Heavy boots grated on the adobe floor of the inn, and José's dark face expanded in a grin of savage delight and triumph.

"To me! compañeros!" he cried fiercely, starting up. "Seize this gringo!"

Rory sprang back to the wall, facing the door, and kept his gun leveled upon his prisoner.

THERE was no rush in answer to the bandit's call for help, but five men came into the room adjoining the small dining room.

They peered furtively at Rory through the doorway, muttering together sullenly.

Rory's sharp eyes caught a sudden movement in the group and the flash of metal.

He whipped his gun around and fired, and there was a wild yell in the other room, and a helter-skelter retreat from the doorway.

At the same instant José Bustamante lunged forward recklessly, and the table between the two men crashed against Rory's legs.

Rory fired as he fell, but the plunge forward spoiled his aim. He saw José reaching for him, and, at close grips, he crashed the gun down upon the bandit's head.

The weight of the Bisley Colt and the force of the blow crumpled the steeple crown of the Mexican sombrero, and José's two hundred pounds went down with a thud of dead weight upon the adobe floor.

A gun flashed and popped in the other room, and the bullet flicked

Rory's thick hair and singed his scalp.

He was on his feet, and he vaulted the overturned table, gained the doorway and emptied the Colt at the men who were jammed in the outer vestibule of the inn. All of them shrieked, and one slumped down, the others trampling on the body as they fought to escape.

The American drew back and got José's ivory-handled .38 where it had fallen from the table, and the knife with it, then filled the cylinder of the Bisley with cartridges. All was quiet at the moment, and he had twelve cartridges ready for business, and cold steel if the battle were brought to close quarters.

The bandit leader lay huddled by table, breathing sterterously now, puffing out his thick lips at every snort. A man who has had a heavy Colt bent over his head, as they put it in Texas, is likely to remain "out" for some time, and Rory gave all his attention to his immediate situation. He turned the oblong table on end, with the top toward the door, to serve as a fortification. The top was formed of a one-inch oak plank, and would resist any sort of ordnance likely to be found in the village.

The small dining room had two other tables similar in design, and he turned them over and ranged them with the first, making an effective breastwork.

As he stepped back to consider the set-up, a gun roared like a cannon in the other room, and buckshot peppered the tables and the whitewashed wall.

HE sprang forward and let go with the Colt, and dropped another man, as there was another stampede of foes through the vestibule.

For a moment he considered tying

José up with his rawhide boot laces, but the gaudy rainbow-striped serape and sash presented themselves, and he tore the serape into strips and bound its owner securely hand and foot.

José was groaning now, showing more signs of returning consciousness, but Rory rolled him along the floor and arranged his bulky form in front of the table tops.

"Hey! you hombres out there!" he shouted at the unseen enemy outside. "Here's a target for you. You can't miss it! Give us another load of buckshot, and you'll bag a general—Excellencia General José María Bustamante y Robredo. Now, blaze away, you yellow-livered coyotes!"

DARKNESS had fallen on the inn of the peublo in the valley, and Rory McCrory sat on a chair back of his barricade, with the Colt in his hand, listening to the guttural swearing of José Bustamante.

Pale light came in through the one unglazed window of the room, from a first-quarter moon, and the same light faintly illuminated the adjoining room. There was a dirty oil lamp within Rory's reach, but he did not light it, as it would be of greater benefit to the enemy than to him.

José had been fully conscious for two hours, and now Rory had serious thoughts of gagging him. The bandit chief raved continually. He appealed piously to his favorite saint in one breath, for life and liberty, then filled his lungs to pour forth blasphemous curses upon all mankind.

At intervals he complained, whimpering plaintively, that his skull was fractured and he was dying, but there was strength and vigor in his voice, and Rory mocked him contemptuously.

"Dog of a gringo!" he howled in

fury, "turn me loose, and you, too shall be free! I swear you shall be free!

"You have the word of honor of José Bustamante. Come! Let me loose, before I am paralyzed!

"Ah, my poor legs are dead to the hips! Set me free, Señor McCrory, and—I take my oath!—we shall part as good friends. Believe me, I am magnanimous! I have a soft heart! Better for any man, that I should be his friend. You will never regret the truce!

"But refuse to liberate me!" he thundered, dropping his voice an octave, "and you shall curse the day of your nativity! Listen to me, gringo! That is my oath! You cannot escape, whatever happens. Here we have you, treacherous coyote! caught like a javelino in a pit. Fool that you are, you are only prolonging your agony and making the fate that awaits you a thousand times worse for every minute of delay.

ISTEN well, Yankee booby! pig! toad!" he yelled, the voice soaring again to shrill treble, "you shall be made to surrender, and then—then! A-h-h-h! the brand of the guerrilla! It shall be a double brand, a triple brand! With my own knife I shall carve your face as the sculptor carves his clay. The ears—I shall slice them with my knife!—as one carves the wings from the roasted turkey.

"The nose!—yes, that impudent nose of yours shall be next. A fine sight you shall be, for all to behold. To kill you, you reptile!—No! that would be tender mercy. I shall turn you loose, when the carving is done. That will be justice!

"Women will faint at the sight of you! Little children will shriek and run away! Men will turn pale, but they will mock you and spit upon you! 'He was the vile and treacherous enemy of the great José Bustamante,' they will say, 'and justice has been done!"

"Hooey! Boloney!" Rory chuckled softly. "Viva Bustamante!"

José shrieked in his wild fury and floundered helplessly on the floor, groaning and straining to break his bonds.

All about the inn his henchmen whispered and chattered furtively, but none came into the adjoining room within range of Rory's gun.

The bar of moonlight left the white wall and streaked along the floor. Soon the moon would pass over the inn, and the room would be left in darkness.

Rory considered the situation, and decided that darkness would afford the foe too much advantage. He would light the lamp and place it so that it would cast some light across the other room.

HE was tired and hungry, and his throat was parched, but he planned to hold the fort against all odds till morning. His hope of escape was based upon the probable movements of his brother and the posse of the rural guard, and the likelihood of their return to Nazas through the little pueblo. Failing to find Bustamante in western Durango, they would scarcely prolong the search and cross the Sinaloa border; and the road to Nazas would be the logical route for their return.

If they did not come—well, that would be another problem for another day. He had plenty of ammunition for the sort of skirmishing he had done, and he felt no great respect for the intelligence of the enemy, or the rough tactics of guerrilla warfare.

Suddenly the room was thrown into darkness. Something had been thrust into the deep embrasure of the window to shut out the light.

Rory held his gun ready, aimed at

the doorway, and looked anxiously about. The moonlight was gone from the other room, too. The enemy had blocked both windows, evidently in preparation for an attack.

"There's going to be a battle now, General," he said to José, "and believe me, you are in a tough spot!"

José struggled and yelled, threatening his friends with his wrath, then begging them to be careful.

Meanwhile Rory lighted the oil lamp and placed it at one end of the barricade, where its rays would reach the outer room.

The men outside the house were still at work on the windows, and by the light of the lamp Rory saw that a large pad of palm matting had been stuffed into the opening. They were poking it, jamming it farther through the embrasure, and as an experiment he fired one shot from José's .38 into the wad of matting.

Jeers answered the shot, and the poking was continued. Apparently the men were using poles, and their actions were vaguely mystifying. The light was effectually cut off, if that were their object, but they seemed intent on making a thorough job of blocking the opening substantially, and Rory could not guess at a reasonable explanation.

"What are they doing, General?" he inquired of his prisoner.

"You shall see!" hissed the helpless captive, unwilling to admit ignorance. "You are not dealing with fools, gringo!"

I'M telling you, General, we're both in a tough spot! I'm no tenderfoot in Mexico, you know; I know your country and your people from Sonora to Yucatan. Give me three guesses, and I'll guess three times that you are out, José. Down and out! Your Mexicans love a change, and want it every few minutes. They're sick of your raving and yell-

ing, and they've elected a new leader. Does that make sense?".

The bandit cursed him for the suggestion.

"All right! You wait and see!" chuckled Rory, driving the captive to fresh raving.

José took breath after a series of spasms, and issued orders in a shrill, cracked voice. He commanded his men to come in boldly and rescue him. He ordered a charge, over Rory's fortifications, and a swift termination of the siege. If men must die, he intimated, they would die in a noble cause. His immediate rescue was imperative, he declared, whatever the cost might be.

THE response was silence—an eloquent silence, heavy with significance.

Rory laughed aloud, and his ridicule drove the bandit to the verge of madness, and made night hideous with his outcries.

All at once Rory snapped to attention, with a gun in each hand.

"Listen!" he snapped sharply to José. "Damn you! will you shut up and be quiet?"

The howls ceased abruptly, for José was quick to take fresh alarm.

A low grating noise came from the other room. It sounded as if something were being pushed along the sanded floor.

Rory thrust the .38 into his belt, and with his left hand picked up the lamp and raised it above the edge of the barricade.

At first he could see nothing unusual, but the grating rasp on the adobe continued; then something moved into his field of vision.

In a moment he made out the form of the object, and knew instantly its significance. It was a copper brazier as large as a sugar boiler, mounted on a massive iron standard—the primitive heating equipment of the Spanish colonials, and still in use in many Mexican houses.

Pale blue wisps of smoke rose from the brazier, and he knew that a damper had been fitted over the charcoal embers, and that the dangerous gas was already being generated in the room.

Long poles were used to push the brazier to a position in the center of that room, and presently the poles were withdrawn, and a door slammed and was fastened from outside with a bar.

Rory advanced from his stronghold and reconnoitered with caution. Peering around the door casing, he viewed the closed door, and was not surprised to discover a hole in the upper panel at least two inches in diameter.

He advanced a foot and scraped it on the rough floor, as if he were walking into the room, and instantly there was movement outside. He drew back swiftly, and a gun roared through the peep-hole and showered the room and the brazier with buckshot.

He was not surprised at that. The besiegers were using the tactics of simple common sense, anticipating his logical actions.

The smell of the gas was already strong in the inner room, and Bustamante coughed, and began to whine and rave.

Rory cast about him for ways of meeting the danger, but there was no water in the room, and nothing with which he could reach the brazier.

To test the enemy's alertness, he moved a chair across the threshold, and another burst of buckshot rained upon it. Then he picked up the chair and hurled it at the brazier with all his strength.

The heavy iron standard tipped at the shock, then righted itself, but the lighter copper bowl was dislodged, and it crashed on the floor, scattering charcoal embers and ashes all around.

Near the iron base, however, was lodged a mass of glowing coals, and spirals of opsi vapor wound upward and spread out on the still air in thin veils.

José suffered a violent paroxysm of coughing. He wheezed and choked, gasping for breath, and suddenly he relaxed and seemed to lose consciousness.

Rory tried to think, but he felt dizzy. The light seemed to be growing dim, or else it was obscured by the thickening vapor.

HE took a step forward, but felt himself sway drunkenly. Then, desperate, he charged into the other room, blundered against the door, and fired three shots from the Colt through the peep-hole.

He heard startled cries, then the shuffling of feet; and then he heard nothing more.

Some time during a prolonged period of mental darkness, Rory Mc-Crory either dreamed in feverish delirium, or actually sensed that he was being held by strong hands and bound with rough cords. In the dream, or in actual fact, he resisted and struggled against his captors, straining his muscles to break the harsh bonds and escape.

When he returned to full consciousness he was still in the room in the tavern, it was broad daylight, and the matting had been withdrawn from the windows, having served its purpose in the process of asphyxiation.

And, in sequence with the dimly remembered delirium, he was bound fast to a chair; his ankles lashed to the front legs of it, and his cut and bleeding wrists bound by cords which passed under the seat. He was very ill, feverish, nauseated and giddy, but he pulled himself together for a fresh ordeal, and grew interested as he saw José Bustamante before him, not exactly hale and hearty, but on his feet and still able to talk and harangue the multitude.

"Behold! He lives again!" cried the general, to a dozen peons that were in the room. "It was not for nothing, then, that I was spared, in spite of your treacherous attempt on my life—pigs and vipers! It was written that I should live to meet this man again!"

"My general, we must leave the pueblo, and now!" said a sober, anxious villager. "The rurales were quartered last night at a hacienda three hours' ride from here. They may come!"

Bustamante silenced him with a regal gesture, and rushed suddenly upon Rory.

His eyes were filled with hate.

"Ha! Little rat!" he cried, "do you know, then, that I saved your worthless life last night? More dead than alive, I fought valiantly against these fools who would have butchered you like a pig.

"And why?" he thundered dramatically. "Why should I lift one finger to spare such a wretch? It was because my word was spoken. What ever I promise, whatever I declare to be my will—that thing must be fulfilled, if I live."

RORY set his teeth and steeled himself against a shudder, as the bandit slowly drew from his belt the knife which had figured in their encounter of the day before.

"Think twice, general," he said huskily, his eyes never wavering as he looked the man in the eye. "The Mexican law is hard on halfbreed bandits, and international relations are involved." "Bah!" exclaimed José, drunk with the sense of power and vengeance, "if I were to die in the next moment, I would do this duty! The maverick is to be branded, and the branding iron is mine!"

Grinning grotesquely, he flashed the bright blade in front of Rory's eyes, then with a tip of a finger he lightly touched the top of his right ear.

"The right one first," he chortled fiendishly.

Rory's heart was pounding, and he felt dazed. He saw the grinning face and the bright knife in a lurid haze, and then he saw his own prized Bisley Colt sticking in the torturer's belt.

HE strained at his bonds desperately, but quietly, and he made no outcry. The cords cut into his scarified flesh, but he was able to turn his wrists. In that dream, or in fact, he had strained against his captors' efforts to bind him, and in doing so he had expanded his muscles. Now the muscles were relaxed, and the cords did not bind so tightly.

Through the film over his burning eye he saw the knife flash, and then he tore his right wrist loose, stripping the skin from it.

In the space of a lightning flash, he jerked the Colt from Bustamante's belt and pressed the trigger with his almost senseless forefinger.

In the flash and the explosion Bustamante seemed to fade out of his vision, but blindly he pressed the trigger again and again, and the faces of yelling, wild-eyed men swam in the mist before him.

He heard, in the general delirium, a new sound, outside the house, on the road, and then some one shrieked:

"The rurales! The police! They are here!"

He settled back then, relaxing, striving to clear his mind and readjust himself to the maze of events.

Then men stormed into the room with heavy boots and clinking spurs, and he saw them; but they were not rurales—they were vaqueros of the plains, and a villainous lot by every sign.

Suddenly the face of Bustamante rose again before him.

"What's this?" cried Bustamante sharply, "and who are you?"

"You should ask!" said Rory faintly. "For that matter, who are you?"

"I am José Bustamante!" said the other proudly, and Rory then noticed with amazement that he wore a Stetson hat and modern well-sprung riding breeches.

"Oh, yes," murmured Rory. "All right, I suppose you are José Bustamante, but—how many of him are there? Are you twins?—or are there more than that?—triplets—quadruplets—"

"There is but one," said the man, with dignity. "It is my misfortune that there are reptiles who resemble me. Even Pancho Villa was impersonated by treacherous jackals who betrayed his confidence. Now, I have been betrayed by a locoed breed, and I am humiliated and disgraced.

"I have heard a report of the man's treachery," he went on, "and now you shall see how I deal with vermin who take my name in vain."

He made a sign to his men, and drew a gleaming Cuban machete from a scabbard at his side.

"You shall see, Americano," he said, "how elegantly the keen machete can administer the guerrilla brand, to one who fails in his loyalty to me!"

The man who had been Rory's captive and captor was dragged for-

ward, struggling and shrieking, and he was bleeding from a wound in the side made by Rory's gun.

A vaquera had cut Rory's bonds, and he suddenly staggered to his feet.

"No, no, Señor Bustamante!" he said to the new leader. "This man is my prisoner. I have my duty, you see, to turn him over to the authorities at Durango. I protest, as an American citizen, against any outrage like the guerrilla brand, and I demand the custody of this fellow."

"The saints will bless you, noble young man!" cried the bogus Bustamante.

"General! The rurales!—they are upon us!" shouted a frantic vaquero; and José María Bustamante, the bandit general, turned with tragic dignity and listened to the thunder of iron-shod hoofs on the highway.

"Well, then, so be it!" he said coldly. "I am not a woman to turn pale at the sound of hoofbeats. Present my compliments to the captain of the rurales."

Soldiers of the rural guard

came clanking into the inn, and William McCrory, ranchman and polo player, rushed upon the dazed Rory with yells of relief and joy,

"Thank God we were in time, old boy!" he cried.

"Sure, it's fine!" Rory exclaimed, "but I'm a little groggy with all this excitement. It seems—well, I've been saved so many times, I can't get the whole thing straight."

"You've been the means of capturing José Bustamante," said his brother, "and now I may get my ponies back."

"Yes, I know," said Rory, "but this new José Bustamante never took your ponies. I have the confession of the other one, who has been prancing around the State of Durango in the guise of José Bustamante, and we'll be finding the ponies pretty close to this village.

"The real Bustamante may be wanted by the police, but he saved me before you did, Bill, and I'll have to do all I can for him in court. He's not the sort of a guy that would cut off a white man's ears!"

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HE cold dawn which presaged the terrific heat of the day abruptly put the night to flight; and once more in the inevitable cycle of time, the vastnesses of Thibet lay barren and exposed in the light of the morning.

Larry Weston opened his eyes, stretched his aching muscles and glanced around at the bare unclean room where he lay uncomfortably upon a pallette of straw.

He rose and dressed swiftly. Then, crossing the room, he pulled back the hanging skin that covered an aperture in the wall, and stared through the makeshift window toward the rocky mountain that lay to his left.

His gaze traversed its granite heights, and came to rest upon a huge edifice constructed of the same grim rock as the mountain itself, which perched itself precariously upon its rocky heights. Larry Weston sighed.

The slither of slippered feet behind caused him to turn and behold the Cantonese guide who had led him to this remote village in the fastness of the Thibetan mountain country. "Ah Lee bids good morning," intoned the Chinese in a sing-song voice. "He brings food."

He set a steaming bowl of rice down upon the floor, and by its side he placed a fragrant jug of tea. Then, with a low salaam, he bowed and was gone.

Larry Weston sighed again as he squatted down native fashion to partake of the food. As he ate his mind was occupied with the rockhewn structure at the top of the hill. His single consuming ambition in life was to enter that monastery. For that purpose he had traveled thousands of miles, only to be told by the sentry at its gates, that no one save a brother of the Lo Chang Tong was permitted to cross its threshold. So, it was, heart sick and weary, he had descended the hill to this village, where he had remained the night, hoping against hope that something might occur which would gain him entrance into the granite sanctuary at the top of the mountain.

Suddenly his hand held a chunk of fleshy rice poised in mid-air. For an instant it seemed that his whole body was petrified.



Larry's right fist crashed against the bearded man's jaw.

He froze to immobility, essaying a diagnosis of the noise which had just intruded itself into his consciousness.

Then it came again, and now there was no mistaking its source. It was the shrill high scream of a helpless human being in dire distress.

Larry Weston did not hesitate. A moment later, one hundred and eighty pounds of fighting American youth was tearing like a maniac through the scattered village in the direction of the thatched shack from which the scream had come.

Even as he approached the dilapidated building, another cry split the air and rang horribly in his ears. His right hand descended to his hip, and his .38 was in his hand as he jerked aside the dried skins which hung over the doorway and stood, covering the occupants of the room.

As a matter of cold hard fact, the men inside the shack were certainly no less surprised than was Larry Weston at the sight he beheld.

First, here in the mountain regions of Thibet where not two white men passed in a decade, he found himself staring at a group of grim visaged Caucasians who in turn glared back belligerently.

At the rear of the room, two natives were tied. Obviously they were the rightful occupants of the hut. While in the centre of the room, surrounded by the white men, lay an old Chinese clad in a scanty gray robe. He was tied to a rude bench. And stark horror was reflected in his countenance as he tried to shrink back from a red hot poker which was held in the hands of one of the white men.

Larry frowned. His hand tightened slightly on the butt of his weapon.

"What's this?" he said. "What's going on here?"

A heavy - bearded man detached himself from the group. Anger shone in his eyes but the dominant emotion which gripped him seemed, rather amazement at this interruption.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing here?"

Larry regarded him imperturbably. "I'll be glad to answer those questions in a minute," he said. "I'd prefer that you answer mine first."

For a moment their eyes met. They stood silent. A low murmur went up from the comrades of the bearded man. At last the latter spoke:

"Mind your own darned business," he said. Then, with deliberate recklessness, he turned his back on Larry's gun, and spoke to his men. "Go ahead, boys, give him the works. We'll get him to open up."

The man with the poker bent forward. The old Chinese priest unleashed another cry that sprang from the heart of a human being undergoing unendurable torture. Larry's voice was hard and metallic as he spoke.

"The first man who touches him dies," he said. "Now stand back all of you."

Despite the bearded man's apparent contempt for Larry, there was something in his tone now that caused them to pause. Then, as they looked at the intruder, they saw a glint in his eyes which somehow compelled them to obey his words. Silently, reluctantly, they backed away from their victim.

Larry spoke again.

"One of you—just one, mind, come forward and untie his bonds. Fast now."

SLOWLY one of them advanced. He took a knife from his belt and slashed the old man free. The Chinese rose from the bench, stretched his cramped muscles and came toward Larry, who became unutterably

astounded as the old man spoke in excellent English.

"I thank you, my son," he said. "I was in dire peril."

"Who are you?" said Larry, not removing his gaze from the white men who stood within range of his weapon.

"I am the head priest of Lo Chang. The monastery on the hill that you visited yesterday is my home. With your permission I shall return there. Come to me when you are able, and in my humble way I shall attempt to reward you for the service you have done me here this morning."

The old man made his way slowly from the shack, leaving Larry standing there rather bewilderedly. In the manner of his race, who are laconic to the point of dumbness, the Chinaman had left without even explaining to his rescuer what this mess was all about. Larry realized that his lack of knowledge was a disadvantage. Perhaps, after all, the old man had stolen or in some other way outraged these white men. Though it was hardly logical, he told himself as he looked at the hard faces before him.

THE bearded man stepped forward and spoke again. This time rage and anger distorted his features.

"You dog," he said. "See what you butting in has cost us. But you can't get away with it. You can't hold off the three of us. Come on, boys. Lct's get him."

Whatever the vices of the bearded man, cowardice was certainly not among them. Disregarding Larry's weapon, he hurled himself upon his captor. Larry's finger constricted on the trigger. But even as he sprang the bearded man threw his head down low, and a brace of steel slugs whistled harmlessly over his head.

Then, in an instant it seemed that the three of them had flung themselves at him. Larry Weston found himself at the bottom of a struggling mass of humanity. Half a dozen hands clutched at the wrist of the hand which held the gun. He felt hot breathing on his face. Grunts and shouts sounded through the shack.

He well realized that his life hung in the balance, that the outcome of this battle would probably decide whether or not he was to see another sunrise. Perhaps it was this thought that suddenly gave to him the superhuman strength momentarily to fling off the bodies that squirmed above him. He rose through the fighting mass, and jerked his whole body spasmodically. For a moment he was free. But yet one set of fingers held his wrist.

He swung his left with all his strength. It landed flush on the point of a squint-eyed individual's jaw. The man dropped. From somewhere a shot rang out, and Larry heard the whining song of a bullet as it sped past his head. The bearded man picked himself up and charged at him.

IT WAS at this point that Larry Weston decided that, perhaps after all, discretion is the better part of valor. He turned tail and ran like a madman through the doorway.

After came men and bullets. He steered a zigzag course up the road in order to render himself a more difficult target.

He thanked the Fates as he ran that he had been a ten second man at college. He thanked them that the winding path up the mountain held few straight runs. It weaved and wound, and the intervening rocks granted him effective cover, as the others plowed panting up the mountainside behind him.

Why he had selected this particular route along which to flee, he

could not have told. However to return to the shack where he had slept was impossible. His pursuers would have as little scruple about invading that as they had had about taking over the other hut.

Up, up, he went. His lungs were bursting, yet he realized with a certain amount of assurance that the condition of the men behind was no better than his own.

THEN, suddenly, as he came within a scant half mile of the tremendous rocky temple at the crest of the hill, he saw a sparse gray robed figure scrambling over the rocks with a speed and agility which was remarkable in a man of his age. He came up to the priest to recognize the man whom he had saved below.

The Chinese saw him and regarded him with a bland imperturbability. "So they follow, my son. Very well, you shall have sanctuary in the

temple-come."

Together they made their way toward the tremendous building. From behind two shots clanged into the rocks at their side. They increased their pace. Larry emptied his revolver at a dark object which bobbed up from behind a rock at the rear.

The old priest cried out as they approached, and slowly the gate to the temple swung open. Panting and exhausted the pair of them staggered into the courtyard of the monastery. Slowly the ancient gate closed behind them, barring the murderous march of the men who were on their trail.

The priest waved Larry to a bamboo bench.

"Sit here, my son," he said, "until I send for you."

Larry bowed and threw himself down to a grateful rest as the old man disappeared within the building.

Less than fifteen minutes later, a wizened Chinaman appeared and beckoned Larry within. He fol-

lowed his guide with a beating heart, and a quickened pulse, down a long stone corridor into a tremendous room whose ceiling was so high that it seemed infinite.

Gathered there were a host of gray robed priests. The man he had saved from the knife came forward. He spoke gravely.

"My son," he said. "I have been told that you desire to see the great Buddha and the Pearls of Lo Chang which will last until the world ends. No man who is not of Lo Chang has ever gazed upon them. Yet they tell me that your desire, your purpose is a noble one. You are preparing a tome which will give knowledge to the world. Very well. I, the chief priest of Lo Chang, owe my life to you. I have discussed it with the brothers and we are of a single mind. You shall enter the holy chamber."

L ARRY bowed his head reverently. He was so excited that he dared not trust his voice. The old priest continued speaking.

"But," he said, "ere you enter you must swear an oath on your own life. While you are in the Holy Chamber anything that may happen, we shall hold you directly responsible for. No matter what it is. No matter whether or not you control the event, we shall hold you responsible on your life. Do you swear?"

"I swear," said Larry Weston.
The old priest beckoned to a
henchman who approached bearing a
tremendous book with silver hasps.
Larry noticed with a start that it
was the Bible.

"You shall swear on the book of your own religion," said the priest.

Larry raised his hand, kissed the book and swore that, on his own life, no harm should come to the holy chamber or its contents while he was in the room. "Then go," said the old priest.

"And go alone. It is not meet and fitting that one of us should enter the holy chamber in the company of one who is not of the faith or the brotherhood. It is the third entrance to the right of the corridor."

Larry bowed again and, with an ill-concealed excitement, walked from the room to the door which the old priest had indicated.

A filmy curtain hung over the doorway. With a trembling hand Larry thrust it aside and peered into a huge gloomy room beyond.

NOW, at the age of twenty-six, Larry Weston found himself in possession of something slightly in excess of two million dollars. In addition, he found himself without living relations, without ties and sans those onerous responsibilities which civilization inflicts upon the average man.

Having little taste for dissipation, and no desire at all for those fleshpots of the world at which most young millionaires gather to drink deeply of what they consider life, he was confronted with but one alternative to save him from an existence of sheer and utter boredom.

He must acquire a hobby.

Now, that in itself was not particularly difficult. Because, for the better part of his life—ever since the day he had seen the ancient Buddha in his uncle's library—Larry Weston had evinced an intense interest in the mystic religions of the Orient.

So now that the uncle had died and left to Larry his vast fortune, it was that glamorous subject to which he had turned.

For twelve months he had wandered up and down the plains and hills of Asia; through the mosques and monasteries of the East, drinking deep of the font of knowledge which is almost as old as the world itself. In his portmanteaus there reposed copious notes which, when collated and set down in order, would furnish a startled scientific world with facts regarding Larry's hobby, which hitherto had been hidden from the civilized world.

Thus is was that for the first twenty-six years of his life Larry Weston had led a quiet sedentary career—a career that in no wise taxed his muscular frame, that in no wise called forth all the resourcefulness within him, that had asked but little from his brains, his courage, or his morale.

In short, he was a clean living, well built normal American youth, who had never been compelled to ask much of himself, who, as a matter of fact, had as little knowledge of what was contained within him, as the rest of the world.

He would have been exceedingly jolted and disconcerted no little had he seen what the next year of his life was about to bring forth; had he seen the flaming live or die existence which was in store for him.

A ND now he was here. Here in A the very chamber where reposed the three pearls of Lo Chang. When the old Brahmin in Benares had at first told him of this, he had considered it one of the innumerable religious legends of the world. But apparently it was true. And his brow clouded for a moment when he realized that those white men who had pursued him must also believe it true. That explained why they had tortured the priest-in order to gain entrance to this very room where Larry now stood. Although for a very different purpose.

With a sense of exultation and triumph, Larry entered the dim chamber. At last he had achieved that which had led him to this barren country. He peered into the room. As his eyes became used to the dusk which pervaded the holy chamber, he made out the figure of a tremendous fat Buddha at the far end of the room. Slowly he made his way toward it.

The ugly god's head towered into the rafters of the room. The thickness of his legs was almost five feet. Larry glanced straight ahead and saw that the left hand of the god was extended, palm upward, and in the centre of the palm, lay three white marbles, whose radiant iridescence glittered even in the murkiness of the chamber.

He could hardly suppress a gasp as he looked at them. Here, then, were the three pearls of Lo Chang the three pearls whose brilliance could only be impaired when the Gabriel of a totally different religion blew his golden trumpet.

PASCINATED, Larry stared at the jewels. The three pearls were almost an inch in diameter. They were absolutely matched. Individually, each was worth a fortune, but the three matched pearls together could never be bought for a king's ransom. Here was the like of which the civilized world had never, and for that matter, would never see.

He took a small pad and a pencil from his pockets and made some notes. Carefully he scrutinized the massive, bejeweled idol, his pencil flying over the paper as each detail registered itself upon his eager brain.

So intent was he on his work, that he became totally immersed in it. Time flew by and he was oblivious to it. This was his own discovery. For this, the god of Lo Chang, and its three pearls, scientists and archeologists would praise his name. So intent was he upon his labors, that he failed to hear the heavy tread of booted feet near-by, he failed to hear

an inarticulate scream of alarm from the courtyard.

But when the heavy footfalls sounded loud on the flagging of the holy chamber, he could not help hearing it. He looked up, notebook still in hand, and what he saw caused a cloud of utter bewilderment to mask any trepidation he may have felt.

Charging down upon him, led by the ruffian who had struck the priest, the day before, were a band of white men. Revolvers were in their hands, and a flaming blood lust shone from their eyes. Greed and gluttonous avidity were stamped indelibly on their countenaces.

Larry still stared at these intruders in amazement as they came closer. He had not the slightest idea how these white men had invaded the temple. They ignored him. The leader rushing toward the idol suddenly pointed a grimy finger at the pearls.

"There," he yelled, his voice vibrant with excitement. "There they are!"

THEN in a flash, understanding came to Larry. How these crooks had gained entrance to the monastery he did not know. But their motive was now quite clear. They were here to steal the pearls—the pearls which he had sworn to be responsible for.

He waited no longer.

With a shout of rage he flung himself at their leader, even as that worthy bent forward to scoop the jewels into his big hands. His right fist crashed against the man's jaw. The man staggered backward.

Furious with rage and disappointment that now perhaps his mission had failed, Larry threw himself upon a second man. Again his right fist shot forward like a piston and found its mark on the other's chin. Then, suddenly he was aware of an upraised revolver butt above his head.

Too late he saw it descending viciously upon his skull. He attempted to duck. Desperately he threw out his hands, essaying to grasp his adversary's coat, to pull him off balance. His fingers just touched the other's clothing above the breast pocket. For a fleeting second his hand came in contact with a small piece of yellow paper which protruded from his assailant's pocket.

A LMOST instinctively his fingers closed around it at precisely the same moment that the steel butt of the other man's weapon completed its journey through the air and found its vulnerable human destination.

The last thing of which he was conscious was a small moon-shaped scar on the hand that swung the weapon on him.

Larry heard the dull thud it made as it crashed against his head, heard it objectively as if it was thunder from some distant place. A streak of zigzag lightning ripped before his eyes. His knees crumpled beneath him. And the dimness of the holy chamber suddenly evolved to a blackness darker than a tropic night.

Consciousness returned slowly to the body and mind of Larry Weston. He stirred, then opened his eyes. He blinked in bewilderment as he found himself gazing into the sober, grave faces of half a dozen priests gathered around a rough couch.

They stared at him in utter silence as he gradually oriented himself. Clearness came back to his brain. He raised himself on one elbow.

"What happened?" he asked.

His answer was a bitter flow of Chinese invective from menacing lips bent over him. Then suddenly the speaker stopped talking. His hand appeared above Larry's heart, and held in it was a wicked looking knife with a curved blade.

Then, from the back of the group, a sharp staccato voice spoke a single syllable. The knife became suspended in midair. The group parted, and the sparse gray-robed figure of the priest whom Larry had saved from the bearded man made his way slowly through the group. As he spoke to the white man there was a resigned sadness in his voice.

"My son," he said. "You have failed. The Pearls of Lo Chang have been stolen. The brothers hold you to your oath. I, whose life you once saved, regret it. But there is only death left for you."

Now, for the first time, since he had regained consciousness, the full purport of the situation came to Larry's mind. Now he recalled with perfect clarity everything that had happened. His oath, the foray of the crooks, the pearls. He swung himself off the couch and came to his feet.

"Tell me," he said excitedly, "what happened? How did those men get in here?"

"At the gate one of them sent in word that he was your servant, that he must speak to you right away. The sentry came to tell me. He left the gate unguarded. By means of a ladder they swarmed in. They bore firearms. Already three of the brothers are dead. They raided the holy chamber and took the pearls. That is all. But the brothers demand you must die. You vowed it. The brothers are right."

A T that particular moment the emotions of Larry Weston were inextricably mixed things. But most overwhelming of all was a terrible hatred for the band of crooks who had perpetrated this outrage. He was not afraid of death. It was certainly not fear that held his mind in

thrall. Instead he was aware of a terrible desire to revenge himself upon those who had violated the holy chamber for their own predatory purposes, and in so doing had signed his own death warrant.

"Yes," the old priest was saying.
"You must die, my son. You must die as we all must die. We are dishonored and death is our only salvation. Prepare yourself, I must strike you down with my own hand."

HE extended his hand, and another priest thrust a knife into his palm. His eyes met Larry's and in that single instant Larry Weston was struck by a flashing, illuminating thought.

"Stay!" he said. "Stay your impatient hand, oh, father. Let me ask the Lo Chang this. Which is more important? Our deaths or the recovery of the pearls of Lo Chang?"

The old man's eyes lit up with a sudden hope, then the momentary gleam died down again and his gaze was dull.

"The recovery of the pearls, of course," he said. "But how can that be done?"

"Listen," said Larry, and the sincerity in his voice flooded the words. "Listen to me. The arm of Lo Chang is long. The tong lives in They can always all the world. strike me down. To leave here is not to escape. If I betray my trust, the Lo Chang may kill me no matter where I am. But let me try. shall recover the pearls. I shall do it. Give me some time and a chance. Give me three months-a month for each pearl. Then may we all live and the tong be not dishonored."

Hope once again glinted in the old man's eyes. He turned to his comrades and translated rapidly.

A low murmur ran through their ranks as he finished. Then one of the younger priests stepped forward and handed a piece of yellow paper to the chief priest. He spoke a few words. The old priest turned to Larry.

"This was found in your fingers when we found you."

Larry took it. He suddenly remembered the fragment of paper which had protruded from the breast pocket of the man who had knocked him out. Eagerly he opened it. His eyes scanned the writing, and his heart leaped as he read it.

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS FROM NUMBER ONE:

When the pearls are taken, each of us shall take one. We have more chance for a getaway if we are separated. All China will be on guard to prevent the jewels from leaving the country. Each man shall take whatever means he considers best to get clear. One year from date we shall meet in the Wright Hotel at San Francisco. There we shall divide the spoils. That is all and good luck to us all.

It was then that the whole amazing scheme leaped to Larry's brain. Three men, plus some hired thugs, had come for the Pearls of Lo Chang in order that each of the three might take one and escape from a country who would maintain the most stringent guard when the alarm was given.

Further, the three crooks ran no chance of being double-crossed by their comrades. The value of the matched pearls so enhanced the value of each single one, that to run out would cost more money than it would to be on the level.

IN addition this knowledge helped Larry tremendously. Here at last was a clue to work on. Rapidly he made known this new development to the old priest, who in turn translated to the brothers of Lo Chang.

When the head priest concluded there was a sudden hum of excited conversation among the gray robed figures. Larry stood still and silent—tense as his life hung in the balance. Finally the head priest turned to him.

"It is well, my son," he said. "You shall have your chance. But first you must be made one of the brothers in order that the great Buddha may help you in your search, without his aid your mission is impossible of fulfillment. Will you become our blood brother? Blood brother to the teng?"

Larry nodded gravely.

"I will," he said. "I shall be your blood brother. I swear allegiance to Lo Chang."

THE old priest rolled up his voluminous sleeves. With the knife which he still held, he gashed a cut in his arm. He took Larry's hand. Again the knife bit deep, this time into the white man's flesh. Then the priest held the two arms together, yellow and white. Their blood flowed in unison, intermingled.

"Now," said the priest, "you are a Lo Chang. Go and return when you have recovered our pearls. Three months we grant. Go. But first take this."

He thrust a yellow jade ring on Larry's finger.

"That is the summons to the tong. No matter where you are. No matter what far lands you traverse in your search, the sight of this ring will bring to you the Lo Changs anywhere. Now go, my brother, and may the great Buddha crown your efforts with glory and success."

Larry bowed and walked slowly from the room. The gates of the monastery opened and closed behind him. He had entered the temple free and untrammeled—a white man. He had left, bound by his most solemn oath to fulfill a mission, his Cau-

casian birthright behind him. For now he owed his allegiance to Lo Chang.

He was brother to the tong!

THE longest bar in the world at Hongkong was crowded with humanity representing every nationality on the face of the globe. Groups chattered volubly over their drinks, but at the far end of the bar a lone, silent figure stood meditatively regarding a glass of beer.

At last Larry Weston took another sip of his drink and muttered a silent prayer to the fates to grant him a modicum of luck. He had come to Hongkong as the town offering him the best chance to catch up one of the looters of the temple treasure.

For some hours now he had stood in the bar. It was more of fact than legend that if one waited here long enough every white man in China was bound to pass sooner or later.

But tonight that axiom seemed due to fail. He sighed wearily, and had made up his mind to return to his hotel when his roving eyes fell on something which galvanized his whole being into alertness.

That something was nothing more than a man's hand with a moonshaped scar on the wrist.

But Larry Weston had seen that scar before.

He had seen it in the holy chamber of the Lo Chang monastery. And the wrist that bore it had been descending rapidly in the general direction of his own skull. It was the hand of the man who had knocked him out with the revolver butt.

He glanced across the room at the man's face. He was short, swarthy and stocky. Beneath his khaki coat and breeches he appeared a man of tremendous strength.

He was alone, and before him were four empty whisky glasses. He picked up a fifth, tossed it down his gullet, paid his reckoning and turned from the bar. A few moments later a rickshaw was bearing him through the narrow streets of Hongkong—and less than fifty feet away a second rickshaw carried Larry Weston fast on the trail of the first pearl which belonged to the Lo Chang.

The first rickshaw came to a stop before a cheap bungalow type hotel on the outskirts of the city. The stocky man descended and disappeared into the building. Larry clambered down from his vehicle, tipped the runner liberally and made his way slowly toward the one-story building.

He did not enter the lobby, however. Instead he stealthily made his way around the building. His keen eyes peered carefully through the latticed blinds of the lighted rooms. Then as he gained the rear of the building, he found what he was looking for.

The stocky man stood in the center of the room drinking from a bottle. In a moment he replaced the bottle on a table, and with a cunning glance about him, he withdrew a wallet from his inner pocket.

HE thrust his forefinger and thumb within and withdrew a marble-like object which he held up to the light, admiring its pristine, gleaming beauty. Even Larry could not refrain from giving vent to a gasp of admiration as he saw the iridescent glittering of the gorgeous pearl of Lo Chang in the light of the room.

However, he reflected, there was little time now for meditating over the beauty of the jewel. This was the time for action.

His right hand sought and found the automatic at his hip. Holding it firmly, he raised the lattice with his left hand so silently that the man inside the room did not hear him. His little beady eyes remained intent on the pearl, avidly drinking in its lustre. "Put up your hands," said Larry Weston.

The stocky man's face turned white. His head swerved around quickly. He essayed to conceal the pearl in the palm of his hand.

"Don't bother trying to hide it," said Larry. "I know it's there. In fact, it's what I came for."

The other snarled.

"You dog! How did you find me? How did--?"

Larry smiled grimly and vaulted over the window sill.

"In the same manner that I intend to find the remainder of your cutthroat crew," he replied. "Now hand over that pearl, friend."

"The hell I will."

Larry moved the muzzle of the automatic a trifle so that it pointed directly at the man's heart.

I'VE come for that pearl," he said, and his voice was jagged ice. "It matters little to me whether you give it to me or whether I take it from the lifeless hand of your corpse. Now what's the answer?"

With a trembling hand the stocky man extended the priceless white marble toward his captor.

"All right," he said. "You win this time. But I'll get that back if I have to track you all over Hongkong. And you'll pay for this in blood."

Larry took the pearl.

"I can stand your threats," he said.
"And if you do find me, I assure
you that I'll be ready for you."

Hastily he backed to the window, dropped over the sill and raced to the street looking for a rickshaw.

He had no fear of the other, but he realized that if he was followed there would probably be trouble and he had no desire to let the native police in on the little deal concerning the pearls of Lo Chang.

He sprang into a rickshaw at the

corner and realized as they sped down the street that a stocky man had emerged from the hotel and was screaming in bad Chinese for a similar conveyance.

ARRY WESTON'S bags were packed in his room. He sat in the dining room of his hotel sipping a cup of breakfast coffee preparatory to his departure. His heart was light and he was elated at his initial success in his venture. In his vest pocket there reposed the first of the pearls that he had dedicated his life to recovering. He ordered a second cup of coffee. His hand had just stretched forth toward the sugar bowl when he became aware of a disheveled, panting figure opposite him. The man's hand was in his coat pocket.

"Well," said a harsh voice. "I've found you. Don't move. You're covered. The slightest piece of funny business on your part and that's the end."

Larry stared into the eyes of the stocky man from whom he had recovered the pearl the night before. He assumed a jaunty nonchalance which he was far from feeling.

"So," he said, "you really did find me. A pretty tribute to your persistency."

"No funny business," snarled the other. "I've been to every hotel in Hongkong looking for you. Now I've got you."

"And what," inquired Larry mildly, "are you going to do with me?"

"I'm going to get that pearl back."

"But I haven't got it."

"You're lying. You've had no chance to dispose of it. The banks haven't opened yet, so it's not in a safe deposit box. You certainly wouldn't trust a thing like that to the Chinese mails. No, Mr. Wise Guy. It's either on your person or in your baggage and you're coming with me while I

find out. Come on now, we're going to your room."

The silhouette of the muzzle of a .38 appeared from his coat pocket. Larry rose slowly to his feet.

"All right," he said. "You leave me little choice." He turned to a waiter who hovered near-by. "Oh, by the way, I must go with my friend for a moment. Leave my coffee there. I'll be back soon, and I like it better if its cooled off."

IN Larry's room the stocky man ripped his luggage apart with a dexterous left hand while he kept Larry covered with the right. At last with clothes and papers strewing the floor, he gave up that angle of the search. "Well, it's not there. Now let's go through your pockets."

His fingers ran through Larry's clothes, but still the gleaming pearl was not forthcoming. Finally he stood back and regarded his captive with smoldering eyes. "You rat," he said. "Now come clean or I'll drill you. Where is it?"

"I told you I haven't got it. Isn't that enough?"

"No," snapped the other. "It isn't. Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'll count three, if you haven't talked by then I'll plug you. I owe you that anyway, whether I find the pearl or not. Now get ready."

Larry surveyed him calmly enough, though his heart was pounding madly within him. His eyes were glued to the muzzle of the automatic as he calculated his chances. The stocky man's voice sounded dully in his ears. "One. Two. Thr—"

Well, it was now or never.

With a swinging side motion of his body Larry ducked low. As he moved his right hand fell to his hip pocket. Even as the weapon of the stocky man barked twice, Larry's own gun belched forth its message. The stocky man reeled and fell to the floor.

Larry thrust his gun in his pocket and swiftly bent over the figure of the dead man.

Deftly his fingers ran through the luckless man's papers. Then at last he smiled, and selecting a large sheet of foolscap replaced the others in the man's coat.

Carefully he read the typewritten words on the sheet. On it were the names and addresses of a number of men. And Larry Weston felt full well that among these were the names of the men that he must see in order to recover at first hand the pearls of Lo Chang.

JAUNTILY Larry walked back to the restaurant. He noticed that his coffee still remained on the table. He scatcd himself and drank the now cool beverage down.

Then with a quiet smile, he dipped his spoon into the cup and scooped up something from the bottom. His smile grew broader as he regarded the contents of the spoon.

For there, coated with wet sugar was the pearl of Lo Chang, exhumed from its hiding place at the bottom of a cup of coffee where he had dropped it with the sugar as his enemy sat across the table from him.

It was one of Fate's simple ironies that the thing to which he had pledged his life should have been saved by a child's trick of palmistry.

But as he replaced the invaluable jewel in his pocket, he realized that this was not the end. Somewhere, scattered over the face of the Globe were two more of these pearls, two more that he must retrieve ere he could fulfill his oath—and he realized full well that the recovery of the others might not be as easy as this.

Watch for the Further Exciting Adventures of Larry Weston on the Perllous Trail of the Pearls of Lo Chang!

Dance of the Drowned



A Night Alone at San Lorenzo-Amid Fearsome Spectres and the Weird Roaring of the Sea

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "The Crimson Blight," "While Chapei Burned." etc.

WAS a first lieutenant of Marines, working in plainclothes under the auspices of the State Department when I went into Sanchez on Samana Bay, and asked for accommodations at the Hotel Borinquen. As I turned away from the counter, a claw-like hand fastened on my arm with a grip like a vise.

I whirled, a feeling of repugnance going through me at the odor which suddenly assailed my nostrils—and looked into a face which in turn must have looked long and often into the face of hell. "Give me a drink, mister!" pleaded the man, who might have been thirty or seventy years of age. One couldn't tell by his clothing. He hadn't shaved for years. His clothes were in rags. He hadn't bathed. He was a six-footer, but so stooped the top of his head barely reached to my shoulder. "Give me a drink, for the love of God!"

"Don't mind him, teniente!" The clerk spoke and I thought I saw something akin to fear in his eyes. "The old one belongs in a manicomio, insane asylum."

"Pedro!" I snapped, speaking English in my new eagerness. "Give him what he wants, and I'll pay for it."

Then the man looked into my face.

"I can't understand it!" he said, unbelief in his whispering voice. "You are a white man! And I didn't know, didn't notice."

HE turned away as though the devil were at his very heels and made for the door with a queer crabwise shuffle.

I shrugged when the clerk's voice, breaking in, made me decide to follow.

"He avoids Americans," said Pedro.
"He says their eyes accuse him!"

I caught him at the foot of the rickety steps and grabbed him by the arm, even though my very flesh crawled at the contact. I dragged him back into the hotel and forced some carte blanca into his hand, insisting that he drink it. He smacked his lips. He drank again, three Then he turned with his glasses. back to the counter and stared out the open door, out across the Bay of Samana with its heaving, beautiful bosom, to Las Hatillas, the south coast of the bay, which is a high rock wall honeycombed with

"It's funny," he spoke in halting English, "but I can't see it today. Maybe it's because for the first time in years I have shown my face to a white man. That would be a strange reason, wouldn't it?"

Mystified, I asked: "What is it that you can't see today?"

"The phantom Flor de Espana and the ladies of Samana, doing their dance of the drowned!"

I shivered, though the hotel lobby was as hot as an oven. This fellow had certainly got under my skin. I waited. He turned to me, told me his name was Peter Jans.

"You remember Ulises Herreaux, whom natives call Lilis?"

"Of course," I answered.

"I was his private physician," said Peter Jans. "He gave me a huge salary. Of all his underlings me alone he trusted. And in those days I was as hard and ruthless as Lilis. I wonder if you would care to hear the story?"

Naturally I nodded. Then I drew him to two creaky rocking-chairs, looking off across Samana Bay.

"You know the reputation of Lilis?" He spoke now in English of unusual purity. "He climbed to glory over the graves of ten thousand men, many of whom he slew with his own hand. Remember the story of the twelve cabinet officers whom he deposed and sent out to become governors of provinces? The officers all left Santo Domingo City, but none has reported to this day. So Lilis began his career as dictator with the murder of twelve of the best minds in the country.

"He built up a marvelous spy system—and if a man in Monte Cristi, or a woman either, for that matter, said anything against Lilis, that person died within seventy-two hours—though Monte Cristi is across the island from Santo Domingo City and there were no roads to speak of and no telephones in those days—"

I KNOW all that," I said, voicing my first feeling of impatience.

"Well," he cut it short, "his soldiers were hired ones, the off scourings of the world's blackest seaports. His advisors were outlanders—and so I became his personal physician—though he never was sick a day in his life. He used me for other things. I confess he completely dominated me. I don't apologize for that. He even dominated

outland statesmen. He laughed at France and made a fool of her. He was a black Napoleon in a small way —and far more ruthless—"

JANS hesitated as though for strength to go on. I knew instinctively that he had perhaps never before told his story to a living soul. I was waiting for him to go on when he interrupted himself with what seemed a strange irrelevancy. He suddenly pointed out across Samana Bay to the southeast, where the shadows of evening were creeping across the waters from the mouth of the Yuna.

"See that rocky island near the mouth of Bahia de San Lorenzo?"

"Yes," I said, showing my surprise at the turn of the conversation. "Why?"

"It is hollow. It is called the Cavern of San Lorenzo, and—"

He hesitated so long that I prompted him.

"And? And what?" I said.

"Every night it is occupied by the spirits of those who have been drowned in Samana Bay! If only I had courage enough to spend a night in that cavern—"

"Bosh!" I said. "You don't be-

lieve that, do you?"

"If I didn't," he answered, "I'd spend a night in the place and rid myself of the horrors. If only I could—then I could get away from this place."

"From Sanchez? What have the spirits to do with your staying in Sanchez? Aren't you free to go whenever you wish?"

"I am free and not free;" his voice was a whisper. "I've tried to go away, but I haven't the will power. Something keeps me chained here. I know that even if I go, I'll come back. I know I can't go, until the people of Samana have had their revenge!"

There didn't seem to be anything to say to such a strange statement, so I kept my mouth shut, walting. He veered back to his story.

"I made a tour of inspection of Samana Province, working for Lilis," he said. "Ostensibly that was the reason, but really I came here to try to throw off the mental burden of his dominance. I knew whither it was leading me and wanted to fight, but it held me as—as—as the dead now hold me. I toured through Sanchez, Punta Gorda, Samana, Las Fleches and San Lorenzo, across the bay there. I found a deplorable state of affairs.

"It is rather hard to put into words, but you must understand that all of these are seaport towns. To them came, as now, vessels of every nation-tramp steamers, four-masted schooners, bringing the riff-raff of the world to Samana Bay. Of course those sailors had to have their sailors' diversions-and every one of those towns I mentioned catered to them. What was the result? The result was drinking, gambling, fighting and bloodshed. The townsfolk danced and sang for the sailor men -and the places where they danced and sang were the plague spots of the West Indies. Even I, hard as I had grown, was stricken by what I I went back to Lilis discovered. with my report.

WHAT," asked Lilis, "would you suggest?" I told him that it would be better for all concerned if the plague spots were all done away with. Of course, manlike, I placed none of the blame on the sailors themselves. However, I changed my statement immediately, for Lilis like his little "jests." He might easily order the wholesale destruction of the natives—men and women together—just because I'd said it—in order to be amused at my

horror afterward. Lilis was like that.

"And he had his jest, after all. He gave me some strange orders. I was to charter a ship at Sanchez and make arrangements for all the townsfolk to go aboard her, telling them they were to have a roistering holiday at sea. Then, upon orders from Lilis, I was to order the captain of the ship to sea. He was to sneak into Porto Rico or the Virgin Islands at night and unload his cargo. They wouldn't improve the Virgin Islands, but at least Santo Domingo would be finished with them."

I LISTENED, my interest mounting, for I noticed that even as he spoke, Peter Jans kept his eyes glued to Samana Bay, which we both faced. I studied his unnaturally pale face as he talked.

"Lilis had played awful jests on others who had trusted him, but, like them, I didn't think he would betray me. But he did. I chartered the ship as he had instructed me. It clung to the dock for weeks. Lilis was to communicate with me in a strange way.

"He had men posted, within sight of one another, all the way from Santo Domingo to Sanchez. All he had to do was have the one nearest him wave, and the signal would be passed along. I would have it in a matter of minutes. But I knew it wouldn't be long delayed when I received word to get the passengers Four hundred people, aboard. many of them the young spangled ladies of the dance hall, crowded the schooner's decks to the rail. laughed in high glee. I noticed that the skipper's face was pale, and that he often looked out toward the mouth of the bay, but he was under orders to Lilis, which must be obeyed -to the death! That skipper knew!"

Jans hesitated, taking a deep breath, gathering his courage in his hands.

"The signal came," he went onand now his face was lined and gaunt all of a sudden, as though he had incredibly aged in the last few minutes, "and I gave the quadroon skipper his orders. The Flor de España pulled out into the stream and started down the bay toward Mona Passage."

When he named the ship I got shivery again. The story showed promise.

"I stood on the dock, watching the schooner gather speed. The passengers waved and laughed at me, there on the dock. They might have been school children going on a picnic. The schooner was out in the middle of the bay before I knew the thing should have suspected before. Lilis had betrayed me! A wall of water forty feet high was roaring and racing into Samana Bay. hurricane was coming in with appalling speed. There had been no storm warnings-Lilis, in working out his priceless jest, had seen to Lilis himself knew, though, and had timed his signal to betray me. See? Sitting back at the Capital City, he must have laughed as he used even the elements to work his will with men!

You know of course what happened, what the skipper must have sensed would happen. The schooner was still close enough that I could see everything with startling clarity. So must the skipper have seen. He did something which may have been right, may have been wrong. It wouldn't have mattered, in any case. When he saw that wave coming he knew that when it struck his schooner it would sweep the deck clean of every living thing.

"So he had the passengers prac-

tically thrown into the hold and the hatches fastened down. That can be done rapidly, down here where hurricanes have made men wise. The deck had scarcely been cleared than the hurricane struck the Flor de España-and when the first wave had broken the schooner had vanishedand the endless mountains of the hurricane rolled over where I had last seen her. She had gone down with all on board—and those doomed ones were human beings I had sent to death. I remembered what I had said to Lilis-and I suppose I went a little mad.

WHAT did Lilis do? He laughed at me when I told him; said he had but carried out my wishes-and sentenced me to stay in Sanchez until the schooner had been salvaged. Part of my task was to get news of any bodies that had been washed ashore. Well, I carried out the sentence-and even after Lilis was assassinated, I stayed on-because I could not leave. For me the Flor de España is always leaving the dock, even at midday, and always being overwhelmed by a hurricane which only I can see—and always I see the passengers being herded into the hold-and the vacant ocean behind that first huge wave."

"Nonsense!" I interrupted. "You were not to blame for what Lills did!"

"If I had said nothing it wouldn't have happened."

"But how could you know he would betray you?"

"I knew he had betrayed everybody else—even in the end he betrayed himself."

I could see how a sensitive man, over a period of morbid, horrible years, could measurerize himself into belief in his culpability as a mass murderer.

"Go on," I said. I wasn't afraid

of urging him now, for the story was pouring from him in a way that nothing could have stopped.

"Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad," he said in a low voice, "but I insisted on torturing myself with my sin. I insisted on going down to the wreck when salvaging operations were begun. I went down in a diver's suit, naturally. The vessel was lying on her keel, almost level. A hole had been cut in her side. Explosives were to be shot off to remove her as a menace to navigation if she could not be salvaged. Well, I went through that hole into the hold.

"Did you ever try to find drowned people by diving? It's a horrible, ghastly experience. I don't know why, but a drowned person will follow a diver-suction, perhaps-and dance all around him. I went into that hold and those people literally set upon me. One after another they leered at me through the glass which covered my eyes. I fought them until I knew I'd go crazy if I didn't get away. They got ahead of me as though to bar my exit. I almost believed that they deliberately sought to keep me there in their watery grave-"

I wonder if you can even remotely feel what I felt as I listened to the confession—he intended it to be that—of Peter Jans? I could see it all, even the diver among the dead. I could even understand the morbid self-flagellation which had sent him into the hold of the dead who would have been alive but for him.

Peter Jans went on:

MAYBE there are plenty of explanations for what happened later, plenty of scientific ones. Maybe there was an underwater current that did it—after the townfolk, some of them, followed me through the hole

in the side of the Flor de España—for when, next day after my visit, which had left me a trembling, sobbing wreck, the divers went down again—there wasn't a body in the wreck—not even the skipper's—and not one was ever reported as having come ashore."

"The sea doesn't give up its dead," I said fatuously.

THE schooner sank miles in from the mouth of the bay," retorted Jans, with more spirit than, perhaps, had been his for decades. "You needn't tell me, mister. I know what happened to those people. They traveled down the bay to San Lorenzo, under water so that none might know what they did, and every night they hold high revel in the cavern!

"The natives say this is so, and I'm sure it is. They hold high revel—and wait for me to come to them for their vengeance. And they keep me here, chained, until I am ready."

I couldn't laugh at the man. suppose he told the truth about the disappearance of the bodies, but his explanation, of course, was absurd. Bodies didn't go on pilgrimages like that. Over in Haiti the blacks believed in zombis, but Peter Jans was white, an American. He shouldn't have believed, yet he did-and I couldn't argue with him. Yet he was worth saving. He had wasted his life on this horrible thing, staying on here, a beach-comber, "chained" to Sanchez by the inaudible commands which came to him forever from the Cavern of San Lorenzo. I pitied the man from the bottom of my heart. I sought for a way to restore him to whatever of life was left him.

"Look here, why don't you get someone you trust, someone who isn't guilty, as you believe yourself to be guilty, to spend a night in San Lorenzo? If you can, and he reports back that there is nothing, will you be satisfied?"

Jans shuddered. His face went grayer still.

"They might not appear for anyone else. They surely would, for
me! But wait a moment—yes, perhaps you are right—for I'm not the
only one who believes that the
drowned dead come forth to dance
in San Lorenzo after nightfall.
Others have even told me they'd
seen them. Still, if someone would
go, and returned unhurt—then—"

"Then?" I prompted him.

"Then I'd have to go and stay one night myself, to assure myself anew. I'd be afraid, of course, but if I knew someone else had come through safely I might have the courage—though after all these years of hell I haven't much courage left. No, it wouldn't work, after all. It's Pthey want, and nobody else—"

I suddenly made up my mind.
"I'm your size," I told him. "And after dark, who's to know?"

It was silly, of course, for if there really were spirits they wouldn't be susceptible to hoodwinking, would they? Yet Jans was childishly eager, didn't even think of that—and therein I saw the perversity of the man, that perversity which had filled his life with horror—for now he was willing to send me, a perfect stranger, the only tie between us being that both were white, to do something for him that he was afraid to do for himself.

STILL, I had suggested it—and he was a mental and physical wreck for whom it was easy to find excuses. And I was young.

"I'll go tonight," I said.

"And if you come back," he answered, "I go tomorrow night, and either lift this incubus from my soul—or—"

But he couldn't finish-and his

eyes were wide with horror. Then I noticed his eyes. They seemed unusually large, the balls protruding unnaturally, especially when Jans was excited. No wonder he saw things.

He seemed always to be looking at something ordinary people couldn't see—perhaps he really was.

I GAVE Jans my room, knowing full well that he wouldn't stir all night, but would sit there and peer out through the darkness, across the bay to San Lorenzo, suffering agonies as he tried to imagine what was happening to me. The result of my foolhardy offer to stay a night in the island cavern might be horrible for him. It might have been better had we never met. But neither of us thought of it then—at least I didn't.

The native boatman didn't want to take me across the bay to San Lorenzo, but when I offered him more money than he usually made in a month he decided to take a chance, though previously he offered all sorts of excuses, even showing me in the clouds and the turbulent sea that a storm was making.

But even as he hemmed and hawed his black face was gray with superstitious fear. His behavior made me feel like backing out—but of course I didn't.

"If the storm upsets us the sharks will get us," he explained.

I thought immediately that sharks—Samana was infested with them—might be the explanation for the disappearance of those bodies so long ago, but somehow I didn't believe it. I waxed facetious with the boatman.

"If we drown we'll go to the cavern anyhow," I told him.

It almost scared him to death, but he finally agreed to take me across the bay. It took about two hours from Sanchez in a motor boat. Its chugging somehow heartened me as the little cockleshell rose and fell on the growing rollers that came in from Mona Passage. I carried flashlights and pistols—though what I needed the latter for I wouldn't have been able to tell. Now and again, in the breaking crests of the waves, I saw the dirty bellies of gray nurses—scavengers of the Antilles.

And thought of them again when I set foot on the island of the cavern. It was perhaps two hundred yards to the south shore of the bay. If I decided to quit the cavern during the night for any reason, I'd have to swim that distance, maybe with sharks for company. It wasn't a cheering thought.

The boatman shot away from San Lorenzo as though the devil were at his heels. I watched him vanish among the waves toward the far lights of Sanchez. Then I turned and strode up a worn path which led to the cave's opening. At the black mouth of the hollow island—the island seemed to be a big stone cave on invisible stilts reaching down to the bay's bottom—I snicked on my flashlight.

THE main cavern could I held comfortably, a regiment of There were holes in the walls, some high up, some low-and I looked into the low ones. They opened into black, windowless rooms, each of which could have held fifty to a hundred men. There were the ashes of dead fires in one or two, footprints in muddy spots-and I grinned. The lights which natives sometimes saw in the cavern had explanation, after all. natural Maybe contrabandists exploited the "haunted" myth to keep people away from what might well be their hiding places.

There was a second opening onto

outer space, on the west side of the cavern, high up. The entrance I had used was fifteen feet above water level, in the southwest corner of the strange island. The atmosphere of the cavern played queer tricks on the eyesight. You started to step over a chasm, for example, because it looked to be narrow—and you fell into it instead and almost broke your neck.

I GLANCED at the holes in the walls, wondering what secrets might lie within them, but not anxious to find out for myself. Some day I'd come back and explore every one, when there was someone with me. I studied the cavern more minutely. The floor swayed downward in the middle. The cavern was perhaps a hundred yards long by twenty wide. The roof was fully a hundred feet above my head—black and gloomy as the dome of a lightless cathedral.

The bottom of the floor was a nest of "blowholes"—orifices up through which the sea boiled with every wave which broke against the island, proving that the waves passed under at least this portion of it.

I hurried through the blowholes, watching my step carefully now, however, knowing that a slip would send me chuting down into one of those holes, from which I'd never escape. I'd go under the island, and even if I could hold my breath until swept clear by the waves—if my clothing didn't catch on something and hold me, or I didn't just simply stick because of my size—the sharks would get me.

I waited for one wave to pass and it shot great white columns of spray up through the blowholes and then went through before the next wave should come, praying that my flashlight would not go out on me at the crucial moment. I found a rocky perch well above the floor, at the closed end of the cavern. The whole cavern was between me and the opening by which I had entered. I couldn't have climbed to the other opening over the slimy rock wall.

I had solid rock at my back. Nothing could reach me from behind. I sat down, automatic in my hand, flashlight snicked off—to wait for morning.

God, it was dark in there when the light was off, but I felt to keep it on wasn't exactly playing fair. It would show I was frightened, which of course I wasn't—much—yet. Besides, if I burned out the battery I wouldn't have a light in the event I needed it. I could see the entrance, and the shape of it against the blackness outside was provoking to the imagination. It wasn't long before I was gure that its stone outlines wavered with every wave which struck against San Lorenzo.

I sat.

Nothing much happened at first, maybe nothing ever did, except what I'm about to relate. I didn't hold with superstitions. If I had I certainly wouldn't have been here now.

AWAVE crashed against the isseemed in I wasn't sure, but it seemed that the great monolith shuddered with the impact. But of course it didn't. Even this early my fancy was running wild, it seemed.

The wave passed under the island and water came up through those blowholes. There must have been about a dozen of them—and with the rising storm the waves struck, passed under or around, and water came up through those holes with terrific force. They came through so mightily that white columns of spume stood up in the center of the cavern to easily the height of a man. It was perfectly natural—but I kept thinking of what Jans had told me

about the dance of the drowned townsfolk of Samana—and I hadn't been in the cavern an hour before those white columns became the shapes of many women, shrouded in the white cerements of the tomb.

ALL naturally explained, I grant you. Those columns were merely sea water made white by rushing up through the blowholes—but I was thinking of Jans, remember. The columns stood out in ghostly fashion in the dark, made visible, I suppose, by the phosphorus of the Caribbean waters.

The columns, as I stared at them, looked like people.

And it wasn't difficult to imagine that they danced.

Did you ever listen to the sea play through blowholes in honeycombed rock? It's eeric even away from San Lorenzo of the legends. It comes into the blowholes with a ghostly shrieking sound-and then it whispers while the column is building-whispers and mutters strange secrets-then it falls apart and flows back down through the hole by which it has catapulted upwardand as it goes back it moans with a sound that has an awful suggestion of something human-or inhumandepending on where you are, and what is in your mind when you hear it. I began to chill-and it wasn't the cold of the night.

"Be careful, fellow," I told myself. "It isn't anything. Merely the roaring of a storm outside—and the sighing and moaning of sea water in a dozen blowholes. That the holes are in the Cavern of San Lorenzo doesn't change anything. This haunted stuff is rot!"

To turn my fancies to something else I thought back to Jans—and what he had told me of his descent into the wreck which had taken those four hundred into the depths all came back to me. He had fought out at pursuing corpses, he had said. I could guess how easily it might have driven him mad.

Anyway in fancy I could see him, down in the pearly waters, entering the black hole which had been cut in the side of the Flor de España, to face the people whose death he had caused. They had swarmed about him, flailed their dead hands over him, peered in at him through the glass eyes of his diving suit.

He had struck out at them, awkwardly, as one must who fights under water.

I shivered again—thinking of the holes I had noticed in the walls before I had snicked off the flashlight. Now all those holes became the hole, each in turn, which had been cut in the side of that schooner of long ago—and as I stared around in the darkness with startling eyes, I could plainly see hands, women's hands, bejeweled bracelets on the wrists, outthrust from the holes—all around the walls of the cavern!

"Nonsense!" I told myself.

You see, I wanted to snick on my light and prove to myself it wasn't so. But I was afraid to, and afraid not to. If I didn't I'd never know for sure that there weren't hands of the dead, beckoning me from all those many holes; if I did I'd go crazy if the light showed me that there were hands.

So I fought it off—and the storm raged outside, shaking the whole island to crash after crash of waves—sea water came up through those holes, screaming and sobbing—and went back out moaning. Column followed column so swiftly that there always were columns—and the sound was a continuous shriek, and moan—and sobbing.

When my watch said it was one

o'clock in the morning—leaving me five hours yet to stand this—I was in such a state that it was all I could do to keep from emptying my automatic wildly at the imagined hands or into the white water of the columns.

I almost rose to my feet to dash across the cavern and out, to plunge in among the sharks and swim to the mainland. But reason showed me my chances were slim. I'd slip and slide into a hole. If I didn't I'd plunge into the bay and the storm would either drown me or the sharks would get me.

"And suppose I drowned," came the terrifying thought, "and had to come back here every night?"

Foolish? Of course—but when you're all alone in a place that not one person in a thousand would visit at such a time, things don't seem so foolish.

The Unknown will always frighten even the strongest willed. I defy anybody, even today, to spend a night alone in San Lorenzo.

NEXT morning I stood waiting for the boatman. He was surprised to see me. He hadn't expected to. He told me he didn't even think it worth while to come for me, but Peter Jans had insisted.

"How is he?" I asked, and I hope I succeeded in sounding casual—and hoped, too, that my hair wasn't gray. "He's pretty bad. He's lost much weight since you left him last night. Weren't there any spirits in the cavern last night?"

"Certainly not!" How brave I was in the bright light of morning! But I shuddered when I turned and looked back, just as I stepped into the boat, at the black mouth of San Lorenzo—where, several times in the night, just before dawn, I had snicked on the light and flashed it over the walls—and would have

sworn at such times, that I had seen hands jerked quickly back into the holes.

BUT I didn't talk to the native boatman, and by the time an hour had passed I was myself again, sure of myself, pooh-poohing all my imagining. I suppose this was normal. Right after one has been through something it doesn't matter so much. But later, when one recalls it again and again, it grows and grows and — well, today I wouldn't spend a night in San Lorenzo for all the gold in Christendom. But then—

I was all smiles when I met Peter Jans at the Borinquen. I wolfed my breakfast and told Jans what had happened. I told him the exact truth; but I belittled my own feeling. "The only danger there ever was, Jans," I told him, "was coming back this morning. There's a storm running nicely out there, you know, and I kept having visions of going into a shark's belly if we capsized."

"That settles it," said Jans, who wasn't listening to a word. "If you could do it, so can I. I'll go out tonight—and afterward—my chains will be broken. After all, how could I know Lilis would betray me?"

I might have repeated his own words back to him—that Lilis had betrayed others—but I didn't. I should have dissuaded him, but I didn't. I really wanted to help—and what I had told Jans had so heartened him that he didn't look the slightest bit mad—eyes clear but protruding a little—hands steady, untrembling. Let him go through my experience—for which the past awful years had steeled him better than I had been steeled for my experience—and he would be right again.

I took him out that evening. He talked calmly all the way across the

bay. He even essayed a dry jest or two, but his eyes kept fastening themselves on our destination, and when we reached it he leaped out first as though eager to get it over with. I followed him into the cavern—and last night's fears began coming back on me.

"Don't!" I said to him. "It was awful here last night! I was frightened half out of my wits."

He lifted his chin proudly, perhaps for the first time in many years.

"I've come this far," he replied, "and I must finish."

Thank God, though, I spoke to him as I did. I sleep easier when I remember.

I showed him where I had sat, warned him to keep his head and not try to get away or he'd slip through the holes.

"I understand," he interrupted.
"Go away and leave me—come back tomorrow morning."

So I left him, a load of misery on my soul; but I knew he wouldn't go back now, not even though I tried to force him to do so.

CAN you imagine how I must have felt, sitting the night away on my balcony at the Borinquen, picturing myself back in San Lorenzo, going through it all again, knowing as I did how much more terrible it must be for Peter Jans, who believed himself guilty of a horrible thing?

I urged the boatman to speed and more speed as we crossed Samana Bay next morning before sunrise. The sun came up as I set foot on that never to be forgotten trail. I snicked on my flash.

I sighed with relief. Peter Jans was just as I left him, sat just where he had last sat. But he didn't move, didn't look up. His eyes scemed to glow as my light struck them. Reck-

lessly I dashed through the blowholes to his side.

I shook him. He was stone cold. He sat in a strange posture. His forearms were on his raised knees, his wrists close together as though he held them out to receive hand-cuffs.

COLD sweat broke out all over me
—for Peter Jans was handcuffed!
But how strangely. There was a bejeweled bracelet about each wrist—
and these two bracelets were connected by two others which were
like the links of a chain. And the
strange handcuffs were salt-incrusted as though they had been
long in the depths of the sea.

When I lifted Jans to carry him to the boat I didn't touch the "handcuffs," which I wished to examine in the light of day.

But as I carried the dead man through the area of the blowholes, the bracelets fell off of their own accord, struck the rocks at the edge of the yawning holes—and slid into them and so down to the sea, utterly without sound.

Outside, of course I was sure I had been tricked by my own fancies, but when I placed Jans in the boat, the boatman had to help me stow him, and he gasped, and said a strange thing:

"His eyes, teniente! His eyes! I looked into them deeply just now—and I thought I could see, far down in them, many tiny figures—dancing—their hair standing straight up and waving back and forth, as though it floated. Isn't that a strange thing?"

"Yes," I said, "and of course you didn't see such a thing, really. It was just the shadow of a cloud passing over."

And now I confess to a certain weakness in myself: I steadfastly refrained from looking into the eyes of Peter Jans!

The Price on His Head



Desperate Combat With Dyak Savages on Land and Sea in a Breath-Taking Story of Valorous Deeds

By ANATOLE FELDMAN

Author of "Manchuria Treasure," "The Silver Haul," etc.

ASTENTORIAN shout from on deck snapped Tracey erect in his bunk. With one movement his slippered feet hit the deck of his cabin while a lean brown hand slipped under his pillow for the cold steel of his heavy .45. Tracey was sailing in dangerous seas—the South Sulu Sea of the Borneos—and he cherished a healthy respect for raiding Dyak head-hunters.

Dawn was still born in the East as he tumbled up the companionway to the poop deck above. Tracey scanned the dim horizon to leeward, found it clear of prau or vinta. On the weather side a fringe of coral strand emerged from the low hanging clouds.

"Ahoy, Devlin, what's up?" he called to the man at the wheel.

Devlin, mate of the Sprite, swung the wheel hard between hairy hands. "Man out there, off the port bow. Clinging to a spar—Slack away there, Ling!" Captain Tracey sprang to the rail as the Sprite answered her helm. The sloop careened wildly to port as the sail came down with a roar. Bracing one foot against a deck cleet, he leaned far over the side, made a lunging grab for a matted mop of hair that bobbed in the long roll of the sea. Devlin, deserting the wheel, was beside him in a moment. Between them they hauled aboard the battered, sea-washed wreck of what had been a man.

"Lord! It's Swanstrom!" exclaimed Tracey.

"Aye," grunted Devlin. "And it's the first time I've ever seen him without his partner."

THE statement was ominously prophetic. Tracey realized it as he carried the limp body to his cabin. Swanstrom and Snedden were two of the most notorious jewel collectors in the East. They had lived together, worked together, drunk together for twenty years. And it had often been their boast that they would die together.

Under the circumstances, that could mean but one thing. An involuntary shudder wracked Tracey's body as he worked over Swanstrom with whiskey and grog. On some marauding jewel expedition, Swanstrom and Snedden had been trapped by the Dyaks. Snedden had been left behind, his head the price of his folly.

And Swanstrom-Swanstrom too, was dying.

But he didn't give up the ghost until he had gasped out the most important details of the tragedy that had overtaken him and his partner. And hardened adventurer that he was, Tracey shuddered as he listened to the dying words.

"There it is, Stevic. Take it or leave it. I'm through. Poor Snedden is through, too. He's nothing but a shriveled head now, drying over a Dyak fire." Swanstrom's voice rattled but with another application from the bottle of Square Face he continued.

"Vengeance of the idol, Steve. It's lost one eye and don't know where to find it. But I know and if you're smart you'll know, too, Stevie—Do a favor for a dying man and you'll get the Emerald Eye. Worth fifty thousand—big as an egg."

The effort to speak was taking Swanstrom's last drop of life blood. Tracey tried to stop him but he would have none of it.

"Then there's poor Snedden's head. Wouldn't listen after we got the emerald. But he's paid, poor devil. Listen, Stevie—Snedden meant an awful lot to me. I hate to die thinking of his head drying forever over one of those devil's fire.

"You're a friend, Steve. Get that head of Snedden and give it a decent Christian burial—For a dying man, Steve, you'll do it. And you want to remember this. Even if they did get Snedden—and me—they didn't get the stone from the idol's eye—

"Maybe I know where it is; maybe I don't. Maybe you'll guess the answer. Anyway, Steve, it's worth thinking about. That and—Snedden's head."

STEVE TRACEY, captain of the sloop Sprite did plenty of tall thinking on the matter of Snedden's head and the Emerald Eye. And so it was, that five months after he had buried Swanstrom at sea off Point Kaarshi, he brought his ship up about three miles off Plummers Rock and hove to.

He issued his final instructions to the anxious Devlin, finished the last of his long and careful preparations. An hour later the ship's dinghy grounded on a narrow strip of coral sand and Tracey stepped boldly ashore. Casually he surveyed the frowning green wall of impenetrable jungle that all but smothered the narrow beach, then went calmly to work.

A FTER making his boat fast, he fumbled under the bow thwart for a moment and snatched out a squealing pig. He strode a few feet up the narrow strand, then with calm deliberation, drew out a long knife and drew it deftly across the throat of the porker.

Tracey soon had the animal butchered and for the next quarter of an hour he bent over the entrails and studied intently the delicate veins. When he glanced up casually, there were no less than fifty wild Dyaks in full war paint, squatting or standing about. Undoubtedly they were head hunters, sent to capture him, but that fact didn't prevent them from studying the entrails of the pig as intently as did Steve Tracey.

Tracey heaved a deep breath and surveyed the war party from one end of the line to the other. His attention centered on the chief who squatted in the sand a yard or two in front of him.

Chief Labad was tall for a Dyak and magnificently proportioned. Tracey studied his flat cruel features intently. The Dyak's beady black eyes returned the look unwaveringly. There was, Tracey noted, dark suspicion in those crafty eyes; a suspicion mingled with hate and contempt. It was quite evident that he did not hold the white man in the fear and awe manifested by his followers.

But if Labad was unimpressed by the magic of the white man, so was Tracey unimpressed by the threat offered by a half hundred savages thirsting for his blood and coveting his head. His face was an inscrutable mask as he picked up a small twig and began to trace the spidery veins on the pig's livers.

"Can you, oh Chief," he asked without looking up, "also read the omen which is so plainly marked here? If so, tell me what it says."

The Dyak blinked beady eyes, spat a stream of betel juice and shifted uneasily.

"No," he faltered. "I-I cannot, Tuan."

"Mapia-lang," replied Tracey. "It is well. I will read the omens for you." He continued in a deep, impressive voice. "I see two stories. One which relates the loss of the Idol's Eye; the other which warns of dire disaster that will overtake any Iban of the tribe of Labad who stands in the way of a certain white Chieftain who is to deliver the Idol another eye. I am the white Chief and here is the eye!"

TRACEY stood up impressively and made a swift motion as if he were plucking something from the air. And suddenly there appeared in the palm of his right hand, a glowing green eye about the size of a turtle's egg. The eye was an eye as far as appearances were concerned, for it had a pupil and an iris.

Tracey held it in his hand and Labad sucked in his breath sharply. The warriors behind him hissed in astonishment. Then, as suddenly as he had produced the eye, Tracey made another dexterous pass and caused it to vanish.

"Mayo-Cayo," intoned Tracey solemnly. "I am pleased. Also, the God of the Idol has no doubt also observed and is pleased. The omen of the liver was favorable, so I shall go at once to meet the illustrious Punamak in whose worthy hands I shall place the Idol's new eyc. Maybe then the holy Punamak will see

fit to give me the head of my unfortunate countryman for burial."

Tracey wheeled about abruptly and strode toward the dinghy. Serenely calm and confident, he returned a moment later carrying a foot-square lacquered box, elaborately decorated.

"Here, oh, Chief," he said affably, "is a casket I would present to the Holy Punamak."

LABAD glanced at it suspiciously, but said nothing. Gifts for the holy men were taboo. Tracey smiled at him, then shifted his gaze aloft to the thousand foot precipice on which stood the temple of the Holy Punamak—the temple of the Idol. For a long moment he stood there gazing upward. Then, after adjusting a heavy pack more securely on his broad back, he strode swiftly up the narrow beach and disappeared into the sinister green silence of the brooding jungle.

Chief Labad sprang into action.

"Tomi! Sagi!" he barked. "Sunka Roa! Follow the white devil and make certain he misses not the path to the sacred mountain." And then in a gloating voice of evil he added: "We shall follow and see that he does not descend again."

The Head House or Shrine, or more properly yet, the den of the sorcerer Punamak and his devildevil fetish, crowned the higest peak of the precipice. It squatted grim, forbidding, alone on the very lip of the thousand foot cliff that fell away sheer to the purple lagoon that washed its base below. Protected from the sea by a vertical wall of unscalable rock and on the land side by a plainly marked taboo line, the holy man was safe enough from native disturbance.

But he had learned that he was not safe from white-devil gem hunters, and for almost six months now he had not been out of the place. Now, however, he would soon be released from his self-imposed exile. Soon a white man would come and if his devil spirits had informed him correctly he would be easily overcome and later be sacrificed to the missing eye of the Idol.

Old Punamak sat on a stone bench before his God and stirred a pungent brew in a huge kettle of beaten brass. He waited. He had observed a ship early that morning and one of his spies had seen a white man alone on the beach. It would not be long now.

Outside on the plateau his ears caught the swift tread of leathershod feet. Punamak chuckled evilly, peered carefully under the pot to see that all was in readiness for his visitor.

Tracey reached the top of the cliff only a jump ahead of the Dyaks. But he was not worried. He figured that the tabu line would hold off his pursuers until he had disposed of the socerer in his den. After a brief survey of the windy plateau, he deposited the lacquer box on the tabu line, then strode boldly toward the shrine.

THE place was high-roofed, rectangular in shape and literally wainscoted with skulls, dried and drying heads, skeletons of what had been men. Tracey surveyed the amazing collection swiftly and glanced toward a tiny flame flickering under the polished kettle. As he looked the fire flared up redly, revealing two such figures as he had never seen before, hoped never to see again.

One of them was the hideous stone figure of some heathen god. It towered a good eight feet high, loomed there like some obscene caricature, its hideous face twisted into a grotesque grimace, its one eye palpitating with a baleful green light.

Tracey drew in his breath sharply and with no little effort dragged his gaze from the glowing eye and looked down at the bent figure of the high priest, who was peering intently into the seething pot.

Punamak proved to be an undersized, dried-up, evil-visaged Dyak with a twisted body, covered with myriads of scars and tattoo marks. He looked not unlike an aged orangoutang. His mop head was the largest part about him, and seemed inadequately supported by a reed-like neck, around which was a triple necklace of human finger bones.

TRACEY stared down on the filthy old man, shuddered involuntarily. But, nevertheless, he stepped forward another pace. In a strong voice he made his greeting.

"Hail to Punamak!" he began in the Iban dialect. "Illustrious priest of the idol guardian of the Holy Mount. I have come, a trusting white man to replace with a new eye the one another white man stole from the God. I hope my coming pleases your illustrious self as well as the Emerald-Eyed One. I hope you will both look with favor upon one who has gone to no little trouble to bring a new and real eye to replace the stolen one. I have spoken and await your pleasure."

For a long minute after Tracey's flowery oration had ended the medicine man continued to stare into the pot. Then suddenly he bent his gaze upward and fastened a pair of utterly evil eyes on the white man. He answered in a voice that was clear and soothing, entirely out of keeping with the rest of him.

"Well spoken, white man. Well spoken indeed, and in the ancient language of the Ibans. And this new eye you have brought with you? Surely you have not braved the perils of the sea-devil, the wind-devils and the forest-devils with no thought of reward. That is not like a white man."

Punamak chuckled evilly and bobbed his mop-head knowingly.

"But I know," he cackled. "I know without asking. I have read all about your mission in the sacred kettle. You have come for the profane head of the white brother who stole and lost in the jungle the Idol's Eye."

He reached behind him quickly and produced a blond, withered head, which, despite the rattan work that held it, Tracey recognized as that of Swanstrom's partner, Andy Snedden.

"Am I not right?" queried Punamak, grinning evilly.

"Quite right," agreed Tracey. "You are indeed a seer and a true prophet. I have come for the head—to take it back for Christian burial among his own kind. Have I, perchance, by bringing the new eye, properly appeased the Idol so that I may take the head of this misguided unfortunate and go my way in peace?"

"That," replied Punamak, "remains to be seen. The eye—where is it?"

TRACEY was puzzled and worried at what seemed an all too ready acquiescence on the part of the priest. He produced the green eye he had showed Labad on the beach, and extended his open palm with the thing glowing on it. But old Punamak would not accept it, as he had expected, and he was nonplussed for a moment.

"No," stated the old man shortly.
"Drop it into the sacred pot. If it withstands the fire of the blood it will only then be acceptable. If not—"

Growing more and more puzzled and worried, Tracey stared suspiciously at the old fanatic. But he realized that he must eventually comply, so he stepped forward to drop his offering in the pot. Then and only then did he sense the trick. Like a flash he leaped aside and drew his pistol. He was not an instant too soon, for over the pot where he would have stood, shot a hissing, boiling stream of molten metal.

Whipped to a frenzy that he had been frustrated, Punamak emitted a yell of baffled rage. Then, like a striking cobra he lashed out with the keen-edged Kamalan with which he had hoped to behead Tracey when he bent over the kettle.

HIS first vicious swing missed by inches. Now mouthing horrible maledictions, he leaped in furiously, his claw-like talons bent ferociously toward Tracey's neck.

There remained but one thing to do and scant time to do it in. Tracey fired twice from the hip. Both shots found their mark. With a blood-chilling scream, he slid forward on his face and fell twitching in the molten metal he had prepared for the white man.

Tracey caught the head of Andy Snedden as it rolled from the pedestal, secured the head basket to his belt. This done, he leaped over the prostrate form and mounted the stone pedestal before the idol. With the aid of his knife he gouged out the fetish's remaining eye and replaced it with the one he had brought. swiftly he dropped down and readjusted the canvas pack on his back and sprang for the door.

The events had transpired with the swiftness of thought. When Tracey emerged from the head-house, Chief Labad, who had been impatiently waiting just clear of the tabu line, had not yet had time to plan his next action. But the instant he saw the white man leave the devil house he yelled shrilly to his followers and

disregarding the dreaded tabu line, sprang like a leopard after Tracey.

From the corner of his eye Tracey saw the long line of head hunters rise up from their haunches like one man and start for him on a dead run. If their chief could defy the ageold tabu tradition, so could they. They plunged forward madly.

WITH eyes assame and teeth bared in a grin, Tracey leveled his gun, took deliberate aim, and fired at the lacquer box which still remained on the tabu line where he had placed it. The box exploded instantly; the plateau rocked and swayed as if suddenly gripped by a rumbling earthquake. The racing Dyaks, stunned by the tremendous concussion, stopped abruptly, plunged to the ground.

But the effect of the dynamite didn't last long. When Labad finally staggered to his feet, he still had presence of mind enough to know what he was about. There was no known way for the white devil to elude them save by deliberately leaping over the cliff and committing suicide. He yelled wildly again and charged for the Head-House.

Tracey himself had vanished suddenly after the explosion, but Labad knew where he had taken refuge, and plunged madly after him. But before the chief made the door of the fetish house, one of his men drew his attention to something white and billowy far below—something that drifted on the strong wind current out to where a white-winged sloop lay like a gull on the water.

Chief Labad had been places and seen things. He had boasted to his men that he could checkmate any trick devised by the white devil. But he had never seen a parachute nor a man who was brave enough to leap off the cliff with one. For a long while he stared spell-bound, fasci-

nated in spite of himself. But when he saw the chute settle like a ball of down on the water, he once again leaped into action. He wasn't beaten yet, and even as the paralyzed warriors watched, he raced to a huge pile of dry faggots and set off the signal pyre old Punamak always had ready for emergencies.

THE wood caught quickly. Flames leaped and licked upward hungrily. In the space of a minute a thick white smoke was reaching heavenward in signal to the praus standing by in the lagoon below.

With curses spouting from his mouth, Labad left the signal fire and whipped toward his warriors.

"Fools!" he screamed. "You stand there gaping like monkeys, eh? You believe Labad defeated, eh? No—not yet! That's the signal for Tubig and Ulon to put off in the war canoes. Hayah! To the beach!"

Below in the water, Tracey had cut himself free of the encumbering chute. Then making sure the head basket was still at his belt, he began to swim toward the sloop which was hovering near. There was no particular hurry. As he stroked easily he laughed to himself. It had been so easy that it now seemed a little tame. The natives had—

A hoarse yell from Devlin roused him. He looked up quickly and saw his mate gesturing frantically, first toward the signal fire on the plateau, then to something that had attracted his attention on shore. Instantly Tracey sobered and increased his stroke. Also he cursed himself for a fool.

The war praus, of course!

Swimming now for all that was in him, he made the side of the Sprite and clawed desperately up the Jacob's ladder waiting for him. Devlin was waiting for him at the rail to give him a hand.

"Quick, Steve! They're after us in two praus."

Tracey made the deck out of breath. He hastily unstrapped the belt with the head basket swinging from it, and placed it on the after companion. Then he ran aft where Devlin was at the wheel.

"There!" snarled the mate, jerking his thumb astern and ahead where two giant war craft were converging on them. "There they are! Two praus loaded to the gunnels with head hunters. I told you we'd never get clear. They're on us now!"

His voice died away in a snarl as Tracey balanced himself on deck, legs spread, eyes aflame. The latter was cool, calm, collected, as he swiftly sized up the situation.

"So," he grunted harshly. "Two of them, rigged for battle. Well, I guess you're right. We still have plenty to do before it's all settled. Plenty of samshu and witch-doctors have primed them for a real scrap. Now let's sec—"

POLLOWING the praus at an amazing clip, came a gigantic war canoe, not a prau—but a great, deep sea cruising vinta; one of the kind that had been used by the piratical Malays in bygone days, to take them to the very gates of Manila itself.

Tracey turned grimly to the two Chinese members of the crew, barked a swift order. Then he turned to Durkin.

"Well, old man, here's where we got to show 'em something. Whoever is sailing that vinta is a master hand. Light as we are, he'll run rings around us in this breeze. Stand by for some hot work. Between the two of 'em, we're in for a rough time." He glanced fore and aft and then aloft. Satisfied with the way his sails were drawing, he sang out to the helmsman: "Hard alee! Snappy with that helm!"

The Chinaman spun the wheel hard over. The Sprite swung giddily into the wind, hung for an instant with blocks rattling and canvas booming, then filled away smartly on the port tack. Tracey and Devlin wrestled the boom aft and secured the sheet.

Wasting no more time on vain maneuvers, they dashed below. A minute later they bounced up on deck heavily armed. Tracey boasted a pistol and a ponderous two-handled cutting kris; Durkin put his trust in a rifle and a long knife.

They were ready for sudden battle; knew they could not escape it. The prau, in an effort to cut them off, was now less than two hundred yards distant, and the tawny Dyaks were straining mightily to lessen the distance even more.

"Steady there on the wheel," shouted Tracey to the helmsman. "Hold your course till they're within fifty yards of us. Then do your damnedest to run them down."

The Chinaman, veteran of a hundred wild forages during his pirate days, nodded and gripped the spokes with iron fingers. His old eyes were aflame with the light of battle and his heart was young again. Gently, very gently, he eased the Sprite a spoke to leeward. But the prau was traveling with astounding speed. The intervening distance narrowed to fifty yards.

"Now!" bellowed Tracey, and strained forward. "At 'em, Devlin! Let 'em have it strong!"

THE Chinaman spun the wheel again, and Tracey eased off on the sheet. The sloop wore sharply and plunged for the prau head on. But expertly as the maneuver had been executed, it was to no avail. Ever watchful and alert, the Dyak in the stern had anticipated the very move. Shrilly he yelled to his sweating paddlers and threw his weight

against the great steering sweep. Then, working like machines, the warriors backed water and checked headway abruptly. As the Sprite bore down on them they skillfully placed their craft so that she would fetch up dead alongside.

Tracey swore a tremendous oath, grabbed up the pistol and heavy kris and leaped along the starboard deck with Devlin at his heels. Already the first of the Dyaks were over the low rail, charging aft with blood-curdling yells.

TRACEY fired steadily as he plunged to meet them. A few of the charging vanguard dropped to the deck, but those behind, some dozen in all, surged aft unchecked.

When Devlin saw Tracey cast his pistol aside he began firing, but as luck would have it, the rise jammed after the first shot. With a savage rumble in his throat, he jerked his long knife from his waist and sprang forward with teeth bared, determined to do as much damage as he could before death cut him down.

But Tracey, famed throughout the Celebes for his agility and expert swordsmanship with native weapons, was to need little help in settling the affair. For a second, after dropping his pistol, he poised, then, for all the world like one of their kind gone amok, he leaped snarling into the fray.

The mêlée was destined to be a short and bloody one. The wild Dyaks, steamed up with fiery samshu and tuba wine, had been led into more than they had figured on. Here, they realized too late, was no simple trader to be frightened by awesome yells and brandishing of knives. Instead, they were confronted by a towering, flaming eyed demon, who seemed to know and love this game of hand-to-hand fighting.

As the howling mob closed in,

Tracey met them and brought them to a standstill with two devastating sweeps of the five-foot kris. Narrow wooden bucklers fringed with hair of former victims were flung up, only to be cut in two like cardboard. Coats of tough bark mail, capable of turning an arrow or knife point, proved little better than flimsy rice paper.

BEFORE they were well aware of it, half their number lay at the demon's feet while the rest, yelling in terror, turned and broke for the rail. Tracey, as mad as any Dyak gone juramentado, pursued them fiendishly, snarling and slashing savagely at their heels.

Three of the Dyaks gained the rail and plunged overboard. The trader, barely an arm's length behind, stormed up just as they hit the water. Swiftly his eyes raked the side, but none hung there. When he looked again the ones who had jumped overboard were swimming frantically toward their half sunken prau a half mile astern. Tracey leaped from the rail and hurled an oath at the dazed Devlin who as yet hadn't gotten in a single stroke.

"Smart now, Devlin! Don't stand there like a fool. Look astern! Here comes the vinta. She means to run us down! Below on the double quick and break out a stick or two of that dynamite. Jump, they'll lay us aboard in two shakes!"

Without looking to see the vinta bearing them down astern, Devlin scuttled aft and dived into the open companionway. Tracey sped after him and shoved the Chinaman from the wheel.

"Stand by-you. Wear ship!"

The yellow man sprang to obey. Tracey threw a swift glance over his shoulder at the giant war vinta and knew he hadn't much time. There was no doubt now as to the Dyak

captain's intention. And Tracey realized with a sinking heart, that if the plunging craft's knife-blade stem came close enough to bite into the hull of his ancient sloop, they were indeed sunk.

However, he held the Sprite resolutely to her course, and when it seemed they must surely be rammed, he spun the wheel hard down.

"Slack away!" he thundered, and the Chinaman let the sheet go with a run.

Seemingly aware of her peril, the sloop answered her helm with a will. Careening like a scared seabird, she swerved sharply to starboard with scant feet separating her from destruction. From astern came howls of baffled rage mingled with the hissing of roiled water as the vinta with thrumming cordage and bulging sails shot past the quarter.

As she tore past Tracey flecked the sweat from his brow and looked to see the Dyak captain's bestial face leering at him from the stern of his craft. Defeated by a hair's breadth in his bold attempt to run them down, he seemed ready to leap overboard after them.

And, as if to aid him in his decision, Devlin charged aft with two sticks of dynamite in his hands. The vinto was still close enough, so with a lurid oath, he heaved the first. It landed cleanly in the after part of the native craft and exploded with a roar. More wild howls and frenzied screams rent the air, and amid a dense, choking acrid haze, the vinta's crew clawed savagely at one another in their mad struggle to go overboard.

Devlin emitted a yell of unholy glee and threw the other stick. But the Sprite was footing it away from the scene of carnage under all canvas, and the dynamite fell short. The mate snarled in disappointment and

shook his fist wrathfully over the side. "Let 'em go, Devlin," laughed Tracey from the wheel. "They've had enough; they're all headed for the shore. If you want to do something besides swear, get for'ard and tend that jib. We've still got to clear that reef ahead, and the tide's beginning to flood strong. Let's get going."

NEXT day at noon found the Sprite hove to off Lakayan Island, where Tracey had buried the body of Swanstrom six months before, and where he intended to dispose of the head of Snedden, Swanstrom's partner.

Devlin was aft by the binnacle, sewing and getting a canvas bag ready for Snedden's head. The were forward taking Chinamen soundings to make sure they had the right location. Tracey was so particular about this matter that Devlin was exasperated. He figured they had wasted enough time on the two dead men and the longer they kept the last one's head aboard, the more certain they were to call down some lingering curse on the old sloop which was the only home they knew.

The skipper had ordered exactly twenty fathoms under the fore-foot and the arming in the lead end must show broken shell and hard sand. Devlin knew that the sooner they got that, the sooner the thing would be over and done with. After a tedious half hour a Chinaman came aft coiling his lead line.

"Twenty fathom," he piped. "Twenty fathom with broken shell and hard sand."

"Fine," rumbled Devlin, turning to Tracey. "If you're satisfied this is where we buried Swanstrom, we'll put his partner's head over and finish the job."

But Tracey wasn't to be rushed. He turned from a long survey of the low outline of Lakayan Island and laid his glasses aside.

"Right," he agreed, while the corners of his lips upcurled to form that maddening smile Devlin knew so well—a smile that he felt would further try his temper. "All set?"

"All set," answered the mate as he picked the head off the hatch and put it in the canvas bag. "All set. Here goes." Then it came—just as he had expected.

"Hold it!" snapped Tracey suddenly, springing forward in alarm. "Hold it! I almost forgot something. Here, give me that bag."

He took the bag from the startled mate, fished out the head again and stood gazing at the gruesome object which had once been part of a human body—alive and vibrant. Then presently he sighed and unsheathed his knife. After setting the head back on the hatch, he pried open the tightly-clamped jaws.

DEVLIN and the Chinese crew were frankly puzzled and stared at him as if he had gone mad. For some minutes he probed around in the mouth and throat with his fingers. Then abruptly he brought forth an object which glowed and sparkled in the bright sunlight like a huge globule of the sea itself.

An emerald, it was—a perfect emerald and a fitting mate for the one he had traded the green eye for in the devil-devil house.

Swanstrom had been right, as Tracey had always believed he was. Snedden had placed the stone in his mouth while running from the pursuing Dyaks. When he had stumbled and fallen there in the jungle, he had choked to death on the emerald. Otherwise he would have escaped with Swanstrom, and Tracey would have picked up two battered men instead of one.

(Concluded on Page 128)

The Battle of the Chairs



There Are Plenty of Adventure Thrills in Shanghai—
as the Hero of this Swift-Moving, PulseStirring Yarn Soon Discovers

By REX SHERRICK

Author of "The Maffia Doom," "Sea Pelf," etc.

ADVENTURE is where you find it.

There are times when it eludes you, unless you look for it with assiduity.

"Shorty" Lyons was the sort of chap who simply must have it, and when he didn't find it, when it didn't meet him half way, he invariably went out on a scouting expedition appointing himself a committee of one to enliven the monotony of life's pathway.

It began in the Shanghai Club,

where may be found, by the persevering, the longest, wettest bar in the world. It was a place where drinks of all sorts could be found, and were.

Shorty Lyons, who measured something like six feet two in his stocking feet, who weighed around a hundred and eighty without his clothes, was a worshiper at the feet of the fickle goddess. He had been places and seen things, had Shorty, but ever the more distant fields assumed greener hue, and Shorty was forever

going forth with his rake and his scythe. Twenty-five years of age, Shorty had no intention of ever settling down.

He'd put the farm behind him, despite the beseechings of an irate father, and was firmly resolved that the West, which wasn't as wild and woolly as fictionists would have tried to make him believe, should see him no more, save when he went home at wide intervals to strut his stuff for the old folks, and the girls he had left behind him.

NOW, Shorty wasn't a booze hoister. He could take it or leave it alone, and sheer delight in his own physical perfection made him leave it alone for the most part.

But he had just been kicked off a tramp steamer on the Bund, and the affair called for a celebration.

When he found his way to the Shanghai Club, whither a ricksha coolie took him as a matter of course, realizing that he was probably just in from the Great American Desert, he hadn't a friend in the world.

In fifteen minutes he had lots of friends. The money which he had brought with him, and which he had refused the skipper of the tramp steamer as passage money—resulting in his unceremonious setting ashore—took care of the matter of friends. Nothing makes friends quicker than money freely spent, nothing loses them quicker than the lack of it. Shorty knew this, and was determined to get as much out of his present visit as was humanly possible.

"What do you do in Shanghai for excitement?" he asked one fellow.

"Well," began the fellow, a downat-the-heel American, ticking off the items on a dirty forefinger, "there's a war going on here somewhere, so they tell me; the Marines have landed and are ready at any time for fight or frolic; the cabarets are full of Russian dames who'll cheat you out of your eye-teeth if you'll permit them; and, let's see, yes, there's always something in the Chinese City. Anything in that line-up listen good to you?"

"All the other fellow's excitement," said Shorty. "How does a fellow amuse himself?"

"Good grief! Haven't I suggested enough to appeal to you?"

"Nope. I want to do something original."

"Well, you'll never do it here. All folks do in this joint is crook the elbow, and rub elbows with crooks."

"But aren't there any other places?"

"How much money you got?"
"Lots!"

"Then let's go away from here. Adventure is where you find it."

Shorty Lyons left the Shanghai Club hanging to the arm of his new found friend, who had introduced himself to Shorty as Smith, but who had answered impartially to Jones, Black, White and Brown when addressed by habitués of the club—and walked right into the snow-white arms of the fickle goddess!

It came about in this wise:

SMITH and Lyons were strolling along the Bund, talking of this and that, when Shorty got his first glimpse of a sedan chair. He'd never seen one before, save in pictures. This one had a light swinging on one of the poles, and was carried by two stoop-shouldered, cross-eyed coolies. Shorty stopped and stared. Smith stopped perforce, and followed the direction of Shorty's glance.

"It's a native doctor, going to visit a patient," he explained.

"How do you know what's in the chair?"

"A doctor always carries a lan-

tern, or a candle inside a globe, on the chair. Some silly superstition or other, I think."

Shorty started on, pulling Smith with him. But once he looked back at the sedan chair. He stopped again, cried out in excitement:

"Look at that! A battle royal as sure as I'm a foot high!"

It was.

A COOLIE carrying two pails of water, or of slops, on either end of a pole slung over one shoulder, had collided with the leader of the coolies bearing the sedan chair. He had splashed the coolie copiously with the fluid. Now, sedan chair bearers were a clannish lot, and they were as proud as proud. A chair coolie never would think of suffering an indignity put upon him by a humbler coolie to pass unchallenged.

He dropped his end of the chair and started after the water carrier. The water carrier let out a yell. Ricksha coolies within sound of his voice dropped their shafts, paid no heed to the remonstrances of passengers, and started for the muss. The second chair bearer likewise slipped free of the chair, and both bearers began to yell.

"It's the call of the clan," explained Smith. "In two shakes this Bund will be a busy place. Wait until wandering members of the ancient order of chair coolies hear that call of their brethren."

The man inside the canopied chair stuck his head out to see what was happening, just as Shorty Lyons, followed by a protesting Smith, ran toward the scene—and the water carrier, in order further to incense the chair bearer, emptied one bucket of the fluid squarely on his head.

"Hey, Smith," cried Lyons, "this isn't right! The doctor is a white man!"

The fight was being fast and furiously waged when the two Americans sailed in.

"Whoopee!" yelled Shorty. "Let'r buck!"

His right fist lashed out, and downward because he was so tall he had to bend to hit, and caught a coolie under the chin.

The coolie described a back somersault among his compatriots, whose ranks were being augmented second by second as coolies of all kinds and classes, carrying sticks, stones and swinging fairly capable fists, ran in to join the fight, in no whit interested in what had started it.

Some of the nearest of the fighters turned at this, and recognizing in Lyons and Smith a pair of the hated foreign devils, sailed into them.

Chinese coolies, because they have to fight to live, are fairly decent fighters, willing to take one to land one, a fact that Lyons soon discovered. In a trice he and Smith were deeply involved, and Smith turned out to be no mean fighter himself, for all that excessive use of spiritous liquors had somewhat shortened his breath.

Lyons' fist smacked home in a greasy face. The face disappeared. Another appeared, and Lyons smacked that. It disappeared. More Chinese turned their attention to Lyons and Smith.

THEY had three each to handle, and the three weren't bad with their fists, especially since their fists were encasing capable looking clubs. Rights and lefts thudded into greasy faces as Lyons and Smith swung, ducked, swung again.

The doctor barged through the press.

"Hurry, please," he begged. "I must go to my patient. It's a matter of life or death!"

"Then why," rasped Smith, "go in a sedan chair, when automobiles are so plentiful?"

"Because she lives in an alley too narrow to be reached by a car."

"'She,' did you say, Doctor?" said Shorty. "You mean your patient is a woman?"

A N American girl, yes, too ill to work, down on her luck, living on charity because she refused to go through with it at some cabaret. I've got to get to her! It's a matter of minutes."

Sedan chairs, some empty, some with one passenger or two, were debouching from the streets which came into the Bund. The battle in the street was assuming huge proportions, and nobody seemed to care how it had started. The doctor's chair rested flat in the street, because his coolies had been dragged away and were engaged in defending their coolie honor against ricksha coolies and others.

A right smacked home. A left. "Follow me, Doctor," said Lyons, "and point out your 'coolies!"

The doctor obeyed. He pointed out one man. Shorty dragged him back to the chair.

"Keep him there, Smith," he gasped, "as you value your life. I'll be back with his brother in a minute."

Back, after a few minutes, he came with the other coolie. Four other chairs, meanwhile, had been deposited close by, and other coolies were mixing in the fray. A merry battle. Lyons, speaking to the chair bearers as he would have spoken to the mules he had left behind him, forced them to their places. The doctor climbed in.

"Now, Smith," wheezed Lyons, "you pace the wheeler, I'll take the leader, and we'll see the doc to his destination." The coolies hoisted their chairs. Coolies darted at the leader from either side, only to crash back as Lyons planted his fists in the faces of each. Behind the chair, Smith performed a like service for the "wheeler."

They managed, somehow, to win free of the press, when the coolies broke into that tireless dogtrot which eats up the miles, and which no outlander can equal for any length of time. Unknown to Lyons, Smith had signaled to the bearers of two unoccupied chairs. These chairs, after the doctor's chair had traveled about four blocks, and both Americans were wheezing like porpoises, came alongside.

Smith yelled to Lyons, and the doctor's white bodyguard took possession of the chairs.

They had definitely taken the side of the chair bearers, and trouble lay ahead, despite the fact that Shorty was quite sure the battle was over.

The doctor appeared after a few minutes, on the dingy steps of the dingy shack in the dingy street where the three chairs had halted.

"I'll have to have a bit of help," said the doctor wearily. "She's delirious, and I can't keep her still long enough to give her a hypodermic."

SMITH looked at Lyons, Lyons looked at Smith.

"You go, Shorty," said Smith. "I —I'm no good with women."

He raised his right hand as though for emphasis. It was trembling like a leaf.

"Booze," explained Smith laconically.

Shorty Lyons doffed his hat and followed the doctor into the dingy house, through a dingy, unlighted hall, and entered a room that was dingier than either house or hall. In a bed, under a flickering light, a guttering candle set high in the

wall at the head of the bed, a woman whose face was very white, rolled and tossed, and muttered in delirium.

Shorty stopped as though shot.

No, he'd never seen the girl before. But he had never seen one so beautiful, despite the pallor of her cheeks. Her hands, which moved spasmodically on the coverlet, were slender, fragile as Dresden china. Her hair was bobbed, and just now all awry, but in that first glance something happened to Shorty.

"If we'd been held up on the Bund two minutes more we'd have been too late," said the doctor swiftly, as he bent above the white face, in whose eyes there was no faintest spark of recognition.

The doctor issued swift instructions to Shorty Lyons. Lyons took the right forearm of the girl in his big hands, hands which seemed suddenly very big indeed, and held the arm motionless while the doctor gave the hypo.

The girl screamed, tried to pull away. Sweat broke forth in great globules on the face of Shorty Lyons.

"Don't hurt her, Doctor, please!" he said.

But the doctor seemed not to hear him. He went on swiftly with his labors. The girl finally relaxed, permitted the doctor to lower her back upon the coverlets. Shorty Lyons stood beside the bed, hat in hand, shifting from right foot to left, and back again, awkwardly.

But he could not tear his eyes from the face of the girl.

Just before her eyes closed, they met those of Shorty Lyons for a fleeting instant. They widened, as though she had recognized Shorty. Then they seemed to cloud over, pain marred for a moment the white beauty of her face, and the eyes

closed. The girl breathed deeply, stertorously.

The doctor looked at Lyons gravely, shook his head.

"She'll die unless she can get to a hospital," he said, "where she can have the best of care."

"Well, why don't you take her?"
"You forget. I told you she had
no money. I can't afford to put her
in a hospital myself, much as I'd
like to."

"How much will it take?" The doctor named a sum.

"I have just about that," said Shorty, glancing again at the girl. "I'll ante my pile if you think hospital is the word."

"Take her bed clothing and fix up the inside of one of those chairs," said the doctor then, "pad 'em in to make the inside as soft as possible, while I gather up her things."

In five minutes the unconscious girl was ensconced in the sedan chair which had brought Shorty Lyons to the dingy street, and the three chairs were turned about, facing down the alley the way they had come.

Lyons noted that the chair bearers were talking excitedly among themselves, but of course could understand no word.

A HAND appeared from the chair in which the doctor rode, beck-oning to Lyons, who strode beside the chair which carried the girl.

"My God, Lyons," groaned the doctor, "I forgot something, and it'll probably be the death of Aimee Loring! That's her name."

"Yes?" questioned Lyons, while his heart suddenly did a dive into his boots with foreboding. "What did you forget?"

"The fight on the Bund! These three chairs have been marked, and we have to go through several big streets to reach the hospital. The other coolies probably know where these chairs are at this identical moment, and we are bound to be stopped before we can get through. Any delay, or excitement, is bound to have terrible effect upon Miss Loring."

Shorty Lyons' teeth clicked together savagely.

"There'll be no delay, Doctor!" he snapped. "Tell your coolies to drive on!"

The three sedan chairs, with the coolies still chattering, though with voices lowered because of the savage glances of the white foreign devil who seemed everywhere at once, moved swiftly and softly into the night.

The chair in which the girl rode moved without bouncing. In this the coolies were making a miraculous concession to the white foreigner. They would have, ordinarily bounced their own emperor all over the place.

The three chairs swung into Kiukiang Road, en route to the Bund.

SHORTY LYONS dropped back to give brief instructions to Smith, who rode in the third sedan chair. He hurried ahead then, to give other instructions to the doctor.

The doctor protested, mentioned his own multitude of years to emphasize his protests; but Shorty Lyons had taken command of things, and refused to be denied.

"You'll do as I say, Doc," he said briefly, "or you'll never collect any more fees in Shanghai!"

Then the game old doctor grinned, stuck out his hand.

"All right, young man," he said. "Man can't die but once. Let's go."

"Atta boy, Doctor. I knew you were a sport, else you wouldn't have been treating this little girl without pay."

Again that sheepish grin, as the doctor's head disappeared into his

canopied chair, and the three chairs swung smoothly on down Kiukiang.

They were within two block of the Bund. Lyons, almost out of breath with the long run, but with his teeth set in savage determination, glanced back at the chair in which rode the man Smith-Jones-Black-White-Brown. Then he looked

A single ricksha, without a passenger, was dashing on ahead toward the Bund with all speed. As the ricksha coolie ran he shouted into the darkness ahead of him, toward the canyon-like opening which gave upon the Bund. From the invisible Bund came answering shouts.

Little as Shorty Lyons knew about China, he knew that the born enemies of all chair bearers were being warned of the approach of the antagonist.

The doctor's chair moved over to the side of the road. The chair in which the girl rode, swung up alongside it, paused for a moment, while the chair in which Smith rode came up on the opposite side, with the girl's chair between the two others.

Thus, side by side, the three chairs moved toward the mouth of the Kiukiang, toward the Bund. Smith was walking now, too, beside Lyons, who strode ahead of the chairs.

THE doctor, his face apprehensive, but with a grim set to his lips, had alighted and was striding along behind the chairs. Into his hands Shorty had pressed a pair of brass knuckles, for which he himself had never found use, but which he was glad that curiosity had caused him to keep.

So disposing his forces, and with warning looks at the chair bearers, some of whom grinned in pleased anticipation, some of whom were in a blue funk, they approached the mouth of Kiukiang, swung into the Bund.

And from both directions, shouting like all the dogs of war, came
ricksha coolies, night soil coolies,
coolies of all kinds—save chair bearers—to give battle to the ancient
enemy.

Odd, what Shorty was thinking as the enemy drew near.

"Six months on Dad's ranch would certainly bring the color back into that Aimee girl's cheeks. She's certainly had a tough break."

The Bund coolies were rapidly approaching, as Shorty continued his mental communing with Shorty.

"But she doesn't know me. She's never seen me before. She'll be unconscious when we get to the hospital, and I'll have to leave right away. Gosh, but she's pretty, even if she is so pale. Not over twenty, either, I'll bet."

Then the coolies closed in.

SMITH jumped around to the side on the right, while Lyons took the left. The chair bearers hesitated.

Shorty pushed one in the back, forcing him ahead. He protested in shrill Cantonese, but when Lyons kicked him he bent to his work, though his head turned right and left affrightedly as he moved on ahead. For a wonder the other coolies followed suit, their confidence somehow going out to these unaccountable forcign devils.

It was no time for niceties. In Kiukiang Lyons had armed himself with a stick about two feet in length, of good hard wood, and Smith had followed suit.

A yelling giant of a coolie dashed for the left side sedan chair, yelling encouragement to those who followed in his wake—and Lyons swung the stick to his face, striking him savagely in the mouth, not drawing the blow in the least, and the coolie went down as though poleaxed. He tried to get up, and Shorty Lyons hit him again.

The three chairs barged ahead.

The three coolies dashed upon the chair bearers from in front. Smith knocked down the one furthest from Shorty, while Shorty disposed of the two near at hand, two swift sharp blows of his club that packed all the anger which Shorty had accumulated as, during the trip through Kiukiang, he had thought what excitement might mean to the girl in the chair, and whom he had never seen before.

COOLIES were all about the chairs now, raining blows upon the bearers. But the bearers, glancing aside at Shorty Lyons, and at the doctor, and Smith, all three of whom now seemed to be possessed of devils, bent their shoulders under the blows, ducked their heads, and dug their toes into the pavement.

They slackened speed not at all, though shortly blood began to appear on every naked back of a chair bearer.

Shorty, murderous anger seething within him, was everywhere at once. He swung with the club, and men went down. He struck with his fist, the free one, driving into yellow faces which seemed to be set with snarling fangs.

But other coolies came up to take the places of the fallen. The fight went on, promising never to end, but the three chairs somehow managed to barge through the press, to keep going, even though they could not shake off the attackers.

Once the left chair swerved aside as someone struck the leading bearer on the side of the head, and one ricksha coolie, sensing that something precious was carried in the center chair, darted in between the chairs. The little doctor followed him. He struck him savagely at the base of the skull, and the man fell, but as he fell his shriek of pain rose to high heaven. From the center chair came a low moan.

It reacted strangely on the three white men, that moan. Where they had been but three before, they now seemed, to the startled coolies, to have increased in number by at least thrice.

Shorty Lyons strode ahead now, grasping the stick in both hands, and whenever he swung it in brief arcs, a coolie fell, and stayed down, and chair bearers stepped contemptuously over the fallen. More confidence now, had the chair bearers, for the foreign devils seemed incapable of being beaten.

The chair coolies took whacks across their heads, faces and naked shoulders, but they took them cheerfully, grinning, and barged ahead.

THEIR straw-sandaled feet began to scrape rhythmically against the pavement, as though they dug in their toes to increase their stride—and the scrape-scrape of their advance was like music in their own ears. Fear seemed to have left them, though all were bleeding from many blows.

Shorty Lyons grinned, but it was a grin of savagery.

A man struck at him, hit him on the wrist. He lost his club, but his feet and hands were still serviceable, and he used them mightily. From off to his right he could hear the wheezing breath of Smith.

He wondered if Smith would be able to stand the gaff, and thought not. But Smith was doing terrible execution among the attackers. Not a matter of pride perhaps, but a matter of self-preservation. Smith had been long enough in China to know the Chinese. Let these people whip

them and their lives would be made miserable as long as they remained in Shanghai.

Little ways of torment-

But if they won?

They'd get, forever afterward, the respect which all white men believe to be due them.

A single coolie, nude to the waist, charged in from the side, made a flying leap to the top of Shorty's chair.

But his weight no sooner told on the shoulders of the bearers than the chair tilted over suddenly, depositing him back on the pavement, where Shorty stood waiting for him, grasped him by the back of the neck with his left hand, yanked him toward himself, and drove a savage fist smack into his yellow face.

There came a thin cry from behind the chairs.

Like a flash Shorty was back there, his toes doing wonderful execution on the persons of three coolies who were perched atop the prone doctor, systematically beating him to a pulp.

The doctor's face was bloody when Shorty yanked him erect, but he grinned bravely through the stains and ran, staggering just a little, to take his place in the rear of the still moving chairs.

That journey along the Bund, to the beginning of Avenue King Edward the Seventh, was the longest Shorty had ever taken.

BUT before the avenue was reached the slumbering police of Shanghai had been mustered for action, and when they put in an appearance, and began to fire upon the rioters indiscriminately, the attacking coolies fled, and the three white men began to take stock of their injuries.

All save the doctor who, granted a breathing space, gave his first attention to Aimee Loring. Smith and Lyons were a mess, both of them. Almost nude, scratched and bleeding, their eyes half closed, they still found it possible to grin at each other.

The doctor nodded, but gravely, as Shorty looked a question at him after his examination of the girl. Then Smith resumed his chair, and the doctor resumed his.

When the hospital was finally reached, and the night doctors and nurses routed out, Shorty discovered that the doctor had fainted in his chair, from fatigue and the unaccustomed exertion.

A WEEK later, as Shorty waited outside the ward, the doctor, with whom he had had many long talks since the fight on the Bund, came to the door softly and beckoned to him.

"She wants to see you, Shorty," he said.

"But she doesn't know me," he protested. "For all she knows I may be a crook."

"I've told her all about you."

"Did you tell her-"

"Yes, I told her you'd been in every day to see her, and were only waiting for her to regain consciousness to introduce yourself."

Shorty gripped the doctor by the arm, so harshly that the kindly faced man winced.

"Doctor," Shorty said tensely, "if you've told her I've been footing the bills I'll break your neck, old and weak as you are."

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"I didn't tell her that. I told her you had a ranch, in the Western United States, that was probably a doggone good place for folks to get well on. Furthermore, whether you like it or not, I told her about that night on the Bund, and informed her that you were madly in love with her."

"Damn you, Doctor," began Shorty Lyons, "I don't—I never—I didn't say—"

"Well," interrupted the doctor, "go on in there and say it now."

And Shorty Lyons, who during the past week had been thinking a lot of the ranch which he had left despite the beseechings of an irate father, went to the door of the ward, met a worldly wise nurse who was just coming out, who grinned at him knowingly, told him to make it short and snappy—and went in.

Shorty was as bashful as a schoolboy when he entered.

When he came out he looked as though he had suddenly grasped the world by the tail, and was grinning like a Cheshire cat—all over his face.

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PART TWO

SYNOPSIS

Bob Burdett has been willed the JB Ranch, known as the Ranch of Bones, by an uncle. The mystery surrounding this ranch concerns the Magpie Creek's sudden and inexplicable dryness. A trust fund of \$100,000 is left in escrow for Bob, to be delivered to him if he clears the mystery.

He leaves with his adopted dad, Pop Argyle. An attempt is made on Bob's life by a member of dangerous Plug Hograth's gang of Jimtown. Enroute, Pop and Bob overtake a bandit, Emilio Rodriguez. Pop Argyle identifies an initialed gun the bandit carries. It is the gun of Bob's dead father. He accuses Emilio of the death of Burdett, Sr., and of Bob's sister Ellen.

Pop and Bob bind Emilio and take him prisoner. In Jimtown, a bartender whose tongue has been removed by Hograth's gang warns the travellers not to stay in town, and other intimations come that Hograth does not like strangers.

Pop and Bob are guided to the residence of Don Julio, who offers to imprison the bandit and invites them to partake of his hospitality. Drinking with



Don Julio, Pop and Bob are given knockout drops in the liquor, by Don, who is an ally of Emilio's. After Pop and Bob are fast asleep, Emilio, released, approaches the two with a deadly poniard raised aloft. This is the vengeance he craves—death, with the victims unable to strike back in any way.

Now Go on with the Story

CHAPTER VII

"You Would Sleep-Long?"

ON JULIO came slowly from the juzgado, following the Indian he had released. Yet upon gaining the open air, the jefe muttered to himself. His voice held a whining note. He was nervous. Why had he not administered cyanide or some other quick poison, instead of the chloral?

With reason he mistrusted the Indian, who, crazed by blood lust, might hack the victims to pieces.

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Also, the don was none too sure about the manner in which the younger of the two victims had gone to sleep. Perhaps he had not absorbed enough of the knockout drops. In haste to pour the chloral without being detected, the jefe had not been able to divide the dose equally.

In all faith the Mexican had little to fear. Had he gone slowly back to the patio, in all likelihood the job would have been done as others had been done before. But of a sudden he broke into a run, reaching the patio gate just as Emilio was tiptoeing toward the slumbering Pop Argyle.

Bob unconsciously chose that moment to let his head slump forward and sidewise, banging his temple against the arm of his chair. He growled, and the Indian leaped back, crouching. Bob seemed to waken. He shook himself, started to

stand erect, then eased himself back into the chair.

"Damn funny!" he muttered. "Never been so-sleepy-"

The jefe darted forward to Emilio's side. "Wait!" he commanded in a whisper.

Reluctantly, the Indian hunkered back beside one of the palms. His black eyes were fixed, seemingly lidless. He would get his revenge, and it was quite in keeping with his nature to gloat over it for a minute or two. Besides, he liked to have his victims completely at his mercy, and this time the jefe seemed not to have done as finished a job as usual.

Don Julio kicked Pop. The latter moved uneasily, but made no sound. A repetition of the kick brought a mumble, but it was apparent that Pop was all under the influence of the sedative.

The jefe thereupon moved past the body, to the chair in which Bob sat. Some doubt still lay in the Mexican's mind. These men had not relinquished their side-arms, according to custom, when they accepted his hospitality. A big Colt lay in a holster right under the younger man's hand. The don moved forward noiselessly, reaching out his hand to secure the weapon.

AT the first touch, Bob reacted. His hand snapped down, clasping the butt and trigger guard of the weapon. Yet he did not draw, did not open his eyes, except the merest slit. The jefe jerked away, abandoning the attempt.

"Señor!" he said softly. Then in a louder tone, "Señor, you would sleep-long?"

"Unggk. Ohhaw-w-w!" yawned Bob inelegantly. He twisted in the chair. What the hell was going on, anyway? His eyes opened a little wider, though this was not perceptible. Bob saw rather vaguely the white trousers and bulging abdomen of the jefe, and wondered vaguely why the Mexican was bending over him.

The jefe saw Emilio rise silently to his feet, the poniard ready, and signaled peremptorily for the cholo to wait. There was one test which never failed. The don reached out his thumb and forefinger, beneath Bob's nose.

Spat!

The jefe, releasing his index finger with a snap, had brought the nail stingingly against the tip of Bob's nose!

"Dios assistra!" shrilled the Mexican. "You go to sleep! You insult the house of a gentleman!"

Combined with the sharp pain at the end of his nose, these words brought Bob to consciousness. Yet he managed to conceal the fact, sensing that something extraordinary was about to occur. Even with a haze over most of his mind he was aware that dropping off to slumber under the influence of fatigue and liquor is not generally considered an insult or a crime in the Southwest.

Then he saw the jefe beckon.

"The young one first!" adjured Don Julio in a whisper. "He is not so sound asleep!"

A taller shadow moved forward, and then Bob saw the mirage assassin—freed from his shackles and tiptoeing forward with some kind of a knife upraised!

Bob still clutched his gun. Now he yanked it from holster and fired once—twice—fair into the midsection of the Indian. The latter slumped with a groaning cry.

The jefe carried weapons as well, but in that terrifying moment he forgot all about them. Yelling Spanish objurgations, he turned to flee. Bob's third bullet caught him in the right arm, spinning him about and bringing a shriek of pain. He fell to one knee.

BUT he was on his feet again in an instant, running as tight as he could travel for the patio gate. Bob, rising, sped a fourth bullet after him, but missed as Don Julio swerved to crash through the gate.

"Well, ain't this a hell of a note?" marveled Bob aloud, looking first at the smoking six-gun in his hand, then down at the inert form of Pop Argyle. Wiping one hand across his eyes, which seemed fogged with a sleep he could not shake off completely, he knelt and shook his comrade after examining him for lethal wounds.

"Hey, Pop! Wake up, pardner! Hey! Hey!"

"No — hey, hey — lemme shleep," mumbled the veteran thickly. He did not move.

"Doped, by God!" said Bob. "I got some, too, but not so much.

Well, I reckon it's sit here an' keep awake till the jefe brings some more of his killers."

Quickly he reloaded his sixshooter.

CHAPTER VIII

"We Got Somep'n Wurth While Up Thataway!"

EITHER jefe nor any of the peon "soldiers"—"bandidos alicantes" were a better term for the five or six irregulars who enforced commands in Jimtown—came back. But about two minutes after Bob's shots a glass door leading to an upstairs gallery opened, and two Indian servants came forth in the moonlight, bearing rifles.

"Señor?" called one of them questioningly.

Bob was in no mood to parley. He snapped a shot in their direction, a shot which splintered some glass but did no further harm. The servants retreated indoors with alacrity. They were not seen again, which was lucky enough, as it proved. Bob stood beside one of the palms, wide awake, for a long time—two or three hours. Then he seated himself in a chair, poking the body of Emilio with his boot.

The assassin had stiffened. He was a "good Injun" now. Bob relaxed in the chair. A little later his eyelids closed slowly and completely.

He slept.

Aches. Sore cyclids that hurt to open. Dizziness. Nausea. Bloodshot eyes that see in blurry fashion. Aches.

Coming out of slumber induced by a big dose of any narcotic, is one of the least enjoyable of human experiences. Bob, who really had absorbed little of the chloral, squirmed and wriggled in the chair, as the light of dawn came down between the walls of the patio. He grunted.

He did not want to open his eyes, at least not just yet. His dry tongue came forth to explore still dryer lips that seemed to have swelled in the night. A peculiar virulent kind of alkali seemed to fill his mouth, and his throat was dry and constricted.

But gradually the cobwebs departed from his brain. He blinked. There at his feet was the body of the dead Indian. Over there old Pop still slumbered, not even snoring. Now under Bob's slaps, shakes and verbal urging he came partially awake. He groaned, retched in useless nausea-they had eaten nothing since the previous morning, and their stomachs both were as empty as punctured water bags. Bob's solicitous urging he stopped groaning, opened bloodshot eyes, then rolled over. A moment later he pulled himself to hands and knees, head lolling downward as though the neck had not strength enough to support it.

I took fully ten minutes to get him to his feet, and all the rest of half an hour before he was able to walk and talk in anything like his usual manner.

"Killed him, huh?" were his first croaked words. Pop stopped with legs propped wide apart, staring down at the body of the Indian.

"Had to," said Bob. "Le's get outa here as soon as yuh can make it, pardner," suggested Bob, helping Pop to his feet again. "I don't see any signs of anybody in the house, but it's a cinch they're watchin' us somehow. I s'pose they've stole our hosses."

"I'll try walkin' up an' down a second."

This time Pop managed it, though

he staggered. Bob left him and cautiously went through the patio gate, into the house, and listened. He did not hear a sound. He went on to the street door, and looked out. Only a few of the mongrel dogs met his glance. Not a soul was visible anywhere!

L OOKS like we own Jimtown today," he reported, but added in a grimmer voice, "Likely there's plenty snipers waitin' behind windows, to give us what-for when we come out."

That guess proved erroneous, however. When they emerged, looking to left and right on the main street, one peon came in sight, riding a donkey. He turned in behind one of the adobes, apparently not seeing them, or not caring anything about them.

The doors of the juzgado hung open, and there was no sign of a guard about the place. The town itself gave the impression of being more than half deserted. Casting about, Pop soon discovered signs which interested him—tracks of wheels, the hoofprints of mules, horses and burros which assembled on the roadway leading out of Jimtown to the west, along the dry gulch of Magpie Creck.

"Funny," commented Bob. "Looks like the jefe took all the jiggers who work for him, an' beat it till we get away from here. Prob'ly waitin' some'eres to waylay us again, but I kinda doubt it. That jefe was one scared Greaser!"

They never would understand that night movement fully, but Don Julio and the handful of breeds and non-descripts who did his bidding had left for a hidden tenaja and cave in the lavas. There they would communicate with Hograth by heliograph first thing in the morning. And long before then the don would

have lost so much blood from his wound that any sort of active campaign would be impossible to him for the present.

In course of their search they entered the cantina where the blind white man had given them warning the previous afternoon. He was the one inhabitant of Jimtown possibly connected with the treacherous jefe, who had not departed.

He lay in a crumpled heap behind the pine bar, two knife wounds in his chest.

"It's the kinda indoor sport they understand an' like!" gritted Pop. "Knifin' a blind man! Prob'ly figgered he'd tipped us off to what was goin' to happen."

"Yeah," Bob agreed. "Don't reckon he cared much, though. In his place I sure wouldn't."

"Can't tell," said Pop soberly.
"There's a instinct agin' dyin' born in most all of us. We hang on, even when the hangin' is a hell of a lot unpleasanter than a quick shove-off."

BESIDE the sightless corpse, the cantina was empty. Pop took a drink of the bar liquor to brace himself, and then they emerged. Whatever tragedy of an earlier day lay behind that mute figure they could wonder; but the chances now were slim that it ever would come fully to light.

Perhaps the most peculiar feature of this unexplained situation confronted them a few moments later. In a mud jacal back of the jefe's residence, they came upon their saddles, bridles, saddle blankets and packs neatly stored. There also were the four horses, well watered and fed! The mule alone was missing.

Pop evolved a sort of explanation which would have to do for the moment, at least.

"That fat jefe was aimin' to adopt these critters into his own family," the veteran suggested. "He hid 'em out so prob'ly even his own men didn't know where they was. Then, when he got his greasy skin punctured, he was so hurt an' scairt he didn't even think of them."

BOB nodded. As they made ready for departure, and rode out leading the pack animals, he had been studying the lay of land to west and southwest.

In that direction lay the ranch they sought.

"If that blame' don wasn't lyin' to me last night," he remarked, "the JB ranch is about four miles thataway along the gulch of Magpie Creek. See them two young mountains out there—the ones that sorta lean away from each other?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'd say they was four—five mile away, though they look nearer. An' unless Magpie Creek turns right back on its own self, it's gotta pass through that notch! I bet that's the gate to our new range, oldtimer!"

"Uh-huh," mused Pop. "An' that's the way the jefe an' his gang have gone. I don't reckon Don Julio was lyin', though mebbe jest from habit the truth ain't ever in him. He sure wasn't figgerin' on us bein' able to use any information he give us, though, so we'll call it the truth till we find out different.

"I'm kinda in favor of desertin' this plain trail, an' circlin' a bit. There was nine or ten men in that party, an' likely enough they'll grow guts enough to tackle the pair of us, sooner or later."

"Plain common sense," agreed Bob, and they turned their mounts into the sagebrush to the north of the trail, away from the bed of the creek. "D' yuh know, with that warnin', added to bein' bushwhacked up there in the lavas, an' then warned again by that pore jigger with the glass eye, an' final bein' drugged—wa'al, pardner, the opposition for some reason is plumb well organized."

"Humph," grunted Pop. Then a sudden idea struck him. "Who gets the money—that hundred thousand dollars—in case we don't make the grade?"

"Well," replied Bob, striving to remember the exact terms of the copy of the will which had accompanied his deed and letter. He had skimmed through it only once. "If after five years we haven't found water an' notified the bank, the money is to go to some university or other. The ranch, of course, is deeded to us anyway—me, that is, an' yo're my pardner—but it ain't supposed to be worth a thing without water."

"Shucks," muttered Pop. "Then that ain't it. But like you say, this is too damn well organized not to have some mighty good reason behind it. All the money we got with us, an' our hosses, packs an' such, wouldn't be enough for to start a whole private war. Nope. We got somep'n wuth while up thataway!"

Bob grinned. "Spooks an' bones an' greasers with guns—not to mention this-here tongue-cutter, Hograth. Wa'al, le's trouble trouble, an' see what's what!"

CHAPTER IX

"C'mon! Git Him!"

HE approach to the mountain notch proved long and arduous. Broken country and a steady ascent necessitated many long detours. Yet if there had been an ambush prepared for them,

they avoided it. They caught no glimpse of life save a few carrion crows and a mule deer which ran whistling from covert.

"Must be some water some'eres near," said Pop. "Deer don't go thirsty long."

The two were forced to return to the trail, where it climbed the north side of the notch. Above them the leaning mountain rose a thousand feet or more. Across the gulch its twin rose more ruggedly to a still greater height. Between was the dry creek bed, now fully four hundred feet below them to the left as they reached the summit of the pass.

PROCEEDING with utmost caution, they reached the ridge unmolested, from which a sweeping panorama of the valley below—and almost all of the descending trail—met their eyes.

"Gosh!" said Pop. "Ain't it purty?"

Bob was silent a full minute, but his brown eyes were shining. "Lordy, Pop," he burst out then, "that range ain't dry! It jest can't be!"

In silence then they drank in the picture. From the bottom of the slope, where the dry creek bed again came almost flush with the trail and surrounding pasture land, a long, broad valley stretched onward and outward, gradually ascending till it reached what looked like a ringed rampart twelve or fifteen miles distant.

"The dry lake 'd be there," decided Bob.

Far beyond the low rampart was a range of hills bluish in the distance. In the clear air is was impossible to calculate how distant they were, yet they were fully thirty miles and perhaps forty miles away.

All the intermediate foreground was carpeted with green grass, flowers, piñon, chaparral, tall mes-

quite and sage, octailla, squaw weed, manzanita and rather discouraged looking cottonwood. The height of the sage, added to the abundance of flowers, testified to the rich fertility of the soil, and also to the fact that rains had been here in abundance recently.

Though they had the fact still to learn, this valley was favored by nature. To the southwest there was a gap in the Mosaer Hills through which a steady wind usually blew. This brought a remnant of moisture from the Pacific, and this ordinarily was deposited as rain. It was never heavy enough to be dependable, however. To Pop and Bob, as they rode down, it became quickly apparent that James Loudon Burdett had known whereof he spoke. Without some steady and permanent supply of water such as could be furnished by a running creek, stock would grow fat for a mouth or two-only to die miserably when rains did not come.

TWO hours of riding brought Bob and Pop to the dry crater basin. This once evidently had been a lake a square mile or so in extent, a reservoir from which sluice gates and ditches, communicating with natural gulches and arroyos to north and south, sent water to more distant parts of the range.

"When Magpie Creek was chatterin' this sure was one cow paradise!" said Pop. "An' lookit them buildings! They musta cost a pile to build—an' they ain't decrepid now. Nope, not any!"

Ranch headquarters nestled in a grove of larger cottonwoods on the south bank of the lake. Whereas the home corrals were broken down, and a few of the sheds were in bad repair, the ranch house proper, the cook shack, the bunk house and a solid square building they discovered

to be filled with well-oiled modern machinery, all were fresh-looking and intact.

THESE edifices, twice as large at least as those of the Cantwell spread which they had left, were all of planed cypress lumber imported from another part of the south, and laboriously teamed the eighty-five miles from railhead at Crandall.

The wood was creosote-stained, which gave it a rich brown color. White trim, and light green shutters now tightly closed, gave the ensemble a wide-awake and pleasing appearance.

"Don't look much like ghosts here," called Bob, his spirits vastly elated.

Pop had ridden up to the rim of the lake. He shook his head slowly, and beckoned.

Bob joined him, following the veteran's brief gesture.

Down in the lake bed was an appalling heap of whitened bones, in some places five feet in height!

"Went down there after the last water. Some of them was too weak to climb out an' be druv to market," said Pop, that sadness in his voice which reflected the queer non-mercenary regard for cows which creeps into the fiber of all decent men of the range as their saddle years flow by.

"An' up there in them breaks or the hills beyond is the answer," reflected Bob aloud. "D' yuh s'pose it's this jigger Hograth?"

"Wa-al, I read some'eres that faith 'd move mountains," said Pop, with the first whimsical touch that had been in his speech since the death of the Indian assassin. "Mebbe Hograth's full of faith—or hop, or somep'n. Le's eat!"

With the horses cared for and turned loose in the better of the two corrals, Pop prepared a meal. This was eaten in silence, for both men were assimilating bit by bit the aweing spectacle of a rich but deserted ranch which with luck could be a home and a fortune for them.

Little by little the cheerful aspect of the place began to fade. There was a creak in one of the larger cottonwoods, which sounded at regular intervals. And despite the fact that the sun was high in the heavens, a mysterious atmosphere of depression seemed to hover over the spot.

"Yeah," said Pop as though in answer to a question, "it's them bones."

Bob nodded. He understood, and said nothing as they scraped their tin plates and washed out cups from water doused out of a canteen.

"There's one of them wells that they dug," he remarked a few minutes later, as with tacit agreement they started to investigate the ranch house. "It mebbe has some water. Le's see."

THE bore proved to be a deep one; and pulling up the bucket showed only about two feet of water at the very bottom. This water was clear enough, however.

"It'll do," decided Pop, after cautiously wetting his tongue to taste for arsenic. "Let us stay a while, anyhow."

Bob touched his shoulder. "Somebody's watchin' us! I feel it!" he whispered.

"I'm sorta squeebjous m'ownself," admitted Pop, darting sharp glances at the big ranchhouse, and all about the buildings and corrals which flanked the yard. "Mebbe it's—"

He broke off suddenly, catching at the butt of his six-shooter.

Bob felt him start, and followed his gaze, yanking out his own weapon in turn. Up there on the second floor of the ranch building—slowly, eerily, in spite of the checkered sunlight of early afternoon—one of the green shutters was swinging slowly open!

THOUGH both watched, holding their breath in a sort of horrified expectancy; yet no sinister visage appeared—not even a human hand! The shutter hung open, and nothing but darkness showed beyond.

Pop scarcely waited to make sure, however. He was certain that no friends awaited him in that building; and was just as positive that nine or ten deadly enemies had come in this general direction from Jimtown—perhaps to join the mysterious tongue-cutter, Hograth, who was as yet no more than a sinister name to the partners, yet whom they had identified instinctively as the instigator of the warnings and the attempts upon their lives.

Jerking up his revolver, Pop thumbed three swift shots into that rectangle of blackness, and as speedily reloaded the empty chambers. For five seconds nothing happened.

"Might have been left open. The wind—" began Bob uneasily. But his practical explanation was left unfinished. It was cut short by the weirdest manifestation of the many which this ranch of bones and ghosts held in store for them

From upstairs, evidently from the room back of that open shutter, where the window sash had been raised, floated out a low, shuddering moan of nasal, inhuman agony! It stopped with a choking sound. Then there was a squawk, like that made when a rooster is snatched from his perch after nightfall, followed by the moan! This time it rose almost to a shriek. And as suddenly as it had come, it died away.

Silence — dead, awesome silence, almost as terrible as the sound! Pop and Bob looked at each other from widened eyes.

The veteran had fallen back several paces, and held his six-shooter aloft, ready to throw down on anything.

"You — got somep'n, all right!" whispered Bob through strained lips. "What in hell kinda critter makes that sorta noise? It sure wasn't human. S'pose a catamount?"

"T-t'ain't a man-a live one, anyway," stammered Pop. "I-I don't like this p-place, son!"

"Neither do I, but we come to settle things," answered Bob, revived determination in his tone. Luckily almost free from superstition, he saw things quickly in a more normal light. After all, the sun was up. There might be human beings in that building which now belonged to him and Pop; but after all, could a possibility of conflict, or mere shuddering yowls, scare them away from their own property?

"C'mon! I'll go fust!" he bade.

This was all the spur Pop needed. Ghosts or no ghosts, he would not allow his pardner to venture alone into trouble.

THE front door never had owned a lock, though inside there were supports for a bar to hold it closed againsh aggression. It opened readily. The inside was pitch dark, save for the light from the open door, which now slowly swung closed with a squeak of rusty hinges. Bob propped it open again.

"Open some of the shutters," he whispered.

With more light, they found themselves on the generous first floor of the ranch-house, where a narrow hallway ran straight back through the center, to a closed door at the rear. To the left a white and green painted stairway led upward, turning at a midway landing sharply to the right. On the sides of the hallway were open doorways, leading to rooms easily identified as the sitting room, front parlor and library of that early-century school of architecture.

BEHIND these, as they discovered, was a narrow little room extending nearly half the width of the house. This probably had been the ranch office, to judge by littered shelves upon which old bills of lading were strewn.

On the other side of the hallway in the rear was the ranch-house kitchen. In front of this was a spacious dining room occupying all the rest of the first floor. From the kitchen a door opened upon stairs which descended into blackness. Doubtless this was a cellar, for it smelled stalely of rotted potatoes and spilled whiskey.

A stair of ladder-like steepness, beside this, led upward, probably to the cook's quarters. There were therefore two ways of getting upstairs. Since there was a key in the door to the ascending kitchen stairs, Bob closed and locked it. Then he motioned for Pop to come with him to the front. "Didja notice there ain't a stick of furniture in the whole place?" whispered the elder.

"Jest the dinin' room table, an' that's built in," acquiesced Bob. A glint of humor came into the brown depths of his eyes. He lowered his whisper till it was well-nigh inaudible. "Anyhow, they live here! Even if they don't sit on chairs!"

"They?" echoed Pop, his voice agitated and a little hoarse. He was having a hard time holding on to his courage against the menace of the unknown. "Say, what'll we try?

Wanta go up there, or jest wait here an' starve 'em out?" Plainly, he was in favor of the latter course.

"Darkness 'd come," suggested Bob sepulchrally. In spite of probable peril, he could not help this bit of rawhiding.

"Yeah—tha's right. Sa-ay, lookahere!" Ripping off his bandanna handkerchief, Pop leaned over and rubbed it on the floor, then on the fresh-looking paint of the stairway. Only a faint smudge of dust showed on the silk!

"They keep it swep' an' dusted!" he said. "Sure as hell there must be a woman, 'cause no man—"

He broke off short, crouching low and throwing up the six-shooter. As if in rebuttal of theory of a woman being among the ghostly inhabitants of the JB, from above-stairs sound a heavy thump, thump, thump, thump! as of a heavy man taking four deliberate steps across a bare floor, seeming to stop almost directly above them!

C'MON! Git him! That's no ghost!" gritted Bob, and darted on tiptoe up the stairway.

Pop Argyle did not follow, but it was not cowardice that held him back. Instinct, deeper seated than the rash impulse which had sent his younger comrade scooting upward, warned him that this had been deliberate bait for them. Possibly the inhabitants of the house meant to escape while the two searched for the man inside those heavy shoes or boots.

Tensed, ready to fire at anything that appeared, Pop waited in the lower hall.

What New Menace Do Pop and Bob Face in the Ranch House? Are
They Trapped by their Enemies? For the Exciting, Smashing
Climax of DRY RIVER RANCH Read the Thrilling
Final Installment Next Month.



In THIS DEPARTMENT last month ye olde Globe Trotter happened casually to mention a word or so about the grapevine telegraph, that invisible, intangible means of communication by which messages and information are bruited about from one far place to another. It is through the grapevine that adventurers receive information on what is going to happen in the far places of the world long before it happens.

Nobody really knows what the grapevine is. It functions entirely without the use of apparatus of any kind. In some manner the five senses of the body work in concert together to exert a sort of sixth sense which is probably psychic, thus the information passes almost instantaneously.

For that reason the younger adventurers have given this mysterious means of communication a new name. They call it instead the underground wireless, a more modern term. But grapevine telegraph or underground wireless, it is all one and the same thing—a mysterious and inexplicable means of quick communication without the use of wires, batteries, transformers, radio tubes, or any of the mechanical adjuncts of the telephone, telegraph, or radio as we know it today.

One of the first adventurers really to disclose the subtle and devious workings of the grapevine to the outer world was the Englishman, Stanley, who rescued the long lost Dr. Livingstone from the heart of central Africa almost a half century ago.

Stanley had absolutely no idea where he might find the learned missionary when he started out. Dr. Livingstone had simply vanished into the interior of the dark continent and been swallowed up, leaving no trace, and sending no messages out. Nevertheless Stanley plunged after him, and after years of searching found him, to the complete astonishment of the entire world, which had given both of them up as lost forever.

Later, when he was back in civilization again, the courageous Englishman was asked to explain how he had effected the rescue. It was then that he first disclosed to the world the mysterious workings of what he termed the grapevine telegraph.

It was the only explanation he had to offer for his discovery and rescue of the long lost Livingstone.

"I was guided by the natives," he said. "I went from one tribe to another and asked them all, 'Where is Livingstone?' Even though most of the tribesmen I asked had neither seen nor heard of him, they communicated from one tribe to another in some mysterious manner and got information back to me that enabled me to press on."

Some one of Stanley's hearers

suggested that that communication was passed by means of drum beats, but the explorer disagreed with him.

"In some instances, yes," Stanley said. "But there is something else, something that I can't explain."

OTHERS have attempted explanations since Stanley. Ye Olde Globe Trotter asked Lieutenant Scott Morgan, who came into the office the other day, to give some explanation of the grapevine. Morgan has been places and seen things—I thought he might have some explanation. He only shook his head and laughed.

"But I know it works," he said. "How exactly, is beyond me. Sometimes the trees in the jungle seem to sigh and speak in a garble of tongues. Even the lapping of the waters in the slow flowing rivers spells out a message to those who are attuned to it. That and the movement of the clouds across the blue skies all means something to the African natives. But you don't always see the messages, sometimes you feel them. I know, I have."

"Tell me about it," I said. The Lieutenant did.

"I was on a safari in the Belgian Kongo. My partner and I had collected a good haul of ivory, so much in fact that I suggested that I had better take most of the bearers and cart it down to the coast while the prices were still high. Meanwhile he was to retain a few boys and keep camp while I made the journey. Sansom, that was my partner, agreed to that. He had his rifles and a good stock of ammunition and food, so neither of us had any great worry about his welfare while I was gone on my trip which would have taken all of three weeks-if I had made it."

Scott sort of accented the if.

"What, you didn't go on that trip after all?" I broke in.

"Yes," he said, "I did, but that is the story. I didn't stay away three weeks. I was back to the camp inside of three days, and good thing that I was, too. If I hadn't returned I don't think I would ever have seen Sansom alive again."

"What caused you to turn back?" I asked.

Scott smiled. "The grapevine message I received from Sansom." replied. "And funny, too, how I got it. We were jogging along without any worries when we came to a river we had to ford at about nightfall. I was just ready to plunge into the river at the head of my safari when I felt something like a steady pressure on my shoulder pulling me back. But there was no one near me. I started forward again, and still that pressure. Then I turned around and felt that there was something like a magnet pulling me on in that direction. It seemed foolish at the time, but I allowed my feet to follow where that force pulled. It led me right back along the jungle trail we had come. Once or twice I stopped and turned back the other way, but my feet simply wouldn't track in that direction.

"At that moment I thought of Sansom, and from then on I couldn't get thoughts of him from my mind. I am not superstitious, but right then and there I called a halt on the coastward trek and started back for the camp on the double quick.

"When we arrived there, Sansom was making his last stand in the center of a circling horde of strange natives who apparently had come down from somewhere north of Nyanza. My men soon cleaned them out and put them on the run. But I tell you it was a close call for Sansom."

Scott was mopping his brow

with his handkerchief now, so I knew he was in deadly earnest. It was apparent that memories of that trek weren't any too pleasant for him to recall.

"Strange," I said, "but apparently real. I never heard of the grape-vine functioning in that manner before."

"Neither had I," Scott said. "But I know it worked, so does Sansom." Then Scott added a fitting finale that set me to thinking. "But the grapevine doesn't always work for you," he ended. "Sometimes it works against you."

So there you are, adventurers, there's a new slant on the subject!

Ye Olde Globe Trotter has worked up an interest in the different kinds of grapevine since Scott pulled that one, and will be open to more like it in future issues of Thrilling Adventures. So sharpen up your pencils and memories, fellow adventurers, and see what you can do. The most interesting accounts of the grapevine's strange workings will be published in this department.

Last month we had a letter from Will H. Gardiner in Montevideo regarding a strange mirage he saw while flying over the Andes. Here's a letter from one of our readers who thinks he has the answer to it. Maybe he's right?

IT WASN'T A MIRAGE?

Riverside, Calif.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I read Will H. Gardiner's letter in your last issue about a strange mirage he saw from a flying airplane. Also your account of a similar experience in France during war days.

I read the accounts with considerable interest, but frankly, I think both Gardiner and you were kidding yourselves. My reason for writing this is that I have been an airplane pilot for slightly over 11 years now and have over 5,000 flying hours to my credit, flying in all kinds of weather and under all kinds of

conditions. And I have yet to experience anything even faintly similar. I have seen mirages, yes, but not of anything so far distant as you and Gardiner write about.

Frankly, I think that both of you were somewhat fatigued at the time and that your mind played tricks on you. You only imagined that you saw the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. The fatigue coupled with the fact that both of you might have been thinking of the good old U. S. A. at the time is the reason you thought you saw what you did. Fatigue does strange things to the mind.

If the above is not the explanation, I'd like to know what is.

Frank A. Crosswell.

Crosswell's explanation sounds logical enough, but I don't remember being especially fatigued at the time. I will admit, however, that I very probably was thinking of the good old U. S. A. then. What man in the A. E. F. wasn't?

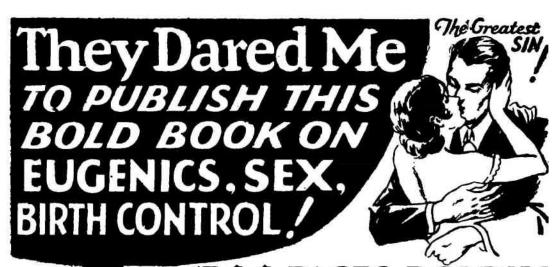
MODERN ROBIN HOODS

A group of eight adventurers and authors are now on the high seas bound on a strange voyage, which will include a bow-and-arrow hunt for big game and exploration of a rarely visited tropical country where cannibals are said to still exist. The names of the adventurers have been closely guarded, but ye olde Globe Trotter has learned that Jackson Cole and Captain Ross McCutcheon have been invited to go along. Both of these men are writers, but in addition to that they are experts with the bow and arrow.

Captain McCutcheon was in the national championships in bow and arrow some three years ago, and is capable of feats with the bow that would make even Robin Hood bow his head in shame.

He and Cole have had considerable experience hunting wild boar on the Santa Barbara islands equipped with no other weapons but their bows and arrows. Ye Olde Globe Trotter

(Continued on Page 122)



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was invited to go along on one of these expeditions a year ago last summer, but I declined with thanks when they told me I wouldn't be allowed to take along my trusty automatic-just as an ace in the hole, in case my arrows didn't knock the wild boars over when they lowered their heads and charged at me.

Preparations for this voyage have been very secretive, but it is known that arrangements have been made with a friendly tribe of natives to meet the expedition at the sea coast and escort them inland where they expect to find and make a study of the cannibals that live there.

Here's a letter from a reader who wants to know if there is such a thing as white Indians.

OUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have read one or two fiction stories where the authors have written about a tribe of white Indians which are supposed to live somewhere in South or Central America. I am just wondering if there really was, or is, such a tribe of Indians. If so, where do they live, and what is the explanation for them?

> Burton F. Wardwell, Tiffin, Ohio.

Answer:

There is a tribe of Indians down in Panama, the San Blas Indians, who are erroneously called white Indians. This because they are somewhat lighter in complexion and finer of feature than the other Indian tribes of Central America. And this is because they are of mixed blood. Some of the soldiers of the Spanish conquistadors deserted and fled from their commands way back in the 16th century. These deserters fled to the interior of Panama and remained there. They intermarried with the native Indians, and it is the descendants of these old deserters that make up the tribe of the San Blas Chicago now.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I would like to get a 1903 Model of the old Springfield Army rifle, and I am wondering if you can tell me where I can order same.

I understand that these rifles are very accurate and serviceable, and can be had at a very reasonable price.

James Olinski, Renton, Washington.

Answer:

Yes, you're right on the accuracy and serviceability of the old Army Springfield, and I think they can still be bought very reasonable from surplus army stocks in the hands of different dealers. I don't know the name of any dealer in your state, but Francis Bannerman and Sons, 501 Broadway, New York City carry them in stock. It would be best to write for their catalog, then order from description in the catalog.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have read various accounts of the great carved stone statues on Easter Island, or Rapanui, as it is called by some and have been very interested. But in all the accounts I have read there is no indication as to what people did the carving. The few natives that still live there are undoubtedly Polynesian, but in no other islands of the South Seas are there stone statues like those on Easter Island.

From the accounts I have read, it seems that none of the authors attribute the statues to the ancestors of the present inhabitants, nor do they intimate who did do them if the Polynesians didn't. Because none of the other Polynesian isles have such statues, I have decided that some other race must have lived on Easter Island at one time. They have since perished and left no trace. I wonder what race it could have been?

B. W. McClintock, Casper, Wyoming.

Answer:

Well, McClintock, you have given me a tough question to answer. Adventurers are in the habit of discovering strange and unusual statues. but it isn't often they bother about the antiquities of them. They usually leave that for the archeologists

(Continued on Page 124)

STOMACH DISORDERS THREATEN HIS LIFE SAYS N. Y. PATROLMAN

"I tried everything," says Officer David R. Caldwell, 2309 Holland Ave., New York City. "I suffered from gas in the stomach and heart-



DAVID R. CALDWELL

burn so bad that I could hardly stand it. My case was diagnosed by one doctor as ulcers, another said I had gall stones. One went so far as to tell my wife that I had cancer and had only a short time to live. I suffered much agony and lost weight until one day I saw an advertisement in the New York Daily News, by the Udga Co., St. Paul, Minn. I wrote for their treatment and thanks be to God I did, for today I am a different man. I have no pain, can eat anything and

I am getting back to my normal weight."

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who follow their trail. I have never been on Easter Island myself, but I have talked with fellow adventurers who have. They told me all about the stone faces, but they left me in the dark as to who did the carving.

According to the latest theories you are right in assuming that the carving was not done by the present inhabitants or even their ancestors. Modern authorities have attributed the statues to a party of Aztecs who left the shores of Peru and settled on Rapanui hundreds of years ago. The Aztecs were not ordinarily a seafaring people like the ancient Norsemen, but Easter Island is not so far off the Peruvian shores to make it impossible for them to go there even with very inefficient sailing craft.

Somewhat similar figures, not so huge, however, have been found in old Aztec ruins. This forms the basis for the latest suppositions of modern investigators on that subject.

It is not definite, however. Maybe some probing scientist will discover more positive proof later on?

Dear Globe Trotter:

A friend of mine and myself have made bet.

He claims that the North Pole is the coldest spot on earth and I claim that it isn't. I say the South Pole. Who is right?

Bobbie Conlon, Lansing, Mich.

Answer:

It isn't the policy of the Globe Trotter to settle any bets. But, because you are both wrong, I feel free in telling you so. Neither the North nor South Pole is the coldest spot on earth. In fact, there are a great many spots that are colder. The South Pole is the coldest pole, however. This simply because of the elevation. It is higher than the North. But the coldest spot where any records have been taken is in

Siberia. It has reached 186 degrees below zero there. Also the summits of Mounts Everest in India, and McKinley in Alaska are colder than either pole.

makes this department interesting to you, fellow readers. Send in your questions on any subject under the sun, just so it is connected in some way with adventuring and the Globe Trotter will try to answer all of them. No human being can know everything, however. Those questions which are controversial will have to be referred to the readers, and some of those on which I do not know the answer or have no way of finding it out will have to be passed up to you fellow adventurers, also.

But come on, dive in; the more the merrier. If we get into a good hot fight, well, that won't be so bad, either. Red-blooded, he-men like to fight—for good causes.

A lot of coupons have been coming in to the Globe Trotter, but some of you fellows aren't sending any letters along with them. Remember, last month, I said I would print some of the best letters right here in the department. Well, come on, fellows, shoot me in a flock of them. Tell us what stories you like and why. And if you should find one that doesn't suit you so well, let us know about that, too.

And remember—post cards are just as good as letters—so don't hesitate to send 'em along.

There's nothing like caustic comment once in a while to keep the authors up on their toes. If you like their yarns, give them a few flowers; but don't forget that the rotten eggs and decaying vegetables have a purpose, also.

As soon as Jackson Cole landed over on the other side, he sent word that he was hard at work on a knockout yarn for Thrilling Adventures.

(Continued on Page 126)



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THE PRICE ON HIS HEAD

(Concluded from page 98)

Finally, Tracey turned on the utterly astounded Devlin.

"Here," he said casually. "Look 'em both over and see what you think they'd bring in open market in Singapore. Pretty things they're both together, eh, Devlin?"

"By God!" muttered Devlin, when he had regained his breath. "Two of them! Now I know why you were so keen on getting that head!" His eyes glinted as he rolled the gems in the palm of his hand. "Two of them," he repeated in an awed voice. "Why, we're rich. Fifty thousand apiece! A hundred thousand dollars! Why, we can-"

"Only keep one of them," finished Tracey coolly. "Only one belongs to us, Devlin. The one I gouged from the idol. The other goes to the families of Swanstrom and his partner. They need it. And I promised old Swanstrom that I'd see that they got it. As it is, we're lucky to have one of 'em-and our thick hides as well."

Devlin nodded his head in mute

"Swanstrom must have thought an awful lot about his partner," he said slowly. "Clever idea, that. you to get the head, and if you did, you'd fall heir to the stone.'

"That was the idea." nodded Tracey soberly. Then, after a long pause: "Put the head in the bag, Devlin, and cast it overboard. Old Swanstrom is waiting down below somewhere for his pal."



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