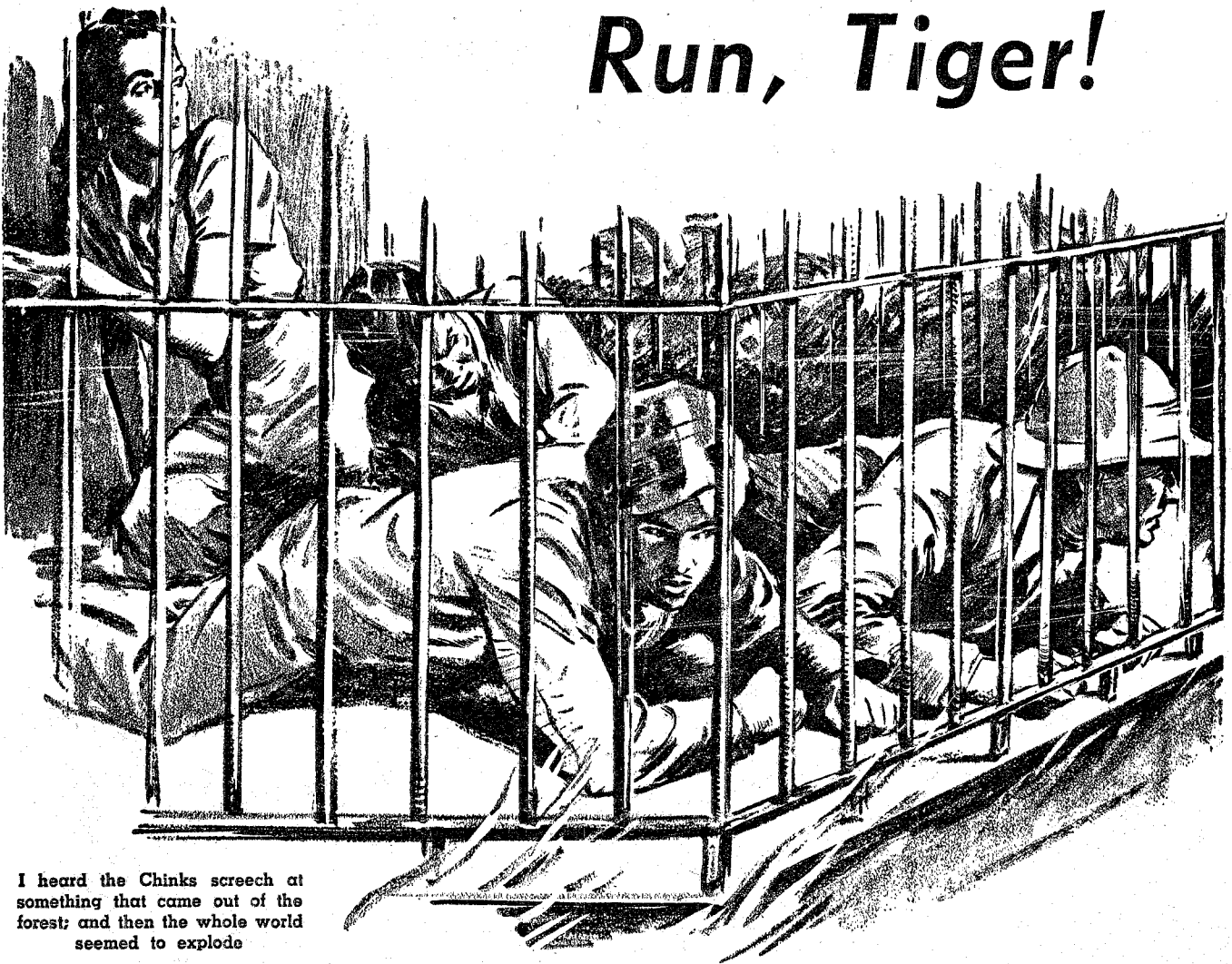


Run, Tiger!



I heard the Chinks screech at something that came out of the forest; and then the whole world seemed to explode

By Donald Barr Chidsey

Author of "All the King's Jewels," "The Queen's Henchmen," etc.

Extraordinary Asiatic engagement! Joseph, the wistful tiger; Racketty-Rax, the temperamental knife-thrower; and other stellar attractions will entertain a group of selected cut-throats. But His Highness Prince Mike of Kammorirri will stop the show with a command appearance of Hiccup, the fire-eating monkey

CHAPTER I

THE GHASTLY CLOWN

MIKE brought it down as neatly as you'd put a book on a table. He had the *hands*, as horsemen and yachtsmen say. The place he regularly landed in and took off from, back in the palace, was a mere courtyard; anybody else would have been killed long ago. And now here near the Chinese border he let the little silver monoplane come to earth among such a clutter of tree stumps that you wouldn't have supposed you could ride a bicycle there.

The bearer was scared stiff; but then he wasn't used to it. He was a native with a name that sounded like Evvy, which is what we might as well call him. Like all Kammorirrians, he simply adored Mike; but even so, you could see that he was a good bit happier when he scrambled out.

I don't believe there are any bandits," said Mike.

I said, "Well, if they're in the jungle we wouldn't be able to see 'em from up there anyway."

"That's true. We couldn't even see the village."

He was restless. He had been a good boy for a long while, ruling Kammorirri in the name of his father, the old Sultan, who seldom showed his face in public; and he was bored. He wanted excitement.

We hadn't jumped into the plane for a little vacation to Bangkok or Hanoi for quite a while now—hadn't had a chance. Nor had we done any hunting. Mike had been busy being the crown prince, practically the regent, and I'd been busy being secretary of war, commander-in-chief of the army, and police commissioner.

"I don't believe there are any bandits," Mike said again. "Let's go up to the village. We're perfectly safe leaving the plane here. The boys will find it. We might be able to knock over a leopard or something later."

"Remember," I said cautiously, "I'm responsible for your life."



"Oh, hell," he said. "Come on."

I didn't believe there were any bandits in Kammorirri either, for that matter. But in a part of the world as remote as that—we were somewhere near the place where Siam, Tonkin, Laos, the Shan States, and southwestern China more or less bump into one another, if that helps you—I figured it was just as well to play safe.

It was true that Chiang Kai-shek was being nasty to the bandits who looked for pickings along the road between Hsia-Kwan and the Burmese border, and that he might have scared them into working a little further south, toward or even over the Kammorirrian border. We'd heard a report, in fact, that this had happened.

It was not a very reliable report. It had come from a wildly excited kid who had appeared a few days ago at the palace babbling something about his village having been attacked by Lolos. It didn't make much sense. Apparently he had not actually witnessed the attack, only heard it from a distance. But anyway, I decided to investigate.

Mike came along, or rather brought me along in his plane, just for the change and because he thought we might get a chance to bag a gaur or even an elephant.

The army was proceeding to this border on foot, just in case. Not the whole army, but thirty picked members of it, my favorites, crack troops I had worked on very hard. They had started the day before, and they ought to reach the edge of the teak forest the day after we did. The

Complete Short Novel

mountain trails were terrific, but those babies knew how to take them.

Their orders were to search for Mike's plane—everybody knew that little silver job, the only one allowed to fly over Kammorirri—which would be left somewhere near the edge of the forest.

The edge of that forest practically marked the Chinese-Kammorirrian border. The forest had been a lot bigger until some years ago when the Governor of Yunnan had given a concession to some teak company which had gone to work cutting down every tree in sight.

They'd built a corduroy road to connect with an artery of the famous Burma Road, and then they had proceeded to cut their way right across the Kammorirrian border—or at least where the Kammorirrian border was supposed to be, this never having been settled very definitely.

The Sultan had heard about it and raised hell. The Sultan, a testy old party, who never did care for the blessings of civilization, had told the governor of Yunnan Province to recall his concessionaires. The governor had responded by suggesting that a joint commission be appointed to study the situation and to determine the exact location of the boundary—meanwhile letting the concessionaires chop all they pleased.

The Sultan had not even answered this suggestion—in

writing. Instead he had sent down part of his army—this was before I commanded it—and kicked the concessionaires out.

The governor had squawked, declaring himself to be insulted, but hadn't done anything else. After all, Kammorirri would be a tough country to invade, being all mountains and deathlike jungle, and the Kammorirrian hillbillies were about as ungentle and inhospitable a pack of savages as you were likely to meet anywhere in the world; in addition to which the Sultan himself was the kind of general who never understood when he was licked; and besides, China had a war of her own starting, with Japan, and she couldn't afford to get into any more trouble.

So the destruction stopped right then and there, the concessionaires, poked in the buttocks by spears, scampering away and leaving hundreds of acres of stumps and the remains of the corduroy road. After which the edge of the teak forest had been accepted as more or less marking the international boundary.

WELL, we had plenty of provisions, and I was in favor of sticking by the plane until the army came. But Mike wanted to go on to the village. "We ought to find a path somewhere," he said.

We did—and it led us spang into the tiger.

There were four of us. There was his Royal Highness Mikuud-Phni Luangba of Kammorirri, which is to say Mike himself, a Princeton graduate but as swell a little guy as you'd ever meet; and me; and Evvy; and finally there was the stowaway, a pest and nuisance of a monkey named Hiccup.

Monkeys are common in Kammorirri, where ordinarily you wouldn't dream of making a pet of one. Hiccup however had walked right into the palace one afternoon and attached himself to Mike, and after that there was no getting rid of him.

Like so many monkeys, he was a born showoff. He was smart too; but you could never figure out *how* smart. I had taught him to play *Yankee Doodle*, the song I used to drill the palace guard to, on an old harmonium; and Mike was trying to teach him bridge, contending that he'd at least be an improvement on me.

On the other hand, just when you'd come to the conclusion that he had more and better brains than most humans, he would turn around and do something so dumb that you began to believe that even among monkeys he must be a halfwit.

He was usually good company, though; too much of it. He hated to be left out of anything. He had no business coming on this little jaunt at all, but by the time we'd discovered him, gravely seated in the washroom of Mike's plane, we were too far on our way to put back.

Evvy plugged along far behind, bent under the guns, while Hiccup was mostly above or ahead, though sometimes he fell back long enough to perch on Mike's shoulder for a little while. When he fell back it was probably because he'd run into some other monkeys up there. Hiccup like human beings, but he did not care to play around with his own kind. They were too rough.

Anyway Hiccup was on Mike's shoulder when we ran into the tiger.

A teak forest isn't like an ordinary forest. I called this a jungle, a little while ago, but that isn't right. Most of Kammorirri is jungle, but this part isn't. The trees were tall and straight, and the leaves were large and smooth but

they didn't block out the sky the way leaves in a jungle do. There was very little undergrowth. It was almost like walking through a park.

However, this happened to be a particularly dark morning, and when we turned a curve in the path we found ourselves within a few feet of the tiger.

It was a big one, too. A male. Facing us.

IT MUST have startled the tiger as much as it startled us. It didn't startle Evvy, but only because he didn't see what was going on. He was a good gun boy and would have stuck close to us if we had expected to come upon anything, but right now he was far in the rear.

Mike half turned; then realizing that Evvy was out of sight, he stood stock-still except that he swiveled his eyes in my direction.

I knew what he was thinking. He wasn't scared. Mike had killed too many tigers to be scared of them. But he knew, as I knew, that this one might get panicky at finding itself so close to men; and when a tiger is panicky it's likely to do almost anything.

Mike didn't have any gun, not even a pistol. I had my revolver, a big S. and W. Magnum, heavy and very strong. I slid this out.

When the tiger saw the gun it didn't turn and run, nor did it crouch to spring. Instead—*it sat up on its hind legs!*

I never got such a shock in my life. It's a wonder I didn't let fly out of sheer surprise. But I lowered the gun, and the tiger, looking disappointed, dropped to all fours. I saw now that while it was a big beast, it was old. It had a weary, sagging look.

Mike started, "Well, if anybody can explain what—"

And then a pipe organ began to play, about a hundred yards ahead. Well, not a pipe organ; it sounded more like an old-fashioned steam calliope in a circus or on a merry-go-round. *Boop-boop-boop!* It was terrible, and very loud. It was playing *Hearts and Flowers* mercilessly.

Before we had a chance to catch our breath a man came running down the path past the tiger and fell flat on his face in front of us.

He must have measured seven feet from the top of his head, on which was tilted a pearl gray derby, to the bottom of his feet, which were encased in moccasins made of silver sequins; and he couldn't have weighed more than ninety pounds. He wore a pink-and-white striped silk shirt, a celluloid collar, a white washable but not washed necktie, a glass stickpin the size of a marble.

His shirttails hung around his hips, he was so tall. His legs were thrust into purple cotton tights, old and faded, ripped and sewed in many places, with giddy silver tassels above the knees. You could have looped thumb and forefinger around the upper part of either of his legs, he was so skinny.

When he sprawled at our feet his derby fell off; and five glass balls—blue, purple, green, yellow, red—rolled out.

He groaned a little, but did not move after that. Mike and I knelt beside him. Mike turned him over and tipped back his head. His eyes were open, but he wasn't seeing anything. There was terror, stark terror, in those eyes. Or there had been. The expression was frozen there. But the man wasn't feeling that terror any more, being dead.

Terror is a quiet word for describing what *we* felt, Mike and I, when we saw this man's face.

For his lips were great swollen purple blobs, crusted with dried blood and not backed by teeth. His nose was only an out-jutting of bone, a smear of soggy flesh, no skin at all. Red wet wounds were what marked the places where his ears should have been.

IT WAS the shock that must have been the cause of me being so slow to think, when the action came. The chief law-enforcement officer of an Asiatic Switzerland like Kammorirri gets used to strange sights, and I had begun to think that nothing could make the Marline blood run cold again; but this did.

In the first place I hadn't supposed that there was another white man within hundreds of miles of me. In the second place I simply wasn't accustomed to witnessing the deaths of seven-foot skeletons in purple tights and with glass balls in their derbies, guys whose noses and ears had been sliced off, while a tiger sat up and begged and a pipe organ somewhere played *Hearts and Flowers*.

It may sound funny; but it wasn't funny. He had died, remember, with horror in his eyes. The face was stiff with agony, the limbs taut with pain endured.

Then the command came, clear and harsh and loud, right in front of me. The words were not familiar, but I couldn't help understanding them. I had heard that command in too many languages not to know what it meant.

I should have straightened up shooting, shooting from the hip, and we might have had a chance. But probably not. Probably that would just have meant that we'd be killed then and there.

As it was, I had stuck my revolver back into its holster as I knelt beside the gruesome corpse, just to get it out of the way; and when I straightened up I slapped my hand over it and even got it half out; but I didn't have a chance to raise it. Which as I say, was probably just as well.

One guy, facing us at a distance of maybe ten yards, had an automatic rifle at his shoulder, and he let this splutter. Fortunately he was the world's worst shot, so that while the air between Mike and me got all whiney with lead for a split second there, neither of us was actually touched.

But there was another guy, squat and square and thickly Mongolian, who held an automatic pistol, and he knew what he was doing. He fired three times at my feet, so that dirt sprang up in little brown spear-heads. He shouted something. And it was clear from his manner that if he had to fire a fourth shot it would go right through my heart.

I stopped as if I were paralyzed. Coldy the squat efficient Chink, without looking at him, spoke to the man at his side, who did not lower his rifle. Then he said something to me.

"He says," interpreted Mike, who knew at least a little bit of practically every language on earth, "that you should take your hand off your pistol, Georgie. And I think you had better obey."

Well, I thought so too. And that's the way they got us.

CHAPTER II

HEARTS AND FLOWERS

THERE were some twenty-five or thirty of them, as I saw in a little while when they began drifting toward us from all directions. Three or four had on uniforms,

but these were so faded and torn that we couldn't make out what nation they'd once represented; probably these guys were deserters from one of Chiang Kai-shek's armies.

Most of the men wore any old sort of rags. They were all armed, some with small flat swords, but all of them with daggers and with either a pistol or rifle, usually a rifle. I suppose they were picturesque, but you couldn't call them easy on the eyes, or on the nerves either.

Some were Lolos, or part Lolos, aboriginal hill tribesmen from Yunnan, while others were Chinese of one sort or another. They slouched, scowling; and they looked all brute. There was nothing about them of the backward but upright Kammorirrian, though there were a few that might have been part Annamite or part Tonkinese, and there was one who certainly had a lot of white blood.

Taking it all in all, they were a tough-looking bunch. Rapists and thieves, these men. Fugitives, butchers, they were ignorant, stupid, avaricious, without conscience.

They didn't seem to have a chief, and they all did pretty much as they pleased. The one we saw most of was the half-white one, and this was because he alone spoke a little pidgin English. The others all spoke some dialect even Mike had trouble getting.

To the tune of *Hearts and Flowers*, now being played for the fifth time, they took us to their camp. And there our breath was sucked away again.

In a clearing were four Model T Ford trucks, arranged in a circle. They were painted yellow and orange and red mostly, though there were streaks and whorls of violets, magenta, Nile green, and indigo, and the Chinese and Siamese characters and the Malayan and English lettering with which they were bespattered were in black and gilt.

The English words on the two closed trucks were MOMMSEN'S CELEBRATED SPECTACLE; the letters, like the rest of the paint, being dim and old. Another truck was, sure enough, a steam calliope. It was very old and wheezy, and badly out of tune, and the woman who sat at it, besides being the fattest woman I'd ever seen, was also the worst musician.

"Oh, Gawd!" she cried, when she saw us. "They got some more!"

A bandit swished out his sword and laid the flat of it across her shoulders with a *thwank* you could have heard a mile away. She didn't wince; just gave him a dirty look and kept right on playing *Hearts and Flowers*. We later learned that when the bandits felt like hearing her play, which was often, they felt like hours of it. They always kept pokers in the charcoal fire which generated the steam, and any time Fatty began to slacken her pace, they would jab her with one of these.

The fourth truck was an animal cage. That's where they put us.

THEY were rough and brusque with us, which I didn't care so much about as far as I was concerned, but it made me sore to see them act that way with Mike. Mike is such a little guy—in spite of the fact that he's dynamite with his fists—that you can't help having a sort of protective feeling about him. I guess I liked the guy more than I realized. Anyway when one of the bandits gave him a push toward the cage, I flared.

"Who the hell do you think you're shoving there, bozo?" As if they could understand. But when you're sore you don't stop to reason out things like that. "Don't you know that's Prince—"

Mike himself cut me short with a look. Mike was, after all, born of a long line of ruling princes, and when he wanted to he could turn on a look that was as definite as a hand clapped over your mouth.

I saw what he meant. If they caught the name Mikuud-Phni Luangba they might recognize it, even the way I pronounced it; then there was no telling what might happen. It was pretty well known that Mike was the apple of his old man's eye. The only son who had been permitted to leave Kamorirri, he had been educated in the States and had been trained to succeed his father.

The Sultan would go on the warpath surer than hell if Mike was hurt. On the other hand, he would certainly pay an enormous ransom for Mike's return. For the Sultan happened to be one of the richest men in the world.

All this the bandits would know; and if they learned who Mike was they might get panicky, kill him and run away. After all, they weren't so much real men as beasts. If they didn't do that, they'd at least hold him for some stupendously high ransom—and when they got it, kill him anyway. He was too important a personage for them to fool with. So it was better for us if they didn't know who he was.

The cage was divided into two parts, though the gate between them was open; and it stank even worse than most animal cages do. And there were already other occupants.

They looked at us, and we looked at them.

Addison L. Mommsen was a very big man, though not as big as his wife, the fat woman who was playing *Hearts and Flowers* outside. He was soft and sad and at all times covered with a smooth unglittering sheen of sweat. His face was pale and marked with purple lines. His yellow silk shirt was plastered to his torso here and there, and there were half moons of sweat under his arms.

What hair he had was so yellow it was almost white, and very thin. His eyes were perfectly round, poppy, china blue, and held a hurt expression. He always seemed to be pouting.

Racketty-Rax (the only name I ever knew him by) looked like an extremely hard-boiled street-corner sport in miniature. Though he wasn't hunchbacked or deformed in any way, he couldn't have been more than three feet tall. He made up for this, or tried to, by scowling and snarling and talking out of a corner of his mouth. He was determined to show the world that it had better not get fresh with him.

When Mike and I entered the cage Racketty-Rax was doing cartwheels up on side of it and back the other: slow deliberate cartwheels that I've got to admit were graceful. He stopped a moment, fisting his hips, to glare at us. Then he snorted in disgust, and fell to doing backflips.

The third captive was Bertina Howland. A brunette with a swift grin and highly intelligent eyes, maybe twenty-two or -three years old, she sat at a typewriter resting on a small folding table.

"Come in, victims, come in! Everything's copy for Bertina! This will be a swell story if I ever live to sell it. Come in!"

MIKE made a bow and introduced me, and introduced himself as Mike Lang, a name he sometimes uses when traveling incog. He told what had happened. Mommsen mopped his face with a handkerchief and shook his head. Bertina Howland made a note. Racketty-Rax went on doing backflips.

"Poor Ralston!" Mommsen said. "I guess they tortured him so his heart gave out." He looked at us and explained. "He used to do a sort of tumbling act with Racketty-Rax here, and they were clowns, and Ralston could juggle too with some glass balls he used to keep in his hat. We all have to do different jobs, because of course there aren't many of us left."

"Ralston was a swell guy," muttered Racketty-Rax, glaring at us as if he held us responsible.

"He used to sell tickets too, while I did my spiel," Mommsen went on. "That's why he used to be dressed up above the waist, which was the only part that showed at the window. When it came time for him to go into his act, all he had to do was take off his collar and tie and shirt."

"Well, that's three," Bertina Howland said. "I wonder who's going next?"

"Not you, anyway," Mommsen said gloomily.

She explained: "You see, I'd heard about Mommsen's Celebrated Spectacle while I was riding the Burma Road between Lashio and the border. It's pretty famous in those parts."

"Been in Asia seventeen years," Mommsen said.

"I wanted to catch up with it and get a story. I'm a free-lance correspondent. But it seems that Mr. Mommsen here decided not to stick to the Burma Road. The Japs were bombing it too much."

"Can you blame me? It'll all right for *you*! You're just itching for excitement. But I'm not any adventurer. I'm a businessman."

"So he turned off into some no-account road that doesn't even have a name, and I heard about this and turned off after him, and I'd just managed to pass him and get to the head of the caravan to stop him—when along came our boy friends!"

The music, if you should call it that, stopped; and there was a long high horrible shriek; and then the music started up again, faster than ever.

Mommsen looked as if he was about to burst into tears.

"They're torturing Gladys again, the dirty bums," he muttered. "She saw what they did to Ralston when he refused to perform any more, so she's scared to stop. I don't blame her."

Mike managed to put a lot of softness and sympathy into his voice as he asked, "Doesn't she know any other selections?"

"Oh, sure. She can play *Marching Through Georgia* and *Abide With Me*, but I guess she's tired of them. She played them practically all day yesterday."

I was hoping that they wouldn't insist that I play my one number, *Yankee Doodle*, with a single finger. That was the number I had taught Hiccup to play on the harmonium. In fact I'd made it familiar around the palace, where everybody associated it with me, particularly the soldiers, because I used to drill them to the tune of it.

I WONDERED what had happened to Hiccup. I looked around but didn't see him. I wondered if there was any chance that he would find his way back to the palace, which would certainly give the alarm just like an old-time cow-hand's pony coming back to the ranch house with an empty saddle. But I decided that Hiccup wouldn't. He'd stick around.

"It was terrible the way they treated Mr. Ralston," the girl said. Her large brown eyes were kind of swollen, the pupils very large, in a way that would only be caused by

dope or extreme fear; and I knew that in this case it was fear, though she was determined not to let it show. "They got Racketty-Rax here to throw knives at him."

The dwarf had ceased backflipping. He must have been in good shape. He was scarcely breathing hard.

"I never hit him with one," he retorted. "I'm getting good."

"Racketty-Rax throws knives, and the highwaymen found that out," Mommsen said sadly. "We've all got to do various things in a troupe like this. But he's just learning."

"I never hit him," Racketty-Rax repeated. "I was scared that I would. There are some guys I wouldn't mind throwing knives at and maybe my hand would slip. But not Ralston. I tried to miss him by a lot, to keep him from getting scared, but they wouldn't let me."

"They liked that act," Mommsen said thoughtfully. "I must use it, if we ever get out of this alive. Only Racketty-Rax needs more practice; and of course we've got to get somebody to take Ralston's place."

"They'll probably think of something else they want done pretty soon," Racketty-Rax predicted gloomily. "They must be getting tired of hearing Gladys play."

"They're like kids; they can stand the same thing over and over again, for hours on end, and love it."

I was thinking also, as I know Mike was, about Evvy the gun-bearer. I figured there was a chance that he had seen what was happening to us, and had turned and run back toward the palace. It was a long distance to go, to the palace, but he would be almost certain on the way to run into the guardsmen I'd ordered to meet us at the edge of the forest.

If *those* babies learned that Mike and I were in trouble, then there *would* be hell to pay! I'd never had them in any real battle, but I think I'd trained them pretty well, and they had just lately been equipped with all sorts of modern weapons. They didn't need to be taught how to fight, though. They were natural-born fighters. All Kam-morirrians are.

Well, just when I was thinking about this, and gazing between the bars of the cage, I saw a bandit come into the center of the clearing and throw down Mike's green canvas gun bags. A second later the whole pack was there, chattering, gesticulating.

I didn't get distressed about Evvy, even then. I figured that, seeing the bandits, and seeing that he couldn't possibly be of any help to us by staying, he had simply dropped the guns and run. That would have been the sensible thing to do.

But when I glanced at Mike I knew that he felt like hell. Those were beautiful guns he had; no stock models but all specially made and fitted: lovely sure shiny things, much too good for the yellow mongrels that were pawing them now.

Hearts and Flowers stopped abruptly, the bandits apparently getting sick of it themselves; and a few minutes later the cage was opened to Gladys Mommsen, who must have weighed four hundred pounds, and she was hurled inside.

She looked balefully at Mike and me.

"They kill Ralston?"

Mike said quietly, sympathetically, "Yes."

"Damn' shame," Gladys said. "He was a regular guy. Best guy in this outfit, anyway. Not that that's saying much."

She did not even glance at her perspiring husband. She went to a corner there was no furniture of any kind in the cage—and crashed carelessly to the floor.

"Gawd! Am I worn out!" Half a minuter later she was snoring.

CHAPTER III

COMMAND EXPERIENCE

"I DON'T quite understand," said Mike, partly out of politeness, partly because he was eager to talk about something else, to get his mind off those guns, "how you ever got *here*."

They fell all over themselves answering this. It seems that Mommsen with his circus had been roaming these parts for seventeen years, and making a fairly good thing of it; but he naturally stuck to the seaports, the interior of China being neither comfortable nor very safe, and certainly no place to make money.

But the Sino-Japanese war had reduced his troupe and had driven him inland. He wouldn't leave Asia. "I wouldn't know how to run a show anywhere else, I've been at it here so long," he wailed.

How he ever got permission to travel the Burma Road in the first place, I don't know. The Chinese at one end and the British at the other are super-fussy about this thoroughfare, and the Japs are very interested in it.

Bertina Howland was different. You can never keep an American newspaperman or newspaperwoman out of any place he wants to go anyway, and Bertina happened to be a daughter of U. S. Senator Howland, which made a lot of difference even in deepest Yunnan. But how Mommsen and his forlorn little carnival had ever crashed the gate I don't know.

The brigands probably wouldn't have dared to attack them right on the Burma Road itself, but the side road looked safe enough. Ordinarily the brigands would rob them and beat them, maybe kill them, and then romp away.

But the circus trucks dazzled them. They had never before seen anything like these giddy gaudy vehicles, and they must have thought, if they thought at all, that Bertina Howland was some Burmese or Indian princess, and that the trucks were her bodyguard.

"So then they decided to take the whole lot of us along."

"That probably saved your lives," Mike pointed out.

"Well, we're not dead yet, anyway. But still . . . It used to be a bigger troupe. We had Jake, who was a kind of man-of-all-works. He was a half-caste. They shot him down before he had a chance to open his trap.

"Then there was Clancy Long, who used to do the act with the animals; he socked one of the beggars and then ran. They shot after him, and pretty soon he began to limp. They shot after him again, and he pitched forward on his face. Then they ran up to where he was lying, and we could see them slug him with the butts of their rifles. They slugged him for a long while. He couldn't possibly have been alive when they finally left him."

Hope stirred faintly inside of me.

"Did they leave him there, then?"

"Yes, but I don't think he'll ever be found. It was just wasteland, no villages. And very little travel. The peasants would naturally be afraid to squeal on these guys, and even if any soldiers should happen to pass that way they wouldn't be likely to notice Clancy Long."

"The other guy? Jake?"

"They hauled him over there too, by his heels, and left him right next to Clancy Long."

Mike wasn't paying any attention now, and I looked over and saw that he was talking to a monkey that had slipped in between a couple of bars. It was Hiccup!

Mike was talking to him in a low voice, while Hiccup, with his shoebutton eyes, was staring earnestly up into his face. Mike was pointing to the highwayman who was supposed to be guarding us but who as a matter of fact was sound asleep against a tree. Mike would point to his own left-hand pants pocket, knowing that the guard had the cage key in *his* left-hand pocket, and he'd make motions about taking something out. Hiccup was trying to get the idea.

"Clancy Long was a pretty good cat man too," Mommsen went on. He got sadder and sadder as he talked. "We used to have three lions and a couple of tigers, but the bandits didn't want them hanging around, so they opened the cage and shooed them away. All except one of the tigers, the he-one, Joseph."

"They wanted the cage for us, I guess. But Joseph wouldn't go. He'd been with me ever since he was a cub, tamest tiger I ever knew, and I guess he couldn't face the thought of living anywhere else. He hung around, day after day, following us. They used to shoot at him, but still he'd slink along. I shouldn't be surprised if he was hanging around somewhere right now."

I asked, "Does Joseph beg when he sees a revolver?"

"Yes. Clancy Long taught him that. It was only a prop pistol he used to use; it wouldn't shoot. But Joseph would sit up."

"Well then, Joseph's still out there."

MIKE pointed again to the sleeping guard, and Hiccup, nodding, slipped outside. Nobody there noticed him, monkeys being common in those parts. At first the bandits had been coming up to the cage to take a better look at us every now and then; sometimes they would even chuck stones in, to make us sore. But they'd given this up. Hiccup had a clear field.

While we all watched, the monk walked to the sleeping guard. He stood in front of the guard in a comical attitude, human as all get out, his right elbow in the palm of his left hand, his right hand at his chin, thumb and forefinger V-ed across the mouth. After a while, having studied the situation, he hopped closer to the guy and reached a tiny nervous efficient paw into the right pants pocket.

The *right* pocket, not the left one! Mike tried to signal to him, but Hiccup was intent upon his theft.

Pretty soon he drew the paw out. The guard never stirred.

There was a revolver in the paw!

Hiccup was proud of this, and decided to play with it for a while. No doubt he had noticed how human beings held revolvers. Monkey see, monkey do, as the saying is. But Hiccup wasn't strong enough to get far with this one. He was soon reduced to using both hands, one on the butt, one over the trigger, which he began to pull. He swung the barrel around until the muzzle was pointing right at the cage. That muzzle wobbled back and forth, up and down.

Well, what would you do in those circumstances? That's what we did: we fell flat on our faces. There wasn't any furniture in the cage, the walls of which were simply bars.

Most of the others were afraid to even look, but I rolled

my head sufficiently to free one eye. I just had to look.

That gun must have had a very stiff action. Hiccup wasn't strong, and as he'd pull the trigger, ambitious, the hammer would go back; but he couldn't get it to go all the way. Time and again he tried, while the muzzle wobbled. Time and again he had to relax his grip. After a while he put the gun down, discouraged.

Now Mike signaled him again. Hiccup was eager to please! He was like a mutt trying to make a home for himself, ready to do any stunt if he could only get the idea. Mike was signaling the left pocket, but Hiccup never seemed to get that at all. Once he thought he had it and he picked up the revolver again—whereupon there was once more a general pressing of noses to the floor.

Mike however kept signaling. He wanted Hiccup, if he didn't have sense enough to get the key, at least to bring us the revolver. A revolver wasn't likely to get us out of the cage; but it might help; it would be better than nothing.

Hiccup nodded with an expression uncannily human. He seemed to know, now exactly what Mike meant and to be trying to say how sorry he was that it had taken him all this time to catch on. Why, certainly! Anything to oblige! He lifted the gun again, this time really putting all his strength into the pull, and the thing went off.

THE bullet clacked against a bar and ricocheted around the cage, not hitting anybody, as we all fell flat again. The guard woke up with a jump; bandits came running from all directions; and Hiccup, knocked flat on his back, scrambled to a tree and disappeared in the general direction of the sky.

The bandits were never able to understand that affair. They hadn't see Hiccup; and the guard, to cover himself, jabbered something that was probably to the effect that somebody had attacked him from behind. There was a general search of the neighborhood, and a second search of us, too, the brigands coming into the cage and going over us carefully if not too gently.

It made me furious to see the way they handled Bertina Howland; but when I started to step forward to clout them she spoke up. "You'd only get us all killed," she said, which might have been true.

Because they figured that she was the leader of the party, the princess or maharanee or what-have-you, they wouldn't be likely to hurt her: they'd figure she represented a big ransom as soon as things cooled off and they could go back to some town and make inquiries and find out how to get in touch with her people.

On the other hand, they'd slaughter any or all of the rest of us with no more squeamishness than you'd feel at stepping on an ant.

"I guess nothing else but an old Model T Ford could have made it, or an oxcart," Mommsen went on. "Miss Howland's car couldn't. Too low-slung. So they rolled it off to one side and blew it to pieces. What they were afraid of, of course, was airplanes. I guess they made for this place because it was the only cover."

"They took us over a corduroy road, and then when we couldn't drive any further, when even the corduroy road gave out, they made us push the trucks by hand until we got here among these trees. We must be quite a way from the Burma Road?"

"You're over the Kammorirri border," Mike said.

"Good Lord! Out of the frying pan into the fire! I

hear the old Sultan's the nastiest old barbarian in all Asia!"

"Oh, he's not so bad when you get to know him," said his son.

Bertina Howland, trying to sound casual, asked, "Have you got anybody you're expecting here, Mr. Lang? I mean, is anybody likely to guess what's happened to you?"

"There's only one possibility," Mike said.

"There's not that, any more," I said, and pointed to one of the bandits who had just come back to the clearing. This bandit was wearing a red Javanese sash. It was the same sash Evvy had been wearing, a thing he was very fond of. Mike himself had given Evvy that sash, and the boy never would have surrendered it except with his life.

As if to choke off any possible hope we might still have, the man with the sash swaggered over to the cage. He called out something in his own language, in a contemptuous voice, and took something out of his tunic and tossed it between the bars.

The thing landed with a soggy plop on the floor.

We tried not to look at it. Evvy the gun carrier had had a little brass ring, a snake eating its tail, an article he valued as highly as he had valued the scarf, and for the same reason—because Mikuud-Pbni Luangba had given it to him.

They had taken this ring: you could see the red indentation, you could see where the skin had been torn. Impatient, no doubt, when the ring wouldn't come right away, they had hacked off the whole hand and worked it loose on the way back to camp. The wet and bleeding thing on the floor was the hand.

After a while I went over and picked it up and slung it back out through the bars. I'll never forget the feeling of it between my thumb and forefinger.

Mike was looking at the ceiling.

"Something tells me," he said quietly, "that if I ever get out of this place I'll find something better to shoot at than tigers."

IT HAD been eight in the morning when we were captured, and the Chinks did nothing about feeding us. That cage certainly did stink. And the other occupants were all more or less at sword's points; they'd been in the cage continuously for five or six days!

I talked with Mommsen for a while, and he told me some of his experiences running an American circus in the Orient, which would have been interesting if he hadn't felt so sorry for himself all the time.

After a while I did what I had really wanted to do, and moved over and talked with Bertina Howland. It did my heart good: not only because she was such a swell-looking girl, and so smart and everything, but also because she was a real American.

Mommsen and his wife and Racketty-Rax were American too, but that wasn't the same. They talked a special dialect of their own. But Bertina was the straight stuff. Remember, I'd been in Kammorirri for more than two years, and I got lonesome. Very seldom did I get a chance to go to some nearby city like Bangkok or Mandalay where I'd hear a little English—not American, you understand! But even English was welcome.

Listening to Bertina was kind of like listening to music when you haven't heard any in a long while. I didn't so much care what she said: it was the way she said it. She told me about the different experiences she'd had in the

Orient, because she was bughouse about experiences and believed that the more of them she had the better she would be able to write. She wanted to write not only newspaper articles and articles for the magazines, but also books. She was very ambitious.

She asked me if I had lived in this part of the world very long, and I said no. She asked me what I did, and I said I was just a friend of Mike's and his family, who were rich. She said I certainly *must* have had some strange things happen to me, in a wild romantic country like this, but I had to tell her no, I hadn't. I had to tell her that most of the time things were quiet with me.

But what I mostly tried to do was keep her talking, which wasn't hard, because she had been lonesome herself. I listened to her practically all afternoon, and when a little before dark some bandits came into the cage and jabbered for a while, I didn't pay the slightest attention—at least, not until I happened to look up and found everybody staring at me.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm afraid you're in for something," Mommsen said sadly.

"Oh, it's fairly safe," cried Racketty-Rax. "I'm really pretty good. I'm getting better all the time."

"What's all this about?" I asked.

Mommsen, who could understand their dialect better than anybody else, explained.

"They want some amusement. They're just like children: they must be kept amused or they'll get into mischief. They're tired of hearing Gladys play, and I can't say as I blame them—"

"What?" yelled Gladys, sitting up. We'd thought she was asleep.

"—and so now they've decided that they want the knife-throwing act again. Only of course Ralston's dead."

I said, "Well, I'd sure hate to be the guy who takes his place."

"Well, that's just it. They've talked it over, and they've decided that *you* ought to take his place."

"What was that you just said about people getting tired of my playing?" demanded Gladys. But nobody noticed her. Everybody was looking at me.

"I tried to talk them out of it, but I can't. They're determined it's got to be you."

I shook my head. I said that I didn't want to imply that there was anything defective in Racketty-Rax's technique as a knife tosser but that I personally was unaccustomed to the pleasure of standing up to such a barrage and I was afraid that my awkwardness would tend to dim his undoubted talents, and so I must respectfully decline.

Mommsen mopped his face, shook a huge soupy head.

"You don't understand. They won't take no for an answer, this bunch. You saw what they did to Ralston? They're very insistent."

"And I didn't even hit Ralston," put in Racketty-Rax. "But of course, he was much thinner than you are."

One of our visitors was that same squat solid Chink who had fired at my feet when we were captured. He was nobody's fool, that guy! Now he grunted, and said something quickly and contemptuously to Mommsen, and then started to move toward the door.

"He says," interpreted Mommsen, "that if you don't start in right away he'll get the rest of them to cut off all our toes, beginning with the big toes, one every fifteen

minutes until you change your mind. He really means that, too."

And I knew that he really did. And they all looked at me. So after a while I got up, shrugged my shoulders.

"It's too bad the light's so poor today," said Racketty-Rax as we went outside. "But I'll do the best I can."

CHAPTER IV

THE LION AND THE PLANE

THE only satisfaction I had was that she couldn't see me. I was propped against a teak tree, and every cut-throat in camp was there, but the place wasn't visible from the cage.

I hope I didn't make any faces. It was hard to know. The brigands of course were watching me closely, for to them it was less an exhibition of skill on the part of Racketty-Rax than a test of my nerves; not so much a performance as a new kind of torture. They laughed a lot, and cat-called; but I think that on the whole I disappointed them.

For one thing, I forced myself to keep my eyes open even at the instant when Racketty-Rax would let fly. This doesn't mean that I saw much. I didn't, for example, see the faces in the chortling eager audience. I was far too busy concentrating on the task of keeping my own face straight.

Maybe now and then a muscle twitched; I don't know. Maybe they were simply laughing to try to get me rattled. Anyway they gave up laughing after a while, probably getting sore because I wouldn't go jumpy.

I would stare hard at Racketty-Rax. There was something Napoleonic about the shrimp—if you can imagine Napoleon winding up like a baseball pitcher. He had a little table of knives, a table hardly any lower than he was; and though they were all exactly the same he would pick one for each throw with all the fussiness of a champ tennis player hefting rackets before a match.

Never glancing at me, his tiny face very serious, he would balance the thing carefully, and perhaps after a while put it back on the table and pick another. Then he would change his stance several times. He refused to be hurried, and never paid the slightest heed to the audience.

They had explained, with unmistakable gestures, that if he missed me by more than an inch he would be sorry. There was a guy behind him with a whippy steel rod, like a heavy fishing rod, and he slashed Racketty-Rax across the calves with this a few times, just by way of a sample. Racketty-Rax never winced. He was absorbed in his art.

Not until he was ready would he really lift his head and look at me where I stood. At practically that same instant he would throw.

The knife would lie on the air like a streak of light; then it would go *tzung!* under one of my armpits or within half an inch of one of my cheeks or just above my head, biting its way into the tree.

And I would breathe again.

He must have thrown them very hard. Teak isn't like oak or maple. Only one of the ten failed to stick; that had been a high one and when it came loose it tumbled right down in front of my face and its point scraped my chin, drawing a few drops of blood. I could hardly feel the cut, it was so slight; but the bandits whooped.

ONLY one of the knives hit me directly. *Tzung!* it went, and I heard a gasp from the spectators and knew that something must have happened. I stood perfectly still; and half a second later I began to feel the pain in my left arm just about half way between the elbow and the shoulder.

The pain was sharp and burny. The knife, I could figure, must have gone through the loose of my flesh. It couldn't have struck muscle or I'd have felt it.

Well, I didn't move, and didn't let on in any way that I'd been hit, and I guess no blood soaked through the sleeve. Anyway the boys began to get disappointed and to pay more attention to Racketty-Rax. He was stealing the show. Which was okay by me!

Racketty-Rax himself was alarmed about that throw. He stood motionless a moment, watching me, his mouth open, his eyes bugging out. Not until he saw that I wasn't going to fall, did he move. The bandit behind him cracked him across the calves again, and with great dignity, ignoring this wallop, Racketty-Rax selected another knife.

It made me feel good, in some peculiar way, to realize that somebody else was frightened too.

When the tenth knife had been thrown, *tzunging* into the tree so close to the right side of my neck that I could actually feel the flat of it when it quivered, they all crowded around me, babbling and blowing their foul breath into my face.

Racketty-Rax came too, but he was more formal. Imperiously—and it seemed to amuse them—he brushed the others aside. With the most elaborate gestures, with finicky care, as if he were the only person alive capable of doing this he withdrew the knives one by one.

When I realized that there was going to be another tossing, a command performance, as you might say, I got really weak in the knees. I didn't know whether I could stand another one. It had taken all the nerve I possessed to keep quiet during the first.

Racketty-Rax, leaning over to tug out a knife, whispered. "They're getting interested in me. Watch your chance."

For a moment I didn't get him. Then when I did I understood the reason for his motions. It wasn't just showmanship. It was a deliberate attempt to draw attention to himself, thereby taking it away from me. For I was nearer to the edge of the clearing—and I had longer legs.

I did not answer or even do anything to show I'd heard. The knives in his hands, Racketty-Rax stalked grandly back to his table, where he arranged them with ceremony. But the bandits were watching me too. Four or five had rifles cradled in their arms; while behind the tree, a little to one side in case a knife should go wild, was a guy with a double-barreled shotgun.

It was getting dark.

Racketty-Rax flexed his legs, flexed his fingers too, touched a handkerchief to his lips, carefully wiped his hands. He patted back his hair. He cleared his throat.

He picked up a knife.

It seemed like he picked the heart right out of me when he did that. I wasn't at all sure that I could watch him throw at me again without screaming. *He* wasn't too sure of himself, either. I knew that.

He balanced the knife, shrugged, put it back, picked another, balanced that.

Suddenly he looked up and threw.

There was the flash that was like a crack of light from a slit in a door which is immediately covered. Just a flash, that's all. There was no *zung!* But I heard a chopped squeal of fear behind me—and then I knew what had happened. Racketty-Rax had deliberately thrown at the guy with the shotgun.

HE HADN'T intended to hit him but only to make him spring out of the way, which would give the midget some grounds for arguing that it had really been a slip and not dirty work.

But they didn't give him any chance to argue. As I whirled, I glimpsed them closing in. I guess they weren't very nice to him. He must have expected that, too. It must have taken a lot of nerve to do what he did.

Well, I didn't stop to chide them for being poor sports. It was my duty to save the ones still alive, if I could.

The Chink with the shotgun had knocked himself off balance, though he hadn't actually fallen down; but for a split second there he was in no position to aim and fire.

And in that split second I sprinted past him.

Something went *twang!* like the twang of a taut steel wire—an angry sound; and with it, from behind me, there was the curt crack of a rifle. Then the twang again, and the crack, separate sounds though they came at the same time. Then both of them again.

Naturally I didn't run straight. I zigzagged. Sometimes I'd hear bullets clunk solemnly into trees on my right or left, or sometimes, grazing them, they would tear out splinters. Sometimes the dirt at my feet, or just ahead of me, would suddenly become all churned up, like muddy water disturbed with a stick.

But it was practically night now, and there among the teak trees, dodging back and forth, squirming and twisting, bending low, running like mad, I couldn't have made a very good target.

At last when I couldn't run any more for a minute or so, I stopped and listened, and over the sound of my own panting I heard that they were quite a way behind.

I went and climbed a tree. Not a teak tree, of course; it was a tree with lower branches. The last place people look for things is up. If you want to hide anything, hide it above the level of a person's eyes. It's man's instinct, when anybody's chasing him, just as it is with an animal, to burrow down into the earth, or crouch among some bushes, to get below something, *underneath* something; and the result is that it's our instinct to look for people and things in places like that. But the safest place is above.

This was only a theory, but it worked out. The brigands passed right underneath me, muttering to themselves, straining their eyes, holding their guns in readiness, but not a one glanced up. After a while they returned, passing so close that I could have reached down and kicked their hats off. They'd given up the search.

Even so, it was two hours before I let myself climb down.

The sky had cleared by that time and there was a good deal of moonlight streaking down. I found the path without any trouble, at a point above the camp, and with my general sense of direction still holding good I turned in the direction of the village.

Some of those Kamorirrians can cover distance at a most amazing pace, back there in that wild country. They

are lizards against the faces of cliffs, deer for speed in the valleys, goats on the mountains themselves.

There is no road anywhere in Kamorirri and it stands to reason no signpost. None of the natives have ever seen a map, and they wouldn't know what a compass was. But from any part of the sultanate they can head accurately and unhesitatingly for the center, the capital, the palace itself. I don't know how they do it; but they never fail.

It was my thought to send out messengers. I could speak enough of the native language to make myself understood, and I could make signs to show that Mike was in danger. Also I could give them various articles belonging to me, which would be recognized at the palace.

This was why I made a dive for the village.

MY NOSE warned me in advance, telling me what my brain refused to believe. It must be that the only reason we hadn't learned earlier about what had happened to the village was that the wind had been the other way.

Well, the wind had shifted since then. Climbing the path, I knew what had happened.

You do, too, of course, by this time! It was pretty horrible. Those butchers couldn't have had any real purpose in doing such a thing—there couldn't been any loot in a miserable clump of nip-thatch huts—except sheerly that of slaking their blood thirst.

There had been maybe twenty men in the village, and perhaps twice as many women and children, and no doubt there had been a certain amount of resistance—though what good that would do, with only spears and bows-and-arrows, against a surprise attack by trained soldiers equipped with firearms?

I guess the slaughter had been complete. I saw no evidence that any of the visitors had been killed, though of course one corpse is very much the same as another after it's been burned.

For they had burned the huts, and in the middle of the huts the villagers. They had just heaped them up and burned them. I won't describe the scene; I prefer not to think about it. The best I can say is that it was gray and utterly dead, the drear home of ashes and bones; and in the moonlight it was deserted even by the buzzards, which I could see had been taking an interest in certain unburned portions of bodies only a little earlier.

Well, I went away fast, almost as if somebody were chasing me. I gave the bandit camp a wide berth, rejoining the path at about the point where the long shapeless body of Ralston lay sprawled in its purple tights. The little glass balls gleamed in the moonlight. Buzzards had been busy on Ralston too, and also the ants. In fact the ants were still at work.

A little further on I heard the sound of a footstep, and with my heart thumping wildly I dodged behind a tree. One of the highwaymen was coming along the path, walking toward the camp. What he happened to be doing there I don't know. Maybe he'd got lost while chasing me, and had just found his way back to the path. Anyway there he was, clear in the moonlight, a rifle over his shoulder, knife and pistol at his side.

He was going to pass very close to me, and I had a fleet thought of jumping him as he came alongside. I was pretty sure I could get his weapons and knock him cuckoo before he ever knew what happened.

But I decided against this. He might have time to let out a yell to be heard.

So I decided to let him pass.

Just as he came to the nearest part of the path to me, his legs not two feet from my face, I felt something small and cold pressed firmly against the back of my neck.

I WONDER to this day how it was that I didn't let out a scream. I guess I was too scared to. Anyway, what I did was stay perfectly still, as if frozen there—which I practically was—until the highwayman had walked past me and out of sight in the direction of the camp; and then I turned my head very slowly and found myself face to face with Joseph the tiger.

Joseph was lonely. He wanted to make friends; and that was why he had pressed his cold nose against the back of my neck.

But I was so mad, what with the release from the nervous tension and everything, that if it hadn't been near the camp I really think I would have busted that beast in the jaw. Joseph was a big fellow and must have weighed close to three hundred pounds, and if his teeth weren't so hot any more his claws were still very long and sharp. All the same, I was too sore to think about these things. I wonder to this day how I managed to control myself.

"Get out of here!" I hissed. "Gwan! Scram! Scat!"

Joseph gave me a reproachful sniff and mooched away. And after a while I followed the path to the edge of the forest and then walked out across the stump-strewn plain to the machine I'd come in.

Now I'm no aviator and never pretended to be; and in fact I usually am scared when I'm up in a plane, except when Mike's at the controls. But every now and then when we were in the air on a longish trip, say down to Singapore, I would slip into the driver's seat to give Mike a chance to stretch his legs. I had actually flown quite a few miles in this way.

But there's a lot of difference between holding the stick in calm weather, with a crack pilot like Mike sitting next to you, and really knowing how to fly. I had never, for example, handled that silver monoplane in bumpy weather. And I had certainly never taken her off or brought her down, which was what I was going to try to do now.

IT WAS the only thing I could see. My chances of being killed were so good that I didn't care to think about them, and even if I got up off that stump-strewn field okay, and fumbled around for and found the palace itself, there still would remain the little business of landing in the only flat surface for many, many miles—the tiny courtyard that Mike used for a field.

I was going to do this! *Me!* But as I say, I couldn't think of anything else. I couldn't barge back into the camp all unarmed. There might not be another village anywhere near here, and if there was I wouldn't know how to find it.

If I struck out cross-country into China I might go for days without reaching any outpost of civilization, and even when I did reach such an outpost how could I explain myself? The hill-people could do it in a couple of days, but it would take me at least a couple of weeks to beat my way back through the jungle to the palace itself—supposing that I ever found it at all.

To be sure, the thirty guardsmen might appear the following day, but I couldn't be sure of this. It all depended on the condition of the trails.

So it looked like the air or nothing.

Mike's machine is the latest in every respect, and it has brakes and a self-starter. I figured that the self-starter was going to make the take-off easier. I figured wrong.

The plane wasn't heavy, and I didn't have much difficulty in wheeling it around to the place I wanted it, facing into what breeze there was, which blew toward the outlaw camp. This I did in the sad moonlight, all alone in the middle of a plain full of stumps which lay like blurred black ghosts. Each one of those stumps, I had an idea, was a live thing that had coiled its strength like a snake and was ready to strike at me when I came close—or at least, to strike at the plane.

At last I got everything the way I wanted it, and I got into the plane and tested the controls. I knew that I'd have to act fast, once I got started. I wouldn't be able to warm the engine up anywhere near as thoroughly as I should in order to make such a quick take-off, because when I gave it the gun they would be almost sure to hear it back at the camp. The breeze, such as it was, was that way.

The choke out, the spark retarded. . . . I was tense. I stepped on the starter.

A faint-hearted whir.

I cursed, and examined the connections. They were okay. The trouble was that the battery was low.

So once again I got everything set, and I climbed out and grasped the propeller and turned her over. She thundered, spluttered, and while I was dashing back for the cabin, died.

This happened five times before she really caught up. I got behind the controls, pushed the choke back, advanced the spark. I opened the throttle. It made a hell of a racket. It seemed to me that it could have been heard for miles. I waited as long as I dared, and then I gave it everything it had—and released the brakes.

Oh, those teak stumps! I'll see them to my dying day!

Even the ground between the stumps was not any too smooth. Me and the plane bumped so violently that I felt I must be knocking all the fillings out of my teeth. The noise was terrific. We began to rise a little, and then we whammed back, jouncing so hard that my head hit the ceiling, which maybe made me a little groggy.

Anyway, what happened after that happened so fast that I couldn't be expected to remember it. I didn't go up against the ceiling this time: the ceiling came down on me! The ground, studded with stumps, swooped in front of me like something swung on a string. I had just sense enough left, when I knew I was upside-down, to shut off the ignition.

CHAPTER V

BLAZE OF GLORY

BERTINA HOWLAND was rubbing my face with a handkerchief soaked in eau de cologne, and she was saying, "You had quite a time for yourself, didn't you? The Prince is worried to death."

Even without the sound of her voice and the sight of her face I would have known where I was. There is no mistaking the stink of a lion's cage.

Mike came scurrying over, and his face lighted up when he saw me with my eyes open. Mike's quick with his emotions; and he isn't like an Englishman or some Americans who are afraid to let anybody see the way they feel.

"Georgie Lindbergh! What did you do, ground-loop?"

I muttered, "Is that what you call it?"

"Wonder you weren't killed! We heard the engine, 'way up here, and I kept thinking 'Poor Georgie! There he goes!' And all the Chinese snatched up their guns and ran. They just got back."

I lifted my head, which hurt, and saw that it was dawn. Birds were chittering and monkeys chattering, and sunlight streaked down between the glossy leaves of the trees.

"Am I hurt?" I asked, dumb.

The only pain I could feel, outside of a dull headache, was a burning in the upper part of my left arm, where the knife had gone.

"You've got a few scratches and bruises," Bertina answered cheerfully. "But you must have bumped your head pretty badly. Might have a concussion. Better go easy."

"What happened?"

"That's what we want to know. Right after you left here yesterday afternoon there was a lot of yelling and shooting, and later they carried Racketty-Rax back. They'd given him an awful beating, and he was more dead than alive. He's sleeping over there now."

"He's got guts, that midget," I said, and I told them what had happened. "You've got to hand it to a guy like that."

"You'd better be still," Bertina said. I had been trying to sit up, but she pushed me back. "There'll be action enough, once they've made up their minds what to do about us. They're holding a powwow out there right now."

So she shooed Mike away, and I closed my eyes again, and she went on bathing my face with eau de cologne, which felt good.

After a while I thought of something, and I opened my eyes.

"Say, listen! What was that you said a little while ago about some prince or something?"

She smiled. And she had a kind of fondness in that smile, and in her eyes too when she looked down at me.

"Why," she murmured, "Mikuud-Phni Luangba slurred over your name when he introduced you, but I know now that you're George Marlin."

JUST like that! She didn't seem to be as excited at the idea of being in close quarters with the descendant of a hundred generations of warrior kings, as at the idea of being in close quarters with *me*! She pronounced that "George Marlin" as if it really meant something. And in a way, of course, it does. In this part of the world I'm sort of famous. But after all, I'm nothing but a San Francisco cop who happened to get a break, while Mike is a member of a ruling house.

"There must be some mistake."

"The mistake," she interrupted, "was when two or three times you started to speak of your friend as 'His Highness' but you corrected yourself. But not soon enough."

This was true, though I'm sure she was the only one who got it. When just the two of us are together, Mike will always be simply Mike to me. But after all, he's got more than a fancy title; he's got a position; he's somebody. And in the presence of anyone else, no matter how informal the occasion, I've always been careful to "highness" him. I've made this so much a habit that I've even made myself *think* of him as "your highness" when other people are around.

Well, it didn't matter, as long as the secret did not leave the cage. The only thing is, it made me embarrassed be-

cause Bertina seemed to think that I was a big shot.

"You know," she said, "I have been trying for a month to get permission to travel up to Kammorirri, and now the very person I wanted to see comes down from there to me."

"You mean you want to interview Mike? I doubt whether—"

"I want to interview *you*!"

Well, I tried to talk her out of it, but it wasn't any use. I tried to tell her that all I was was just another flatfoot, but she insisted that I was a Figure of Romance.

"Now Mike," I said, "that's a different matter—"

"Never mind about Mike. I want to hear about some of *your* adventures."

"I don't have any adventures. I live a very quiet life."

She repeated some stories she'd heard about me, and most of them were baloney and I told her that all of them were, but she was unconvinced. She said that where there was so much smoke there must be a certain amount of fire. She said that just for a white man, any white man, to get up to that dizzy breathless palace where the Sultan of Kammorirri lived like an eagle, was sumpin. Just to *get* there! Missionaries couldn't, she pointed out. Diplomats couldn't. Even traders couldn't.

"That's because there's nothing there that the rest of the world wants," I answered. "If Kammorirri had a few oil wells or a tin mine or two you can bet it'd be packed with Englishmen and Frenchmen and Japs, falling all over themselves trying to 'protect' it. It doesn't control any important mountain pass, it hasn't any harbor, it hasn't even got a piece of level land large enough to make an airport out of. So the rest of the world lets it alone. There are some old ruby mines, which is where the sultans got all their wealth from, but they were worked out long ago."

"You're trying to belittle yourself," she said. "I'm sure that you have a fascinating story to tell."

It was good to listen to her. It was good to see her eyes light up, and to hear that nice low American voice. Oh, sure, I was homesick; I've admitted that already. And while I lay there, with her mopping my face with cologne, I couldn't help wondering what would happen if we all did get out of this pickle alive, and if then I resigned.

It would be hard to leave Mike. But I'd done my work. I'd trained the Kammorirri police force and army, which was one and the same thing. And I knew I could always get my old investigator's job back with the Great Western Insurance people, and it hadn't been such a bad job either, though of course it didn't pay as much as I got now.

But maybe they'd give me a raise, considering all the prestige I'd gathered. Or then again, maybe they wouldn't. The name George Marlin might mean a lot in this part of the world, but how many customers did the Great Western have or expect to get here?

And at best, I would be nothing but a common ordinary dick, while she was the daughter of a senator. . . .

Still and all, they can't hang a man for dreaming.

SHE was giving me a nice little smile and was starting to say "Now suppose we get back to—" when Mike came over.

"Excuse me for interrupting," he said, "but could you tell me, Miss Howland, whether they took any personal articles from you?"

"Well yes," said Bertina. "They took my wristwatch and two rings and some odds and ends of Cambodian silver work I'd bought more as souvenirs than anything else. My

bag, too. It took three days of heavy sign-languaging to get back my compact even, and in the meanwhile I looked a fright."

Mike nodded. He looked serious.

"They're getting fidgety out there. They've been breaking off fancy bits of woodwork from the trunks, pieces with lettering on them, and chunks of gilded gingerbread. I'm afraid they want it just for the same reason they wanted your personal belongings. They want to be able to prove, later, to somebody in the outside world, that they actually have got you hidden."

"But where are they going to keep me? Here?"

Mike shook his head.

"Not anywhere, I think. That's the trouble. I don't want to frighten you, but it looks as if they're agreed that it would be better to follow the example set by so many kidnapers." He nodded toward the clearing. "As the old pirates used to say, dead men tell no tales."

There was an air of bustle in the clearing. The bandits were breaking camp. They had their weapons, their scanty personal possessions, their loot, collected in bundles which some had already fastened upon their backs. They were tightening their boots, snapping looks up at what could be seen of the sky.

A little earlier they had built a fire under the boiler of the calliope, meaning to have another concert; but they must have given up this idea. They were in fact doing so many things out there in the clearing that despite the fact that this group was very near the cage, almost alongside of it, it was some minutes before Bertina and I saw the Chinamen Mike indicated.

There were three, two of whom were taking eight-inch brown paper sticks out of a box and stacking them criss-cross on the ground, while the third cut some lengths of white thick cottony cord.

"What's that?" Bertina asked.

"The same stuff," Mike answered, "that they blew up your automobile with. They must have stolen it from some construction gang."

She said "Oh . . ." She had shown a lot of courage, and I admired her, but now she wouldn't talk because she feared her voice would quaver.

"I wouldn't have mentioned it if it didn't seem a sure thing," Mike explained gently. "Mr. Mommsen and I managed to overhear some of their conversations, and I'm afraid there's no doubt of what they intend to do. What's more, I'm afraid it will happen very soon. In case you want the time to pray."

The man with the fuse had measured off three lengths of about five feet, and he tamped one end of each into a blasting cap and thrust the blasting cap into a stick of dynamite. He selected three different sticks in three different parts of the pile, but all low.

There must have been a hundred sticks altogether. The Chink laid the three fuses along the ground.

The others were all set. In fact they seemed anxious to go. They were jittery, and had been that way since my escape and recapture. I think maybe the sight of the plane had worried into them. Desperadoes like that are always afraid of airplanes; and these babies might have figured that where there was one there might soon be many more.

They gathered at the other end of the clearing, and the dark squat one, the one who had originally captured Mike and me, and who seemed to be the nearest thing they had to a leader, yapped a command. One of the others ap-

proached the dynamite. He was holding a fancy gold cigarette lighter, undoubtedly stolen.

It was clear that the squat guy wanted to see with his own eyes that the fuses were lit before he left; and what's more, he wasn't going to let anybody else go until he did!

"Well," said Gladys, "we'll finish up in a blaze of glory, anyway."

I guess she'd been in the show business so long that even when she was about to be blown to bits she couldn't help thinking what a sight it would be. Mommsen's Celebrated Spectacle. Sure.

There was a sharp slatty crack from the forest, and the Chink with the lighter went over backward and began to cough blood.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORLD CRACKS UP

FOR a little while after that everybody was running in all directions at once and nobody knew what was happening, except that whatever it was it involved a lot of noise.

The first shot was followed by a swift splatter of others. Chinamen began to fold up. Chinamen began to slide to their knees, here and there a Chinaman even fell flat. It was fantastic the way they did it. They were like that many dolls in a shooting gallery.

Two or three broke and ran, and these were not seen any more. A few started to crawl, moaning. There were a few also who never moved again. The rest, after the first shock of surprise, and under the barked commands of the squat dark Chink, began to get a grip on themselves.

I think that maybe they had ordinarily been sort of communists, if not politically then practically; but when a really dangerous situation rose, like this, they didn't do any sort of conferring and they didn't take any votes: they just snapped into it when their natural leader, the squat guy, shouted.

If they had run away, then and there, they would have escaped—provided they ran in the right direction. For this was not meant to be a surprise attack, as it seemed at first. The camp was not surrounded. We later learned that the shot which laid the man with the lighter low was a wild one, originally aimed at a picket.

Once they got under control, the bandits showed an astonishing discipline. Naturally I was interested in watching them, this being my profession.

Under the menace of spotty gunfire, and not ever being sure which direction the next chunk of lead would come from, they moved fast. They darted from place to place, never scooping out any sort of trenches, but piling up their packs and bundles and rearranging the trucks so as to form a square. Two of the trucks, by means of ropes, they toppled over on their sides: these were the closed ones. The calliope formed a third side of this improvised fort; while the cage we were in, with the front of it facing the forest, made up the very narrow fourth side.

BECAUSE the cage truck *did* face toward the forest, we could not get a clear look out there but only an oblique one. Bullets clanged against the bars, but by lying at the extreme front end of the cage we were fairly safe—except from ricochets.

But it was hard to stay there. Hard for Mike and me,

anyway. We wanted badly to see what was going on.

So we wriggled on our tummies to the danger end of the cage, and there, with lead going *whee-ee-ee* above us, we snooped.

We didn't see much. The forest was dappled with sunlight but contained no hint of human occupancy. It was, as before, like a park, but a deserted park. There was so little underbrush that it was a mystery where the shots were coming from.

Just the same, they were coming! They weren't all wild, either. The Chinks had already learned that they had to be careful about showing themselves. There were some good marksmen out there.

"Well, what we're both thinking is right," Mike said after a while. "I just caught a glimpse of one of those black helmets."

I nodded. I had glimpsed one too, maybe the same one, as a soldier slipped like a shadow from tree to tree.

"They certainly made wonderful time," I said.

The black trench helmets had come only a few months ago, as part of a shipment of uniforms, when the Sultan, following the trend of the times (which was something he didn't usually do) decided to triple and modernize his army.

They came from the States, where the Sultan had bought the rest of his military stuff, the first of its sort ever to hit Kammorirri. I suppose they'd been made for some home guard outfit, or maybe some college boys' training corps, and then black-japanned when they were found to be too bright, and sent to Kammorirri on the theory that Kammorirri was so far away that they'd never be sent back.

They weren't really what we'd ordered. But we took what we could get, practically all the rest of the world being at war and therefore too busy to worry about Kammorirrian customers.

Anyway the native soldiers liked them. Most of them had never had a hat on before in their lives, and I don't suppose any of their ancestors ever had either, all the way back to the days when they slogged about in paleolithic slime; and I guess that if you wanted to moralize and so forth, you could remark that it was a pity that the first hats they ever did wear had to be steel ones. But anyway that's how it was.

"Only a few years ago in a border affray like this," Mike said thoughtfully, "those men would have come rushing in like maniacs—and got themselves shot to bits. They're the most reckless fighters in the world, ordinarily. That's always been their greatest fault." He glanced sideways at me. "But now look at them. You've done a swell piece of work with those boys, Georgie."

For all I know I might have blushed; my face certainly felt hot enough. But then it was a hot spot we were in.

"I never had a chance to teach them to take prisoners," I replied. "And I don't think they know what it means to parley."

Mike smiled a little, half proudly, half ruefully. He got my point. When the guardsmen had properly surrounded the place and scouted it out, so that they'd learned how weak a force held it, they would unquestionably rush. They wouldn't wait for a flag of truce: they'd just rush. They *might* see Mike and me in time to recognize us and obey our commands; or they might not. When the charge came, it was going to be pretty bad. There wasn't going to be much time for explanations.

"They your men out there, Mr. Marlin?"

I turned my head with a start, as Mike did, and we both

scowled to see Bertina crawling in between us. She wasn't going to miss anything! She was breathless, and her eyes shone bright.

I nodded.

"The U. S. Marines in disguise," I said. "The only thing is, when they get really riled up they don't know one guy from another."

"They're doing a sweet piece of work," she said, squinting in a professional manner. "You must have trained them well."

"Too damn well," I muttered.

BY THIS time the camp was surrounded. The besiegers had the situation well under control, while the besieged, doubled up behind their trucks and bundles, were afraid to show themselves. It did not surprise any of us when they hoisted a tablecloth.

It didn't get them anywhere. In fact it was shot full of holes immediately, and lowered. Those gorillas out there didn't know what a flag of truce was. The Chinks would have been glad to get away with their lives, and would have turned us loose without hesitation; but the only kind of fight the Kammorirrians knew anything about was a fight to the finish.

I had taught them to keep their heads down and not rush into a thing until they'd taken their time and looked it over first; but I had not yet got around to teaching them the difference between an enemy and an innocent bystander. Once they got steamed up, anything and everything that got in their way was just out of luck.

But of course if they knew Mike was there, it would be different. And if they knew *I* was there, then they'd know that Mike was.

So I raised my head and started to bellow a command in Kammorirrian. It was a command to retreat, so I guess they wouldn't have known what it meant even if they'd heard it. But anyway they didn't hear it. There was a blast of machine gun fire and I ducked my head just in time to miss a flock of metal that came close to parting at least my hair and maybe even my brains, if any.

I tried again, a moment later, and the same thing happened. Out there, of course, they never could see who I was, me being in the shadow of the cage and low against the floor and they never heard enough of my voice to recognize it.

And if *I* couldn't make myself heard, with my bull's bass, then certainly Mike wouldn't be able to.

Still, it would be hard lines to be killed by your own men; so I thought I'd have another try. Just as I was about to open my mouth, up above the level of the floor appeared the square yellow head of the outlaw chief. He spurted words like a broken water main; then he was gone.

He had declared, Mike interpreted, that if any of us made another sound, for any reason whatsoever, he would have us fired upon.

The back of the cage being all bars like the sides, he could have done this easily.

Mike wriggled to the edge of the floor and tried to get the chief's attention by whistling, yoo-hooing, and even sometimes cautiously shouting. He tried to call out that the men besieging us were friends of ours and could be induced to cease firing and back away if they knew we were here. He took a chance that the chief, hearing, would wheel around and blast him then and there.

But the chief either didn't hear or didn't give a hoot.

Only once again he turned toward us, and that was when, dashing sweat from his face, he savagely told us, according to Mike that we could be damn' sure that if the barricades were stormed *we* would be disposed of no matter what else happened. He would save his last clip of cartridges for us he said, according to Mike, and he had instructed his lieutenants to do the same.

We tried to get Mommsen to the back of the cage to argue with him and explain, but the circus proprietor ("seventeen years in the Orient, sir") was stiff with fear and couldn't be induced to budge.

Anyway, it was never very likely that the Kammorirrians would hear us, even if we dared to yell. There was too much shooting.

WE HAD a flare of hope when something darkened a between-bars space for an instant, and the diminutive Hiccup thudded into our midst. Hiccup was scared. But he trusted Mike and me. He was ready to do anything we told him—provided he could understand it. He looked up to us, with his funny little old-man mouth working, his shoebutton eyes bright with earnestness, convinced that we were twitchy, and teetering on the verge of the noise; but he had it figured that we were the only ones who could help him.

The kidnapers had already stripped us of personal articles like jewelry, so I tore a button off my shirt. The buttons were tricky glass ones containing little French flags, that I'd bought in Phnom Penh; everybody in the Kammorirrian army would know those buttons. Each individual private had used to stare hard at them while I stood giving him a bawling out about the way he held his gun or the way he wore his uniform.

I handed the button to Hiccup, and I made signs. The signs might not have been very complete or very elaborate, but you must remember that all this while I was flat on my belly. I pointed toward the forest and made the motions of handing the button to somebody else. Then, to emphasize it, I made the shape of a trench helmet with my hands over my head. *Metal*, I wanted to explain. A *metal* hat. So I tapped one of the iron bars of the cage.

Hiccup was all enthusiasm. Sure, he got it! Gibbering, the button clutched in a wrinkled paw, he swung out through the bars and dropped to the pile of dynamite just below.

There he paused a moment, while we held our breath. Then he scrambled up on the top side of one of the overturned trucks, and stood there for perhaps two whole minutes, exposed to rifle fire, scared. He knew that bullets were whizzing around him, poor creature, but he didn't know what they were or where they came from.

Suddenly he looked over toward us and made a reassuring gesture. We were filled with hope then. We were sure he was going to jump down into No Man's and and hop to the forest to deliver the button. After which, of course, the firing would cease.

Instead, Hiccup reached suddenly down to the *inside* of the barricade, plucked off the felt forage cap of a Chinese army deserter, and at short range threw the button at this Chink's head with all his might.

The Chink only ducked lower, yowling, no doubt under the impression that he'd been grazed by a slug. The button rolled harmlessly on the ground.

Hiccup cocked his head and looked toward us, waiting for applause. All he got was an additional volley of deaf-

and-dumb signals, which completely confused him. These were from me. Mike had given up.

I tried to motion with both hands, fingers down, that the monk should recover the button. I did this again and again, while Hiccup, perplexed, regarded me with his tiny bright black eyes.

The interruption to the soundless one-sided conversation was a honey.

There was a sudden lull in the firing from the forest, and I saw a speck momentarily against the sky, and I heard the Chinks screech in fright as they ducked, covering their heads with their arms. I couldn't duck, myself. I was already as low as I could get. But I closed my eyes; and as I did so, the whole world seemed to come apart.

CHAPTER VII

YANKEE DOODLE

THE first thought that flashed through my mind, even before the explosion, was that this was a hand grenade. We had imported a lot of hand grenades, along with sub-machine guns and modern rifles and so forth; and I, who had never handled one before in my life, after practicing in secret for a while, had instructed certain selected guardsmen in their use.

They were crazy about them! The pulling of the plug, the hiss, the long-armed throw, at last the *boom*, followed by a rattle of stones, a flutter of leaves, and the startled squawks of departing birds—these fascinated the simple Kammorirrian mind.

It was only natural that they had brought along a few grenades on this trip, in the hope of finding some excuse for using them.

But I knew from the sound of the explosion that it wasn't an ordinary grenade. And even before I opened my eyes, I knew from the hiss and *sweet-ee* of the spreading flames, what it was.

Thermite. An incendiary hand bomb. The sort of things they drop on London, only small enough to throw.

The boys got it mixed in with the others, I guess. Or it may be that they seized this opportunity to throw the thermite bomb, having always been anxious to do so. We only had a few of them, and I'd never given anybody permission to throw them in practice, the truth of the matter being that I was afraid of the things myself.

Well, I'd reason to be. This one didn't just start a fire: it started a whole landscapeful of them. Little ones and big ones. They burned brightly, briskly. They seemed to be enjoying themselves. Nobody else was.

The place was pandemonium. We in the cage had been lucky that none of the flaming thermite was thrown between the bars. Trapped as we were, we wouldn't have lasted five minutes, had that been the case. The stuff has a fiendish way of spreading. It's all over the place at once. And there's nothing stodgy about the fires either.

But if none came inside, the roof of the cage, which was wooden, and the floor, likewise made of wood, caught fire promptly. The bars admitted plenty of air, which was a break for us, and the flames were confined to the back end; but even so, we were in a bad spot.

Nobody behind that barricade was going to take the trouble to come to the side of the cage and unlock the door, even if that door had been protected against gunfire. They had too much else to do.

THE noise out there was hideous. I guess Hell must sound something like that, and I'm serious. Both the closed trucks were burning; boxes of food were burning, and bundles of loot. What's worse, the soldiers themselves were ablaze. At least, their clothing was.

Some devoted themselves to bapping it out with their hands. Others, the wounded, and two or three who'd been blinded by the explosion, rolled on the ground screaming, begging their companions to help them, while little angry eager yellow flames hurried over them, slithering through their clothes to the delicate shrinking skin.

It was a wonderful weapon, that thermite bomb. It was the most modern thing that backward Kammorirri had ever known. Even the butchers of Europe, admittedly the best, would have been proud of it.

I don't know whether the others remembered, but one of my first thoughts, after I'd made sure that Mike and Bertina were not hurt, was of the dynamite. From the middle of the cage, a place too hot to stand very long, I could see the pile outside, the neatly stacked sticks, the three long white fuses.

Not a fuse had become directly ignited, but there were fires burning in the weeds and grass between and all around them. None of the paper wrappers was blazing, but this didn't make so much difference.

Dynamite itself will just burn, if exposed to flame, the way unwrapped gunpowder will burn, though not as briskly. A big pile of it, overheated, might explode; but the real danger here lay in the fuses, each of which was crammed into a blasting cap. Blasting caps are temperamental. It doesn't take much to set them off. And if one of these went blooey the whole pile would; in fact the whole clearing!

In no time at all the flames ceased being little licky things, thankful for what they could get to nibble on, and became huge, reaching, roaring sheets of destruction. The roof of the cage might have been matchwood, the floor celluloid. Smoke swirled past us, thickening, making us cough, making our eyes run. Sparks rose in successive clouds, through which bits of broken burning wood tumbled negligently from the ceiling.

The Chinese like fireworks, but I don't suppose they enjoyed these very much.

The truck was old, and it had probably never been as strong as it should have been, considering what it was made to carry. The whole rear end of it fell off, released bars zigzagging crazily this way and that. Suddenly, just like that, we had an exit—if we could manage to get through it alive.

Big Mommsen rushed, his arms over his head, whimpering, paying no heed to his wife. Bertina Howland was next. She refused to be helped. Mike, tiny brave gentlemanly Mike, with all the gallantry in the world, did his best to shield Gladys Mommsen from the flames as they raced out together.

I couldn't help grinning at the sight, even then. Gladys was big enough to have picked up Mike and thrown him the whole length of the clearing; but wailing and sobbing, she let him lead the way, him protectively gripping an arm that was as big around as his own waist.

And I followed up in the rear carrying Racketty-Rax like a baby. I guess nobody else had remembered the poor little dwarf. He was still unconscious from the beating he'd received for doing one of the most courageous things I've ever seen a man do.

FOR a moment I couldn't see anything, and in fact I didn't dare open my eyes anyway, it was so hot. I heard the flames shrieking around us, and the sparks hissing and spitting.

There was a mad music going through my head, something loud and very familiar that I could hear even above the fire's fury, but I just supposed then that I'd gone haywire or was feverish.

We broke through, somehow, me leaning over to try to protect the dwarf. Then we were clear, with nothing more than burning splotches of grass and weeds around us.

Mike and Bertina were safe. The Mommsens were face down on the grass, in a clear space, and I guessed that they were all right. I put Racketty-Rax between them and sprang toward the dynamite.

All three fuses were burning by this time, and one was within a couple of inches of the blasting cap. I grabbed it, jerked it out. I grabbed and jerked out the others, and threw them away.

That mad loud familiar music was pounding in my ears every second of the time.

On one knee, I looked around in time to see a Chink swinging his rifle toward Bertina and Mike, where they stood. He was close to me. I threw myself sideways against him, and we went down together, coughing and rasping, among the bright pools of flame.

I got a grip on the gun barrel and held it so that the muzzle was high, and I could feel the shock when he pulled the trigger; but that bullet only went zipping through the treetops. With my other hand I slugged him three or four times, and after that he was still.

Once again I started to get up, and this time I found myself facing the square squat thick Chink who never had liked us. He must have figured that the game was up. He had turned his back to the enemy out there in the forest, and he was going to dispose of his prisoners.

His face was streaked with sweat and grime, and twisted with hate. He had his automatic in his hand, and the only reason why he didn't plug me then and there, I figured afterward, was that he was afraid of the bullet going clear through me and into the guy I'd just knocked out. He moved to one side, so as to get a clear shot—

And then the Kammorirrian army burst in upon us.

THEY came from all sides at once, yelling like demons, making themselves heard even above the roar of the flames, the screams of burning men, the mad music.

This is the way (but brandishing mere spears) that their fathers and all their forefathers had used to charge the enemy. But these babies, my own men, the men I'd trained were armed with bayoneted Springfields, with Thompson sub-machine guns, and Colt .45 automatics.

What's more, they knew how to use them! And it was no senseless burst of fury, this. The bandit chief was knocked flat in a shower of lead, and five or six of the tallest guardsmen promptly surrounded Mike and Bertina and the rest of us, while the others mopped up.

It was all over in short order. I guess it was pretty terrible—it certainly was a messy scene afterward—but half fainting the way we were, and with the guardsmen standing protectively round us, we didn't see much of it. By the time Mike and I got around to shouting a command that prisoners be taken provided they threw down their guns and raised both hands, it was too late. Perhaps this was just as well.

Bertina Howland came toward me, and I saw with a start that she was weeping. It was not like Bertina to weep. It must have been a powerful emotion that gripped her.

"George . . ." she sobbed. "George . . ."

As I say, she came toward me. But when I stretched out my arms, she walked right past me, as if she'd never seen them. She walked to what was left of the cage truck.

"George, my notes have been burned! I tried to save them, when I ran out, but they slipped loose! Oh, I'm just *furious!*"

Mike laid a hand on my arm.

"Thank God I still have my Georgie!" He grinned up into my face. "It's tough sometimes, being a crown prince. But with a guy like you around, that makes it all right. You won't ever quit this job, will you, Georgie? You won't ever get homesick and want to go back, or get married or something?"

I could hear Miss Howland behind me, bemoaning the fact that her typewriter too had been ruined.

"Hell, don't be silly!" I said. "*Me* resign?"

I shook my head, trying to shake that mad music out of my ears, trying to understand things. Why had the boys charged? Why hadn't they waited until the fire drove the Chinks from cover, and then picked them off one by one without exposing themselves? And why, when they had come, had they seemed to know that Mike and I were here?

"My Georgie of many talents! You are even a success as an animal trainer! See?"

And then I realized that the music was real music, or at least real noise, not delirium. And no wonder it was familiar! Earnest little Hiccup, for all the excitement, still anxious to please, had got my directions wrong when I pushed down with my fingers trying to tell him to pick up the button. He had thought it over, and had decided at last that what I wanted him to do was play *Yankee Doodle*.

So he was playing *Yankee Doodle*. With one finger, as I had taught him to do on the harmonium, he was playing it on that wheezy but powerful old calliope.

Out through the vast teak forest sounded the strains, loud enough to be heard for miles, so loud that they had been heard by the Kammorirrian forces.

And this was why the boys had charged. They had known, when they heard *Yankee Doodle*, that I was there, and that therefore Mike must be there. And they had come dashing in to save us from the fire.

Terror-stricken, afraid to stop, head down, eyes closed, Hiccup kept right on playing until we lifted him away from the keyboard.

"He saved our lives," Mike said gravely. "We must see that he is decorated. And your soldiers too. They were magnificent."

"*They* don't get any medals," I growled. "What they get is hell, when we're back at the palace. Discipline's discipline, and even if they did save our lives they had no business bringing along one of those thermite bombs without my permission."

But Mike by that time was looking for his hunting rifles.

MIKE had a soldier behind him carrying those rifles, each back in its green canvas bag, when late that afternoon we went down the path toward the edge of the forest to look over the wreckage of the plane.

"I think I shall have the circus give a command performance at the palace, eh, Georgie? We will entertain them sumptuously, of course. But what about Miss Howland? She has asked me if she could come up to the palace to get an interview. What do you think?"

"You know your father the Sultan better than I do."

"Oh, no! She would not aspire to an interview with *him!* It is undoubtedly *me* she wishes to write up. And I don't care for that, personally. So if you haven't any particular feeling about it," he added carefully, "I think I'll refuse the permission."

"Why not? She's got plenty to write about, as it is."

"Just what I figured."

This was near the spot where Ralston of the purple tights had fallen. His body had been removed a few hours earlier. And now a large male tiger stepped from behind a tree into the middle of the path.

Maybe my nerves were a bit on edge, which was only natural. I stepped toward the tiger, waving my arms.

"Shoo! Get out of here, Joseph! Scram!"

Steel-muscled, it crouched, moving its hind quarters for a spring. Its claws were out, its teeth bared. A growl came from its throat.

And I saw then that this was not Joseph. This was an honest-to-goodness wild tiger.

It sprang.

Mike's shot, considering that he had to snatch the rifle from a bearer behind him, was a miracle of speed. But then Mike always was fast. A faster thinker and a fast shooter. The bullet caught the tiger in mid-air, caught it perfectly just back of the left shoulder, and tore upward through the heart and into the spine, bringing the beast down as decisively as you might bring down a flying bird.

Mike had used the Rigby he liked so much, the .275. I personally would have used the Holland and Holland express. But of course it's all a matter of taste.

THE END

Happy Relief From Painful Backache

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys—and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, loss

of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

Peanuts to You



Bubber busted a hole in the clean October afternoon air and sat down on the seat of his pants

By William R. Cox

Author of "Man Bites Champ," "The Gloves Hang High," etc.

It's my own fault. I could have been an insurance salesman, or maybe a truck driver. Instead of which I have to go and manage a ball team, and have a daughter that reads books, and— ahh, nuts! Peanuts!

IT IS a long way from March until October. When you have been carrying upon your back a ball club like the Panthers; when you have got Bubber Holt and Lefty Conover and twenty-two patched-up crackpots who have stumbled backwards into a pennant, you are not even glad to see October; not even with World Series dough staring you in the pocket.

Once I could have had a job in a manufacturing plant where they made screwdrivers. I should have taken it. It's my own fault I chose to be a baseball manager.

Bubber and Lefty were my own fault, too. Last year, with the club broke and the team wallowing in the second division, lower half, I took a scouting trip. I took it at my own expense, with Daisy along for the ride.

Daisy is my daughter. She is a very-fine looking girl, taking after her mama for blond hair and big blue eyes.

She is inclined to be plump in certain places, which personally I think is swell, but which she thinks is very un-good, and Daisy spends most of the trip reading out of a set of little green books which were written by a guy who makes a speciality of thinning out women.

Daisy, also like her late beloved mama, does not care about baseball.

So there we were in Florida, where they play baseball in December. And there was Lefty Conover, of the Florida state, pitching a no-hit game for the Goody Woodies against the Centuro Astrianas in one of those "exhibition games."

Lefty is a handsome guy with wavy hair and narrow-set eyes and the usual southpaw disposition. But I signed him. I would sign a no-hit pitcher from the Epworth League. The Panthers have not got a no-hit pitcher from grammar school.

Daisy liked Lefty from the start. We hung around Tampa for a couple of weeks because Daisy clamored to go jooking with Lefty, and jooking was better for her than reading green books and starving on lettuce—I thought.

There is a couple of breweries in Tampa, and I have got a academic interest in breweries, so our stay was not unpleasant. It was down by the brewery that I discovered Bubber Holt.