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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. II, No. 3

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

July, 1932

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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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PROLOGUE

1910

THE sullen brass disc of the sun trembled perilously on the rim of the world for a moment, then plunged with an expiring sigh below the horizon. The world within the constricted circumference of that brassbound, palpitating horizon, lay panting and shriv-

eled, bathed in an unnatural reddish glow.

The glow of blood.

Rugged sand dunes, barren, forlorn, bare; a rude lean-to supported by a heat-stunted pine. No more! There was no sound, no sign of life.

Only the air pulsated and vibrated in the rhythmic waves of heat that rose from the sun-parched earth.

TREASURE



It was as if the world had given up in its perpetual fight with the sun and was content to expire in the after-glow of the monster that had consumed it.

THEN, abruptly a puff of smoke from behind a hummock of sand, followed by the staccato explosion of a rifle.

Inside the lean-to, Pete Sayers wearily jerked up his head and forced open his weary eyes. An agony of pain crawled slowly across his face as he squinted through a chink in the rough walls of his barricade.

Every breath was torment, every movement a living hell.

Six hours back Sayers could have picked up a three hundred pound stone and walked away with it.

Now he was paralyzed from the waist down due to a heathen bullet

which had scraped across his spine.

Lovingly he patted the rifle by his side, grinned like a fiend and wrenched his head around in a sweat of agony to face his partner who held the adjoining side of the barricade.

"Not long now, old man," he grated. "They'll charge with darkness."

The other grunted, spat disdainfully.

"And they'll eat plenty of lead before we go."

PETE SAYERS and Larry Monihan had bucked the heathen Chinese for many years and now it seemed that they would go out together, still fighting them. Behind them the trail was red—red with blood. Before them—but both men realized that from that time on there would be no more out trails for them. The checkered career of their lives was com-

ing to an abrupt end at a nameless spot in the nameless wastes of the Manchurian wilds.

What were they doing there? That was their business. They had succeeded. For a breathless moment they had stood dazzled on the threshold of a fortune. Now failure. Bitter failure, ending in death.

Again the rifle barked its message of death from behind the hummock of sand. Six other Mausers picked up the venomous chorus and a barrage of lead converged on the flimsy barricade.

Monihan grunted again, spat, picked up his rifle, leveled it and aimed carefully. Sayers followed suit, putting sweat, blood and agony into his shooting.

THE room became heavy with smoke; the bitter, acrid smoke of gunfire. For a half hour the embattled heathens spewed lead from their rifles, cutting away the flimsy protection of the lean-to.

For a half hour, behind the tottering barricade, two desperate, grimy men cursed and snarled over the hot barrels of their stuttering rifles, nursing their few remaining shells for sure shots at the blurred moving figures outside.

Hell broke loose from the dunes again as the Chinese closed in on the shack under the protection of a heavy barrage. Bit by bit their heavy slugs chewed away the shelter by the pine tree. It was only a matter of time now—and lead.

Still, the two men fought on, grimly, sardonically.

It was some ten years before, that Pete Sayers and Larry Monihan had first set foot in that desolate land on a search that had seemed almost fantastic, unreal. Ten long years of bitter struggle that had brought them close together, made brothers of

them. For only men who face the rest of the world in opposition can form a tie deeper than that of blood. Side by side they had fought white and yellow men alike, and now it seemed they would go out together, still fighting.

"Looks like the yellow devils are going to get us at last," snarled Sayers, as he hastily reloaded.

"We'll see a bunch of them in hell, then," answered Monihan philosophically, "for we're sure going there tonight."

THE bark of the guns outside rose to a staccato roar as a fresh onslaught of screaming lead raked down upon them. Sayers crept to the shattered window of the hut, squinted down the barrel of his gun, spat flame three times and then staggered back on to the floor.

"Got me, Larry," he panted, as Monihan crawled across the floor to him. "Lung," and as he spoke a froth of crimson bubbles welled up to his lips. "If you make it—remember my girl."

And thus Pete Sayers, in the arms of his pal, cast a last glance through the doorway at the rapidly darkening Manchurian plain, mouthed a tortured oath and died.

Some fifteen minutes later, a slant-eyed, tattered figure peered through the splintered doorway of the hut. He raised his voice in a high-pitched alarm that brought his comrades on the run. In a huddled heap below the window lay all that was mortal of Pete Sayers. But the other white man was gone.

A mile away, hidden in the slums of Harbin, Larry Monihan stretched his long limbs and picked feebly at the silken covers of the couch on which he was lying. He looked with glazed eyes up into the opaque, black orbs that stared down at him. Moni-

han was dying and he knew it. He managed a feeble smile.

"Wo Sin," he gasped, and every word was an effort, "you're what I call a white man—you're a square shooter. Listen—they got Sayers. I stayed with him till my shells gave out—then I crawled away. Lord knows why they didn't run into me—and finish me off. But I made it. I'm going out, though. I know it. You're the only friend I got in this God-forsaken country, Wo Sin. I want you to promise me something before I die."

He peered anxiously up into the impassive yellow face above him, saw it nod in agreement.

"Take care of my son, Wo Sin. And Sayers' girl. She's in the States—but she'll be back some day. I promised him, see, and you'll have to take over the promise."

Wo Sin nodded gravely.

"I shall do all I can, my friend. I give you my word."

MONIHAN sank back on the cushions, satisfied. His eyes closed, but a second later he opened them again.

"One more thing, Wo Sin," he panted. He raised a feeble hand and tugged at the bosom of his ragged, blood-stained shirt. "We got it hid out. This tells where. It's for young Pete—give it to him when he grows up. Tell him the whole story then."

A shudder shook him violently from head to foot and a spasm of pain twitched his features.

"So long, Wo Sin, you're—I—twin—tat . . ."

But he never finished the jumbled sentence.

He was an hour late already for his appointment with his friend Pete Sayers—and he was going to meet him.

CHAPTER I

The Chart

WHEN Wo Sin had promised to accept the trust reposed in him by Larry Monihan, he knew full well that he had undertaken a perilous task. He was well aware of the identity of the yellow-skinned men who had sent his two American friends to their deaths—secret agents working for the deposed Emperor, Pu-yi.

Well-known as a staunch friend of the Republic, Wo Sin had no illusions as to what would be his fate should he himself fall into their hands and he also realized that he had small hope of escaping them.

They got Wo Sin, all right, but that was all they did get. He had given his word and he kept it. He faced his accusers with unblinking black eyes and no word crossed his thin, tight lips. For five long years the ageless Chinaman endured his punishment.

Every means known to a race that had perfected the arts of loosening stubborn tongues was applied to him. Wo Sin's dull eyes acquired expression—they transformed slowly into twin agate balls of glowing hate. But his lips remained sealed.

He was a bitter, silent man when he emerged at last, unshaken, from his ordeal. Emaciated, scarred, Wo Sin made his way once more to his native Hongkong and resumed once more his life as a wealthy scholar, surrounded by his friends and his books.

For long years he kept a fatherly eye on the growing son of his friend Larry Monihan. And the boy revered him as a wise and gentle foster father.

To young Pete Monihan life was simple enough—almost too simple. Once out of school, he found no difficulty in obtaining a position with an

American oil company. But long hours, sitting cramped behind a desk, were trying to his excitement-loving soul. He would spend long hours in the office, day-dreaming of the one thing that promised adventure galore.

Wo Sin had told him of his father, had given him vague hints that at the time he should reach his majority, he would come into possession of a wonderful, glamorous secret.

Wo Sin, himself, was getting old. He remained almost in retirement among his books. But he managed to keep his finger on the pulse of international events and the results were disquieting.

He was troubled and later happenings only served to bear out his forebodings. He shook his venerable head solemnly as he read of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, of the capture of Harbin, and of the fighting at Shanghai.

THE day came when Wo Sin, enthroned in his luxurious library, accepted a glass of samshu from his faithful servant, sipped it slowly and then waved a hand in dismissal.

"Go," he ordered. "I would be alone—it is important." The man nodded his head and glided silently toward the door. "And when the young white man comes," went on Wo Sin, "send him in to me."

As the servant bowed and disappeared, Wo Sin set down his glass and walked stiffly across the room. From his blouse he extracted a tiny gold key and inserted it in the lock of a carved teakwood cabinet that stood against the brocaded panel on the wall. The door of the cabinet swung open and from within its recess Wo Sin withdrew a packet wrapped in crimson silk.

With long, deft, saffron fingers he unwrapped the bulky parcel and extracted from its folds a large envelope. Three red seals, yellowed

with the passage of time, emphasized its importance. And on the face of the envelope, in a bold, firm hand, was written:

"For Wo Sin, to be opened on March 6, 1932."

Impassively, Wo Sin looked down at the mysterious parcel whose safe-keeping had meant five long years of the tortures of hell for him. Unconsciously he reached up a frail hand and stroked the long scar that stretched from the corner of one oblique eye to the very edge of his thin lips.

Slowly he crossed the room, picked up an ornate paper knife and inserted its long, thin blade beneath the seals.

CAREFULLY he withdrew a dingy sheet of foolscap and a rough, parchment chart. He seated himself before his writing desk and spread them out before him. With beady eyes he scanned the map that was sketched on the parchment, then he picked up the letter and read it slowly.

Wo Sin—My friend:

Because I know your word is as good as your life, I entrust this chart to you. Give it to my boy, Pete. Take care of him. When you open this letter, tell him the whole story. Don't forget Sayers' girl, either—he can't get the treasure without her. I'm not telling him how to get it—but if he is as smart as a son of mine should be, he'll find out.

Good-by, my friend,

Larry Monihan.

Wo Sin turned from the note and pondered once more over the chart. Here in his hand he held the clue to a fortune, the fortune that he had held in trust for the son of Larry Monihan.

And tonight he would turn it over

to the boy. For this moment he had suffered those bitter, terrible five years. But he had kept his faith and his promise would be fulfilled to the letter.

Only one thing troubled him—Sayer's girl. She was in Hongkong, that much he knew. But where?

His meditation was cut short by the sound of a footstep outside. Softly Wo Sin drew the crimson silk over the papers on his desk and turned to greet his visitor.

The embroidered curtains in the doorway parted and Wo Sin's eyes brightened as he gazed at the tall, well-built young man who strode into the room.

"You are like your father," he said. "Would that he could see you, for he could well be proud to call you 'son'."

"Thanks, Wo Sin," laughed Pete. "I wish I had known him. He must have been a real man, from what you tell me."

"I prized his friendship as one of my most valued possessions," said Wo Sin softly, lapsing for a moment into thoughts of the past.

MONIHAN watched him for a moment before he spoke again. "What's up?" he asked at last. "You sent for me."

"It is the sixth of March," answered Wo Sin. "You have not forgotten?"

Monihan's face lit up. "Well, I'll be . . . I did forget. Can you imagine that? After me dreaming all these years about . . . tell me the story, Wo Sin."

The old Chinaman nodded. He picked up a long-stemmed pipe and replenished its tiny bowl from a porcelain jar of tobacco. When it was drawing well, he settled himself comfortably and then looked at Monihan.

"You know what brought your father and Sayers to the Orient?"

Monihan shook his head. "I don't know much. But it was something worth plenty of money, wasn't it?"

"Money?" repeated Wo Sin. "Yes. But worth more than money. Listen. One of the treasures of the Manchu dynasty was a priceless headdress. It is old, incredibly old. It is made of purest gold and inlaid with gems worth a king's ransom.

BUT it is worth far more than the intrinsic value of the jewels and the precious metals it contains. It is a symbol of power, of the sacred power of the Dragon Throne. Once out of the hands of the Manchu rulers, they lose face. You begin to understand?"

Monihan nodded, but did not interrupt.

"During the time that the Dragon Throne ruled the Empire, the headdress was stolen. There was consternation in the court. They dared not let the news of the vandalism become public. But the secret agents of the Emperor sought the stolen treasure through the length and breadth of the Empire.

"Then came the revolution—and now both sides sought frantically for the sacred symbol of power. Somehow, somewhere, your father and his friend Sayers came across a clue to its hiding place. They found it, though the agents of the deposed Manchu ruler and those of the Republic dogged their very footsteps. Harassed, beset on all sides, those two found a safe hiding place for their loot.

"Then, with the agents of the Republic at their heels, they fled to Manchuria, only to run into the hands of the Manchus. There they made their last stand and there Sayers died. Your father escaped, wounded. He lived long enough to reach me.

"I promised to look out for you

and upon your coming of age, to deliver you the treasure map. You are twenty-one today. I have kept my word, though it cost me much sorrow and pain." Again Wo Sin's thin finger traced the length of the scar across his saffron cheek.

Monihan whistled. "What a story! And you got the map? Well, looks like all I've got to do is go out and help myself to all that wealth, eh?"

Wo Sin permitted himself a faint smile. Then his face sobered.

WOULD it were as simple as that, my son. But it is not so. The vandals who stole the Dragon Headdress from the vaults of the Emperor perished before they could reap the harvest of gold as a reward for their audacity and their courage. Your father and his friend, also, found the trail of the treasure a bloody one," he shook his head sadly, "and I fear more blood will be spilled before you hold the coveted diadem in your hands."

But Pete Monihan was young and his enthusiasm was not to be quenched by Wo Sin's solemn prophecy.

"It shouldn't be so hard to get," he protested. "With that map—"

"I admire your courage, my son," interrupted Wo Sin, "and your enthusiasm, which is the heritage of youth. But do not disregard my warning thus lightly. Remember this—if the Dragon Headdress was of great value politically at the time it was in your father's possession, it is doubly so now.

"The Japanese, with the support of the White Russians, have installed Pu-yi as ruler of the new Manchurian State. The possession of the Manchu symbol would be of measureless value to them. For that reason, the emissaries of the Republic will redouble their efforts to secure the coveted prize.

"They would gladly destroy your life if it led to the destruction of the headdress. You are but a pawn in the game of international intrigue, my son, and as such you will be removed with little compunction by either side, should it be to their advantage."

The tone of Wo Sin's voice, even more than the actual words he spoke, sobered Monihan considerably.

"I understand, Wo Sin," he nodded. "But I'm going through with it. Give me all the information that you can."

"Assuredly," answered Wo Sin. "All I know, and gladly. Your father had a double trust—he had given his word to Sayers that he would take care of his friend's daughter. The treasure is your heritage, to be divided equally between you. And this map, alone, is valueless.

"You will need the girl to solve its meaning. There is only one more thing I can tell you that may be of use—as your father died in my arms, he spoke a few, disconnected words. He said 'twin tattoo' I believe. But I could not be certain, for his life was ebbing fast and his voice was a mere whisper."

TWIN tattoo?" repeated Monihan. "I guess he meant the tattoo mark on my arm, Wo Sin. I've often wondered about it—I can't make it out, can't understand what the picture is supposed to be. But what did he mean by 'twin tattoo'?"

"That I do not know," answered the Chinaman. "Unless by chance it concerns the girl."

"Where is she now?" asked Monihan.

Wo Sin blinked through the haze of blue tobacco smoke.

"She is in Shanghai, that much I know," he replied. "But I am afraid I have not been able to live up strictly to my promise. I have

tried to find her, but I believe she has fallen into strange hands. I trust that I am mistaken, but I fear that someone has learned the fact that she holds half the secret to the treasure."

"You mean—you think somebody's holding her, so that they will be able to get their hands on the stuff?" said Pete. "That makes it difficult, Wo Sin. We've got to find the kid."

"She is no child," said Wo Sin. "If she is alive, she is almost your age."

Monihan grunted. "That makes it even harder."

They both lapsed into silence for a moment. Then Wo Sin removed the crimson silk covering and beckoned to Monihan. Pete bent over the desk and hastily read through the contents of the letter. Then he pored over the chart with eager eyes.

"It looks to me like one of the islands off Macao," he said at last.

"I believe you are right," answered the Chinaman. "I know that your father and Sayers fled there when the pursuit was closing in on them."

Monihan straightened up. "Well, Wo Sin, there's nothing for it but to find that girl. I'm going down to the Metropole and find Red Corrigan. He knows every girl in Hongkong, or at least he boasts that way. If anybody knows of her whereabouts, it'll be Red."

"And the chart?"

"Keep it for me, Wo Sin. I'll be back."

CHAPTER II

Death Strikes

AN hour passed—two hours. Wo Sin sat in his library, staring with expressionless eyes at the chart on the table. Suddenly his gaunt body tensed—he felt that he was being watched. He sat rigid

and strained his ears. Nothing! Nothing stirred in the room but the silken draperies at the windows as the night breeze rustled their folds. But still the feeling persisted.

He tried to shrug it off and turned again to his papers. He was getting old, getting nervous. The day was soon to arrive when he would meet his honorable ancestors.

For a fleeting second a face appeared in the dark rectangle of the window behind him, but Wo Sin was completely immersed in the chart again. From outside came the mystic noises of the night—nothing else.

Then, so softly and swiftly that he was but a blacker smudge in the shadows of the room, a man slipped through the opening. The draperies waved as his bulk thrust them outward, and once more Wo Sin held his breath. His claw-like hand crept across the table, but he never completed the movement.

"You will sit still," said a voice behind him.

DELIBERATELY, slowly, the Chinaman turned to face the owner of that voice. His beady eyes fastened on the gaping muzzle of a revolver, aimed at his heart. Then slowly they traveled upward and came to rest on a broad, swarthy, bearded face.

"You came to see me?" asked Wo Sin.

"Yes, Wo Sin," answered the other in a guttural voice.

"You know me, I see," said the Chinaman. "And I know you. Ivan Klementoff. Yes, my friend, I know you. But I cannot say that I am glad to welcome you in my house. Were the Chinese government less harassed by the menace of Shanghai, I feel sure they would take the trouble to ensconce you safely behind the bars of a prison cell. You are a dangerous man, Klementoff—

a dangerous man at large in war-torn China."

The Russian grinned, displaying white teeth through his touseled beard. He executed a smart Cossack salute.

"A great tribute, Wo Sin, for which I thank you. Now that you know me, it makes it very much easier. You understand what I have come for."

Wo Sin's hands stole behind him. The bony fingers of his left hand closed convulsively over the parchment.

He shook his head.

"I am sorry, but I do not understand. What is it that Ivan Klementoff seeks in the house of Wo Sin? Surely not my books—the wisdom of the great Confucius would mean nothing to the eyes of a Cossack."

KLEMENTOFF stepped closer. "No, old one, I do not search for wisdom. I search for treasure. I wish the chart that holds the secret of the Dragon Headdress. You will give it to me."

Wo Sin's right hand found what it was seeking. It closed over the handle of the long-bladed paper knife with which he had opened the envelope that held the map. He gazed unblinkingly into the gaping muzzle of the gun in Klementoff's hand.

Slowly he drew forward his left hand, clutching the map. The Cossack's eyes glittered beneath his shaggy eyebrows and he took another step forward, his hand outstretched to grasp the precious document.

But even as his fingertips brushed the parchment, Wo Sin's right hand flashed up. The long, sharp blade of the paper knife glittered evilly in the light.

A low, animal-like snarl escaped the Russian's twisted lips as he

dodged the blow. The hand that had sought to grasp the chart snaked through the air and closed in a frantic hold on the thin, claw-like wrist of Wo Sin's knife hand.

Exerting every muscle in his huge, powerful body, Klementoff jerked violently. Wo Sin's breath hissed through his tight lips, then the knife flew from his limp fingers and whirled in a flashing arc to the carpet beneath.

"Fool!" spat the Cossack. "You are too old, Wo Sin, to battle with me. The time has come for you to—die!"

Even as the last word rang out in the room, Klementoff's thick finger clenched convulsively on the trigger of his revolver. The gun barked out once—twice.

Wo Sin's mangled hand crept up to where a rapidly widening stain of crimson oozed across his blouse. His beady eyes flashed deadly hate at his enemy, then slowly they glazed over.

His thin shoulders sagged and his knees buckled, then he slumped to the carpet.

From somewhere in the house sounded voices—a shrill, high-pitched flow of Cantonese and a deeper voice, a strange one. Cursing under his beard, the Cossack stooped swiftly over the emaciated, lifeless body at his feet. With desperate haste he snatched at the chart, but even in death Wo Sin retained his vise-like grip on the document.

HEAVY footsteps pounded toward the room. Frantically Klementoff tugged at the chart. The aged and brittle parchment gave way beneath the strain. Rent in two, one half still remained in the clenched hand of Wo Sin. Grasping the other, the Cossack raced across the room and disappeared as he had come, through the window.

CHAPTER III

The Fight

WO SIN was buried with all the pomp and glory of a red button Mandarin. White men and yellow men alike joined in the elaborate ceremonies and with deep regret over his passing, escorted him to the grave of his ancestors.

But none grieved more sincerely over the tragedy than young Pete Monihan. In lonely silence, his eyes glittering with unshed tears, he performed the rites expected of a dutiful and filial son.

He did not open his lips until he was ensconced once more in his room at the Metropole. There, with Red Corrigan and Tom Harden, his pals from the office, he broke down and wept.

The passing of Wo Sin had filled him with a terrible feeling of loneliness. No more would the kindly old Chinaman watch out over his doings; no more would brief, softly-spoken words impart to him some of the great store of wisdom that had been gathered behind Wo Sin's beady black eyes.

He was on his own now. He was—Pete Monihan sat up straight on the bed where he had flung himself—he was twenty-one. He was a man, now.

Avoiding the commiserating glances of his friends, Monihan hastily wiped the back of his sleeve across his reddened eyes. His shoulders straightened, squared back and his jaw set firmly. Then he turned to face his friends.

"Well, Pete, it's all over," said Harden. "Better forget it—there's work to be done."

"Tom," answered Monihan bitterly, "you said plenty just then. There is work for me."

"And for us, too," spoke up Corrigan. "We're with you."

Monihan scowled at the toes of his shoes. "Listen, whoever killed Wo Sin was there just before I reached the room. When I get him—"

"When we get him," amended Corrigan. "Wo Sin was a white man, Pete. You're counting us in on this, understand?"

"Better have a drink," suggested Harden, crossing the room. He found a bottle and some glasses on the bureau and proceeded to pour out three stiff drinks. "Here," he handed one to Monihan, "it'll steady your nerves a bit. I guess we can all stand a shot."

They drank in silence.

"Well," ventured Harden at last, "have you got any ideas?"

"As to who killed him?" asked Monihan. "No. It could have been any one of thousands, I guess. But the treasure is back of it. If we start looking for it, and get hot, the man who murdered Wo Sin is sure to turn up."

"Right," agreed Corrigan. "And the first thing to do is find the girl."

MONIHAN strode restlessly up and down the room. His eyes were hard and bitter and his once laughing mouth was a cruel, narrow line.

"The hell of it is," he grunted, "I told Wo Sin to hold that chart for me. I should have taken it when he offered the damn thing to me. If he hadn't had it, maybe—"

"Forget it," counseled Corrigan. "We all have to go sometime. Wo Sin isn't sorry, wherever he is."

"Where have you got your half?" asked Harden.

Monihan slapped his breast. "Right here. If anyone wants it, they'll have to kill me first."

With the words, he drew from his pocket a long, blued-steel Smith and Wesson .38. With a flick of his

wrist he snapped out the chamber and carefully examined each shell. Then, satisfied, he pocketed the gun once more.

"You two sit tight," he ordered. "I'm going for a walk. I've got to do some thinking and maybe the air will clear my head a bit."

Corrigan bounced from his chair. "Good. We'll trail along."

He reached for his hat, but Monihan stopped him. "Nothing doing. You two wait here. I have to be alone."

Despite the protests of his companions, he was firm. He left the hotel and with unseeing eyes joined the throng that shuffled through the streets.

A motley stream of passers-by jostled his elbows, and a dozen foreign tongues dinned into his unheeding ears. But Monihan's mind was a tumult of bitter thoughts and he wandered aimlessly down the thoroughfare.

His eagerness to find the heritage his father had left him was tempered and yet strengthened by the murder of his Chinese foster father. His unknown enemies were not mere obstacles in the way of his search, but the object of a bitter personal hatred that welled up in his heart.

Solemnly he dedicated his own life to the avenging of Wo Sin's brutal murder.

HIS unthinking steps had taken him away from the wide thoroughfares of the foreign concession, ever deeper into the slums of the native quarters. The streets were narrow, shabby, crooked alleys. Ramshackle, flimsy houses, leaning crazily against each other, flaunted long vertical signs in faded vermilion and yellow.

With a start, Monihan's mind jerked back to reality. A padded, but insistent, footstep behind him

beat into his consciousness. All his nerves and senses became alert.

Now that he had noticed the fact, he realized that he had been dimly aware of the soft footfalls for some time past. Hastily he lengthened his stride and his right hand crept toward his hip.

But the steps behind him speeded up to match his own.

MONIHAN cursed softly beneath his breath. He swung abruptly around the next corner and took three swift strides forward. Then he brought up to a sudden halt. He peered through the shadows and realized that he had turned into a blind alley. Fool!

No chance to use his gun here—his hand dropped away from his hip. One shot and the ramshackle houses would erupt a horde of yellow-skinned men—and a lone white man, in the torturous maze of the native quarter, could look for no assistance from the yellow pack.

Monihan whirled about, fists clenched, just in time to avoid a murderous blow swung at his head. He side-stepped and swung up his arm, to catch the force of the unwieldy weapon on his forearm.

As his attacker lunged past him, Monihan caught him with a stiff right, flush to the chin. A grunt and a curse from the thug and the fight was on. The shadowy alley echoed and reechoed to the sound of blows.

Monihan had counted on only one enemy, but instead he found himself surrounded by four of his attackers. A hail of stinging blows landed on his chin and he staggered back.

There was only one thing in his favor, he realized. And that was, that his unknown antagonists were no more anxious than he was to rouse the neighborhood. It was that fact, Pete knew, that had saved him

from a swift, merciless, leaden slug in the stomach.

A surge of savage anger impelled him forward and he shot out his heavy fists with lightning precision. He grunted with satisfaction as the impact of his knuckles on yielding flesh brought low moans of pain from his adversaries.

The four thugs shouldered together and crowded him back against the wall. Pete swung with his left and brought his knee up with the blow. He followed the thrust with a crashing right to a chin that bobbed in front of him. He ducked as a fist swished past his ear, but hard knuckles scraped across his forehead and raked the skin above his eye.

A THIN trickle of blood seeped down his cheek and crept, salty, to the corner of his grim set mouth. Once more he swung his knee and his fist in simultaneous action, and the man nearest him reeled back. Sprawling, he blocked the rest of Monihan's attackers for a moment.

Monihan leaned back against the wall and gasped for breath. The air whistled from his tortured lungs in great sobs. Then they were on him again.

Monihan knew he was a beaten man; but he determined to go out fighting. Heavy fists smashed into his head and neck and his own arms grew tired as he retaliated. A right to the ear sent him crashing backward again. He reeled crazily, stumbled, caught himself up again and swung out blindly. A jutting chin collided with his battered knuckles and the man went down in a heap.

But Monihan knew it couldn't last much longer. He steadied himself for a last stand. He dropped another with a cruel right to the heart, then the last two rushed him as one.

Monihan was weary and his head swam.

A kaleidoscope of blazing lights flashed before his eyes as he hammered away, almost unconsciously, instinctively, at his two attackers. A heavy bludgeon crashed down on his shoulder and sent fiery jabs of pain through the numbed muscles of his arm.

Slowly, foot by foot, by their superior weight, they forced Monihan's back to the wall. His foot slipped in his own blood and he went down, the men piling over him. With the strength of desperation he fought his way once more to his feet.

In a rush of savage fury he slashed out wildly, but Pete knew that his blows lacked steam. Blood ran from the cut over his eye. Only the thought of the murdered Wo Sin, who had died to pass on this dangerous heritage to him, gave him renewed strength to fight on.

It was but a matter of minutes, seconds. Then—

"Hold 'em, Pete!" rang out from the mouth of the alley. "Here I come!"

A hysterical desire to laugh gripped Monihan. Never before had Corrigan's voice sounded so sweet in his ears.

WITH the battle cry still on his lips, Red smashed his way into the fray. Under the mighty power of his crushing blows the four men fell back. This was evidently more than they had counted on, and battered and bleeding from Monihan's desperate fighting, they broke ranks in confusion.

As suddenly as the fight had started, it was over. The cowardly attackers turned tail and fled. Monihan placed a weary hand on the wall to steady himself and passed his fingers tenderly over his bleeding forehead.

"Thanks, Red," he panted. "You just made it in time—they had me finished."

"Yellow dogs," grunted Corrigan, breathing on his bruised knuckles.

"Did you get a good look at them?" asked Monihan. "It was so dark in here, and after the fireworks started I could only see sky rockets and pin wheels. I couldn't make them out."

"I sized them up as they lit out," said Corrigan. "They belong to Klementoff's outfit—Japs. But one of them, unless I'm crazy, looked like his son."

"That's funny," mused Monihan. "Old Ivan thinks the world of that hell-raising kid Nick. It doesn't seem logical that he'd send him out on this back alley stuff."

Corrigan shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably Klementoff doesn't know that Nick trailed along. He's a mean young devil and he most likely wanted to have the pleasure of helping to finish you off." He passed an arm through Monihan's. "Let's get going. Tom'll be getting uneasy."

THEY walked down the shadowy length of the alley and emerged on the narrow street. Almond eyes stared after them curiously as they headed for the British city once more.

Corrigan hailed a ricksha coolie and they piled into the dilapidated vehicle; Red gave the driver sing-songed orders and he nodded; then they were off at a rapid pace.

Back in Monihan's room at the Metropole, Harden looked at them curiously. Monihan let Corrigan explain as he carefully washed his wounds.

"By the way," he called over his shoulder, "how did you happen to be down that alley, Red?"

Corrigan fidgeted uneasily in his

chair. "Well, you see it's this way . . ." he began, but Pete interrupted him.

"You followed me, eh? Thought I couldn't take care of myself."

"Aw. . ."

"It's a damn good thing for me you did," grinned Monihan. "Let's go downstairs. Dinner's on me—you earned it."

HE ran a comb through his tousled hair, slipped into his coat and led the way. They clattered down the stairs and made their way into the dining room on the main floor of the hotel.

A sleek, white-jacketed waiter placed menus before them. Corrigan waved his hand at the card.

"Bring food—any kind and plenty of it," he ordered. "We're all starved. Hurry now."

As the grinning waiter hurried off kitchenwards, the trio got down once more to the business in hand.

"It looks to me," offered Harden, "from Red's story, that Klementoff is working this on his own. I think he's the only one who knows you have half the map. If the Chinese government knew as much you'd have heard from them by now. The Japs may be backing Klementoff, but apparently he's having a free hand in the recovery of the Headdress."

"That's good news, if your hunch is right," answered Monihan. "That means we have only one man to look out for, and somebody we know, at that."

"Say," interrupted Corrigan, joggling his elbow. "Look what just came into the room, will you? A swell looker, too."

"You and women," grunted Monihan, screwing around in his chair. "You forget everything else on your mind when a skirt swishes past you." He surveyed the newcomers critically. "She's not bad, at that, though,"

he offered. "But I can't say I like the looks of her boy friend."

As if she knew that she was the subject of their conversation, the slim blonde turned her head and met Monihan's direct gaze. She flushed prettily, then managed a faint smile in his direction as her escort steered her to a table.

Harden scowled thoughtfully at her swarthy-skinned escort.

"I've seen that man some place before," he mumbled. "I wish I could remember just where, and when."

"Forget him," suggested Corrigan. "Here's the grub. I'll find out who he is for you. I'll ask the girl friend."

"Quick worker, eh?" laughed Monihan.

"Sure," boasted Corrigan. "I'll bring her around for dinner tomorrow. I've seen her, haven't I? That's enough for me."

By the time they had finished their coffee and had lit up cigarettes, they had carefully gone over the entire history of the hidden treasure.

"Let's go up to your room, Pete," suggested Corrigan, "and we'll go over the chart together."

CHAPTER IV

The Twin Tattoos

MONIHAN led the way down the corridor, turned the key in the lock of his door, and felt for the light switch on the wall. He snapped it on, but the room remained dark.

"That's funny—lights gone bad," he muttered.

"Maybe," grunted Corrigan. His hand crept toward his hip. "Take it easy. Tom, keep an eye on the door."

Cautiously, their guns ready, they felt their way into the room. Satisfied that it was empty, Monihan struck a match and guided by its

flare, approached the light bracket on the wall. He felt the bulb and found it loose in its socket. He gave it a few turns and the light went on.

Corrigan and Harden followed suit and found each bulb had likewise been loosened.

Under the full glow of the lamps, they stared aghast at the room. It was hardly recognizable. Bureau drawers had been pulled out and emptied carelessly upon the carpet. A litter of papers and letters strewn the table. The bed had been roughly torn apart and the tumbled bedclothing hung trailing over the footboard.

Nothing had escaped the confusion; every article of furniture in the room had been subjected to a thorough search.

MONIHAN smothered a curse, then patted his breast pocket and grinned. He would have enjoyed seeing the baffled faces of the men who had failed in their search.

"Thorough job," he commented dryly.

"But you got the map on you?" asked Harden anxiously.

"I sure have," answered Monihan. He crossed the room and snapped the lock on the door. "And if anybody else comes searching, they're going to run into a lot of grief."

Without bothering to straighten up the littered room, the trio drew up chairs and gathered about the table. Monihan drew out the torn chart and passed it over to Corrigan. Harden leaned over Red's shoulder as they eagerly scanned the coveted parchment.

"It's some island off Macao, that's all I know," said Monihan. "Just what its name is, I don't know. Probably hasn't got one. It might not be anything more than a sandbar. But we can go ahead with that.

We'll have to cruise around a bit and take a chance on beating Klementoff there."

After the two men had satisfied their curiosity somewhat, he went on. "First thing to do is find Sayers' girl. From what Wo Sin told me, we have to get hold of her before we can find the loot."

"Suppose," said Harden slowly, "suppose that she is working against us? Suppose she's tied up with whoever it was that got Wo Sin, and they're trying to get the Headdress themselves?"

A dark scowl crossed Monihan's face. "I've thought of that, Tom. If she was responsible for Wo Sin's murder—I'll ram the Dragon Headdress down her throat. She can keep it that way."

"And I'll help you do it, dame or no dame," grunted Corrigan.

"Good," answered Monihan. "Now I vote we go down to see Old Man Hawkins tomorrow and charter a boat from him. I think he has a line on several British and American boats that are out for charter. You, Tom, can sign on with the crew and trail along. Then I'll take the regular steamer to Macao alone."

"Why alone?" objected Corrigan, unwilling to be left out of it.

"You'll have to trail along later," explained Monihan. "Klementoff will be watching us, and if we all start off together, it'll be a dead giveaway."

CORRIGAN grumbled, but in the end, he was forced to acknowledge the wisdom of Monihan's plan. After making arrangements for the morrow, Corrigan and Harden rose to leave for their own rooms. At the door Harden stopped suddenly with his hand on the knob.

"I got it—I just remembered," he burst out.

"Got what—rhythm?" mocked Corrigan.

"No—I mean I remember who that man was. You know—the one with the blonde down in the dining room. You better watch your step when you start making a play for the girl friend, Red."

"How's that?"

"He's one of Klementoff's outfit, that's all."

Left alone, Monihan settled himself in a comfortable chair and scowled moodily at the opposite wall. So the blonde had flashed him a smile, eh? They thought they would get to him in that way. His lip curled a bitter smile.

It was a good thing, a damn good thing, that Harden's memory for faces had warned him in time. For she had been a delicious little bit of femininity. Monihan didn't try to fool himself. If it had not been for Harden's timely tip, he would have been fair game for her golden beauty.

For the hundredth time he studied the rude outlines of the map, then a discreet tap at his door stiffened him in his chair. Hastily he stuffed the chart and the letter into his coat pocket and then crossed the room on tiptoe.

THEN, with his hand on his hip, he grasped the doorknob and flung it wide in a sudden movement.

For a moment he stood, staring open-mouthed, at his visitor. Then he recovered his composure. It was the piquant blonde of the dining room.

"May I come in?" she whispered.

"Of course," answered Monihan, grinning widely. "Walk right in and make yourself at home."

If there was anything sarcastic in his tone, the girl apparently did not notice it. She meekly accepted the chair he drew up for her and watch-

ed him from wide, innocent eyes as he hitched his own closer.

Then she glanced about the room, and her fingers twitched slightly. It was evidently hard to stifle the desire to put the room to rights, a true feminine instinct. But instead she asked:

"Your friends—where are they?"

"In their own rooms," he answered.

"Why?"

"You're Americans," she said. "So am I. I'm in trouble—terrible trouble. I thought . . ."

"Uh, huh, go on," urged Monihan.

"I don't know where to start," she evaded. "Oh, it's been awful. I—I—I'm afraid . . ."

She leaned forward impulsively, pillowed her face on his shoulder and sobbed. Unconsciously Monihan slid a solicitous arm about her shaking shoulders.

"Now, now," he murmured. "Don't cry—that's a good girl. Everything'll be . . . Why, you little hellcat," he suddenly snarled. His hand shot out and closed about her wrist. Her fist came up out of his pocket, still clutching the map. "So that's your game, eh? Well, you made a mistake. I expected just this."

The girl hung her head for an instant, ashamed that she had been caught rather than of the game she was up to. Monihan dug his fingers cruelly into her wrist and she winced.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Margy," she answered. "Margy Sanders."

"So you're one of Klementoff's outfit, eh?" he went on.

HER silence was an admission of the fact. The thought that the girl might have been responsible for Wo Sin's death fanned the dull anger that burned in Monihan's breast, fanned the embers into

flaming hate. With an angry gesture he pushed her violently from him.

Margy fell back into the chair and a matching hate flashed from her eyes. With a cunning twist of her arm she broke from his grasp and snatched at her bosom. But even as she brought a tiny .22 automatic to light, Monihan pinned her wrist again.

For a moment they struggled furiously and the girl fought tooth and nail, clawing like a wildcat. Just as Monihan wrenched the gun away from her, the entire right sleeve of her dress ripped loose under his fingers.

"Say," he gasped, pointing at her arm. "What's that?"

MARGY looked down at the curious tattoo mark on her firm white skin.

"What do you think it is?" she countered sullenly.

"Sit down," snapped Monihan. He pushed her back into the chair again. "I'm sorry I hurt you. I want to talk to you."

"You've got a rough way of talking," grumbled the girl, ruefully rubbing her aching wrist.

"I know, but I didn't mean it," answered Monihan. "I've been touchy lately." He watched her narrowly as he spoke. "Ever since a— a friend of mine was killed."

But if he expected to make her start, Margy disappointed him. She merely gazed at him in sullen silence.

"You're a game kid," continued Monihan. "Listen—you said your name was Margy Sanders, eh? Was it ever—Sayers?" he shot out suddenly.

The girl looked startled. "Sure, that's my real name. Klementoff made me change it."

Without another word Monihan ripped off his coat, rolled up his

sleeve and displayed a tattoo mark almost identical with the one on her own arm. Then when she had somewhat gotten over the shock of the revelation, he showed her his father's letter. He was open and above board, and told her all he knew of the hidden treasure of the Manchus.

"That's the story, Margy," he finished. "Now tell me how you feel about it."

Margy squinted thoughtfully at the floor.

"I thought there was something queer about Klementoff," she said. "Now I know. I don't know if he's the man who killed Wo Sin, but you can bet he's mixed up in it someplace. He's smart, though, Pete. It'll be hard to prove anything on him."

WELL, if I can find out to my own satisfaction that he murdered Wo Sin, he's a dead man. I've given you my cards straight. If you want to see this through with me, fine. If you don't . . ."

Margy met his gaze squarely and held out a slim hand.

"If you trust me, Pete, I'm going with you—all the way. Your father and mine were friends. They hoped we'd be friends, too."

Monihan crushed her cool hand in his own. "Margy, when this is all over, I'll tell you what I thought of you when I first saw you downstairs." He raised her firm chin with the tip of one finger, then with an impulsive movement, bent down and covered her lips with his own.

A rosy flush crept slowly over the girl's cheeks. She drew back and her lips opened, but before she could speak, for the second time that evening, a discreet rap sounded on the door. The pair froze.

Then Monihan, with his fingers to his lips, indicated a closet on the far side of the room. With a flash of

twinkling spike heels, Margy tiptoed to it and disappeared within its recess.

CHAPTER V

Klementoff Shows His Hand

AGAIN the knock sounded. Monihan hastily donned his coat, crossed to the door and snapped it open. With a swift glance he surveyed the tall, bearded man who stood on the threshold.

"Hello, Pete," said his visitor.

"Hello, Klementoff," answered Monihan coldly.

"Am I to be invited in?" asked the Russian.

"Invited? No. But come in anyway," snapped Monihan.

Klementoff bowed, his lips drawn back in a mirthless grin above his beard, and stepped into the room. Monihan watched him closely as he took in the disorder about him. The Cossack looked around the room in dismay and his hands went up in a gesture of question.

"What is all this, my friend?" he asked.

"I thought maybe you'd explain it," insinuated Monihan.

"I? I explain?" questioned Klementoff.

The tone of surprise in his words almost sounded genuine.

A worthy adversary, thought Pete. He would have his hands full outwitting the Russian. And the more he thought about it, the more he was convinced that Klementoff was responsible for a far more terrible deed than the ransacking of his room.

"It looks," went on the Cossack, "as though your belongings held something of great interest—to someone. Papers, a letter, perhaps, and other things?"

"Get down to business," snapped Monihan. "What brought you here?"

Klementoff hunched his broad shoulders and spread his hands once more. "Such importance, my friend. Perhaps you were looking at the chart even as I knocked upon the door?"

"You . . ." snarled Monihan, streaking for his hip. But the Cossack, with an incredibly fast draw was before him, and with his gun hand still in the air, Monihan found himself looking down the ugly, black muzzle of a heavy caliber revolver.

EASY, my friend, easy," laughed Klementoff. "You are too impetuous. Also you are too slow—with your revolver. You know of my reputation with a gun, do you not? You were foolish to attempt it."

The hot anger that flamed in Monihan's heart choked his words to an almost inaudible hiss.

"Klementoff," he whispered, "if you killed Wo Sin—I'll get you."

"Perhaps," shrugged the Cossack. "But you may find it more difficult than you expect. I shall leave you now, but you will see me again. Take good care of your health, my friend."

With a mocking bow, the big Russian strode to the door and was gone. Without a thought for Margy, still concealed in the closet, Monihan grabbed his hat and raced off in pursuit. Down in the lobby he tarried long enough to deposit the chart in the hotel safe. Then he raced out on to the veranda.

Klementoff's big sedan pulled away from the curb as he ran down the steps. Monihan passed up the line of ricksha coolies and roused the sleepy driver of an ancient, dilapidated taxi.

"Follow that car," he ordered, as he climbed inside, and the chase was on.

The Chinaman at the wheel blinked rapidly, became suddenly wide awake and flashed a wide row

of glistening teeth in an understanding grin. Monihan held his breath as the ancient vehicle honked its way through the crowded streets. A tall, bearded Sikh policeman peered suspiciously in at Monihan as they rattled by him, but did not stop their mad flight.

Their destination soon became apparent. The big sedan ahead turned up the road that led up the Peak. Monihan sat well forward on the back seat of the taxi as they labored up the winding road, through beautiful groves of palms, past the gardened villas of the resident British officials.

His mind worked rapidly. He knew that Klementoff had been after the chart, but why he had paid that little social call was more than Monihan could figure out. He was out to find the answer.

They turned off down a palm-lined driveway. Up ahead, Pete could see the dark outlines of a two-story house, set well back among the trees. He barked a curt order to his driver, and the ancient hack rattled to a halt.

MONIHAN tossed the grinning Chinaman a handful of coins and waited until the dilapidated vehicle was once more headed for the waterfront section. Then, on foot, he silently crept up toward the house.

He ducked hastily, behind the cover of some shrubs, as the sedan's headlights swung about and the car swept past him on the driveway. Then he emerged once more on to the road and quickened his pace.

The building was dark, ominously silent. Monihan hesitated a moment before descending the two short steps that led to the low doorway. His caution told him that it was folly to enter that dark, secretive entryway.

But the scent of his quarry spurred

him on. On tiptoe he crept to the doorway and leaning against it, pressed his ear to the jamb. The door gave at his slightest pressure.

That was too much—he could not resist the invitation. With a steady hand he pushed the portal inward. It swung easily on well-oiled hinges. Before him lay a long, dark passageway, faintly illuminated at the far end by the diffused light that came from an adjoining room.

Monihan's heart picked up a faster rhythm as he crept down the carpeted hall. He reached the end of the passageway without incident and peered into the dimly-lit room that gave off it on the right.

THERE, sitting in a chair with his back to the door, sat Klementoff.

A rapid survey of the room showed Monihan that no one else was there. He hesitated for a second in the shadows of the hall, but his indecision was immediately dispelled for him. The Cossack spoke from his chair without even turning his head.

"Come in, Mr. Monihan," he said in a casual tone.

There was no recourse but to obey. Monihan was not going to turn back now that he had come this far. He stepped boldly into the room and Klementoff turned in his chair.

"You are quite prompt, I see," said the Russian, and Monihan noticed that he had a thin gold watch in his hairy hand.

"I see you do not quite follow me mentally," continued Klementoff. "You see, I have been expecting you."

For the first time, it dawned on Pete that he had walked into a trap.

"You mean—"

"Exactly. I knew you would follow me. I was very careful to make sure that you did not lose sight of my car. Why did you think that I was so slow in leaving the hotel?"

Pete's heart sank. His only consolation, he reflected, was the fact that he had taken the precaution to deposit the chart in the office safe. Though it was evident from Klementoff's smug satisfaction that he had the situation well in hand, Monihan decided to face it out.

"Pretty clever of you, Klementoff," he said. "I sure hand it to you."

The Russian's lips curled in scorn. "You are a mere child—a babe. Yet you would match wits with me. Bah!" He indicated a chair opposite him. "Sit down."

Monihan shook his head. "I'm standing."

"As you will," shrugged the Cossack. "I will be brief. I want the half of the chart which is in your possession. You will write a note to your hotel, directing them to turn it over to the bearer."

Monihan's eyes narrowed. So Klementoff hadn't missed that move, either. But he said nothing.

"Come, come," continued the Russian. "You would be foolish to refuse my demand. In your hand, the map spells nothing but death."

AN ironic smile twisted the corners of Monihan's mouth. He was well aware that the heritage his father had left him was a perilous one indeed. But that was no reason for young Pete Monihan to relinquish it so easily. His chin set stubbornly and he shook his head.

"I know I'm in for a peck of trouble. But it doesn't make any difference. I'm going through with it."

"Once more I ask you," said the Cossack in a hard voice. "Is it yes or no?"

"No," answered Monihan promptly. "And you can go to hell, for all I care."

Imperceptibly Klementoff's head

inclined in a nod. Monihan recognized it as a signal. He ducked and side-stepped—but too late!

A heavy bludgeon descended with murderous force on his skull. For a moment a blinding flash of vivid crimson flashed before Monihan's eyes. Then blackness. Utter blackness. He slumped to the floor in an inert mass.

The tone of Klementoff's voice never varied as he addressed the colossal Chinaman who bent over the body of his victim.

"Finish your task, Chang. Remember—acid, no trace."

With a grunt to show that he understood, the huge yellow man stooped down and gathered Monihan's body in his powerful arms. Then, carrying him as though he were a child, he left the room by way of a concealed door in the rear wall.

Klementoff sank back in his chair, ran a thoughtful hand through his beard, and frowned at the floor.

CHAPTER VI

To the Rescue

MARGY was not above listening in on Monihan's conversation with the Russian. With her golden curls pressed tightly to the jamb of the door she managed to hear every word. When Klementoff took his departure, she decided to play safe and wait a moment before she emerged from her hiding place.

When the second slamming of the door came to her ears, she did not know what to make of it. She listened intently, but heard no further sounds from the room. Then in a flash she realized what had happened. Pete had followed Klementoff!

She burst open the door of the closet and tumbled out of the room. She raced down into the lobby,

emerged breathless on the veranda, but it was too late.

For a moment Margy was in a quandary. It was clear, all too clear to her then, that the entire object of Klementoff's visit had been to get Monihan to follow him. She had to act, and act fast. Back in the lobby, she scrawled a hasty note, folded it up and tugged the sleeve of one of the white-jacketed China boys.

"Here," she said, thrusting a coin into the boy's hand. "Take this to the friends of Mr. Monihan. Two men—they live in the hotel. You know them?"

Margy hardly waited for the moon-faced Chinese to reply in the affirmative. She dashed once more out of the hotel and climbed into a waiting ricksha.

LIKE a sick babe in his arms, Chang carried the unconscious Monihan through the secret door in the wall and passed down a short, narrow, blind passage. With a heavy foot he kicked at the closed door at the far end and entered the room beyond.

The room was broad and low. Its walls were a dirty white, a fresh coat of whitewash having just recently been applied. At the far end was a shallow pit sunk in the floor.

Chang placed Monihan's limp figure on a steel table in the center of the room, under the one bright light. It was the only piece of furniture in the room and the place was brutally stark in its emptiness. There was a creepy, suggestive sense of horror about it under the brilliant, unshaded lamp.

A strong, acrid, distasteful odor filled the room as the huge Chinaman opened a cabinet in the wall, revealing shelf after shelf of dark blue bottles. He donned rubber gloves first and then gingerly pulled the corks from a few of the acid contain-

ers. Crossing the room, he poured their contents into the deathpit. The air was heavy and oppressive. It even gagged Chang, who was long inured to it.

The pit prepared to his satisfaction, he returned to Monihan and calmly and unconcernedly as a butcher slaughters a pig, methodically went through his pockets. Watch, cuffs links, collar buttons, anything that the acid would not eat was carefully collected and placed in one pile; papers and letters in another.

MEANWHILE, Margy leaped down from the ricksha in front of the dark, gloomy villa. She pressed a handful of coppers into the moist palm of her panting human horse, and then descended the two short steps to the entrance.

With a beating heart, but a steady hand, she gave the bell beside the portal a peculiar ring. In answer the door swung silently open and a yellow face peered out at her.

"Where is Klementoff?" she asked.

The Chinaman pointed an eloquent thumb down the hallway. Margy's heart sank. She realized then that she would have to bluff it out. The only way of reaching Monihan was through the room in which Klementoff was now sitting.

How she was going to get out of there with Pete, she hadn't the slightest idea.

She patted her blonde curls into place, felt at her breast for the cold, hard steel of her automatic and then assuming a casual air she was far from feeling, she sauntered down the hall.

It was customary to knock before entering Klementoff's room, but Margy thought it would be a good gesture to disregard that formality. Humming a bar from a song she had heard in a waterfront grog-shop, she pushed open the door and entered.

"Hello, Klementoff," she called innocently.

The big Cossack surveyed her slowly from head to foot. "You have been—where?" he shot out.

Margy's eyes widened. "You mean, where have *you* been?" she countered. "I looked all over the Metropole for you."

"So?" answered Klementoff. "And did you meet with any success on your—er—mission?"

"None," said the girl, with assumed disgust. "He suspected me from the start. He didn't believe a word I told him."

"Bah," snorted the Russian. "You should not have spoken. Women need only to talk with their eyes—women with figures like yours."

MMARGY placed her arms belligerently akimbo. "Is that so? Well, you've got me wrong. I don't do business that way. And that goes for you, too," she added, hiding her uneasiness over the strange light that glittered in Klementoff's eyes as he fairly devoured her slim figure.

"Please do not get excited," the Russian soothed her. "It does not matter whether you have failed. I have the young man myself." He watched her closely to see the effect of his words. "He is inside with Chang."

Margy felt herself go sick at the thought, but with a strenuous effort she kept her jumpy nerves under control.

"With Chang, eh?" she said lightly. "So that will be the finish of Mr. Monihan. I guess that's the only thing to do. I must say you know your business, Klementoff. You never fail—you always get what you go out after."

"You think so?" leered Klementoff. "I thank you. Perhaps you would like to go in and see our friend

Monihan, before he is past recognition?"

If Klementoff had expected Margy to reveal her real feelings in the matter he was disappointed. She took his ghastly suggestion at face value. It was just the opportunity she had been waiting for.

"Not a bad idea at that. I think I will," she answered his grim words as if that way was as good as any to kill a few idle minutes.

With a nod of her head and a smile at the leering face of the big Russian, she pressed the panel in the rear of the room and disappeared through the secret door.

Once the trap had shut behind her, Margy's bearing changed completely on the instant.

Instead of a pert, provocative blonde, she became a lean, ferocious pantheress. All her assumed indifference fell away as she snatched the tiny automatic from her breast and with lithe, supple limbs crept down the dim passageway to the door at the far end.

HER tiny fist was clenched determinedly around the cold butt of her gun and she swore beneath her breath that if she was too late, her first bullet would plow through the yellow heart of the giant Chang.

At the door, she paused a moment and listened, her ear glued to the panel. Faint noises sounded from within and a foul, strong odor drifted out to assail her nostrils. Her throat tightened and she swallowed hard to keep from crying out. With a savage kick she flung the door wide and charged into the room. Before the Chinaman was aware of what was happening, the muzzle of her gun was boring into his ribs.

A rapid sing-song of Cantonese poured from her lips. With puzzled astonishment written on his yellow

face, Chang raised his huge hands above his head. Then, still keeping him covered, Margy backed to the door and closed it.

"Now," she ordered, waving her hand in Monihan's direction, "bring him to."

Chang hesitated a moment, his lustreless black eyes gazing stupidly at her.

"Hurry," she whispered, "or I'll blow your head off. March!"

Chang knew better than to refuse. Margy knew him well, and she also knew his type. Huge, powerful coolies, almost insensible to pain themselves and almost inhuman in their ability to inflict torture on others, nevertheless they were used to obeying orders.

Almost mechanically he obeyed her curt commands. He went to the locker and returned with a bottle of whisky. One swallow and Monihan stirred. Another shot and he came to.

He sat up on the table, dazed and befuddled, and looked vacantly about him. His dull eyes fastened on the towering figure of Chang, but still he did not understand. Was he dreaming? Was this some ghastly nightmare?

HE closed his eyes tightly for a moment to shut out the lights and gradually the humming in his brain subsided. Slowly it all came back to him—Klementoff—the signal—the impact of something solid on his skull. Probably Chang's handiwork, and now the Chinaman was preparing to finish him off.

Monihan slid off the table, landed on shaky legs and weakly raised his fists, prepared to battle for it. He turned, and it was then for the first time that he saw Margy and the threatening weapon in her hand. Still keeping her eyes on Chang, she

raised a slim hand and placed one finger to her lips in a gesture for silence.

With renewed vigor, Monihan hurried over to her.

Briefly she poured in his ears the story of what she had done. "All we can do now," she finished, "is wait for your friends to get here. They ought to make it any minute."

Monihan nodded. "Red's got a car. And he can drive like a bat out of hell. He'll be here, if he got your note."

"If he didn't, we're finished," said Margy grimly.

MONIHAN'S jaws set aggressively. "We'll fight our way out."

"Don't be a fool," she snapped. "What good is this toy? Everybody in this place has a gun. Use your brains."

"I guess that slant-eye knocked them out of me," replied Monihan sheepishly. "You do the thinking—I'll trail along."

"I've got an idea," said Margy, after a moment's thought. She turned on Chang. "Here, Chang, listen. Take all this stuff you removed from his pockets. Bring it in to Klementoff as you always do and tell him the task is finished. Understand?"

Chang nodded.

"You see, Pete," explained Margy, "that will hold him off for a while, until those two get here. With any luck, Klementoff won't get curious about me until it's too late."

"Good stuff," grunted Monihan. "Go ahead."

"And remember, Chang," she went on, turning again to the Chinaman, "my gun will always be trained on you through the hole in the door. One word—one false move—and you go to meet your ancestors. Now—move."

CHAPTER VII

The Battle

WHILE the Chinaman was gathering up the articles he had taken from Monihan's pockets, a long, dark, touring car was roaring its way up the winding road toward the Peak. Once in high, Corrigan kept his foot all the way down to the floorboards on the gas pedal. By his side sat Harden. Silent, immersed in his thoughts, he fondled on his knees a heavy shotgun. Occasional pedestrians, blinded by their headlights, scurried from their path like frightened rabbits.

Corrigan hunched over the wheel, peering ahead for the side road that led to the villa, according to the directions in Margy's scribbled note. He spoke from the corner of his mouth.

"If that blonde is trying to pull a fast one—if she's leading us into a trap . . ." He did not finish the sentence, but the tone of his voice boded no good for Margy in the event that their mission had been a false one.

"It looks funny, all right," admitted Harden. "And if you're right—well, I'll help you take care of her. She—there's your road, Red."

Their approach to the gloomy house in the palm grove was a very different matter from Monihan's cautious entry. If Margy's note had told the truth, there was no time to waste in reconnoitering the grounds. They had to act, and act fast.

The big touring car roared up the driveway, grated to a sliding halt before the darkened villa. Almost before the wheels stopped spinning on the gravel, the two men, guns in hand, were charging down the steps to the doorway.

Side by side, their shoulders smashed the portal and the pair staggered into the narrow passageway

beyond. From somewhere, yellow-faced men appeared in the shadows of the hall. Shrill voices rang out in alarm. Then a long knife, its keen blade glinting dully in the dim light, sang past Corrigan's ears and stuck, quivering, in the wall beside his head.

Almost on the instant his revolver flashed up, belching vivid orange flame. Devastation and all hell popped loose! Guns cracked out, stabbing the darkness with streaks of light. Sizzling lead and shining steel threw up slithering splinters of wood about their ears.

With his shotgun Harden pumped a blinding barrage up the passageway. Then, flat on their stomachs, the pair slowly wormed their way up the dark hall as a singing hail of death whistled over their heads.

THERE was no stopping the now thoroughly aroused pair. If Pete was there, they would get him out. If he was dead—if they were too late—their flaming guns would see to it that he was not lonesome on his long journey.

Chang had been in the midst of his little act for Klementoff when the attack came. As the first terrific roar echoed in the hallway, the huge Chinaman spun around and pitched headlong to the floor, a bullet in his brain.

Margy, without hesitating to seize the opportunity for putting the yellow fiend out of the way forever, had emptied her automatic at him through the peephole in the door.

Klementoff leaped from his chair and looked down at his fallen henchman in amazement. Then suddenly he went livid with fury. He knew where that shot had come from; knew that the girl had turned traitor to his camp. Well, time for her later.

Instead, he flashed for his own gun, urging on his men with gut-

tural oaths. He fought with all the desperation of a cornered animal. The room was filled with deafening thunder and the smoke from many guns swayed over the heads of the struggling men like a shroud.

Corrigan, edging slowly down the hall, found the fusebox and plunged the house into abrupt blackness. Only the licking tongues of flame from the guns showed how the battle waged.

With bitter defeat in his heart, Klementoff saw how his plan had miscarried. It was the girl who was responsible. The intense hate in his heart distorted his face. With clawing fingers he edged himself across the room to the secret door. He was half way across when Harden poked the muzzle of the shotgun around the jamb of the door and fired a deadly charge inside.

His consuming hatred of the girl urged the Russian on to his vengeance, but his reason told him that he could never make it. Reluctantly he raised his voice and barked out a few terse commands. A yellow hand found a secret panel in the side wall of the room and Klementoff charged for the opening. His followers wormed their way across the room and they fled blindly in his wake.

For another instant Harden and Corrigan sprayed the place with flying lead. Then all was quiet.

ONCE more back in Monihan's room at the Metropole, the four went into executive session. Swiftly Monihan explained the story. He told the others of Margy's visit, of the fact that she was Sayers' daughter, and their subsequent adventures. "She's got the tattoo and all," he finished. "From now on she's one of us."

That introduction was enough for Corrigan and Harden. They forgot their suspicions regarding the note

she had sent them, and got down to business.

"Our plans will have to be changed," said Margy. "Klementoff knows that our destination is Macao. He has plenty of boats at his command. Fast boats. No matter what we do, he will be there ahead of us."

"That makes it hard," mused Monihan. "Well, our idea of separating is out, then. We'd better stick together. Tomorrow I'll charter a boat and have it waiting for us at Macao. Then we'll all take the mail-boat over."

"Swell," approved Corrigan. "We'll meet here in your room tomorrow night at ten, say. The steamer leaves at midnight."

CHAPTER VIII

To Macao

THE next evening, Harden, Margy and Monihan dined together in the latter's room. They were taking no chances of a last minute accident separating them.

"I got the boat chartered, all right," announced Monihan, exhibiting a sheaf of papers. "The *Dolphin*—a British schooner. She'll be waiting for us at Macao."

Ten o'clock found them still waiting, but Corrigan failed to appear on the scene. Twenty minutes went by—a half hour, but he was still missing.

"We'd better get going," said Monihan. "Something must have turned up, but he'll probably get down to the steamer. Looks like we'll have to take a taxi."

With their hands thrust deep into their coat pockets and the girl between them, they descended to the lobby and crossed the veranda. Just as they emerged from the hotel, a taxi pulled up before the entrance.

"What a break," grinned Harden. "That's the best-looking cab I've ever

seen in this town. Most of them are such rattle-traps they shake you into little pieces before you get where you're going."

Monihan called out to the driver and as they crossed the sidewalk, the rear door of the cab swung open. Swiftly they piled inside, hesitating only to cast a hasty glance up and down the street. Apparently the coast was clear.

Margy jumped in first, with Monihan close behind her. But as Harden placed his foot on the running board, before he could slip in beside them, the cold muzzle of a gun ground into the small of his back.

"Do not move," a sibilant voice hissed in his ear.

No one stirred; no one answered.

"You, Mr. Monihan, and the lady, please to throw your guns on the floor. Otherwise, your friend here will die."

Reluctantly they obeyed, and their revolvers clattered to the floorboards. A small, saffron hand reached out and gathered them.

"I thank you," went on the voice. "Now you may go on with your journey."

A deft push sent Harden tumbling into the cab. Then the door slammed behind him and before either of the trio had a chance to move, the taxi slipped into gear and raced down the street.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, Harden and Monihan jumped to the doors on either side and then looked at each other in consternation. There were no handles. They put their weight against them but they did not budge. Monihan felt the side with his finger and found nothing but cold sheet metal.

Under the flare of a match they examined both doors carefully and saw that they fitted perfectly into the chassis of the car and evidently

could be opened only from the outside, by a secret mechanism operated from the driver's seat.

They attacked the glass partition that separated them from the unheeding driver, only to find that it was made of unbreakable glass that resisted their strongest blows. The small windows, also, were made of the same substance. It was no use—they were sealed in the interior of the cab.

Monihan swore roundly. "Damn Japs! The one who shoved you in here, Tom, was one of the gang that attacked me down that alley. I recognized his voice."

"And I was cheering because this swell looking bus was waiting for us," groaned Harden. "Sap!"

MARGY pushed her hat back on her curly head. "Well, there's no use worrying about it. We'll just have to fight it out when we get out of this contraption."

Monihan squeezed her hand. "Good kid," he muttered hoarsely. "Only I'm afraid we're done for. If they hadn't taken our guns we might have a chance."

With a harsh grinding of brakes the taxi came to an abrupt halt. Monihan pressed his nose to the glass and peered out into the gloom beyond. He saw a deserted brick dock and the glinting water beyond it. They had pulled up alongside a boat house. A few sampans and a large, painted junk, its sails down, bobbed at their moorings.

The driver of the taxi sounded his horn once and waited.

As Monihan watched the house, a door opened, piercing the blackness with a shaft of brilliant light. Two men were silhouetted in the glare for a moment and then they started for the sealed cab.

At a sharp order from one the door snapped open and the three inside

looked with impotent fury down the threatening muzzles of two guns.

"You will come out," said a voice, "one at a time."

There was nothing to do but obey.

With the muzzle of a gun prodding each of the two men from behind, the three captives were pushed along a suspended gangway to the boat house. They entered grimly, hands in the air. Two small, stiff-haired Japanese and a villainous looking white man were seated about a bottle-littered table with a deck of cards strewn over the greasy covering.

THEY leered at Margy as she entered, but a low growl from one of the guards closed their mouths and they confined themselves to crooked smiles.

With business-like precision the hands of the prisoners were securely tied behind them. Then with the guns still prodding them, they were pushed from the room and still further down a dark passageway.

A door opened and they were shoved, like unwilling cattle to the slaughter, through it. A lock snapped shut behind them and they were alone.

Harden backed up to Monihan. "They're not killing us yet," he whispered. "Maybe they're waiting for Klementoff. Get to work on the ropes—we have to get loose."

Without a word, Monihan obeyed. The sharp hemp tore his nails but he worked determinedly with his constricted fingers. Knot by knot the rope loosened and at last Harden was free. A moment later and he had released Margy and Monihan. The latter cupped a match in his hands and looked at his watch. It was eleven-twenty.

Silently they tried the door but it did not budge under their combined weight. A quick survey around

showed that there was no other exit from the room. Time passed—bitter, speeding minutes. Eleven-forty, fifty.

Monihan swore futilely as the hands on his watch crept around to twelve.

A step sounded in the passageway outside. With a warding gesture of silence, Monihan tiptoed to the door as a key turned in the lock. For a moment a black shadow loomed in the doorway. Then, with the impact of a battering ram, Pete's fist landed on the Jap's chin.

AS he staggered forward, Margy grasped the automatic in his limp hand to prevent it from clattering to the floor, while Harden caught the sodden figure and eased it to the boards.

Then in darkness they held a whispered consultation.

"As they marched us in," Margy told them, "I saw a speedboat tied up to the float. Probably used by Klementoff. If we can make it, we might catch the *Eastern Prince*—the mail steamer—on her way out of the harbor."

"Good for you," whispered Monihan.

"Great," echoed Harden. "Give me the gun, then. We'll charge the room and I'll hold them back at the door while you two get the boat started."

Monihan protested at Harden taking all the risk but he would not yield.

Silently they advanced down the passageway and with a mighty heave of his foot Harden kicked open the door. The bottles danced on the table as the card players jumped up at their entrance.

Before they had a chance to recover from the shock, Harden swept them with a slow, fan-like motion of his gun. Without waiting for more, Monihan and Margy sped to the

outer door and into the night, while Harden slowly backed his way after them.

A bottle hurtled through the air at his head and in the same instant Harden's gun flamed, winging a leaden messenger of death at the thrower. The table overturned with a rising crescendo as the booze bottles crashed to the floor. The room was pitched into darkness, a darkness that was punctured by savage spurts of jetting flame as three revolvers spat venomous death across the room.

Silence for a brief moment. Harden strained his ears to catch the sound of the motor. Something moved inside the room. The men there had solved his disappearance and were advancing on him. He crouched by the door, his finger cocked on the trigger of the automatic.

Then with a cough and a stutter the engine picked up. Its loud, thunderous, crescendo was music to Harden's ears. Then Margy called to him. He had to risk a shot in the back as he zigzagged down to the float, but the breaks were with him for once that night.

SPITTING death whistled over his head, around his head, everywhere but through his head. A barrage of bullets screamed through the night as the three men charged out of the room and emptied their guns at the running figure.

Harden flung himself bodily into the cockpit as Margy threw in the clutch. Throwing a heavy lip of water over the float, the speedboat careened out into the harbor with wide open throttle.

Margy crouched low over the controls while Monihan nursed the engine. The blue flame from the exhausts trailed out behind like a banner of hell. Again a wild volley

of shots rang out from the shore to splinter off the hardwood deck of the boat.

It took a skilled, steady hand at the wheel to guide the slithering speedboat in and out of the clumsy sampans and junks, but Margy never batted an eye. The awkward, high-prowed boats keeled hard over under the three foot wave that surged back from the knife-like prow of the racing cutter.

At last the sweeping shore line, with its glittering lights that stretched in a wide semi-circle and mounted up to the heights of the Peak, fell back off their stern. Margy threaded the maze of winding channels with marvelous dexterity.

They were going at a dizzy pace over the water and the little wind ripples slapped against their bottom with the solid impact of a hammer. Nothing but the stern of the speedboat sat in the water as the flaming exhausts licked hungrily at the waves.

Then far out on Canton Bay twinkled the port lights of a steamer. With a deft hand on the wheel, Margy slightly altered the course of the speeding boat. Some minutes later, the towering walls of the mailboat rose sheer above them. She circled the ship twice, then slowed down and pulled up alongside the steamer amidships.

CUPPING his hands to his mouth, Monihan bellowed up to the bridge. "Ahoy, *Eastern Prince!* Three passengers to come aboard!"

His hail was answered by a voice of bells deep within the bowels of the ship. Slowly the *Eastern Prince* lost headway. A megaphoned voice bellowed down to them.

"Putting over a ladder for you to come aboard. Look sharp, now."

Twinkling lights appeared on the deck and a row of curious faces

peered down over the rail. A cluster of lights was swung over the side and a Jacob's ladder snaked down into the water. Monihan caught hold of it.

"Up with you, Margy," he said.

And without hesitation the girl clasped the perilous ladder and went up, hand over hand. Harden followed her, then Monihan killed his engine, grabbed the rungs and pushed the speedboat away from the ship's side with his dangling foot.

The curious watchers on deck watched them climb up. As Margy stepped on to the deck, a swarthy-faced young man with snarling lips slipped away from his place in the crowd and concealed himself behind a ventilator. An expression of frustrated hate distorted his face as Harden and then Monihan landed solidly on the deck after the girl.

Once more the internal throb of the engine beat out its monotonous rhythm as the *Eastern Prince* resumed its course for Macao.

CHAPTER IX

For a Price

WHEN Klementoff strode into the lobby of the Avenida Hotel in Macao, a message awaited him at the desk. He waited until he had retired to his room before opening the missive. Then, for the next half hour, the Cossack was a raging madman.

He stamped up and down the confined quarters of his room, working himself into a fury. His strong, twitching fingers worked convulsively and his breath came in short, rasping gasps from his distended nostrils. The pupils of his eyes dilated with anger and small flecks of white foam collected at the corners of his beard.

So they had escaped him once more, had they? Three times now

his plans had miscarried. From now on, he, personally, would see to their execution. And they were now on their way on the *Eastern Prince*. But whether they would land in Macao alive—well, that was another matter.

He marched down once more into the lobby of the hotel and questioned the clerk regarding the arrival of the steamer from Hongkong. Tomorrow, eh? He had to do some quick thinking. Perhaps a drink would help to stimulate his already active brain.

KLEMENTOFF wandered down the Praia Grande for a few blocks, then turned off down a side street and entered a dingy, ill-smelling grog-shop. As he eased his huge bulk into a chair between a battered table and a still more battered piano, he glimpsed a face that he dimly remembered. After a moment's frowning concentration, he placed the man.

Ferreira, that was it. Difficult names, these Portuguese. If he remembered correctly, Ferreira was a man one could easily do business with, for in the old days his price for the commission of any crime from arson to murder was measured in quarts of potent liquor.

Klementoff rose from his chair, crossed the rough plank floor and dropped a heavy hand on Ferreira's shoulder. No, he had not changed much; thinner, perhaps, but the evilness of his soul was still stamped plainly on his face.

"You will have a drink with me, my friend," suggested the Russian.

Ferreira looked up at him blankly.

"You remember me, do you not?" persisted Klementoff.

The Portuguese shook his head. A vague, uncertain recognition glowed in his dull brain, but the

effort of concentration was too much and he gave it up.

"No," he answered stupidly. "I do not."

"Well, I know you—very well indeed," grinned Klementoff. He scraped back a chair and sat down beside the other. "I have work for you."

FERREIRA appeared indifferent at the mention of work.

"It means much money," said Klementoff. "A great deal of money, if you are successful."

Ferreira's head snapped up and his eyes glittered. Money? Money meant liquor.

"It is not difficult," persuaded the Russian. "A few minutes of work and you are finished. But you must be sober. You must be steady of hand."

"Well? Tell me," grunted Ferreira.

Klementoff waved a hairy hand before him. "Not now, my friend. I do not trust your tongue. You talk in your drink. But it is worth . . ." he whispered a sum into the Portuguese's ear and Ferreira stiffened in his chair.

"So?" he leered. "There is but one thing for which a man will pay that much money. And that is . . ."

Klementoff's fist clamped fiercely over his jaw. The Russian glanced hastily at the other occupants of the grog-shop.

"Be quiet, fool! If you wish the money, do not drink tonight. Come to my hotel tomorrow—the Avenida. I shall pay you half the sum agreed at that time.

"The rest when your work is finished. You understand?"

Ferreira nodded his head and pulled away from Klementoff's hand. "Tomorrow," he agreed.

CHAPTER X

The Map Is Stolen

THE trip on the *Eastern Prince* was uneventful for Monihan, Margy and Harden. They lolled under the awnings on the deck and bridled their impatience as well as possible. And that was no easy task as time dragged heavily with inactivity. Black velvet night engulfed the bay and the ship.

Steadily the *Eastern Prince* held her course, throwing back a lazy lip of foam from her prow as she cut the swell from the China Sea. The three leaned over the port rail amidships and strained their eyes into the black gloom toward the horizon.

"Well," said Harden at last, "we anchor out at twelve tonight and no getting ashore till morning. I'm going to turn in."

"Me, too," said Margy, stretching her arms and suppressing a yawn. "The easiest way to kill the next twelve hours is to sleep them off. What do you say, Pete?"

They sauntered in the cool night breeze to their adjoining staterooms and with a casual good-night to one another, retired.

* * *

Klementoff was on the wharf when the *Eastern Prince* eased up to her anchorage outside the breakwater. He heard the far-away thunder of her chain run through the hawse pipe as the hook plunged into the still water. Twinkling lights bobbed back and forth on the steamer as the deck crew opened the hatches.

A fleet of lighters, an odd assortment of craft loaded with provisions, put off from shore for the ship. In the darker shadow behind the Russian slouched Ferreira.

"There is the boat," said Klementoff, turning to him. "Do not forget what I have told you. Remember, Stateroom Fifty-six, Boat Deck. Get

the chart and his papers. I do not care what you do—but get them and bring them to me at once. I shall be waiting at the hotel."

FERREIRA nodded his understanding and backed it up with a vicious smile as he felt the razor-sharp edge of a ten-inch blade of steel.

"I will get them. Pay first!" he demanded.

"Half," said Klementoff, passing over a roll of bills. "You shall get the rest when the papers are in my possession."

"How can I be sure?" whined Ferreira.

"Pig!" snarled Klementoff. "You do not take my word? You must—you have no alternative. Now—go!"

Ferreira lost himself on one of the lighters and Klementoff watched with satisfaction as the lumbering craft pulled out toward the breakwater. Then he turned and hurried away.

Ferreira, with his knife tucked into his belt, had little difficulty in gaining the deck of the *Eastern Prince*. He milled about for a minute with the jabbering crew and when the mate went forward to supervise the opening of a hatch, he slipped into the gloom behind a ventilator.

His bare feet made no sound on the wooden deck as dodging from shadow to shadow he made his way up the companionway to the boat deck above. It was quiet up there. The passengers slept.

He concealed himself behind a lifeboat for a few minutes and waited, but no one followed. There was little chance of his being disturbed, for what little noise he made was drowned out by the noise in the holds.

Ferreira slipped out from his hiding place and dodging from ventilator to hatch, snaked his way to the

starboard side of the ship. Cautiously he peered down the long deserted deck and silently made his way aft to where a deck lamp glowed dimly from above. By its light he made out the number on the nearest cabin door. It was seventy-four. The one he was seeking was further forward, amidships.

Loosening his knife in his belt, he padded on, crouched low against the wall of the deck house. He merged himself in a patch of blackness thrown by a skylight combing as the sound of a door being slowly, secretly opened, came to his ears.

His beady eyes, accustomed to the night, followed the figure of the man who emerged from a stateroom a little ahead of him. This new pawn in the game looked cautiously up and down the deck before proceeding on tiptoe forward.

Something blunt and dull gleamed in his hand and in answer to it, Ferreira's fingers tightened about the hilt of his knife. The new prowler on the deserted deck crept forward as silently as the Portuguese had come.

AMIDSHIPS he stopped and waited a moment. Then so softly that the renegade behind him could not hear the click of the key, he unlocked the door of a stateroom and stepped in, closing it once more behind him without a sound.

Ferreira crept forward rapidly. A flare of light burst like a bomb into the night from the porthole of the cabin that had just been entered. With a start of surprise, the Portuguese read the number on the door—fifty-six! Someone was there before him.

He raised himself and with one eye looked through a corner of the porthole on a sight that held him spellbound. His fingers clenched more tightly around the haft of his knife

as he glued his eye to the glass and watched.

The man he had followed down the deck was standing over the berth. In his hand he held a leveled revolver, covering the heart of the man he had prodded to wakefulness with his gun. His victim's face was a study of surprise and hate, but there was no fear in his eyes.

The intruder evidently was speaking, for as Ferreira watched, a cloud of anger spread over the victim's face, to change to a snarl as the gun prodded him savagely. Words passed between them and Ferreira strained his ear, but could not catch them.

As he crouched there by the porthole he saw the man in the bunk sullenly raise his hands over his head as the other's hand reached under his pillow.

FERREIRA gasped as the mutilated chart of which Klementoff had told him was brought to light. Then, to his utter amazement, the man crawled from the bunk and with the gun of the intruder pushing him from behind, made for the door. Just in time Ferreira slunk away from the porthole.

From a ventilator he watched the strange procession march down the deck—the man in pajamas prodded on by the one with the gun. The two proceeded aft and Ferreira, gripping his knife, brought up the rear.

The pair ahead worked their way behind a lifeboat and with a smile of comprehension, Ferreira at last realized the intention of their promenade. He crept out to the deck's edge and from the other end of the lifeboat watched with fascination the execution of the tragedy being enacted before his eyes.

The man in pajamas stood on the edge of the deck, no rail before him. His back was to the killer. A hundred feet beneath, the still, dark

waters lapped at the sheer sides of the steamer.

Suddenly the butt of the gun was raised on high, to descend with crushing force on the skull of the defenseless man. He tottered a moment over the abyss and then plunged downward. A distant splash of water—and then silence. The killer turned, his task completed.

Still with a cautious step he edged down the side of the lifeboat from behind which Ferreira had witnessed the scene. A gleaming streak of steel in the night and Ferreira's knife plunged through his throat. Again the hand was raised and the gory blade flayed downward once again. The man lay still on the deck in a pool of blood—dead.

With deft fingers Ferreira extracted the papers from his pocket and transferred them to his own. The dimmed blade of his knife described a dull parabola in the night as it sailed over the side.

KLEMENTOFF started nervously at the discreet rap on his door. In two hurried strides he was across the room. He turned the key and Ferreira stepped in.

"Be seated," ordered the Russian. Swiftly he closed the slatted shutters of the door that led to the balcony outside. Then he turned to Ferreira once more. "Well?"

"The money?"

Klementoff passed over the blood money with a grunt. "Here. Now—the papers."

He snatched them eagerly from Ferreira's hand, examined them hastily and was satisfied.

"You killed him?" he asked.

The Portuguese smiled evilly. "The two of them. Just as you said. With the knife."

"Two men?"

"Two."

"Good. Where is the knife?"

"Over the side," answered Ferreira. "With the dead man."

THE first hot rays of the morning sun climbed over the rail of the balcony and pierced the chinks of the wooden shutters on the windows. Slowly the light crawled up the bed until it pried under the closed lids of the Russian, tossing in fitful sleep. At last he opened his eyes.

Instantly he was wide awake. He felt for the little packet tied around his waist and at its reassuring touch sank back at ease on the pillow.

After many long years of waiting, he was at last the possessor of the chart. Many men had paid with their lives for the Dragon Headdress, but Klementoff had been patient, cunning. He had the means to reach the treasure and he smiled to himself at the thought.

The Japanese government had financed him, had placed a villainous crew of cutthroats at his disposal, in return for the Headdress when he succeeded in attaining it. Klementoff's lip curled in scorn. Fools! He would outwit them, as he had outwitted the others. The Dragon Headdress was his and his alone.

He climbed out of bed. The passengers would soon be disembarking from the *Eastern Prince* and he must be at the wharf to greet his son. That young hot head! He was his father's pride and yet his greatest worry. He would keep the boy out of the way until the long search for the treasure was really over. Then together they would reap the benefits of the hoarded jewels.

It was with a friendly and complacent eye that Klementoff surveyed the city of Macao as he set out for the pier. Its gaily colored houses of pink and yellow and green, snuggled on the protecting hillside, were truly a bit of old Europe set down in the heart of the Orient.

He thought of the pleasures to be had in Macao, the gambling houses, opium dens and almond-eyed girls who had acquired for it the name of the Monte Carlo of the East. Time enough for all that later. With the treasure of the Manchus in his hands

Idly he watched a tender put off from the *Eastern Prince*. As the boat came through the breakwater and headed for the wharf, the sun glinted from the brass buttons on official uniforms. As it drew nearer, Klementoff stiffened slightly and his eyebrows drew up in a shaggy line.

The tender made fast and four policemen, each at the corner of a white sheet, lifted out and tugged up a sagging bundle. Panting, they deposited it on the float. Sudden realization dawned in Klementoff's mind. Harden or Monihan.

A morbid desire to find out which one of his victims it was, impelled him over to the gesticulating crowd that gathered rapidly about the policemen. No one took notice of him as he edged over to the sheet, one corner of which the wind had obligingly blown back.

One glance and the blood surged from Klementoff's face, leaving it a ghastly white. His heart constricted painfully. His senses reeled. He became deathly sick.

The morbid fascination drew his eyes again. He looked down at the distorted face of his son.

* * *

The next morning, the bloated corpse of Ferreira bumped crazily against the pilings of the dock.

CHAPTER XI

Still Trailing

THE blow that had sent Monihan plunging down into the water was a savage one and cut a deep wound in his head. He

struck the water with terrific force and his unconscious body sank fathoms deep before the cold water washed away the darkness that had descended on his brain. Instinctively he held his breath. Slowly his unconscious body rose to the surface. Blinded, broken, spent, Monihan flayed out both arms helplessly as he gulped in hungry mouthfuls of air.

Slowly he nursed back sufficient strength to reach the ladder that hung from the ship's side. With feet that dragged heavily behind him he climbed up to the deck and staggered down to Harden's cabin. There he collapsed in a limp and dripping heap on the floor.

An hour later, under the stimulating effect of a strong shot of whisky, he told his tale to Margy and Harden.

"There's only one thing to do," he concluded. "Klementoff must think I'm done for. He mustn't see me come off the ship."

"That ought to be easy," Harden assured him. "We'll smuggle you off in the morning, don't worry."

A TIP that almost bulged out the eyes of the Chinese steward did the trick. Later, in the locked seclusion of their room in a cheap hotel, they went over every detail of their now disorganized plan. The killing of Klementoff's son worried them. They had lost the chart and if it was not in the Cossack's hands—who did have it?

It was a bitter dose for both men. After an hour's excited argument they lapsed into a sullen silence. Harden's fingers itched for the sinewy throat of the Russian. Monihan pounded the floor while Margy slumped dejectedly in a chair.

Suddenly Monihan yanked out his gun and swiftly overhauled it.

"Where you going now?" asked Harden.

"After that chart," growled Moni-

han. "No use twiddling our thumbs. Klementoff's staying at the Avenida. I'm going up there and have a show-down. If he's got it—he won't have it long."

There was no dissuading him. "It's our only chance," insisted Monihan. "We have to get that chart somehow. I'm off—be back in a half hour."

But it was only fifteen minutes before he was back, his face even longer and more sour than when he had left.

"What happened?" asked Margy eagerly.

"He's burned the chart," spat Monihan. "I found nothing but the ashes there."

THE others considered this serious bit of information for a long while in silence. Then finally Margy spoke.

"It could be worse," she said slowly. "At least we know that Klementoff had it. That's something positive." Then inspiration moved her. "The Russian thinks you are dead, doesn't he?" Monihan nodded weary assent. "And he's got all your papers for the ship, hasn't he? Well, what he'll do then is to take over the schooner in your place. That's simple."

"Yes—too simple," said Harden bitterly.

"Not if you get aboard her. You'll have to!"

"By Jove, Margy, you're right!" exclaimed Monihan. "We'll get aboard, let Klementoff lead us to the Head-dress and then for the fireworks!"

That afternoon two shabby, dilapidated beachcombers hung listlessly around the waterfront. Though they seemed indifferent enough to the varied activity about them, their attention was concentrated on a trim, three-masted schooner that lay a little way off shore. All signs aboard pointed to an early sailing.

Suddenly Monihan's hand gripped Harden's arm. An ancient hack ran

out on to the quay and Klementoff stepped out. He called to a boatman, jumped into the stern of his skiff and was rowed out to the schooner.

Monihan and Harden kept well out of sight until Klementoff returned. After he had disappeared up the street again, they waited another hour, then rowed out to the schooner themselves. On deck they found the mate forward, overhauling the anchor gear.

"Need a couple of men, Mr. Mate?" asked Harden.

"No," replied the officer in a hurried voice. "All hands signed on."

"Any chances of working a passage?" insisted Monihan.

"Sorry, boys," replied the mate. "Just going a ways up the coast."

"Thanks, mister," said Harden. "How about getting a hand-out in the galley?"

"Well, I guess so," replied the mate, "but don't hang around. I want to see you over the side in fifteen minutes."

"Right-o, Mister."

THEY started down the deck towards the galley amidships.

"See if we can get some information out of one of the crew," explained Harden. "Couldn't question the mate too much."

The cook was an agreeable soul and dished them out a savory stew and coffee. After a few minutes they had him talking.

"The toff who chartered this bottom was aboard about an hour ago. Rum one, he was. Name of Monihan, but he looks more like a Roosian than a Yank, to me. Raising bloody hell. Wants to sail in an hour, but can't be done till tonight. In a Gawd awful hurry. Comes aboard, shows his papers, bawls out the mate and stamps ashore again!"

"Where you bound for?" asked Monihan.

"Bit of a mystery. Signed on the

paper, coastwise. Pleasure! But that's a rum one. What pleasure in sailing on this coast?"

Harden agreed with him. "And so you're heaving anchor tonight, eh?"

"Aye, mate, about twelve. Can't get away before. The Roosian's coming aboard then with a party of friends."

"Well, we'll be going now. Many thanks, cook; that's good slum you're chucking out," said Harden and with a friendly wave of their hands, the two would-be deck hands made their departure.

They were silent while they rowed back to the quay. Ashore, Harden purchased two sea bags, while Monihan looked on a little puzzled. They did not speak until the door of their room was locked behind them.

WELL?" demanded Margy eagerly at their entrance.

"You were right, Marge," threw back Harden. "He's taken over the ship."

"And he's going to pull out without us," added Monihan bitterly. "Do you think the cook meant Klementoff's pack of Japs is coming aboard?"

"Most likely," answered Harden.

"We're licked then," said Monihan dejectedly. "Red won't be here until tomorrow."

"No we're not," replied Harden. "I have an idea. Listen. I know sailors. Tonight after they knock off work, some of them will come ashore for drinks. We'll just waylay two of them. Put 'em out of the way nice and quiet and then go aboard in their places."

"Great!" exclaimed Margy. "Tom, you're a wizard."

"Sure," grinned Monihan. "Think it will work?"

"You have a pair of fists, haven't you?" she asked with a smile. "Well, that's all there is to it."

It was their only chance and they

decided to act upon it. They packed their few belongings in their canvas bags and waited for darkness.

"Quick, quick!" called Margy from the window. "Look!"

They ran to her side and followed the direction of her finger. A ramshackle bus had just pulled up before the Avenida Hotel and as they watched, all that remained of the Russian's crew slid out and disappeared into the hotel.

"His yellow men are here all right," said Monihan, "but the cook said that they wouldn't sail till about midnight. Klementoff won't go aboard till then. Time for us to get going."

"Right!" agreed Harden.

"And you, Margy," said Monihan, turning to the girl. "If we get away with it tonight, you get Red as soon as he shows up and follow us. If you catch up with us—well, we'll leave the rest to your own judgment. But, please, now, don't—don't take too many chances."

Margy returned his smile and gripped his hand. "Don't worry. Leave that to me. Red and I will find you!"

CHAPTER XII

Aboard Ship

THE two men left immediately after and by the time they reached the circular quay, black night had fallen. From the dock they saw a few moving, twinkling lights on the schooner. They concealed themselves behind a row of crates and waited.

An hour passed and nothing happened. Aboard the schooner the hatches were battened down, the last wedge hammered home and silence settled over the ship.

"If I'm right," whispered Harden, "a boat ought to shove off any minute, now."

They strained their eyes across the murky waters and their ears were attuned to the faintest sound. Then from far out in the still night, the dull thumping of oars in rowlocks came to them.

As they watched a small skiff pulled around the stern of the schooner and headed with lusty strokes for the landing stage.

As it cut cleanly through the water, Monihan and Harden made out two men in it; one dark silhouette that bent over the oars and the other on the tailboard. As the skiff glided against the landing stage, the rower shipped oars and the sailors climbed out, making the boat fast. Monihan set himself for action.

"We'll get them on their way back," whispered Harden, with a restraining hand on his companion's shoulder.

They eased themselves further back into the shadows as the two men passed within a few feet of them. Their voices dwindled away into nothing as they disappeared into the gloom further up the quay.

"I'll take the first and you take the second," whispered Harden. "One punch has to do it. We'll roll them in behind here and tie and gag them. Then we'll wait till they're overdue before rowing out. If I'm not mistaken, Mister Mate will be glad to get us."

AN hour later muffled footsteps sounded down the dockway. The two crouching figures unlimbered for action. Silently they crept around the jutting edge of the crate. As the footsteps became more distinct their muscles tensed for the spring.

Another ten seconds and the sailors would be abreast of them.

Monihan's pulse pounded to each succeeding footstep and Harden kept his hand firmly on his shoulder.

Two black, towering figures

sheered up ahead of them and the hand was off Monihan's shoulder. Like twin panthers the two men leaped. The powerful haunch muscles of their legs hurtled them through the air.

Before he knew what had hit him, the first sailor crumpled to the planking under Monihan's crushing right to the chin, while Harden caught his man just behind the ear with a clubbing left, that snapped the sailor's head halfway round before he fell. No word had been spoken; not a noise had been made.

PICKING up the two prostrate men in their arms, they carried them behind the crates.

"Hated to do it, buddy," breathed Harden sympathetically to his unconscious victim. "But I did it fast and quick. You never knew what hit you. All you'll have when you wake up is a rotten headache."

"And a stiff jaw," grunted Monihan.

In a few moments they had bound and gagged the two sailors and then Monihan slipped into their pockets some bills, more than sufficient to compensate them for the unwarranted blows and the loss of their gear aboard the schooner.

They waited out another half hour in silence. Then picking up their bags they crept down to the skiff. Monihan cast loose and Harden, picking up the oars, pulled for the schooner.

"Ahoy, there, *Dolphin*, ahoy!" Monihan bellowed up to the dark deck.

A light scurried along the rail. Its glare revealed the face of the mate staring down at them.

"What's up there, below?" he called down at them.

"Just heard ashore that two men jumped ship," lied Harden. "Thought maybe you'd sign us on."

"So they jumped ship, did they?" echoed the mate. "Come aboard. Sharp!"

WITH elation in their hearts they pulled alongside. The mate threw them a line and they sent their bags aboard and a moment later climbed up the rope after them.

The mate was waiting for them as they landed on the deck. He looked them over, his first thought being that they were two likely looking sailormen and then recognition dawned in his eye.

"Weren't you two aboard here this afternoon?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes, mister," answered Harden. "We were looking to ship out."

"Well, I see you succeeded. You say those two men jumped ship, eh? You sure got wind of it in a big hurry. Mighty queer!" he growled, eyeing them narrowly.

Monihan hoped he would not press the question further. It did not bear investigation. He vaguely wondered what would happen if the schooner did not sail that night and the two gagged sailors were discovered in the morning. Too late now for regrets. They were aboard the *Dolphin* and they had to stay there.

"We were hanging around the quay when we heard them speaking about it and knowing you were sailing tonight we came aboard at once," offered Monihan in explanation.

"Well," grumbled the mate, still unconvinced, "get forward. I guess one of you beachcombers is as good as another." He turned on his heel, still muttering. "Don't like it. Too damned much mystery aboard this ship!"

Without waiting for more, Monihan and Harden slipped forward to the fo'c'sle. Five men were asleep in the bunks. Harden looked them

over hurriedly, then gave a little sharp gasp of surprise.

"What's up?" whispered Monihan.

"A break—a real break! Two old friends of mine—two old sailormen. Gimp and Tar. I once did 'em both a big favor and they'll never forget it!"

"You mean you're going to tell them . . ." began Monihan doubtfully.

"Yes, why not. We'll need all the allies we can get. And I know these two. They're white, Pete. I can trust them."

He stepped over to the nearest bunk and gently shook the sleeping occupant.

"Hey, Gimp, wake up," he whispered softly. "You, Tar, snap out of it."

THE two sailors came to at once. There was a startled moment of recognition, then cordial greetings all around. When the enthusiastic introductions had been completed, Harden mysteriously led the men out to the fo'c'sle head for a whispered consultation.

Swiftly he told the two grizzled sailors the story of their adventure. Gimp and Tar listened with rapt attention, nodding with silent assent at each new fact.

"And if hell breaks loose, we want you two to side in with us," finished Monihan.

"Are you game?" asked Harden.

"Game?" grinned Gimp. "It'll be a joy."

"We're not forgetting what you did for us," added Tar.

"Then it's settled," breathed Harden with elation. "We got a chance, now."

"Klementoff has the ship, now," whispered Monihan. "He's coming aboard with his pack of Japs tonight and they're sailing. We don't know what happened to Red Corrigan, but

Miss Sayers is waiting in case he turns up, with orders to follow us."

"That part is all right," replied Gimp, "but there'll be bloody 'ell to pay if this here Roosian discovers you."

"We know," replied Harden. "But that's the chance we have to take. Everybody hang together as much as possible and keep off the deck as much as we can. If something breaks, we'll all stick together and give 'em a run for their money. All we ask is that Klementoff takes us to the island and then we'll make a little hell of our own."

FOR another half hour they consulted together and so engrossed were they in their conversation that they did not notice the rising wind which forecast a stormy passage. With each succeeding minute it grew in violence and a black mass of clouds scurried low across the sky.

Suddenly breaking in on their lowered voices came the sound of high, querulous voices from over the storm-tossed water. The four conspirators lay flat on the deck and looked and listened.

Soon they heard the sound of muffled oars and then they saw a dim light out on the water, from the floorboards of a large skiff, loaded to the gunwales. In the stern, perched precariously on an assortment of luggage, Klementoff's pack tossed and swayed to the rocking of the boat, while the Russian himself, balanced himself in the bow.

Their guttural profanity was picked up by the wind and carried screaming away into the night. In a sudden burst a squall of rain drenched the ship and the beating wind flicked the surface of the water to a frothy white. It seemed that with one accord the elements had decided to lend themselves to

the mood and humor of the dark expedition about to set forth.

"That's our second break," whispered Harden to the watching men. "They're all a little drunk. And the chances are the Russian has enough rum aboard to keep them that way for a long time."

"And if this heavy weather keeps up, it'll go a long way to make that bunch of yellow Japs a sick gang of men," grunted Gimp.

The skiff scraped along the schooner's side and the boatman made fast. Then, jabbering incoherently in high-pitched voices, Klementoff's men piled aboard.

"These are the men I'm taking with me," said the Russian to the mate, as the latter surveyed the motley crew with a jaundiced eye. "Quarter them amidships."

"Aye, sir," replied the mate, still eyeing the Japs with ill-concealed dislike. "Orders, sir?"

"Yes, up anchor!"

"Very well, sir."

The mate turned to get his ship under way and Klementoff disappeared with his henchmen into the cabin amidships.

CHAPTER XIII

The Island of Treasure

THE early promise of the wind was fulfilled in a half gale as the *Dolphin* heaved up anchor and with a patch of square sail on bare poles, beat her way out of the tiny harbor and headed for open sea.

Once clear of the protection of the land, the schooner heeled hard over to the storm and scudded along with a hissing lip of foam under her figure head. The heavier the weather, the better it pleased Monihan, who flung his defiance to the elements with a silent shout as he straddled his feet at the wheel.

For two days the storm buffeted the ship like an egg shell, but gallantly she beat her way north. Klementoff and his crew were content to remain in the comfortable dry cabin amidships and only on rare occasions did any of them show on deck.

MONIHAN and Harden got away with their imposture without much difficulty.

Dawn of the third day found Monihan standing his trick at the wheel and as the first long rays of the rising sun lit up the water, he saw that they were sailing parallel to a long, sandy island, that continued as far as the eye could see into the north.

He scanned the shore line eagerly, comparing it mentally with the ill-fated chart. He felt sure that they were fast approaching their destiny and destination.

Toward afternoon the wind died down somewhat and the storm abated. Klementoff came out on deck and examined the island for a long time through a pair of binoculars. He seemed pleased with what he saw, for a bland smile showed through his beard.

Late that afternoon, as Harden came off watch, Gimp managed to whisper some very important news to him.

"We're anchoring out tonight, about six bells," he said. "In the morning the Roosian is going ashore. Thinks this is the place. Heard him talking to the mate."

"And I guess he's right," replied Harden. "Now is the time we got to be careful. Soon as we anchor, meet us up on the fo'c'sle head. Pass the word along to Tar."

At about half past eleven that night, the anchor chain of the *Dolphin* rumbled through the hawse pipe and the hook plunged into ten fathom of cold, gray water. As soon

as the sails had been taken in, the four conspirators, one by one, made their way to the fo'c'sle head.

"I got a hunch, boys," began Monihan, "that tomorrow things will happen. Keep close together. We'll have to see Klementoff's first move before we do anything."

"Do you think he'll take us ashore with him?" asked Harden.

"No, I don't. Chances are he'll go with his men. If he does, well and good. We'll know if he has the treasure when he comes back and then the thing is simple."

"I don't think he'll get the treasure," volunteered Harden. "Remember what your father said in the letter about you and Margy having to work together?"

"Yes, I remember," replied Monihan thoughtfully. "Can't figure that out."

The mate routed them out at dawn the next morning and after a hurried breakfast, put them to work uncovering the two small boats. Even at this early hour there were signs of activity amidships where Klementoff and his men were quartered.

THE boats uncovered, the mate came up and supervised the stowing of provisions, water, lamps and all equipment necessary for a few days stay ashore.

Slowly the sun rose in a stainless heaven and with it excited voices from the cabin. At last Klementoff showed himself, followed by his men. He strutted as proud as a peacock to the rail and again scanned the shore through his binoculars. Some object ashore held his particular attention.

Monihan strained his eyes toward the spot and made out vaguely some way up the beach, the dim outlines of a tumbled pile of brick, half covered with sand.

For a moment his heart skipped a beat, for he was sure that that particular bit of ruin had been plainly marked on the chart. Not only that, it had been the central, the prime key to the entire map. Yes, Klementoff had taken him to the exact place, all right and the problem now resolved itself down to a battle of wits.

After a close inspection of the ruins, the Russian directed his men back to the cabin. They reappeared a moment later staggering beneath an assorted load of firearms. They piled them in a heap besides the boats and then returned for cases of shells.

THIS strenuous work completed, the Japs turned again to the ship's rail and leaning heavily on it, gazed longingly at the shore. Klementoff ignored them for a few minutes and personally superintended the loading of the guns and ammunition.

He stood within a foot of Monihan, spoke to him, ordered him, but he himself was so engrossed with thoughts of the fortune ashore that he altogether ignored that gruff "yes" and "no" with which Monihan answered him.

Of course, three days' growth of stubble on his chin had changed Monihan somewhat, but if Klementoff had bothered to look squarely at him once, the game would have been up.

For a half hour Monihan worked on pins and needles, expecting to be discovered any minute, but Klementoff's thoughts were far away. The big Russian was day-dreaming of various ways in which he would spend the money which the Dragon Headdress would mean to him.

At his direction Monihan stowed away everything, down to the last case. With a heave he swung it up from the deck and gently lowered it into the lifeboat.

With a grunt of relief he relaxed his straining muscles and lifted his arms clear. But Fate at that moment must have decided that she had been far too kind toward his enterprise, for by an impish twist the sleeve of Monihan's shirt caught on a projecting nail and as he pulled his arm roughly away the entire sleeve stayed behind.

The noise of the tearing cloth attracted Klementoff's attention in a minute. He looked down at Monihan's bare forearm for a casual moment. Then he stiffened; his eyes bulged; his breath whistled between his teeth. For there, before his eyes, boldly engraved on Monihan's massive forearm, was the twin tattoo. It was curiously like the one the Cossack had studied for a long time on Margy's arm.

The Russian's first startled surprise was his undoing. He was just a fraction of a second too late on the draw for the gun at his hip and he found himself staring down the business end of Monihan's revolver.

"Tom!" Monihan barked to Harden, who was working on the other lifeboat.

HARDEN turned and took in the situation at a glance. Monihan nodded toward Klementoff's crew, still lined up at the rail, their backs to the interesting scene being enacted before the lifeboat.

"One word out of you, Klementoff," whispered Monihan, "and I'll drill you straight between the eyes. I'm reserving that happy occasion until I make sure that you've brought me to the right place. But kick up a row now and you're dead. I don't care much if you do."

Klementoff's bearded face went black with rage. His great, hairy hands clenched and unclenched themselves and even if he had dared to call for help, it would have been

impossible for the terrible fury that completely paralyzed his tongue. The best he could do was mouth an inarticulate oath.

"Get those Japs," ordered Monihan. "Send Gimp after the mate and Tar after the other sailors."

WITH a grin on his face, Harden rounded up the two men and gave orders, then with gun drawn, made his way silently to Klementoff's unsuspecting crew.

"Put 'em up!" he growled. "All of you, you yellow devils."

There was no mistaking the meaning of his words, backed up by the motion of his gun. They turned about in stunned silence and sullenly stretched their arms above their heads. When Monihan saw that Harden had done his job, he slowly backed the raging Russian across the deck and lined him up with his men. A moment later Gimp prodded forth the protesting mate and lined him up with the others.

"This is an outrage. Piracy!" he stormed. "You'll rot in gaol for this, you fools!"

"That's enough out of you," roared Harden at him. "One more word and you'll rot—on your own deck."

They waited a moment until Tar came up, trotting behind the sailors, who without a protest took their places in the line-up and reached for the sky. Then Monihan surveyed his handiwork and a slow smile spread over his face. "Easier than we thought, eh, boys?" he laughed. "Now, Harden, give me your gun. I'll hold this outfit off while you lower the lifeboat. We'll beat them there yet."

Harden slipped his gun into Monihan's left hand and with Tar and Gimp hard on his heels, jumped across the width of the deck. They heaved mightily on the tackle and slowly swung the loaded boat clear

of the davits and then sheered it over the side.

"Boat's over," he shouted.

"Lower away then," called back Monihan.

"Aren't you coming?"

"Sure. Lower the boat."

Without another word Harden obeyed. In a minute the boat bobbed in the water by the side of the schooner.

"All set below," he called.

"Cast off, then, and row," ordered Monihan.

"Pete—aren't you coming?" called back Harden anxiously.

"Sure. But row for all your worth. Row out of range. I'll make it," shouted Monihan.

At a sign from Harden, his two men shipped oars and pulled away from the *Dolphin*. As the sound of their oars became faint, Monihan spoke to the line of muttering men.

"A little surprise party for you, eh?" he taunted them. "I haven't fired at anyone yet, but from now on I'm not going to be so careful. You can tell your crew that for me, Klementoff. Understand?"

AS he spoke he began to back slowly across the deck to the opposite rail.

"Just stay where you are. The first one that moves is asking for trouble and I never miss at such close range."

Klementoff knew him well enough to take him at his word. He growled a few terse sentences at his crew and they kept their hands rigidly in the air. In a minute Monihan was across the deck. Then, still keeping his revolvers trained on the line of men, he did an agile bit of gymnastics and sprang over the rail, teetering at the very edge of the ship.

Once more Monihan surveyed the line of strap-hangers. Then he laughed.

"So long, Klementoff. If you're looking for more—come ashore." And with the invitation on his lips he whirled and dove clean into the water.

The sound of his splash was the signal for the entire line to wheel around as one man. Like a surging wave they broke across the deck, Klementoff, leading the van, his gun glinting. A shower of shots rang out and the barrage of lead kicked up tiny geysers of foam on the water.

FOR an instant Monihan's head appeared above the surface some fifty yards from the ship, but before any man could draw a bead on him he had ducked again. Another burst of shot from the schooner skipped harmlessly off the surface where his head had been a moment before.

Monihan swam under water straight for the small boat which Harden commanded. He came up once again for air, but was gone too quickly for the men on deck to be effective with their guns. Harden rested on his oars and in a few minutes Monihan swam alongside to be pulled in by eager hands.

The four men pulled mightily and sent the loaded boat skimming over the water. Even as Monihan had predicted, as they looked up after each stroke, they saw Klementoff raging up and down the deck, frantically urging his men as the other skiff was put over the side.

Like a crew of yellow pirates the Japanese tumbled in, falling over one another as they reached for the oars. Soon they had the boat under way and propelled by six pairs of saffron arms it took up the chase. Long before they were within range of Monihan and his crew they opened fire, but the fugitives still sweated at their oars, realizing the

folly of wasting a stroke to return the fire.

Slowly but steadily the pursuing boat overtook them. The leaden slugs from the belching guns of Klementoff's crew spat closer and closer in the water about them. Still Monihan did not return the fire. His entire energies were bent then on reaching the beach which was now only a little distance off.

Without losing a stroke Monihan gave orders to his men.

"When we beach her," he said, "you and I, Tom, will hold off Klementoff while Tar and Gimp unload the truck out of here and carry it up to the ruins. We'll barricade ourselves there. That's where the treasure is. We've got enough ammunition to hold off all hell until Margy and Corrigan get here."

"That's our best bet. I hope nothing's happened to Red," answered Harden. "If they don't get here—we're sunk. Pull, men, pull!"

Another few strokes and the keel of the boat ran up on the sand. As soon as they touched bottom the men were over the side and the loaded skiff was drawn up on the shore. Monihan and Harden threw themselves behind the side of the boat and unlimbered their guns while the other two loaded themselves with supplies and made for the ruins.

AS Klementoff rowed within range Harden opened up. He didn't fire blindly; he steadied his gun on the gunwale of the stranded skiff, took careful aim and then let them have it. A scream of pain from one of the Japs and a chorus of yelps from the rest told the defenders on the beach that the lead had found a mark.

The crew in the boat backed water and concealed themselves as well as possible on the floor boards of their skiff. From here they returned the

fire. A rain of bullets zipped over Monihan's head. Another burst threw up splinters as it ploughed into the side of their improvised breastwork.

"It's going to be hot work for the boys," Monihan told Harden. "We'll have to pump fast and straight when they come back for another load and keep those yellow devils out there under cover."

They held their fire for a moment. They gave Klementoff all the chance he wanted to throw lead at them, but a moment later, when Tar and Gimp returned for another load they opened up with a devastating withering fire that swept the gunwale of the boat that was creeping up upon them. No head showed itself. Guns were thrust over the side and fired blindly at the shore, but Tar and Gimp made the trip in comparative safety.

CHAPTER XIV

The Siege

FOR an hour the battle raged, first one side firing and then the other. Slowly but surely the wind from the China Sea edged Klementoff closer to shore. But by this time Monihan's boat was almost unloaded. He decided to withdraw to the ruins after one more trip. But that trip was never made.

Sweating under their Herculean labors and sorry that they weren't getting a chance at the gunplay, Gimp and Tar trotted across the beach for the last trip. They were halfway to the boat when their advance was suddenly checked by a terrific barrage of lead from the skiff. With the first burst, Tar spun around and crumpled up on the sand and instinctively Gimp flattened himself beside him.

With an agonized heart Monihan saw his new-found comrades fall.

"Gimp!" he shouted. "Did they get you, too?"

"No—only Tar!"

"Drag him out of range, then," shouted Monihan. "Take him up to the ruins. We'll hold them off here."

AS Gimp started to wiggle his way across the sand, dragging the body of his wounded pal behind him, Klementoff opened fire again. But this time the burst did not go unanswered. Both Harden and Monihan swept the skiff with their smoking guns.

The firing switched abruptly to their refuge. A splintering hail crashed into the side of the boat behind which they were sheltered. Gimp continued his slow progress across the sand and while Harden and Monihan fired as fast as their fingers could clench on their hot guns, he managed to drag Tar out of range.

"We'll have to run for it, Tom," said Monihan as he reloaded. "Another five minutes and there'll be nothing left of this hulk but splinters."

A gun spat flame from Klementoff's boat. At the same instant Monihan and Harden went into action with a furious burst of lead over the side of their demolished skiff. Each emptied his gun in one short burst and even before the echo died away they were racing across the sand.

They had gained fifty yards before the raging Klementoff kicked his crew into action again. It was the Russian's fury that defeated him in the end. He had so instilled the fear of wrath into his yellow followers that instead of mowing down Monihan and Harden like ninepins as they ran, they succeeded only in clipping Harden in the shoulder.

By the time Klementoff had beached his boat, Monihan and his

companions were firmly entrenched behind the crumbling walls of the ruins. A quick survey of the place told them that it had once been a lighthouse, but for years it had not been used. Nothing remained of it but a crumbling, moldy wall about waist-high, but it served as an admirable breastwork.

With Monihan and Harden at the walls, coolly sniping at Klementoff's crew as they advanced, Gimp busied himself with Tar, who had received two bullets through his shoulder. While the unconscious man was still out, Gimp sterilized the blade of his knife in a match flame and then with his knees firmly pressing down on Tar's back, he gently probed with the steel for the bullets.

TAR groaned feebly, but Gimp worked on and at last fished out the flattened lead. Then he tightly bound the wounded shoulder and carried Tar to a far corner.

Klementoff steadily advanced with his men till the bullets from the guns behind the wall threw up spurts of sand into his face. Then the siege began.

That was just the beginning. For two days the siege lasted. The sandy, flea-bitten island took on the aspect of the World War front. Neither side gained an advantage.

Klementoff and his yellow followers were still as far away from the ruins as he had been the first day, while the defenders inside were still unsuccessful in their sporadic search for the treasure.

As evening fell on the second day and the sun sank glowing into the waters of the China Sea, the firing from Klementoff's camp grew less rapid. It was disheartening to fire forever at a blank wall unless someone was lined up against it.

More than one Japanese had been

sent screaming back with a slug in his body, in a vain endeavor to edge up closer to the ruins. They knew better now and despite Klementoff's exhortations, they kept safely out of range.

INSIDE, Monihan and Tar held the wall. Gimp was off in a corner, snatching a few winks of much-needed sleep despite the crackling of the guns and the bitter smoke whirling around the place. Harden, for the hundredth time, was prying into the heap of rubbish that littered the floor. At last, despondent and weary, he slumped down beside Monihan and picked up a revolver.

"No luck, Pete," he began. "I've gone over the damn room backward and forward and back again, but no sign of the treasure. Are you sure this is the right place?"

"Positive," answered Monihan. "My father was right. We won't find the Headdress until Margy gets here."

"What the devil's happened to Red?" growled Harden irritably. "If he doesn't show up soon, it looks bad for us. Everything is running low. Water, food, and, worst of all, lead. If he doesn't come soon, we're going to be a pretty sorry crew. I know how Klementoff finishes off his little play-mates."

"I've got an idea," answered Monihan. "I think it's quite likely that Margy and Red are out cruising around some place, looking for us. I'm going to bring them here."

"How?" grunted Harden.

"Watch me," said Monihan. He went over to Gimp. "Sorry, Gimp. But see if you can knock off a few Japs for a while. I'm going to slip off to the beach. Keep Klementoff's crew busy while I make the break."

Out in the darkness he slowly wiggled his way toward the shore. He smiled to himself as he heard the

defenders open up with a heavy barrage.

It took him more time than he had figured to crawl through the tangled brush that covered the ground back of the beach. The moon lost itself behind a bank of clouds and under cover of the darkness he rose from his hands and knees and sped silently toward the water's edge.

He threw himself in and swam under water until his lungs threatened to burst from the strain. Then he rose to the surface and struck out with long easy strokes for the *Dolphin*.

When he reached her slack anchor chain he rested a moment and then climbed silently up it, hand over hand. On deck he crouched for a moment, listening.

But the only sound that came to his ears was the steady rattle of gunfire from the shore.

Like a shadow he crept to the lamp room under the fo'c'sle head. Softly he closed the door behind him, then he went to work and gently tilted over three cases of oil until the tiny compartment was drenched.

Next he laid a trail of oil-soaked waste out to the deck. A touch of a match and with an eager hiss the flame sputtered along the fuse to the lamp room. Waiting for no more, as silently as he had come, Monihan slipped over the side and struck out for shore.

HE had just crossed the beach and was safe again in the rank undergrowth beyond when, with a roar, the entire fore part of the schooner went up in a blaze. The licking, oil-fed flames billowed sky-high, and the heavens took on a red and sinister glow.

Even as he watched, the light breeze scattered the flames to the rigging and in a trice the *Dolphin* was a seething, roaring cauldron of fire.

CHAPTER XV

The Manchu Headdress

HUDDLED in their cruiser, their stolid faces beginning to take on a look of black suspicion, the dozen Chinese muttered sing-song monosyllables to each other. Margy, at the prow, looked back over her shoulder and turned to Corrigan.

"It looks bad," she whispered. "We've got to do something. There's going to be trouble."

Once more Corrigan swept the horizon with gloomy eyes. Then suddenly his hand shot out and gripped her arm. "Look! Look!" he shouted, pointing his finger over the water.

Margy followed the direction of his hand and saw a tiny spark of flame on the horizon. As the two watched in fascination it grew in volume, then of a sudden it leaped up in wild fury and the distant heavens took on a ghastly reddish glow. A shout went up from the Chinamen.

Margy rushed to the wheel, grabbed it from the wheelsman's hands and put it hard over until the cruiser was bearing directly on the blaze in the sky. In an instant all the apathy of the yellow crew was sloughed off. Excited voices shouted orders and shining rifles and revolvers were caressed lovingly by saffron fingers.

The blaze from the burning schooner sent a swirling cloud of black smoke down upon them as they drew near. As they charged through the effective screen, they heard for the first time the distant rattle of guns on the shore. Margy hailed Corrigan.

"They're still fighting it out! We're in time! I'm going to drive this bus right up on to the beach!"

"Good for you," cheered Corrigan. "We're ready for it."

The sun had just peeped over the horizon when they ran out of the smoke screen. Directly ahead of them, two hundred yards away, was the shore. The crisp, staccato firing now came plainly across the water and they saw the gray, ghostly curl of smoke trailing skyward from the belching guns.

THEN, as if their arrival was a signal, the firing was suddenly redoubled and a mighty shout went up from shore. The cheers of the besieged crew rang out above the panic-stricken cries of the Japanese.

"Head on!" screamed Margy, gripping the spokes of the wheel with clenched hands. "Watch the crash—then over the side!"

With a rumbling thunder the cruiser threw itself far up on the sandy shore. The force of the sudden impact knocked Margy sprawling on the deck, but she scrambled to her feet as the boat keeled over. With the rest of the men she flung herself over the side into the water.

Up the sand charged the Chinese, all their pent-up emotions suddenly released at the sight of their hated enemies. A blood-curling yell rose from their lips. With an impetuous rush they bore down on the Japs. Guns blazed and barked.

Corrigan staggered along in the van with his spitting revolver sweeping a path of death before him.

Men staggered and cursed only to come up again with a smoking gun, to spit forth a final volley of death before going to the black beyond. The Japanese fought with fury.

Klementoff's voice rang out in hoarse, unheeded orders as Monihan and his crew charged out of their improvised fort and plowed down into the thick of battle.

"If he's alive—save him for me!" was Monihan's cry.

He charged down the intervening distance, swaying in and out of the smoke wreaths, looking for the tall figure of the Russian. Klementoff saw him coming and his gun flashed up, but before he could pull the trigger, Monihan let him have it. The big Cossack coughed as a bloody froth gushed from his bearded lips. Then he spun wildly around and pitched headlong to the sand.

Deprived of their leader, the last two Japs threw down their guns. The triumphant Chinese surrounded them and led them off down the beach.

Margy, with tears streaming down her face, stumbled across the shambles into Monihan's waiting arms.

Once more inside the ruins, Margy bathed an ugly bullet wound that had seared its way across Monihan's forehead. Meekly he submitted to her ministrations. With a wrench she pulled the sleeve from her dress and made a bandage of it.

As she lifted his head, her bare arm pressed against Monihan's for a minute.

HARDEN, who had been smilingly watching the proceeding, stifled a cry and grasped the two arms. He held them together. "Look!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Margy.

In his excitement, Harden ignored her. "Pete—look, will you! The tattoos! Your father's secret!"

At his excited words, the assembled crowd gathered about them. For a moment Margy forgot the urgency of the bandage. With amazed eyes they looked down at their respective arms and at the twin tattoos which were matched together.

"See, Margy?" exclaimed Monihan. "It's all clear, now. Those twin tattoos together, the way they are now, make a floor plan of this old lighthouse. My father must have engraved them on our arms when we

were kids. Look, that line on your arm comes down to a line here on mine, making an arrow. And that arrow is pointing right over to that corner of the room. I'm a liar if the Dragon Headdress isn't found there!"

BEFORE he had finished speaking, Corrigan and Harden were digging up the stones where the arrow had indicated. Monihan made a movement to rise, but Margy gently pushed him back again.

"Wait a minute," she urged. "The treasure won't do me any good if you pass out on me."

Monihan relaxed in her arms. "I'd sooner have you than the jewels, anyway," he smiled. "You know, Margy, that I'm not going to pass out on you—ever."

A shout of triumph went up from the crew as Harden straightened up from his labors. He brought to light a canvas covered bundle.

Swiftly he unwrapped it and his trembling fingers pulled away the rotting canvas. Underneath was a further wrapping, a square of crimson velvet. As eager hands removed the silken cover, a low gasp broke from the lips of the watchers.

There, in all its glory, reposed the Dragon Headdress of the Manchus.

Fashioned by skilled artisans long dead, an intricate fretwork of gold and delicate-hued enamel, the gorgeous gems that studded the headdress winked back at them with dazzling rays of gleaming light. For a moment all were speechless. Monihan was the first to find his voice.

"Whew!" he whistled. "No wonder there was a mad scramble to get the thing." He looked up at Margy. "You'll wear it—on your wedding day."

"I'm sorry, but nobody will ever set that thing on their heads again," said Corrigan solemnly.

All eyes turned to his.

Corrigan waved a hand at his yellow-skinned followers. "You are looking at soldiers, even if they don't wear uniforms," he explained. "Soldiers of the Chinese Republic. Why do you think these men came out here with me and fought like yellow devils from hell?"

"It was in Hongkong," he went on, "that I learned about the crew of Japs that Klementoff was taking with him. I figured we couldn't make it alone, so I made a deal with General—well, never mind his name"—he exchanged a rapid glance with a tall Chinaman opposite him—"and he agreed to help us.

"I sent a message to the hotel, but I guess it didn't reach you in time. We found you gone and I went on to Macao. There I found Margy and you know the rest."

AND the deal you made?" asked Monihan in a thin voice.

"The Headdress must be destroyed."

Monihan sank back into Margy's arms and stared up blankly at his friend. It was unbelievable. After all they had gone through, now that they had found the treasure.

The tall Chinaman stepped forward.

"I believe you do not understand," he explained. "The Chinese Government seeks only to destroy the symbol of Manchu power. The gems are yours. The headdress will be dismantled, melted down. The gold and jewels are yours to do with what you wish. That is all—the Republic of China owes you a great debt."

Monihan sat up suddenly as two of the soldiers stooped to pick up the glittering headdress. He pointed a lean forefinger at a sparkling diamond that graced the front of the diadem, then grinned up at Margy. He turned to the soldiers. "Be careful of that stone," he warned. "It'll make a swell solitaire."

The Crawling Creature



Every Step Meant Danger in the Trail of Dan Buckly's Mysterious, Sinister Killer

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Author of "Voodoo Vengeance," "The Whispering Menace," etc.

AYRES swung around tensely. The heavy rifle that he held in his hands was ready as he gazed back. His eyes searched the dense undergrowth that lined the faint trail through the jungle.

The low overhanging branches of the trees made it dark and shadowy despite the hot sun overhead. It was hard to see clearly for any distance. Twenty feet away sections of the brush were merely black splotches just beyond the reach of the sunlight.

For the past hour he had been almost certain that he was being followed. He had expected that he would be ever since he had come back to the camp that he and Dan Buckly had made during the previous night.

Finding Dan that way had been horrible. Dix Ayres did not like to think about it. Yet it was hard to forget his friend lying there just at the edge of the little clearing, his head smashed like an egg shell and those two ghastly red X's drawn

across his cheeks with his own blood.

Ayres was sure that it had not been done by the natives. They were not very friendly toward what few white men ventured into this part of the African brush, but still they were comparatively peaceful. No, it had not been the natives, Ayres was sure of that. It was something far more sinister.

Something which even the blacks themselves feared, and that was the "Crawling Creature."

The Crawling Creature—no one knew just what it really was, for those few who had seen it had died just as had Dan Buckley, murdered by that one powerful blow that cracked open their heads. It might be human and then again it might be some unusual species of huge ape.

The natives, those few that Ayres had found willing to talk about it at all, seemed to believe that it was some sort of strange beast that had spread a wave of terror over the jungle. Ayres did not believe that the Crawling Creature was an animal, not since he had seen those crimson marks on Buckley's cheeks.

They had been left there deliberately—the brand of the killer. Even the highest degree of intelligence that an ape might possess would not make him capable of that.

AYRES was convinced that the Crawling Creature was a fiend in human form. Possibly a native, or even a demented white man. The way the money belt that Dan Buckley had been wearing had been torn from his lifeless body indicated that. The five thousand dollars that Dan had been carrying just as Ayres was now, had been missing.

Someone had learned that they were carrying enough cash to buy an interest in that diamond mine in South Africa that their old friend Ed Gordon had written them about.

Ayres bitterly regretted that Dan and he had discussed the matter so freely there in that little dive in the coast town near the mouth of the Congo.

News traveled fast at times and two men going alone into the brush and carrying ten thousand dollars in cash between them was tempting bait for the human jackals of that part of the country.

From the first the two men had felt that they were being trailed. It had been an unusual noise in the brush that had drawn Ayres away from the camp the previous night.

HE never had discovered what had made it, but during his absence the Crawling Creature had found the opportunity to get Dan Buckley—and half of the wealth that the two men possessed.

This morning, after having buried Dan as best he could, Ayres had continued—leading south through the jungle and across the veldt. Hoping to reach Ed Gordon and safety before the thing that lurked in the jungle got him also.

Now he found that someone was following, had been sure of it for the past hour, and he believed that someone or something was the Crawling Creature.

Ayres searched the brush with his eyes, found that he could see nothing, turned and started once more along the trail. He was very much alert. He had grimly made up his mind that whatever or whoever it was that had killed his partner would not get him in the same way.

He halted suddenly, the powerful big game rifle in his hands half raised as he heard a crackling in the undergrowth ahead. A man stepped into view and Dix Ayres stood staring at him in amazement.

The man was a huge creature, fully six feet, seven inches tall and must have weighed close to three

hundred pounds. A grimy pith helmet rested on the top of the bushy head of flaming red hair, his clothing was torn and ragged and he held a heavy rifle in one ham-like hand. There was a belt with an automatic in a holster strapped around his waist.

"Looks like I got company," he said as he stood gazing at Ayres. "This sure is a pleasant surprise."

Ayres did not speak, but his lean, tall frame was ready for instant action as he stood staring at the other man. The latter appeared big and powerful enough to be that mysterious killer, the Crawling Creature, who crushed men's heads in with one mighty blow. Ayres was not taking any chances.

"What's the idea?" demanded the big man with a grin. "You one of them fellers that figures we ain't be properly introduced? We're both white men, ain't we. There ain't no reason for you being so damn high-hat, Mister."

Ayres realized that the big man was an American just as he was.

"Who are you?" he asked slowly.

"Most people calls me 'Lucky' McNally," answered the big man. "You ain't trusting me for some reason—I can see that, but you're all wrong. I been watching you from the brush up ahead there for the past five minutes. I could have plugged you easy if I'd wanted—but I didn't. Me, I'm a right friendly guy, unless somebody gets me kinda perturbed."

"Lucky McNally, eh?" said Ayres.

HE had heard the name before. McNally bore a reputation in this part of Africa of being a fighting two-fisted adventurer. A trader of sorts who traveled the jungle trails alone bartering with the natives for ivory and anything else they might possess that he deemed of value.

Men spoke of Lucky McNally with

admiration and respect. It seemed hardly possible that this man could actually be the Crawling Creature and yet Ayres was not sure.

HE thought swiftly and then decided that his attitude toward McNally would be friendly but watchful. He had not forgotten Dan Buckley and he was not taking any chances.

"My name is Ayres, Dixon Ayres," he said slowly. "I have to be careful."

"Why?" demanded McNally, his eyes fixed upon Ayres' lean tanned face. "What's wrong?"

"Something or somebody killed my partner last night," Ayres answered. "Broke his skull with one blow."

"No wonder you're kinda cautious," said the big man. "One blow, eh?" his laugh was booming, friendly. "Sure, I know what you're thinking, Ayres. I look big and husky enough to have done it, but I didn't. Nobody ever said that Lucky McNally minded a good fight, but they ain't saying that I'm a killer either."

"I'm beginning to believe you," said Ayres. "I've heard of you before and you don't look to me like you might be—" he hesitated, deliberately waiting to see if McNally would finish the sentence for him.

"Sure, I know. You don't believe that I'm this Crawling Creature. You're right, Ayres, I ain't. But when I was watching you a few minutes ago, I seen something duck back into the jungle when you turned around, and kinda half crawl away." McNally frowned. "And ever since I been wondering."

"I thought someone was following me," said Ayres.

"There was," said McNally. "And I got a hunch it is this crawling whatever it is."

Ayres nodded. He was still suspicious. If McNally really was the

killer, and Ayres was not at all certain that he was not, then he was being very clever now. Saying that he had actually seen something back there along the trail, making it seem that the Crawling Creature was still lurking somewhere in the brush nearby.

"Look!" said McNally suddenly gazing over Ayres shoulder. "There is something moving back there."

Dix Ayres was no fool. He did not swing around with his back to the other man. That would make it far too easy for McNally if he did happen to be the murderer.

Ayres moved forward swiftly, stepped by McNally, well out of the big man's reach, then swung around. He was standing behind McNally and a little to one side of him, the heavy rifle in his hands, ready.

FAR back in the shadows along the trail he saw something moving. Both he and McNally raised their guns to their shoulders at the same instant and the roar of Ayres' Jeffery seemed like the echo of the big man's .57 express rifle.

"Missed," said McNally lowering his weapon. "Too dark back there beneath them trees." He swung around so that he faced Ayres. "You got a lot of sense," he said. "I'll hand you that, for not turning your back on a guy you ain't sure of. If I was in your place I'd a done the same thing."

"I haven't forgotten what happened to my partner last night," said Ayres grimly. "I'll believe that you're not this Crawling Creature when we get it, McNally!"

"Fair enough!" said the big man. "Only tell me one thing. Why was your partner killed?"

Ayres hesitated an instant before he answered. This McNally was a hard-boiled adventurer. If he knew that the man he now talked to was

carrying five thousand dollars in a money belt around his waist it might prove a temptation even though he was not actually the Crawling Creature.

"Because my partner was carrying all the money we owned," said Ayres slowly. "Five thousand dollars that we were going to use to buy a share of a diamond mine with."

"Five thousand, eh? In cash?"

"Yes—and it was missing from poor Dan Buckly's money belt when I found him dead."

"Dan Buckly?"

"That was my partner's name."

"Hells Hinges!" exclaimed McNally excitedly. "Was this Buckly a little wiry guy, sandy hair, with a scar over his right eyebrow?"

"That's Dan all right. Why?"

"Because I know him. Me and Dan used to be friends when he was in Mexico about five years ago." McNally scowled evilly as he gazed at the jungle that surrounded them. "And this Crawling Creature got him! The rotten offspring of a so-and-so! Listen, Ayres, I'm gonna get this 'what-is-it'—if its the last thing I ever do, Dan Buckly pulled me out of some tough spots—and I'm gunning for his murderer from now on."

SO am I," said Ayres calmly. "I thought he or it would follow me—might give me a chance to get a shot in where it would do the most good. That's one reason why I started along the trail this morning. The other reason was that I wanted to get back out to the coast and get a boat down to Cape Town where I've got a friend waiting to learn what became of Dan and myself."

"I get you. This friend was figuring on giving you and Dan an in on this diamond mine. Ain't that it?"

"Just about," Ayres nodded.

"Then don't be foolish," said Mc-

Nally. "You don't want to leave this jungle until you get your five thousand bucks back and we get this Crawling Creature!"

"Yes, I know," said Ayres. "But I would like to know just what this murderer is, whether it is a man or a beast."

A thought struck him and he swiftly told McNally about the two X's that had been drawn on Buckly's cheeks with the murdered man's blood.

"Huh," said the big man as he listened. "Sounds to me like this Crawling whosis is a man—and a crazy one at that. I'm figuring that no guy in his right mind is going to pull a trick like that!"

"That's the way I feel about it," said Ayres.

Now that he knew that McNally had been a friend of Buckly's he was beginning to have a bit more faith in the big man. He did not trust him entirely, for it might be a trick. This claim of friendship upon McNally's part.

The man who had killed Dan had seen his face, would doubtlessly be able to remember it clearly enough to describe it as Lucky McNally had done and Ayres did not remember Buckly having ever mentioned the fact that he had known McNally.

That in itself did not prove very much. For Dan had never been inclined to be overly talkative regarding his life in the years before Ayres had known him.

WHAT McNally said about having known Buckly in Mexico might be true and then again it might not. But the way things stood at present Ayres was willing to give McNally the benefit of the doubt.

"It ain't a native trick either," said McNally as though half thinking aloud. "It might be—" he broke off abruptly and shook his massive head.

"No, if I told you that you'd think I was nutty myself."

"What do you mean?" Ayres looked at McNally curiously.

"Never mind," said the big man starting back along the trail. "Come on. I got a hunch that this killer ain't got any gun. If he had he would have taken a shot at us both long before this," he paused suddenly, and turned to Ayres as a thought struck him. "Say, what did you do with Buckly's gun? He had one, didn't he?"

OF course," Ayres answered. "I buried it with him."

"That was bright," said the big man again moving back along the trail. "I'll bet you'll find that grave dug up when we get back to it!"

"You mean you think this Crawling Creature will want that gun?"

"Sure, he will. Didn't we both just take a shot at him? Well, if he knows we're both after him he's gonna want to be armed and ready for trouble," McNally smiled as he glanced over his shoulder at Ayres as the latter walked close behind him.

"I've seen a lot of tough bozos in my time and the reason I'm still alive and kicking was because I'm always willing to figure they've got as much brains as I have! This Crawling Creature may be crazy but he ain't dumb!"

They went on back through the jungle, following the trail that had evidently been made by the natives, for it was too narrow to have been an elephant spoor.

They had ceased talking and their faces were hard and grim. The set expressions of their countenances brooded ill for the creature, be it man or beast that lurked somewhere amid the brush.

Heat rose in waves from the vegetation all about them. There was no sound save the faint crackling of

twigs and leaves beneath their feet. Constantly their gaze searched the shadows, peering into the dark place beneath the trees, ever on the alert for some indication of the presence of the Crawling Creature. But nothing moved.

As they passed beneath the low overhanging branches of a big tree, Ayres, who was walking a few paces behind McNally, brushed against what appeared to be a bit of green vine. It snapped up into the air, then dropped over his head and tightened suddenly, drawing him back and pulling him half off his feet.

He uttered a hoarse cry and McNally wheeled abruptly, the rifle in his hands ready. The big man cursed as he saw Ayres swinging in the air, hanging by a rope made of a vine that was tight about his throat.

McNally fired as he saw a shadowy object make a flying leap from the tree above—land in the brush with a crash, and then disappear. The big man did not wait to see if his shot had hit its mark. He could tell that Ayres was strangling.

McNally leaped up and caught the vine in his huge fist just above Ayres' head. The combined weight was too much and the vine broke, dropping both men to the ground.

AYRES tore at the noose that was still around his neck as he lay there. It came away—and he gasped for breath.

"That was close," murmured McNally as he got to his feet. "Too damn close. If you hadn't yelled I might not have known what had happened until it was too late!"

"I know," said Ayres weakly, rising and picking up his gun. "Did you get him when you fired?"

"Afraid not," said McNally. "What a jump that was." There was a scowl on his big face as he gazed up at the tree. "I said it wasn't a native, but I

ain't so sure of it now. That vine trick—is one that a black might think of doing. And if it was a white man—he sure knows how to jump."

THEY both stood listening. Far off to their left they heard a faint rustling in the jungle. It gradually faded into the silence.

"He got away all right," said McNally. "Guess I missed him." He smiled ironically. "Reckon you figure I'm a rotten shot—that's the second time I've missed."

"So did I, once," remarked Ayres. "Evidently he hasn't dug up that gun yet—if he really is going to do it at all."

"How far are we from where you and Buckley camped last night now?"

Ayres looked around him. "About a mile, I guess—maybe less."

"Come on then," said McNally starting ahead again. "He's got a head start. He'll get there first."

They went on. Dix Ayres was very careful to avoid anything along the trail. His neck still ached from that vine rope. He no longer had any suspicions regarding Lucky McNally. The attempt to hang him with the vine had convinced him that the Crawling Creature was actually someone else. There was not the slightest doubt of that.

They reached the clearing in which Ayres and Buckley had camped the previous night without encountering any further trouble. Ayres led the big man to the shallow grave he had dug for Dan Buckley.

"Look!" exclaimed Ayres as they reached it. "You were right!"

The grave had been dug up and the heavy rifle that had been lying beside Buckley's body was missing.

"That guy sure moves fast," said McNally. "He got here first all right. The gun is gone!"

Ayres was not looking at the grave. His eyes were fixed upon the

back of McNally's huge hand. There was a black streak on it that might have been dried blood.

But that was impossible. McNally wasn't the mysterious killer—that was the individual who had been ghoulish enough to rob Buckley's grave. To steal the gun of a dead man.

THERE was one thing about that gun that Ayres had not told McNally—the rifle was not loaded. Ayres had removed the cartridges and put them in his own pockets. He had been intending to tell the big man that, but now he decided against it. He did not have any particular reason for not doing so—save the faint improbable suspicion that had just entered his mind.

He realized that his suspecting the other man was hardly fair. Lucky McNally had rescued him when he had been caught in the jungle by the vine rope in the hands of someone who obviously intended to hang him. If McNally was the real killer he certainly would not have done that. At least it did not seem very probable to Ayres.

"Looks kind of bad," said McNally gazing around him anxiously. "If this Crawling Creature has the gun—and we know he has, then we're in a tough spot, Ayres."

"We are," said Ayres watching the other man closely. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Try and get him first," said the big man. "Listen, I got a hunch that this guy's somewhere around here. Suppose we separate and see if we can't dig him out, huh?"

"All right," said Ayres. "That might be a good idea."

"It's a swell one," said McNally. "You go that way," he pointed into the jungle toward the south. "And I'll go this," he nodded toward the west. "Circle back here and meet me

in about an hour—we ought to have some trace of this killer by then."

Ayres stood watching as the big man moved across the clearing and entered the brush. He stood with his eyes fixed upon McNally's back until the latter disappeared.

Then suddenly Ayres turned and started running toward a big tree. He ducked behind it swiftly, and remained hidden from view. His move was instinctive—and he did not quite know why he had done it, but he felt there was some reason.

McNally's having brought him all the way back to this camping spot did not seem as logical as it had at first. Yet it had seemed sensible—this effort to keep Buckley's gun from the Crawling Creature. Was it though? Ayres wasn't so sure of that now.

He realized that it was not, knowing as he did that the gun was empty. But he had not told Lucky McNally that. Lucky McNally—dimly Ayres tried to remember something that he had heard about the name.

THERE had been some ironical reason for McNally having been given the nickname. He had heard men who knew McNally well laugh over it, but he could not quite remember what it had been.

Ayres turned and started into the jungle. He might as well do as McNally had suggested and look for the man who had murdered his partner. He did not think the search would prove particularly fruitful.

If the Crawling Creature was clever enough to escape as easily as he had done from that tree back along the trail he was not likely to be found readily if he chose to hide.

For over half an hour Ayres circled through the jungle searching for some trace of the hidden killer. Once he heard a rustling amid the brush, but discovered that it was merely

some sort of a small wild animal. He was not interested in game at the moment. He had more important things on his mind.

FINALLY he returned to the clearing. McNally had not as yet returned. Ayres went to Buckley's grave. He stood frowning as he gazed at it. It had been filled in again—and upon the soft dirt that covered it had been drawn two large X's. The mark of the Crawling Creature.

Ayres swung around as he heard the roar of a heavy rifle and a bullet thudded into a tree trunk just above his head. There was a crashing back in the brush and then a second report of a gun. This time the bullet did not appear to be aimed in Ayres' direction. It would not have hit him anyway, for an instant after the first shot had struck he had ducked behind the tree.

In a moment Lucky McNally came running out of the jungle. Ayres had him covered from behind the tree. He was taking no chances with anyone. Either McNally or the other man had fired those two shots, nearly got him with the first one—and as far as Ayres knew the hidden killer's gun was not loaded.

"Ayres!" called McNally. "Where are you?"

"Right here," said Ayres from behind the tree. "And I've got you covered, McNally!"

"Covered!" exclaimed the big man as he came closer. "What in hell for?"

"Just playing safe," said Ayres. "You better stay right where you are!"

"Of all the fool idiots," exclaimed McNally, "you're it. Here this Crawling Creature takes a shot at you. I fire back at him—and instead of being thankful, like you should be that I'm protecting you, you cover me with your gun. Are you nuts or something, Ayres?"

"Buckly's gun wasn't loaded," said Ayres. "I forgot to tell you that."

McNally stared at him for a moment and then threw back his big head and laughed loudly.

"What of it?" he demanded finally. "Didn't Buckley have a lot of cartridges in his pocket—like we all carry them at times. I got a hunch he did!"

Ayres began to feel rather foolish. The big man was right. Buckley ought to have had a handful of cartridges in his coat pocket. Ayres remembered that was possible.

"You sure are dumb," said McNally with a shake of his head. "Do you think this Crawling Creature would go to all the trouble of digging up a grave in order to get a gun and then not make sure it was loaded? You know damn well he wouldn't."

"I guess you're right," said Ayres as he stepped out from behind the tree, the rifle lowered. "My error, McNally."

"Forget it," said the big man. "I think I winged the killer but I ain't sure."

MCNALLY glanced around, and then stood staring as he saw the filled grave.

"What the—" he exclaimed striding closer. "Who done this?"

"The Crawling Creature," said Ayres. "At least those X's seem to be his mark. The man is insane, there's no doubt about it."

"Oh, no he isn't," said McNally. "He's just smart, that's all. He knows those marks are gonna worry us—and he is right."

"I don't agree with you," stated Ayres. "Tricks like that are merely childish—that's all—the products of a demented mind. I tell you the man is a homicidal maniac!"

"That's what you think," McNally

glared at him. "But I got a hunch you're all wrong."

"All right," said Ayres. "We won't argue about it."

It was growing late in the afternoon. Ayres dreaded another night in the jungle. It had been dark when the Crawling Creature had murdered Buckley and when the sun disappeared he might strike again.

"I'm going to take one more look around," said McNally suddenly. "You stay here."

Ayres glanced at the big man as the latter spoke. McNally was scowling and he seemed to have something on his mind. He walked away hurriedly and disappeared into the jungle.

Ayres seated himself at the base of a big tree. He could watch all sides of the clearing save in back of him from where he sat. He had not been there long when he began to have the uncanny sensation that someone was watching him. He looked around anxiously, peering into the undergrowth that surrounded the clearing, but he could see no one.

The fact proved nothing. He still felt that someone was gazing at him. He was sure that the hidden watcher expected him to do something, was observing him for that reason. But what was expected of him?

Ayres suddenly remembered something that he had been trying to recall for the past half hour. As he did so a number of things that had puzzled him began to grow clearer in his mind.

THE solution to the mystery of the Crawling Creature was beginning to take shape in his brain. It seemed impossibly fantastic—and yet the more he thought about it the more logical it seemed.

He got to his feet slowly, looked about him as though he half feared

that he might be watched. He knew that he was actually being observed closely, but he was playing a part now.

Again he glanced around. He appeared to be satisfied that he was quite alone in the clearing. He went to the tree where he had just been sitting, leaned over as if he were about to pick up something.

"Don't, you fool!" whispered a voice from the shadows of the jungle near-by. "That's what he's waiting for—to find out where you've hidden it."

"That's what I thought," said Ayres calmly.

He stood up quickly. Shook his head as though puzzled about something, and then moved to another tree and leaned down as he had done before. Again he did not appear satisfied. He went to a third tree.

Then suddenly swung around, the heavy rifle in his hands half raised. He looked all about him anxiously, then shook his head and seated himself again against the trunk of a tree, the rifle across his knees.

FIFTEEN minutes later he was still sitting there as Lucky McNally appeared out of the brush. Ayres was idly tossing small objects into the brush at his left. As he finished doing so he heard a very faint rustling coming from that direction and smiled faintly.

"Not a trace of that guy," said McNally as he reached Ayres. "I'm still figuring that he's somewhere around here though."

"Got one of those hunches of yours about it?" asked Ayres casually.

"Yes," the big man nodded. "And I've never gone wrong on one of my hunches yet," he looked at Ayres. "Know what I think?"

"No," Ayres shook his head. "What?"

"That this Crawling Creature is watching us for some reason."

"So do I," said Ayres.

"Huh?" McNally looked at him in surprise. "Why do you think so?"

"The same reason you do. At least I believe it is. Might be more sure if I knew your reason exactly."

"I ain't telling you that yet," said McNally. He yawned and dropped down on the ground a short distance from Ayres. "Want to see if you can figure it out yourself."

"I see you carry an automatic," said Ayres casually. "What is it, a .45 caliber?"

"Yes," McNally nodded.

"Wonder how the killer ever got the name of the Crawling Creature?" remarked Ayres. "It sounds weird."

"Well, I've heard the natives talk about him," said McNally. "And they say he kinda creeps up on his man, and busts his head in."

"That's what he did to poor Buckly all right," said Ayres bitterly. "I wish we could get him. I owe that to Dan."

SO did I," remarked McNally. "I told you that before. Told you I was good friends with Buckly down in Mexico ten years ago."

"Yes, I know," Ayres nodded. "Only you said five years ago the last time. Not that it matters."

"Naw, I forgets dates easily," McNally glanced about him. "It's getting dark." A thought struck him. "Say, didn't you and Buckly have any camping stuff?"

"Of course," said Ayres. "I hid it in the brush when I broke camp this morning. Didn't want to be bothered with it. I was after the Crawling Creature and I wanted to travel light."

"That's a good one!" McNally laughed. "When I first seen you you was beating it away from this

part of the jungle like all hell was after you."

"I told you that was because I hoped the killer might follow me."

"Sure you did, but I've got a hunch you were wrong—that you were lying!" McNally's tone changed suddenly. "I've been playing with you long enough, Ayres. Where is it?"

"Where's what?" asked Ayres apparently unconsciously turning so that the muzzle of the rifle across his knees covered the big man. "I don't understand?"

"Oh, yes you do," the big man's voice was heard. "I mean the other five thousand bucks. You hid it somewhere. I want to know where!"

"So that's it!" exclaimed Ayres. McNally moved with lightning speed. He flung himself at the other man.

A heavy hand clasped Ayres by the throat and dragged him to his feet, held him. With his left hand McNally reached for the automatic in the holster at his belt.

"Tell me where you hid that money," he growled. "Or I'll give you the same thing I gave Buckly!"

Dix Ayres saw death staring at him from those glittering eyes in the big distorted face that gazed into his. He knew that any moment the automatic might crash down upon his head, cracking his skull.

"I'll tell you," he gasped. "It's—"

FROM the jungle behind McNally there came the roar of a rifle. A bullet plowed into the big man's shoulder, spun him half around. He released Ayres, and turned swiftly, the automatic in his hand. As the automatic barked rapidly Ayres dropped to the ground.

McNally howled with pain as a second bullet from the rifle of the marksman in the brush seared his cheek. The automatic was still bark-

ing as the big man turned and dashed madly across the clearing.

Again the rifle boomed. McNally threw his hands above his head, stumbled, and then rolled over to remain there limp and motionless.

"Looks like we got him," said a voice, and a tall well-built man walked into the clearing, a heavy rifle in his hand. "That's the Crawling Creature! Otherwise known as Bull Dill, the craziest killer that was ever let loose."

I KNOW," said Ayres. "And you're Lucky McNally."

"Right," the real McNally looked at him in surprise. "But how did you figure that out?"

"I had heard about you," said Ayres. "Finally remembered that they had called you Lucky because you hated hunches. This killer here said that he was McNally, but he was talking of having hunches about something."

"You're right so far," McNally grinned. "What else?"

"I had heard that one of the strange things about Lucky McNally was that he never cursed. This Dill here cussed plenty. Then I got to figuring things out. I knew that Dill had brought me back here for some reason. Then I remembered that when I first met him I told him that the Crawling Creature had gotten all the money that Dan Buckley and I had. He knew that I was lying—for he had learned somewhere that Dan and I had ten thousand between us—"

"Yes, I knew that," said McNally. "Early last night this Dill found my camp. Planned to kill me just as he did your partner, but I got away. I had to move fast though to do it and I had to leave my gun behind. I followed him, saw him murder Buckley—but I was unarmed and helpless—so I could do nothing then."

"But why didn't you warn me later?" demanded Ayres.

"I couldn't last night. After Dill left here he picked up my trail again. I spent the rest of the night ducking him. In the morning I did follow you," McNally smiled grimly. "Both you and Dill took a shot at me back there on the trail. That was close."

"Later I climbed up in that tree. I planned to slip that noose over Bull Dill's head, but it was dark—I couldn't see very well and I got you instead," McNally looked at Ayres earnestly. "I'm sorry, old man. Right then was when I certainly played into Dill's hands. He had you convinced that I was really the Crawling Creature, I'm sure."

"But you haven't any hunches about it," Ayres smiled. "I finally figured it out. That was why I pretended to be looking for the place that I had hidden the money belt. I knew that Dill was watching me. I wasn't surprised when you warned me from the brush. I thought you might be somewhere near-by. Sorry you had so much trouble digging up the grave to get Buckley's rifle—and then found it wasn't loaded."

"Yes, that wasn't so good. You showed a lot of sense when you tossed me those bullets as you were sitting there by the tree. If you hadn't Dill might have got you."

"I know that. Dill tried to bluff me into believing that you had done the shooting after he went into the jungle and took a shot at me—but I knew Buckley's gun wasn't loaded—and I was almost positive that poor Dan didn't have any cartridges in his pockets but I wasn't quite sure. When I saw that the grave had been refilled I knew that whoever the Crawling Creature was he was absolutely insane."

"You were right," said McNally, smiling. "And I haven't got a hunch about it!"

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CHAPTER I

Amok!

TO the north lies Tibet, a vast, arid terrain whose infertile sands hold fast through all the centuries a thousand terrible secrets of the past. To the south is India, the over-populated peninsula, whose people are many and mysterious, whose history is unwritten but not unknown, whose heritage is one of exploitation and suffering.

But between these two vast realms of antiquity lies Assam, whose claim on the past is even more secure; Assam, where the outposts of civilization have failed to stretch their powerful arms; Assam, which is still dominated by ancient ritual, where weird and cruel things happen in the name of religion, where the Gods are revered, and man-made machine is unheard of.

Tibet has been ravished and ransacked by the anthropologists, mapped and charted by the explorers. India has been conquered and yolked by the white man.

But Assam remains what it has always been—free, untrammled, unconquered, and impenetrable.

If the white man must travel from the northeastern corner of India into Tibet, he goes not through Assam. He travels, perhaps, some few hundred miles further, but he considers the extra mileage well worth the trouble.

He misses the certain death that lurks in the poisoned arrows of the *Abors* and *Mishmis*, he misses the torture and decapitation that the *Nagas* are so willing—aye, eager to mete out to him. He escapes the onslaughts of the huge tailless monkeys who can strangle a man with their hairy hands. He avoids the relentless mountain leopards, which swoop

Adventure and the Chaos of the Jungle



down from the heights of mighty Everest and dine on human flesh.

No, the white man has traveled far and wide. He has taken his civilization, for better or worse, to the remotest corners of the globe, but as yet, he has not made any forays in that green, vivid hell upon earth which is Assam.

Thirty miles south of the Indian border is a tea plantation. It is owned by the nearest white man to the Assam frontiers. It is owned by the only Caucasian who has ever pierced that dangerous border, and returned to tell the tale. It is owned by a man who has seen the Nagas, the Abors, and the Mishmis face to face, and yet he still lives, a fact which accounts for this story.

TWENTY years ago, that tea plantation was a small, but rapidly developing enterprise, owned and managed by Robert Stanley, of Bos-

ton, Massachusetts. In his veins ran the blood of pioneering forefathers, in his heart was the spirit of adventure, the desire to create order and industry out of the chaos of the jungle.

For three years he had worked the plantation, and now the business had reached the stage where it had begun to return a profit. True, that profit was small, but it gave promise of great things. Promise, enough at least, for Robert Stanley to send to Delhi for the wife and two children who waited for him there.

So it was that Mrs. Stanley, Robert, Jr., and his elder sister, Doreen, took up residence on the Stanley plantation. Their life was happy and uneventful. The terrible jungle heat beat down upon them, yet they did not mind. The vast green chaotic realm stretched out all about them, yet they were unafraid.

But there was one other white

man in their community to whom the drumming of the sun's constant heat did something; upon whom the sinister spell of the jungle worked its insidious effect.

Tarvin, the overseer, had changed from a huge healthy laughing man into an emaciated muttering, shifty-eyed individual in the three years he had stayed at the plantation.

Stanley was worried about him. On a hot miasmatic morning when it seemed that the sun had added to its already overwhelming power, he sent for the overseer.

TARVIN, unshaved, hollow-cheeked, and with eyes that refused to meet those of his employer, entered the small screened room that served as an office.

Stanley regarded the overseer with worried, friendly eyes.

"Tarvin," he said fraternally. "You're not looking your best, old man. Suppose you take a trip back home for a few months. I can get someone from Calcutta to fill in while you're gone."

Tarvin's roving eyes suddenly came to rest on the other's face. A maniacal gleam shone in his gaze as he stared at Stanley.

"Oh," he mumbled. "Trying to get rid of me. That's what I get for working like a dog for three years. Trying to get rid of me—trying—"

"Of course not, Tarvin. Only I'm worrying about you. This rotten climate seems to have got you. I'm only thinking of you. That's all."

"Don't want to go," said Tarvin.

Stanley bit his lip in chagrin. He was seriously worried about the overseer. The pounding sun seemed to have done something to his brain. Yet, as long as he did his work, and there was no doubt about that point, Stanley failed to see what he could do about it.

"All right," he said shortly. "Bet-

ter get the men out on the East field this morning."

Tarvin stared at him again, and the cunning shiftiness in his strange, glaring eyes made Stanley uncomfortable.

"This morning?" he repeated in a queer hoarse voice.

"Of course," said Stanley. "Why not this morning?"

If he spoke sharply it was because the other's peculiar behavior had sent a little thrill of apprehension shooting up his spine.

"Not this morning," said Tarvin. "It's a feast day of the Nagas."

Stanley stared at him in amazement.

"Are you crazy, man?" he demanded. "There aren't more than three Nagas working for us. If they want to observe a feast day, let them do it. But that's no reason why everyone else should take a day off."

"We must respect their gods as much as we respect ours. Who knows which religion is the true one. We can't afford the risk of angering their gods."

IF amazement had showed in Robert Stanley's face before, stark stupefaction shone there now. He half rose from his seat and stared dazedly into the other's eyes. What he saw there was far from reassuring. Tarvin blinked nervously. His pupils were dilated and a strange light which Stanley had never seen gleamed there. His mouth was open, and his wispy hair ruffled on his head.

Then just as he was about to speak, Stanley checked the angry words that were on his lips. He came to sudden realization. Tarvin was undoubtedly mad. The burning sun, the womanless waste of green jungle had undermined his mind, had sapped his brain of its vitality.

It was this that Stanley had seen

slowly happening to his overseer. This was the reason for Tarvin's strange behavior. Stanley dropped back to his seat and resorted to strategy.

"All right, Tarvin," he said quietly. "Perhaps you're right after all. Let them all take a day off, and you and I'll get some rest, too."

To his horror Tarvin uttered a frightful cackle that sounded like the laughter of a gloating harpy.

"You're wise," he croaked. "Wise not to offend the gods."

With that he turned on his heel and walked slowly from the room.

STANLEY'S apprehensive eyes followed the other's soiled white figure until it had passed out of sight, then quickly he left his desk and went to the dining room where his wife was playing with the two children.

"Maida," he said quietly to the handsome woman who smiled a greeting at him as he entered. "Tarvin's gone off. The sun's got him. I can't get him to leave for a rest. But we must get a doctor here at once. I can't go myself. You'll have to do it."

His wife rose to her feet. She showed no trace of alarm, but she did show her character as she remarked calmly:

"I can start in an hour. Will you send some of the boys with me?"

"Yes. You'd better take Robert, too. He's a trifle too young for me to take care of. I'll look after Doreen. And hurry, darling. Tarvin was a good man once. I want a doctor here before he goes too far. Perhaps we can still save him."

From that moment on things moved with a startling rapidity in the tea plantation at Sadiya. Mrs. Stanley and her son Robert rode off, escorted by half a dozen natives, less than two hours later.

Robert Stanley, Senior, returned to

his office, taking his daughter Doreen with him. The child sat playing on the floor under her father's eye as he busied himself with the papers on his desk.

The plantation lay quiet and still. The natives, glad of their day's respite, though not quite understanding why it had been granted them, slept in their quarters. The sun belted down on the palm-thatched roofs. It seemed that an air of grim foreboding seeped from the jungle and pervaded the whole atmosphere.

Once, while bent over his books, Stanley suddenly glanced up, and an involuntary shudder shook his entire body.

In his own quarters Tarvin lay on a soiled mattress and took a number of swigs from a square-faced bottle of gin. The more he resorted to the bottle, the more radiant became the weird and evil gleam in his wide eyes.

From time to time he muttered some gibberish to himself, then, in the early afternoon, he sprang from his bed and walked bareheaded out into the murderous heat of the day.

HE stood before the little shack that served him as a home and glanced around the clearing. Not a soul was in sight. To his bleary eyes the whole scene was glazed and unreal as if it had been painted by an exact hand on a cake of ice.

He blinked slowly as the brightness almost blinded him, then slowly walked toward the large building where Stanley was working. He approached quietly. Stanley did not see him as he came to a halt just beyond the screen, and peered through at the dim figures of his employer and the child who played innocently on the floor.

Tarvin stood still and quiet, accustomed his eyes to the shadows of the room beyond.

Then suddenly he drew a deep breath and his eyes fairly crackled with emotion. His whole emaciated frame shook violently. He raised his face toward the heavens, and despite the blinding light which threw itself down upon him he gazed straight into the center of the sun.

"He works," he said softly. "He works on the feast day. The gods will become angry. Ah, no, for they shall be propitiated—his sin shall be wiped out, and by my humble hands."

HE turned and ran toward his own shack. At the rear of it he stooped and picked up a shining hatchet with which his houseboy chopped wood for cooking purposes. Then like a madman, he raced back toward Stanley's quarters.

He pushed the screen door open so violently that it almost fell from its hinges. A houseboy on the veranda took one look at his face, and ran howling toward the native quarters.

Tarvin rushed across the room, and with his gleaming weapon held high over his head he glared down at Stanley.

The planter looked up in amazed alarm.

"Take it easy, Tarvin," he said. "What's wrong, old man?"

"Wrong!" fairly shrieked the overseer. "Wrong! You outrage the gods, then you ask what's wrong. But the wrong shall be retrieved by your death. Your death."

Stanley was a brave man. He had stared the reaper in the eye before this, but there was a weird quality in the other's voice, an utterly crazy glint in his eyes that sent Stanley's heart to thudding. He rose in his chair and his voice shrilled to a crescendo of alarm.

"Tarvin! Tarvin! Stop it, you fool. You're mad. You're—"

He never finished the sentence. Tarvin's hatchet swung through the

air in a glittering arc, with all the force of his arm behind it. It struck Stanley squarely in the center of the skull. The planter slumped forward on the desk, blood streaming upon his books.

Tarvin stared at the ghastly sight for a moment and an idiotic grin of sadistic satisfaction crawled over his mouth. Saliva dripped down his chin.

He started suddenly as he heard a shout from the native quarters. Evidently the houseboy that had run from him was bringing reinforcements to investigate.

Tarvin stood there irresolutely for a moment. Then the terrible sobbing of a child came to his ears and for the first time he took notice of Doreen Stanley on the floor at his feet.

Stark horror was reflected in the child's wet eyes as she stared transfixed at the horrible thing on the desk that had been her father.

TARVIN blinked and shook his head as he essayed to collect his mad thoughts. Then with the suddenness that characterizes the action of a lunatic, he lunged forward and jerked the crimson weapon from the dead man's head. He stooped over and picked up the squalling child, tucked it under his arm, and fled from the room.

Past the shouting alarmed natives who were on their way to Stanley's house he ran with his bloody hatchet and the crying child. Right up to the edge of the jungle where no white man had ever dared to make his way.

He pushed aside some thick growth and leaped into the forest. The child screamed lustily. The undergrowth closed behind him.

A huge bronzed man detached himself from the group of staring natives and made his way to the

place where they had seen Tarvin disappear.

At the edge of the jungle he hesitated for a moment and stared at the bright crimson stain on the vernal greenery before him; then shaking his head, he slowly returned to the group.

In reply to their inquiring glances, he permitted himself but one word of explanation. He glanced significantly at the sun, and then uttered the Malay word which has become synonymous with madness the whole world over.

"Amok," he said sonorously, "amok!"

CHAPTER II

Twenty Years After

TWENTY years brings change with it in those great places where the white man's civilization is constantly undergoing vicissitudes, where the mind of science performs its miracles year after year. But up on that hellish border of Assam, twenty years, like the last three centuries, brought nothing save a dreary sameness.

The tea plantation upon which Robert Stanley, Senior, had met his death, still functioned, under the supervision of Jamie Ferguson, a dour Scotsman, who had taken charge on that tragic day, years ago, when the two living members of the Stanley family, departed from the scene of their father's death, and their sister's kidnaping, and returned to the United States.

Ferguson, in sole charge for two decades, was called upon one day to surrender his authority to a tall, bronzed, young man with an assured bearing and a clear and steady eye. Robert Stanley, being of age, and wondering why the plantation which his mother had told him was a potential gold mine, yielded nothing

save the small profits which Ferguson sent them from time to time.

In the same small screened room in which his father was slain by a maniac some twenty years ago, Robert met the Scotch overseer. The youth extended a cordial hand. Ferguson hesitated for a moment, then took it limply.

"Well, Ferguson," said young Bob, "here I am. Of course, you'll have a free hand as usual until I pick up something about the business. I'm just a babe in the woods right now."

"It's a bad country for babes," said Ferguson dourly. "Aye, a bad place indeed."

Something in his tone caused Bob to look up. The overseer was regarding him queerly. Bob, a stranger to the country, felt the other's antagonism keenly. Abruptly he brought their aborted interview to a close.

"That'll be all for now," he said. "I'll see you in the morning."

Ferguson nodded and shuffled slowly out in the dusk which was fast enveloping the jungle.

Bob Stanley sat silently at the desk which had once been his father's. As he stared idly down at the worn scarred top, he saw a dark brown stain. His eyes became transfixed upon it. Then suddenly he shuddered without knowing why, without realizing that the stain was a drop of his own father's blood.

DUSK was fast coming upon the jungle and the myriad of night noises from the denizens of the thick undergrowth came to his ears. He twisted uncomfortably in his chair and lit a cigarette. He was aware of a peculiar foreboding.

He had traveled all day through a terrible heat, through a terrible country, and now that he had reached his destination, he had come up against the dour foreman's an-

tagonism. He could not exactly understand why he felt disturbed, but somehow, deep down inside him he knew that all was not well. He knew that something malevolent, something evil was approaching him.

HIS houseboy approached and served his meal where he sat. The white man ate mechanically, topped off the meal with a stiff whisky and soda, then lighted a cigarette. But even the food and drink failed to remove the sensation of worry that pervaded him.

He sat for a long time gazing out into the purple tropical night. Then, at last, with a sigh he rose and took himself off to his sleeping quarters.

Running his hands through a suitcase in search of a pair of pajamas his fingers came into contact with a heavy .38 which he had carelessly tossed into the bag on that day so long ago when he had left his mother in Boston.

He fingered it speculatively for a moment, examined it meticulously, and then acting on a sudden hunch thrust it beneath his pillow.

Bob Stanley climbed into bed and prepared to spend his first night on his plantation; his first night in this weird unsettled country which was blanketed with the mystic and sinister spell of the orient.

Myriad scented odors seeped from the jungle into his nostrils. The scent was so heavy that it almost drugged his senses. To his ears came the unearthly cries of the beasts of the forests in search of their prey. Monkeys chattered angrily. Birds raised whining cries to heaven, and Bob Stanley lay in his net-covered cot, and fought the awful wakefulness that was upon him.

Then, of course, through the unfamiliar nocturnal noises of the

jungle came a more familiar sound. Bob Stanley's muscles tensed, his ears became alert. Again came the sound of a human footstep.

With his left hand he slightly raised the netting that covered the bed, while with his right he reached for the loaded weapon which reposed underneath his pillow. The golden tropical moon outside was obscured by the towering trees at the edge of the clearing in which the houses were built.

BOB strained his eyes through the darkness. He saw nothing, but his ears warned him that a door had slammed somewhere, then once more he heard the patter of naked feet.

Suddenly looming up before him, black against the blackness of the room, he discerned the figure of the most gigantic man that he had ever beheld. His heart thudded, and with a tremendous effort he sprang from the bed, his revolver, gripped firmly in his hand, ready for action.

Before he could level the weapon at the intruder, a powerful hairy hand gripped his wrist. Frantically, Bob clenched his left fist and swung with all his strength at a point where he judged the intruder's jaw should be.

His fist crashed against something hard and hairy. He heard a guttural grunt in the darkness. The hairy hand on his right wrist gripped tighter. Then a long arm reached out and seized him by the throat.

Bob fought desperately, but as the battle continued he was aware of a sickening feeling of terror in the pit of his stomach. This adversary with whom he struggled for his life seemed more animal than man. The terrible strength, the hairy arms and body, the inarticulate grunts all indicated that some human beast, some cretin was bent on exterminating him.

In desperation, he called out:

"Who are you? Speak to me if you are a man. Speak to me!"

But the only answer to his frantic supplication was another throaty grunt which rasped against his ear drums.

COLD sweat stood out on his brow. His breath came in short, sharp gasps. His muscles felt as if they had become frozen, as if a thin glaze of ice held them in an iron thrall. The fingers that held his .38 went inert beneath the terrific pressure on his wrist. The gun fell clattering to the floor.

Something hairy brushed his cheek and the awful pressure on his throat forced him to his knees. Then suddenly a silver shaft of light swept through the room, as the jungle moon rose higher. With a desperate jerk Bob forced his eyes upward. Then, as he saw his adversary for the first time, bathed in the ghostly light of the moon, his pupils dilated in utter horror, and his heart became a leaden, spiritless thing.

For bending over him, staring into his face with wicked, murderous eyes was a huge hairy monkey! In a single flash he knew! he had already, despite his short stay in this country, heard of the powerful tailless monkeys of the region who could easily strangle a man. Now, on his first night he had met one of them.

THE grip on his throat grew tighter and tighter. The little gleaming eyes that burned into his own became glazed with yellow hatred. Bob Stanley stared blankly into those relentless eyes and waited for the doom that was surely upon him. Then, one of those quirks of fate upon which hang such vast things, occurred.

The animal intent on the atavistic emotion which impelled it to kill,

jerked forward suddenly to deliver the coup de grace. As it did so, the protruding elbow of its hairy arm came into sharp contact with the edge of Bob's bed. The simian gave vent to another guttural grunt, and as the pain shot through its arm, its tense hold on the white man was, for a moment, weakened.

Frantically, Bob summoned all his flagging energies and exerted every ounce of his waning strength to take advantage of the opportunity which chance tossed him.

With a tremendous effort he flung himself clear of the beast's grasp. His right hand swept the floor hastily. His relieved fingers came into contact with the cold butt of the .38.

THE monkey turned sharply, its wide arms outstretched once again to seize the victim who had escaped its hold. The horrible hairy arms reached out once more. Bob backed up two paces, his finger constricted on the trigger of his weapon. A sharp report cracked through the room. Twice more the weapon spoke its belated message.

The black brute before him, dropped with a heavy thud to the floor. Panting and dripping with sweat, Bob stood over it, the still smoking pistol held in his hand. He stared wild-eyed at the inert black heap at his feet, circled weirdly by a halo of silver moonlight.

Then with trembling fingers, he lit a match and a moment later the kerosene lamp in the room cast its flickering light over the ghastly scene. The huge black beast lay wallowing in its own blood on the floor of the room. Bob still breathed hard, as he crossed to a small table and picking up a long bottle poured himself the stiffest drink of whisky that he had ever taken.

He was still panting when a discreet knock came at the door.

"Come in," he called exerting every effort to keep his voice steady.

The door opened slightly and the timid countenance of one of the houseboys thrust itself through the jamb.

"I hear shot," he announced gravely. "I come see what trouble, if any."

Despite his feelings, Bob grinned at the boy's massacring of the English idiom.

"It's all right," he replied with a casualness which he was far from feeling. "I just killed this beast. Drag his body out of here, and send for Sahib Ferguson."

The black boy bowed.

"I go get help, and Sahib Ferguson."

HIS shining face disappeared from the doorway and for a moment Bob was left once more with the horrible corpse which had almost reversed the present order of things.

Presently Ferguson accompanied by three natives walked into the room. The overseer calmly surveyed the creature that lay dead at his feet, deliberately filled a worn pipe, and snapped an order in dialect to the boys. The trio of blacks bent down and dragged the bloody, hairy thing from the room.

Bob, who had complete control of his nerves by this time, turned to the overseer.

"How do you figure that, Ferguson?" he asked brusquely.

The Scotsman shrugged brawny shoulders. "Who knows?" he asked. "Strange things happen in the jungle."

"They do," concurred Bob. "When a monkey has enough intelligence to open a door with a spring lock without a key, I can say that I most certainly agree with you."

He watched the other closely to watch the effect of his words. The overseer maintained his poker face, however, and said: "You'll learn that even stranger and more dangerous things can happen here. You're not in America now."

He took a deep puff at his pipe, and before Bob could frame a reply, he turned on his heel and quitted the room, leaving a frowning, puzzled youth behind him.

CHAPTER III

Magic

BOB STANLEY awoke with the chattering of the gaily plumed birds that greeted the tropical dawn in the huge trees outside his room. For a moment he blinked dazedly at the glare of the sun which poured into the room, then stretching and orienting himself to his surroundings, he sat up in bed, and reached for a cigarette.

As he lighted it his eye became fixed to a number of dull red stains of the floor. The sight of the tailless monkey's blood brought back to his mind the weird events of the night before. He dressed slowly and meditated.

As he had remarked to Ferguson, already, it was odd—even in such an odd country—that a mammal could open a Yale lock without a key. It would have been odd enough if the monkey had achieved the feat *with* a key, but under these circumstances it was almost impossible.

Bob already knew something of the tragedy which had overtaken his father and sister two decades ago at the plantation, but all the details of the affair he had never learned. His mother had always been loath to speak of it, and knowing her desire to forget, he never pressed her.

But now he found himself won-

dering if the attempt on his life of last night could conceivably have anything to do with those terrible happenings of so long ago.

He pondered this question all day, as Ferguson showed him over the plantation; and, as he pondered, he kept a close watch on the overseer, for it seemed to him from the man's obvious antagonistic attitude toward him that a clue to the mystery might be had. But Ferguson evidently was a man who knew how to keep his own counsel, who knew how to maintain an ingenuous poker face.

Neither of them mentioned the affair of last night to the other, and Bob did not speak of the idea that came to him that afternoon. Instead he put it into operation as soon as he had finished his evening meal.

He instructed the houseboy to saddle his horse, and without confiding to the overseer, he mounted and started off down the trail that ran alongside of the jungle.

HE had not gone three hundred yards when, to his amazement he saw the figure of Ferguson appear from the thick brush at the side of the road and start walking up the path toward him. He reigned in his horse, but before he could speak, the overseer said:

"Danger lurks on the jungle trail at night, my boy."

Bob, stung by his patronizing tone, retorted sharply. "It doesn't seem to bother you much."

"It won't bother me," replied the other with a mirthless grin. "But if you're riding for pleasure, I'd not suggest this route."

"I'm not riding for pleasure," said Bob. "I'm going down to see the British agent in Sadiya."

Ferguson frowned. "You'll not find him partial to social calls," he commented.

"I told you this wasn't a social call. It's business—grim business."

Again the Scotsman's face clouded. Characteristically, he shrugged his shoulders, and continued his walk up the path. Bob watched him for a little while.

"Well," he told himself. "I guess I talked too much that time, but that guy gets my goat."

He tapped the horse lightly on the flank and the animal trotted along the three mile jaunt to the settlement of Sadiya where four white men, including the representative of the British Government, lived.

CREIGHTON, His Majesty's agent for the Sadiya district was a typical insular Englishman. Ferguson had not exaggerated when he had said that he would not relish a social call. He didn't.

He greeted Bob with the strained hospitality of a man who sees a duty to be done, and does it, even though he is not particularly enthusiastic about it.

He ushered Bob into the living room of his bungalow, poured him a whisky and soda, and said with the air of a man who wishes to come to the point at once.

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Stanley?"

"I don't quite know," confessed Bob. "But some strange things have happened to me since my arrival here yesterday and I wondered if perhaps you could throw some light on the subject."

Creighton sipped slowly from his glass and said nothing. Despite his cool reception, Bob related his story emphasizing Ferguson's strange behavior and the episode of the monkey of the night before. But if he had thought that his tale would cause the Englishman to evince the slightest interest, he was disappointed.

Creighton sat back in his chair and puffed thoughtfully on his cigar.

"I think you're inclined to exaggerate, Mr. Stanley," he said at last. "This country is new to you. It's a dangerous and mysterious place. I'm afraid you've let it undermine your imagination. Ferguson seems all right to me. Dour, Scotch, but on the level. The monkey undoubtedly forced its way into your room somehow. But I fail to see any connection between that and Ferguson."

"As I told Ferguson, monkeys don't unlock doors. But let that pass. If you don't see any connection between that episode and my foreman, perhaps you see a link between these things and the peculiar death of my father twenty years ago."

For a moment the other's eyes seemed to light with interest, then just as suddenly, Creighton became bored again. He shook his head.

"No," he said. "I'm afraid I don't. I don't know much about your father's death. I came here after that, though, of course, I've heard of it. But I still believe that you're simply worked up by the general exotic air of this place. In fact—"

HE never finished the sentence, for as if in direct refutation of his words, there came a single staccato thud upon the door. It wasn't a knock. No human hand could have delivered such a powerful blow. Rather, it was a sharp staccato crack that brought both men to their feet simultaneously.

Bob was the first to the door. He flung it open, and then stood staring open-mouthed at a quivering shaft in the top panel. For there, plainly revealed in the platinum argent of the moon, was stuck a shaking arrow, whose point was deeply embedded in the wood.

He reached up, and seizing the shaft, tugged at it with all his strength. The weapon was encased in cobra skin, and upon its tip was a dark red stain as if it had already achieved the purpose for which it was made.

Bob looked up. "What's this," he said. "Looks like—"

AND then for the first time he saw the Englishman's face. Creighton had at last lost his composure. His red beefy face had suddenly evolved to a pasty white. The eyes which had seemed so dull and bored a moment ago, were now distended and flooded with fear. He took a single pace toward Bob and with a nervous gesture snatched the arrow from the American's hand. Trembling fingers ran along the cobra skin, then he flung it on the table and hastily gulped his whisky.

"My God!" he ejaculated, then fell back in his chair.

Bob was staring at him in amazement.

"What's the matter?" he demanded excitedly. "What on earth's the meaning of this?"

Creighton pointed weakly to the arrow lying innocently on the table.

"That," he said in a faint voice. "It's the poisoned arrow of the Nagas. The warning of danger and death from the Northern hill tribes."

Before Bob could question him further, a knock on the door was followed by the entrance of two men who regarded the Englishman with alarm.

"I thought I saw an arrow shot at your door," said one. "So I—"

He broke off as he perceived the thing of which he spoke lying on the agent's table. Excitedly he picked it up.

The second man, apparently taking but little notice of the weapon which had so affected his companion

smiled over at Bob, then extended his hand.

"My name's MacGraw," he said. "I guess you're Stanley."

BOB shook the proffered hand cordially. This was the first friendly greeting he had had since his arrival. Creighton, suddenly realizing his duties as a host, introduced the other man as Somers, the storekeeper.

"What's it all about?" asked Bob when the formalities were over. "You'll have to explain it to a tenderfoot like me."

He noticed that Creighton and Somers exchanged swift glances as he spoke. MacGraw, alone seemed calm. In fact, with his shock of red hair and innocent blue eyes it was impossible to imagine him excited about anything. He had, Bob reflected, the most placid expression of any man he had ever met.

"Well," said Creighton slowly as though the matter was distasteful to him, "as you probably have heard, the tribes of Assam aren't exactly Sunday School children. They're devils and murderers. We've had no trouble with them for a long time now—until tonight."

He broke off and looked significantly at Bob.

"Then," said Bob, "you admit that perhaps it has something to do with me. You see now that my theory was correct."

Creighton rose slowly. "Whether or not your theories are correct, Mr. Stanley, I don't know. As a matter of fact, I don't want to know. However, I can't afford to involve the government in a fiasco of this sort. I must request you to keep away from here. I do not want to antagonize the tribes."

Bob stared at him, then as the full significance of his words came to him, he said bitterly:

"You fear that it's me they're after and you don't want to risk your own precious skin. Is that it?"

Creighton shrugged, but Somers took up cudgels for him.

"And why not?" he demanded belligerently. "Why should we endanger our lives? We can't hold off a whole native tribe simply as a personal favor to you."

BOB opened his mouth to utter the bitter words that welled up from his heart, but before he could speak, the most terrible sound he had ever heard smote his ears.

It was a high throbbing plaintive wail which somehow set one's very heart to beating like a cold piece of ice in the breast; and it was more than a wail, it was a cry of murder, a cry of death, a sound wrought of suffering and doom.

Bob cast a swift glance about the room at the faces of the three others.

Creighton's face remained the ashen pallor which had come to it upon discovery of the arrow. Somers shifted nervously and his fingers twitched. MacGraw nodded his head slowly and silently as if corroborating some unspoken opinion of his own.

"What's that?" asked Bob.

"That," said MacGraw very quietly and very seriously, "is the death cry of the Nagas."

"And it means?"

"It means," continued MacGraw, "exactly what its name implies. It means death."

"To whom?" said Bob tensely.

MacGraw shook his head. "We'll have to wait to find that out," he said.

Bob looked at the others, and the fear he saw in their faces recalled their attitude of a few moments ago.

"Very well," he said acidly, as he walked toward the door. "I suppose I am to assume that it means my

death. In that case I won't endanger you gentlemen with my presence any longer."

He flung open the door and walked into the moonlight compound beyond. Yet even as he went he heard Creighton's sharp sigh of relief.

HE untethered his horse and sprang to the saddle, when he heard a soft voice at his side.

"Don't take it too seriously, Stanley," said MacGraw. "There's danger, it's true. But those two in there get panicky rather easily. Take a good night's sleep, and I'll come up and talk it over with you in the morning."

His reassuring words did Bob a world of good, but before he could even offer his thanks to the red-headed Irishman, MacGraw had turned and walked back to Creighton's shack.

Bob rode off up the jungle trail and the friendliness of the other's words almost banished the bitter foreboding which was in his heart.

As he rode he tried to grapple with the misery that seemed to be pursuing him. If as Creighton had implied, the Nagas sought his death, he was at an utter loss for an explanation. If, as he firmly believed himself, Ferguson had sent the simian to his room last night, he was at a loss to explain that also.

But the thing upon which he grimly and positively decided was that one Robert Stanley, Jr., was certainly an unpopular man in this desolate region on the Assam frontier.

As he arrived at the plantation, he noticed a light in Ferguson's quarters and for a moment he was tempted to confront the overseer and ask him point-blank what it was all about, but a moment's thought showed him the futility of this course. He could pin nothing defi-

nite on the Scotsman, and it was absurd to expect him to give his own hand away. He handed his horse over to the boy who squatted on the veranda awaiting his master's return and then made his way to his own sleeping quarters.

He opened the door, then stopped abruptly on the threshold. For there, crouched on the floor, silhouetted in the moonlight, sat a horrible old crone. The native woman apparently intent on what she was doing had not heard him enter. She bent forward and muttered softly.

Bob's hand dropped to the gun in his pocket, and he stood there still and silent, watching the uncanny, unreal scene before him. The emaciated old hag leaned forward and touched something with her bony fingers. Bob strained his eyes through the gloom in an effort to see more clearly.

FASTENED to the leg of his bed was a huge bloated python frog. The old woman passed her skinny hands over the luckless amphibian and spoke some gibberish in a tongue that Bob did not understand.

Then suddenly she produced a knife from somewhere in the folds of her clothing. With a swift sure blow she severed the tether that held the animal to the post. Again she mumbled the words of her weird ritual, and with staring eyes transfixed upon the puffed-up frog, watched it intently.

Bob, from behind her, was no less interested in the rite than was this ugly priestess. The frog hesitated for a moment, then summoning its energies, it essayed a leap. Bloated as it was, it teetered crazily, for a moment, then moved toward the north.

The woman gave a sudden exclamation, then came to her feet,

just as Bob, picking up a flashlight from the table, sprayed the entire room with light.

But if he had expected the old crone to show fear or surprise he was disappointed. She stared steadily into the unwinking eye of his electric torch, and said clearly:

"Before the moonsoon, Sahib—to the North—Nizam Ghat and beyond. There will you find her."

Then her skinny arm reached out and touched his sleeve.

FOR a second he was astounded by the fact that the words she had spoken were perfect English, and in that moment of consternation, the hag glided past him, through the door and into the night. Bob stared down at the ugly animal on the floor, then suddenly summoning his faculties, he ran through the door to capture the woman in order to question her.

Certainly she had not preceded him through that doorway by more than twenty seconds, yet as he flashed his light around the clearing there was no sign of her. She had vanished completely, as though the jungle itself had swept forward and snatched her in its tenacious grasp.

Once again Bob thought of consulting Ferguson, and despite his suspicions of the man, decided that after this last mad episode, he must speak to someone. He stood upon his veranda and called loudly.

"Ferguson," he said in a tense vibrant tone, when the Scotsman arrived. "For God's sake tell what in the name of God all this madness means."

The overseer glanced down at the bloated green figure on the floor, and his eyes narrowed, then he turned to Bob.

"What's happened here?" he asked quickly. And it seemed to Bob that his usually calm and unemotional

voice had become filled with alarm.

Hastily Bob related the story of the old hag and her frog, and as he spoke he saw that the alarm he had noticed in Ferguson's voice was reflected in the man's eyes.

"You say she spoke to you in English?" he questioned.

Bob nodded. "Yes. Now tell me, Ferguson, what's it all about? I know that you know more than you pretend. Now what's the answer?"

Hastily Ferguson banished the alarm from his features and resumed his old implacable air.

"I told you," he said, "that many queer things happen up here."

"That seems to be your answer to everything," snapped Bob. "Frankly, I don't mind telling you that I think you're lying."

FERGUSON glanced up at him keenly. His mouth opened to speak, and then for the second time that evening, Bob listened to that terrible soul agonizing cry that he had heard in Creighton's bungalow.

"Listen," he said excitedly. "You know what that means?"

Ferguson nodded. "Too well," he said gravely. "Open the door. Perhaps we can see something."

Bob turned the knob and opened the door. He was about to step outside when his foot struck something soft and yielding. He regained his balance, then looked down.

"Ferguson!" he cried. "Look. That's the woman who was here with the frog."

The overseer joined him in the doorway, and together they bent over the prostrate form of the hag who had worked her weird ritual a few moments ago. From her breast protruded the feathered shaft of an arrow encased in cobra skin. Bob reached down and withdrew it.

"The *Naga* arrow," he said softly. "Now, what can all this mean?"

"It means," said Ferguson looking Bob squarely in the eye, "that for some reason the tribes to the North are threatening you. Take my advice and leave immediately."

Bob returned his gaze coolly. "It's not only the tribesmen who want to get rid of me, apparently," he said. "I guess that certain white men would be glad if I cleared out, too. But no, Ferguson. I'm staying to solve this business."

"It means death—horrible death."

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "Well, then," he said calmly. "What of it? Better men than I have died before this."

Ferguson turned and left the shack, but before he went Bob saw the flicker of apprehension in his eyes, and he knew that at last, he had scored over the dour Scotsman.

CHAPTER IV

Mac

WHILE Bob was consuming his breakfast the following morning, Mac appeared on the veranda. Delighted to see the only white man who had treated him like a human being since his arrival, Bob sprang up to welcome him.

"Hello, MacGraw," he cried pumping his hand. "I'll get a boy to take care of your horse, then you must eat with me."

Mac grinned.

"I'll eat," he said. "But I have no horse."

"How did you get here?"

"Walked."

"Walked? In this heat? In this country? I thought a white man never walked."

Mac sat down.

"It's quite evident," he said slowly, "that you don't know who I am."

Bob looked at him curiously.

"No," continued the other. "As a

matter of simple fact, I'm a beachcomber, who through a caprice of fate has been removed from his beach. I'm invariably broke. I have no horse, and so little credit that Creighton wouldn't lend me one if I wanted it."

Bob regarded him with a puzzled look. "I don't quite understand," he said. "You mean you have no money? Is that it?"

MAC put his cup down with a clatter. "That about sums it up," he said with a smile. "I wandered up this way from Mandalay and Rangoon, some time ago. Got tired of my old haunts. I finished up here. It's an easy life. I know enough about medicine to make myself useful. The natives like me, and I sell them cures in the form of aspirin for enough to live on. Then, too, there are the orchids."

"The what?" asked Bob.

"The orchids," said Mac. "The jungle's hearts of gold, I call them. I'm very fond of them. That's why I stay here. I like to look at them."

"You stay here?" asked Bob, incredulity showing in his voice. "You give up the comforts of civilization because you like to look at orchids?"

"Why not? They're more beautiful and less selfish than any woman civilization has to offer."

"I see," said Bob. "Well, Mac, unlike Creighton, I don't care how broke you are. Your credit's good here."

"Thanks," said the Irishman. "But enough of my affairs. I take it that you have some of your own."

"Plenty," said Bob grimly as he proceeded to unfold the events which had taken place since his arrival at the plantation. Mac listened intently.

"Undoubtedly," he commented when Bob had finished, "that frog business was some sort of ritual. The very fact that the old woman

selected your bedroom to work her magic in indicates that it has something to do with you. Have you any idea who the woman was?"

"I questioned the natives, and discovered that she was of the Abors, though no one had ever seen her about here before."

Mac nodded gravely. "Then she came down from Assam, through the treacherous jungle to work her magic. To take those risks it must have been important for tribal reasons."

Bob nodded. "But what on earth can it be? And what's Ferguson got to do with it? I'm sure he's mixed up in it somewhere."

"He probably is. You say that the old woman, said in English 'There will you find her?'"

"She said: 'Before the moonsoon—to the North—beyond Nizam Ghat and beyond, there will you find her.'"

MAC rose to his feet. "I'll be back in an hour," he said. "I think I know someone who can explain the frog business anyway. After we solve that we mastermind the rest of it."

The day was uneventful, and as the cool of the evening came down upon the plantation, Mac returned.

They sat together on the veranda sipping their cool drinks. Bob noticed that his new friend's face was usually grave.

"Any news?" he asked.

Mac nodded slowly. "Yes," he said. "It was rather as I thought. I

called on an old native patient of mine, a chap I had cured of malaria. He didn't know a great deal about magic, but he knew at least part of the significance of the frog business."

Bob sat up eagerly in his chair. "What did he tell you?"

"It means that the old sorceress meant that you must travel North, beyond Nazim Ghat, a far flung outpost above the Debang River. That's in the Naga country, and to my knowledge no white man has ever been there."

"But why? Why must I go there?"

"Because," said Mac gravely, "because the frog jumped that way."

Bob look at him inquiringly.

"Yes," continued the Irishman. "It seems that the ritual of the frog is performed to discover in what direction one must go in search of what he must find."

"What must I find?"

Mac shrugged. "Answer that and you've solved the mystery. The point is that the murdered old woman was trying to tell you something. Something which evidently concerned you and her religion as well. There's something of interest to you lying beyond the jungle. God only knows what it is."

"God—and possibly Ferguson," said Bob grimly.

At that moment there came ripping through the air from the native quarters, a shrill scream.

What new danger confronts Bob? What is the mysterious mission indicated by Frog Magic? Does Ferguson prove an enemy? The answer to these and other thrilling questions will be found in succeeding installments of "The Lake of Flaming Death" . . . Continue this Exciting Serial in Next Month's Issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES

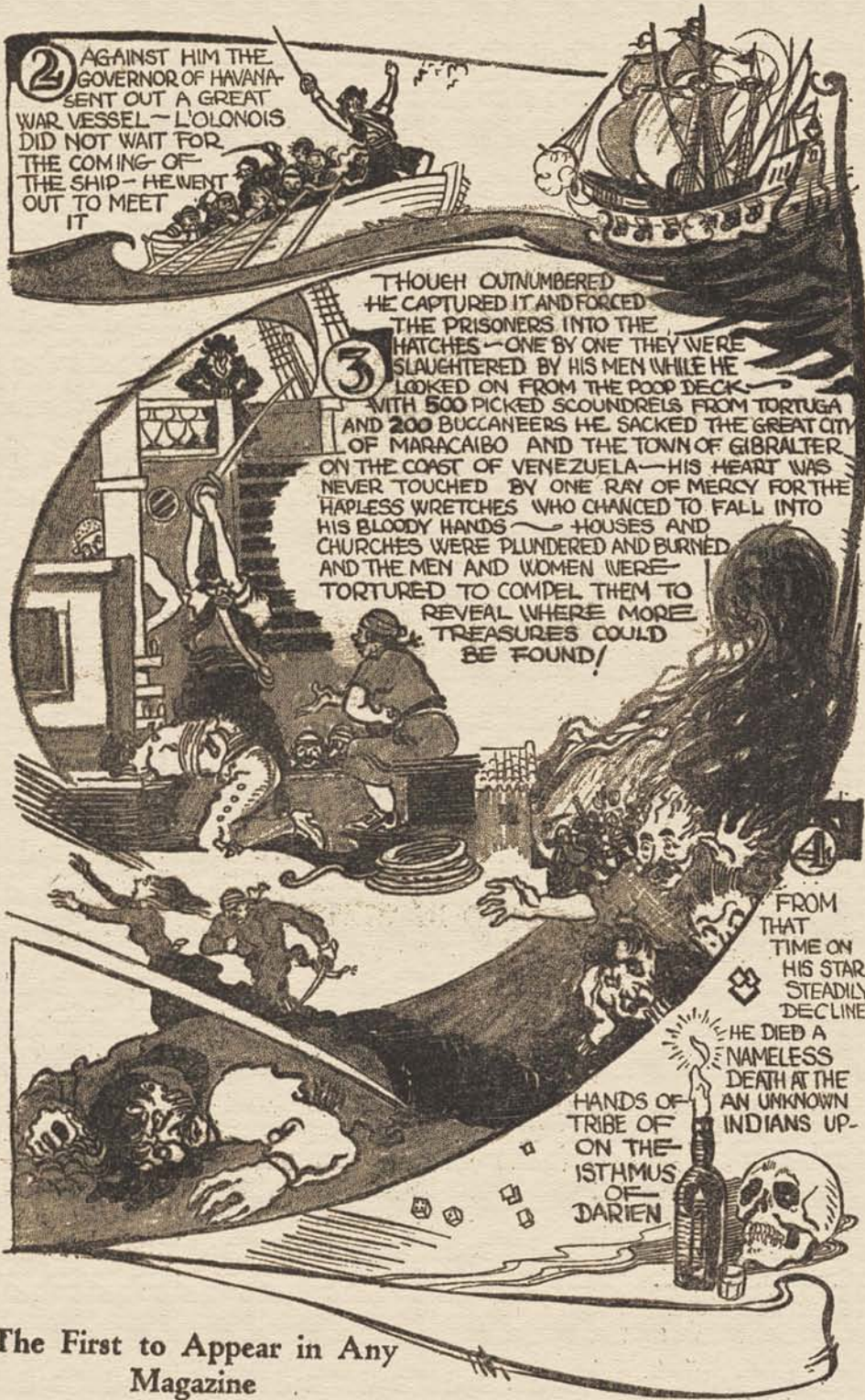
FAMOUS SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE



1
FRANCOIS
L'OLONOIS

PIRACY RAGED ON THE HIGH SEAS IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES ♦♦ AND ONE COLD UNIMPASSIONED AND MERCILESS NAME IS THAT OF FRANCOIS L'OLONOIS ~ HIS RISE DUE TO ILL FORTUNE WAS NOT RAPID ~ HE WORKED HIS WAY UP BY DINT OF HARD LABOR

This is the Original Illustrated
Adventure Feature



2 AGAINST HIM THE GOVERNOR OF HAVANA SENT OUT A GREAT WAR VESSEL - L'OLONOIS DID NOT WAIT FOR THE COMING OF THE SHIP - HE WENT OUT TO MEET IT

3 THOUGH OUTNUMBERED HE CAPTURED IT AND FORCED THE PRISONERS INTO THE HATCHES - ONE BY ONE THEY WERE SLAUGHTERED BY HIS MEN WHILE HE LOOKED ON FROM THE POOP DECK - WITH 500 PICKED SCOUNDRELS FROM TORTUGA AND 200 BUCCANEERS HE SACKED THE GREAT CITY OF MARACAIBO AND THE TOWN OF GIBRALTER ON THE COAST OF VENEZUELA - HIS HEART WAS NEVER TOUCHED BY ONE RAY OF MERCY FOR THE HAPLESS WRETCHES WHO CHANCED TO FALL INTO HIS BLOODY HANDS - HOUSES AND CHURCHES WERE PLUNDERED AND BURNED AND THE MEN AND WOMEN WERE TORTURED TO COMPEL THEM TO REVEAL WHERE MORE TREASURES COULD BE FOUND!

4 FROM THAT TIME ON HIS STAR STEADILY DECLINED

HE DIED A NAMELESS DEATH AT THE HANDS OF AN UNKNOWN INDIAN UP-
 HANDS OF TRIBE OF ON THE ISTHMUS OF DARIEN

The First to Appear in Any Magazine

The Inn of Treachery



*A Stirring Story of Paduan Days of Old and
the Thirst for Vengeance*

By GUIDO RENGETTI

Author of "Days of the Doges," "Waters of Strife," etc.

MY lord, Carlos Catalano, the Duke of Padua, deserved the love of his subjects, if ever a prince did, and for the most part he had it; but it pleased fate to give him as his deadly foe the very man whose intelligence he needed most, his greatest vassal, that plotting, black-hearted, consummate villain, Luigi Magnozzi.

For my part there are times when I thank Heaven that I am no crowned ruler, but only plain William Fraser, English soldier of fortune and captain of the best band of mercenaries that ever bore lances.

I can deal with my enemies with cold steel, and they seldom trouble me twice; whereas a prince, though as mortal as you or I, with full as many loves and hates, must consider policy and duty and the good of his land—that is, if he be a prince worthy of his throne.

Duke Carlos felt little good-will toward the man who had betrayed him secretly and defied him openly. Nevertheless, when I had stormed Magnozzi's stronghold and brought its master into Padua a prisoner, and he, perceiving that his shrift was likely to be a short one, made a

humble plea for pardon, my lord considered several things.

He considered that if Magnozzi met the death he merited, his great lands would descend in inheritance to his daughter. He considered that this daughter had been married for some years to a powerful Venetian noble.

He considered that Venice was the tireless rival of Padua, and that, should Magnozzi's son-in-law possess such wide estates within the Paduan boundaries, the peace of the duchy would surely be menaced. So he pardoned his old enemy and wiped the score clean.

Now all this was, of course, none of my affair, nor did it concern me overmuch if my lord, the duke, chose to believe in this peace pact and to assume that Magnozzi would prove his faithful ally in the future, according to the bond.

But when, some time after, my lord conceived the mad idea of passing the night at an inn situated on Magnozzi's lands and scarcely a mile from his castle, I felt that it was full time for me to take a hand in the game and open his eyes to the risk he ran.

The three of us—Duke Carlos, my Irish lieutenant, Dennis O'Rourke, and myself—were riding back to Padua in the dusk of a sharp October afternoon, after paying a visit of inspection to one of the duke's fortresses. We were late beyond our expectation, and it was now plain that we could not reach the palace until the night was far advanced.

THIS prospect and the nip of the night air set the duke's wits to working. He ended by pointing out to us that there was small sense in journeying through the cold, when, within a few moments, we would pass a hostelry that could shelter us till the morning.

If it were a rude place, so much the greater would be the zest of adventure; and it would amuse him to be served by Magnozzi's people.

At this absurd suggestion I spoke my mind as freely as ever man did—and had my trouble for my pains.

"Oh, you soldiers are too suspicious, Sir William!" the duke smiled good-humoredly, when I had paused. "Because Magnozzi once fought me, must he always be my enemy?"

"You do not like this gentleman, nor, to be frank, do I; but he has sworn allegiance to me on the honor of his name, and I choose to believe him honest. Besides, he will be quite unaware of our presence at this inn. Why should we fear him, then?"

"My lord," I said bluntly, "you know no more of such gentry than of—let us say the devil, a most appropriate comparison. Even to pass through Magnozzi's lands without a guard, as we are now doing, is an imprudence I should never have counselled.

"As for this other piece of madness, what proof have we that the old knave might not pause at his inn this very evening and discover you there?"

"And what think you he would do then, knowing that you were utterly at his mercy?"

THE three of us exchanged words for a time, each stubbornly set in his own belief. Then the duke ceased smiling and narrowed his eyes.

"Tonight I sleep at the inn yonder. Is my decision clear?" he asked haughtily. "That is well—for I am the master, I think, Sir William Fraser!"

"Aye," said I surlily, "and better for you if you were not, and if we could drag you back to Padua and put you under the guard of my sol-

diers until it please the saints to give you back your sanity!"

He laughed at that, for what he called my soldier's bluntness always amused him.

"I fancy you would get little help in such an undertaking from O'Rourke, who is madder far than I," he retorted. "Come, I know why you are so black. You had planned to spend this evening among the roses with Lady Fraser! Ride on to Padua, then, if you choose, and Messer Dennis and I will enjoy the adventure by ourselves."

I shook my head gloomily. "If you are bent on such folly, my place is with you. But in the name of Heaven, grant me at least one boon. Keep your rank and title to yourself, and do not let the people of the inn know who it is they entertain!"

"Very good," he answered after a reflective pause. "You shall have your way, my friend. Now, are you satisfied?"

"Aye, satisfied as Damocles was when the sword hung over his head!" I returned grimly.

So we set spurs to our horses and galloped toward where the distant lights were glimmering through the dusk.

THE inn kept by Magnozzi's people was situated at the crossing of two roads, one of which ran in the direction of Padua, while the other led steeply up a hill to where Luigi's fortress-castle perched like an eagle among its crags.

A mean-looking, roughly built place, it was by no means inviting; but we were all weary after the day's ride, and the prospect of a fire and a meal was tempting enough to cheer us considerably as we dismounted and hastened in out of the darkness and the cold night air.

It appeared that there were no

other guests, and we got a warm welcome from the wizened, shrewd-eyed little host and his dark, silent, hard-mouthed wife—a rather unprepossessing pair, it struck me, and much the sort of fry that old Magnozzi might have been expected to harbor on his lands.

There was a fire roaring in the chimney-place and we promptly gathered around it and began to warm our chilled limbs.

"An adventure, Sir William; a true adventure!" the duke kept repeating, as he glanced about the mean little room.

PERHAPS to one reared in palaces it was, though, for my part, I had passed too much time among such scenes to find them particularly enlivening. My host had vanished immediately after our arrival, but his wife now appeared with our supper, and we fell on it with a good appetite, while Dennis loudly voiced his satisfaction with the meal.

"Sure and it's yourself can cook to the king's taste, no less!" he informed the woman. "Never did I see a better roast than the one I'm eating now! Come, tell us, are you growing rich at your trade? And do you find him a good master, this Magnozzi, on whose lands you dwell?"

"'Tis mesilf am a stranger to Padua and know little of its nobles, but I'm hearing on all sides naught but good things of your master. A rare nature, they tell me; gentle, charitable, most faithful to those above him. And is it true, now?"

"A good lord," the woman assented, without a flicker of expression on her hard face. If she suspected his irony, she was far from showing it.

"But the Duke of Padua," I suggested with a side glance at my lord, "scarce merits the loyalty of such a one. A tyrant, many people say, a spendthrift, a proud, addle-

headed rogue who plunges his duchy into troubles of all sorts! I know nothing of this, you understand; I have only heard it. What is your mind in the matter?"

SHE glanced at me quickly, then lowered her eyes.

"I cannot say, signor," she told me composedly. "I have never seen him. Should he come here to my inn to-night and be pleased to conceal from me his name, I would be none the wiser!"

On the last word she left the room and went back into the kitchen, and we, who remained, stared open-mouthed into one another's eyes. Had she recognized us? I thought that she had, the duke maintained she had not, and Dennis declined to commit himself.

"Ye never can tell with a woman," he said solemnly. "Wait till our host comes back and I'll soon reach the bottom of this matter. Bless us all! And what's this?"

It was the sound of galloping hoofs in the near distance. They approached rapidly, there was a noise of voices without, and an instant later the door was thrown open and there appeared on the threshold, with a pair of black-visored, scowling troopers behind him, a white-haired, hawk-nosed, keen-eyed gentleman in a plumed hat and gold-embroidered cloak, whom, with a sinking of the heart, I recognized as Luigi Magnozzi!

In a flash I realized that the very thing I had foretold had come to pass.

At the sound of the opening of the door the duke had turned in his seat, and the eyes of the two men met.

Instinctively I reached back and loosened my sword, half-rising from the table as I did so; but what followed gave me a surprise and made me feel rather ashamed of my haste.

Magnozzi stood a brief instant on the threshold, gazing at us in apparent stupefaction. Then his look turned to one of delighted welcome, and, springing across the room with an agility remarkable in a man of his years, he bent his knee before the duke and fervently kissed his hand.

"Welcome, my lord, welcome!" he cried. "I had not known that you were so near me; a thousand pardons that I am so late in greeting you! But why pass a night in such a place as this, when my castle and all in it are at your service? I am but now on my way home after a day afield. Ride with me, then, and let me house you suitably!"

HE turned to O'Rourke and me with a beaming smile, apparently quite forgetful of the not so far distant day when he had ridden to Padua a prisoner in the midst of my White Company.

"All friends of my prince are welcome here," he informed us, "and none more so, Sir Fraser, than you and your brave lieutenant!"

"Is it so, indeed?" Dennis demanded quite audibly. "I recall a time when you hid most rarely what tenderness you felt for us!"

For my part, I left the greeting unanswered, being in an agony lest the duke should accept Magnozzi's invitation and ride to the castle with him. To my relief, however, there proved to be limits to my lord's recklessness.

"I give you all thanks for your courtesy, signor," was his gracious answer, "but what you suggest is impossible. My friends and I are weary from riding and are going to sleep within the hour, while early tomorrow we must be on our way home.

"At some other time I will most gladly enjoy your hospitality. Mean-

while, it has afforded me pleasure to see you for even so brief a moment."

AND he smiled into the fierce eyes of the old man as composedly as if he did not know himself to be in grave danger. He had courage.

Magnozzi assented with protestations of deep regret, and then he flung a thunderbolt into our midst by announcing his intention of not leaving us at all.

"The people of the inn are most honest and trustworthy, my lord," he began, "but nevertheless, when my sovereign honors my lands with his presence, I can surrender to no one else the task of guarding him.

"I will pass the night here by the fire with two troopers; we will not sleep, we will not close our eyes! Ah, my lord, let me prove my devotion, let me make amends for my late fault to you and show my gratitude for your kindness!"

Had I stood in the duke's shoes I would have replied that to me a guard of lions and tigers would be preferable to one composed of Magnozzi and his men; and I think the old knave read my thoughts well enough in the look I gave him.

Nevertheless, it was perfectly plain that since we were in his power we had better not start a quarrel, and I was not surprised to hear my lord answer graciously, accepting his offer with every appearance of trust.

Seldom in my life have I been more pleased at anything than I was that night when the duke arose and announced his intention of going to bed. The evening had been a well-nigh insupportable one, and had it been prolonged, I fancy it would have ended in a general *mélée*, in the course of which our ill-assorted quartette would have cut one another's throats.

Dennis, who possessed no more prudence than was to be expected from one of his nation, had been doing his utmost to exasperate Magnozzi by a series of covert allusions to his late rebellion and downfall; that gentleman had retorted by veiled attacks on me, and I had defended myself with the best wit I could muster. The duke alone, though amused and annoyed by turns, had maintained a pretense of serenity and sought to keep the peace. An hour or two of this congenial chatter had exhausted us, and we were visibly cheered at the thought of separating for the night.

MAGNOZZI guided us above-stairs in person and ushered the duke into a room which was, he declared, the best in the place, and later conducted O'Rourke and myself into the one next to it.

"Good dreams, Sir William," he said, lingering an instant on my threshold, "and never fear but that I will guard our prince well!"

"You had better do so," I responded, with a shrug of the shoulders, "for if any harm came to him there are some of his friends at Padua who would know the reason for it!"

He scowled at me blackly, then turned away.

"You think yourself a clever man, Sir William," he snarled, letting his venom appear openly for the first time that evening, "but there may yet come a time when you will find that others beside yourself can play a winning game!"

Before I could answer him, he was gone, slamming the door behind him.

This vague threat did not trouble me much. Indeed, I was growing easier in my mind, for surely, I thought, had he intended us any active harm he would not have waited so long before attempting it.

Weary but contented, I stretched myself on the rude straw pallet that did duty for a bed.

"Praise Heaven that my lord showed wit enough not to pass the night at the old rogue's castle!" I yawned to Dennis. "That would have been the end of us all, I think. Well, tomorrow we shall be home again and his mad jaunt will be over!"

"'Tis the devil of a queer evening we've had, nevertheless," he murmured sleepily. "A meal at an enemy's inn, a pair of innkeepers whom that old spalpeen is after saying he trusts, which is a good reason for suspecting them. Aye, and a night passed with Magnozzi watching over us, save the mark—"

He halted on the very borderland of slumber for a final thrust.

"And there's another queer thing sticks in my mind. Our friend there was after saying he was on his way home, you recall; but I heard the hoofs of the horses in the distance and I could swear on my soul 'twas *from* the castle and not *toward* it they came, which proves—"

HIS voice trailed into silence. He was asleep, but he had left his words behind him, and I found that they had banished all my desire for repose. Propping myself on my elbow, I thought steadily for a long time.

I remembered that the innkeeper had vanished immediately after our arrival. Perhaps he had recognized the duke and hurried to Luigi's castle with the news!

The result of my musings was that I rose, took up my sword belt from the floor, buckled it round me, and, bending over O'Rourke, shook him ruthlessly awake.

"What is it you're wanting, anyhow?" he stammered.

"Hush!" I muttered, my hand

across his mouth. "Listen to me, Dennis. There is deviltry here. I am sure of it. We have been blind not to suspect sooner. Heaven send we are not too late! Now follow me and do it without noise, if you hope to keep this side of the gravel!"

BEING wide awake by this time he obeyed me as if it were all the most natural affair possible, and, inch by inch, testing each board lest it should creak beneath our feet, we stole across to the door. Very slowly I unbolted it and swung it open.

Before us stretched the dark line of passage, and I tiptoed noiselessly across it to the stairs, thrust out my head and stared down into the lower room where Magnozzi had informed us he meant to mount guard.

The fire, though nearly extinguished, still lit the place with a faint glimmer, and I saw exactly what I had expected to see. There was no sign of either Luigi or his troopers!

There was mischief afoot, that was certain, and I could think of but one way to cope with it. Rejoining O'Rourke, I beckoned him to follow me, and we stole cautiously to the duke's door. I put my hand on it and swung it open. Yes, he had left it unbolted, quite as I had expected.

And now he was fast asleep! Had he not been a ruler and therefore accustomed to such predicaments as the present one, I would surely have dubbed him an imbecile, and, as it was, his complete unconcern toward his danger irritated me extremely.

For a little while I stood motionless, accustoming my eyes to the darkness. The couch itself was in the shadow, but part of the room was illumined faintly by the moonlight that poured through the window.

Very slowly and cautiously I made a tour of inspection and found, I must say, little enough to

reward me. There was but one door, and it had a firm bolt; the paneled walls seemed strong and solid; the window was high above the ground and barred.

How anyone could enter I was at a loss to conceive, yet I was anything but easy in my mind.

WHEN I had ended my search, I knelt down by the duke's pillow, stretched out a hand to seize his shoulder and had the misfortune to drive it against his eye instead. Naturally enough, he started up with an oath, and as the situation was urgent I ventured to silence him in the same fashion I had used with Dennis.

"It is I, Fraser, my lord!" I hissed, my hand still firmly over his lips. "I have come to implore you to sleep in my chamber and to permit me to sleep here. There is danger tonight, and I have discovered a way to meet it."

He was anything but grateful for my solicitude, and he let me know as much frankly. There was no danger, he maintained, and he was out of patience with my forebodings. Was it not enough that his couch was hard as any stone, and must I rob him of what little slumber he could get?

Throughout this tirade I kept my hand over his mouth, so that he could formulate the words only in gasps, for I did not mean that he should rouse the house.

"My lord," I muttered desperately, "do you remember Castagnaro? I won Verona for you that day, and I saved your life as well. If you are grateful, pay me now. Go into my chamber and bolt the door, and leave me to my devices here!"

I had touched the right chord at last.

"Have your way. 'Tis a strange return for such a service, but each

man to his taste," he grumbled, and rose from the couch.

When he reached my room and I heard him bolt the door behind him, I shut O'Rourke and myself into the chamber and began my preparations.

These were of the simplest. I piled the covers of the couch into such a shape as resembled, in the shadow, the body of a man; then I stretched myself in the gloom near it with my drawn sword beside me, motioned to Dennis to do the same and hissed in his ear a command for silence. He obeyed me to the letter, for he went promptly to sleep.

If any man thinks it a pleasant diversion to lie in the dark waiting for he knows not what danger, I wish him the same experience I had that night.

BENEATH that roof, I could have sworn it on my hope of heaven, was some black plot for the sudden removal of the duke and the soldier who was the duke's right hand. A web had been woven round us, and it was drawing closer and closer beneath the cover of the darkness.

The fact that I did not see how anyone could enter a barred and bolted room made me but the more uneasy, since it lent a sinister note to the affair. The face of old Magnozzi rose before me, lined, bitter, fierce-eyed. He was a most consummate villain, and something whispered to me that tonight he played to win.

The minutes dragged by, the night wore on and still nothing happened. The house was as silent as death; never a board creaked, not a breeze sighed without. I lay very tense and alert, my eyes continually roaming from side to side of the chamber, always seeking for a sign of the peril that would presently come upon me.

Yet, I say it to my shame, no man

can remain watchful forever, and at last my vigilance began to relax a little. It was very late now. The moonlight was fading. Perhaps after all I had deceived myself. Perhaps—

Another instant and I believe I would have been in a doze. My eyelids were falling, and beneath them I gazed dreamily at the one spot on the opposite wall where the moonlight still lingered. Praise God that in that drowsy moment I looked there and not elsewhere! The one glance was enough, for it showed me what sent sleep fleeing, and brought me back to my senses with a bound.

Was I mad, or was it true that beneath my eyes the wall was swaying outward? A cold chill swept over me; I pinched my arm to convince myself that it was not a nightmare. The thing was mysterious and ghostly, more hair-raising a thousand times than the clash of arms and the sound of spurs would have been.

Not a sound broke the stillness of the night, but slowly and steadily, under the rays of the moon, the panel swung out and a black void was revealed behind it! Then I understood. There was a secret door in the wall, and our foes were coming through it!

MAGNOZZI was the first of the invaders to appear. As I watched, he stepped lightly into the room and paused for an instant, waiting until the two troopers had emerged in their turn from the dark hole.

Each man carried a drawn sword in his hand, and, if I ever read murder in my life, I read it then in the fierce, pale, twitching face and gleaming eyes of my enemy and the grim, dark countenances of his followers.

Nevertheless, I was now quite calm. I put out my hand and grasped O'Rourke's shoulder, and he stirred

slightly, then stiffened, and lastly drew a sharp breath. Satisfied, I released him. Among his other admirable qualities he numbered the power of waking with all his wits about him, and I knew he was already alive to our peril.

Signor Magnozzi tightened his grip on his sword-hilt. I could see the muscles of his hand grow tense in the moonlight. He began to steal forward, testing each board before he trusted it with his weight. After him, dark and noiseless, came the troopers. They were approaching the couch in the shadow, where they believed that the duke lay asleep.

AS for me, I did not stir, though the mounting anger in my heart made quiescence well-nigh impossible. Carlos Catalano had pardoned this man, had treated him with the generosity of a noble and princely soul. In return he was to be stabbed in his sleep at a roadside inn!

Magnozzi was very close to me now, crouching, creeping. A moment more and I felt his quick, hoarse breathing almost against my cheek. He bent toward the couch, raised his hand, leaned forward to strike. Then I sprang to my feet, and knocked up his sword with mine.

On the instant bedlam reigned about us. Magnozzi started away with a choked cry of furious bafflement, and I pressed him backward in a frenzy of rage, allowing him small time to collect his wits.

"Ah, would ye then, ye murdering divils!" I heard O'Rourke shout with an exultant laugh, and knew that he had fallen with enthusiasm on the two troopers.

Doubtless they were picked swordsmen and desperate fighters, but I did not think the two of them would get beneath the Irishman's guard.

For my part, though to fight in

the dark is not child's play, I have enjoyed few things as I enjoyed that combat. Since to have killed Magnozzi too easily would have lessened my pleasure, I was glad to find that he possessed an unusual skill. Our blades crossed and recrossed, ringing together sharply. Yes, he was clever and cool, too. Already he had recovered from his fright, and was beginning to attack as well as defend.

I recalled grimly that he was said to have passed much of his life in France. Well, certainly he had studied fencing there.

THROUGH the clash of steel I could hear Dennis laughing and jesting as he fought, but I had small leisure to heed him. Magnozzi's breath was coming fast; he was learning what manner of swordsman he had against him, and his courage weakened as I drove him steadily back.

"Gilberto! Andrea! Aid me!" he panted over his shoulder to the troopers.

"Is it your cut-throat friends you're wanting? Sure, and they're engaged elsewhere and most urgently!" O'Rourke mocked from the other side of the room.

Magnozzi gasped, and I will not deny the sound was sweet to my ears.

"It is best, before you come to stab a sleeping man, to be sure that he is not awake," I said grimly, as I parried his thrusts. "Above all, it is best when the man chances to be Catalano of Padua, a great and noble prince who has true friends as well as cowardly, lying foes—"

"Sir William!" he panted. "Sir William Fraser!"

Until I spoke I think he had not been sure who was at his sword's point, and with the coming of this knowledge all hope of victory plainly left him.

"Yes," said I, "Sir William Fraser, who now intends to kill you like any dog, as you would have killed your master. I have wasted too much time on you already. Say your prayers, if you can call them to mind!"

Again he gasped hoarsely. He was facing the windows now. The moon, shining across our swords, gave me the light I needed for my thrust, and I feinted once, twice, three times, and ran my blade through his body. He cried out chokingly, then flung up his arms and fell.

Wrenching my weapon free, I sprang over to O'Rourke and found my advent to be a most timely one. He was fighting most brilliantly and enjoying himself to a quite unreasonable extent, but the two against him were no pigmies, and one of them had swung round behind him, and was about to plunge a sword into his back when I interfered. Thereafter, for a time, each of us fought his own man.

The uproar had aroused Duke Carlos from the sleep of the just in the next room, and he was now pounding on our bolted door, and clamoring for an admittance which neither of us had leisure to give him. However, the end was rapidly drawing near, and soon I heard the Irishman's opponent go to the floor with a crash.

"Let in the duke!" I called. And as Dennis drew back the bolt and flung the door open, I got beneath my man's guard and brought him down.

A MOMENT later the duke was standing beside me, holding my hands and peering at me anxiously, while the innkeeper and his wife hesitated on the threshold, she raising a candle over her head and staring at the litter of bodies, he whey-faced and extremely weak-kneed.

"Sir William!" my lord was cry-

ing. "Are you wounded? Where is Signor Luigi? And, in the name of Heaven, what does this uproar mean?"

NOW, though I had been anything but idle during the few minutes, my wits had been full as busy as my sword, and I believed I understood all that had befallen us that night. Nor could I resist the temptation to play the part of the clever man who unravels the mystery.

"Signor Luigi is there, my lord," said I, pointing dramatically to where he lay huddled on the floor. "As for the meaning of the occurrence, it is what I propose to discover now."

Striding suddenly across to the doorway, I halted beside the startled innkeeper and his wife, and keenly scrutinized their faces in the hope of discovering which of the pair was best suited to my purpose.

The woman, though pale, confronted me with steadiness, but the man was a pitiful sight in his terror, and I promptly addressed myself to him.

"Listen to me, my friend," I said harshly. "The gentleman yonder, he in the center of the floor, is the Duke of Padua. Ah, you did not know? You are astonished? That is somewhat strange, is it not, when you recognized him on his arrival here, and straightway took yourself off to inform Magnozzi of his coming?"

"We, my lord? Never, as the Virgin hears me!" the woman cried, in a desperate effort to divert my attention.

But I never took my eyes off her husband's pasty face.

"Ah, you choose to lie, do you?" I demanded. "You had better beware! If you speak the truth it may be that the duke will show you mercy. If you do not, I swear on my soul that this is your last hour

on earth!" And I flashed my bloody sword close before his eyes.

He flung himself on his knees in a panic.

"Pardon, pardon, my lord!" he moaned. "Yes, I confess it."

"Turn your head!" I commanded sternly. "Look at that door in the wall. You are accustomed to lodge those of your guests who carry fat purses in this room, is it not so?"

"And in the night you enter and relieve them of their abundance of this world's goods, eh? And Magnozzi knew of the trade you ply and permitted it and in return for his complaisance taxed you from your spoils."

THE man fairly grovelled before me. "It is true!" he shuddered. "But how have you guessed this, my lord, in the name of the saints?"

"In place of asking questions," said I, "you had best go thank Heaven for its mercy toward you! You know what Magnozzi planned for tonight—the murder of the duke, the killing of me who guarded him.

"But you do not know, I fancy, what he planned for tomorrow. Fools! He would have cried out in horror; he would have haled you to Padua and given you up to justice as the murderers! Do you see? Your master would have been rid of his enemy and at no cost to himself!"

Turning from their horrified faces, I confronted the duke, who was still standing in the center of the room, a good deal more serious than his wont, and obviously as much impressed by my revelations as I could have desired.

"And now, my lord," said I, "this neighborhood is far too near Signor Luigi's castle to be a healthy one for us. Let us go saddle our horses and ride back to Padua as quickly as we may!"

Beginning a New Series of Stories of an

Captain Trouble

THE
FIGHTING
FOOL

By

PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

*Author of "The Leopard Man," "The
Bugler of Algiers," etc.*



I

THE way Shattuck slid around that rock would have done credit to a fox. But, even as he did so, he knew that he was trapped. There was no other cover near. The rock had concealed him from the camp he'd been stalking. When he'd heard those voices from the rear his quick shift of position meant he'd be seen from below.

The people in these hills had eyes like hawks—eyes like those of their own hunting eagles.

In any case, he was out of rifle range from the camp. That lay about a mile below, in a hidden little valley. He'd been looking at it for the past two hours as he slowly approached it from above. In the high thin air of the mountains the camp lay microscopic—it had been like looking at it through the wrong end

of a telescope, everything minutely clear, but too microscopic to be studied.

And he had to study his moves—did Shattuck.

He didn't know where he was. He'd almost forgotten that he was a freeborn American—almost forgotten his name, he'd been called by so many different names in so many different dialects.

ALL he knew was that he was somewhere in the midriff of Asia—Himalaya country—Pamirs—Hindu Kush; that one of those gossamer billows of blue and white off there to the north might be the Tien Shan—that is, the Heavenly Mountains, as the Chinese called them.

In a general way, he was headed for China.

China to Shattuck almost meant

American Adventurer in the Orient



the United States. He'd passed his boyhood there—in Canton, Shanghai, Tientsin—where his father had lived and traded.

NO other countries open to him at all! And perhaps not even China! A man without a country! He had no papers, no relatives. He could hardly think of a living soul who could link him up with his past—who could actually swear that he was Pel Shattuck—Pelham Rutledge Shattuck—and not some international tramp who'd merely appropriated that name.

Like a wild animal caught in his dangerous position he blended himself as best he could with the gravel and dead grass at the foot of his rock and there lay completely still.

For a time the voices he had heard were stilled. He might have been

seen. Or the intruders might have spied some other game.

From where he lay, without other movement than that of his eyes, Shattuck could view the camp—or the better part of it—through a crotch of his sheepskin coat. No excitement yet!

Whatever happened, he'd have to go into some camp again pretty soon anyway.

He wondered where he was—wondered who these people were.

THESE were some of the questions that had kept him on the scout ever since running away from Juma's camp. The trouble with Juma's camp was that Juma had a daughter, a girl named Mahree. And not even a man who has got himself in bad with governments will do certain things that a girl might propose.

"*Khabadar!*"—a voice near-by had spoken.

IT was a word of warning. It hadn't been addressed to himself. But Shattuck knew that he'd been discovered.

His mind worked quickly. There was no friction even to thought in the thin air of these high altitudes. Down in the camp just now he'd seen a man staring up in his direction. He could guess the rest. The man had signaled to the hunters on the mountain. . . .

It wouldn't do to let them take him for a wolf or a bear.

Shattuck began to whine a bit of song that he'd learned in Juma's camp—just a bar or two—then stopped short.

As if by accident he thrust his foxskin cap beyond the edge of the rock. No shot was fired. He left the cap where it was and took a look from the other side. He saw four men—two of them elderly, with beards, and all of them slant-eyed. The quartette were fanned out and had their rifles ready, evidently in a maneuver to surround him.

"Let us drink tea," Shattuck offered, in one of the last phrases he'd picked up in Juma's camp.

It was an invitation to a parley, an offer to talk—they'd get the purport of it whether they understood his speech or not. He recovered his cap. He stepped from behind his rock with his own rifle ready.

"Who are you?" one of the bearded elders asked.

His language wasn't like the Kirghiz dialect of Juma's people, but it was close enough to it to be understood.

"Ameriki," Shattuck answered.

He smiled and raised his right hand in salutation. He'd dropped his rifle into the crook of his left

arm but he'd be able to use it, he guessed, if he had to.

The four stared. They were a wild looking lot, dressed in sheepskin and felt. The two elders, those who were bearded, had their left ears pierced and ornamented with large turquoise earrings. None of them looked as if he'd been washed or had had his hair cut since the day of his birth.

As for that, Shattuck felt that neither had he himself.

The four converged closely as Shattuck approached. There was an air of tenseness about them that Shattuck didn't like. They were like strange dogs closing in on a dog they'd selected for a kill.

In an instant Shattuck had swung his rifle back to ready again and had them covered—ready to fire from the hip.

The movement was so swift that they were caught unprepared. He gave them a quick survey, then addressed the elder who carried the best weapon—that alone was enough to indicate he stood higher than these others.

"Let the guns fall," he ordered. "Quickly! Then, maybe, we shall talk like friends."

II

THERE is a sort of universal language, more of looks than of words or gestures—the sort of communication that had already thrown Shattuck on his guard. In the same way he could grasp the thought of these four now as they let their weapons fall.

"Here is a mad fool! We'll get him later!"

Shattuck pushed the four guns into a pile with his foot. One was a modern sporting rifle—English, he surmised. The others looked like copies of older models—clumsy imi-

tations, but effective enough, such as might have been made in Lhassa or Kabul.

Even with his eyes down he surprised a movement from one of the younger men.

The emergency was so sharp that Shattuck spoke up in English.

"Do you want to die?"

The young man had started to signal the camp in the valley. He'd done so already, perhaps. With their telescopic eyes most of these hillmen could flash signals or read them across amazing distances.

There was a lull, then the leader of the four spoke up.

"Huzoor—"

THAT was vernacular, an address of respect; but the rest of it was coming in English—as slowly, as creakingly, as a door forced open on rusty hinges, but English.

"Excellence, we mean you no harm; and I take it that you mean us no harm."

"Who are you?"

"Your servant, Tsarong!"

The humility was too great to be sincere. Shattuck looked the old man in the eye. The gaze that met his was veiled and shrewd.

"Who are your people?"

"Just a few poor Changpas."

Changpas! People from the Chantang!

As the meaning of this simple statement flashed into Shattuck's mind it was all that he could do to suppress a start. Even so he divined an answering start in the eyes of the old man.

The Changpas were Tibetans—the people of the *tang*, the desert plains of Tibet's Far West. It was an affair of Tibet and Russia that had got Shattuck into trouble with the Cheka, the Soviet Secret Service.

Shattuck smiled pleasantly.

"Sit down, Father Tsarong," he invited; "and tell your friends to sit down. Thus! You four sit down with your backs to the camp and I'll sit here in front of you. Like that, should you see any other of your people coming from behind me, you can signal them not to shoot—as they might miss and shoot you instead."

Old man Tsarong hesitated.

"We are unworthy of that honor," he said. "Only our lord, the general, is worthy such an honor."

"What you say is perfectly true," Shattuck replied. "Send for him."

"Send for him! He is the governor of the entire Chantang!"

"Father, do as I say. Tell him you've met an earth demon who knows everything. I know all about those Russian arms you've come to this valley to get. Dorje-Pamo, the pig-faced goddess, told me about them herself."

The old man was stricken.

He mumbled an order and the three others—including the other elder himself—were for setting off together. But Shattuck stopped the rush. Only one was to go, and he was to be the best runner among them.

As the runner started off down the mountainside, Shattuck could see that there was already some alarm in the camp. A string of yaks, horses, sheep and goats had begun to straggle in from behind a shoulder of the hill, driven by women and children.

"Are you not, then, English?" Tsarong asked.

"Ameriki," Shattuck replied.

HE could see that the word meant nothing to the Tibetans. To them all white foreigners were English—that, or possibly Oross, Russian.

The three Tibetans sat in front of

him and below him at a respectful distance, facing him, their backs to the camp. Shattuck also had folded his legs and seated himself on the ground, the four surrendered rifles piled in front of him and his own weapon across his knees.

The queer thought came to him that he was no longer an outcast and a man without a country, after all. He was now as a king seated on a throne. The throne was a mountain. He had an arsenal. He had subjects who looked at him with awe, speculating, like other subjects, on the divinity of kings.

There was something about the vast panorama that surrounded him, that stimulated this thought—stimulated it to the point of sheer craziness. Yet, hereabouts, there were still legends of Alexander the Great, of Ghengis Khan and Kubla Khan and Tamerlane.

There was a persistent legend that from this part of the world would come the next great King of the World.

The three Tibetans were watching him. He was watching them.

"I am Pelham Rutledge Shattuck," he announced slowly.

He was making the announcement for himself as much as he was for them. It sounded strange to hear his own name spoken like that, even by his own voice, here in this Himalayan space. It was like some sort of a mantram—a spell. The name went vibrating off into the blue of Central Asia.

The Tibetans looked puzzled, even old Tsarong.

"Shattuck! Get that?"

There was a respectful murmur.

"Repeat it," Shattuck told them. "Shattuck!"

They tried it—first Tsarong, the linguist, then the others. They also seemed to think that it was some sort of a spell.

"*Sha-dak!*" "*Sha-dak!*" "*Sha-dak!*"

It might have been a spell, at that. As they pronounced it the name became a Chinese word meaning "trouble": *Shadak*.

They were repeating it with honorary titles added:

"*Shadak-la!*"

"*Shadak-beg!*"

"*Shadak-khan!*"

"My God," Shattuck muttered. "That's who I am, all right!"

In the silence of his thought it was as if an echo of silent thunder had come rolling back upon him out of space, calling him by a name to which he was fated:

"*Captain Trouble!*"

III

IT may have been what some would have called just a coincidence, but as that new name of his vibrated in Shattuck's thought with a queer sensation of something magical about it, a din broke out in the camp below.

"*Shadak!*"

It sounded like trouble. It was a din of horns and gongs, drums, a shouting. The whole camp, it seemed, dogs included, had begun to turn out with its full capacity of noise.

Shattuck never winced. He'd become used to a lot of things since his escape from the Cheka in Samarkand. He'd become used to a lot of things before that.

He'd gone to Russia as a mining expert—especially as one who spoke Chinese—expecting to be sent to Manchuria. Instead of that, through some error, perhaps, he'd found himself switched to Bokhara. The error, it turned out, was that he'd been falsely accused of pro-Japanese activities. It was true that he'd lived in Japan for a while.

In Samarkand he'd broken open some boxes which should have con-

tained some overdue mining machinery. The machinery turned out to be machine-guns instead, and destined for Chantang.

Suddenly, it had become desirable that he leave the country. He was in the Cheka's black list. He'd always wanted, anyway, to see Afghanistan; and the devil was there in the person of a former Afghan wazir, Michmander by name, to speed him on his way.

Michmander knew of certain lost mines in the Hindu-Kush. It was knowledge that had to be kept, of course, from the thieving government at Kabul, the Afghan capital.

Shattuck was willing.

HE stuck to Michmander in a trek that took them into mountains not marked—except vaguely and incorrectly—on any map. And they'd had a small army of cutthroats and all-round soldiers of fortune with them before they were through—Shattuck himself the only white man in the lot.

They'd penetrated to the depths of that great upheaval known as "the Purdah Lady"—"K-2"—a mountain as veiled and as hard to get to, that is, as a lady shut up in a harem.

And there they'd had a battle with wild natives who were armed with spears and long-handled hatchets.

It was a great battle.

Shattuck had seen almost all of it. And he must have done his share, for the last thing that Michmander—he who had led him into this mess—ever said to him was to call him a fighting fool.

Michmander—having been exiled from Afghanistan long ago—had passed enough time in America to have picked up some American slang.

He was laughing as he said it, in the thick of the fight, and trying to

reload his automatic—a difficult job because he'd lost a couple of fingers; and Shattuck himself was swaying on his feet and covered with blood.

"You fighting fool!"

One of the few supreme compliments ever paid to any man; for, just as Michmander said it, a long handled hatchet came swishing down and split Michmander's head like a melon.

How the fight ended Shattuck didn't clearly know. Anyway, there were parts of it that he was willing to forget.

But he had a vague idea that he'd lived for a while in a cave where long ranks of stone gods a hundred feet high looked down on small brown men bearing saucerlike lamps.

After that, there followed months—it might have been years so far as he knew then—of wandering, always wandering and always amid mountains.

When he emerged from this daze or trance it was to find he'd been adopted by Juma, the Kirghiz chief, who was almost blind. He cured Juma's blindness by simple cleanliness and an application of boracic acid. He'd worked up the wash himself from borax he'd found in the bed of a dry lake.

IN the meantime he'd found out that he had been barred from India. The Government of India was taking no chances with tramps who'd messed things up in both Russia and Afghanistan. Yet he might have told those folks at Delhi about those boxed machine-guns had they let him in.

Or again he might have stayed on with Juma. He liked the old man and Juma had given him a rifle and ammunition considerably more valuable than their weight in gold.

But the girl Mahree—fifteen, slen-

der, full-breasted, with eyes like a fawns'—had broken an apricot in two and offered him half.

THE din from the camp had assumed something like order and processional movement, swelling louder, coming nearer—horns and gongs, clanging cymbals, that tumult of shouting. The voices of women and children split through all this now and then with a shrill like that of fifes.

There were, Shattuck judged, three or four hundred persons in the mob. Most of the noise seemed to come from a solid phalanx of men in the center. It wasn't long before he could see that these men were roughly uniformed in long red robes. At first he thought that these men were masked. But in a little while he could see that what he'd taken to be masks were simply their own blackened faces.

Somewhere he'd read about those blackened faces—the fighting monks of the Tibetan lamaseries. Even their name popped up. He repeated it:

"Dok-dokpa!"

He kept his air of unconcern. But he decided that, at the first show of battle, he'd seize old Father Tsarong over there, and hold him as both shield and hostage.

"They have heard," said Tsarong, "what your presence has said about Dorje-Pamo. They wish to honor the messenger of the Pig-Faced Goddess."

It was simply stated, but it sounded like irony to Shattuck. He had an idea that old Tsarong was not so simple as he would have it appear. Nor could Tsarong have been so unimportant, either. The other elder had placed himself slightly back of Tsarong. The beardless one was frankly remote.

"Stand up and face them, Tsarong La," said Shattuck.

"Your presence—"

"Stand up and face them! Signal them to remain where they are."

There was something besides blood that had begun to beat through Shattuck's arteries. It was always that way when a fight threatened—especially if it was apt to be a fight against overwhelming odds. It was a sort of lulling warmth. It was as sweet as a bugle call to a cavalry horse. It was a premonition.

As Tsarong still hesitated—pretending not to hear—pretending not to understand—Shattuck saw a glint of something in the old man's eyes that confirmed the premonition in his veins.

FROM where he sat, Shattuck jumped.

It was a trick that Juma's young fighting bucks had taught him. They'd be sitting crosslegged on the ground—they might have been sitting like that for hours; and then—presto!—they could fling themselves to right or left, or forward or backward, as if their legs had been springs.

As Shattuck sprang, it was exactly as if a fragment of that swelling din from down the hillside had detached itself and had almost fallen upon him.

He came down crouching at the side of old Tsarong. As he did so he whirled and fired without taking aim. An instant afterward—and always afterward—it seemed to him that he must have seen what was coming up behind him with some sort of eyes different from those in the front of his head.

He'd as if seen that enemy sneaking upon him from behind.

Felt boots, red cloak, black face—it was a giant of a man, and he'd been on the point of cutting down

on him with one of the biggest swords that Shattuck had ever seen.

The bullet from Shattuck's rifle had taken the giant through the shoulder. He was twisted back and around like a big tree hit near the top by lightning. The sword got a jerk that sent it spiralling like a boomerang for a good twenty yards.

"You next?" grunted Shattuck.

And even while this was happening he had caught an arm about the old man Tsarong's shoulders.

To Tsarong it must have been like an embrace from Death.

"Shadak—Shadak Khan!" Tsarong squeaked.

In the confusion of the moment the pronouncing of that name reached Shattuck like a happy portent—a sure enough mantram.

He was aware that Tsarong wasn't the only one who'd pronounced that name. So had that other elder—also perhaps the beardless boy. The fact that they had joined in the cry—some intonation of horror and pleading in their voices—gave Shattuck an idea.

"Ai-ya!" he laughed. "You thought to fool me, Old Man Tsarong. Why, you're the Governor yourself!"

IV

ALL this had taken place in full view of that mob of dokpas and civilians coming up from the camp. They'd been coming pretty fast. There'd been a crescendo to their racket culminating in a shriek and clang that was like the explosion of a high-powered shell.

The Goliath of the sword was staggering around in a narrowing circle like a dog looking for a place to lie down. Down he went—coiled, then straightened out. He was summoning all that vast strength of his to become a man again—become the

hero he must have felt himself when he'd swung up that big sword of his to kill an earth demon, no less, and his whole tribe looking on.

It was a swift impression that Shattuck got—but detailed, one apt to be lasting. That big face of his, shining with grease and blacking, contorted with terror more than pain, was nothing human.

THEN Shattuck saw that the big man had been merely the first of several. There must have been a dozen swordsmen headed in his direction.

In one respect, at any rate, his strategy had been correct. There wasn't a single gun in sight. Tsarong must have seen to that. Unwilling to take a chance on any dokpa marksmanship he'd given his order accordingly when he'd sent his runner back to the camp.

Shattuck, still embracing Tsarong, gave an order:

"Tell your swordsmen to retire—"

The old man panted, but did not speak.

"—else I'll kill you before their eyes!"

"The victory is God's!" Tsarong panted—slowly, fatalistically—in English. He raised his voice and shrilled something in Tibetan.

Just an affair of seconds all this was—seconds that galloped like horses in a race, but each horse of a second mounted by some watchful jockey that recorded every move.

"You haven't answered me, Tsarong La," said Shattuck softly.

"Wherefore, O Shadak Khan, when you know all things?"

"It's you, the Governor of Chantang."

"I am but half the Governor, as you see, O Shadak Khan. The other half is he who sat beside me. Each district has two governors."

Shattuck eyed the other bearded and earringed elder. He'd been sitting there in a white trance.

"And what's your name?" Shattuck asked.

The old man merely gasped like a carp out of water. He wanted to answer something. But he was afraid. He hadn't understood.

"Don't you understand even the language of heaven?" Shattuck asked in his best Chinese.

"Kuan-hua!"

The stricken elder recovered himself in a gulp of amazement that made him forget his fears.

"The Mandarin dialect," was what he meant.

"My lord speaks even the language of the Sons of Heaven!"

"I am, indeed, your lord, Old Uncle," Shattuck told him rapidly in Chinese. "And make no mistake. I have proved it. I am a spirit merely disguised as a Hairy Face. Which is the superior of you twain?"

"My brother, Tsarong, is the elder."

"Doesn't he speak the Kuan-hua?"

"Inadequately. While I went East, he went West."

TELL Moon Face, here," said Shattuck, "to go get such help as is needed to carry away this crippled dokpa. He is to be cared for kindly."

Moon Face was sped on his way.

"And before he returns," Shattuck hurried on, "I'll tell you that both of you old men are deserving death. But see! Instead of that, here while all your people are looking on, I embrace you both. To him who went West I speak the language of the West. To him that went East I speak the language of the East. Who then, am I?"

"Verily, you are Shadak Khan!"

"I am Shadak Khan! I am Captain Trouble! Have you not heard

—hasn't the Dalai Lama himself heard—that a new king is coming into the world? I am he! I've come to rule the world for a while! My name is—Shadak Khan! My name is—Captain Trouble!"

Something of this talk must have reached the crowd down the hill. It may have done this partly through that curious intuition of crowds—especially of crowds already incandescent and annealed by excitement. Moon Face, the messenger, may have spread something of it as he went down seeking help for the wounded man.

A DOZEN lamas not of the fighting sort but regular *ge-longs*—the superior sort who'd had brains enough to pass their examinations, and showing it in their faces—had responded to the call. The appearance of them gave Shattuck another idea.

"And is there not one among these," he asked, "who speaks either the language of the Chiling-ky-me?—he'd put the question in English, but he'd used the only Tibetan word he knew. It made a pretty flourish.

Chiling-ky-me!

Old Juma had taught him that word. For Juma had conducted robber raids off and on into pretty nearly every section of the high country, even into Tibet. The word meant foreigners—that is, the English.

Before old Tsarong could pull himself together to answer Shattuck, it was another's voice who answered in English:

"Sir, my—father—"

Shattuck, just at the sound of that voice, felt a tingling thrill, he didn't know why. He didn't have time to ask. He'd raised his eyes and had seen the speaker—a lean face and a shaven head that might have belonged to some young Roman gen-

eral. Even his tattered robe of a Tibetan lama might have been a toga.

The voice was forcing a calm that the brilliant eyes belied.

"Sir, my — father — was — American!"

V

IT was Shattuck's turn to exert all his will at self-control. The other lamas were staring. So were the two old governors. Shattuck could feel that they were. But he kept his eyes on that soberly flashing face of the young lama who'd spoken.

"Brother," he said, "what is your name?"

"My Tibetan name is Champela."

"You have another?"

There was a long pause.

"John Day."

It had been his father's name, this young lama explained. His father had been a geologist who'd married his own Lalla Rookh in the Vale of Cashmere. They'd both been killed by an avalanche in that gorge called by the Tibetans "the Four Devil Pass."

It was also Champela himself who referred to his mother as Lalla Rookh. He'd read the poem as a boy.

"So did I," said Shattuck.

To Shattuck, after his months of exile, it was as if he'd stumbled onto a lamasery here in the heart of Asia floating the American flag.

While the other lamas carried the wounded black-face away, Shattuck deserted the two old governors and drew Champela aside.

"John Day," he said, "are you free?"

Champela reflected.

"As free as you are, Shadak Khan," he replied.

Shattuck let the title ride. There'd

been no hint of mockery in it. If anything, there'd been something just the opposite. It was as if the title had been confirmed by a prophet.

"You're not held by any vows?"

"None but those I have made to myself."

"No chief lama is your master?"

"Not even the Dalai Lama himself, Shadak Khan."

"Why don't you call me by my right name, John Day?"

"I believe that I am calling you by your right name, Shadak Khan. Your coming has been predicted since a thousand years—since twice a thousand years—"

"You mean?"

"A scourge of God, perhaps—a Shadak Khan—a Captain Trouble. He has a thousand names. But so has the sun. So has Maitreya—He Who Will Come—"

They were standing there on the high slope of what has been called the Roof of the World. The sun was going down. And with one of those sudden transformations of light so common in mountain country the snow peaks had turned to flaming gold.

"You be my prime minister, John Day," said Shattuck.

He'd still intended his proposal, even then, to sound something like a joke. But it didn't sound like a joke at all. It was as if the very mountains were celebrating the event. This was something that had been predicted since twice a thousand years.

"I'll be your prime minister," Champela told him.

"Shake!"

THE young lama might not have caught the meaning of the word in that particular sense, but he was quick enough to understand the extended hand.

"Now I'm not free," he said.

"Neither am I."

"No man is free from his destiny—and this, our meeting, also was predestined—perhaps since the beginning of the world."

There was a barbecue in the little valley of the camp that night, though not in the American style. The Tibetans like to eat their meat boiled—or raw; washed down with gallons of tea and rancid butter, or *chang*, the beer of the country, and *arrak*, a whisky distilled from the beer.

The dung fires seethed and spit blue flames.

There was singing, dancing and fights, before it was fairly dark.

The people were celebrating the advent of Shadak Khan. They weren't quite sure yet just what this signified. But it had something to do with Dorje-Pamo, the Pig-Faced Goddess. They knew that much. And that was enough. The way to please old Dorje-Pamo was to gorge and souse, brawl and make love. . . .

But John Day, prime minister of Shadak Khan, wouldn't let Shattuck partake of the feast—not even as a guest of the governors.

"They'll fill you with aconite," he said, "you'd be dead before dawn."

Most Tibetans were ardent poisoners in times of great emergency.

There was an early moon. In its ghostly light a cavalcade of ponies left the scene of the camp and wound its way further up the valley.

Shattuck was in the midst of it, in the place of greatest safety and honor. Those in front and those following, so far as he could see, were white lamas like Champela.

IN the moonlight it was hard to think of Champela as John Day, American. For that matter, Shattuck found it hard to think of himself as himself. He was something else—

something bigger than himself—something predestined since the beginning of the world.

Shadak Khan!

Captain Trouble!

VI

BY the light of this same moon a caravan of more than three hundred camels came padding back into this same secret valley from the outlying desert. Unknown to Shattuck it was this caravan for which the warring Tibetans had been waiting.

The camel-bells made music in the night. It was a rhythmic music to which the swishing feet of the stock kept time like the feet of tireless dancers. It would have been hard to find a better equipped or a better conducted caravan anywhere.

Every man was armed. Even the camel-pullers were armed.

Any old caravan man would have spotted the sort of caravan this was without looking twice.

"*T'u fang-tze!*"

Opium-runners! Caravans like this brought the precious "white opium" of Persia through the Gobi to all points east. But even an old Gobi man might have been puzzled by the loads and the haste of this present caravan if not by the trails it followed.

No opium-train ever followed the regular roads anyway.

But these camels were carrying full loads—compact and strongly boxed. Arms! That would be sure. But the trail could lead nowhere except back into the wild and thinly populated Chantang country of Tibet's Far West.

Along a smooth bit of going the owner of the outfit, mounted on a nimble black pony, drew alongside of his caravan-master, who was riding half asleep and half awake on the pick of the camels. The relations

of owner and master were about like those of owner and captain on a ship at sea.

They were speaking Mongolian, a language that had been largely developed in desert places. Their voices were no louder than the occasional bubbling of the camel the caravan-master rode.

"We'll soon arrive at the turn-off of the Thorny Well Trail, Big Man," the owner of the outfit said.

"What of it, Duke?"

"It is a short way and a safe way."

"To where we're going?"

"No, Big Man, to Kansu."

"We're not going to Kansu, Duke. We're going to the Lesser Valley of the Soaring Meditation."

"I can't help thinking about how much more money these arms would bring in China than they would in Tibet."

The caravan-master yawned and belched.

"Big Man, I mean it."

"Mean what?"

"The difference in price would enrich us both. General Hokwa is in Kansu with all the gold he collected during his last campaign."

"May it give him inflammation of the bowels!"

"But Kansu needs these machine-guns. Tibet doesn't."

"Search me!" groaned Big Man, or words to that effect.

HE dropped his head on his chest and pretended to be sleeping again. The owner of the outfit still ambled on at his side.

"Big Man," he said, "when they've got you back there in the hills, how do you know that those louse-breeding Tibetans are going to pay you?"

"I don't know it."

"What then?"

"They'll pay first or they don't get the arms."

"They may take them anyway."

"From this bunch? Don't make me laugh! This bunch? I haven't got a man in my string who hasn't been slitting throats for the past ten years! We're a bunch of fighting wildcats."

VII

WE'LL need a fighting-man like you," said the old abbot, as Shattuck stood before him.

John Day translated the Tibetan into perfect English.

"They are bringing fighting-machines into the Little Valley," the abbot went on in a whispering monotone, "and they that bring the machines are fighting men."

The abbot was very old. His eyes were so glazed that they appeared to be sightless. He seemed to be talking in his sleep about things that he saw in his sleep.

He sat cross-legged on a cushioned bench back of a carved teakwood table. On the table were a covered teacup and a bell. The table was like an altar. When the abbot was silent he sat so still it was easy to imagine that he was an image in a temple.

He was silent for a long time, then he spoke again.

"The spirit of revolution has entered Tibet. There are foolish men planning to put a king in the place of the Dalai Lama."

John Day translated. He saw that Shattuck was about to ask a question, but he raised a warning hand.

It was as if the movement had struck a spark of life from the image presented by the abbot. What he said was:

"I will answer your question, Captain Trouble."

And Shattuck knew then beyond all doubt—as he'd already been

prepared to believe—that he was in the presence of an authentic Bogdo—a Living Buddha. Although the old seer continued to speak in Tibetan it was as if a skillful painter were now casting up a picture on some invisible canvas of the air.

“Along toward the next peak-shining time”—and Shattuck could see the light of the rising sun along a mountain-crest while it was still night in the valleys.

“—they will arrive at the narrow place of this valley of ours called the Jaws of the Wolf.”

Shattuck would recognize that narrow gorge when he saw it—he would recognize it from what he was seeing now.

SEVERAL times the Bogdo seemed to be on the point of speech again, and each time that he did so Shattuck caught some fleeting vision in which the movement and the figures were confused by a red mist. Each time when the red mist was shaping itself into something definite, the Bogdo made an erasing gesture in front of him with his slender hand and the unformed picture disappeared.

Finally he murmured two words, which John Day translated:

“Acquire merit!”

The Bogdo reached out and touched his teacup as if he were about to drink. It was a ceremonial gesture meaning that the audience was ended. . . .

The Soaring Meditation Lamasery of the Lesser Valley—as the place was known—was like a series of setback houses against a steep mountain slope. As Shattuck and his new prime minister came out on an upper terrace they both could tell by the stars that the night was already far gone.

“It is time that I hit the road,” said Shattuck.

“Pel—Captain—”

“Make it Pel.”

“I’m going with you.”

YOU’RE not. I’m Captain Trouble. I’m even the Fighting Fool. I saw a blood-red mist when the Bogdo talked. You’re not a man of blood.”

“The camp is debauched and drunk. You’ll have no one to help you.”

“So much the better.”

“You can’t go alone. These are gun-runners—all fighting men.”

“His holiness, the Bogdo, saw me fighting them there alone. So did I. That’s why he mentioned that place where one man can turn them back. Is there a horse in the stables with a chestnut coat and a white mane?”

“Torang! The abbot’s own! If he showed him to you in the vision he meant you to have him.”

For an interval John Day closed his eyes. During that interval he had become Champela, the mystic disciple of Buddha again. He opened his eyes with a changed expression.

“I have just received a message myself from the Bogdo,” he said.

“What about?”

“I’m not sure myself. Follow me.”

They went down a dozen flights of steps as narrow and as steep as ladders. Most of the time they were in almost complete darkness. Only here and there a butter-lamp burned.

They came into a dusky temple room and there, without hesitation, Champela, again the mystic, went over to where a monumental statue of Buddha reared its height and breadth into the shadows from a breast-high platform. The front of this platform Champela raised like the lid of a coffer. Into this receptacle he stood gazing for a few seconds with a rapt attention.

Then he drew out a long object swathed in fold after fold of silk.

"What is it?" Shattuck whispered.

The young lama also whispered, but his voice was thrilling.

"Something else the Bogdo is sending you—the sword of Kubla Khan!"

VIII

WHEN Chief Juma awoke to the fact that his adopted son, Dak (the nearest he'd ever got to Shattuck) had put the wind between them he was very disconsolate.

Like many another hillman, nature had been generous to him in the matter of height. He was all of six feet seven in his well-worn chap-lies, the sandals he stuck to in winter as in summer. And physically he was as tough as a bundle of rattan. But he was at an age when he was prone to go over and over the same story time and again.

And now that "Dak" was gone, he was worse than ever in this respect. Formerly he'd had a number of favorite stories—how he'd killed this or that blood enemy, how he'd robbed whole caravans single-handed.

But now he could think of only that one story.

He'd come on this crazy young sahib (Shattuck) back in the hills being more or less neglected by some roaming Kazaks. After all, even Kazaks may treat a crazy man no worse than a dog. And he was about to pass up the incident when, by mere chance, he learned from a renegade Afghan the sort of battle the lad had put up against great odds while trying to raid a government gold mine.

Thereupon, in the hope of merit in heaven and also, perhaps, a few honest rupees from the sahibs to whom this lad evidently belonged, he'd sought to turn "Dak" over to the English. But the cow-eaters wouldn't have him at any price.

He'd done something that had made him skip out of the country of the Oross, the English had said. Then he'd got into this battle in Kafirstan.

After that, Juma wouldn't have parted with the boy anyway—not at any price. He'd nurtured the lad like his own child. He'd spent a year's income on prayers and medicines for him. As a result, the boy came out of his dream. And having come out of his dream he'd put the healing touch on Juma's own eye-trouble.

JUMA couldn't understand it. They'd loved each other like father and son. Why had "Dak" put the wind between them?

And so it went on and on, day after day. Until the mother of the girl Mahree came and told Juma the tale she'd learned from Mahree herself.

"Now, by Allah and all the fiends of Gehenna," said Juma, "had Dak but whispered it to me I'd given him the girl as readily as I would have given him anything else I won. Didn't he restore my sight?"

After that, he kept his band on the move. He was looking for "Dak." Over high passes and into valleys he'd almost forgotten, into villages where there were unsettled blood-claims against him, into forbidden temples and lamaseries—there was no place where Juma wouldn't go in the pursuit of that strange search of his.

To make matters worse, Mahree was getting older. Also she was gaining in beauty. He'd never gone in for purdah nonsense. He was able to take care of his women. But he'd have to wrap the girl up in a *burgua* at that, if he wanted to keep her for "Dak." He was getting higher and higher offers for her all the time.

Then, one day, Juma came on a fakir sitting naked on a glacier. And the devout neighbors assured Juma that the holy man had sat like that, unmoving since the last new moon. That meant the fakir had suffered killing frost for more than ten days. Yet he showed not the slightest ill affects from it. The man was holy.

When Juma went to see him, the holy man came out of his period of meditation and said:

"He whom you call your son is near death."

Juma said: "Sick?"

"No! In bloody battle!"

"Praise God, at least for that," said Juma. "Where?"

"I see—wait!—a lamasery in a little valley—a cleft between two hills—and there thy son is as one against a hundred—"

The sadhu stopped as if he'd never spoken at all.

"Where?" screamed Juma. "Or I'll tear you—"

The sadhu looked up at him unmoved. And Juma, for the first time in his life, began to quaver.

"Where, O holy one? See, I am getting old!"

The holy one looked at him with compassion. He made a forward movement with his hand to indicate a direction.

"That way—until the sun goes down!"

JUMA turned and strode away as he stood. He didn't have his gun. He hadn't dared carry it into the presence of the holy one as he'd wanted to be sure of having his questions answered. But he had his knife. And the hills were rich in rocks of throwing and hammering size.

He'd covered a mile before he discovered that he was followed. It

was that curse of a female, the cause of it all, the girl Mahree.

He tried to drive her back.

But to his amazement and her own, she defied him.

"Since when," she shrilled, "is a woman forbidden to fight for her man?"

IX

WITH Torang between his knees and the sword of Kubla Khan held close to his breast Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble, the Fighting Fool, was off to fight he didn't know exactly what.

Long ago he had known someone called Pelham—Rutledge—Shattuck. The name kept time to Torang's swift but easy lope. Pelham—Rutledge—Shattuck—

But it wasn't he—it wasn't he—who'd sat on a mountain throne and looked into the eyes of his subjects. It wasn't he who'd stood in the presence of a reincarnated Buddha and heard his fortune told. It wasn't he who rode an abbot's horse down a long dark valley with the sword of a great war-lord against his breast.

No, those were pages from the life of Shadak Khan—Captain Trouble—Fighting Fool—

There came to the reincarnation who was himself the sharp pang of a realizing thought. The thought was this—that he might be riding to his death. He remembered the red mist—the half-seen astral pictures that the Bogdo had wiped away with his slender white hand, the old man's final words:

"Acquire merit!"

How? If death was the way, he'd take his chance!

He looked up just in time to see a meteor slide across the sky. It wouldn't be so bad to go like that.

He felt a sense of elation. It was as if the sword against his breast were coming to life—taking on a warmth of its own. It had no scabbard. The blade was a long strong scimitar, yet so exquisitely balanced to the hilt it could be handled like a wand.

He flashed it about his head. It sang.

To that faint note Torang let out a link or two of speed. In this light the gelding's dark body was invisible. His white mane and tail glinted along like a pair of detached specters.

It was this dash of white in the dark that had given the horse his name. Torang!—the first glint of daybreak; a high cloud shining white while the earth was dark.

There was a cloud like that hanging over the easterly summits when Shattuck passed the camp where, last night, the two old governors would have given him aconite. He spat in their direction.

IT was a gesture as much for all their gorging, guzzling, lecherous herd of human swine as it was for them. And these were the men who'd barter for a revolution!

Before you could revolute a land you had to revolute yourself!

So said the heir to the blade of Kubla Khan.

The thought was still with him when the valley suddenly twisted and went into a corridor like that of some overwhelming ruin. He was at the very lips of the wolf's open jaws.

He didn't know how to pray but some instinct was telling him that the moment was solemn and that he ought to do something.

He reined in Torang, with a swift hand. He raised the sword of the great khan Kubla straight up above his head. His head went down. For

a moment he was thinking of the strange John Day.

"I sure would be glad to be good enough," he whispered, "to have him not as a prime minister—you're crazy!—but merely as a friend."

A moment later he was stirred from his reverie by some faint spasm of nervous excitement that ran through Torang's lithe frame. It was like a faint current of electricity, a silent telephone call. Torang had arched his neck. His slender ears were focusing on a distant sound.

A moment later, Shattuck was hearing the sound himself—the faint, far-off clink and clank of camel bells.

X

THE gorge of "The Wolf"—literally the throat—ran between towering cliffs for a twisted mile, and pretty bad going all the way. After the primordial earthquake had riven the mountains apart, a stream—or recurrent streams—had scoured out the bottom, leaving a debris of footless boulders, causing a cave-in here and a dike there and a pit like an elephant trap somewhere else.

The caravan-master knew all this. He had been through the gorge time and again before. It used to be part of the regular opium route until the old Bogdo of the Soaring Meditation Lamasery put an end to it.

The Bogdo was known to have great powers. Otherwise he would have "taken the aconite" a long time ago. There had often been talk among the caravan-master and his band that they could raid the lamasery and make their fortunes at it.

The place was isolated. There wasn't a drunken, brawling, dok-dokpa about the place—not a fighting man of any kind. And it was generally known that into the mountain

back of every monastery the treasure caves were being dug deeper and deeper every year. That sort of thing had been going on for centuries. The treasure of even a run-down old lamasery like that of the Soaring Meditation would be enough to buy Japan.

But they'd never tried to make a raid. They didn't dare. The Bogdo had a reputation of being in league with certain ghosts.

It was that matter of ghosts as much as the uncertain footing of the gorge that had caused the caravan-master—a pastmaster in timing, like all good smugglers—to bring his weary train to the outer mouth of the gorge just at the “peak-shining” hour.

No more ghosts after peak-shining. And there would be light enough, although night got clogged in the narrow defile and stuck there like a fog until late morning.

He didn't dare halt now, even for a minute. Camels were peculiar creatures. You could keep them going and going—as he had this time—
“*Kwa-chi-cheng!*”

ONE forced march on top of another. But let up on them, after a race like that, and the beasts would flop down and die in their tracks. Besides, inside the valley there were good grazing and water. Outside, there was none.

Still in the lead and only half awake the caravan-master pushed on into the gorge. He'd scarcely entered it before there was a clattering of hoofs and he saw a lone horseman in the shadows ahead.

From the moment the caravan-master saw this man he felt the approach of trouble—a dark horse with a white mane and tail. Then, to a sharp increase of his trouble, he saw that the man in front of him was unquestionably white.

The man came ambling toward him at a good swift track and didn't stop or speak until the caravan-master's own camel stopped.

“I know you,” said the man on the horse. His Chinese was that of Pechili, with a good snap to it. “You're Wong Tajen.” It was as if to say, “Wong the Big Man.”

Wong was beginning to simmer.

“This is no place to halt my caravan,” he said.

He guessed the fellow might be a Russian. He'd heard about big fights between opposing clans of the Oross beyond the Gobi.

“I'm halting it, Big Man.”

“Who are you?”

“Don't talk to me from a camel. Dismount!”

Big Man's ears were picking up tell-tale sounds from back of him as squad after squad of camels came to a halt.

“Dismount and send your camel ahead or all the camels will be lying down on you. You know that, Fathead.”

Wong did know it. He'd been handling camels for the better part of thirty years. But not for twenty years had anyone dared call him *ta-tou*, “fathead,” except a fresh tax-collector whom later he'd slowly killed.

WITH a curse and grunt he rolled himself from the riding camel he was on. The beast was already smelling grass and water and lurched ahead. The camel that followed also lurched. As it did so, something amazing happened. It shed its load—one heavy box to either side.

A sword had flashed across the pack rope—a mere swish, and the rope had parted.

Even while Wong was rolling from his camel he'd found the grip of the revolver he carried in the breast of his sheepskin coat. He got that far

when he stopped to think. This man might have an army back of him. Already two camels were past—his favorite of all the camels he'd ever slept on, leading the way.

The thought meant hesitation; the hesitation lost him his chance and two other camels. Two other loads had crashed down.

"Hands up and face the rock, you!"—this fellow spoke like no Russian.

There was a needle of steel against Wong's neck.

Wong's nerves were tuned to small things. In that needlepoint against his neck he could detect not the slightest quaver—no skipping, no torture.

His hands were up. His face was to the rock.

There were shocks of falling boxes, the grunt and scramble and heave of camels becoming frenzied by a prospect of camel heaven after a long, hard drag through camel hell.

And the fellow kept talking all the time—slanging the camel pullers and laughing at them; he was driving them back along the gorge as fast as he slit the lashings of the heavy freight. "Hey, you, Big Man! Why don't you ask me who I am?"

"Who?"—and Wong dared to turn.

"Hands still up, or I'll slit your throat as you did the widow's in the Traveling Sands!"

THAT was the most secret murder that Wong had ever done. His eyes were beginning to pop. The man leaned down from his horse—Torang wasn't very tall—and found with his left hand the pistol in Wong's breast. Wong felt a faint breath of courage when the white devil searched no further—else he'd found a second pistol lower down.

"Who are you, duke?" Wong asked placatingly.

"Not 'duke,' kahn!" He stopped

to sever the ropes on two more camels and Wong had snatched his second pistol higher. "Shadak Kahn!—all same Captain Trouble. You savvy, Captain Trouble?"

Shadak Khan turned to yell at a camel puller who was trying to stop a camel by the nose-rope. The camel-puller was either stupid or deaf. He raised apologetic frightened eyes to the horse-riding duke and pulled harder than ever.

At that instant there was a crashing report—it sounded like a hand-grenade, there in the rocky confines of the gorge.

Shattuck felt a blaze of heat at his side as if his coat had caught on fire. But before he'd take note of this—more swiftly than Wong the Big Man could fire his Number Two gun a second time—Shattuck lunged. Like a thing alive and self-directed the sword of Kubla Khan slit the Big Man's throat.

XI

TIBETANS are early risers. Their climate has made them so. Late night and morning hold about the only golden hours they ever know. Along about mid-day the horrible wind comes up—the buran, the hideous dry gale that blows stronger and stronger under a blanched and cloudless sky.

As often as not the people of Tibet will be up and about well before daylight even after a night of debauch.

It was so this morning in the little valley, in the camp of the two old governors, Tsarong and his brother. Then the black-faced fighting lamas were thirsty and on the prowl for fresh adventure so early—or so late—that there had practically been no night for them at all. And the dokpas were the first to note that queer invasion of camels from the

Throat of the Wolf. They were a superstitious lot, those dokpas—none more so, since to each of them had come, some time or other, manifestations of powers they could not understand.

These blubbing, crazed, and naked camels rocking into the valley like so many camel ghosts, and something really terrifying about them.

The governors were roused.

In an incredibly short time the whole camp was up and active. These were livestock people—more used to yaks than camels, but recognizing in this stampeded herd more value than a century of goats would ever bring.

OLD Tsarong wasn't long in putting two and two together.

This was the munition train they'd come to meet. Something had happened to it. But what? Where were the men? Where was the freight?

Through the thin air of daybreak they heard that distant revolver shot. After that, there were the muted staccato barkings of a small-arm battle.

While the governors were still shouting conflicting orders, a special shout went up and the people fell aside as if tossed by an invisible plow and through this furrow—beautiful as a dream-horse and as elusive—they saw the horse of the Bogdo go trotting by.

"Torang!"

Torang they believed to be as holy as its master. They saw it saddled but riderless, unblemished, uncannily wise when it came to its keeping on its way. Wasn't it likely that it was ridden by a ghost?

It had come very close to that.

In less than a minute after Wong had fired—and died—Shattuck recognized that this was no place for an abbot's horse—or any horse. He had

an overwhelming gust of pity for all horses, camels, dogs—and men! These men had fought the Gobi until they were as cruel as the Gobi itself! He'd sent Torang home.

This wasn't a chain of reasoning.

His reasoning all went into the fight—clear, precise, perceptive with a thousand eyes only opened in times like these.

Still with that revolver he'd taken from Wong in his left hand and the great scimitar in his right, he plunged on further into the pass.

Already the place of his first stand was being choked with cast boxes, and blue steel brought a flash of clairvoyant memory. He'd seen these self-same boxes, and at least a part of what was in them, back in Samarkand.

He cut more pack ropes and dodged. Camels slipped and straddled and disappeared. Horses were being kicked forward by hard-faced Mongols.

Shattuck would remember those faces. When the world needed fighters, these were fighters. But they'd have to be led, bled, crucified, to be taught the things they'd known before when they conquered half the world.

ONE was poking a gun in his face when Shattuck dodged under the horse's belly and cut the gunman down from the other side. An instant later he'd fired his first shot and had seen the horse jump from under its rider as if the fellow had been roped.

The confusion saved him a dozen, a score of times.

"Back!" he shouted. "Or you'll all be killed!"

"*Ya-ming!*"

That was shorter: "Sure death!"

Some of the riders were trying to turn back to regain the desert.

Camels were writhing, moaning,

grinding their teeth. Some thudded to a fall and squalled as panic wrenched them to their feet again.

A sudden weakness blew a breath over Shattuck. It was like the first whiff of the anaesthetic before an operation. But he felt no pain.

He gathered his nerves to a tighter pitch.

"*Ya-ming!*"

"And that means you," a calm voice echoed in his brain.

"Let me do this first," his thought replied.

He was drawing the great blade across another pack-tie when a Mongol struck down at him with the loaded butt of a whip.

At the same moment Shattuck fired.

Bullet and bludgeon both went home.

"I'm taking him with me," was the Fighting Fool's last thought.

XII

A BUNCH of the dokpas—faces black with grease and their dank hair making them look like devils on a frolic—were looting what they could find in the Throat of the Wolf.

They screeched and laughed. They stripped the dead and kicked the dying, leaving a number of naked and humiliated corpses in their wake.

Then they made the one gorgeous and outstanding discovery of the morning. They'd not only found the white devil of the preceding day—he who had called himself Shadak Khan—but leaning over him, trying to lift him, trying to recall him to life, one of the most beautiful female creatures they had ever seen.

They'd all heard legends about the Kashmiri maidens. They told filthy stories of their own invention about their affairs with such. They vaunted of local conquests that had

Kashmiri conquests beaten a mile.

But here was the real thing. So they believed. Anyway, it was the first of her species any of them had ever seen. They crowded toward her and the white man like a pack of wolves at a spent doe.

Mahree was no spent doe, though, even if she had traveled for one full day and one full night over a terrain that would have strained a yak.

She turned to fire. Her eyes shone green. Her forehead seemed to flatten.

Before the boldest of the dokpas could carry out his plan of stepping on Shattuck's face and seizing her at the same time she'd literally brained him with a sliver of rock.

The unfortunate thing about this was that it gave an idea to the more cunning wits of the crowd. The dokpas also groped for rocks. At least two of them failed to do their groping fast enough.

Mahree threw a rock splinter with the free-shoulder grace and power of a professional ball-player—although she'd never seen one. She scored two perfect hits. Then a rock like the end of a sledge-hammer caught her shoulder and she staggered.

She was staggering, trying not to fall, when she saw another sort of lama coming through the gorge. He'd seen what was happening. His hands were up. He was shouting things that Mahree couldn't understand, but which the expression on his face told her were prayers on her own behalf and denunciation of the dokpas.

THE black faces got his message. They turned on him with howls. One of them with a stone all ready let fly at him and scraped his head. The young lama covered his face with his hands and arms and kept on coming.

It was his only way of fighting back.

One of the black-face ruffians already had his hands on him when from behind and above the young lama a hand plunged down with a knife in it. That was one good knife that was apt to be lost forever. The dokpa went down with the blade out of sight in his shock of hair.

That was Juma's knife. It was Juma, looking more than his six-foot seven, who had followed John Day here—Champela, whom he'd found in the Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation. Champela himself was just setting out, having heard that Torang, the abbot's horse, had but then returned without the Shadak Khan.

CHAMPELA and Juma had then run the length of the valley. But Mahree, even so, had got there first—a long first, having followed some instinct of her own.

Juma cried to heaven as he tried to pull his precious knife from the dead man's skull. It wouldn't come. It was a tussel as short as it was fierce—Juma's struggle with the stubborn knife. He was losing seconds, and in any sort of fight Juma never lost any time. He spat on the corpse and almost, without looking, had found the throat of another black face with his able hands.

The others were in full flight.

Champela came to Shattuck's side. He lightly touched a temple; he thrust his fingers into Shattuck's shirt.

It was clear that he thought at first that Shattuck was dead—the end of a dream, the eclipse of a great adventure!

Mahree, with all that she had left of consciousness—after that wallop with a rock—centered in her eyes, let out the beginning of a wail.

"Ai-ya-ya! I have killed him! He

went away because of me! And I meant nothing! I loved him only as a sister!"

"Hush!" said the prime minister of Shadak Khan. "He's not dead!"

It was a message that went up to old Juma, too.

Juma, having just killed two men, one by stabbing and one by bare-handed strangling, was leaning over with a great deep tenderness burning in the secret cavern back of his old-eagle eyes.

"Allah Akbar!" he said.

He gently pushed the prime minister aside. He stooped and picked up Captain Trouble as if that famous Fighting Fool was the merest infant.

"Friend," he said, "if you know any effective magic, I'll see that you get a couple of those runaway camels."

"Get him quickly to the tent of the governors," John Day said. "You put them out and I'll do my best."

XIII

SHATTUCK was getting well. As soon as they were able to move him again they'd carried him up the valley to the Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation where there were some authentic records of Kubla Khan.

They'd found—by a well authenticated miracle, it was claimed—Kubla's sword where Shadak Khan had dropped it when he fell—as he thought—dead. And the sword was presented to the new khan by the old dogpo himself—the divine incarnation who had the power, it was generally believed, to look into the past lives of others.

Perhaps the good old man saw something in some past life of this modern Captain Trouble, something that linked him with the life of Kubla Khan.

It was, according to the secret books, about the time that an avatar should come about to purge the world before the coming of the Great New King.

The times were full of portent.

Tibet itself would have to be purged. There were mysteries in Tibet such as the world never dreamed of, John Day said. There were hollow mountains he knew about where the secret libraries of the ages had been stored away.

"Couldn't you and I find them?" Shattuck asked.

"We'd find them, all right; but how about the guardians?"

"What sort of guardians?"

"If I thought we had a right to get into those caves we'd get into them," said Captain Trouble.

"There you go! I thought you'd had enough of fighting for a time!"

"I'll never have enough of it so long as there is anything worth fighting for."

Unknown to Shattuck, there was a scribe in the monastery making a record of his stay. Some day, it was argued, such a record might be as valuable as such a one concerning Alexander the Great would be.

"And, according to the horoscope that three of the astrologers in three different lamaseries cast up, this man Shadak Khan, was going to have a number of stirring adventures. . . ."

He had one, in fact, before it was considered advisable for him to leave his bed.

He awoke one night to see a huge dokpa crawling into his room on all fours. It was this fact that discovered to Shattuck the identity of the man, because, walking on all fours like that, he revealed a limp in the shoulder where he'd been stopped by a bullet the day he tried to saber Shattuck from behind.

"Ah, go on and get out of here, you big bum!" said the Fighting Fool in English.

And that's what the big bum did—sneaked out and never showed himself again.

Juma had sent for his people, for Juma also would be lingering on in the valley indefinitely. He'd become as you might say the official steward of the loot—camels, horses, boxes of machine-guns, small arms, and ammunition.

Juma loved especially to sit in when Captain Trouble and his prime minister talked about cleaning up some robber band or other and starting an independent state where men could be free and women happy and everyone would get enough to eat—with a few punitive expeditions now and then, just to keep your hand in.

BUT, best of all, was when the two of them were alone on some upper terrace of the lamasery and the earth so uptilted about them that it almost seemed they were among the stars. Then it was no mere correction of some poor robber band that engrossed them. They talked greatly of great conquerors—men who had been sent into the world to boost men on—by struggle, pain, self-mastery.

There was the inevitable struggle between Asia and Europe—the never surveyed frontiers of China and Russia, for example; the necessary merging of nations that still hated and feared each other; there was the growing challenge of Africa—a riddle as ancient and profound as that of the Great Sphinx.

And when it was all over, when they had the world cleaned up, why, maybe then, they'd go back to America and settle down, like Cincinnatus, on some quiet farm.

Watch for More "Captain Trouble" Stories by Perley Poore Sheehan

The Better Man



*Men Did Not Dare to Interfere With Bully Lafitte
of the Northland—Until the Day Chet
Rand Came Along*

By HAROLD De POLO

Author of "Mr. Monk's Human Freight," "The Game Goes On," etc.

OF all the chechacos to come in on the last boat of the season, they will tell you Chet Rand looked the least likely to gamely champion a husky he had never laid eyes on before. Coming down the gangplank and onto the wharf landing, with a bulging and well-traveled grip in either hand, it actually seemed as if the weight of them were too much for him. So much so, at least, that several of the

down-and-outers sprang hopefully forward—but he shook his head negatively with a pleasant smile.

Setting down his luggage, he drew in deep breaths of air, and comfortably widened his legs, as if, perhaps, to get the feel of earth under them after tedious days spent in cramped quarters on shipboard.

It was as he stooped down to regain his bags that the thing happened.

A big man with a barrel-like chest, over where freight was being unloaded, had piled two boxes he had just received on a sled, to which a single powerful dog was harnessed. The animal was straining mightily to move the load, but the steel runners merely bit through the five or six inches of fluffy snow and sank into the ground.

SEVERAL onlookers were quizzing the big fellow:

"Told yuh so, Lafitte," one of them raucously laughed.

"Bully" Lafitte turned with a snarl at the phrase that so frequently angers. His black eyes burned, and the lifted upper lip showed ugly teeth through his beard. There was venom in his voice:

"She move, by gar," he said. "W'en I say she go—she go! *Allons—allons, mon brave!*"

He sang the last at the husky; but he did not sing heartily, encouragingly, as a man is apt to when urging an animal. There was a vicious threat in it, concretely followed by a rawhide whip that curled about the husky's haunches.

The dog twitched spasmodically under the blow, but he did not whimper or break from his stand. Instead, he gripped his feet further in, swelled out his great chest, and threw every ounce of strength into the effort to drag that sled.

Superb though he was, presumed to have as much power in his shoulders as any dog in the Northland, he failed to move it an inch. It simply could not be done.

Bully must have been in a particularly bad mood today. His eyes blazed:

"W'en I say go—*she go!*"

Brutally, and with added force, as he cried the words, he curled that lash around the dog so that a red

welt with drops of bubbling blood showed on one side of the white belly.

"Easy," warned a man in the crowd. "You're goin' too—"

"*You filthy hound!*"

At the words the circle of onlookers instinctively parted as Chet Rand—a stranger to every one there—broke through and faced Lafitte. Color had come to his drawn cheeks, and his gray eyes were smoldering with angry loathing.

His lips, oddly enough, did not seem so sensitive. They were pulled taut in a bloodless line.

"Damn you!" he exclaimed, while the Canuck stared at him as if he had not fully gathered the import of that first phrase. "Can't you see that you've been asking the impossible of the dog? Can't you see that the poor beggar can't do it? You—you swine!"

"W'ot—w'ot? You mean dose for mee—*pour moi?*"

Bully Lafitte, striking his chest with a clenched fist, finished with a roar. Men in the North country, as a rule, do not interfere between a man and his dogs unless the thing has gone pretty far; more particularly, men did not interfere with Lafitte, no matter what the circumstances.

It came home to him now, however that this stranger—this puny chechaco—was actually calling him names:

"'Ound, *hein?* Swine, *hein?*"

WITH a bellow of rage he charged, blindly, crudely, his great arms flailing. Rand, cool and poised, deftly side-stepped and sent his left crashing in for his attacker's jaw. He caught him squarely, and though all his body was behind that blow, it barely caused the Canuck to hesitate.

His head went back for a moment, it is true, but then he shook it off as if tossing off some annoying insect

that had alighted on his face. Again, with a maddened bellow, he charged.

A good many men there would have stepped away from that rush—nor could they altogether have been blamed for doing so. The newcomer, instead, went forward with the look of a battler who realizes that his main gun has failed, and that he might as well get in another shot before he himself is beaten down.

Once more, cleanly, Rand found that heavy-boned jaw with his left, and simultaneously drove in his right to the pit of the stomach.

He got a grunted "oof" out of Lafitte; that was all. Then that hammer-like right fist of the toughened prospector caught him behind the ear as he futilely tried to duck. He went up into the air like a mechanical jumping jack, his body stiffening, and then down onto the snow unconscious.

"'Ound, *hein?* Swine, *hein?*"

Georges Lafitte, standing over him with swelling chest, sucked the words through his teeth in a whistle as he lifted his boot—and there was a growl from the husky as the animal tried to hurl himself forward. A quiet voice, though, did what the dog was unable to do:

"No bootin', Lafitte!"

AUTOMATICALLY, the foot stayed suspended in the air. It came down slowly, and the big fellow turned with sullen, baffled anger:

"'Ee call me 'ound—swine. 'Ee hask for eet, Square!"

"Mayhap he's right," said the other calmly. "And you've beat him in fair fight, haven't ye?"

Bully Lafitte glared at the little man facing him—glared at Square O'Brien, the gambler, a wisp of a human, not weighing a hundred and ten pounds, with a pair of the most remarkably blue and chilling eyes one could find.

"Ho, well—ho, well," Lafitte shrugged, "eef 'ee's fr'end, Square, w'y—"

"He's no friend, Lafitte," cut in O'Brien, who never evaded an issue. "He's a man beaten who fought fair, and I'll see that he gets a clean deal himself."

"Ho, well—"

BUT Chet Rand just then came to, after one of the crowd had rubbed him with snow. He propped himself up to a sitting posture.

Rand got to his feet awkwardly, painfully. He looked at the husky he had defended, and in the clear, wide-eyed gaze of the dog he saw understanding—understanding and gratitude.

"Care to sell that dog?" he asked.

The Canuck turned, his teeth showing a smile of derision as he softly brought out his words:

"I sell hanytheeng I got, m'sieu. But to you, *mon ami*, I geev thees dog! *Oui*,—I geev him w'en you prove, m'sieu, you are bettaire man than I'm be, lak' you call heem! *C'est bien?*"

With a loud guffaw he turned his back, and again raised his foot. He completed his kick, this time, sending the two boxes tumbling off the sleigh as he ordered his husky to move on—ordered him to move on without the sting of the lash.

Although Chet Rand had taken a jolt that made every bone in his head feel sore for several days, his championing of the husky did him no harm. Bully Lafitte was not precisely a popular customer in the Northland.

Lafitte was made to know, when several of the old sourdoughs had heard of his tilt with Rand and the reason for it, that if they again heard of his maltreating a husky they would personally step in—and *not* use a fist.

"Should have given him a dose of lead," one of these veterans told Rand. "Man deserves it—any time he tries to kick another when he's down for the count."

"I don't carry a gun," Chet smiled.

Square O'Brien, as well, tried to make Chet Rand see that he should carry some sort of firearm. He knew Lafitte, he insisted, and he knew that he would never forgive Rand—never be satisfied until he had got even.

Here, too, Rand smilingly shook his head and held out his hands, saying that he would depend on them alone; also, he went a bit more into detail in his explanations.

"You see, I don't want to offend you or any one else, Mr. O'Brien," he told the white-haired gambler, "but I'm honestly against all killing. I can't help it—I'm just made that way constitutionally, I suppose. If I carried a gun it would be sure to bring on a meeting sooner or later, for he'd think I was arming myself with that purpose in view; also, if I *did* have a weapon, and he drew, I'd probably do the same myself, and one of us would surely get it. No, I'll take my chances!"

"Suit yourself, son," shrugged Square. "Trouble with Lafitte is, he's not a lad that comes out in the open. Don't forget."

"I won't, thanks," Chet assured him.

Nothing seemed due to happen in the near future, however, for Lafitte stocked up heavily with supplies, and munched on for a cabin he had up on the Mackenzie. Rand, for a time, rented one of the rooms that O'Brien had above his gambling hall and just lazed about, seeming to enjoy hugely the newness of this life that was so different to him.

Back home he had been an instructor in botany in a high school ever since he had quit college some six

or seven years previously. His one great ambition, however, had been to complete an exhaustive book on the subject he loved.

HE had spent his every leisure hour studying and compiling notes. The result had been an utter physical and nervous breakdown that had laid him up in a sanitarium for seven long months, with rigid orders from the doctors when he left to get away to an absolutely strange environment for ten or twelve months, and forget all about his cherished hobby.

Rand was a perfect patient, the medicos would have said had they seen him now. He obeyed commands implicitly.

Anyway, he picked up surprisingly in that first five or six weeks. So every one assured him, at least.

"Hell, son," a rugged old-timer who had heard of the Lafitte affair told him, "ye'll be able in another coupla months to step in and plumb beat that Canuck to a pulp. Tell me ye've taken on 'most fifteen pounds, they do."

It was thought, a month later, that the thing might be put to the test.

Lafitte had come to town, leaving his string of dogs with a half-breed helper while he stepped into O'Brien's for his usual fling at the roulette wheel. Rand, coming down the street, had suddenly stopped as he recognized the husky he had defended, and at the same time the dog had struggled against the harness toward the man with a sharp bark of gladness.

Rand had gone over to him, a pleased light in his eyes as he reached out and stroked the husky's head. He stayed there for several minutes, playfully cuffing the animal and talking to him—and it was so that Bully Lafitte found them.

"You theenk she's time for try

prove 'ee's belong to you, m'sieu?" the prospector asked with mock politeness.

Chet's jaw muscles tautened; but he was a wise enough man to know his own limitations. He was not back to normal yet, he knew; was a generous twenty pounds under weight, still; and, he was utterly certain, it would be folly for him to attempt to pit himself against the powerful Canuck just at present.

When he *did* go into the next encounter, if ever, he, at least, wanted in all fairness to himself to be in the pink of condition. So, with a little sigh, he shook his head gravely and answered:

"No, Lafitte, I don't think it's quite time. Sorry."

He had spoken coolly, as if merely stating an actual fact, and as he turned away, after giving a final pull to the husky's ear, not a man there, somehow, felt that he had evaded the issue. He had simply deferred it in a business-like way.

"You've a way with dogs, son," O'Brien said to him the next morning. "That big lead husky o' Lafitte's is no gentle puppy with men, and even though he remembered ye'd fought fer him, I was surprised at the gladness he showed to see ye.

ANYWAYS, I mind me that my own string never take yer presence amiss, and I was wonderin' if ye'd care to take them fer a bit of a run? 'Tis Saturday and my busiest time, and I can't get away.

"I have an old running mate at Spruce Valley—thirty odd miles, maybe—and he's needin' grub, with a sick wife he can't leave. Would you like to do me the favor, Chet?"

"Glad to," Rand assured him. "That is, if you think I can handle the dogs. I've watched others, of course, and I think I've picked up the trick of it, but I've never had any experience,

and I wouldn't want to be the cause of anything happening to your—"

"Shush, shush," broke in the gambler. "I pride meself I can tell a man that has a way with dogs."

Square O'Brien was right. The moment he stepped behind the laden sled, with the long whip that must reach to the lead dog in his right hand, Chet Rand showed an almost abnormal knack in handling the string of huskies.

HE seemed to be able to get the greatest amount of effort out of the dogs with the least amount of exertion on his own part. They liked him instantly—liked him, probably, because they sensed that here was a human that would use no brutality, and yet who would stand for no dawdling or bickering among themselves. And the average sled animal doesn't ask much more.

Anyway, Rand brought the string back in such good condition that O'Brien had a suggestion:

"Seein' that ye're one of the few men that ain't mad fer findin' gold, what should be the matter with takin' my dogs and runnin' a sort of freight and express service? The boys 'll pay high, and over to MacLean's Pass they're still stampedin' from all sides. 'Twill be a favor to me—them dogs are getting lazy!"

"You're a lifesaver every way to me, Mr. O'Brien," was Chet's grateful answer. "I'll take that up."

From the start Rand made good at the thing. As O'Brien had said, most men were too busy hunting for gold to think of other pursuits, and the freighting of supplies had very little competition.

Chet learned to handle his long rawhide whip like a master; handled it so well that it became nearer an art with him. He could send it curling out to crackle within a fraction of an inch of the lead husky's ear

without touching the animal, and this helps tremendously. The driver, the dog remembers, has complete control.

On one of his runs to MacLean's Pass, after he had emerged from some spruce covering and was perhaps half way across a clearing that was about a mile wide, he suddenly heard a commotion behind a knoll not a hundred yards on the left—a shrill bark, a harsh curse, a muffled growl. And, looking hastily toward the spot, he saw a man and a dog struggling on the horizon, while a rifle was tossed crazily into the air, as if it had been unexpectedly jolted from the hands of the human.

The husky, unmistakably, was the one he had defended; and the man, just as surely, was Bully Georges Lafitte.

Chet Rand did not pause. Swiftly, he got to the other side of his sled, shielding his body as much as he could with the load he was carrying.

WITH tense words that registered instantly on O'Brien's well-trained string, he urged the dogs to their fastest pace. They responded nobly, and foot by foot they cut down the intervening distance between them and the forest of blue-green spruce that lay protectingly ahead.

At last they surged into the engulfing safety of it, and not until then did the freight carrier allow his tautened muscles to relax as a sigh of relief exploded from him.

As he traveled on toward the pass, Rand tried coolly to figure out what had happened. As near as he could come to it, Lafitte had doubtless started out to ambush him, leaving his dog team somewhere in the rear. In some manner, probably the lead husky had got loose—a broken leash he remembered seeing, bore that out—and had followed his owner.

Whether the animal had sensed that Lafitte was out to get the man

that had championed him, Chet wasn't sure; he was certain, however, that the arrival of the dog at the critical moment had unquestionably saved his life.

He kept his mouth closed about the incident at Mac Lean's Pass, just as he remained silent about it with O'Brien when he got back. The next day, though, he walked straight up to Lafitte when the latter swaggered into the gambling hall.

"Lafitte," he told him, in words that he knew would mean nothing to his listeners but would nevertheless cause them to be remembered did anything happen, "I've written down all the details about that little episode back in the clearing. If any one ever finds me with a bullet hole through me it'll make interesting reading!"

Lafitte must have taken heed of the warning, for as winter wore on Rand was not troubled with him. He knew, though, that the ill-feeling between them must eventually come to a climax; and he was almost wishing that it would not be too far away.

Powerful though the Canuck indubitably was, Chet felt that now he could hold his own. He had taken on still more weight—more than he had ever had in his life before, in fact—and he knew that in every way he was in superb condition.

The chance to prove whether or not he was a better man than Bully Lafitte came before long. Toward the fag end of the winter, when the spring thaws were expected to begin at any time, the ironic elements once more took it upon themselves to play pranks.

Snow started; but snow that caused every wise veteran in Square O'Brien's place, after an hour of it, to predict that it would be one of the worst storms in years. And Chet Rand, who had learned a goodly bit about weather conditions, was quite



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willing to admit being happy not to be caught on the trail on this particular night.

As heavy storms, wherever men gather in colder climates, will always bring out memories of other storms, the poker and faro and roulette tables at O'Brien's were less frequented than usual, as the old sourdoughs swapped lies beautifully. Each one had a story to cap the other, and be it known that these men were no niggards when it came to yarning. But, although they didn't know it, drama was pushing toward them through the storm.

IT entered in the form of a half-breed—along about eleven that night. The man came crashing down on the floor, when the door was opened at his feeble knock, and it was all he could do breathlessly to gasp out his words:

"Ee's out dere—'bout wan mile—Mackensie tr'l—M'sieu Lafitte! Dog—dog she all gone—los'—excep' de big lead. 'Ee's—'ee's mos' gone—La—Lafitte!"

The half-breed keeled over with that, and while Square O'Brien efficiently went to him with a flask of brandy, men looked questioningly at one another in the hush that had suddenly fallen. They spoke much, those looks, of the contempt in which Bully Lafitte was held.

There was no keen desire written on any face to go to the rescue; there was only those inquiring frowns that seemed to ask if any man cared to save him, and whether it was worth while.

It was Chet Rand, as the fire of brandy brought the half-breed to with a sputtering cough, who spoke first:

"Up to me, boys," he said quietly. "No, I don't want help—thanks!"

"But, son—" began Square.

"You'll understand, Mr. O'Brien," broke in Rand with a smile, already on his way to the door that led to his room above the gambling hall.

He was gone, and men argued heatedly as to which ones should accompany him, although O'Brien and a few of the wiser old-timers smiled knowingly. A tribute to Rand, these offers to go.

He was down again in a moment, pulling a parka over his head, and scrupulously examining his snowshoes, asking O'Brien for the flask of brandy that would undoubtedly help Lafitte.

"Damn it, Chet," broke in a young trapper, "I ain't goin' t' let yuh make it alone!"

There was gratitude in Rand's smile and his serious gray eyes, but he shook his head firmly.

"Thanks, Jim," he said, "but I've got to go alone! Oh, I'll make it. Trail along if I'm not back in four or five hours, if you feel like it, Jim. So long!"

"Luck, son!"

It was those two words of O'Brien's, as Chet pulled open the door, that made the trapper and every one else still their arguments.

CHET RAND came back in what was closer to four hours than five—came back, to be exact, just a trifle under the four mark. He lurched in through the wide door that was held open for him, the inert form of big Bully Lafitte across his shoulders, and with the husky he had defended pulling on ahead of him, tied to his belt with broken harness.

Slowly, carefully, he eased his human burden on to the floor, and even as he staggered back and caught hold of a table for support, one mittened hand went out to stroke the head of the dog who was gazing up at him with pure adoration.

(Continued on Page 124)

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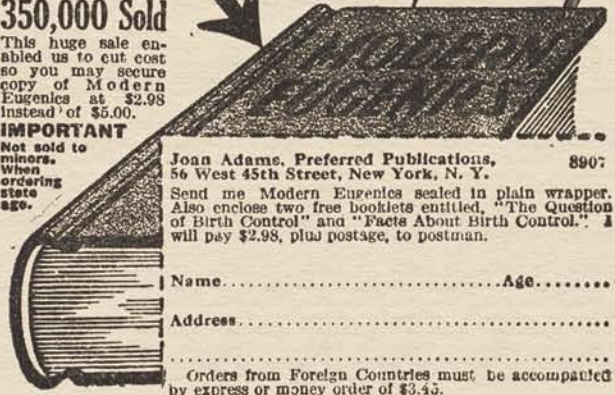
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"I guess you're mine, boy—I guess you're mine now," he was saying.

Silently he handed his friend Jim the flask of brandy, and the trapper poured the last stiff dose that was left, down the throat of the Canuck.

Lafitte, gurgling and spluttering, opened his eyes and gazed about dazedly, his voice a thick mutter.

"I go down, by gar—I go down, some'ow," he was saying, almost incredulously. "I don' know, I don' know. Dese legs she jus' get too weak for to stan'. She's hard going, out dere. One dog go down—othaire—'nothaire—excep' my strong devil of the lead. I don' know, I don'—An' Jean—w'ot 'appen w'en all theeng go black for me."

He was lifting himself up with a hand now, still swaying, still dull-eyed and groping-brained.

"Your Jean came here—for help," said O'Brien curtly.

"So—so?"

Georges Lafitte got up, then, with the help of a table, and stood there scrutinizing the knot of men from between narrowed eyes. He spoke with a sharp intake of breath, as if fearing for the answer.

"An' 'oo breeng me in?"

"A better man than you are," replied Chet Rand quietly.

"Dere is *no* bet-taire man dan me," he cried savagely. "Dere is no man w'ot 'ave evaire knock me down—an' dere is no man w'ot 'ave evaire use dese gun so quick!"

HIS hand, as he finished, went to the heavy revolver that was hanging low in the holster at his left thigh, and he grinned with scornful invitation at Rand.

But it was Square O'Brien who answered, his face and voice very calm as his own hand hovered casually in the neighborhood of his left armpit.

"He's proven himself a better man every way, Lafitte—and I mind ye what ye say, there on the wharf, on that first snow of the winter."

"And I claim the dog now," said Chet. "You keeled over, and I didn't. I'd just come in from a run from Spruce Valley, but I still had enough left to finish your own trip for you with you on my back."

THERE was an assenting grunt or so from some of the older sourdoughs, and it seemed to drive Lafitte wild. His teeth showing, he juttied out his head and glared balefully at Rand.

"So she's put up job for get husky, *non*?" he snarled. "By gar, I don't stan' for dose treeck, Georges Lafitte don'. Boy—why don' you be *man*? All dose talk 'bout not believe in gun—all dose talk 'bout not believe hurt nothaire human bein'—she's—she's bluff. I'm seeck, me of hear dose talk, an' w'en I say I geev you dose dog w'en you prove bet-taire man, I mean pro—"

"Just a minute, Lafitte!"

Chet Rand, a dozen paces away, raised a hand that seemed to compel silence. The muscles of his face were taut, and he was nervously tapping the top of his high moccasin with the lash of a coiled rawhide whip in his right hand.

"You want gun-play, do you?" he continued, as Lafitte stared at him with eager questioning. "Well, you'll get it. Draw—draw, you filthy hound!"

"W'ot?"

Lafitte, as he hungrily cried the word, looked as if he thought it was too good to be true, but Chet, with steady, tense tones, came right back at him:

"I said draw, draw, you low swine. I'm armed and I'm ready for you!"

"You 'ear—you 'ear?"

(Continued on Page 126)

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With fierce joy, Bully Lafitte flung his warning at the crowd as his right arm pitched down toward his thigh, but even as his fingers went to grip the blue-steeled butt of his weapon, that rawhide lash in Chet's right hand coiled out like a striking snake and wound itself around his wrist:

"*Dieu!*" he shrieked, as the whip cut through his skin and flesh with what must have been agonizing pain.

"You had your chance and I beat you to it, Lafitte," Chet was coolly saying, "and I'm telling you again that I'm the better man!"

THE big Canuck was rocking backward and forward on his feet, his left hand gripping the ugly wound on his wrist as his face twisted in pain. At the words of his opponent, however, mad rage contorted his features and he bellowed wildly:

"Bet-taire man, eh? By gar, not w'ile I got—"

Those unharmed left fingers never reached the revolver butt—for the husky that had been standing tense-muscled by Rand's side made his leap in the nick of time.

Fully and squarely, with all the power in his sturdy body behind the charge, he struck Bully Lafitte on the chest. Down they went in a tangled heap, rolling over and over as the dog sank his fangs into that left hand.

"Break—break way, there," Square O'Brien said, reaching down and firmly taking the dog by the neck. With his other hand he yanked out Lafitte's weapon and leveled it at the bully. "Get on your feet," he ordered. "The dog's quieted; don't worry!"

Then, as Lafitte shakily managed to right himself, Square O'Brien spoke his ultimatum.

"Like I told ye before, Lafitte,

Rand's proven himself a better man; and also, like I told ye before, I mind me what ye said about the husky that day down at the wharf. I'm taking it upon meself, anyway, now, to be the judge, and 'tis to Chet that I'm fair and square awarding that dog.

"And one other thing—out of this place with ye, and on a word of honor that's never been broken, Bully Georges Lafitte, I'm telling ye that do I ever see ye trailing into this camp it's I meself that'll shoot ye down like the dog ye are!"

"I had to bring the thing to show-down, you see," Rand was explaining later, "because I surely did want this dog. Need him for a lead husky, it so happens, because I've decided that now I'm physically on my feet again I'm going to stick up here at this freight carrying game. In my blood, this North country."

He paused for a moment, a dull flush creeping over his face as he went on more haltingly:

"I didn't like to speak of it before this, and I don't like to now, but I suppose it's due some of you boys to know why I've been so hanged much against gun-play.

"I—well, I took a little over a year off from college, back in 1917, and I got in the mix-up across the water. I saw so much killing and so much blood that I told myself I'd certainly never be responsible for any more unless I was forced into it by another war. I . . ."

Chet Rand laughed and looked down at his whip, making the distant tip of it curl back to him with a deft flick of his wrist that was sheer artistry.

"No, this old rawhide's good enough for me!"

"Good enough is right," chortled Jim, unquestionably echoing the sentiments of every man in the room.

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After tabulating the coupons and striking an average, it was found that the readers of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** ranked the stories in the following order:

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- 5th—**BLACK CATS**
by Gerald De Vries
- 6th—**PEARLS OF THE LUZON**
by Jonathan Edwards
- 7th—**THE BLOOD TRAIL**
by Wallace R. Bamber

Frank Rosenthal, of Philadelphia, cops the first prize. Congratulations, old man—you're a swell picker! Second money goes to John H. Nostwold, Conway, Washington. Third money is awarded to both A. J. Mackey, Clarksville, Mo., and Mrs. John Devine, Pottsville, Pa., who tied for third place. They each, of course, get the full amount of the third prize.

In the next classification of winners, five readers were to receive a prize. As nine readers submitted coupons of equal proximity to the final average choice, the awards will be given for all nine lucky submissions, which were sent in by the following:

H. J. Rush, Belvedere, N. J.; Mrs. H. T. De Laney, Millstone, Ky.; Frank Patkus, Newark, N. J.; Robert F. Jepson, Watertown, Minn.; Gerald Mulhall, Britton, Okla.; Robert F. Harnish, Jr., Taunton, Mass.; Bernice Waddell, San Bernardino, Cal.; W. G. McGee, Muscatine, Iowa; Martin Steinert, Greenwood, Wis.

If your name isn't above, maybe your luck will be better when we announce the May winners next month. Here's hoping!

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Paul Regard—yes, the same Paul Regard who gave you **JUNGLE JOSS** and who has written many, many thrilling stories of the tropics—has produced the most exciting and enthralling novel of his career.

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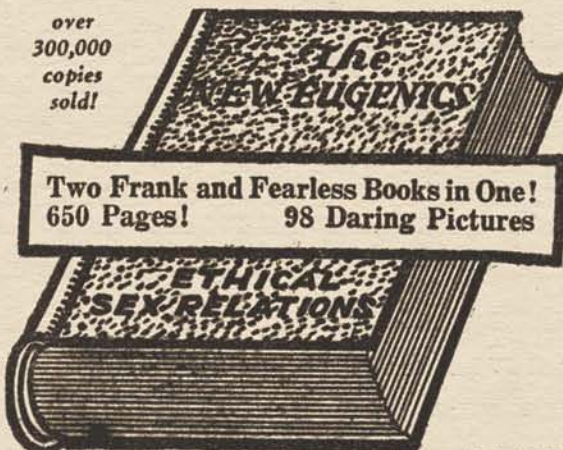
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