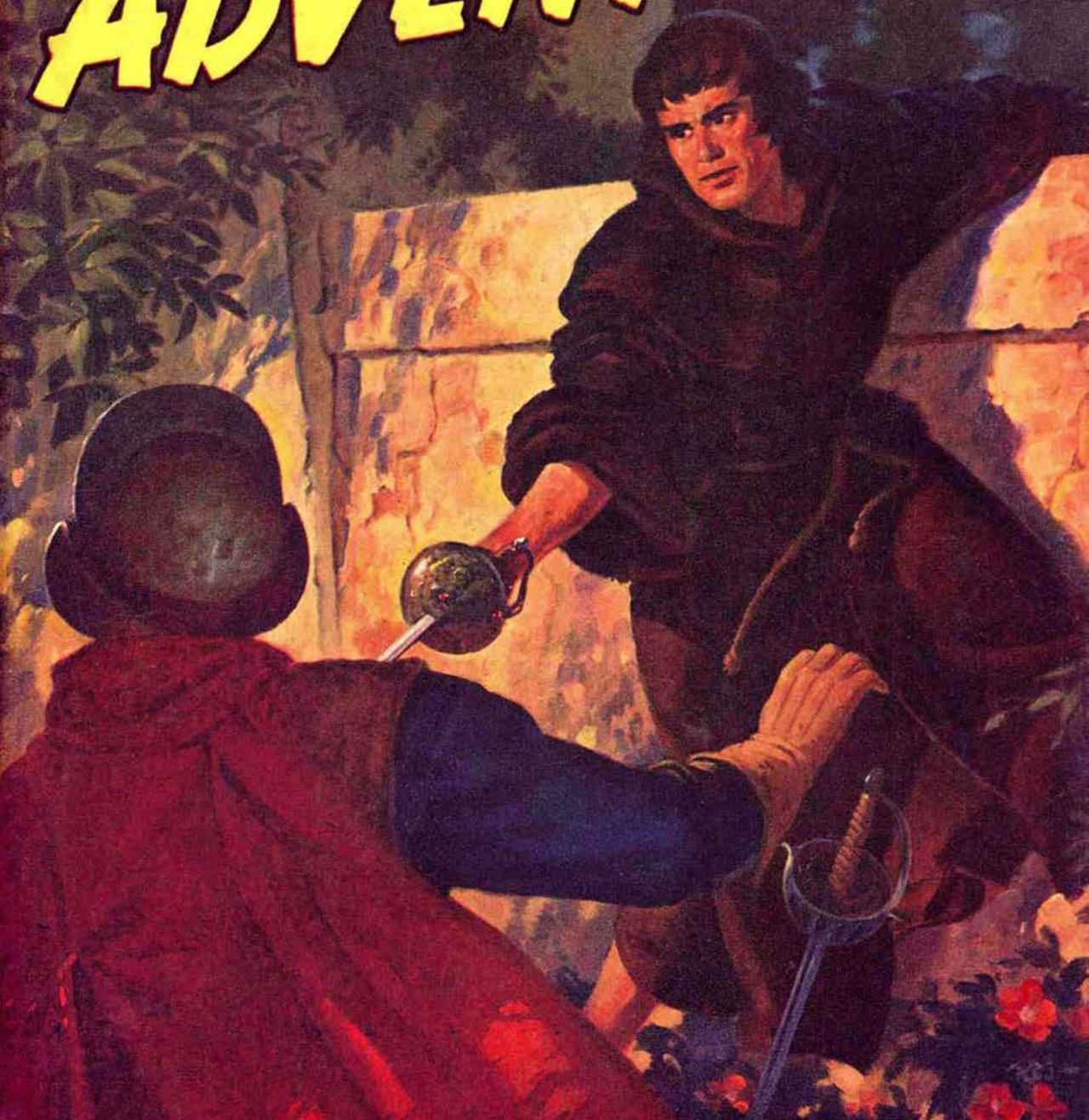


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MAMMOTH ADVENTURE



The CASSOCK and the SWORD
By TOM W. BLACKBURN



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MAMMOTH ADVENTURE



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Big fists are handy, but if you haven't got 'em, there are other weapons that can be employed.

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "The Cassock and the Sword."

MAMMOTH
ADVENTURE
NOVEMBER
1946

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Volume 1
Number 3

The Editor's Page

WE'VE had Tom W. Blackburn in mind ever since we first thought of *Mammoth Adventure*, and we don't mind saying that it's a great pleasure to welcome him to our pages. In "The Cassock And The Sword" you'll find a rare treat. It's one of those historical novelettes that take a skilled hand to turn out. From the first line you'll see what we mean. And unless we miss our guess you'll be wanting to see more of Tom Blackburn in future issues. Then to top this story off there's the swell cover by Robert Gipson Jones. Your editor feels that Mr. Jones is one of the finest magazine illustrators in the business. He gets a "feeling" in his work that is not easy to achieve. And he has that smooth professional touch that makes him a master in his trade. We don't mind saying that the original to this painting is framed and hanging on our office wall!

RICHARD S. SHAVER is a newcomer to the pages of *Mammoth Adventure*, but he is by no means a newcomer to the writing game. Shaver is the author of the very popular "cave" stories in our big sister magazine *Amazing Stories*. We might point out along this line that you adventure fans who are looking for something really out of the ordinary in the line of *adventure*, will find more than enough of it in Mr. Shaver's stories in *Amazing Stories*. We suggest you give them a whirl. In this issue Mr. Shaver presents a short adventure yarn with an unusual twist. He writes about a golden nugget with a microscopic map engraved on its surface. You'll meet a race of Incas that were extinct long ago, and—but that would be telling you the story.

CCHESTER S. GEIER returns to the pages of *MA* with an unusual novelette, "Quest Of The Split Map." You probably remember Geier's story, "Secret Of The Andes" in one of the past issues—at any rate your fan mail says so, and we guarantee you'll enjoy this present story just as well. For you Geier fans we'd like to point out that Chet has a novel length fantasy adventure in the current issue of our companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*. In this present story, Geier tells about a fabulous bonanza in Alaska, the key to which is held in a split map. But the two people who hold sections of the map find it pretty hard to get together on it . . .

"VALIANT DUST" is another off-trail historical adventure story that we think you'll enjoy. Joseph Chadwick writes about the conquistadores of New Spain, and what happened when the glories of conquest faded away and the brutal reality of the aftermath of war became evident. It's a story

of small people—the men who do the fighting, and dying . . .

CRAIG ELLIS is a very popular detective and mystery writer for our companion magazines, *Mammoth Mystery* and *Mammoth Detective*. Some of his novels are out in pocket book form right now. So you can see we're glad to present him to you in this issue with his short story, "Convince Me, I Said." Craig was in the Army and he got the idea for the story while serving his country. He heard the boys in the barracks telling stories—with plenty of accent on *stories*, and he decided to do one himself. It's a tale that might need a lot of convincing, depending on how you look at it. But that's for you to decide.

WILLIAM G. BOGART has a long novelette in this issue entitled, "The Crazy Indian." The title alone was enough to arouse our interest when Bogart brought the manuscript in to us.

"WANTED—Dead Man," is the title of Berkeley Livingston's contribution to fill up the issue. And we think it's a pretty good closing note. The story concerns a little guy with big ideas who tangles with a couple of men who are even bigger than his ideas. . . . What happens provides a lot of rib-tickling entertainment. It's told in the inimitable Livingston manner, which ought to be a good enough guarantee for some fine reading.

NEXT month we'll have a number of treats in store for you. Leading off with the cover story, Chester S. Geier presents a short novel entitled, "The Island of Vanishing Men." This is one of the best adventure yarns it has ever been our pleasure to publish, and we think you'll agree with us when you read it. Also in the issue will be a long novelette by a talented newcomer, Leonard Finley Hiltz, entitled, "Apache Squaw Man." This story is a tale of the old frontier days, when a man's honor was measured by his scalp. It's a tough, action packed yarn that will have you sitting on the edge of your chair. Don't miss it.

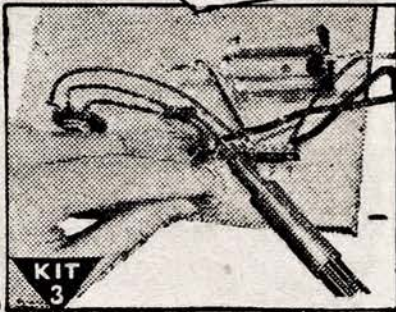
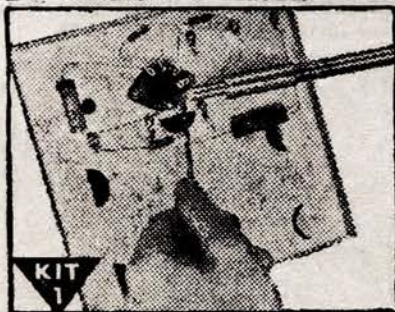
SINCE this is your magazine we'd certainly like to hear your reactions to the type of stories we are giving you. So far we've achieved a pretty fair balance between modern action adventures, off-trail stories, and historical adventures. Let us know which type you like best—or whether you prefer the "balanced diet" you've been reading thus far.

WHICH just about winds up things for this month. Keep your eye on your favorite newsstand for your favorite magazine! See you next month . . . *Rap*.



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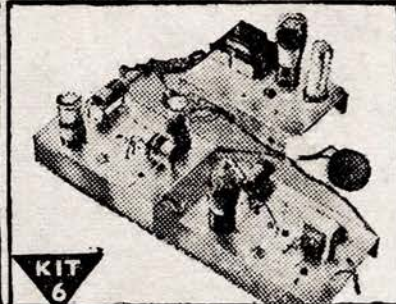
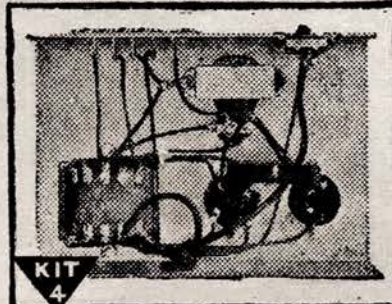
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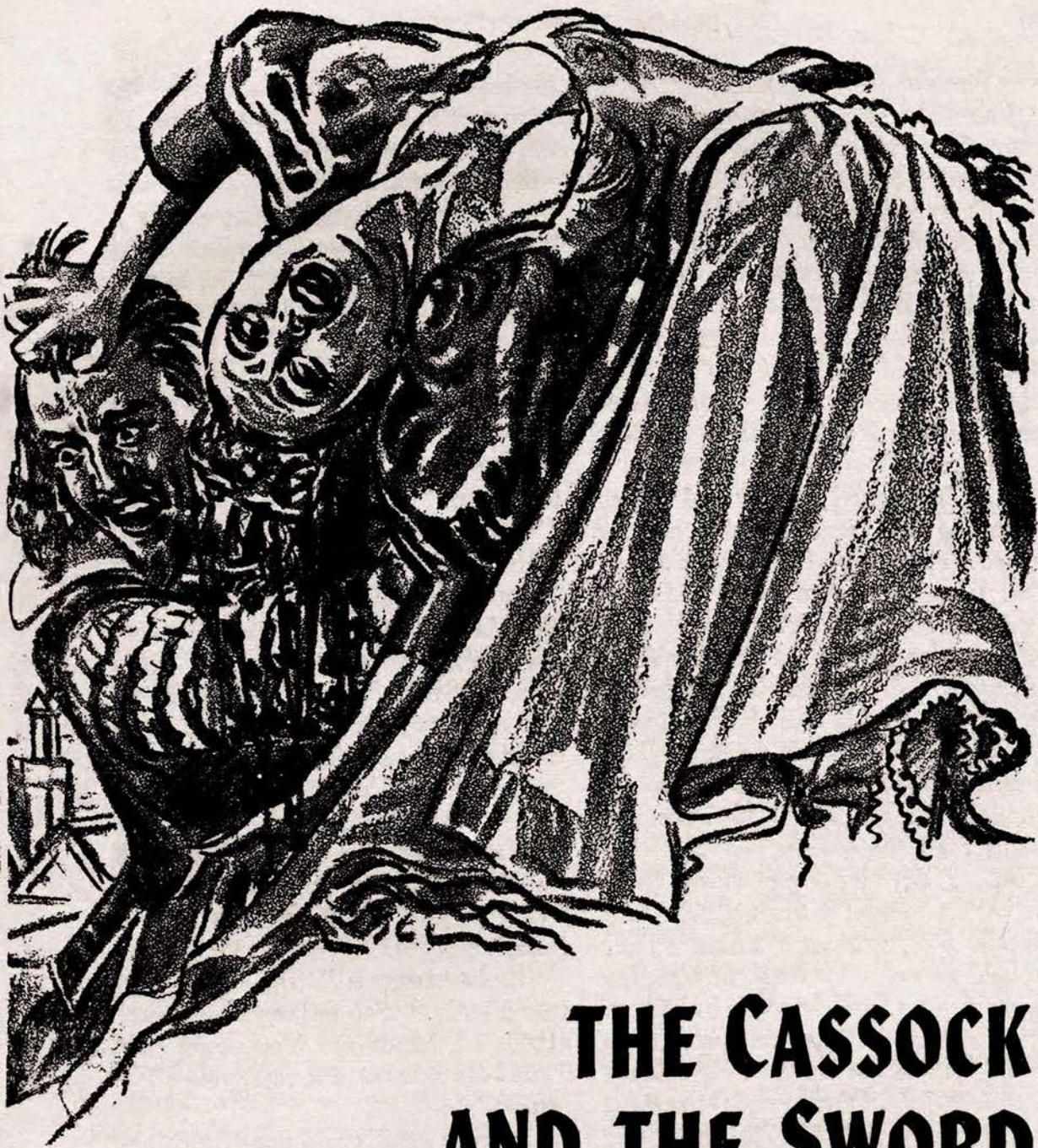
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The friar's sword lashed out
vengefully as the screaming girl tore
desperately at her assailant's body . . .



THE CASSOCK AND THE SWORD

by Tom W. Blackburn

In times of stress the Friar bowed his head in prayer—and forthwith drew his sword.

THE day was hot in the City of The Name of God. And it was dull. Juan Espadin, who could judge a woman's virtue at one hundred *varas* of distance, eyed an approaching shawl-draped figure without interest. It

was that hot and that dull.

Juan Espadin was justly an unhappy man. The passage out to New Spain from the homeland had been nearly as dull as were the streets of Nombre de Dios. A man must fight dullness as he fights an enemy. In Cordoba the house of Espadin had long been noted for its skill at gaming. *Guala!* Who would think a man of that house could lose his modest fortune in a single ship-board game—and make an enemy, besides? Yet it was so.

Espadin grinned ruefully and shifted along the wall against which he idly leaned. The woman on the walk passed him. He no more than saw her, his eyes turned inward on his misfortune. How could a man guess that the simpering dandy he had so elegantly insulted at the captain's table was a man of note in this city? Foul luck, nothing more! It now appeared that Dario Lozan was not only a man of note, but that his family ruled this colony.

Behold, city guards had sought Espadin within an hour of his landing. Their captain was a Vicente Lozan. They brought an order banning the Cavalier Juan Espadin from Nombre by sunset. It was signed by Reinaldo Lozan, Governor. Behind the order was the threat of the old Inquisition, recently revived in this colony, and Alfredo Lozan was Chief Inquisitor of Nombre.

Por Dios, the Lozan were numerous dogs! Espadin shrugged. He must leave the city. But how? Along through the jungle swamps across the isthmus to Panama? Foolhardy he might be, but a fool—no! The beasts and brigands of that steamy dark made no distinction between the rich and honest men. It was yet three days until a train of silver mules and a company of soldiery would make the trip. Wait or stay, it was a bad matter.

Espadin shifted again. A stir drew

his lagging interest up the street. The woman with the shawl—and a man. He was about to turn away. Had not the woman passed within a yard of him without casting so much as a glance at him—without raising one spark of interest in return? She must be, in fact, a hag under her veil. It was the man who interested him. An old pig. And showy. The Toledo blade at his side was too long for his arms. He was too hasty, without a swordsman's grace. And he lacked an Espadin's judgment in women.

ESPADIN started leisurely up the street. It was not his affair, but a man should not wear the gear of a cavalier without first learning the duties of a gentleman. The man had a firm grip on one of the woman's arms, halting her. He turned angrily at Juan's touch. Juan saw an arrogant face which was somehow familiar.

"Tall friend," he told the face with formality, "the lady has grown already weary of you. I tell you this to save embarrassment."

"Embarrassment!" the man protested hotly. "You misbegotten swine! Hands off, hands off! You accost me? *Todos los santos!* I'll read you a lesson—!"

Only the great could afford such anger over so small a matter. Espadin wondered who this spindly old follower of veiled women might be. But it was a faint curiosity. He stepped back a pace and as the man's long Toledo scraped from its scabbard, his own Cordoban steel sang in his hand. He was stiff from long weeks on shipboard. He took no chance. A man and his sword seldom look alike and a clever wrist is often in an old arm. He made a single feint and set his point a handbreath into the man's shoulder.

The fellow bleated as though struck

nigh to death and sagged to his knees. Espadin caught a fistful of velvet in the crown of the man's fanciful hat and wiped his blade clean of such thin blood. He bowed then, and spoke pleasantly.

"My advice, *Senor*—it comes free with a pinking. Forget the lady—and get a shorter blade. It takes a stout man to make a cloth-yard of Toledo dance properly!"

Outraged, the man gave over his moaning and began to shout for assistance.

"*Guardia municipal! Aqui! Aqui!* Help, brigands! I am killed! Bring soldiers, bring police! Swiftly!"

A sharp blow struck the calf of Juan's leg. He wheeled. Only the woman was behind him. She had swept back her veil, exposing the face of a red-lipped, warm-eyed saint. Espadin was stunned. *Por Dios*, how could he have made such a mistake? A hag—*ai!*—perhaps in a hundred years. But beautiful, now! This old fool who thought a shoulder pink a mortal wound had showed better judgment than a *Cordoban*.

Ah, well, a man is entitled to one mistake. And he should be in favor. Such a beauty could feel but nausea at the old goat who had halted her. She would be grateful for a cavalier. And, perhaps, there would be reward. *Bien fortuna!* Even in *Nombre de Dios* an enterprising man might find an end to dullness.

Espadin bent low.

"*Senorita*—" he said, "Juan Espadin of *Cordoba*—"

The old goat left off bellowing. His eyes sharpened malevolently.

"Espadin?" he snarled. "I shall remember that name!"

At the same instant the girl's thick skirts rustled and a sharply shod little foot struck Juan's leg again solidly.

And she loosed a torrent of bitter abuse.

"Fool! Pig! You and your hasty sword! Before God, I hate cavaliers! For three days I have baited my trap. Then, when my game at last is in hand, you spit him! You, then, can answer to Brother Paco when he asks where is this worst of the *Lozans*—the carrion I promised to bring him!"

Espadin saw soldiery at the lower end of the street, all too plainly in haste. He stood motionless, appalled at the continuing flavor of his luck.

"This—" he choked, "—this is also a *Lozan*?"

The girl nodded. Then she saw the guards. Wrapping her skirts close, she ran. Another company of soldiers appeared at the upper end of the street, cutting off escape. The girl ignored them, running lightly and with the purposefulness of one who knows where she goes. Espadin looked at the two companies of city guardsmen—doubtless numbering among them still more of the innumerable clan which seemed to flush like rats from the stones of *Nombre*. He felt a tightness in him.

Pues, he was a clever fellow! He had insulted one of a family. He had ignored the orders of another. And he had pinked a third to make certain of their affection. All for the whiling of a dull afternoon and a girl!

Juan Espadin was not a man to run after a woman. The dignity of a cavalier set certain limits in such matters. But the guards were close. He overtook the girl as she dodged into the doorway of a large house which backed up to the outer wall of the city.

CHAPTER II

Jungle Friar

THE house was empty, apparently long deserted. The girl raced

through dusty rooms to a door set in the rear wall of the last. The planking was old. It stuck under her hand. The *guardia* sounded close in the street. Espadin hit the door, drove it open, and wheeled with drawn sword to face the guards should they break into the room before the girl had a fair start. But she pulled insistently at his arm.

"This way will be useless to the brotherhood, now!" she panted. "It will be watched, thanks to the alarm you raised. But we're safe from here on. Come—!"

Espadin obeyed. The door let into a tunnel under the city wall. The tunnel ended in a thicket. The girl found a trail with the ease of familiarity. The smell of the city faded with the sunlight. In its place was the damp aroma of growing things and the perpetual twilight of rank, tree shaded undergrowth. The swamp—the jungle!

Espadin was uneasy. He was a man to see things as they were. He knew what kind of government was set up by most of the favored nobles sent out by the King to rule his colonial lands. There were Indians in this jungle who would admire a fine Spanish head like his own as a token of revenge for many injustices. And there were brigands who would count a knife-stroke fair exchange for the privilege of feeling of his pockets.

The girl ran untroubled through the gloom. She ran lightly and steadily. Espadin was vain of his body. He gave it certain care and it served him exceedingly well. Yet he was drenched with sweat and his lungs were heaving when the girl at last stopped in a broken clearing.

She gave him a glance yet tinged with bitterness and whistled—a shrill sound from such soft lips. The whistle echoed and the clearing was suddenly full of men. Some were Indians, sullen faced

and shadowy. More were brigands. The rest were the poor which crowd the streets of any colonial city—victims of swindle and false hopes and rapacious taxation. They were a strange crowd but the strangest was a round, ruddy-faced man with a bushy fringe of gray hair around a red and shining pate. He wore the robe of a holy order, but he looked like a teacher from the College of King's Wrestlers at Cadiz. His stocky body was as solid as the walls of Nombre.

The face was that of a man Espadin could savor, with the color of a bottle of claret and the genial humor of Malaga from a cask. Little round eyes winked measurement and the robed man turned to the girl.

"Not Reinaldo, not Alfredo, not Vicente, not Dario—nay, nor any of the rest. This is no Lozan! Pepita, you have disappointed us!"

The girl nodded grimly.

"*Ai!*" she spat. "And ask this one why! He is yours, Paco. He owns a swift blade. Where is Father Montezanto? I must talk with him."

Brother Paco tipped his head toward a great tree beyond the clearing.

"In the chapel, still. Nor has he eaten. Give him food, Pepita. Make him eat. Then, if he would come out among the men again—they lose heart and need his voice—"

The girl shrugged weary assent and moved away. Brother Paco called after her.

"Pepita—you had word from your father?"

The girl's voice floated back heavily.

"Does a man speak from the Inquisition with Lozans in the church?"

BROTHER PACO frowned darkly.

Suddenly he wheeled back to Espadin.

"Friend, your catechism!" I instruct

you. When Reinaldo Lozan became governor of Nombre, he wrought many changes. Father Montesanto, bishop of the city, was driven out to make room for a friend of the Lozan who also wore the cloth. Felipe de Ardenas, commander of the old guards, was brought before the governor and ordered to levy taxes for the Lozan as well as the King. He was also ordered to pass the keys and hiding place of the old city's treasury to the Lozan. These things he refused. He was then sent to the Chambers of Inquisition, unused in Father Montesanto's time, but bloody enough since.

"Remember these things well. None here forget them. You have been brought to us by Felipe's daughter, Rosalia de Ardenas, whom we call Pepita. Those who hate the Lozans have gathered here. Those who have suffered find shelter with us. We are a brotherhood, united under Father Montesanto for—ah—prayer and self-preservation. You would join us?"

The man's ruddy face was beaded with sweat when he was finished. Juan saw here was a man unaccustomed to much talk and the use of fine phrases. Slowly Juan swept the circle of faces about him. Among other duties, such as preserving his life and health, Espadin had a fortune to regain. This company seemed barren ground. He had need of acquaintance with rank and wealth, the company of silks and velvet, if he was to fare well in this land. The dark of this swamp depressed him.

"I travel toward Panama," he said. "I am delayed only until I can reach a mule-train on the highway."

Brother Paco shook his head grimly.

"Only members of the brotherhood may stay one night in our haven. Will you join?"

Espadin shrugged. *Pues*, why not? There was, after all, the girl Pepita.

How could even these jackals be oppressive when she was at hand? Brother Paco asked his name. He gave it. Brother Paco grinned disarmingly.

"Pepita has said you own a swift sword. We will see to that. But first a man of God must see to the temper of his flock. Art a hasty man, Juan Espadin?"

Espadin had no time for answer. The flat of a thick hand rapped smartly against his cheek. He was stunned for an instant. Anger shook him. He stepped back, intending to repay the holy brother's caress with a like one from the flat of his rapier. Brother Paco moved swiftly. His cassock was swept back over steel belted under it and a good blade winked and rang against Espadin's own weapon.

"Oho!" Brother Paco exulted. "Art quick with the steel, Juanito! Pepita told us true. But art good with it? That is a thing to know—"

Espadin lunged. He met a wrist of iron. He fainted and was held. Brother Paco thrust. Espadin gave, reversed, and layed open a rent in the man's cassock. It settled to something magnificent. The squat man was a magician. Grandee or rake, man of honor or vagabond, Juan Espadin had never met this burly one's equal. The skill of a dozen generations of swordsmen born flickered wickedly in Juan Espadin's Cordoban blade. This jungle friar met it fair.

Espadin's arm grew heavy. The man in the cassock seemed lighter on his feet, more wicked in his thrusting. Then, suddenly, it came. An old trick, learned from a grandfather. Brother Paco's blade slipped from his hand. He tripped and fell. Juan leaped forward and bent with his point at a corded throat.

Brother Paco looked up at him. But without fear. Little eyes danced with admiring pleasure and he laughed.

"Aho! Aha! Por Dios—he'd spit Paco like a pig! Pepita! Where is the little flower? Pepita, come here! This one will do. How he will do! Before long we have fun in Nombre de Dios—I promise you it!"

CHAPTER III

For Fortune

AT THE supper fires Pepita reappeared with a thin, white faced old man. Had he been without his robes of office, Espadin would have known Father Montesanto. The man made Espadin uncomfortable, there was that much of goodness about him. Pepita, gentlest of this company, was near to being a witch for the bitterness in her. And Paco—*ai!*—even a saint does not learn such mastery of living steel without consorting with the devil in the learning of it. Among the round hundred other faces about the fires were many wolves and few sheep. Violence and unrequited wrongs burned close to the surface of them all.

Yet, when the good bishop came among them, harsh tongues were silent and rough hands turned gentle. Assuredly he was a man beloved.

The father had barely seated himself when his eyes fell upon Espadin.

"I see a new face tonight, my daughter," he said. Pepita bent forward and spoke quietly in his ear. The old man nodded and his voice was touched with gentle reproof when he spoke again.

"These are times to try us all, my son," he said. "We built the King a city and he has used our labor to reward men of evil. But violence will not counter violence and a sword may not save a man's soul. Give yourself to the keeping of our brother, Paco. He will instruct you in our ways and the meat of our prayers—"

When the fires began to die and most of the banished citizenry of Nombre turned to pallets in the brush, Espadin grew restless. His belly was full but his pockets empty. He circled the clearing and came to the huge tree under which an altar had been raised. The good father's chapel. He eyed it wondering what manner of men these people of Nombre were who looked to a feeble old man for revenge and turned their hands to chapel building when the one road to salvation must lie in blood and ringing steel through the streets of the city from which they had been driven.

"Why do we hide here when the road is plain?" he asked.

Pepita raised one shoulder listlessly. "Consult with Paco—"

It was a flat enough rebuff. But it seemed there was a flash of kindness in the deep eyes, the barest reflection of his own ready ardor. It gave him heart.

"Paco—*guala!*—a great one with a sword, I don't deny. But lacking in charm. I come to you—"

"I have seen as much," she answered quietly. "Art a cavalier, Juan Espadin, a figure of a man and a fine gay devil. I'll not say you no to that. But it is as nothing with me. How can water come from a dry well? My heart is dead!"

Juan snorted in half anger.

"The warm blood of Castile cannot thin so much in ten generations in these sun-blasted seas, let alone one! The heart of a woman of Spain dead because jackals burrow in a heap of stones like the town at our backs? You only think it! But I match the thought. I'll trade the head of a cursed Lozan for every kiss!"

The girl suddenly ceased to be Pepita. She was again Rosalia de Ardenas. Her proud eyes flashed sombre fire and Espadin saw deep into her grief.

"I will trade with any man who will

bring me my father—out of the Inquisition of the Lozans!”

SHE was gone, then, and Juan stared moodily at the night. A man was a fool to bargain with a woman. He was bested at the start. To bring a man from the chambers of the Inquisition was no fair trade. What woman could be worth the risk? Yet his mind fell to thinking of some artifice by which it might be done and he was powerless to halt the thought.

A moment later a hand touched his arm and Paco spoke softly beside him.

“Find another woman and talk with her. That Paco will not hear. But with Pepita I am always close. It is a thing you should know, Jaunito!”

It was a real enough warning. Such devotion to the fair was unseemly in a man of holy office. And an Espadin was not one to brook interference in affairs of heart.

“Art a lusty man for a friar!” Jaun said savagely.

Paco looked hurt.

“Juanito, I have thought we should soon have a talk,” he said sadly. “Remember that I tell you things only Pepita knows. First, I am in truth no friar. When the Lozans first arrived at Nombre, my business did well, for it was one which thrived on disorder.”

Juan smiled thinly.

“A cut-throat and a picker of pockets,” he guessed shrewdly. Paco spread his hands deprecatingly. But he grinned.

“Say better—a modest thief,” he suggested. “However, I touched the wrong purse. The Lozans set a price on my head. I was cornered, but one of their frocked jailers for the Inquisition was at hand. He suffered accident. I took his robe. Fleeing as a friar and hotly pressed, I passed the house of Felipe de Ardenas. I thought the house empty,

but a girl beckoned from its door. I followed and she showed me a way through the city wall into the jungle. Here in the swamp I would have bargained for a change of clothing. But Father Montesanto saw me too soon.

“God witness it, you should have seen his joy that another man of the cloth had joined him! He did not even ask me my order. He needed help. Pepita, to whom my life was owing, begged I give it. What could a man do? Thus Paco became a man of faith! Since, while the good father talks most earnestly with *El Senor Dios*, Pepita and myself make certain small forays on Nombre which feed our hatred and the bellies of the good father’s flock at the same time. But Nombre is still in the hands of that cursed family. They sack it as no Englishman has yet dared to do. And we strike no real blow in return!”

Paco wiped at his broad red forehead with the wide sleeve of his cassock.

“I tell to you I am sick on it! Do I look like a man whose legs are cut for skirts? No! And this cursed robe scratches like a bed of husks! A cassock over good steel—I tell you there must be an end! Why not tonight? We are men of a kidney. We go to Nombre, eh? Two blades, honed for Lozan guards. We go behind the walls of the cathedral. We slit the throats of scoundrels hiding in robes not even so honest as mine. And we bring Pepita her father back. A man could sleep better then, eh?”

JUAN scowled. Paco made it live in words—a fit foray for two bright swords. But where was the profit? Assuredly, Pepita had offered an exchange for her father. And a man could find much joy in the face of a grateful woman. But beauty would not feed a man nor found a fortune.

Paco's eyes narrowed. His face was still genial but his eyes turned sly.

"Ye'll not go, Juanito?" he asked in mock astonishment. "Not even for a treasure locked in Nombre?"

This ill-assorted friar had mentioned treasure before. The treasury of the old city, the hiding place of which Felipe de Ardenas would not reveal, even before torture. Perhaps the former captain of the guards now had enough of torture. Having been offered a trade by the daughter, it was possible a shrewd man might make another with the father. The treasure of old Nombre would handsomely replace the modest funds with which Juan had parted on shipboard. It was the curse of the Espadins to be hasty in all things—even with 'no' for an answer. A man should consider things well. Juan shrugged.

"You have a plan?"

Paco's grin gave way to hearty, open laughter.

"*Ai!* Juanito, Juanito, art as much a dog as Paco!" he roared. "Ye sport silk and sweet smells and a jewel in the hilt of your steel, but ye'd be no different man in the rags of a brigand! A plan? *Seguro!* The Inquisition lies in an old building back of the cathedral. It is dark of the moon and guards will not be many, I think. Then, there is my robe. However far it takes us, we will go as friar and friend. After that—quick steel, hard thrusting, and swift retreat. When we have Felipe de Ardenas out of that cursed prison, we talk to him of golden bars. You see it so?"

Juan nodded, not without uneasiness. It was not the nature of a Cordoban to take another's planning for a risky night's work. But this could not be otherwise. Paco knew Nombre.

ESPADIN followed the friar through a gate into a courtyard back of the great buttresses which shored up the

rear wall of the *Catedral de Nombre de Dios*. A dark, walled yard, closed at its lower end by a darker building. Here was the Inquisition. Built in the days when madmen were masters of the colonial church, and for the express purpose of converting unbelievers by all the implements of torture known to savage man, the evil of the practice yet clung to the building. Here was proof of the bloody tyranny of the Lozans—the ancient building reopened and its forgotten tortures put to their own use!

Paco nudged his arm.

"Walk softly, Juanito!" he whispered. "The bones of a thousand heretics lie beneath these stones. I've no relish for adding ours to the lot!"

Juan nodded. Half across the court a man in priest's robing rose from a cluster of stone seats.

"*Pax Vobiscum!*" Paco offered aloud.

"*Pax Vobiscum!*" The man in the robe replied. And he moved on toward the courtyard gate. Paco whispered with glee.

"Fortunate I am a learned man!" he boasted. "Were it not for that Latin yon black imposter might have raised an alarm. I must learn more of the magic tongue when we return to the swamp—and Father Montesanto!"

The language of a dead race seemed a flimsy defense, especially when the rescue of another and a chance at fortune lay in the balance. But Juan made no protest. The robed man—priest or masquerading whelp of the Lozans, whichever he might be—appeared satisfied. There was but now to make an entry into the building ahead, silence such guards as might be within, and escape with Felipe de Ardenas. The sheen of smelted gold was already lighting Espadin's eyes when a bellow set up at the gate of the courtyard. The man in the robe!

"*Hola*—turn out—turn out! Dogs

in the yard—brigands—thieves! Turn out!”

“Magic tongue!” Juan spat. “You charmed him with your learning, for a fact. He was a guard. The gate is closed behind us. Quick, Paco—back-to-back with me. A dozen kirtled swine cannot down a pair of good blades standing in that fashion!”

Espadin expected sound from his companion—a laugh or a stout curse which would ring well here in the darkness. But there was nothing. He wheeled to see Paco clawing himself with amazing agility up the rough stone surface of one of the cathedral buttresses. Even as Juan watched the man made a prodigious leap from the buttress to the adjoining courtyard wall. Paco was a dark blob there for a moment. Then he was gone—outside—to safety.

Juan Espadin, who had a store of such for like occasions, swore an oath which rang like steel against the walls of the yard. A door in the building ahead flung open. Men tumbled out. One carried a torch. The rest bore pikes. They were death’s heads, sheathed in long black gowns and wearing sack-like hoods with pierced eye-holes. Minions of hell would look like these. From the building they quitted came the dank odor of bloody sweat and agony. These were the iron hands by which the Lozans ruled a colony for their king. A man could run from such and count himself no coward.

And Espadin ran. He flung himself against the buttress Paco had scaled. Perhaps it was anger at Paco’s desertion—perhaps that the long scabbard of rapier fouled his legs. But as the hooded devils of the Inquisition reached the base of the buttress, old stone crumbled in Juan’s hands and he fell. He struck heavily and fought to his knees. There, just as his hand locked to the hilt of

his sword, the haft of a pike caught him. The solid pole of wood rang brazen thunder in his head and night vanished into a deeper blackness.

CHAPTER IV

Cavalier and Soldier

IN TIME Espadin had an impression of a thin, cruel-faced youngster standing over him and a kick in the ribs which was more than an impression. The face belonged to that Dario Lozan whose nimble-fingered trickery at cards had shorn Juan of his moneys and whom he had castigated with insult in return. Espadin comforted himself that it was but a dream, a part of the haze in which a stunned man lies.

But it was not so. His head ached abominably. Could an unconscious man feel pain? He forced vision into focus. He was in a damp stone room with a low ceiling. A flambeau was thrust into a sconce on the wall. Smoky torchlight flung unsteady shadows of strange and bloody machines against the wall. Eye-bolts studded the mossy stone, dangling manacles and fetters. In one place was an erect scarecrow of a man who still clung to pride although his limbs were bent and knotted from stretching on the rack.

There was strength and a bravery in the pain-scarred face which sickened a man with pity. Espadin turned his face from his fellow prisoner just as another kick crashed against his own chest. He coughed with agony. Dario Lozan laughed.

“Art a bravo now. Espadin, he mocked. “Soon you’ll be neither so glib with insult to the favorite nephew of His Excellency, Governor of Nombre. And, when you’ve had a brace of days on the rack, you’ll be no more than a fair sword match for the old

chaser of *mantillas* whose shoulder you pinked today. *Ai!* I'll have my payment and my second uncle, Alfredo, will have his for his wound!

"But most—and I tell you this out of kindness—you will pay dearest for your boldness. Noble families are few here and the Lozan noblest of these. What if the swine of the streets and the jackals of the swamps believed they also could attack us? We must guard ourselves against rabble dogs. So you shall pay—lest you seem an example to follow!"

Young Lozan wrinkled his nose at the stench of the dungeon. He produced an elegant snuff-box. Juan caught a drift of scent. It was not even a good man's nose-dust but some fancy perfumed stuff. Lozan drew an affected breath of pleasure in his vice.

"Think of these things, Cordoban," he suggested thinly. "We give you a little time—to dawn, it may be. And you think in good company. Yonder is Felipe de Ardenas, who loves street beggars better than the honor and the gold of the governor's favor. If you think I jest, ask him!"

Dario shut his snuff-box with a snap of the lid and went out. The hooded devils who had come with him left also, taking the flambeau with them. There was a deep silence in which Espadin felt the throb of his hurts and fed his anger with explosive fuel. Then the shackled figure across the black room spoke defiantly.

"Wasted!" Felipe de Ardenas said. "All wasted. Your masters think that if they give me a companion in my misery, I'll cry out to him on what I've been silent to them. Ha! A cunning trick, even for a Lozan. But a failure. The only ears to whom I'd trust old Nombre's secrets have been driven from their city!"

"Art hasty, *Senor,*" Juan protested.

"Let me but lay my hands one time only on a snuffing Lozan and you shall see one man in Nombre of whom they are not master!"

Old Felipe laughed unsteadily.

"Art but a dog at the heels of the new governor," he insisted. "Have done with your trial at winning me to you in this Satan's dark. Give me peace for my suffering and have done!"

A sob shook the old captain's voice. Even in this Juan felt the ring of steel which made a strong thing of Pepita's slender body and set her above all women in his ample memory. The blood of De Ardenas ran strongly in father and daughter alike. The old man believed he was a decoy placed by the Lozans. Juan could see no way to gain the old soldier's trust. This troubled him. There was stubbornness in Espadin. He had come to this den of devilry to rescue this man. He would not go without him. The cowardice of false friars, the sanguine torture of a colony's petty tyrants, the distrust of De Ardenas—be damned to them all. An Espadin walked no return way empty handed. There would be an answer when a man hit upon it.

Thinking thus, Espadin slept, his weary body victor over the restlessness of his mind. When he wakened it was day, a vague change from night in this pit where the Lozans used old tools to break men who brooked their will.

JUAN was barely roused when the door again opened. Two hooded guards appeared with pikes and a flambeau. With them were two more, hooded also, but stripped to the waist in earnest of coming labors. Felipe de Ardenas saw these and cackled.

"The play is to be perfect, eh?" he snarled. "I am to feel pity for this one and so not guard my tongue! Fools, 'tis useless, I tell you! I'll not talk

to this dog you've thrown me. Fagh! I can tell the hand of the Lozan by the stench which goes with it!"

A wry humor seized Espadin as his fetters were struck free. This father of Pepita was a hard man to convince! The guards spoke no words. Juan was stripped to his clout. Such gear as had not earlier been taken from him was added to his baldric and rapier and the finery he had purchased in Lisbon. The lot was carelessly cast in the mouldy dust of one corner. Espadin was spread-eagled and lashed on his back across the frames of a rack. The wraiths of Satin who wore no tunics put themselves at the capstans which forced the frames of the rack apart. Wooden screws turned slowly, building pressure until they cried in their sockets.

When joints stretched unbearably, Juan Espadin denied their pain. He fastened his mind on the hills of his homeland, the good Malaga in village casks, the ancients and the wise of his clan who had wed his hand to Cordoban steel—and on Pepita. The salt taste of blood came in his mouth, for a man's teeth must shred flesh when he cannot cry out. But his lips remained closed.

In mid-morning Dario Lozan bent in the doorway.

"He's asked for a priest?"

"Nay!" one of the bare chested giants growled surlily. "Not a groan from him yet—and soon his flesh tears!"

"A pity!" Lozan said carelessly. "I had hoped the priest would already be here—one of our own. What things a Cordoban dog with such a sword-arm might have to confess! Ah, well, that for later, eh? Perhaps a turn or two more. But end it there for today. A man should have time for the repenting of sins!"

In the afternoon not even Pepita or

the green hills of Spain could vie with agony. Only hatred could meet the challenge. But there had to be an end to it. There is a limit to all hatreds and the trials of all flesh. A haven of darkness loomed and Espadin plunged eagerly into it.

He roused, aching and sick, to find his jailers had been carelessly certain of the ruin they had worked. They had flung him prone in the ancient filth of the floor, scorning the effort of supporting him upright long enough to snap his fetters. Juan moved heavy limbs, found them free, and felt hope. Felipe de Ardenas heard the movement. He spoke gently.

"Not for favor or gold would any man endure what I have seen you suffer this day! I have mistaken you. But I do not know your face—you are not of old Nombre—"

"No—" Juan said hoarsely, "—of Cordoba—"

He spoke slowly, then, bitterly. He told the old man of his fortunes ashore in this colony of the King. Felipe de Ardenas clucked his tongue in wonderment.

"And you would have rescued me!"

"I would still!" Juan growled.

"For gold? 'Tis the city's and not mine to give freely—"

"For myself! What is gold beside thinking of Lozan's face should he discover both of his birds flown?"

De Ardenas clucked his tongue again.

"Art headstrong—but a man, Juan Espadin! Yet I warn you, find no comfort from hope in this place. None can survive this black hole!"

"Hope!" Juan spat. "Do you kill an enemy and feed revenge with hope? *Santissimo!* The fools have left me unfettered and my steel is in yonder corner. Had I a way to keys for your chains we should carve us a swift way to freedom or death!"

"Keys?" De Ardenas muttered. "Pues, it is not impossible—"

THE old man spoke swiftly. Juan listened, chafing and flexing mistreated limbs. Water was brought by custom after sunset. And by two guards. One possessed keys. A ready sword—a pair of swift strokes—*quien sabe?* The plan was made. Came then a time of waiting in which Espadin worked and further loosened outraged muscles. He paced restlessly, his rapier clutched in stiffened fingers.

The waiting ended with little warning. The two guards came briskly. Espadin, earnest of no failure, drove his weapon too deeply into the body of the man with the water crock and so lost his grip on its hilt. Startled, the other guard thrust out with the flambeau instead of the short broad-pike in his other hand.

Espadin caught the thrusting arm, broke it at the elbow with a twist of his body, and seized the flambeau. The flaming torch was a terrible weapon. The man's head shattered dully. Espadin tore a brace of keys from him before the guard began to fall.

His manacles had cruelly chafed Felipe de Ardenas at throat, wrists, and ankles. He winced as Juan fumbled at the locks. But when the fetters fell away he retrieved a guard's broad-pike and hobbled for the door. His face was a stone mask, set in a smile of terrible joy. Juan tore his own sword free and joined his companion in the corridor outside the dungeon.

The passage slanted upward, giving through an outer door into the courtyard above. De Ardenas seized Juan's hand when they reached this door.

"If there is trouble, push for yourself, Cordoban," he urged. "If you make it free without me, tell Rosalia I have counted you friend this night. It

will carry your suit far with her!"

"I ask no man's help with a woman!" Espadin growled. "Beside, a man must live before he loves. We started together. We finish the same. *Por Dios y Sus Majestades del Espana!*"

"For God and the rulers of Spain!" De Ardenas echoed. And he thrust the door open.

Espadin hoped for luck—dark and a sprint to the gate which Paco and himself had used. There was a smoky flood of torchlight instead and a company of guards in close rank under the command of Dario Lozan and his amorous uncle, that Alfredo who wore a sling over a wounded shoulder. Juan understood. Leaving him unfettered had been but another form of torture. The Lozans had known he would try escape. They had been waiting like cats at a rat hole.

"I said it, my uncle!" Dario exulted. "The rack was not enough for cavalier or soldier either. Leaving the sword was a master-stroke. For a fact, if you buried a Cordoban's steel with his body, he would fight his way above ground though his flesh was already rotted from his bones! Will not your brother, my other uncle, order this pair quartered on the public gibbet, now?"

Alfredo Lozan grimaced.

"The death order is in my pocket—the manner of death my choice. But first, let them sing for a quick ending. It would please my ears!"

Espadin had enough of this. He lunged forward. De Ardenas charged with him. The two Lozans dodged back. Dario screamed at the soldiers. Guards surged forward. Dario yelped again, shaken with fury.

"Have done!" he ordered. "The game no longer amuses. But do not damage the heads. They go through the city tomorrow atop pikes as warning to the reckless!"

This was the end. The writing was clear. De Ardenas saw it, too. He set his back to Juan's back and braced himself to take the first of the guards with his broad-pike. Juan flexed his blade and made it sing a last song—good Spanish steel which loved the blood of tyrants. But before rapier met pike and broad-pike met lance, a terrible yell rang out.

The ranks of the *guardia* wavered toward the courtyard gate. Through that passage, howling like wraiths from hell, came men of the swamp. Bounding at their head, his cassock girdled high, was the false friar of Nombre—grinning and as wicked as the blade in his hand.

CHAPTER V

Corridor to Hell

ESPADIN, for all his joy at relief, saw only the brigand. Juan fought toward him. Paco threw wide his arms as though he did not know Juan was more than half a mind to run him through.

"Juanito—comrade of my heart!" he roared. "I come in time!"

"Black rascal!" Juan gritted, "—leaving me as a hale man leaves a leper! In time—fagh!—hast overmuch thin blood in they veins. Come, up blade and I'll let me some!"

Paco's eyes grew roundly alarmed.

"No—before God, no!" he protested. "Could I help a comrade were I also on the rack? Better that one go for help than that both be lost. *Por Dios*, would you stick a brother?"

The alarm was sincere and the hurt look so honest that Espadin could hold no ill will. He laughed. Paco laughed with him.

"Make it a good fight, *amigo*," he counselled. "Pepita would nor risk our

company for her father alone. But she begged these wild ones to come after the pair of you. She gained Father Montesanto's agreement or I might not have returned at all! Now is the time, eh? We are here. We fight and blood runs. Why stop? Nombre is a rich enough prize for us all!"

With the ragged bulk of the robed brigand at his side, Juan Espadin turned eagerly back into the fight. So it was Pepita who had fanned the fury of these madmen—Pepita, whose heart was dead! He grinned widely.

The disciplined *guardia* might have stood solidly. But discipline is no weapon against the anger of an outraged people. They wedged the soldiery out through the gate into a square before the cathedral. The doors of long-shuttered houses burst open to spew forth more mild men turned savage with hope.

With pot-hooks and fire-tongs they fell on the rear ranks of the guards. Here was raw justice. Espadin savored this battle as he had none other. The little ones—the meek and the gentle and the long-suffering, risen now against their enemies! Juan forgot he was without means and that his sword must win him fortune. It was enough now that it drew blood.

News of the fighting spread. More men poured into the city from the swamp. Among them were Pepita and Father Montesanto. They joined with old Felipe on the steps of the cathedral. The holy man Juan had shunned in the swamp as a man too goodly for earthly life, spoke to the crowd. From the gentle lips of the old father poured a fighting man's prayer—a plea ringing with simple faith that the good God was with Nombre and that His hand guided whatever weapon struck at a Lozan.

Juan had believed that Paco and himself gave heart to the men of the city.

But this was as nothing to the exhortations of Father Montesanto. In truth, Nombre loved its bishop and his God. They turned wilder still, those fighting fools. The guards fell back, trembling at collapse. Suddenly a fierce mounted company poured without warning from a side street. Two men rode at its head. One was Vicente Lozan, who had succeeded De Ardenas as captain of the guards. The other was a fat man so pompous that he could be only His Excellency, Reinaldo Lozan, Governor of Nombre.

THE wild ones bunched against this attack. Felipe de Ardenas plunged among the city men, striving with a soldier's skill to organize their forces. Riders were dragged from saddle, dismembered before they touched paving. But the charge was too savage for clumsy weapons to turn. It was done in a moment. Father Montesanto and the girl beside him on the steps were seized, flung across horses, and the troop wheeled. A brief skirmish and they were free with their prisoners. Dario Lozan, among the foot guards, flung an ultimatum.

The two were hostages to the end of fighting. All arms must be down by dawn, the crowds dispersed without further violence. Certain leaders—Felipe de Ardenas, a Cordoban vagabond called Espadin, and the notable brigand Paco—were to have surrendered at the palace by the coming of light. Failing this, the good father would be hanged in front of his people and the Ardenas wench impressed into the household of Alfredo Lozan, who had spoken for her—

A grapeshot volley from English guns could not have more swiftly cooled the ardor of the men of Nombre. They broke, permitting the guards to fall back across the square to the facade of

the governor's palace. The bubble of a great hope was near to collapse. Old Ardenas fought to save it, climbing again the steps of the cathedral.

"I am one who will not surrender!" he roared. "The girl is my own blood. The bishop is my friend. But Nombre is my city. Forward, circle the palace! They'll not dare to harm either hostage if there is no escape for them afterward!"

Juan saw the old man's face. It was a brave gesture. But it was not enough. Nombre's warriors did press on sullenly toward the palace. But it was plain they would fight no more.

"That you knew a serving-wench in that place!" Espadin breathed to Paco.

The brigand's small eyes lighted eagerly.

"A rear door, eh?" he guessed shrewdly. "No wench and no door. But I do know a passage. A risk, Juanito—and no gold at the end of it!"

"Pepita is there!" Juan snapped. "Is that not enough?"

Paco laughed as though a last barrier was gone.

"I would have spoiled the bargain she made with you, Juanito," he said. "But not now! *Pues*, we have been asked to surrender. We go, then, to the governor to do this, eh?"

Paco slid into a dark and narrow alleyway. He found a ledge in the darkness, travelled it many yards to a buttress by which he climbed to a higher level. There was another ledge, then a tile drain all too insecurely fastened to the towering wall. From this they reached a third foothold on which a feeling of great height and hard stone far below seized Espadin. Suddenly Paco vanished from in front of him. A moment later he found a casement open and crawled through, also. A room took vague shape. Dull metal gleamed from shelving. Juan understood Paco's

knowledge of this entry to the palace. In a few moments a man without principle might load a sack with enough silver to provide a month's good living from the cannisters and state goblets stored here.

Paco pulled open a door, stepped cautiously into a long hall. Juan followed him. The far end opened into a stairwell from which short corridors led to a number of apartments on what must be the front of the third floor of the palace. A heavy, gated grill closed the head of the stairs. Four guards stood on duty at the gate. Paco nudged Espadin, pointing to the belt of one of these. Keys hung there. The meaning was clear. These guards could not be attacked without alarm. Yet should that gate be closed and locked, this floor would be cut off from the rest of the house—and reinforcements. So well protected, this floor could be none other than the haven of the Lozans. Juan nodded at his companion and freed his steel.

As they had done before, Espadin and Paco moved as one. There was a clash of steel, a curse, and one cry because Paco was clumsy—and painful—with his first thrust. Before his own second victim struck the floor, Espadin slammed the gate closed. Alarm rang on the floor below. Guards thundered up the stairs. Paco's stubby fingers fumbled with the keys. The tumbler turned but an instant before the first of the guards rammed his shoulder against the barred portal. Paco spat in the man's face, laughed, and twitched in his robe as though the rough cloth was again chafing him. The brigand then leaped into the dividing corridors and tried three doors in swift succession. Only the fourth was locked—and from the inside.

With the palace ringing alarm behind him and soldiers wildly trying to

throw weapons between the steel bars of the gate, Espadin foiled his comrade and bent before this door. Thrusting his thin Cordoban blade into the case-ment joint, he found the bolt with its point and shot it back. The door swung wide.

CHAPTER VI

Not for King or Gold

ESPADIN had hoped for triumph—a moment of facing four craven dogs who trembled in their slippers and showed the pimples of cold fear through the thin silk of their long and costly hose. A man looks no better to a woman than when vengeance puts enemies in his hands. But the Lozans were desperate and a coward's cunning is a terrible thing.

Alfredo, still hampered by his pinked shoulder and always stupid, sat as he must when alarm first sounded in the hall. Reinaldo, his fat no longer lending dignity, clutched a bodkin of a dress sword in the center of the room. But it was Vicente and the merciless Dario who held the prisoners. They stood beyond the open windows of the room on a balcony, beyond the railing of which the square was far below. Paco would have leaped at them. Espadin stayed him with a quick hand. Dario smiled thinly.

"Art wise, Cordoban!" he mocked. "But to stand is not enough. Your comrade has keys which belong to His Excellency. Hand them over!"

Paco looked helplessly at Espadin. It was a hard thing, but Juan nodded. There could be no doubt. Dario and Vicente would not hesitate to fling the girl and the old man into space. Paco's hand moved jerkily. Sweating, Reinaldo Lozan took the keys and waddled into the corridor toward the stair-well

and the gate. Dario's smile grew wider.

He moved a little and a stirring murmur rose from beyond the balcony, proof that the sullen crowd in the square could see what happened high above them and so was watching. Dario scowled and his lips tightened.

"A hostage is useless when a trap is sprung," he said softly. "Nombre has not learned her lessons well. She needs stronger medicine than any we have given her. Put the old man over first, Vicente!"

The hand of God could not have stayed Paco then. He lunged forward like an animal. Even so, Espadin was onto the balcony ahead of him. There was but a moment. Father Montesanto, who had stood with bowed head, suddenly straightened and thrust a feeble hand bravely into Vicente Lozan's face. That gesture of defense saved the bishop of Nombre a terrible death. It stayed Vicente just long enough for Paco to reach him. Juan heard Vicente's breath choke off in a sob as stout fingers tore deep into his throat.

Rosalia de Ardenas was already swung from her feet when Espadin's crashing weight shook her from Dario's grip. Juan knew only that she fell—and within the railing. Nothing more. At too close grips to use his long blade, Espadin was put to it to fend off a poniard in Dario's grasp. And he was but scanty successful. Razor steel split his doublet from shoulder to thigh and a thin line of welling red was traced down the bunching muscle exposed under the rent cloth.

Juan had no choice. Before that needle of death could strike again, he had to be free of his enemy. Dropping his rapier, he reached with both hands and found purchase. Weight came on his arms, his shoulders, his back. A weight which rose squirming high in the air and went hurtling out from him.

A high, thin wail sounded. There was an uglier sound from the pavement far below. And a sudden, exultant roaring as those at hand recognized the crushed body which had plummeted down among them. The square, which had been nearly silent, rang again with men moving toward final battle. Father Montesanto peered over the railing of the balcony with a strange look on his face. Paco yet thrashed purposefully on the floor with Vicente Lozan. Espadin thought of the fat governor and the keys with which he was unlocking a gate to send a flood of guards into this room. He wheeled—and stood stunned.

His rapier was not where he had dropped it. Its hilt projected at a crazy side angle from the trunk of Alfredo Lozan. The man held a weapon of his own in his hand and stared down at the weapon which skewered him. To one side, ever so little to one side and close to the Lozan, Rosalia de Ardenas stood white-faced. But she did not look at Alfredo. Her eyes were on Juan Espadin and the great fear she had felt for him was not yet gone from them. Beyond believing, Juan understood. Alfredo had come at his back. And Pepita had come between him and death!

ALFREDO took a tottering step and fell. Juan caught his blade as the man went down. A single stride carried him to the hall door to face a tall guardsman, plunging in. A parry and riposte, then Juan stepped aside. The guard fell inward and Juan dodged back to face another. The doorway was deep and of a right size for a swordsman to work one foeman at a time. The guards, shaken and uncertain, did not think of bringing up a long-shafted pike.

Another fell. And another. Blood made the planking treacherous. The fallen bodies hampered Espadin, who fought much with his feet. Then a hand

reached past him, a hand with broad fingers, and hauled one carcass away. It came back for another.

Each time there came, after a little, an approving roar from the square below. Espadin puzzled at this. But he lacked time to think.

Suddenly it was over. Tumult within the palace reached the stairs and climbed to the topmost floor. Familiar faces from the swamp appeared behind the *guardia* in the hall. Swords clattered to the floor in surrender. Juan turned back into the room, then. No single body of the slain remained. Paco grinned, dusting his hands with pleasure. The collapse of the guards was understandable, then. How could men fight under a rain of their own dead from above?

"Juanito, my pigeon!" the swamp-friar of Nombre exulted, "—what we have done! Come, now, swiftly. I once had connections in this house. Reinaldo is still on this floor and he has keys. I will know if the fat fool lies—but he will not! The treasure of the Lozans for those who fought for it!"

Juan shook his head.

"For me only a small purse containing the value of five hundred *cunas de oro* in exchange for one of like size and weight I lost to Dario's shipboard cheating. The treasure of the Lozans for those who fought for it—*ai!*—that is just. Reinaldo and his keys are best for Father Montesanto—for the poor of Nombre!"

Paco showed liquid disappointment.

"No fortune? Then glory, Juanito! Quick, onto the balcony. Talk to the wild ones below. They have loved your good blade and we have need for a new governor!"

Juan shook his head again.

"*Por Dios*, must you make me over, Paco?" he protested. "Am I a gray-beard to rule a city? Put Felipe de

Ardenas on this balcony and let Nombre make its choice!"

Paco was near to tears.

"Art the friend of my heart, Juanito!" he urged. "For the love of heaven, take some office where I may share the glory! Have been a holy man long enough. I must be rid of this irking robe or I die. Speak to the *guardia*. Many are loyal to Nombre. A sword makes at least a good captain!"

Juan grinned.

"That much is true. Father Montesanto is my witness that your sword is not the sword of God. But what better wisdom than to make a brigand chief of civil guards?"

Scandalized hurt leaped into Paco's eyes.

"Juanito!" he cried. "Have betrayed my secret—the father heard."

Father Montesanto turned to Paco, dropping a comradely hand to his shoulder.

"I have long thought you a most unusual friar, Brother Paco," he said gently, "but even God may use strange tools. Go to your *policia*, take their command. And serve Nombre as well as you have served me!"

A HUGE relief broadened Paco's features. He mumbled thanks to the bishop of Nombre. He grinned at Espadin. And he rushed into the hall. Father Montesanto followed after him. Presently Juan heard the father's voice, suggesting that Felipe de Ardenas might make a fit governor. The men of Nombre answered with loud acclaim. With their bishop, they moved down the stairs in search of the proud old soldier who had loved Nombre more than life, carrying their vote and their confidence with them. The upper hall was emptied when a group of loyal guards turned also down the stairs, prodding Reinaldo Lozan along prisoner in their

midst.

Thus order came simply to a city in just revolt. Espadin was alone in a room with a woman he once would have taken at a bargain and now could not. The change was a softness in him and he marvelled at it. Rosalia de Ardenas crossed the room to him and he saw her again as Pepita of the swamp—a girl without family whom he would have courted in the shadows of Father Montesanto's chapel.

"Art a strange man, Juan Espadin," she said slowly. "There is a hunger in you, for I have seen it. Yet you have turned down both bread and wine—glory and reward. You want something more than these?"

"Perhaps," Espadin agreed with tight restraint. "I want to sail a ship across to Spain. I want to take the fat pig we destroyed today to face the King who sent him to us. I want to tell the King what Nombre chose in place of a Lozan. It is time even Kings learn that here is a new land where little men are

stronger than the mighty—where people will desert a wicked city for a swamp where there is freedom and honor for their God!"

"No more than this—you want no more?"

Espadin had kept his eyes averted and his thoughts on Nombre. He had been a strong man in the thin light of this dawn, refusing this woman lest only her bargain had brought her to him. But his eyes met her eyes, now. And she was still the girl of the swamp—but with a living heart. *Pues*, strength could rob a man of much!

The girl's shoulder stung the knife-mark on his chest and the blood of an Espadin stained her jacket. But what of this?

"I will tell the King here also is a land where the women are witches!" he murmured huskily above her lips.

"And I—I will stand behind you, Juanito, and smile in the King's face. He will think you a great liar!"

The End

FLOATING HELL

By

HENRIETTA BROWNE

The ghastly story of the floating "devil's islands" that were the prison ships of the 18th Century

BURIED deep in the pages of the not-too-ancient history of supposedly civilized peoples can be found this very vivid descriptive passage:

"Dr. Ullathorne visited the ship to prepare some of the condemned men for the death that awaited them. He went into the crowded cell to announce his mission and read the names of those who were finally adjudged to die. One by one the condemned men fell upon their knees as their names were read out for death and deliberately and calmly thanked God that the gallows was about to deliver them from that horrible and unspeakable place."

Inspiring a dread so great that men could prefer death to life, the British prison ships in use during the nineteenth century were a blot on the history of mankind. Indirectly the American Revolutionary War was to blame for their existence.

In the late 18th century there were 350 crimes listed in England which were punishable by hanging. Women and children were hanged for shoplifting a loaf of bread. The British began to find out that hanging for petty theft was a serious mistake. They then resorted to transporting criminals out of the country. For a time the British Treasury benefited from the scheme.

Criminals were sent to the shores of America where they were sold as slaves to the planters, and \$250,000 was added to the government coffers annually. But after the American colonies waged their successful revolution, that market was closed and the British were forced to look elsewhere to dispose of their undesirable countrymen. The Penal Settlements of New South Wales were founded, and the floating torture chambers were brought into being.

The work of carrying convicts from England to the settlement was turned over to contractors. They carried on that duty under their government's military protection, and they received six cents per day for each convict's food allowance besides a tonnage rate. The stories told of the wolfish greed of those contractors and the murderous abuse of their task is borne out by recorded fact. The longer the voyage lasted, the more money the contractor was able to demand. And if the convicts happened to die, he could pocket the money for their maintenance. Thus a business-like understanding was established under which the human cargoes died off like rotten sheep. A report written by Dr. White, the Colonial surgeon, states that over two-thirds of the convicts were either dead or dying upon arrival. Many never arrived at their destination; they had been overtortured and thrown into the sea.

The typical prison ship, when used as a transport, carried all the prisoners in two huge chambers. Hundreds of men, women, and children were chained to one another and to the sides of the hold where they remained for the entire voyage. With hardly any light, very little air, almost no food, and no provisions for sanitation, it is no wonder that most of them arrived at their destination in a dead or dying condition. According to the records, at least one hundred and sixty-five thousand convicts were transported from English ports in this manner while the system lasted.

Many of the ships were used later as stationary prisons. The "Success," one of the most notorious of the floating prisons, stood several miles off the coast of Australia. In order to completely isolate the "Success" and prevent the escape of any prisoners, a cordon of buoys was moored around the yellow-painted hulk at a distance of seventy-five yards. Any person entering the circle without the proper password and identification was liable to be shot on sight.

Rows of cells were constructed below decks. They looked more like cages for wild beasts than a prison house for men. The massive iron-bound doors were fastened with huge iron hasps and heavy draw-bolts. The "Black Holes," in which special punishment was meted out to obstinate prisoners, were properly named. These stood in the corners of the lower deck and can best be described as small and tapering torture chambers. They measured only two feet eight inches across. The doors fitted as tightly as valves, excluding all air, except what could filter through the per-

forated iron plate that was placed over the bars above the door in order to make the hole as dark and oppressive as possible. A stout iron ring was placed about knee-high in the shelving back of the cell, and through this ring the right wrist of the prisoner was passed and then handcuffed to the left hand. In this position he could not stand up straight or lie down, but had to stoop or lean against the shelving side of the vessel as it rolled with the motion of the sea. In every cell on the ship the floor was worn into hollows, ruts, and grooves next to each doorway, by the constant jangling and friction of the prisoner's leg-irons as they stamped impatiently, waiting for the stroke of the bell that marked the times for meals or exercise.

Although there is not a single case of a successful escape on record, riots were of frequent occurrence on the "Success." Flogging was the most common means of punishment resorted to. As many as one thousand lashes were ordered and administered. A "doctor" was always on hand to time and direct the blows so that a glimmer of life might still remain.

In addition to the numerous other horrible punishments practiced upon the "Success" and other prison ships was the "compulsory bath." Ten prisoners were scrubbed at once in the large trough provided for that purpose. Three "well-behaved" prisoners scrubbed with the aid of long-handled brushes and the salt water which was made to spray over the bodies of the men. There are ugly tales related of prisoners being brought straight from the flogging frame, with their backs torn and bleeding from the cruel lashes of the "cat o' nine tails," so that their wounds could be cleansed by the steady flow of salt water used, in order it was said, to prevent "inflammation."

The prison ship is now regarded as a thing of the past. The ill-treatment broke the health and spirit of would-be good citizens. There was no chance of reclaiming a man once the torture chambers of the prison ships were brought into play. Men became beasts; their hearts were filled with hate for the society which had banished them from all living things. Their sufferings led them to dwell upon the idea of the only means of escape—death. It is no wonder that Dr. Ullathorne was confronted with a group of deliriously happy men, men who had just been informed that they were on the way to achieving a peaceful end to all their torment—on the gallows.

The year 1870 was the last in which these floating prisons were used. Public indignation rose to such an alarming height that they had to be abandoned. These "floating hells" had served their purpose if only to prove that medieval physical torture methods had no place in a modern penal institution. In the modern prison the emphasis is placed on reform. Illiterates are taught to read and write, petty thieves learn useful trades, and many men are given a new lease on life.

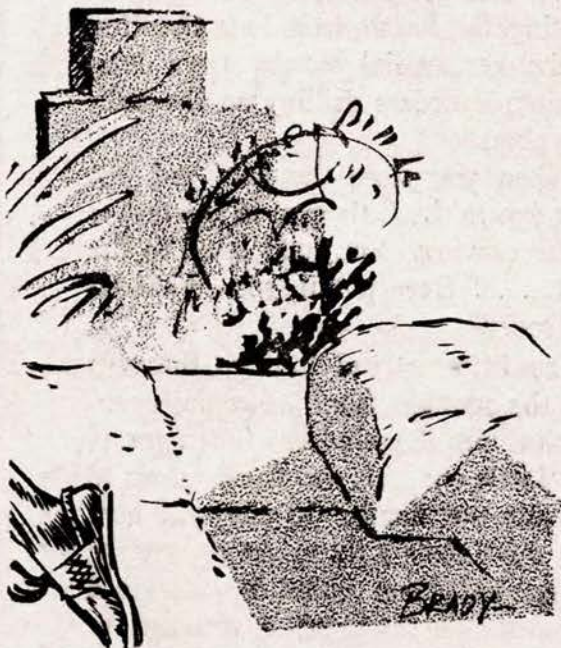
The Inca plunged the maquahuilt down in a surprisingly savage blow



THE TUNCA PUNCU NUGGET

by *Richard S. Shaver*

**It would be quite a trick
to kill the Inca, but it could
be done . . . if he fell for the
old gag about lost treasure!**



AS THE sun rose above the peaks of Sallac and Piquicho, between which lies the castle of Sacsayhuaman, little Alana—relative and servant of Mama Anac the Empress—ran to the great round window and held up to the bright, new face of the sun a little carved box of rubra wood.

Far below, in Cuzco, fifty thousand people watched the sunrise. For this was Capak-Raymi, when the Sun-Lord, Inti, reached nearest to the land and told the people of the New Year.

About the mighty city of Cuzco, in the wall openings, four thousand sentries stood at attention and held their brightly painted shields and long lances very straight, the colored pennons whipping; and listened attentively to the music of a three hundred and seventy-five piece orchestra. Flutes, little organs, guitars, cornets, trumpets and drums, and instruments without names.

When the Inca raised his finger to the height of his mouth, every one of the fifty thousand uttered a cry of joy. For this was the beginning of a five-day holiday, including free *chicha* for everyone. The *chicha* was already standing in great ollas on every street corner, and had been tentatively sampled by not a few.

Then all were silent as the ceremony went forward—watching the brilliant figure of the Inca, his solemn face topped by the *llauto*, a diadem bearing two tall red plumes of the pillco-pichui bird and two white eagle feathers. About his neck was the royal collar of fifty-two emeralds the size of pigeon eggs, from each of which hung great topazes each carved to represent the sun and moon and the fifty-two phases of the moon. His robe was the finest the looms of Cuzco produced, and was bordered with gold embroidery. In his hand was the Champi, a big gold mace, elegantly formed and beautifully bal-

anced—which included an axe blade in the round hammer head.

He looked very fine, thought Alana, looking down from her window in Sac-sayhuaman, and so did everyone today. But Alana had more to do than watch silly ceremonies! Little Alana had just pilfered a most curious object from the baskets of gifts sent the Inca from every neighboring ruler, from every vassal Prince—from everyone who could afford a gift rich enough to interest the Inca.

So it was that Alana was not present at the ceremony, but stood looking out the round window into the eyes of the new sun through a little gem in the top of the box of carved rubra wood, with the bird called Ramantzan beautifully flinging its plumes about the red wood of the box.

Alana was young and darkly lovely, and the thing she had stolen was very beautiful. The room she had chosen for privacy to examine her prize was wood-paneled of virumna wood, and the panels fastened with gold nails. The great round window silhouetting her dark, serious head pierced two feet of solid stone wall to reach the outer air and light.

Into the room behind her strode the tall, strong figure of—was it an Inca? No, this was a priest's regalia, and from the objects in the room, this was his own retreat which Alana had appropriated.

HE MUST have come direct from the ceremony of welcoming Inti, the sun, again to earth for a year. He was still wearing the condor head-dress, with long golden sun rays terminating in the sculptured metal heads of jaguars. In his hand was the tall staff with the golden condor head. He flung off the rainbow sheen of the feathered ceremonial cloak. He bent over the girl, for she had hardly looked up. His cop-

per skin was taut over smooth-sliding, powerful muscles on his bared limbs. The sun disc on his chest glittered with gems.

"Why do you sit here mooning, little flower of love? Why were you not in the procession? People will talk, you know!"

Her soft eyes looked up at his, still dreaming and hardly aware of his words, though his presence sent a thrill through her, compounded of love and a sense of peril and a kind of happy vertigo—like leaning over mysterious deeps filled with glorious tinted mists, far down.

"It is a magical little trinket sent as a gift to the Inca from that ugly sorcerer, the Masked Ruler of the Manabi. It contains some kind of crypt I have been trying to puzzle out. See, it is of rubra wood, tiny and carved beautifully as only the Manabi can carve. I open it thus, and upon the soft down is a tiny golden bead, and that is all!"

"What is so cryptic about that? Is gold so rare among the wood folk that they can spare no more for a gift than that?" His deep voice was not greatly pleasing, but harsh, from long chanting of the ceremonial words, from long barking of orders drilling on the military plain.

"Then you close the box, and put your eye to the little gem in the center of the carving. You hold it up to the light. . . . Here put it, so. What do you see?"

The Priest stared through the gem into the sunlight from the round opening that was the window. Then gravely: "Little one, this was never meant to fall into our hands. It was sent here with our Inca's gifts to get it past the border inspection unnoticed. It is a map—and a message; a message to some profound enemies of ours!"

"I knew it was a crypt, but I couldn't

make it out. What is the map for?"

"Is is for the ancient treasure of the *Bearded Ones*. You know our race was visited by the mysterious bearded men, an age ago. They brought with them many magical instruments and formulas which were left behind in a hiding place long forgotten, or kept a secret to a very few. Those magical devices have been long sought by our wise men, and also by those among us who long for power to which they have no inherited right."

"Would the treasure give them such power?"

"Yes, little one, for the bearded ones were members of a race that knew much more than we of the powers of earth and sky and the Gods' ways. There are supposed to be weapons in this cache which kill mysteriously at a distance; formulas of medicines that make men young; jewels of magical value through which one can see—when one looks as you are looking at the small and invisible—even living animals which can be seen in no other way. It is a vast and valuable treasure—and it has been long sought."

ALANA'S black eyes shone with excitement, and her breath panted sharply as she looked at the scenes of the micro-engraving. "And we have it, the place of the Magic of the Bearded Ones!"

"Yes, the Masked One who rules the dark forests of the Manabi probably thinks to steal away a treasure rightfully ours. Only luck brings it into our hands. How did you come by it, truthfully, Alana?"

"The gifts wait in their baskets for the hour of the audience. I stole in when no one was looking and looked through the things. This little box so beautifully made caught my eye. I held it up to the light to catch the sun

on the gems—and behold, the gem is a window into the world of the small—a world the skilled hands of the Manabi craftsmen alone can enter!"

"Come, little love—we will go and look at the other baskets; maybe we can catch the one who was meant to steal this box instead of you."

A rude and sudden voice broke in upon the conversation of Alana, sweet young sister to Mama-Anac, the Empress, talking with Huaycar Wira, chief aide to the High Priest of Pacha-Kamac, the Creator of the Universe.

The voice, in that room walled with the dignity and reserve of centuries of polite usage—that room for royalty or the relatives of royalty only; a room where no voice was raised in anger upon pain of imprisonment; a room where the wall carvings were set with rare and huge gems, and where the very foot stools were of gold . . . into that room came this voice, saying: "Spawn of Supay,* accursed of Inti, you think to have tricked me, Tumi Hayta, out of the secret of the Bearded God's power! I paid many strong slaves to learn of the whereabouts of that little key to the lost secrets. I will not lose it so easily!"

Alana sprang to her feet, her mouth a wide O of astonishment. For, through the door stepped Tumi Hayta, the Inca's brother-in-law! Two of the tall Lucanas of the Inca's bodyguard flanked him, carrying short, wide-bladed stabbing spears. In Tumi's big capable hand was a bronze axe of war, a famous "Champi" of the Inca's family. Facing these three conspirators, so suddenly coming upon him, Huaycar had but his dignity, his condor-headed priest's staff, and a tiny decorative dagger as weapons.

* Supay: the devil, Lord of Hack-Pachac (Hell).—Ed.

But Huaycar had his wits, and he stepped to Alana's side, standing between her and the spears of the grim-faced Lucanas, and picked up the little box of rubra wood, saying—"Ah, this little plan of yours should come to the ears of Tupac Yupanqui Inca. He, too, might be interested in the treasure his father sought for so long; in the map sent him so kindly by the Masked One of the Manabi."

The blood darkened Tumi's face with rage, he raised the heavy mace, but Huaycar went calmly on. "And how would you explain my death, Kayta? You would then have to kill little Alana to keep her quiet; and then your two bribed guardsmen to keep them quiet; and then you would have to kill the assassin you hired to kill these two! Since the Inca, my cousin is known to be more generous than yourself, you can trust no one! Quite a problem!"

The grim faces of the two fierce Lucanas, men sent from the North by their ruler to do honorary duty to the Inca—became thoughtful at these words, and they exchanged glances which were not missed by Tumi Hayta, for he looked to see if this thrust of Huaycar's clever tongue was understood by them—who were not expert in the subtler nuances of the Quichua tongue, themselves speaking Chimu. They understood well enough, for it was plain that if Tumi chose to kill these relatives of his to silence them, he would also have to silence themselves.

HAYTA lowered the heavy bronze mace, and a bewildered expression came over him. He muttered—"How in Supay's unspeakable name can I be so stupid?"

Huaycar laughed mockingly. "That is a question anyone can answer but yourself, my dear cousin-in-law. It were best that you go now, while you

can, for I hear footsteps, and if my Incan ears* are true, they are the footsteps of Mama-Anac Huarca, who is your sister and our Empress. She might misunderstand your presence here with our dear little Alana—especially if we are forced to speak of our mutual 'secret.' You and I will confer of this another time. Preferably when I, too, am armed."

Tumi Hayta had a problem before him too complicated for his dull mind. He backed through the doorway a picture of bafflement. As he disappeared, through the opposite doorway hurried Mama-Anac Huarca, Empress of twelve hundred thousand square miles of land and some twenty million people. But Mama-Anac was not thinking of the land or of the people; she was hunting little Alana.

"Oh you young scamp, it is past time for audience, and my hair isn't dressed yet and you always do it so much better—now come along. And you, Huaycar, you are worse than this little trifter; why aren't you down entertaining?"

"Mama-Anac Huarca, my beloved cousin, the guests are quite as aware as myself that you are invariably at least an hour late to the audience. There is no one present yet but the cleaning women. Must I help them dust the carpet for your lovely feet?"

"Oh! You are insufferable, and what's more, not even polite! But I love you, you handsome rogue, as much as do the virgins of the Sun, who should have their minds on more worthwhile things than your own gorgeous self. If any more of our virgins become with child,

* Incan ears: The Indian races of South America are famous for an incomprehensible method of hearing, akin to telepathy, by which they know events that transpire even up to hundreds of miles distance; can count the number of horses approaching in pitch darkness at many miles distance; can follow a cold, spoorless trail for weeks . . . Dr. Juan Durand—A Hyatt Verrill.

the Inca will have to take some action! Must all the children look like you? Couldn't you let some other man do a little sinning? You should be ashamed of yourself! How can you face people?"

As aide to the aged High Priest of Pacha-Kamac, he in a way was the earthly representative of the Sun-God, Inti being the Son of Pacha-Kamac, himself in ceremonial represented the Inti, and officially he was the only man with whom the Virgins of the Sun were allowed contact—their shepherd, as it were. In this position he came in for a great deal of "kidding", and if any of the Virgins backslid, he was always blamed for the resulting child; for all Sun Virgins are officially supposed to be in love only with the Son of God, and himself was his earthly vehicle.

Huaycar laughed off her sally, as he laughed off the usual jibes on this count, saying: "Well, if you love me, give me a cousinly kiss, and I will be off to tend to the preparations—the gift-bearing Ambassadors of the Masked One come from the Manabi and many another spying guest from afar, and things really should look as if we knew how to keep house, at least."

ALANA started up from her chair by the window, where she had sunk in relief at the departure of Tumi Hayta's dark and angry face, her hand going again to her throat in alarm. "But, Huaycar, what of the bead? Something will happen. What will I do with it?"

"That little golden bead from Manabi, eh? I had not forgotten you, little thief—I had only wanted not to alarm the Empress. But perhaps you are right; we should not delay in seeing it well guarded. Its proper use will require much thought." Huaycar reached for the great woven bell rope, and far off the mellow chime summoning the

guard rang and rang again as he pulled the rope repeatedly.

Within seconds the chamber filled with the brown, scarred limbs, fierce faces, and the glittering obsidian weapons of the veterans who made up the palace guard.

Huaycar turned to the Empress. "Mama-Anac, this little box contains a treasure vastly greater than its size would indicate. Alana and I were just threatened by your brother. I will tell you all about the treasure during audience this morning.

"You can tell me while Alana dresses my hair, in my own rooms, in comfort—and not in forced whispers while everyone tries to get my attention—while I must watch every move of the foreigners so that none of them are slighted unintentionally. You come right along, you large, lovely man, and earn your keep by being pleasant to your Empress."

It was nearly an hour later that the three—Alana, the little ward of Mama-Anac; the Empress; and Huaycar, her cousin and a priest as well as a famous warrior of the Nobles—left Mama-Anac's chambers for the audience hall.

MAMA-ANAC, regally attired in the long plumes of the pilco-pilcui, red and brilliant streams of glistening beauty nodding from her head, a robe of fine cloth embroidered with gold fitting her full-blown womanly curves tightly, swept on ahead, with Huaycar and Alana just behind. She spoke over her shoulder, fretful as ever at the restrictions of her rank which made the two young people she loved walk behind her.

"That brother of mine gets too big for his boots. Now he has threatened you over some treasure! What can it be that leads him to such extremes? When the Inca hears of it he will send him to the prison at Macchu Picchu, and I for

one will not miss him. Him and his sneering superior ways. He is no true brother of mine."

"I have often thought that myself, Mama-Anac, but it is not polite to say it."

"It is no secret that my mother was not always discreet, my Huaycar. But this little box; why should it upset him so? There is more behind it."

At this instant they were traversing the hall of the seven Gods, a tall and gloomy passage full of the great sacred images and their attendant trappings. They turned out of the lofty passage into the smaller hall leading into the great throneroom where the audience would be held.

From the shadows of the great stone figures, from the little hall into which the sturdy figure of Mama-Anac had just turned, sprang a dozen masked warriors. A heavy black mace crashed upon Huaycar's skull; as he fell, the tiny red box was twisted from his grasp. Mama-Anac screamed, the startled guards whirled up their axes, raised their spears or sprang to seize and grapple the black robed, masked, and terrifying figures. But the leader seized Mama-Anac and held a knife to her throat. Immediately another of the black-masked assassins took his cue from the leader, seized Alana. Their meaning was all too clear, and helplessly the guards stood, watching the attackers back away into the shadows of the small passage that led away from the throne room. The whole affair had lasted not a minute, and the guards knew that unless they found a way to act, the Inca would find a way to avenge their carelessness in allowing this thing to happen. Helplessly they watched their Empress and her little attendant disappear before their eyes. Tumi Hayta had won the second round in the battle for the secret of the Bearded

Ones! And he had Mama Anac, the Empress as hostage.

OUTSIDE the great palace waited litter-bearers to whisk them away to hiding. While the guards searched the Palace, Mama-Anac and little Alana lay in a curtained litter borne swiftly through the streets crowded with the holiday's merrymakers, ever farther from the safety of the Inca's protection. And in Hayta's hand was the tiny box of rubra wood.

Hayta's assassins had left Huaycar behind because he looked very much dead, his head peeled open by a terrible blow of the mace, and all spattered by his own blood—he did not look like a man apt to talk a great deal about what had befallen him. Hayta could not afford the Emperor learning of this attempt of his to acquire the vast lost power of the Ancient Bearded Ones.

Two hundred miles away lay Tiahuanaco, upon the shores of Titicaca, the original home of the Bearded Ones' vast and almost forgotten Empire; an Empire greater by far than the present Confederation under the Incas. Tiahuanaco, The Place of the Dead, was the place Hayta must go to search for the hiding place of the treasure of the Ancients. Among those cyclopean ruins he could hide, and it was there he must search by means of the tiny engraved map for the power that lay in possession of the treasure.

Along the great Highway of the Incas his caravan swung at the trot; himself in a rich litter, while ahead the larger curtained litter contained the bound forms of Mama-Anac and Alana. Across the gorges on the great waxed-hair cable-suspension bridges, through the Andes' Alps by means of the tunnels—tremendous tunnels built by Incan Engineers, across the masonry bridges (which are still in use today—so might-

ily were they built) trotted the strong legs of the carriers, urged on by curses and by liberal wads of coca in their cheeks.

Hayta's Incan hearing told him that only some ten miles behind the pursuit had formed and was on his trail. And the warriors of his brother-in-law had no burdens to hold them back!

Now that his flight was known, Hayta had a means which would stop any pursuit along these precipitous highways.

Their party numbered a hundred warriors and half as many burden bearers and slaves.

As they completed the swaying crossing of the wide fabric of a great suspension bridge, the half dozen bridge guards came out of their little guard house at the great hair cable's end. It was their duty to keep track of the passage of any party as large as this—for the records of the Inca.

Hayta signed with his hand to the trotting Captain of his warriors. Without pausing in their stride, their painted hardwood maquahuitls flashed black venom in the sun, crushed through the Guards' upthrown arms, through the bronze helmets, slashed into the copper hued necks, left sudden blood and death about the quiet guard house.

Then swarming up the piled boulders bolstering the great anchor rock of the cable, up to the round hole through the anchor rock where the cable passed—the black obsidian-edged maquahuitls gleamed sullen triumph as the blades cut and cut again upon the cable that was years labor for many hundred hands—cut and cut until at last the great bridge crashed resounding into the deep abyss beneath.

Hayta laughed at the swift destruction of such long hard labor for the Inca's glory and signed to his men to press on less swiftly. The Inca's war-

riors would consume several days of perilous climbing to pass that gorge.

FOUR days later they rounded the northern end of Lake Titicaca, passing now among the awesome vastness of half-fallen stone figures of the Gods—the Sky God with his fierce condor beak, the frog faced God of the Rain, past the great grotesque nosed nose of the Wind God who leered lewdly at them from where his fallen head lay between his feet. Hayta looked at the bright, frightened and angry eyes of Alana where she lay with her adorable young head thrust through the curtain of the litter.

"Fear you the anger of the Ancients, little one?"

"Not half so much as I fear yourself, rash ingrate that you are! Did you have to slay my beloved Huaycar?"

"Who is not a friend is an enemy, little one. The fewer enemies, the better."

"You should have thought of that before you kidnaped Mama-Anac and made an enemy of twenty millions of people. Can you eliminate all those enemies, O master of cunning?"

"When I have the power of the Bearded Ones again awake across the land, they will be either my friends or they will be dead!"

"Even if you find their forgotten horde of weapons and treasure you will be too stupid to use them. Think you they were fools to build such things that a child-mind like yourself could operate them? I think that before long your head will decorate a pole outside the Temple!"

Hayta's face grew dark with angry blood, and the looks his men exchanged at her jibes frightened him, for in truth everything depended on their belief that he could do with the ancient powers what he said he could do.

"You are a magpie, a birdbrain, not to know the powers of the Bearded Ones. None will stand before me—and the place is marked well on the map you so kindly obtained for me."

"If I had known sooner what it was you would never have gotten it, oh man-with-a-face-like-a-dog."

The trotting cavalcade passed the great stone Plumed Serpent, so different in aspect from the Plumed Serpents built nowadays—so different that Alana, though no priestly student, doubted herself that the great mysterious thing was Kukulcan at all, but some other monstrous God of the past. Past the slim, scarred beauty of the lean figure of Xipe, that was not Xipe either, but some other God lately mistaken for the same figure as the God-warrior of the Aztecs in the far north. Past the elephant-headed God—and Alana laughed, for it was so impossible that any creature could look like that; yet the ancient peoples of this dead city had believed in him.

Now at last the vast shadowed bulk of the Punca-Puncu, the Place of the Ten Doors—loomed up before them, and the procession passed into its dwarfing shadow silently, awed by the great beauty and majesty, by the thought of the mighty ones who had built this place—so much beyond the power of Modern Incan engineers to construct.

NOW Tumi Hayta and the smarter of his men bent long over the little crystal that enlarged the micro-engraving on the nugget. Long they searched through the labyrinthine mystery of the Tunca Puncu, and long they compared markings on the walls with markings on the map. And at last, as day was closing, Hayta bent over the floor of the inner chamber where the great old Master God of the Ancients stared

down at them from his vast niche with his ruby red eyes twinkling in the fire from the sinking sun that struck even here from cunning little slots in the wall . . . Hayta bent and lifted from the floor one of the great silver interlocking keys between the vast slabs of which the Tunca Puncu was built—and as he tugged out the key, the slab tilted on its pivoted center, and revealed a long flight of two-foot steps leading downward into darkness.

The party passed down the tall steps, the litter-bearers grunting, their sandals slapping the dusty stone hard when the weight of the litters hit them as they lowered them down the two-foot drops of the steps. Hayta came down last, carefully letting the great stone shift back into place, his shoulder helping the groaning, creaking ancient mechanism.

Alana, now dangling over the shoulder of a burly warrior, her hands bound behind her and her ankles trussed painfully, looked at the walls as they passed through the gloomy, abandoned home of the ancient people. The rocks of the walls were huge, many-faceted, fitting snugly together, and held there by slots in which solid silver keys, locking bars with T ends, had been driven. It was a method of construction no longer used or understood. The torches flickered, Mama-Anac moaned ahead of her, still suffering from a blow on the head given her when she screamed to a guard at a bridge. Mama-Anac would be all right in a day or so, maybe.

Alana was scared, and she knew that there was little chance of the unimaginative soldiers of the Incan army finding them here. It was hot and close down here. Her face dripped with sweat and tears. She wriggled, and the warrior bearing her sank his fingers painfully into her leg to make her be still. She stopped wriggling.

They came out of the long dank pas-

sage at last into the vast subterranean Chamber of Magic, where the priests of ancient times had kept their secrets, their prisoners, their forbidden pleasures, their wine and the tools of their sacred mummerly.

CHAPTER II

HUAYCAR struggled back to consciousness in a red haze of pain. Over him the face of Sana Ptaoul, the Inca's own surgeon, bent—and what he was doing with his fingers to Huaycar's scalp was excruciating. Huaycar murmured: "Must you torture me? What have I done father?"

"It must seem like torture, my Huaycar. But if you are ever to seduce another Sun Virgin, you will have to have some hair on your head—so I am sewing the pieces back in place. Your attackers, striking more squarely, would have left you your scalp, but crushed your skull. So you should be glad to be alive! By the way, just what was the shindig about? Why did they take Mama-Anac and Alana? It doesn't make sense."

"It was Hayta. He has the map to the lost treasure of the Ancients. Alana found it, showed it to me. We were going to the Audience—he struck to regain it. He must have thought I was dead."

"You certainly looked dead! Half your scalp torn off and bleeding a torrent. You would have died of bleeding had you lain a few minutes longer. But I stopped the blood. I will patch you up, I hope."

The old doctor squeezed a handful of leaves between his fingers, directing the green juice droplets upon the great gash he had just closed. Then thoughtfully he mashed the leaves in a pestle, and lay them as a poultice along the wound. Behind him stood two of the Sun Vir-

gins, sent by the aged High Priest to care for his aide and probable successor. In their hands were tall black ewers of water, of the glossy glazed work decorated with line figures in gold; white soft bandage-weaving—and on their faces was grave concern for his welfare, for they liked the big laughing warrior who had unwillingly become their "shepherd" not long ago.

Lovely, innocent faces, thought Huaycar. So soon to die! It did not make sense. He did not greatly believe in the Gods he served. One could talk to the Gods, yes, sometimes, but the answers never sounded to Huaycar like Gods' voices, and the results were never anything he would accomplish if he had a God's power. So to Huaycar the business of pushing Virgins into a well to make rain next year was particularly unfortunate and foolish.*

As Sana Ptaoul finished the bandaging of his terrifically throbbing head, Huaycar relaxed and closed his eyes. But as sleep swept over him he heard the soft voice of a friend, and opened his eyes again to see Kapac Tupa, the glorious Inca, talking to Sana Ptaoul with a troubled face. Thinking that his concern was for himself, Huaycar spoke loudly—

"Oh My Inca, trouble yourself not about me, for other than a sad headache from the blow I am well. The wound, to my knowledge, is not serious."

The tall majesty of Kapac Tupa

* According to most writers of the Incas they did *not* push virgins into the well for the rain god, or sacrifice human beings; these cruel practices being confined to the Aztecs and Toltecs of Mexico and those races under their domination and influence. But this paragraph slipped in—you can take it or leave it; I left it—as the idea of these races without human sacrifice connected with their ceremonies is so general. But in truth, the Incas' laws were well enforced, and they were infinitely superior to the Spanish, who conquered them only by deceits and subterfuges the Incas found inconceivable.—Author.

swept closer, his rich robes sending the scent of the camac flower before him, the embroidered image of Inti on his breast glittering, and above it all the wise dignity of the man, the gentle culture that was Kapac Tupa's self, smiling down upon the injured man.

"There is a something mysterious about this disaffection of my brother-in-law that I cannot put my finger on, Huaycar. Can you help me?"

"He thought that the bead which little Alana purloined from the gifts from the Masked Ruler of the Forest was a map to the treasure of the Bearded Ones. I thought so myself when I first examined the engraving, but now that Timi has gone overboard I have another idea. I am not yet ready to declare to you what my thought is, but I too smell a strange odor of intrigue about this affair."

"We do not have all the pieces of the puzzle, my gentle shepherd of the Virgins. When we do, we will see a great light in this sudden action of Hayta's. It does not make sense that he would throw away my favor for a chancy affair like the treasure of the Bearded Ones; which is in truth but a legend, and not a reliable one, to my mind. We know they had certain wonderful things, true; but we do not know that they placed them in this alleged cache when they again left this land behind them."

Huaycar groaned loudly and shifted his weight on the cushioned couch. The Inca said in a concerned voice, "I will talk of this with you another time, Huaycar. You are not yet recovered."

"It is not so much my head that hurts, O my Emperor.* It is that confounded joke about the Virgins. I hear it morning, noon and night. It was one of the last things Mama-Anac said to me."

The Emperor laughed. "The jest is

one inspired by envy, noble son of my friend. You will always hear it, till you are too old for it to make sense."

"That is a dispiriting thought. Now my head does ache!"

"I have set my best trackers after the traitor. He will not escape, no matter where he flees."

"It would seem that he plots further than a mere excursion after mythical treasure, O Panaca Tupa. I would keep my spies awake in Quito and in the land of the Manabi. Something may be afoot!"

CHAPTER III

HAYTA was not surprised to find subterranean chambers, as many of the greater builders of his own people built such places—escape tunnels, underground storerooms and dungeons—but he was surprised to find an extensive, labyrinthine series of chambers, leading on and on; no one now alive knew where.

The party, feeling safe in their hiding, prepared to spend the night. Hayta and his chief officer sat themselves down under a torch to study the tiny micro-map at greater length, for this latter part of its detail gave the exact location of the treasure they sought . . . and now must find or eventually fall to the searching Inca soldiery.

It was with vast surprise that Hayta heard from his sharper-eared warriors

* The tenth Incan Emperor's name before he became Inca was Panaca Kapac Tupa and after he became Inca his title was Tupac-Yupanqui Inca. The first his actual name, the last an honorary or symbolic title.

All the Empresses are titled Mama, something like our Queen-mother.

The Eighth Inca took the name of Wira-Kocha Inca although his right name was SocSoc. Wira-Kocha was a mythical god-person who created lake Titicaca, and is supposed to have built the cyclopean Pre-Incan ruins. The Inca took the god's name.—Author.

that, in the distance marching feet were approaching along some underground passage.

"Hundreds of men, armed men—and they are not the Inca's!"

Now, far off, nearer and nearer, they saw a line of flickering torches. The wearied warriors sprang from the skins and ponchos they had stretched on the cold stone, to look to their weapons. For them was no retreating, they were too weary.

Into the far end of the vast chamber—gloomy with shadows and eerie as it was—marched a mass of men fronted by a frightful figure which made the already frightened Alana shiver still more with apprehension and eerie dread of the things that looked so much like the armies of the dead, talked of in their legends.

Hayta was surprised, but not so greatly as one would expect; and as the frightful foremost figure became more distinct, Tumi Hayta stood at attention, his weapon held before him in salute.

The clutched spears of his men relaxed, came to the vertical of their military salute. It was plain to Alana that this meeting, while surprising to Hayta, was at the same time not with any stranger, but with someone known to himself and to his men.

That foremost figure stalked on, nearer and nearer, but his marching warriors stopped, the foremost spread out a little in the far end of the chamber. His face was a fierce golden mask, wide mouthed and hideous; the face of Cimi, the Death God—or the face of Supay himself. His height was not great, but he was extremely wide, the legs bowed and hugely muscled and twistedly deformed. His arms hung to his knees, huge-handed and hairy as an ape's. Tumi Hayta bowed in low obeisance before this hideous apparition, and humbled himself as he had never done before

his own Inca.

"Welcome, O Lord of the Dark Forests, who holds in the hollow of his hand the lives of all the myriad of the Manabi; O visitor from the Dark Mysteries of Haek-Pachac; O master of the Mysteries of the Lost Underworld—I greet thee. I did not expect to find you here. I came here thinking I had uncovered at last the lost hiding place of the Treasures of the Bearded Ones—only to find yourself already here. With me I have a hostage who should interest you—the Mama-Anac Huarca, the Empress!"

MAMA-ANAC lifted her rather sweet middle-aged face at the sound of her name on her false brother's lips, but at sight of the fierce golden mask and hideous deformed limbs of the Masked One, she screamed and fell again into the unconscious state in which she had spent her time since the fall of the great suspension bridge.

"Greetings, faithful servant." The mysterious and frightening figure of the Masked One lifted a wide, bulky palm in the gesture of peace, his deep frog voice booming and echoing eerily in the rock chamber. "Though affairs have taken a somewhat different trend than I had planned, yet there is much for which to be grateful to chance and to the Gods. You see, my Tumi, I sent that bead to the Inca with a double purpose. With it I sent an agent, whom I told to rumor that it contained the map to the long sought treasure of ancient power. But I have never been quite sure of you and your allegiance, for others of high rank like yourself have failed me through an inability to realize that I could offer them vastly more than their rulers. Thinking you likewise would fail me, I did not tell you why that bead was sent to the Inca—and it has trapped you into an in-

discretion which might have made you useless to me forever. I expected my agent to tell many of the nobles of Cuzco that the bead contained the map so long sought; but he told you among the first—and you slew him before he could complete his work. Your impulsiveness is understood, and it is my fault that I did not tell you what plan I had in mind. I expected the Inca to fall for my little lie and lead a search party here to find the treasure, for he has searched other clues in person before. Once down here, I would have him—and after him his Empire—in my hands. It is unfortunate that you have removed the little bait for my trap from his hands.

The golden mask turned awkwardly, looking into all the shadows of the room to see who might be listening to him. Then he went on, "It were better we two talked alone. There are things I must tell you now—now that I know you are one who must serve me or have nothing. Our positions, the whole plan, has altered vastly by your action."

Tumi nodded, and barked an order to his men. They left the great chamber, taking Alana and Mama-Anac with them.

Alana said savagely, "Already this traitor thinks like an Inca, he makes sixty people leave the room, where he could himself walk a few steps and be as much alone." But Mama-Anac did not answer, and Alana bent her mind to overhear the echoing murmur of the conspiring voices in the distance. The shape and acoustics of the rock helping her, she made out to hear much.

The Masked One was continuing, his voice rolling in confusing, whispering echoes:

"My friend, I have lied to you, and I must confess it. The map on the little bead of gold is false. There is no knowledge in my mind of the location of the

mysterious powers of the God-like Bearded Ones. I sent that nugget to the Inca, among other things and gifts, for a purpose. I also sent an agent to spread a rumor as to what the little bead really was. That it would lead a man to the immense power of the weapons of the Bearded Ones. But the agent I chose was a poor one, and he did not fully understand my orders. He told you of the value of the bead, because he believed that it really was such a valuable thing, and that you would richly reward him. You did; you killed him—which upset certain of my plans. It kept him from telling those whom I told him to inform. You see, if the Inca should have that map, and should come to this place, I have prepared a force of men here to take him—an army of men, indeed."

Tumi's voice, higher pitched, yet could be heard by Alana. "You thought to test me, to see if I would tell the Inca of the value of this map?"

"That was part of my plan, if you wish to think that."

TUMI was vilely disappointed. "It does not lead to the Power of the Ancients—it is folly I have thrown away my life for! This is not a good thing you have done to me."

"On the contrary, your swift, impulsive seizure of the golden bead, and your forced abduction of the Empress to keep her mouth closed about the map—or for what reason you did so—played into our hands beautifully. I can now show you how to become the Inca!"

"How, O mighty friend? I will soon be a dead man if you mislead me again."

"Send that bit of engraved foolishness back to the Inca. Place it in the hands of one of your men—the one most likely to be believed. Have him say that he heard of its value, stole it and brought it to his Emperor in loyal up-

holding, knowing that his Inca would die if you, Tumi Hayta, reached the trove of weapons before the Inca. The dignified fool will go at once to the place marked on the map, taking with him but a few hundred men at the most.

The Golden Mask—a sample of fine but evil handiwork in the precious metal; a mask that contained a lifelike image of Hell's fiercest face—looked a moment upon Tumi with the inscrutable disturbing regard of two empty eye sockets. The too-deep voice went on:

“And that place is here—*here*—where no tactical elusiveness or skill will help him to escape us. Here in these sunless borrows he will die at our hands. He will not bring a great many men because he will want to travel swiftly, and an army cannot travel swiftly for baggage. He will think that your own search for the hiding place will be delayed or blocked entirely by the loss of the map on the nugget—and will hasten to be sure to be in time to forestall you in case you had copied out the map upon a larger surface. He will believe in the truth of the map quite as much as you did. He knows a great deal about the Bearded Ones from the palace records. He has long sought the legendary cache of mighty God-Weapons.”

Tumi's voice was gloating, pre-emptant with the taste of imagined triumph. “And here we set upon him, eh? Here we slay him, and here he will lie and rot in these forgotten halls. Then we march at once on Cuzco, proclaim the Mama-Anac Empress. Then we force her to proclaim her brother Tumi Hayta as her regent! I will be the Inca within this moon's passage, Master of the Manabi—I will be the Inca!”

“Yes, it is lucky for us that Kapac Tupa has no lawful heir. As it is the

greater part of the nobles will come over to our side, against those who see through our plan—for the sake of sweet legality. Had the Inca a son, our plan would never work.”

“I understand the plan fully. It is a good and practical plan!”

“After you have become Regent over all the Confederated Quichua, you can cede to me the lands of the Manabi now held by the Inca. Then, a little later, we will march on Quito in the North, and conquer our only rival in this whole land. After that, who is to say what could not be ours?”

“Your plans are irresistible, O Lord of Death and Life. It is also a pleasant thought to know that the nobles of Cuzco would never accept yourself as ruler. It will be to your advantage to keep Tumi Hayta in the land of the living.”

“Yes, that is a good and healthy thought for both of us. My own dark minded warriors would want none of your milk and water ways did you think to conquer or to lead them in my place, to dispense with my own dread mummery and dark mysterious claims of kinship with the Lord of Death. So there is little danger of either of us trying to annex the others power. We should work well together, Tumi Hayta, so long as you remember who is Boss!”

From the eyeholes of the golden mask a long stare bored into Tumi's face, and slowly the power of the mind behind that mask struck into Tumi Hayta a cold and dreadful fear, so that he half credited that The Masked One's claim of kinship with the Underworld was not a lie, and that his mention of his claims as mummery was the real lie. And Tumi shivered in his fear, and the Masked One laughed at the sudden craven face of him. For behind those holes in the metal face of the mask, Tumi could see not the least glitter of

light, not the least sign of wet eyeball, but only a terrible red-lit darkness, and deep within him a flood of cold fear welled up, a superstition that would not down. This man was other than life.

Fighting hard against the fear that gripped him, Tumi seized the tall black torch that burned on the table and held it up to the golden horror of the Mask. And then he set it down again with trembling hands, and the Masked One turned away with a mocking laugh that yet was triumphant evil.

For Tumi Hayta knew that never would he do other than this thing that looked so little like a man wished him to do.

SOME seven suns later, into the glittering chambers of the Inca of all the Quichuas, staggered a sweat drenched and dust streaked warrior. One of the Lacunas; he had been absent since the flight of Tumi Hayta. He fell on his face before the Emperor, his breath coming in great gasps. Above him stood four of his countrymen, their faces like thunderstorms—for disaffection of a half-dozen of the royal guard had thrown their whole race into the shadow of the Emperor's doubt of their loyalty. It could lead to the destruction of their homeland, the transplanation of their whole race to lands farther from the center of the Inca's power, the breaking up of the homes of their people forever—did any further thing cause his doubt to grow. Their short stabbing spears were poised above the prostrate man's back, ready for the death blow did the Inca give the word. But he raised his hand, saying: "Let the traitor speak!"

The prostrate man raised his head, and held up his open hand. In the palm glowed a little golden bead! From his place beside the Inca, Huaycar ut-

tered a low cry, and stepped forward swiftly, lifted the tiny gleaming object to his eye.

"It is, O my Inca, it is the map of the hoard of the Ancients. This man has somehow retrieved the cause of this trouble and brought it again to you."

The Inca bent forward, interest glowing bright on his face, "Speak, O fearful one. Speak of the Empress and why you have returned. Better for you had you brought Mama-Anac back to me than this tiny gaud!"

"I was forced by my brothers to help them or die. When I heard of the mighty power that lay in the lines invisibly written upon this bead, I saw my chance and stole it—bringing it to you—that our kindly ruler might not be replaced by an evil man like Tumi Hayta. He plans to use the power of the Bearded Ones—which he will find with this tiny bead—to slay you, to set himself upon your throne, to rule us all with the lightning of the Ancients' terrible weapons. I have brought you the map, that you may be swifter than he, and with your armies seize this place marked upon the map so that Tumi Hayta, when he arrives to unearth the hidden store, will find your anger waiting for him. I have run faster than any man other than myself could run, to bring you this power. With it you can be a greater ruler than any before you ever was."

"You have looked at the map through the lens?" The Inca had turned to Huaycar. "Where does the map place the ancient cache?"

"See, I will show you. I have another of the Manabi lenses. Look, here, through the light."

The Inca gravely held the gem to his eye, and moved the bead about till the lines invisible upon it became pictures, until the pictures became understand-

able places. "Now the first picture shows the Ancient Highway running between Cuzco and Lake Titicaca. It shows the Bearded Ones traveling along that Highway, does it not?"

"Yes, it does show that."

"Next picture: it shows the vast city of Tiahuanaco, when it was the holy city of all this land, none of the buildings fallen. And it shows the Bearded Ones entering the greatest building of all, The Tunca-Puncu. The Temple they built to their own invisible God, the Creator, whom we still worship above our god and the Inti—the sun—who is the son of the Creator."

"Yes, the map shows the Tunca Puncu."

"Now if you look carefully, the trail leads beneath the Tunca Puncu. There are subterranean chambers there about which I myself did not know till I saw this bead. The last picture of all shows the general layout of the subterranean chambers, and a cross marks the place of the cache."

FROM the stone floor where he still groveled before the Inca, the Lacuna spoke. "O my glorious Emperor, it is to the Tunca Puncu that Tumi Hayta has fled with Mama-Anac. He lifted a pivoted stone, and went down into the bowels of the earth under the mighty ruined palace of the Ancients."

"What is his strength, O man who turns his coat every day?"

The warrior's face fell at the words of the Inca, for it showed he was not entirely believed.

"His strength is some hundred warriors now, and more come in from his own lands, from Macchu Picchu—and there are too some dark skinned men from the land of the Manabi."

"Manabi? Then the Masked One, too, angles for this treasure of the Ancients! There must be more truth

than I had credited to the legend of the weapons to be found there. Does the Masked One think to upset me, O fearful one?" The Inca's face was scowling, and the cunning mind of the Lacuna warrior knew that he had said too much.

"I do not know; there was much talk among the nobles I was not privileged to hear."

The Inca turned to Huaycar, his face suddenly firm with decision. "This is a gathering storm during which we cannot sit upon our behinds, Huaycar. Call together the officers, and we will plan to pull this little brother-in-law out of that hole he has found to crawl into."

"There is a certain bad odor about this, Panaca Tupa. The whole thing could be a trumpery lie. The inner plan looks strangely to me like the cunning twining of that dark mysterious snake, the ruler of the Manabi. His mummery, his passion for secrecy, his ways of thinking, of which I have heard from spies of ours among them. I would say this could well be a trap of his—carefully planned. You see, my Inca, did he succeed in killing you, Mama-Anac could proclaim her brother the regent."

The Inca's face grew dark with anger. Huaycar hastily went on:

"I do not think the Empress has a hand in this; but they could easily trick her, after your death, into being an unwilling accomplice. Holding her, they hold a claim to the throne!"

"Whatever is in their minds, your warning is timely, but your caution is not too timely. We will send against that dark ruin enough sound warriors to pluck it stone from stone and crush the worms within before they grow into serpents."

"If they are planning a trap for you, they will insist that you come in person to bargain for the ransom of your Em-

press and for Alana. That will be the give-away. So do you remain here, and I will go to step into their little trap. Then, knowing what is in their minds, do not bargain; but fling your whole strength against them and crush them at once. Just to make sure they do not trap you, I will take along your robes of office, the golden mace, the feathered crown—the whole trappings of your glory. When they ask for you in person, I will show myself from afar as you—and they will spring their snare upon the wrong animal. Then all will be plain before you, and their cards will be upon the table while your own strength remains untouched. How do you like that plan?"

"You are more cunning than I had known, it is not a good thing that yourself should be a priest, when the land needs soldiers. One day I may remedy that."

"That day I will marry Alana and be happy, if she remains alive through this treachery."

THE Inca was thoughtful. "But I think your cunning in this case is wrong. I think that my *dear* brother-in-law is mad, has no alliance with the Masked one, and that there is no trap and no plan to use the Empress to replace me with her brother. I myself am going along with this expedition, because I want to see with my own eyes what this treasure of the Bearded Ones is all about. It is a strange tale to cause so much anguish to us. I would know what lies under that gloomy ruin, the Tunca-Puncu. It has ever been a curious, dark, mysterious and unknown place. If there are underground chambers and passages, I want to see them for myself."

"You should remember, good friend to me before my Inca, that this bead came to you direct from the hands of

the Masked one! His people are skilled in making these things, and it could have been inscribed only the day before it was sent to you. There is no reason to think this so-called map is anything but a bait, and a rather obvious and silly bait, for a trap. Your own riches and power are vastly more actual than any prize of the Bearded Ones, who are so long disappeared into time that we do not know for sure they *had* any treasures we would value—or could use. It is to me too plain that the Masked One plays a devious game with us, and such is his reputation."

"Nevertheless, my young Pillar of Caution, I am going. I have not had any fun for years. I would like to hear the battle cries, the glorious thrill of the shock of the charge; the streaming blood of brave men; the feel of a weapon in my hands! You would not allow your Emperor to scratch his little finger, had you your way. What will my warriors think of me, if I obey you and remain here like a fearful woman while my own loyal men die to pluck my wife back from a few hundred traitorous kinsmen. Bah, Huaycar, there is a thing called too much caution. There is another name my own brave warriors will give it if I listen to you! I could not face them."

SO IT was that a thousand of the Inca's best trotted down the King's Highway toward the ruined city of Tiahuanaco, toward the Holy Lake Titicaca; and in the midst of them swayed the painted, luxurious palanquin of Tupac Yupanqui Inca, whose actual name was Panaca Kapac Tupa. And walking beside him marched Huaycar, his priestly robes discarded for the glittering weapons of a warrior officer—and his priest's benign smile for the frank, honest face of a man of action going toward the action for which he

was born.

The stone mile-posts, each one marking the number in distance from Cuzco, were swung by their rhythmic, strong brown legs, and every twenty miles the party of warriors stopped at the rest-house for food, wine and an hour of sprawling talk and refreshment.

Each night the Inca talked with the Officers of the distant palace by means of the fire-signals from the towers—and there was little of importance there that he was not informed of. Too, he listened to Huaycar's still insistent warnings, and ordered from Cuzco another force of five thousand men to start the journey for the ruins of the sacred city—and at those villages about Titicaca were some two thousand men waiting to join their ruler. Thus he insured the presence of a strong force if he should need it, but Panaca Tupa did not believe he would need it to subdue the despised Tumi Hayta.

His rage at the destruction of the suspension bridges was terrible to see.

Night had fallen on the eighth day when the Inca's thousand approached Tiahuanaco, the City of the Dead; for they were much delayed by crossing the gorges. This was the home of the Ancients. The lake Titicaca gleamed silver and placid in the moonlight, and the gloomy grandeur of the mighty home of the Elder Incas, the Holy City where the majesty of a race greater than their own, but now passed into oblivion, struck into their hearts an awe and a feeling of their own inferior worth.

Huaycar counseled that they make camp, and enter the deserted avenues of the mighty city in the safe light of the morning; but Panaca Tupa insisted on looking on the hill of the Tunca Puncu in the night. It was in his mind that some light, some motion, would betray the presence of the men of Tumi Hayta, might show whether they were

many or few.

They made camp in the Kalasasaya, the Sun Temple, on the great paved terrace in front—the steep walls of the terrace forming a spot easily defended—the only entrance being the broad stone stairway. At the western end of the terrace the mighty Gateway of the Sun insured them of the protection of their God, Inti. Looking at the scenes carved on the single great stone of the gateway, cryptically telling of the preparation for the war with the Jaguar God of the Night, the assembling of his lesser Gods by the Condor God who carries the Sun, Inti, across the heavens every day—Huaycar mused that this battle of evil and good is always present in one way or another. Too, he wondered why the Incan stone-cutters had no longer the vast skill of these ancients; and wondered if it was that they no longer knew how to harden metal to their use as had the ancient race. He wondered if they should find within the supposed hiding place of the Elder Bearded Race's* tools and weapons and magic, hardened metal stone-cutters' tools among the other things, so that once again their Incan stone masons might equal the mighty skill of these ancient forgotten artisans.

Huaycar himself saw to the posting, of sentries and made all secure.

CHAPTER V

WITHIN the Tunca Puncu, Hayta was aware of the coming of the

* It is interesting to speculate if it was not this legend of the Bearded Ones that assisted the Spanish Conquest as much as their horse and armor. The Incans had a reverence for all the works of the races that preceded them; they were Holy Ones, and the greatest of these were The Bearded Ones who came from no one knows where and disappeared the same place. It is quite possible the Incas had difficulty persuading their warriors to struggle against the "bearded" Spanish.—Author.

Inca. Nervously he waited, sending word by messenger down the long subterranean passage, the escape tunnel of the ancient cunning Lords who had built this vast pile—a tunnel that ran almost to the coast, opening in the foothills of the Andes on the Manabi territory.

Then night wore on, and with coming of the dawn came again the tread of the marching warriors of the Masked One. Little Alana woke Mama Anac, whispering: "That horror in the golden Mask is back, now don't wake up and start screaming, just look at me and don't think about him."

"I can't stand the sight of the beast. He is as wide as he is tall—and more ugly than is possible!"

"He seems to have Tumi Hayta pretty well under his thumb. Your brother looks at him as if he was hypnotized."

"He could be at that. Certainly Tumi is playing the fool for a lot of promises from that one. He does not exactly look like a man whose word was untarnished as gold, does he?"

"He looks like a fiend from the pit! For all that, he may be the kind of animal that our religion says really lives—the beasts of the abyss beneath our feet. We don't know! He claims to be related to the King of Death, the ruler of the Underworld; and who is to say different?"

"Bah! It is lies he has made up to frighten his ignorant forest people into obeying him. He is just the misbegotten freak from some mother who got her love affairs mixed up and came out loser. He is a monster—and probably his father was before him."

"But where could such a hairy man come from? There are no hairy Indians."

"There are tales of hairy races in the past, and he could be a throwback to some ancestor of that kind."

"But, hush, Mama—he speaks—we want to hear!"

The deep booming voice was not trying to be secret and they could not miss hearing.

"Well, Tumi Hayta, our condor has come to the trap; I told you he would do what we expected. He has taken a few hundred men and rushed to be the first to unearth the ancient wisdom."

"It is more like he has rushed to get his wife and my head, O Masked and Secret One—but that is no matter. What matters is that he is here where we can kill him. He is camped upon the terrace about the Kalasasaya. His sentrys are well posted in the shadow of each of the mighty pillars. It is a place easy to defend, hard to take by storm."

"He will not stay in that position. He will march straight up to these deserted doors, enter the Tunca Puncu, lift out the silver key just as you did and come down here. The whole lot of them will come down here as though they had no fear. I know their minds, little things of no strength."

"You underestimate the Inca. He will not enter these passages for you to kill him. He is rash and proud, but not that rash."

"Well, post your men. When he comes, club down the first that enter, silently. Then if he calls down these stairs to know what is waiting, you yourself will call back that all is well. The chambers are empty of all but the wonderous magic, work of those who built this city. Then he will come, if there is nothing to cause him caution. If there is a noise of combat, and something arouses his fear—if he does not enter—we will charge out upon him as he retreats before our sudden showing of greater strength. Panaca Tupa will not live to embrace Mama-Anac again. He has already entered our trap too far

to escape.”

CHAPTER VI

AS DAWN brighted the sky above the mighty Andes, Huaycar stood beneath the single massive block of carved andesite that formed the ancient Gateway of the Sun and chanted the ritual of welcome with which the priest greets every day. Silently the warriors stood, their eyes on the yellow and awesome God of the skies, and the prayer had more meaning, this day, it seemed, than ever it had among the living avenues of Cuzco.

The short ceremony over, Panaca Tupa called the officers together for a council of war. A half-dozen warriors left to scout the great bulk of the Tunca Puncu, a mile away; to look for smoke, for signs of Tumi's men.

In an hour the scouts returned with a wholly negative report. The tracks of the party could be seen entering the great ruin, none leaving. They were somewhere within. Panaca Tupa turned to the Lacuna who had brought was born.

“Can you guide us to the turning stone within the Tunca Puncu where Hayta went into the underground chambers?”

“Surely, O my Emperor. It lies not far within the central chamber of Pacha Kamac, the Creator.

The Inca turned to Huaycar. “We will have to enter the burrow, dangerous as that may be, for I see no other way to lay the dog by the heels.”

“I have said *be careful* too often to repeat it, my Inca. It could be a trap, and the warriors of the Masked One waiting beneath to destroy you.”

“Bearing that in mind, we will spring the trap—if it be one—upon empty nothing.”

“Huaycar, take this fellow who claims

to have turned his coat twice in one week, and find that turning stone. Send him down alone, and then follow after him, just within hearing distance. As soon as you hear him speak, return and we will decide what the speaking meant. And you, worthless one, if you want to stay alive, turn your coat my way this time for sure or your death will not be a pleasant one. If they wait beneath, speak to them in such a way that they will not realize we test them—and Huaycar can return with the words you say. If there is no one there . . .”

“But Master, I *stole* that bead and fled. Tumi Hayta will kill me at once he sees me.”

“In that case Huaycar will hear his words and bear them again to me, and I will know you died honestly. But in case he does not kill you, but welcomes you as returned spy—what then?”

“Why then I will have served you, for you know Tumi Hayta waits below with the Empress—what more could you know?”

“These Manabi you witlessly mentioned, how many of them wait below?”

“I do not know, Master.”

“It would be better if you did know, for you! Now, if you are a spy, how much do you think Hayta will pay you? When he is through he will kill you so that he will not have to reward you. He is not kind and generous, not a good man. Why do you serve him?”

“Let me go alone, and I will return and tell you exactly what awaits below.”

“That is a good idea. Now go!”

Quickly the tall Lacuna set out for the gloomy ruin towering in the distance. The Inca signed to Huaycar, and Huaycar—thinking like the Inca it were better if the fellow did not know he were followed—set out after the man at a distance of a hundred paces. But with him went a score of warriors, and

they went at an angle, so that when the Lacuna looked back, he would think they traveled to circle the ruined Tunca Puncu.

HUAYCAR, as soon as the tall Lacuna had disappeared between the huge portals of the Place of Ten Doors, ran forward, ducked his head into the gloom, saw the man turn the corner, and hastened after him. Behind him came his twenty, as silent as serpents.

Into the dread chamber of the Creator, where his red eyes glowed startlingly through the gloom, and gaping upon the tilted slab down which the spy had disappeared. On swift but silent feet Huaycar stole to the opening, peered down into darkness. No sound came up—nothing. Quickly he lowered himself down the two-foot high steps, but with his back first, so that he could sprint upward at the first sign of attack. With Huaycar silent caution was the better part of valor just now.

A distant rumble of voices did come to his ear, but the sliding feet of someone just below him made him sprint again up the great steps, and hard upon his heels came the rush of footsteps. As he burst up into the light, an arrow shot over his shoulder, and out upon the broad paving spewed a torrent of Manabi warriors, mixed with the condor-symbolled harness of the taller, renegade Cuzco men.

Huaycar's score of warriors, surprised at the number and ferocity of the outspewing attack cast their spears, and at the short range near half of them found a mark in the bodies of the squat Manabi warriors.

Flight was their only hope, and Huaycar was not the last as they legged it back across the rubble strewn wreckage of the great plaza that surrounded the Tunca Puncu, and dodged into the narrow avenues of half-fallen walls back

toward the Kalasasaya.

Tumi Hayta, wishing to show his valor before the Masked One, had himself led the first rush of warriors upward, after their attempted capture of Huaycar had missed its first grasp. It was useless to hide now that Huaycar knew they waited at the bottom of the steps, was Tumi's thought in ordering the rush to make good their seizure or the death of Huaycar; but if he could have heard The Masked One's great booming voice cursing him for his impulsive rush out into the light he would not have felt so proud of his courage. The Masked One sent an officer to order back the hundred or so men who had followed Tumi Hayta in his upward charge; but the whole chase had crossed the plaza and were fighting and running down the rocky littered avenues toward the Sun Temple before he caught up with Tumi.

Tumi Hayta returned to the dark chambers under the vast ruin to find himself not praised, but embarrassingly reproved for his rash action.

"It so happens that not too much harm has been done, since the Inca's watchers have seen but a short hundred men—which is about the number his spies have been led to believe await him here. But hereafter, when a decision like this of so much importance is to be made, consult me. Your action under different circumstances could have plunged all of us into defeat. You must realize, my little man, that only clever conniving can wrest the Inca's Empire from his grasp, and no sudden action like yours will ever do the trick. He is evidently suspicious, or he would not have sent his favorite, young Huaycar, to see what awaits him here."

"It was hard to keep from following when the young coward fled so suddenly. I expected to down him before he reached the exterior of the ruin; but

he is young and swift, and twenty of his best warriors waited with spears at the swinging stone."

"We cannot live by alibi. Death does not keep away for excuses, Tumi. Every move we make must be a planned move, not a blunder! Never mind. We await his next move, and we do nothing, understand, *nothing*, until he ventures again down here where we have the advantage of him. He is not one born yesterday, that Inca of yours."

WHEN Huaycar arrived back among the nobles and warriors, the thousand of the Inca force, there were no laughs at the expense of the score—who were no longer a score, having left a half dozen behind.

The Inca looked at Huaycar's red and embarrassed face, saying, "Don't be ashamed of flight from five times the number; I am only sorry we did not expect just that to happen. We could have lined the ruined streets with soldiers, and caught the whole lot of them between our arrows."

Huaycar, stilling his hard breathing, said: "Panaca Tupa, there are more forces down there than rushed out. Even Tumi Hayta is not so big a fool as to send his whole force in a sortie like that. The fact that a hundred were seen, proves there are more men there than we thought—for the Lacuna told use there were but a hundred, hence there should have been but fifty at the most in the pursuit."

"I think you are right. There were two Manabi to each man of Cuzco in that bunch. If the Masked One is planning what you suspect, he plans it very poorly. Call in all the fighting men you can get on short notice, and we will ready ourselves to take Tumi Hayta apart piece by piece, and the Tunca Puncu with him."

Runners were sent now to every vil-

lage within a day's march—and Huaycar figured that by tomorrow night their force would be doubled or tripled.

The scouts and sentries of the Masked One, posted in the tower of the Tunca Puncu, posted in the empty buildings for a half-mile around the ruin, reported the sending of the messengers. The Masked One waited no more, for he saw the prize slipping through his fingers. Cursing the necessity of venturing his all upon an increasingly risky venture, he ordered an attack upon the Kalasasaya

So it was that out of the tunnel beneath the ancient pile now poured a stream of squat Manabi warriors, rank on rank, steadily for half a day. Mid-afternoon saw some twenty thousand disciplined fighting men advancing upon the ruined Sun Temple by every broad avenue, and by every narrow street of meaner ruins. The Inca was surrounded!

The warriors from Cuzco tore up the stones of the temple terrace—a space about five hundred feet by four hundred—and built breastworks between the surrounding columns. Their situation was not good, though the temple terrace rose above the surrounding terrain by some ten feet and the improvised breastworks between the tall pillars gave them protection; still they could be attacked from three sides, and from the fourth were only partly protected by the Temple itself.

The squat, big-chested Manabi warriors advanced steadily to long arrow range, and poured over the breastworks a gradually increasing shower of arrows. Under cover of this fire, the heavier armored warriors advanced to the assault of the terrace. These, their armor consisting of cotton quilting in layers; of broad wooden shields and long lances; at their wrists hanging the war axes of stone, of obsidian, and of

silver and bronze; the obsidian edged wooden maquahuitl (which was near as deadly as a sword); wooden leg-greaves; bronze, gold and silver helmets topped the more well-to-do of the Manabi; the nobles and the officers who were in the favor of the Masked One. The whole press were painted in bright colors in startling stripes, dots and weird designs. The metal helmets were shaped like the heads of jaguars, of eagles and of bears. It was as gaudy and terrifying an assembly as Huaycar had ever seen, on former campaigns of the Inca.

PANACA TUPA, now equipped in full armor—wooden greaves on his legs, the quilted armor covering him to his knees, the golden champi swining in his hand, which was his badge of office as well as a nicely balanced and well-built weapon, and topped by a glittering golden helmet which fiercely displayed the condor's beak and covered his face to the nostrils—was snorting with the excitement of the first action he had managed to get into in over two years. To Huaycar's constant concern for him he only growled, "Let 'em come, they're only ten to one. Since when did a man of Cuzco admit he couldn't kill ten Manabi!"

"But, my ruler, the whole object of the Masked One's attack is just to kill *you*—nothing else! That accomplished, he will retreat at once; and from a distance proclaim Mama-Anac the ruler and Tumi Hayta the new Inca by her orders. Then he will march on Cuzco and half at least of the nobles will join his forces out of love for Mama-Anac. That is the sole purpose. Don't show yourself—and we can hold out for a day or two till the men we have sent for arrive and start trouble for him from his rear. They

will get word to Cuzco, and perhaps will penetrate his lines and bring us food and weapons. We have of arrows not enough for more than a day of fighting, as you well know. If you must fight, fight as one of us without that condor helmet and gold mace. They are more famous than your own face, you big-headed . . . may Manco Kapac send his spirit to watch over you, certainly I can't unless you listen to me!"

"Not for all the Manabi on the western coast will I doff this helmet or drop this mace, and may the God of all timid people, Centeotl, watch over *you* today."

That first charge brought the shouting Manabi up to the very top of the steep ten foot slope. The long lances thrusts picked off many, too many of the Inca warriors, but the Manabi could not close. What looked like a simple climb and a leap over the breastworks proved on closer approach to be an impossible feat; and every scrambling Manabi that shoved his ugly face to the top of the breastwork promptly got his skull split. The dead at the foot of the slope grew rapidly in numbers, and as fast as they scrambled up the slope, they rolled down again, dead or dying or maimed.

Above them all, Panaca Tupa shouted and his mace plied as rapidly and as true as the most battle-hardened veteran in the ranks. At his side stood Huaycar, his eyes and his quick shield trying to catch the arrows that flew in a stream toward the Inca in time to intercept each one.

The charge broke at last against their iron resistance, and the Manabi withdrew out of bow range to lick their wounds and to plan anew.

The Inca had caught but one arrow in his forearm, but the shield that Huaycar bore beside him was a splin-

tered wreck, bristling with arrows like a porcupine with quills. Huaycar showed this to the Inca, who wryly commended him on his quick eye, but showed no desire to keep his person less in evidence.

They counted their dead, some hundred, and tended to their wounded. Night was approaching, and of their living number but some six hundred were fit to fight. Huaycar dreaded the night attack he was sure would come. Now they would be spread thinly along the near eighteen hundred feet of breastwork, and another charge would surely break their line. Two more such attacks spelled sure doom, Huaycar knew—and looking at his Emperor, it was evident he knew it too.

LOOKING out over the enemy filled landscape, a dread and a foreboding of death filled Huaycar's breast. Tenderly he thought of little Alana waiting in the subterranean corridors beneath the Tunca Puncu—and himself beleagured here and failing at the job of setting her free. What would be her fate did the Inca fall he well knew. It was not a good thing to think, for the customs of the Manabi are not such as can be thought of without loathing. And as he leaned against the great Gateway of the Sun looking out upon the setting splendor shining directly through the doorway in the single great stone, a little light far-off in the gathering darkness gleamed for an instant on the distant hillside—and disappeared! Instantly it reappeared, and again was swallowed by the dusk! Huaycar's heart leaped within him, for it was the fire signal of the Incan soldiery—and only fresh warriors of the Inca would be using that signal. Huaycar hissed excitedly to the Inca, hoping the too-near Manabi scouts would not notice the tiny

flicker of light. The Inca swore a great oath as the light flashed again, and instantly with his own hands began to prepare the scorched cotton for the return blaze, tearing up his own quilted armor to make the tiny fire needed, which Huaycar quickly stopped, seizing the tunic from a dead warrior to kindle the blaze. About the blaze, directly in the center of the Gateway of Inti, shielded from all points but that far hill's view by ponchos held by grateful warriors, gathered the wounded men, and hope sprang in their hearts as the swift interchange between the Inca and his distant forces took place. Completed, the light disappeared instantly into the gathering gloom.

The Inca turned to the grim faces gathered about him, few of whom had been able to follow the rapid signaling.

"I have told them to attack directly opposite the Tunca Puncu. It has but ten doors, and our own choice of positions is *all* doors, it seems. They will drive through from behind the Tunca Puncu, take it if they can, we sortie from here to join them. Eh, how is that? Even at the forst, we retreat into the ancient palace of the Dead—and have our Mama-Anac again in our hands and our precious Masked One's plans are spiked!

An old noble at the side of Huaycar raised his voice—a voice that by its firmness showed the grim experience of old campaigns when this Inca whom he served had been a babe in arms.

"I have been silent, all this time, while you got us into this fix, my revered Emperor. But, as one whose life is now in peril, as well as the freedom of some two dozen noble sons and some five thousand retainers in my lands outside Cuzco, I think I have a right to make a suggestion."

His rather ironical and contemptuous

manner did not nettle the Inca. He knew he had it coming, and he turned to the old veteran, a rich man of royal blood himself, though of another line, saying:

"Manco Mayta, my teacher you have long been, say your say."

"Your present plan has not one, but *two* flaws! You have failed to provide a means of drawing off the Masked One's forces from your line of attack. I would suggest a feinted sortie here to the east, and shortly after that one, a second feint to follow up here to the south. If he realizes the first attack is but a feint, he will be sure the second is the real attack and will fling at once his whole force against the second. Both of these are but simple good tactics—suicidal to those who participate, perhaps—but quite necessary to draw off his overwhelming strength from your real attempt to reach shelter within the Tunca Puncu and there have the walls to protect you till more complete reinforcements arrive."

The Inca pondered for a moment, and slowly his proud head lowered in shame, for what the old man said made of himself a tyro in appearance.

"I am a fool, my friend. Here, take this mace. I am unworthy to bear it longer."

"Nay, my Emperor, but hereafter I would appreciate a more close attention in yourself to such old heads on young shoulders as young Huaycar—who divined all along this whole thing was but a trap for your person. And a more close attention to such warriors as myself who have by battle experience proved themselves worthy of a place at your side in all counsels which may lead to the risk of their own heads. One does not like another's thoughtlessness to cost one's own life when a few words would have saved the whole affair. Now that even an Inca has proved himself

not all-wise, let us all forget this incident—for we all love you, Panaca Tupa, but in some ways you have badly neglected your opportunities. One of those ways is in the study of tactics from ancient has-beens like myself."

THE Inca, his fore-arm bandaged, his helmet on his arm dented, his mace still bloody from recent struggle, looked at the oldster like a spanked child, the corners of his mouth drawn down slightly, his eyes doleful.

"May Supay devour me if I ever allow your white head to be out of my sight again, if only to escape the shame of another such deserved calling down!"

The laughter at the Inca's bearing under the reproof lightened the strained atmosphere and the Inca went on. "And may the God of Idiots devour you if you ever keep your mouth closed again when I need it open and talking—do you hear! Do you think I am too proud to listen?" The warriors pressed closer about the two to hear.

Old Manco Mayta grinned a yellow-fanged grin at his emperor, such a grin as only the privileged dare give an Emperor, saying: "You had better spend your time preparing this next blood-letting carefully, for upon it depends the whole fate of the Inca nation as well as my own worthless life, my Inca." The old man, with this parting shot, turned and went to the breastwork, where he curled up on his poncho to await the next need for activity. At his age one needed rest to keep up with the young bloods.

"Huaycar . . ." began the Inca, but the young priest was not to be taken again in the net of the Inca's impulsiveness.

"Oh no, you don't. I am staying by your side to keep you alive, as the old man says—our heads depend upon it. Some other can lead the feinting sorties,

not myself. Wisdom is needed here, not my own youthful intelligence. Smart as I may be, only your most experienced warriors can come through such a job alive. And only myself realizes the necessity fully of protecting you, for the whole plan of the Manabi's dark ruler depends on your death."

The Inca growled under his breath; but as other leaders in difficulty have found it necessary to swallow their pride as well as a few digs, he too obeyed the youthful Huaycar and selected from those about him the two best fitted officers for the feints old Manco Mayta had recommended.

At moonrise, an hour later, they were ready; and none too soon, for the dark line of the Manabi front had approached nearer in the darkness—was obviously readying for a new charge, protected by the darkness. The moon, a thin silver crescent, did not appreciably lessen the darkness.

The first party of fifty seasoned warriors leaped the stacked slabs of the parapet and charged, screaming insults as to the origin of the whole Manabi race. As the first impetus of their charge dissolved into a howling melee, the second wave, two hundred more, leaped the parapet, and with vast noise and apparent intent to wipe out forever every living enemy of the Incan ruler—sprang across the bloody, dead-littered plain at right angles to the first sortie.

Four minutes later the remaining six hundred, a third of which were seriously wounded, slipped over the parapet on the opposite side and silently, stooping low, raced northwest directly toward the great shadow of the Tunca Puncu. Even as they flung themselves into the dark line of Manabi before them, a tiny signal fire sparkled briefly from the dark, squat tower of the Palace of the Dead, telling them that at least the surface portion of the Tunca Puncu was in

the hands of the new-come Incan soldiery.

FIERCE, bloody, hand-to-hand fighting it was; axe against axe, brawn against brawn, savagery against savagery. The Manabi, a shorter race than the Incan Quichuas, were yet sturdier of limb and were no mean antagonists.

The Incans' lives depended on the swiftness with which they covered that mile between the terrace of the Sun Temple and the dark, ancient Palace of the forgotten Bearded Ones. Half the distance covered, their progress halted. The Manabi had erected a low barricade of building rocks across the end of the avenue. Beyond lay the open plain clear to the Tunca Puncu, but across the street up which the Inca and his forces raced desperately, was a solid bank of Manabi a dozen deep, the long lances a forest of death, themselves a solid rank of shields behind. It was break through the living wall or die, and their hearts sank with sight of the impossible task. Behind the Inca, Huaycar heard old Mayta muttering—and paused to bend his head and listen, for the old man's breath was gone. "Give them every last arrow from the quivers, then advance and seize their spears in your hands. Not a charge; just a slow advance so that the stab can be avoided and the spear head seized. Pull the spears to you hand-over-hand. They will either release them or come along to be maced to death. Turn the spears upon them then, and drive home. Do it right, and you can make it. Do it wrong, we all die here, and the Quichua will learn to speak Manabi and our women will bear Manabi children. Do you want Alana to have bow-legged, hairy children? The Masked One has seen her, she will belong to him."

A fury arose in Huaycar which swept

away all his caution, all fear of the Inca's pre-eminence. In a loud voice—calculated so that not a Cuzco man would miss the meaning, but the Manabi would fail to understand the idiom—he detailed the old warrior's plan to them.

As one man, the fore ranks fell to their knees, swung forward their quivers, and steadily all fired upon the dark ranks of the Manabi until every quiver was empty. The solidity of the dark mass visibly lessened under the concentrated fire, but they had not a shaft left among them.

They tossed aside their bows and now sprang forward, stopping just short of the line of bronze spearheads. First one, then another, tempted a thrust by starting forward, dancing back as the long lances reached for them only to be seized by another, watching and ready. Once seized, a half-dozen hands grasped the spear shaft, and pulled head-over-heels the luckless warrior from behind the barricade.

"Just like trout from the stream," exulted Huaycar. "Like shooting fish in a cask, aye" grinned Mayta at the simple, effective strategy. From behind the lancers, flung bronze hatchets dropped some few Incans, and a few well-directed arrows pierced the quilted armor. There were now but half the six hundred with them; and those sore wounded.

They would have won through, and the Inca was bellowing the battle cry for the last desperate all-out charge; they might have hammered this stubborn barrier of bow-legged Manabi flesh into blood and bones before them; had not there arisen before them at that moment a frightful apparition!

From among the squat and weary warriors retreating stubbornly before them, a wide lane appeared among the

Manabi as they were shoved right and left by powerful, too-long arms, came the Masked One—the Son of Death, he called himself. He truly looked it now, his great head encased in the golden, horrific mask, the false mouth tusked and snarling, the hinged jaw opening with his fierce breath—and in the two round eyeholes the red flickering rage from within was a fire of doom. A fire of fear that struck every brave man that looked upon him with strange awe, that shivering terror that only the supernatural, suddenly made manifest, can bring.

OUT before the shattered remnants of the slaughtered barrier of flesh he had built so carefully to stop their last effort at escape stalked this door-wide figure, his battle harness all gleaming gold like his fearfully wrought helmet, one ape-strong arm swinging a great two-bladed bronze axe, and in his other hand a heavy too-long maquahuitl that no other warrior would have attempted to handle with two hands. Thus doubly armed, his immense, twisted and unhuman limbs terrifying in their weirdly sudden appearance before them, stalked The Masked One. Here was the feared, mysterious leader of the Manabi, whom his followers believed to be a son of the Lord of the Underworld, the son of the Death-God himself!

"Meet me, O braggart Kapac Tupa, you who falsely hold the title Yupanqui Inca—meet me or forever be branded coward and unfit to lead any man to battle."

In the Incan code of honor there was no other course open to the Inca; for all rulers must first prove their valor and worth to lead brave men upon the battlefield before they are even considered claimants to the throne. They must likewise keep this reputation for

courage untarnished or an election among the nobles would create a successor; a successor whom all men who hold courage and honor dear would choose automatically as their ruler. The Inca did not hesitate, for to hesitate here would be as final as an abdication. As his men drew back, as the Manabi lowered their weapons, the Inca stalked forward toward this apparition of superhuman ugliness, his hairy limbs looking to Kapa Tupa like the limbs of some spider, the frightful golden masking helmet like nothing so much as his own skull, not far in the future.

It was this meeting which Huaycar had dreaded—and knew The Masked One would bring about if he could—for no such warrior had ever appeared, no warrior so capable and so strong among the Incas or their neighbors for centuries, if all reports about him were true.

The Inca, armed only with his golden mace in his right hand, and a heavy round target of wood in the other, closed with the fearful figure cautiously, knowing that one square blow from either of the weapons in the huge hands of the monster would be his end.

The Masked One whirled up the double bladed axe and sent it crashing down upon the Inca's helmet; but the Inca caught it on slanted shield, flung the blow aside and countered with a roundhouse swing of the heavy mace, directed square at the center of the wide bulk. The Inca was well trained and canny, knew that a blow at his wind would cripple him more than to break an arm. The Masked Horror caught the mace on his broad maquahuatl, grunting with the force as he parried the blow, and the mace shot past his belly.

Still carrying the momentum of its original swing, the Inca arced the mace up and around and down upon the great

gold mask. The hairy arm carrying the axe got the thick haft of his axe under the down swing of the mace. The haft splintered as the mace slid down the length of it to smash against the great fist.

The monster howled with pain, and the axe chopped in a short arc forward into the Inca's fiercely grinning face.

THE Inca's round shield broke the force of the blow, but the sharp blade drew blood as it touched his chin with the last spent force. Without pause the sword-like maquahuatl whirled in from the side and again the target in the Inca's hand caught the blade, but it bounded from the shield in a glancing blow to his leg. The Inca gave a cry of pain. His knee would never be the same! Supay would have this hairy son of his back in short order, if a curse could do it.

In a red haze of anger, the Inca whirled the heavy mace in alternate continuous back hand and forehand. The giant, squat figure gave ground steadily, the fierce, unnatural glow within his helmet flickered as he ducked and parried, parried and ducked, the inescapable golden head of the big hammer; a hammer with one end a razor-edged axe.

Huaycar was astounded that the Inca could give trouble to the huge Masked Horror. He had often watched the Emperor in desultory practice, but had never seen him in battle before. He realized now that all the praise of his battle prowess was not flattery, by far.

But the Inca was weary with the long leg-pounding drive from the Sun Temple through the death-laden ruins; was ready for rest before they had even seen the Masked One. The huge figure was fresh, unwearied, had not before raised weapon that night.

The steady arc and swing of the

Inca's shining weapon slowed. He paused and took the defensive.

Time was dragging on. They could not wait, for they heard footsteps of approaching men of the Masked One grow ever more frequent. They would be surrounded.

Honor be damned, the Masked One was merely delaying the fight, taking no chances, waiting till they were surrounded fully, when his arrows would plunge among them. Huaycar took decision again into his hands, shouted at the top of his young lungs: "We are cheated, the Manabi advance behind us to take us. Forward!"

Realizing they were allowing the code of the warriors to dupe them all to death, the Inca's warriors swung their maquahuitls, their axes, lifted their short-bladed stabbing spears of bronze, lanced forward between the Inca and his opponent. The Inca cursed them all as they swept him on through the now open ranks of the Manabi—and the suddenness of their advance gave them freedom. Two-score men died before their sudden flashing blades and they were through. The great plaza of the Tunca Puncu lay empty before them, and in the squat tower blazed the fire of the Inca signal men.

Their feet pounded now hopefully, behind them the bowlegged Manabi ran hard, but their short legs were not built to catch the slender limbs of the men of Cuzco in a race.

They sprinted into the dark shadows of the great southern doorway of the Place of Ten Doors, and into the arms of a mass of shouting warriors, and nothing was ever so glad a sight as the little shoulder-symbol Condor Heads of Gold that marked the armor of the Inca's army. Nothing so good as to hear around them good round Quichua words instead of the dog-barking of the Manabi tongue.

As Huaycar leaned wearily against the great round pillars of the huge doorway, a flying little bundle of soft flesh, of weeping and laughing and talking all at once, of sweet smelling hands caressing his face, of welcoming lips upon his own, of flying hair that insisted on covering his eyes, of clinging limbs that somehow climbed upon him until he was holding her like a mother holds a child—all flung themselves upon Huaycar out of the darkness.

Among other things, Alana said: "I never thought I would be so glad to see anybody as your own battle-gloomy face and tall, too-attractive self. I never knew till now how much I loved you! Huaycar, never let me go again, never, never! That monster, The Masked Ape of Hell oh! He looked and looked at me, and his men laughed, knowing what he meant to do with me. I'll never tell you, not I! Oh, poor Mama-Anac, she fainted every time he crossed her vision, the poor woman has been unconscious half the time. She has, honest to Inti, she has! The only reason I didn't pass out, I was afraid too, for fear of what might have happened to me when I woke up and me not know I was dead. It's a dreadful feeling, not knowing when they're going to kill you, day after day. That Tumi Hayta, the snake. Kill him before this is over, Huaycar; kill him deader than this old hole Tiahuanaco, for me."

AS HUAYCAR got the hair and kisses out of his eyes for the first time, he saw that Yupanqui Inca was likewise engaged with the more rotund Mama-Anac, and seemingly very happy about it.

Little Alana's voice went right on, telling everything at once, with gestures and kisses and words all intermingled.

"When the men came from Hualla

and Chawin and the other villages and gathered on the hill of Tiaspnac over there, and got the Inca's signal and came here, they found the old door to the down-stairs guarded by only two sentries. They killed them and sneaked down into the underground, and now they hold the tunnel that the Manabi came here through, that nobody knew about but that musty old side-of-a-barn, the Masked One—and he is one who knows all about the underworld, having come from there anyway! They drove the soldiers he left to hold the tunnel up the tunnel, and are holding them there—and tell me, how are those ugly Manabi going to get home?"

Grimly the Inca, overhearing the chattering, sweet voice, answered: "They will get home as spirits, little Alana. Just spooks, that's all. Within two days there will not be one of all that force alive, I swear it!"

CHAPTER VI

THE Masked One was a raging fury. He realized that now his escape tunnel was blocked, the whole barrier of the mighty Andes cut him off from his own trackless forests and safety. He knew that but two days or so more would bring from Cuzco the vast strength of the Incan army. That his time was running out—that whatever luck he may have had was now only bad.

That fury he expended in assault upon assault upon the immovable walls of the massive Tunca Puncu. Those cyclopean slabs of rock, pierced by ten great doorways, saw fiercer fighting now, in the dull days of their ruin, than ever they had seen in the period when they had been the mighty home of a greater race than the Inca's hordes.

Fruitless, hopeless assaults they were, marked by the death of the brave

strength of the squat courageous people who called The Masked One their Lord.

Each of those ten doors was racked by a continuous shower of the short, red arrows of the Manabi, and under that canopy of arrow fire, the warriors charged again and again—to be flung back by the savagely plied axes, spears and maquahuitls of the men of Cuzco.

The day wore on, and after each bloody attempt the Manabi withdrew, seemingly convinced of the futility of piling their dead before those sombre, age-old portals. A curse was on the place, they muttered, it was protected by the Holy Dead who were punishing the Manabi for their profaning of the Place of the Dead.

Night came again, and the silver crescent of the moon rode peacefully over the bloody scene; the moans of the dying before the ten doors; the cry of a hunting jaguar among the far ruins; and the fierce mocking calls of the Incans to the hovering army of the Masked One to come and be killed.

Day again, and the watch in the squat tower of the Tunca Puncu reported that the dawn-fire signals along the Incan highway had stated the army from Cuzon would arrive sometime soon after noon.

Themselves had lost men, sheltered though they were behind the thick walls, the fresh thousand plus their own five hundred who had lived through the flight from the Kalasasaya now joined within the ancient place, numbered again among the living but a few more than the thousand. Nearly a thousand warriors had died in defense of the Inca, and of the Masked One's horde, one guessed but half remained, for his losses were ghastly.

With the sun's advent, the fruitless assault began again, the whistling arrows fell among the warriors at the doors like rain, and their own arrows,

hoarded desperately, were now held against the last resort.

This morning the wide and terrifying figure of the Masked ruler led the assault in person. He had heard from his own scouts of the nearing, overwhelming force of men on the march from Cuzon, knew that it was now or never with him.

A long crescent of bow-twanging warriors ringed each of the ten doors of the Tunca Puncu; a crescent that tried continually to close tight and crush in upon the beleaguered Inca warriors—and failed. Their steadily raining arrows took a deadly toll of the decreasing strength of the defenders; but the Tunca Puncu was built to perfection for their need. Ten men could hold each door against an army equipped as these; and the greater part of the constant flight of arrows they caught on shield, or spent themselves in the thickness of the quilted armor over their thighs.

AT THE huge central portal of the ancient palace the greatest number of Manabi concentrated; and it was here that the mighty and frightening ugliness of the Masked One boomed his battle cry, and led his chosen in charge after charge against the defenders only to bring up short against the lances of the Incan nobles.

That deep frog voice of the Masked One rolled steadily, reviling the Inca, Kapac Tupa, for a coward and poltroon, one who dared not meet again the one who had yesterday nearly killed him; meet him in honorable combat. To his repeated challenge the Inca derisively jeered his answer, that soon his horde would be laid low and that then he would meet the Masked One where his own forces would insure fair play and no tricks from the lying braggart who claimed what was an obvious lie—that he was a relative of the Supernatural

Lords of the Underworld of the Dark; that he himself was immortal, here on earth only for amusement. Which obviously was not true, as the Masked One was not enjoying himself, but appeared to be in great trouble and perplexity, and could get none of his plans to come right! For that matter, it could be true that the Gods of the Dark had tired of his bombast, and had sent him to earth, and it was kind of them, for he, Kapac Tupa, was enjoying the affair immensely.

At the close of each of these interchanges of mutual insults, the Masked One would go into a rage, and rush forward whirling his great two-bladed axe, only to be stopped by the out-thrust lances, or pinked by one of the few arrows the Cuzco men had left in their quivers.

Huaycar, standing beside the Inca with his shield steadily catching arrows intended for the royal person, shivered at the raw power in the monster's limbs at each of these charges, and knew that did he manage to break their defense not a man would live, slaughter would be short and complete.

After each raging charge, the Masked One and his bow-legged crew would withdraw, taunting them all for cowards, women afraid to come out and fight, and time and again Huaycar drew back the Inca from accepting his challenge.

Inti, the sun, rose steadily higher, stood at last directly overhead. The watch in the tower of the Tunca Puncu called down that the gleam of weapons and the color of the head plumes of the armies of the Inca, coming at the trot, were in sight on the great highway.

The Masked One, too enraged to consider flight, made one last desperate attempt to win again the safety of the mighty ancient stone walls of the Tunca Puncu—and the escape through his

no-longer secret tunnel.

Placing his men in a long column before the huge main door, protecting their front with a solid rank of shields, he tried to crush through the door by main force, regardless of the death of his men the plan entailed.

In plunged the head of the huge spear of flesh and flashing axe heads, of gaudy shields splitting against the lances of the Inca's, who ground the butts of the hafts and let the Manabi impale themselves upon the bronze points, only to replace the entangled spears with new, a little further inward. Steadily the awful crush pushed in . . . in. The screams of the dying were a terrible sound of death agony, rising higher and higher as the Manabi trampled inward, driven by the fear of the now visible approaching column of soldiery from Cuzco, driven by the horrible shouts of their leader, whose terrible axe steadily hewed a path for them through the bodies of the Incan warriors. Back, back, the battle was now in the deep gloom of the interior of the temple, the defense was broken, and spreading out within the vast chamber from the great central doorway, the Manabi were swiftly evening the score, tipping the scales of death, with steadily plying axes and maquahuitls herding the hard pressed Quichua warriors before them. And ever over the heads of the foremost showered the short red arrows of the stumpy Manabi bowmen. Back, back into the inner chambers of the ancient house of the long dead.

KAPAC TUPA, seeing at the last moment his triumph over this gold-masked horror slipping from his grasp, called an order, and his words, picked up by his desperately fighting men, were shouted again and again through all the hard pressed line, giving for each backward step its exacted payment of

blood, and paying steadily with wounds and death for the privilege.

"To the tunnel—to the tunnel—down through the turning stone!"

Suddenly all resistance ceased and the last few hundred Incan warriors turned as one man and sprinted for the gaping opening in the great central chamber which led to the Masked One's tunnel under the Andes to his own land on the coast.

About the dark hole they formed again, a solid square of wooden shields, of ready maquahuitls, of flickering lance thrusts. Nearly every man of them wounded, and each conscious of the loss of brother and comrade—they were a sight to strike terror to stronger hearts than the Manabi, who are fishermen first, forest hunters next, and warriors last of all.

"We hold here to the death!" shouted the Inca; and from each throat a roar answered him: "To the death." And the echos of the word: *Huanacu*, death, rang and rang through the great stone chambers with an awful message of doom. *Tiahuanacu*, the place of the dead, and *Huanacu*, that day were well-mated words, for death was everywhere, sprawled and bleeding. Crushed heads and gashed limbs lay before the great Ten Doors in heaps four deep; were scattered singly and in groups everywhere across the great chambers through which they had fought to the gaping opening which was the escape-way of the Masked One, and which he would never enter again except over their dead bodies.

That cheer's echoing *HUANACU!* reached even to the ears of the approaching Inca army, and was taken up by ten thousand throats as they broke into double time and came into the great City of the Dead on the loping, Incan ground-eating run.

"*Huanacu! huanacu!*" rang and rang

in the struggling Manabi ranks like the knell of doom, like the cry of the Death Bird come for their spirits, like the creak of the Gates of Haek-Pachac, opening to admit their evil souls to Hell—and nearer and nearer came the cry as the armies from Cuzco deployed to surround the Temple of the Past. "The Tunca Puncu was to be their Huanacu Pampa of Ten Doors," shouted the foremost ranks of the Incan soldiery as they cut down the rear-most of the Manabi still struggling to force themselves into the already jammed mass of men within the Tunca Puncu.

About the turning stone a ring of dead had fallen and lay bleeding, and over their bodies they fought on, the raging axe of the Masked One rising and falling as though he were in truth the Lord of the Realm of Death; and the smaller Manabi Maquahitls flickered and flickered in short quick blows, parried by the longer, harder striking Incan weapons, though their line of living was now pitifully thin and closing steadily nearer and nearer to the gaping hole that meant freedom for the Masked One, and which they had pledged to die before he reached. As each man fell, their ring tightened, and shoulder-to-shoulder they faced the swarming, maddened Manabi, hampered by their own numbers and the jamming fright-to-escape which crushed them ever against the laboring weapons that slew and slew as they were pushed close. It was a sickening butchery, and one they deserved, but Huaycar somehow pitied these earnest, bowlegged, hardfighting Manabi—misled by their frightful "Masked One" into this impasse from which they would not escape!

USING the same tactic the Masked One had used, the massed shields of the fresh Inca soldiery crushed inward through the great central door,

their fresh cries of "For the Inca" and "Huanacu" striking a terrible terror into the Manabi, who now saw their defeat was inevitable, and began to pour from out the other nine doors in a steady stream only to be cut down by the longer-legged Incan soldiers who quickly overtook them and covered the plaza of the Tunca Puncu with more dead. Here and there a fleeing Manabi could be seen clambering the far slopes of the Hanca Pira hill with a tall Quichua hard after and his far land across the Andes obviously a false hope which he would never reach.

Inside, the now despairing Manabi flung themselves upon the weapons of the Incan warriors suicidally, and swiftly the horde of the Manabi became a thousand; and then but a hundred men remained, the best armored, better-weaponed nobles who made up the inner circle of the Masked One's council. These ringed him in defense. It was his last stand, and theirs, and they meant to make their deaths count, but were not to be given the chance. The Incan officers brought fowling nets, and cast over them in sixes and sevens, pulling them to the floor and bount them. At the last the Golden-Masked and hairy-limbed monstrosity stood alone, his great axe bursting the nets flung upon him, his huge legs still free—his mask turning oddly as he watched for the next attack, the eyeholes emitting that red glow of rage that was so mystifying and awe inspiring.

Kapac Tupa called off his men and they retreated from the great cornered beast that had been king—and toward him stalked the Inca, his golden mace aswing in his right hand, and this time in his left hand a heavy hardwood maquahitl which he figured better suited to parry and block the double-weaponed attack than the too easily shattered standard shield.

"It is more than he deserves—why let him have the opportunity?" called Huaycar to the Inca. But the Inca only growled back, his usually gentle and almost scholarly face, after all this blood and struggle and death, a streaked and furious mask of war-fury. "Let me have my fun, you ninny!" and Huaycar shut his mouth.

The combat, interrupted in their flight from the Kalasasaya, continued where it had left off; both men now equally wearied, both wounded more than once, and both filled with a rage that would be satisfied only with death.

The Golden Mask lifted and seemed to light with some flicker of hope of revenge. The huge limbs tightened their ropy muscles, the great axe swung, whirled up—and the Masked One leaped upon the Inca as leaps the hunting spider on its prey.

Kapac Tupa caught the axe haft on the heavy maquahuitl, shoved it aside to whistle past his shoulder, strike a fountain of sparks as the long arc of the blade touched the stones of the floor. His counter blow was only partly parried, put a great dent in the golden helmet—and the Mask's maquahuitl flashed in a black, whirling counter, waist high.

Square on the massive head of his mace the Inca caught the blow, the maquahuitl spun from the Mask's grasp and flew thirty feet into the air, falling into the great niche where the red-eyed and awesome state of the Creator-of-All squatted, staring unmoved down at the mad interlopers who cluttered up his peaceful gloom with their mad rage for death.

Fair, the Inca tossed aside his own maquahuitl and faced the Mask with his mace against the great two bladed war axe. The Gold Champi against the massive bronze with all its weight and heft.

THEY went at it hammer and parry, duck and swing—a vicious, expert performance of the ancient art of blood-letting, a demonstration fully worthy of the many courageous, veteran eyes awatch.

Both bled now from arm wounds where they had failed to catch the full stroke of a blow on haft or head; both gasped for breath, and the blurring, arcing blows slowed, became shorter, more carefully directed attempts to kill.

The Mask was fighting only to kill the Inca, and had no hope on earth of any other thing did he win or lose but death. The Inca was fighting for God knows what intricate self-made code of honor—to give this opponent his full chance with the Gods who rule the earth, perhaps. Was fighting to vent in full his rage at the plot against him by this man he hardly knew in any way, and who knew him only by hearsay.

The great figure of the Mask was weary, but the power in his strokes was still crushing, and the Inca's knees bent as he caught those fearful strokes on his mace handle, holding it long between his two hands to protect his head; to release with the left, swing in counter stroke, the massive figure ducking smoothly and countering. Stroke and stroke, sparks flew in showers as the blades met, and the dull thud of the haft on head of mace came steady and rhythmic. They were strangely, almost evenly matched; the Inca's quick flow of strength evened by the slower but stronger, as skillful handling of the heavy weapon, of the massive Mask.

Then, as the Mask struck a two-handed blow down upon the Inca's shining helmet, Kapac Tupa stepped wide and the axe showered bits of rock from the stone floor—and the Inca threw caution aside and leaped in close

to those terrible arms and crashed the mace full into the grimacing mask, crushing the whole horrible sculptured metal face. The stubby giant staggered back, tugging to get the mask free from his shattered face and blinded eyes, and the Inca followed with a wood-splitting, full-arcing blow upon the now defenseless head. The sharp leading edge of the heavy head of the Champi pierced full through the broad metal headgear and the giant toppled, fell sprawling, twitched and reached with his great hairy hands, moved his wide feet jerkily—and lay still, at last, in death! His blood formed a slowly widening pool around the bright ruin of his weird head-gear. The silence after the battle

could have been cut with a knife.

The Inca broke this awkward silence.

"I always wondered what the freak really looked like." He moved wearily to the shattered globe that was the Mask's fallen head, tugged to get the helmet off. The Mask came off with little trouble, and the great figure rolled over. The hairy face, the thick red lips, the crushed bloody ruin of nose and eyes and forehead, were all there were to see.

"He was but a man, like ourselves, is evident. Not any supernatural horror from the abyss below. Just a man, and not too clever, either, to fling himself against the might of the Inca Empire with but ten thousand men."



FEMALE BLUEBEARD



By PETE BOGG

LET those who look longingly through the pages of the matrimonial journals beware! There is a tale told (and substantiated) about a female Bluebeard—a woman of mysterious powers and a peculiar attractiveness who lured and then disposed of an unknown number of unsuspecting men with the aid of such publications.

Someone should have tried warning her prospective husbands and victims, but there was no one capable of undertaking that duty—at first. For the people of LaPorte, Indiana, were only mildly curious about their new neighbor, the Widow Sorenson. The farm she purchased lay less than a mile out of town and consisted of a full forty-eight acres. They heard rumors that she was well-fixed financially with eight thousand dollars in life insurance and a few thousand more received from the sale of her home in Illinois.

The portly widow arrived with her two children and Jennie Olson in the summer of 1901 and amazed the truckers with her ability to juggle heavy boxes and crates. The Widow Sorenson was no petite creature and, from all outward appearances, far from delicate. She was five feet seven inches tall and weighed two hundred pounds, most of which was pure brawn.

It was not long before the community learned that this woman wanted to be left alone—and was capable of taking care of herself. An experienced farmer, she could pitch hay, milk cows, and do her own butchering of hogs and calves. Meat from the Sorenson farm was sold in LaPorte.

Hardly more than a year elapsed when a strange set of events began to occur. In April of 1902 she married Peter Gunness, a stranger to the community. All might have been well had the groom not come to an untimely end. After only seven months of wedded bliss, Mr. Gunness left this world for the next. The death blow was dealt by a sausage grinder that accidentally fell from a shelf, Mrs. Gunness explained to the coroner. But the widow was well provided for with a four thousand dollar policy and the people of La Porte ceased to think about the matter.

The widow, now known as Belle Gunness, continued to live modestly despite this new wealth. A son was born to her in 1903. A hired man was engaged to look after her place, but she herself was still active in the butchering of pigs and the caring of the garden. The farm help changed from time to time, but none of the men exerted any deep influence over Belle's life. A photograph of her at this time shows a squat, powerfully built woman with an exceedingly dull face.

Although it was not known until later—Belle Gunness made frequent use of matrimonial journals. She advertised in them regularly listing her desire for a good husband; she was not too coy regarding her own personality and qualifications. What Belle wanted, it seemed, was a man of Scandinavian birth, preferably Norwegian, who was kind and honest and who would help a lovable and hard-working widow to lift the mortgage on her little farm. "Triflers," Belle's advertisement said coldly, "need not apply."

In 1906, a Mr. John Moo arrived in answer to

(Continued on page 96)

ORAL ODDITIES

By LESLIE ANDERSON

★ **T**HE teeth which we brush so diligently every day have so captured the imagination of men down through the ages that literally thousands of legends and curious superstitions have sprung up concerning them. The power of the teeth to bring pain and anguish as well as to determine beauty and ugliness has focussed the attention on this part of the human anatomy to a much greater degree than that accorded the rest of the body.

In the year 1865 a "professor" residing in Paris seriously taught that the characteristic personality of a man could be found out by studying his teeth. He tried to prove that teeth perfectly in alinement were a sign of orderliness and magnanimity in the person under observation. Teeth which slanted toward the lips pointed to a passion for imitation and mockery. Those whose teeth bent inward toward the palate possessed the instinct and the impulse to do wrong. The "professor's" list of characteristics was long and detailed, but men of science have never taken his statements seriously enough to accord him recognition. This study of the teeth belongs in the same category as the reading of one's fortune in the wrinkles of the palm and the bumps on the head.

* * *

The early Romans thought that an infant born with a tooth was so remarkable that he should have a surname commemorating the oddity. The famous consul Manius Curius (250 B.C.) owed his surname "Dentatus" to the fact that several of his deciduous teeth had come through before he was born.

On the other hand, the country people of Hungary are very suspicious of babies born with teeth. They believe these offspring to be changelings who shortly after their birth were exchanged by witches for the real children stolen by them and as a result are treated with general contempt.

Much worse is the fate of such children in certain negro tribes in Africa. Among the Basutos, the women assisting at childbirth mercilessly kill each baby born with teeth (or any other deformity) by drowning it in a pot of water.

* * *

At any time as far back as the history of mankind can be traced, at any epoch of civilization, and at any place where men live, very definite rules were, and are observed regarding the disposal of the children's "baby" teeth after they have dropped out. Although the traditional prescription varies slightly from one national group to another the basic act is this: When a milk tooth falls out, the child is supposed to throw it away over his shoulder backward, or over a roof, or into a mousehole, and ask a mouse, or a rat, or a squirrel, or a fox, or some other animal

to take the tooth and give the child a better one in its place.

* * *

The ancients prized white healthy teeth as much as we do today, but adequate cleaning methods were unknown to many of them. Regular dental hygiene was not practiced in Greece until the country was made a Roman province. Under the influence of their western neighbor, the Grecians learned how to use pumice, talcum, emery, granulated alabaster stone and coral powder for dentifrices. Iron rust, too, was recommended.

The Romans themselves were not too particular what they ground into powder to use for teeth-cleaning purposes. Bones, hoofs, and horns of certain animals, crabs, egg shells, and oyster shells were pulverized by them after first being burnt and then mixed with honey.

* * *

Plant remedies as well as those obtained from animals were popular before the development of scientific dentistry. Garlic was one of the most popular remedies. The ancient Greeks considered a decoction of garlic together with aromatic resinous pine wood and incense helpful if kept in the mouth.

* * *

The most renowned example of honor accorded to a tooth is found in the history of the celebrated tooth of Buddha. Tracing the worship of this relic, a strange and fantastic history is unearthed.

In the temple of Kandy, India, there is assumed to exist, among other treasures of untold value, that most sacred and precious piece, the tooth of Buddha, which is esteemed with devotion by four hundred and fifty millions of people. It is said to be one of the four canine teeth of Gautama, which were among his seven great relics, and has been famous in Ceylonese Buddhism as the Dalada. Its miraculous preservation from every means taken to destroy it by a hostile Indian king, and its ultimate arrival in Ceylon in the year of 312 reads like an exciting adventure story. The Chinese traveler Fa-hian describes the procession of the relic as he saw it in 405. In the thirteenth century Dhammakitti wrote a Pali poem about it, based on an older Singhalese work in prose named "Datha Vamsa." Once it was sold for many millions to the King of Burma. At a later time the Portuguese are believed to have crushed it into fragments and thrown it into the ocean, yet the Ceylonese preserved it at Kandy in a shrine in its original form and size, the size of a hippopotamus' tooth; it must be remembered that this tooth was not taken from a common mortal man's mouth but from the mouth of that worshiped superman, Buddha.



The two men struggled desperately on the edge of the cliff, with death yawning beneath.

QUEST OF THE SPLIT MAP

by Chester S. Geier

THE cab purred off into the evening darkness, leaving Gregg Stacey alone on the curb. He wasted no time lingering there. A street lamp several feet away enclosed him within its circle of illumination, made his figure too conspicuous. He wasn't certain yet that he hadn't been followed.

Bending quickly, he gathered up his bags and strode across a stretch of lawn to the sidewalk. A short distance away, he sighted a broad, shadowed opening between two buildings, flanked by tall bushes. It was the entrance to a driveway. He turned into it, stopping where the shadows were thickest. He couldn't be seen from the street, now.

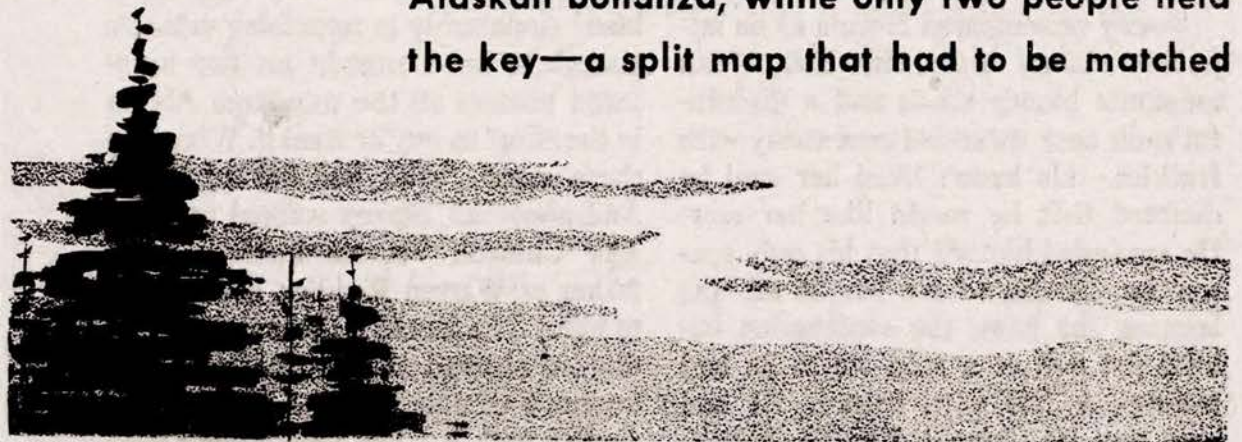
He set down his bags again, and pulled out his pipe. He began filling it from an oilskin pouch, watching the

street, unable to shake off a feeling of unease that lay like a black, cold shadow on his mind.

Cars passed frequently on the street. They went rapidly, going somewhere, not slowly as though looking for something. There were occasional pedestrians, but they came and went with a definiteness that carried no hint that they might be searching.

Finally, carefully, Gregg Stacey lighted his pipe. The match, flickering in his large, brown hand, illumined his face. It was a youthful face, broad, with a pleasantly wide mouth, and thick dark brows that almost met over the bridge of a short blunt nose. The eyes, narrowed intently over the pipe, were a clear candid blue, fringed heavily with dark lashes. They were quick, straight, intelligent eyes that many people would

Men fought and died in search of the Alaskan bonanza, while only two people held the key—a split map that had to be matched



find disconcerting. An easy humor showed in the lines around his mouth and eyes, but they were deepened now by grimness and strain. He wore a belted tan gabardine trench coat over a gray tweed suit, and a brown felt hat, the brim of which had been pulled low over his forehead.

The pipe going satisfactorily, Stacey resumed his watch of the street. He thought of the girl named Norma Reddick, and impatience began to build up within him. Norma Reddick held the answer to the mystery that had brought Stacey to Seattle. She lived just around the corner, in the next block, if the cab driver who had brought Stacey here knew his directions. Stacey had given an address near the girl's, in case he might be followed. He hadn't wanted to lead pursuit directly to her, even though he had changed cabs twice since leaving the airport.

NORMA REDDICK wasn't entirely unknown to Stacey. He had seen her several times, the last being some ten years ago, when both were little more than kids. These meetings had taken place on the infrequent occasions when their respective fathers, Ben Stacey and Warren Reddick, came down from Alaska to visit them. The two men were inseparable friends, and as partners operated a couple of mines near Fairbanks.

Stacey remembered Norma as an impudent skinny brat, with hair of an indefinite blonde shade and a disdainful snub nose sprinkled generously with freckles. He hadn't liked her, and he doubted that he would like her now. He reminded himself that his only reason for coming to see her at all was because she knew the explanation behind the half of a map which he had received a few days before. It had been sent by Chinook Vervain, a half-

breed servant of his father and Warren Reddick. With the map fragment, Vervain had enclosed a badly scrawled, barely legible note, containing Norma's address and informing Stacey that the girl had the other half of the map and would explain the matter. Vervain had added a strange warning for Stacey to be careful.

As it developed, the warning hadn't been an empty one. The next day Stacey received a visit from two men, obvious toughs, who had offered to buy his half of the map. He had refused to sell. That evening, while Stacey had been out making arrangements for his trip to Seattle, his room had been painstakingly searched. The map half hadn't been found for the simple reason that Stacey had taken it with him.

The two men had followed Stacey afterward, their purpose now evidently one of robbing him of the map. But doubly warned, Stacey had managed to elude them. So far anyway, he thought. It was possible that the sinister duo had followed in another plane, landing but scant minutes behind him, and even now might be hot on his trail, with a lead furnished by a swift check-up of cab drivers.

Heavy, dark brows meeting in a frown of perplexity, Stacey puffed at his pipe and watched the street. For the dozenth time, he wondered what the split map could mean. To what did it lead? Apparently to something valuable enough to have brought his two hard-faced visitors all the way from Alaska in the effort to buy or steal it. Who were these men? Who was behind them? And above all, Stacey wanted to know why Chinook Vervain instead of his father or Warren Reddick had written to him. The fact that the map had been divided showed the two partners had expected trouble of some kind in connection with it. Did their silence indi-

cate that something had happened to them?

The pipe went out between Stacey's teeth. He knocked it empty on the heel of his hand, decision crystallizing in his mind. He was going to see Norma Reddick. He'd waited long enough to be sure that he hadn't been followed.

Tucking away the pipe, Stacey picked up his bags and left the driveway. It was only a short distance to the corner. A sign there assured him that the intersecting street was the one he wanted. He turned into it, striding rapidly, watching the house numbers. He hadn't entirely abandoned his sense of caution. He scrutinized closely the people who went by and the cars that drove past. But still he saw nothing that hinted of danger.

NORMA REDDICK'S address proved to be that of a tall apartment hotel. Walking toward the entrance, Stacey heard a car door slam behind him. The noise was followed by the sound of swiftly approaching feet. Stacey whirled, thoughts flashing in alarm.

Two men were coming toward him. He relaxed a little as he saw they were not the men who had visited him in Los Angeles. But there was a purposefulness about them that showed Stacey was their immediate objective.

Stacey measured them grimly. He hadn't heard a car drive up. The two must have been waiting for him all the time. He discarded the idea of bolting into the building as soon as it came. He wouldn't have been able to make it.

"You're Gregg Stacey, aren't you?" one of the men asked, in a politely inquiring tone. He was fully as tall as Stacey, though somewhat slimmer, with sharp olive features that narrowly escaped being handsome. Even white teeth showed in a smile below a thin,

carefully trimmed black mustache. He was smartly and even foppishly dressed. His black Homburg was tilted a bit too rakishly, and his gray double-breasted topcoat fitted a bit too snugly at the hips.

His companion was of an entirely different type. The man was a giant. He had a square, lumpy face and heavy, sloping shoulders from which swung arms that seemed abnormally long. His clothes were several sizes too small for him, not to mention the fact that a Borneo bushman might have shown more taste in their color scheme.

Stacey forced a smile to his lips and shook his head. "The name's Johnson. You probably have me confused with someone else."

"I'm more than positive I haven't," the man in the black Homburg said evenly. "You look too much like Ben Stacey for there to be any mistake."

Stacey said nothing. He didn't intend to commit himself. The fact that this foppish stranger knew his father didn't necessarily mean he was a friend.

The other's even white teeth gleamed in a faintly mocking smile. "Your silence, I presume, is an admission that you're actually Gregg Stacey. Let's stop beating around the bush. You have part of a certain map, Mr. Stacey. I want to buy it."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

"Come, come, Mr. Stacey, I'm sure we have more important things to do than play games. I happen to know you have the map."

Stacey's mildly quizzical expression vanished. "Then you must be connected with the two men who came to me in Los Angeles. You're here to get Norma Reddick's half of the map, and the Los Angeles boys contacted you after I gave them the slip. Somehow, you knew I was coming to Seattle, to

see the girl."

"It pays to be informed, Mr. Stacey," the other returned coolly. "At any rate, I'm sure this knowledge doesn't affect my offer to buy your half of the map."

Grimly Stacey pointed out: "Those Los Angeles boys tried to steal my half. That's no way to do business. You've practically admitted being connected with them."

"Allow me to apologize for the boys, then. They're just a bit too impulsive sometimes." The dapper stranger lifted slim shoulders in a shrug. "Suppose we return to the subject of the map, Mr. Stacey. As I said, I want to buy it. Name your price."

"I haven't anything to sell."

"Is that a refusal?"

"You might put it that way."

THE other thoughtfully fingered his thin black mustache. He said finally, "Your words suggest that you're in no position to sell the map, Mr. Stacey—even though you might like to. Is it because you don't have the map with you?"

The question rang an alarm bell inside Stacey. It seemed abruptly clear to him that the stranger's talk about buying the map was merely a subterfuge to determine whether or not Stacey had it in his possession. The two men in Los Angeles had searched his room after employing the same trick. There was little doubt in his mind about what the pair before him would do if he were to admit that he had the map on his person.

"You guessed it," Stacey said. "After that stunt your friends tried to pull in Los Angeles, I decided I'd better be careful. So I mailed the map on ahead. Since you're interested only in buying it, I'm sure it won't be necessary for me to tell you where. The information

wouldn't do you any good anyway, since I'm the only one who can claim the letter."

"Clever—but you hesitated just a bit too long, Mr. Stacey." The man in the black Homburg smiled thinly and nodded at his hulking, clumsily dressed companion. "All right, Buck."

The giant started forward, thick lips stretching in an eager grin. Stacey glanced quickly up and down the street. Nobody was in sight for the moment. He would have no help in what was shortly to take place.

But there was no time to worry over odds. Stacey moved into action. He ducked under Buck's first swing and heaved his shoulder violently into the giant's midriff. Buck staggered back, crashing into his dapper chief.

Whirling, Stacey darted for the entrance to the apartment hotel. He found the door handle and pulled. Nothing happened. The door seemed to be locked. Then he saw the small metal plate fixed to the frame. The door was to be pushed, not pulled against. But the information came too late to do Stacey any good. Before he could correct his mistake, Buck reached him again.

A great hand closed like a trap on Stacey's shoulder. He felt himself swung around as easily as though he were a child. An enormous fist leaped out, exploding against his chin. All the lights went out.

STACEY regained consciousness to find himself on a wheeltable in a small, white-painted room that smelled strongly of disinfectant. Pain beat a wild anvil chorus inside his skull.

After a while he sat up. The effort sent waves of white hot agony through him. He groaned. Raising his hands to his temples, he discovered that his head had been bandaged. Another dis-

covery came a moment later. His clothes had been soaked with whiskey. Traces of it still lingered in his mouth.

"Awake, eh?" a voice asked cheerfully.

Stacey turned. A short, slender man in white trousers and tunic had entered the room. An interne, Stacey decided. He said:

"This is a hospital?"

The interne nodded. "A motorist found you draped over the tracks at a railroad crossing and brought you in. You were lucky, mister. A train was due in another ten minutes. And you were out cold. Probably stumbled and hit your head on the tracks." He grinned. "That must have been some party!"

Stacey opened his mouth, then closed it. To explain what had actually happened to him would accomplish nothing useful. Going over the events which had led to his awakening in the hospital, he thought suddenly of the map. Anxiety flaming through him, he reached quickly into the inner breast pocket of his coat.

The map was gone.

CHAPTER II

THIS time Stacey pushed. The door swung smoothly open, and he strode into the lobby of the apartment hotel where Norma Reddick lived.

There had been no difficulty about leaving the hospital. The interne had obligingly called a cab, and after tidying himself up as best he could in a wash-room, Stacey had left. Luckily enough, the contents of his billfold had been left intact. The map had been the only thing taken from him. His luggage, amazingly, had not been lost.

To the left of the lobby, opposite a self-service elevator, was a small office. A woman night clerk set at a telephone

switchboard, reading a magazine. She glanced up sharply as Stacey appeared. Her bespectacled eyes widened at sight of his bruised face and bandaged head.

"I'd like to see Norma Reddick," Stacey requested. He gave his name.

The woman glanced disapprovingly at a clock on an adjacent wall before she turned to the switchboard. It was almost midnight, Stacey saw, hardly the time to be calling on anyone—a young lady, least of all.

The woman clerk's ring was answered quickly enough. She spoke into the mouthpiece a moment, then turned back to Stacey.

"You may go up. The room number is 506."

Stacey's thoughts were grim as he ascended in the elevator. It had been ten years since he had last seen Norma Reddick. She was very much an unknown quantity. He couldn't be entirely certain that she wasn't connected with the two men who, earlier in the evening, had waylaid him and robbed him of his half of the map.

Stacey already knew that the map led to something valuable enough to make robbery and attempted murder worthwhile. He didn't know exactly what it was, but Norma Reddick apparently did, if she were able to explain everything to him, as Chinook Vervain had written. The girl might have decided to get Stacey's half. Vervain might have given her Stacey's Los Angeles address, as Stacey had been given her's in Seattle. Thus the girl could very well be the person behind the Los Angeles attempt. And when that failed, she could have prepared the trap at this end, knowing, through Vervain again, that Stacey was coming to Seattle to see her.

It explained very nicely the knowledge of the map and of Stacey's whereabouts possessed by the man in the

black Homburg and his companions. Stacey couldn't see how else the others fitted into the picture and knew as much as they did.

THE elevator stopped. Stacey emerged with his bags into a long hall. Locating room 506, he knocked. The door opened after a moment, revealing a girl.

Despite himself, Stacey stared. He had seen lovely women before, but he hadn't expected Norma Reddick to fall into that category. For some inexplicable reason, he felt suddenly awkward and foolish.

The girl surveyed him coolly from large, long-lashed brown eyes. Their expression didn't quite match the tense set of her piquant, oval features. She wore a maroon satin robe about her slender figure, and her small feet had been thrust into furry white mules. Blonde hair the color of ripe wheat was piled in thick coils atop her head. Her skin was delicately tanned, and the freckles Stacey remembered lay like the faintest of bronze shadows over her cheeks and the bridge of her small nose. She had been preparing for bed, Stacey decided, or had already been asleep when he arrived.

Finally Norma Reddick stood aside. "Won't you come in?" Her voice was soft and cool, like her eyes.

The living room Stacey entered was small, simply but comfortably and tastefully furnished. It showed none of the usual frills of feminine occupancy. Stacey sat down stiffly, not quite sure of himself, as the girl closed the door and nodded at the sofa.

She leaned against the wall near the door and looked at him, hands buried in the pockets of her robe. The tension which Stacey had earlier noted had deepened in her face, and now wariness was apparent, too. Her eyes moved

over his clothes, and then from his bruised jaw to his bandaged head. Stacey was abruptly, painfully conscious of the whiskey odor that still hung about him. The girl said:

"You claim to be Gregg Stacey. It's quite possible that you're trying to trick me. The last time I saw Gregg Stacey was ten years ago—and in ten years people can change so much that it isn't too hard for other people to impersonate them." She paused a moment, as though to note the effect of her words. "If you're actually Gregg Stacey, suppose you prove it?"

"Suppose you tell me how?" Stacey said. "You started the game."

"Well . . . you might have half of a certain map, for one thing."

"You've got me there." Stacey indicated his bandaged head, and explained what had happened, beginning with his receipt of the map half from Chinook Vervain, and ending with its loss in the encounter with the man in the black Homburg and his giant companion, Buck.

Norma Reddick moved her slim shoulders indifferently. "An interesting story. It could be just a little too pat."

Stacey felt a surge of anger. "You don't believe me?"

"Why should I? You still haven't proved anything one way or another."

"Neither have you, for that matter," Stacey pointed out grimly. "There's no reason why you should be considered entirely above suspicion. I don't know what the whole map leads to—something valuable, evidently—but you do. You could have decided to steal my half. Chinook Vervain probably gave you my address, just as he gave me yours. So you could be the person behind the two men who searched my room in Los Angeles. And when that failed, you could have had the other two waiting for me outside, knowing I

was coming here to see you."

"But I didn't have anything to do with it," Norma Reddick insisted, with a trace of indignation. "Why, Mark Devore—the one in the black hat—is after my half of the map, too!"

"Too pat," Stacey said. "Doesn't prove anything one way or another."

THE girl's face tightened angrily, but in another moment she grinned. "Some of my own medicine, is that it? All right, let's settle this once and for all. If you're actually Gregg Stacey, tell me what happened in the movie our fathers took us to the last time we saw each other."

Stacey scowled. "You put a wad of chewing gum on my seat, and I sat on it. I was wearing my best pair of pants, too."

"You sound as though you were still mad," Norma Reddick said. She tried to look serious, though her brown eyes showed a betraying twinkle. "If it's not too late to apologize, I'd like to do so."

Stacey watched her unsmilingly from beneath the overhang of his heavy brows. "You may be satisfied about me, but I'm afraid I can't say the same for you. You haven't proved that you aren't the person behind the men who stole my half of the map."

Red lips tightening, the girl reached into the neck of her robe and pulled out an envelope. She tossed it into Stacey's lap.

The envelope contained half of a map—the girl's half, Stacey discovered. He looked up at her, puzzled. She said:

"If you think I had anything to do with the theft of your part of the map, then here's mine to make up for it. I don't know any other way of proving my innocence."

Stacey handed the envelope back hastily. "I wouldn't think of doing any-

thing like that. Anyway, your part wouldn't be any good without mine to go with it."

Norma Reddick thoughtfully restored the envelope to its hiding place. "You took that last hurdle nicely. So I guess I won't be needing this." She pulled a small revolver from a pocket of her robe and placed it on a bookcase near the door.

Stacey was staring in dismay. "You mean if I hadn't given you back the envelope . . . ?"

"Something like that." The girl took in Stacey's expression and grinned.

Stacey sputtered wrathfully. But in another moment, meeting the dancing impishness in Norma Reddick's brown eyes, he grinned, too.

The girl went to a nearby chair and sat down. Stacey produced his pipe and began to fill it, frowning meditatively. He said:

"But the fellow in the black hat—the one you called Mark Devore. How does he figure in this? If he's an outsider, how does he happen to know so much about everything that has happened here?"

"Adding what you've told me to what I already know, it seems easy to guess," Norma answered. "Mark Devore came to me two days ago and explained that he was a friend of my father. He said he had flown here from Grubstake, the tiny mining town near Fairbanks where my father . . . and yours"—her voice faltered strangely—"operated their mines. Devore told me father was being held prisoner by a gang, and unless I gave my half of the map as ransom, father would be killed. Devore even had a note from father, verifying his story. Father wrote he was being held prisoner, and that I was to give my half of the map to Devore, a friend who had been chosen by the gang to act as go-between."

"DEVORE lied!" Stacey growled. "After what happened to me a while ago, it's clear that Devore wasn't acting as go-between for anybody but Devore. He's most likely the leader of this gang, and forced your father to write the note."

"I didn't suspect anything like that at the time," Norma went on. "But I decided to stall him off until you arrived. I realized that my half of the map was valueless unless your half went with it. I wanted to compare notes with you, to see if any demands had been made upon you, and what sort."

"I knew you were to visit me, because I, too, received a note from Chinook Vervain with my half of the map. But enclosed was also a letter from my father, which explained what the affair was all about. The letter had been written not long previously. Father was afraid that something might happen to him, and he arranged with Chinook Vervain for the letter to be sent to me in case anything did. Chinook also had the map, with orders to send a half to each of us. Father took this precaution, since he suspected, without actually knowing who they were at the time, that unscrupulous men were after the map—men who would stop at nothing to get it."

Stacey emitted a cloud of pipe smoke and leaned forward. "There's one thing I don't understand. Where was my father while all this was going on?"

Norma hesitated, glancing away. "You'll have to prepare yourself for a shock, Gregg."

"Why . . . what do you mean?"

"Your father is dead."

Stacey rose slowly from the sofa. ". . . Murdered?"

"No, Gregg, he was sick." Norma paused a moment, as though groping for continuity. "Perhaps I'd better ex-

plain everything in order."

Stacey nodded mechanically. He stared at the floor, not seeing anything. The lines in his face had deepened.

Norma resumed, "I learned about Ben Stacey's death in my father's letter. It's tied in with the explanation for the map. You see, several years ago an old prospector came into Grubstake with the story that he had discovered a fabulously rich vein of gold, which he called the Golden Dream. The prospector drank himself to death in a wild orgy of celebration before he got around to doing so much as filing a claim, but he was only person who knew the Golden Dream's location, and the secret died with him. Hundreds of men later searched for the vein, but none ever found it—that is, until Ben Stacey did."

"He and my father had a theory about the location of the vein, and planned to set out together on a prospecting trip. But a few days before they were to start, my father had an accident at one of the mines and broke his ankle. Ben Stacey and Chinook set out alone. They found the vein, all right, and Ben Stacey made a map of the location. Then, as he and Chinook were on their way back, Ben Stacey took sick. By the time Chinook got him to the hospital in Grubstake, it was too late to do anything."

"Before he died, however, Ben Stacey was delirious and revealed not only that he had rediscovered the Golden Dream, but had drawn a map leading to it. The news spread. Father had the map by this time, and decided to take the precautions I've already mentioned. He ordered Chinook to go into hiding, since Chinook had been with Ben Stacey and could have been forced to tell where the vein was. Chinook thus had the letter and the map, and was free to send them on to us in the event that something happened to father."

"Why didn't your father file a claim?" Stacey demanded. "He would have been safe, then."

"Things evidently happened too fast," Norma said. "Father's ankle hadn't entirely healed yet, and he didn't have time to do even so much as wire you about Ben Stacey's death. If it hadn't been for his ankle, he could have gone into hiding with Chinook. Anyway, no information could have been forced from him, since, without the map, he didn't know where the Golden Dream was located."

STACEY nodded thoughtfully. "As regards Devore, it's clear enough how he got his information. He was one of a number of people who heard the news about the Golden Dream and the map that Dad gave out while delirious. We already know Devore must be the leader of the gang that is holding your father prisoner. Devore apparently forced your father to tell what happened to the map, learning it had been sent to us. Then Devore got our addresses, either from your father or from old letters which we had written." Stacey puffed in silence a moment. "How long did you succeed in keeping Devore stalled off?"

"I'm supposed to give him my decision about the map in the morning," Norma answered.

"I'd been hoping for more time than that," Stacey said, in dismay. "The only way to beat Devore is to file a claim to the Golden Dream. That's impossible without my half of the map, but Devore probably thinks a train finished me by now, and with enough time I could have flown to Grubstake, to find Chinook. He knows the location of the vein, and friends of his would have told me where he was hiding. Then I could have tried to find your father. He's most likely being held prisoner some-

where near Grubstake."

Norma said slowly, "I could try to stall Devore off a while longer. The drawback is that he now has your half of the map and would refuse to wait. I couldn't do anything that would endanger my father's life."

Stacey stared morosely into space, gnawing at the stem of his pipe. The situation was hopeless. If only he hadn't lost his portion of the map—Abruptly Stacey slapped his knee, face brightening.

"I've got it!" he told Norma. "Listen. Devore wants your map half. There's no way we can stall him off without risking the chance that your father will be killed. All right, we'll give him what he wants—but not exactly. Devore doesn't know what your half of the map looks like. We could give him a faked map—a map showing a false location for the Golden Dream—and he'd never know the difference. And that's just what we'll do! It'll put your father out of danger for the time being, and before Devore finds out he's been tricked, I'll have found Chinook and filed a claim."

Norma was smiling eagerly, but in another moment she sobered. "The faked map will have to pass a close inspection. Devore is certain to compare it with your half."

"We'll get around that," Stacey said with assurance. "We'll use paper and ink as nearly like that of the original as can possibly be found. And we'll see that it's properly aged by soiling and creasing."

Norma snapped her fingers. "There's an all-night drugstore down the street. It has a large stationery department, but if we can't find exactly what we want, the manager will get it for us. Or for me, rather." Norma grinned wryly. "Just one of my many admirers."

"We'll get started at once," Stacey

said. "When we're finished with the map, I'll check in at a hotel and get some sleep. In the morning I'll take a plane to Juneau. From there, I'll be able to get another to take me to Grubstake."

"You don't seem to be including me in your plans," Norma pointed out. "You'd better—because I'm going along."

Stacey objected, pointing out the dangers that lay ahead. But the girl remained adamant. Finally Stacey gave in. Somehow it wasn't hard to do.

CHAPTER III

MORNING sunlight was warm on Stacey's face, as he stood watching the entrance to Norma Reddick's apartment hotel from a deeply recessed doorway on the same side of the street, but a safe distance away. He puffed impatiently at his pipe and wondered how much longer it would be before Devore and Buck came out. Almost fifteen minutes had passed since the two had gone into the building.

Stacey's thoughts became worried. Could something have gone wrong? Had Devore discovered at the very outset that Norma's map half had been faked?

The possibility was one that Stacey couldn't avoid, despite the fact that he and Norma had been able to secure materials closely similar to those used in the original map, and that Stacey had worked into the small hours of the morning over the imitation. It had taken longer than Stacey had expected. There had been no time for sleep afterward. Stacey had checked in at a hotel, but only long enough to take a cold shower and change his clothes. Then he'd had breakfast and made air reservations to Juneau. Restlessness and a nagging anxiety had made him decide to

be present near Norma's apartment hotel when Devore arrived with Buck to get Norma's map half. He had been watching since the two appeared and entered the building.

While waiting, Stacey had toyed with the idea of calling the police to arrest Devore and Buck, and even of jumping the two alone, when they emerged. He had realized, however, that he could do nothing while Devore held Warren Reddick in his power. To take any sort of action against Devore at this point would only doom Norma's father. Besides, Stacey saw his big advantage lay in keeping himself out of the picture for the time being. As long as Devore thought him out of the way, he would be able to wage a campaign that would take Devore by surprise right on his home grounds, without running the risk that innocent persons would suffer.

Peering from his doorway vantage point, Stacey stiffened as he saw two men leave the apartment hotel. There was no mistaking the pair. Devore and Buck.

They seemed highly elated. Stacey heard Devore laugh. Then the two crossed the sidewalk and entered a car parked at the curb. The machine looked like one rented from a drive-yourself agency.

The car pulled away from the curb and sped off in the opposite direction. Stacey watched it dwindle in the distance and finally disappear into an intersecting street. He felt certain that Devore wouldn't return. Leaving the doorway, he strode toward the apartment hotel.

NORMA was busy packing when Stacey arrived. She grinned excitedly.

"It worked like a charm!" she reported. "Devore swallowed that fake map hook, line, and sinker. He didn't examine it very closely, evidently sure

that I'd be too afraid to trick him."

"I was starting to get worried," Stacey admitted. "He was up here so long that I thought he'd found out what we were up to."

Norma made a face. "Devore was giving me a song and dance about how worried he was over father, and how sorry he felt that the gang in Alaska should force me to give up the map this way. He insisted that he was father's friend, and that nothing was too good for the daughter of a friend of his. He was so concerned about my future that he offered me a job."

"A job!" Stacey snorted. "Doing what? Cracking safes and cutting throats?"

"Private secretary. It seems Devore operates a few mines around Gurbstake himself. He named a salary too large for honorable intentions, and every time I refused, he raised it. Finally, though, he accepted the idea that I wasn't interested in working for him at any price, and left."

Stacey was thoughtful. "If Devore was sincere about the job, that means your father doesn't know Devore is responsible for his being kept prisoner. Thus when your father is released, Devore will be in the clear. He can file a claim to the Golden Dream, and nobody can prove anything. Without the map, neither we nor your father could tell if it was the Golden Dream or any one of a dozen still undiscovered veins of gold."

Norma resumed packing, while Stacey used the phone to send for a cab. When the girl had finished and readied herself for leaving, they talked while waiting for the cab to arrive. Typical small-talk that did much to relieve the nerve-gnawing tension which both felt.

Stacey learned that Norma had been working as a fashion designer for a large exclusive Seattle dress shop. Al-

most shyly, she revealed her plans for opening a small shop of her own, to sell clothes which she had designed. Finding the conversational gambit in his hands at one point, Stacey told the girl that he had been taking a post-graduate course in chemistry at a university in Los Angeles, studies that had been interrupted by two years of war duty with a chemical warfare division in Europe.

No time at all seemed to have elapsed, when the clerk downstairs rang to notify that their cab was waiting. Stacey took the girl's bags, and they left the room. He'd already had his own luggage sent to the airport.

Stacey didn't overlook the possibility that Devore and Buck, obviously on the way to Grubstake also, might take the same plane on which he and Norma had booked passage. At the airport, he gave the cab driver a bill, with orders to check the passenger list on the pretext that he was trying to locate a fare who, while enroute to the airport earlier, had left a wallet in his cab. The driver was also to tour the terminal building looking for Devore and Buck on the basis of descriptions which Stacey supplied. Stacey realized that Devore and Buck might travel under false names.

THE cabbie found no trace of the two, however. Stacey remained cautious, nevertheless, until the plane bearing Norma and himself finally took off for Juneau.

The trip was uneventful. Yet, to Stacey, it had all the glamor of a flight to the Moon. How much of this mood was due to Norma's presence, he didn't dare guess. The girl was intelligent, humorous, fascinating to talk to. He found that they had an astonishingly large number of outlooks and ideals in common.

Stacey was startled when the stewardess announced that they were shortly to land in Juneau. It seemed impossible that the trip could have been made so soon.

Immediately after landing, Stacey made inquiries at the air terminal about the next flight to Fairbanks. A plane was due to leave in twenty minutes. Stacey was elated. It meant that no time would be lost. He made the necessary arrangements for passage, and then, after a quick meal in a restaurant adjoining the terminal, he and Norma were once more in the air.

At Fairbanks, Stacey found that a train on the Alaska Railroad would take them to Grubstake. The train was the last that day from Seward, and would arrive in two hours. Stacey didn't mind the wait. With Norma time had little if any meaning, and he was certain that he had a more than sufficiently large lead on Devore and Buck.

Stacey bought tickets, and then he and Norma took a seat in the station. They didn't talk much. By this time, a depth and warmth of understanding between them had been reached that made words superfluous.

Norma fell asleep, her head resting against Stacey's shoulder. After a while, he put his arm around her. He thought of his pipe, but filling and lighting it would have required taking his arm away. He decided that the situation was sufficiently perfect as it was.

The train arrived on time. Less than an hour later, Stacey and Norma were in Grubstake.

A dilapidated flivver with the word taxi crudely painted on its sides was parked at the depot. The driver, an elderly man whose appearance was completely in keeping with the car, took Stacey and Norma to Grubstake's only hotel. It was after midnight, and the drive showed the town dark and desert-

ed. Stacey was grimly glad of that fact. His and Norma's arrival couldn't have been timed better, since it would draw hardly any notice.

The hotel was a large frame building covered with asbestos shingles. Stacey and Norma registered under assumed names according to a prearranged plan. The clerk took them up a broad stairway, to the doors of their respective rooms. He was short and bald, with protuberant eyes that showed a strong curiosity.

Stacey and Norma parted with a deliberate casualness that left the clerk plainly disappointed. Once in his room, Stacey lost no time preparing for bed. He'd had little if any sleep the past few days, and had been going along mainly on reserve energy. Sleep engulfed him like a tidal wave as soon as his head touched the pillow.

THE sound of someone knocking at his door awakened Stacey. Sunlight poured into the room from around the edges of the drawn window shade. He gazed about him uncomprehendingly for a moment, while the knocking came again.

"Who is it?" he called out.

"It's me. Norma. Do you feel like getting up?"

Stacey glanced at his watch. It was almost eleven o'clock. He answered:

"I'd better get up if I feel like it or not."

"I'll meet you down in the dining room, then."

"Be right with you."

Stacey washed and dressed quickly, and went downstairs. The hotel dining room was small and pleasantly old-fashioned. He found Norma seated at a corner table. He had hardly sat down when a buxom waitress came to take his order.

"Well, here we are," Norma said with

grim cheerfulness, when the waitress had gone. "Where do we start first?"

"The most important thing to do in the beginning is to find Chinook Ver-vain," Stacey responded. "Chinook knows the location of the Golden Dream, and with his help we can file a claim. Devore will be blocked off in that direction. Then we'll try to find your father. Chinook knows the locality around Grubstake, and may have an idea about where your father is being kept."

"But how are you going to find Chinook?" Norma asked. "He's supposed to be in hiding—and he really must be well hid, if Devore hadn't been able to find him."

"Chinook has friends in Grubstake," Stacey pointed out. "The obvious place to look for them is among the people who worked for your father and mine. The Stacey-Reddick Mining Company has an office here, in Grubstake."

Norma grinned with characteristic impishness. "Mastermind!" Then she sobered. "Gregg, it seems almost too easy. Suppose something goes wrong?"

"I don't see how anything can go wrong until Devore and Buck get here. And we have enough time." Stacey put a confidence into his words that he didn't entirely feel.

Norma remained grave. Stacey made no further attempts at false light-heartedness. He saw that the intimate mood which they had shared the previous day was not to be recaptured. To both Grubstake had become synonymous with danger, and their presence in the town seemed to cast a shadow over their thoughts and emotions.

The waitress returned, bringing Norma's order along with Stacey's. They ate in silence. A short time later they left the hotel. A pedestrian directed them to the offices of the Stacey-Red-

dick Mining Company. Grubstake was small, and they found that they could easily walk the distance.

Their objective proved to be a small single-storied brick building of comparatively recent construction. Sight of it and the sign over the entrance acted as a catalyst upon them, releasing a long-pent excitement.

Stacey caught Norma's eager gaze and nodded. "This is it. Keep your fingers crossed."

THEY strode inside. Just within the entrance was a wooden railing beyond which a group of a dozen or so people sat at work behind desks. Their appearance made them the targets of a concerted barrage of curious stares—the longest and most intent of which seemed to be directed at Stacey. After a moment a young woman rose from one of the nearest desks and came forward.

"Can I help you?"

"I'd like to see whoever is in charge here," Stacey said.

"That will be superintendent Bill Haekstrom. Who shall I tell him is calling?"

Stacey gave his name. The young woman's face showed a look of surprise, though the answer didn't seem entirely unexpected. She turned quickly and strode into one of a group of three offices, partitioned off from the rest of the room. Almost at once, she returned, opening a gate in the railing.

"Mr. Haekstrom says he will be delighted to see you."

Haekstrom was a red-headed, burly man with broad Scandinavian features. He wrung Stacey's hand with a delight that was almost tearful.

"So you're Gregg, Ben Stacey's boy! I'd have known it a mile away. You're a regular mirror image of your Dad. A regular chip off the old block!"

Haekstrom greeted Norma with simi-

lar enthusiasm. He bustled about excitedly, closing the door, and settling his visitors in chairs. Finally he sat down on a corner of his desk, and his broad face turned solemn. He said slowly:

"A lot of strange things have happened here within the last few weeks. Maybe you can explain some of them for me. What I want to know most of all is what happened to Warren Reddick. He was laid up with a busted ankle, you know. Then he suddenly went away somewhere, without letting me know where he was going or why. Just left me a note, telling me to take charge of things until he got back."

"Warren Reddick was kidnapped," Stacey said.

Haekstrom stared incredulously. "But the note he left me? I know his handwriting like I know my own face. He wrote it, all right."

"Warren Reddick was undoubtedly forced to write that note," Stacey explained. "But before I go any further, I want to check on something. You heard about my father finding the Golden Dream, and the map he made of its location?"

Haekstrom nodded his bristling red shock. "Sure—and so has almost everybody else in Grubstake. Your Dad was sick, you know, and talked about the lode and the map before . . . before he died."

Stacey went on to tell about receiving half of the map from Chinook Vervain, and the attempt which had been made in Los Angeles to steal it. Then he detailed its loss in the encounter with Devore and Buck in Seattle, where he had gone to see Norma. He outlined Devore's part in the affair, explaining what had actually happened to Reddick, and told of the trick which he and Norma had used to prevent Devore from obtaining Norma's map half. Finally he

related his and Norma's purpose in coming to Grubstake.

"Chinook knows the location of the Golden Dream, and he might know where Warren Reddick is being held," Stacey told Haekstrom. "I came to you on the chance that you could tell me where Chinook is hiding out. If I can find Chinook, Devore is through."

Haekstrom smiled sadly, bitterly. "A note from Chinook reached me a little over a week ago. He wanted to see me, and told me where he was. A cabin up near Birch Creek. He said I shouldn't let anybody else know, and to be careful. Well, when I got there, I found the cabin burned down. Investigating, I found bones among the ruins—hardly more than cinder and ash. Chinook Vervain is dead."

CHAPTER IV

THE hotel dining room was filled with the buzz of voices. It was evening, and almost all the tables were occupied.

Stacey and Norma sat at a table beside one of the windows. They had just finished eating. Norma was gazing pensively through the window, at the lighted signs and storefronts of Grubstake's main street. Heavy brows fused in a scowl, Stacey brooded into his empty coffee cup, smoke spiralling from the pipe gripped between his teeth. Dejection was a weight that lay heavily over both.

There no longer was any doubt in Stacey's mind that Chinook Vervain was actually dead. At first he had refused to believe Haekstrom's story. He had trusted the man instinctively from the very first moment of their meeting, but Chinook had been his only hope for defeating Devore's ruthless plans, and he had been reluctant to accept the fact that it should be so swiftly lost. That

afternoon, however, Haekstrom had taken Stacey and Norma to Birch Creek, and Stacey had seen the evidence of the burned cabin with his own eyes.

Knowledge of his helplessness ate at Stacey's mind like an acid. There seemed utterly nothing that he could do now, nowhere that he could turn.

Stacey was startled as he felt Norma's fingers grip abruptly at his wrist. The girl was peering tensely through the window. Following the direction of her eyes, Stacey saw two men passing a lighted store-front on the opposite side of the street. He recognized them at once. Devore and Buck!

The two carried suitcases and were striding along swiftly and purposefully. They had obviously just returned to Grubstake.

A cold emptiness spreading through him, Stacey met Norma's gaze. The girl's features were drawn with despair. She whispered:

"Gregg, what are we going to do? If Devore finds out that we're here, my father will be killed. Father is all the evidence we have against Devore, and Devore won't take the chance that we might get to him."

"We'll have to take the fight directly to Devore," Stacey answered grimly. "We're here, and we certainly wouldn't accomplish anything by hiding out like a couple of mice. If we act fast enough, Devore won't have time to do anything about your father." Stacey's face tightened with sudden decision. "And I know just how to start. I'm going to follow Devore!"

"But, Gregg, if something happens to you—"

"That's the risk I'll have to take." Stacey rose, tossing a bill to the table. "You go to your room, Norma, and stay there until I get back." Heedless of the girl's protests, he grabbed his hat

and hurried out to the street.

DEVORE and Buck were still in sight. Keeping to the side of the street opposite that along which the pair were striding, Stacey followed rapidly in their wake.

The pursuit led for two blocks along Grubstake's main thoroughfare. Then Devore and Buck turned a corner. They proceeded for almost a block more, stopping finally before the entrance to a small wooden building. It seemed to be an office, for a sign over the door read *Greater Alaska Mines and Metals*.

Stacey drew back into the shadows of a building on his side of the street while Devore produced a key and unlocked the door. Then Devore strode inside, Buck following, and the door closed. Lights sprang on behind the windows in front, but in another moment shades were drawn.

Crossing the street quickly, Stacey slipped into the dense shadows filling the space between the side of the building and the one next to it. Shades were drawn behind the windows here, too, but at one of the windows further back, Stacey found the shade hadn't been pulled entirely down to the sill. The bottom of the window was on a level with his chin. He could see without difficulty into the room beyond.

Devore was standing at a desk a bare five feet away, his sharp olive face visible in profile. Buck's hulking form was sprawled in a chair nearby.

As Stacey watched, Devore reached into the inner breast pocket of his suit coat and pulled out an envelope. He toyed with it a moment, smiling exultantly. He said something to Buck, and the giant's thick lips stretched in a grin. Stacey found, by pressing close to the window, that he could hear almost every word spoken.

". . . best way to get rich but

quick," Devore was saying. "After all, Buck, nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"You said it, chief!" Buck agreed.

Devore went on, "I have the entire map now, and once I file a claim and start mining the gold, I'll be top man in these parts—financially speaking. And I won't have anything to worry about. Gregg Stacey's out of the way, and as for the girl, she swallowed the story about her old man that I gave her, which means she'll swallow any other story I choose to give."

"What about Reddick, chief?" Buck asked.

Devore drew a finger across his throat. "Reddick would be able to make too much trouble for me. Kidnapping is a serious offense, you know, and the money from the Golden Dream wouldn't do me any good in jail. We'll go down to the Trump Card in the morning and see that Reddick is taken care of."

Devore toyed with the envelope an instant longer, then turned toward a large safe placed against the wall on the side of the room directly opposite Stacey. Devore's back hid his manipulations of the dial.

STACEY waited no longer. He guessed that Devore's next move, after locking away the envelope, would be to leave the building with Buck. Stacey considered only briefly the idea of waiting until the two left and then tackling the safe in an attempt to regain his half of the map. It would have been merely a waste of time. He was anything but an expert safecracker.

Leaving the building quietly and cautiously, Stacey strode swiftly back to the hotel. His pulses raced with excitement. Devore had dropped a clue leading directly to Norma's father!

At the hotel, Stacey went at once to

Norma's room. The girl opened the door at his knock, and he hurried inside. He checked an eager rush of words as he saw Norma had a visitor. It was Haekstrom.

"Just dropped in about some business matters that I didn't think you'd feel like discussing this afternoon," Haekstrom explained. He gazed at Stacey curiously. "Norma told me about you following Devore and Buck. Did you turn up anything?"

Stacey nodded and proceeded to relate what he had overheard while eavesdropping on the pair. He finished:

"Devore doesn't know it yet, but he's furnished us with exactly the information concerning Norma's father that we want. The reference to the Trump Card in connection with Warren Reddick obviously means that the Trump Card is the place where he's being kept prisoner."

Norma's small face had brightened with incredulous joy. "That means everything isn't entirely hopeless after all, Gregg! We now have a chance to rescue my father." She frowned slightly. "But where and just what is the Trump Card?"

"It's an abandoned mine about ten miles out of town," Haekstrom replied. "I believe Devore holds the title to it."

"Think you'd care to take the risk of leading me there?" Stacey asked.

Haekstrom's broad features set determinedly. "I don't see why not. This is my fight as much as yours."

Stacey nodded. "Good! If we can get Warren Reddick away from Devore, we'll still have a fighting chance at the Golden Dream. According to what Devore himself said, Reddick knows that Devore is the person who is keeping him prisoner. By rescuing Reddick, we'll have a weapon against Devore—force him to return my half of the map or charge him with kidnapping. Devore

knows that Reddick's testimony would form an air-tight case against him."

"You can count me in on anything you do," Haekstrom said. "When do we start for the Trump Card?"

"Immediately, if possible," Stacey returned.

Haekstrom hesitated. "I'll need a little time to get some things together. It won't take me long. Besides, there's a fairly good road leading to the Trump Card, and we'll be able to drive out in my car."

Stacey nodded quick agreement. "I'll wait for you, then. As for Norma, she'll remain at the hotel while we're gone."

Norma's red mouth tightened stubbornly. "I think I have something to say about that, Gregg Stacey! I came this far, and I don't see why I shouldn't go any further. After all, Warren Reddick is my father. I ought to have a chance to help him, too."

Stacey was about to remonstrate, but Haekstrom shrugged and said, "It'll be all right for Norma to come along with us. There won't be much if any danger. Devore won't be out to the Trump Card until morning, and he can't have more than two men guarding Reddick." Stacey gave in, and Haekstrom left with the understanding that Stacey and Norma were to get ready while he was gone.

WITHIN twenty minutes, Haekstrom returned. Stacey and Norma were waiting for him in Norma's room. They had both changed into rough clothes.

Haekstrom grinned. "Took me a little longer than I thought it would." He had removed his business suit and now wore a wool jacket, corduroy breeches, and laced boots.

"What did, if I may ask?" Norma inquired. "Gregg seems to understand, but it's a mystery to me."

"We'll have to persuade your father's

guards to let him go," Haekstrom responded. "I just went to get a little persuasion. Guns, in other words. I have two rifles and a revolver down in the car."

"Oh." Norma's brown eyes widened.

"Do . . . do you really think we'll have to use them?"

Haekstrom nodded solemnly. "There's a good chance."

"I hope so, for one," Stacey grunted. "Men who'll work for a skunk like Devore deserve to get shot." He gestured toward the door. "All right, let's get started."

They left the hotel unobtrusively, and Haekstrom led the way to his car, a battered sedan parked at the curb outside. A moment later they were moving toward the outskirts of Grubstake.

The lights of the town dwindled and presently vanished altogether behind a turn in the road. The sedan's headlights bored into a darkness that was deep and still and menacingly primeval. A wilderness reached out to gather them in. On either side, rugged hills rose out of broad stretches of fir and pine, and in the distance ahead a quarter moon showed the tips of mountains, a vast jagged outline against the sky. The cool air streaming past the car was fragrant with the mingled scents of pine and wild flowers and moist grass.

Stacey, Norma, and Haekstrom rode in silence, faces grave with thought of the task before them. After a while, Haekstrom turned the sedan into a narrow rough dirt road. They progressed more slowly now, lurching and bumping.

"Almost there," Haekstrom announced at last. He drove for several minutes longer, then brought the sedan to a stop. "We'll have to walk from here. If I drove in too close, the noise from the car would give us way."

Stacey and Norma climbed out. Haekstrom joined them after a moment, holding the revolver and two rifles, and a flashlight. Stacey took one of the rifles, and Haekstrom handed the revolver to Norma, who declined it.

"I have one of my own, thanks," the girl explained. She produced the little revolver which Stacey had seen back in Seattle.

Haekstrom chuckled and shoved the extra weapon into a pocket of his jacket. With a gesture, he swung into the lead, cautiously lighting the way with the flashlight.

They followed the road along a line of low hills on one side and a dense stretch of brush and pines on the other. The road gradually grew steep, curving around to meet the hills and entering them between a narrow pass. Beyond the pass, the road slanted down to the floor of a tiny valley.

Haekstrom switched off the flashlight. "This is it. We'll really have to be careful, now."

PEERING into the valley as his eyes became adjusted to the unrelieved darkness, Stacey saw a number of lights. They came from the windows of a long low wooden building.

Stacey caught Haekstrom's glance and nodded grimly. They started down the descent, stepping carefully over the ruts and loose stones of the road. A number of other buildings shortly became visible in the gloom. These were unlighted. The only sign of life was that shown by particular building upon which they were closing in.

Presently their objective was only a scant dozen yards away. They crept forward, moving with extreme caution among rocks and clumps of brush. Reaching the lighted building, Stacey, Norma, and Haekstrom slipped up to one of the nearest windows and peered

inside.

The illumination came from two kerosine lamps hanging on wires from the low ceiling. Directly under one of the lamps was a table at which two men sat, playing cards. They were roughly dressed and unshaven. Revolvers lay close at hand on the table before each. Bunks were placed around the sides of the room. In one of these, visible across the table, lay a slim elderly man whose disheveled sandy hair was streaked with gray at the temples. He seemed to be asleep.

Stacey glanced at Norma. She nodded, brown eyes suddenly filmed.

Beckoning to Haekstrom, Stacey moved back from the window. He whispered:

"I'm going in through the door. When you hear me kick it open, knock the window in with your rifle and cover the two guards from your side."

Haekstrom nodded, and Stacey crept toward the door. He paused a moment, gathering himself, then threw his shoulder against the panel in a sudden lunge. The door burst open amid a crash of splintered wood. Stacey catapulted into the room beyond. The two guards rose half out of their chairs, hands reaching instinctively for their guns.

"Don't!" Stacey warned, levelling his rifle. "Stay just as you were."

"It's no good, son. You've walked into a trap." Warren Reddick had sat up in his bunk, and was regarding Stacey sadly.

The two guards grinned and completed their act of reaching for their weapons. Stacey stared in dazed incomprehension, Reddick's words flaming in his mind. Then he realized that Haekstrom hadn't carried out his part of the strategy. What had happened?

The two guards had their revolvers now. They turned to Stacey. One of them spoke.

"All right, boyscout, drop your iron!" Stacey swung the rifle the little that was needed to cover the speaker—and pulled the trigger.

The rifle clicked loudly in the silence. Stacey pulled the trigger a few more times, then tossed the weapon aside. It hadn't been loaded.

From the doorway came a soft, mocking chuckle. Devore stepped into the room. After him followed Buck, thick lips stretched in a huge grin. Then came Norma, herded forward at the point of Haekstrom's rifle.

Stacey gazed at Haekstrom bitterly. "So you were in with Devore all the time, eh?"

"It pays to be connected with the right people," Haekstrom said.

CHAPTER V

STACEY took a deep breath, fighting down the sickness inside him. "I understand, now. You warned Devore about what I was up to, while pretending that you had to prepare for the trip up here."

Haekstrom nodded. "Mark had a ten minute start on us. He told the boys here that you were coming. It was my idea to give you an empty rifle and let you jump through the door. I intended to suggest it if you didn't think of it yourself. Mark and Buck were waiting behind one of the building outside. All we had to do was walk in once you had made a fool out of yourself with that empty rifle. Both were empty, by the way, since I didn't know which one you'd pick. I loaded mine later."

"What about Chinook and the burned cabin?" Stacey asked. "Was that a trick, too?"

Haekstrom shook his head. "No. I got a tip Chinook was hiding there while Mark was gone. We wanted him bad, as Chinook knew where the Golden

Dream was. But when I found the cabin, it was the way you saw it."

Devore chuckled. "Satisfied, Mr. Stacey?"

"As well as I can be, under the circumstances," Stacey said, shrugging.

"I thought I finished you in Seattle," Devore said. "This time I'm going to be more thorough. One of the reasons why this mine was given up is because the main shaft leads directly into a huge crevice—bottomless, as far as I know. And it happens that the roof at that part of the shaft is faulty. Knocking away just so much as one of the supports will cause a cave in. Which is just what I intend to do—once you, the girl, and Reddick are pushed into the crevice."

Norma released a low cry. Heedless of the guns on all sides, she ran to where her father sat in the bunk and buried her face in his chest, sobbing.

Devore watched in sardonic amusement. "I really hate to add insult to injury, Miss Reddick, but I'll have to trouble you for your half of the map. Mr. Haekstrom told me about the little deception which was practiced on me in Seattle. Quite clever. I never realized I had been tricked."

"You can go to the hotel in Grubstake and get it if you want to," Norma snapped.

"Tut, tut! I'm sure you consider the map too valuable to leave in hotel rooms, Miss Reddick. I have no doubt but that you have the map with you right now."

"I hid it—and it's going to stay hid."

"I'm afraid you're forcing me to have Buck search you." Devore glanced at his giant satellite. "You'd like that, wouldn't you, Buck?"

Buck leered. "Sure, chief!"

NORMA looked at Buck and shuddered. She hesitated a moment,

then reached into the neck of her blouse. She pulled out an envelope and threw it to the floor. "There! Just keep that monster away from me."

Devore was unable to hide his gloating triumph as he retrieved the envelope and examined its contents. "Well, that's that! Since there now is no longer any reason for keeping you people alive, I suggest that we start for the mine at once."

The volcano of fury and despair seething inside Stacey boiled over. He reached Devore in two quick steps, and his fist smashed squarely into the other's face.

A gun went off. Something burned a furrow along Stacey's shoulder. Then Buck emitted a bellow of rage and rushed at Stacey wildly. Ducking under the swing of a huge fist, Stacey plunged his fist into the giant's midriff. Buck released a grunt of surprise and pain. He stood for a moment as though frozen, the flat of one hand pressed against the injured spot. Stacey swung again. The blow caught Buck on the jaw and sent him reeling backward, to crash against the table.

Stacey was given no chance to follow up. One of the two guards had circled behind him, and now the barrel of the man's revolver flashed down. The room went black.

ROUGH hands slapped Stacey awake. The first person he saw was Haekstrom, who had evidently been working over him. Stacey sat up on the floor. Pain flashed and roared inside his head. His cheeks burned from repeated slaps, and his shoulder was stiff and sore where the bullet had grazed him.

Norma was seated on the bunk, with her father. Her eyes were red and swollen. Reddick looked unutterably weary, the lines of his face sagging with

hopelessness.

Devore was seated on the table, smoking a cigarette. His nose had evidently bled a lot, and his upper lip was discolored and larger than normal. He eyed Stacey balefully.

"I could have had you tossed down the crevice while you were out, but that way you'd have missed the fun. Now that you're awake, we'll get started."

At an order from Devore, Buck hauled Stacey to his feet. Buck didn't try to be gentle about it. Great waves of agony battered Stacey, threatening to engulf him. He clung to awareness with dogged effort.

Devore crushed out his cigarette and stood erect. He picked up two lanterns that stood, already lighted, on the table, and handed one to Haekstrom.

"All right, let's go."

Devore and Haekstrom led the way out of the building. Buck followed next, clutching the back of Stacey's jacket in one hand, and propelling him forward with repeated jabs of the revolver in the other. Norma and Reddick brought up the rear, forced along by the two guards. Reddick was able to hobble along with the aid of a crude crutch. He fell several times.

The procession wound its way over the valley floor, toward a rectangular opening at the base of a large hill. Devore and Haekstrom strode into the opening, their lanterns lighting the way for the others in the rear. They were swallowed up by a long tunnel that slanted steadily downward. The air became clammy and dank as the descent continued. To Stacey, breathing it seemed like inhaling the very atmosphere of death itself. The thought made realization of what lay ahead suddenly sharp and clear in his mind.

The tunnel abruptly broadened out, ending at the brink of a broad chasm fully twenty feet across. It was a nat-

ural pocket in the earth, which the man-made tunnel had intersected. The roof of the cavern was formed by huge rock slabs that sagged precariously, prevented from falling only by numerous support beams.

Devore held his lantern high, and glanced at Haekstrom. "Never been here before, have you?"

Haekstrom shook his head. A growing unease showed on his broad face.

Devore gestured at the crevice. "Nothing to worry about. There's no bottom to this thing. Just take a look."

Haekstrom peered cautiously over the edge of the chasm, extending his lantern over it. Devore smiled slightly—and pushed. Haekstrom vanished. He left a scream behind him, a scream that seemed to go on and on, growing fainter, before it suddenly ended.

"One less to divide with," Devore said cheerfully. He looked at Stacey. "See what I have in mind for you? How do you like the idea?"

"You're mad to think you can get away with it," Stacey pointed out. "We'll be missed. Sooner or later the authorities will connect you with our disappearance."

"They'll never prove anything," Devore returned confidently. "You'll be hundreds of feet under the earth, buried under tons of rock and sand. Anyway, you were last seen with Haekstrom—and Haekstrom's dead. No trail leading to me there. Chinook Vervain might have been able to figure things out, but he's dead, too." Devore's air of studied suavity abruptly vanished. His sharp features became set and cruel. "I've wasted enough time on you. The sooner I get this over with, the better I'll like it. Buck—over with them!"

STACEY felt Buck's great trap-like hands close inexorably over him. He heard Norma scream.

Then, with stunning unexpectedness, came the repeated, insistent honking of an auto horn.

Buck gasped, and involuntarily released Stacey. Devore stood as though frozen, staring toward the tunnel mouth.

The honking came again.

"Somebody's outside!" Devore hissed. He whirled to Buck. "Give me your gun. I'll watch these people. You go with Hank and Matt and see who's out there."

Buck obeyed the orders automatically. Shortly he disappeared up the tunnel with the two guards.

Devore placed his lantern on a rocky projection and settled down to wait. He kept licking his lips nervously, glancing from Stacey to the tunnel entrance.

In another moment the sound of shots rang out, striking like sudden thunder into the tense stillness. It startled Devore into inattention for just the instant Stacey had been waiting for. He left the ground in a leap, catching Devore about the legs. They hit the ground in a squirming tangle, a scant dozen feet from the edge of the chasm.

Once he had recovered from the surprise of Stacey's attack, Devore fought like a madman. His struggles were the frenzied struggles of one who has had victory within his grasp and feels it slipping away. He had dropped his weapon in falling, his fingers having splayed instinctively to clutch for support. The gun had hit the ground a few feet short of the crevice. Devore sought frantically to kick loose from Stacey in the effort to regain it.

Stacey was unable to maintain his grip. He rolled aside. Quick as a cat, Devore scrambled to hands and knees and lunged for the gun. Stacey caught Devore's jerkily retreating ankles and pulled desperately. Devore was

stretched flat on his chest, the wind leaving him in a pained gasp. But in the next instant, threshing wildly, he broke Stacey's hold on his ankles, whirled, and pushed himself erect.

As Stacey climbed to his feet, Devore closed in with a barrage of swift, numbing punches. Momentarily confused, Stacey gave ground, shielding his face.

Norma cried: "Gregg—look out! The edge!"

Stacey stopped barely in time. He ducked under pistoning jabs of Devore's fists and caught the other around the waist. They wrestled for some seconds with quiet savagery, one straining away, the other pushing toward, the brink of the chasm.

Slowly, slowly, teeth clenched, face beaded with sweat, Stacey forced Devore back. Then, suddenly, he broke free and began to hammer in blows of his own. Devore dodged away, but Stacey closed in quickly and relentlessly. He battered down Devore's guard, and while it was down, shot a numbing punch to the other's middle, following it almost instantly with a piledriver cross to the jaw.

EYES glassy, Devore went staggering backward. He teetered for a moment on the edge of the chasm—and then he was gone.

"Good work, lad!" a deep voice approved.

It was a voice that Stacey had never heard before. He turned puzzledly.

A man strode into the circle of light cast by the lantern. He was short and thick-set, with deeply tanned features that had a faintly Indian cast. His lips were parted in a broad smile, revealing large teeth that seemed startlingly white by contrast with his skin. He wore a wool jacket, with denim trousers stuffed into boots. A battered felt hat was pushed to the back of his head, reveal-

ing grizzled black hair. He held a rifle in the crook of one arm.

"Chinook!" Warren Reddick gasped. "Chinook!" He hobbled forward with his crutch and grasped the other's arm unbelievably. "But . . . but Devore said you were dead!"

Chinook Vervain's smile broadened still more. "It didn't hurt anything to let him and his friends think so. I burned the cabin down on purpose, leaving a bear I had killed inside, so that when the bones were found, people would think I had burned up with the cabin. Devore and Haekstrom were trying to find me, and were getting a little too close for comfort. Especially Haekstrom. He was trying to beat Devore out of the Golden Dream."

"But how did you get here?" Stacey demanded. "And where's Buck and the other two men?"

"I saw you and Miss Reddick up at the burned cabin with Haekstrom this afternoon," Vervain explained. "I do all my hunting up there, so it wasn't just luck. I knew Haekstrom was in with Devore, and decided I'd better keep an eye on you and Miss Reddick. It wasn't so easy, because Haekstrom and Devore had cars, and I have to do my traveling on a horse. I followed you, Miss Reddick, and Haekstrom when you left Grubstake this evening. The tire tracks of the car led me to the Trump Card. Riding a horse, I got here almost too late.

"But I saw Devore and Haekstrom taking the bunch of you down into the mine, and guessed what was going on. I couldn't tackle Devore and the others all at once, so I waited until they went into the mine. Then I pressed the horn of Devore's car which he'd parked behind one of the old mine buildings not far away. When Buck and the other two came running out of the mine, I picked them off as easy as eating pie."

Reddick grinned and thumped Chinook's shoulder. He seemed younger and stronger already. He glanced at Stacey and Norma.

"There's a lot more to be explained, I think, but first I'd like to get out of here. After all the time I've spent cooped up in this place, there's nothing more I want right now than to have lights, noise, and people around me."

Chinook hurried to comply. He took the lantern, and with Reddick limping at his side, lead the way out of the tunnel.

Stacey and Norma followed slowly. Stacey was thoughtful.

"With Chinook alive, we won't have any trouble about filing a claim to the Golden Dream. That means we're as good as rich right now. I . . . ah . . . suppose that with your share, you'll

open up that dress shop you mentioned."

"I suppose so," Norma murmured.

"About myself," Stacey went on, even more thoughtfully, "I think I'm going to stay here and help your father run the business—including the Golden Dream as part of it. This is a nice country. Clean, with plenty of elbow room. Good place to raise children, too."

"Wonderful country," Norma agreed.

Stacey said desperately, "But it wouldn't be wonderful at all unless a certain girl—That is . . . well, look, Norma, wouldn't you rather open up a little cottage instead of that doggoned dress shop of yours?"

Norma grinned. "I think the idea has a dress shop beat hollow!"

THE END

RUFFIAN DICK: EXPLORER



By ROBERT CLAYTON



LITTLE known to the world at large in the 19th century, there lived a great man. He will not be remembered for the good things he has done; there was nothing of the humanitarian in him. A selfish adventurous soul, he was completely consumed by one feverish desire, to do what others dared not attempt, to make himself notorious by his daring. And yet, this completely self-centered mania which possessed him demonstrated that even it could be utilized in the discovery of Truth.

Richard Burton was an explorer of great, but unrealized, worth. It was not until years after his death that the value of his wonderings was established. He was born in England in March of the year 1821. His father, a retired army officer, suffered from asthma. Seeking relief from his suffering, he led his family from one country to another and returned to England. Young Richard, as a result, was learning Greek at the age of three, and Latin at the age of four. He was unusually receptive and attentive to all the languages he heard in those youthful days; he was all his life to be a great language-learner

and language-user. They were the means to developing and satisfying his curiosity, ways of escape from that sense of frustration that was to haunt him all his days.

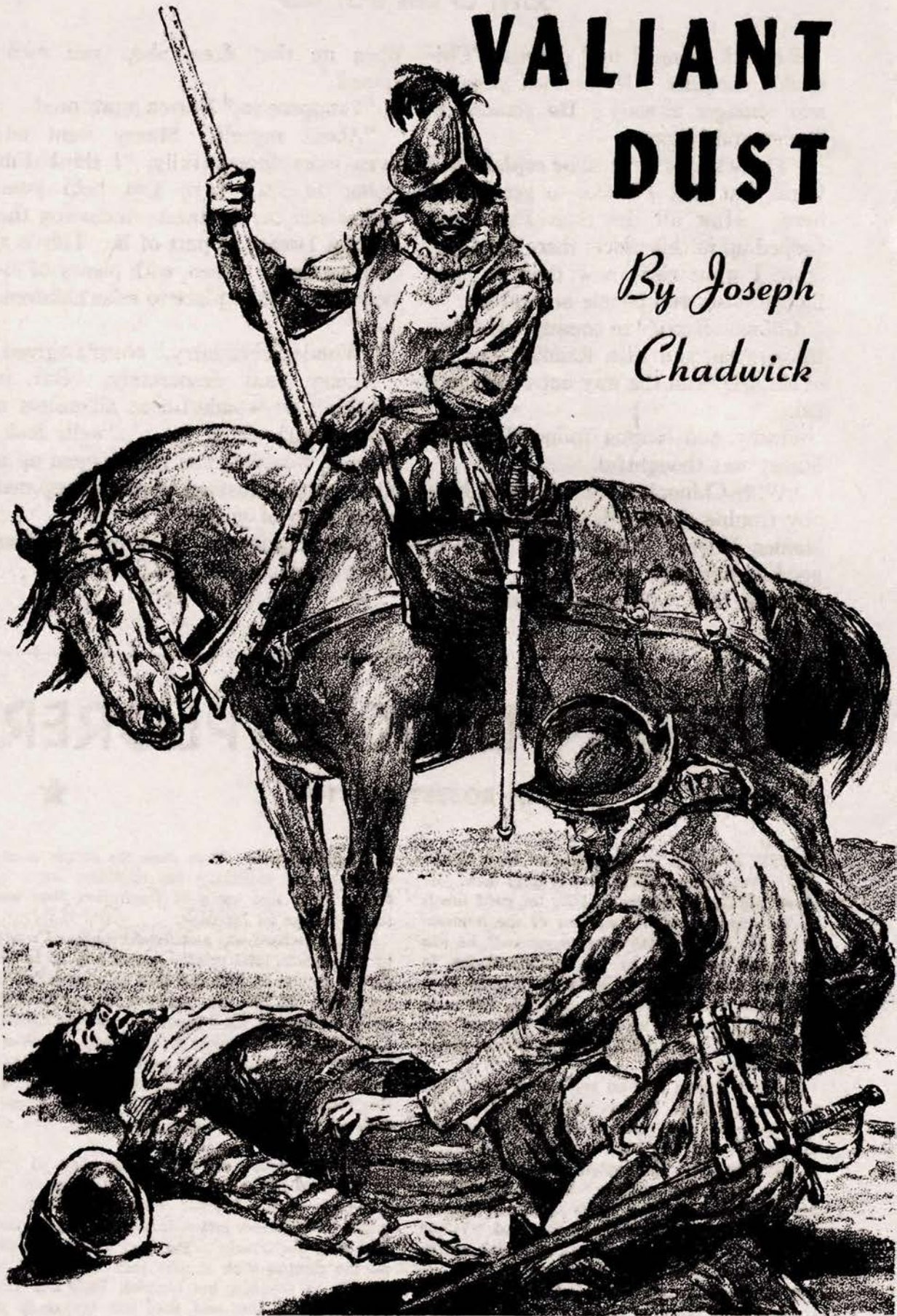
Young Richard was a continual source of worry to his parents. His pranks caused him to be regarded first as an imp and then as a scoundrel in their eyes. In Pisa Mt. Vesuvius loomed mysteriously for him on the horizon. There was nothing for him to do but explore it for himself. He wasn't content with reaching the crater, for the fumes twisting slow wreathings of smoke far below his feet intrigued him considerably. He had himself lowered to investigate and, as a result, was almost suffocated.

In 1840, though not yet twenty years of age, he was sent to Oxford, to Trinity College, in the company of his brother Edward. Trinity, as might be expected, bored, infuriated and amused Richard. He bought a gun and amused himself on the campus with it. He took to rowing, to fencing, to anything but lectures. Only one subject interested him and that was the study of

(Continued on page 159)

VALIANT DUST

*By Joseph
Chadwick*



The man lay in a pitiful heap on the ground, his arms spread limp and lifeless . . .

The glories of conquest were gone from New Spain. In their place marched a haggard troop of soldiery bent on a futile mission of death

GONE now was the great show of pageantry. The banners no longer fluttered proudly in the blazing sun of New Spain, and the armored soldiers of Charles I had lost their great air of bravado. The raw land had reached up to smite the conquistadors, and the glory of the Spanish Crown dragged in the dust. Coronado had said, "We fear not for our lives, for the arm of the true God is over us." But it seemed to every man, from mounted cavalier to lowly foot soldier, that only the dark spirit, *El Diablo*, traveled with them.

The advance patrol of Don Carlos de Hernandez, who was as fanatical as Coronado himself, wasted itself upon the unknown desert and, if this madness continued, was surely doomed.

"Me thinks," even Don Carlos began to say, "that this heathen devil of an *Indio* lies."

His doubt was confided only to his nephew, Don Miguel Cordova, a very young man who was fresh from Spain and upon his virgin adventure. But Don Miguel was not surprised. He too had suspicions of the native guide, a cunning fellow who talked a few words



of the white man's tongue, learned from the good friars, and professed to be a Christian. But . . . *a wondrous city called Quivira, where there was a great tree hung with countless bells of pure gold—where every native possessed dishes of the same bright metal, as well as jugs and images and all manner of ornaments?* To even so young and inexperienced a man as Don Miguel, it seemed beyond belief. Yet it was Quivira that the conquistadors sought.

"Don Miguel . . ."

The cry came from an agonized throat. Don Miguel turned his gaunted mount about and saw that yet another man had fallen. The eighth in two days. *Madre de Dios!* thought Miguel, and felt pity in his heart. That he too might die here in this empty land seemed a certainty, yet his heart could go out to these other wretched humans.

He saw how the foot soldiers—only the two caballeros were mounted—straggled in a ragged line. They were crossbowmen, arquebusiers and swordsmen, transported across the seas and now turned into sorry creatures by the desert. No longer did the dream of riches lay in their dulled eyes. No fanaticism drove them, as it did the fierce Don Carlos. But the Indian bearers, who came last, moved steadily under their burdens and were untouched by blazing sun and scorching heat. "*They are the children of this land,*" thought Miguel, "*and so it cannot harm them.*"

"Miguel, come along!"

Don Carlos was shouting from his place at the head of the column. He was looking back at his nephew, and the fires of hell seemed to glitter in his black eyes. He had a hawkish beak of a nose, a cruel traplike mouth. Don Carlos was one of Coronado's most trusted captains. There was no mercy in him, no sympathy for the weak. If

a man fell, he remained where he fell. Again Don Carlos bellowed, "Miguel, come along!"

But the fallen man cried out, "Have mercy—!"

Miguel was swayed. He ignored his uncle's command, risked Don Carlos' temper. He rode back and dismounted. He took the goatskin waterbag from his saddle, and he knelt—with an effort because of his armor—to give the soldier water. The goatskin was more than half empty when the man ended his greedy gulping. "*Gracias, Don Miguel . . . you are a good man.*"

"You must get to your feet, Mateo."

"I cannot."

"I will help you, my friend. And you will ride my horse."

That was unthinkable, a mere crossbowman riding while a Castillian don walked; the soldier shook his head. "Leave me," he said, but Miguel's arms were already about him, already lifting him.

Miguel got him onto the horse, then handed him his heavy crossbow and sheath of arrows. They went on, and a life had been saved. For how long, Miguel did not know.

THEY made night camp by a great arroyo. Tana had promised that there would be life-giving water in the creek bed, and there was none at all. The Indian was a squat man of middle age; he had a bland sort of face, but his darkeyes were full of guile. He wore a religious emblem from a chain about his neck, the gift of the friars with whom he had associated. He showed chagrin as Don Carlos, in a black temper, questioned him about their failure to find water. But it seemed to the watching young Miguel that Tana was not at all put out; it seemed that the Indian had known from the start that his promise of water would

not be fulfilled.

"One day's march," Tana now said, in his bad Spanish. "We come then to the land of the humped *cibolo*—cattle bigger than those of the white men. And there is Quivira."

Quivira!

The name fell from the Indian's lips with a magic sound. And perhaps he believed in it. But Miguel knew, without understanding why, that there was no such wondrous city. Tana lied, whether he knew it or not, and he was leading the patrol to its death. Miguel looked at his uncle. Don Carlos had removed his flanged helmet; he sat upon a rock, a big man with pointed beard and bristling mustaches. He stared at Tana with a cruel smile, and he said, "One day's march. . . . Then it is either Quivira or I will have your tongue out!"

Miguel saw Tana's ready answering smile, and he turned away in disgust. He had lost faith; what was to have been a glorious adventure, a quest to add land and wealth to the Spanish Crown, had degenerated into a shabby effort of a band of men to stand off a creeping death. There was no glory, nothing but greed motivated Don Carlos . . . for Miguel knew that his uncle was impoverished and was seeking to find riches for himself—so that he might retire comfortably to Spain—rather than to raise the banner of Spain over a fabulous city. Greed was Don Carlos' fanaticism, his madness.

The campfires glowed red, pushed back the eerie desert night. The Spaniards hunkered down, munching their half-rotted food and sipping their wine—when what they really needed was a bellyful of water. They talked in low, uneasy voices; they stayed close to the brush fires, like children afraid of the dark. The Indian bearers, actually slaves, kept apart from the white men

and talked among themselves in their unintelligible tongue. Miguel went beyond the camp and peered into the darkness, almost as though hoping to see something of what the Indian guide promised—a fine city, wells full of crystal clear water, the great humped cattle, gold that did not need to be mined. . . . He believed none of it, but in his heart he still faintly hoped.

He stepped by a growth of jagged cactus, heard a rattling sound, and drew his sword while his heart for an instant stood still. A creature slithered toward him; a snake struck at his leg, fangs against the steel greave protecting the leg. Miguel struck down with the sword, then withdrew back to the camp. He was a man greatly shaken.

A DARK figure loomed, a man coming to meet Miguel. It was Mateo, the crossbowman, now somewhat recovered from his weakness of mid-day.

"Something is wrong, Don Miguel?"

Miguel saw that the soldier had his crossbow loaded and ready. He said, "Nothing Mateo. Nothing but a snake."

Mateo shuddered. "This land is lost to the devil," he whispered. "Only hell could be so bad. The men are saying. . . ."

"Saying what, friend?"

Mateo hesitated, as though afraid his words would bring him trouble. But then: "They are saying that the Indian is leading us deeper and deeper across this barrens, so that we will die terribly. They say he hates all men whose faces are white. And Don Carlos—"

"They are saying Don Carlos is mad?" Miguel prompted as the soldier broke off. "It may well be . . . I will talk again to my uncle."

He walked through the camp and found Don Carlos still perched upon the boulder, like a man enthroned, but now wrapped in his once proud but now

shabby cassock. One thing about Don Carlos, Miguel realized, was his courage. He had the heart of a lion, and he feared nothing on earth. He was proud and arrogant, and he would go on even though he lost every man of the patrol.

A lanky, hatchet-faced soldier sat crosslegged on the ground before the don. He was the patrol's scribe, and in the glow of a fire he was writing upon parchment with a quill dipped in ink. Don Carlos was dictating in a low voice, and finally he said, "Now I will make my mark and affix my seal."

Quill and parchment were handed to Don Carlos, and he made his mark. The scribe heated wax, dabbed some upon the parchment, and Don Carlos pressed his signet ring upon the seal. He looked up at Miguel with a friendly smile that was a rare thing.

"I am making ready for the event of my death, my nephew," he said. He rolled the parchment and handed it to Miguel. "Should I not live out this adventure, then you shall inherit the de Hernandez estate in Spain." He lifted his hand as though to halt any protest Miguel might utter. "No; it must be so. You and I, Miguel, are all the remain of our family. It is good that my property should go to you."

"I am overwhelmed," said Miguel, yet he knew that all that remained to Don Carlos' estate was a farm of little worth. "But what if I do not live, uncle?"

"You should make some disposal of the rich lands you inherited from your father, Miguel," said Don Carlos. "You might have made such a document as this one I have given you—in my name. Although, you are young and strong and will surely live to see Spain again . . ." He looked at Miguel with his bright eyes oddly veiled. "But it is a matter for you to decide."

Miguel nodded. He saw that there was wisdom in his uncle. It would be a good thing to make sure that the Cordova estate did not pass out of the family in the event that he, Don Miguel, lost his life. He feared Don Carlos, yet he respected him. And who could say that blood was not a strong tie? Miguel said, "I will sign such a document, Don Carlos," and so had the scribe write out the testament. Unlike his uncle, Miguel had learned to read and write. He signed the parchment with a steady hand, then gave it to Don Carlos.

"But we must not die here," he said. "I ask you, my uncle, to turn back before it is too late."

The friendliness went out of the older man's manner, and now his face darkened with quick rage. "I ask no sniveling boy for advice," he all but shouted.

And Miguel then knew for a certainty that Don Carlos had no real doubts about the existence of a golden city called Quivira.

THAT night Miguel nearly died. He awoke and was suffocating. Some heavy cloth had been thrown over his face; it was his own velvet cassock. The cassock was held in place, to smother his breath and his voice, by strong hands that were also closed hard about his throat. Terror gripped his mind, and for an instant he could not fight back. Blackness seeped into his brain. His lungs seemed ready to burst for want of air. But then he managed to get a dagger from its sheath and into his hand. He raised the weapon and struck blindly. The blade struck against his assailant's breastplate, and slid off. He thrust again and again, trying to strike flesh. He was squirming, fighting, now with a wildness. Then the throttling hands left his throat. The

weight of his attacker was lifted from his weakening body.

Miguel lay gasping, still feebly striking out with the dagger. But his attacker was gone, and he was safe . . . at the very moment when he would have lost consciousness. He was too shaken in his mind to throw the smothering cassock from his face, but now that the choking pressure was gone he could get enough air even through the heavy cloth. His throat ached, was swollen thick, and there was a numbness all through him.

Finally some of the weakness left him. He flung aside the cassock. He sucked in great gulps of air. He saw the night sky, the stars. He pushed himself up on his elbows and looked about. The camp seemed asleep in its entirety. No lurking figure moved about in flight. Men lay sprawled, unmoving. Miguel looked toward where Don Carlos slept . . . His uncle lay nearest him, not more than ten paces off; but Miguel could hear the rattly snore of Don Carlos' breathing, and it seemed that he must be asleep. Yet someone had tried to murder him; Miguel had only to feel of his throat to know that it had not been a mere nightmare.

He rose, reaching for his waterbag. He drank and his mind seemed to clear. He stood thinking, knowing . . . It had been Don Carlos. The soldiers had nothing against him, so they had no reason to want him dead. But that document he had signed and given to Don Carlos! It was reason enough for murder, to a greed-mad man. Despair, if not hatred, filled the heart of Miguel. He moved toward his uncle, the dagger still in his hand. He stood over Don Carlos, a wild desire to kill in him—a urgent need to get back that document gripping him.

But Miguel hesitated. He could not

kill Don Carlos!

He shuddered and went back to his bed-place, but he did not close his eyes in sleep during the remainder of the night.

THE sun climbed into the brassy sky. Against the desert's distant rim, a heat haze shimmered in constant waves. The pathetic column moved on, heading northward once more, driven by Don Carlos' mocking voice. The morning ration of water had been parcelled out; so much for Don Carlos, a little less to Don Miguel Cordova, a smaller amount to each foot soldier, and even less to the Indians. Tana, the fool, had taken his in an earthenware bowl and then had deliberately spilled it to the dust. He had grinned wolfishly at the watching white men, had mocked them. "*Agua,*" he had said. "Water—end of day's march."

Miguel thought of that as he rode along behind Don Carlos. It had been a crazy thing, throwing away water that was worth all the gold that was supposed to be at Quivira. Or was it crazy? wondered Miguel. It might be that Tana was merely baiting the Spaniards on.

Miguel's horse was dying under him. Miguel himself was in bad shape, perhaps out of the fear forced upon him by last night's attempt upon his life. His throat still hurt, proof enough of how close a call it had been. He watched his uncle, sought guilt in the man, but Don Carlos was not a person to reveal his hidden thoughts. Even now, Don Carlos said, "Miguel, you are silent this day? Has the desert sickness gotten you?"

They rode side by side, the failing horses slowed to an uncertain walk. Miguel said, "I was nearly murdered in my sleep in the night."

"Murdered?" said Don Carlos, and swore a round oath. "My nephew set upon by a murderer? Who was the blackguard? Name him, Miguel, and I will cut his heart out!"

Miguel had hoped to startle the older man into some sign of guilt. But Don Carlos was a fox as well as a lion, and, as Miguel made no answer, he said, "One of the natives, I swear!"

Miguel's horse stopped, quivering in every muscle. Its eyes had a wild look. Miguel dismounted, and none too soon. The animal collapsed, a victim of its thirst. Miguel removed the waterbag from the saddle, and there was nothing more to salvage. He looked up and found Don Carlos watching him with a thin smile. "Ah, well," said the older man, "you are young and strong."

Tana too had stopped to watch. His eyes were malignant.

Miguel learned the agony of being afoot on the endless desert. He removed the steel greaves from his legs, threw them away . . . and later relieved himself of the weight of his breastplate. His helmet he retained as protection against the sun; he kept too his sword and his dagger, for a soldier must not abandon his arms.

The sun climbed overhead, began the descent westward. The partol lost two more of its men; they fell and the scant portion of water that could be afforded them was no help at all. The survivors complained with despairing mutters, but Don Carlos was too much their master for mutiny to flare. The madness continued, and now there seemed no escape at all. To turn back meant death, for now even that chance was gone.

THE sun arced downward, a fiery red ball at the desert's rim. Don Carlos called a halt. He was by some miracle still mounted, and the man

showed little strain. But then Don Carlos had had the lion's share of the precious water. He called up two of the arquebusiers and ordered them to lay down their firearms. He pointed to Tana.

"Seize the heathen," he ordered.

The Indian guide was roughly seized, and Don Carlos said, "Stake him out."

The order was quickly obeyed, and the Indian soon lay spread-eagled and helpless on the ground. A fire of brush was built up, a knife blade heated to a glowing red. Dismounted now, Don Carlos received the blade and walked to the Indian. This was a game a conquistador really understood!

"A liar and a fool are one," said Don Carlos. "Heathen, you will talk. You will tell us how to reach Quivira!"

"*Mañana*," said Tana.

"No, not tomorrow, heathen. Now —"

Miguel had to turn away. He heard the Indian's wild scream. His nostrils caught the odor of burning flesh. He was sickened, and his whole nature revolted. It went on and on until Miguel could stand no more. He swung around, shouting, "Enough, Don Carlos. I, for one, can stand no more!"

Don Carlos looked up. "Ah? You cross me, nephew?"

"You are the fool!" Miguel said wildly. "You should know there is no place like this Quivira. This Indian for some secret reason hates us Spaniards—perhaps for some wrong done him or his people. He has lied, but he is no fool. He has baited us into this devil's den, and now we are lost—just as he wanted. But I will have no more of this madness!"

"Mutiny!" said Don Carlos, rising.

He flung away the torture knife. He was smiling with some evil thought, as though this was a thing he found to his liking. And to Miguel it was sud-

denly very clear; Don Carlos had failed to murder him in the night, but now he had his victim in an even better trap. Don Carlos would never find the golden city of Quivira, but he was hoping to escape from the desert—to return to Spain and claim for himself the rich Cordova estate. He would have Miguel die, here, now. It was a thought alive in the glittering black eyes.

"Seize this mutineer," ordered Don Carlos.

The haggard, dull-eyed soldiers stared and were unmoving. A kindness occasionally given now repaid Don Miguel Cordova. Don Carlos saw that here was more mutiny, and he swore with a great blasphemy. He drew his great sword with a flourish.

"Be my witnesses," he said. "I punish a mutineer!"

He lunged at Miguel, whose armor had that day been discarded. Miguel dodged the first deadly blow, then drew his own sword. The naked blades glinted dully in the fading light. The two men fought with savage strokes, with lightning thrusts. Don Carlos drew first blood, a stab to Miguel's left arm. The soldiers made way for them. The Indian stared with dull fascination. The tortured Tana forgot his own pain to strain in his bounds and watch. Miguel's blade glanced off Don Carlos' armor. He was beaten back and back. But he could move more quickly. And now he swung a great stroke. The blades clashed, and Don Carlos' weapon was knocked from his hand. Miguel held his point to his uncle's throat.

"I SHOULD kill you," he said, gasping for breath. "But I let you live because you are of my own blood. You will harken, Don Carlos—I am taking command. We shall forget Quivira, and try to find our way out of

this death trap. Mutiny? Well enough. I shall stand before Coronado, if we live."

He turned from Don Carlos, and had his slight arm wound bandaged by one of the soldiers. Then he went to Tana. "Mateo," he ordered, "release this poor devil."

He could see that the Indian was dying. Don Carlos' torture had not loosened a tongue but it had taken a life. A sip of water was given to Tana, and then he talked to the Indian bearers. He talked long, and the others nodded. Finally Tana turned his dulling eyes toward Miguel.

"It is good to find one a man with a clean heart among the Spaniards," he said in his awkward Spanish. His voice was weak, a mere whisper. "I have told my people to take you out of the desert, amigo. Water is not so far. You will be safe—" A shudder swept over him. Then: "There is no Quivira. . . ."

Miguel rose from kneeling beside the dying Indian. Then he heard the soldier Mateo cry out some warning. He turned and saw Don Carlos lunging at him, almost on him, a dagger striking down. Fear clutched at Miguel. He tried to jump backward, but he tripped and fell. Don Carlos bent over him, his black eyes full of a look of triumph. But the knife blade missed Miguel's throat by a scant margin. A crossbow had twanged. An arrow drove through the neck of Don Carlos. The don fell. He died hard. . . .

THE sun was gone. A purplish haze lay over the desert. The Indian bearers were already setting out, to lead the way to water as Tana had ordered them. Two shallow graves had been opened, and were now filled in. Rocks were gathered. A cairn was raised. The small, pathetic band of conquistadors

stood by the burying-place. The cross-bowman, Mateo, was pale and shaken. He had killed a Spanish don, one of Coronado's captains, and that meant punishment.

Miguel read Mateo's unspoken fears. He stooped and picked the arrow which had been withdrawn from the dead man's neck. He snapped it in two

across his knee. He threw the broken pieces to the dust.

"Don Carlos de Hernandez died," he said, "of the desert sickness."

He turned and walked after the Indians, followed by his sorry band. And what would tell, if men did not, the secrets of the trail to Quivira?

THE END

FEMALE BLUEBEARD

(Continued from page 62)

Belle's ad from Elbow Lake, Minnesota. With him was the tidy sum of one thousand dollars to be used to pay off the mortgage on his intended farm. For almost a week he was seen about the house. Then one day he wasn't there. John Moo has never been seen since.

George Anderson was the next to arrive, and like both Peter Gunness and John Moo was a Norwegian by birth. Demonstrating a certain well-placed wariness of the "kind and honest" widow, Anderson did not bring much money with him to Belle's place. Attracted by Belle's description of herself in one of the marriage papers, Anderson made the trip to LaPorte with the intention of matrimony. After the usual amenities, George was seriously considering returning home to get what might be termed the entrance fee and then marrying the woman, but something occurred to make him throw aside these plans. During his stay at the farm he awoke in the night and broke out in a cold sweat at finding himself meeting the gaze of Belle who had been peering intently into his face, a lighted candle in her hand. What she intended to do, if anything, George never found out. With a yell he leaped out of bed, into his clothes, and out the door as fast as he could go. At the railroad depot, the frightened Mr. Anderson hopped the first train for his home town.

In the next few months Ray Lamphere was hired to help out on the farm. It was about this time that young Jennie Olson took a trip to California, as Belle explained to the neighbors. Jennie was never seen after that midsummer of 1906.

The Gunness farm began to assume an aura of mystery. Hack drivers in La Porte told of delivering trunks at night. The neighbors noted Belle kept the shutters on her house tightly drawn both day and night. Farmers going by late at night often saw Belle herself on the prowl, around her barn or in a small yard some fifty by seventy-five feet which she had recently enclosed with an eight-foot fence of stout and fine wire mesh.

The cellar of the house was always kept locked except during the hog butchering season. At

these times a stray neighbor or two had happened to call when Belle was in the cellar, her sleeves rolled up, wielding a knife and cleaver with unusual skill. All around the room lay implements of the butchering profession.

The stream of suitors continued in 1907 and 1908. Ole Budsberg arrived with \$2,000 in his pocket and Andrew K. Helgelein with \$3,000 and neither has ever been seen since. Belle's smooth plans seemed to be clicking in good order, that is, until she and Lamphere had a disagreement. He, like many another poor man, had fallen in love with her. Jealousy had made him pack up his belongings and leave. In LaPorte he told friends that Belle owed him back wages. He intimated that he knew enough about Belle to make her pay him not only his wages but to keep his mouth shut, too.

Lamphere's talking must have frightened Belle. She had him arrested on complaint that he was insane and a menace to the public. Found sane by the court, he was promptly released. And then trouble came from another quarter. A letter arrived from Mr. Asle Helgelein wanting to know what had become of his brother, Andrew.

Belle Gunness was worried. She told an attorney in LaPorte that she was mortally in fear of Roy Lamphere, the ex-hired man. She said he had threatened to kill her and promised to burn her house down. With these threats hanging over her she wanted to make out her will. There was nothing out of order about the will. It left her estate to her three children. In case the children did not survive her, the estate was to go to a Norwegian orphanage in Chicago.

On the day following the signing of the will, farmers on the McClung Road saw the Gunness home in flames. It burned to the ground. Only the hired man, Joe Maxon, escaped, and he said he barely made it. Noise of the flames licking at his room had awakened him, he said, and he jumped out his second-story window in his underwear. He vowed that just before jumping he had shouted loudly to wake Mrs. Gunness and the children but had received no reply. They had been in the house when he went to bed.

When the embers had cooled slightly, searchers found four bodies. Three were readily identified as those of Belle's daughters, and of Philip Gunness, her son. The other corpse was the headless body of a woman. All four were found on a

mattress in the cellar. On top of them were the charred remains of Belle's fine upright piano.

The first move made by the sheriff was to arrest Roy Lamphere. A neighbor's boy claimed he had seen Lamphere running from the Gunness place just before the flames were noticed. Lamphere was indicted for murder; and a charge of arson was left hanging over him, just in case the other charge wasn't sufficient. The victim named in the murder charge was Mrs. Gunness. But soon people began to wonder whether the headless body belonged to Mrs. Gunness.

Those who had seen her, talked with her, and did business with her, were quick to state that the body was too small to be that of Belle Gunness. Physicians measured the charred remains of the headless woman. Making proper allowances for the missing head and neck, they concluded that the corpse was that of a woman five feet three inches tall weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds. Belle, as those who knew her agreed, had not been a hair under five feet seven and weighed at least 180 pounds if not more.

Clerks in the town who had sold Mrs. Gunness various articles of wearing apparel were interviewed, and they were able to furnish valuable information as to her clothing sizes. These figures were compared with measurements made by the examining physicians. The two sets of figures indicated that the body found in the cellar must be that of someone other than Belle.

While the baffled authorities busied themselves in the hunt for the head or the skull of the corpse, Asle Helgelein appeared on the scene. He was the brother of Andrew and had come in search of him. He told the sheriff of his fears that Andrew had somehow been done in by this woman he had come to marry.

A very thorough inspection of the grounds followed. The diggers went to work in the high-fenced yard. Under the soft earth they came upon rubbish of every sort. Among the disorder of old cans and bottles lay an innocent looking sack. Andrew's remains were found inside, hacked up but still in a recognizable condition. Before sun-down that same day, four more bodies were unearthed. One of these was identified as Jennie Olson, the girl who had gone to California. After the third day of digging in the yard, a total of ten bodies were found. So many bodies and unrelated parts of skeletons were found that it was hard to estimate just how many people had met their end at the Gunness farm.

A rumor grew and spread in LaPorte.

Dr. Ira P. Norton, a LaPorte dentist, recalled that he had done some dental work for the "late" Mrs. Gunness, work which he could easily identify if found. The problem at this point of the investigation was how to sift the ashes and debris of a large house and find a few small teeth. Louis Schultz, a public-spirited citizen of the town, heard of the quandary and went to

the officers with a suggestion. He offered to put all his talents, acquired in the Yukon as a gold miner, at their disposal. With some lumber he could build a regular gold-mine sluice box right on Belle's place. The Schultz offer was readily accepted. The sluice was built in Belle's front yard; water was piped from the barn, and Louis went to work on the strangest mining job of his career.

Thousands gathered to cheer him on as he shoveled tons of debris and washed it down over the riffles. Newspaper photographers flocked to the scene. Bets were made on the outcome. Chicago bookies formed pools on the day and hour Louis would strike "pay dirt." On May 19, after four days of hard work, Louis came upon the piece of dental bridgework he had been looking for. Dr. Norton examined it carefully and positively identified the piece as the work he had done for Mrs. Gunness.

Ray Lamphere, the ex-farm hand, went on trial in LaPorte for the murder. Acquitted on that charge, he was tried for arson and convicted. Obviously the jury did not believe Mrs. Gunness was dead. Confined in a prison in Michigan City, Lamphere told what he knew to his cellmate, Myers. In 1909 when Lamphere died, Myers repeated the story to prison officials.

Highlights of the account were that despite the evidence of the dental work, the body was that of a woman Belle had lured from Illinois on the promise of housework, then killed and beheaded to prevent proper identification. The head had been destroyed in quicklime. Lamphere claimed that Belle had killed the four children one after another, then piled the bodies on the mattress after dressing the woman's corpse in some of her own clothes.

Lamphere was sure that Belle had done away with at least forty-two men getting large amounts of cash varying from \$1,000 to \$32,000 from each. Usually she first drugged their coffee, then bashed in their heads while they were in a stupor. She then dissected the bodies on the big table in the cellar, tied the parts into neat bundles, and buried them in the locked yard. Occasionally she put the bodies into the hog-scalding vat and added generous amounts of quick-lime.

Lamphere admitted to Myers that he had helped Belle bury several bodies, but denied he ever had a part in the actual killing. Although Lamphere was convinced Belle did not die in the fire, the police have not ever caught up with her. Many people around LaPorte believe she is still roving in a distant part of the world.

The legend of this Female Bluebeard still lives on and has become a permanent part of the folklore of that region of Indiana. A song is still sung about her which begins like this:

"Belle Gunness lived in Indi-an;
She always, always had a man;
Ten at least went in her door—
And were never, never seen no more."

* * *



The men hurtled through the air under the terrific impact of the explosion

"CONVINCE ME", I SAID

by Craig Ellis

WE WERE sitting in the shade, leaning against a building and looking out across the waters of the Tompkinsville Navy Yard to a ferry that was coming to Staten Island from Manhattan. We weren't talking much because it was too hot to talk. It was almost too hot to live on a day like that.

A one-and-a-half striper came walking down the dock to some PC's that were tied up near us. I'd seen him before and knew he was the skipper of

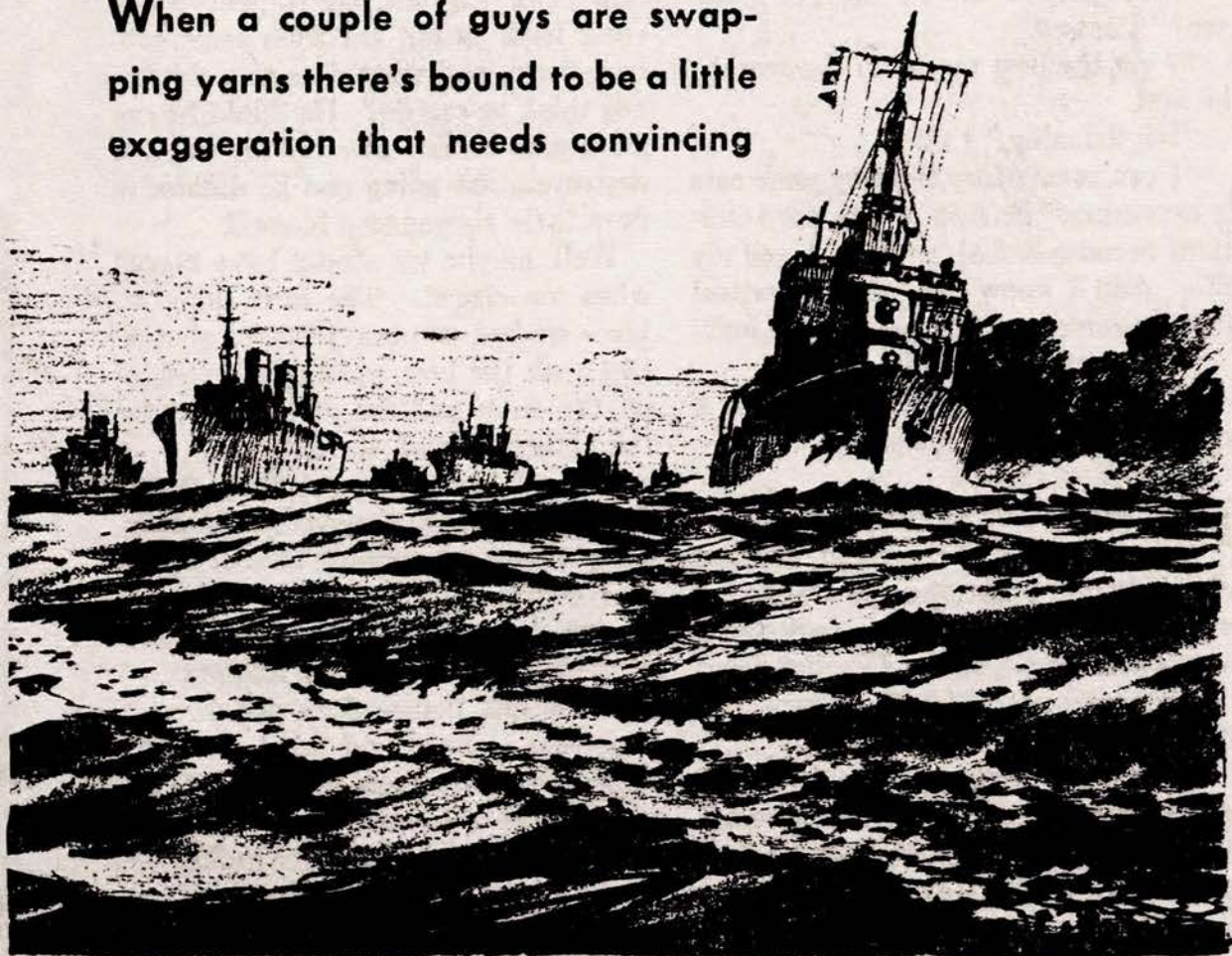
the nearest of those PC's. I watched him go aboard, the way he turned aft to flick a salute to the ensign, and he'd taken no more than three steps on deck when a rating came over and hauled down that repeater they fly to show the skipper's ashore. I felt sorry for that rating having to get up in that heat and pull a flag down and for what?

"For what?" I asked this guy who was with me.

"*What* for what?" he asked me.

"That poor guy," I told him.

When a couple of guys are swapping yarns there's bound to be a little exaggeration that needs convincing



"Stretched out having a fine time until his old man showed up. Makes me glad I'm station duty."

"What are you talking about?" he asked me.

"Tradition," I said. "Tradition in this man's navy. Now why should they haul the repeater up and down all day just to show the old man's gone for an ice cream cone or he's playing gin in the wardroom? For what? Even them little PC's. They got so much tradition stowed aboard it's a wonder it don't drag 'em down to the bottom."

"You're against traditions?" he asked me.

"Not all of 'em," I said. "Not pay-day and liberty. But you can have the rest of them. What are you making faces for?"

"I'm for 'em," he said. "All of 'em."

"You just for 'em or you got a reason?" I asked.

"I got the best reason in the world," he said.

"I'm listening," I said.

"I can see that by the way your ears is quivering," he said. "I'm for traditions because one of 'em once saved my life. And I know two more guys feel just the same way for the same reason."

"Convince me," I said.

"Sure," he said, and he told me a story.

FOR reasons of security, he said, I will not identify the exact location of this action I am about to relate. I will merely indicate that it took place somewhere between the Carolines and the Solomons, west of both of them, and at that time deep in Jap waters.

We were a little convoy trying to sneak through to one of our advance bases. We had a few four-stacker destroyers and a light cruiser to protect maybe twenty freighters. I was just a few weeks out of boot camp and I was

aboard one of those freighters, part of a seven-man gun crew.

The gun we had would've sunk our ship if we'd ever got to fire it. I figured we'd captured it from the British in the war of 1812 and it still wasn't friendly to Americans. Anyway, in those days we didn't have to know much. They taught us only three commands: Ready, Aim, and Abandon Ship. It was a rugged life.

It got more rugged pretty fast. Our fourth day out, just before sundown, a flight of twenty-one Jap bombers spotted us. The next thing we knew they started coming down. The convoy scattered and it was every ship for itself. The destroyers started zig-zagging and they had the speed to make it work, but this tub I was on could do maybe seven knots running downhill. She had an old skipper who'd come back to the sea from some cabbage farm, and what does this old sea-dog think he can do? He thinks he can learn new tricks. He sees the way the destroyers are going and he decides to do a little zig-zaggery himself.

Well, maybe we should have zagged when we zigged. The next thing we knew we had two heavy bombs aboard. One took the bow and the other sliced off the stern and the middle went for the bottom like an anchor.

When I looked around again, I was floating. A few hundred yards away I saw two guys climbing aboard a raft, so I decided to pay them a visit even though they weren't Navy, but a couple of deck hands from this freighter. I made it just before dark and there I was, safe in body and mind, but very lonely except for these two guys. What was left of the convoy scattered and was out of sight before I got to the raft. There wasn't even smoke on the horizon in an hour. If the destroyers came back later to hunt for survivors, they never

came out our way. We were orphans right from the start.

And we stayed orphans. We had some food and water aboard and some gadgets like fishing tackle and flashlights and we figured we'd be picked up pretty soon. But we weren't picked up. The days went by and the raft went wherever it wanted to go. Sometimes it went so fast it looked like it had an appointment some place, and after the first week we didn't any of us know what ocean we were in.

It kept getting worse. These two guys with me hadn't ever shipped out before and they didn't even know the sea was salty. We ran into some rough weather one night and most of our food went overboard because I trusted them to make the stuff fast, and fast was the way it disappeared. What was left didn't last much longer and then the water gave out.

IT WAS desperate, I mean to say. We had some poles aboard they wanted to use for oars, if they knew where to go and cared to row five hundred miles, and I used those poles to knock down an albatross and once we stunned a little shark and ate its belly while the tail was still kicking. About every fourth or fifth night there'd be a squall and we'd catch rain water in our shirts and pour it into the cans we had. And every day that South Pacific sun would rise and bake us crisp before noon, and every night we'd shake with chills and fever.

We had blisters the size of coffee cups all over our bodies and barnacles started growing in our beards. Then, the fourth week we were out we had another blow and the raft started breaking up and we kept it together by using our clothes for line.

The fifth week was the hungriest, and that was when these two guys

started to break up worse than the raft. I hardly got any sleep at first because I was afraid of the skinny one. He used to look at me all day and ask me how much I weighed. After awhile I figured I was safe because I didn't weigh enough any more. So I slept a little until the other one tried to slide overboard, and after that I had to watch him pretty close.

When the sixth week started I finally got ready to tell myself I wasn't going to get saved. I might have dived over myself but I didn't have the strength to stand up and I didn't like the idea of just rolling off. After that I lost track of the days and nights, and when I could think a little I tried to figure out just where we might be, just for the sake of thinking about something. I knew we were finished but I wanted to know where. They'd taught me a little something about stars in the Boy Scouts and I'd try to work them out, but every time I looked at the big dipper I'd think how nice it would be if it was full of beef stew, and it almost drove me crazy.

Then came the day we spotted the sub. It was late afternoon and I saw it laying way off against the horizon, running due south on the surface and heading towards us at an angle. I'd learned my lessons and I knew from its silhouette that it was an American sub, and a big one at that.

The closer it came, the crazier we went. We were half blind from the sun and more than half deaf from the sea pounding our raft, but we were sure they'd spotted us and we thought we'd heard the guy in the conning tower yelling at us.

It was that close when it submerged. That's what it did. It submerged when it was no more than a mile or so away, and that was the last we saw of it. Did I say we'd gone crazy just seeing it? You can imagine how it was with

us when that sub just nosed under and vanished. At first we thought it would come back, that it had ducked under for a good reason, but when it started to get dark and that sub still hadn't showed up again, we knew what the score was. It hadn't seen or heard us, and it had been close enough to have smelled us.

SO THERE it was, the end. Finished.

I lay on my back and looked at the stars and wondered if I would be alive the next morning. I was crying like a baby half the time and cursing myself for having asked for the Navy when I went for induction, the rest of the time. The Navy, I kept yelling, the blankety-blank Navy with its blankety-blank sea and its blankety-blank tradition and chicory in the java and thirteen buttons on the pants and piping the admiral aboard. I really spoke my mind that night, what I mean.

And then it hit me—the big idea, I mean. Why had that sub gone under? Why in the blankety-blank-blank had it picked just that time to go under? There was only one answer I could figure out. It was based on a Navy tradition about subs. The tradition was that no sub crossed the equator on the surface!

You hear that? You understand what I'm saying? I figured that sub had submerged because of the Navy tradition about submerging when it crossed the equator. And that meant that we were sitting right smack on the equator. I kept looking up at the stars and thinking about the equator and suddenly I let out a yell that was louder than any of the yells I'd let out that day, and some of 'em had been loud enough to kill fish in a radius of half a mile.

I figured I knew where we were, by looking at the stars and placing us at the equator. I got on my knees and shook those two guys with me and

yelled at them until they understood what I was saying. I was telling them I'd figured out a group of islands we were near, and I grabbed one of those poles and used the flat ends for oars and made them take the others.

And then we rowed. I don't know how fast we rowed but we had a wake, and I don't know how far we rowed, but by morning we saw land. We hadn't had the strength to raise our eyelids the night before, but hope is what did for us, and prayer didn't hinder any, I guess. When I said I knew there was land just ahead, they didn't know enough not to believe me, and that's what saved us.

"SO DON'T go knocking down tradition when I'm around," he said to me. "There's a bona fide case where tradition saved three lives."

I shook my head and made a clicking noise with my teeth and I asked, "And it was really land—American land?"

"Nah," he said. "It was just a lost little island nobody cared about, but it had trees and coconuts and birds and turtles and we lived there six weeks more before a Catalina spotted up and took us off."

"If it was a lost island," I said, "how did you know about it?"

"I didn't," he said. "I was crazy. I went so nuts when that sub disappeared I just couldn't think straight anymore, but I didn't know that. I really thought I could navigate lying on my back on a raft and reading the stars. But if it hadn't been for that sub, I'd never have thought of the tradition and I'd never have thought we were at the equator and I'd never have made them row. We'd be fish-food in the fifteenth generation by now."

"But," I said, "if it wasn't for tradition that sub wouldn't have submerged and you'd have been saved right then

and there, without that wild piece of luck."

"Nah," he said. "We found out about that later. When we told our story to Naval Intelligence, they checked their subs and the place we'd been at and the time. We weren't anywhere near the equator, not any nearer than two hundred miles."

"What?" I said. "Then what made that sub submerge just then?"

"They told us that later," he said, "after they checked. It seems they'd

spotted three Jap planes way up and they crash-dived before the planes could come down to take a poke at the sub. We were so blind and so deaf we never even knew those Jap planes were around."

I tried to say something but I couldn't make it.

"So don't go knocking tradition to me," he said. "I'm the living proof of the value of tradition. Got anything to say now?"

"You convinced me," I said.



NEPTUNE'S MAIDENS



CHIEF among the legends which originated about the sea is that of the glamorous maidens of the briny deep and their male counterparts, the Mermaids and Mermen. These creatures are prominently featured in prose and poetry and in the folklore of many lands. The crews of the old sailing ships firmly believed in their existence.

One of the first experiences a man is supposed to have had with one of these lovely women of the seas is told by Alexander ab Alexandro. While his friend Gaza was travelling in the Morea, a live mermaid was cast on the shore. She looked very much like her sisters on dry land, possessed a beautiful face and a well-proportioned body—as far as it went. Towards the waist the scales began and instead of legs she had a fish's tail. A great crowd gathered around her, so frightening her that she burst into tears. Gaza, who was a considerate man, remonstrated with the spectators and requested them to stand to one side. As soon as an opening was made, the mermaid scrambled back to the sea using her fins and tail for locomotion. Plunging in head first, she disappeared from sight and was never seen again.

From the folklore of sea-faring peoples such as the Danes and the Norwegians there are tales of Mermen, sea-cows, sea-horses, sea-dogs, and an entire civilization in the hidden depths of the ocean.

In one of the early dictionaries, Jablonsky's *Universal Dictionary*, the Merman is discussed to great length. He is regarded as a real being.

"Merman is a sea-man, a fish found in the seas and in some rivers in the southern parts of Africa and India, in the Philippine Islands, Moluccas, Brazil, North America, and Europe. The length is eight spans; the head oval, and the face resembling that of a man. It has a high forehead, little eyes, a flat nose and a large mouth, but no ears or chin. It has two arms which are short, without joints or elbows, but with hands or paws, to each of which there are four long fingers connected with each other by a membrane, like the

foot of a goose. The females have breasts, at which they suckle their young; so that the upper part of their body resembles that of a human species, and the lower part that of a fish. They make a lamentable cry when drawn out of the water."

In the 18th century several people claimed to have set eyes on these elusive creatures of the sea. In 1723 four Danes testified before a court of law that they had seen a Merman. To them he appeared to be an old man.

In June of 1762 a French newspaper told of the experiences of two girls on the island of Noirmoutier, off the coast of La Vendée. They had been spending the afternoon searching for shells in the crevices of rocks when they discovered in a kind of natural grotto an animal of human form leaning on its hands. One of the girls had a long knife. Within a moment she had thrust the blade into the animal which uttered a groan like a human person. The two girls cut off its hands which had fingers and nails as well as webs between the fingers. The surgeon of the island who went to see it, says it was as big as a full-grown man, and that its skin resembled that of a drowned person. The chin was adorned with a kind of beard formed of fine shells, and over the whole body there were tufts of similar shells. It had the tail of a fish—and at the end of the tail a projection which resembled feet.

In 1775 a Mermaid was exhibited in London causing much excitement. Edmund Burke, the famous philosopher was among those who went to see it, and he believed in it. Nevertheless, it was later proved to be a fake made from the skin of angelshark. The exhibitor, was punished for the hoax. A clever American exhibited a similar curiosity not many years ago. His was made up of a monkey's skin sewed on to that of a seal. Today there are no living examples of either Mermaid or Merman. Scientists deny they ever existed, and yet the legend lives on.

—A. Morris.

* * *

THE CRAZY INDIAN

by William G. Bogart

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning—especially a morning that promises to be a hot summer's day—that part of Manhattan Island located at the lower end of New York's financial district is pretty much deserted. The nation's great financial wizards just don't get up that early.

In fact, the district was somewhat below the end of Number One Broadway, which made it the Battery, the very southernmost end of the stony rock pile bought for a few dollars from some Indians. The sudden change in the neighborhood, as you emerged from Broadway into the Battery, was some-

what startling.

There was a park. Bums still slept on paper-covered benches. More papers littered the grass, and a few more disreputable-looking characters slept there. One old fellow sat up and sleepily scratched his head, looking around for his shoes.

Buildings of assorted sizes and ages faced Battery Park. Beyond was the choppy sweep of the Harbor. Some energetic little tugboats scurried up and down, the first indication of activity for that particular day.

Therefore no one noticed the Indian. Not that New Yorkers would have paid



On the streets of New York
you see a lot of strange sights
so an Indian would seem to be
a natural thing—maybe . . .



With hair flying in the wind, she lashed out with her weapon

the Indian any undue attention. You see just about anything cockeyed in Manhattan. It is said that strangers travel to New York to study the natives of that city, rather than the other way around.

Also, the Indian wasn't dressed like an Indian is usually dressed.

He wore plain store variety clothes. He was hatless, and his black straight hair gleamed in the early morning sunlight. He was about the tallest Indian imaginable. His skin was the color of well-cured leather, and his eyes were cold black.

For the past hour the Indian had been making regular trips, at exact ten-minute intervals, to the building across from the east side of the park. The building was still locked, and the Indian sat there on the one deserted park bench, a straight ramrod of a figure, and watched the doorway of the dilapidated office building.

The structure was in sharp contrast to the imposing buildings that started at Number One Broadway. It was ancient. The grandchildren of countless generations of pigeons used it for a nightly roost. Bronze work on the entrance doors was green with age.

Finally, near nine o'clock, a man in overalls unlocked the front doors and propped them open with a wedge. The fellow disappeared into the cavernous interior of the place again.

Instantly the tall, wide-shouldered Indian was on his feet. He quickly crossed the street and, sharp black eyes first searching right and left along the street, he dived into the doorway as if a coyote was after him.

HE FOUND the directory on the lobby wall. There were only six floors, and on two of these were no tenants listed at all. Which gives you some idea of what people thought of the

building address.

Obviously the Indian could read. He noted the name listed for the fifth floor. It was the only tenant on that floor. The directory said: ADVENTURERS, INC.

The Indian made a satisfied grunting sound in his throat and turned away. He saw the elevator cage nearby. It was the old-fashioned type visible through open grillwork. The man in overalls sat on a stool inside the cab, reading the morning newspaper.

The Indian was just turning away from the directory when sharp heels *tap-tap-tapped* along the marble hall. Ancient dusty walls threw back the sound as though resentful of the intrusion.

It was a girl, a tall, a straight-shouldered girl in a gabardine skirt and sweater. Both fitted nicely in the places where they were supposed to be filled out.

The girl paused a moment, adjusting her eyes to the dimness inside the lobby. The sudden change from bright sunlight had left her partially blinded.

The Indian saw this. He took advantage of it, pressing farther back into the corridor, flat against the wall, almost as if he were scared to death about something. If the girl had come directly to the bulletin board she would have seen him standing rigidly there. Instead, she moved directly to the elevator and stepped inside.

"All right," she said impatiently. "Let's get up to the fifth floor . . . Adventurers, Incorporated."

"It's the heat," the elevator operator—he was well over fifty and kindly mannered—said to the girl. "Makes people restless and fidgety. A pretty girl like you shouldn't let it get you. I always say—"

"Please!" the girl said.

"All right, all right, miss."

The elevator operator started to close the gate, peered through the diamond-shaped openings at the Indian back there in the gloom. He had seen the man come in, but had not recognized him as an Indian.

"Where do you want, mister?" he called out.

The tall black-eyed Indian took out of there as if released by a spring. He streaked toward the front doors.

The girl saw him. She stared. Then she yelled, "Mike!"

Pushing past the elevator operator she dashed into the hallway and started pursuit. "Mike!" she called again. "Mike, wait!"

SUNLIGHT struck the coppery red of her lovely hair as she reached the sidewalk. The Indian had just turned the nearby corner. She dashed that way—and almost collided with a patrolman who was just crossing the street.

She clutched the officer's arm, gave the arm a shake, and said worriedly, "Catch him. Hurry!"

The patrolman had seen the tall, dark-skinned man turn the corner. He had not noticed that the man was an Indian, or a frightened one. He was a young, long-legged cop with a good jaw. The jaw pushed forward with determination as he looked at the attractive red-haired girl.

"You bet I'll catch him for you!" promised the patrolman.

He plunged up Broadway, his whistle sounding as he ran. His long legs gobbled up distance.

The girl saw him turn down a side street. Apparently the Indian had disappeared in that direction. She waited, tapping a foot, an uneasiness in her clear gray-green eyes.

Ten minutes passed. Finally the lanky patrolman returned. He was breathing hard. His face was flushed.

"Where's Mike?" the girl demanded.

"If you mean that guy I was chasing for you," said the cop grimly, "he's gone. Like the wind! My God, I never saw anyone run as fast as him!"

"Don't be silly!" snapped the red-head.

The young patrolman rocked back on his heels. He looked at her curiously.

"Come again?" he prompted.

"I said, don't be silly. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a young man like you!"

The cop frowned at her. For such a pretty girl, the young woman certainly had a fiery disposition. Maybe the red hair explained it.

"Mike—the fellow you were chasing," she went on, "is over one hundred years old. And you couldn't catch him!"

That tears it, thought the young officer. Whacky, she was!

"Now, look—" he started.

"Huh!" repeated the girl. "You ought to be ashamed."

She turned abruptly on her heel and hurried toward the old office building facing the Battery.

The patrolman stood there with his mouth open, staring after her slim, shapely, taut figure.

Naturally he couldn't see the change that had come into the redhaired girl's eyes. Anger had been quickly replaced by a troubled expression.

"Damn!" she murmured to herself as she swung into the cool, shadowy hallway of the old building. And then, again, "Damn!"

CHAPTER II

THE plane, sitting on a ramp at LaGuardia Field, gleamed like bright silver in the hot morning sunlight. Low-winged, sleek, it carried two engines and looked as if it were built for

unusual speed.

A ground crew fussed around it. The pre-flight check had already been made, yet the five men looked over the ship again.

The big plane was parked near the hangar of a private, charter air line well down the huge field. It appeared to be brand new.

Inside the plane, the fat man—the sole passenger—sat and fussed also. He was a round man—round chins, florid round face, a fringe of gray hair forming a round halo around his otherwise bald head. He mopped perspiration from his face, grunted as he raised up to stare out the window, sat back again and grunted with displeasure.

Forward in the large cabin, the door to the pilot's cockpit unlatched and the tall wiry man in uniform stepped into the cabin aisle. The pilot glanced at his watch and moved up the aisle toward the fat passenger.

"Benson should be here," he said.

"Dammit, yes!" said the fat man. "What's keeping him?"

The pilot shrugged his shoulders a little. "I can't imagine, Mr. Marsh. He told you ten o'clock, didn't he?"

"Yes. Then I phoned him and changed it to nine o'clock, as I told you a while ago. Now it *is* ten, and he isn't here yet. I haven't all day!"

"I'm sorry," murmured the tall pilot.

"A lot that helps. A fine way to handle a buyer for this ship! I have to be in Washington this afternoon."

"He ought to be here any minute."

"He'd better!"

The fat man was Jordon Marsh. It was said he had made his millions in the coffee business in South America. Then he'd become interested in politics. Money had bought him a high political position in Washington. He was an ambitious fat man. Money got him the things he wanted. His small, round,

dark sharp eyes told you he was a man who wouldn't be kept waiting. Patience was not one of his virtues.

"I'll turn on the air-conditioning," said the pilot, and he returned to the cockpit, latching the small connecting door behind him.

In the quiet of the empty cabin, Jordon Marsh could hear a faint, vague murmur of voices as the pilot conversed with the first officer of the flight, up there in the cockpit.

Footsteps sounded atop the portable steps at the rear doorway and a man in white jumpers entered the plane. He looked like one of the mechanics.

"Mr. Marsh?" he asked.

The fat man jerked his head impatiently. "Yes, yes?" he snorted.

"It looks like we'll have to make the flight without Benson. It won't make any difference."

"What do you mean, it won't make any difference?" demanded Jordon Marsh.

"Benson's tied up. Just phoned the field office. He says to take you up, see how you like the way the ship handles, the pressurization and so on at high altitudes, then if everything is satisfactory you can close the deal for the plane afterwards. He'll be here by the time we return."

"That's a hell of a way to treat a customer!" said the fat man.

"Sorry . . ." murmured the mechanic.

The fat man snorted.

The mechanic went to the doorway, said something, and the remaining four members of the ground crew came aboard. They each took a seat.

"The boys want to take the flight too," explained the mechanic. "They've never been up in this new job."

Without pausing to see if this was agreeable with Jordon Marsh or not, the mechanic slammed the door firmly and turned the latch. He went forward,

used a key to open the narrow door to the pilot's compartment, closed it behind him.

THE first motor was started. It sputtered a bit, then settled into a vibrant roar. The second followed. Power pulsed through the entire plane.

Shortly they taxied out to the end of a long runway. The pilot made his checkoff. The great engine roar shook the plane as the powerful motors were revved up.

"Noisy," commented the fat man sourly.

One of the ground crew said, "Reflection of sound against the earth. You lose that as soon as we get in the air."

Jordon Marsh grunted.

Brakes were released and the plane edged out onto the runway, awaiting the signal from the tower. A moment passed. Then they were taking off.

Jordon Marsh thrilled to the surge of power that held his huge frame back against the seat. He liked power in anything.

Shortly they were airborne. The big ship climbed smoothly and steadily. The thousands of homes and apartments in Queens, below them, shrank to matchbox size. They headed toward the lower end of Manhattan, crossing the East River.

The air-conditioning had cooled the interior of the cabin somewhat, nevertheless Jordon Marsh was still perspiring. He turned once, looking at those who accompanied him. The men were all silent, merely sitting there.

Fine company, he thought.

He sat gazing out the window as the ship continued to climb. It didn't level off, but kept going higher and higher. They were over New Jersey now. He knew the countryside below. It wasn't the first time he had flown.

Fifteen minutes passed. The earth

became a silent, unreal, miniature world far below them. Twice Jordon Marsh frowned as he gazed downward from the window.

Finally he remarked to one of the men behind him, "We're still heading west."

"That's right," agreed the member of the ground crew.

Marsh said, "The flight is only for a half hour. The orders were to merely circle over Manhattan. Why are we going straight west?"

"Guess," said the man nearest him.

"I don't like this!" rapped the fat man, and he got up and went toward the door at the front of the cabin. He tried the door, found it latched, pounded on the panel with a huge fist. While he waited, he turned and looked at the other passengers. For the first time, and with some uneasiness, he noted their blocky jaws and hard features. It occurred to him that they did not look like regular air line personnel.

The cockpit door opened. A stranger stood there in front of him, not the head pilot who had talked to him earlier. He was a thin, trim man with cool gray eyes.

"Well?" the stranger said.

"What is this?" demanded Jordon Marsh. "Why aren't we staying over New York?" He leaned over, glanced out a window again. "We're still going west."

"He doesn't like it," said one of the men behind him. The fellow gave a peculiar, brittle laugh.

"I think," suggested the man in the cockpit doorway, "you'd better get Mr. Marsh some warmer clothes out of the cargo compartment. It will be quite cold where we're going."

"Going where?" asked the fat man uneasily.

The man merely smiled.

"Now, look—" Jordon Marsh started,

and he moved grimly toward the seated man. "Somebody's going to explain this, and damn' quick!"

He seized the first man he came to by the collar, yanked him out of the seat. For all his size and fatness, Marsh was quick-moving and powerful.

A FIGHT got underway in the narrow passage. The other crew members joined in. The fat man's huge size was a disadvantage to them. He bowled men over with his size. His hamlike fists slugged out. Men cursed.

The man from the cockpit came down the aisle. "We can't have this," he was saying coolly. "A good thing I prepared for this trip. Here, you guys, hold him still. What the hell's the matter with you?"

Marsh struggled with four men at once. Even at that, he managed to jerk around and stare at the speaker. He saw the instrument that looked like a hypodermic needle in the thin, trim man's right hand. He saw the man's intention, and tried desperately to break loose and knock the instrument aside.

But now he was held rigidly. His coat sleeve and shirt beneath were yanked back and the long needle jabbed into his arm.

"Brother," said the thin, small man, "you got a long trip ahead and you'll need some rest. It'll do you good."

Everyone started to laugh.

The drowsiness flowed over the fat man swiftly. His knees started to sag. He was lowered into a seat, and the back of the seat was reclined so that they could stretch him out.

Shortly he slept.

One man had been fumbling through his own pockets. He swore. Next he searched in the cabin seats. After that he got down on his hands and knees and peered everywhere.

"What's got into you?" someone

asked.

"Lost it," said the searcher. He appeared worried.

"Lost what, pal?"

"The Indian thing!"

All eyes swung toward the man who made the statement. Someone prodded, "You sure?"

"I ain't kidding, chum."

Everyone started searching the cabin.

They all looked worried.

CHAPTER III

THE two men who waited just outside the fence that enclosed a walk bordering the airport were an unusual-looking pair.

One was a short, wiry, hard-bitten character with lively, bright-blue eyes. His homely face was tanned the color of oak. It was impossible to estimate his age. He could have been thirty or fifty. In turn, in his colorful career, he had been a tunnel sandhog, construction worker and prospector. There was not a corner of the world where he had not sought adventure.

They called him "Buzz" Casey, and he was tough.

Right now he was muttering, "The hell with it! Rush must have made a mistake in the time. Let's shove off and eat."

The tall, gaunt-looking man standing beside him frowned with annoyance. He said:

"The trouble with you is, runt, you got worms. Rush said to meet Jordon Marsh here, and we're going to meet him come hell or high water. Marsh is big money, you dope. Rush knew him once in South America. It must be something pretty good or Rush wouldn't chase us out here."

"Ha!" said Buzz Casey.

"Speak English," snapped the tall man with the gloomy face.

"Look," said the wiry little man. "We get here, see. Some mechanics tell us that new plane is due back here in a few minutes, see. Now it's an hour. And no plane . . . no Jordon Marsh, no nothing. I say, the hell with it. Let's eat."

Malcolm Dean—better known as the "Deacon"—continued to stare at his small partner as though the man were some kind of worm.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "it might be better if you weren't here when Marsh arrived. My God, where'd you buy that race tout's sport coat? You'd frighten off any client. And I've got a hunch this millionaire, Marsh, is a prospect. Rush said over the phone to be sure to meet him here."

"This coat cost me ten bucks on Sixth Avenue," snorted Buzz Casey.

"You'd better not wave it near a bull," warned his tall partner.

"Aw, shuddup!"

They continued to argue.

Clothes were one of the things they argued about, for the Deacon dressed as somberly as his nickname implied. Dark suit, black tie, black hat suited his gloomy features. No one would have ever surmised that he was a naval hero, explorer, holder of various degrees in science and engineering. Like his partner Buzz Casey, adventure had taken him to the faroff corners of the world.

The two men formed two-thirds of the unusual organization known as Adventurers, Inc.

ANOTHER fifteen minutes passed. The Deacon stood there with his long boney hands folded in front of him. For the past five minutes his thumbs had been chasing one another in a twirling movement as he kept his hands folded.

Buzz Casey watched the twirling thumbs and there was a twinkle in his

lively blue eyes. It was the one indication that the Deacon, his partner, was getting restless for action. You could always tell. When those thumbs started twirling, it paid to watch out. He did the same thing when he was spoiling for a good fight.

Abruptly the Deacon moved down the walk toward a gate. There was a sign that read: "No Admittance To Airfield." Ignoring it, the tall, gaunt man continued on to the field and approached a nearby hangar. Some men were standing there. They looked like mechanics.

Buzz Casey tagged along behind his partner.

The Deacon was talking to a field attendant when Casey caught up with him. The man was saying:

"Frankly, they don't know what to think. The plane was due back here an hour ago. They've tried to contact it by radio, with no results. Right now they're checking emergency landing fields in this area."

Apparently there was something wrong. The field attendants stood around in little groups, talking, their faces grim. Buzz Casey saw his partner slip the man a crisp, folded bill.

"What else?" the Deacon prodded.

"Well, I really shouldn't—" the attendant started. He looked at the bill. "A funny thing," he added.

"Yes?"

"No one has been able to check on the ground crew who serviced that plane," the attendant said, frowning. "The regular crew was due here on the field at ten o'clock, but through some change in plans the plane took off before that. And this other crew, apparently, was aboard. No one knows *who* they were. There's going to be hell to pay!"

"I should think so," said the Deacon solemnly.

Buzz Casey asked, "Hasn't anyone tried to check the plane in flight?"

"They're doing that now," said the man. He pocketed the bill, said, "Wait a minute," and disappeared toward an office in the hangar. He came back in a few moments.

"I don't understand it," he said tensely. "The plane was seen passing high over Pittsburgh. A TWA pilot bringing a Constellation into the field, there, saw it. Said it was flying plenty high and fast. No one has seen it since!"

"Flying where?" asked Buzz.

"West."

The two partners waited another half hour, but there were no further reports. The plane, it became apparent, had vanished.

They decided to return to the office and report to Rush Randall, the third member of their organization. They rode a cab back to the Battery.

The pretty redhaired girl was sitting there in the outer office in the old building facing Battery Park, and she looked as if ready to punch noses.

"**A** ABOUT time!" she exclaimed, as they entered the room.

"Time for what?" said little Buzz Casey, a pleased grin touching his homely features as he saw the attractive redhead.

She had jumped to her feet, slim and pretty, her expressive eyes flashing.

"I don't see how in the world you can expect to do business," she raged on. "Heavens, coming to work at this hour!"

Her gaze swept over Buzz, then went to Malcolm Dean's long, gloomy-looking figure. She said coolly, "You don't look like I've heard Rush Randall looks like." She said it as though she were disappointed.

The Deacon said quietly, "I'm not Rush Randall, ma'am. We are merely

associates of his." He politely introduced himself and his partner. He looked puzzled. "I don't believe I recall you—"

"The name," the redhaired girl said sharply, "is Williams . . . Lucky Williams. I've got a different first name, but I don't like it. Don't ask me what it is. You just call me Lucky like everyone else does."

She talked rapidly as though she were all keyed up about something. She added, "This is certainly a funny-looking office for a business concern. Hardly a place to sit down, either!"

Buzz said, "We don't do business in the usual manner, Miss. We're different."

"I'll say!" snapped the girl.

Her description of the office was an under-statement, to say the least.

The big room was cluttered with an amazing collection. Sitting on a wide windowsill was a dumpy bronze Chinese figure that grinned at them fiendishly. Beside this was a beautifully made model of a three-masted sailing ship. In contrast, on the wall nearby, hung a large photograph of a lean, tall young man in a pilot's garb standing beside a fast, sleek-looking airplane.

There was a portable diving bell suitable for a shallow water diving, an assortment of hunting rifles in a wall case, a framed diploma showing that one R. J. Randall was a graduate of M.I.T., and covering the entire floor an oriental rug that had not been cleaned in several years.

A huge desk was littered with nick-nacks that must have been gathered in the four corners of the world. Books and circulars were stacked on chairs. There was a sagging old couch with two colorful Indian blankets thrown in a heap atop it.

The girl's eyes swiftly inspected these things, then came to rest again on tall

Malcolm Dean. "I should think you'd have a receptionist. I've been waiting for ages. A fine thing!"

Buzz Casey offered hopefully, "Look, miss, maybe we can be of service. You act like you've been chased by a polecat. Something wrong?"

"I want to see Rush Randall, that's what! I can't wait forever, either!"

The Deacon was moving toward the rear of the big room. He said quietly, "Rush should be in." He opened a heavy paneled door and continued through a room beyond.

"Come on," said Buzz Casey, and he and the girl followed.

THE next room they entered was also an office. None would have ever suspected its presence in this old rattle-trap building.

Its walls were pine-paneled, and from floor to ceiling there were built-in bookcases. A massive, exquisitely hand-carved desk practically filled the room. The study was deserted.

They passed along a corridor from which doorways opened into rooms of a private apartment. At the rear of the hall they entered another office, and the girl was in for another surprise.

For the place was more of a laboratory than an office. Electrical gadgets were everywhere. There was a radio transmitter and receiving unit of the type recently used in the armed services. There was equipment stacked in a corner, and it looked like the type of stuff carried on expeditions. There was a large desk in this room also, before a wide window that overlooked the Hudson River.

The man seated at the desk had been phoning. He seemed to be completing the conversation just as they stepped inside. They heard him say, "All right, keep checking, and call me."

He hung up and turned to look at

them. Seeing the girl, he stood up. He got up, legs, body, arms straightening out into a very tall, very straight figure that was taller than anyone's in the room.

He was blond, probably close to forty, and he appeared to be a person of very sound muscles. He had pale gray eyes that searched through one. His lips were too thin and a little too stern. He looked like a man who did not smile enough.

The Deacon said, "Miss Williams, I'd like you to meet Rush Randall." He introduced them, adding, "Whatever it is that is bothering you, I'm sure he can help you."

The girl said immediately, "Your outfit helps people who are in trouble, doesn't it?" She was looking directly at tall, blond Rush Randall.

"That depends," he said.

"On what?"

"On whether we're interested." He made a slight motion with his hand, indicating the other two men. "Those gentlemen are my partners. It's true that we handle cases in various parts of the world—with certain limitations."

"Such as?" The girl's tone was again impatient.

Rush Randall shrugged his broad shoulders. "Sometimes we simply take an assignment because it is in a corner of the world where we've never been, and which we'd like to see. Or the job might be mysterious enough to be fascinating. Again, we take it just for the sake of adventure."

"And sometimes," put in homely little Buzz, "just for the hell of it."

Rush Randall smiled for the first time. He nodded agreement.

The girl, Lucky Williams, said abruptly, "Well, I need help, and I think it's in your line. I've heard you fellows don't scare easily, and I have an idea this job's going to be plenty scary

before you're through."

"Perhaps you'd better tell us about it," suggested Rush Randall.

"It starts with the Indian," blurted the redhead.

"Indian?"

She jerked her head, eyes wide. "He's like no other kind of Indian you've ever met. They call him Mike, and he's from Central America or some awful place. He's over a hundred years old and can run like a deer."

She paused, and no one spoke for a moment.

"Well?" she demanded crisply. "Why don't you go ahead and call me a liar?"

CHAPTER IV

BUZZ CASEY'S leathery face crinkled in a grin. "You're sure this Indian called Mike is a hundred?"

"Positive!"

She explained, "Uncle Clarence brought him back with him from some place. Uncle Clarence and the others. They had him on the summer place down in Florida for awhile, then they brought him to New York just recently. Uncle Clarence said he could prove that Mike was a hundred years old." She bit her lip a moment, then rushed on: "Well, a few days ago, Mike disappeared. I was coming here this morning, to see you"—she nodded toward Rush Randall—"and I bumped into Mike in the lobby. A policeman tried to catch him for me, and he even outran the young officer. So you see?"

Rush Randall said quietly, "So far, Miss Williams, it is rather confused."

The girl sighed, shook her head. "Why wouldn't it be?" she said tensely. "I'm all mixed up too. Because Uncle Clarence has disappeared also. That's why I came to you. "You've got to find him for me!"

"Who is Uncle Clarence?" asked Rush Randall.

"Clarence Hobart. Certainly you've heard of him?"

The Deacon's dark eyes flickered and he glanced at Rush.

Clarence Hobart, they all knew, was big money and big time. He owned a chain of large newspapers across the country. He was an influence in Wall Street. More recently, in the past few years, he was also an influence in Washington.

Rush had been studying the girl. Now he placed her. "And you," he stated, "are the young woman who gets her name in the newspapers from time to time. You were lost once on a solo flight to Alaska. Half the police and fliers in Canada and Alaska were searching for you. Another time you set out in a fifty-foot sloop for Florida and ended up on a reef off one of the Virginia capes."

She nodded, eyes flashing.

"That's why I came to your organization now. About Uncle Clarence, I mean?"

Rush made no comment, but merely waited for her to go on.

She said, "I've caused enough publicity for him. The last time he was furious. Said it hurt him politically. That's why I don't dare go to the police. And now it's *him*, poor dear. He must be in some terrible kind of trouble. I've been frantic worrying about him. And so . . . so I came here."

"You say," asked Rush calmly, "Clarence Hobart has disappeared?"

"Yes! And now Mike's gone, too. Mike—that's the Indian—was living up there at Uncle Clarence's apartment also, and now they're both gone. Mike was frightened about something this morning when I saw him downstairs. If we could find him, perhaps he could tell us."

"Mike speaks English?"

"They taught him," the girl explained.

The Deacon's gloomy face showed a little expression. He appeared puzzled. "Who are 'they'?" he wanted to know.

"My uncle's associates." She moved a hand impatiently. "Judge English and Jordon Marsh—"

"Marsh!"

It was wiry little Buzz who gave the exclamation.

THE girl turned, her gray-green eyes querulous. "You sound like you were jabbed with a pin. Do you know something about him?"

"I—" Buzz started, and he caught the imperceptible head shake that Rush quickly gave him. He finished, "I've heard of him, is all. Pretty important man, isn't he?"

The girl nodded. Expression in her eyes said that she was not completely satisfied with his answer.

She turned back to Rush. "I have plenty of money to pay, you needn't worry. And if Uncle Clarence is in trouble, he has plenty of money to pay you too."

Rush didn't seem interested in that part of it. He asked, "You say your uncle and his business associates, or friends—whatever they are—have been interested in this Indian called Mike?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

"I don't know, really! He's the craziest Indian I ever saw. He eats herbs!"

"Tell us," suggested Rush Randall, "just what has happened. I mean, the reason you think your uncle has disappeared."

The girl said tensely, "It was several days ago. I went up to see him. He has an apartment on Central Park West, but no one was home and I fig-

ured they were out at the time. But now I've been back every day since. No one's there. No one's *been* there . . . because I've made inquiries at the apartment house and now at his office downtown. The office has been closed. No one knows a thing. My uncle has completely vanished."

Rush said nothing for a moment, then asked, "Anyone living in that section of New York employs servants. Certainly the servants must know the whereabouts of your uncle."

"But that's the strange part of it!" the girl cried. "There *are* no servants! They've disappeared, too . . . the butler, chauffeur . . . everyone!"

Buzz's homely face brightened. "Heck," he put in, "maybe your uncle just up and moved out."

But the girl shook her pretty red head. "No," she said, "I had the building superintendent let me into the apartment. Everything is still there just like it was before. The table was even set for dinner last night. Nothing has been changed. But . . . but *nobody is living there!*"

Rush Randall decided to accompany the girl alone to her uncle's address. They departed a few moments later, and on the way uptown in his car, Rush asked further questions. But there was no slightest clue that the girl could give him regarding her uncle's whereabouts.

AT THE Central Park West address, they had no difficulty gaining admittance to the apartment. Obviously the girl had visited here often, and was well known by the building officials. She was given a key and permitted to take Rush upstairs.

Rush, his eyes missing no single detail, went through the richly furnished rooms. And he found that the girl had told the truth.

Everything was in order, even to a

table already set for a meal.

But there was no clue as to the whereabouts of wealthy Clarence Hobart.

An hour later, they left the apartment.

Back in the car, Rush asked, "Who would be the most likely person, besides yourself, to know about your uncle's activities?"

Rush was driving the big, closed car, and Lucky Williams was seated beside him. For a moment she gave him a thoughtful look. Then she said, "Judge English!"

"Judge English?"

She nodded, continuing. "Yes, he was associated with uncle in politics. I was talking to him just a few days ago on the phone. And he had seen my uncle. *He* should know about him if anyone does!"

She gave an address near the East River Drive, and Rush swung the car in that direction. They crossed 59th Street, cut onto the drive and headed uptown again.

As Rush swung the limousine into the curb, he was aware of some kind of excitement beneath the canopy leading into the building entrance.

A doorman had hurried out to the curb, was excitedly blowing a whistle for a cab. Another building attendant came running outside, followed by a heavy-set, gray-haired man in his fifties.

The girl beside Rush exclaimed, "That's Judge English! He seems to be excited about something!"

The moment their car stopped, Lucky Williams was out on the sidewalk, hurrying toward Judge English. Evidently the big, middle-aged man knew her, for he turned, spoke excitedly.

Rush, arriving behind the girl, heard her gasp, "No!"

She swung toward Rush Randall, eyes wide with horror, as she an-

nounced: "His son . . . Howard . . . is missing!"

Then, realizing that Rush Randall did not even know the young man, she explained, "Howard is a lawyer. I know him well. Why, now that I think of it, he was one of the last persons to see Uncle Clarence. He mentioned it to me on the phone yesterday. I was talking to him!"

Rush's quiet gray eyes went to the big, well-built man. He asked, "What's this about your son?"

Judge English drew in his breath deeply, let it out again as if trying to gain control of his nerves. "God," he said worriedly, "I wish I knew. Just a few days ago, Howard was elated about some new work that Clarence Hobart had sent his way. I never saw my son in higher spirits. And now . . . well, he's simply dropped from the face of the earth. We can't locate him anywhere!"

"Work?" Rush asked curiously. "What kind of work?"

"Legal stuff, I imagine. What else? I hadn't had a chance to discuss it with him. It was something confidential for Clarence Hobart, that's all I know at the moment."

AS THE big man talked, his dark eyes kept blinking nervously. Rush wondered if it was an involuntary habit, or merely something brought on by his wrought up condition.

Then Judge English was saying quickly, "Look, you're R. J. Randall, aren't you? I've seen your pictures in the papers from time to time."

Rush nodded.

"Perhaps you can help. Would you mind calling me back in, say, an hour?" He indicated the girl. "Miss Williams can tell you. I . . ."

He seemed visibly upset.

"Yes?" Rush prompted.

"A man . . . a man I do not know, just called me. He said it was something about my son Howard. He sounded . . . sort of terrified, in a way. He's going to meet me right away."

Rush said, "If you would like me to come along . . ."

Judge English shook his head quickly. "No! That would be dangerous . . . for Howard. The man who phoned warned me to come alone. But I'll be back tonight. Perhaps, then, you can help me. I hope you will . . ."

The last was said pleadingly, as the gray-haired man paused with his foot on the cab running board.

Rush nodded. "You will hear from me later," he offered.

Judge English left then, urging the driver to full speed. For a brief moment, Rush and the girl stood looking after the disappearing cab.

Then Lucky Williams touched his arm, said breathlessly, "I was hoping . . . Howard might know something about Uncle Clarence. But now, with *him* missing . . ."

She broke off, staring at Rush Randall. She was trembling as she asked, "What could have *happened* to them?"

Instead of answering, he motioned to his own car, said, "You can wait at our headquarters until after my interview with Judge English. That might be best."

Frowning, the girl climbed back into the car. But as they started up, she said, "But what about Uncle Clarence? Aren't you going to try and find *him*?"

"That will be taken care of," Rush said quietly.

Lucky Williams appeared upset about something, and she sat there, her hands again knotted in her lap, and from time to time she cast furtive glances in Rush Randall's direction.

He had noted these actions. He had also seen something else. He said abruptly, "You might show me that object which you have been trying to hide."

The girl jumped. "What . . ." she started, evasively.

Rush continued, "You have been holding it ever since we left your uncle's apartment."

The girl was on the point of making another denial, but there was something about the intent grayness of the man's eyes that caused her to give in.

She opened her hand and held a small object toward Rush.

It was a figurine carved out of finest mahogany, not more than four inches long, an intricate piece of workmanship. It was the tiny figure of an Indian.

Rush's eyes happened to catch the girl watching the object rigidly. Fright was plain on her pretty features.

He said abruptly, "Why do you fear it?"

The girl gave a start. She looked at him.

"Fear it?" she asked. "I don't understand."

"You seem to be frightened."

"I . . . I'm not frightened," Lucky Williams said. "I never saw it before in my life. It was on the divan in Uncle Clarence's apartment."

Rush was convinced that she was lying about her fear.

CHAPTER V

LATER that night, alone, Rush Randall returned to interview Judge English. He left the girl at headquarters with his two partners. She had not protested staying there; she appeared too frightened to do anything else.

Buzz had reported that there had been no further reports about the plane. Jordon Marsh's disappearance was still

quite a mystery. Rush was still keeping this part of it from the girl. She did not know he'd had an appointment to meet Jordon Marsh.

Rush left his car parked in a dark side street, walked a block to Judge English's residence. The doorman recognized the tall, blond man, having seen him earlier when he had talked to Judge English at the curb.

"You are to go right upstairs," the doorman said.

"Judge English is at home?"

The uniformed man shook his head.

"He returned, sir, but he has departed again. However, he left a message for you, and you are to go right up." He named the floor and apartment number. Rush took the elevator.

A butler admitted him to the apartment. Obviously he had been expecting Rush's visit, and recognized him, for he said, "This was left for you, sir. Judge English had to leave again immediately, but I was to be sure that this envelope was turned over to you."

Rush looked at the white envelope which the butler had picked up from a table and handed to him. He broke the seal and studied the brief note that was inside.

The hastily written message read:

I AM CERTAIN THAT I HAVE MET THE MAN WHO KNOWS WHAT TERRIBLE FATE HAS HAPPENED TO MY SON. I AM GOING WITH HIM TO MAKE POSITIVE THAT HOWARD IS ALIVE. ANY INVESTIGATION AT THIS TIME MIGHT BE DISASTROUS. WAIT FIVE DAYS. IF I HAVE NOT RETURNED WITHIN THAT TIME, PLEASE INVESTIGATE.

Rush looked at the butler. "Judge English wrote this note?"

"Yes, sir." The butler jerked his head. "I saw him write it myself, sir."

"Have you any idea whom he met?"

"No, sir."

"Or where he went?"

"No, sir. I have no idea. He didn't say, sir."

RUSH put the message in his pocket and departed. He did not intend to wait for the five day limit to expire. He decided to investigate immediately.

The doorman of the building recalled a certain familiar cab that Judge English had taken. He gave the name of the driver and the address of the company which owned the string of taxis.

He said, "That driver is on the stand here every night, sir. But he finished about now." He looked at his watch. "You ought to be able to catch him as he's checking in tonight, sir." He gave the address of the garage where the cabs were turned in.

Rush arrived there twenty minutes later. He located the driver who had picked up Judge English. And was informed that the man had been driven to a small flying field not far from the New Jersey end of the George Washington Bridge.

Rush drove out there.

The field, except for red marker lights, was in darkness. But there was a small office near the edge of the field, and it was inside the building that he located the night watchman.

He asked discreet questions.

Shortly the man was explaining, "Why, sure, they left some time ago."

Rush Randall's eyes flickered. "They?"

"Yep. The gray-haired man you described, and three or four other guys. It was these other guys who owned the plane, and they waited until your friend arrived."

The watchman, with gestures, described a modern-type plane that obviously was equipped for long-distance flights. The plane, he said, had been

kept at the field for the past couple of days. No, he didn't know the owners. They had merely rented temporary space at the field.

"What was their destination?" Rush prodded.

The man scratched his beard.

"Well, now," he murmured, "I wouldn't know, exactly. But they did a funny thing before taking off. They changed to heavy clothing. And I heard one of them guys say it was going to be pretty cold where they were going."

That seemed to be all Rush could learn about Judge English's whereabouts. And so he returned to his lower Manhattan headquarters.

BUT if Rush Randall had been in Judge English's place, at that moment, he would have known little further.

The gray-haired man was seated in the cabin of the big plane, and the men were grouped around him as the ship droned through the night.

One man was saying, "And so, that's the way it is. We're taking you to see your son. You will be shown that he's still alive. But we do this only under one condition!"

Judge English glared at the speaker. "And that is . . ." he prompted.

A hypodermic needle flashed in the big man's hand. The fellow had leathery, sunburned skin and a lot of jaw.

He said, "You take an injection of this stuff which keeps you asleep until we get there. You'll also get a shot on the return trip. It's harmless. Only thing is, you won't have any idea where you've been taken. Okay?"

"How do I know I'll ever wake up again?" Judge English demanded.

The man with the hypodermic needle grinned.

"Don't be a chump. *You're* the guy

who's gonna save your son from death. So you don't think we'd kill you, do you?"

That appeared to be logical. And if Judge English was going to see his son alive, it looked like he'd have to agree to the proposition. He yanked off his coat and pulled up his shirt sleeve.

"All right," he said.

There was only the prick of the long needle that hurt for a moment, then he was aware of a swift drowsiness that was flowing over him.

He tried to remain awake, to hear what was being said, but all he could remember at the very last was someone saying, "Wait'll he wakes up two days from now!"

JUDGE ENGLISH was surprised when he did wake up. He had experienced doubts, just before losing consciousness, that he might ever see this world again.

But he did, and it was a strange world at first—very silent, very mysterious, as though all time had suddenly stopped and he was the only individual in the entire universe.

He was lying in a crude swing, on the porch of a large, rustic hut of some sort. Judge English sat up and rubbed kinks from his arms and legs. He felt incredibly hungry. He stared around him. And all that met the eye in every direction was deep forest. Trees grew everywhere, heavily foliated, very green. It was warm, and from somewhere overhead the rays of a hot sun slanted through the trees and cast grotesque patterns on the earth.

Judge English had no idea how long he'd been asleep.

He stood up and walked the length of the porch. It had been well built of sturdy logs.

He returned to the open front doorway and yelled, "Hey!"

Immediately, someone moved inside the house. A man shortly appeared in the cabin doorway. He was one of the big fellows who had been aboard the plane, and he was rubbing sleep from his eyes.

Seeing Judge English awake, he gave a shout and hurried out onto the porch. Soon, more of his associates were out there with him. They, too, looked like they had been taking some sort of siesta. Half a dozen men gathered around the gray-haired man.

One, though, appeared to be the leader. This one had not been on the plane.

He was a tall, well set-up man with sandy-colored hair. He looked very healthy and very grim.

He said, "You understand why you were brought here?"

Judge English nodded. "My son disappeared mysteriously. Why, I do not know. But I have been told that he is here, and I have been brought to see him."

"Exactly," said the leader.

"Well?" demanded the judge.

"Come along."

The tall leader of the group led the way inside the shack. The leader swung into a room, stepped aside as, closely watched, Judge English was followed in by the other men.

The cage, extending from floor to ceiling, had been built in the center of the large room. It was made of poles stout enough to have the strength of steel bars.

INSIDE the cage, sitting on a chair and looking terrified, was a slender young man with dark hair and somewhat pallid features. He had the same angular, strong face of Judge English himself.

He jumped up and cried, "Father!"

Judge English stood there, emotion

plain on his stern face, his big form trembling. "Howard!" he said. "Then you *are* alive?"

Gripping the stout bars, Howard English asked tensely, "Did they tell you about the . . . the little Indian?"

Judge English's eyes narrowed carefully. "The Indian?" he asked.

Before his son could answer, two men grabbed the judge by the arms and started out of the room with him.

"That's what you're gonna learn about now!" one guard said.

The others, in the room with Judge English's son, waited silently. A half hour passed. Finally the judge was led back into the room.

Sweat covered the man's features. He was trembling. Terror was mirrored in his wildly staring eyes.

His son stared, asked, "What is it? What did you see in there?"

But Judge English merely shook his head dazedly. He muttered, "They're taking me back to New York. I'll raise the hundred thousand dollars. Then . . . then you'll be released."

"Raise the money for *what*?" young English prodded.

But the elderly man merely shook his head. He appeared too terrified to speak. "I can't tell you!" he blurted.

He was led out.

But outside the room, a trace of courage seemed to return to him. Judge English was a solidly built man, and he suddenly whirled on his captors. He roared, "Damn you . . ."

He was slugged from behind by someone with a blackjack.

When he awoke, he was in a plane, and the plane was moving. He was tied hand and foot, and was in the cabin of the same ship that had brought him to the mysterious hideout.

A man stood over him, and the fellow smiled.

He said, "This will hold you until

we get to New York!"

He had a hypodermic needle in his hand, and now he quickly seized the judge's arm, rolled back the sleeve, and jabbed in the long needle.

Within seconds, the drowsy feeling was stealing over him. He tried to fight off the heaviness. It was hopeless. There was only the droning of the plane motors, and someone talking at another point in the big cabin and . . .

Judge English woke up on a park bench behind the big library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, in New York City. It was just shortly after dawn, and there was a cool chill in the air. He felt half starved.

But before doing anything about his hunger, he hurried to a cigar store and put through a telephone call to Rush Randall.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY that same morning, shortly after receiving the telephone call from Judge Randall, Rush left his office. But first, he gave himself an injection of a peculiar chemical. He also left a message for Buzz and Deacon, stating that they were to wait, in case there should be any word from Jordon Marsh, the millionaire.

It had been six days now since the millionaire politician had vanished.

Strangely, Rush had done nothing—so far—about the disappearance of Clarence Hobart or the judge and his son. The girl, Lucky Williams, had been quite upset about this. And she was so anxious for information, that she had remained at his headquarters, waiting for any news.

She had been given a private room in their unusual apartment.

Lucky Williams, looking bright and attractive as a new spring hat, was in the library when, some time after Rush

Randall's departure, Buzz and Deacon came from their rooms.

Deacon was wearing dark somber clothes as usual. But now a fresh flower was in the lapel of his coat.

Buzz, yawning as he strolled into the room, looked as if he had slept in his clothes—much to Deacon's disgust. But both men brightened at the sight of the trim, pretty-looking redhead.

Buzz Casey said, "Honey, did anyone ever tell you that you're beautiful?"

"Yes," the girl said brightly. "Deacon did."

Deacon laughed. "That'll hold you, you flat-footed runt!"

Buzz made a swing at his partner. There threatened to be a fight.

The two men started a loud argument.

The telephone started ringing.

Lucky Williams said, "The phone is ringing!"

She tried to make herself heard above the racket taking place between Buzz and Deacon. Finally her words penetrated the somewhat blue air.

"I said *the telephone is ringing!*"

Little Buzz Casey leaped to answer it. It was Rush calling.

Rush announced: "Judge English has returned to New York."

That was news for hard-bitten little Buzz. He had not known where their partner had gone that morning. Buzz repeated the news for those in the room with him.

Rush continued: "You and Deacon will remain at headquarters. Try to pick up any word about the kidnapped men from any of the airports. I might be gone for several days."

Buzz frowned. "Where you going?"

THERE was a slight pause, then Rush Randall said, "Judge English has seen his son, but is too terrified to go on. I am replacing him. The jour-

ney will take several days."

The girl, listening, heard his words. She seemed startled. She moved forward, took the phone from Buzz's hand, said into the mouthpiece, "But what about my uncle?"

Rush did not reply to the question.

"Darn!" the girl said, stamping her foot. She handed the phone back to Buzz Casey.

"Rush?" Buzz said.

"Yes?"

"What about that little Indian gadget the girl found?"

"That seems to be tied in with the mystery."

"But . . ."

"You will," continued Rush, "keep your eyes open for any further sign of that omen."

"Omen?" Buzz was puzzled.

"It is an Indian superstition," said Rush Randall. "Investigate anyone who knows something about that thing. That is quite important. Also, you might keep a lookout for that crazy Indian. Mike was apparently frightened away because of it."

"You mean," asked Buzz, "because of that omen?"

"Yes."

A moment later Rush hung up.

The girl, her lovely face tense, looked at the two men. She said, "Where is Rush Randall going?"

Buzz shrugged. "We have no idea," he said.

"No, we can't even guess," said Deacon, looking gloomy.

If they had only known, they would have been convinced that Rush Randall had no idea, either.

NEITHER would they have recognized their leader and partner.

Skin stain and pieces of paraffin inserted inside his cheeks had changed Rush's character. He now had dark,

leathery features and a limp. He was stoop-shouldered. He looked like an old codger who might have spent most of his life in the Maine backwoods.

The instructions for meeting those who knew about the Indian thing menace—turned over to Rush by Judge English—had been quite specific. Rush was to take the noon ferry from 125th Street, cross to Fort Lee, and enroute watch for a man on board who would be wearing a derby and whistling "Mexicale Rose." He was to follow this person from the ferry on the Jersey side and get into the car which the man in the derby hat approached.

The contact was made, and "Derby Hat" was a big, powerful fellow with sunburned features and wedge-shaped shoulders. There were three other men waiting in the car on the Jersey shore.

Rush, limping a little and bent over, climbed into the car, and the machine started up and they went away from there in quite a hurry.

All the individuals in the machine were browned and husky-looking. The driver seemed to be in charge. Without turning his head as he sent the car climbing the long hill up out of town, he said, "You have the money?"

Rush, speaking with a slight twang, said, "Reckon as I have. Check."

"A check?"

"Yep. It will be handed over to you when I see Howard English released, in my custody."

"Let's see that check," someone demanded.

Rush slowly and painstakingly extracted a check from a worn billfold that he carried in his inner pocket. His coat was of a design that had gone out of style almost a dozen years ago.

The two men seated on either side of him looked at the check.

One exclaimed, "What the hell! There's places on that check for two

signatures . . . but only Judge English has signed it!"

"Yep," agreed Rush, still using his old-codger twang.

"What's the idea?"

"Tell you," said Rush. "When the other signature is put on the check, that piece of paper will be honored at any bank in New York. That's Judge English's agreement."

"Whose signature?" someone wanted to know.

"Mine," said Rush Randall.

Another man commented, "Nobody's kidding that foxy judge!"

"I guess *not!*" said the driver. Then, "Well, that plan is okay with us, I think. We'll take this old geezer out there."

He continued driving at a fairly good rate of speed.

And some time before one o'clock that afternoon, they arrived at the small, private airport in the Jersey hills. The big silver plane was waiting on the field, and Rush, as the old man, was taken aboard. A few moments later the plane took the air, circled the field twice so the pilot could make certain that no one had followed and then headed north.

Two men came into the cabin where Doc was seated. One said, "Pop, you gotta get a treatment."

"Treatment?"

"Yeah. We're gonna give you a little shot. It won't hurt you any. You'll just sleep the rest of the way. You see, we ain't taking no chances on you finding out where we're taking you."

The old fellow seemed to think that over for a moment.

"Wal, I reckon I'll have to take it," he said finally.

They gave Rush the kind of an injection they had administered to Judge English.

Soon, Rush was stretched out limply

on a bunk that had been installed in place of some of the cabin seats. He snored loudly.

One of the passengers grinned.

"Won't that old boy be surprised when he wakes up?" he said.

"I *guess* so!" agreed his partner.

Rush Randall listened to the remarks and tried to decide whether the plane was still heading north or not. Later, if the men should step into the cockpit, he might be able to find out.

AT FIRST, the drug reaction in his system was terrific. For the injection that Rush had taken earlier, as an antidote for the hypodermic given him aboard the plane, was now counteracting effects of that hypo. Rush fought off the strange sleep.

Judge English had told him of the injection which kept him asleep throughout the journey to the mysterious hideout. So Rush Randall had been prepared for the same thing.

He was not "asleep" now. In fact, he was quite wide awake, as a result of one drug trying to overcome the other in his system. It was his splendid physical condition that finally won out. He remained awake—though to anyone who might have closely examined him, he appeared to be a person in deep slumber.

He listened carefully, careful not to make any movement, and after awhile he was certain that the plane was not heading north.

Men came into the cabin at intervals. They discussed the flight. Rush listened. . . .

A day and a night passed, and some time early in the morning the big ship came down and landed on the long stretch of hard-packed sand that formed a beach bordering a river.

All around the isolated region, heavy foliage was everywhere. A dark forest

grew to the water's edge, excepting the strip of beach, and this forest of stately trees slowly mounted upward into mountains that lay beyond.

But the entire thing, the green forests, the mountains, even the cloud-studded sky was reflected in the flat, smooth water like something done in oils. The air was motionless and warm.

The great silence everywhere was somewhat breath-taking.

Rush Randall was removed from the plane, laid down on the beach, and a discussion followed as to just how the big fellow was to be carried. Nobody seemed to relish the job.

While the men were talking about that, a man appeared along the trail that led out of the deep forest, hailed them, and came down the beach to the plane.

Someone said, "It's Mort. He'll tell us what to do."

MMORT, it turned out, was a thin, trim man with cool gray eyes. It appeared he had arrived from some camp located not far from the river.

He said now, "We're not taking this old guy up to the camp."

Rush knew that Mort was referring to himself. Through slitted lids, Rush had obtained one quick glimpse of the man, but he dared not look again. Someone might see the movement of his eyelids.

"Why not?" one of the men from the plane demanded.

"Because we've moved Howard English."

"Moved him?"

"Yeah. We think maybe his father might have figured out something. Maybe he guessed the location. So we've sent him up to the passage. That's where you'll take this contact man."

"You mean," someone said in surprise, "up to the Crazy Indian?"

"That's right."

There seemed to be some doubt in the men's minds about making the trip to the Crazy Indian at this time; this was more of a feeling that Rush sensed, rather than hearing any actual words spoken.

"Howard English," continued the man named Mort, "is at the Passage. It'll take you about two days. We've got things all ready and waiting for you. So you'd better get started."

Rush Randall, listening, continued to assume his sleeping, unconscious attitude. He had planned a break when the plane flight was ended, but that plan was swiftly changed now.

For he had an idea, now, where he was. The plane had not flown north. The comments about the direction the plane was flying were made simply for his benefit, before they thought he had been knocked out by the drug. They had wanted him to believe the hideout was somewhere north.

Rush guessed it was South America. They had flown too long to make it Panama or Central America, though the country, what he had seen of it, was similar.

The thick jungle growth all around them, the odor of tropical foliage, the quiet motionless warmth told him these things. And something else.

The girl had mentioned South America when she told Rush and his partners about Mike, the strange-acting Indian who was supposed to be more than a hundred years old. And all three men who had so mysteriously dropped from sight—Jordon Marsh; the girl's uncle, Clarence Hobart; Judge English—all of them, according to the girl, had been associated in one way or another. There was her comment about a project the three wealthy men had been interested in down in Florida. Somewhere, Mike, the In-

dian, was tied in with that too.

And now Judge English's son, Howard, had been apparently abducted also. Where did he fit into the mystery?

Well, it looked as if Rush was going to find out. They were going to take him inland, from the comments he heard, to the spot where they were holding Howard English. Where was the Crazy Indian, and just what was it? They spoke of it as if it were an inanimate thing. Odd!

Mort was saying, "You guys will be met by the chief when you get up there. He's got some other stuff lined up."

Someone whistled.

There were exclamations.

From the undercurrent of tenseness that Rush Randall quickly sensed, he knew a reference had been made to the real brains behind the mystery. Somewhere in this vast jungle of space was the solution.

Would he live to return to the "outside" again, or to get word to his associates? He wondered if, for once, he had carried this thrill for adventure just a little too far.

They were getting ready to start.

CHAPTER VII

AN IMPROVISED rack was constructed, and his big, hard-muscled frame was tied securely to that. Rush still pretended deep slumber.

The trek through the forest lasted several hours. The heat was not unbearable, for the thick green foliage shut out practically all sunlight, and it was moist and humid in the shadows beneath the trees. There was the heavy, sweet smell of wild orchids, growing atop the tall trees.

They reached another, smaller river. He was transferred to a boat. It was a large affair made of stout saplings and

logs. There was a cabin of sorts, its walls laced with heavy matlike material that was as secure as the bars of a prison. Light came through tiny cracks in the latticed material.

He was placed inside, still tied hand and foot, and a door was latched securely. The trip continued, men poling the wide, flat craft downstream.

Another day passed.

Rush knew that two men stood guard outside the cabin. He had heard them talking from time to time. Mort, obviously, was taking no chances—though everyone still believed Rush Randall to be under the influence of the sleeping drug.

Night came again, and some time after dark the boat stopped. There was heavy silence for a while, and then activity began. Rush listened.

He heard men talking.

Someone came into the dark cabin where he lay motionless on the hard floor. Others followed. Rush chanced a look before a lamp was lighted.

They were cool, gray-eyed Mort's men, but the leader was not with them.

One said, "I got this thing all figured out, and this is one job we get out of. We'll make that big fellow carry this old guy!"

Rush was suddenly very alert.

"You mean," someone asked, "that guy they captured along with Jordon Marsh?"

"Yeah. Him. He's built like a horse."

"Then we're gonna push through to the Crazy Indian without waiting for the chief?"

"Right," someone replied.

Men picked up Rush Randall and carried him out on deck. Lanterns moved in the night, and it was cooler now, though the heavy humidity was everywhere. Blackness cloaked everything around them.

"Bring that big bozo aboard," some-

one said.

Rush chanced a slitted glimpse through his eyelids. The darkness covered his guarded glance. He saw that the raft-like craft was tied up along the shore.

Shortly, under guard, a tall, powerful, dark-skinned figure was led aboard. He wore only tattered trousers and a ripped, dirtied white shirt. Appearance of his clothing indicated he must have put up a magnificent fight before being subdued.

It struck Rush, sneaking a glance at the figure, that the fellow would have looked more natural clad merely in a loin cloth. Especially in this wilderness jungle interior.

For he was an Indian native!

Then the single name flashed through Rush Randall's mind. Mike! The Indian the girl had talked about. Hadn't someone just referred to the "guy who was captured along with Jordon Marsh"? Mike, the Indian, was Jordon Marsh's protege. Why, Rush still had to learn.

Right now, though, he saw an opportunity for an escape while at the time learning what the mystery was about. The girl had said Mike spoke English!

Rush wondered why the Indian had been coming to his office that morning. Did the fellow know him?

IF THE tall, hard-muscled Indian recognized Rush Randall, he gave no sign. He stood there in the quiet night, his face impassive.

Behind him, handcuffed to a guard, was a little, mousy-looking man with thin gray hair and jumpy eyes. Rush almost opened his eyes wide in amazement.

Clarence Hobart, the girl's uncle! The wealthy owner of a chain of newspapers!

Naturally Clarence Hobart did not

know Rush—at least not now, the way Rush was posing as an old codger. He doubted if the newspaper magnet knew him anyway.

All Rush could do was bide his time.

The fussy-looking little newspaper owner was saying in wonderment, "My goodness! What are you going to do with us now?"

A man laughed.

"We're going to take a little hike, pal."

They went ashore.

Rush, to all appearances still drugged, was picked up and loaded on the powerful Indian's massive shoulders. He was slung across the big fellow's back like a limp sack. Then the crooks use a neat trick to assure themselves that the Indian could make no dangerous move.

Heavy rope was passed around his waist, and the rope bound Rush Randall's hands and feet to this. Also, where the Indian's hands were supporting Rush's body, they were also tied in this position. Thus the Indian was tied to his heavy burden, and it would have been impossible for him to make any sort of attack against the men who accompanied him.

The party set out along a forest trail that bordered the shore line.

Throughout the remainder of that night, using the lanterns, the men trekked through the wilderness. At intervals, there were rest stops. Big Mike was made to lie down with his heavy burden still tied securely to him. He was watched every moment by two men who carried guns.

Rush Randall, apparently, was still unconscious.

RUSH, so far, had made no attempt to escape. Because there was something he still sought—location of this object referred to as the Crazy In-

dian. Finding it meant finding Howard English, and perhaps the others. Also, it could be the real hideout or the clue to the location of the person behind the mysterious disappearances.

Who was he? And what was the significance of the little carved wooden images of Indians?

The trek kept moving onward through the night. The trail was fairly well defined. The men, obviously, had used it before, and before them someone else had worn a path through the jungle growth.

The air changed, became still cooler. They climbed steadily, with the rest stops more frequent, and from time to time Rush saw patches of star-studded sky. Sometime before dawn they followed a high ridge, completely clear of the jungle now, and the blue sky was all around them. There was some wind.

Dawn came.

A rest had been called, and everyone seemed to be waiting for something. As it became brighter, Rush through narrowed eyelids, saw a surveyor's sighting instrument set up on a particular high point of ground. Another man stood by with a notebook in his hand, and he started calling off figures.

Everyone was watching and waiting, which gave Rush Randall the opportunity to watch also. He made a mental note of the readings and comments. He heard that reference to the "Passage" again.

The man at the instrument finally announced, "There she is! It'll take us about four more hours to reach the Crazy Indian!"

He gave a few more figures to the man with the notebook. Apparently they were the directions to be followed until the Crazy Indian was reached.

Just as the party was ready to set out again, a man approached from the rear. He had been trailing the group,

was one of the guards himself. He carried some sort of small paper in his hand.

"Damn' good thing I brought up the rear!" he announced. He passed the paper to the leader, thin, wiry Mort, but to the others who were watching him, he said, "That dropped from inside the old guy's shirt while he was being lugged through the forest. *He's Rush Randall!*"

Rush slid from the Indian's wide shoulders, the ropes seemed to fall away as though they'd been severed in a dozen places by a knife, and both men leaped toward their nearest guards.

A wild, confused battle followed.

AT THE first hint of trouble, two guards had seized protesting little Clarence Hobart and rushed on ahead with him. They were soon out of sight along a path that dropped sharply downhill from the high, exposed ridge.

The others closed in on Rush and big Mike.

Mike, rumbling with rage and making big bear sounds, grabbed two men, got his massive arms around them and started banging their heads together.

Rush had already knocked out two more men with two single blows. The tall blond adventurer's speed was astounding.

The fight moved back and forth across the high point of ground. Men fell, knocked down, but they got up again and kept slugging at Rush and the Indian.

There were enough figures in the fight, that confusion was too great for the use of guns.

But one man—he had been carrying an equipment pack—broke free of the melee at the beginning, and he had now run off to one side and was frantically working at the draw-string on his pack.

Shortly he had a heavy-looking wea-

pon in his hands, was busy snapping two portable parts of it together. He inserted what looked like a magazine drum filled with cartridges.

The weapon was a portable machine gun. The man straightened with the object in his hands, and he yelled:

"Back you guys! Out of the way!"

Those who had not been knocked out fell swiftly away from Rush Randall and the giant Indian. They ran.

The machine gun was pointed toward Rush and big Mike.

But even in the split second when the gunner had yelled to his partners, Rush and the Indian moved with amazing speed. They carried no guns themselves. To remain there and face the machine-gunner would mean certain death.

And so they plunged down a steep path that led back the way they had approached the lookout point. The narrow path skirted a hump of ground, and it was this that protected them from being seen.

For the machine gun gobbled and roared, sending chunks of dirt flying around them. But the gunner was excited. His aim was faulty. By the time he got the deadly weapon under control, forcing it downward for better aim, Rush and the Indian had reached the protection of the trees downtrail. Soon they were completely hidden in the forest again.

The gun, though, continued to send out blasts at intervals. It continued to do so for some time, giving the two men no chance to stalk their captors.

And so, since they were unarmed, they continued along the backtrail through the great silent forest, and about midafternoon of that day they reached the point where the large, flat-bottomed raft had landed them. They looked for it.

It was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE had been little time for talk during the tense hours of escape along the backtrail. Half running, half dog-trotting, Rush Randall had been hard put to conserve every ounce of his strength. Several times they had stopped at fresh water springs, where Rush had flung himself down to gulp the cool water.

His entire body had been feverish because of the lack of water and the effects of the drugs. He had been so long without food, however, that he did not feel hungry. Yet big Mike must have known that he had not eaten. From time to time, as they hurried along the shaded trail, the Indian had dodged off into the matted undergrowth to swiftly return again with fistfuls of wild berries. He had forced them on Rush.

"Eat!" the Indian ordered.

The berries had acted as liquid as well as food. They had taken the fever from his body and soothed his parched throat.

Now the two men, sweat-bathed and panting, stood there and stared at the deserted, narrow, muddy river that flowed past them.

Mike said abruptly, "Us being in one hell of a fix, boss man."

Any other time, Rush would have laughed at the comment, coming from the powerful man who looked, at this instant, as if he had never set foot from this tropical wilderness.

The girl, Lucky Williams, had been right about big Mike being able to speak English. Perhaps now there would be a solution . . .

Rush asked quickly, "Mike, you know who I am, don't you? You tried to see me in New York."

The tall, brown-skinned man nodded. "I guessing last night," he told Rush.

"I keeping piece of glass so us escape maybe."

Rush grinned. "You do all right, Mike."

The glass had been a small bit of broken bottle, which the Indian had managed to hold concealed in his hand. During the trek through the forest, under cover of night, the Indian had managed to cut one of Rush's hands free. Then they had taken turns using the bit of glass, sawing through the ropes, freeing themselves.

After that it had merely been a case of waiting to see what would happen. Rush had hoped to learn more about the mystery, but all he had heard was the information about the Crazy Indian, whatever *that* was. And then he had been recognized.

He asked now, "Mike, what is hidden down here? Why are those wealthy men being kidnapped?"

THE Indian made a pointing motion with his hand, indicating the trail they had just covered. "Back there in hidden valley . . . my people."

"Your people?"

The Indian nodded.

"Where are we, anyway?"

"Amazon." Mike pointed. "Back there. No white man ever coming there. My people living many years . . ."

Rush suddenly remembered. "What's this about you being a hundred years old?"

Again Mike nodded. "Secret," he said matter-of-factly. "Secret of hidden valley where my people living. Mister Marsh, him coming there . . ."

"Jordon Marsh?"

"Last year," said the Indian. "Him finding hidden valley. Him taking me to Florida. I bringing herbs and Mister Marsh and the others are raising in Florida."

Suddenly, Rush was beginning to

piece the thing together. A hidden valley somewhere up the Amazon, and natives who lived to be well past a hundred! Many times, in his adventures to strange corners of the world, he'd heard the story. He'd often wondered how true it was.

And he recalled that wealthy Jordon Marsh had been a plantation owner in South America. He'd met the man at one time. Marsh, obviously, had found the secret valley of the Amazon.

But what strange enterprise had Jordon Marsh started with his friends after they had taken Mike, here, to Florida, and later to New York? Mike had just stated that he had brought some of the herbs with him.

Did Marsh and his associates have some wild idea about outliving other men, by raising and eating the herbs?

Could be. Men have tried stranger things.

But the real puzzle was, why had each of the men been kidnapped? And by whom?

He asked, "Mike, who kidnapped you?"

The Indian shook his head. "I not knowing, boss man."

"Where did they grab you?"

"New York."

Rush thought a moment, his pale gray eyes curious.

"Why did you come to my office, Mike? And why did you run away when you saw the girl, Lucky Williams?"

"Mister Marsh one day telling me if anything happen to him or his friends, to be seeing you right away. I going to Mister Clarence Hobart's house and finding him gone. So I am coming to you. Mister Hobart always saying I am not worrying Miss Lucky Williams."

"You weren't supposed to frighten her?"

The Indian nodded.

"Do you know the men who grabbed you in New York?"

"Not knowing. They taking me in car to New Jersey, to airport."

Rush was puzzled.

More to himself than to the Indian, he started to comment, "Damned if I can understand why—"

He stopped saying that and watched the Indian's figure. Mike was standing stiffly, apparently listening to something, his head half cocked to one side.

Rush listened also, and he couldn't hear a thing in the utter silence of the afternoon.

Mike said abruptly, "We keep moving. We getting away from here. They coming!" He motioned toward the forest trail.

"You're positive you hear someone?"

Mike nodded.

He led the way, picking a trail that followed the river.

Rush Randall, following, wondered if he had ever been in such a predicament. It was imperative that he get word to Buzz and Deacon in New York. He needed food. Also, he needed equipment if he was going to accomplish anything down here.

He stared bleakly at the wilderness all around him. Mike, there, ahead of him, was the only person in hundreds of miles who could help him.

He wondered if he could even trust Mike?

IT WAS almost two weeks later that the message reached Rush Randall's office in Manhattan. Tough little Buzz Casey and Deacon, at the moment, were enjoying one of their arguments. The argument centered around attractive, redhaired Lucky Williams. Buzz, waving a fist in front of Deacon's gloomy face, was saying acidly:

"The poor girl moved out because of you, that's what! Wait'll Rush hears

that she's gone!"

Deacon glared.

"I had nothing to do with it!" he snapped. "She got tired of waiting to hear from Rush. She thinks Rush isn't going to do anything about her uncle's disappearance."

Buzz strutted up and down the office. He was wearing baggy trousers and an old turtle-neck sweater.

"Even if you're right, I wouldn't believe you!" muttered the homely man.

Deacon paid no attention to the remark.

"Besides," he continued, "even though she doubts Rush is trying to help her, we can still reach her. She's going to be at her apartment, and we can get in touch with her any time we want."

Buzz immediately jumped toward the phone. He turned, glared at his tall partner, demanded, "What was the phone number?"

Deacon consulted a small notebook that he took from his pocket. He read off a number, and then, as Buzz dialed it, added, "I'll talk to her when you are connected."

"The hell you will!" Buzz piped. He swung, blocked Deacon's path as his partner tried to reach for the phone a moment later.

A woman's voice said, "Hello?"

Buzz immediately became all smiles. In a sugary voice, he said into the mouthpiece, "Look, honey child, this is your Big Moment . . . Buzz calling . . . I wanted to tell you how badly I feel about that gloomy guy who hangs around here. I mean, the way he scared you out of the place. Now, I was thinking . . ."

With a yell of rage, Deacon tried to reach the phone.

But Buzz Casey still blocked the way, holding the phone in front of him and moving around so that Deacon

could not reach it.

The voice at the other end of the line said, "Well, listen honey chil', you-all will have to call later."

Buzz jumped. "What's that?" he said. "Who *is* this?"

The voice drawled, "Clarabelle. An' you-all is callin' the wrong Big Moment. You is talkin' to Miss Williams' maid!"

Deacon, behind Buzz, overheard the words and the southern drawl. As Buzz slammed up the receiver, Deacon dropped into a chair and howled with delight. He held his sides.

"Hello, honey chil'!" he said to his tough little partner.

Buzz grabbed the telephone book, flung it. Deacon ducked.

Buzz muttered, "All right, forget it!" He looked upset.

"Anyway," he added glumly, "I'm worried about her. I'm at my wit's end."

"Well," agreed Deacon, "you didn't have far to go!"

This time, Buzz grabbed up telephone stand and all, and was ready to let it fly when the skinny, unhealthy-looking man appeared in the hall doorway.

The man wore a messenger's uniform. "Hey," he yelled loudly, "I said *telegram!*"

THE two partners instantly forgot their argument and swung to face the messenger. Deacon seized the envelope, ripped it open, unfolded a lengthy message. Buzz tried to read over his shoulder, but he was so short it was impossible for him to see.

"All right," he snorted. "What *is* it?"

"From Rush," said Deacon, continuing to read swiftly. "Hey, he's somewhere in the Amazon valley. South America. Says we're to get a fast plane equipped for landing on water, load

aboard all the equipment we can, and get down there. It's a river down there some place.

"How in hell we gonna find it?"

"Rush has directions here. He suggests we pick up the girl, because he thinks maybe she can help us find her uncle."

Buzz grinned. "Wow!" he exclaimed.

"Also," Deacon continued, "we're to try to locate the Crazy Indian from the air. Rush gives us the possible location." He looked at his partner. "Remember those maps we have of South America? We're to check one of them. Rush was down there once a long time ago."

Buzz demanded, "How the hell you gonna find a crazy Indian from the air?"

"It appears to be a boat of some kind, you dope. Rush says so here."

"I'll be damned!"

They decided that first they would tell the girl, Lucky Williams, the good news. Also, Deacon put the machinery in operation for readying a plane for a flight. At different times, on special jobs, they used a charter service air line that was familiar with their unusual jobs in various parts of the world. Deacon called the number and ordered the air line to begin loading the plane. He rattled off the supplies needed. Other items he and Buzz could pick up here at the office.

Buzz gave the elderly messenger a dollar and shooed him out of there. The fellow had been standing in the doorway listening, open-mouthed.

Deacon, still on a phone, snapped at Buzz, "Call Lucky Williams and tell her we're on the way up to see her. Get busy, you nitwit!"

Buzz got the same maid again and gave the information.

A little while later they arrived, using their own car, at an exclusive apartment

section near Riverside Drive. Deacon wanted Buzz to wait in the car, but the smaller man only grinned and followed him into the ornate lobby of the apartment building.

THERE was a reception clerk and a switchboard operator. Both gave hard-bitten Buzz a doubtful regard. His features, his clothes were enough to place him as a roustabout.

So Deacon, in his smooth way, did the talking. He stated that they wished to see Miss Williams, if she had returned.

The operator called the apartment, waited, then spoke to someone. She turned and said, "Yes, there's someone up there. You may go right up. Suite 1001."

They took the elevator.

On the tenth floor, Buzz pushed on ahead. It had been several days since they had seen the girl, and Buzz had been worried about her. His weakness was pretty girls, and he had fallen hard for the trim redhead.

He rapped on the door, waited.

"Try to act like a gentleman," Deacon advised.

From inside the apartment, a voice called, "Come in."

They opened the door, found themselves in a small foyer, and moved toward what looked like a large living room beyond. The living room was expensively furnished. There were numerous deep armchairs. The hall door slammed behind them.

The men with guns in their hands rose up from behind the wide chairs. One particularly ugly-looking fellow said, "We *thought* you Romeos would come here sooner or later!"

The speaker started shooting.

TO THE amazement of both Buzz and Deacon, there was no thunder

of gunfire.

The gun simply made a little *putt* of a sound, and a small object whizzed past Deacon's arm.

He suddenly understood.

"Darts!" he yelled at Buzz, and they went into speedy action.

Deacon's long, fast-moving body hurtled a chair and he seized one of the men. His fist slashed out. The fellow's head snapped back and he fell down behind the chair. He lay there, motionless.

Buzz, in the meantime, and with a bellow of rage, leaped over chair and all and took hold of the man who had shot at him. There were five assailants in all. The hard little man reached out and seized another who was trying to aim a dart gun.

Obviously, the thugs had decided on the dart guns in order to avoid too much noise in the apartment building. The darts were probably poisoned, or contained a knockout drug.

But now, with Buzz ripping loose in the midst of the assailants, there was little chance to use the strange weapons. Buzz swept up a pair of heavy metal book ends from a table, gripped them in his fists and started cracking skulls. There were assorted, painful yells.

Buzz Casey was never happier than when in a good fight. At such times, he roared and bellowed. He made a lot of racket, and he did a lot of damage.

Deacon leaped after a man who was trying to escape toward the hall door. He reached the fellow and brought him down with a vase that he had scooped up from a table.

The man lay still.

Buzz was in the midst of three others who were still on their feet. But not for long.

He hit a man with one of the book ends, then followed through with his foot. The fellow did a flying dive over

a chair and didn't get up.

Another man had reversed the air gun in his hand, was bringing it down in a smashing drive toward Buzz's head. Buzz was not quite fast enough to avoid the blow. The steel gun butt struck his skull.

For a moment, leathery-faced Buzz looked dazed. Then, shaking his head, blinking his small bright eyes—he dived in again! He was making a terrific racket.

Outside the apartment, someone was pounding on the door.

A voice yelled behind the panel. "Hey, you guys! I've located the dame! She sneaked into the building next door!"

BUZZ hardly heard. Another man went down. The last one remaining on his feet suddenly looked scared to death, dived down the long room and headed for a window that was open. There was a fire escape platform directly outside the window.

Deacon jumped after the man; while Buzz bent down to scoop up three of the dropped air pistols. He put them in his pocket, then leaped to help his gaunt partner.

But the swift-moving Deacon had already clipped the last thug. Out on his feet, the fellow swayed around in a crazy circle, sagged down across the window sill.

Deacon started to lower him to the floor. He started to say, "The girl must have ducked out just before they broke in here . . ."

He paused, his gaze going out the window and apparently freezing on something out there.

Buzz demanded, "What the blazes you staring at?"

In the next moment, he stared also.

The tenth floor of this building was just slightly above the roof level of an

adjacent structure. Ventilators and air-shaft chimneys dotted the graveled roof-top.

The girl had been standing there looking toward the apartment where the fight was taking place. But now she turned, streaking toward a doorway that was open atop the roof.

It was Lucky Williams, hatless, her lovely red hair shimmering in the morning sunlight.

"**G**OSHAMIGHTY!" Buzz yelled, and in the next second had the sash up and was out on the fire escape. Distance to the adjacent building was only about three feet. He leaped.

Long-legged Deacon was right behind him.

"Hey!" Buzz yelled, as he took out across the roof. The girl was almost to the open doorway.

But at his yell, she stumbled, went to her knees. However, she was quickly on her feet again, and running.

Behind Buzz and Deacon, a gun blasted. The slug whined across their heads and a voice bellowed: "Halt in the name of the law!"

Both men spun around.

A policeman was sticking his head out of the open window of the girl's apartment. There was a .38 in his fist.

Another cop appeared in a window adjacent, and he started to raise a gun also.

Buzz, without waiting, shoved Deacon behind an airshaft projection near by. "Hell with 'em!" he said. "We gotta help the girl! Come on!"

Deacon paused long enough to scoop up some small object from the roof. Slugs knocked up gravel around his feet.

Ducking low, Buzz and his partner reached the door opening through which the girl had disappeared. They plunged down a flight of iron stairs, found them-

selves behind a fire door that led to a top-floor hallway of the apartment building.

They flung out into the hallway and saw two sets of elevator doors. The elevators were the self-operating type, and a small glass button next to one shaft was lighted, showing that the car was in use.

They leaped to the other, and Deacon held his finger on the button. The glass above it lighted, and they waited, fuming.

Buzz said, "She's in the other car!"

"Must be!" agreed Deacon, forgetting to argue, for once.

It seemed hours until their car arrived, and then they were inside, pushing a button that would take the cage to the ground floor. Even as the elevator started slowly downward, they both heard a commotion in the hallway outside.

Buzz, still pressing the first-floor button within the car, grinned. "They can't follow until one of those elevators is not in use!" he said.

Deacon jerked his head. "I hope not," he said. "There'd be a lot of questioning, and we haven't got time for that now!"

They finally reached the ground floor and raced out into the hallway. It was deserted.

They hurried out to the street, drew up short as they saw police prowl cars drawn up before the building next to the one they had just left.

But Deacon pointed out, "Nobody in the cars. Come on!"

They managed to reach their own machine without seeing any police and, with Buzz at the wheel, got away from there.

BUZZ CASEY'S driving would hardly be recommended for persons with weak hearts.

Deacon gripped the seat. He said, "Take it easy!"

"Got to find her!" Buzz said.

He went down the block at break-neck speed. They saw no signs of the girl. He took the corner on complaining tires, went down a square and turned in again at the street which paralleled the girl's.

They found no trace of her.

But Buzz, determined, turned in at the girl's street again. Just as he did so, a police car left the curb, its siren whining.

Buzz flung the steering wheel over hard, started a complete circle in the street. He went up over the curb, missed a lamp-post by inches. But they managed to make the turn, and then Buzz sent the car racing away from the spot.

The siren behind them made wailing sounds in the morning air, but their own machine was faster. Soon they had out-distanced the police car, turned numerous corners and were safely away from the spot.

Buzz finally slowed down. Deacon let out his breath with relief.

He said, "Well, I hope you're satisfied!"

"About what?" Buzz asked.

"That girl! She's in with those crooks, of course. We almost got caught in that nicely planted trap!"

Buzz frowned, shaking his head. "Don't believe it!" he snapped.

"All right," Deacon sighed. "What have you got to say about *this*, then?"

He held out his hand. In it was the small object that he had picked up on the roof, the thing the girl had dropped when she stumbled.

It was one of the small wooden miniatures containing the carved figure of an Indian.

Deacon said grimly, "Every time someone runs into one of these things,

there's trouble!"

For once, homely Buzz made no comment. As they continued downtown toward their office he thought of the girl. Perhaps, he decided, Deacon was right.

Could the girl be involved with those behind this unexplainable mystery?

CHAPTER IX

THE start for South America was delayed, because of the girl's absence. The following morning, while Buzz checked final loading of the plane at a Long Island airport, Deacon said:

"I'll go to her apartment once more. I've called Judge English. He doesn't know a thing. He's under a doctor's care because of the ordeal he's been through.

"Did he hear anything further from Rush?"

"No."

Deacon left. But it was several hours before he returned.

"No trace of her," he announced. "No one knows a thing."

Buzz gave his lanky partner a skeptical look. "Hell," he demanded, "what about that maid of hers—the one who answered the phone?"

"We were sucked in," said Deacon.

"Meaning?"

"There never *was* a maid. That's something I found out at her apartment hotel."

"But—" Buzz began.

"That was a gag. Those smart Joes did it to lead us into a trap."

"The cops catch up with them?"

Deacon shook his head gloomily.

"It looks," he said, "as if your girl friend has flown the coop."

They tried to get a message through to the little village in South America from which Rush Randall's wire had been sent. But the telegraph office would not guarantee that their wire

would get through. They sent it anyway.

Late that afternoon they were ready to take off. The airport was on the south shore of Long Island, and there was a ramp down which the plane was eased into the water.

Both associates of Rush Randall were excellent pilots, but Deacon took the controls for the takeoff. As he commented, "You got your mind too much on that babe."

Buzz, beside him in the cockpit, snorted, "She's cute."

"Too damned cute, if you ask me."

The argument helped to pass the long hours as they flew steadily southward. They spelled each other at the controls, the other holding air charts on his lap, or taking a catnap. They landed several times for fuel.

Sometime within the next thirty-six hours they were over the area described by Rush Randall in the message. Dawn had just broken. They came down to a thousand feet and closely scanned the endless green carpet of tropical wilderness beneath them.

A huge carpet that was torn here and there by a twisting narrow river. There were several of the rivers, each separated from the other by the impenetrable forests.

It wasn't until they were flying low that Deacon remarked, "There's mountains down there, too. I'd hate like hell to get lost in this country."

"You think this is the river Rush mentioned?" Buzz was busy checking a chart. He had transferred figures from the telegram to the air map, and was studying them.

"If you haven't made any mistake in figuring, it is."

They watched for a shack that was supposed to be located along the shore. That, and a sandy strip of beach. They dropped to five hundred feet.

Then Deacon was banking the plane and circling. He lost more altitude.

"Take it easy, pal," warned Buzz.

"I think this is it," said Deacon.

He watched the river below them, saw the narrow strip of beach alongside the river, saw a rooftop that gleamed momentarily in the morning sunlight. He looked especially for smoke or any signs of activity.

Then he announced, "Well, chum, here we go!"

He circled again, throttled back on the gas and went into the approach glide. He brought the craft down on the glass-smooth water with scarcely a ripple, taxied toward the beach, eyes alert.

Buzz held a gun ready in his fist, just in case.

Nothing happened.

THEY beached the plane and made it secure, then moved along the beach.

The morning stillness was almost startling. Each carried a gun now. Each was wary. Buzz looked uneasily at the closely growing, matted underbrush.

He said, "I hope there's no fuzzy-wuzzies around."

Deacon indicated tracks in the sun-baked sand that was as hard as a cement floor. "A plane landed here," he pointed out.

The beach followed the shore for a good mile. Midway down its length they located the big shack almost concealed beneath the trees. They still had seen no signs of life anywhere.

Soon they were searching the deserted cabin. There was evidence that some of the skimpy furnishings had been hastily removed.

Buzz found his partner standing before a cracked old mirror on a wall.

"Admiring yourself again?" he asked.

"Look at this," said Deacon.

There was writing on the mirror. The words read:

FOLLOW TO CRAZY INDIAN
ACCORDING TO DIRECTIONS
GIVEN YOU IN TELEGRAM.
WATCH OUT FOR TRICKS.

—Rush.

Buzz exclaimed, "Then Rush was here!"

"Naturally!" said Deacon. "This means he must have gone on ahead. We're to follow . . . if we can locate that damned Crazy Indian!"

Deacon rubbed out the writing with his hand. They returned to the plane, and soon were in the air again. They'd checked the maps and the directions given in the telegram, and saw that their route was downriver.

What would take hours by slow-moving river raft, was only minutes in the air. Soon Deacon was convinced that they had found the area where the craft had pulled up along the shore. They came down and taxied slowly along the river, eyes watching.

Buzz spotted the trail opening into the heavy forest. "That looks like it!" he pointed out.

They came up to the tiny point of land and killed the engines. Buzz climbed out in knee-deep muddy water and looked around. He saw where a flat-bottomed boat had landed here. He noted the trail coming down to the tiny patch of beach. He looked for any further messages from Rush Randall, but could find none. He went back to the plane.

"I wonder where the boat is?"

Deacon, his head stuck out a window, gave the spot a gloomy regard. "Who knows? Look, we'd better tie up downstream a bit. Not right here."

HE CLIMBED out. The plane, floats barely drawing six inches of water, was easy to handle. They guided it

down along the shore until they reached a curtain of trees that hung, veil-like, down over the water like weeping willows. They concealed the plane as best as possible.

They removed distributor parts from the engines, locked the cabin. Deacon carried an equipment case. Buzz strapped on a walkie-talkie radio outfit. In his pockets he stuffed some sandwiches taken from one of the food cases that were stored in the plane.

It would have been impossible to follow the forest trail from the air. And Rush, in his long telegram, had said this trail was important. It led to the point where the readings were to be used for locating the Crazy Indian. So there was nothing to do but follow his directions.

They plodded through the deep green forests. The vast silence bothered little Buzz Casey. "Dammit," he commented once, "it'd be good to hear an ambulance siren going up Broadway. Something familiar, huh?"

Deacon's long face was more gloomy than ever. "You just keep your eyes open," he warned. "There might be more guys around here than you think. The blasted woods could be full of them!"

That gave Buzz something to think about. His sharp, bright eyes remained on the alert, and he carried a heavy .45 ready in his hard fist.

They had switched on the walkie-talkie, just on the chance Rush might be trying to contact them. Rush, though, probably had no equipment with him. They were still uncertain as to just how he had arrived here. It had not been mentioned in the telegram.

The day wore on.

EARLY that afternoon they came out atop the ridge, high above the tops of trees. Monk found several brass casings from machine gun bullets, and

exclaimed, "Somebody was doing some shooting!"

"This must be the spot, all right," said Deacon. He was removing some instruments from the equipment case. "Let's get done and get out of here, before we get a slug!"

Which seemed to be a good idea.

Buzz kept watch while his tall, beanpole of a partner set up a small portable sighting instrument. Then Deacon took a slip of paper from his pocket. He repeated aloud the readings that had been sent to them by Rush. He sighted the instrument on a spot far off.

He seemed puzzled. Passing the piece of paper to Buzz, he said, "Read those figures to me."

As Buzz read, he again checked the sight. Finally he said dully, "Hell!"

"See anything?"

"Only a river. And there's plenty of rivers in this country. The Crazy Indian, Rush said, is a boat. It isn't there." He removed one of the air maps from his pocket and made notations. "Perhaps we can locate it from the air. They've probably moved it. At least, now we know where it's *supposed* to be!"

They started the trek back to the plane.

Buzz cursed the humidity. The air was thickly wet, and gave the impression of coolness beneath the closely growing, tangled trees. Nevertheless both men were streaming with perspiration as the afternoon wore on. Buzz was stripped down to the waist now, and his sweaty body looked like a skinny shaft wound with steel bands.

The afternoon was waning when they reached the river again. Their first thought was of the plane. If someone had heard them land this morning . . .

But they found the ship secure and intact. They had just completed a quick inspection when both heard the

sound. They listened.

It was a gasoline engine, and the engine was on a boat somewhere on the river, for it came down there.

"Coming this way!" exclaimed Buzz. They waited.

Shortly the boat appeared. It was an old gas boat with a small cabin built on its deck. As the boat approached they made out the figure of a man at the wheel. Buzz yelled before Deacon could stop him. Regardless, the man had spotted the plane concealed beneath the trees.

Buzz said, "Golly! He's an Indian!" This was true.

The man at the wheel was a tall, big man with coppery features and heavy straight black hair. His features were very sharp and very grim-looking.

They noted these things as the motor on the boat was silenced and the craft drifted slowly toward them. They waded out into the water and waited.

The boat was almost up to them now. It's bow gently scraped the bottom and the Indian turned and said something to another person who must have been in the cabin.

There was some sort of muffled answer, and next the girl appeared abruptly on deck.

They gasped.

The girl, as pretty as ever, was Lucky Williams!

CHAPTER X

BUZZ was excited.

But Deacon murmured sourly, "Trouble! I see it coming!"

Disregarding his remark, Buzz scrambled aboard the craft. He grasped the girl's slim, straight shoulders. "Gosh!" he said. And then, "Gosh! You're all right, huh?"

Deacon had followed with some misgiving.

"Of course, I'm all right, Buzz," she said. She smiled at Deacon. She indicated the tall, wiry Indian. "This is Joe. He has a name a mile long, so I call him Joe for short. He's one of the best guides in this country."

Joe nodded.

"How'd you pick him up?" Buzz wanted to know. "And how'd you get down here?"

She smiled again. Her eyes were blue now in the fading sunlight. "I flew one of the regular airlines, then chartered a pilot to bring me to that little village from where Rush Randall sent the telegram. I picked Joe up there."

It was Deacon who asked, "Have you been able to locate Rush or any of the others yet?"

Lucky Williams shook her head. Her lovely eyes clouded. "I'm worried," she said tautly.

"We go now," said Joe, the guide.

Deacon looked at the girl instead of the guide. "What's he talking about? Go where?"

"He knows of a camp upriver. He told me Jordon Marsh built it several years ago. He thinks it might be the best place to start the search."

Deacon thought that over a moment. "All right," he agreed. "We'll use the plane."

But the guide shook his head. "Place we go, river too narrow," he said without expression. "Only go by boat."

Deacon frowned, looking at the girl. "Can this guy be trusted?"

"Absolutely," she said quickly.

The tall, lanky man shrugged. "Well, I guess we can't be any *worse* off!"

Obtaining some additional food supplies from the plane, they set out.

The river grew narrower. The forests closed in around them as dusk neared. The solitude was tremendous, only disturbed by the steady throb of

the boat engine which echoed far up and down the inland waterway.

It was dark when the guide put the craft into shore again. Deacon held a powerful flashlight. All saw the float made of heavy logs, and which served as a landing point. The raft was anchored to the shore line by heavy chains.

They went ashore.

BUZZ was particularly solicitous about the girl. But she was first off the boat, first to have a small pack sack up on her shoulders.

She said impatiently, "We'll have to hurry. Joe told me the camp is a mile from here."

They had brought additional lanterns as part of their equipment. Deacon had had little to say to the girl.

However, as far as Buzz Casey was concerned, she was tops. She had explained to his satisfaction why she had so abruptly disappeared from New York.

Joe, the guide, saying nothing, his jaws occasionally working on a wad of tobacco, led the way through the woods.

Everywhere there was the vast, strange silence, as though the whole world were waiting for something to happen in the next moment. It was uncanny. What menace lay ahead in the deep interior of this vast country?

This feeling grew upon them as they plodded beneath the trees. The spongy, slightly damp ground muffled their steps, and about the only sound was when they spoke to one another.

Buzz said abruptly, "I was just thinking."

Tall Deacon was behind his partner, the girl between them as they walked single file.

Deacon said sourly, "Don't flatter yourself."

Disregarding the comment, Buzz went on, "I was thinking what a heck

of a spot we'd be in if this guide walked out on us." He waved his arm indicating the impenetrable forest that completely surrounded them.

"Shut up!" said Deacon.

The girl gave a soft laugh. "Buzz," she said, "you're worrying needlessly. Joe is dependable. He's a wonderful guide."

"I hope so," said Buzz.

They abruptly emerged in a large clearing, and there before them was the camp.

Whoever had built the cabin should have been given credit. It was well-made, heavy logs forming its sides.

The girl pointed ahead and exclaimed, "There's someone here! There's a light."

They all hurried forward toward the doorway of the building. But suddenly the guide spoke in a voice that was more of a soft hiss than anything else.

"You wait!" he said.

Buzz gave the Indian one of his beligerent looks. "Wait for what?" he demanded.

The guide had turned, was motioning for the others to crouch down. He pointed behind them, toward the heavy woods from which they'd barely emerged.

"Look!" he said very quietly.

They all stared.

Buzz, impatient as always, started to mutter, "What the blazes . . ."

Then he paused, his small eyes blinking. All of them saw now as their eyes concentrated on the darkness beyond them.

Dark forms were moving out from the trees. Those near the cabin were being surrounded.

The moving forms were men.

THE guide made a deep sound that sounded like a grunt.

"Trap!" he announced.

Buzz shot a look in the general direction where the guide was also crouched down in the darkness. "Yeah," he agreed. "And heap big!"

They could perceive several dark forms advancing swiftly across the clearing.

Deacon was the first to act. He leaped to the door of the cabin, pushed the girl inside.

"Keep out of sight!" he ordered. "There's going to be a little trouble, I'm afraid!"

Buzz had dropped his pack, was advancing across the clearing. His bright, small eyes gleamed and his fists knotted.

"I'll say there's gonna be trouble!" he yelled.

He was first to meet the circle of advancing assailants. Deacon and the guide were quickly at his side.

Fists swung. Men yelled in a strange tongue. Bones cracked.

There was enough night light in the clearing around the cabin to show the moving of figures. Buzz banged his way through several of them. They were dark-skinned natives. They became confused.

Buzz was shouting now, making a racket. He grinned every time a figure went down beneath his flailing fists. Deacon was busy with his fists, too, trying to handle a couple of natives at once. The natives appeared to be unarmed, so the two partners hesitated at using guns.

Joe, the guide, seemed to be doing his share of fighting.

Deacon, seeing his small partner's predicament, worked out a little system. He picked up a man, whirled around and around with him until the fellow was dizzy.

THEN, setting him upon his feet again, Deacon sent a single haymaker to the jaw. The man went stag-

gering backward like a drunk looking for a place to light.

Buzz was waiting. He held his .45 by the barrel. He tapped the dazed native with the gun butt as the fellow staggered past him.

They tried the same method with another victim. It worked.

Three men leaped on scrappy Buzz Casey—and this time Deacon hit Buzz with a gun. It was a mistake, a result of the confusion. But that didn't help Buzz Casey.

He fell flat on his face . . .

When Buzz swayed to his feet, he was aware that the fight had worked its way around to the rear of the cabin. There was some commotion back there, and so he leaped that way.

But it wasn't a fight. It was Deacon, yelling worriedly. The attackers seemed to have disappeared.

Buzz glared at his lanky partner.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

Deacon waved toward the deep woods. "They took out for the wild spaces," he announced. "And now we're in one sweet mess. Those birds grabbed Joe, our guide!"

Buzz stared.

"You mean, he's gone?"

His partner nodded.

Suddenly, Buzz yelled, "Poor Lucky! She must be scared to death!" He leaped toward the rear door of the cabin.

A moment later he appeared outside again. His eyes goggled.

"Goshamighty!" he yelled.

"What's wrong with you now?" Deacon demanded.

"Those fuzzies have got her, too!"

CHAPTER XI

FOR a tense moment following his partner's announcement, Deacon said nothing. For once, Buzz was not

joking.

Around them there was the dark, deep solitude of the forest, more ominous than ever. Nothing stirred.

Buzz finally said, "Bet you those guys figured the girl knows something. That's why she was seized."

Deacon's features were grim. "Has it occurred to you," he demanded, "that she might have *arranged* this trap?"

Apparently it had not, for Buzz looked surprised at mention of the idea.

"Don't believe it!" he exploded.

Deacon said, "She's in trouble. Her uncle, Clarence Hobart is also in some sort of trouble, as are the others. Where are they? What's happened to them?" He spread his hands hopelessly. "It looks like some menace threatens that entire crowd!"

Buzz still didn't look convinced. After some arguing, it was decided, finally, that perhaps they'd better try and trail the girl. She *might* be in danger.

They spent a few moments locating things that had been lost in the fight. Finally they got started.

The beginning of the trail led along a fairly well-defined path through the big woods. Men—or possibly animals—had made the trail. It skirted the thicker undergrowth. Walking was not too difficult.

They continued onward for about an hour. They found no signs of the girl, or of the guide, or of anyone else for that matter.

The trail had narrowed now, was nothing more than a narrow pathway. They came to a fork.

Since the left branch of the fork seemed to be the main route, they followed this. Naturally they first searched for footprints. But a heavy carpet of old leaves that lay on the ground gave no clues.

They continued.

And there were more forks in the

skimpy trail beneath the dense trees, and at each of these points the two men stopped and argued. Argued about which trail to follow.

For another hour they kept boring deeper into the heavy forest.

Finally Buzz drew up short and said, "I think we took the wrong turn at that last fork. Better go back." He pointed ahead. There was nothing but a wall of trees now. "I think we made a mistake."

They returned, watching for the last fork where they had turned off. And they discovered a startling fact.

Going in the opposite direction, things were reversed. They came to forks in the trail that could lead in *other* directions. They tried one, discovered that the pathway ended *against* a snarled mass of undergrowth. They returned again—to find that they had somehow missed the trail they'd been on.

Buzz blinked his eyes. "What the blazes!" he said.

Deacon frowned. "I could have sworn this was the right path."

"I'll tell you what I think," Buzz said. "We're lost!"

Deacon nodded. "I rather figured that an hour ago!" he admitted.

And then, as an afterthought, Buzz exclaimed, "Daggonit, I wonder if Rush is lost too!"

IF RUSH RANDALL was lost, his movements at dawn the following morning did not indicate the fact.

With Big Mike, the Indian at his side, Rush seemed to be following something or somebody. The two men moved silently along the forest trail, not hurrying, pausing from time to time in order to listen for some sound that might come from ahead.

Rush asked, "You're sure we're not mistaken, Mike?"

The big fellow shook his head. "Not being long now, boss man. Missy Lucky Williams and man not far ahead."

For sometime, Rush had seen no sign indicating the presence of the other two people along the trail. Yet Mike had insisted they were not far away.

"You seeing," he said.

And a few moments later he proved that he was right.

Sunlight showed through the tall trees just ahead, and almost in the same moment Rush saw water. It looked like they were approaching a river.

Leading the way quietly, Mike moved closer to the clearing that led down to the water. Suddenly he paused, motioning Rush to a position behind a big tree trunk.

They watched.

The Indian guide had obtained a boat from somewhere along shore. Quickly he had the craft in the water, and then he and the girl were aboard. Each handled a paddle.

The canoe slid out into the water and headed downstream.

Rush said, "Follow them. We can keep to the trees along shore."

They set out, their movements silent.

The canoe made good time. It was necessary for Rush and big Mike to run, at the same time keeping themselves concealed along the shore line. This was somewhat difficult.

The river was narrow, and made a considerable number of bends in its course. It was around one of these bends that the canoe had disappeared now, and when Rush and his friend again caught sight of it—they stopped short.

For Rush saw the amphibian plane drawn up close to the shore, practically concealed from the river by low-hanging tree branches.

Mike turned, asked, "Others being

here?"

Rush nodded, his features thoughtful.

Mike started forward again.

"Wait!" Rush warned.

And then Mike saw the reason for the warning.

Because the girl's Indian guide had seen the plane, and had now paused, his paddle resting across the gunwales. He said something to the girl.

In the next moment she was slipping from the forward seat and easing her slim form into the bottom of the canoe. She lay down and remained out of sight.

The guide picked up his paddle and, looking alert, started toward the spot where the plane was moored near shore. He used his paddle silently, making no splashes as it dipped the smooth water.

The gun, being fired by someone aboard the plane, started shattering the still, morning air.

RUSH immediately swept into smooth action.

"Get to the canoe!" he ordered Mike.

"Take care of the girl."

Instantly Rush disappeared through a screen of underbrush that hid him from the moored plane. He made little sound as he worked his way down close to shore. It would have been unlikely if anyone aboard the plane would have heard him anyway, so great was the sound being created by the blasting gun.

The Indian guide had, at first, desperately tried to paddle away from the spot. But slugs kicked up water dangerously close to the flimsy craft.

Perhaps figuring on drawing the gunfire away from the canoe, the Indian leaped overboard and started swimming frantically toward a protecting overhang along the river bank. The canoe drifted.

Cabin door of the plane was open. Firing stopped for just a moment. Perhaps the gunman suspected a trick. Per-

haps he knew someone was still aboard the canoe.

He appeared in the cabin doorway of the plane and raised the gun again.

That was when he was seized by Rush Randall's powerful hands. There was a fight.

The gunman was fairly young and well-built. He was dark-featured, with cheeks that were pale for a man found in this part of the country.

He tried to fling Rush from the plane.

And, instead, found himself held in a viselike grip as he was thrown back inside the cabin of the ship. The cabin was crowded with equipment cases and paraphernalia. The man stumbled over a case—and the gun fell.

His feet whipped out and attempted to kick the blond whirlwind. The fellow could have saved his energy.

Because Rush picked him up, pinioned his arms, and then held him. The man found himself absolutely helpless. He stared in bewilderment.

Rush said quietly, "It might be a good idea to learn identities before trying to kill people."

There was a commotion just then, outside the plane.

Big Mike climbed aboard. With his left hand, he gripped the grim-faced guide. In his other was the girl, Lucky Williams.

The girl took one look at Rush and gasped. Then she cried, "Someone aboard this plane was trying to shoot . . ."

She broke off, her gray-green eyes widening. She stared in wonderment at the man held by Rush Randall.

She stammered, "H o w a r d! . . . Howard English!"

CHAPTER XII

HOWARD ENGLISH stared at the girl, at Rush Randall, and at big

Mike. He appeared too stunned to speak.

Finally he blurted, "I . . . I thought you were some of *them*, following me! I . . . I guess I was pretty scared!"

"That was quite evident," said Rush. "That is why it was necessary to hold you. You might have shot somebody."

Howard English gave him a grateful smile.

"Thanks," he murmured.

Rush questioned, "You said you were escaping from them? Who?"

Howard English, though he was a tall, very capable-looking man, started trembling.

He stammered, "I . . . I . . ."

"Were you seized," asked Rush, "because of the miniature Indian thing?"

Howard English jumped as though he might have been struck by someone. Terror was now plain in his eyes. He said evasively "Well . . . yes . . . in a way!"

"What is it all about?"

"I . . . I don't know!" Howard English gasped. But as the same time, his wild gaze veered to ageless Mike. It was a fleeting glance, and yet it was observed by Rush.

"Well, then," Rush said finally, "all we do is return to this place where you were being held and blast out this crowd!"

Howard English shook his head.

"It won't be as easy as that" he said.

"Why not?"

"Because, first, you've got to find the Crazy Indian. That's where they have the real hideout, where they hold all captives. I was being taken there when I escaped."

"And you didn't learn the location?"

"No. I was unconscious part of the time. Also they have moved the boat. And they were pretty careful about mentioning definite locations. I came upon this plane, and I was investigat-

ing."

Rush thought Howard English's story rang true enough. In Rush's pocket was a check that had been drawn by the young man's own father, for his release. Strangely, though, Rush made no mention of that fact now, or that he had played the part of the contact man.

He said, "Perhaps the guide, here, can help us?"

They all looked at the man named Joe, whose name the girl had mentioned. He had been listening to the conversation his lean hard paws working on his tobacco cud from time to time. Now he took time out to spat.

He made a motion with his hand, indicating the river. "Maybe I find for you."

Rush turned to big Mike. "How about this hidden valley where your people live? Why not there?"

But Mike shook his head. "My people are being what you call very timid and peaceful race. They are getting frightened when too many people coming. They go away."

Rush asked, "You don't think the boat was taken there?"

Mike shook his head. "Hidden valley of my people is being inland, boss man. No way to going by boat as large as Crazy Indian. Boat is being some place else."

Rush sighed, looked at the girl. "What do you think?"

In turn, Lucky Williams touched Howard English's arm. "What about the others? Were they mentioned while you were being held captive?"

"Yes. Your uncle . . . Marsh, too."

"Any others?" queried Rush.

"I'm not sure, sir."

Rush had removed the makeup sometime after escaping with his friend Mike. He realized that Howard English had immediately recognized him when he had seized the young men here

on the plane a little while ago. It occurred to Rush that Howard English had not been too surprised.

"Well," Rush said finally, "all aboard, then. We'll see what we can learn from the air."

RUSH checked the fuel tanks and the reserve supply of gas. There was still enough gas for many hours in the air.

It was crowded aboard the plane, but everyone managed to find a spot to sit down. The girl was in the cockpit with Rush Randall.

She told him about the camp where the attack had taken place against Buzz and Deacon.

She explained, "I escaped from there during the excitement last night. I was afraid. But now I think those natives were merely trying to frighten us away."

Rush made no comment. And in the next few moments he was busy getting the heavy ship in the air. They climbed for altitude, headed back up the river.

Everywhere, for endless miles, was the forest. It looked like wild jungle.

Rush said, "We will first try to locate my partners."

A half hour later he was setting the plane down again, taxiing up close to the log landing raft which Buzz and the others had used the night before.

Leaving Mike in charge of the plane, they had the guide lead the way through the woods to the camp.

It was deserted. They looked around outside, but found nothing. Rush made a special examination for any hidden messages that might have been left for him.

He found none.

However, Rush did not seem particularly concerned by his partners' absence. He said, "Perhaps we can contact them later, from the plane."

They returned to the plane, were soon in the air again.

The guide, Joe, watched the winding river below and gave directions.

At no time was it possible to tell whether the poker-faced guide was trying to be cooperative or not. His copy features continually held a grim look. It was as though he was always mad about something.

While Rush checked the route with the guide, Howard English manipulated dials that controlled the short-wave sending and receiving apparatus. He knew something about radio. He tuned in on a wave-length suggested by Rush. Finally he announced: "I can't pick up those guys!"

RUSH himself manipulated the dials. But he got no response. His eyes were thoughtful.

Next he sent the plane in a banking circle and turned back up the river. They reached the point where the cabin was located a mile back from shore. From there, he flew a course inland, in ever-widening circles.

Below them spread the thick tangle of forest, the trees growing so close together that it was impossible to see the ground beneath them. Here and there they picked up a tiny, isolated lake. But the forest itself appeared endless.

Rush said, "If they were down there, they would hear the plane. They would build a fire, or give us some kind of sign."

Howard English nodded. "In other words, they're not down there?"

"Apparently not," said Rush.

He turned back to their original course, after instructing young English, "Keep the radio tuned in."

The big plane gobbled up miles. What would take days of weary travel on the ground, was now covered in a matter of minutes. But one thing was obvious.

The plane was only good as long as they followed some waterway. The interior was nothing but wildly growing jungle. There was little of anything else.

Sometime later they reached another river. The guide indicated that Rush was to swing north and follow it.

They flew perhaps twenty miles—distances were deceiving to those aboard the plane, due to the vastness of this great country—and then the guide motioned to another river that lay below them.

It was still another of the many waterways that sliced into the interior.

"Follow," the stoney faced guide ordered briefly.

And shortly the guide pointed to a tiny indentation along the shore.

"Down," he said.

Rush brought the ship down from five thousand feet, and they all saw the cove was of a good size. A crane, startled, took off from the water and disappeared.

They landed.

Howard English said doubtfully, "Nothing here but more wilderness! What the devil?"

But Rush indicated something that was almost hidden beneath trees far back in the cove. Only a sharp eye could have detected the object.

"A gas boat!" young English said.

Everyone saw the deserted craft tied up near shore.

Rush nodded, looking at their guide, Joe.

It was as though Rush had intercepted the guide's thought, for Joe said gruffly, "We use boat now. This thing no good." He indicated the plane.

It was impossible to get too close to shore, due to rocks that appeared just beneath the surface. There was danger of wrecking the plane.

But part of the plane equipment in-

cluded a portable rubber raft. This was inflated and put overboard.

The girl and the Indian guide were first taken ashore by big Mike. The trip was perhaps two hundred yards across the inner curve of the cove.

Then Mike returned for Rush and Howard English. Rush had anchored the plane.

They started out for shore.

From the gas boat, another hundred yards off to their right, men suddenly appeared on deck and started shooting.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE first staccato sound of gunfire, Rush whipped toward Howard English.

"Can you swim?" he asked swiftly.

The young man jerked his head.

"Then try to get on the far side of the plane," Rush advised. "Dive!"

Rush was an excellent swimmer. It turned out that Mike was also. They plunged from the raft, Howard English between them. They disappeared below the surface.

The guns held by the assorted group of hard-looking men aboard the fifty-foot gas boat whacked out lead, and spray was knocked up from the water.

But the range was bad for small arms. It was not far. A man appeared on deck with an armful of rifles, and these were put into use.

The gunmen, however, jumped to one wrong conclusion. They figured that the three swimming men must be making toward shore. Judging about where heads would break the surface, they directed the gunfire that way.

The swimmers, meanwhile, came to the surface on the far side of the plane.

They worked their way, by reaching up with their hands and still remaining in the water, toward the cabin of the plane. On the far side of the plane

rifles were cracking, and there was some shouting from the gas boat located across the cove.

Obviously, the gunmen now suspected the truth—that their prey was behind the protection offered by the plane. Bullets started arriving that way. A couple thumped into the metal body of the big amphibian.

Rush had swung up to a wing and, crouched down, had reached over and opened the cabin door on their side. In a moment, they were inside.

Howard English stared through a window. "Look!" he yelled.

But Rush had already seen. "Wait!" he warned.

A small rowboat had set out from shore. In it were half a dozen men, five of them with rifles. A sixth rowed. The gunmen kept firing in the direction of the plane.

English said worriedly, "I don't see the girl—or that blasted guide!"

Rush nodded. He was working with an object that looked like a type of flare pistol. His hands moved swiftly, and he seemed oblivious of the crashing impact of leaden pellets against sides of the plane.

"The guide," said Rush, "is probably hiding with the girl in the woods."

Rush had the pistol ready now. It contained a short barrel perhaps an inch in diameter. He stepped near a doorway. He fired a single shot.

There was a loud sound—and then a peculiar phenomenon took place.

A great black cloud seemed to mushroom over the cove. It spread rapidly, thick and dense, and it enveloped everything within sight—water, trees, men.

Rush put away the gun, motioned to the others, ordered, "Swim for shore." He was already urging them out of the cabin, for the cloud was fast enclosing the plane, and shortly they

wouldn't be able to see a thing.

Howard English, understanding something of the blond adventurer's scheme, said, "We'll circle and get aboard that gas boat?"

Rush nodded.

"But how will we see?"

"Stick close to us," suggested Rush.

They got out onto a wing, and then slipped back into the water. The shooting had stopped now, and all around the cove there was the racket of men trying to shout directions to one another.

The black curtain, however, had them confused.

TO HOWARD ENGLISH, Rush Randall's sense of direction seemed amazing. All around them was the shouting of the excited gunmen, and the blackness, and yet Rush pushed through the water quietly, intent on one course. He was very calm. Mike swam beside them.

Shortly their feet touched bottom and they were climbing out onto the shore.

They could barely see each other in the black cloud that had even spread to shore. They circled the shore of the cove. The men out on the water and aboard the gas boat were still yelling excited orders to one another.

But abruptly the shouting stopped. There was heavy silence.

"Careful," Rush advised, leading the way. "It might be a trick."

They were keeping to the woods, so naturally their progress was necessarily slow.

But they finally reached that part of the inlet near where the gas boat had been tied up.

Rush moved ahead silently, every sense alert. The black cloud was like a heavy fog all around them.

And then, from out of the fog, loomed the bulky outlines of the boat. Rush

had stopped almost at the water's edge, warning the two men with him.

"Wait here," he said very quietly.

He was gone two or three moments. And then his tall figure appeared from out of the foggy blackness.

"What's happened?" Howard English wanted to know.

"They've disappeared," Rush said.

They started a quiet search. They covered the shore line, located the point where the guide and the girl had been landed.

They met no one, heard no further sounds from the gunmen who had been aboard the boat. It was clear now that the men, scared off, must have taken to the woods. What their plans might be was a question.

Rush had been stooped over, examining the ground. He had found something that now held his interest.

He finally said, "The guide, Joe, entered the woods at this point. There are the imprints of his moccasins."

Howard English blinked. "There is only one set of prints," he pointed out.

The cloud had been slowly lifting. It had raised several feet above the water now. They could see the gas boat, deserted, and off to the right they noted the plane, intact.

There was no sign of the gunmen, though, or of the girl, or of the guide.

Rush said, "There is one other possibility in regard to the girl."

"What would that be?" queried English.

"The guide could have been carrying her. There is a chance that they are in hiding nearby."

IT HAD started to grow dark now. They had little time to prepare for the search.

Big Mike located the rubber raft some distance up the shore. They returned to the plane. Rush selected

certain items from his equipment, as much as they could comfortably carry.

Rush tried once more to contact Buzz and Deacon. There was no reply. He moved a switch that set some kind of device on the plane. They returned to shore and made a complete search of the fifty-foot gas boat. And found nothing of importance except a number of five-gallon tin cans containing gas.

It was dark when big Mike finally picked up the trail of the guide, and led the way into the deep forest. The route seemed to be following a fairly definite course. It did not waver.

Howard English asked worriedly, "Is there anything to show that the girl is still with that fellow?"

Rush shook his head. He was carrying a small black device of some kind in his massive fist. It looked not unlike a voltmeter. He had been holding onto the thing ever since they had left the cove.

And now, unexpectedly, the device started making a small vibrating sound. Howard English looked at it, then at Rush Randall.

"If we hurry," Rush said, "we can reach the plane in half an hour."

Young English stared. "You're going back?" he asked, puzzled.

Rush nodded.

"It is possible that Buzz and Deacon are in more danger than we figured," he said. "It is obvious that there is a reason for the girl and that guide disappearing."

"What do you mean?"

"There is a second crowd in this mystery. What their exact purpose might be, is not yet clear. But the danger from them is just as great as this other thing. It is possible that this second group are trying to trap Buzz and Deacon."

"But the girl—" English started.

"The girl," said Rush, "apparently is

acquainted with one group. She is either working with them, or trying to reach them. At the same time, she is terrified of the other. That would explain her actions, her disappearance from time to time."

"But what about the guide?"

"He could be working for either crowd," said Rush. "Which one, we do not know."

Howard English understood. "Then there is a purpose in their trying to confuse anyone who is trailing them!" he exclaimed. "One crowd wants to get us off their tail; the other would just as well kill us as not!"

Rush nodded.

Worried, Howard English asked, "Which one?"

Rush did not answer.

They had been returning through the forest. English was silent awhile, asking no further questions, then suddenly he asked, "But what about this thing that you say is installed on the plane? How did you know . . .?"

Rush explained, indicating the device which he carried in his hand. "I turned on a sensitized alarm gadget before we left the plane," he said. "It sends out short-wave pulsations. That's what is making this thing register now."

"You mean," asked English, "someone is trying to get aboard the plane?"

Rush nodded. "Either that . . . or Buzz and Deacon are trying to reach us on the radio."

CHAPTER XIV

TWO men drifted slowly down-current on a flat, primitive, large raft. They were disheveled. They had grown fairly heavy beards. They sat there in the hot sunlight and acted as if they didn't care whether the raft ever reached any place or not.

Buzz said dully, "What day is it?"

"Thursday, I think," murmured Deacon.

"You sure?"

"No."

"Then why the hell say Thursday?"

"Shuddup," said Deacon gloomily.

They continued drifting along.

Deacon had long since given up trying to figure out where they were. They had wandered through the tangled forest for well over a day. They had come upon this river. Which one it was, they had no way of knowing. Hours later they had located the discarded raft along shore. And so they had set out downstream, knowing not where they were drifting, trusting that they would spot some familiar landmark seen before.

The day wore on.

"Hey!" said Buzz of a sudden.

Deacon roused. He had been dozing.

"Eh?"

Buzz pointed.

The next moment, and lanky Deacon was staring.

The white, sleek-looking yacht moved in midstream. The river was wide here, and there was a fairly strong current. The yacht bore down upon them swiftly. Someone hailed them.

Buzz gave a sigh of relief. "Boy, our troubles are over!" He stood up and yelled a greeting.

Suddenly, there was a *crack* from the deck of the fast-approaching yacht. Something whined close over the wiry little man's head. He dropped to his stomach, and stared.

Men on the yacht were holding guns now. Several had rifles. All the weapons were aimed in the general direction of the raft.

The yacht slid smoothly alongside. There was the sound of powerful Diesel engines throbbing. Instantly men leaped over the rail, landed on the raft. They held clubs in their hands now.

Other men covered them with guns from the deck rail. But one of the men boarding the raft made a mistake. He got too close to Buzz Casey. Buzz saw his chance, figuring those above dared not shoot.

Buzz yelled, went into action. He leaped into the midst of the men. Deacon immediately joined him.

A terrific fight started taking place.

THERE had been no chance for Monk or his partner to reach their pack sacks. They carried guns in the packs.

The fight, a tight, furiously moving mass, swayed back and forth across the raft. The yacht pulled away, standing off as a battle took place.

Buzz slugged one fellow, dumped him overboard as though he were an empty sack. He grabbed another. He managed to twist one of the clubs out of the fellow's hand. He hit the man a single crack, saw him sway crazily. Buzz booted him and knocked him into the river. He leaped back into the melee, the club swinging, heads cracking.

Deacon was trying to hold his own on the opposite end of the raft.

Both partners were so busy fighting that they had not noticed something about the raft. But Deacon got a quick view now.

Ahead, the river divided into two channels where it passed a heavily wooded island, that lay right in midstream. The raft was doing a crazy circle in the river currents, swinging to the left of the island. But it was quite close to shore, moving swiftly.

Deacon had already eliminated several assailants. All were in the river, swimming, being carried downstream.

Three others were picking themselves up dazedly from the float, and looking somewhat amazed. They had figured capture of the two men was going to be

easy.

The three men remaining on their feet suddenly backed off as Buzz and his partner started a wedge-formed drive in their direction. And then, with wild yells, they ran back along the float and dived into the river. They had had enough.

The yacht, meanwhile, had held back, its pilot apparently afraid to venture too close to shore. And for good reason.

Abruptly a submerged rock hooked the forward end of the moving raft, jammed it, and suddenly the huge float swiveled in the swift current and made a half circle, its forward end still jammed. Then the raft slammed against the river bank, pushing up beneath low-hanging branches that hung down almost to the water.

Someone was shouting from the yacht, still out in midstream. A small boat was being lowered over the side. Aid was being sent to those struggling in the water.

For a moment, Buzz and Deacon were screened from those remaining on the yacht. The raft was still stuck against the jamming rocks. It was half hidden beneath the overhanging trees.

Buzz yelled, "We'd better hurry!"

He was ripping at a draw string on his pack sack. Shortly, he had one of the pistols in his fist. Breaking the gun open, he removed the shells and started wiping them with his shirt.

Deacon located one of the guns in his sack and started doing likewise.

Buzz grumbled, "Hope these blasted things still work!"

They got the guns ready, crouched down near the back of the raft, and waited for the attack that they knew was soon to come.

But before that happened, they heard the screaming of the girl and the sound was nerve-wracking.

BUZZ, screened by the branches, had been standing with one of the pistols held ready in his hand.

Taking a desperate chance, he ran out along that part of the log raft which still protruded into the river. The small boat had just returned to the yacht, and it was loaded with men rescued from the river. But on the deck of the yacht itself, another form of activity was taking place.

There were two men struggling with someone. Buzz stared.

It was a girl!

Sunlight touching the red-gold of the girl's hair! He gasped.

Lucky Williams!

And she was struggling with men who held her captive aboard the sleek-looking yacht!

Buzz gave a yell. He raised the pistol and fired a blast over the yacht.

"Look out!" Deacon warned.

Guns blasted from the yacht. Lead sprayed all around them, peppered the leaves of tree branches just above their heads.

They bellied along the raft, reached the inland bank, dived behind protecting trees. It was either that—or get shot!

The siege of the island took place throughout the remainder of the day. Each time one of them ventured out onto the log float, to note what was happening aboard the yacht, there was a rattle of gunfire and he was forced to retreat to the island again.

The yacht, Deisels throbbing as it held steady against the downriver current, lay two hundred yards off-shore. The yacht could not come closer than this because of rocks which surrounded the shore.

Neither did the small boat put out for the island. The raiders were taking no chances.

Darkness finally came, and the situa-

tion was the same. There had been no further sign of the girl on deck; nor had they heard any further cries for help.

Later that night, they heard men suddenly shouting aboard the yacht. It sounded like there was some kind of trouble. Clearly across the water, they could hear men pounding along the deck, shouting.

And then there was the girl's cry again. A cry of terror!

Buzz, out on the raft now with Deacon, squinted his gaze as he tried to see across the water. They could see the trim outlines of the white yacht.

He said grimly, "I'm gonna swim out there! I'm gonna find out if . . ."

Even as he spoke, they saw something clear the railing of the yacht. There was a brief, shrill scream. And then a splash.

Silence, strained and ominous, followed.

Almost immediately the boat's powerful engines swung into a deep throb, and the yacht started moving upstream. Its speed was amazing. Within moments it was out of sight.

Buzz whipped off shirt and shoes, leaped into the river and started swimming. He soon disappeared in the surrounding darkness.

Deacon waited. Minutes passed. A half hour.

Finally he heard underbrush crackling, and then Buzz, water still dripping from him, appeared from behind him.

"Worked my way back to shore at the other end of the island!" he said. He was still breathing hard from the exertion of swimming. "Damned current almost got me!" he said.

Deacon said, "And the girl—"

Buzz held something in his hand. Deacon looked at the object in silence.

It was a brightly colored scarf. Lucky Williams had been wearing the neck-

erchief the last time they had seen her.

Buzz, his features strained, said quietly, "I found this . . . floating in the river. But . . . but that's *all* I found."

The two of them stood there, and they were silent.

FINALLY, it was Deacon who said, "We misjudged Lucky Williams. She's been a captive of that crowd all the time. She must have tried to escape, tonight, and rather than be held by those devils, she jumped off the yacht."

He looked at Buzz. "You don't think she reached shore?"

Buzz shook his head. His face was somber.

Deacon said, "We've got to get off this damned island. No telling if those birds will come back."

Buzz nodded, "But we'd better not try swimming," he pointed out. "We'll never make the mainland."

They spent an hour trying to pry the big log float loose. They used the long poles that had already been on the float, and they located pieces of heavy driftwood along the shore. Using pieces of the driftwood as fulcrums, they pried the raft slowly off the rocks. It finally came loose and started easing away from the shore. They jumped aboard.

The moon had come up now. All around them was the night, white and bright, and in the distance the dark, somber fringes of the forest.

Buzz said, "We're in one hell of a fix now if that yacht comes back!"

He still held one of the pistols. But like his partner, he realized their chances were slim if the yacht returned. They would be starkly revealed out there in the white moonlight.

It was while Buzz was worrying about return of the yacht, that they heard the drone of the airplane. Both

men stared overhead. The steady drone became louder, and then they saw the silver object silhouetted against the moon-bright sky.

Buzz squinted. Then he gulped in amazement as the plane swooped rapidly toward them and came down out of the skies.

He howled, "That's *our* ship!"

Ham added: "Rush must have found it!"

The plane had leveled off now, was flying close above the water. It zoomed over them. They saw that a cabin window was open, and a man was leaning out of the plane. The man was holding something in his hand.

Buzz let out a whoop and jumped to his feet. He started waving his arms. "Rush!" he yelled. "It's Rush!"

Rush Randall was leaning out of the cabin window. Just as the plane skimmed close over the log raft, the package that he was holding dropped. It landed on the raft. The plane lifted and continued on.

Buzz leaped toward the object that Doc had dropped. And then he let out a yell.

"Wow!" he cried. "Food!"

Deacon, in the meantime, had been watching the silver ship. He said curiously, "I wonder why Rush doesn't land and . . ."

HE PAUSED, his gaze going up the river behind them. Buzz followed his stare.

Like a sleek white ghost, the yacht had appeared again. It was moving downstream swiftly, heading toward them.

Deacon shouted, "Rush has spotted that boat. That's why he didn't land. Look!"

They saw the plane start to circle the yacht. It dropped low again.

And then, without warning, the thing

happened.

A powerful searchlight sprang into life aboard the yacht. Its revealing gleam picked up the silver wings of the plane.

Rush Randall must have suspected a trick. He immediately sent the amphibian in a steep climb. The motors were a deep roar now. He got up to five hundred feet . . . a thousand . . .

The gun, that must have been mounted on the deck of the yacht, made a *barr-o-o-o-om* of a sound. A shell exploded high in the air, dangerously close to the climbing ship.

Another followed.

Astounded, Buzz and Deacon watched.

Then, suddenly, the plane stopped its climb, jiggled crazily in the air for a moment, then started a screaming descent toward the shore of the river. A wing dipped and the plane looked like it was going into a dive.

Within seconds the plane had disappeared across the treetops. It was out of sight now.

Several moments passed. Then a red glare touched the sky.

Buzz gasped, "They crashed!"

Deacon exclaimed, "Come on! We've got to get ashore. We've got to do *something!*"

He grabbed up the tin box of food. The box was tied with rope. He loosened his belt, slid the belt through the ropes on the tin box, fastened his buckle again.

Whether they would be able to outswim the river currents or not, was a question.

But they managed to make it.

THE river made a long, sweeping curve near the point where they dived from the raft. Ahead there was a finger of land that jutted out into the curve of the river. It was toward this

point that the river currents flowed.

They made use of the currents. They managed to reach land about a half hour later. They dragged themselves up on shore.

For moments they were too exhausted to speak.

But thoughts of Rush drove them to action. They started toward the forest, across a bit of beach, Deacon taking a line on the point where the plane had disappeared inland. There was still some red glare in the sky, and they could use this to go by.

Just then a tall, dark figure detached itself from the darkness in front of them and came quickly across the small open space.

Both men drew up short. Then they stared.

The fellow was an Indian. He held up a hand in caution. Buzz was already fumbling inside his shirt for the pistol he had placed there . . .

And the man said, "I am being Mike. I am coming from the plane."

That stopped Buzz and Deacon.

Deacon demanded: "You are the guy who disappeared in New York? You were with Rush Randall?"

The big powerful fellow nodded. "Everything being all right. Boss man, he landing the plane. He saying plane cannot flying again, but no one being hurt. So he setting the plane on fire."

Deacon said, "Smart work!" He looked at his partner. "Rush did that to fool those babies on the yacht."

Mike, the Indian, was warning them to silence. "You being quiet. That boat landing above here. We hurry!"

"Where?" demanded Buzz suspiciously.

"We going to meet others . . ."

Too late, they saw the other figures. The woods were literally full of them. Men from the yacht! They came from behind the trees and they held guns in

their hands. One man rapped:

"Just relax, chums. Nobody's going any place!"

It would have been suicide for Buzz to try to use the pistol. They were hopelessly outnumbered.

They were seized. But at the last moment Buzz, in his customary fashion, started to fight. Someone hit him with the stock of a heavy rifle. He was hit solidly across the back of the skull.

The night suddenly became very black indeed . . .

WHEN Buzz woke up again, he saw that he was a captive along with lanky Deacon and the big Indian, Mike. He, along with the others, was tied hand and foot and lying on the floor of a room of sorts. The room had a peculiar way of seeming to rock beneath his aching head. He wished the aching would stop. Then he realized that the rocking sensation wasn't caused entirely by his head.

He was in a cabin, and the cabin was located on some kind of boat. The thought hit Buzz Casey—the yacht!

It was the Indian, Mike, who said: "So you being awake?"

Buzz stared around, twisting his head, from his flat position on his back.

Deacon said unhappily, "Figure your way out of this mess, pal!"

Then he turned his attention to big Mike. "What happened to Rush Randall? Where were you with him?"

Mike explained how he and Rush had met the girl and the guide, and Howard English. They had been unable to locate this yacht, the Crazy Indian, so a search had been started for Buzz and Deacon. Then they had found both, and when the deck gun had been fired at the plane Rush had been forced to crash land some distance away. The plane *had* been nicked, Mike told them, and they had closely

escaped death.

Then Buzz told about the girl, and her apparent death. "She ducked out on us," he told Mike. "I don't know why she did that."

Mike said, "I thinking her guide may be one of the crooks. He fooling her."

Deacon asked, "You mean, the guide deliberately led her to this trap . . . to this boat?"

"Yes."

"Who else is on the boat, Mike?"

"I thinking all captives are being prisoners here." He was ready to say something else, when he paused, an intent expression coming to his ordinarily blank features. He seemed to be listening to something.

Watching him, Deacon asked, "What is it, Mike?"

The Indian didn't seem to hear. He continued to listen intently.

Then Buzz and Deacon both heard the faroff sound. It reached them through the open portholes of the small cabin.

It was a sound somewhat like a loon call, and yet it was some other kind of tropical bird. Deacon could not place it. The faint sound affected Mike oddly. He was very tense.

Deacon and Buzz, in their twisted positions, watched him. The sound did not come again.

"What was that?" prodded Deacon, still watching the Indian.

Mike started to say, "I thinking maybe my . . ."

All heard a faint sound outside the cabin door. They forgot everything else as each watched the door. A key turned in the lock. The door started to open.

And then little Buzz Casey could scarcely contain himself.

She was standing there, tall, slim, straight, as beautiful as ever. Not a thing wrong with her!

Lucky Williams.

THE redhaired girl slipped quietly into the room, closed the door behind her, looked toward them and made a motion for silence. She hurried across the small room.

"Has anyone of you . . . a knife?" she asked softly.

Deacon moved his head. "Back pocket," he directed. He stared at the girl's face, his own showing complete amazement.

She located the heavy penknife, got the blade open, then went to work on the ropes that held each captive securely. And as she hurried, she talked softly and breathlessly.

"Someone might come down here any minute," she whispered. "I'll tell you what happened . . ."

"We thought," interrupted Buzz, "you drowned. We heard you hit the water . . ."

"Shuddup!" snapped Deacon.

Lucky Williams continued: "That guide, Joe, was working for them. He tricked me, and brought me to this boat. But the rest of it . . . I can't understand. I mean, for some reason they have not made me a captive. I have the freedom of the boat. They haven't looked me up, like the others."

"The prisoners are aboard?" asked Deacon.

She nodded. "I've heard their names mentioned."

"How about your uncle? Have you seen him?"

She shook her head. "He's the only one they haven't talked about. But they keep the cabin doors locked, and there's no way to find out anything. I can't learn a thing. My cabin's right down the passageway, so I knew when they brought you aboard. A hard, tough man named Mort seems to be their boss. I waited until they had all

gone on deck, then I slipped in here. They left the key in the outside of the door."

Buzz grinned. "Honey, remind me to kiss you later. You're a wonderful girl."

Deacon groaned.

"Listen, pal," he snapped, "start figuring a way to get off this rat trap. Three of us against a boat load of . . ."

Mike, on his feet, flexing his powerful legs and arms, made a warning, hissing sound. Climbing to their feet, the others stared at him. Mike was standing near the passage door, and was intently listening again.

All heard the commotion above decks. Men were moving about, some running. There was a yell.

Yet big Mike seemed to hear something else. There was an expectancy about him. Abruptly he turned and said to them, "My people are coming. Maybe we are escaping. Come!"

Deacon's eyes were sharp. He asked, "That bird call that sounded like a loon?"

Mike nodded. "Signal," he said. "My people coming."

Buzz was rubbing his hands together. He exclaimed:

"Then what the hell are we waiting for?"

DEACON, however, paused long enough to look worriedly at the girl. He motioned to a double-tiered bunk in the cabin. "Hide in that upper berth," he suggested. "Otherwise you might get hurt."

But there was a brightness in her expressive eyes. She shook her head.

"Not me!" she exclaimed. "I'm helping out too!"

Mike had already slipped noiselessly from the cabin. They followed. Along the way they managed to locate an object that provided them with weapons.

It was a long boat hook, which powerful Mike snapped into short lengths as though the object were a matchstick. They each grabbed a length of the solid wood.

On deck, now, a loud racket was taking place.

Buzz, Deacon and the quick-moving Indian arrived on deck via various ladders, the girl trailing Deacon. A weird sight met their eyes.

Dark-skinned, half-naked Indians were everywhere. They fought with white men who had apparently been taken by surprise aboard the yacht. The fight surged from spacious deck cabin to the wheelhouse and out to the wide decks again.

The natives carried no weapons. They were all powerfully built fellows, and they merely grabbed the white men and throttled them until the crooks fell down. They did this in an efficient, strangely silent way, which made the battle the more amazing.

Buzz let out a whoop and started cracking heads. He shouted. "These Joes sure gave us plenty of hell! Now we even the score!"

Oddly, some of the white men seemed to be fighting among themselves, and the dark-skinned natives were grabbing them indiscriminately. Buzz did likewise.

The Deacon spotted Rush Randall's tall, blond-headed figure just disappearing down a ladder leading below deck. He jumped that way. The girl, Buzz and Mike had not seen Rush's quick-moving figure. There was another white man just ahead of Rush, Deacon saw, and this worried him.

He ran along a passageway, saw Rush some distance ahead. Rush and the other man had paused near a stateroom door. Deacon called out.

"Rush!"

Rush turned, his pale, penetrating

gray eyes bleak, and then those eyes lighted as he saw lanky Deacon. "I guess we were none too soon," he said, and you could tell there was relief in his voice.

"I'll say!" exclaimed Deacon. He told about the girl releasing them, and of the strange bird call that Mike had heard.

Rush indicated the young, dark-featured man with him. "Deacon," he said, "this is Judge English's son—Howard English."

THE two men nodded briefly. There was little time for formalities. Rush was explaining:

"Don't ask me how he did it, but somehow Mike got word to his people. Where that hidden valley is, I don't even know. Those natives who scared you off from that deserted camp the other night were Mike's people. They were after the others."

"I'll be damned!" said Deacon, amazed.

"They also located this yacht for us. You see, they were aware of its movements. Mike had arranged the rendezvous place here along the shore. Then he was captured along with you and Buzz. So I met his people. We swam out here under cover of darkness. If it wasn't for them . . ."

Rush moved his broad shoulders.

"Yeah," Deacon said grimly.

Then he noted the ring of keys held in Rush Randall's hand. "What's up?" They were still standing before one of the cabin doorways.

"We've taken care of the one called Mort," said Rush. "He's locked him up in the brig. Now we'll take care of the prisoners. We have the room locations."

He started fitting keys into the door.

When the door was finally opened, the huge, fat man stood there. He

looked none the worse for his experience, except that he had grown a beard. He sputtered, growled, and finally belatedly, "Well, it's about time!"

"Jordon Marsh," Rush said in explanation, for Deacon's benefit. Then, coolly, to the fat man, "Consider yourself lucky, my friend. You *might* have been dead."

Fat Jordon Marsh still sputtered. "Why didn't you rescue me in New York, Randall? I called your office, asked for help . . ."

Rush interrupted quietly, "If you and your friends hadn't had such worldly ideas, none of this trouble would have happened." He turned to Howard English. "See if he needs anything, Howard. Then come along."

THE fat man seemed about ready to explode, then looked at Rush Randall's peculiar gray eyes, changed his mind and said nothing.

They continued along the passage. There was some commotion ahead. Buzz Casey appeared with two subdued, very meek prisoners. He grinned when he saw Rush. "Got a place where I can lock these Joes up?" he asked. "The brig's already full!"

They found an empty large cabin. Rush turned the key over to little Buzz, for the tough assistant explained, "I got me some more up on deck." He turned, added, "The battle's over, dammit!"

Rush had been looking at cabin numbers on the doors. Howard English was saying, "There's only the girl's uncle, Clarence Hobart to be accounted for. Dad's safe in New York, and you've found Jordon Marsh . . ."

Rush nodded.

Young English, frowning, asked, "Why was I kidnapped, Randall, in place of my father who was one of that partnership?"

Rush shrugged. "Because the man behind this knew your father would pay off if *you* disappeared. He knew that your father would pay plenty for your release. Also, by kidnapping you, it kept your father from knowing too much."

"You mean," asked Howard English, "it would keep Dad from knowing who the real villain was?"

"That's right."

.. "Who is it?" the young man asked.

"You're going to meet him now," said Rush, and he opened the door beside which they stood. Oddly, it was not locked. Rush had not thought it would be.

THE man inside jumped up nervously from the bunk. He was a small, alert, fussy little man with jumpy eyes. He started to gasp with relief, "Thank heavens you're here. I thought . . ."

"Clarence Hobart!" exclaimed young Howard English.

Rush Randall said coolly, "You can lay off the dramatics, Hobart. You're washed up."

The fussy little man acted as if he was going to have a nervous breakdown.

Rush said harshly, "Cut it!"

And Clarence Hobart stood there, fluttery eyes holding on Rush Randall, on the strange, calculating, cool gray eyes, and he became silent.

Rush motioned English and Deacon inside the room, then he closed the door. He said to the small, nervous man, "Your niece, Miss Williams isn't wise to you—yet. It explains why she wasn't harmed by Mort and his crowd when she was brought aboard this yacht. Because it's your hideout and you've been behind the whole scheme." He paused, then added, "For her sake, possibly there's a way of keeping you out of prison. But by God, you'd better talk—and fast!"

They waited.

You could see the turmoil taking place in the small man's mind. It was mirrored on his face and in his jumpy eyes.

Finally he said, "Just what do you mean, Randall?"

"I mean," said Rush, "you can make retribution. Understand I don't hold with any of your crowd—you, Jordon Marsh or Judge English." He glanced at young Howard, murmured, "Sorry." Then: "The three of you were out to make a killing, only *you* thought you had a better idea than the rest. So you had them kidnapped. All right, let's have the rest of it!"

Clarence Hobart sat down on the bunk. He rubbed his small hands across his sweaty face. Suddenly he looked like an old man. He murmured, "All right."

The others were silent.

Then Hobart said: "Jordon Marsh, as you know, was a coffee plantation owner in South America some years ago. He stumbled onto this Indian thing. He located the hidden valley where that tribe lives. He'd heard they live to be a hundred or more, because of certain herbs that grow there in the valley and which these Indians live upon. One day he took me in on the secret."

"In other words," prompted Rush, "he wanted a little financial backing?"

Hobart nodded. "Judge English and I joined him. We helped buy this yacht. We spent a lot of money coming down here and finally making friends with the natives. Ordinarily, they're a shy lot. It took several trips. Then we took Mike back to Florida."

"Where you were going to raise the herbs in a part of the Everglades. The climate there, the moisture, duplicated that found here."

"Yes."

"Why?"

HOBART looked up, smiled dully. "Why does any man want to live to be a hundred or more? Think of the things he can accomplish in life. Each of us was active in Washington politics. We saw a way to outlive any who opposed us and to become the greatest power group in history. We would become famous."

Rush said, "The only trouble with that kind of power is that it gets you. *Each* of you thought it would be swell if *you* could gain complete control of power and wealth. So you started chiseling . . ."

"Jordon Marsh did!" cried little Clarence Hobart. "He bled me for almost every cent I had. I was going broke. My newspapers are mortgaged to the hilt!"

Rush nodded. "So you hit upon the scheme of kidnapping them, shaking them down for several hundred thousand, and going through with the scheme yourself. Right?"

Slowly, the man nodded.

Rush sighed. "Well, this little adventure has cost me money. I have a plane to pay for—not counting my time and trouble. I can turn this whole rotten business over to the police, and you three men can pay. Take your choice. Remember, there's your niece to think about."

Hobart's low-spoken "Yes" indicated he was thinking about the girl, too.

"I think," he said softly, "we'd all be better off forgetting this long-life business. It has only led to unhappiness and trouble. I'll make amends with you." He looked at Rush. "You won't tell her—Lucky?"

"I think," Rush said, "we can tell her that the tough little man named Mort was behind it. Who were the others?"

Hobart explained, "Typical New York sharpsters who got wind of the deal from the man I employed. One group was trying to cut in on the other."

"I thought so," said Rush.

OVER the forests, there was the calmness of the vast, silent night . . . a quiet that extended to the deck of the motionless yacht.

Decks that were now cleared of fighting men. Only Rush Randall, Deacon, and Mike, the Indian, now stood there. Buzz and Howard English were below, seeing that all captives were locked up in separate cabins, or in the brig.

Oddly, there was not another Indian on deck. But out there in the river, dark forms swam toward shore. The figures were fast fading in the moonlight.

Mike said, "My people returning. They not liking trouble. They being always a peaceful people. I returning too."

He turned to Rush and the girl. "I thinking it better if white men not coming here any more."

Rush nodded. "Mike, I want to thank you and your people for what you've done. No, I don't think you'll be bothered with white man's kind of civilization again. It isn't very good, is it?"

Mike seemed to smile a little. He shook hands with them both, then quickly, climbed the rail. His powerful, lean body flashed overside. It cut the water smoothly. Then he was swimming away.

Lucky Williams sighed. "Maybe," she murmured, "he has more sense than any of us."

"Maybe," agreed Rush.

The girl asked, "Rush, what was the meaning of those little carved miniatures of Indians?"

"Nothing, really," he explained. "Mike told me. His people used to

carve them out of mahogany. Marsh got hold of some of them and they got scattered around. They were odd enough to be puzzling."

"And," said the girl, "frightening!"

Buzz came on deck. There was a large lump on his forehead and he was dirty and disheveled. But he seemed as bright as ever.

"Boy!" he said. "Chicken! Found it in the galley refrigerator." He grabbed the girl's arm. "How about making some coffee, honey. Let's put on a feed." He glanced at Rush. "Join us?"

Rush said, "In a moment. In a little while we'll have to divide up duties here

on the boat. We're setting sail as quickly as possible. Tell Deacon he'll have to navigate."

Buzz and the girl met Deacon coming along a passage. Buzz said, grinning, "Sorry you can't join us. Rush wants to see you about navigating the ship."

"Where you going?" lanky Deacon asked suspiciously.

"Got a dinner date—with a redhead!" beamed Buzz Casey.

The gloominess dropped from Deacon's face. He joined them. "You *did* have, pal," he said. "But three makes more pleasant company!"

That started them arguing again.

RUFFIAN DICK: EXPLORER

(Continued from page 87)

Arabic. Finally he was sent home from the school after very carefully attending the forbidden races under the watchful eyes of the proper authorities.

The next few years were spent in India. At the boy's request, his father had purchased a commission for him in the East India Company's private army which still governed India. He embarked, endured the boring days of heat and stench and monotony on the journey around the Cape, and landed in India on the 28th of October, 1842. Ambitious, he set about learning the languages, manners, customs, of the peoples of the East. Very unpopular among his fellow officers, he came home on furlough bearing the nickname that stuck throughout the rest of his life—that of Ruffian Dick. He had been over-bearing, brutal, and unmannerly. But what alienated his fellow countrymen the most was his queer behavior among the natives. In his free time he was always to be found wandering in the native bazaars, more often than not himself in the garb of a native, unclean, and unashamed. He had even been admitted to the native order of mystics as a Master-Sufi; he was an atheist; and, very properly, he had been forbidden active service.

At home on a long furlough, he responded to the urge to write and put down his thoughts on paper. Several insignificant volumes were published. It was at this time that he met Isabel Arundel, who was so greatly to influence his later life. Her parents refused to consent to their marriage until Richard could prove himself worthy. Penniless and disreputable as he was, there seemed

no chance for him.

Setting about to answer that challenge, Burton prepared himself to attempt what no other white man had ever dared to do before . . . make the pilgrimage from Medina to Mecca disguised as a Moslem. South Arabia was still—though not entirely—unexplored country from the viewpoint of the European. The real nature of the ceremonies at the Kaaba, that focus and shrine of Al-Islam, were still uncertain.

Obtaining a further year's furlough, Burton descended upon Arabia in the form of a Persian Moslem. Staining his skin with walnut juice, accompanied by a half-witted but devoted Mohammedan servant, and bearing the name of Mirza Abdullah of Bushiri, his disguise was complete. In 1853 he landed in Alexandria. Cairo was reached by river boat. After that leg of the journey he felt reasonably sure of his disguise. The boat to Suez was loaded down with pilgrims; Burton was the only white man among them. By the time the vessel docked at Yambu, he had complete confidence in his venture.

At Yambu a camel caravan was formed. The trek into Arabia furnished the daring Englishman with his first real taste of thirst and sun glare. The days melted into one another, and months passed before Medina was sighted. Burton won a place in the hearts of the Mohammedans for himself by using his scant knowledge of medicine to good advantage. By the end of August Medina was reached. There caravans arriving from all directions were formed into one huge concourse and made ready to march on the Holy City.

The march began on the 1st day of September and was an uneventful journey of ten days inland toward the holiest spot in Arabia from which Mohammedanism had sprung. The closer Burton moved to the revered city of Mecca, the more

(Continued on page 176)

WANTED-DEAD MAN

by Berkeley Livingston



He stood there with the chair poised across his shoulder, watching them slug it out

HE WAS a *precise*, little man. Not fussy, you must understand, but precise. Exact. Like when he cut the steak he ordered at The Howling Cat, the beanery which catered to the Crow's Nest crew of which I was a member.

He had walked in, a small man in a well-worn though neatly pressed dark suit, and with quick, quiet movements went to the hall tree and deposited on it the derby hat which was part of his costume. Then turning, he surveyed the gang at their dinner hour. I saw him clear his throat, as though he had intentions of saying something. But if

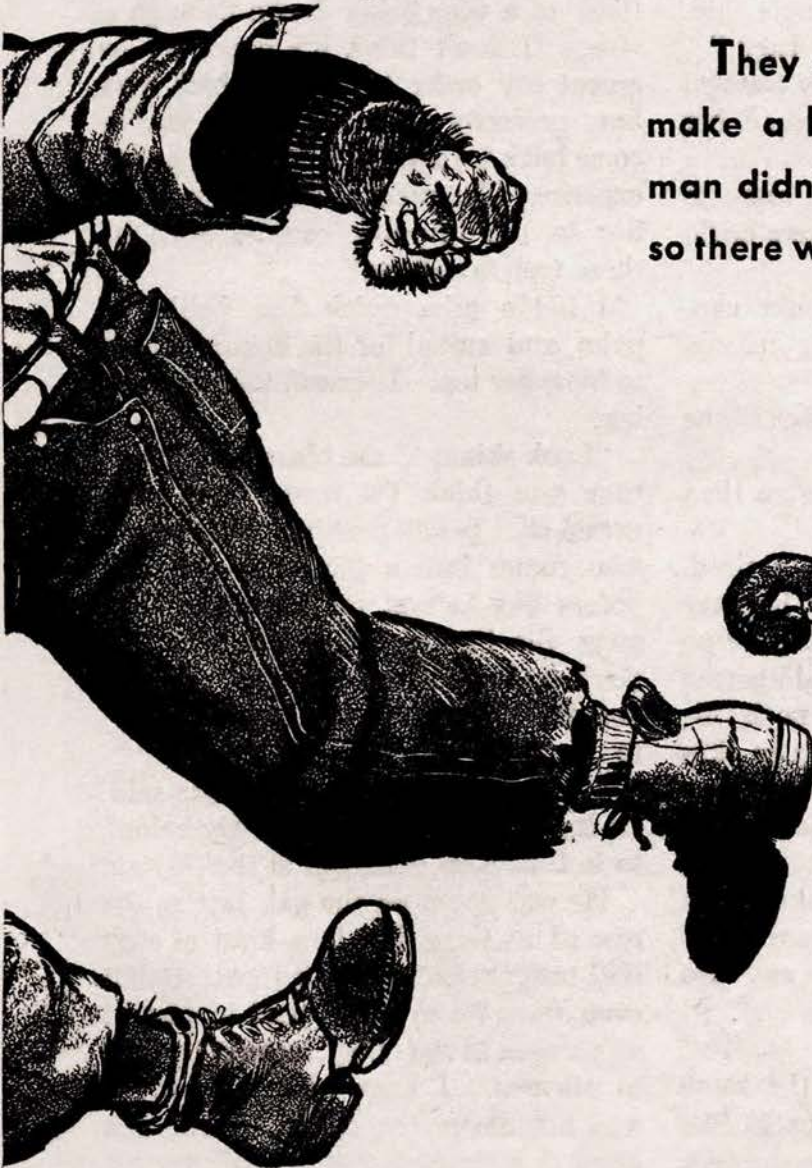
he had intended that he changed his mind. Deliberately, he looked about, and though there were several vacant stools, he chose the one next to mine.

"Ah, miss," he stopped Jenny, the only slinger the beanery boasted. He lifted a cautioning finger, the other fingers curling delicately toward his palm.

His voice high and slightly nasal, brought attention to our end of the counter. Jenny stopped as though her feet had hit a glue puddle. She turned wide protruding eyes on him.

"Yaas?" her husky voice asked.

"I would like very much to have a steak," the little man said. "A T-bone



They say it takes big men to make a big fight, but this little man didn't see it quite that way, so there was only one thing to do



steak. You may tell the chef that I would appreciate him broiling the steak for a period not to exceed five minutes at the end of which time he will find that the steak will be done to my taste, that is if the flames are not too high. A temperature of approximately eight hundred degrees would be about right."

Jennie had a row of orders slung down the length of her arm. The wide, greyish-blue eyes went even wider, the full, pouting lips pouted a little fuller. And the high, rounded bosom, an attraction which we found irresistible, heaved into more delicious roundness. This was something new in Jennie's life.

"Just sit there, mister," Jennie said. "Don't go away. I'll be right back."

The stranger turned slightly puzzled eyes to me as Jennie continued on her way to her customers.

"Don't go away?" he said, more to himself than to me. "But where could I go in this benighted town?"

"Well," I said, more to make conversation than for any other reason. "You can go to the Rattery."

"The Rattery? What's that?" he asked.

"Another joint. Only more so than this?" I replied.

He had peculiar eyes, I noticed. Where the skin on the rest of his face was set flush to the bone structure so that it looked as if someone had knotted it tightly at the back of his neck, his eyes lay buried in folds of leaden skin behind which peeped the palest blue orbs I'd ever seen. They looked like a pair of fleshy icicles.

"Unless I'm greatly mistaken," he said, "there is under that gloomy exterior an intelligent being. At any rate I'll chance it. Can you tell me . . . ?"

WE LOOKED away at the same time. Jennie had come back. She stood looking down at the little stranger

as if he were a being from another world. He probably was, too. Dead-End Gulch was not the most cosmopolitan town in the country. Matter of fact it was just a copper town which owed its existence to the fact that the Gentry Claim lay a half-mile from its dust-shrouded streets.

"Now would you come again on that order, mister?" Jennie said.

The thin lips of the stranger drew tighter until they were a pale thread of flesh across the taut skin. I started to avert trouble but he was too quick.

"My dear young lady," he said in the oddest of gentle voices. It made me think of a wire being drawn through a vise. "I don't think it's necessary to repeat my order because I think you hear perfectly well. Therefore you've come back for a bit of amusement at my expense. The proof if which, I'm sure, lies in the grinning countenances of these men watching."

I hid a grin, quick like, behind a palm, and waited for the buxom Jennie to blow her top. It wasn't long in coming.

"Look skinny!" she blazed out. "Any time you think I'd waste time on a sawed-off, pencil-pushing blue-nosey, who comes into a joint like this and orders like he's at the Ritz, and then gives the hasher lip, you're nuts! I don't go for no stuff like that. And if you don't like that—you can go to . . ." to . . ."

"Atta gal, Jennie," a new voice said. Its harsh throatiness could only belong to Bull Benton, a mucker at the Gentry.

He was sweet on the gal, just as the rest of us were, but in a kind of way that brought blood to our faces, so that even when he said the most innocuous of phrases to her, they seemed cloaked in vileness. I knew that suddenly I was hot under the collar. What was more, I suspected that he had put his

two cents in just to throw his weight around. He was standing to my right and I could get the sweetly-sour smell of his clothes. Sweat which hadn't been washed away in a long time.

"Go on," he continued. "Tell the little tinhorn what you want. Old Bull'll back you up."

She turned on him like a tigress. "Get away from me, you stinkin' hunk of dirt," she shouted. "I don't need your protection . . . I don't need your help! Just mind your own little business which is feedin' your face."

I whipped my head around as the little man beside me said in his penetrating voice:

"Precisely! She could not have put it better. So why don't you do as the lady suggests and go, 'feed your face.'"

Blood made a mottled mask of the bearded face of the mucker. He could only glare in surprise at the words. Then their import struck home and he started for the little fellow.

THERE'S one thing in common with all muckers. They're usually muscle-bound. All their work is done with their shoulders and legs. Benton was no exception. He moved like a milk-heavy cow.

I whirled on my stool, sending a stiffened arm at the end of which was a very bony elbow, into the midriff of the big guy. He doubled up with a howl of pain. It was long enough for me to get to my feet.

We were about the same height but the resemblance ended. He outweighed me by twenty pounds at least. And he was more muscular in the right places. But he was slow. And that was my ace in the hole, my speed.

I shoved my hand against the top of his head trying to get him off balance. It was a mistake which almost ended the fight before it had more than

started. He shot both hands to the one I had on his hair, and jerked down, at the same time butting upward with his head.

I ducked, that is partly; his head caught me a glancing blow along the cheekbone and ripped the flesh as though he had used a knife. It was a good thing I was wearing cleated boots. Even as I went back I kicked sideways, the cleats catching him just below the kneecap and again almost doubling him up.

I heard the sound of Jennie's scream as my blood splattered the counter when I whipped my head to clear it of the pain-fog. Then I could see clearly again. And Bull was charging in. I danced out of the way and as he went past, I clipped him but good. He half-fell against the counter almost knocking it over. Once more there was the high-pitched sound of Jennie's voice. But I heard it only in the back of my mind. Because I was busy trying to wear my knuckles down on Bull's jaw. He grunted every time I hit him, but those thick legs of his kept moving him forward. His arms were high, he was wide-open, and I was slugging the hell out of the guy, but he kept coming in for more. I knew what he wanted, to get me in the circle of those arms. And what they'd do to me once they got me there.

One eye was closed where I hit him with a straight right. But the other was staring with a fearful intensity into mine as he moved forward. I fainted with my left. Instinctively he blinked, and I started a right hook with all the power at my command, straight for the button . . . And fell over one of the spectator's legs. I landed hard enough to knock the breath right out of me.

And Bull was over me, his arms still hooked, his body bent at the waist. I could see he was going to give me the

miner's knockout, jump on me with both cleated boots. And he wasn't going to hit me in the belly. It was my face he was after. I saw his tongue come out in curious concentration, saw his pants belly out as the huge leg muscles contracted in their jumping movement, and saw him suddenly topple sideways.

THE little guy just stood there, the broken chair gripped in his hands; he stood there looking down at the knocked out Bull, and turned slowly, deliberately to the rest and said:

"I don't approve of fighting like that."

I guess I ran lightning a close second the way I got to my feet. The place was full of miners. I knew these guys. Their conception of fair play was a long way from the man who had saved me. No fight, no matter how dirty it may seem, brooked interference. Even as I stepped to his side I could hear the growls of the men.

Without turning my head from the circle of sullen, bearded faces which had suddenly formed a ring about us, I took the chair from the little guy. I felt a surge of admiration for him. He was breathing in gentle nasal gasps. And I could see from the corner of my eye that he was as unflustered as if all this was a meeting he was to address.

"Better step aside, Gloomy," somebody said from the rear. I have always noticed that it's *always* someone from the rear who starts the ball rolling, keeps feeding the flames. The guys in front are the ones who do the battling.

"Okay, boys," I said softly. "Fight's over. Go on back to your eatin'."

"Fight's over for you," the voice said. "But not for nosey Joe. We want him!"

"Better do as Gloomy says," Jennie's voice commanded.

She was suddenly the center of the stage. I guess we had all forgotten her

in the excitement of the fight. She was unforgettable now. I looked up at her; she stood on top of the counter, a .45 looking a bit incongruous in her hand, yet somehow as if it belonged. And her eyes were narrowed in determination. There was no doubt in *my* mind that if needs be, she would use the gun. I guess it struck the rest that she would, too.

"If you guys think," she continued, "that I'm goin' to run my size nines down to the ground because your food got cold, you got another think coming. That hash you ordered's gettin' mighty heavy just sittin' around. And I ain't gonna cook up a new mess."

That did it. Jennie was not only the waitress, she was also the cook, and the proprietor of the place. Someone laughed, another said, "Atta gal, Jennie," and another said, "Well nothin's cookin', gang, let's go."

The sigh that I heaved came right out of my boot tops. No wonder it squeaked, the way I laced up my twelve inchers. But the little guy wasn't fazed at all by the excitement. He resumed his seat and turned again to me. It was as if nothing had happened.

"Uh," I began, "uh, thanks for . . ."

"You know," he said, interrupting me, "she is a primitive sort. Simple. But on the whole a rather decent sort. Might even say, splendid, in her own way."

"Jennie? Yeh," I said, falling in to his mood. "A good kid. Came out here on her own, opened up this place and made a go of it through her own perseverance and . . . huh, charm."

"Plural, you mean," he said.

I thought I detected a twinkle in those cold, blue icicles. Of a sudden I realized that I liked this strange little man. Why, I didn't know. Yet I felt that there was something about him which compelled my liking.

I GRINNED down at him. He smiled, a rather shy twisting of the lips. Then the smile was wiped away by an intent, questioning look.

"As I started to say, before the ruckus began, you look like an intelligent sort. I've come to this place to find someone."

I put my hand on his arm, turned my face from him and looked to where Bull had fallen. The big mucker had skipped my mind entirely. I was just in time to see his friend, a ratty individual, called Jimsy, assisting him through the door. Then I turned back to the stranger.

"As I was saying, I came to find someone. A man named Alex Sorensen," the little man said.

Sorensen, Sorensen, I thought. The name was familiar, but . . .

"What about this Sorensen?" I asked.

"I have to deliver something to him," he said. "I heard he works at the Crow's Nest."

"Could be," I said. "Lots of Swedes up there."

"He's not a Swede," the stranger said. "He's a Norwegian."

"What's the difference? He's big, blond and dumb, like the rest of them."

"You work there also?" he asked.

"Yeah. I'm a machine man."

His eyes narrowed in bewilderment. "What's that?" he asked.

"A fancy name for a dynamite tapper," Jennie said. She was standing before us, her right arm loaded with dishes, the topmost two bearing steaks from which smoke faintly curled. She set them before us and a couple of side dishes of potatoes and vegetables, and said:

"I don't know whether that's been broiled like you want it. But it's done like I'd want it. Now don't let me see any of that steak on the plate when I

come for your dessert order."

There wasn't any, either. Jennie could cook like she had the gift. The stranger's eyes were alight with pleasure and he exuded a warmth which I imagined was unusual with him, after the first bite.

As I said in the beginning, he was a precise little man. It showed in the way he cut his steak. Not fussy. Precise! The pieces were all of one pattern and size. I imagined he was that way in everything he did. Nothing ever to be left to chance. The kind of man who was meant to be an auditor, or clerk in some lawyer's office. I could see him drawing up briefs, meticulously, briefs like traps, from which there were no loopholes of escape. Everything in its place and a place for everything.

We got back to Sorensen, after our coffee.

"Do you know many of the men who work there?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "there's about six hundred working the three shifts. Copper's in great demand. Of course I've only been here some ten months. And the claim's been going since the year before the war. However . . ."

"Yes," he nudged me with the word.

"I know the night man in the office. I imagine he'd go through the payroll sheets if I asked him."

"He would? *Splendid!*" the little guy crowed. He had a queer way of accenting words to give them special meaning.

I LOOKED at my watch. Just eight. We had another four hours to go before my shift went on. I got up from the stool and said:

"No use sitting here all night. Doing anything?"

"Why, no. I just got into town a little while ago. Took the bus in from Douglas. A rather rough ride, too. Matter

of fact, I'll have to look for a room tonight. But I was so hungry I couldn't resist dining first."

I looked toward the tree on which his derby hung. There was no bag below it. Nor did I remember him having any. He intercepted the look.

"I left it at the bus station," he explained.

"Let's get it," I suggested. "He closes a little after eight. The last auto-bus comes in then."

The Howling Cat was just around the corner from the station but we had to cross the dark depths of an alley before we hit the corner. The Motor Transports, a trucking outfit had their siding just past the alley's mouth. I was a little ahead of the little guy, sort of leading the way, when all of a sudden a human catapult hit me at the bend in the back of my knees and I fold over like a broken accordion. I think the sound of the shot came a second later.

I was a little shaky when I got to my feet.

The little guy was standing, facing the darkness of the alley. He was sort of bent in a crouch. I noticed that his right hand was held kind of high and close in to his left breast, and that hand was hooked like a claw. Then he turned to me and said:

"Looks like someone was practicing pistol shooting. It was a fortunate thing he stood before the overhead light there."

I followed his pointing finger. The truckers had rigged up an overhead light just above their platform. It was a three hundred watter at least. And I got the little guy's meaning. Whoever had taken the pot-shot had been outlined. He had seen the shadow in time to my life—or his life. I said as much.

He shrugged his narrow shoulders

and said:

"No use worrying about it. They're gone."

I laughed sharply. Who the hell was going after them. Certainly not up that alley.

HE HAD a single bag, a plain leather affair. I lugged it for him up to the Joslyn House, the only hotel in town.

"Well," he said after we had left the room and descended to the lobby, "what do we do now?"

"There isn't much to do, Mr. Beemish," he had registered as Sylvester Beemish. "Except do a bit of drinking, or go back to the Cat, or shoot a little . . ."

"I think I've had enough of shooting for one night," he said.

"We can sit here and talk," I said. "Frankly, I'm curious about that Swede."

"He's a," he began sharply, then less irately, "what's the difference? We've been looking for him. It seems that he has something coming to him . . ."

"We?" . . . I said.

"Oh, I only represent these people," Beemish said. "There is a matter of debt . . . Sorensen is involved, and so I was sent to find him. It has been a long quest, I assure you?"

"Why? Where are you from?" I asked.

"From . . ." he hesitated, then went on, "Chicago."

"Wouldn't it be a hell of a thing if you were chasing the wrong man?"

"It would be," he said. "Though I don't think so."

"You mean you've got a picture of him, a description to go on?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Well," I said. "That makes things simpler. Mind if I see it?"

(Continued on page 168)



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

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WANTED: DEAD MAN

By Berkeley Livingston

(Continued from page 166)

He slipped his hand inside the breast pocket of his serge suit and pulled out a picture. It was of a thick-shouldered smiling man, whose bland and rather full features showed no distinguishing traits.

"Looks like any of a hundred Swedes," I said.

"My God!" Beemish exclaimed. "Aren't there any others but Swedes who work here?"

"Swedes and Mexs," I said. "This is Arizona. Mines depend on cheap labor. South of the border labor is cheap and men work hard for a few bucks a day. The biggest end of getting copper is a hard, dirty job. And lately they've been *stopping* new openings. That meant new help, muckers particularly, had to be hired. Mexs, of course. But to get back to the Swedes, somehow they've always been associated with digging of one sort or another. And they make good foremen."

Beemish digested that in silence.

I asked, "Is there more besides the picture? Y'know, identifying labels?"

"Sure," Beemish said, and suddenly reached for my hand, pulling it off the chair side and turning it palm-up. "Sorensen had a . . ." he stopped and his eyes went wide when he saw the criss-cross of a dozen lacerations. "What under the sun happened to you?" he asked.

"Some caps went off when rocks fell on one," I said. "That fulminate makes a hell of a show."

"So I see," he said slowly. "Sorensen had a peculiar scar on his palm. I was going to show you what it looked like."

I WAS still holding the photograph in my hand. I looked at it once more and noticed a peculiar graininess in the texture. Beemish must have noticed that I wasn't paying any attention to him, for he sullenly asked:

"What's wrong? Do you recognize something about the photo?"

I shook my head. "N-no," I said. "Or rather, I should say that the photograph strikes a chord of sorts. But we'll soon know. We'd better get to the office before the shift goes on. Payroll'll be made up tonight and he'll have all the sheets there."

Johnny was in the supe's shack. I'd left Beemish outside, explaining to him that it were best he did so. Johnny was alone. I asked him what I wanted and he showed me the sheet. I happened to look through the window and saw Beemish's face through the glass. He was watching us. I smiled grimly at him and nodded my head to show him that I'd gotten what he wanted.

He was impatient, inwardly excited; it showed in the sudden jerky sound of his high voice:

"Well? Did you find out?"

"Yes," I said. "Funny thing, Sorensen's working on my shift and in the same *stope*. Of course we don't ask anyone their name, but usually somebody knows."

"So what do we do now?" he asked.

"Tell you what," I said. "Come along with me. I've got to get things ready. And by the time I'm through, the rest of the shift will be there."

He was willing.

We hitched a ride on a dump truck going back in number twenty. At the short branch I hopped off, picked up a couple of helmets and lamps for the two of us, got the lamps going, and started down the railbed.

We were about twelve hundred feet
(Continued on page 170)

IF YOU MUST GAMBLE

A few months ago, a book was submitted to us for publication. Since the subject was out of our field, we were about to turn it down when we became intrigued with the very first few pages. The more we read, the more fascinated we became.

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WANTED: DEAD MAN

(Continued from page 168)

in. The air was still okay but I knew that another hundred feet, where the tunnel narrowed and made the turn toward the stope I was working, the air would become heavier, damper.

There was the sound of voices and feet coming toward us. I stopped Beemish and drew him back along some muck sheets along the damp walls. He grunted a sour something about his suit. Then the crew came along, their lamps making glow-worm lights in the near distance. They all looked curiously at the neatly dressed Beemish. A couple of them greeted me. Then they were gone.

At the turn we clambered over two trucks lying empty on the tracks and started up the stope. Timbers blocked Beemish but I showed him around them and we came to the stope.

"It's a shame about your suit," I said. "There's a good bit of water seepage here and this muck's heavy with it."

"Must we come here?" he asked bitterly.

"If you want to meet Sorensen?" I said.

"Lead on," he said.

MY HAMMER was lying near the neatly coiled hose. I looked up at the face of the wall I was going to blow. Tom, my helper had done a good job of marking. Fifteen streaks of silver against the grey walls showed where he'd tapped out my markings. I attached the hose to the hammer, let it take a couple of snorts to clear it and turned to Beemish.

He was standing against the wall watching me. The taut skin of his face looked leaden, and his eyes were

slits of glowing ice. His hands hung limply at his sides. He coughed a sigh and said:

"How long before Sorensen gets here?"

I shrugged my shoulders and bent over the cases of Hercules. A fifty foot coil of fuse and four boxes of caps lay beside one of the cases of dynamite. I knelt down and slipped my knife out, began to notch the fuse into two foot lengths.

Suddenly I felt him standing over me.

I turned my head and looked up at him. He was grinning, tight-lipped at me. It was an odd grin, twisted, bitter, vengeful.

"What the hell did you think you'd gain by telling me that Sorensen will be here?" he asked.

I started to stand and that hand, delicate and small as a woman's, went to his shoulder holster with a deadly speed.

"Stay put, Sorensen," he snarled.

I felt cold all of a sudden, and it wasn't because there was a chill in the air. Just the look on his face was enough. It was a death's head looking at me.

"What do you mean, Beemish?" I asked.

"Did you think you were fooling me," he asked, "by dyeing your hair black, losing weight and scarring your hand up that way. I've been on your trail too long. Three years."

I got tired of kneeling so I twisted over and sat, my back against the pile of muck. His hand had come out. There was a short-barreled automatic in his palm. The black hole from which death was going to come at me looked like the finger of doom.

"No," I said slowly, "I didn't think I was fooling you. Nor did you fool me. You look like your brother. The same features, though he was heavier.



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But not meaner. But tell me, why did you put your two cents in at the restaurant? And back there when we were coming to the bus station?"

"Because I wanted it like this," he said. "And that bullet wasn't meant for either you or me. Someone was just shooting for some reason. But I thought I'd throw your mind off any track it might take leading to suspicion."

I laughed, though I didn't feel like laughing. It's hard to be gay when death is standing beside you. And this guy was a killer.

I NEEDED time. I had to have it. Talk was one way of gaining it. I talked.

"No. You didn't fool me. That photograph, for instance, was a copy. It was made from another picture. The original had a grained finish. Yours showed the grain of the original. Then the business of the scar. You grabbed my hand, just to make sure. No. You didn't fool me too much."

"You almost did though," he said. "The Alex I was told to get and the picture I had didn't stack up to what you looked like. But you gave yourself away."

I wondered how. He continued:

"First by little things. Like your deliberately wanting to forget that Sorensen was a Norwegian. You kept insisting he was a Swede. Then a lifetime of talking like an educated man can't be lost in a few years. But the clincher was . . ." he paused dramatically for a second, then went on, "the fight you had with the big guy. Once a guy's been a fighter, he never forgets how to handle his mitts. That straight right after a double feint . . . only you had it. I've seen you fight. And I suddenly remembered how you'd shift your left leg a trifle just before you'd send that right in."

There was a silence for a few seconds after that.

"So they didn't forget, did they?" I asked.

"You mean about welching on that deal?" Beemish asked. "No. Not till hell freezes over. You were supposed to blow that fight. But no, you got mad because Harris was fighting dirty. So you knocked him out. Well, the big guy lost fifty grand on that fight. He swore to get you."

"He always was a bad loser, that brother of yours, wasn't he?" I said.

I didn't see his hand move. And I'm not the slowest man in the world. But before I could more than shift the smallest bit, the barrel had smacked me along the side of my skull. Stars swung around me and for a second I blacked out. Then his face swam into view again. The grin was wider, now. He was enjoying this. He was his brother's blood.

"God damn you!" he grated. "My brother fried because of that fight. That's why I'm here. Not because of fifty grand."

My mouth popped open. I felt a sticky wetness slide down the side of my face where the barrel had raked me. His brother dead, in the electric chair!

"Yeah!" he continued. "That's why I wanted you . . . dead! Because you were the reason he died."

"But how?" I asked.

"You skipped town. But your manager stayed. And he and Ned got into an argument. Ned shot him. And was caught, red-handed. They gave him the chair. I vowed I'd get you for that."

I made my move then. I was in a bad way, sitting on my haunches the way I was. But I had to take the chance. He was already on the verge of letting me have it. So I heaved the knife straight at his head, at the same

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time scrambling erect. The knife caught him over the eyes, getting him off guard for a minute.

But quick as I was, he was faster. That damned gun came up again and smacked me, gashing my mouth from the right corner all the way up the cheek. Worse, it stopped me cold. Through a haze of blood and pain I saw the gun come up. Somehow I knew it was aimed at my head; I ducked, though a thought came to me how futile it was. The gun went off in a flash of red and a sound like thunder. But that shot wasn't meant for me.

I stepped in and hit him. He went back on his heels and I followed fast, my hands clawing for the gun.

I NEVER even saw his foot come up. I only felt it strike me. The whole damned tunnel exploded in a wave of pain as he caught me squarely in the groin. I don't know how many times he hit me from then on. There was a feeling like I was sinking under a warm blanket and everything went dark.

Something struck me in the side. I groaned and opened my eyes. He was standing over me, that damned gun pointed at my middle. I reached in sudden sickness and he laughed at the sound.

"Get up!" he said.

I got to my feet, weaving like I was drunk.

"Now tie that fuse around your middle," he commanded.

I did as he said.

"Now stick one end into one of those sticks of dynamite."

I understood what he wanted then. He was going to make *me blow myself to kingdom come.*

I broke open the top to one of the sticks and inserted the fuse. Then he made me face the wall. When I was

the way he wanted me he stepped to my side, shoved the gun against my back and brought the stick around so that I couldn't reach it. I wondered what he was up to.

"Put your hands behind your back," he said.

When I did, he slipped a piece of rope around my wrists. He had evidently made a loop while I was out because he just slipped it taut. Then he told me to turn around again. Before I knew what he was doing, he went down to his knees and slipped another noose around my ankles. Then he pushed me down. I fell flat on my face, gashing my nose on a piece of razor-edged quartz.

I heard a match sputter, then heard the unforgettable sound of a piece of fuse taking fire.

"In a little while," I heard him say, "that fuse will burn to where it'll fall off. But you won't be able to do anything about it. I'd love to stay and watch you try to take those ropes off. That'd be a race I'd like to see. But I can't. It'll be an accident. And I'm in the clear. Easy, isn't it?"

Once more his foot drew back and came at me. This time he ripped the flesh right off my cheek. It was his farewell to me.

Turning, he scrambled down the slope. I heard his feet move off in the darkness. Then he made the turn in the tunnel. I waited for a few seconds. It came. A shrill scream of fear . . . then silence.

He had fallen into the shaft. It was three hundred feet to the bottom. We had pumped the water out of it when number twenty was flooded. I had fixed his lamp so that the flame would not last more than ten minutes. It had gone out just as he had made the turn. Coming up, I had shielded the pit with my body. He'd never noticed it.

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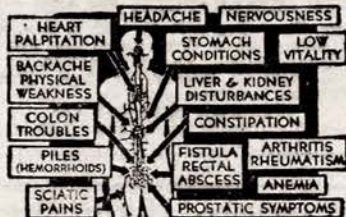
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I bit my lips until they bled. Then there was the sputtering sound of the fuse expiring. It takes two things, fire and percussion to make dynamite explode. There was no cap in the stick I'd fixed up.

I was very sick then. But he was dead . . .

THE END

RUFFIAN DICK: EXPLORER

(Continued from page 159)

perilous his position became. It was certain death if his true identity as an unbeliever should be discovered. His remarkable linguistic ability stood him in good stead. Quiet and unpretentious, he drew little attention from the rest. But always his dark eyes darted to and fro taking mental notes for the future, so that the outer world, the world of the West, might someday know what they had only been able to guess at for so many years. Were the stories true that told about the fabulous riches of Mecca? What did the mysterious rites consist of? Burton was bent on finding out. At last, shining white and dirty in the sunlight, stood Mecca. Burton's heart rose high at the sight.

Now he was called upon to exercise even greater skill in imitating the actions of the others, utilizing all the patience at his command to maintain the character of a pilgrim. He had to live the Arab as completely as it was possible for any alien to do. And he seems to have done it very completely.

There followed days of pilgrimage to this and that site throughout the Holy City, culminating in the visit to the Kaaba, that centre of Islam, older than Islam itself, with the sacred black stone much be-kissed by the crowding pilgrims. Burton, when it came his turn, knelt and kissed with an equal piety but a sharp eye. He noted the texture and appearance of the stone, decided that it was an aerolite, stored the fact away in his mind for future use, and passed on with praying lips and hooded eyes. . . .

The strain on Burton was very great. He was haunted by the thought that some night, some hour, his veil would slip aside, and he would betray by alien gesture or motion that un-Islamic soul of his. Then the caravan gathered and Mecca became once more a mere speck on the horizon. Burton reached the British consulate on the coast a different man. Memories of little indignities and the discomforts he had to bear preyed upon his sensitive mind until outwardly in every respect he was likened to the Ruffian Dick people had dubbed him. The account he later published of his exploit in penetrating Arabia cast off the veil

of darkness that had hung over it for so long.

Back in service in India, he was selected to undertake a new venture, this time in the interest of the East India Company. For some time the Indian Government had toyed with the idea of the exploration of Eastern Africa, particularly Somaliland. They wished to know the population of the region, the habits and appearances of its people, the exact location of the forbidden city of Harar, far inland. Burton's proposal was that he be landed on the East African shore, with suitable provisions and money, in the company of two others. The expedition would set out across the country, visit mysterious Harar, pass on to Gan-anah, and so reach Zanzibar.

Without delving into the actual day-by-day account of the incidents which befell the group, it is enough to say that the venture was a complete success from the standpoint of knowledge gained. On the other hand, the sufferings and hardships of the trail from raiding bands of robbers, from dangerous animals which lurked nearby in the night, dysentery and fever, made the effort call for a very rare brand of heroism. Burton returned home with scars. A Somali had thrust a javelin into the explorer's mouth, lacerating his lips and cheek.

Resting in England he wrote his "First Foot-steps in East Africa." Burton's now peaceful and placid existence got on his nerves, and he was anxious to be off again. The Arundel family still regarded him as an unfit son-in-law and advised him to make an attempt at success in his own profession.

The Crimean War was now being waged. Burton sailed for the Crimea on his own responsibility. There he joined Beaton's Irregulars, became adjutant, drew up elaborate plans for new modes of cavalry attack and general tactics, and impatiently awaited action.

He waited in vain. The war dragged on, by now a war of siege and sortie and repulse, having little or no need for gay irregulars in cavalry uniform. Burton sank to quick despondency . . . and as he dreamed of what he might be doing, his thoughts drifted to Africa again and the possibilities of another expedition, this time to seek out the sources of the Nile.

Back in England after the war, Burton laid his plans before the Royal Geographical Society. Remembering his journey to Harar and also the news of Livingstone's discoveries in the southern parts of Central Africa, Burton's plan interested them. The primary object of the expedition would be to ascertain the limits of the Sea of Ujiji—a great sheet of water of which rumor had travelled down to the East Coast. He was also to investigate the exportable produce of the interior and the ethnography of its tribes.

With a grant of 1,000 pounds and Speke to accompany him, Burton set out on his fourth journey into unknown regions. It was a large and well-equipped expedition which disembarked

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at Zanzibar in December, 1856. A thorough study was made of every aspect of the island and its people. This took several months and it was not until June of the next year that the expedition headed into the interior. Burton was the first white man to look upon Lake Tanganyika.

Burton set about to plan for a thorough exploration of the lake region. Too ill to move he called Speke to him and laid before him a tentative plan. Speke agreed to take half the caravan and set out on the mission. When Speke later rejoined Burton he had vague news to tell of a great lake he discovered. Burton became disgusted with the roundabout replies he received to his queries and gave up. The caravan set out for the coast.

While Burton lay ill in the hospital, Speke hurried to England. He published an account of the expedition, stressing his own discovery of the lake he named Victoria Nyanza, made no mention of Burton, and affirmed his opinion that the Nile rose in the Victoria Nyanza. He was greeted with great acclaim, honored everywhere, and funds were raised to equip a new expedition under his command. Burton arrived in England to find himself robbed of his fame.

At this time Richard Burton faded from public view. He wrote bitter articles against Speke which were not widely read, and then looked about for something to do. Voyaging to America he spent some time with the Mormons. He returned to write the usual book and to marry Isabel Arundel. To the end of his days, he moved from one foreign and distant shore to another. Appointed counsel to Fernand Po, then Brazil, Damascus, and Trieste, his curiosity for new places was only partly satisfied. When well over fifty he rode out in search of the Gold Mines of Midian from Damascus, spent a vigorous holiday in Iceland, and continued writing manuscript after manuscript. Finally, between 1885 and 1888 he set to the translating of a completely literal English version of the "Arabian Nights." The translation was very well received, and Burton was now a rich man.

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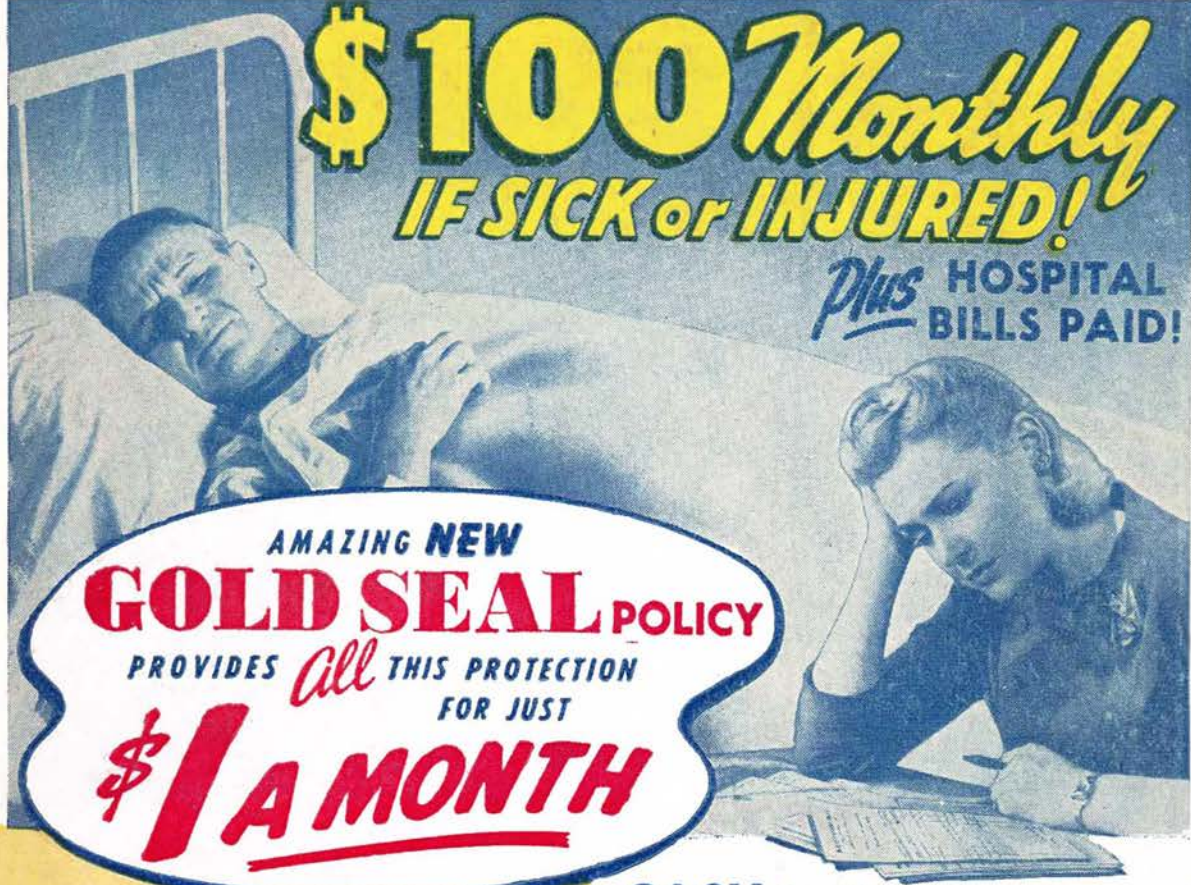
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