

Baker's Dozen 05: Adventure



Publisher's Page

"Adventure" was once defined as someone having a bad time of it -- *a thousand miles away!* Here's a collection of thirteen yarns about people having a bad time of it. These stories were collected from thirteen different magazines and represents thirteen different authors. Enjoy!

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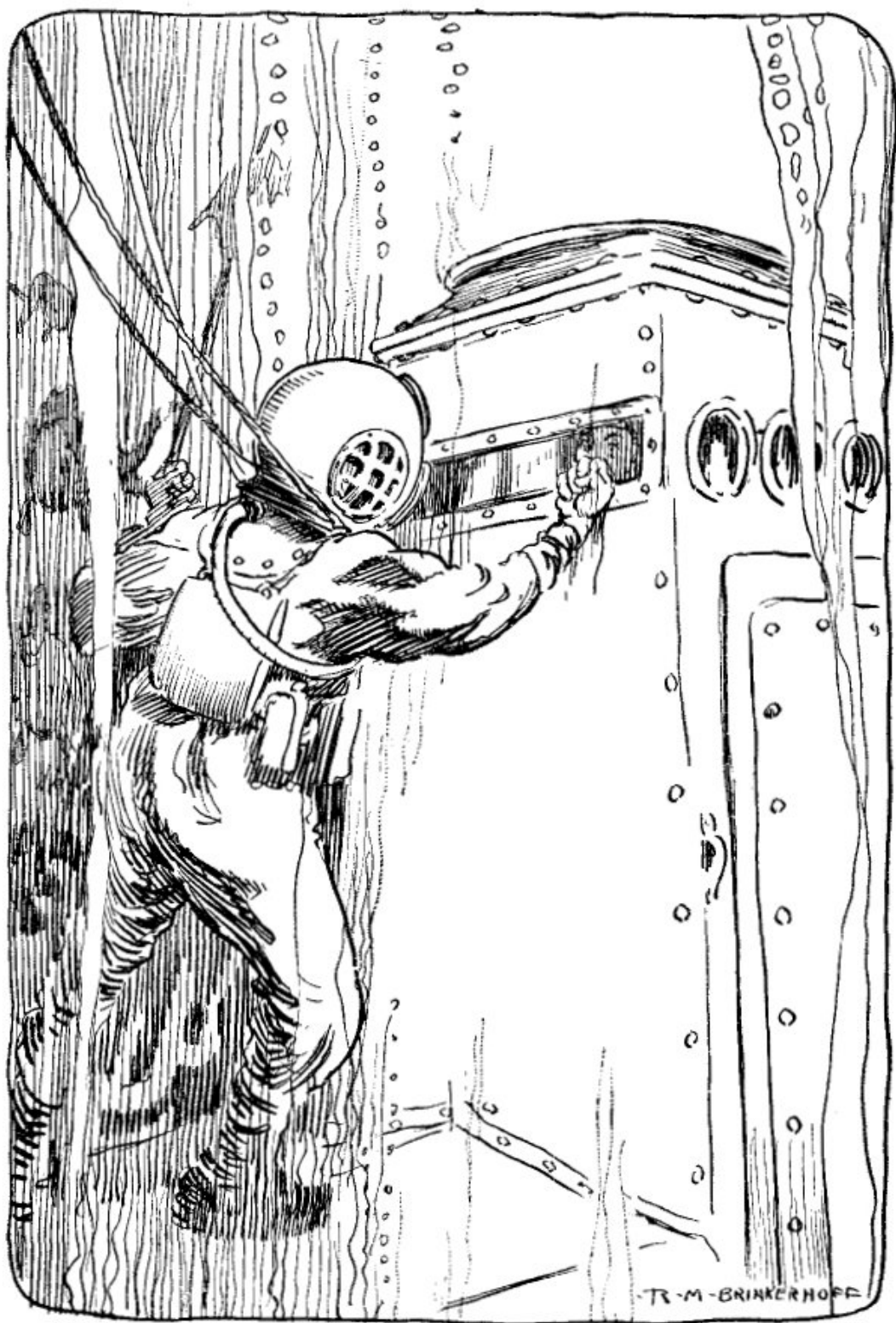
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Down Among the Dead Men by S. Ten Eyck Bourke



I SHOOK MY FIST AGAINST THE GLASS, ANGER MASTERING ME

"THEN you'll not go to Newport?" the chief said. "I tell you, man, they need a diver badly. There's no government man to be had and that submarine won't last another ten hours on bottom, locked fast. They can't get a local man to risk it; and it means money to you, Mac, let alone the mercy of it."

I could guess why the local divers would not take a chance at the sunken submarine and her imprisoned crew, but I did not mention it. I had had a bitter hard day in the harbor, clearing the ship channel, and that was excuse enough, let alone the other men hurrying homeward to help.

I am a violent but God-fearing man, or I would not be telling of the judgment that fell upon me, as a warning to others. I shook my head. The boat was down too deep, the divers said.

"Then let me tell you, John MacGregor," the chief cried in a rage, "I know why you will have nothing to do with the navy or navy men! You cast your own son off because he ran away to sea, and that Puritan stone that you have for a heart hates men of his kind--men that fight for their country--"

"Aye, and shed innocent blood, and make widows and orphans--I know the argument! With your permission, sir, having reported, I'll go home to my girl. Your submarines and your war engines must take their chance!"

I am a violent man, as I said, but Godfearing, like my forefathers before me, who turned the sinner from the door in the wintry night and snow, to live or die as Providence might decree. Folks call me a hard man, but just; nor does my calling make for a gentle nature, groping among the blind fishes for coffers full of gold or human tenements empty of soul.

Neither the chief of the divers nor the men with whom I worked side by side that day knew of the heart of lead inside me, nor the bitter hatred I bore for all men who wore the uniform. I had spoken of my daughter Jeanie with a smile on the lips. There was no reason why any one should know of the letter which had struck me to stone that morning, or maybe the chief would have understood, and would have forbore to curse me for my hardness of heart.

Still dumbly unbelieving, I reread the letter that I had received only a few minutes before I was summoned by the chief.

Dear, Darling, Cruel Daddy:

I am going to him--Lieutenant Gerald--isn't that grand, daddy? I have never dared to tell you. When everything is all right, you will forgive us both; but, darling, cruel, stupid, dear dad, I had to see him before he took his first command--a submarine at Newport; so we'll be together a little while, at least--

I had forgotten that. A submarine at Newport!

I did not fully realize yet what Jeanie had done--that she had left me for a villain in a uniform. I had not heard the name--never a rumor, till the letter struck me like a blow in the face. Lieutenant Gerald--a submarine! It seemed like a terrible jest of fate; but it was a jest that took me back to the chief's office with a hope and a vengeance gnawing in me.

The chief sat where I had left him, reading a telegram.

"The roster of that submarine--her officers?" I said, as he glanced up with a scowl.

His face cleared wonderfully.

"I've just got word. Lieutenant Gerald and--"

"I'll go!" I said.

I HAD not been at home the night before, and Jeanie's letter had been left at the chief's office the previous day, while I was working at the bottom of New York harbor. So she was in Newport at the time of the accident to the submarine! Not that it mattered, for her letter went on to speak of many meetings with the man, and the "plans they had made for the future"-- poor girl! I did not read the whole letter at the time.

As the special bore me to Newport, with the right of way cleared for the "rescue train," I was not thinking of the judgment that had intervened so much as of the part I should play, I had a vision of that helpless submarine lying in the deep water, and of the last act that Providence had left to me--to avenge my poor Jeanie, if not to save her.

In the launch that took me out to the scene of the accident, I learned more facts.

"The submarine's the *Shark*; she's down in more than twenty fathoms, and her air compressor's leaking," the officer in charge told me. "Of course, we've got no news from her, but by the way the air bubbles up they're alive aboard and fighting the leak."

"No diver's been down?"

"One tried it." The officer hesitated, looking at me out of the corner of his eye. "He came up unconscious--suit torn, too," he said finally.

I nodded, I had known from the first that the depth of the water was enough to knock out a man in an ordinary diving-dress, but my suit was reenforced for deep diving. It would help to protect me, too, from the dangers of an encounter with sharks or dogfish, such as had apparently been the cause of the other diver's torn clothes.

The safety of the job, or its certain peril, was the last thing I thought about. I wanted to ask for news of Jeanie--whether she knew that the scoundrel who stole her from me was at the bottom of the sea, awaiting a terrible death; but my lips seemed sealed, and the navy man was sharp business. I don't know whether he suspected anything, but he had watched me closely from the

moment we started out in the launch, making for the group of boats a mile from shore.

"You're not a government man, but I take it you know what to do," he said to me as we neared the big lighter that was anchored over the sunken submarine. "The other man said the pressure crushed him before he could make her out at that depth; but if you can get the hoisting cable and the air-tube to her, that's all we'll ask of you. You're taking chances, I tell you straight."

I laughed again--the laugh he didn't seem to like--and we sprang on board the lighter. The diver who had been down was there, sprawled out, white and helpless, but I didn't stop to talk with him, though he seemed to want to tell me something.

Among the crowd of craft near by a torpedo-boat was snapping and crackling her wireless.

"Trying to call a battle-ship--if we ever get a chance to derrick up those poor chaps," the officer told me. "It all depends on you, MacGregor--and God be with you!"

That gave me a start. Till that moment, from the time I left the chief in New York, I had moved like a man in a dream. The only clear thought in my numbed brain was that Providence was in some way shaping events, and that I was the instrument called to a certain end.

It was in my mind that here, in a steel coffin at the bottom of the sea, lay a man who had wronged me as much as one man can wrong another; and on me, the father of Jeanie MacGregor, depended Lieutenant Gerald's salvation.

The irony of it swept over me at the moment when one of the men on the lighter knelt to lock on my copper helmet, and I threw back my head and laughed like a man gone mad. I saw the terror and suspicion leap into his eyes, and I finished roughly:

"Bah, man! I'm but thinking how the dogfish will gnash their big teeth on my

armored suit. 'Tis my trade, remember, diving down among the dead men!"

The fear was still on him that my nerve had broken, and suddenly his eyes flashed.

"Good Heaven!" he cried. "You're name's MacGregor. Can it by any chance be you're a relative of--"

"I haven't a relative on earth. Finish, or let some one else finish," I snarled back at him.

He snapped on the helmet, and the last word I heard was a muttered threat, or command, or curse, I could not make out which--nor cared.

The terrible mockery of the situation possessed me. For all I knew, Jeanie had heard of the catastrophe and come out. The man must have connected our names that way, and Heaven knows what she may have said in her despair. The thought fired the rage within me. Half-way down the weighted rope ladder I stopped to have another grim laugh, and to wait for the pressure of the water to give the warning "snap" in my ears. The pressure of grief and shame had already snapped my brain.

o this day I do not know how deep the submarine lay; but below me, a man's height from the bottom of the ladder, I saw the gray floor of the sea, dotted here and there by moving black shadows that seemed to be prowling round a long, cigar-shaped vessel which rolled slightly in the ground swells. Only a strong man could live where my leaden shoes landed me, and I knew by the sluggish motion of the submarine that she was resting heavily, all her buoyancy gone from her. Beside her, on the bottom, another long, narrow shape showed that she had shed her keel--her commander's last desperate

attempt to rise to the surface. The ship was helpless, dead already.



BELOW ME, A MAN'S HEIGHT FROM THE
BOTTOM OF THE LADDER, I SAW THE
GRAY FLOOR OF THE SEA

"Aye, Providence did a good game when at it, and left the finish to me!"

Snarling at the helpless craft through clenched teeth, like a savage beast, I drew nearer. I saw now why the men within had been unable to save themselves when she sank. The blunt bow of the ship, like the stubby neck of a bottle, was jammed against a wall of rock, blocking her torpedo-tubes and preventing egress by that way.

"The hand of Providence!" I gloated.

In the implicit faith that all things were ordered. I had thought only for the man who had wronged me, none for the imprisoned crew, though I knew that five men besides the commander were within that steel shell. Over her glowed a pale nimbus of light.

I knew where I should be most likely to find Lieutenant Gerald. I made my way to the turret like structure amidships, and peered through the thick glass band that circled the conning-tower. Within, I caught a glimpse of a distorted white face that stared out at me--the face of a man already dead and buried.

"He knows I'm here. I'll let the villain see me before I talk to him." I thought.

I was so deep down that a spring landed me on the lateral fin that ran round the boat. As I stood upright, glaring into the turret, Lieutenant Gerald's hand flickered up at salute and I shook my fist against the glass, anger mastering,

"Wait--just wait!" I snarled.

Pressing my vizor against the thick glass, I could dimly see other forms in the submerged ship, some crawling on their hands and knees; and then I knew that the lights were still going in her. I could make out the swinging electrics, the brass staircase, and the sheen of machinery--even a box of cigars, drenched by the sea water that had rushed into the ship when she sank, so quickly and unexpectedly that the commander had hardly time to swing the lever that closed the trap cover when she dropped to the floor of the sea.

For hours the living death had mowed at them, had clutched at their throats. I knew well enough why some of them were crawling--it was from sheer

weakness.

"They're almost out of compressed air. It's not hours they have to live now, but minutes!"

Moved by a will stronger than mine--the habit of saving life, I suppose--I grasped the long air-hose which the men on the lighter had lowered beside the ladder, and made it fast to the brass standard that I had already located in the bow of the submarine. Signaling up top, I waited till the leap of the air in the hose told me the pumpmen were at work, and made my way back to the turret.

I could tell by the commander's face that the air was pouring into the ship. Suddenly my heart gave a great leap. Maybe it was the uniform cap, or the fair hair that curled on his head; but thought of my own lost boy leaped back to me, and now I knew why Jeanie had loved the villain. He looked like my lost Jerry!

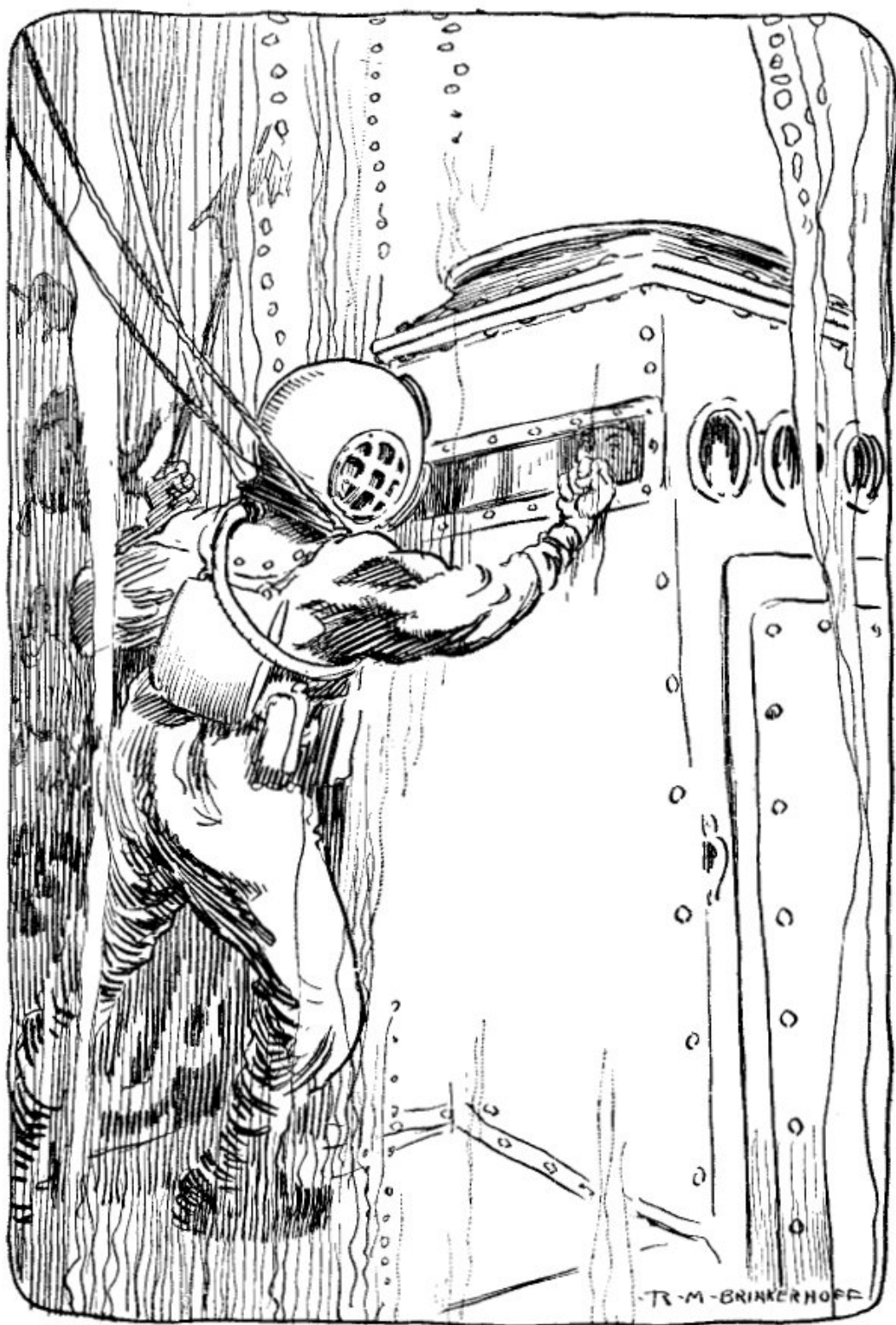
They say that training makes most men alike; but it was more than that--it was the defiant courage that shone in the man's eyes, the courage that never gives up to the end, whatever the odds --that made me want to spring on the fellow and tear him down, to proclaim who and what I was and utterly destroy him, at the very moment when hope surged up in him.

He seemed puzzled himself at something--though he could only have had the vaguest sight of me through the vizard of my helmet. He was trying to motion with his lips. Suddenly he snatched up the head-piece of the turret telephone--the emergency instrument, used only in talking "up top" and to divers, when the ship is submerged.

He had seen the receiver inside my helmet, or he was chancing it; but I had come prepared--prepared to denounce that handsome, smiling scoundrel, and to put the fear of death into him, as I had already given him the breath of life.

"You're a dead man already, but I'll let you know that there's no escape from me I was growling at him like a wild animal, while I was working with the copper pegs that I had taken from my belt and screwed into the plate on the

turret-sill. My last words must have reached him, for he stopped just as he was about to speak. Then, evenly and clearly, his voice came to me--the voice of a doomed man in a steel coffin, yet the voice of an officer talking to a sailor.



I SHOOK MY FIST AGAINST THE GLASS, ANGER MASTERING ME

"Who are you? You are not a government diver! I am the commander of the *Shark*, Lieutenant--"

"I know who you are! And I am John MacGregor!"

IV

WHAT else I said in the first rush of rage I do not know, only as I knew it by the change that seemed to pass over his face, as I glimpsed it staring at me through the wavering lights of the lenses and the sea. I left little to be said, when the cold cruelty of my forebears came upon me. I wanted to kill the man, but most I wanted to hear him beg for mercy; and he only smiled!

The great hawser was hanging behind me, a few feet away from the ship to which it was my duty to make it fast. He saw it in the refraction of light from the turret, and motioned over my head.

"There's your duty--do it!" he said. "For the rest--I will answer to that on top, or Jeanie MacGregor will answer for me. Now make fast that cable!"

I laughed. I heard the sound of my own voice, and shuddered.

"I have only to disconnect the air-hose, and where are ye?" I retorted. "Aye, there's a ship overhead--a big one. She can pull out a boat of this size--and will, when you get down on your marrow-bones and swear the oath I'll put to ye. Decide, or--the hose is as handy as the hoisting-cable."

It was not John MacGregor that was talking; it was some demon of the deep. Who knows a man's soul? And mine was in torment.

But the man in the turret was an officer and a gentleman. Yes! That's what they call 'em, in spite of what he'd done. I knew while I swore it that no power of life or death could make that man show the white feather. Helpless he was--dead, did I give the word--and yet the cold feeling of defeat crawled over me, lying like an icy hand on my heart.

In that moment I could have crushed the world. Think of what I had gone through! Think of what I had lost, through the villainy of that smiling, scornful blackguard in the turret. That I should beat him down to shame, he would not permit--no, though his life and the lives of all aboard paid for it. I knew that.

I turned away from the turret, and looked out into the surging water. Help had come. The great shadow over me, which I knew was the battle-ship, waited. The hoisting-cable swung from her huge steel derrick. Above, I knew that every man held his breath--impatient, too, as I could tell from the swaying of the cable and the quick, anxious twitches that came from my signal-cord.

They knew, up above there, that the submarine was getting air; they must know that I had already had speech with her commander. But it rested with me how much to tell them of the black drama being played out below.

A thought came to me, and I stifled it like a thief in the night.

"It's the way I'd like a son of my own to act," it came into my mind; and I hated myself for the thought.

Just then a shadow, grayer in tone and closer to me than the war-ship's shadow, swung slowly athwart the sea, passing over the sunken submarine. It swayed aside the hanging cable and came back again, playing with the new toy. It was a shark.

Blankly I kept my eyes raised to it as it passed between the air-hose attached to my helmet and the air-hose that rose from the sunken ship, swishing both lines with its fail. A voice filtered evenly and coldly into the receivers in my helmet, startling me.

"Better watch out for that shark, Mr. Murderer. He'll beat you at your own game if he takes a bite out of that rubber hose!"

It was Lieutenant Gerald talking, but somehow the man's voice affected me differently than before. The tone of command had gone out of it. It was not that the man was afraid; he was just waiting for what fate would bring forth. I heard him say something:

"It is on the knees of the gods," it sounded like.

It came to me with a shock, and it maddened me, too, that this man--knowing him for what he was--should trust himself to the hands of Providence. Then, suddenly, the most terrible thought of all came to me, and I hurled myself through the water, clutching at the swaying cable.

"If he will have it so, then he shall have it. Providence shall judge between us!"

Well I knew that the monster of the sea, wandering so far out of his range in the great deeps, had come to the sunken submarine by no chance of fate. Nor would he go without leaving a terrible mark behind--a mark that would spell life or death either to one John MacGregor, or to the smiling face that taunted him behind the plate glass of the turret.

The shark's rush had torn the threadlike wires of the telephone from my helmet, but I did not mind that. As the gray form melted away I seized the cable and sprang with it to the bow of the submarine. In the great pressure of the water my own weight and that of the hawser were nothing.

Twice I passed the cable round the bottle neck of the sunken craft, doubling it back on itself, and finally making the great hook at the end fast to a huge ring-bolt in the bow. Once the powerful engines of the ship above strained on that cable, the submarine would go to the top, nose first, as easily as I myself could bound from the bed of the ocean back to the turret on top of her.

Once there, a bitter pang struck me. I could no longer taunt the officer inside, defy him and dare him to the duel in the depths that my mad brain had evolved. But he seemed to understand. I saw him glance down at his crew--God forgive me for forgetting them, but in my madness I had. When he looked up again, his face was pale, but I could make out that he was smiling, as before. He was watching the scourge of the sea--and me.

"Ah, you understand?" I exulted, as if he could hear me.

He was a sailor, as I was a diver, and he knew. Sooner or later that terrible curiosity that impels those monsters of the deep to return to that which they

cannot understand, would turn to rage. Twice the great shark had returned already, nosing and swishing aside the thin lines of the air-hose as if in contempt. The great hanging cable attracted him, and he nipped it. I must have been mad, but I turned to nod to the watching officer.

"There's judgment for ye!" I gibed. "He'll tear one o' them apart before he goes, I know, for I've seen them nip a ship's cable as a woman nips a thread!"

"Two against one!" he taunted.

Whether I heard it, or sensed it from the movement of the man's Hps, I'll never know, but the words that came from the man in the turret were as plain to me as if I had heard them. Another word came, too:

"Coward!"

It struck me like a blow in the face; but it was true! To the shark I had left the choice of destruction. The parting of those trailing lines of hemp and hose meant the destruction of one or both of us.

I have said that I was mad, and the thrashing demon above us was even madder than I. He had seized the cable in his great jaws, champing on it, but foiled by its wire core. His madly swishing tail threw the air-hose into a tangle of white water.

Suddenly he turned, in his own length, snapped, and missed the dangling air-hose of the ship. In my ears I heard that taunting cry:

"Two against one!"

Such cowardly odds never should stand in favor of John MacGregor!
Besides, the madness in my brain was clearing.

The lunge of the shark brought his great side within a foot of me. I staggered, and felt the sawing rasp of his sandpaper hide tearing across my diving-dress. A great black fin flapped against me, and I flung out my arm to save myself, stabbing, stabbing, stabbing with the long diver's knife that I snatched from my belt.

"Ye black fiend!" I roared. "Ye'll come spoiling the work o' John MacGregor, when I've taught the likes of ye many times to keep off! Take that, and that, and that!"

A horrible red mist filled the waters, and a blow sent me rolling over on the bed of the sea. I braced myself for the rush of salt water in the air-tube, but it never came. I gave the signal to the top, and began to stagger up the rope ladder.

It must have been a fearful blow that next struck the armored back of my diving-suit. It threw me clean to the foot of the ladder, and as I recovered myself and caught at the bottom rung I saw the submarine slowly rising by the nose from the sea, hooked like a great fish on the derrick of the battleship above. We were both going up top!

V

I WOKE from unconsciousness with the hoarse chorus of sailors' voices in my ear.

"Down went McGioty to the bot-tom of the sea!" they were singing.

Then an officer spoke in a tone of authority.

"Keep those fellows from the submarine quiet, can't you?" he said. "They ought to be saying their prayers--praying for Diver MacGregor, at that!"

The officer was beside me, and his hand on my breast when I struggled up. I saw that I was still in diving dress, save for the smothering helmet. Some one behind me was holding my head; and that made me angry, to be treated like a child, though the hands were soft and cool. The officer laughed.

"Didn't know me, dad, did you? I could see that the pressure had floored you, down at the turret, when you talked all that queer stuff. Steady! Hold him fast, Jeanie. You'd think we were murdering the man!"

It was Lieutenant Gerald--my own lost lad, Jerry MacGregor, speaking. Did I know him now, outside that awful turret in the deep? God's mercy, yes; and Jeanie, his sister, looked in my eyes, and laughed, and cried.

"Jeanie," I mumbled, gasping for breath with the wonder of my discovery, "why--why didn't ye tell me?"

"Tell you, when ye hated him, dear, cruel, stupid daddy! You would have cursed Jerry; and maybe the curse would have counted against him. I'm sorry I ran away, but he sent for me to see him take his first comand. Lieutenant Gerald MacGregor--isn't it grand, daddy dear, after all these years apart? We were coming home, when--when--"

"When you took me from the dead men, with your good MacGregor courage, in spite of an attack of diver's madness," said my son.

Our eyes met, and we gazed long into each other's faces, with a look of understanding.

"'Twas you proved the blood of the MacGregors, and mastered your old mad dad, son o' my heart!" I said. "Man, man, there's no fool like an old fool. Aye, my lad, 'tis a grand place for madness--down among the dead men!"

Patrols of Peril by Frederick C. Davis



AS he sat on the steps of the recreation house, Lieutenant "Farry" Fareton gripped the imaginary "stick" of an imaginary DeHaviland and rushed to the climax of his narrative:

"Then I saw it wasn't a bird, either. It was a kite! More than a thousand feet up, but down where the San Angela patrol would miss it. On the end of the tail was swinging a little box. I suspected right away the box was full of cocaine, but I was thinking then about the old air hack I was driving.

"Straight ahead and close, I saw a long, thin flash, reflection of the sun, and I knew the kite was being flown on a steel wire. Gosh! If I buzzed into that wire--*zing!*--it would maybe split the propeller or at least upset the control connections. Quick as lightning I zoomed over it, with the propeller missing the wire by inches, and when I stalled into the field here, that funny kite was hanging onto the undercarriage, where it'd got tangled, like I'd wanted, I'd thought I ought to bring it along, you see. After that, it wasn't anything for the Cap to figure out where and how the smugglers had been getting their cocaine across the Rio Grande--"

A snore interrupted. Other flyers on the "rec" building steps, likewise members of the Cantilla flight of the United States Army Air Service, were catching after-lunch naps. Fareton's recital was on for the twentieth time, and they knew it by heart. The event itself, in fact, was not yet months old. From the mouth of one Porky Stevens issued a yawn.

"And to prove it," Fareton hurried on, "I'll go get--"

"Throttle her!" Stevens' bark halted Fareton's stride away. "Stay where you are, Farry. I swear, I never knew another man like you, with a past composed one hundred per cent of narrow escapes, who takes along with him everywhere he goes a boxful of souvenirs from each and every one of said narrow escapes, just to prove he had 'em. You're a museum, all in yourself. And it's just my luck that I can't sleep through your chatter, like the other boys do, on account of my damn' insomnia."

"I've got to get the old stories off my chest," Fareton excused himself calmly, sitting again, "because I've got new ones coming along all the time. Hello!" he exclaimed. "Hope nothing's wrong with the morning patrol!"

Across the way the radio sergeant had burst out of the shack and run quickly toward Headquarters building. At the door he met Captain Horder

and rattled out his message. For a moment the two men talked fast. Then the Captain hurried out.

On the field a reassembled D. H. had been warmed up for a test by the mechanics, and several flying shavetails were about. The Captain spoke briskly to them. They began to move excitedly.

"That's no check ride," Fareton declared to Stevens. "Come along, Porky."

The pair hastened toward the ship. Its propeller was already spinning, the four-hundred-horsepower engine roaring. The plane taxied off, inclined over the fence and deadheaded east. The sting of flying grit still on his face, Fareton turned to Captain Horder.

"Trouble, sir?"

"Something's gone wrong with McKeever and Thompson on the Silver Lode patrol," the Captain answered. "Reports have been coming in regularly until the last one, a moment ago. The last report said that a strange plane had come out of a cloudbank, Mexico-ward, The plane opened fire on them--"

"Opened fire!"

"--opened fire with a machine gun--"

"Machine gun!"

"--And the message stopped there. The rest we'll know when Clark and Johnson get back," Captain Horder went on, his face pasty. "They've gone to hunt for McKeever and Thompson in the mesquite."

As the Captain strode away, Fareton and Stevens exchanged dazed glances.

"Porky, this is 1927, not 1917, any more. And this is the Rio Grande territory, not the Argonne--"

"I don't get it!" Stevens cut in. "I haven't even thought of a machine gun for more'n five years. Lord, I hope there's a mistake, and the boys get back

safe."

Statistics with which flying service men are familiar say that every eighth man in the service is killed every year. The government insurance bureau is not instituted for no purpose; the Border Patrol understand that. To the dangers of the sky their nerves are immune, until the eighth man leaves his crate and keeps on arching straight into the stars, forever; then emotional and alcoholic orgies come.

Fareton and Stevens tramped back toward the rec house silently, until Fareton spoke.

"It reminds me, Porky. Did I ever tell you about the time I glided down in No Man's Land, forced down, and saw a Boche coming straight at me with his hog-sticker all honed and stropped? All I had was one hand grenade I'd picked off a buddy who didn't have any further use for it; and in the excitement I forgot to bite the plug off. There it went sailing straight at that Boche just the same!

"All he had to do was catch it and toss it back right, and I'd have blown away on the breeze. My subconscious mind must have been working, however, because that grenade happened to hit the Boche right between the eyes, and down he went--to stay, I saw to it. That was a close shave! It happens I've got that grenade yet. I saved it. I'll go get it and show--"

"Don't do it!" Stevens roared. "Just try to show it to me, and I'll use it proper--at you!"

"What's the matter with you lately, Porky?" Fareton came back. "You act as though you'd been looping on a full stomach."

The question touched Stevens' depths. The change which blended through him was profound. The eyes he turned up at Fareton were sad.

"You and me, we understand each other," he admitted. "We both have felt the same ever since pretty Lieutenant Twombly was assigned to the flight two months ago--except that I feel worse than you do. At least, Julie had you up to tea once."

"Just once," Fareton nodded. "And Twombly has tea with her every day in the week!"

"I haven't never been at all," Porky repeated, "and I've got no prospects, either. I've got sense enough to know I haven't any chance with her. And anyway, I promised Minnie, back in Tulsa, that I'd marry her. I guess I just naturally hate to see a lady's man like Twombly get away with all his smooth stuff."

"My hopes are dying fast," Fareton observed, "but fighting for life. Speak of the devil, and also of angels--"

The sleek official touring-car eased to a stop before Headquarters building under the guidance of Miss Juliet Horder, the Captain's daughter. At once a uniformed man sped across the space from the rec building and received a cordial greeting from the girl. Fareton and Stevens looked away, their eyes smarting with the sight, but they heard the girl say:

"I'm sorry we can't have tea together today, Lieutenant Twombly--"

Fareton grinned in spite of himself and Stevens audibly giggled.

"--But if you'll come up at six for dinner, we can spend the evening together instead."

Fareton and Stevens cursed softly.

"Oh, good afternoon, Lieutenant Fareton!"

Fareton whirled, his face aglow. "Afternoon, Miss Juliet! Well, well, I've been wondering where you've been keeping yourself. I used to see you come down to bring the Captain home around four or five in the afternoon, but I notice lately the Captain's been going home alone, and--"

Fareton realized that he had stumbled into a conversational bog and hastily strove to extricate himself.

"I--I was just telling my friend, Porky Stevens, about the time back in 1917 when a Boche--"

"Oh, yes," said the girl sweetly. "I'm sure he was interested. I'll see you at six, then, Lieutenant Twombly."

Fareton came away dazedly as Stevens pulled his arm. Stevens exploded.

"You big fool! That's what queered you with her--your chatter. Do you think a girl invites a man to tea to hear terrible stories of how he rounded up a bandit gang with a nigger-shooter--and have him show her the very pea he did it with? Nix!"

"I guess I can't help it, Porky," Fareton sighed.

"And tonight it's dinner for that slick Twombly. Curse the day that brought him to the flight! I wish I could--I wish I could--" Stevens paused, meditating. "Sometimes I think I'd--"

Abruptly he turned and walked away, leaving Fareton puzzled.

THE exhaust of a powerful Lincoln motor had been beating through the air more loudly with each passing second. Now the plane stalled into the field from due east. It taxied to a stop while the mechanics mobbed around it. Captain Horder hurried out of Headquarters, and close behind followed Warren, the flight surgeon.

The two men in the D.H., who had been searching the mesquite for McKeever and Thompson, did not at once jump out. They had burdens to lower. Others reached up to assist. Stretchers were brought, and, sheet-covered, two bodies carried away. Fareton sidled close while Clark and Johnson reported to the Captain.

"The D.H. they took out on patrol this morning is a wreck, sir. We found it in the mesquite, in pieces. We looked at the motor. The cylinders are cracked, by steel-jacketed bullets. We found one inside. There are twenty-odd bullet holes through the fuselage, sir. McKeever and Thompson--by

some miracle. Captain, there was something of them to bring back. Riddled, sir--riddled!"

The Captain strode away, his face beet-red. Fareton whirled, and with the others pushed questions at the two scouts. Porky Stevens and the immaculate Twombly joined the circle together. Theories grew.

"There's only one explanation for it," Fareton asserted. "It's been only a few weeks since the cocaine smugglers were rounded up, and we know we didn't get them all. It looked like a family affair, that smuggling, and family affairs in Mexico get damn' serious. The Velenzos are hot-blooded, anyway. Now that the old man is in the pen, one of his sons might be gunning for us out of sheer revenge. Ever hear of a vendetta--?"

"Against the whole Border Patrol?" Twombly asked skeptically.

"Certainly! When Mexicans hate, I tell you, they hate. What's left of that little crowd hates us for breaking up the dope ring. Why shouldn't the smugglers be addicts themselves? Hate, dope, tequila--somebody crazy enough to unlimber a machine gun at us--and there you are!"

"It sounds im--"

Fareton sliced into Twombly's comment. "Does it? Well, how do you explain it? With help from all the tea you've drunk recently you ought to get up a nice lavender-scented theory about it!"

Fists would have flown at that moment, had not timely interruption taken away the possibility.

The buzzing of a motor was again disturbing the air. All eyes turned upward in the direction of the approaching craft. It was smaller than a De-Haviland. It was not preparing to stall into the field, but coming down with motor roaring in a full power drive. Its nose was pointed straight at the group on the field.

"That's not a service plane. It hasn't the markings."

"It looks like--my God above!" Fareton's voice shouted the warning: "Run!"

The plane was close now, and Fareton's startled eyes had seen a mechanical device mounted in the rear cock-pit. Then a helmeted and goggled head had risen and, swung around, straight at them, was the bore of a machine-gun!

Like frightened chickens below a swooping hawk, the men on the ground scattered. In comparison with the dynamic sweep of the plane, their movements were far too slow.

Pr-r-r-r-r! Pr-r-r-r-r!

The machine-gun spat fiery death out at them!

Window-panes shattered. Bullets planked through the corrugated tin roofs of the hangars. Little spurts of dust jumped up from the ground in even rows.

And men fell!

Pr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Instantly the unknown plane zoomed up, climbing again into the blue at a steep angle. For a moment more it sprayed the ground with deadly slugs; then the sputter stopped. With incredible rapidity the plane receded.

On the ground three men lay still. Two others were writhing in agony. A few muffled curses were audible in the tense silence. One of those only wounded waved wildly, as those unhurt rushed instinctively toward them, and shouted:

"Get that crate?"

Then came the squeak and rumble of hangar doors. Mechanics fluttered around. Two DeHavilands rolled out. Men climbed into the cockpits, two into each plane. In an instant the propellers were humming in a grim rhythm.

One and then the other taxied off, banked south in pursuit of the death-dealing craft, and crabbed after that mere speck in the sky.

Lieutenant Fareton stood backed against the door of Headquarters. As the hostile plane had darted down, his move had been to block the instinctive rush outward of the persons inside--particularly Miss Juliet. As he stepped aside, the rush came; and he hastened to aid the men who had fallen.

He threw his arm around Porky Stevens' shoulder.

"Thank Heaven, Porky, they didn't get you!"

"Danm it, Farry, they didn't get Twombly, either!"

The field was in a hubbub. The flight surgeon moved frantically. Those uninjured carried into the little board-floored tents the injured and the dead.

Under stern direction of her father, Juliet Horder drove the official car off the field.

After the first hysterical outburst, an enforced calm came into the air.

These names and others came from the lips of Captain Horder like so many shots:

"Lieutenants Twombly-- Fareton-- Stevens-- Jackson-- Rich--!"

Alertly the men ducked from the tents and responded. To them the Captain stated in crackling syllables:

"Three more men are dead. Five in all today! The two D.H's which have chased the armed ship stand very little chance. The most they can hope to do is locate the field from which the armed ship came. They may not succeed at that. I'll be glad if they come back at all.

"We will stand as prepared as possible, under the circumstances," the Captain went on sharply, "if another attack should come. In the meanwhile the routine of patrol confronts us. Orders are to fly the patrols if flying is

possible. It is not impossible yet by any means. The afternoon patrol between Bitter Creek and San Angelo will fly as usual."

"But--" Twombly cut in. Sharp eyes turned at him.

"It happens," the Captain went on more slowly, "that both Hennings and Fulton, who were to take the eastward this afternoon, are dead. King, who was going west with Harper, is injured. Harper will take the west alone. I will send only one man up for the east. I ask for a volunteer for the east patrol--"

A chorus answered.

"One man only. And understand that the machine-gun craft may still be up."

Twombly stepped out. "A moment ago I was about to state that I knew Hennings and Fulton can't take their patrol, sir. Some men--" his eyes shifted toward Fareton, who grew red of face--"some men might think I was objecting to the usual flight in the face of such danger. In order to offset all such suspicions, I ask to be allowed to take the east to Bitter Creek."

"Wait a second!" This time the treble of Porky Stevens interrupted. "Lieutenant Twombly is a newer man with the flight than I am. He doesn't know the patrol as well as I do, sir. I ask to be allowed to take the east--"

"Twombly will go," Captain Horder interrupted.

"I--I ask again--"

"That'll do, Stevens!"

"Captain Horder, I--I demand--" At a murderous glare from the Captain, Porky Stevens stepped back, his face wet with sweat. "I beg pardon, sir!"

Dapper Twombly turned briskly on his heel toward the tents. A D.H. had been tugged from the hangars by the feverish mechanics and already warmed up. Twombly ran into his tent and loped back jacketed and helmeted, adjusting his goggles.

An instant after he was in the cockpit the propeller was singing. Then the plane taxied, lifted, stalled into the wind, crabbed off south, and deadheaded east. Until it became a dark star on a white sky all eyes kept to it.

Then relaxation came, and men dragged themselves wearily to their tents.

In Fareton's tent Stevens lay on the cot, and Fareton sighed.

"This man Twombly is a dude, but he knows the stick. Also, he has guts. He knows how to fly and--how to make love." Fareton slumped down in his chair. "If he was a rotter, I'd feel that I had some last chance with Miss Juliet, but he's a pretty good guy, and my chance with the girl isn't worth a plugged nickle."

Stevens moaned.

"What's wrong, Porky?"

"God, Farry--you know--ah, God, I couldn't have done a more damn' fool stunt than--what I did--"

"What're you talking about? Not your insisting on going up?"

"No!" Stevens opened eyes heavy with misery. "Farry, just before they brought McKeever and Thompson back, I took Twombly into my tent, friendly like, and gave him a glass of my ginger-ale. Well, I guess I was just naturally sore at his lording it over us so much that he stands in so good with Julie-- Anyway, I thought it would be a good joke--just a good joke, understand--"

Fareton frowned. "What're you driving at, Porky?"

"Wait a minute! Wait till I get the nerve to tell you what a rotten fool I've been--that's all."

"Take your time," Fareton bade him laconically.

The purring of a ship's exhaust came faintly on the air. Fareton craned out of the tent. In the southwest two D.H. planes were approaching, almost side

by side. They stepped down to the landing space and stalled in. The pilots hopped out of the cock-pits. Captain Horder had come out of Headquarters again, and now received their report.

Crowding close, Fareton and Stevens heard.

"We lost it, sir. There are heavy cloudbanks down over the mountains, and the ship sneaked into them. We couldn't follow too close on account of the gun-fire. Also a little short of gas, sir. Sorry!"

"Be glad you're still breathing!" Horder grunted; and turned on his heel.

When they were together again in their tent, Fareton observed to Stevens: "Whoever it is in that Mexican plane, he's a flying wild man!"

Stevens again turned worried eyes on Fareton. "You think there's a chance they might try to fire on Twombly on patrol?"

"Sure there's a chance. Twombly knew it when he went up. We all did."

Stevens flung his feet off the cot. "Farry, we've got to do something, fast! I told you I wanted to play a joke on the dude. I didn't know all this was coming up. I thought it would be sweet revenge if I could make him miss that dinner-date. Well, you know about how I can't sleep at night, always, and have to take powders. Farry, by Heaven, I put two powders in Twombly's drink. It'll put him to sleep in the ship. Farry, as sure as you're cursing me now!"

FARETON stared. "Good God, Porky! That stuff's powerful! You mean to tell me he couldn't stay awake if he tried?"

"Nothing would keep him awake with those two shots in him! It's almost sure death for him, Farry! I--I tried to keep him from going up--you heard me!"

Farry jumped up. "Come along!"

They hastened to the radio shack and put their heads in.

"Sarge," Fareton demanded of the operator, "Twombly's reports are coming in regular?"

"One is overdue. It ought to be in any minute--if that machine gun lunatic isn't chasing him."

Fareton and Stevens, both paler, turned away swiftly.

"Porky, is it too soon for that stuff to be working on him now?"

"It is not!" Stevens answered tightly. "Right this minute Twombly may be--" and he finished with a shudder.

Fareton ran toward one of the D.H's which was still in the field, and signaled to the mechanic to warm it. They hastened out for themselves in caps and goggles. Fareton gestured Stevens into the fore cock-pit. Into the rear one he climbed himself. Before the motor caught, Stevens turned to demand:

"Farry, what's on your mind?"

"We're going after Twombly the fastest way possible!"

"But what can we do now?"

"If there's anything special to be done, little man, I'll do it. You keep your hand on the stick and do as I say!" Then came a word like an explosion:

"Wait!"

He poised thoughtfully, then leaped to the ground. Running straightly for his tent, he ducked under the flap. In the plane Stevens fidgeted anxiously. No matter what could or could not be done, every second was precious now. In a moment Fareton dodged out of the tent again, ran back to the plane, and legged into the rear cock-pit.

Stevens froze his eyes to the controls.

K-k-rrrrrr!

Combined with the staccato notes of the motor came the ground rumble of the ship as it taxied around and nosed into the wind. Then with a gentle tilt the D.H. was skimming over the fence and fast leaving the patchwork of tents and hangar roofs below.

Stevens paralleled into the usual trail of the afternoon patrol to Bitter Creek. At two thousand feet Fareton's eyes scanned the ground below, spotted, clumped with mesquite, the band of the Rio Grand curling across it. Scudding southward and northward at intervals, the ship went up to five thousand feet as the search went on. Then Stevens waved toward the northeast, where a plane was spinning evenly along toward them.

For minutes Fareton eyed the plane, half believing it an illusion. It was, however, real. As it came closer, Fareton saw that it was navigating uncertainly. It swerved and veered, and was not maneuvering in a usual manner. It seemed out of control.

Stevens glanced back and through the glass of the goggles. Fareton saw the horror in his eyes.

The plane, they knew, was running itself. No hand was on the controls! They knew that a ship which is accurately aligned and balanced will, if it is driven at the correct speed, fly on by itself so long as the air is smooth and the gas holds out. Both men realized that Twombly, feeling the drowsiness coming upon him, had set the controls to this nice adjustment. As they arched up they could see Twombly in the pit of the other ship, head hanging forward, but, even in sleep, braced back to keep himself from unconsciously pushing against the stick and so driving himself to death on the earth below. The credit for his still being in the sky was due to mechanical perfection and the grace of God.

The self-flying plane passed them, and Stevens banked to the left to chase it. When he leveled off Fareton bent forward, tapped Stevens' shoulder and signaled that he had something to say. Stevens throttled back and let the plane mush out into a glide.

"Porky, how long will Twombly sleep?"

"Hours!"

"Thought so! There's only one thing can be done. I've got to get onto his plane."

"*What!* You're crazy! You're no wing-walker. You couldn't do it You've got too much imagination. You'd slip off--and we're up six thousand."

"Under the circumstances, you're doing what I say! Listen to me! I've got to land on Twombly's tail. Give her the gun!"

The motor roared again. Stevens banked right and carefully crowded his plane closer to that of the free-flying D.H. As the two planes straightened out, Fareton divested himself of his jacket and climbed out of the rear cockpit.

More than a mile down, the crust of the earth was rocking giddily, floating on the sea of eternity. Hanging onto the struts and wires as he went, Fareton toed outward on the wing until he was hanging at the verge of space, at the tip of the wing.

Stevens, his face a pasty white beneath the leather of his goggles, complied. He caught Fareton's signal to close in.

The checkboard of the earth was careening. The fragile bodies of the planes and their death-flashing propellers were appallingly close together. A wind racing at more than a hundred miles an hour tore at Fareton.

Still Fareton kept his eyes on the tail of the loose plane as it swung closer. Sometimes many feet, sometimes only a few, separated the wing of the one plane from the tail of the other, while Fareton's leg stretched out, waiting for his chance.

In the cockpit Stevens gazed on it all as in a dream. A shaky move, a sloppy adjustment, a turn-out at the wrong instant and Fareton would go hurtling a mile down to death. Soon after Twombly's plane would also crash.

Delicately Stevens moved the controls, and the planes weaved closer--while Fareton waited, leg outstretched.

Then a moment came when the tail of Twombly's ship levelled with the wing which was carrying Fareton; and Fareton swung out. Both his feet left the wing. His hands still clung to the strut. Stevens grew frigid. The under plane bumped. Fareton all but dangled, Stevens gently swung over; and Fareton whirled off, falling astride the tail and punching his fingers through the linen for a hold.

Stevens frantically banked his plane away.

Fareton crawled rapidly up the tail of Twombly's crate, and fell inside the cockpit. Sitting on Twombly's lap, grotesquely high, he shot on the gas and the plane bored ahead steadily.

As Stevens arched to the other plane's level, Fareton waved broadly to him.

"Get out of the way!" this gesture plainly said. "Go back home!"

Stevens was too shaken to question. Gladly he complied; he banked right and bee-lined.

As Twombly's plane eased down again, Fareton strove to get himself in a position whereby he could work the stick more easily. Having done this he tried to arouse Twombly. But Twombly was not to be aroused. The man was as though dead.

Fareton leveled off again and headed into the wind.

Fareton's compass straightened him. By the time he had found the bearings for the plane, Stevens' own D.H. was almost out of sight. Taking it easy, Fareton throttled back.

Now an avalanche of emotion, in contrast with his coldness of a few moments back, came upon him. He shuddered, air-sick for the first time. He had never done a plane-change stunt before in his life and he had no desire

to repeat it. His one wish, now that he was steadied again, was to get back to his tent and take a rest.

The ironic thought struck him that perhaps, if the man could be revived, Twombly could keep that dinner date with Miss Juliet after all!

He heard, close behind him, suddenly, the drone of another motor merging into the whirr of his own ship. He glanced back--and the blood in his veins became as ice.

In the rear cockpit of the ship which was streaming straight toward him a leather-encased head was rising; and the bore of the machine-gun, was leveling straight at him.

P-p-pr-rrrrrr!

WITH insane suddenness, even before the rattle broke out, Fareton dove. The earth tilted straight up before the nose of his plane. Through the haze he saw the Rio Grande full ahead! Fareton braced himself madly upon every possible support; he was loose in the cock-pit, without a strap, without a parachute! Downward he went like a shot, until he skimmed off to the south, banked east steeply, and climbed directly below the other plane.

Some of the bullets had penetrated the fuselage in the rear. Luckily the propeller was unhit; one bullet would have splintered it. Twombly was untouched; Fareton's fast drop had saved them both.

Pr-r-r-rrr!

Again a parade of steel-jacketed bullets raced across space at Fareton. He heard the slugs rip through the linen. Madly he stomped on the gas and drove the D.H. upward at a steeper angle.

Fareton knew that if he kept close under the other plane, the machine gun operator could not reach him. The barrel could not drop many degrees

below the cowling of the pit. The other plane swerved and veered to get at Fareton, but Fareton, keeping his eyes always on it, duplicated its every move. His life depended on keeping the bottom of the other plane close above him.

This was a strange game of hide-and-seek with Death in the sky!

The gun-bearing plane swooped, and Fareton swooped likewise. Then the Mexican plane leveled off and Fareton, like a pilot fish on a shark, followed.

"I see! You're trying to make me ease up--think you'll catch me napping, eh? You babies have got something coming you're not expecting!"

His hand dove into his pocket and brought out something black and pear-shaped. It was his precious souvenir hand-grenade, the one which he had forgotten, that memorable time in No Man's Land, to bite off, which had knocked the Boche out cold! On a wild notion, Fareton had run back to fish it out of his box of mementoes, just before taking off the field, on a wild chance that he might need it. Now he gripped it tightly.

He inclined his plane straight up at the other. Directly under it and very close he put the hand-grenade to his mouth, bit it off, and tossed it upward. At the same instant he dove, and the earth swung again before his eyes.

The shock of the explosion shook his own plane. Dimly Fareton saw flashing fragments streaking across his field of vision. The sudden push in the air made one of the wings of his ship crackle and the linen rip slightly.

In answer to Fareton's prayer, the linen held as he put the sky back where it belonged. The ground was very close again now. Then--

Ka-weeeeeeeee!

Another short crash, and the Lincoln motor screamed out like a dying thing.

"Propeller's gone!"

A weighty fragment from the other plane had struck it and splintered it.

Desperately Fareton tried to glide down the remaining distance. He gave one glance at Twombly--still asleep. He shot a look toward the one right wing, which was crumbling. And then, all at once, Fareton passed from daylight into a darkness which seemed to reach into the depths of his soul.

He was glad, for he was tired. He thought, as he fell, that he would like to have a cup of tea.

FARETON heard Porky Stevens talking, and feminine voices answered. He blinked, but could see nothing. And at that instant something warm trickled between his lips. He almost choked. It was tea!

He opened his eyes again, determined to see. On the other bed lay Twombly, patched with plaster, and at his side Miss Juliet Horder was giving him tea in a spoon. Fareton's eyes turned puzzledly to the girl sitting on the edge of his own bed.

The girl's blue eyes were straight into his. She was almost the double of Miss Juliet; except that she was prettier. Yes, bewitching as Julie was, this girl possessed an even more exquisite charm. As Fareton stared, he gulped down another spoonful of the tea which she was giving him.

"Also," Porky Stevens was saying, irrelevantly, "Minnie is coming all the way from Tulsa to see me, right away."

Fareton said bluntly, "Who're you?"

"Mariet--Julie's sister. I just came in on the train today, for a visit--indefinitely."

Fareton swallowed more tea. "Do you ever serve tea--at home? You do? Well, may I come up, please--if I promise not to tell you about the time when I forgot to bite off a hand-grenade and saved it, and took it along up there just on the chance I might need it, and--Go-osh! I'm telling you already. Well, if I promise not to--"

"You may come to tea," Mariet said, "if you promise to tell me every detail of it." Her smile was dazzling. "You see," she added, "I'm a newspaper feature writer, and that's copy."

Fareton sank back contentedly. Then he blinked worriedly. He looked at Stevens.

"Porky!" he exclaimed. "Did you remember to bring back a piece of that machine gun for me--as a souvenir?"

Safari Slayer by Charles S. Strong.



Jan Pieter Van Bronck pits himself against Nazis who plot to establish a secret airdrome in South Africa!

JAN PIETER VAN BRONCK was weary as the hump-backed oxen led his *voortrekker* cart into the aloe-lined roadway leading to his sprawling farm. It was no slouch job being a general volunteer trouble-shooter for the whole Transvaal.

This time Obongo, headman of the bushmen up at the Fourteen Streams had called him in to use his rough-and-ready medical knowledge. Twenty of his warriors had been stricken with a weird form of fever which had, fortunately, responded to ministrations of bicarbonate of soda and quinine, after the wiles of the medicine men had failed. But it had been a trying time for Jan Pieter none the less.

Now, as his cart drew close to the farmhouse, he saw a dust-covered touring car drawn up at his front door. As he pulled his beasts to a halt, his tired eyes deciphered the insignia "RSAAF" under the dust on the vehicle. And as Luongne, his native boy, led the oxen to the barns, a tall young man in blue uniform rose from the swing at one end of the veranda.

"Mynheer Van Bronck?" he asked.

"Yaah?" drawled Jan Pieter. The stranger extended a hand.

"I'm Squadron Leader Alan Wynwood of the South African Air Force," he said amiably. "I've heard you are good at puzzles."

Jan Pieter settled himself in a reed-bottom chair, took off his flat-crowned hat and put it on the floor beside him.

"What sort of puzzles?" he asked.

"Crime puzzles, to be specific. We have heard something of your achievements. In the past fortnight, eight of our men and two-score natives have vanished while engaged in important defense work."

"Forty-eight?" said Jan Pieter. "Yaah, that is a real puzzle."

"Our government," said the young man, "plans to build an air base in the Bush country north of Victoria Falls on the Zambesi. Thence we can maintain close contact with Free Belgian forces on the Congo as well as our men in the Southern Sahara and East Africa."

"Yaah," said Jan Pieter thoughtfully. "And with Pan-American Airways running a ferry service to Africa, the base will be doubly important."

"Precisely," said Wynwood. "However, the bush is so thick we have had to send advance *safaris* on foot to clear the land for planes. Two such parties, each with four white technicians and twenty bearers have vanished, have been swallowed up. Our planes have failed to find a trace of them. A Panzer division could hide undetected in that wilderness. Not that it could exist

long. We suspect the Nazis, naturally. But the natives know nothing of any other party of white men in the territory. It's a baffler."

"Yaah," said Jan Pieter. "It is a baffler. We will sleep on it."



THE next morning, the corpulent Dutchman and Squadron Leader Wynwood were on their way to Kimberly in the RSAAF car. Jan Pieter asked questions.

"Where did the *safaris* start from?" he inquired.

"From Livingston on the Zambesi," said Wynwood. "Bruce Foster supplied them and Cain Black was their guide."

Both names were familiar to the Boer detective. Foster had outfitted numerous big-game hunting expeditions, Black was a professional leader of motion picture outfits.

He asked other questions en route until they reached the Kimberly railroad station. There they were met by two more RSAAF men, Flight Lieutenant Carberry and Sergeant Gunner Maybridge. Carberry read them a telegram in a grave voice.

BODIES OF EIGHT NATIVE CHIEFS WITH RSAAF SAFARIS PUT IN
TRIBE COMPOUNDS LAST NIGHT WITH WARNING FOR
TRIBESMEN TO STAY OUT OF BAROTSE LAND.

KENNEDY,

WING COMMANDER RSAAF.

"That won't make getting another *safari* together easy," said Jan Pieter.

"What good will that do?" said Wynwood. "It would go the way of the others."

"I thought you gentlemen were soldiers at war," said the Boer. "That attitude won't get results. My methods are peculiar, but--"

"But they will, eh?" said Wynwood. "We're with you, Van Bronck. Capetown has ordered us to place ourselves at your disposal."

"I'll need you," said Jan Pieter. "Do not be surprised at anything."

They boarded the Capetown to Cairo express, discussed the war in general terms until the train slowed for the water tower at Fourteen Streams.

"You must excuse me," said Jan Pieter, rising. "My friend Obongo, the chief, is camped nearby. I've already sent him a message."

Puzzled, Wynwood and his comrades watched without comment as Jan Pieter conversed with a little Negro on the platform.

"The *veldt* drums," said Obongo, "say you go north. Is it to help our people?"

"Yaah. Have the drums told of eight murdered Bechuanas?"

"We have heard. *Bwana* Van Bronck will do something, will he not?"

"Perhaps," said Jan Pieter, "if your Zambesi cousins will help me."

"Chief Akka will have message before the steam horse reaches Livingston."

Back in the train, Jan Pieter made himself comfortable again.

"How's your friend?" Flight Lieutenant Carberry asked.

"I've just pulled his tribe through an epidemic," said Jan Pieter. "It helps to have native friends. Makes my farming easier too."

It was early morning when the train pulled into Livingston. There was tropical warmth in the air. Jan Pieter inhaled deeply on the car step. Then temperature was forgotten as Wynwood pointed out two men on the platform.

"Foster and Black," he said meaningly.

The two were interesting to the Boer detective. One was as short as Jan Pieter himself, but leaner, and wearing dirty linens. The other was tall and so thin he looked drained of body fluids by the tropical sun. Wynwood introduced them.

"Have you rounded up any more natives?" Jan Pieter asked.

"No," said, Black. "I'm not anxious to guide this party. We've already received warning from Congo natives that Leopard Men are on the prowl."

"Yaah, I see," said Jan Pieter. "If you meet me near the Barotse camp before sundown, I think we will have a *safari* ready."

When Black and Foster had reluctantly agreed to assemble supplies, Jan Pieter turned back to Wynwood.

"If Black guided the other two *safaris*, why did he, too, not vanish?"

"He claims he was five or six miles ahead, scouting, believes the attackers let him through to get at the others."

JAN PIETER nodded. He helped check supplies sent to Livingston with them. They included a lighting system, two-way radio sets, all equipment needed to start the air field. All were marked to provide half a load for the mules. At four that afternoon, Jan Pieter and Wynwood were paddled in a native canoe over the clear Zambesi waters under whispering palms to their rendezvous at the Barotse camp on lonely Kandahar Island. Twilight deepened rapidly as they progressed, and when they reached the camp, preparations for the beer drink in honor of the *safari* were already under way.

At sight of Jan Pieter, the bustle ceased, and the chief, a tall native in feathered girdle and head-dress, advanced and raised his hand.

"Hail, Jan Pieter," he said in halting English.

"Kavimba, my friend," said Jan Pieter in the Barotse dialect.

When the inevitable amenities were ended, he asked the chief for twenty warriors.

"If Jan Pieter shows no fear, how can Kavimba?" the chief replied. "I myself will lead nineteen of my best warriors. We received word of your coming from our mutual friend, Chief Obongo, of Fourteen Streams."

"I am sure," said Jan Pieter, conveying a subtle compliment, "that with your help rather than that of Chief Akka and his Mangbettu pygmies we will find the *safari* killers. When can we start?"

"With the dawn," said Kavimba. "*Bwana* Black and the supplies are here."

By the following noon, the *safari* was well on its way, following the Zambesi shore to the northwest. Cain Black still growled warnings, but Jan Pieter, a ludicrous if practical picture on muleback, ignored him. The donkeys were strung out behind him, their precious panniers canvas-covered.

For three days the party proceeded without incident, and Jan Pieter awaited the signal inviting contact with Chief Akka. On the third night, the *safari* camped behind a thorn stockade at the foot of the Gonye Falls.

"We're getting close to where the others were wiped out," said Black.

"This time," said Wynwood, "we're going to fight them off. I've got twenty-four submachine-guns, and the natives have caught onto how to use them."

"Leave them in their cases," said Jan Pieter. "The other *safaris* were taken prisoner. The chiefs were murdered later. Otherwise your search parties would have found traces. The Nazis must be working with the natives, and we must meet guile with guile."

"Right," said Black. "If they wanted to, they could pick us off from the jungle. We wouldn't have a chance. My advice is to turn back."

"You are free to go when you wish, Black," said Jan Pieter. "I'm asking no man to sacrifice his life against his wish."

"Okay," said Black. "I'm leaving in the morning." He walked away.

"What's gnawing him?" Lieutenant Carberry asked.

"He's involved, I fear," said Jan Pieter. "But he's not the leader. Someone has to tell the Nazis when to spring their trap."

"Not one of us, I hope," said Wynwood uncomfortably.

"I don't know," said Jan Pieter. "I think I'll stroll around the camp before turning in."

He left three uneasy RSAAF men behind him, strolled from under the mosquito netting to the thorn barrier. Four Barotses were on guard.

"Where is *Bwana* Black?" Jan Pieter inquired.

"Gone to join the night prowlers," one of the natives replied.

Jan Pieter walked into black jungle. He expected to meet Chief Akka somewhere in the darkness. Inspecting his automatic by feel, he moved as silently as a panther, for all his bulk. Black, he figured, would have followed the river trail he was pursuing.

Something rustled, and he swung. He was too late. His automatic was knocked from his hand, and he grappled an unseen assailant. He was gaining the upper hand when another attacker crashed something hard behind his ear. Jan Pieter fell forward....

WHEN he came to, a fat native in a chief's head-dress was pouring water over him from a half cocoa-nut shell. Jan Pieter spoke reproachfully.

"I hardly expected Chief Akka to greet me thus."

"Africa," said the pygmy, drawing himself to his full three-feet-ten inches, "owes Jan Pieter Van Bronck much. I was fortunate to be able to save you from serious injury. When I saw you, I feared you were dead."

"My enemies are dangerous," said Jan Pieter. "Have you news for me?"

"Only today my runners came back with the news you are seeking. The *safaris* and their white leaders are held by evil men. My warriors cannot stand against their rapid-fire sticks."

"You have done well," said Jan Pieter.

He discussed ways and means of dealing with the problem. At the conclusion of the conference, Akka spoke.

"*Bwana* Van Bronck is indeed a man of many methods. When you need us, we will be ready. I return to my people."

Jan Pieter watched the little chief melt into the jungle. Then, using his flashlight, he searched for and found his pistol. After which he returned to

camp, where he found only the native guards awake. Jan Pieter checked over the pack loads, then turned in himself.

"The Nazis," he told Wynwood the next morning, "are two days' march ahead. They have used the captured equipment to clear their own airfield. Now they are counting on us for the extra lighting and radio equipment we carry."

"Great Scott!" said Wynwood. "What are we going to do about it?"

"They expect us at dawn tomorrow. By forced marches we can be early."

"Will the natives march at night?" Wynwood asked.

Jan Pieter shrugged. But he was equal to the occasion. He gathered them together and made a speech.

"You remember," he said, "the German masters of Southwest Africa. They beat and shot your fathers twenty-five years ago. The killers of the Bechuana chiefs are the same people. We cannot let them regain the upper hand?"

Chief Kavimba and the Barotse natives agreed fervently.

"Then we must march tonight," said Jan Pieter. "We must rope the donkeys together in order to place guards at front and rear of the train to guard against surprise attack and keep the animals from straying in the dark."

Plans were completed, and the *safari* moved ahead at increased speed. They took long rests at mealtime to keep man and beast ready for the night trek. Through the dark hours they pressed relentlessly onward. Finally, at three o'clock, Jan Pieter called the airmen for a powwow.

"We are almost there," he said. "We must be on our guard."

"I still think we should issue the tommy guns," said Wynwood.

"We want to keep bloodshed at a minimum," said Jan Pieter.

Suddenly a searchlight threw a bath of light on them. Wynwood raised his pistol to try and shoot it out. A gun spoke, and his arm fell useless.

"We do not want to hurt you, Captain Wynwood," said a guttural voice "You are more valuable alive. Welcome *Mynheer* Van Bronck."

Though his plan had boomeranged, Jan Pieter kept his head. More than ever, he knew he needed his wits. Beneath the guttural that voice was familiar.

"Come out from behind the accent, Foster," he said.

"So you know me," said Foster angrily. He advanced into the field of light. "Did you suspect me in Livingston, too?"

"Perhaps," said Jan Pieter, smiling amiably.

"It's a pity you did not arrest me then."

"One does not find the eagle's nest by shooting the bird on the wing," Jan Pieter replied. His bearing gave his comrades hope, even though a dozen men in Nazi uniforms surrounded them. "I wanted to visit your secret airdrome."

"You know about it?" Foster asked incredulously.

"Yaah," said Jan Pieter. "I suppose you put Black in charge of construction. But why did you kill the chiefs?"

BLACK began to curse from the darkness, but Foster silenced him.

"The chiefs refused to work. We had to make an example of them. We figured that, lacking natives, the RSAAF would send in soldiers. We could handle them, and their arms would come in handy."

The Nazis finished disarming the white men, herded the donkeys together, and the procession continued.

"I hardly expected to catch such a big fish," said Foster to the Boer detective. "Berlin was disappointed when the plan to poison the cattle in South Africa failed. My chiefs will be glad to learn you are my prisoner."

"I can imagine," said Jan Pieter. "After your Fifth Columns and Trojan Horses, what do you call this airport--a Cuckoo's Nest?"

"Clever, *Mynheer*. We all know that cuckoos lay their eggs in other birds' nest. Like our Luftwaffe in the English nest. Ha-ha!"

"Knowledge is a wonderful thing," said Jan Pieter. "So relaxing."

Guided by the searchlight mounted on bicycle wheels, they soon reached a heavy barbed-wire fence. Two Nazis guarded a reinforced gate. Inside the fence, a vast field showed under the moonlight. The natives were led to a stoutly built compound in one corner. Nazi slavery ruled here.

Temporary hangars stood between the native area and the white man's quarters. A three-room structure in the latter housed the white prisoners, and to this Wynwood, Carberry and Maybridge were conducted. Foster led Jan Pieter to a strategically located building near the gate, his own quarters.

Jan Pieter placed his hat on a table, lit his pipe. He looked around at the folding chairs, the cabinet trunk, then spotted the case of guns by a small filing cabinet. An automatic and a pair of clips were lying atop the case.

Bruce Foster, secure in his quarters, was off guard only a moment. But a moment was enough. Moving amazingly fast, the bulky Dutchman leaped across the room, knocked Foster off balance and snatched up gun and clips.

"You fool!" said Foster. "A shot will bring my men running. You can't get away. I brought you here because you are a Boer, and as such deserve preferred treatment. But I can change all that."

He backed to the table, pressed a button.

"Get away from there," warned Jan Pieter.

"You're too late." Foster grinned. Footsteps sounded outside. "Shoot him!" the Nazi called. "He's armed. A painful wound will do."

The mesh over the window was ripped open. Jan Pieter looked at it, recovered in time to gun-whip a charging Bruce Foster to the floor. Then he waved at a smiling black face in the window.

"Good work, Akka," he said. "Pass these guns to the pukka pilots."

He handed the case to the pygmy, raced outside for the gates.

"Halte, Handen hoch!" snapped Cain Black's voice.

"Kind of jumpy tonight, aren't you?" Jan Pieter asked calmly. His newly acquired gun was concealed beneath the skirt of his Norfolk jacket.

When it appeared that Black recognized the newcomer, the two armed guards turned back to their posts. Cain Black was suspicious.

"Where's Foster?" he demanded.

"He's sleeping," Van Bronck declared truthfully. Then he took a quick step toward the slow-thinking Black, and whipped up his gun. "I wouldn't be surprised if you were due for a nap, too," he concluded.

Cain Black whipped up his gun to fight off the paunchy Dutchman, but Jan Pieter stepped aside, brought up his fisted left hand, and clipped Black on the chin. His gun-hand came down and knocked the weapon out of Black's fingers.

The whole thing was over before the two guards recovered from their surprise. Van Bronck whipped up the fallen gun, and as Cain Black slipped to the ground, the Dutchman turned on the two storm troopers.

"Drop your guns!" he ordered.

THE order was a signal for concerted action in other parts of the camp. Chief Kavimba and his Barotses rallied the other natives, and they overwhelmed their guards almost before the storm troopers realized what was happening. The glossy, sweating skin of the natives took on a rosy glow as the first faint streaks of dawn climbed up over the mountains of Mabonubwe.

As the gray tendrils of night were thrust away by the first spears of sunlight, the groggy Cain Black and the two guards saw a strange sight. Now it was the Air Force men and their native safari men who held the upper hand. The machine-guns clattered, but this time they were aimed at the Nazis who had planned to take over South Africa.

The Bechuanas in the first two safaris knew the identity of the killers of the chiefs, and they were pointing these men out to Kavimba and his warriors for quick and summary revenge.

Van Bronck prodded Black and his companions toward Foster's house. Wynwood, Carberry, Maybridge and the freed pilots from the first two pack trains were rallying around the native warriors with the guns Akka had supplied them.

The battle for the airport was brief. As the squadron leader joined Van Bronck, the Dutchman said:

"Rig up your radio. Get in touch with the Air Force, and tell them to send in their planes."

Jan Pieter Van Bronck sat down on the porch of Foster's bungalow. His pipe was in his mouth, and he was fingering the two guns, as he ran them from Cain Black to Bruce Foster.

Chief Kavimba was standing in the midst of his warriors at the edge of the porch.

"Have your men take down that camouflage," the Dutch detective said.
"When Squadron Leader Wynwood gets in touch with his base, we'll have planes coming in here."

Bruce Foster watched the activity on the airdrome, and he glowered as he spotted forty pygmies working with the six-foot Barotses.

"How did they get in here?" he asked.

"They wrought your downfall," Jan Pieter pointed out. "I told you literature was a wonderful thing. Back in the days of Persia, there was a chap named Ali Baba. Forty thieves rode into his house in oil jars. Akka and his men rode in here in the wicker panniers on the white Zulu donkeys. They were a big help in setting us free and turning the tables on you. You ought to learn to read, Herr Foster."

Jan Pieter laughed. Wynwood's opened in amazement. Chief Kavimba looked at Akka, the pygmy, with new respect. The Dutch detective shifted his pipe to one corner of his mouth and began to hum the tune to "Pack Your Things and Trek!"

Half an hour later the V formation of a squadron of the South African Air Force was coming in over the field.

The Skeleton By B. M. Bower

Pink, the cherubic Little One of the Flying U outfit, accidentally discovers a grim secret and stands by a friend who is in sore straits

THE herd was grazing quietly all up and down the grassy-walled coulee which opens widely into the Hagamore Flat, and Big Medicine was due to be relieved, along with Slim, who was not watching the cattle at all, but was sleeping unashamed in the sun at the head of the coulee. Him Happy Jack took much pleasure in rousing. Pink it was who rode slowly down the coulee rim, looking for Big Medicine and half expecting that he, also, had yielded to the temptation of a hazy, windless day in midsummer. Because there was a possible chance of tormenting the sleeper, with a grass blade drawn lightly across his nose, perhaps, Pink went softly.

Big Medicine was sitting upon a hummock of grass, his head propped upon one hand, his elbow on his knee. He did not hear Pink ride up behind him, so that the other was very close before he turned. Pink, looking curiously down at him, saw a picture held loosely in his fingers--a picture which seemed to be that of a woman. Big Medicine was staring at it, lost to everything but his thoughts. When he turned, Pink saw with amazement that his cheek bones were wet and that his eyes glistened.

Pink did not know what to do, and so did nothing at all--which was, perhaps, the very best he could have done had he chosen deliberately. Big Medicine started, glared resentment, glanced down at the picture, and then deliberately snapped the cardboard in two, tore the pieces with a twist of his fingers, and dropped them to the ground. He set his heel upon them, and glanced defiantly at Pink.

Still Pink did nothing.

Big Medicine took a deep breath, twitched his shoulders impatiently, and got up. "Yuh sure caught me at it, didn't yuh, Little One?" he said, laughing awkwardly. "Yuh wait till you're growed up and git a skeleton that rattles its bones every time you're off by yourself! That's the way to fix 'em, kid--if I'd done that at the start I'd been a heap better off, maybe." He glanced down at the trampled, ragged squares of cardboard. "Yuh reckon I'll hear the bones rattling again, Little One?"

Pink fidgeted in the saddle. "I hope yuh won't," he said slowly. Then, as the other still seemed waiting, he added impatiently: "How can *I* tell? I don't know who she was, or how much yuh cared, or----"

"Oh! Yuh seen it was a woman, then; that's what I wondered. Well, Little One, I'll tell yuh something. That there"--he swept his hand downward--"is all I got left uh my wife. It wasn't much, was it? And, seeing it made me act foolish, I reckon I done the wise thing when I tore it up. Men I can handle. But memories--and women--they sure do play the very devil with a man. You take my word for it, Little One, and don't yuh never let neither one get a hand-hold on yuh." He twitched his shoulders again. "B-r-r! It's like rotten whisky, Pink. It has a blamed mean effect, and yuh can't get the taste outa your mouth." He turned abruptly and picked up the hanging bridle reins of his horse.

Pink dismounted, stood a second beside the horse, then went over and kicked loose a clod of earth from the hummock, pushed it over the telltale fragments, and looked up at the other, who was watching him.

"A good scheme with skeletons is to plant 'em out uh sight," he explained. "I don't reckon you'd enjoy having one uh the boys run across these pieces and try to josh yuh about your girl, would yuh?"

Big Medicine laid his hand heavily upon Pink's shoulder. "Kid, you're all right. I'd 'a' gone off like a chump and left 'em there--and I'd likely got into a shooting scrape with the jasper that found 'em and started asking questions. When a man's got the blues he ain't apt to think uh little things like that. I'm sure obliged to yuh, kid. I wish yuh'd do me another good turn. Forget it, will yuh?"

"I've got about the poorest memory yuh ever heard tell of," Pink assured him, and made his dimples bear witness that he refused to consider the incident as other than a trifle.

Big Medicine hesitated, decided not to speak what was evidently in his mind to say, stuck his toe in the stirrup, mounted, and rode slowly away toward camp.

Pink looked after him commiseratingly, and was tempted to uncover the fragments and piece them together just to see how she looked. He resisted the impulse, however, and remounted to turn back a few stragglers which were making off across the prairie. "No, darn me if I want to dig up other men's troubles," he said to himself. "She was homely, chances are, er he'd 'a' showed me the picture. A man ain't never much reluctant, I've noticed, to show up the picture of a good-looking woman that's married to him."

He could not so easily forget, however. He had never suspected Big Medicine, with his wide grin and his blatant good nature, of ever having rubbed elbows with a trouble which went deeper than anger or revenge. He could not seem to see Big Medicine as a married man; he was not that sort, any more than was Happy Jack, for instance--or Slim. Apparently he lived for the purpose of riding bad horses, making pretty shots, drinking what whisky came his way, playing games--any game--for money, and, most of all, for heralding his exploits with his megaphone voice. It was extremely hard to believe that, with so much turbulence upon the surface of his life, anything could lie hidden beneath; anything so surprising as matrimony.

When he rode back to camp at supper time, and found Big Medicine declaiming loudly that, with his eyes shut and one hand tied behind him, he could beat Patsy making peach pie, and that, if it weren't for the disgrace of the thing, he would sure tie an apron around him and learn the bunch what real cooking tasted like, Pink found it hard to keep from looking several times at the man's cheeks, in expectation of seeing some sign of the tears which had made them wet.

Big Medicine greeted him with a bellowing laugh, and swept him into a fresh controversy with Cal Emmett over a trivial matter that had already been worn quite threadbare, and Pink decided that there was no skeleton in

Big Medicine's life; or, if there were, it was fast going to pieces, and the incident of the torn picture was not as serious as it had seemed to be at the time.

Neither of them would have to stand guard that night, and Pink looked forward eagerly to a whole night's sleep. But he found himself wakeful for no reason except his vagrant thoughts, though others slept around him. Because his mind clung to the strange spectacle of Big Medicine shedding tears over a photograph--Big Medicine, of all men!--it irritated him to hear the man snoring comfortably, louder than any of the others; there was no mistaking the voice of Big Medicine, even when he dreamed. Pink raised himself to an impatient elbow and listened.

"Aw, he ain't got any feelings about a blamed thing," he remonstrated with himself. "I guess he was just loading me."

He lay down again, and immediately came a vision, startlingly clear and convincing--a vision of Big Medicine's face, surprised into revealing the man of him as he was, with cheek bones wet, and eyes awash with tears. There could be no joke about that! Pink thumped his pillow, and tried to think of something else.

It seems strange that night happenings nearly always come when a man, however wakeful he may have been, is just sliding away into sleep. Pink was dreaming irrelevantly of playing a hard-fought game of pool with a drunken Chinaman, when he came back, with a snap, to consciousness. There was the dark, sleep-filled tent, with the heavy breathing of ten or twelve full-blooded men. Occasionally there was a rasping snort, as some dreamer reached a crisis in his fancied adventures, but it was nothing of this which held Pink's breath.

Somewhere across the tent was a stealthy movement--the careful pulling of body which betrayed brain alert and wakeful. Pink lay quite still and watched, though there was no sane reason for so doing. When the head and shoulders of a man rose silently against the dim whiteness of the tent wall, Pink's eyes never left the figure. Whoever it was, he was feeling his way cautiously into his clothes--and it was not time for guard relief. Pink lay like a dead man, with eyes wide open; and his nerves were in such a state

that he never once wondered at himself for attaching any importance to a man's rising in the night.

The dimly seen form rose to its knees, felt its way carefully over the unconscious bodies of Weary, Happy Jack, and Irish, and lifted the tent flap.

Outside was clear starlight; a breeze which had the chill of midnight puffed in and brought to Pink's nostrils the faintly aromatic odor's of a dewless prairie. He lifted his head, waited until the other had dropped the flap behind him, then cautiously dressed himself and followed.

When he put a tousled yellow head out of the tent, he saw no one at all. He went out, stood erect by a guy-rope, and listened. Off to one side, beyond the cook tent, he thought he heard some one stumble, and went that way to look. Fifty yards away, headed straight from camp, he saw the man who had left the tent two minutes ago--afoot, and seemingly in a hurry.

Pink followed him as quietly as he knew how. To that moment his curiosity had been absolutely unwarranted, a mere matter of nerves keyed to a pitch above the normal; but now he felt in a measure justified. For to leave camp afoot at midnight, and in so stealthy a manner, was, to say the least, unusual and deserving investigation. Pink walked a bit faster, though he made no more noise than before.

Half a mile went the two, and then he halted, half ashamed. Before, he had not been quite certain of the man's identity in that dim light; but when the fellow stopped beside a rock, hesitated, and went down upon one knee to hover groping there, Pink knew at once the man and the meaning.

"It's his wife he wants back--what there is left of her," he said to himself. "Yuh wouldn't think a man like him---- And I went and kicked dirt on the picture! But then, he tore it up himself, and you'd naturally think-----" He turned suddenly, and went thoughtfully back,, to camp, crept quietly into his blankets, and tried not to concern himself over the troubles of Big Medicine.

It was long before Big Medicine returned and went unobtrusively to bed; indeed, Pink guessed that it was near daylight. He was sorry for the man, in

a vague, futile way, and was prepared to show him more friendship than had been his habit. For, while Big Medicine was frankly sincere in his liking for Pink, the regard was not more than half reciprocated. A man who is close to twenty-four does not greatly enjoy being called Little One, and treated as a child.

But when the camp stirred to life with the coming of the sun, Big Medicine did not seem to be in need of either sympathy or friendship. His grin was quite as wide and frequent; his eyes protruded with the same frank assurance; his voice and his laugh dominated the camp just as they had always done, since his arrival from Coconino County, Arizona.

Pink felt somehow baffled and resentful. If the bones of the skeleton rattled at all during the weeks that followed, he could detect no sound, however faint. When a man has a great sorrow hidden deep in his heart, one expects him to show evidence in some form or other. Pink watched him covertly for two or three days, made up his mind that Big Medicine was just what he appeared to be--a wide-mouthed, empty-headed josh, who could not take anything seriously if he would--and forgot the skeleton.

They had gathered the first beef herd, and had driven it leisurely in to the Dry Lake stockyards; had loaded a train on a hot, windy day; and, when the great door of the last car slid shut upon the tail of the last steer, they got upon their horses and raced thirstily down the hill to Rusty Brown's place--all save Big Medicine, who had trouble with his horse, and Pink, who waited to make and light a cigarette.

The two rode slowly after the others, enjoying their brief freedom after the long, dusty drive. There were horses to be shod, the mess wagon to be restocked, and the day was old; they would have that night, at the feast, in town, and perhaps a good share of the day following. They would quench their thirst as speedily as might be, but they would not set their aching muscles to the swing of galloping when two minutes of walking would bring them to their destination.

As they turned into the main street, and swung short around the corner of the new restaurant kept by the widow Wilson, the horse of Big Medicine

shied and snorted. The rider jerked him back, and lurched drunkenly in the saddle, and a child gave a squeal of triumphant joy.

"Hello, papa! We rode on the train, and a man gived me ten cents, and we runned over a cow and broke her all to pieces. And we slept on a shelf away up, and I falled out, and there's a big little hill on my head. See? Right there! And a man----"

Big Medicine swooped like a great hawk, and with one arm swept the child up into the saddle before him. With consummate skill, he controlled the horse, which was so terrified that it hesitated between bolting, bucking, and standing upon his hind feet, so that he stood still, with his legs shaking as though they would give way beneath him. The boy squealed again with delight, and hugged Big Medicine almost to the strangling point.

"Where's that lump on your head?" the latter demanded, with his voice so hoarse and broken that Pink could scarce make out the words. "Oh, there it is. Honest to grandma, it's a fright. Yuh didn't cry, I'll bet a hoss--did yuh, Old-timer?"

"No siree, Bob Jones! Er--the water kinda runned outa my eyes, but I didn't cry. They just leaked a little bit. And the man--his face was dirty, papa! It was just *black!*--he gived me a shiny button outa his pocket-----"

Big Medicine yanked his horse out of a half-formed decision to pitch, and hugged the child close. "Where-- where's--mamma?" he asked gently.

The boy wriggled in his arms and pointed toward the hotel. "She's over there. She--she'll spank me good and plenty, I reckon, when I go back. I runned away, 'cause she telled me to set still and not ast so many questi'ns. A boy can't set still. Make him buck, papa! Take me for a ride! Make him split the breeze! Is this your hoss, papa?"

Big Medicine looked down at the boy, and Pink, watching, felt himself choke. There was nothing blatant, no boisterous good humor in that glance. Even his mouth, grotesquely wide and teeth-filled as it was, looked tender and wistful and sad, when he smiled.

"I reckon mamma wants yuh, Old-timer," he said caressingly. "Maybe we better go hunt her up. What'd yuh say?"

"No siree! I'll get spanked, sure. Take me for a big, long ride, papa!"

Big Medicine lifted his head and looked around, as if it had occurred to him that they might excite curiosity if they stood there longer. But, save Pink, who waited, no one was in sight. The horses of the Flying U drooped heads at the long hitching pole in front of Rusty Brown's, but not a man was in the street. He turned, and his eyes met the big, blue, sympathetic eyes of Pink.

"You come along with me, Little One," he said. "You're kinda in on this deal, anyway. I'm liable to want some moral support." He tried to grin in the old way, failed, and turned his horse abruptly.

Roused by the signal, the horse seemed to recover his nerve, and to lose, in the same moment, his temper. There was a struggle for his head, a jab or two of spurs, a vicious snort. The boy clung to his father and grew wide of eye. He lost his shiny tam-o'-shanter, and his little legs waved erratically with the motions of the frantic animal.

Pink spurred close and held out his arm. "Give him to me, Bud," he cried, and grasped the child. Big Medicine let him go, jerked his quirt off the saddle horn, and settled himself to the exhilarating fight for mastery, while Pink rode around the corner of the hotel office, out of sight from any one who might appear on the street, and waited with the boy before the parlor windows. It seemed to him that Big Medicine, gyrating in the open plot just off the street, was fighting something more than the horse; there was a stern preoccupation in his face which betrayed his riding as purely mechanical.

Pink let the boy carefully down to the ground, got off and straightened his rumpled blouse and tie, smoothed down his tow-colored hair--which was very like the hair of Big Medicine--and left his horse standing with dropped bridle reins, while he went out and recovered the shiny tam-o'-shanter. With his shirt sleeve he polished it well and set it carefully upon the child's head, making sure that the rubber band was quite comfortable under the chin. It was not much that he could do to show his sympathy, but he was grateful for the opportunity to lend even that slight service. He was thinking of the

time when Big Medicine had saved his life and had asked only his friendship in return. Faint sounds of laughter and loud talk came across to them from Rusty Brown's saloon, and he heard Happy Jack's protesting "Aw, g'wan!" The sounds jarred upon his nerves. It was as if some one had laughed out unexpectedly at a funeral.

Big Medicine gave a last vicious swish downward with his quirt, held the horse from plunging forward at the sting of it, spurred him up to where Pink stood waiting, with the hand of the boy clasped warmly in his own, and got stiffly down. Pink glanced sharply at his sweat-beaded face, saw that it had come back to its normal expression, except for a certain grim set to his mouth, and sighed his relief.

"You're a real wolf, ain't yuh, papa?" admired the child quaintly.

Big Medicine brushed the back of his gloved hand wearily across his face and looked down at him. "You bet I am, Old-timer," he agreed lightly. He turned and looked searchingly at Pink, took the hand of his boy, and started toward the parlor steps.

Pink let go the other hand. "You go on. I've got to build me a smoke," he said shortly.

Big Medicine hesitated, his foot upon the lower step, looked clown at the shiny tam-o'-shanter by his knee, twitched his shoulders, and went in.

"Don't be long, Little One," he admonished over his shoulder as he turned the knob.

When Pink went in, Big Medicine was sitting upon a corner of the center table, with his hat pushed back upon his head, his arms folded, and his fingers plucking nervously at his sleeves near the elbows. There was in the room a silence unbearable--the silence which comes between two and builds a wall impalpable, impenetrable. Big Medicine had been staring at his boots; he looked up, grinned widely and unconvincingly, and greeted Pink with boisterous welcome.

"Why, hello, Little One. Come in. This is--Mrs. Manderson, Mr. Perkins. My wife, Pink."

Pink took off his hat and bowed hazily. He felt the tight-strung atmosphere, and he was confused by the utter calmness of Big Medicine. The woman--when he dared lift his lashes to look at her--had been crying. Her handkerchief was a tight little wad of white held in her hand, which was drawn up into a fist. Her hair was mouse-colored and straight and fine, and her mouth rather sweet. She was slim and pink-cheeked and wistful, but there was something about her which Pink did not quite like.

"I didn't get spanked yet, but I will when you go away," whispered the boy solemnly, sidling toward Pink.

Big Medicine stopped drumming upon his forearms and caught him by the blouse. "No, yuh won't," he said, and looked meaningly at the woman. "Say, Little One," he began suddenly, in a tone reckless of results. "Had any experience with skeletons? How do yuh reckon a fellow would go to work putting flesh and blood back onto 'em and makin' 'em look human? Reckon it could be done?"

Pink stammered and glanced sidelong at the woman. "I--I don't know."

"My wife has kinda got a notion to see me try it. This is kinda unexpected--this meeting here. Seems like she didn't know I was in this country--but now she's saw me----"

"John Manderson, you've no right to talk that way before a--a stranger." The woman showed a flash of temper in her eyes.

"He ain't a stranger--to me," said Big Medicine. "He's my friend. I ain't got many, but he heads the list."

"I didn't know you were here," admitted the woman, "but I heard something that made me think you might be. I--I thought I'd come and see, and--and let you know that"--she glanced quickly at Pink, standing by the door--"he ain't dead. He wants me to get a divorce and marry him. He--he thinks more of me than you do, John Manderson!"

Big Medicine smoothed the hair of the boy, and looked at her fixedly. His big, protruding blue eyes were unpleasant, staring like that. She stared back at him. "It's for you to say," she added, in a softer tone. "You--you made a mistake when you-----" She stopped short, glancing again at Pink.

"Oh, go on and say it--he's my friend, I told yuh once." He, too, looked at Pink. "What she means is that I shot a fellow and pulled out. I'm from Oregon, not Arizona. I'm on the dodge, for I naturally supposed I'd killed him. By cripes, I meant to! The best uh shots hit crooked oncet in a while, when they're excited--and I reckon I must 'a' been, to do a punk-job like that. It seems the doctors patched him up ag'in. Here, Old-timer," he broke off suddenly to the boy. "You take this two bits and go up to the store and buy yourself some candy. Make 'em give yuh your money's worth, kid." He set the shiny tam-o'-shanter upon the boy's head, and Pink opened the door to let him out--opened the door and let in another, a tall, lean man with shifty eyes.

Big Medicine stiffened, his hand to his hip. Pink had stepped directly before the newcomer, warned instinctively of the crisis upon them. Big Medicine moved to one side, and Pink moved also. Big Medicine stopped, laughed harshly, and twitched his shoulders.

"All right, Little One," he surrendered. "We'll continue the conversation--seeing it's so pleasant!"

The tall man had backed against the wall, and his face was a sickly white. He did not speak at all.

Big Medicine turned harshly to the woman. "Did yuh come together?"

She sprang up and went close to him. "John, you know we didn't! I--I wanted to find you. Little John kept talking about papa, and--and I dreamed every night of you being sick and alone and in trouble--with men hunting you like an animal. I couldn't stand it. I thought you would be haunted by what you had done--or thought you had done. I wanted you to know that you aren't a--a murderer, after all. I----"

"And I want to say that I'm damned sorry I ain't," Big Medicine cut in, putting out one hand to keep her from him. "Yuh thought I'd be haunted, did yuh? Well, let me tell yuh, by cripes, that was the only thing made life look good to me--when I thought I'd killed him. Aw, what do you know about men? Lemme tell yuh, there's times and circumstances that makes killin' a pleasure. That was one uh them. And let me tell yuh, I'd rather face the gallows, right now, than see *him* standing there in front uh me, alive when he'd oughta be dead! Think of it, Pink! Me, the best shot in Oregon--me that dropped that hoss uh yourn stone dead at a hundred yards with my six-gun, and him on the jump--and then to make a mess uh killin' that"-- he swung his arm passionately toward the stranger--"and him standin' not more'n twenty paces upstreet from me! Why, by----"

It was the woman, staring at him, fascinated, stirred by the brute strength of his anger, won by his very ferocity, who stopped his headlong speech. "I'll stay with you, John. He followed me--he has always followed me--John, I can swear that is the worst, only you didn't know and yon wouldn't wait to be convinced--but I like you best. I'll stay with you, and I won't get my freedom. I----"

Big Medicine turned, swallowed hard, and looked at her. "Molly--Molly, darlin'----" He hardened again. "Oh, what's the use? Yuh got tired uh me once. Yuh did, or yuh wouldn't 'a' spoke to him at all. I believe yuh--there wasn't nothing but temptation, but if yuh cared like yuh claim yuh do, there wouldn't uh been that!" He got up, took a step toward the door; and the man who had followed moved farther along the wall, eying him watchfully, his hand to his gun. Big Medicine grinned wolfishly.

"Aw, don't get none alarmed," he taunted. "I'm leavin' yuh for her. She likes yuh, even if she does deny it. She'll get free uh me, all right. You oughta----"

"John, you don't care for me! You never did care. You don't know how to love a woman! If you cared, I'd stay----"

Big Medicine looked at her steadfastly. "No," he said heavily, "I reckon maybe I don't know how to love a woman. There's some things I do know tolerable well, though. One is that it's a blame poor plan to swap skeletons. I

got one, and I'm used to it. I know just the kind uh hurt it can give me. But if I took yuh back, Molly, I'd have another one on m' hands--and I don't reckon I'd find it none easy to live with. Good God, girl! Could you bear to live with me and have the thoughts uh him comin' up between us all the time? Maybe you could do it, but *I* couldn't. You're crazy--plumb crazy to talk about it. Yuh don't know me--yuh don't know any man. I do!"

He opened the door with a jerk, went out, and would have slammed it shut behind him; but Pink was following close behind him, watching over his shoulder to see that the stranger inside made no hostile move.

Big Medicine went straight to his horse, gathered up the reins, and then stopped.

"Say, Little One," he said, in his ordinary tone, "I got a roll uh money here that I wisht you'd take back to her. She's liable to need it. I been carryin' it on me in case I had to drift suddent--but I ain't killed nobody, after all"--he laughed unpleasantly--"so I won't have no use for it. You hand it in to her, will yuh?" He fumbled inside his shirt, drew out a flat package, and gave it to Pink.

Pink went back, opened the door, and thrust the money into the hands of the woman, who was crying again and dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief. "He wants the kid to have this," he said briefly, diplomatically shut the door before she could reply, and hurried after Big Medicine.

He found him halfway to the store, leading his horse, while he gravely chose bits of candy from a striped bag which the boy was holding up to him with that air of importance which belongs exclusively to childhood.

"That's enough, Old-timer. I'll get toothache sure, if I eat any more. You pike along now and give mamma some. Here, let Pink have a piece, first. That's the stuff. So-long, kid. I got to go, now."

The boy ran off down the path, smiling over one shoulder at his father--and, because he did not look where he stepped, fell over a stone. Big Medicine handed the reins of his horse to Pink, went back and picked lip the boy,

brushed the dirt from his clothes, helped him find the candy which had spilled from the bag, straightened the shiny tam-o'-shanter, and gave him a hasty kiss before he started him off again. He stood still in the path and looked after the boy until the parlor door opened and received him. Then he turned, reached gropingly for the reins--and Pink saw that, for the second time in their acquaintance, his cheeks were wet and his eyes awash with tears.

Big Medicine twitched his shoulders, gathered up the reins, and took hold of the stirrup to mount. "I reckon I'll ride on out to camp," he said simply.

When he was in the saddle, he turned and grinned, desolately, down at Pink. "Say, Little One," he remarked grimly, "ain't it hell, the way these here skeletons keep rattling when yuh think yuh got 'em hog-tied and helpless--and won't quit when yuh tell 'em to? Women--and memories--they sure play the very devil with a man!"

He struck backward with his spurred heels, and went galloping away, past the saloon, and on down the street. Pink watched him whip around the blacksmith shop and leave only an uneasy dust cloud to tell of his passing; then he led his horse slowly over to the hitching pole in front of Rusty Brown's place, tied him thoughtfully, and went in.

The Fetish Stick by Edgar Wallace



VIEWED from the sea the headquarters of Mr. Commissioner Sanders was a strip of golden sand fringed to the seaward side by a green backing of trees. You caught a glimpse of the white residency with its red roof and on a very clear day the little flagstaff where the national standard hung limply. Perhaps you might even see the long rows of yellow barrack huts where the Housas lived, but you saw little more.

Officers of passing steamers which came sufficiently near the west African coast would point out the mouth of the river and show the passengers how the yellow waters ran far out, cutting a muddy roadway into the indigo-blue of the sea and sometimes a mail steamer would slow down and drop into a waiting surf-boat a small mail-bag.

But the territories and the three white men who ruled them had no personality to the ocean-going wanderers until a certain day when a beneficent Government placed in the hands of the commissioner a means by which he and his fellows might become at least articulate.

Lieutenant Tibbetts coming to breakfast one fiery morning discovered a folded sheet of foolscap paper beneath his plate.

"Ha, Monday, sir!" said he with an extravagant start, as though the discovery that this was indeed the second day of the week came in the nature of a shock, "and orders of the week as per regulations."

"Read 'em you lazy do--fellow," said Hamilton, catching his sister's reproving eye.

"Quite unnecessary, my jolly old tyrant," said Bones airily, as he shook his serviette free with a loud "*flap!*" and all but caught Mr. Commissioner Sanders' coffee-cup. "Quite superfluous--I know 'em by heart:

"1. The orderly officer of the week is poor old Bones, who will do everything every day.

"2. Field trainin' will be carried out on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday an' Saturday under the command of poor old Bones.

"3. Kit inspection on Thursday. Bones will arrange.

"By order."

"Read it," suggested Hamilton.

With a hoist of his shoulders Bones opened the paper and read.

"Orderly officer for the week: Lt. Tibbetts'--what did I say? 'Field trainin' in accordance with paragraph'--um--um--'Lt. Tibbetts'--as expected--hullo, dear old sir--what's this?

"3. On the erection of the new flagstaff and signal yard, Lt. Tibbetts will assume the duties of O. C. Signals. He will be responsible for the maintenance in good condition of the signal locker and flags, code books---
-'"

"They are sending the pole down from H. Q. administration," explained Hamilton, "and it should be up by the end of the week--do you know anything about signals, Bones?"

Bones smiled.

"I think I may say in all modesty, dear old sir," he said with fine carelessness, "that there's jolly little I don't know about signals. I hate to boast, dear old Ham, as you've often said----"

"I've never said anything so untruthful--but I should not let that discourage you," interrupted Hamilton, "nor should it divert your mind from the fact that I asked you a very simple question to which you have not yet replied. Do you understand signals?"

"I won't deceive you," said Bones solemnly, "I do."

AND this he proved, for when the great new flagstaff had been erected, and the Government tug which had towed the pole to the beach had turned its nose for home, Bones, with the aid of the Government code-book, signalled--

"Wish you pleasant voyage."

Whereupon the tug spun 'round and came back at full speed.

"The signal flags H.L.M.I., sir," said the exasperated skipper of the tug, "do not mean 'Wish you pleasant voyage,' but 'return at once; natives are in revolt.'"

"Dear me!" said Bones, "how jolly romantic!"

And so the tug went off again and Bones undeterred sent a string of flags fluttering up to the yard which the skipper read--

"Am short of coal--can you tow me?" Which he rightly interpreted as being something rather complimentary in farewell messages.

Bones not only took kindly to his new job, but it became for him an absorbing passion. Not only did he spend his spare hours poring over the Government and mercantile codes, but he invented a code of his own.

Not only had he signal flags, but in a great box, each enclosed in a neat canvas bag, were the ensigns of the nations "for employment"--said the printed instructions--"in saluting war vessels, governors, commissioners, etc., of foreign powers."

"Some of 'em wholly superfluous, dear old sir," he complained, "unless we receive a visit from the Swiss fleet or hobnob with the jolly old King of Siam an' who the dooce am I to salute with the German Royal Standard? With a war like this going on it can't be done, dear old thing!"

Life had a new interest not only for himself, but for every native within ten miles of the station. Visitors and residents alike would gather about the flagstaff and watch Bones as he played with his new toy. And one of these visitors was the son of the sister of a certain Buluta, and a notorious thief.

Of this small fact Bones was oblivious in the ecstasy of new discoveries, for he found friends which in olden days moved outside of his orbit. He sent astounding greetings to little old tramps that came rolling over the edge of the ocean, spoke hilariously to passing liners which answered briefly and often coldly--the "affirmative" in answer to a sixteen-flag message was little short of a snub--and once when a lean gray American warship came nosing out of nowhere looking for submarines Bones surpassed himself in a cordial greeting which ran, literally:

D. Y.D. has arrived at this port.

S.

Y.

L.

X. Have cavalry chargers on board.

A.

B.

T.

S. Am carrying feathers and hats.

Y.

R.

U.

G. Please arrange supply wine and macaroni

M. for Italian emigrants.

The commander of the American warship, fortunately, thought that there was a regatta or a Fourth of July celebration on shore and contented himself with signaling --"Good-by."

"And what the dickens were you trying to say?" asked Hamilton when Bones complained bitterly of the lack of international courtesy.

"My dear but dull old landlubber," said Bones wearily, "it's as plain as your jolly old nose. If Sanders were here he'd understand it in a minute. I've studied the dashed thing an' worked it out."

"But what does it mean?" insisted Hamilton.

Bones uttered impatient sounds.

"It's a verse," he said shortly, "that jolly little tune:

"Yankee Doodle came to town

Riding on a pony

He stuck a feather----"

"If you're going to laugh," said Bones huffily, "there's nothin' more to be said, sir," and he closed the book with a bang.

Bones was frankly bad-tempered that morning, for in addition to other vexations he had discovered the loss of a certain national ensign which had disappeared from under his eyes.

ABOUT this time in the forest village of Kasanga a man fell sick. He had pains in his head, shooting, throbbing stabs of agony that did not cease by day or night.

He was lucky in that there lived in this village a very famous witch-doctor, one Buluta, to whom all the forest folk went in their hour of adversity. His fame passed the frontiers of his own land and you might not travel for a day anywhere in the river territories without coming upon a man or woman who wore on his or her breast one of those charms which were characteristic of Buluta.

If you take a palm-kernel, soak it in a solution of gum and camwood, thread it neatly with two steel wires and turn the free ends of the wires until each forms the letter "P," you have a fair imitation of that powerful spellmaker which cured coughs and insured for married men the fidelity of their wives.

The sick would pay him a chicken for his services, and this gift was tied to one of the legs of the sufferer, and Buluta, kneeling by the patient's side, would knead and pound the unfortunate body of his victim, starting from the head and working down to the feet until the evil spirit which possessed the patient and which caused his unhappiness would depart with a loud cry--which Buluta himself supplied--into the body of the bird. Whereupon he would cut off the head of the bird, sprinkle a few drops of his blood upon the gratified patient who by this time should have felt such relief as would enable him to rise and call his doctor blessed.

And in most cases this relief was instantaneous and complete. Sometimes Buluta would find no response to his treatment, but that was invariably explained to his own credit by the discovery of bewitchment or a peculiarly strong devil whom the sick man had offended.

In such cases as these Buluta would go into the forest for a consideration and conduct an expensive wrestling match with the devil. Usually by the time he returned to the village to discover what had happened to the patient--the patient had died.

Now this man who laid so grievously sick was rich and Buluta had long envied him his wealth, so that when he was summoned by the man's principal wife he saw the magnificence of the opportunity.

He had the patient stripped and laid upon a wooden grille and beneath him he lit a fire of herbs that sent up a very thick and pungent smoke.

He also painted all the toes of the sick man with red camwood that the devils might not enter his body. Then he cut little patterns in the chest of Kofubu--: that was the man's name--with a small keen knife. What other treatment he would have introduced may only be surmised.

Since it was acknowledged that none was greater than Buluta and that if he could not cure Kofubu no other witch-doctor could perform that service for him, the philosophical villagers decided that he must be left to die, and death would certainly have been his fate but for the happy circumstance that Mr. Commissioner Sanders was making a tour through the forest villages, and arrived one evening when the seven wives of Kofubu were discussing the division of his property.

Sanders carried a hairy little medicine-chest which contained a few, but powerful drugs, designed to meet the half-a-dozen epidemic or simple maladies native to the country. If the disease was outside the range of the six diseases for which he had made provision, the sick man or woman was treated for the commonplace ailment which it most nearly resembled.

Sanders went into the hut of the man and found two strands of wire tightly bound about his skull, these strands having been in place for some twelve years. They were rather difficult to cut, and Kofubu suffered something in the process, but when they were removed and after the man had spent a night under the influence of one of Sanders' six medicants, he discovered that his pain had disappeared.

"I think you are a fool, Kofubu," said Sanders, "for who but a fool would put wire about his head?"

"Lord," said Kofubu ruefully, "that was a very powerful charm which kept from me ghosts and evil devils."

"You were nearer to ghosts and evil devils than you know, my man," said Sanders with a wry smile. He had no use for witch-doctors of any kind.

Sanders sent for the medicine-man.

"Buluta," said he, "do you believe in devils?"

"Lord, I do," replied the man apprehensively eyeing the stick which Sanders carried.

"And do you believe that your devils will save you pain?"

The man, still with his eye on the stick, edged away.

"Answer!" said Sanders sharply.

"Lord, it is said that we wise men do not feel--ouch!"

"And now," said Sanders, when the flogging was finished, "hear my words. I will have no witch-doctor who draws blood in this land. This time I beat, but if I send for you because you have done this evil again, I will await you at the Village of Irons, and there you shall stay for ten years."

The commissioner passed on the next day and Buluta was forgotten, but Buluta did not forget.

IT WAS a month or five weeks after Sanders had come and gone, that Buluta sent secret messengers to all the tribes, to the N'gombi, the Inner N'gombi, to the Akasava, the Lesser Akasava and the Three-Streams Akasava, to the Isisi, the Lesser Isisi, to the Ochori and the Upper Ochori and even into the forbidden land of the Old King.

To no chiefs or headmen did his summons go, but to strange old men who lived apart from the communities to which they were attached, and on the night his call reached them, they left their villages furtively and came by hidden ways to the rendezvous which Buluta had appointed. This was one of those famous islands where bats hang in great bunches from the trees throughout the hot day and fly by the thousand over the river at night. There never was such an assembly in all the history of the land since the day when they buried Gufufu, the witch-doctor.

There were old men and there were young men too. Men fantastically arrayed in skins of unknown animals, men belted about with teeth and claws, men cloaked in feathers, men streaked and circled with paint and they came to sit at the feet of Buluta and learn his will.

"Wise goats," said Buluta, "I have called you that I may tell of wonders, for I who understand devils and have fought with terrible ghosts have been beaten by Sandi because he hates me. Also I have discovered a great wonder. All men know that Sandi has a *ju-ju* which tells him when any man breaks the law--for have not the people of the river held very private palavers and has not Sandi come swiftly? And when the Akasava went secretly to make war and none knew, save the king, where the goats would bleed, was not Sandi waiting in the Isisi River for their coming?"

"Wa!" chorused his audience, "all men know this."

Buluta's eyes blazed.

"Now I have found the mystery," he shouted in triumph, "Sandi has a wonderful fetish!"

"That is foolish talk," said a skeptic in the circle, "for all people know that Sandi is a white man and white men have no fetishes."

"Wa! that is true," said another, "for did not Sandi beat me cruelly because I smelt out one who had bewitched the daughter of Kumulubu the chief of the Lesser Isisi?"

"Let all men hear this," cried Buluta, "Sandi who lives in a fine house by the sea has put up a great stick near where the big water runs, and that is his fetish for the son of my sister who has newly come from Sandi's home, tells me this and every morning Tibbetti, the young one, goes before this stick and bows himself and picks up pieces of cloth and hangs it upon the stick and puts his hand to his face thus."

One of the old witch-doctors nodded.

"I also have seen Bonsei put his hand to his face when he speaks to my Lord Sandi and to Militini, and a soldier of Sandi's told me that he does this thing to do honor to Militini and to Sandi, who are his chiefs. Now, tell us, Buluta, what may we do?"

Buluta raised his hands, he was almost incoherent in his excitement.

"We will make a dance and a devil palaver, such a palaver as never was seen in this land, and we ourselves will put up a great stick so that we may talk with ghosts, for the son of my sister has stolen a wonderful cloth such as Tibbetti hangs, and this is surely a great magic and a charm for sickness. And since we shall be as great as Sandi he shall not harm us if through our medicine men die. Also because he beat me, I will lay a spell upon him and he will go mad. Wa!"

For six days there were mysterious doings on the Island of Bats, fifty separate fires burned and smoked and the awe-stricken villagers on the mainland watched this evidence of the witch-doctor's activity with their knuckles to their teeth. There was sacrificing of goats and chickens and a score of snakes died in the course of twenty different rituals. There was a pounding and a mixing, a dancing and a chanting beyond all precedent, and when a week and three days had gone by Buluta and five delegates launched their canoe and struck down the river to the forest of tall trees to choose "The Stick" and anoint their find with proper ceremony.

NEWS of a gathering of witch-doctors reached Sanders and the commissioner acted quickly. Bones was torn from his tangled halyards and his chaotic signal locker and dispatched, he protesting, in search of proofs.

Near the Forest of Happy Dreams the river broadens until it forms a great lake, where, on hazy days, it is almost impossible to see from shore to shore. Steersmen loathe this breadth of water because sandbanks grow in a night and islands that you chart on your way up give way to five fathoms of water on your way down-stream. There are places in this lake where a steamer can bump her way into deep water and find herself within a sandy

circle from whence there is no escape. On such occasions all the crew descend into the water and literally lift the steamer from her embarrassing position.

On a hot day in July a little steamer specklessly white, her tall twin funnels belching a constant billow of black smoke, picked an erratic way through the lake. Two sounding boys sat in her bows and stabbed the water at intervals of a few seconds with long rods, transmitting the depth in tones of abysmal weariness.

Bones, standing on the bridge of the *Zaire* with a telescope under his arm and a very severe and disapproving frown upon his forehead watched the maneuver of the Government ship with every indication of impatience.

"Oh, Yoka," he said at last, turning to the steersman, "is there no straight course, for when I brought the *Zaire* through this broad river I turned neither to the left nor to the right?"

"Lord," said the Kano boy who steered, not taking his eyes from the waters ahead, "who knows this river--every day the water finds a new way?"

Bones turned to a weary "Tut!" and his thoughts went back longingly to a cool beach and a high white flagstaff.

Presently he spoke again in Arabic.

"Now my great eyes can see the course," he said, "you shall go to the middle waters."

"Master," said Yoka earnestly, "I think there is sand in the middle waters."

"It is an order," said the imperious Bones.

The wheel spun 'round under the helmsman's hand and the nose of the *Zaire* pushed 'round. They struck the strong river current. The black waters piled themselves up before the bows.

"Exactly," said Bones complacently, "I thought we should do it."

Suddenly the speed of the vessel perceptibly stopped and Yoka, who knew that this meant that she was reaching shallow water, spun the wheel with feverish haste. There was a shivering bump, another and a whole series of frantic little hops, and though the stern-wheel thrashed furiously the *Zaire* went neither forward nor backward.

"Master," said Yoka simply, "this is a sandbank."

Bones said nothing. He took his big pipe from his pocket, deliberately loaded it with tobacco, struck a match and lit it and puffed cloudily. He was apparently deep in thought. Then at last he spoke.

"We shall have to get her off," he said.

Unfortunately the *Zaire* on this trip was carrying a skeleton crew. There were a dozen Housas, a few deck hands, a native engineer, also half a dozen villagers who had begged a passage to Youkombi.

Moreover, part of the *Zaire* lay in deep water so that it was impossible to wade. Bones rang the engines first to stop and then to astern, but the *Zaire* was firmly fixed.

"But presently the river will rise," he said to Yoka confidently, "and the water will wash away the sand."

Yoka scratched his chin.

"I think the waters are going down, lord," he said, "for the river was in flood six days ago and there have been no rains."

"You are a silly old ass," said the annoyed Bones.

He scanned the horizon for a sign of a village, though he might have known that there was none, for he had passed through the lake fifty times. Bones' motto, however, was that "you never know," and such was his optimistic spirit that he, at any rate, would not have been surprised to have discovered a fairly large-sized township, equipped with, amongst other things, a complete dredging plant, had established itself since his last visit.

There was only one thing to do. Bones ordered the canoe to be launched, and with four paddlers and one Housa as an escort he made his way to the nearest village which, as it happened, was situated on the big middle island that lay athwart the northern end of the lake. There was, as he knew, a footpath close to the river, and he started off on his two-mile tramp to Youkombi, the village in question.

A mile from the point of his departure the path divided, for here the land forms a promontory. One path naturally followed the water, but the other cut straight across the neck of the salient and formed a short way for such people as did not fear ghosts. Bones took the nearer path, and in consequence he did not see the two watchers who squatted by the side of the water only waiting for a glimpse of the *Zaire* to fly back with their discovery to Youkombi.

It also happened that when he reached the point where the paths were reunited, instead of following the one broad track that leads to the village, he followed the forest path which took him away to the left, for he was anxious to see for himself whether certain allegations against the people of the Youkombi were well founded. Though he was not conscious of the fact, here he missed the second group of watchers who, as a matter of precaution, had been placed on the road half a mile from the village. Bones searched diligently and patiently, for in all matters of strict and serious duty Bones was conscientious to a fault. His search was well rewarded, for under a dwarf mimosa and almost hidden by the rank foliage which smothered the ground he discovered a bundle wrapped in native cloth and containing certain little wooden pots of native manufacture which were filled with vari-colored clay. There was red and green and vivid orange, blue and brown. Also there was a necklace of human teeth, a mask of feathers and a strange-looking ivory instrument shaped rather like a tuning-fork.

BONES met no villager, and it was extremely unlikely that he would, because the whole of Youkombi was sitting in wrapt silence watching a man fantastically hued with great white rings painted 'round his eyes and blue and green stripes of ocher running across his shrunken breast. They

would have been interested in Buluta under any circumstances, for his name was a household word from the territory of the Great King to the villages by the sea. But what added fascination to his own personality was the fact that he was at that moment engaged, under the professional inspection of fifty witch-doctors, in curing the first wife of the headman of the Youkombi.

The cure was a simple business. She lay, spread-eagled, on the ground, ankles and wrists attached by stout rawhide thongs to little sticks which had been driven in the ground and he was letting out the nine and nine devils with which she was possessed, from time to time lecturing as an anatomical professor to his fascinated audience. "Oh, people and wise ones, thus you see my magic," he said, brandishing his little knife and rubbing his nose with the back of his lean hand, "because of the wonderful things I do now Sandi would hate me and follow me with guns. But now because of a great magic which I have done, I am greater than Sandi and I may do many things which were forbidden. I cut this woman a little--so. What do you see, wise brothers and people of the Youkombi? Just a little blood. Do you see the little devils with eyes like moons? Only Buluta sees those. Look, there he goes!"

His bony finger pointed and traced the passage of the mythical devil, and as it indicated a progress nearer and nearer to the circle those who stood in its line leaped out and sprang shivering back to allow it passage.

"There it goes," he croaked, "into the forest! I see it! It is gone! Presently it will come back a very beautiful wonder. None will see it but I!"

He bent his head as though listening, his hand to his ear.

"My *ju-ju* tells me it is coming. Look, look!" he pointed again to the forest, "it comes!"

An appropriate moment this, for Bones to make his appearance which he did quite unknowing that he fitted so well into the scheme of clairvoyance. The people stood dumfounded, their knuckles to their mouths.

"This is a great wonder," said the headman of Youkombi, "for this good devil looks like Tibbetti."

But the witch-doctor did not reply. This was a moment too great for words. As for his fifty hideous colleagues they faded into the shadow of the woods.

Bones marched into the circle, his helmet pulled rakishly over one eye, an eye-glass in the other and stood looking down at the medicine-man and his victim. He dropped his cane lightly on the shoulder of the headman.

"Take this woman away, Kabala," he said, "afterward you shall call a palaver of your people."

He turned his attention to the witchdoctor.

"Oh, Buluta," he said, "Sandi wants you."

The witch-doctor licked his lips. Before him was the supreme injustice of a ten years' sentence--and that it was unjust he stoutly believed.

He looked 'round helplessly and then-- "Lord!" he cried, his eyes bright with hope, "by my magic and my *ju-ju* you may not touch me, for I am favored by a fetish stick greater than Sandi's--look!"

Bones' eyes followed the pointed finger. For the first time he saw the tall roughly dressed flagstaff.

"Good gracious, heaven an' earth!" gasped Bones.

"Lord," Buluta went on proudly, "that is a great devil more terrible than M'shimba-m'shimba, very fierce and terrifying, who eats up people, and I call this thing *Ewa*, which is death."

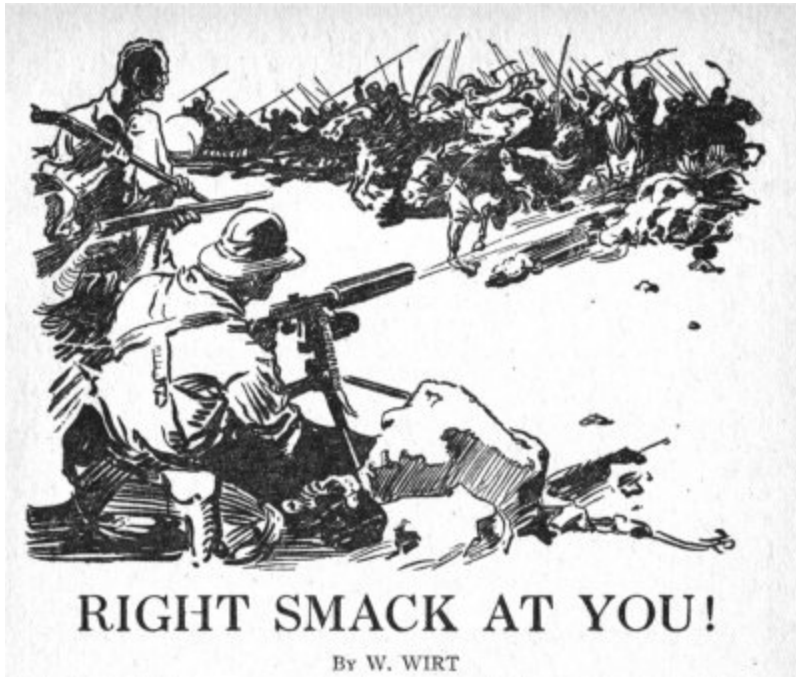
Bones shaded his eyes and looked steadily upward at the one standard that floated at the head of the staff.

He saw the big black cross on the white ground and the double-headed eagle with its clutching talons and nodded.

"*Ewa* which is called death," he repeated soberly, "I think you are wiser than you know, Buluta."

His automatic pistol cracked three times and at the third shot the rope that held the German Imperial Standard aloft was severed and the flag came fluttering down.

Right Smack at You! By W. Wirt.



CHAPTER I - *The Son of Jenghiz Khan*

"THE Yid believes it," said the Boston Bean, "And he wouldn't lie to me!"

"Why not?" asked Red Dolan lazily, from the couch in Grigsby's apartment in Hong Kong, China, where his two hundred and thirty pounds of bone and muscle lay sprawled out. "And why wouldn't he lie to the like of ye, Beany, darlin'?"

"Well, I saved his bacon once and----"

"Never mind those apes," interrupted Putney looking up from his game of solitaire. "Tell it to me; I wasn't listening when you started."

"I met the Fighting Yid and another man this morning," began the Bean, whose aristocratic sorrowful looking face concealed a reckless happy-go-lucky heart and chilled steel nerve. "They just got in from Chinese Turkestan. They met a bird up there that had been run out of Samarkand, they said--he had gone in up in the northwest by the Famine Steppe and the desert of Kyzyl-kum and----"

"Enough!" said Red sitting up, "tell us no more. Them names is plenty. 'Famine desert,' says me bold Beany and----"

"Pipe down, Red," commanded Jimmie Cordie. "Go on, Bean. I've been in that neck of the woods."

"All right, I will. In the year 1219, to begin at the beginning, Jenghiz Khan came down from Mongolia with his youngest son, Tulé, and mopped up on Bokhara."

"Correct," affirmed Jimmie Cordie. "And when he got in the said Bokhara, he stood on the steps of the principal mosque and shouted to his horde, 'The hay is cut; give your horses fodder!' Then they looted the city."

"Well," went on the Bean, "after the looting of the town, Jenghiz Khan started back to Mongolia by way of Samarkand. One of his generals came from the Karakul Oasis----"

"Wrong," said Jimmie firmly. "All wrong--and you from Boston. What happened was this. He had several sons who used to lead the hordes, one of whom was named Jagatai. That baby had been jazzing around with some of his pa's men, and going through the pass of Taras, had taken Otrar for the old man. At Kara-kul he called it a day and kicked the bucket. His pa decided to bury him there with all the honors of war because he, the said Jagatai, loved that neck of the woods. So they took him out in the rocky hills that the desert of Kyzyl-kum is crossed by, and after scragging all his personal servants and concubines and what not, they buried him. Proceed from there, Beaneater!"

"You seem to know so damn much about it," said the Bean. "What else did they bury with him. You ought to know--I suppose you were there?"

"No," grinned Cordie. "The day he was buried I was in a stud poker game with the Khan of the Tartars. I know what they put in the hole with him though. All the loot that was his share was put in!"

"Exactly," answered the Bean. "And from that day to this, it's been right there--waiting for whoever finds it. This lad that the Yid met said that----"

"Too many 'he said' and 'the Yid said,'" interrupted Grigsby. "Go and get the Yid and this Scotchman, if he's still around. We'll get at it first hand."

"I'll be back in an hour," said the Bean. "I left them down at the place of One Million Delights."

"And that's wan hell of a fine place to leave anyone!" yelled Red as the Bean closed the door behind him.

"WHAT do you think about it?" asked Putney after the footfalls of the Boston Bean had died away. Jimmie Cordie laughed. "It's just one of those things. No doubt there's a raft of those tombs scattered all over the lot up there, but nine-tenths of them have been looted five hundred years ago. And also, young fellers me lad, the amount of stuff they had in 'em was exaggerated."

"I suppose, now, ye have looted some, ye grave robber," jeered Red.

"Not more than six or eight," answered Jimmie with a grin.

They all laughed, the four men who had fought together in the Foreign Legion, the A.E.F. and afterward, wherever there was need of machine guns and rifles. They had fought for War Lords--and for themselves.

"You say you've been up there, Jimmie?" asked Grigsby.

"Yeah--years ago though. I was with my pa when he was special agenting. To tell the truth I don't remember much about it, being a youngster at the time, but I do remember this--that's no country to go jazzing around in hunting any man's tomb. We were at the oasis of Kara-kul. That's where I got the dope about Jagatai, Jenghiz Khan's son. It's not like China up in that man's country. You can't slap a few out of the way and see the rest run. Up there they'll run--but right smack at you, old kid."

"Wait a minute," said Grigsby. "I thought that there was only a few Kirghiz tribesmen up in that country."

"You better take a few more thinks," said Jimmie. "In Samarkand there are over one million people. My gosh, it's 26,000 square miles. Man, they've got mountains up there 22,000 feet high. Not in the Famine Steppe or the desert of Kyzyl-kum, which is in the northwest, but in other parts. Darn right there are a few Kirghiz up there--and also, my fair dumb-bells, if you or any other white man go jazzing around there you'll find that more than a few Afghans, Tartars, Uzbegs and Tajiks will come rallying around the old flag."

"And what the hell do ye care, Jimmie Cordie?" demanded Red. "Is it ye now that is sittin' there and trying to tell us, what wid a couple of machine guns and the rest, that we couldn't slap all them guys you do be namin' outta the way?"

"Listen, you red-headed bum from Cork, these birds have guns, sabe? And they think when they die on the field of battle they go to Paradise."

"All right," interrupted Grigsby. "What I want to know is--if it looks like the real thing, what's the best way to go in?"

"We can get in easy enough," answered Jimmie. "But getting out is something else again. But far be it from me to frighten you delicate young ladies off. I just wanted to tell you what's doing up there. We can go up the Persian Gulf to Bushire, then to Teheran and then to Astrabad. I know a lad up there--if he hasn't been bumped off before now. He'll pass us on to Bokhara. That is unless you gents had rather take a little walk through Afghanistan."

"Never mind the kidding stuff," said Grigsby. "Go on from there."

"Go on from there? From Bokhara we go over into Samarkand, that's all. We walk up to the tomb, open it, take the stuff, turn around, walk back to Bokhara and come home. Simple isn't it?"

GRIGSBY'S Chinese boy ushered into the big living room the Boston Bean, the Fighting Yid and a tall, gaunt Scotchman.

"Come over and sit by me, ye Yid beneath notice," said Red, after the introductions were over and the house boy had put bottles and glasses on the table. "Then ye will be right handy for me to play the 'Wearin of the Green' on the coco of ye, do I think ye are about to tell the truth!"

"Big Irish loafer!" promptly returned the Yid, sitting down alongside the big Irishman who would make three of him. "Me and Jimmie vill kick the slats from you, gondiff? Ain't it, Jimmie?"

"Darn right it ain't," answered Jimmie. "You can do it easy enough by yourself--why drag me in for a kid's job."

"Let's dispense with any more foolish remarks," said Grigsby, "and get down to cases on this thing. Mr. Macintosh, will you tell us just what you know of this chap van Johann and what he told you?"

"This I know about Johann," answered Macintosh grimly. "When he was to the lee-side of a bowl o' whusky, there was nae raising him. He wadna' lie for the mere sake of the lie, ye ken. What he was doin' way up yonder is no my affair. What he says he saw, I believe he saw--but I'll go no further!"

"He told it to me, George," said the Yid. "He vas up dare mit some fellers who vos lookin' for some ruins mit writtin' on dem, for some society vat is in Germany. Veil, he vanders away some day and up on de side of a hill what has caved in, is dere a place vot looks like a hole in the ground, ain't it? He goes in, all by himself, und he sees a big room in de back und dare is

skeletons und gold und diamonds und every-ting. He takes it a handful und goes out to go back und get his gang und just ven he is tellin' dem about it--bingo--dey is jumped by all de people. Dare is a runnin' fight und finally he und von odder chap vins clear out of all of dem, und comes down through Tagharma into Turkestan, where ve met him. He vanted us to back mit him und get a outfit togedder. Ven ve vouldn't--he goes down into Kashmir. I got it from him just vare de place is."

"Where it was, you mean," said Jimmie Cordie, with a grin. "You poor fish, what do you think the bunch that jumped him are doing--letting it stay there?"

"Vate a minute, Mister Viseguy," grinned the Yid. "De hole vas only a small von, und before he vent back he covered it up mit dirt und everything. Ven he vos jumped dey come from de odder side."

"Yeah? My mistake, Mister Cohen. Did he tell you how to get to it?"

"He did--und also he got it a promise from me that did I go und find dem, he vould get it his share."

"Fair enough," said Grigsby. "He will. Want to go along, Mr. Macintosh?"

"I do not!" said that gentleman, rising. "I ha' heard full many the time of the four of ye, and would I be wishful of goin' anywhere it is with ye I'd be glad to go. As it is--no, all the time, not up there, for no man or money!"

"Well, if we go--and we find anything, we'll save some for you," answered Grigsby. "How's that?"

Macintosh grinned. "If ye come back--with anything--ye can leave my bit with the British Consulate. I'll bid ye all good day!" He took up his hat and, without another word, stalked out.

"Vell," said the Yid, after the door closed, "do ve go up and take a look-see?"

CHAPTER II - *"Right smack at you!"*

THE tight, compact column advanced slowly into the Kyzyl-kum. They had come up the way Jimmie Cordie had outlined, as English scientists, going in to investigate an archaeological find reported to the Royal Geographical Society of London. Jimmie Cordie, who, as Red said, "could produce anything at any time," had, in an afternoon in Hong Kong, gotten credentials signed and gold-sealed by everyone but the President of China. Yen Yuan, head of the Taiping, the most dreaded and powerful secret society in China, whose son Jimmie had saved from death in the States, when their were students at Boston Tech, had furnished them with two hundred fighting men, ostensibly to act as bearers, but in reality to serve as fighting men when necessary. If the outfit seemed unusually heavily loaded, it was explained that the bulk of it comprised scientific instruments and digging tools. There was very little trouble made, though. The credentials, the presence of the Taiping--whose members were scattered through the Orient, wherever there were Chinese--was generally sufficient to pass them along. Incidentally, the hard-boiled look of the entire outfit discouraged any unwarranted investigation. It would have taken more of an army than any lord of a city had, to have stopped them, and as a result they were passed along, paying for what they got promptly, Until they reached the Kyzyl-kum Desert. Once in, it was a different matter. It was no man's land there, and whatever a man held and wanted to keep, he had to protect for himself. The first day out, there had been whirlwind attacks by the Uzbeks and Tajiks. Attacks that seemed to blow up suddenly, like a sandstorm, to be beaten back as promptly. The second day, at break of dawn, there had been a rush by Afghans, attracted by promise of loot. It had lasted all day and Jimmie Cordie's statement, "they'll run right smack at you, old kid," was fully verified.

Now, the third day, twice since dawn, there had come an attack on all sides at once, made by Afghans, Tartars, Kirghiz, who came pouring down from the bare ragged hills, and all the rest, who seemed to have combined.

The Fighting Yid had been wounded the second day and was being carried in an improvised hammock slung between gun barrels.

The Boston Bean limped alongside of Jimmie Cordie, his head almost concealed by a bloody bandage, using a rifle as a crutch.

"Do you think we'll make it, Jimmie?" he asked.

"Darned if I know, Codfish," answered Jimmie Cordie cheerfully. "We're almost to the place, according to the Yid. All the water we have is what we got on us. Here's a problem in higher mathematics for you. We start out with two hundred men--in three days we have half of them left and two of us out of commission. If we reach it, how long will it take us to get back--and with how many men?"

"Why is a mouse that spins?" grinned the Bean. "I think the answer is that before long the angel chorus is to be increased by several new faces. My head feels like there are two or three boiler factories operating inside of it."

"Hold 'er down here, you long-legged giraffe, and I'll pour some water on it for you."

"You will like hell! What'll you do, you poor fish?"

"Fish is good--I don't drink water. Hold 'er down."

"Heads up, Jimmie!" Grigsby shouted from the left flank. "Get to your gun!"

THE attack came on all four sides and the little column tightened in, then formed into a four-pointed star to meet it, machine guns at each point. Red Dolan with two Chinese at one, Jimmie Cordie, Putney and Grigsby at the

others, with Chinese to feed them. They were all machine-gun men, taught in the hard school of the Foreign Legion and the equally hard one in the A. E. F. and the guns were perfectly handled.

The bearers knelt or stood, forming the lines between the points of the star, and fought as calmly and as coldly as the white men. They knew that if the smiling, black-eyed one, who was the "honorable elder brother" of Yen Yuan, did not come back safely, they had much better meet death with him. It would be a much shorter and easier one.

It was a deadly attack, delivered by men who counted death as an entrance into bliss. Men that knew nothing else but fighting and whose ancestors had charged home against all comers for centuries. But it was met by men with equal courage--and better weapons.

The Boston Bean sat down and began using a thirty-thirty rifle, his lean, aristocratic face as impassive as ever, even if pale now and drawn with the pain of his wound.

The Fighting Yid had promptly ordered his bearers to set him down, rolled out of the hammock, staggered to his feet, took a rifle from one of the men and, with a bullet in his left leg, high up, joined in. He used one of his bearers to lean against, much to the Taiping's disgust. The Yid, when engaged at his trade, which was fighting, always talked to himself or anyone in sight, whether they listened or not.

"Vate, mister vid de viskers," he began. "I get to you in a minute. Dare is yours--und dare is yours--and here is von for you--Oi, Jimmie! Vatch Popper knock 'em off und learn you sometings. Und dare is yours--"

Twice the horde almost reached the lines and always men who had been wounded or those whose shaggy little ponies had been shot out from under them, were crawling in over the hot sand, like wounded snakes--and just as deadly. They would be met with the long curved swords of the Taipings, which had appeared like magic from the packs.

It was a grim, merciless fight to the death, waged there on the sands of the Kyzyl-kum Desert. A fight between men who were fighters, irrespective of

race, creed or color. The machine guns cut wide swathes and piled up tangled heaps of men and horses, and the rifles poured a stream of steel-jacketed bullets into the horde. But from all sides, out from behind the sand hills and out of the passes of the barren hills that towered almost four thousand feet, came the attackers. And from the top of the hills and the sand dunes there was a steady volleying of the trade guns and quite a few modern rifles. The trade guns, carrying lead slugs, were more to be feared, as the slugs smashed through bone and muscle, tearing and crushing. Those in the charge would fire as they started, sling their gun, draw sword or level lance, crouch in the saddle--and charge directly in the face of the guns.

And the charge was met by the tight-lipped white men, all but the Yid, who talked all the time, and the equally grim, hard faced Taiping, led by Wang Li, one of Yen Yuan's most trusted captains.

The sand between the hills and the star was covered with men and horses, mostly in groups where a burst of fire had caught them. There was a sudden lull, although the horde was massing again in a circle a thousand yards away and the sniping went steadily on. Every once in a while a man in the line would pitch forward on his face--his arms and legs twitching. The Bean got up and came over to where Jimmie Cordie was.

"Hullo, Codfish," grinned Jimmie, busy cleaning his gun. "How'd you like to be in your pa's barn just about now?"

"In my pa's barn," answered the Bean, sitting down on an ammunition box. "There is a stream of cold water flowing all----"

"You say 'er," said Jimmie firmly. "Go on, I dare you. One peep out of you about cold water and you'll be sitting on a damp cloud playing a harp, right after."

"Did you say a damp cloud?" grinned the Bean. "Gimmie a cigarette."

Red Dolan came up. "Hey, Jimmie--George says to break it up as soon as they start and never mind any cross fire stuff. Hand over them pills, Beany darlin'. How's the head of ye?"

"Go tell General Grigsby that he's teaching his grandma how to fry eggs, Mister Dolan. You better be getting back to that popgun of yours, you red-headed ape--it looks like the band was going to start playing. And don't leave it all for me to do this time, either. Tell Putt and George the same, also. And likewise, keep your eyes open when you're shootin' that gun!"

"What? Keep my eyes open, is it? I'll knock the can off ye for that, once we get home, ye shrimp!"

"Take the Beaneater on, he's a crip," answered Jimmie. "One Cordie can lick ten--get back, Red! Here they come!"

THE horde meant to wipe out the outfit that had invaded their territory, in this one charge. After that they could fight each other for the little guns that spit a continuous lance of death.

As they got in motion, the machine guns began to rattle. Jimmie Cordie, who could hold a machine gun almost as closely as a rifle, waited a moment until he saw how far Putney's fire was reaching, then picked it up from there and brought it to Red. It was a merciless defense, put up by men who were all veterans. They fought for their lives there in the Kyzyl-kum Desert--and they all knew it. Nearer and nearer came the attack, great gaps now between bunches of riders. They came steadily on, their lances and swords gleaming in the sun.

Red Dolan stood up from his gun. It had jammed on him after the fifth burst of fire. He picked up a rifle and began using it. Of all the Taiping, there were only forty-odd left on their feet--the rest were dead or wounded.

Putney's gun jammed also a moment later and he drew his Colt. Whenever Putney became hard pressed he began to croon some old song. This time it was "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emanuel's veins," and between every two or three words, his Colt raised, he threw down, and a man dropped.

The Yid stood as before, only now two of the bearers, both slightly wounded, held him up. His rifle was worth more than their two--and he was still talking. "Oi, vat lofely shootin'. Von--two--three--und von for you--vat? Am I missing? Vell, vell, you decided to fall, vot? Hold me tighter! Give me anoder gun. My, dey eat dis stuff, vat?" The Boston Bean had begun firing with a rifle, but the constant recoil had made his head seem to burst open and he had put it down and drawn his Colt, standing there with it in his hand, trying to rally strength enough to clear away the mist before his eyes. Grigsby and Cordie still worked their guns methodically, swinging in a radius to take care of the half circle. Wang Li untouched, stood out in front a little, with a long curved sword in his hand. Any man that had crawled up to the line on his side unscathed, met his death. Wang Li's sword would flash out once--never twice.

Suddenly, just as it seemed that the little star would be wiped out, the charge broke, as charges do even when delivered by men who are fearless, and those that were left, wheeled their ponies and fled to the shelter of the sand hills.

As they did Grigsby shouted an order to Wang Li and stood up. The firing ceased and the six white men and those of the Taipings that were able, stood up.

"My gosh," said Cordie, "it was about time. What happened to you, Red?"

"Nothin'--she jammed on me, that's all. Are ye hurt at all, ye spridhogue?"

"Only in my feelings," answered Jimmie with a grin. "When I look around and see what's left of the ammunition. How are you, Codfish?" he went on, turning to the Boston Bean.

"Not so bad--if I could make this damn head of mine quit turning around so fast."

Red looked at him, "Goofy," he said, with deep conviction. "Never mind, Beany, acushla--I'll carry ye on me back."

"All right," called Grigsby. "Get busy."

"His master's voice," grinned Jimmie. "Stay and take care of the Duke of Boston, Red. Get the Yid over here first. He looks all in."

"He is," agreed Red, looking over to where the Yid was sitting, swaying back and forth. Red went over to him. "Come to daddy, ye fat omadhaun. 'Tis like a mattress ye are, tied in the middle. Up ye go, Abie darlin'," and he lifted the Yid, as a mother would a child, in his brawny arms.

"Big Irish bum," jeered the Yid, as he rose in Red's arms. "Me und Jimmie vill from you knock--Oi, I am down and out and all in. Easy mit de leg, I esk you."

"Shut the trap of ye," commanded Red. "Or I'll roll you across the sand for the wildmen to play wid. Are ye hurt bad Abie, acushla?"

Jimmie, with Grigsby and Putney, counted ammunition and collected all the water bags. "I'm of the personal opinion," Jimmie said with a grin, "that this is rapidly getting to be a place that is not so good. If they come once more, the ammunition will be most distinctively all, gents!"

"And that's the time, Mr. Cordie," answered Putney, "that you showed if you had only fifty per cent more brains, you'd be half human. George, I think the best thing we can do is to back trail, pronto and in haste--and keep on that way as long as possible. I hate to crab the party, but it don't look as if we could get much further."

"What?" demanded Red. "After lickin' them scuts? Are ye goofy too, Putt?"

Grigsby grinned. "If we've licked 'em, Red, they don't know it. We better go on, Putt. No water on the way back and there may be--"

"On the fire!" called Jimmie Cordie, jumping for his gun. "On the left! Give 'em hell, Wang Li!"

THIS time there was no attempt to encircle--the remainder of the horde, about two hundred men, charged in a wedge shaped column, led by an old man with a long flowing beard. He was riding a big stallion and loomed above his followers who mostly were on the shaggy Mongolian ponies. He stood in his stirrups like a Cossack, his sword held as in the position of "right cut against infantry." Back of him, spreading out on the lines of the wedge, about ten deep, came the Afghans, Tartars, Uzbeks and Kirghiz, brother fighting man now, until the loot was secured.

Grigsby and Putney were at their guns almost as soon as Jimmie. Grigsby fired one belt--reached for another--but there was no Taiping to hand it to him! Both had been reached by the snipers on the hill tops. Grigsby stood up for a second, to step clear of the bodies, and reached for an ammunition box, looking over to where Jimmie Cordie was working his gun with Red. The Boston Bean still stood with his Colt in his right hand, his left holding his head as if to stop it going around. Grigsby saw the Fighting Yid, lying prone on the sand, still pumping his Winchester and still talking. As he stooped for the box, he saw Putney, standing as if on a rifle range, using a .30-.30, his face as calm as ever. The Taiping were lying and kneeling as before, among the bodies of their brothers. Wang Li was standing in the middle of them, watching the advance of the horde.

As Grigsby straightened up, the side of his face suddenly became curtained in blood and he fell sideways over the bodies of the men at his feet.

One machine gun left in commission now--Jimmie Cordie's--and he was shooting it with all his skill. He had seen George Grigsby go down out of the corner of his eye, as Red hooked on a belt for him and now, the smile was gone from his lips and he shot, bringing all he had ever learned of machine-gun work to bear, coldly and accurately. He started at the point of the wedge, ran down the side opposite to him, as a gardener would send the water from a hose on a border of flowers. Then back and down again. But even a machine gun bullet must stop when it hits and these men were chunkily built, hard-muscled, and wore heavy sheepskin clothes. A bullet would not go through them and into the next man, as it would through a half-naked, illy-nourished, savage or a much slighter, thin-bodied Chinese. Men would go down, as did their horses, carrying other horses and men

with them. The men if they could, would crawl out of the welter and continue the charge on foot. The rest never faltered but came on, to ride over these strangers who had killed so many of their tribesmen.

The rifles of the Taipings were taking toll, and every time Putney or the Yid shot, a man fell from his saddle. The old man leading, by one of the strange freaks of battle, was not touched. He came on, followed now by less than fifty men and as they got to within a hundred feet, he shouted in exultation and waved his sword over his head. The stallion he was riding was stark crazy and was running, his head far out, his lips curled back, the long yellow teeth showing through the foam.

JIMMIE CORDIE fired one burst--then another, almost under the hoofs of the horses, and stood up, drawing his Colt. Red Dolan sent a bullet through the brain of the stallion when he was within ten feet of them and the big horse, killed in the middle of a jump, turned a complete somersault, throwing his rider over his head. The old man lit behind Jimmie Cordie, and as Red parried a blow from the sword of the next man, whose horse had been killed by the last burst, and closed with him, Jimmie turned to where the old man had fallen. There was no one on his front, most of the horde left had hit the line further down and were being met more than halfway by the Taipings, who were as fight crazy as the tribesmen.

As Jimmie faced him, the old man, dizzy from his hard fall, raised up on his elbow and his sword swung in an arc like a flash of blued steel lightning. But Jimmie Cordie had been raised in a hard school, where men were taught that a wounded man was often more dangerous than a man on his feet. As the old man's wrist turned, Jimmie stepped back a half step. As the blade point passed him, he stepped in, his Colt hammer beginning to rise. Now he was on the old man's right side, so close that the sword arm could not be brought back. The grim face of the old Tartar glared up into his, unafraid, and he tried to twist the sword so that he could thrust sideways with the point. Jimmie Cordie, who had fought and killed for years, without a thought if the man killed was a fighting enemy, did a surprising thing. The hammer went down again from almost half cock and he struck the old man

across the side of the head with the barrel. It was not a hard blow, but hard enough to knock what remaining sense he had out of him and he sank back on the sand.

Red Dolan had parried the blow aimed at him and had crashed the butt of his rifle squarely between the eyes of the Afghan. The Boston Bean, his head cleared by the shock of the hand to hand fighting, was using his Colt. The Yid, hit by the fallen body of a man, was lying still. Putney was beside Wang Li, he had dropped his Colt after emptying it and was using a sword.

Jimmie Cordie stood in a practically cleared space. "Shoot 'em away from Putt!" he said calmly. "Red! Drop that gun! Use your Colt!"

"Colt hell!" snarled Red. "I'm goin' meself," and with the rifle, its butt now shattered, Red Dolan ran to the milling mass of men, in the center of which was Wang Li, Putney and ten of the Taiping. Around them eddied thirty-odd of the horde--all that was left.

The Bean started to follow. "Stay here, fool," Jimmie shouted, raising his Colt. "We can do better--" and his Colt began to send death to those of the horde on the outside. They fell, one by one, as he fired. The Bean stopped and joined in. They were both men who could put six bullets in a playing card at revolver range and now they were shooting to clear Putney.

The men pushing in paid absolutely no attention to those falling beside them. They got into striking distance and killed or were killed. But the two deadly revolvers could not be withstood and the tribesmen melted away. As Jimmie started to reload for the second time, there was a flurry, a flashing of sword blades, a surge forward and Putney, Wang Li and three of the Taipings staggered across the dead bodies in front of them, their swords dripping blood.

Putney came slowly up to where Jimmie and the Bean were. He had been wounded in several places and was carrying himself on his nerve. He stopped and looked gravely at Jimmie Cordie.

"Old kid," he said, slowly and distinctly, "I just wanted to tell you that you were plumb right. They run right smack----" He pitched forward and would

have fallen if Jimmie hadn't caught him and eased him down.

"Steady does it, old settler," said Jimmie. "Hang tough, Putt. You'll be--my God! Where's Red?"

"Under the pile, probably," answered the bean, weakly. His head was beginning to turn again, this time worse than ever.

Jimmie Cordie started over to where the bodies lay the thickest, to be halted and turned by a yell from the Fighting Yid, who had come to under the bodies of the men who had fallen on him, and had wiggled his way out to a sitting up position. "Oi, Jimmie! Look! Oi! Dey got Red! Over dare! Knock 'em off, Jimmie!" and the Fighting Yid tried to get to a rifle.

CHAPTER III -- *"Look what the redheaded ape was packing!"*

FOUR horsemen, leading another horse, across which there sprawled the big form of Red Dolan, were almost in the shelter of a hill, a thousand feet away. Red had reached the fight, been swung around in the milling to the side away from Jimmie and the Bean, killed the first two men that struck at him and the next second had gone down from the heavy hilt of a sword on the temple. The men nearest to him had promptly quit trying to get in to the fight any more and had crawled to where they could pick up horses, dragging Red with them, thrown his unconscious body across a pony and were heading for the hills. They knew that the prospect of loot had disappeared, and without question figured that a ransom would be paid for the man they carried. If not, they would have something to show for the loss of tribesmen and if Red remained alive, something to make pay by torture.

Jimmie Cordie and Wang Li picked up rifles and Jimmie shot twice. It was all he had time to do. Two saddles were empty as the little party turned into the hill, out of sight. Wang Li had either missed or hit the same man Jimmie had. The sniping suddenly ceased from the hills and Jimmie knew that they had come down to see what kind of a man it was that had been brought from the battle.

"I will get horses, oh honorable elder brother," said Wang Li, "and we will go for the war-lord of the flaming hair."

"No we won't," said Jimmie calmly, although his lips were gray. "There's wounded men here, Wang Li. If the warlord is alive, he won't be hurt, yet. We will see that all is done here that we must do--then we will go, you and I. But for that offer, oh captain of warriors, you are my brother always. Get water and open up the package marked with the red cross."

Jimmie went over to where Putney lay and lifted him up, then over on his back, putting a gun butt under his head. There was a deep cut on his left arm up near the shoulder, two not so deep on his left forearm, a glancing sword had laid his scalp open on the right side and there was another cut straight down his ribs on the left side that ran from his collar bone to his shortrib. None of them were serious, except for the amount of blood they had let out of him.

Jimmie, with the help of Wang Li, gave him first aid, put a coat under his head and left him there on the hot sand. There was no place to take him. "I got it some brandy mit my pack," said the Yid, crawling over. "I gif it to him, Jimmie."

"You will? Come here, you Yid wildcat, and get fixed up yourself. My gosh, how many holes have you got in you?"

The first-aiding of the Yid was accompanied by many voluble protests. "Oi, Jimmie, easy mit de iodine! Oi, my persecuted race! Quit vid de fingar! Oi, gif a drink before you cut it out, Jimmie, I esk you!"

One of the bullets had gone through the fleshy part of the forearm and was just beneath the skin on the other side.

"Sit tight then," Jimmie said, opening a bottle of whisky that was in the Red Cross case. "Here, drink hearty, while I sharpen up the knives and the saw."

"Vat?" yelled the Yid. "A saw? Oi, for vot, Jimmie?"

The Boston Bean came over and stood gravely watching Jimmie operate on the Yid.

"Cut his head off just below the ear," he suggested. He had stopped holding his head and his Colt was bolstered, but his eyes showed that the real Winthrop had gone away somewhere. Jimmie looked at him for a second, then said, "I will in a few minutes. You go and see if you can find a pail or something to hold the blood."

The Bean considered this for a moment. "That's a good idea," he said. "Then after you cut it off I'll use it. The top of mine has gone, see?" and he bent his head.

"Sure you can," said the Yid, game to the core. In spite of his pain, he was trying to help Jimmie Cordie. "Go get it de pail."

The Bean turned away without saying anything else and began pawing over the equipment.

"Vell," said the Yid, as Jimmie tightened the last bandage, "now ve got it a goofy, ain't it?"

"He'll come to," answered Jimmie. "Put this bird down by the other one, Wang Li, and then we'll--well, for Pete's sake! Welcome to our fair city, Mr. Grigsby."

GRIGSBY had come up to them, still a little uncertain on his feet, white of face, with caked blood on his neck and head, but otherwise sane and all together. The bullet, a steel-jacketed one, fired at long range, had hit him, glanced from his skull, torn it's way across his head, laying the skin open

and out. The result was just as if he had been creased. It had knocked him cold for a long time.

"It looks to me more like a cross section of hell," Grigsby answered, with a rather weak grin. "Where's Red?"

"Gone on a visit with some of our recent playmates," answered Jimmie. "Wang Li and I are going after him as soon as I get the hospital organized. Step up, you're next."

"You go easy," commanded Grigsby. "My head feels like if anyone touched it, it would break up in small pieces!"

Ten minutes later, they sat by Jimmie's gun, which was ready to hurl out defiance at any further attack. Putney was conscious now, the strong brandy taking effect. He was sucking on concentrated beef cubes and already the color was coming back in his face. The Yid was propped up against a box also with a bottle near him. Grigsby's head felt better and he was able to sit down on a box alongside of Jimmie Cordie.

The Bean had come back to them and after announcing that he couldn't find a pail, sat crosslegged in the sand, at Jimmie's left.

Jimmie looked at him. "Never mind," he said, "I'll find one for you. What's that on your Colt butt?" and he reached over and took it from the holster. "Oh--nothing but dirt! I thought it was a gob of something!" and he held the Colt in his hand, swinging it around by the trigger guard. He did not return it to the Bean. Wang Li and the three Taiping were busy among their own wounded. All of a sudden the Yid said, "Oi! vat--" then stopped. He was facing in the direction of Wang Li.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Jimmie. "Bandage slip?"

"No--it vos--I got it a pain, ain't it. It's gone now."

"Yeah? Well, keep your pains to yourself while we dope something out. We can't stay here, that's a cinch."

"Collect all the wounded," said Grigsby, "and get to the nearest hills, fight our way into water, and hole up!"

"That's all we can do--and the quicker we do it the better. We might dig in here but it would be a case of no water pretty soon and the wounded would catch hell in this sun. They'll gang up again. It's a thousand yards to that baby over on the right."

Wang Li, leading ten of the Taiping, all with roughly made bandages on their arms or legs or heads, came slowly forward. The three men that came through the fight walking with him.

"Lord," he, said, bowing to Jimmie Cordie. "Give orders. These brothers of mine can still use a rifle--and it may be a sword for a few minutes." He was a pure Manchu, this young war captain of Yen Yuan, and had been much with the English in Hong Kong and Peking. "The rest," he added calmly, "have ascended on high, taking their seats with their venerable ancestors."

"Mit your assistance," muttered the Yid, as Jimmie spoke. It was just as well that Wang Li did not hear him. He had done what was considered his duty, both by himself and the men who were so badly wounded. He had put them out of their misery and started them in all honor on their journey.

"We have here two wounded men, Oh brother," answered Jimmie, "and we must make the hills. We must carry one machine gun, rifles, ammunition, food and water. Sit down with us in council."

WANG LI bowed, his face lighting up with pride. He knew what that invitation meant--and the Taiping with him knew also. It meant that if they got back, his place among the million and more Taiping would be among the highest. "Lord, I am not worthy to sit in your magnificent presence."

"You have my permission," said Jimmie gravely, handing over an empty box. Wang Li sat down, his followers standing beside and behind him.

"I am not of the brotherhood," went on Jimmie. "But these men who are wounded? Are they not my fighting brothers? Let them sit on the stand!" Up to that time Jimmie Cordie had been protected and guarded because of Yen Yuan's orders, but from then on, all through the Taiping, which ranged from the highest to the lowest in China, he was served for himself also.

Wang Li snarled an order and the wounded sat down, the three unwounded standing back of him.

"Get going," Putney said suddenly. "Never mind any more talk. I can walk if you take it slow."

"Und I can crawl," declared the Yid. "Mit von more drink I can fly, I bet you."

"Make up light packs," said Grigsby, "food and water, fill our belts, each man take a rifle. Take your gun down, Jimmie, Wang Li's men can pack it. You take as much ammunition as you can pack. We advance a hundred yards, stop, go back and bring up Putt and the Yid, then forward again for another. Wang Li and I will do the bringing up stuff and you can cover us."

"All right, except that taking down business. We'll carry her as is, until we get in the clear. Make a portage of it--a hundred yards at a crack. We can get more stuff into the hills that way."

The Boston Bean suddenly pulled his legs under him and crouched, half up from the ground. "Gimme my head!" he snarled, and launched himself straight at the Yid. It was fast but Jimmie Cordie's action was faster. As the Bean's body shot past him, he twisted the Colt he still had in his hand and the barrel struck the Bean just above the ear. There was force enough in the blow to throw the Bean off his lunge and roll him unconscious on the sand a foot away from the Yid.

"What the hell's coming off?" demanded Grigsby.

"Nuts," explained Jimmie calmly. "He's been that way off and on all day. If he'd hit the Yid he'd have busted open his wounds."

"So you apply a counter irritant?" Putney grinned.

"Yeah boy, and save the Yid's bacon all at the same time. The Bean was knocked goofy--maybe that'll knock him all right."

"Anyway, it's given us one more to carry," said Grigsby. "Let's get going."

"Look!" the Yid shouted. "Behind you, Jimmie!"

Jimmie Cordie turned, as did the rest. The Bean's Colt was again ready for action.

The old Tartar that had ridden the stallion and been knocked out by Jimmie, was staggering to his feet. His hands were groping aimlessly at his belt for a weapon that was not there.

"Don't shoot," Jimmie Cordie said, getting up and starting over toward him. The old Tartar saw him coming and made a desperate effort to clear his befogged brain. Jimmie halted when he got to within four feet of him.

"Put 'em up!" he commanded, at the same time raising his left hand above his head. That command, delivered in almost any language, when backed by weapons, is understood, and the old man, after a quick glance around, slowly obeyed. Jimmie motioned with the gun toward the others and the old man promptly started over.

When they arrived, Grigsby said, "What are you going to do with your boy friend?"

"Darned if I know?" admitted Jimmie. "Maybeso swap him for Red."

"Yeah? Well, let's get going. Load him up with ammunition."

THE old man made no objection, and after watching the rest for a moment, he lifted one of the one hundred pound boxes to his shoulder. As he did, one of the Taipings brushed against him, very slightly. The old man turned and

snarled something. The Taiping put down the box he was carrying and drew his long curved sword. The Tartar grasped the box and raised it above his head, ready to throw. Wang Li, who saw it, shouted an order and the Taiping sheathed his sword, picked up his box and started. After a minute, the old man lowered the box and stalked along.

At the first halt, Jimmie Cordie went back with Grigsby and three of the Taiping. The Yid, Putney and Wang Li staying. When they returned with the Bean, who was still unconscious, Jimmie Cordie had the Tartar's sword. He went up to the old man, bowed and held it out, hilt first.

"Oi, such a business," said the Yid. "For vat you do dot, Jimmie? Now, go und find a rattler und gif him first two bites."

"Shut up, nitwit," whispered Putney, beside him. "Jimmie's up to something."

The Tarter looked at Jimmie, then at his sword, then held out his hand and took it. Jimmie motioned to one of the boxes, sat down himself for a moment. The old man watched him grimly until he had risen again, then went and sat down on the box Jimmie had pointed to, his sword across his knees.

"Vat is it?" said the Yid in a stage whisper. "Jimmie makes him a passenger, ain't it. Maybe he comes over here at us? Ven he does, I crocks him before he gets started mit de pig-sticker."

It was a long, hard job, the bringing up of the stuff and transferring the wounded, but they stayed grimly with it. From the first time on, Jimmie stayed with the machine gun. But there was no need. The hills were still and there was no attack of any kind. The old Tartar made no offer to help, neither did he show any hostile intent. He advanced when they did, and sat on a box near Jimmie when the rest went back for more. He ignored the Taipings and they him. That was all. It was late in the afternoon when they came to the hill, not even dusk yet, but rapidly getting that way. As they came close, they could see a cut or gorge running in, with side walls about a thousand feet high.

"Hold 'er'," commanded Grigsby. "Heap plenty fine place for an ambush. Maybeso that's why our little playmates have been so quiet and let us get this far. Somebody's got to take a look see."

Wang Li volunteered to go, with the three unwounded Taiping, two on each side. As they started, the rest sat down to wait. The ten Taiping spread out, those that could handle rifles took them, the rest with their swords. The man the Tartar had spoken to, had evidently told the rest something as there were a good many black looks cast in his direction and quite a little talk. The old man ignored it all.

"We can ease in--" began Jimmie--he stopped, being interrupted by a yell from the Yid.

"Oi look! Dar is de castle over dare! See, on de little hill in de middle of de two big vons on de right. See, he said it was by a hill mit rocks on de top dat looks like a castle!"

"My gosh!" said Jimmie Cordie, looking in the direction the Yid was pointing. "It does look like a castle at that--or I'm getting goofy too."

"You always were," answered Grigsby with a grin. "Well, when Wang Li gets back, we'll ease over that way. If the tomb is there we can--"

"If de tomb is dare? Oi, George, vat a vay to talk. Sure de tomb is dare--und if it isn't, vat a swell place to make it a stand."

"You said something that time, Yid," agreed Jimmie. "If we can win to that hill where the castle is, all hell couldn't pry us loose."

"Until our water and ammunition are gone, you mean," put in Putney.

"Naturally, I mean until that happens," said Jimmie curtly. So curtly that Grigsby looked at him in surprise, then said gently, "Easy does it, Jimmie. Red's all right, and we'll go get him."

"I don't know whether he's all right or not," answered Jimmie. "But I do know one thing, and that is as soon as I get you birds in out of the wet, I'm

going out and find out."

Wang Li and the men with him came back. "No one on either side, Lord," he reported to Jimmie Cordie. "We went to the top."

"All right, then--let's go," Grigsby said. "What are you going to do with the seven Sutherland sisters brother, Jimmie?"

"Pack him right along. He can talk so that one of the Taiping understands. Wang Li can translate. I may be able to get a line on where Red is."

THEY made it to the hill where the rocks on top looked like some medieval robber baron's hold. It took quite a while. No attempt was made to hurry, plenty of time taken out to rest and never for a moment was the vigilance relaxed. As they came into a little valley, the hill loomed up ahead of them, a little on the left.

There on one side of a smaller hill, almost in front of the castled one, about fifty feet up, in the middle of a bare swath that was plainly made by a landslide, was--the black mouth of a hole going in! It was a climb of about forty-five degrees angle and by the time they made it, carrying the Bean, Putney, who had collapsed once more and the fighting Yid, plus the fact that Grigsby played out halfway through, it was dark.

THE opening was about ten feet high by twelve wide and the solid blocks of stone that made what was the roof were set on upright stone blocks, set tightly together by some kind of cement or mortar. The floor was made of square blocks of stone and as even as a billiard table. It was absolutely black after the first ten feet and the floor seemed to take a sharp pitch downward. The air was much cooler than outside and seemed dryer.

"Hole up here in the entrance," commanded Jimmie Cordie, as the last load was brought in. "We can do all the exploring later. George can you work this gun with the Taiping to help you?"

"Yeah, boy," answered Grigsby. "Putt will be all right again in a little while and the Yid can do some shooting right now if necessary, can't you, Yid?"

"Vot, can't I?" answered the game little Jew. "Esk me und vatch Popper. Prop me up by de opening und vatch."

"I can also," said a faint voice behind him. "I wish someone would tell me just what happened."

"Oi," yelled the Yid. "Beaneater, you is back, vat?"

"Back, hell," said the faint voice. "I haven't ever been away."

"Fair enough," said Jimmie. "The Codfish is returned. Now, Wang Li, lets you and me go outside with my friend here and see what we can get. You take the deck, George?"

"I got it," answered Grigsby. "Come back before you start, Jimmie."

"I will--and before I go to administer the third degree to my new found friend I want to ask the Yid what he thinks now about the bunch that jumped Johann not finding this place. Look at the mess around in front. She's cleaner than a rabbit, I bet you. Your Dutch friend didn't throw enough dirt over the hole, Yid."

"Vell," admitted the Yid. "It looks dat vay, Jimmie--mit dose cart tracks und de busted veels und vat not. But anyway ve found it shade and coolness und a place to rest, ain't it?"

"That's right," answered Jimmie as he started, "and right now all that's worth a damn sight more to us than all Jagatai's loot."

The old Tartar accompanied them without any objection, and as they went out in the semi-darkness, the Yid called, "Jimmie--keep the finger on the Colt und vatch de big sword!"

Five minutes later Jimmie and Wang Li came back. Grigsby had given Putney a drink, and now Putney was conscious once more. "Where is he, Jimmie? Did you kill him?" asked Grigsby, not seeing the old man.

"No, we let him go. He could speak Chinese. He is or was top-cutter of an outfit, but we mopped up on most of them. He said that there is no regular village around here and damn little water. He doesn't know where or who got Red. I think he's a damn liar myself, so I turned him loose."

"Why?" asked Grigsby.

"Oh, hell!" answered Jimmie. "Figure it out yourself. Where's Red's pack? He's got a flashlight in there I want."

"Over there by the gun," Grigsby answered. "I suppose you know you are going to your death, Jimmie?"

"If my number is up--and not unless," answered Jimmie, pawing over Red's pack. "And I don't give a damn if I am. Red will be looking for me to--well, for Pete's sake," and for the first time since Red was taken, Jimmie Cordie grinned. "Look what that redheaded ape was packing!" and he held up four Mills bombs. "My gosh, with one of these and--come on, Wang Li. Take a rifle and a Colt."

"Load your belts, Jimmie," said Grigsby. "You may need all you can carry."

"Give me yours, Yid. You got a full one. Hurry up, he's getting too far ahead of us. Let's go."

"Who is?" asked the Yid, as he passed over his full belt, having had one of the Taipings fill his up with shells right after the last attack.

"Why the old man, you damn fool. Why do you think I let him loose?" answered Jimmie, as he disappeared.

CHAPTER IV - "*Here's a little light for you!*"

WHEN Red Dolan regained consciousness, he was lying on the ground on what felt like bare rock. That it was some place way up on the top of a hill he could see by the moonlight which was just strong enough to distinguish large objects. His hands and feet were not bound, and save for a dull ache at his right temple he was unhurt. His iron body had withstood the jarring of the ride across the back of a horse without strain or bruise.

Around him in a circle sat men most of them crosslegged. Back of them stood others. There was a cleared space about ten feet across in the midst of the encircling figures that neither moved nor spoke as Red first sat up, then got to his feet. Where he was or what had happened after he had killed the man in the fight and then felt something as if the heavens had suddenly dropped and hit him, he didn't know. That he was alone, surrounded by enemies and unarmed made no difference to Red Dolan. His one thought was to get to the man nearest to him, take his sword away from him and fight the rest. As he tensed his body for the rush, the circle around him melted away, as far as sitting men went. It was as if they sensed that the big red-headed man standing there was as dangerous as a sabre-toothed tiger and was only to be met by men with weapons ready and on their feet. A man, big almost as Red, whose body seemed to be great rolls of fat, with long drooping mustache, his sheepskin coat removed, stepped in front of the others, and faced Red. He was a Tartar and the sword held in his fat, hairy right hand was a Persian *talwar*, whose blade showed, even in the moonlight, the damascening of a sword of price.

Suddenly the moon, what there was of it, went behind a cloud and it became dark, with the black velvety darkness of the north. There was a moment's confusion, a shouting of orders in different tongues and with it the crash of falling bodies and the tinkle of a blade on rock. Red had crouched and sent his two hundred and thirty pounds of hard muscle with all his strength in a flying tackle at the big man in front of him. His shoulder hit just above the knees and his arms went around the legs of the Tartar like

the closing of the jaws of a vise. The man went down as if struck by a shell, his sword dropping. The force of the tackle sent both of them rolling over and over into the milling feet of the men nearest to them. Red's weight, plus that of the Tartar, plus the force with which they were rolling, made them like some old Juggernaut car. Before they stopped rolling there were three or four men knocked down and one or two across them.

Red, having played football in the old days when they played football, and not a ladylike game of throwing a ball around and tagging each other, let go of the Tartar, who was completely out, heaved at the bodies of the men on him and came out of the pile like a Jack-in-the-box, only to dive for the nearest legs to him and gather them in.

Mr. Dolan formerly of the Foreign Legion, the A. E. F. and points west, was in his element. As a rough-house battler he was, as the Yid had once said, "a dirty fight-are," and at the moment he was not holding back anything he had, either. The men trying for him were handicapped. They didn't know that kind of fighting, it was dark, they had to be at least a little careful as to who they cut at, if they didn't want a blood feud afterward.

RED was handicapped by no such considerations, and as he heaved up with the legs he had gathered in, he let go, kicked at a man, butted another, reached out an arm, felt a body, drew it to him, jabbed up with his two fingers held stiff to where he thought the eyes might be, let go, jammed his knee up hard in another man's belly, went down on his knees and dove straight through the surrounding legs, which faded away on either side.

The men against him were good men, all fighting men and all eager to close with Red. Any one of them could and would have ended it with one cut. But doing that in the dark, with a two hundred and thirty pound Irishman, who loved fighting, throwing himself around like a wounded boa constrictor, was not easily done. After the last bucking of the line, Red felt that he was through the press. It was dark and he couldn't see, but he no longer felt--and smelled--the bodies around him.

He got on his feet--and fight drunk, turned to charge back. As he did, some one bumped into him. Red promptly gathered the newcomer in, and as his arms went around him, his hand closed on the hilt of a sword, over another hand. The man strained against Red, at the same time yelling loudly. He had been sideways to Red when he bumped him, but in reaching for him, Red had turned him so they were face to face. Red's left hand closed on the man's throat and his right slipped down over the hand on the sword hilt to the wrist. His hip came against the hip of the struggling yelling man and he heaved up, once. The yelling and struggling ceased and when Red let go, the man's sword had dropped and he followed it, his head way over on his shoulder. Red had broken his neck with a twist as the weight of the body had come on it. He stooped, picked up the sword and jumped into the darkness. His feet hit solid rock the first time, sloping down and he crouched and ran down the side of the hill. About thirty feet more he ran full tilt into a ledge that stuck directly up and the only thing that saved him from a cracked skull was the fact that he was holding his sword hand out a little. As it was it stunned him and he stumbled to his knees. As he did, his left hand, flung out to break the fall, went into an opening in the rock. He just had sense enough left to feel around. It seemed to be a crack of some kind, big enough to hold him and Red crawled in. It ran back about five feet and was not quite long enough to allow him to stretch out. The height was barely sufficient to clear his shoulders as he lay on his side.

Torches had been lit now, up on the hill top and there was a lot of running around and loud talking.

"Talk on, me buckos," Red said aloud. "'Tis clear of ye I am. As soon as I get me head to stop buzzin', I'll take me good sword here and come up to ye and then--and then--I'll go find Jimmie--the--" Red's head went down on his arm and he passed out of the picture.

Hence he did not see that there was a bunching together of the torches on the hill. Several that had been farther out, as if the holders had been starting a search, came back in. The whole thing, from the time Red stood up and was confronted by the fat man, had not taken five minutes.

INTO the light cast by the torches strode the old Tartar that Jimmie had released. Several other Tartars at once closed in behind him. The Afghans, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kirghiz, to the number of about thirty, got together also.

"Where is he?" snarled the old man, in a bastard mixture that they all seemed to understand.

"Lord," answered one of the Tartars, "he was here, lying quiet. Then suddenly he became possessed with a million devils. See, Lord, what he has done to us. Then, in the darkness when we could not see to strike--he flew away!"

"Fools!" shouted the old man. "He was worth many rifles and they would have given the little guns that spit death for him. Out and search--shall he hide from a hill-man and a rider? Get fresh torches. Go far out and drive in--soon it will be light! Go without fear. His friends are driven into a hole."

"Here's a little light for you!" said a mocking voice from behind, on the same side the old man had come up the hill.

The old man, with no thought of being followed, had gone slowly up in the hills, still dizzy and shaken from his fall and Jimmie's blow on the head. Wang Li and Jimmie had caught up with him without trouble--and arrived with him, a little while back.

At the sound of the voice, which they could not understand, the entire party on the hill top turned, and hands went to sword hilts.

Even as they did so, a Mills bomb detonated almost in the center of the massed men. It blew them literally apart, men falling away in all directions. Before the flash of the first bomb had died out, another landed and exploded among the remnant of the tribesmen. The old man pitched forward, half of his head blown off. The torches were down now, some burning on the rock, but none held up. Just enough light for those left, now frantic with fear at the devils that had appeared to burn and tear them, to see two forms come over the brow of the hill, one with streaks of fire coming from an out-held arm, the other, with a long curved blade that shimmered in the flickering light.

Ten or twelve tribesmen--all that were left--yelled in an agony of fear, turned, and fled blindly down the hill. Just then the dawn broke, clear and lovely.

Jimmie Cordie and Wang Li stood for a moment, looking down on the dead bodies, and the wounded who were trying to roll out of the sight of the demons who had the form of men.

"Turn some of those piles over," said Jimmie. "Red may have been killed before the--"

A wild Irish yell of exultation came rolling up the hill and following it came Red Dolan. He had been brought to consciousness by the two detonations of the Mills' bombs, and on cautiously peeking out of his hole up, had seen Jimmie and Wang Li just as the dawn came.

"Jimmie!" he yelled as he came. "Jimmie, ye scut!"

Cordie's grim, tight-drawn face became once more calm and smiling. It was as if some magician had wiped it clean. He bolstered his Colt and stood there, one hand on his hip, and waited for Red.

"We didn't wake you up, did we, Mr. Dolan?" he asked, as Red got up to them.

"Ye did, ye shrimp of the world," answered Red. "And damn glad I am ye did. Sure now, 'tis once I'm glad to see the homely face of ye. Are ye hurt, Jimmie darlin'?"

"I am not. Everything is all right now--you damn red-headed baboon. My gosh, you look like the curse of Brian Boru, you big cheese. What do you mean by--"

"'Tis right," interrupted Red. "I feel the same about ye, Jimmie, alanna. Where do the rest be now?"

"At a summer resort near here. Let's get going."

"Right away, Jimmie. Sure now, Wang Li, ye highbinder. I owe ye wan, for comin' wid Jimmie. 'Tis me that will pay it some--"

"Cut the wah-wah out and move out," said Jimmie. "They may rally and we've got a hell of a way to go."

"Wait till I swap me sword here for that wan wid the pretty handle," said Red. "Sure now, ye stole me bombs, ye robber!"

"Stole hell," grinned Jimmie. "We hoped you were dead and divided up your kit. The Yid got your shaving set."

"He did--and it will be about wan minute after I get back that he'll keep it. Come on wid ye--wait a minute, do ye know which way ta go now, Jimmie?"

"Yeah, we made trail sign. Carry these belts, you big moose--and this rifle, as well as me good sword.' I'm about all in."

"Jimmie! Now why the hell didn't ya say so, ye grinning gibbon. I'll carry you, wid all the--"

"You will not--go first, Wang Li."

CHAPTER V - *"I'll pack 'em all three!"*

A LITTLE after daylight, the Yid, who was sitting propped up against one of the big entrance stones, let out a yell.

"Oi! Come see! Here comes Jimmie mit Red! He got him! Und Wang Li mit dem! Now, by golly, ve give dem hell vonce more, ain't it?"

Grigsby and the Bean, who had been sitting further back, came to the entrance. Putney, whose clean, hard, well conditioned body, helped by the dry, cool air, was rapidly rallying from the effect of the cuts, turned and inched himself over so that he could see the three men coming up the hill.

"Mr. Dolan didn't want to leave his friends so soon," said Jimmie, as they came up, "but we persuaded him to come and visit us for a little while."

"Yeah?" said Grigsby. "Well, we are glad to see Mr. Dolan--all in one piece. I think, in honor of his arrival, we will all take one small drink."

"After which," Jimmie Cordie went on, "Mr. Dolan will entertain by explaining just why he quits work and goes horseback riding in the middle of the shift."

"And so would ye, shrimp, if ye knew no more about it than I did. Here I was, havin' a fine time, and all of a sudden some-pin' hits me and----"

"There you wasn't!" finished Jimmie for him.

Later, Jimmie and Grigsby sat outside the hole, while Red was telling the rest about what happened to him and Wang Li was doing the same with the Taiping.

"I don't want hang any crape on the festive proceedings," Jimmie said to Grigsby, "but let's get down to cases. Putt is coming along all right; so is the Yid. The Boston Bean is sane at the minute but liable to go bats again any time. Neither one of the three can stand the gaff. The Taiping are all shot to hell except Wang Li. That leaves you, Red, Wang Li, and Mr. Cordie's son, Jimmie. You follow me, Mr. Grigsby?"

"I'm ahead of you, Mr. Cordie--keep right on!" answered Grigsby gravely.

"As you urge me to do so I will," grinned Jimmie. "We have enough ammunition to last about ten minutes for the Colt plus what we have for the small arms in general, which isn't more than two thousand rounds all told. The food question doesn't enter in--there is plenty. But the water question is sticking up like a sore thumb. You agree, Mr. Grigsby?"

"Fully, fully--continue with your remarks, me good man."

"I will. We are now some three days' march in Kyzyl-kum Desert at the tomb of the late Mr. Jagatai Khan. It is quite obvious, Mr. Grigsby, that some one arrived before us--after the said Mr. Johann left. When we started we had two hundred perfectly good Taiping fighting men, four machine guns, and what we thought would be plenty of ammunition, water and sich-like. Plus that we all had good health. I'll bet nine dollars that this place is as bare as Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Question in front of the class--how long can we stay here before we start to fight our way back? Our late playmates will come to call on us again and--"

"You are slipping, teacher," grinned Grigsby. "They have already come. Look on the surrounding hills. Cut the comedy, Jimmie. Only thing I can see to do is to hole up here until the wounded are better, then strip down to fighting weight and shoot our way out. We got all the water bags and there's enough to last a week. If you ask me, we're damn lucky we got here."

Jimmie grinned. "What we got handed to us up to date is like the gentle patter of a summer shower on the old tin roof, old kid, compared with a tornado, when they really get ganged up--which they will do now. George, no kiddin', we got just as much chance of cutting our way out of here as a snowball in hell."

"What do you care," yawned Grigsby. "We're all together and it's a cinch we got to go sometime. Why not now, Jeems?"

"No reason--except I've got a few heavy dates to keep first, if I can--well, something may break. It's on the knees of the Nine Red Gods, anyway. Let's get in and take a look-see down the hole."

"I'LL go wid ye, Jimmie," announced Red promptly, when they went in and told the rest they were going to explore down the sloping shaft. "I'll go too," said the Bean firmly.

"You will not," said Jimmie, just as firmly. "You are liable to go goofy any minute, you poor piece of brown bread. Hell of a nice thing if you jumped at us down there and tried to take the tops of our heads for yourself, wouldn't it? You stay in the hospital, you hear me?"

"You and Red go," Putney said. "George can stay here as chief nurse and be ready to knock the Bean cold. Don't you try for my head, Beany, if you----"

"Oi," yelled the Yid. "Dot only leaves me und vonce before he did it?"

"Aw," defended the Bean, "I was nuts then. Now I'm all right."

"If you are," said Jimmie, as he and Red started with two flashlights, "you are promoted to be chief cook and bottle washer. Get busy on those tins. If you birds hear three shots, rally around the old fireside--and we'll do the same. Come on, horseback rider!"

They went slowly and cautiously ahead, their Colts ready and flashlights in their left hands. The passageway narrowed considerably, but was still high and wide enough to allow them to walk abreast. It went down on the same angle for about a hundred yards, then took an abrupt slope upward. The walls and roof were of stone, underfoot it seemed to be of tiles or squares of stone set close together, the same construction as the entrance. The slope up continued for a hundred feet, opening out here and there in chambers, and then the passage became level for a few feet and suddenly opened out into a square room about twenty feet square.

All the way along the passage there were bones and pieces of copper and old time-eaten blades of swords and axes--but nothing else.

"Whoever got here," said Jimmie as they entered the chamber, "sure mopped up. See those overturned slabs, Red. That's where his----"

"Mary, Mother!" interrupted Red. "Something crawled in here and died by the smell. Devil a thing here, Jimmie. The black curse be on that Yid for--that's what smells, Jimmie, over in the corner."

Jimmie's flashlight joined Red's. "Yeah, it looks like a snow leopard--my gosh," as they walked toward the body of a magnificent leopard. "She crawled in here to die, Red. Look at the dead cubs. She brought them in or she had 'em in here, I bet. See the place she has hollowed out for a den. Look at the stones pawed to one side. Her old man must have got knocked off outside and--what are you doing?"

"Nothin'," answered Red, who had knelt close to the head of the mother leopard. "I never seen one of those babies before. Hey, Jimmie, look at them teeth? How'd you like to have them sunk into ye."

RED had drawn back a little and put one hand down on the side of the hole. No sooner had he done so than he grunted jumped up, and drew his Colt, stepping back. As he did, Jimmie promptly stepped back also, and his Colt seemed to jump in his hand.

"What is it?" he demanded throwing his light into the hole.

"I put me hand *on a man's nose!*" answered Red. "There--where I rested it!"

"A man's nose? Come on, goofy--come and join the Bean. Sure, you're the Czar of Russia and I'll lick anyone that----"

"I am not," said Red firmly. "And bad luck to ye, Jimmie Cordie, for even suggestin' such a thing. I put the hand of me on a man's nose, I tell ye!"

"Too bad he didn't bite you," grinned Jimmie stooping down where Red's hand had rested. "You mustn't get so damn familiar with--by gosh, Red, it is a nose! When your friend the leopard here kicked out in her death agony she uncovered it." As Jimmie was talking he was pawing the loose dirt from around what looked like an iron knob sticking out of the ground.

"Keep away from that damn thing," said Red. "It may be a trap or----"

"Trap? It's a statue, dumbbell. Buried, see--that's the reason the birds that beat us here didn't find it. Say? Are you a passenger on the liner? Get down here and help me clear it!"

"Get up here," commanded Red, "ye poor weak sob sister! I'll dig it out for ye!"

Jimmie got up. "Hop to it. There'll be more digging than you think, old timer. From the size of the face, that baby is nearly man size!"

Red dug with his hands, his heavy boot-toes, and his heels.

"'Tis loose," he grunted finally. "Give me a hand, Jimmie, alanna."

Together they brought the figure up out of the ground and carried it almost to the entrance of the room before setting it down. "Holy cats," Red said as they did. "It weighs enough. What the hell is it, Jimmie?"

"Darned if I know. May be a statue of Jagatai, or one he looted and thought a lot of."

They stepped back and put their lights on it.

It was an effigy of a man, short, thick set, standing erect on a low square block, with what looked like, as Red said, a towel around his waist.

Red flashed his light up on the face.

"Holy smoke!" he said, "'Tis the Fighting Yid!"

"What?" asked Jimmie, who was looking at some characters carved on the stone base. "Where's the Yid?" and he turned to the entrance.

"This statue," answered Red, with deep conviction, "'Tis the livin' split of him. Take a look, Jimmie."

JIMMIE laughed and threw his light up with Red's. "Boy howdy, it is at that. Black the Yid up and he could--wait a minute. I thought the darn thing was made of iron or bronze but it might----" Jimmie reached in his pocket and brought out a pocket knife. He dug into the leg of the statue nearest to him. The knife scrapped through a layer of verdigris and then a yellow streak showed. He dug deeper, then sat down on the stone and laughed.

"What the hell now," demanded Red. "Are ye goofy, ye laughin' hyena?"

"Goofy hell!" answered Jimmie. "My gosh, it is funny, though. Here we are not able to carry ourselves out and we find a--oh, my sainted aunt Mandy!"

"Find a what?" asked Red. "If ye have gone bats now, Jimmie Cordie, I'll--"

"Oh, for Pete's sake, you nitwit. What do you think that thing is made of?"

"I dunno, what?"

"Gold my boy, gold--and we can't pack an--"

"Who can't?" interrupted Red. "Gold, is it? Sure I'll carry it meself, ye poor feeble peanut. How much do it be worth, Jimmie darlin'?"

"What? What good will it do you to know. Man, you got to pack ammunition and water, not gold."

"I'll pack 'em all three!" answered Red firmly. "How much gold is there, Jimmie?"

"Well," grinned Cordie, "given that the Yid weighs around one ninety and this baby is a little thinner, we'll say one seventy-five for him. He certainly isn't solid, or we wouldn't be able to lift him. Must be a thick shell of gold. Gold is worth around say twenty dollars an ounce at the mint--and let me call your attention to the fact, my fair red-headed nitwit, that you are one hell of a long way from any mint at the moment. Well, at twelve ounces to the pound that's two hundred and forty dollars a pound. Two hundred and forty times one seventy-five--holy smackers. I'd need a sheet of paper and six pencils. It's somewhere around forty thousand dollars, Red."

"Is that all? Sure wan vase we----"

"Let's go back. We couldn't take it, Red, if it were worth forty million. I'd swap ten of them right now for some of the old gang with machine guns. Gold is good in some places, boy, but right here it isn't worth a tinker's damn."

They went back, and after Jimmie had told about the statue, the Boston Bean asked, "Did you say it looked like our distinguished friend here on my right?"

"It did," answered Red. "Could be himself!"

"And there was some inscription carved on the stone?"

"Yes," said Jimmie. "What's on your mind, Codfish?"

"Why, it may be that--could you get it up here where----"

"Sure, Red, go down and bring it up for the gentleman."

"Who, me--by meself? I will not. Lemme have three of the Chinks--an I will!"

The three unwounded Taiping went with him but only after Wang Li agreed to accompany them. They hadn't lost anything down that dark slope underground and they didn't like tombs anyway.

CHAPTER VI -- *"If they get to you, Yid----"*

WHEN the statue was finally brought up and placed a little back from the entrance of the tomb, so that the light of day could play on it, the

resemblance to the Fighting Yid was remarkable, as far as the face and general outlines of the body went. He came over and looked at it. "Oi, Popper! How come you here wid only a napkin on? If dot ain't a statue of my old man, I eat it!"

"What's the inscription, Yid?" asked the Bean.

"Vat? How the hell do I know? Vait a minute--it's Hebrew, ain't it? It is--vat de--und me de son of a rabbi, mit a million lickin's behind for not learning it--vaite; it is, *This--is--now*, vot de hell is dot damn curlycue--a--dot's it--a und dem comes it--*F*--und dat baby is *G*, und dat baby is *H*--now I get it back-- 'A-F-G-H-A-N-A' it reads. '*This is Afghana*' and under it reads--'*The son of Jeremiah,*' who was de son of Saul, de King. How's dot for reading, mistares?"

"Very good," answered the Bean gravely. "Darn good. This is Afghana, the son of Jeremiah, who was the son of Saul the King. Fair enough, my brave Hebrew scholar--fair enough. Now we will go home, in state."

"Goofy again," said Red, moving over alongside the Bean. "Be easy now, Beany, darlin, or I'll floor ye wid a right swing to the jaw."

"Lay off, Red," warned Jimmie. "You're the goofy one. Go ahead, Codfish--tell us!"

"Let's go out where we can sit in the sun," answered the Bean.

"I've got a toehold on an idea. Now," he went on after they were all seated about a yard outside the entrance, Putney as well as the rest, "here it is--that's a statue of Afghana, from whom the Afghans claim descent. How the hell it got in there, I don't know--and I don't care. But here it is for a guess. Jagatai did a lot of promiscuous looting and he didn't care where or when. He ran across that statue in some temple or shrine or whatever the hell the Afghans call their dumps--and he promptly assimilated it. Why, he only knows, and he isn't around to tell us. Not a doubt in the world that the Afghans have some tradition about it--and that it has been handed down that Jagatai had it. Now, question is--how much do they think of it--and would they recognize that old gent?"

"Good way to find out will be to set him out in front here and see what happens. It's a pipe they won't stay away from us very long," said Jimmie. "In fact, gents, if you will notice, it's getting time for the party. Cast your eyes over on the top of the next hill and down in the valley, and you'll see the guests beginning to arrive!"

The hill they were on was more or less a detached one from the spur that jutted out from the disconnected, broken-up range, going into the next higher one with a ridge not more than a hundred feet high. It stood out like the point of a broad bladed spear. Attack could come from any direction, down the hill as well as up and in the sides, but to reach the entrance it must be delivered squarely in front.

"If we do set the old boy out," said Grigsby, "and they recognize him, it will start something off and we're not in shape to take advantage of it. Any hard play and Putt and the Yid go south. The Bean's head is an unknown quantity. They won't make any attack yet, knowing damn well they've got to pull us out of this hole."

"That's right, George," agreed Jimmie Cordie. "They'll try us out to see what we've got, then they'll sit down in front and try and starve us out. Those gents have nothing to spend but their time. Go ahead, Codfish."

"Well, here's what I thought--if we could show them we----"

"Show who?" demanded Red. "Them chimpanzees? 'Tis all mixed up they are. What wan knows the rest----"

"How did you happen to think of starting wah-wahing?" interrupted Putney. "Put a jaw tackle on. They'll be starting up here any minute."

"Do I have to ask the likes of you----" began Red, hotly.

"Send him a letter about it," interrupted Grigsby. "Pipe down, Red. Go on, Bean."

I'VE been told to do that several times," sighed the Bean, "and have tried without much success. Well, here it is--if the Afghans recognize the statue, they'll want it. They are the best fighters and can mop up on the rest. I thought we could show the darn thing--hole up, fight 'em off until they get sick of it--then make a deal with them to escort us back to safety in return for the statue.

"Boy," said Jimmie gravely, "the old bean is hitting on five of the six once more. But, Lord Boston, you've slipped on one or two little details. The first one is, you can't make these birds sick of fighting. They'll carry the fight to us, free, gratis, and for nothing. Second, if they see the statue it will only be like adding a little TNT to a charge of 60 per cent, gelatin powder--we won't notice the difference, old-timer. We may make 'em pause long enough to listen to a compromise, but any dicker you make with Afghans, my learned friend from Bosting, is nix with them at the first chance. Of all people, they are the last to make an agreement with--unless you have the whip hand."

"If we put it out for a minute--or long enough to give them a chance to take a good look, then stand them off, all that are here of them, what happens?" asked Putney.

"Easy," answered Cordie. "They go home or to wherever there are more of them, leaving enough here to keep us holed up, then come back with a crowd and mop up, if it take until Christmas."

"Which gives us the time we are looking for," went on Putney. "Then when they get back with enough Afghans to mop up and take care of the rest of the mixture, we can put the statue out again, only this time it will be the Yid blacked up--the darn thing is almost black and----"

"Vat?" yelled the Yid. "Oi, Putt! Vat did I ever did to you? Me, mit a towel on, outside und mit dem----"

"I'll cover you, Yid," grinned Jimmie. "There won't any more than four or five reach you."

"I got it!" shouted the Bean. "The Yid can come to life, wave them back and--and--we can hold the Yid as prisoner and make them keep away from us--no, we'll----

"Inside!" Red bowled, jumping to his feet. "Here they come!"

It wasn't much of an attack, really it was more of a feeling out. A party of fifty or sixty men trotted up to the bottom of the hill, dismounted, and scattering out, rushed the slope. If it were a feeling out, it succeeded in doing that thing. It fully demonstrated to the onlookers that the men left alive and holed up were able to put up a fight. The .30-.30's stopped most of them, the rest were met by Wang Li, Red, and the Taiping and wiped out. Several of the wounded, those who had been shot down first, rolled back down the slope, and one or two got on their horses and rode back the way they had come.

"Let 'em go!" shouted Jimmie Cordie, as the Yid stepped out, his deadly rifle already at his shoulder. "You damn fool, come on, set His Joblots out--Come on, Red, you big moose, take hold!"

THE statue was set out about three feet from the entrance and the men slipped back to cover. Two of the scouting party were Afghans and had been wounded as the rush started. They were facing the other way when the statue was brought out, both of them half-sitting, half-lying on the ground. One of them staggered to his feet, turning as he did so. He saw the statue, let out a wild screech of terror, fell forward on his face. The other, from where he sat, turned at the yell and saw what the first had yelled about. He had been shot through the chest and a bloody froth was on his lips, but he jumped to his feet, raised his hands high above his head, took two full steps forward, then crumpled to the ground, dead.

"There is no doubt," said the Bean softly, "but what they recognize it."

"And there is also no doubt, John Cabot," answered Jimmie Cordie, "that news has reached the rest of our playmates. Look at 'em come--all Afghans

this time. Help me get this gun out here, Red. Leave the damn thing where it is--no time to bring it in. This is the one we've got to stop!"

They stopped the rush but all the machine gun ammunition was exhausted before the Afghans drew off, those that were left. The sight of the statue made them literally stark crazy. There was no drawing off of whole men, only those who were wounded so badly they could not use their weapons. The fire this time from other hills was not so bad as the range was longer and those in the charge had trusted to swords. Jimmie Cordie, as he shot the last burst, got a lead slug through the right forearm. Fortunately, however, it did not touch the bone.

"Welcome to the hospital," said the Yid, after they had taken the statue inside. "Now if Red gets a nice little von, we all got it, ain't it?"

"Well, ye Yid ape," said Red bitterly. "I've got a good mind to take you apart."

"Get one more mind," said Grigsby, from where he was fixing Jimmie's arm, "and get to the front. They may be coming over the hill."

"They are not," answered Red, as he stepped to the entrance. "Holy cats--there go all the different kinds of wildmen--come and see, Jimmie. Look--all divided out. See--there goes them damn hyenas that the Yid belongs to!"

"Not all," corrected the Bean. "See that bunch over there and that one on the top of that hill? They're making camp, boy. We're going to be policed until the rest of the gang get here."

"Ain't that somepin'?" demanded Red. "Them few hold us! Come on, the rest of ye, sure we can dance through that many."

"Hold 'er, Red," Cordie answered. "They wouldn't fight us--they'd tail along and run the rest up to us. We're better off here. They'd get us before we'd gone a day's march. The plan--holy mackinaw! What are you trying to do, twist the arm off me, you big cheese?"

"Stand still, Mr. Cordie," answered Grigsby with a grin. "Full many a time you've worked on me. Don't begrudge me a chance at you."

"When you get through, hand him over to me," said Putney.

"Oi, und den to me," put in the Yid. "Vat I wouldn't do to dot monkey. He poured de iodine, a quart at de time----"

THE day went by, then the next day and night. They could see camp fires on the hills now, when darkness came. There was a ring of them, some far out on the desert.

"Ridin' herd on us," said Putney, one night, as he relieved Red, who had been on guard. His wounds were healing fast, aided by the beef cubes and jerked beef, and thick broths made for the wounded by Jimmie Cordie. The Yid's wounds were better, and Grigsby's head had almost healed! The Bean was normal once more and Jimmie's arm, though painful was not serious. Of the Taiping wounded, eight were practically well, the other two were in a bad way. They were all a clean living, hard muscled bunch, who had never abused themselves and had lived in the open air, on good plain food. The dry air and the prompt first aid had prevented blood-poisoning.

Another day and night went by, then at the break of dawn on the fourth day, they saw filing down through the passes and around the hills onto the desert, an orderly array of riders--all Afghans. The men on the hills and further out came down to meet them.

"Curtain, first act!" Jimmie Cordie said, as they stood in the entrance, watching them. "Now's the time for the Yid to strut his stuff, while it's still a little dusk. Get ready Yid. Red, get the stone upon the skids and--"

"'Tis ready long ago," interrupted Red. "Strip, Abie darlin', and let daddy black ye up wid the burnt wood."

"Oi," protested the Yid. "Vait, I esk you. It's cold und I must sit dare mit nodding but a towel on."

"You sit, you polecat," warned Jimmie. "You stand--and no matter what happens, don't you move an eyelash, you hear me?"

"Do I hear you?" groaned the Yid. "I do, plenty. Vat if dey reach me, Jimmie?"

"If they reach you, old kid," grinned Cordie, "from what I see of those big knives you won't have to worry much longer than a minute about it. Remember now, Yid, don't get so carried away with your part that you forget your cue. When George and Red come out, you wait till they get on each side of you, then you reach out a hand and put it on their heads--"

"One hand on each head," interrupted the Bean firmly. "Go on, Mr. Cordie and be a little more explicit, please."

"Then," Jimmie went on, not paying any attention to the Bean, "you step down, put one arm around each of their shoulders--how's that, you hair-splitting piece of brown bread!--and walk back to the hole and in, with them."

"Und if dey gets to me first, de deal is off, ain't it?" asked the Yid, with a grin as he started back with Red and the Bean.

"If they get to you, Yid," confirmed Jimmie gravely, "the deal is off--several ways."

The Afghans seemed to be holding some kind of a conference among the chiefs, the rest standing or sitting on their horses quite a little ways back. And not until Red, Wang Li and three Taiping set the Yid, now an almost perfect duplicate of the statue of Afghana, standing on the block of stone, just outside the entrance and about in the middle did the conference break up.

"If you see it's a real come-and-get-it," instructed Jimmie Cordie to Red and Wang Li, "get your men and go out and bring it in. But--"

THE Afghans had seen it and there was a surge forward which was checked by shouted orders. Then a party of twenty or more mounted their horses and trotted briskly for the hill. There was no attempt at a charge and the riders were old men, most of them. "We got a nibble," said Jimmie from the Colt machine gun, "let 'em have all the line they want."

"Who's going to talk to them?" asked Putney.

"I think that most Afghans speak Pushtu," answered the Bean, "and the educated ones speak Persian. I can speak a little Pushtu and--better halt 'em, Jimmie!"

"I'll do that little thing," answered Cordie, and the machine gun began to rap out the warning. A line of sand spurted up about a hundred feet ahead of the riders. It ran from the extreme left to the right and was laid down as if by a ruler. There was not a foot of over or under shooting along the whole line. It told the Afghans to stop before it and they knew it did and stopped well on the far side. From where they were they could see the statue plainly and several were out of their saddles, kneeling on the sand. Three of the older men rode up to the imaginary line, dismounted and stood, their right hands held up, palm forward, the universal sign all over the world of peaceful intentions.

"Get out, Bean," commanded Grigsby. "You with him, Wang Li. You say you know Persian, they may speak it. When you get halfway down, wave them up to you."

The three Afghans advanced without hesitation to where the Bean and Wang Li halted. The rest of their party dismounted and joined those kneeling in the sand.

"What do you wish, you men who are our enemies?" asked the Bean, speaking Pushtu.

The oldest man spoke readily in the same language. "All men are our enemies who come unbidden into our lands. We come for our ancestor, Afghana, who has been hidden from us many years."

"This is not your land," answered the Bean. "Your land lies to the south and east. Your ancestor came to us of his own free will--and will stay with us, until we go back to our land."

The grim old Afghan laughed. "We will come and get him," he answered. "And you dogs, sons of dirt eating mothers, will die--slowly!"

The Bean laughed. "Before that happens, oh father of many dogs, Afghana will be lost to you forever. We will burn him up and send his spirit back to hell. But first, oh blind fools of the north, see for yourselves, that he will fight with us!"

The Bean took off his sun helmet and reached for his neck cloth, as if to wipe his face. As he did, Grigsby and Red Dolan came out and stood, one on each side of the Yid, who slowly raised his hands and put one on each head, according to instructions. The three Afghans gasped with astonishment and those on the sand, stood up. Then, the Yid got stately down from the stone and Red came around to the other side. The Yid reached up, he had to, to get to the shoulders of the two big men, and put one arm around each of them, as far as he could. They walked slowly up to the entrance and went in, disappearing in the semi-darkness.

"Afghana is our brother," said the Bean, "and will go with us. Tonight we take him through the ground to a new resting place. If you think you can get him to go with you, unless he wishes, oh robbers of widows and orphans, come and try it--and never see him again!"

The three old men, all of them Ghazi, men who devoted their lives to the extermination of all other creeds but Mohammedan, stood, their eyes and mouths wide open.

"Go back to the slaves quarters," went on the Bean. "Or come--and be smitten with his wrath."

"Lord," said the old man who had spoken. "Do not go with the most holy one until we have made report. Upon what terms, Lord, will he come to us, his children?"

The Bean was too clever to fall into the trap. If he had announced terms, the Afghans would have become suspicious and would have begun to figure coldly. "How do I know?" he demanded. "Am I to speak for a Lord such as he? Get back to your kennels and it may be that at dawn tomorrow, he may speak. If before, we will signal you."

The three old men turned without a word and walked down the hill and the party rode back to where the thousand-odd warriors waited for them.

"WELL," said the Bean, after he had told the rest what had happened, "what now?"

"This," said Jimmie Cordie. "It's a pipe they'll fuss about it all today and tonight, then in the morning we'll bring out the real thing and signal them to come back to where they were just now. Then, Beany, you tell them that Afghana has spoken. He is to go with us, his friends, until we reach the border of Bokhara. His children are to follow and guard on all sides--but far away, beyond range of a gun--"

"Wait, dumb-bell," said Putney. "How the hell does Afghana know what the range of a gun is--also how does he know what a gun is?"

"Well, you world's biggest fool--do you suppose the Afghans will figure that? If they could, they wouldn't believe a statue could come to life. Nut, they think it perfectly natural that he knows everything. To continue--tell them he says that if they close in, or allow any other race or breed to come between them and him, that he will at once go back to his underground home or Paradise, whichever sounds best. When he is ready for them, to come and get him, he will appear alone."

"I am forced to ask you some questions, Mr. Cordie," said Grigsby gravely.

"Go ahead," answered Jimmie generously. "We've got all day."

"The first one is--do you think the Afghans, once we are in the clear, will obey that rule of out of range, or will they come galumping in and take their great grandpa away from us?"

"Ain't that somepin?" said Red. "How about that, Jimmie darlin'."

"The answer to that is, God he knows, and no one else!" said Jimmie with a grin. "Personally I believe they will do exactly as they think he wants them to do. If it were us alone, they'd agree to anything and then scrag us, but with him--I doubt it. Their holy men wouldn't stand for it, taking the chance of losing him."

"Well, at that, we can't stay here. The second question is, Mr. Cordie, when we get to the said border, just what do you expect to find? A traffic cop on the corner to shoo them back? What is to prevent them from getting their relation and then hopping merrily on us? What's the difference in being killed here and killed there?"

"Not a darn thing," agreed Jimmie. "What I thought was, the last night out, we'd set the old bird up on top of the trench, soon as it gets dark and take it on the lam, having told them not to show close until they saw him alone. By morning we ought to be far on our way. None of them will want to leave His Royal Joblots and chase us much further."

"You mention trenches--is it your idea that we dig in?"

"Yeah boy, every night--some of the Afghans might get a little ambitious to take a good close look at him and come sneaking up. Those babies can crawl up to a cobra and get first bite before she knows anything about it."

"I see. Now, one more question and I'm done. Does the Yid do his famous impersonation on the march?"

"He do," answered Jimmie, with a grin.

"Vat?" said the Yid. "I go out mit a towel und all blacked mit burnt vood? In de sun I sweat und it rolls off me. Und mit bare feet? Oi, Jimmie, such a business!"

"Don't holler before you're hurt," answered Jimmie. "You're carried in an elegant hammock, Yid, with bearer and a fan and everything."

"What?" shouted Red. "And who the hell is going to carry that fat omadhaun for three days?"

"You, for one," answered Jimmie.

"I am? Like hell I am, Jimmie Cordie. Take shame for yeself, ye--"

"All right, delicate--then I'll take your place. If four men can't pack a hundred and eighty-five pounds of live weight, taking it easy, for four days, they better go to the old man's home--where I'll send you, you red-headed ape, just as soon as we get home. I'll do your packing for you and carry your gun also!"

"Sure now, Jimmie, darlin'," soothed Red. "Ye know I was only foolin'. Sure I'll pack Abie, all by meself if ye say so."

"Yeah? Well, just for that you can be one of the other four that pack our new buddy along--that will be heavier."

"For Pete's sake, Jimmie," said Putney, "what do you want to pack that damn thing along for?"

"Why--to leave for them--but at that, it isn't necessary--we can leave the Yid just as well."

"Vat? For dem? You leave me? Not vile I got it a pair of legs--vounded or oddervize. Jimmie! Ain't it you und me is buddies? Black up the Irisher und leave him--he likes dem und goes on visits mit dem."

"Never mind now, Red," said Grigsby as Red started to say something. "Go on, Jimmie, make it plain."

"All right--the Yid is carried in state, sitting in a hammock--is that plain? Then, we cover up His Joblots, without the base, with whatever we have got--we may have to make a long box out of ammunition cases--and we pack him also. There are eight of the Taiping that can lend a hand plus the three whole ones, and Wang Li, Red, the Bean, you and I in commission to do a little packing. We'll strip down to our rifles and gats and four days' chuck and water. We'll have to leave the Colt machine, which I'll put out of service. Now, on the line of march they can see the Yid being carried. If they start in he can wave--"

"If they keep right on coming, Jeems?" grinned Grigsby.

"Then, gentlemen," answered Cordie firmly. "We will be forced to first scrag the Yid, then fight it out."

"Try und do it," protested the Yid. "If my children don't obey popper's orders, I gets it a rifle und joins in."

"Then," went on Jommie, "if they do leave us alone, the last night out, we will stick the real Mr. Afghana up on top of the trench and execute a masterly retreat to the rear, as fast and as far as we can."

"What," said Red, "and him all gold? Leave him for them scuts!"

"Boy, you'll be lucky to get out of this man's country with your skin, let alone a shirt tail," answered Jimmie.

THE rest of the day they sat at the entrance and watched the Afghans. There seemed to be several conferences going on at the same time and twice fights swirled up, to be scattered out by the rest. In the morning, at break of day, the three old men came up once more. The Yid, arrayed as Afghana, came to the entrance and stood with one arm around Grigsby, as the Bean and Wang Li went down to meet them. The bandage on his left leg had been pulled tight and smooth, and he looked the part even better than the day before. The Afghans looked a little closer also, but what they saw only

confirmed their belief. The Afghans have distinctly Jewish features and without doubt their descent is from a Hebrew origin.

After the Bean had given them Afghana's message, adding to it just what the white men would do at the first sign of a rush, among which was that they would cut Afghana up in little pieces and eat him. the three swore by the Prophet that Afghana would be obeyed in every particular. And to prove it, after they got back to the main body, the Afghans spread out, in an ever widening circle, until there was a mile on either side--and nothing in between.

Jimmie Cordie led, then came Wang Li, then the Bean, then four of the Taiping carrying the Yid, who lolled back in the hammock made from discarded coats and web belts, and hung between interlocking gun barrels. Then four more of the Taiping carrying what looked like a pile of ammunition boxes and food carriers on a platform made of empty boxes. Back of them came Grigsby, Putney, and the two Taiping that were still too weak to do any more than steady work pack their rifles and belts, but ready to spell any of the others. Alongside of the Yid stalked Red Dolan, waving a fan, made of several shirts, very solicitous of the Yid's comfort.

The first night out they dug a shallow trench, running at right angles, then back on a half curve. There was no attack or attempt at one. They could see the fires of the Afghans, way out in the desert, all around them. The second day and night passed, but no Afghan came within a half mile. The third day went by and now they could see the range from which they had come down in the desert.

They had refused horses offered, because of the carrying of the statue, the Bean stating that Afghana had rather be carried.

At halts the Yid would get down from the hammock and sit on a box or walk around, always inside the little circle formed around him. "Let them take a look-see," Jimmie said. "But not too close a one."

When they made camp that night Jimmie said, "Go out about two hundred yards, Bean, and wave in the old birds. Tell them that the time has come for Afghana to go back with them. That in the morning they are to come for

him when they see him standing alone. That he commands that they no longer circle his friends and that they are to withdraw two miles in the rear. Say that Jeremiah, his father, comes tonight to take his friends further on their journey and that it won't be at all healthy for any of them to see the old man--chief it up better than that, but that's the idea. As soon as it gets good and dark, we'll stick the old boy up, the Yid can cover his slim, beautiful form with a few clothes, and we will do the snake wiggle for the hills."

"And right then," said Putney, "we will find out just how far we have pulled the cork of our boy friends!"

CHAPTER VII -- *"The--his hand turned!"*

THE Bean got back with the statement that Afghana would be obeyed to the word and after it became fairly dark they brought the statue out and as they got ready to set it up on the shallow trench top, Jimmie said, "For once in my life I can state truthfully that gold does not look near as good as it generally does to old man Cordie's son Jimmie. We've been in some tight--what the hell is the matter with you, you bean pole?" Jimmie finished, as the Bean staggered back against him. The Bean and the Yid had been fooling around the statue.

"His--*the hand turned!*" the Bean ejaculated. "It turned! Anyone would jump back. I took hold of it and--look! Something is sliding out!"

The hand of the statue had turned as the Bean said. He must have touched a hidden spring. It had turned and fallen back, hanging on a hinge from the forearm which was on a downward slant. For some little way up, the forearm must have been hollow, because as the Bean spoke a short, fat little roll slid down the arm and dropped to the ground almost at the feet of the Yid.

"A package wrapped mit gold!" he gasped, and picked it up. It was not more than six inches long and about four inches through at the thickest part. The gold of the thin plates that made the tight wrapping was not tarnished in any way and glistened in the light from the little "Indian fire" like a golden spider in the sun.

"Vat de hell can it be?" demanded the Yid holding it out at arm's length. "Maybeso it is poison, vat?"

"Open it up, Yid," suggested Jimmie. "If it's poison, only you will get it."

THE Yid produced a sturdy pocket knife and began to charily pry open the bent over corners. "Writin' mit it," he said, as one came up. "Same as before, Hebrew--Vat de--oi, smell dat? Frankincense and myrhh--und--vat de hell is dot--aloes --calamus--camphor--my, vat a lofly -----"

"All right, Yid," interrupted Jimmie. "Come back to earth. We haven't got such a heck of a lot of time, you know. We all know what the old timers used to make mummies with. Open her up!"

"Hold it," said Grigsby. "Read what's on the gold sheet first, Yid."

"Who me? In dis light? Vell, maybeso I can if one of you hold it a flash down low so de Afghans don't see it und vonder vot is doin'."

The Bean squatted down beside him and held his light.

"Veil, it says--*I am*----" and the Yid hastily put the package down. "You hold it, Jimmie."

"Are you wishing something on me?" demanded Jimmie, as he picked it up.

"No, but me, I don't--veil, it says--*I am de son of Jenghiz Khan--who is--* hold de light closer, Beanearer. It is hard for me to make it out--vait till I remember. Oi, now I am glad dat so many times you took it the slipper to

me, popper--now I got it vonce more, wait till I can say it proper mit de right words----"

"I am Jagatai, the son of Jenghis Khan, Lord of the World, Leader of the Hordes. My name is Jagatai. I conquered the Kanklais--destroyed Otrar--Lahore--Herat. I, like my father, am the scourge of God. This is my heart--my fighting, pitiless heart that knew not fear. Read and obey--on my death which is soon, my heart is to be taken from my body and hidden in the forearm of the image of Afghana that I took from the hills and kept with me always. He was a fighting mem, and his children's children are fighting men. None better could guard the heart of Jagatai. This--that my heart will remain in the hills that I love and my spirit will come here to be near it--this I have ordered as I lie in Samarkand on my deathbed. Woe be unto him that disobeys. I am Jagatai!"

The Yid finished and looked up. The eyes of them all were on the package held in Jimmie Cordie's hand.

"My God," said Jimmie softly. "The fighting heart of Jagatai Khan!"

"Und vorth," said the Yid, once more back to his usual manner of speech, "all de money in de Metropolitan Museum or de London----"

"Is it now, Yid?" demanded Red. "Well, any wan of us can carry that."

"Sit down, you birds," said Grigsby. "Wrap that sheet around it again, Jimmie. Listen--it is probably just what the Yid said. Any museum in the world would pay thousands for it. But--did you get it--'this--that my heart--will remain in the place I love.' Do any one of you birds want to see the heart of a fighting man like Jagatai, who fought at the head of his hordes down through all the world that he knew, opened up in some damn museum and pawed over and looked at by men that would call a copper if a cripple threatened them? I say to put it back and turn the hand again--and let his heart stay where he wanted it. I don't often sound off about things, but I am sure doing it this time. We're fighting men--he was a fighting man--what the hell is money to us--we've all got plenty of it. I----"

"And even if we didn't have," interrupted Jimmie Cordie, "what difference would that make. Picture us going along, knowing that we sold the heart of Jagatai Khan. By gosh--let's admit that we got licked, for once--licked good and proper, and if it hadn't been for a damn lucky break we would all be pushing up whatever kind of flowers they've got in this man's country!"

"That's right, Jimmie," said Red firmly. "I know what ye mean, ye scut. Sure it would be like--like--wan of us sellin' out the rest. Put the damn thing back, Jimmie."

"What's all the blub-blub about anyway," asked Putney. "We better be on our way if we are going, instead of holding a sewing circle chat. George is right--even if he did put it as clear as mud. And so is Jimmie. We got our heads in the lion's jaw and if it hadn't been for Jagatai using that statue for his heart and having it buried under the floor, we would have gotten our heads bitten off. Put it back where it belongs and lets go!"

"How about you, Bean?" asked Jimmie. "You see the point, don't you?"

"Certainly," answered the Bean gravely, "several of them. Whoever is sat--"

"Vell," interrupted the Yid with a grin. "I don't--but vat is jake mit de rest, is Jake mit me, always, ain't it, Jimmie?"

"Yeah, boy," answered Jimmie Cordie with a smile that told how much he really thought of the Yid, "All the time, Abie, old kid!"

"Put it back, Jimmie," said Grigsby. And the five hard-bitten soldiers of fortune watched him gently place the heart of Jagatai, once more wrapped in the golden plates, far up in the forearm of Afghana, and twist the hand back in place. After he had finished he turned with a grin. "Get His Royal Joblots up on the top side, and pray to Heaven there'll be no moon!"

"No will be," announced Wang Li, who had gravely watched and listened. "Much dark, very soon."

HIS prophecy was correct the darkness fell suddenly like a black blanket over the desert.

"All right," Grigsby announced finally. "Let's go. Four pointed star, wounded in the middle--take the point, Red, Jimmie, take the rear. We'll darn soon find out about the cork-pulling stuff."

If the meeting of no Afghans or anyone else was proof, they had pulled the cork. When dawn came they were in the second range of hills beyond any pursuit, which did not come. They marched steadily on toward where Jimmie's friend was waiting for them.

The Fighting Yid stopped suddenly, an expression of deepest concern came over his still more or less blackened face, and he began to hunt frantically through all his pockets.

"What's the matter with you, you Yid ape?" demanded Jimmie Cordie, sitting down on a convenient rock, the rest following his example. The Yid paid no attention to them at first, then, "Oi, such a business! I know dat ven I strip in de hole to be-- I put it oudt to remember it--und forgot it. Maybe I von't catch----"

"You forgot what?" demanded Red.

"My handkerchief," moaned the Yid, "und----"

"Holy cats," said Jimmie, beginning to laugh as they all did but the Yid, and Wang Li, who was regarding the Yid with astonishment.

"Your handkerchief," repeated Jimmie as soon as he could stop laughing. "Well, Abie, you have my royal permission to run back and get it. We'll wait for you."

"Better I should do it," answered the Yid still mournfully, "than catch the hell I will from my girl, ain't it? She gave it to me mit my initials on it und everything. Now she will think I giv it to some odder girl und----"

"What?" interrupted Red sternly. "Ye get in where the skin of ye ain't worth a bad cent--yet get out of it--ye have held the heart of a fighting lad in the hand of ye--on top of that, ye have been carried like a king for days, wid me fannin' ye-- an now ye stand raisin' hell about a nose-wiper! Double shame on ye for a----"

"Vot is all dot to vat I get ven I get back to Hong Kong from my girl?" demanded the Yid hotly. "You don't know my girl, Mister Viseguy Redhead!"

"The Yid's right," said Jimmie Cordie. "I wasn't quite sure before, but now I am. He's got the relative importance of things sized up correctly. *Allans, mes enfants!*"

The Dagger of Macbeth by Stephen Chalmers

CHAPTER I -- *The Dark Island*

THAT island is as dark as ever it was, despite that American influence has changed semibarbarity in its Caribbean neighbors to almost ultracivilization. The Dark Island, I shall call it, which term includes two republics, for where one portion of the island is black and speaks French and revoltes as regularly as an alarm-clock, the other portion, its black slightly modified by Andalusian blood, speaks Spanish and revoltes at lengthier intermission--like, say, an eight-day clock.

Both sections have one thing in common. In Caribbee French or aboriginal Coromantee or Negroid Spanish, that thing is called by different names; but they all mean the same thing, which will presently appear--forbidding, ugly, brutal, weird, damnable, but interesting.

What Ronald McBeth did there was a mystery to me. I had known him at college--Edinburgh--before either of us heard of Horace Greeley's advice to enterprising youth. Years later he noticed my name attached to an article in the Geographic Survey on the head-hunters of the Eastern Archipelago. He wrote a tentative note from somewhere south of Panama and I came back at him with a hail-old-fellow-well-met which assured him I was indeed myself and no other.

We corresponded at intervals thereafter, sometimes years elapsing between letter and reply; for McBeth was as unsettled as myself. One time I would hear that he had just emerged from an Antarctic expedition and, a few years

later, that he had survived--by luck--a journey into the region of the Amazon headwaters. I remember how he quoted at the end of that letter, which was all stained with sweat:

"With one man of the crew, alive.

What put to sea with seventy-five."

On my side, I was usually absent on some ethnographic survey--white Eskimo or a lost tribe of Aztecs--that sort of thing; so that often a letter from McBeth would lie on my desk for a year before I found it, and then Heaven only knew where McBeth might be reached, save through the Adventurers', to which club he occasionally had recourse, via cable and a much-harassed consul.

But at last he seemed to settle down like a sane person. I did not hear of it until after my return from studying the Singing Apes. He was managing a gold-mining concession in the dark island of which I have spoken, somewhere in that Spanish-Afric section of it. He hoped I would visit him. He had nothing to offer, he said, save every possible inducement to stay away! There was nothing interesting about the mine, he stated, because they hadn't started to mine and didn't know when they would--or could! The country, he gently hinted, was "rotten" with fever and such towns as it boasted, alive with cholera, due to the pleasant native habit of using any sort of water for every sort of purpose and not having any appreciation of its qualities as a cleansing medium.

All of which fascinated. If there is one thing that appeals to me it is a hopelessly unregenerate people. I draw the line at degenerate, although a lady relative of mine cannot see any distinction. But just think of the opportunities to the ethnographer or the anthropophagist, or whatever you

please to call the man in my business! What, for instance, are the ideas of such a people on morality? Is there anything they hold sacred, even if it is a white snake or a blue crocodile? If they have a religion of any sort they are not, at least, unregenerate. Professor Provan disputes this. Provan holds that religion as a form of actual degeneracy does occur, and--

However, even if one rides a hobby, that hobby should be stabled on occasion.

As I say, McBeth invited me to--stay away. Wherefore I went, making the visit to my college friend an excuse--or vice versa--for an expedition into the darkest depths of that dark island. Of my observations I shall say nothing here; my expanded notes will presently appear in the *Journal of Ethnographic Survey*. Suffice it that darkest Africa had never anything on Dark Island. The former was to be expected; a small section of it, four and a half days from Sandy Hook was not.

The country was rich in minerals, hardwoods, everything worth while to the powers that colonize; but nothing was being done, nothing could be done, short of first submerging the island--and its population--for half an hour beneath the blue, cleansing waters of the surrounding Caribbean.

But the people did have something they worshiped, and it may be that Professor Provan is right.

In due time I met McBeth in this migrated chunk of darkest Africa. He greeted me and my native company at the door of a low-roofed bungalow, which was surrounded--at a respectable and only fairly smellable distance--by numerous thatch-and-wattle native huts. He was tall, large-boned, rather hook-nosed, sandy-mustached, gray-eyed--very gray-eyed--and I never saw such powerful thighs on a man. One noticed these long, narrow, curving thighs by the listless way a loose revolver-belt caressed them when he moved. His clothes--such as they were--were not of recent date.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume!" I hailed.

"Son of a gun!" said McBeth in his familiar, curiously clipped way of speech. But when he smiled I knew he was changed only on the outside.

Well, that is all about how McBeth and I came together again in the heart of Dark Island.

I stayed with him for a fortnight, meaning to stay longer; but--well, we had to come away at the end of that period. In the interval I rested up and spent hours assuring myself that I understood my own notes. There was nothing--absolutely nothing of interest--to see around this other-side-of-beyond where McBeth was living and having his business.

There were several forbidding peaks around the little hill about which McBeth's "settlement" clustered. Down the main valley roared a torrent at all seasons, fed by innumerable freshets from the descending ravines, or gashes, where there was always a shower visibly in progress. The place was not without a certain natural beauty, but the lords of mankind had no idea how to utilize those gifts.

These hills were full of gold; McBeth showed me proof inside of an hour; but not only were the natives too shiftless to work it for themselves, but too lazy to work it even for white man's wages. To bring in an army of brawny white men was something that simply could not be done, short of turning over the entire gold output to whatever swarthy gentleman with a stovepipe hat, an admiral's epaulets and spurs strapped to big, bare, black feet, happened to be *presidente* for the--er--moment.

So McBeth's days were spent waiting for something to develop either in the way of a concession reasonably clamped or American capital--or confidence--while he ate his heart out watching that wonderful torrent wasting its power in riotous tumbling.

You will judge that McBeth was a most unromantic person. I mean by that that he refused to see anything romantic or picturesque in anything. Perhaps one would be more accurate in saying that, so keen was his sense of these things that he was ashamed of, and tried to hide, the "weakness." He knew more poetry than I ever read, and in the evenings he would sometimes illuminate a silence with some sublime quotation which he would break off at its most sublime point with: "And all that sort of stuff." I realized that the man was a mine of information regarding the things I wanted to know about those un-regenerate, or degenerate--what you please--people; but either I

was a poor miner or he was as impossible of mining as that gold which held him there.

His head man was called Tamayo, which is really a Spanish name. A more evil-looking person I never clapped eyes on. It is no play upon words to say that he looked like the devil. By that I mean he was handsome in a sinister way; half negro, half Spanish; with a hooked beak, keen, snaky, black eyes set close together, and long black hair with just a suggestion of a crimp in it. His whole body in movement suggested stealth, steely strength and serpentine suppleness. I had a secret desire to see him leap at something--just as one is fascinated by the serpent ready to strike, the tiger ready to spring--just to see the lightning speed of it.

That man was a demon. I was not mistaken. The first time I saw him--or, rather, he saw me--he looked me over with a slithering eye from head to foot and then his nostrils twitched in a way that was somehow insulting. Later, I mentioned my antipathy to McBeth.

"Rotten bad--all through," said he.

"Then why do you keep him on?"

"Useful," said McBeth. "Got brain. Man I had before--Porto Rican--unpopular. Tamayo got him."

"How?"

"Knife--ear to ear. Caught asleep."

"Lovely!" I said, chilled as much by McBeth's crisp, casual manner as by the episode.

He was cutting out his pipe as he spoke, employing the point of a curious-looking knife. I had previously noticed the handle of it protruding from his belt-sheath and been attracted first by the ancient appearance of some carving on what appeared to be a sawed-off buckhorn and then by the fact that from a tarnished silver claw setting at the top of the haft some ornament was missing.

"That's an odd knife you have, McBeth," I ventured, to change the conversation to a less discomfoting channel--I decided to conceal my dislike of Tamayo.

"Old thing," said my friend. "From Scotland."

He had laid the knife on the table and I reached for it.

"Why--it's a Highland dirk!" I exclaimed.

"Course. Lots like it."

CHAPTER II -- *"The Dagger of MacBeth"*

BUT It was a very old dirk. I recognized that at once. Two-edged was its blade and the tempered metal was of no modern make. Evidently it had been forged and beaten into shape with a hammer. The hilt was curiously chased and the horn, a section of stag-antler, was carved into figures of a wild boar on one side and an ancient crest on the other. I recognized the crest of Macbeth, but did not utter the question which half-jocularly suggested itself. I knew Ronald McBeth was of that blood which spilled and was spilled with lamentable frequency in the ancient days of Scotland. But if there was one thing that roused McBeth it was any reference to the fact. I have heard him growl in his throat when some correspondent--intending a compliment no doubt--spelled his name "Macbeth" instead of "McBeth."

"How did you come to lose the stone? Usual cairngorm, I suppose?"

"Cairngorm--yes," said he, filling his cut-out pipe. "Some black magpie. Pried it out in the night."

"But what for? A cairngorm stone is worth only a shilling or two."

He stopped in the act of lighting his pipe and looked over the match-flame at me in a curious way. But he said nothing and went on puffing his pipe into a glow. I supposed he thought I had asked a foolish question; as indeed I had. The beautiful yellow stone called the cairngorm, so lavishly studded in the brooches, claymores and dirks of Scottish highland costume, is nevertheless worth next to nothing as a gem. But it was new to these people of the dark island jungles. McBeth had probably said enough in two words. A "black magpie" had been decoyed into petty larceny by its glitter.

That was all about the dirk--then. I stayed on, working at my notes, without which I must have been bored. I saw little of McBeth in the daytime. But for those occasional loquacious--for him--spells in the evenings and my knowledge of the true gold of the man, I might have been ready to write him down a sullen boor. He spent the greater part of his days prospecting for more gold against that hoped-for day when he might be able to convert it into bullion.

My own people--I mean the twenty or more coast natives whom I had coaxed into service less by money than curiosity and the privilege of carrying real guns and ammunition--my own people did not quarter with McBeth's natives, but set up camp--with my host's approval--on the other side of the torrent. Neither did they mix with McBeth's people, openly despising them, in fact.

And why should they not? Those blacks of mine had lived in civilized towns where there was a sewerage system, even if it did run down the middle surface of main street. Nearly all of them had had a hand in setting up and knocking down *presidentes*: two of them had been *generales* in revolutionary "armies," and my head man had a four-in-hand necktie! They were a superior class altogether and now that they carried such guns as I had furnished for my own protection, McBeth's people became as mere worms under their august strut, mere transparencies before their distant gaze.

My wants--meals and so forth--were supplied in McBeth's absence by a very handsome half-caste girl who went by the curious name of Rama.

From the first I had observed her as I had the head man, Tamayo. She was very light in color; but perhaps that was due to illness, for it was only a day or two before I discovered that she was a young mother. I saw her one day between meals nursing a baby that could not have been more than three weeks old.

The child was much fairer even than she. I wondered about the father. Next to McBeth, Tamayo was the only light-colored person in the settlement. I fancied Tamayo might be Rama's husband, for in his presence she evinced the fear and deference one would expect in the wife of such a silent, sneering devil-person. But McBeth undeceived me.

"Child's near white," said he. "Father was Salmo Pilar--Spanish--my assistant. Usual native arrangement. Widow now."

"What happened to the paternal Pilar?" I asked with foreboding.

"Died suddenly--ground glass."

Again I felt a chill. I had some notes on ground glass and bamboo fur as native measures in cases of personal antipathy.

"Tamayo?" I ventured.

"Possibly," said McBeth, flashing me a quick glance. "But why Tamayo?"

"The woman. I thought, perhaps, he was the husband, but--she's scared to death of your amiable head man."

"Got 'em all scared," said McBeth. "Bad lot. Trouble-maker. Got more power than I. Why I keep him. Useful in my business. Must have labor when time comes."

I set down these incidents just as they occurred. They seemed to have no connection then, but they linked up swiftly-enough, presently.

A morning or two later, after breakfast, I heard McBeth muttering savagely while he moved restlessly about our low-roofed living-room, clapping a

hand to his hip one moment, then rummaging among the papers on his desk. In his left hand he held a twisted rope of native tobacco.

"Knife," he grunted. "Must ha' laid it on this table. Odd."

I had noticed that it was not in the sheath at his belt; which was odd, for McBeth was a creature of methodical habit. Probably he had left it on the table after cutting a pouchful of tobacco on the previous night. He did not remember doing so; which he thought very curious, although I did not. That's the trouble about mislaying things; you don't remember doing it.

"Anybody in here this morning?" he asked suddenly.

"Only Rama," I said, burying myself in my notes.

He went on grumbling and rummaging about the room. Plainly he was greatly perturbed by the loss of that old highland dirk. All at once he uttered a surprised "Huh!" I looked up. He was standing in the middle of the room, soundlessly whistling through pursed lips.

"Magpie again," said he. "Remember now. In my belt when I turned in. Gone now. Answer?--in the night."

I somehow had a vision of Tamayo, the gentleman who had slit the Porto Rican's throat from ear to ear and the same, probably, who had put ground glass in Salmo Pilar's coffee-sugar--Tamayo, the saturnine, softly entering while McBeth and I slept and deftly removing that dirk from its sheath. There was cause for thankfulness that the thief, having a knife so handy, had not tried its qualities on the exposed throats of a couple of white men wrapped in slumber sweet.

That day McBeth did not go into the bush, but stayed around the settlement, coming and going restlessly. I never saw a man so silently ruffled over just a petty theft.

"Did the value it so much?" I asked.

"Sentiment--that sort of thing," he growled. "Very old dirk. Tradition. Don't know how much Shakespeare had to do with it."

Then I understood. It did not seem possible that that could be the same dagger, and McBeth himself seemed inclined to make light of the tradition. But if it was-- I did not blame him for regretting its loss.

Around that dagger memory and imagination recreated a famous scene. I saw Macbeth himself, at dead of night, cold sweat oozing from his every pore, ambition fighting against--what was it?--cowardly fear or manly conscience? In the guest-chamber Duncan, the king, sleeping in fancied security beneath the roof-tree of his host. And then the woman, more ambitious than the man, her face hard in the candle-light that glistened on the cairngorm of the dirk in her lord's hand, and her voice harder still as she whispered: "Infirm of purpose. Give *me* the dagger!"

And here was the descendant of the Macbeth, in the jungles of a far, dark island, growling less--as it seemed to me--that he had lost that infamous weapon than that he had to borrow my *cuchillo* to cut his tobacco twist!

Well, the knife did not turn up that day, or the next, or the next. McBeth seemed to forget the matter except for a few minutes after breakfast each day, when he growled as he cut his twist with my knife. No doubt the dirk had gone the way of its cairngorm ornament, the latter awaking a cupidity to possess the setting. Some half-savage black had it, doubtless, and gloated over his treasure, dazzled by the great yellow eye of the cairngorm, his savage instincts roused by the sense of man-superiority this two-edged blade brought to him.

In the mean time, the woman, Rama, was acting queerly. Her fairness was now a sickly pallor. Her eyes were haunted, her whole atmosphere hunted. The way she served our meals would have brought discredit to an incompetent, underpaid waitress in a third-rate quick-lunch. It was when she dropped a pot of cabbage-palm soup from her nerveless hands that McBeth challenged her--not at all unkindly, be it said.

"Look here, girl!" he said in negroid Spanish. "What ails you? Baby sick--or what?"

He used the word *pequena* for baby. I thought the woman would fall. In more or less choked articulation she said something like:

"Niña--pobre niña--muerto!"

"Lo siento!" said McBeth with genuine sympathy. "When did the baby die, Rama? What was wrong?"

She stared in a helpless sort of way at McBeth. Then her eyes flashed with the fire of mother-love, mother-hate. It seemed to me she was about to say something that would throw light upon the baby's death, a light that would not cast the shadow of blame upon herself; but she suddenly checked herself. Her jaw literally dropped and that same hunted look came into her eyes, which were all at once fixed upon the doorway.

Involuntarily I turned. There stood Tamayo in the oblong of sunlight. He looked more devilish than ever. While he addressed McBeth in suave tones his eyes rested upon Rama. She, poor girl, was indeed a spectacle to arrest any one's gaze in that moment.

CHAPTER III -- *The Call of the Mumbo-Jumbo.*

"BUENA dia, señor," said Tamayo in his corrupt Spanish. "What is the senor's pleasure for the afternoon?"

McBeth gave his instructions and later himself joined Tamayo in some excursion into the bush. I was left alone with my notes and was still busily engaged with them an hour later, when I heard a scraping at the door. There appeared around the edge of the sunlit oblong a round black head slit across by a grinning mouth. It was a Jamaican negro--a stray from his own island.

He was more of a fool than a knave, servilely anxious to please, and from the first he had seemed determined to attach himself to my service.

"*Buccra*," he whispered, grinning and squirming, "yoh wan' see sumtin' funny dis night? Yessah? Yessah! Me tek yoh de-deh--there--after night time come. No, sah, me no 'fraid! Me see plenty-plenty foolishness same like in Jamaica. Yoh jis' put silvah-piece under yo' tongue an' nuttin' can hu't yoh."

"What the devil are you talking about?" I asked, alert nevertheless. Was it possible--

"Yessah! Dem is gwine hab obi dance dis night in de bush. Yoh jis' gib me silvah-piece foh put under me tongue an' me show yoh sumtin'."

Obi! The word suggested "snake" to me. A snake-dance in the jungle of the dark island? Splendid! But I did not let my grinning friend know how well pleased I was. I wondered what size silver-piece that capacious mouth would take as a charm against the malevolent influence of the snake-god.

I told him I would think about it and might send for him later. I wished to consult McBeth. Besides, I was still much in the dark as to the nature of the promised event.

McBeth returned about sundown. He was scowling ferociously. When I told him of my grinning visitor and his offer to reveal jungle mystery his face momentarily cleared.

"That's it!" said he. "Knew something was in the wind. Orgy to-night. That's it. Where's Rama?"

Rama, it turned out, had not prepared supper.

Rama had disappeared.

"Humph!" grunted McBeth thoughtfully. "Canned meat, Blythwood. Best I can offer. When 'd she say that baby died?"

"She didn't say. Tamayo turned up and--"

"Probably nine nights ago. Ninth night to-night--sort of wake. No sleep for us. Row all night. Batter drums. Howl. Keep ghosts away."

"My would-be cicerone mentioned something about *obi*," I ventured.

"Oh--mumbo-jumbo?" said McBeth, momentarily interested. "Thought it was baby 'nine-night.' Similar stuff. Different names -- ñañigo -- obi -- hoodoo -- brujeria--that sort of thing. Jamaican, was he? He'd say *obi--obeah*, perhaps. Originally African--snake-worship or similar rot. Always evil. Bush gods always evil. Negative sort of worship, you know. Don't pray for good; pray to avert evil. Interesting in its way."

"I'd like to see it." I suggested. "It's rather in my line, you know."

"Nothing to see," McBeth grunted. "Story-book stuff all that--story-book stuff. Bunch of dirty blacks--and Tamayo's the worst of 'em--howling around a fire, dancing corruptions of coast ragtime. Dressed up like savages. Try to think they are and usually succeed when they've had enough rum. Wind up by killing a kid goat or a white cock. Drink the blood hot--eat meat raw. Rotten!"

"Still--"

"Of course, if you want to," said my host quickly. "We'll trace the affair by the drums."

As he had finally fallen in with my wish I was somewhat surprised when, after nightfall and canned meat, my grinning man Friday turning up and making mysteriously signals to me from the doorway, McBeth roared at him:

"Get out, you black swine!"

He who was more of a fool than a knave, but not such a fool at that, vanished, merging suddenly with darkness. The mighty anger of McBeth was his greatest safeguard in that isolated place.

My host said nothing when just before we started I strapped on my automatic pistol. His own revolver belt dangled loosely about his powerful thighs--but then it was always there. He smiled a little, but no doubt he felt that if it did me good to imagine a spice of peril in the adventure. I was entitled to all the thrill I could get out of it.

For some little time we could hear the throb of drums faintly in the distance. I was sure it come from the east, across the river and probably from some valley beyond the peaks. I was a little surprised, therefore, when, emerging from the bungalow, McBeth started in the very opposite direction. I said nothing then, following in silence.

We went out by the opposite side of McBeth's settlement which, I observed, was all in darkness. We did not encounter a human being. Temporary desertion of the place was attested by the lugubrious howling of a number of mongrel dogs.

"The call of mumbo-jumbo!" said McBeth, jerking his head toward the dark, silent huts.

The moment we reached the edge of the jungle to the west, McBeth swung in his course until I saw by the dipper that we were heading due north. This course brought us to the torrent of which I have spoken, but some distance above the settlement. McBeth knew the ground like a child's primer and led me unerringly to where a suspension bridge of woven lianas and bamboo poles spanned the gorge. At the bottom of this I could see the white turmoil of the mountain stream.

On the other side we continued north, then northeast, and finally almost made a circle of our course, traveling eastward through the jungle and guided over an invisible trail only by a narrow belt of starred sky above us. Once McBeth laid a hand on my arm and pointed downward to the right. There, upon the small hillock around which the mine settlement lay in the amphitheater of hills, a single light burned in McBeth's bungalow. Dark blots to the right of it suggested the deserted village. Between us and the village the torrent showed in an irregular streaky-white line, and on this side of the stream were numerous little lights in the camp of my own people.

The latter seemed to have neglected, or not received, what McBeth called "the call of mumbo-jumbo." We could hear their broad laughter over some game they were playing--gambling, of course--gambling their very shirts, such as had them--my own distributed ammunition perhaps. Mingling with their shouts and laughter the throb of drums came distinctly from the east.

We had thus worked around so that no longer did the peaks stand directly between us and the sound. I marveled at McBeth's caution, considering the contempt in which, patently, he held the whole excursion and its objective.

"Self-respect," he said. "Wouldn't have these people imagine me curious about their doings. Why I sent Jamaican away. Also went in other direction."

But as we came nearer that throbbing of drums, I fancied his own curiosity began to get the upper hand. We crossed the shoulder of a ridge and descended into a densely jungled ravine, out of which arose a rhythmic medley of sound. There were human voices chanting, hoarsely but subdued. I wish I could set down the tune of that chant, if tune it could be called. It was like no tune I ever heard; yet in dreams-- boy dreams--I seem to have heard something like it in the back of my brain when reading of some barbaric orgy where brutal death brooded over the scene. It was not so much unmusical singing as a musical muttering to the soft clapping of hands, the shuffle of bare feet on beaten earth and, through it all, the insistent drum-throbbing that came to the ears with the sensation of blood beating in one's temples.

Presently through the tangle of the jungle appeared a red mist, growing into a dancing flare. McBeth halted me with a touch. In the flickering light, by which we could see, but were ourselves unseen, he looked up and around him. He presently pointed to a giant *ceiba*-tree, the trunk of which stood near to us, but one of whose grotesque arms reached out almost over the clearing where the fire was. By signs McBeth made me to understand that we must climb the tree and creep out on that limb as far as we dared without being seen from below.

Not without some difficulty we gained the first fork of the giant tree. Thereafter it was easy enough to work ourselves out upon the limb, which

alone was as thick as the trunk of a good-sized tree. We had to move very cautiously, half straddling, half crawling, keeping our legs up and our shoulders close to the upper surface of the limb. We finally halted our progress when we were directly above the inner edge of the circle below. Even there we could feel the heat of the fire which blazed in the center, but it was not unbearable and its light served to reveal the surrounding scene in detail.

There was enough of interesting detail to occupy us for a few minutes to the exclusion of the scene as a whole and its meaning.

The two main objects that caught the eye at once were the fire--naturally--and the hideous thing that McBeth whispered was "old mumbo-jumbo himself"--that is to say, the supposed god *obi*, or *ñañigo*, or *voodoo*, or *brujo*--whatever he happened to be called by these particular worshipers.

CHAPTER IV -- *The Third Eye.*

IT was not, after all, a snake or anything like one. The idol was about eight feet high and set up against the face of a cliff which backed the cleared, beaten-earth arena where the fire blazed. It was apparently constructed of some kind of dark clay, modeled in the rough and painted after it had been hardened by fire. It was no fine example of the plastic art, even among a savage people. The thing had no limbs, only a shapeless body hunched at the shoulders and a short, thick neck, upon which sat an abnormal head thatched with long grass for hair and a crown of upright spears of palm-fronds. The nose was a flat, broad blob of clay, the nostrils redly painted to

appear wide apart and distended. The mouth was like most savage attempts at such delineation--a quartered-orange effect, fillen in with saw-tooth lines. The lips, thick and pendulous, were painted a bright vermilion, and the chin seemed to drip the same sanguinary hue from the bestial mouth.

The god had three eyes; two in the usual place for eyes, but set grotesquely wide apart; the third, larger and gleaming brightly in the very middle of the forehead.

"My cairngorm!" muttered McBeth. And then I saw that the third "eye" was indeed that great, yellow stone.

There was nothing to be done about it just then. McBeth had the satisfaction of knowing where the cairngorm was and now had a fairly good idea of the identity of the thief, for unless my eyes deceived me the high priest of this strange religious orgy was the head man, Tamayo. He sat--but wait a moment!

Around the fire moved about a hundred Negroes-- Negroes more or less-- Negroid people. Mostly men; but there were women, too. All were dressed in the most fantastic manner, a favorite costume being female in the men and male in the women.

Without exception their dark faces were plastered with some chalky smear overlaid with streaks of brilliant paints. Each and all seemed imbued with the spirit of extreme masquerade such as characterizes Guy Fawkes parades in England, Hallowe'en in Scotland and, in the neighboring island of Jamaica, the "ohn Canoe" masques of Emancipation Day. The so-called John Canoe masque of Jamaica is, I think, a survival or a mild outgrowth' of Obi worship.

These almost ludicrous figures moved around the fire in a curious shuffling dance, each individual seeming oblivious to the rest, each appearing half dazed, as if in a trance. And ever they muttered rather than sang that horrible chant which I would give a great deal to be able to set down. It still haunts me, and if it once resounds in my memory I know I am in for it all day or all night. You know that maddening persistence of a silly phrase in doggerel music?

Diagonally across from Mumbo-Jumbo were the "musicians"--four performers on goat-skin drums and a strange, bedaubed contortionist who scraped nothing more or less than an old file against a *cassava* grater. He kept perfect time with these rasping instruments which he scraped together, now above his head, now behind his back, now under one high-lifted leg, now under the other. Occasionally his enthusiasm took him amid the dancers and while he pranced with them he would add his voice in some wild stanza to the accompaniment of the drums and the file-and-grater.

As the dancers circled the fire they had to pass the hideous clay god and the figure of the high priest, who sat at the base of the idol, his head almost hidden in a brightly colored blanket, only his eyes--which were unmistakably the eyes of Tamayo--peering at the fire. In the center of the latter an immense pot swung from a tripod of green hardwood sticks. Tamayo seemed oblivious to the dancers, but each and all, passing in their weird gyrations, spread out their hands, with the palms upward, in deference either to *Obi*, or his high priest, or both.

"Big session!" grunted McBeth. "Glad I came."

Thereafter my own interest heightened and I settled down on that broad limb to enjoy the whole performance.

Presently Tamayo stirred and rose to his feet. The "music" did not cease; the dancers did not pause; rather the former grew louder and the latter increased their efforts. Tamayo touched a passing dancer, a woman in dungaree pantaloons and with her face hideously painted. At a word from the high priest she ran to the side of the clearing where, next to the orchestra, several baskets were lying, covered with clothes. From one of these she extracted a white live cock with its feet tied together.

This she brought to Tamayo, who took the snowy rooster and held it up to the god, *obi*. The firelight gleamed sinisterly on McBeth's cairngorm. The doomed rooster flapped and squawked frantically in Tamayo's grip. That worthy drew from under his enveloping blanket a machete and with one sweep decapitated the cock.

The first stream of red blood from the severed trunk he swished in the face of the bestial-appearing idol. Then he swiftly lifted the still flapping, though headless, fowl over his own upturned face and allowed some of the hot blood to drip into his mouth. With a sudden shriek at the drummers and the dancers, who increased their efforts, he began to pluck the rooster, throwing the white feathers among the disciples, who picked them up without ever halting in their gyrations. They seemed to attach some superstitious value to those feathers. Tamayo, in the mean time, put the plucked fowl--without disemboweling it--into the great witch-pot over the fire.

"Chicken-broth!" chuckled McBeth.

But nothing could have induced me to sample it, especially when to the soup-pot was added an *Iguana*, which was plunged, living and emitting its raucous squawk, into the scalding brew. And at the death-squawk of that hideous but--they say--edible reptile, the drummers and dancers let their joy be unconfined, while the contortionist file-and-grater artist certainly outdid himself.

It was all very interesting to me. I glanced at McBeth, who lay stretched out ahead of me on the limb. I looked from him to the scene below and at the cairngorm from the dagger of Macbeth set in that hoodoo idol's head. And I thought queer thoughts. The *brujeria*--witchcraft workers dancing around the pot; the guttural sounds of the surrounding jungle; Tamayo, chief *brujo*, placing the giant lizard in the pot--and the descendant of Macbeth staring down at the strange scene with Heaven knows what thoughts moving in his own mind.

Double, double toil and trouble.

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Fillet of a fenny snake...

And then my heart momentarily stopped beating. I was nearer to the fork of the tree than McBeth and all at once I became aware that a third person was crouched on the limb between me and the crotch of the *ceiba*. It was a half-nude figure, black as Tophet, the only relieving points two shining eyes.

My hand crept to the automatic. The eyes turned upon me and I heard a faint voice, chattering with fear.

"*Buccra*," it whispered almost incoherently. "See me yah, sah? Me beg yoh, wan piece a silvah fo' put under me tongue!"

It was the Jamaica boy--my man Friday. Vastly amused in the reaction from fright, I groped in my pocket, found an American half-dollar and passed it to him, hoping it would at least keep him quiet. With the utmost solemnity he took it, opened his capacious mouth and stuck that half-dollar under his tongue. After that he seemed more at ease and settled down on the limb behind me to his own peculiar enjoyment of the affair.

But the interest suddenly took a tragic turn. As if cut off by a pair of shears the "music" ceased, the dancers came to a halt and all eyes turned toward Tamayo. That devil-person had dramatically thrown off his enveloping blanket and stood up straight and menacing before the idol, his right arm aloft, his saturnine countenance. Stained with blood, turned to the worshipers and his demoniac eyes ablaze. He wore nothing but a snake-skin belt and a pair of grass sandals.

Not a word did he say, but the arm came down with a gesture of absolute command and finality. Down upon their faces fell the worshipers, all except the woman who had served Tamayo the offerings to *obi*. This creature ran to the baskets and took from one that was slightly larger than the others something that looked like a bundle of rags. But a faint wail came from it and then I knew that they had a baby there--a human baby!

CHAPTER V -- *Friday and the Finish*

"DON'T like that!" I heard McBeth mutter.

But he did not move--just then. Neither did I. I was paralyzed with a certain fear, a fearful certainty. It was, then, not all story-book stuff? Had we happened to stumble on a first-class revival of the old heathen rites?

I was ready to do anything, but somehow initiative had deserted me for the moment. Perhaps I still relied on McBeth's leadership. Perhaps, after all, I was merely anticipating, and imagination's preconception had got the better of my sense of probabilities. There was yet time enough. One shot would prevent the thing, although into what dilemma that one shot might plunge us I hated to think.

My eyes had never left the scene below. Again came a whimpering sound, but this time it was not a baby note, but the deep-breasted sound of a woman sobbing, yet fearing to let her sobbing be heard. I traced the sound to the outer circle, at the point farthest from the *brujo*-doctor, toward whom the painted woman was advancing with the infant, now unwrapped from its rags and squirming in her upheld hands. The other woman, she who sobbed, was flat on the ground, but her face was slightly raised and the eyes that stared at Tamayo were the eyes of Rama.

It was then that I realized the whole brutal truth. They had taken her infant from her to be a human sacrifice to the evil god, *obi*. And she--poor, ignorant wretch--had been compelled to submit to the decree of Tamayo, high priest of *obi*, to keep silent--for she herself was of the cult.

My heart bled as I looked down on that woman where she lay, powerless, herself as much a victim as her child, her only fault that her baby was as nearly *white* as *obi* could desire. My hand was on my automatic and I had drawn it, when--

"My dirk!" I heard McBeth exclaim under his breath.

I did not look at my host, my attention being further riveted by the new link in the chain of circumstance. Tamayo had taken the whimpering child in his left hand, holding it up by the feet. In his right hand had appeared a curiously shaped two-edged knife--a highland dirk--McBeth's at a glance!

So! It had all been part of the same mumbo-jumbo scheme--the cairngorm, the dirk, the baby. But it was no time to attempt reasoning about the processes of the connection. Tamayo was getting ready for that one stroke which would spill the child's blood most rapidly.

A cold sweat was upon me. I forgot McBeth. I did not even wonder what he might be doing or planning to do. Only I saw. Only I obeyed that impulse which makes a white man respected. I leveled the automatic, resting it on the *ceiba* limb, and took careful aim at Tamayo's heart. But between the command of the brain and that command's transmission to my forefinger, another hand than mine took charge.

McBeth dropped from the limb directly over Tamayo's head! I did not know he had left my side and crawled further out to that vantage point. He threw all his weight of bone and sinew astride the high priest's neck. I heard something crack. I saw Tamayo collapse like a tree struck by lightning, McBeth on top of him. I heard the wail of a child and the cry of a woman. I saw Rama dash forward and snatch up her *pequeña* from the beaten ground. I saw a great stirring among the *obi* worshipers. All these things I heard and saw in a flash, and lastly, the fallen Tamayo roll over on his back, revealing the dagger of Macbeth sunk to the hilt in his ribs.

Whether he was quite dead, whether his neck was broken under McBeth's terrific descent, whether McBeth turned the dirk upon Tamayo or Tamayo fell upon the weapon in his own hand--I do not know--McBeth has never expressed his own opinion.

But all these things happened in a few seconds before a greater semblance of hell broke loose upon that scene.

"To me, Blythwood!" roared McBeth from where he stood with his legs planted wide apart over the body of Tamayo. In his right hand he held a

revolver with which he fanned the air before that howling mass of black barbarians.

What had become of man Friday I did not know. It was a moment for but one thought at a time. McBeth's revolver spat fire and a gigantic Negro who had attempted to rush him crumpled up and fell. At the same instant I, having crawled farther out on the limb, dropped at McBeth's side and opened fire with my automatic. My appearance, coupled perhaps with the fear that my armed people were behind me, checked the threatened rush for a few moments.

"Hold them a second!" said McBeth in my ear.

Out of the corner of the eye that was trained along the automatic-barrel I saw McBeth lean over the body of Tamayo, then disappear for a moment behind me. At that the mob came on with a sudden outburst of rage. I know now that it was McBeth's action which goaded their fury beyond fear of our weapons. He had plucked the dirk from Tamayo's heart, turned around, reached up and coolly pried the rest of his ancestral property from the brow of the great god, *obi*.

But a second later he was back at my side. Between two quick shots into the shrieking, seething blacks he said:

"Got it, Blythwood. But we're tight fixed."

We were. I did not have an extra clip for my automatic. I doubt if McBeth had shells other than those in his two revolvers. When the first of the latter was emptied he thrust the weapon into my left hand as he drew his loaded second and grunted:

"Club! You'll need it. Better than automatic."

And then, without the slightest warning, the *brujo* people scattered and took to the bush. In ten seconds we had that arena all to ourselves, except for the body of Tamayo and a sobbing woman who crouched against the cliff wall behind us with a baby in her arms. McBeth was not deceived, however; neither was I. Swiftly we looked around for shelter. I was for taking to the

jungle to our left or right on the chance of escaping in the darkness; but McBeth did not even comment on the suggestion. His eyes were fixed on the wall of rock behind the idol. There the cliff slanted inward slightly--off plumb.

"In here!" he snapped. "Mumbo-jumbo will protect some. They've no guns. Rocks from above won't touch if we hug close."

So in we got, flattening ourselves and compelling the woman to do likewise against the in-slanting face of rock. *Obi*--or mumbo-jumbo, as McBeth contemptuously called the thing--formed some sort of protection in front.

Presently a rock crashed down from above, dropping in the narrow space between us and *obi*.

"Hope they don't hurt jumbo," said McBeth coolly. "So far. so good."

Yes--but how was it to end? I had no answer, nor had McBeth. That answer, however, came unexpectedly, although not before we had spent nearly an hour, besieged by stones and rocks, watching the demolition of that partly protecting idol in front, dreading what would happen to us when the fire died down and went out, leaving us in darkness.

The answer was announced in due time by an uproar which told its own story. Man Friday was our salvation. Seeing our peril he had discreetly descended that tree by the regular route, made all speed through the jungle over the ridge to the camp of my people and removed the half-dollar from under his tongue just long enough to make himself understood.

The way those coast fellows sailed into their own people was a racial disgrace. But then they were highly civilized persons from the city and they had two *generales* among them, to say nothing of guns and ammunition and a chance to shoot off the latter.

But we did not have it all our own way even then. We fought a retreating fight right back to McBeth's place; and there we were besieged all night, while at the advice of my host, I packed up for a hurried trip to the coast.

He had decided that a vacation was about due himself, meaning, however, to return to his gold concession when the time was ripe to work it.

Thrice during that night the *brujo* people fired the bungalow, and as many times we extinguished the blaze and fired the enemy! At dawn we started for the coast--four days of hard going. Not a soul was in sight as we marched out of that settlement; but that the *brujos* were still on the warpath was evident in the several ambushes and more or less open attacks we suffered during the first two days and nights. Then they gave us up.

We had taken man Friday and Rama and her baby along with us. On the way Rama told her story to McBeth. It was she who had pried out the cairngorm at the order of Tamayo. When that devil-person noted the awe with which his less intelligent associates regarded the strange yellow stone, doubtless the idea dawned of making it an *obi* fetich and the knife to which it belonged. Rama, again at Tamayo's secret command, filched the dirk from McBeth's sheath while we slept and Tamayo probably decided to "consecrate" it as the sacrificial knife of his voodoo altar.

The unfitness of choosing Rama's baby as the first victim of the knife the baby's mother had stolen, probably never occurred to that devil-person, Tamayo.

Man Friday, I duly rewarded with enough silver to keep off *obi* for a year or two at least. I shipped him back to his own island, Jamaica, after vetoing my own thought to keep him as a henchman. Rama and her child were turned over to the care and the discretion of the American consul at ----

Well, he is still, I believe, in office there and he had trouble enough with us at the time. He had hard work keeping us under cover at the consulate and getting us out of the dark island where we had violated, with armed force, the lives, personal liberty and spiritual happiness of a people who, as Professor Provan more than ever maintains--

However. McBeth says he is going back; and it would be just like him to do it!

The Beloved of Allah by Eugene A. Clancy



THE Little Soko, or small market, is the heart of Tangier, Morocco. Whenever you have nothing to do--which in Tangier means most of the time--you go and sit at one of the tables in front of the Cafe Espanola in the Little Soko.

If you have arrived in town only recently, you are pop-eyed with interest and excitement; but if, like Steve Marsh and myself, you have been in Tangier a month or two, you merely sip a glance of coffee and fall into a trance. The whirligig and foolish Morocco world goes on around you, but you give it little attention.

I went and sat thus one morning. Gibilo, the young Moor with whom Steve and I lodged for the present--our finances being in a very weak condition, and hotels out of the question--was still sleeping in our room, so far as I knew. Steve had not been seen since the previous evening. He had not come home to the nice oriental rug on which he slept on the floor. I wondered, so far as my trance would permit, where Steve was. I was saved from

overthinking myself by his suddenly looming up in the Soko and sitting down beside me.

"Bill," he exclaimed, "he's the most interesting character in Morocco!"

"Is he, indeed!" I remarked, not caring in the least who the most interesting person in question might be. I was used to Steve Marsh, and I was also quite familiar with Morocco by this time, and no longer expected any one, native or European, to talk or act like a sane, human being.

"Most interesting!" Steve went on, paying no attention to my indifference. "I was never so entertained in my life! Half the night I sat listening spellbound to the eloquent and elevating discourse of Mahjub-- Mahjub, the cave-dweller, the all-wise eater of mystic herbs--"

"Steve," I asked, this stuff being enough to bring any self-respecting man out of a trance, "are you talking about a human individual or a Moorish circus?"

"I am speaking," he continued with great enthusiasm, "of my new and respected friend, Mr. Mahjub al Larabi--the surname meaning, as you know, the Beloved of Allah. Mr. Mahjub is an ancient citizen of Morocco, and a true philosopher. He has seen much. He has served under many great sultans, and suffered much. In fact, he served one sultan so well that the royal and anointed one, in a fit of wild gratitude, tipped him good and proper--with his royal sword he cut off the tip of the beloved of Allah's nose, that the beloved might always show in public a lasting mark of the royal favor and esteem. While my friend is, therefore, not exactly what you would call a handsome man--"

"For the love of Allah," I put in, "cut out your friend's mutilated biography and let us have some sense!"

Steve glared at me. "What a dull, prosaic mind you have, Bill!" he remarked, and then resumed: "Astride my intelligent mule, I was returning home last evening from Cape Spartel. I had lost fifteen cents in a poker game in the lighthouse, and naturally I was feeling downcast. I came by way of the donkey path over the mountain, and I was half-way down the

Tangier side when an old Moorish gentleman rushed out at me from the solitude and shrieked Arabic words at me--words which might be translated: 'Alms, for the love of Allah!' In my best Spanish-- which the old gentleman evidently understood--I politely explained that I hadn't any alms about me just then, and offered him a cigarette. He graciously accepted the gift, and asked me if I would come in awhile and rest up in his humble abode.

"The humble abode was a quaint and simple cave, lighted at the moment by the charcoal fire over which the old gentleman's supper was boiling in an iron pot. He invited me to partake of his meal, saying the pot contained some of the choicest herbs to be found in that region. He was much surprised when I informed him that my doctor has strictly forbidden me herbs as being too rich for my American stomach.

"After the old gentleman had stuffed himself with herbs, I led off with the remark that I supposed he was the Moorish brand of hermit. He said no; he said he was not officially a hermit; rather, he was an exile--and then he told me the story of his life, as I have hinted.

"What most interested me was the last part of it. He had been a henchman and graft-getter for our mutual friend, Mulai Hafid, the only living ex-sultan. When Mulai was deposed, all his crowd were bounced with him, including Mahjub, the cave-dweller. At that time, Mahjub had a nice, paying bazaar in Tangier, it seems, but the new Moorish governor of Tangier sold him up, chased him away from here, and pinched his wives!

"Since then, deprived of home, wives and fortune, poor old Mahjub has been living quietly in his cave, reciting the Koran, piously cursing the governor of Tangier, and eating rich and delicate herbs.

"When Mr. Mahjub told me this, he finished scouring the inside of his iron pot and sighed deeply. He said he longed to have his bazaar again. He did not care so much about his wives--he had learned to do the housekeeping himself--but he yearned to lie asleep in front of his shop again, in the mad whirl and bustle of Tangier business life. The dear old cuss completely won my sympathy. I told him so, and let him know that I happened to be a friend

of the Governor of Tangier, and that I would see if I couldn't do something for him.

"The old gentleman toppled right over and wept. He grabbed the iron pot and placed it in my hands as a token of his gratitude. It was most affecting. I handed back the pot, and, as delicately as I could, I explained that I couldn't think of depriving him of his cooking utensils--that it would be a real pleasure to help him without any thought of reward.

"He said that never before had he met a man like me. He handed me a pipe of keef and begged me to tell him the story of my life. I proceeded to do so, and, the stuff I was smoking being pretty strong, I believe I constructed quite a romantic and adventurous past for myself. Concluding, I chanced to mention that I, too, had once almost met my death at the hands of Mulai Hafid. The old gentleman looked at me with a sudden light of understanding in his eyes.

"My dear young friend!" he cried. 'Now it is I see why you ask nothing for the great favor you offer to do--you, too, are a seeker for revenge! How well it is we meet--I show you how to make the great rage in Mulai Hafid!'

"Well, with many pledges of undying friendship, I finally remuled and took my departure in the breaking dawn, having assured Mahjub of my speedy return with a free pardon, properly signed by his nobs, the gov. Now, as I know you are consumed with an eager desire to have a part in this good and pious deed, Bill, will you accompany me to the Kasbah and help me put it over?"

I looked at Steve suspiciously. You never can tell--Morocco has a way of doing things suddenly to a man's mind. If ever a liar looked like a man with a holy mission, it was Steve. I might even say his expression was beautiful to behold.

"Steve," I said, "I have listened to the story-tellers up in the grand Soko, and in the Moorish cafe, with the tom-toms and gimbri going a mile a minute, but they've got nothing on you! However, much as I like romance and sentiment, I should like to know, from the viewpoint of the accounting department, just why you stay out all night in a cave, playing angel and

swapping keef-inspired lies with an old gentleman who eats herbs cut of an iron pot?"

"Well," Steve replied slowly, and still trying to look like a man with a mission, "I will admit that there is some sense in your somewhat coarse way of putting things. I shall further admit that before leaving, I extracted a guarantee from Mr. Mahjab--that should I succeed in getting him back in business again, he will turn, over to me a fair percentage of his profits for a period of one year.

"He would not tell me what his business was--you never can find out just exactly what some of these bazaar keepers are selling--but he assured me his line is most profitable. I feel certain it is contraband--smuggling, and that is why I naturally did not press him for further information, as he might suspect my motives. Now, come on up to the Kasbah--I think we are on the track of something that will relieve the financial stringency!"

We left the cafe and, stepping into the gutter, wound and twisted our way through Tangier's leading alleyways--Tangier would not know what to do with a street--and climbed the hill to the Kasbah, or government buildings.

We were fortunate enough to find the governor in his office. His excellency was squatting on the floor and playing a game of chess with his secretary. He received us with such gracious smiles and kind words that you would imagine we were his dearest friends on earth. As a matter of fact, however, his excellency was constantly sitting up half the night, figuring out how best he might murder us and get away with it.

In Tangier there is always more plotting, grafting, and subtle double-crossing going on than in all the big and little capitals of Europe put together. We happened to be on to some of his excellency's pet graft, and he was, always afraid that we ought whisper something the ear of the American consul.

Steve related the sad story of Mr. Manjub with fine eloquence, carefully suppressing the percentage angle, and playing up the moral and atomistic side. His excellency listened with a benevolent and childlike smile; but I

could tell from his eyes that he was positively hurting his brains in the effort to discover what was back of Steve's story.

But he couldn't make the idea at all, for we had learned to play the game the Moorish way--always smile and murmur gentle words while you are selecting the precise spot in which to stick the knife.

"Excellency," Steve concluded, with tears in his eyes, "it is indeed a noble thing we ask you to do! Allah will bless you and you will prosper! Poor old Mahjub will love you, excellency, and every day he will go to the big mosque and call the prophet to witness how great is the Governor of Tangier!"

"Dear amigo Americano," the governor replied, with his benevolent smile, "I cannot find words to tell you how much I thank you for bringing this woeful affair to my mind. Poor Mahjub--I had forgotten him, alas! I cannot tell you now what agony I feel when I think of what injustice has been done him! He shall come back to Tangier at once--and may Allah protect him, and you, and your friend!"

He turned to his secretary. "Mohammed al Kali," he directed, "make writings like this: Mahjub al Larabi, lately compelled to be in hateful and accursed service of Mulai Hafid, is by this pardon invited to return freely to Tangier in care of our most distinguished and cherished American friends and visitors. Make special note in public book that this is done by the governor out of goodness and soft kindness of his heart."

"Now," said Steve, with the pardon in his pocket as we walked back to the Soko, "we must not say anything to Gibilo--it is not good for his simple soul to know too much."

Accordingly, we said nothing at all about it to our host, and we were greatly relieved to hear that he was going to the village of Alcazar for a day, to see a new Holy Man who had bobbed up there.

In the late afternoon Steve and I went to the Big Market to get our mules. To my surprise, Steve hired six instead of three.

"Why the caravan?" I asked. "Are we going to bring back the cave and the pot and the quarry as well as the Beloved of Allah?"

"Mind your own business!" Steve retorted. "The three extra mules are for Mr. Mabjub's store fixtures--he has them stowed away somewhere, and asked me to bring extra mules to carry them. As no bazaar in Tangier is larger than a postage stamp, I guess three will do the job."

The evening was falling as we wound down into the quarry. It was just as Steve had described it. The cave was also there up-stage, and the iron pot was in the limelight. The Beloved of Allah, however, was not to be seen.

"I suppose," Steve mused, as he leaned against his mule, "the gentle old exile is out herbing. What a thing it must be to have to pull up one's dinner by the roots!"

The supposition was evidently correct, for in a little while I saw a gaunt and gray-bearded old Moor come creeping down toward us, a sack over his shoulder. Steve introduced me, and Mr. Mahjub prostrated himself as he had done to Steve.

"And now," said Steve, when all the preliminaries were over, "let's get started! Mr. Mahjub, where are the fixtures? You know--the counter boards, the cash register, the fake scales, and the burglar-proof safe?"

The old gentleman's reply caused me much disquietude. He proceeded to explain that when he had been sold up and run out of Tangier, a life-long enemy of his, a rival for the royal favor, had stolen the goods in question, and that at the present time they were reposing in an outhouse in the grounds of Mulai Hafid's villa, just outside of Tangier. The ex-sultan was not allowed any guards about his place, the old fellow explained, and, as it was now dark--we could regain his precious goods without any trouble.

I did not like this, but Steve seemed tickled to death. It is an annoying way Steve has--whenever things take a fool turn, instead of pulling out like any ordinary human being, he has to run right up in front and lead the circus.

"Bill," he cried, "this thing gets better every minute! Let me help you board the mule, Mr. Mahjub. Off for the ex-sultan's back yard!"

I was disgusted, but I silently joined the party. I went along merely to protect Steve if I could--I did not want his relatives to blame me for his sudden taking off.

Our caravan wended its way down the mountain. The old gentleman had insisted on bringing his iron pot, and we had it tied to his saddle. Making a detour, at length we brought up in the rear of the villa in which Mulai lived in ex-royal seclusion.

Leaving the mules a little distance away, we crept up to the garden wall to a spot which Mr. Mahjub said was near the outhouse which contained his belongings.

The wall was not very high, but the top was covered with broken glass. Mr. Mahjub, however, was right on the job. From the folds of his burnoose he drew forth an implement which proved to be some near relative of a pickax. With this Steve cleared a space and climbed up.

A few minutes later, nobody seeming to be around or interested in our proceedings, Steve and I were following the old gentleman through a grove of date trees to the out-house. We were surprised to find that the shed had no door and that we could walk right in. Steve took a flash-light from his pocket and turned it on.

"Mr. Mahjub," he said, "I'm afraid some one is wise--I don't seem to see any valuable goods lying around loose in here."

But evidently Mr. Mahjub did see what we had come for. Muttering something to himself, eagerly he pointed to half a dozen ordinary potato sacks on the floor and assured us that these were what we wanted. They seemed to me to be merely stuffed full of straw, and I was about to enter a vigorous protest, when Steve suddenly gripped my arm and whispered:

"He's right! Don't you see? It's as I thought--he's a little old smuggler guy, and these bags are full of stolen or counterfeit customs stamps and such

things! The consul was telling me that they caught a chap in the Soko a couple of months ago with just such bags in his cellar. But they'll be safe in that room of ours--let's get busy!"

As the old gentleman had already carried two of the sacks out to the wall himself, we grabbed the remainder and followed. I may say that I followed most quickly-- I didn't care just then whether the fool bags contained thousand-dollar bills or merely old nails. The whole program was getting on my nerves. We tied the bags together, two and two, and, slinging them across the three extra mules, we started for town.

Without consulting my personal convenience at all, Steve had decided that Mr. Mahjub, until such time as he found suitable quarters and was properly launched in business, should reside with us in our room. Now, Gibilo was fairly civilized and quite all right; but I must here state that I did not relish the prospect of living in family with Mr. Mahjub.

Our room was not in any way large or well ventilated. Like many Moorish rooms, it had been built about six centuries earlier, and you entered it by going up a dark, dank stairway and then crawling through a hole in the wall.

I had all this to think of as we rode along, and also the painfully obvious fact that Mr. Mahjub showed no evidence of being a bath-taking man. So far as I could see, herb-eating was the one and only virtue he possessed--besides the doubtful distinction of having lost the tip of his nose by the touch of a royal sword.

But Steve was in his element, and all wrought up over the enterprise, so there was nothing for me to do but to play whatever humble part was assigned me.

We entered Tangier late and by devious ways. Reaching our house without attracting more than ordinary public attention, we carried the bags up-stairs and put them on the floor. When we got them laid out, there was just room enough left for our rugs, on which we lived and slept when at home. Steve detailed me to take the mules back to their boss in the Soko.

When I returned, I found the Beloved of Allah making himself quite at home on Mr. Gibilo's rug and smoking much keef. Steve was reclining on his rug, smoking cigarettes and thoughtfully regarding the potato bags.

"Well, Mr. Mahjub," he said, as I sat down on my rug, "now that we are safely here, and all met and comfortable, I think, before we repose in well-earned slumber, we might talk a little business and incidentally examine the contents of these bags--no fear of prying eyes up here."

The Beloved of Allah, however, did not seem to be in a mood for business. In fact, he began to conduct himself in a most uncalled for and childish manner. He rocked to and fro, singing to himself. I wondered how much keef Steve had foolishly let him smoke while I had been taking the mules home. Then, his eyes falling on Gibilo's gimbri in the corner, he reached for it eagerly and picked the strings, meanwhile wailing discordantly.

"Mr. Mahjub," said Steve, "I really do not care for any music this evening, well and correctly as you play. Some other time--"

But the Beloved of Allah went right on playing and waiting with greatly renewed gusto, not to say artistic passion. I started at him, fascinated. A strange light had come into his eyes, and his tongue wagged right out of his mouth.

It was then that I felt an arctic chill creeping up and down my spine. With chattering teeth, I turned to look at the bag against which I had been idly reclining. Even as I looked, a fat, dark green snake stuck his head through the loosely tied end, and then humped himself slowly out into the room! Wildly I looked around at the other bags, and what I saw was enough--they were coming thick and fast!

At that precise moment Steve and I dived together through the hole in the wall, and together we rolled to the bottom of the stone steps, Steve screaming and kicking me all the way, while I resorted to biting his neck. I don't know how we got through the ground-floor door, but when I came to I was sitting in the gutter and Steve was lying flat on his back in the alley, still waving his arms wildly and begging me to "chase 'em away!"

In the course of time we grew calm enough to stand up and look at each other. I was about to speak, when our ears caught the frenzied wailing of Mr. Mahjub above. With one accord, we fled. It was a fine race and ended in a dead heat at the Cafe Española.

"Cognac!" said Steve hoarsely.

We swallowed two big ones, and then became aware of the unexpected presence of our Moorish host, Mr. Gibilo.

"I have just come back from Alcazar," he said; "and I am glad to see--but what is matter, eh? You look like you been having much movings on!"

As Steve was still incapable of speech, I briefly narrated the facts--as clearly as I could. At first, Mr. Gibilo fairly screamed with laughter--ribald laughter! Then, with an obvious effort to control himself, he exclaimed:

"Oh, my dear friends! You really not know? What a joke the Governor of Tangier now have on you--he make very big fool of you! This man, Mahjub, he is not exile! He is one of those what have the sacred fire--what you call crazy. If you had told me what you plan to do! Everybody know him. We call him Mahjub the Mad--the Mad Charmer of Snake! He all time think things--he very famous big liar in Tangier!

"What he tell you is all lie. Mahjub, he live for one thing; he have just one wish in world--to charm snake. He do anything to get chance to charm snake--I guess he hear that Mulai Hafid have got new lot of very fine snake for his private charmer, and old Mahjub he just dying to have those new snake hisself! But my dear friends, now he will stay in our room for many days--we no get in or out! What you have done!"

"Bill," said Steve weakly, "I ask your pardon! I think we'd better go around and ask the American consul to lend us a spare room--until Mr. Mahjub has exhausted his passion for snakes. Meanwhile, I shall plan a couple of murders!"

"Gibilo," I asked, as we walked to the consulate, "how did Mr. Mahjub lose the end of his nose?"

"Huh!" said the Moor. "When he very young man and not know much about snake-charming business. One day, he not charm snake enough, and snake he bite him good on nose! Mahjub, he hold nose tight and run for doctor. Doctor jump on him and make cut off quick before Mahjub know what happen!"

Jerk Gets Girl by V. V. Dredaine



Tom and David kept their eyes on Linda but so did eighteen feet of big, hungry, man-eating shark!

WHEN she woke to find herself on the tiny island, she felt no alarm. Her first concern was for her skin; the smiling male clerk in Bermuda's most fashionable store had warned her that a South Sea *lava-lava* offered very little protection against the white sun. But she wasn't badly burned at all.

The sun had dropped from its position overhead when she had fallen asleep. That had been three hours or so earlier. While she slept, the tide came in and covered most of the peninsula. She'd seen it stretching away from the rest of the shore like a finger pointing out to sea. Its highest point was at the fingertip, where it formed a little hill, and she'd walked out on the peninsula to sit there and be alone for a while.

Everything was very much like the tourist brochures had promised: *Bask in the Warmth of a Tropical Sun, Listen to the Whisper of the Surf and Feel the*

Caress of the Breeze Stealing over You . . . She rose and stretched. Her skin felt taut where the sun had gotten at it. The sea wasn't as calm as it had been before the tide started coming in. Her hill on the peninsula was now an island some twenty feet square, and the rest of the slender white strip was under water which she estimated was five or six feet deep, right behind her.

She smiled. It meant she would have to swim back to the beach, and while the distance was no more than two hundred and fifty yards, her *lava-lava* was considerably--say, two hundred and forty-eight and a half--less. If a man came by on the beach when she happened to be coming out of the water, or before she'd had a chance to dry, well. . . .

Probably the clerk had been thinking something like that when he spoke to her. She remembered her sense of annoyance when she'd felt herself blushing for no good reason. Hell, she thought, I wish I were the man who came by when I climbed out of the water. That made her think of Tom and she smiled again, trying to imagine how it would be if Tom were the man.

She stuck a toe into the water. It felt cool.

Then she saw the gray belly of a shark at it turned over very easily, swimming in the water between her and the beach.

Her eyes teared and a wave of nausea swept through her. She had never before known so profound a fear. This was fear that came up slowly, and it remained, undiminished, for moment after moment. Her muscles tightened and she opened her mouth and sucked in a long breath. Then her fists relaxed and she sank to the ground, suddenly so limp that her legs gave under her weight. But her eyes were fixed on the place in the water where she had last seen the shark, and she saw it come back.

The tip of its dorsal fin was a bare six inches above the cleaved surface of the water. It swam with an effortlessness that made it look as if it were being towed. Neither fins nor tail moved as it floated slowly past, a huge gray and darker gray-brown body in the very blue sea.

SHE lay on her back. A wave broke across the tiny island and the sun made a rainbow in the spray. The shark would leave, she knew. It was unusual for one to have come so near shore at all. The notice at the hotel warned guests not to go swimming in strange or unguarded waters. The shark would go away and then she would quickly swim back to shore. She sat up and looked for the shark.

She had almost decided it was gone when she saw the long shadow sliding across the white sand under water, and the shark reappeared.

The spray caught her again, less delicately this time. When it hit her a third time, she suddenly realized that the island had grown smaller by almost a third. The tide was still coming in. In a little while the whole island would be under water. The shark was swimming more swiftly now. She could see its powerful tail flick as it went by. It was swimming in a circle, and she understood why. The peninsula was sloped, like a bridge that sagged in the middle, and the beach was concave at that point. Now that it was under water, it formed a basin. The shark had entered the basin and was swimming around in it. When the little island would be entirely under water, the basin would cease to exist.

She stood on the hot sand, oblivious to the breeze, shivering when the spray hit her. Both hands were touching her throat, and her eyes kept moving from the water to the horizons of the shore. There was no one in sight.

"Tom'll miss me," she said out loud. She turned toward where she knew the hotel was, perhaps a mile away, but it was out of sight. "He'll come back to the hotel and ask for me. The sun's down too far for David to continue painting, and Tom'll come back. He'll miss me and he'll come looking . . ."

Suddenly she screamed. Her fingers recoiled from the feel of the cords in her neck, and she was frightened by the sound she'd heard in her voice.

It would be bad for the hotel. "She came here to be married to a Mr. Thomas Forman," a lady under the green awnings on the terrace was saying, "and on this day--three days before her wedding, poor girl--she put on one of those little what-do-you-call-its and went out swimming. Well, when this Mr. Forman came back to the hotel with his painter friend--a Mr.

Stephenson who's a resident here; that house up at the point, if you've seen it--well, he just heard the first few words and collapsed. Like a sack of--"

"*Tom!*" she screamed. "*Tom! Tom!*"

She wondered whether her screaming had brought the shark so close to the surface. Could fish hear sounds from outside the water? It seemed odd to her that she should be crying. She turned slowly and saw how much smaller the island had become. If fish couldn't hear, why did fishermen insist that loud talking frightened them away? She wondered why she was crying.

It was a lovely day. Where the beach ended, the tall grass began, and beyond it lay a grove of fruit trees with a musical name she couldn't remember. The sky was blue enough to be a reflection of the water, and the afternoon sun had gentled. Just like the advertisements said . . . except that in the water, twenty feet away--

"*Tom!*"

He'd come then, as she had known he would. He saw her and came running down the beach with David. He had come back and missed her and come looking for her.

"Tom, I'm marooned! There's a shark here!" she called, rising to her toes. Tom and David both waved to her. Then Tom stopped to peel off his white duck trousers and stood in his swimming trunks. "*Tom!*" she screamed, and her voice broke.

Tom cupped his hands and shouted through them. The words floated out to her, distorted and hardly audible. "*Ohhh-kayy, Linn-da!*"

"*Shark!*" she screamed.

They both waved and Tom went in up to his ankles.

"*Shark!*"

He was running to meet an oncoming low roller.

Suddenly she swept an arm down and tore the *lava-lava* from her body. Tom saw her and stopped, and the wave broke against his middle and swept on. He stood there for a moment and then turned to David, and then he backed out of the water. He turned to face her again and his hands made the quick slapping motions in midair that he sometimes used to indicate disapproval.

"*Shark!*" she screamed. She couldn't see him through her tears, but she stiffened her body against the sobs that shook her. She dropped the cloth to her feet. The next wave that hit the island soaked the cloth and made it a small wet ball.

"NOW what the hell does she want to do a thing like that for?" said Tom. "What a damn fool thing to do!"

Stephenson smiled again. "I'm sorry I can't share that reaction to such a lovely nude. Seriously, though, at that distance and with the sun behind her, we can hardly see her--and don't think she doesn't know it. Feeling good, I suppose."

"Listen, Dave, you know more about things like this than I do. About what happens to girls when they get to a place like this. If--"

"Are you kidding?"

"The hell I am! It isn't as if ... well--"

"As if what, Tom?" said Stephenson, very quietly. "As if Linda hadn't been one of my models before you met her through me? As if she was flaunting something? Or as if she was what so many people like you stupidly think of all of them?"

"I'm sorry."

"I wonder."

"All right, then wonder."

"Now I'm sorry," said Stephenson, smiling, "My guess is that she wants to stay out there by herself a while longer--maybe until the island disappears. She likes to play games and she knows you'd never go out after her like that. Especially with me around."

"There's a lot of smirking around here," said Tom.

"I'll meet you back at the hotel," said Stephenson.

"Wait. She's putting it on again."

"Before the tide carries it ashore."

"Anyway, I'm glad she tired of this game fast," Tom said as he started to go into the water again. He hadn't taken three steps when Linda tore off the soaked, clinging cloth.

Stephenson laughed. "Can you hear what she's saying?"

"I don't give a damn. What does she think this--Hell, what if someone from the hotel saw this? My whole damn family's coming in tomorrow, and if a breath of this--"

"What your family needs is a breath of fresh air!"

"Like this, huh?"

"Exactly. Couldn't be better. You stink."

"Go die," said Tom. "That's my girl and I'm going out there to get her." He walked down the beach into the water again. As he went in to his knees, he watched the nude form on the island. He saw Linda bend, swing an arm, and a rock splashed into the water fifty yards away from her. He stood there undecided for a moment. Then he turned, came back up the beach and put on his trousers. "I'm going back to the hotel," he said.

"Why must you be such a jerk?" said Stephenson.

"Because I'm a jerk. Jerk meets girl, jerk loses girl."

"The island won't last much longer. Is it so terrible that she wants to wait? Look at her gathering rocks. She must think you're still coming after her."

"She's wrong," said Tom. "Coming? Or does the spectacle--"

"Oh, shut up."

"You can wait, you know," said Tom. "Sure, I'll tell her."

As he cupped his hands in front of his mouth, Stephenson took him by the shoulder and pulled one of his arms down roughly. Tom spun around, a fist coming up. Stephenson caught the hand halfway up, but he was looking past Tom to the island.

"Tom!" he cried. "Look what she's doing!" He grabbed Tom's other hand and turned him around to face the island. "She's got all those rocks in her lava-lava. She's going to throw it away!"

The girl had evidently made a bundle of the strip of wet cloth and she was swinging it around her like a hammer thrower. She lost her balance and fell, and the rocks tumbled out of the cloth. On all fours she gathered them again.

"She's gone crazy," Tom said in a low voice.

The two men stood there, neither moving, as if finally both were prepared to let the scene come to what now seemed its inexorable end. They watched her swing the weighted cloth again. When she let it go, a soft, strange sound of hurt escaped through Tom's tight lips. The cloth sailed towards shore, scarcely five feet over the water. It hit, bounced once and sank.

"All right, Tom--*Tom! Look!*"

From out of the quiet water where the cloth had vanished, a gray form rose in a lightning slash of movement. The water was cut as if by a large black triangular blade, then it was quiet again.

SHE sank to the ground again, and for the first time in a quarter of an hour she stopped crying. She watched the figures of the two men disappear as they ran swiftly down the beach. She couldn't think of anything . . . then suddenly she felt warmth returning to her body and the blood hammering in her temples. It hardly seemed to her that it was her own voice laughing, as she began to dig ... When the motor launch came roaring along parallel to the shore, she saw Tom and David standing at the prow with two other men who held rifles. She knew they wouldn't see her until they were very close, because she was lying flat in a shallow pit and her body was covered with mud she had made of the sand. The pit was three feet long and half as wide, and it took up three-fourths of the island.

Thirty yards away they saw her and someone held up a blanket.

"Turn around! Everybody turn around!" she shrieked. "I'll stay here until dark if you don't!"

She never understood why Tom and David almost fell apart laughing at that. After all, it wasn't as if ...

"Bwana, Beware The Devil's Belly!" by Captain Hugh Thomason



In the eerie African twilight, they heard it--the jungle-devil's trump of doom that called even white men to a fate stranger than death. . . .

MY shooting trip was coming to an end. We had just emerged from the country where, in the good old days, the Masai had lived and raided, and were camped for the night by the edge of an extinct volcano, known to all the natives in the neighborhood as "Milima an Muungu" (God's Hill). Fires were lit; the safari boys were squatting round the cooking-pots, stirring their "posho" and discussing the rising price of goats, with the consequent increase of the monetary value of wives, which is today their everlasting theme. Even in Central Africa the cost of luxuries has risen.

Old Juguna, my gun-bearer, was busy with an oily rag on the barrel of my .450 Holland & Holland rifle. Presently he finished polishing and came to where I sat in my Roorkee chair, toasting my feet by the fire. He laid the rifle down in the tent behind me, and then, squatting on his haunches by my fire, meditatively picked up the stray live embers and returned them to their proper place.

An old object was Juguna: curly hair (resembling grey astrakhan), toothless gums, with the thick underlip projecting an inch or more, and long, slit-distorted ears, the lobes of which rested comfortably on his shoulders and carried on their points some heavy copper ornaments.

Except for the chatter of the boys, now become only a murmur as they dived into their cooking-pots and filled their stomachs with mealie meal porridge, there was only the eerie silence of the African twilight!

Suddenly, as clearly as if I were on a parade-ground, my ears caught the sound of a bugle-call. It was the "Retreat." The music appeared to rise from out of the vast jungle-clad crater below me, and as the bugle-call died away, I distinctly heard the bleating of goats!

I gazed around in astonishment. "Did you hear that?" I asked Juguna, who, holding his scraggy black hands to the fire, seemed lost in reverie,

"Yes, Bwana," he answered, "the spirits of the lost askaris!"

"Spirits!" I said contemptuously. "Spirits can't play army bugle-calls like that!"

"These can," said Juguna.

"But why on earth," I asked, "play in the belly of an extinct volcano?"

"Bwana," said he, "since you have heard the music which they make, and after it the sounds of voices, I will tell you the tale of the lost askaris, No other white man is acquainted with their story. I, who alone know it, have told it to none--for all are scoffers. But tonight you cannot say I lie, for you have heard. Therefore is there no shame in telling.

"IT was many moons ago, Bwana, when the Masai were fierce warriors and overran the earth--before the white man had completely taken possession of our land and preventing us from proving ourselves men.

"I was a 'toto' then (little one). How old I cannot say. In my tribe there is no record of birth or death, but I had not yet become a man. That I know. My village was half a day's march from Milima an Muungu.

"This place was known to all as the abode of evil spirits. Very few had dared to come as near as we are now, and none who had gone into its belly were ever known to return. So awful were the tales our fathers told, of what the evil spirits did to men, that after dark no one would venture within fifty spear-lengths throws of Milima an Muungu.

"One night at full moon, the Masai raided our village. I saw my father killed and my baby brother placed at the end of a spear into the fire, where shortly before we had been cooking our supper. My mother and a big sister, soon to become of marrying age, they carried away screaming, and they collected all our goats, which were housed for the night in an adjoining hut, ordering me to drive them. They knew the beasts would give less trouble if their daily companion escorted them. Where I sit is a scar made by a Masai spear, because I did not move along fast enough with the raiders.

"We walked till the moon fell asleep. Then the Masai halted and lay down in the forest. I collected all the goats in a ring near them, and pretended that

I too was drowsing, but as soon as I was sure the raiders were dead to all noise, I wriggled away on my belly, whither, I knew not, but when dawn broke I found myself on the edge of Milima an Muungu, and nowhere was a sight or sound of the Masai. It must have been many hours after noon--for I lay hidden all day too frightened to move, and in much pain--when I heard the tramp of men's feet coming through the forest, and almost on the top of me there appeared a white man with a party of twenty askaris.

"I flung myself at the white man's feet.

"'The toto is wounded,' said he, as he noticed the dried blood on my thigh. 'Is this also the foul work of the Masai?'"

"'Last night, Bwana,' I answered, 'they raided the village of my fathers. Of all the family I alone remain. They dragged me along to herd our goats, which they stole, and they speared me because I did not move along fast enough with them. In the dark I escaped, and at dawn I found myself here. Oh, great white man, do not let the Masai catch me again!'"

"Scarcely had I spoken when, on a not far distant hill, my eyes lit on something shining--the gleam of spears.

"'Bwana,' I gasped; 'the Masai!'"

"He shaded his eyes and stared in the direction I indicated. Apparently he could see nothing--white men have very poor sight--for he took his other eyes from the skin bag slung across his shoulder.

"Then as he flung himself to the earth, his men doing likewise, he prayed to his God. "Great Scott!" I heard him pray.

"'Boys," he said, 'I am responsible for your lives, and though we are all longing to fight the murderous devils yonder, such an act would be madness. My other eyes show me thousands of Masai and thousands of spears. We must wait and hide for twenty-four hours, till the other askaris, who are only a day's march behind, join up with us, then we will attack.'

"I can hear,' he said, 'down in the crater the sound of running water' (which was true enough, for in the rainy season there is much water in the belly of Milirna an Muungu). 'We will hide by the water in the thick jungle down yonder till the other askaris come up.'

"His men agreed. They were of a far-distant tribe, and did not know what an evil place he was leading them.

"But I was aghast.

"Bwana,' I exclaimed, 'you cannot go into the belly of Milima an Muungu. True the Masai may kill you, for you are few and they are many, but death from Masai spears is a million times more desirable than the torture and death the evil spirits will deal you, if you go down there!'"

"Evil spirits!' said he, and laughed. 'We can tackle them, boys, can't we?'

BUT his men did not laugh. Though they came from a far-distant tribe, they knew that in Central Africa there are dangerous places where evil spirits dwell, and I think fear fell upon them. But there was that about this white man which makes us of the darker skin follow his type anywhere--aye, even into that raging fire to which your padres tell us we shall one day go if we lie and steal. So they went, into single file, down into the enveloping jungle which carpets the belly of Milima an Muungu.

"The white man stood till the last askari had passed, stroking the hair on his upper lip. It was the color of gold, and he was good to look upon.

"Come, Toto,' he said to me, 'I will see that neither the evil spirits nor the Masai catch you.'

"But I drew back.

"Your blood, then, be on your own head!' he exclaimed angrily.

"When they had all disappeared I crept into the long elephant-grass which grew by the side of the vast pit. As the moon rose, all around me I heard the stealthy footsteps of the searching Masai. So near did they come I caught their whispers.

"'If the white fool and his men,' I heard one of them say, 'have gone down into the belly of Milima an Muungu, we need hunt no more! The evil spirits will save us the trouble of cleaning our spears!'

"Soon they went.

"Long after dawn had broken I crept out of the elephant-grass which had so successfully hidden me. Below me and all around was silence. And, Bwana," said old Juguna, shaking his head till the copper ornaments on his distorted ears jangled musically, "the tale of my fathers were true. That white man and those twenty askaris were never seen nor heard of again. The evil spirits ate their bodies and turned their souls into goats.

"Sometimes men hereabouts see a herd of twenty black wild goats. They had hit them with their spears, and the spears have bounded back with the iron heads bent nearly double. And always leading the herd is one large white goat. He brings it out of the pit's jungle to graze on the sweet 'maleshwa' which grows at the edge. Sometimes, too, at certain moons, the askaris play the music which you have heard tonight, and always they play when old Juguna is camping near. They remember that he warned them! They know!"

Some Pearls and a Swine by Carl Clausen

MAINA LO, the shell-diver's daughter, took from the shelf above the hearth a heart-shaped pearl shell and a small leather sack. Placing the shell upon a low stool in the middle of the floor, she shook into it twelve small, gray seed-pearls from the sack and poured over them half a cup of coconut-oil from an earthen vessel. On her knees, her elbows resting on the edge of the stool, she pursed her lips and blew softly upon the surface of the oil.

Her father watched her intently from his mat, peering over her shoulder with his watery, brine-blinded eyes, a broken stump of a clay pipe between his toothless gums. Old and decrepit was Aoku, the shell-diver. The icy clutch of twenty fathoms had squeezed the warm blood from his veins and left him a paralytic, helpless wreck, dependent upon the charity of the inhabitants and upon the bounty of the occasional traders whose schooners tarried in the lagoon for a few hours between the tides.

"What see you in the shell, daughter?" he croaked, raising himself on palsied knees.

Without answering, Maina Lo continued blowing, until the funnel-shaped opening made in the oil by her breath touched the bottom of the shell and caused eleven of the twelve small pearls to arrange themselves in a circle about the base. The twelfth and largest stayed in the center of the circle and no amount of blowing could dislodge it.

"A strange ship will enter the straits." she answered, gazing into the shell with her face between her hands. "We shall have food, much food, my father. I see a very white *sahib* with hair like the sun and eyes the color of mother of pearl."

"It is time," Aoku mumbled. "Perhaps it is Perrot, the trader. He is free with his purse and he favors you."

"Perrot, the Frenchman, is a swine," she cried. "Sooner would I starve than eat from his hand. Have you forgotten his perfidy with other maidens? Aileta who leaped from the cliff and others?"

Aoku shook his head and gazed at the floor.

"I am an old man," he whined. "Soon I shall be gone. Have I not labored for you these many years? It is time you took a man. Among our own people not one finds favor with you. Then why spurn you this white trader who has much gold and fine houses?"

"The Frenchman is a swine," Maina Lo repeated. "Think you he would take me to dwell as his wife? Not he! I am still a maid, and a maid I remain until-- until--" she paused and patted her father's wrinkled cheek--"until my heart calls me."

"We shall starve," Aoku whimpered. "I am an old man--"

"Rest easy, my father, I am young and strong. I can dive. Tomorrow I begin. Who knows but some day I may bring up a great pearl?"

"But you are a woman," he remonstrated, "and good to look upon. The men will laugh you to scorn."

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I am a woman--and good to look upon."

She rose to her feet, poured the oil from the shell and replaced the twelve small pearls in the sack.

A quiet serious-minded girl was Maina Lo, with rather heavy, sensuous lips and somber eyes that somehow suggested slumbering passions. She had the respect of traders and natives alike, for she was a good girl. Also, she was beautiful, a rare combination along the Straits of Malaita, where beauty and virtue rarely go hand in hand.

From her crown of glossy black hair to her finely-arched bare feet she was good to look upon. Proud of bearing she was, high-breasted as Venus, with the aristocratic blood of her race flowing undiluted in her veins.

She was proud of this blood. Upon the free and easy unions between maidens of her race and the white masters she looked with scorn. Her mind, primitive, and untutored though it was, grasped the significance of such unions and their effect upon the destiny of her race.

In a vague sort of a way she understood that she and her people were inferior to the white man who seemed to possess everything in the world worth possessing. She wondered why. It seemed unjust. Did she not love, hate, eat and drink as they? Did not the sun smile on white and brown alike, and the soft-trade winds, did not they kiss the graves of both races, impartially?

The brown man toiled no longer at his ancestral pursuits. Rum had left in him no desire for the old, simple life. Upon his women a new and sinister value had been placed, and he had sunk low enough to take advantage of it.

Maina Lo pondered much upon these signs and hot hatred grew in her heart against the white man and her debased brethren. Had she lived in New York instead of upon Danrhyn atoll, she would have been an ardent suffragette.

AOKU'S boat, the *Moonbeam*, was the fastest and best equipped of the fleet. Crippled and reduced though Aoku had become, he had ever refused to part with it at any price. Originally the lifeboat of a merchantman, the old diver had bought her for five pounds sterling from the captain of the ship, who was anxious to use the deck-room which it displaced for stowing cargo. Aoku had dragged the boat upon the beach, overhauled her from stem to stern, decked her over with a deck of inch and a half baltic-pine and rigged her with a long slender mast, mainsail, topsail and two jibs. Outside the South Pacific Trading Company's lugger at Duralong--an ex-yacht--no faster boat existed in the straits.

Before daybreak Maina Lo hoisted mainsail and jib and stood across the bar with a five-knot breeze long before the rest of the fleet had begun to stir. She headed for Little Akaroa, a cove on the lee side of Duralong, where

diving was good on the slack tide. Once clear of land, she set the tops'l, slacked out the main sheet and squared away before the wind.

The *Moonbeam* leaped in response to the increased pressure of sail and buried her nose in the turbulent greenness under her bow. Maina Lo hung upon the tiller and through the flying spray watched the white-caps chase one another in the wake astern, and her heart leaped in exultation with the *Moonbeam*.

Here she was at home. A sister to the north wind, she, racing down her ancestral domain. Her long black hair lay coiled in two heavy braids about her head. She had fastened the braids securely with shell-pins and raffia in preparation for the diving. A snug-fitting sleeveless tunic of woven raffia encased her slender body from the armpits to the knees, giving her absolute freedom of movement, a very necessary thing in twenty fathoms of water.

When the sun rose warm and dripping from the eastern sea, she cast aside her covering blanket. The warm wind raced through the loosely woven tunic and drove the blood dancing through her veins. Her cheeks were aflush with excitement for her new undertaking.

Although it was no uncommon thing for women of her race to engage in pearl-diving, Maina Lo had never descended more than a few fathoms among the shallows of the coral reefs, while her father worked the great depths between the barrier reef and the mainland.

Aoku had playfully taught his young daughter the tricks of the trade, never dreaming that some day he should become dependent upon her for food and shelter. There had been in his mind visions of their triumphant return to their native Marquesas with much gold, for the pearl-beds of the great barrier reef were rich in the early days of the industry, but years had passed from plenty to scanty, from scanty to poverty, his body becoming more useless and withered from month to month.

Maina Lo grew into young womanhood among the fleet, capable and earnest, always learning, always inquiring, the ablest and most skillful sailor on the lagoon. The pilot at Duralong never ceased to relate how he

watched her from the lighthouse drive the *Moonbeam* across the bar in a black northeaster at low tide with a double-reefed mains'l.

With decks awash and the mainboom dragging in the trough of the seas, Maina Lo rounded Point Miguel and nosed her way, close-hauled, along the barrier reef, looking for a safe passage. The wind threw the boat on her beam-ends under the heavy sail-pressure and she was forced to furl the tops'l and outer jib.

So busy was she, dodging submerged reefs and taking in her high canvas, that she did not notice a bank of dark clouds rising with incredible swiftness out of the northern sea. The first intimation she had of the approaching hurricane was, when looking across the straits, she saw an incoming bark furl her canvas down to lower tops'ls and square away to sea.

Through her glasses she made out the bark to be the *Pappillon*, the French prison-ship that for the past two years engaged in transferring prisoners from the penal colony of New Caledonia to Cayenne.

ANXIOUSLY watching the oncoming cloud-bank, she ran the boat into the wind, double-reefed the mains'l and set the storm-jib. There was but one thing to do; follow the *Pappillon* out to sea. To look for shelter along the reef was worse than useless. Swift as she worked, she had hardly tied the last knot in the reef when the hurricane burst upon her.

So sudden and furious was the onslaught that the boat was thrown on her beam-ends with the storm-jib pounding in the teeth of the gale, threatening momentarily to dismast her. Maina Lo leaped for the tiller and threw all her weight against it, but with her deck buried amidships in storm-whipped water, the *Moonbeam* lost all steerageway and pounded head on into the seas. One after another the reef-lashed waves raked the frail craft from stem to stern. With her knees braced against the lee bulwarks, in water to the waist, Maina Lo hung on to the tiller in grim desperation, expecting momentarily to be dashed to pieces upon a reef.

Then gradually the *Moonbeam* paid off, righted herself and tore out to sea before the hurricane in the two-mile wake of the *Pappillon*.

To prevent getting carried overboard, she tied the main halyards around her waist and made the end fast to a ring-bolt in the deck. In less than half an hour she was out of sight of land, racing before the eighty-mile gale with the jib-sheet taut as a violin string and the hurricane howling in the rigging. Through the flying mist ahead she saw the *Pappillon's* lower tops'ls blow out in a shower of shreds, leaving the bark running before the wind with bare poles.

The last of the young sun hung lurid and ghostly behind the black clouds astern. Sky and water seemed to unite in a frenzy of storm-lashed fury. A lone albatross swept down the gale before her and was swallowed up in the blackness ahead. She was utterly alone in the turbulent expanse of storm-whipped waters, hanging on the tiller with numb, nerveless hands.

Then, the deluge. The heavens seemed to open their flood-gates. Howling, snarling, raging came the icy, spume-laden downpour, whipping the surface of the waters into a veritable caldron of leaping fury. It beat upon her bare arms and legs with the sting of a lash and drove the breath out of her body.

The frail craft shuddered beneath the weight of it and wallowed for minutes at the time, submerged to the bulwarks, only to rise gallantly again, shake herself and leap forward on the crest of the next wave.

Never for a moment did Maina Lo's heart fail her. With numb, frozen hands she grasped the tiller in a grip of steel; guiding the *Moonbeam* through the chaos of wind and water. Even momentarily she did not relax her vigilance. She looked upon the white, merciless death about her and smiled. The fear of death was not in her. With blinded eyes she strove to pierce the gloom ahead. So low hung the clouds that it seemed as if by reaching out her hand she might touch them.

Sun nor stars broke the inky pall, and the sea beneath was like a caldron of madly boiling milk, a great expanse of blinding whiteness. The hiss of the rain was drowned in the thundering noise of the waters pouring over the boat.

How long it lasted she could not have told. When the squall passed on, she saw the *Pappillon*, a scant quarter of a mile ahead. Her rigging and white, slender spars stood drawn against the blackness of the sky like a delicate, silver-threaded pattern upon a curtain of black velvet. She was laboring heavily without a stitch of canvas. A storm-torn signal of distress fluttered from the mizzen gaff.

With the cessation of the rain, the waves began to rise. The sea changed in aspect. Great mountains of water lifted the *Moonbeam* toward the sky and flung her forward with incredible speed. The little craft plunged on, her head down green, phosphorescent valleys of abysmal depth, climbed up the next wave bravely, only to be tossed as by some giant hand into the sky and go coasting madly again.

With a deafening roar a great sea bore down upon her. Maina Lo set her teeth, flung herself face down upon the deck and took a fresh turn about her waist with the halyards. For one breathless moment she waited with the thunder of the oncoming waters in her ears. The *Moonbeam* lay momentarily passive like a hunted stag awaiting the *coup de grace*.

Then with a last brave attempt to meet the onslaught, she staggered into the thundering death. The tiller snapped in Maina Lo's hand like a piece of matchwood. With terrific force she was hurled against the mast, the waist-rope almost cutting her in twain by the force of the onrushing waters.

Bereft of the guiding hand, the *Moonbeam* swung broadside to the seas. The jib blew out with the noise of a blast. Topmast and jib-boom went crashing over the side.

Stunned and half-drowned, Maina Lo groped her way on hands and knees along the engulfed deck to the companionway and tore the hatchet from the rack. With bleeding hands she chopped the tangled rigging adrift to prevent the dragging topmast from pounding a hole in the side of the boat.

On examination she found the rudder carried away. Only a broken splinter of wood remained, swinging uselessly above the water-line. Cutting one of the oars from its lashings, she chopped a deep notch in the stern, laid the oar in the notch and lashed it securely to the top hinge of the broken rudder.

Then rising to her feet, she threw her weight against the oar and righted the boat.

She was almost abreast of the *Pappillon*. Fifty yards to starboard the great black hull of the prison-ship towered monstrously above her, her stern pointing toward the sky. She was foundering by her head. Foc'sle-head and forward deck lay engulfed to the fore-hatch. Crowsnests and rigging were crowded with human forms awaiting the end. The fragments of two splintered lifeboats dragged in the water from the tackle at her davits.

Against the railing of the poop-deck a crowd of prisoners was lined up. Two sailors with hammers and chisels were striking the shackles from the unfortunate men across the iron hawser-bits. As fast as he was freed, each man leaped for the rigging.

The bark was drifting helplessly before the gale. With her forward hold half-full of water she staggered drunkenly to her grave. Curious, incredulous faces stared down at the frail craft with the lone half-nude figure of a girl standing upright in the stern, guiding the boat with only an oar. A sailor in the mizzen truck waved his sou'wester to her.

Above the tumult of the wind came faintly the sound of voices. They were cheering her. From the rigging and yard-arms flashed a message of tribute from a hundred doomed men. Then suddenly the great bark plunged head down in the waves up to the mainmast. Her stern rose in the air with the dripping rudder pointing to the sky. One by one the men in the rigging dropped into the sea. The two sailors abandoned their hammers and chisels and leaped from the railing of the poop.

In the stern stood the solitary figure of a man silhouetted against the sky, with manacled hands raised above his head, the last of the prisoners whom the sailors had abandoned in their efforts to save themselves. A giant of a man he was, with a great shock of yellow curls dancing in the gale. He was signaling to her, pointing astern with his manacled hands.

Maina Lo measured the distance with her eyes, cast all her weight upon the oar and swung the *Moonbeam* under the stern quarter of the bark. Tying a bowline in the main halyards, she threw the rope overboard and signaled

her readiness. With a terrific swing the man brought down his manacled wrists across the hawser-bit, breaking the shackle-chain. Then he leaped.

Straining at her oar, Maina Lo saw his head rise in the wake of the sinking bark, a few feet astern. The *Moonbeam* staggered momentarily as the man caught the dragging rope and rose half-way out of the water with the sudden strain. The next moment two bloody, mangled arms with the broken shackle-chains dangling from the torn flesh were thrust over the railing. Grasping the man beneath the armpits, Maina Lo dragged him to safety and sprang back to her oar, just as the last of the *Pappillon* disappeared beneath the waves.

NIGHT came with the hurricane spent and a chill moon rising out of the sea. Weary and worn, Maina Lo left her oar and knelt beside the prostrate form upon the deck. By neither sound nor movement did the man betray sign of life. One mangled wrist lay across a forehead white as death. The broken shackle-chain swung tangled in his hair with the movements of the boat. She looked at the man helplessly. To all appearances he was dead. She had risked her life and boat to no purpose.

When she accidentally touched his forehead with the tips of her fingers, she thought she saw a faint flutter of the eyelids. She placed her ear against his breast and listened breathlessly. Barely perceptible yet unmistakably came the soft beating of his heart. Life was not quite extinct.

For several minutes she sat looking at him perplexedly. Across the moon-flooded waste long, swift lines of ponderously cat-footed rollers moved from horizon to horizon, breaking in menacing white-capped thunder about the boat. Phalanx after phalanx of storm-torn clouds charged the young ascending moon.

The storm still raged in the higher levels, though but the merest breath of wind fanned her cheek as the boat coasted down the rollers. A blue layer of chill, shroudy mist hung low over the sea with an interminable stretch of

clear, sparkling space above. A sinister, brooding peace of fury-gorged elements enwrapped the universe.

Against the deck the face of the unconscious man glowed ghastly beneath his matted, brine-soaked locks that moved Medusa-like in the wash of the deck with the pitching of the boat. A strange freak of circumstances had placed in Maina Lo's hands the fate of one of the hated race. Only in the fact that he was a convict and therefore in the estimation of his own people no better than she, did Maina Lo find in her heart a sense of pity for him.

Like herself, he was very young. A downy golden beard covered his vigorous, aggressive jaw. His nose was straight, finely molded, with sensitive blue-veined nostrils. There was a bold, careless quality in the repose of his face. Where his shirt lay open, the skin of his throat glowed soft and velvety beneath its coat of sun-bitten tan. A pathetic boyish look, reminiscent of a brutally disillusioned childhood, hung about the corners of his mouth.

Taking his head in her lap, she began to rub his face and chest briskly and rolled him back and forth to induce circulation in his frozen arteries. After several minutes of unceasing labor she was rewarded by feeling the play of his reviving muscles under her touch. When she placed the water-soaked blanket under his head, he opened his eyes for a fraction of a minute and gazed up at her unseeingly.

Letting her hand fall upon his shoulder, she leaned over him breathlessly, searching his eyes by the faint light of the moon. Deep blue, the color of mother of pearl, they gazed beyond her into nothingness. When he had closed them again, she sat lost in thought, studying the blank repose of his face.

Then, rising to her feet, with a look of determination upon her face, she found the hatchet and knocked the cover off the hatchway. Below decks everything was snug and tight. Groping about in the dark she found matches and lighted the lantern which swung from the beam above the bunk. She extended her stiff, frozen hands over the flame and looked about with a sigh of relief. Not a drop of water had the staunch little craft shipped.

Returning on deck, she dragged the unconscious man below, dropped him in the bunk and began to strip him of his wet garments. When she pulled his coarse prison-shirt over his head, she gave a gasp of horror. From the neck to the waist his back was a mass of horrible, bloody bruises.

She knew too well the mark of a cat-o'-nine-tails to be mistaken. Cords of beaten flesh lay in livid lines from armpit to armpit. He had been brutally whipped. With a sob of mingled rage and compassion she worked away feverishly and flung the last of his water-soaked garments on deck. Tender-handed and pitying, she anointed his body with healing oil from her locker and bound up his mangled hands with strips torn from the blankets.

She forgot race-hatred and prejudice in administering aid and comfort to the helpless, white-skinned stranger who had come to her out of the sea, bruised and bleeding. She rolled herself into the blankets against his icy body that the warmth of her youth might kindle into flame the flickering spark of life. With maiden shyness she drew his face to her breast and closed her eyes. An indescribable feeling of peace and contentment came to her. She slept.

WHEN she awoke, she was alone. The cabin was flooded with warm noontide sunshine. The boat swung lazily upon a calm, sunlit sea. She heard him move about on deck. Wondering, she sat up and looked about. Before leaving, he had tucked the blankets around her.

She crawled on deck and found him curled up, prison-garbed, on the mainsail with his back against the mast. She dared not lift her eyes for fear of encountering his. He held out his hand and took hers between his two bandaged ones and raised it to his lips, drinking in the beauty of her with his clear, boyish eyes.

Gently withdrawing the hand, she knelt beside him and pressed the spot his lips had touched shyly to her breast. No word passed from her lips. He also was silent, but in his eyes she saw enshrined something which she dared not believe true.

The youth of him, for he was but an overgrown, bearded boy, spoke to her own in youth's breathless language, tremulous with awe and exquisite delight at their mutual discovery. Fiercely her spirit assailed the barrier of blood and found his amid the wreckage.

It was no mere mortal love which shone from the splendor of her face. The fire in her eyes was love's refining flame, the beacon that has guided frail humanity through the ages in its wingless pursuit of happiness.

The sea moved inevitably from horizon to horizon. Near by a flock of albatrosses fought over a drifting morsel of food. She remembered then that she had not eaten since the morning before.

When she placed food and drink from her locker before him he followed her with his eyes, eating ravenously the while. Knowing the scanty supply, she ate and drank sparingly herself, heaping his lap with fruit and sun-cured fish. When he had eaten his fill, he drew the sail about him with a grateful smile and closed his eyes.

While he slept, she tiptoed about, repairing the damage done by the storm. Every little while she paused in her task to watch him in silent exultation. Bending low over him, she touched his cheeks shyly with her lips and ran her finger-tips lightly through the gold of his hair.

In the afternoon a strange sail appeared, bearing down upon them with a strong breeze from the east. With a sudden fear in her heart, Maina Lo recognized the *L'Aiglon*, the swift brigantine of Perrot, the trader.

Arousing the fugitive, she pointed to the ship.

"It is Perrot, the French trader," she whispered. "Go below and hide. Even now he may have seen you through his glasses."

The boy's face turned white beneath his tan.

"He shall not take me alive. Sooner death than the living hell of Cayenne."

The girl took his face between her hands.

"Fear not, *temasere*" she said softly. "He shall not take you at all, dead or living. But you must hide swiftly."

Hastily rigging a jury jib-boom with the second oar, she hoisted the remaining jib and the mainsail and bore away to the south. Storm-beaten and damaged though she was, the little *Moonbeam* staggered bravely on. With anxious eyes Maina Lo watched the brigantine grow larger and larger. Through his glasses Perrot, the trader, had recognized her and was driving the *L'Aiglon* off her course in an effort to overhaul the *Moonbeam*. Maina Lo set her teeth and prayed for night.

At dark the brigantine was a league astern, gaining rapidly. Through the gloom of the tropic night her red and green beam-lights followed the wake of the *Moonbeam* like the two evil eyes of a demon. Crouching at her oar, the girl resorted to every known trick of seacraft in futile efforts to outmaneuver the Frenchman. A stone's throw to starboard, the great white hull of the brigantine rose out of the phosphorescent sea, a ghostly avenger, following every movement of the *Moonbeam*.

With a sob of rage and despair Maina Lo saw her mainsail flap idly in the breeze that began to die with the approach of dawn. At daylight the *Moonbeam* and the *L'Aiglon* lay a cable-length apart upon the calm, rose-tinged lap of the sea. From the forward davits of the brigantine a boat was being launched.

"WELL?"

Maina Lo drew from her bosom the leather sack containing the twelve seed-pearls and threw them upon the cabin table. She glanced through the open port-hole at the *Moonbeam* towing in the sluggish wake of the *L'Aiglon* and bit her lip. Perrot, the trader, laughed loudly. It was a cold, sinister laugh that seemed to emanate from his flaring hair-studded nostrils.

"A piker's bet, *mademoiselle*," he snarled. "Twelve seed-pearls, value thirty francs, for your pasty-faced lover. *Sacre bleu, enfant*, the Government of

France will pay me one thousand francs for him, dead or alive."

The girl choked back a sob.

"It is all I have," she murmured faintly. "*M'sieu* will have mercy. I will sign a contract. Half my earnings for one--nay two years to come shall be yours. I have found a new bed where the shell is heavy and pink-edged, and there are pearls of fine luster."

Perrot leaned back in his chair and leered lewdly upon her. His bleary pig-eyes lingered with bestial contemplation upon her slender, lightly garbed form.

"The thirteenth pearl *mademoiselle*," he said, smacking his damp lips with an insinuating leer, "the finest in the world, and I trade. Take it or leave it. A house in Suva, fine silks and nothing to do till tomorrow, as the Yankees say."

"*M'sieu* is jesting," she whispered. "I am still a maid, and poor. There are others more beautiful than I. Have mercy!"

He rose from his chair and took a step toward her. With a look of inexorable loathing, Maina Lo drew away and turned her back upon him. A hundred feet astern swung the *Moonbeam* at the end of the *L'Aiglon's* hawser. Perrot's eyes followed hers through the porthole. Upon the deck two sailors sat Turk-fashion, guarding the hatchway, smoking their pipes. The girl was hardly aware of the trader's presence. She stood looking out to sea with her arms folded upon her breast.

A rose-tipped ridge of fleecy clouds framed the young dawn. Her face grew radiant. Carved indelibly upon her soul stood the runes of love's sacrificial message. Her sacrifice would atone for the mere carnal sin! Fragrant and virginal his white rose should ever rest upon her heart.

"*Eh bien, mademoiselle*, time is precious. I am waiting," Perrot growled.

"I accept," the girl answered in a barely audible voice.

"Ah!"

The trader drew a breath of surprise and gratification and placed his hand upon her arm. Her flesh cringed beneath the foul moisture of his palm.

"One moment, *m'sieu*--the terms of our contract. Food and water for thirty days. A suit of clothing to replace his prison-garb, a compass, a chart and medical supplies. You are to repair the damage done by the storm and send the ship's blacksmith to strike his fetters."

The trader waved his hand airily.

"It shall be done--everything. In one hour your convict shall be as free as the wind."

He raised his swarthy, grinning face to hers.

"One kiss, *mademoiselle*--just one leedle kiss to seal the bargain."

"*M'sieu*, have a care!" she panted, turning upon him with the fury of outraged chastity.

Perrot shrank back, a cunning look in his bloodshot eyes.

"*Tres bien, ma cherie*, business before pleasure, eh, what?"

Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he mounted the stairs and locked the companionway door from the outside. She heard him descend the poop-ladder and order the crew to haul the *Moonbeam* under the stern quarters.

Through the porthole she watched the ship's carpenter fit a new jib-boom in place of the broken one. The two sailors fell to work upon the tangled rigging, while others-lowered the supplies over the side. Perrot himself descended the rope-ladder and threw an old suit of clothes upon the deck.

"*Mademoiselle* sends her best regards," he said maliciously.

The boy steadied himself against the mast and looked at the bundle blankly.

"*Monsieur* had better go below and change," Perrot continued. "The authorities of Tahiti might ask embarrassing questions of one landing there in the garb of a thief."

"The authorities at Tahiti?" the boy repeated weakly. "You mean--"

"That you are free," the trader interposed.

"Free?" the boy ejaculated. "I don't understand."

The trader shrugged his shoulders.

"*Monsieur's* obtuseness is alarming," he sneered. "I said free. A price has been paid. *Mademoiselle* begs me to wish you a bon voyage."

THE two men measured each other across the open hatchway. The blue eyes of the convict grew hard with the glint of steel. His hands moved convulsively at his side. He was about to leap at Perrot's throat, when a sound above his head caused him to look up.

Maina Lo, with her finger upon her lips cautioned him from the open porthole unobserved by the trader or the sailors. Turning his back upon Perrot, the boy picked up the bundle of clothes and threw it down the hatchway.

While the blacksmith worked at his shackles, the boy kept his eye on the porthole. Presently a brown hand grasping a slender, fine-toothed saw was thrust cautiously through the opening. Fascinated, he watched the saw move back and forth across the rudder-stock, six inches above the top pintle. While the blacksmith perspired over the shackles, oblivious to everything save his task, the saw ate its way into the oaken rudder-stock, slowly, relentlessly. Minute flour-like particles of sawdust floated over the heads of the two men on the rising breeze and were lost in the swirling wake of the *L'Aiglon*.

Perrot and the sailors had clambered aboard the brigantine, their task finished. Only the blacksmith remained. The boy prayed for time. In a dozen ingenious ways he delayed the work of the man.

Slowly the gleaming saw-blade sank into the wood. Outwardly calm, he watched its progress with his heart pounding madly against his ribs. Only an inch of the wood now remained. His task completed, the blacksmith rose, tossed the sundered shackles into the sea, picked up his tools and clambered aboard the *L'Aiglon*.

"Son of a thief, let go the hawser," Perrot bawled from the waist of the ship. As the boy bent over the forward hawser-bit to cast off, a sudden lurch of the brigantine swung the *Moonbeam* close under the stern, less than four feet from the porthole. He could almost have touched the girl's face, so close was he. The saw was withdrawn. Only the fraction of an inch of the wood remained.

"Set the mainsail and stand by to windward," she whispered, as his head swept past and the released *Moonbeam* drifted astern. He heard the faint snap of the parting rudder-stock as he leaped to the halyards and ran up the mainsail and jib, and hove to.

Crouched under the belly of the sail, every nerve alert, he saw a brown figure drop from the porthole of the *L'Aiglon* and come plowing hand over hand through the water toward him. The next moment Maina Lo, dripping with brine, swung herself on deck. From the helpless brigantine came cries of rage. The helmsman spun the useless wheel in his hands. Slowly the disabled craft swung into the wind, sails aback. On the bridge, beside himself with rage, stood Perrot, the trader. The girl waved her hand to him.

"*Bon voyage, m'sieu,*" she sang out. "Twelve seed-pearls you will find in the sack upon the cabin table. The thirteenth--" she turned her wet, radiant face to the boy's--"the thirteenth, *m'sieu* is my wedding dower. *Au revoir!*"

The Fetish of Remorse by Achmed Abdullah

A tense and breathless story of the ruthless power of gold, staged in the reeking tonkin jungle where death lurked behind every tree--a story with a surprise--and one that will leave you guessing as to the real source of a bob-tailed heart flush.

ANATOLE GAUTIER lost all idea of time and place. Twenty years of life were wiped clean from the slate of his memory. Once more he was in Tonkin. Once more he was young and very enthusiastic. Once more he faced Durand, good old Durand, the friend of his youth.

The moon, a bloated thing of copper swinging among the trees, threw down a single broad ray of orange which fell on Durand's face. Gautier recognized the familiar features, the round face, the black, silken beard, the crooked sabre cut across the forehead which he had received at fencing school when the leather tip had slipped from the blade.

They were both deep in thought. Something had to be done. The Tonkinese had given them until daylight to decide. Two more hours! A low wind stirred the dead leaves at their feet, a wind as hot as a breath of flame.

Somewhere in the distance a jackal howled.

They were both afraid. Of course. But there was something else, a nameless, brooding, sinister feeling which crept through their souls. A harshly discordant note was pealing through the recesses of their beings.

And so they looked into the spectre-pregnant, Stygian darkness, and listened to the night-sounds of soft-winged things which flopped lazily

overhead, and of slimy, swishing things which glided and crawled underfoot. Both were afraid to speak.

When on their way back to the Coast, to Saigon, from the interior of French Indo-China, their guides, bearers and interpreter had deserted them more than four days ago, here in the jungle, they had not taken it very much to heart. They were young and strong; they were fairly familiar with jungle-craft. They would make the Coast somehow. And then--just three minutes' talk with the agent of the Australian syndicate. They would pass over what they had brought from the interior, and in return they would receive a check of six figures. Even split in two, it would mean a comfortable income for life; more than that: it would mean riches and the chance to multiply them.

Then, a few hours ago, the Tonkinese had come from nowhere, out of the jungle, hundreds of them. Tonkinese rebels they were, and they called themselves *les poings du patriotisme et de la paix*--the fists of patriotism and peace--a gentle touch of Mongol humor which did not appeal to either Gautier or Durand.

Suddenly the two Frenchmen had understood why the guides and the interpreter had deserted them. It was evident that they had been watched every step of the way; that even at the Coast, in the very office of the Australian agent, there had been spies in the pay of the Peacock Banner.

They were two against a small army. There would be no arguing, no bargaining whatsoever. These yellow devils had the whip-hand.

The leader of the Tonkinese, a tall, courtly, well-bred man, had left them two hours ago. Durand, who had a smattering of the local dialect, had given greetings in it; fligid, flatterling greetings. The Tonkinese had bowed to the ground and had replied in the same language.

"By applying oil or flattery most things are softened. But these three never soften: a sword, a leather receptacle for clarified butter, and a Tonkinese."

Then he had continued in French, perfectly correct French, though with the peculiar stiff wording and the gentle sing-song of the Mongolian.

"Do not break your tongue over our barbaric patois, my friend. I speak French. I have lived in your country. I have studied in Paris. I have learned there that dealings with Christians are uncertain. Either three times the principal is obtained--or nothing at all. Thus shall I make sure to obtain from you three times the principal."

There had been nothing intimidating in his voice. His accents had been rich and gentle; with a bronze tone to them like the echoed murmurings of an ancient temple gong.

"Look," he had continued, and his face had been as stony and as passionless as that of the Buddha who meditates in the shade of the cobra's hood. "I am an open book before you, and I bid you read. *I am Vasanda.*"

He had paused. They had shuddered at the name; and the Tonkinese had smiled gently, very gently.

"Yes. I am Vasanda. I am the man who makes war on you French; *according to the way we make war.*"

Again he had smiled; and again the two Frenchmen had shuddered. For they had heard at the Coast about the way Vasanda, the Tonkinese outlaw--"patriot" he styled himself--made war.

The Tonkinese had bowed to the two Frenchmen.

"With your permission." He had squatted easily on his heels, and had lit a cigarette, first courteously offering his case to the two. Then he had continued. "I and my young men have again stepped on the path of strife. We have performed the proper ceremonies before the many shrines. We have laid naked blades on our shaven heads, thus symbolizing our voluntary renunciation of this life's vanities. We have offered rice and drink to the shades of the departed heroes who died for our land in the ancient days. We have consecrated our souls and our bodies to our people." Again he had smiled, a boyish, impish smile. "But it appears that prayers and the laying of blades on shaven heads do not purchase the rifles and ammunition the French are using.

"Yet there is a shipment of such weapons waiting for me somewhere"--he had made a vague, circular gesture--"but the payment demanded for these so necessary weapons is exorbitant. Also the foreigner who has the weapons demands gold. A cursed swine he, who will be born again in the bodies of noisome, crawling insects for many lives to come. But gold he demands, and gold he shall get. It is an easy matter. You may consider it as done."

He, Gautier, had then regained part of his wits.

He had spoken with a suspicion of arrogance.

"What have we got to do with it all, Vasanda?"

"Everything, my master, everything. Because, look you: you will supply the gold. You do not believe me? Behold. I will show you."

He had lit another cigarette, swaying gently from side to side, to ease the strain on his heels.

He had proceeded to explain that he knew all about their little expedition. How they had visited the court of Bah-ngoh, the great king of the interior, who, short of cash because of his latest fantastic harem extravagancies, had been forced to part with his famed one hundred-carat pink diamond "The Star of the Middle Kingdom"; how even before leaving the Coast they had made arrangements with the Australian agent to sell the stone to him for five million francs--ten times the sum which they'd pay for the stone; how they had completed their transaction in the interior and were now returning to the Coast with the stone.

Gautier had looked wild-eyed. He had stammered.

"You--you want--the stone--*the stone*----"

He had taken the diamond from an inner pocket, clutching it madly to his breast as a mother clutches her first-born when fever stalks through the land. The light of the camp fire had mirrored a thousandfold in the facetings of the diamond, like countless, intersecting rainbows; endless, zigzag

flashings of electric blue and deep rose and keen, arrogant emerald-green; like the shooting of dragon-flies and purple-winged tropical moths.

But Vasanda had only smiled and waved the stone away.

"No, no. By the lives of the many Bodhisats! I do not wish your plaything.

They had felt relieved at such altruism. But a moment later their relief had changed into impotent hatred and rage.

Vasanda had risen to his full height. There was a look in his oblique eyes as sharp and clear as edges of splintered glass. His voice had lost its gentle, soothing quality. He was now speaking with harsh-riveting emphasis.

"What good is the stone to me? I cannot eat it. I cannot drink it. I cannot kill with it. I am not a woman of the inner bazaars to long for scented hair oil and jewels. Neither could I sell it. For behold: the stone is known. Also is it known who bought it. The Australian agent waits for it now, there, at the Coast." He had pointed to the East, into the silent, brooding jungle. "He is waiting; and he is waiting to pay--five million francs. He will pay it to the one of you two who brings the stone. Such was your agreement. For, careful men, you considered the possibility of one of you dying of fever. An unhealthy land this!" He had smiled. "And so it will be. One of you will go to the Coast with the stone. He will go unharmed, peaceful. I myself shall show him the right way. He will give the stone to the Australian and receive the money--in gold. Then he will return to a place which I shall appoint, with the gold. The other--I shall hold him as hostage. He shall be honorably treated. For thirty days I shall hold him. For thirty days I shall wait for the return of the first-- with the gold. And then, if he does not return with the gold, also if he should play false and talk to the French--and remember that I have many spies--I shall kill the hostage." His voice had again been very soft and gentle. "I shall kill him slowly. Oh, so very slowly. There shall be no hurry. The first day I shall cut off an ear and the next day his tongue. Perhaps. A matter of choice, my friends, of the moment's inspiration. A little bit of his throbbing body cut off to-day, another to-morrow. Thus for two weeks. Perhaps three. It depends upon the vitality of the man who is being killed. You both look strong and healthy. You would last a long time under the little knives. Raw wounds, my friends, remember that. Also there

will be insects, the flying cockroaches and the bramras which follow the smell of blood and festering flesh. Also there will be ants, many ants, and a thin river of honey to show them the trail."

He had lit another cigarette. He had yawned. Then he had continued.

"Consider. One goes to the Coast. The other remains as my guest. It has been told me that you two love each other with the love of twin brothers. Thus I believe that he who goes to the Coast will return--with the gold. It is a safe gamble. I give you two hours to decide which one of you two shall go, and which one shall stay behind. Remember the little knives--and the little ants which follow the trail of the honey----"

The Tonkinese had bowed and stepped back into the black jungle.

And now the two hours were nearly over.

Vasanda had said that they loved each other with the love of twin brothers. It was true.

They had visited the same school in Paris. They had been *copains de lycee*; roommates, class-mates, bench-mates during the long plastic years of childhood and youth. They had served in the same regiment, at Tours. They had sown their wild oats along parallel lines. No woman had even come between them. They had been apprentices, then clerks in the same office. Finally they had established themselves in business as partners. They bought and sold precious stones.

They were the best of friends. They knew that their mutual liking and friendship, their trust in each other, their combined honest, square-souled decency and strength was a solid edifice which sheltered them against petty jealousy and envy.

When they had gone to Tonkin to buy jewels, they had done so eagerly, expectantly. A little adventure, they thought; a ray of vivid tropical light to break into the complacency of their home business. And they had done mighty well in the Far East during the two years of their stay.

Finally had come their chance to buy and sell "The Star of the Middle Kingdom," the famed pink diamond which had been the dream of every jeweler for three generations. It had been a big, promising chance; and they had gone after it with the enthusiasm of youth.

Yes. They knew each other well. *And they knew that each knew the other as well as he knew himself, and that their characters, their virtues and their shortcomings, were exactly the same.* And so, when Vasanda had come to them out of the jungle they felt suddenly as choked in mephitic air. The thought of the unspoken, half-formed desires in their hearts stretched before them as a boundless bog.

For, knowing each other so well, they also knew that the foul tropics had bred in each the sordid love of gain, the cruel ruthlessness of desire. They knew that, though enigmatic and close-hidden, there was yet in both their hearts that grim craving after money--hard and merciless as a bitter-cored stone fruit.

Friends? Why of course they were friends. But then they had lived in the tropics for two years, breathing, thinking, eating, drinking the poison of the yellow lands. There was the chance to reach the coast--with the stone--and then the Australian agent--the gold--and over there, across the way, was Paris.

Friendship? Duty of friendship?

If friendship it was, it was a friendship of their own making--of their own unmaking, if they wished. So they thought, and each could read the other as an open book. For they were friends who loved and knew each other as twin brothers rocked in the same cradle.

One would go to the coast--to bring the gold. The other would stay behind as a hostage--and there were the little knives and the ants which always follow the honey trail.

And suddenly they knew, both knew, that the one who would go to the coast would never, never come back. For there were five million francs in gold--

and back yonder was France, Paris, home--and the chance, the lovable, damnable chance!

Suddenly Durand laughed--that dry, harsh laugh of his--and he threw a greasy pack of playing cards into the circle of meager light which came from the little camp fire.

"Let the cards decide, old friend," he shouted. "The loser stays; the winner goes to the Coast. And he returns here with the gold--inside of thirty days. It is understood, is it not, *mon vieux*?"

And again he laughed his cracked, high-pitched laugh.

"Of course," Gautier replied. "The winner comes back with the gold--inside of thirty days."

But he could not look into Durand's eyes, nor could Durand look into his.

"One hand of poker! Draw to your cards and show-down!" cried Durand.

Anatole Gautier picked up the deck. He shuffled, slowly, mechanically, his thoughts far away, at the Coast. Suddenly it seemed to him that his brain was frantically telegraphing to his fingers. A fit of nerves? No, no. He looked at his hands. They were shuffling; shuffling in a perfectly normal, perfectly steady manner. It wasn't nerves. Still his brain kept telegraphing, and he kept watching the motions of his fingers--and then he saw that his second finger and thumb had shuffled the ace of clubs to the bottom of the deck.

Had he done it on purpose? He wondered. All his life he had amused his friends with card tricks. He reflected. There was the Coast. There was the stone. There was the gold. There was Paris. And here was the stinking, festering jungle--the Tonkinese-- Vasanda--the little knives--and the ants--the ants.

Another ace joined the first at the bottom of the deck--the third--the fourth.

Then the harsh, jarring, arrogant voice of Jean Durand.

"Deal! Damn you, deal! You'll shuffle all the spots from the cards." Gautier was about to shuffle again. But the other stopped him with a savage gesture. "No, no, no. Don't you dare shuffle them again."

Gautier cleared a little space on the ground with the point of his shoe. The dead leaves stirred with a dry, rasping sound. Something slimy and phosphorous-green was rapidly squirming away.

"Cut, Durand."

He put the cards down between them, on the ground. The other was calmly lighting a cigarette, making no attempt to cut the deck. Gautier spoke again. There was entreaty, supplication, despair in his tense, strained voice.

"Cut, Jean! Cut, for the love of God!"

The sweat was pouring from his face. Little luminous blue spots were dancing in front of his eyes. Something like a gigantic sledgehammer was striking at the base of his skull. His blood throbbed thickly in his veins. His hands seemed swollen out of proportion.

"Cut!" he cried again.

Durand laughed at him with a mad, demoniac light in his beady eyes. He laughed.

"No! Deal them as they lay. I shan't cut. You are too anxious for me to cut. *Too anxious*. No, no. Deal, and be damned to you!"

Gautier dealt. And mechanically, even as he was watching them, his fingers gave to himself five cards from the bottom of the deck. Four of them were aces. The fifth was the queen of hearts.

Durand picked up his hand. He looked at it. He laughed again.

"Give me two cards, Anatole. I'm going to take a chance. I have a hunch that I'll win."

Gautier studied his own hand. Four aces--and the queen of hearts. The queen of hearts! He would never forget that red queen. She seemed to smile at him. A sardonic grin was on her silly, painted lips.

The queen of hearts! Of course he would discard her. Might as well make the other believe that he had bought one of the aces. So he discarded the queen. She fell face upward. The wind carried her a little to one side--a little away from the circle of light--over to where Durand was sitting.

But still Gautier could see the mocking smile on her painted lips.

Then he dealt. Two cards to Durand, one to himself.

There was a short, tense silence. Durand was studying his hand. He looked up and stared at Gautier. Gautier felt embarrassed. Did the other suspect him? Now was the time to act, to act well, to simulate surprise. He looked away from the other. He studied his hand; he studied it again and again as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

Then he gave a mad shriek of joy.

"I win! I win! Four aces! By the Madonna, four aces!"

And he threw his hand on the ground, face up.

Durand picked it up. He examined the cards one by one.

"One--two--three --four --four aces." His voice was thick, choked.

Then he studied his own cards. Again and again. Beyond the feathery tops of the trees a haggard morning sun was rising. A flickering, pale-yellow ray fell on Durand's face. It looked drawn and green.

Suddenly a change came over him. He straightened himself up. He rose.

At the same moment, Vasanda stepped out of the jungle. He bowed deeply, courteously.

"You have decided?" he asked in his gentle sing-song.

"Yes." It was Durand who spoke. "I stay with you. Gautier goes to the Coast. He returns here with the gold--inside of thirty days." He broke into his dry, harsh, high-pitched cackle. "He returns here with the gold--with the gold--with the gold! *Au revoir, mon ami.*"

He did not offer to shake hands. He bowed mockingly. He was about to go. Suddenly he noticed that the cards were still clasped in his hand--the cards were losing cards which had cost him fortune and life.

He threw them on the ground, in front of Gautier, face up. A second later, he was gone.

Anatole Gautier looked dazed. It seemed to him that he had lived through all this before. In a former life? Yes. It must have been in a former life, a former incarnation.

He remembered the whole scene, every single detail.

But wait, wait! There had been a difference. What was it? He thought and thought and thought.

Then doubt came into his soul. Had it really all happened in a former incarnation? Had it not been in this life; twenty years ago? Old memories flashed up in red streaks.

Yes. Twenty years ago. He remembered the whole scene. But there was a difference, a little difference.

Suddenly he knew. He knew where the difference was. There, in that scene of his dead life, Durand had gone into the jungle. Of course. He had lost. He had seen the four aces; a nearly unbeatable hand. And then he had laughed. But he had torn the cards into small pieces; he had thrown the pieces into the dying camp fire!

And here--here were the cards, whole, face up. He looked at them. He studied them. It was a heart flush--up to the queen.

The queen of hearts.

But he remembered that he himself had discarded that same identical queen of hearts. A gust of wind had carried the bit of pasteboard a little to one side, to where Durand was sitting. Had then Durand cheated? Had he picked up the card to make his flush?

Gautier trembled in every limb. He called after the other.

"Durand! Oh, Durand!"

The other turned and looked at him, questioningly.

Gautier stared. He rubbed his eyes. But this was not Durand at all. This was Jenkinson, the American, his friend. And the other, the Tonkinese by his side. Why it was Lee Mon-Kau, the Chinaman with the long, gold-encased fingernails, and the heavy-lidded purple-black eyes.

Suddenly the whole scene flashed up. He remembered. Why, yes--this was Paris--his home; and he had arranged it all; he and his two friends: Thomas Jenkinson, the big, good-natured, slightly sarcastic American, and Lee Mon Kau, the Chinaman. Yes. Together they had arranged it all. He, Anatole Gautier himself, had coached the American in the sound of Durand's voice . . . he himself; because he wanted to get an actual picture, an actual moment of his dead life, visualized once again, lived once again. Of course it sounded real. Jenkinson did remarkably well. Jenkinson should have been an actor. . . .

And of course the atmosphere, the carefully staged, carefully prepared atmosphere of the room made the whole cursed impression more real than ever. Florist and painter and decorator had joined hands to change the large living room of his house into a bit of Tonkinese jungle. Even the moist heat had been faithfully reproduced. Also there was the incense; that mad, blue-clouded Indian incense in the jeweled silver censer, breath-clogging, mind-choking. And the acting--the acting! Yes, yes--he remembered it all!

He turned on Jenkinson. He spoke with a thick, angry voice.

"You--why didn't you do as I told you? Why didn't you tear up the cards as Durand did? As he did twenty years ago? Look--look--you picked up the

queen of hearts from the discard. You cheated. And Durand did not cheat. It was I who cheated. I who killed my friend. Durand did not cheat."

He broke into a paroxysm of tears.

Lee Mon Kau smiled. He opened the windows. A gust of fresh clean air came from the garden.

Jenkinson put his hand on the Frenchman's shoulder.

"Yes. Durand tore up the cards. So you told me. But then, my friend, how do you know? You did not see his hand. He might have cheated. Eh? He might have cheated.

Gautier looked up. He spoke mechanically, stupidly.

"He might have cheated." Again and again he said it. "He might have cheated. He might have cheated."

And suddenly, with a great throaty cry of relief, he fell on his knees. He raised his hands above his head.

"Thank God, thank God!" he shouted. "He might have cheated!"

And he dropped on the ground in a swoon.

Sand and Diamonds By Victor Rousseau



Like ghosts of the night, Rawlins and Simons, of the Bechuanaland Mounted, melted forever into the ominous maw of Ngami

LIEUTENANT CONNELL, of the Bechuanaland Mounted Police, South Africa, frowned as Sergeant Luke Evans stepped into the office of the barracks at Boskop.

"Read that, Evans!" He tossed a telegram across the table to the sergeant, who picked it up and read:

Kiss Boskop good-bye for me. Not coming back. Johannesburg's as fine as ever. Rawlins.

The sergeant raised his eyebrows.

"You think Rawlins has deserted the Force, too, sir, like--"

"Like Simons? What do you think, Evans? You knew Simons and Rawlins intimately. Each of them was sent to patrol the Ngami district. A week or two later each of them sends an impudent wire in turn, announcing his desertion."

"I don't believe either of them deserted, sir, or sent that wire."

"What is your theory, then? Who sent that wire from Johannesburg in Rawlins's name, and who sent that one from Cape Town, signed Simons, telling us that he was sailing for England? What is there in the Ngami district?" he went on, without waiting for the sergeant's answer to his first question.

"Sand, baboons, thorn scrub, and thirst."

"You're right, Evans. You know the district as well as it can be known. A lot of it is included in that enormous block of land that old Duplessis holds, but it'll never see any humans except a few wandering Bushmen. Still, it's in our district, and--"

He paused. "You don't think Rawlins and Simons quit because they didn't want to patrol the desert, do you, Evans? You know the natives have queer stories about its being peopled by ghosts, and so on. Of course that wouldn't have scared our men. Still, when a man's been riding week after week with only thirst for a companion..."

"I want you to go up there at once," Connell finished abruptly. "Report back to me after you've thoroughly covered the district. Try to get on the tracks of Simon and Rawlins, that's to say, learn whether they actually went to the Ngami or not. And don't you send me a wire from down country telling me that you've deserted, because I won't believe it."

He grinned at Evans, who grinned back at him. No one would believe that of Sergeant Evans, with five wounds and half-a-dozen medals gained on the battlefields of France.

"You'd best start right away," continued Connell. "And when you reach old Duplessis's farm stop in and pay him your respects. We've got to keep in with him, however much he hates us."

Evans was just at the door when Connell called after him:

"I wish we could get hold of old Pete Flanagan. If any man knows the Ngami from end to end it's Pete. Haven't heard anything of him of late, have you, Evans?"

"Haven't seen or heard of him for months, Lieutenant. I s'pose he's off looking for more of those diamond mines."

The other nodded, and Evans left the office. His preparations were simple, and occupied almost no time at all. Into his saddle-bags he stuffed a few tins of bully beef, a quantity of flour, a small bottle of effervescent saline, as a substitute for yeast, and a roll of sun-dried beef, biltong, of the appearance and consistency of blackened sole-leather. In addition he took tea, matches, sugar, salt, and a quantity of compressed vegetables. He had also a double billy, for cooking, two large water-flasks, and, besides his service revolver, a carbine, grounded in the leather bucket that was suspended from the off side of his saddle.

Three miles down-hill from the police post lay the settlement of Boskop. It consisted of the usual large market square, common to all South African towns, and three or four wide streets criss-crossing each other at right angles, lined with one-story brick buildings roofed with galvanized iron; stores, old clothes shops, and "ice-cold drinks" emporiums devoted to the native trade.

All about lay the half-desert country, at present a uniform brown, though when the rains began--if they began--it would be transformed almost overnight into an expanse of emerald. The *spruits* would run water, the empty dams and cisterns would be brimming, crops would be sown--if the rains came.

Boskop was on the fringe of the desert. Usually the four months' downpour materialized in Boskop. Sometimes it did not. It never rained in the Ngami

country, over beyond the fringe of *kopjes* on the horizon, or only enough to maintain the stunted thorn scrub that dotted the land like the wool fibres on a native's head.

That was Luke's destination, a land where no one lived except the wandering Bushman and his cousin, the baboon. A few had traversed it, among them Pete Flanagan, the oldest and most sanguine diamond prospector in the district. According to Pete, the Ngami region was thickly sprinkled with diamond "pipes," the volcanic outlets in which the stones were made. Pete's volubility had long since been discouraged, and nowadays it was only under the stimulus of a few drinks that he would repeat the old story for the amusement of his entertainers. For some time past nothing had been seen of the old man.

Diamonds had been found near Boskop. Twenty miles away two men, Hart and Van Reenen, had found stones two years before. A rush had followed, but the supply had proved to be only a single pocket.

Hart was the district money-lender, and had his hands on everything negotiable. Van Reenen was his chief satellite, an adventurer who was probably wanted under various aliases in many parts of the country.

Sergeant Luke rode through Boskop, past the line of stores, with their crowds of chattering natives pawing over the second-hand clothes and bargaining with the gesticulating proprietors; past the market square, with its few teams of longhorns inspanned to heavy Dutch wagons, out into the land beyond. Just on the other side of the town was Jacob's Hotel, Hart's headquarters.

On the *stoep* Sergeant Luke saw Hart sitting, tilted back in his chair, his thumbs in his armholes. Though it was not yet noon he was already drunk. He sprawled there, a drunken blotch in the sun, fanned by a Sechuana boy with a palm leaf. Upon the little table at his elbow stood a bottle of whiskey, and a tumbler, half-full.

Seated beside him, leaning forward and gesticulating, was "Baldy" Smith, one of Hart's crowd, and one of the hard characters left stranded in Boskop

after the diamond rush had petered out and the disgruntled prospectors had removed to other haunts.

Inside the store adjacent to the hotel Sergeant Luke saw the mean, wizened face of Jacobs as he bent over a roll of cloth from which he was measuring a short yard for a colored woman.

"Hello, Sergeant!" called Hart from his chair, as Luke rode up. "Looks like you're starting off on patrol somewhere. Going to meet Rawlins, I suppose, and bring him back with you?"

Luke saw the furtive glance that "Baldy" Smith shot at the other. Hart's gross face assumed an expression of infantile blandness.

For the first time the idea came into Luke's brain that Hart might know something about the two troopers' disappearance. But though the police had proved a thorn in Hart's side, notably in curbing some of the grosser evils of frontier life in whose existence Hart was pecuniarily interested, he could not imagine that Hart had been so mad as to set himself in open opposition to the Force.

The sudden impulse was killed by the flash of reason.

"Maybe," Luke answered non-committally. "I hear Van Reenen's left town," he continued casually.

Hart guffawed. "Oh, yes, after big game, sergeant. Him and old Duplessis have gone after a herd of springbok out in the Ngami."

This speech gave Luke food for thought. Prodigious herds of these antelopes migrate periodically through the desert regions, armies of several hundred thousand sometimes covering hundreds of miles on those strange *treks* that are the peculiar characteristic of this animal. Luke knew that old Duplessis's passion for hunting was almost on a par with his hatred of Englishmen--one of his two dominant passions, in fact.

Still Luke also was aware that Hart and Duplessis were at odds. Hart held a mortgage on the old man's lands and was pressing him hard. Three thousand

morgen--six thousand acres of the old Dutchman's holdings--were fair ranching land, and worth all that Hart had advanced on the total, composed preponderatingly of thorn scrub. Duplessis had acted queerly in going off hunting with the associate of his bitterest enemy.

"So?" Luke commented. "Well, so long, Hart."

He touched the reins and the stocky Basuto pony set off upon his tireless gait, known as the "triple," which bore a close resemblance to that of a rocking-chair.

Hart and Baldy watched him till he had disappeared below the dip of the road. Jacobs came out of the store and joined them. The three broke into guffaws.

"Another of them damn policemen on the trail," said the hotel-keeper. "One arter another, like flies going into a jam-trap."

Hart cursed volubly. "That'll be the last," he said. "We've got to make that clean-up and get down country in the next two weeks now, or hell won't have nothing on Bechuanaland for hotness."

Baldy grinned at his employer. "Don't worry, Hart," he answered. "Well pick him up where we landed the other two."

"How about wiring one of our agents to send another telegram?" suggested Hart, turning to Jacobs.

"Give 'um time. We'll wire the post from Kimberley arter we git there."

"I'll leave that part to you, Jacobs." Hart leaned back in his chair, drained the glass of whiskey, and cursed the boy with the fan in Zulu, the lingua franca of the country.

"Get on the job, Baldy," he told his henchman.

He uttered a grunt of satisfaction as he saw Baldy riding back into town a few minutes later.

"Well," he said to Jacobs, "we've got that feller Evans, and we'll worry along for two weeks more without any more damn policemen mixing in."

The hotel-keeper's face took on a saturnine expression.

"If Van Reenen don't spill the beans by fooling with that Duplessis girl," he observed.

"Hell!" exploded Hart. "I've warned him that this is business."

"Well, Van Reenen ain't the kind of man who keeps his pleasure and his business separate enough," responded Jacobs.

CHAPTER II -- *Into the Desert*

AS he rode on toward the desert through the scorching sunlight Sergeant Luke was anticipating his reception at the Duplessis farm with mixed feelings.

The farm was some sixty miles from Boskop, on the very fringe of the desert, a goodish way, but only a day's journey for one of the hardy native horses such as he rode. Here years before Jan Duplessis had built up a flourishing ranch, with a string of dams fed by a *spruit* in the wet season, and substantial enough to defy the eight months of drouth that succeeded it.

Of course there would be a welcome for him, a meal, coffee, a bed if he cared to stay. No South African would deny that even to his bitterest enemy without feeling himself disgraced forever, provided he came with the necessary emblem of respectability--to wit, a horse. The horseless white man would be invited to eat alone and sleep among the natives.

Sergeant Luke had met pretty Emmy Duplessis several times. She always had a smile and a blush for him, which had sometimes made him dream of the date of his discharge, when, with his savings and a small legacy that had come to him, he meant to take up land and start out for himself with a small flock of sheep.

On the other hand, Jan Duplessis's reception of him had been, to say the least, devoid of warmth. The old man, who came of an old Boer family with a strain of French Huguenot blood, had always been an irreconcilable enemy of the British. He had migrated to the edge of the desert after the War, a generation before, and vowed that no Englishman should cross his threshold again. If time and circumstance had forced him to modify that vow he none the less retained his ancient prejudices. As he had told Sergeant Luke the last time he had visited the ranch-house:

"I've got nothing against you as a man, Sergeant. But I won't have any *verdommte Engelsmans* buzzing around my girl. When, she marries it will be one of our own people."

Luke had wondered if the old man was thinking of Van Reenen. Adventurer as the fellow was, he had a superficial air of breeding, and was insinuating enough to have acquired a certain ascendancy over the simple-minded old farmer, in spite of his being Hart's right-hand man. Besides, two almost rainless seasons succeeding each other had brought the Duplessis ranch to the verge of ruin, and Duplessis might have hoped to win favor with Van Reenen with the idea of placating Hart, who held the mortgage.

At any rate, Van Reenen, as Duplessis's son-in-law, would probably avert ruin. Luke thought that Emmy had hinted as much the last time they had met, when there were tears in her eyes, but he had not felt justified in speaking to the girl then--not without his discharge in his pocket.

The sergeant decided not to make the ranch-house that night, with a view to saving his horse for the long desert marches that were to come. When the sun dipped under the horizon, and darkness was a matter of minutes he off-saddled, knee-haltered the animal, built a little fire of dead branches of thorn, and cooked his supper. He rolled up in his blanket, and was asleep almost immediately.

He was astir at sunrise, shivering in the icy wind that would change to a burning sirocco inside of two hours. He upsaddled after a breakfast of coffee, *biltong*, and a couple of cakes made hastily on the ashes of his fire, and rode on at a leisurely gait. Time had lost much of its meaning for him in those wastes. He calculated on striking the Duplessis ranch about mid-afternoon.

All that morning he rode steadily. A bite of lunch, and on again through the heat of the afternoon. The line of *kopjes* marking the fringe of the desert loomed nearer. Now he was among them, low, single hills emerging from the plain, their tops heaped fantastically with boulders, and crowned with solitary cacti. Baboons barked at him and scampered away as he threaded the narrow cart track that at last emerged into the Duplessis ranch, the last outpost of civilization.

Luke saw the homestead in the far distance set beside the series of great dams, around which the thirsty cattle crowded under the grateful shade of the immense eucalyptus trees. Reaching the cluster of native huts two miles from the house Sergeant Luke was surprised to discover that they were empty. In place of the smiling, native women, eternally washing rags or sweeping the mud floors, was solitude.

The sergeant pulled in sharply. He shouted, but there came no answer.

This wholesale abandonment of the native quarters meant that something untoward had happened. He spurred his horse up past the dams, in which a little water still remained, and dismounted at the entrance to the *stoep*, throwing the reins.

He strode up and hammered on the door. No sound came from the house, which was already in the long shadows cast by the *kopjes*. There was no sign of life anywhere.

Luke tried the door and found that it was open. He stamped inside, calling. No sound came but the echo of his own voice.

The big living-room, which Emmy had furnished tastefully from Cape Town was in disorder. The rugs were disarranged, the table pushed into a

corner, three chairs overturned, Indication were that a struggle had taken place.

What had happened? A marauding raid, from some wandering tribes? The natives had been at peace for years, and, if such a thing had happened, old Duplessis would not have been caught napping.

Sergeant Luke strode through the house, shouting. He stopped. He thought that he heard a moaning sound in answer.

He stepped into the kitchen and called again. This time he heard the answering moan distinctly. It came from a small cellar that Duplessis had hollowed out for a larder.

Luke made his way down the rickety wooden stairs. Hams and dried peaches hung from the roof of the little place, barrels of flour and crates of groceries were ranged along the sides.

The moaning came from a far corner. Fighting down his terror, the sergeant made his way there.

He was conscious of intense relief. Among a heap of old rags and rubbish he saw the wizened body and monkey-like face of old Jantje, Miss Emmy's Hottentot body-servant. The Hottentot, being of a higher or more adaptable mentality than the negro, is usually attached to the house in a personal capacity, generally as groom. Jantje had always accompanied Miss Emmy when she went abroad. He had been with her since she was a baby.

The sergeant saw that the yellow man was unconscious, though he was moaning. He had been shot or stabbed. His rags were streaked and stained with blood. Stooping, he raised the man in his arms and carried him up to the living-room. A quick examination showed that Jantje had been shot twice in the head. Both bullets had glanced off his forehead without shattering the bone, but had traveled around the scalp, causing considerable loss of blood.

Administering water and binding up his wounds, Luke soon had the Tottie restored to consciousness. Jantje recognized him and sat up, jabbering

incoherently in Dutch.

"Where's Miss Emmy?" demanded Luke in the same language.

"That devil-man Van Reenen take her. She fight. No good. Plenty mans along with Van Reenen," Jantje muttered with an effort.

"When? Tell me all that happened as quick as you can!" Luke cried.

Jantje seemed to pull himself together. "Yesterday afternoon Van Reenen come and tell Baas Jan there's a big herd of springbok out in the Ngami country. Baas Jan go mad. He stuff a roll of *biltong* into his saddlebag, strap on bandolier, take his rifle, and jump on his horse. In five minutes they both gone together toward the Ngami."

"Go on!"

"Last night late Van Reenen come back, with him that man Brouwer Miss Emmy always scared of and two more. Van Reenen say Baas Jan fell off his horse and hurt himself. Miss Emmy to go back with him while Brouwer ride for the doctor. Miss Emmy is getting ready when I tell her Van Reenen is lying. Then she says she won't go.

"She asks questions and sees that Van Reenen is lying. He catches hold of her, and she fights him. I ran to get gun to shoot them, but Van Reenen shot me in the head twice and I fell down. They thought I was dead because I lay still. They carried me downstairs and threw me into a corner. When they were gone I tried to get up, but I remembered nothing more till you came, Baas Luke."

"Where have they taken her?"

"Into the Ngami. They doing something there, I don't know what."

"Jantje, I'm going to leave for there at once. As soon as you are able, hurry to the police camp and tell Lieutenant Connell.

"No use, baas. Too long. Jantje go with you. White man cannot follow their *spoor* through the desert without Tottie man. We go together. See, Jantje

strong now."

Making a great effort, the little yellow man got on his feet and stood looking up into the sergeant's face with a twisted grin.

"Jantje strong now. No time to go back to police camp for help when that devil-man and his other devil-mans have got Miss Emmy."

CHAPTER III -- *The Valley of Ghosts*

SERGEANT LUKE reflected quickly. He decided that the Hottentot's advice was sound. It would be hopeless for any white man to attempt to follow the tracks of horses through the scrub and over the sun-baked ground. Only a Hottentot or a Bushman could do that.

He realized that Hart and the rest of his crew had been in the conspiracy. Hart had told him that Van Reenen had invited Jan Duplessis to accompany him on the hunting trip several hours before the invitation had actually been extended. Hart must, therefore, have known of Van Reenen's intention.

"But can you travel?" Luke asked the Tottie.

"You feed horse; when you finished, Jantje strong again."

Luke knew enough of the recuperative powers of the natives to believe that Jantje would prove as good as his word. In spite of the urgent need of haste, he must feed his horse, also pack some oats on his saddle; he had intended to procure a small sack at the Duplessis ranch in any event. He offsaddled the animal, watered him, and fed him in the stable, where he filled a small sack with oats, which he strapped to the saddle. A handful or two a day would sufficiently supplement what the hardy little beast could pick up in the desert.

Jantje, meanwhile, had proceeded to dig a small tunnel, about nine inches long, in the hard ground outside the house. Kindling a handful of a native herb in one end, he ran a quill through the opening and inhaled the smoke until the last embers had burned away. Then, bleary-eyed and choking but apparently quite restored to strength by the drug, a species of hemp, he sauntered up to the sergeant, who was ready for the journey.

"You get a horse, Jantje?"

"Me go on foot."

It had grown dark, but there was a brilliant moon which shed a bright light over the face of the country. Luke let his horse proceed at its comfortable triple. Jantje ran beside it like a dog, picking up the *spoor* of the horses as rapidly as was necessary. An hour or two passed, during which Jantje changed the course two or three times, before Luke reined in.

"Jantje, you say Van Reenen and his gang are doing something out in the Ngami country?" he asked. "What is it?"

Jantje only clicked gutturally in answer.

"Are they on Baas Duplessis's land?"

"All his land everywhere."

Luke knew that the old Boer's holdings covered an immense extent of territory. Like the old-fashioned men of his nation he lived in dread of being crowded by his neighbors, and being crowded, in the Boer idea, is being able to see the smoke of your neighbor's chimney anywhere from your property. The land in question had been purchased from a native chief years before at about a penny for ten acres.

They went on steadily, while the terrain grew rougher, threading deep defiles among the *kopjes*. Luke did not know whether Jantje was following the tracks all the way, or whether he had only divined the direction that the kidnapers had taken. It was well on toward morning when he told Luke that they were ready to camp for the remainder of the night.

Luke knew that there was water here and there in the Ngami, and his patrol route was mapped out to enable him to halt at various pools that never ran quite dry, being fed by subterranean streams. Here, however, being off his course, he was trusting entirely to Jantje. He was about to drink from his water-bottle when the Tottie signed to him to put it away, and disappeared with a guttural warning.

Ten minutes later he was back with an armful of wild melons, bitter gourds with roots that extended twenty or thirty feet below the ground and tapped the subterranean water supply. The horse devoured them greedily, and Luke, scooping out the pulp, as he had learned to do on patrol, quenched his thirst.

He dozed at intervals during the remainder of the night, feverishly impatient to get on, yet knowing that in the desert it is literally a case of the more haste the less speed. His mind was tortured with fears for Emmy. He started up from an uneasy doze at dawn, to see Jantje on his hands and knees beside him, puffing at his remedial herb, while the billy boiled on the fire.

A feed for the horse, coffee made of the bitter fluid from the interior of the melons, and they were off again. Luke asked no more questions; he could see no trace of *spoor* upon the sun-baked ground, and it seemed impossible that the Tottie could be following one--yet as Jantje ran before him he scanned the ground ceaselessly, turning now to the right, now to the left.

All the morning they traveled through the howling desert of sand and stones, with here and there a stunted thorn or mimosa tree. At noon they halted.

"Van Reenen six hours ahead," the Tottie volunteered. "Another man join them an hour back."

"Let's push on!"

"When the afternoon grows cool, Baas."

Fuming, Luke was forced to acquiesce. He had only a little water left in one of the bottles, and the last of the melons was gone.

In mid-afternoon, when the sun's heat had begun almost imperceptibly to decline, they set off again.

This was the worst stage of the journey. It was less hot, but nevertheless an inferno. Luke had finished the water, of which the little dried-up Tottie had refused to drink. Jantje skipped agilely ahead of the panting horse, which labored over the stones of that desolate route. Not a vestige of vegetation was to be seen as they threaded their way from one shallow depression into another.

Toward sunset a line of *kopjes* sprang up suddenly before them. They were approaching them as the sun dipped under the edge of the sky.

"They go through there," said Jantje, indicating a narrow defile in front of them. "No go farther."

"What do you mean?"

"Ghosts walk in that valley, Baas. Tottie man no go on. Ghosts kill Tottie man, no harm white man."

Without much hope, knowing the strength of native superstitions, Luke tried to persuade his companion. The Hottentot, trembling and mute, refused to go farther. Not even for his beloved Miss Emmy would he enter the valley ahead, where he believed the spirits of the dead to dwell.

"All right, make camp," said Luke. "I'll go on. Wait here for me. You think they're in there, do you?"

"Three hours ago they pass here," said the Tottie. "Me wait, Baas."

Luke climbed back into his saddle and rode on into the defile. The sun was down by the time he reached it. The moon was already lighting up the dark sky. The chill night wind made the sergeant shiver after the heat of the day.

Reaching the crest of the narrow pass, Luke reined in and looked down into the valley beneath him. He was surprised to see that here the desert yielded to a long extent of densely set thorn scrub, indicating that there was water.

The entrance was a winding path hardly more than three yards across, between two massive walls of rock.

Luke dismounted to survey the valley in front of him the better. Leaving his horse he went on afoot for fifty--a hundred yards. It was surprising how long the defile was. At last, however, it ended abruptly in the large crater-like bowl of the valley.

Something glittering in the moonlight at his feet arrested his attention. Luke stooped and picked it up. It was a metal badge of the Bechuanaland Police. Attached to it were a few shreds of khaki tunic.

The discovery instantly put him on the alert. That badge must have been worn by either Simons or Rawlins. The presence of the shreds of cloth indicated that it had been torn by force from the wearer's shoulder.

One of his two men had been there, then. The little piece of metal spoke as clearly of foul play as if Luke had himself witnessed the scene. The trooper must have been murdered, and the badge thrown away by his murderer to prevent identification of the remains.

Half-involuntarily gripping his revolver, Luke began the descent of the little incline leading from the pass into the valley. He followed a narrow trail amid the thorn scrub. The discovery had accentuated Emmy's peril in his mind. He meant to solve the mystery before the night was much older.

He reached the level flat of the valley. In front of him two fallen trees formed a knee-high barrier, the trail winding around it. Luke stepped aside to follow it.

As he did so, the ground yielded underfoot. He felt himself falling, clutched at the surface of the ground, missed it, and went sliding down amid a shower of sand into emptiness.

CHAPTER IV -- *The Death Trap*

FOR just a few moments Luke lay unconscious, though this was more by reason of the swiftness and unexpectedness of the fall than from the depth into which he had fallen. Half-buried by the mass of sand that had accompanied him, and by the sandy bottom into which he had plunged, he finally struggled out, blowing the grains from his mouth and nostrils, and got upon his feet.

He saw that he was standing in a circular sandpit, not very much larger than a spacious room, and perhaps twenty to twenty-five feet deep. All around it rose the rock walls of soft, crumbly sandstone, emerging out of banks of shelving sand and gravel. The floor was strewn with masses of some substance gleaming white in the moonlight.

Assuring himself that he still had his revolver, and still under the impression that what had happened to him was no more than an accident, Luke made his way toward the wall. He looked about him for some means of ascent. He began to make a tour of the pit.

Presently he paused, turning his attention to the white things that he had seen on the floor. They were the bones of animals. Then he identified the place into which he had fallen. It was no natural pit, but a trap hollowed out by the Bushmen, perhaps a hundred, perhaps five hundred, years before. It was one of those pitfalls made by a whole generation of those indefatigable little hunters, in which they caught their game--the antelope, the bush-hog, even the elephant.

One might have expected the floor of the pit to be covered with bones, but the game had long since ceased to frequent that region, so that the greater part of the bones had pulverized and disintegrated, strewing the floor with silvery, glistening flakes.

At the farther side of the pit, however, a heap of fresh bones was gleaming white in the moonlight. As Luke approached them he started back at the sight of a glistening skull.

No skull of baboon, that--a human skull unmistakably. Piled up about it were the ribs, the long thigh-bones, the bones of human arms. Shreds of clothing still clung to this human framework. But it did not need the presence of those wisps of cloth, fluttering to and fro in the night wind, to tell Luke it was all that remained of Rawlins and Simons.

Now he began to realize that it was no accident, this fall of his into the sand-pit, but a cunning trap devised just at the spot where one who was unwarned must inevitably step into it. Caught in the same trap as himself, the skeletons of the two troopers lay hunched up together--but in horrible disarray.

Surely no man, however hard the death agony might have been, could have twisted his limbs like that . . . and that!

It looked as if ghouls had descended into the pit, and hacked the two troopers limb from limb. Even the bones were splintered and horribly mutilated. Yet surely no human fiend would have committed this sacrilege on men who were already dead.

No human fiend! The explanation came to Luke next moment when, from a little shallow recess at the base of the rocks behind the pile of bones, without a sound, a hideous shape launched itself at his throat.

It was a striped hyena, one of the few denizens of those wastes, which had fallen into the pit weeks before, and had gorged itself, like the vampire that this creature is, upon the bodies of the dead men. Now, famished by its long fast, and mad with terror, it had forgotten the instincts that make it the most cowardly of all the creatures of prey, the offal-eater that follows the lion to feast on what the killer leaves. Famished and desperate, the huge grey bulk launched itself at Luke's throat.

It was Luke's backward stumble over the heap of bones that saved him from the crunching jaws that snapped together as the lean shape shot past and over him. Before it had recovered itself Luke was upon his feet again. He turned to face it, and realized what it was.

Again the hyena leaped. Luke's revolver barked too late. The bullet, shot without aiming, merely glanced off the great dome of the rounded skull. The weapon was knocked from Luke's hand as the beast shot past him again, the outward thrust of its feet sending him sprawling.

Luke scrambled desperately to his feet. At its next spring, quick as a flash, the monster smashed against Luke's body. Both went sprawling to the floor of the pit. There ensued a nightmare of struggle.

With the fetid breath of the foul animal nauseating and choking him, Luke managed to get a grip on the upper and lower jaws, wrenching and straining to get the head back and dislocate the vertebrae. Man and beast rolled over and over among the bones, but Luke never relaxed his hold.

Failing to break the shaggy neck, fortified with its masses of matted hair, Luke suddenly shifted his grasp and caught the hyena by the throat. There he clung, with the jaws spouting venom over him, and the great body threshing in an agony of pain.

Beaten almost into unconsciousness by the monster's convulsive struggles, dashed to and fro across the heaps of bleaching bones, Luke never relaxed his hold. At length the struggles of the beast grew fainter.

With the last power of his muscles Luke tightened his grip to the uttermost, flinging the entire weight and tension of his body into that grip of his hands, till, after a convulsive shudder, the creature ceased to struggle.

Staggering to his feet, the sergeant found his revolver, and extinguished the remnants of life with a bullet through the brain.

He sank back exhausted. With reviving strength there came to him again the problem of escape. He began circling the pit, seeking an egress. His attempts to scramble up the side merely precipitated the fall of a cloud of sand. There was no niche in the soft rock in which he could set his foot. An attempt to hack a foothold with his jack-knife broke away the crumbling surface of the rock as fast as he indented it.

It was maddening to be trapped like that, with the upper ground and the thorn scrub clearly visible in the light of the moon. Sometimes Luke would manage to win a few feet upward, and clinging there like a fly on a wall, would work with infinite care to carve out a foot rest a little above him. With four or five such niches he could attain the surface. Just when hope began to rise the rock would crumble. Losing his balance he would roll over and over into the heap of bones beneath.

Time and again Luke tried, while the night wore on, doggedly, desperately, and always in vain. As he realized the hopeless nature of his situation it became difficult to preserve his sanity, to check an impulse to hurl himself against those walls and beat his fists against them.

There was a brief interval when he did yield to this weakness. He pictured Emmy in the power of Van Reenen and realized that, come what might, he could hardly hope to save her.

There was another interval when, lying exhausted among the bones in the moonless second half of the night, he heard the jingle of horses' bits above him, the creak of leather, the voices of men.

He sprang to his feet and stumbled forward, shouting for aid. Mocking laughter came back to him from the edge of the pit. He recognized Hart's voice.

"Hello, sergeant," called the other. "Met Rawlins yet?"

Hoarse guffaws of mirth met this sally. Looking up, Luke distinguished two or three other horsemen dimly outlined at Hart's side.

"Looks pretty, Rawlins does, eh, sergeant?" Hart shouted. "That feller without the head is Simons. Hyenas got into the pit and made a meal of him. They'll be coming back for you, sergeant."

With a shout of fury Luke loosed a shot into the dark. He heard cries of alarm. The figures disappeared abruptly.

"Put up that gun!" he heard Hart yelling. "We ain't going to shoot the feller. Let him stew there in the sun tomorrer. Good-bye, sergeant," he called mockingly. "We'll be back to see you when the hyenas and the ants have picked you clean. You'll look as pretty as Rawlins and Simons, sergeant."

More guffaws, and the cavalcade receded into the darkness. Luke raged to and fro like the trapped beast that he was, till at last he succumbed to utter weariness.

Dawn came, in splendor of red and gold, across the desert. The sun rose. Luke made another survey of his prison. With the new day his sanity had come back to him. Everywhere were the same walls of sandstone and the loose sand.

He spent the morning in a succession of dogged attempts to scale the walls. At last he gave up hope, sat down in the bottom of the pit, and awaited the inevitable.

Rawlins and Simons must have made the same efforts too, builded the same hopes, and sunk back into the same despair.

He knew he would not have very long to wait. As the incredible heat of the desert sun beat down upon his head he felt his senses leaving him. He heard himself babbling. He had a curious sense of being two persons, the one collected and resigned, watching and listening to the other one, demented, now raging to and fro, now sunk upon the floor among the bones and calling Emmy's name.

How quiet that other man was lying at last! The thirst that filled the swollen mouth like red-hot, searing iron--what had that to do with him?

The icy cold of the night wind came at last, and the two beings were welded into one again. Sick and faint, Luke lay on the floor of the pit, shivering in his sweat-soaked clothes, knowing that only one more day of torture lay between himself and death.

He had already lapsed into a coma when through the dark he fancied that he heard a voice calling. Through the dark of unconsciousness, by a supreme

effort, he struggled back to reality.

A voice was calling him, although not by name, from the edge of the pit above. Luke sat up dizzily. He was sure it was Hart and his crew, come back to finish him off. But better that than another day of such torment as he had endured!

Pulling himself together, he took out his revolver and crept forward, crying out of his swollen throat, and peering craftily about him for a sight of his persecutors.

He heard something swish softly at his feet. His fingers encountered the strands of a rope.

Half-incredulous, he pulled at it. It was fastened to something above, and held tight. He thought this must be Jantje.

"Make a noose and sling it about ye. I'll pull ye up," he hear a familiar voice, although he could not place it.

Luke knotted the rope about his body. Slowly he felt himself being dragged up the slippery ascent, amid a cloud of sand. Another moment, and he sank down exhausted upon the surface under the thorn scrub.

He looked into the face peering into his own and recognized it as that of the half-mad, wandering prospector, Pete Flanagan.

CHAPTER V -- *The Rendezvous*

THE contents of Pete's flask of water liberally mixed with raw Cape spirit, soon brought Luke back to complete consciousness. He staggered to his feet and caught his rescuer by the arm.

"Emmy Duplessis!" he cried.

"Hurray!" yelled Pete. "Emmy and old Jan and diamonds! They got the diamonds, policeman, but they won't have them long. You and me and Emmy and old Jan, and the big, shining diamonds! You're lucky not to be rotting with them two poor fellows, policeman. If I hadn't heard 'em talking, and guessed they had another policeman here, the hyenas would be crunching your bones now, like them poor fellows."

Luke pulled himself together and observed his companion. Old Pete was drunk, incoherently drunk, and in that condition he was a sort of childish madman. He tapped him on the shoulder.

"Listen, Flanagan. You've seen Emmy?"

"I've seen her. Van Reenen's got her and old Jan in the nice house I builded me long ago. He thinks he's got the diamonds, too, but old Pete Flanagan was too clever for 'em. Those two poor fellows was calling for days, but Van Reenen wouldn't let me go to them."

Luke shuddered at the words.

"Ya! They thought Pete Flanagan was a harmless old drunkard, so they didn't kill him, only fed him brandy and locked him in the room. Tonight I heard them saying they'd got another policeman in the pit, and I gave them the slip, because I knew you'd help me get the diamonds." His voice took on a note of frenzy. "Diamonds, big yellow boys I found, policeman! We'll get them, you and me and Van Reenen, and share them. That's why I come to you, so as you'll clean up that nest of thieves and get the diamonds."

"Where is it? Where's this place they're holding Emmy?"

"Not far. We're going to get them now. You and me, and then the diamonds. Big, fine, white, shining stones, policeman! You and me, and old Jan--"

He went on babbling incoherently. Luke shook off the last traces of his mental confusion. He was feeling stronger now. Old Pete's horse was standing near, and that reminded Luke of his own. He had no hope of

finding the animal, of course. Either it had strayed or Hart and his crowd had roped it in. Nevertheless, he decided to go back to the pass.

Explaining to Flanagan, who regarded him with a look of suspicion, then followed him, Luke went back. Of course there was no sign of the horse. Dawn was not far away and the moon was down. It was impossible to see far despite the brilliance of the stars. He would not wait till day; he was burning to get on and find Emmy.

He had left his carbine on the saddle. He carried only his service revolver and three or four dozen rounds of ammunition. Moreover, he was one man against seven or eight. But delay was not to be thought of.

"Come, Pete, show me where they are," he insisted.

Pete urged him to ride.

"You'll need the horse for fighting," he hiccupped. "I ain't going to fight. I'm only showing you where the diamonds is, and you divide with old Pete. You won't keep them all?" he pleaded anxiously, upturning a face as woeful as a child's.

"I'll see that they're divided fairly, according to the law," answered Luke, and Pete seemed satisfied. Chuckling and staggering, the old man took up the trail, first past that awful pit of death, then through the scrub.

How far it was, Luke had no idea, but they had not gone more than a mile or two, and there was only the faintest tinge of saffron in the east when the flicker of a campfire appeared through the scrub, at the base of a low *kopje*.

Pete indicated to Luke to dismount, and he did so, fastening the horse to a thorn tree. Silently the two crept forward, not going directly toward the fire, however, but circling it. Luke pushed through the scrub in the old man's wake, until he reached a clearing.

In the distant foreground, outlined by the fire, he could see a queer little brick house, composed of hand-pressed bricks, which Flanagan had fashioned in the simplest manner with a wooden square out of earth and

water, evidently the structure that he had made for himself during the years that he haunted the desert. Immediately before him, in the centre of the clearing, Luke saw a wide hole in the ground. At the top was a crude windlass for letting down a bucket.

Cautiously he went forward. The pit was of blue earth--the famous diamond earth that decomposes into a yellow clay after exposure to sunlight for a lengthy period, revealing the stones embedded within. Beside the pit was a long, leveled stretch of ground, covered with decomposing clay.

Luke looked at it and was completely enlightened as to the motives that had led to the murder of his companions, and the kidnaping of Emmy and her father. There was no doubt but that Hart and his men had discovered the diamond pipe on old Jan's land, and had kidnaped him in order to force from him a deed to the property. The two murdered policemen must have nosed out the trail of the conspirators.

As Luke looked down he felt a tug at his arm. Pete Flanagan was at his side once more.

"They've got the stones!" he whimpered. "Big, white, shining stones, as good as De Beers. They're going to make their escape with them. My stones that I found when everybody laughed at old Pete and called him a madman! Kill them, policeman, and we'll divide the stones between ourselves. We'll be rich! We'll have everything we want. I tell you they are the finest stones that ever came out of South Africa!"

Suddenly, from the house, came an outburst of oaths and drunken laughter. Instantly Luke was all alert. Shaking off the old man, who vanished, still whimpering, into the darkness, Luke turned his steps toward the house, his hand gripping his revolver. As he approached he heard a renewed outburst of quarreling, more distinct.

As he began to round the structure, he caught the faint reflected light of a candle upon the ground outside. Creeping nearer, Luke perceived that the building was divided into two rooms, to judge from a tiny window at the rear, but there seemed to be only a single door, with another window beside it.

Advancing softly to the rear window, Luke raised himself on tiptoes and looked inside. A single candle was guttering in its socket. Luke could make out an iron cot, and old Jan Duplessis stretched out upon it. From the posture in which the old man was lying Luke surmised that he was bound. It was impossible to see anything clearly.

Beside her father crouched Emmy, with ropes about her body. The sight awakened all the sergeant's indignation, and it was with difficulty that he succeeded in keeping in control his impulse to rush in upon the kidnapers in the outer room. He must act cautiously, he realized, if he was not to encounter disaster. How many of them there were he could not know for sure, but there would be, in addition to Brouwer and his two confederates, Van Reenen and the party he had brought with him and which had mocked the policeman from the edge of the pit.

If only Pete Flanagan could be relied on! But Luke realized that the old man would be worse than useless in an emergency.

He made his way around the house to the little window beside the door, and peered through the sheets of mica that covered it. Dimly he could see that there were seven men in the room. Four of them, Hart, Van Reenen, Brouwer, and Baldy Smith, were seated around a table, thumbing a pack of greasy cards by the light of a candle stuck into the neck of a bottle. The three others were stretched out upon the floor asleep. Each of the players had a bottle of Cape smoke and a tin mug before him, and a pile of money at his side.

As the sergeant hesitated, preparing for the leap through the doorway beside the window, the wrangle broke out again, and he awaited the propitious moment.

Hart and Van Reenen were facing each other across the table, snarling savagely. Baldy Smith and Brouwer, upon opposite sides, looked on at the dispute impassively to outward appearances, yet their unconscious attitude showed that the former was with Hart, as the latter was with the Dutchman.

"You've won that pot, Hart," Van Reenen shouted, "but I want my revenge! I'll play you for the mine. The whole damn mine and all the stones we've

got to go to the winner of the next pot! Are you game, Hart? Or are you afraid? All to the winner of the next pot, I say, after Baldy and Brouwer here have had their share. If you win the stones, I'll be satisfied with the girl!"

CHAPTER VI -- *Red Battle!*

"I'LL go you, Van Reenen!"

Hart's face was livid with excitement. Luke saw Brouwer glance at Van Reenen, lean toward him, and whisper something.

"You keep out of it, Brouwer!" Hart shouted. "This here's between Van Reenen and me. All or none--that's the game I've played all my life, and by God I'll play it now! First pot, the winner takes the stones. If either of you two blokes wins, it's off till the next one."

"Stones or the girl!" Van Reenen affirmed. "The winner gets his choice, the loser takes the other."

"To hell with her! If you win the stones, you can have her, too!" shouted Hart. "Cut the cards, Baldy. Van Reenen deals."

The play began. Brouwer opened on the second deal. He drew two cards. Van Reenen drew three, Hart one, and Baldy Smith sat out. Brouwer bet five pounds, and Van Reenen raised him five. Hart raised five more.

The betting grew faster and more furious. Luke, completely absorbed in the spectacle, and concluding his moment had not yet come, crouched between the window and the doorway, listening. One of the three drunken men upon the floor staggered to his feet and came up to the table, blinking in the light of the candle. The two others sat up.

"And ten!" yelled Van Reenen, pushing forward two five-pound notes into the great heap in the centre of the table. "That's the last of my money. Never mind raising me no more. See me, if you ain't afraid!"

"I'll see you!" Hart shouted.

Brouwer, though he had opened, had withdrawn from the game in the beginning. His eyes were watching the three men like a hawk's, Baldy more than either Hart or Van Reenen. The gold formed a pyramid, prevented from toppling over by the crumpled five-pound notes that banked it up.

Slowly Hart laid down two pairs, queens up. Van Reenen, with a savage shout, revealed two pairs, aces up, on his side of the table.

The shouting gave place to absolute silence. The three men were standing watching. Luke felt his heart thumping. In a moment...

With a snarl, Van Reenen dropped his fifth card, a deuce. He had been playing with two pairs.

Hart, with a shout of triumph, disclosed another queen, giving him a full house, queens and tens.

"It's mine! My game, and my stones!" he yelled, and reached for the kitty.

As if the others had been awaiting that precise movement on Hart's part, Van Reenen's and Brouwer's guns roared out their death-message simultaneously. It was at Baldy Smith that Brouwer fired, Van Reenen at Hart.

Baldy's gun alone answered. He had been waiting for that move. But he was a second late. Brouwer's bullet caught him between the eyes. He crumpled forward in his chair, collapsed, and rolled to the floor.

With a terrible cry Hart staggered back, upsetting the table, Van Reenen's bullet in his throat. A wild, inhuman scream broke from his lips as he pressed his fingers to the wound, from which the blood came spurting.

There was the bitter foretaste of death in the wild cry that bubbled from Hart's lips. Holding his wound, he rocked to and fro, while Van Reenen, knocked to the floor by the overturned table, deliberately picked himself up and walked toward him.

Deliberately he shot Hart through the brain. The bloated body crashed down among the gold that strewed the floor. Even as it fell the inner door burst open and Emmy Duplessis appeared upon the threshold, screaming.

Her arms were bound to her sides. She was struggling desperately to free herself. At the sight of the two dead men she screamed again.

With a howl of triumph Van Reenen leaped forward and seized her in his arms.

"I've got the stones, and I've got you, too, Emmy!"

By the light of the flickering candle in the little room behind, Sergeant Luke could see old Jan Duplessis struggling with his bonds as he tried to free himself from the iron cot to which he was bound.

The sergeant stepped inside the house, his revolver leveled at Van Reenen.

"Throw up your hands!"

At the sight of the man whom he had supposed to be lying in the death-pit, Van Reenen released Emmy and started back with a cry. His hands went up instinctively.

Brouwer was more quick-witted. Luke saw him, crouching over the overturned table, draw rapidly. Both men fired together.

Luke had made an instinctive movement sidewise. He felt the other's bullet sear his cheek, like a red-hot iron. Brouwer pitched forward, regained his feet, and came stumbling forward, yelling like a maniac. But the words that poured from his lips were meaningless babble.

He stopped, twitched, and began to spin like a teetotum, his arms extended, his fingers twitching. Then he collapsed over the body of Hart. Cries and

movements had all been purely reflex, for he had been shot through the brain.

The only light that now afforded was that of the single candle in the small inner room. It went out, upset by old Jan's frantic struggles to free himself. Outside the day was breaking, it was still night inside. Luke ran to where he thought Emmy was standing. He heard the girl's frightened gasps, but it was Van Reenen into whom he stumbled.

Like a flash the Dutchman wheeled upon him and fired. The bullet passed through Luke's sleeve, grazing the flesh. Luke fired and missed. Before he could fire again, Van Reenen had flung his arms around him, bearing him to the ground, howling to the three drunken men to come and finish the job.

Luke succeeded in gripping the other by the wrist and pointing the gun toward the floor. More he was unable to do. Van Reenen was at least as strong as he, and fighting desperately as he saw himself deprived of the diamonds for which he had staked everything.

In a moment the three confederates had precipitated themselves upon the sergeant.

"Schiet hem! ["shoot!"-ed] Schiet, schiet!" yelled Van Reenen, as he disengaged himself from the melee.

The four were struggling on the floor, rolling over and over. Luke's hand came in contact with his gun, which had been knocked out of it by the impact of Van Reenen's body. His fingers closed upon it. He fired into the body of the man immediately above him, who was pinning him down, clutching him by the throat.

The grip relaxed. Luke struggled to his feet and fired again. The hammer fell upon a spent cartridge. He brought the muzzle smashing down upon the head of another of his assailants, heard the gurgle that came from the man's throat, and found himself free.

As he turned to face the last man and Van Reenen, a stunning blow fell on his head. He staggered backward, groping for consciousness. He heard a

rifle roar, had a glimpse of old Jan Duplessis faintly outlined against the growing light, felt the wall against him, and, grasping for a hold, subsided into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VII -- *Finale!*

THE taste of raw spirit in his mouth, the sound of an insistent voice in his ears brought Luke back to reality. He opened his eyes, staring at the bright sunlight that lay in a mottled pattern on the floor and walls of the cabin.

For a moment or two his mind went groping backward for a clue to his situation; then he saw the dead men huddled upon the floor and remembered.

He was lying half-propped against the wall. Old Jan Duplessis was bending over him, pouring the last drops of brandy down his throat.

The old man was still in the ropes that had fastened him. Only his right arm was free. Hampering him was a part of the iron cot from which he had broken away in his struggle. He was covered with blood from a wound in the upper part of the right arm, which hung helpless at his side.

Luke started up.

"Emmy!" he cried.

"He's got her, the *verdommte swart-sel!* He has taken her away, with the diamonds!"

"How long ago?"

"One hour. I have been trying to restore you. How is your head; Can you stand?"

Sergeant Luke forced himself to his feet with a groan. Although his wounded cheek had bled a good deal it was the blow on the head that had put him out of action. The room was whirling round him. Nevertheless he succeeded in standing without support.

"I'm going after him. Which way did he go?"

"Into the desert. There is a water-hole twenty miles away, but it is a hard ride--too hard for you. Once there he can circle back to the road that runs south thirty miles east of Boskop. If you untie these ropes, we can go together."

The sergeant tugged at the ropes, which had become knotted fast by the old man's struggles. He worked furiously. Each moment was carrying Emmy farther away from him. In five minutes he succeeded in loosening the main strand. After that it was not a difficult matter to free Duplessis from the remainder of the cot.

"We shall go. There are horses--" Duplessis began, but suddenly toppled backward in a dead faint. The loss of blood had overcome him.

A glance into the old man's pallid face showed Luke that Duplessis was in no condition to take up the pursuit. He must follow alone. He must key up all his strength and enterprise to that last accomplishment.

He lifted Duplessis up and staggered with him into the smaller room where he laid him upon the mattress from the cot. The old man opened his eyes and fixed them on Luke's face with intense anxiety.

"You'll get her?"

"I'll get her and bring her back safe," Luke promised him.

The brandy had revived his strength, though his head was still swimming, and ached abominably. He staggered out of the cabin. Three or four horses

were standing a little distance away, grazing on a few blades of grass that grew around a small, sandy pool of water in a dry nullah. Luke, to his delight, recognized his own mount among them.

It came at his whistle. He led it back to a small shed in which were saddles, stores and equipment. He had it saddled and bridled in a few moments. Then he filled his water-flasks, found and reloaded his revolver and picked up the rifle lying on the floor with which Duplessis had shot the last of his assailants.

"I'll get her!" he told the old man. Mounting, he took up the trail indicated by the horse's hoofs in the heavy sand.

There was only one route Van Reenen could have taken. It ran straight between the two ranges of low, flanking hills toward the water-hole of which Duplessis had spoken, and of which Luke had heard, though it had never been patrolled. This was the most hideous part of the Ngami. Not a scrap of vegetation grew amid these parched and shifting sands.

From the water-hole there ran an old Bushman trail toward civilization. This was the trail by which Van Reenen hoped to return with the diamonds.

And Emmy?

The thought made Luke quicken his horse's gait despite the heat which, at eight in the morning, had already become insupportable. He rode toward the neck of the hills, feeling more comfortable than he had expected in spite of the dull ache in his head. He was forced to drink repeatedly from the water-bottle, for all his resolution not to use the precious supply until it became essential. The heat seemed to suck every drop of moisture out of his body.

Long before noon the desert had become a shimmering waste alive with mirages. Here on the horizon was a lake of sparkling water, there a great mountain where was nothing but the flat. The sand, stirred by a hot wind, rose up and filled his nostrils.

Luke felt himself a part of this mirage. It all seemed like a dream to him, that ride, or a play which he was witnessing, Only the realization of the

prize at stake kept him upon his course.

At last, when he had surmounted the low rise of land at the neck, where the lines of *kopjes* came together, he came back to reality. There, far in the distance, were two little black specks, outlined against the vast face of the desert.

Emmy and Van Reenen!

He urged his tired horse on. He had drunk one of his canteens, but now, seeing that the beast was faltering for lack of water, he unscrewed the top of the other, and, after moistening his own lips, poured the whole contents down the horse's throat.

How far the water-hole was he could not know, but from that moment he lived only in the two figures an immeasurable distance ahead of him.

There was no possibility of taking cover in the flat of the desert, smooth as a billiard table save where the winds ruffled it, that now unveiled itself before him. They must have seen him.

Again he urged on his horse, but the distance between himself and the fugitives seemed hardly to decrease, and he had a nightmare feeling of standing still.

It was not until of a sudden, a shifting of the wind cleared away the haze and the mirage that he realized he had been steadily gaining on them. They were perhaps a little over half-a-mile distant.

Luke spurred his horse recklessly, driving it to the utmost.

A puff of smoke, the whistle of a bullet past his head, the distant crack of the discharge a moment later. Again--again! Van Reenen was shooting wildly through the mirage. How far away was he?

Even as the horse made his last spurt Van Reenen appeared, looming immense through the wavering air, with Emmy on the horse beside him, her hands bound to her sides.

Next moment the two horses crashed together. Both went down. Luke felt the sting of the powder as Van Reenen's bullet brushed his cheek. He fired into the Dutchman's savage face, that grinned with bared teeth into his own. He saw the blue hole that suddenly appeared between the mouth and nostrils. Van Reenen's body crumpled.

After that Luke was only dimly aware of Emmy beside him, calling to him, shaking him. Several times he tried to rise, but the raging thirst and fever that had hold of him were stronger than his limbs.

Hours must have passed under that inferno of burning blue sky, with the inferno of molten copper blazing down. Then it was night. Emmy lay very quiet beside him. She still breathed faintly, but her lips were swollen out of all recognition, as he knew his own must be.

Hours of half-consciousness mixed with coma, then the terror of the dawn, now flooding the east with gold.

The sun was coming up. His last day, and Emmy's. Even if he had known the secret of the water-hole, he could not have risen to his feet. And that secret was hidden in the pulseless brain of that bloated thing not far away.

Shouts rang in Luke's ears. He closed his eyes, not to credit that hallucination. But they were strangely persistent.

Out of the depths of coma Luke came to himself as water was poured down his throat, to find himself looking into the face of Lieutenant Connell.

"It's all right, old man. Keep still. Yes, she's recovering, and we've brought spare horses. We'll start back tonight. Jantje's putting up the tent. He came back and notified the post just as I was opening a wire saying you'd gone to Kimberley. Here's the clue. The pipe was on Duplessis' land, and they tried to force him to assign it."

Weak as he was Luke gaped at the bag of stones, brilliant even in their uncut state, that Connell displayed.

But he forgot them as his eyes met Emmy's.