

KIDNAPPED IN THE JUNGLE

A
HAL KEEN
Mystery
Story

HUGH LLOYD

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A HAL KEEN MYSTERY STORY
KIDNAPPED IN THE JUNGLE

By

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KIDNAPPED IN THE JUNGLE

CHAPTER I

STOWAWAY

It moved only a fraction of an inch and that was all. It might have been a fleeting shadow hovering between the dim flickering light and the dark recesses of the hold. It might have been a mere figment of his vivid imagination, Hal told himself, yet, all the while, he knew what was the secret that the towering bales and packing cases kept in the far corner.

A stowaway!

Hal's bright blue eyes had strayed for a moment, then rested on the face of the chattering purser. He feigned polite attention as they moved about the miscellaneous collection of baggage, but kept his mind and eyes upon the bales in the far corner.

"As I said before, Mr. Keen," the purser was saying, "this is strictly against rules, but if you think you could quickly identify your bag ... You say it's just a small one, eh?"

"Uh huh," Hal answered thoughtfully, "one that my mother crowded all the most important articles into. Pipes, tobacco, razor, neckties, etc. You see, the bag that was put in my stateroom is for my uncle—he's down at the Isthmus now. Been there two months, in fact, and my mother's sending some extra clothes for him, which I have to cart along with the rest of my luggage."

The purser smiled pleasantly. "Ah, I remember now," he said. "Your uncle came down with me. He's Mr. Denis Keen—red haired and a miniature Woolworth Building like yourself, eh?"

Hal chuckled loudly at the simile and nodded. "Righto, we almost look like twins, Uncle Denis and I. He's staking me to this trip—he thought I'd like to see what Panama looked like, and, besides, I'll be company for him on the way home. He hates long journeys alone and most always takes me with him if he can."

"I know about his connection with the secret service," said the purser, lowering his voice significantly.

"On this line there are some of us employees taken into certain confidences so that we may be of aid to the government if it is within our power, or, I may say, chance. For instance, we've had our orders to keep our eyes peeled both on and off shore since this Alan Brody was kidnapped almost six months ago. No tellin' when one of us, situated as we are, might run plunk into a clue or even Alan Brody himself. A twelve-year-old kid with blond hair and brown eyes ain't easy to mistake, an' it's a safe bet that somethin' some day will turn

up about him between here and the Isthmus. That's why I wasn't surprised when I learned who your uncle was."

Hal wondered if the stowaway had heard, and lowered his voice instinctively when he spoke. "It'll be a big feather in Unk's cap if he ever lands that Brody kid, and it'll be a bigger feather if he lands the kidnappers. It'd be darn nice of you, purser, if you could give Unk a tip. Suppose you fellers are so used to the Isthmus that you find your way around and see lots and hear lots, huh?"

"Sometimes. I've heard lots already on my trips down there, since the kidnapping, but none of those Spiggotties seem to know anything about it."

"They could lie?" Hal suggested.

"Yes, but in this case I think they're telling the truth. If they did anything like that, it would be for money—ransom—but nothing like that has been written or mentioned to Mr. William Brody, the kid's father. The man's never heard a word since the kid wandered off from his mother and father when they were on a sightseeing trip through the jungle."

"Mm, the kid might be dead, then. He could have sunk in a swamp or something like that."

The purser nodded. "Well, your uncle will find that out one way or the other before he starts for home." Then: "By the way, Mr. Brody's on board right now. Captain told me that your uncle sent for him by cablegram last night in connection with that discovery they made there the other day. It's in this morning's papers. Police found part of a skeleton at the foot of a cliff."

"Haven't read about it," Hal admitted. "That reminds me—my mother stuffed a paper in that bag I'm looking for. She told me last thing to read an article she had marked—maybe it's about that. Gosh, I didn't have time to even read the weather reports," he said, half listening to the steady lash of rain and water against the ship. Then he glanced toward a small mound of baggage at his left and, at sight of a familiar looking steamer trunk and a small bag, he smiled. "There's my stuff, purser. The lost is found, huh?"

Hal took up the bag, and the purser turned to lead the way out of the gloomy hold. No sound issued from the region of the bales, no shadow moved, and, though Hal lingered a moment hoping for some further sign, he heard nothing but the usual groanings and creaks of the ship as she plowed her way through a stormy sea.

They passed a stoker just up from below on relief. Stripped to the waist and covered with grime, he exchanged pleasantries with the purser, then went on his way straight in the direction of the bales.

A feeling of apprehension and sympathy welled up in Hal, and he wondered if this grimy fellow was the one that would discover the stowaway and turn him over to the ship's captain. If he didn't, someone else would, that

was pretty certain.

“Rather anybody else than me,” Hal thought as they came up on deck. “I couldn’t turn any fellow over like that—no, not in a thousand years.”

CHAPTER II

NEWS

It was that kind of an afternoon and evening on shipboard when everyone seems to stick close to his stateroom. The dining room was practically deserted at dinner time, and, before the meal was over, Hal had every reason to believe that he was about the only good sailor among the first class passengers.

He lounged in the saloon for a little while and, after yawning from sheer ennui a few times, bethought himself of the great store of reading matter in his stateroom. He skirted the wet and slippery deck and stopped before his door to inhale a deep, long breath of the heavy salt air. Just as he was about to turn, a young man shuffled out of the shadows and, without looking to right or left, went past him.

After he had gone a few feet, he stopped a moment and exchanged weather opinions with the purser, who had just come out for a turn on the deck. Hal got a glimpse of the fellow's profile and noticed that he had a rather large and prominently hooked nose and was taken a little by surprise at the sound of his high pitched voice.

Hal hailed the purser after the fellow had gone on. "A swell night for ducks, huh, purser!" he greeted him pleasantly. "I thought I was the only bird on this deck with sea legs tonight, but guess not."

The purser nodded and buttoned his slicker close about his neck. "You mean Mr. Dorsey that I was just talking to? Yes, he acts as if the sea couldn't faze him. He's a second class passenger; that's the reason you didn't see him at dinner. His steward tells me he keeps to himself and looks kind of seedy. One of those chaps that's staking everything to pay for his trip down so's to get work at the Isthmus. We have lots of them coming and going, Mr. Keen."

Hal nodded and opened the door of his stateroom. "Going to read the paper now," he explained with a grin.

"What," said the purser, "haven't you looked at it yet?"

Hal chuckled. "Too lazy, I guess. I'll give it the once over and turn in. This sea air weighs me down."

He said goodnight, and, a few minutes later, was sitting on his bed with his back against the propped pillows. He yawned lazily and spread out the newspaper that was in his hands, noting at once that the article his mother had marked and instructed him to read, was, as he expected, concerned with the Brody case.

Hal's interest in the kidnapping of Alan Brody was measured by his

uncle's connection with it and that was all. He hoped that Alan Brody would be found only because of the prestige it would bring to his uncle. And that it would bring added fame to the already famous Denis Keen, Hal hadn't a doubt, for the government had announced that no stone would be left unturned until the missing boy was returned to the grieving parents.

Consequently, Hal hastily read a short review of the case; then shifted comfortably in the bed as he studied the concluding paragraph. The bed light gleamed brightly on his red, curly hair, and, save for that small area surrounding the bed, the rest of the room was dim and shadowy. The soft swish of the rain and the muffled boom of the sea seemed only to accentuate the silence. Presently he read aloud from the paper.

"Panaman police," he muttered softly, "find the remains of what is thought to be the missing Alan Brody, son of William Brody of New York City. The tenacious claws of the jungle have yielded only a few bones and the skull, however, and it is thought that the voracious denizens of the deadly swamp underlying this dense section have obliterated every other clue. Doctor examining bones maintains that death occurred from six months to a year ago ... the missing Brody boy has been gone just six months today. Denis Keen, Department of Justice man in charge of the case, has cabled Mr. Brody, and it is believed he will sail on today's boat for the Isthmus."

Hal laid his head back on the pillows for a few moments; then went on reading divers columns on news of the day. He yawned, leaned over toward the night table, and secured his pipe and tobacco. After he had taken a puff or two, he gave the sheet an idle flip, then suddenly stared at a small item in the inner section, whose headlines seemed almost to speak to him.

"I'll be gosh darned!" he exclaimed aloud. Then: "Warrant issued for arrest of Colin Walters in connection with death of Josiah Wainwright." And below this, he read: "Clear Brook, N. Y. ... Warrant was issued this morning for arrest of Colin Walters, who has been kept under surveillance since the death of Josiah Wainwright, grandfather of suspect's friend, Miss Jean Wainwright. Old Mr. Wainwright was found dead in his study seven months ago, and the contents of a steel box containing an antique ring and a map disclosing the whereabouts of some buried treasure in Panama (both heirlooms willed to the late Mr. Wainwright by his father) were gone. Young Walters, who had been lately calling on the granddaughter, Miss Jean, was the only known person outside of the Wainwright family to have any knowledge of the map and ring. Walters, however, claims to have told the story of the heirlooms to three strange young men, saying that he did not know it was to be kept a secret ... Mother still defends alibi."

Hal sat straight up in bed and whistled. Coly Walters! That daredevil friend of his prep school days! Could it be possible that he was really guilty of so

terrible a crime? Good-hearted, generous Coly! A human monkey he was—could climb in and out of dormitory windows without flinching. Hal drew up his knees and propped his chin on them thoughtfully.

“A year since I’ve seen him,” he mumbled aloud. “That must have happened a few months after we graduated—gosh!”

He sat like a sphinx for a time, thinking hard, yet idly listening to the soft splash of the rain on the deck. The sea seemed to have quieted down, and from afar off came the dismal clang of a bell buoy. As that faded into the distance, he suddenly became aware that his door was opening ever so slowly....

CHAPTER III CONFESSION

Hal jumped to the floor and in three leaps had reached the opening door. He hid himself as well as his big frame permitted, drawing himself up close and allowing the panel to shield him. Suddenly it began to swing shut again and he knew then that his unbidden visitor was in the room.

He saw a dark-haired, medium-sized young man as he stepped out and confronted him. A glow from the bed lamp fell on the visitor's tanned face.

"Coly!" Hal gasped. "Coly—for heaven's sake!"

"Sh!" said the young man. "For heaven's sake—*shush!* It's me all right, Hal—your old side-kick, Coly!"

Hal thought of the newspaper lying on the bed, and a frown overspread his face.

"Coly," he said sharply, "what are you doing here?"

Colin Walters shrugged his shoulders; then went over to Hal's bed and threw himself down wearily. "Hal," he said with a sigh, "it's a long, long story."

"And I guess I know that story, Coly," said Hal, sitting down on the edge of the bed and studying him closely. "In fact, I've just been reading about it."

Coly glanced quickly at the outspread paper, and when he looked up, the surprise on his face was real. "As true as I'm here, Hal," he said huskily, "I didn't know about this—I didn't know they were looking for me. You see I only left the house last night. This warrant must have been issued this morning. They've kept the watch on me ever since it happened seven months ago, but they couldn't pin anything on me. I don't know any more about that map or that ring than you do. And I never laid a hand on the old gentleman; that's a fact."

"Then why are you running away now, Coly?"

"Running away?" Coly looked pained. "Gosh, I never thought of it in that light. It does look like it, huh? But I'm not running away, honestly! I'm running after somebody. One of the chaps to whom I told the story of the map and the ring. I followed him right up to the gangplank of the ship this morning, but I haven't seen him since."

The tilt of Hal's broad shoulders bespoke incredulity.

"You don't believe it," said Coly with a wistful smile. "You're measuring me up in this business with the crazy stunts I used to get off at school—huh?"

"Guess that has a lot to do with it," Hal admitted. Then, feeling a surge of

sympathy for his friend, he added: “Suppose you tell me the whole thing through, Coly—right from the beginning.”

Coly smiled gratefully. “You always did give me a good break. Remember Jean Wainwright, Hal?”

Hal smiled. “Nice girl. You liked her a lot, didn’t you, Coly?”

“Still do. She’s the kind of girl that likes everything, especially horses. You’d like her for that, Hal. Anyway, that hasn’t anything to do with the story, except that I went over to her house more than ever after I got out of prep and said goodbye to you fellows. Their house faces ours.”

“Mm, I remember.”

“Well, the point is, Hal, old Mr. Wainwright, her grandfather, got telling me one day about that map and the ring. He didn’t make any secret about it—just said that Jean was heir to them and he even laughed about it. After that he referred to it any number of times, so that doesn’t look as if he meant me not to say anything about it to anyone else, does it?”

“Doesn’t sound so, anyway,” Hal agreed. “But what’s all this buncombe about the map’s indicating the whereabouts of some buried treasure?”

“It isn’t buncombe, that’s just it! It does actually exist and, although old Mr. Wainwright didn’t believe there was enough to warrant him spending the time and money to go down there after it, it’s there just the same! Miss Wainwright (she’s Jean’s maiden aunt) and Jean believe there’s more than Mr. Wainwright thinks, but that’s neither here nor there.”

“What happened to old Mr. Wainwright’s grandfather, and why the map?” Hal asked, interested.

“His name was Silas Wainwright, and he went to California in the gold rush of ’49. As far as his heirs can learn, he decided after a couple of years to come home by way of the Isthmus, as so many people did in those days, to escape the Indian attacks across the country. So he set out in a boat with a few other people, intending to land at a little port in Panama and then cross the Isthmus to the Atlantic side, where they would take a boat for the States. It was a much safer way, though longer, and if they could stand the terrific heat and the yellow fever, they’d finally get home some time or other.”

“That’s if they didn’t lose their lives in an Atlantic storm,” Hal smiled.

“You said it,” Coly agreed thoughtfully, and for a moment listened to the rain lashing against the deck. Then: “Anyway, old Mr. Silas Wainwright landed with the rest safe and sound, and they started their trek across the Isthmus on an old forgotten trail—Mendoza Trail it was then called. They were about halfway on that journey when a few of the party came down with yellow fever.”

“Not so good,” Hal commented.

“No, and Silas must have thought the same thing,” said Coly seriously.

“Those who were well had to pitch in and nurse the sick, and that meant that they all ran the risk of coming down with it and perhaps dying. Anyway, they rigged up living quarters in some old French stone ruins. They are still to be found under the jungle growth, I guess. At least, the last time Mr. Josiah Wainwright inquired they were. But to go back to the story, Mr. Silas must have had a hunch that he’d come down with it, so what did he do but bury his belongings back of the old French ruins. Then he made a map of it and wrote his wife and son a letter inclosing the map, of course, and the ring, filled with gold dust. An Indian who happened to be in the neighborhood was given the letter to mail when he was sent to the nearest settlement for help. The whole party died of the fever and the letter finally found its ways to the States. Mr. Silas’ wife was dead then, too, so his son received it.”

“That was Jean’s grandfather, Mr. Josiah Wainwright?”

“Yep. He never attempted to go to Panama, because he was always skeptical and said it might only be a fool’s journey, after all. He was an unromantic sort. Jean’s father died right after she was born—so did her mother. Consequently, the map and the ring are Jean’s when she becomes twenty-one.”

“What about the letter, Coly?”

“It fell apart, Mr. Wainwright told me. Anyway, he said his father just wrote in it what he thought his fate would be and bid them goodbye. And, as if it was an afterthought, he added on the bottom of the letter that the map indicated where he had buried some of his belongings, and that it would be to his family’s advantage to come and get them some day.”

“Some journey to get a few belongings!”

“But don’t you see!” Coly said excitedly. “Consider the times and the fear old Silas Wainwright had that many people would open that letter before it got to his family! Do you suppose he was going to write in plain English that he had buried gold? Use your brains, Hal—why do you suppose he sent the ring? It was a plain signet ring with his initials, S. J. W., engraved on it. Underneath is a secret compartment that contains the gold dust. It’s worked by a secret spring lock and Jean’s grandfather discovered it only a few years ago. What does the ring mean but that there’s more gold dust buried in Panama? Even Jean’s aunt insists that must be so.”

“Gosh!” said Hal.

“They could use that treasure, believe me. The map’s gone, but I can remember word for word just what it indicated. I could even draw one from memory, I’ve seen it so many times.”

Hal frowned. “Did you tell the police that?”

“I was going to,” Coly answered frankly, “but my mother prevailed against it. She said they would arrest me then, thinking I had destroyed it and was just

waiting for the fuss to blow over before I disappeared.”

“And believe me, that’s just what it looks like now, Coly.”

“Don’t I realize it *now*—since I read that paper! But listen, Hal, I’ll tell you about those three fellers I told that story to. Mother believes it and I think you will too. You’re that kind of a fellow.”

Hal never lost faith in Coly from that moment on. He nodded. “Go on,” he said simply.

“I don’t know where they came from or where they went to. They just stopped in front of our house one day when I was cutting the lawn and asked the way to the turnpike. I strolled up to their car and directed them and after that we just got chatting sort of. Anyway, they got kidding me about what a dead town Clear Brook was and one of them, a great big blond bird, said he bet nobody had left it to make his way in the world for over two hundred years.”

“And you told them that Silas Wainwright had, huh?” Hal interposed.

“Sure,” said Coly sheepishly. “I suppose I didn’t like them knocking my home town. Besides, the Wainwright business is historical, sort of, and Mr. Silas was a romantic figure, a pioneer kind of, and that’s something to be proud of when I think of how he was born and raised in Clear Brook. But I’ll admit I talked too much, Hal, because I got peeved when they didn’t believe it and I told them that Mr. Josiah Wainwright had the map and the ring in a steel box in his study, and they could go ask him about them.”

“Did they?”

“I don’t know. They didn’t then, anyway. They drove off toward the turnpike, and two days later, when Jean and her aunt were in the city on an overnight shopping tour, Mr. Josiah Wainwright was killed in his study. You know the rest.”

“Yes, I remember the papers said that the front hall door was found open when Jean and her aunt returned in the morning and discovered the tragedy.” Hal’s sober features suddenly lighted with a smile. “I know that it couldn’t have been you, Coly,” he said with a chuckle. “You never came in and out of regular doors and entrances. You liked dormitory windows better.”

Coly smiled wistfully. “Any fool would know I couldn’t have killed Mr. Wainwright, anyway. What would I do that for when I knew that map by heart? But somebody else didn’t know it by heart, and that somebody was the bird who came to my house last night!”

“What?”

“Yep. A fellow came to the house and rang the bell and when my mother opened the door, he asked for me. He wouldn’t come in, even the way it was raining. Just stood out in the dark so’s I could hardly see him.”

“What did he want?” Hal asked excitedly.

“That’s the funny part of it,” Coly answered. “He said he was a reporter

and that he came to ask me if I remembered much of what the map contained, where it was and all about it. He said his paper wanted to make a story of it and renew public interest in it so the murderer or murderers could be caught.”

“They ought to have thought of that before this,” Hal said disgustedly. “How about the Panama police?”

“Oh, they’ve kept watch down there. Anyway, they did right after the murder, because Jean told the police in Clear Brook just about where the map indicated the treasure to be and they got in touch with the Panama authorities to watch. But nobody has ever gone near those old French ruins, and by this time I guess they’re tired of watching.”

“Maybe they’ve grabbed the treasure themselves,” Hal suggested.

Coly shook his head. “They don’t know about the treasure part of it. They were given instructions to watch for any suspicious characters that came to the ruins and arrest them. Jean told me that.”

“What happened to the reporter last night? What else did he say?”

Coly smiled ruefully. “He didn’t say any more. He left, and after he was gone I happened to remember I wanted some tobacco for my pipe so I slipped on my raincoat and went out of the house. Down at the bus station I saw the reporter in the light and I thought I knew his face, Hal. He looked like one of those three fellows!”

Hal whistled. “For goodness’ sake, what did you do?”

Coly’s eyes blazed. “A bus was just coming in and the fellow was getting in. I got in after him and sat right behind him all the way to New York, but he didn’t see me. I followed him from the bus right down to this boat and as he started to go up the gangplank he turned.”

“And he saw that you were following him, huh?”

“I can’t be sure, Hal,” Coly said dismally, “but I think so. Anyway, I crawled on after him and I heard him say to a man standing on the deck that he was a passenger and had been permitted to come aboard early. It was two o’clock then.”

“Boy! What did you do then?” Hal said breathlessly.

“I waited my chance and sneaked in with some freight,” Coly laughed ruefully. “I hid between some bales and decided to wait a few seconds until they had the freight all in, for I had heard a man say they’d be finished in a few minutes. But darn it all, Hal, I fell asleep! When I woke up we were past Sandy Hook, I guess.”

“You would do something like that!” Hal exclaimed. “Why didn’t you tell the police right away? Why didn’t you get a cop to come on board with you and hunt the fellow out and make him come clean? *Why?* Gosh, Coly, what a fool you’ve been!”

“Don’t I know it!” Coly buried his head in his hands. “I just lost my head

when I saw him, that's all. I realized that when I woke up down there. That's the time you and the purser came in and I had to scoot to stay under cover. Goodnight, how I wanted to call you and tell you! It was terrible sitting behind those bales all day. I haven't had a bit of food—nothing. Luck was with me tonight, though. I waited my chance and got up here and it was just in time to see you talking with the purser here at your door. Then I hid behind one of those vents until I was certain the deck was clear. Two men passed me, but I couldn't see who they were.”

Hal put out his hand and gave Coly a friendly clasp on the shoulder. “Brace up,” he said cheerfully. “You've got a pretty good clue in a way, do you realize that? All you need to do is to spot him. It's pretty significant that you've as good as recognized him and on top of that, he boards this boat—a boat bound for Panama! There's that much to work with, anyway.”

Coly smiled grimly. “Meanwhile,” he said, “I'm just a stowaway.”

CHAPTER IV

A SHADOW

It was after midnight when Hal and Cody concluded an interview with the captain. A kind, considerate man, he had patiently listened to the recital of both young men and weighed the circumstances well before giving advice.

"It's clear that you'll have to give yourself up, Walters," he told Coly. "Keen is willing to stake you to your transportation down and back, so that eliminates my company in the matter, but I'd give myself the benefit of the doubt where the police are concerned, if I were you. I'd nip this thing in the bud and tell them just what you've told me."

"It'll make it look good for you, too, Coly," Hal said when they were on their way back to the stateroom again. "To give yourself up before they know even that you're on board this ship will be that much in your favor. It'll show that you didn't run away but really followed that fellow here before you realized what you were doing."

"I guess you're right, Hal—I guess the captain's right, too," said Coly. "Only one thing—I don't like it that you're shelling out your money like this for my passage down and back so's to keep me from being charged as a stowaway—it's too much! Maybe it'll be a year or even two before I can pay it back."

"I don't care if it's sixty, Coly," Hal said with a ring of feeling in his voice. "Don't worry about it, because I'm not. Uncle Denis can give me some cash when I get down, and my mother can send me some more before I'm ready to come back, so don't worry about leaving me short. Another thing, Uncle will make me an extra present, he'll be so glad I was able to help you out. And as far as the rest of this business goes, I'll see the purser in the morning and see if he can let me in on the secret of who came aboard early and who didn't come aboard."

"And if the captain sends that radiogram right away my mother ought to know where I am around about breakfast time, huh?"

Hal nodded and for a moment they loitered at the rail for the rain had stopped and the air felt fresh and invigorating. Coly inhaled it in quick deep breaths as if he would have done with his worries and problems in just that manner. For a second his glance rested on the shadowy amorphous bulk of a vent rising from the forward deck.

"That's where I hid when I first came up from below," he said. "I was so hungry I couldn't think of anything else but now since we've talked and

planned so much, I don't know which hurts me the most, worry or hunger?"

"Gosh, Coly, I'd almost forgotten," Hal said apologetically. "You must be starved—and how! Nothing to eat in twenty-four hours almost. I'll see if I can rout out the steward somewhere, so you go on in and undress, and I'll bring something in the way of food back with me, if I have to break open the kitchen myself." Then, catching a glimpse of Coly's feverish eyes, he added: "Quit worrying, kiddo, everything will be O.K.—you see if it won't. I've an idea the captain will radio your story to Clear Brook just as you told it. He's a good scout and he wants to see you get just as fair a deal as I do, and I bet anything he'll wire for orders to question and watch his male passengers for the cause of the Wainwright case."

"I hope he does, Hal, I hope he does!" said Coly anxiously. "It's my only chance to identify that fellow and make him come clean. He must know something about it!"

"But the mystery is—why did he come to your house last night and ask you where the place was that the map showed?"

"I've asked myself that too, and the only answer I seem to get is a sort of a hunch that those other two double-crossed this fellow I'm looking for. Now he's going down there to look for them if they're to be found. Usually that kind knows where to hunt for their double-crossing friends, and they were all crooks, Hal—just plain criminals. The more I think of their faces, the more I'm confident of it."

"They must have been, Coly," said Hal kindly. "Now scoot on in to that stateroom—you look half sick, that's a fact. I'll be back with some milk and sandwiches in a sec, or my name isn't what it is."

"You're a brick, Hal. Gosh, I'll never forget..."

"Forget it. If I couldn't help out an old friend, I'd be a heck of a gink, wouldn't I? Now toddle along."

Hal looked relieved when the stateroom door had closed behind Coly. Then he started around the vent in search of the steward and had taken but two or three steps when he saw a shadow emerge before him. In two seconds the figure was lost in the darkness of one of the many staterooms. He thought he heard a door closing softly but he could not be sure.

Hal stood, perplexed and bewildered, looking from the shadowy vent to the spot where the fleeing figure had disappeared. One thing was certain—whoever it had been, he had heard every word uttered by himself and Coly. And somehow it struck him that a chance eavesdropper would never have sought to escape in such a furtive and extraordinary manner; this man's purpose was deliberate.

But why?

CHAPTER V BORDERLAND

Hal burst into his stateroom fifteen minutes later, armed with milk and sandwiches and fruit. A sleepy steward and he had stormed the kitchen successfully and Coly, already in bed, smiled wanly at the savory results.

“Hope I can do justice to ’em, Hal,” he said wearily.

“What do you mean—do justice to ’em!” Hal countered gaily as he set down the heavily laden tray on the night table.

Coly looked earnestly at his friend. “I mean I feel so fagged that I can’t tell anything about myself. One second I think I’m so hungry and tired that I’m sick, and the next second I think I’m sick of being hungry and tired.”

Hal grinned. “Then that means that all you need to do is to cram this stuff and then get down to your forty winks. You’ll be fine and fit in the morning.”

Coly’s brave but feeble attempts to do justice to the food that Hal had brought him were rather a failure. He seemed not to have any appetite now that food was at hand and there was a queer, restless expression in his eyes as he smilingly refused a bit of luscious fruit from Hal’s hands. Moreover, he had two deep red spots on his cheeks and his voice was husky when he talked.

“No hard feelings, Hal—guess I’m more tired than hungry.”

“Guess you are, old bird,” said Hal, shaking him by the shoulder lightly, and laughing. “And don’t worry about my feelings—this stuff will never go to waste when little Hal’s around. Now go to sleep and don’t think of my feelings or anybody else’s.”

Coly smiled gratefully and closed his eyes. Hal stood and watched him a moment and a look of apprehension settled on his features, a look which ill consorted with his former gay bearing and optimistic prophecies. Then with sudden decision he leaned over and felt the dozing young man’s forehead.

It was feverish.

“Coly,” he said softly, “do you still feel fagged?”

Young Walters slowly opened his eyes. “Rather,” he said feebly, “I’m chilly and....” Suddenly his eyes widened thoughtfully, “Say, Hal, it would be awful if I was to get sick or anything like that now, huh? Why, it’s my only chance....”

“Don’t be thinking of that now, kiddo,” Hal said cheerfully. “I just think maybe you ought to have the doctor look you over. You might have caught cold with all your trouble since last night. And down in that hold today you might have.... Suppose I run out and get the doctor?”

Coly smiled. “Just as you say, Hal.”

And Hal said, “That’s just what I say.”

About dawn the ship’s doctor stood talking to Hal at the stateroom door. “I’ll be back in a few minutes with a nurse,” he was saying. “Meanwhile you can pick up your belongings and get the purser to assign you to another room. He’s a pretty sick young fellow, Keen. And he’s going to be worse—pneumonia. I doubt if he’ll be out of his delirium when we land. You had better get some sleep.”

Hal went back to Coly’s bedside for a moment. The young man was tossing fretfully with fever and muttering to himself. Now and then his burning gaze rested on the watcher and there was a pleading look in his eyes. Once he spoke aloud.

“It’s my only chance,” he said thickly. “My only chance ... Hal’s carrying on for a friend, for me ... it’s my only....”

That was all. He dropped into a heavy, labored sleep after that and Hal tiptoed around the room gathering up his things. A strange feeling of detachment seized him—a sudden feeling of remoteness from Coly had developed, for the delirium had made a gaping chasm in their plans and hopes. The doctor’s pronouncement helped to widen it still more, for even the remembrance of his words sounded like a death knell.

Suddenly something welled up in Hal. What had made Coly say that about carrying on—carrying on for a friend? Oh yes, he remembered. It had been about the snack, the food that he was too sick to eat. He gulped with embarrassment—he was near to shedding real salt tears at that moment and yet his young man’s breast was firm with resolve.

He would carry on for Coly—that he would!

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE EPISODE

They were due to land at Colon at dawn. It was a little after midnight and Hal stood at the port rail thinking that the voyage had been all too short, cruelly so for Coly's sake. If it could only have lasted another day!

"So young Walters' crisis isn't until tomorrow, eh?" came the purser's voice suddenly.

Hal looked around startled. "Didn't see you, purser," he explained. Then: "Yes, it's tough luck for Coly, huh? It couldn't have happened before tomorrow. Oh well, even at that I guess he wouldn't have been in any condition to identify his own mother. If that isn't the worst break I ever heard of!"

"I know, I know," said the purser consolingly, "things do happen that way sometimes. But never mind, Keen, we don't know why. The worst breaks sometimes give the best results after all. The Old Man^[1] is as interested in the young fellow as anybody on board and he's already radioed for the port authorities to look close at our discharged male passengers. If there's a man with a record among them, or a man who can't give a satisfactory account of himself, they won't hesitate to hold 'em. We've questioned every passenger that came aboard early that morning we sailed and it hasn't got us anywhere—there were too many of 'em. But you leave it to the boys at Colon—they'll ferret out the guy, if he's here."

A passenger strolled around on the stern deck, circled it, then hurried back along the opposite deck. Hal lowered his voice, "Did you see that man, purser?" he asked.

"No. Wasn't paying much attention to him. Why?"

"Nothing," Hal said thoughtfully, "only it's a funny thing how he suddenly popped out when you were talking. Maybe I imagined it but he had that sort of guilty air of an eavesdropper. He acted as if he wanted to be sure who we were and going round the deck gave him a fine chance to do it. I couldn't see who he was either, but there was something familiar about his walk. Do you know, I surprised somebody behind one of the vents on the forward deck the night Coly came up from below. It was right after I chased him off to bed and I went looking for the steward."

"You mean someone had been listening to you and young Walters talking?" the purser asked.

"Uh huh, listening to every word we said, I guess. When I started round the

deck he scooted out from behind the vent and gosh knows what stateroom he disappeared in—he went that fast.”

The purser hurried up around the stern deck looking up and down and all around.

Then he came back. “Not a sign of anyone, Keen,” he announced. “Wish I had looked to see who that fellow was. Too bad you didn’t think to give me a wink—the whole thing looks a little suspicious to me.”

“It does, sort of,” Hal agreed. “Maybe it’s just some nosey bird, though. Anyway, I’ve got to concentrate on Coly, see if I can think of some way to help him. He’s kind of got faith in me, purser. I said something about carrying on for him that night he came down sick and he’s been talking about that in his delirium ever since. Things like that get me, that’s a fact. I couldn’t go back on him now—not for anything. He’ll be pretty weak and sick when he gets home and if he has to face that thing—well, he’ll need help. I believe him about those fellows and even if it’s seven months too late, I’ve got an idea that maybe Unk can look up some things. He’s great at that.”

The purser looked up at Hal’s handsome, clean cut features, admiringly. “Don’t know but what you seem to have some of your uncle’s knack for that too,” he said smilingly. “You’ve got little traits of observation that most people your age wouldn’t know if they were told about them. Guess it’s in the blood.”

Hal grinned. “Hope so, purser,” he said modestly, “but if I’m going to beat Unk ever, I’ve got a long way to go yet. Guess I better get some sleep too, huh? I want to be up and on the job when we come in sight of Colon.”

“Then you’ve only got a few hours, Keen.” The purser put out his hand. “I’ll say goodbye now because I might be pretty busy in the morning. Hope I’m down here when you and your uncle decide to come back.”

“Hope so too,” Hal said, shaking the man’s hand heartily.

He left the purser and went back to his stateroom feeling that his short acquaintance with him would be a pleasant and lasting memory. Certainly Coly’s return trip to the States was in kind and thoughtful hands from the captain on down. There was nothing further he could do but sleep and wait for dawn.

Hal felt not a little helpless and chagrined at this forced inactivity. Sleep seemed but an admission of weakness at such a time for he felt that had he even the slightest clue the remaining hour or two of the voyage could be spent in fruitful pursuit.

Thus it took him quite a time to compose himself to rest and sleep. When he had finally settled into slumber it was only to toss and moan with wild, meaningless dreams. An hour and a half passed in this manner when suddenly he was awakened to the startling realization that the boat was not moving.

He sat up and looked around and saw that it was not yet dawn. A faint rosy

light gleamed through the mist on the far horizon, but the sky was still black and starless and a deep solemn hush pervaded everything. So great was the silence that Hal instinctively stifled a rather audible yawn and stepped out across the floor on tiptoe.

He dressed quickly, sniffing with youthful enthusiasm that sweet dampness of the tropics that one recognizes instantly upon reaching the Isthmus. Immediately his mind was full of the jungle excursions and fascinating trips that his uncle had promised him, and he forgot for the time Coly's present and future troubles.

Absorbed in these thoughts he stepped quietly out on deck. No sooner had he shut the door noiselessly behind him than he became aware of the purser crouched in a ludicrous posture behind a mammoth pile of rope that lay just under the rail. A little further along the deck he saw the figure of a man leaning over the rail and engaged in what seemed to him a sort of absurd pantomime with some invisible creature below.

At that moment, the purser became aware of Hal and made a gesture for silence and secrecy by putting his finger to his lips.

"What's the idea—what's the matter?" Hal asked when he had crept silently across the deck to the purser's side.

"Crouch down here so's he can't see you. He thinks he's all alone on this side of the deck," whispered the purser. "I just happened on it myself a second ago and he was so busy signaling to that Spiggotty below. Something funny about it, Keen—*look!*"

Hal peered through the rail and to his surprise saw a swarthy Panamanian in a small dory making frantic gestures to the man on deck. It was impossible to make out his features, for a heavy mist lay over the water and one could not see more than a few feet away from where the man's boat was gently rocking on the tide.

"When I first came along, the Spiggotty was fishing a suitcase out of the water," the purser whispered. "This bird threw it in, I'm thinking. Now what do you suppose...."

"Where are we, anyway?" Hal interposed.

"Right in the harbor. We're waiting for the fog to lift—that'll be in a little while."

Hal peered around the pile of rope and looked from the man at the rail to the native in the dory. They had ceased signaling to each other.

"Do you suppose he's smuggling something?" Hal asked excitedly.

"*Shush!* I'm wondering myself. You see I only came along ... wait ... we'll see what he does next and I'll go and report him!"

The man's next move was a truly novel one, so much so that it took Hal and the purser completely by surprise. In point of fact, they were so staggered

for the moment that they seemed unable to move or cry out and crouched where they were stark still, while the fellow leaped to the rail as agilely as a monkey and poised in mid-air.

The next second he had clipped the waters of the harbor as silently and swiftly as an arrow.

[\[1\]](#) Captain.

CHAPTER VII

CHASE

Hal gasped and jumped up. "This is dirty business, purser," he cried, "or he wouldn't do that!"

They leaned over the rail and saw the man scrambling into the dory with the native's help. Hearing Hal's voice he glanced up on shipboard furtively, then quickly turned his face and signaled the native to paddle away.

"Why, it looks like Mr. Dorsey!" the purser exclaimed.

"And it looks as if he'll get away if you don't give an alarm!" Hal shouted. And as the purser hurried oft, he called: "Meanwhile I'll see what I can do toward holding them off myself."

The purser turned inquiringly and got a flashing glimpse of Hal's towering frame poised atop the rail. Before he could shout to dissuade him, the young man's graceful body had pierced the mist and was gone.

Presently, to the purser's relief, a sudden ripple of the water betokened Hal's coming to the surface and presently his red head could be seen bobbing off in pursuit of the fleeing dory. Meanwhile shouts of "man overboard" were heard from one end of the ship to the other.

Hal was soon aware that a boat was being lowered but he had too good an eye for distance to be fooled into believing that the fugitive passenger and his companion could be intercepted by them in time. They were a good distance off already and it would take an excellent swimmer to reach them. And Hal was certainly that.

He struck out, ploughing through the foaming trail which the dory had made. Every move of his long muscular arms seemed to sweep him forward an amazing distance and there was a quiet smile on his slightly freckled features as he noted the apprehensive glances that Mr. Dorsey was casting in his direction. It was pleasant to realize that he was gaining on them steadily.

The little native put more energy into his paddling at the earnest entreaties of Mr. Dorsey. But it seemed almost futile, for the young, red haired giant swimming upon them in close pursuit had more motive power in one arm than any inanimate paddle could ever hope to have.

Hal chuckled loudly, "Might as well stop and be reasonable, Mr. Dorsey!" he called. "I'm going to upset you both!"

Mr. Dorsey did not answer but turned and mumbled something to the native who in turn muttered a few words from beneath the folds of a dark bandanna handkerchief which he had closely tied about his throat and chin.

Hal laughed outright then and swung himself forward with renewed energy.

The Panamanian was dexterity itself when it came to manipulating his dory. Moreover he knew his harbor as Hal did not. Also he knew the sheltering curtain of the fog if he could but put enough distance between himself and his dogged pursuer. Therefore he began hurling great sprays of water into the swimmer's eyes with the paddle, and soon he had the capable assistance of Mr. Dorsey.

Hal's mind worked like a charm from the very outset of the water battle. One flip of the stinging salt spray into his laughing blue eyes changed his whole plan of action in a flash. He took advantage of the laborious efforts of Mr. Dorsey and the native, for while they were creating their foamy barrage he silently dove under water and gauging his distance very nicely, came up directly at the prow of the dory.

Perhaps if he had been able to enjoy the joke with no more than just a mental chuckle, all would have gone well. But he had that unselfish quality that he couldn't laugh alone. In this instance, certainly, he wanted his near captives to laugh at the joke with him, and he pulled himself half out of the water with the aid of the dory's prow and shouted gleefully.

"Here I am, gentlemen!" he laughed. "What do you say—hands up, or bottom up? I'm referring to the dory."

The laugh ended suddenly, for Hal was quick to note the cat-like agility with which the native turned about in his little boat. There was no responsive laugh from under that voluminous bandanna handkerchief; there was not even a sound. Instead the man swung his paddle high over his head, sweeping it straight in the direction of the pursuing swimmer.

Hal ducked, but not quickly enough, for the native brought down the paddle upon his unprotected head. He felt a sharp stinging pain and as his senses reeled he fancied he saw through the mist a gloating smile in the man's sharp, black eyes.

He tried to hold on to the prow of the dory but there seemed not to be an atom of strength in his hands. Something kept whispering to him that to release that grip was to be lost—to admit defeat. Yet his mind, his senses, seemed to be slipping further and further away from him all the time. Finally he was aware that another stinging blow had been administered to him and he saw the swinging treacherous paddle in the native's hands as if through a haze.

Suddenly he realized that he had let go; realized that he was sinking....

CHAPTER VIII

MR. BRODY

A dark-haired man of medium build and height had offered himself as one of the rescuing crew putting off in the ship's lifeboat. It had not been at all necessary, but the man had insisted on it and once the boat was launched he kept his sad gray eyes fixed on the red head of the swimmer.

"Do you know young Keen, Mr. Brody?" one of the crew ventured curiously.

Mr. Brody shook his head. "Not any more than the rest of you. He's interested me for two reasons—one because he's the nephew of the man who's hunting for my lost boy, and another, because he's devoted himself to the cause of that unfortunate young Walters. There's stuff in that young man worth taking note of—that's why I'm here."

The sailor was puzzled for the moment. "Game kid," he said at length. "And some swimmer!"

Mr. Brody nodded approvingly. "Mind if I take off my shoes and coat, boys?"

The crew, busy at their oars, made no answer. One sailor looked at the other while Mr. Brody was divesting himself of his coat and shoes, as if to say "Is the man crazy? Has the loss of his own son affected his mind?" They had not long to question about this passenger's sanity, however, for they soon saw what had prompted his act of preparedness.

It was when Hal was sinking from the blows of the Panamanian's paddle. Mr. Brody arose in the boat, calm but determined. "I've come to learn the treachery of these natives," he explained simply. "I'll keep the boy up until you fellows can back around and come over on the tide. See—the rascals are leaving him and getting away under cover of the fog!"

The crew did see and gasped admiringly as Mr. Brody dove off the side of the boat. He was making slow but sure progress against the tide when Hal sank for the first time. The man fairly leaped under water and came up with the red head and pallid face resting on his shoulder.

A whoop of applause went up from the crew which in turn was taken up by those waiting aboard ship. The lifeboat had difficulty in turning around against the tide, true to Mr. Brody's prophecy, and it was a full three minutes before they reached the unconscious Hal and his rescuer.

"I think the boy's quite stunned," said Mr. Brody, releasing Hal to the outstretched arms of some of the crew. "I hope it's no more than that."

And dripping in his soggy wet clothes he found a place in the boat, feeling revengeful toward Hal's attackers. Behind that fog they were fleeing—fleeing from what?

With that natural human curiosity that the bystander experiences, he wondered for a moment or so, then forgot about it.

CHAPTER IX

A VIEW TO CARRYING ON

In the early evening of that same day, Hal sat with a bandaged and aching head on the balcony of his uncle's suite in the Washington Hotel at Colon. From his comfortable chair he could see on one side the interminable stretch of mountain range and jungle, and on the other side, the dazzling line of sea and sky bathed in the lurid glow of a tropical sunset.

Night falls quickly in the tropics, and it seemed to Hal that the darkness closed him in even while he was feasting his eyes upon the peaceful scene of clean white streets shaded with waving palm trees. His uncle Denis stepped out on the balcony and sat down beside him.

"How do you feel?" he asked in a voice startlingly like Hal's own.

"Great," Hal replied, though his aching head belied the word. "Have supper?"

"Yes, Mr. Brody and I. How did you fare?"

"Swell," Hal grinned. "I'll feel like eating the whole of Panama by tomorrow or next day anyway. Have you heard how Coly is?"

Mr. Keen nodded. "He'll be on the mend from now on. I went to see him late this afternoon. He was awfully anxious to know how you were. Told me to tell you that the ship sails back tomorrow night again and that you shouldn't think of trying to see him feeling as you do. He's going to see this thing through when he gets home, he says. Said something about not having any misgivings but that you'd carry on for him here if you could."

"Bet your life I will!" Hal exclaimed vehemently. "I don't know how, but there'll be some way, somehow!"

"I hope so, Hal," said Mr. Keen, crossing a long white-flanneled leg over the arm of his chair. "Really, though, I don't see how you're going to do it—every man was questioned on board that boat."

"All except Mr. Dorsey," Hal interposed.

"Hmph, I thought of that too, but now that he's got away, what can you do? Besides, he may be just a petty scamp that's trying to dodge the port authorities—a man with a record."

"Coly said that those three fellers looked as if they had records too. Why couldn't Mr. Dorsey have been one of them—the one that Coly followed on shipboard that night, huh?"

"Now you're letting your imagination run rampant, Hal. The fellow might have just led young Walters on that boat to throw him off the scent. He might

have walked on and walked off again. Anyway, you're off the boat now yourself and there isn't any definite clue with which to help Coly, unfortunately. Besides, you almost killed yourself by allowing your heroics to get the better of your judgment and go on a wild goose chase in that fog-laden harbor. No sense in it—it wasn't your job to care whether this Dorsey had a record or not. But that, too, is past and you've got Mr. Brody to thank for your life. You would have gone down as sure as thunder if he hadn't gone after you. The captain said it was quite a stunt."

"I realize that, Unk," said Hal thoughtfully. "Did you tell him how grateful..."

"Certainly. And by that same token, my boy, Mr. Brody and you can do some exploring together in the next couple of weeks. We're going to shift over to the Tivoli in Panama soon as you're fit. I have a little work to do there. Tomorrow, he and I are going over to inspect that skeleton they found at the foot of the cliff."

"Do you think there's any hope, Unk?" Hal asked sympathetically.

"I don't think so—in point of fact, I know there isn't any chance of that skeleton being Alan Brody. I knew it when I cabled him but he has given us orders not to pass up the slightest clue. And he's a very rich man, Hal, a half dozen to a dozen trips a year down to Panama and back are the least of his worries. He's spent a fortune already, but he means to find that boy, dead or alive."

"Mm," said Hal thoughtfully, "but what fun could I have exploring with Mr. Brody?"

"What fun? Mr. Brody's still quite a young man and despite his sorrow, he knows a young man's enthusiasm for adventure. That's why he suggested to me tonight at dinner that he take you off on a jungle tour—say a week or two. He knows the jungle around Panama pretty well, but he wants to go further so he's going to hire a guide who can act as chief cook and bottle washer too."

"Hot dog!" Hal exclaimed happily. "That sounds good." Then: "Poor Coly, Unk, I wish he was going along. It doesn't seem fair for me to go around enjoying myself while he..."

"Now, Hal, no vain regrets," Mr. Keene interposed. "I know it isn't fair—few things are in this world, but you can't spoil a perfectly good vacation because of Coly's misfortune. It looks pretty bad for him, I'll admit, his running down here, but perhaps your affidavit will help some. He's confident enough that it will. But see here, you can't go mooning around about other people's troubles—you'll need all your wits if Mr. Brody decides to take you up in the wilderness, up among some of those tribes of San Blas Indians."

"That's the name of some of the Indians I saw hanging around the hotel late this afternoon. I asked the bell hop and he told me. They didn't look as if

they came from any wilderness.”

“They probably didn’t, but there are countless tribes scattered way up in the jungle that have never been anywhere near the city of Panama. It is said that they are still in the same savage, primitive state that they were a hundred years ago. One of the clerks over at the Tivoli told me that even the Panama police are afraid of them and adopt a policy of hands off with them. There are strange goings on in some of their tiny villages, he said. Treachery, murder and all that goes with ignorance and lawlessness.”

“Then why on earth does Mr. Brody want to go to such places!” Hal asked. “Does he suspect...”

“I strongly suspect that he has Alan in the back of his head. If that is his motive, then I’m afraid the journey will be futile. There is nothing to indicate that those distant tribes had anything to do with the boy’s disappearance. Moreover, they would be quick to conceal it, if they did. They’re not likely to let an American pin any such crime on them.”

“Boy, then there’s chances of a scrimmage now and then, huh?” Hal asked delightedly.

“Now I know you’re feeling better!” laughed Mr. Keen. “No, I don’t think there’s a chance of a scrimmage. Sorry to disappoint you, Hal, but even those savages have some respect for the United States government. They know what would happen if they were to molest a law-abiding American citizen in their midst. And Mr. Brody is merely going among them to look around and convince himself. I shall keep in close communication with you myself and if he decides to stay longer, as I think it is likely, I’ll take up the trail and join you on the homeward trek.”

“That’s simply great, Unk! I’m all keyed up to it.”

Mr. Keen smiled and rose. He stretched thoughtfully, and ran his long fingers through his sandy hair. “I must go down now and make arrangements with Mr. Brody. We have to get over to Panama early about that skeleton. Want to go to bed now?”

“Nope,” Hal answered, inhaling deeply the sweet damp breeze that played about his head. “I’ll sit and watch the lights and the people until you come up. Tell Mr. Brody I’ll be able to get over to the Tivoli day after tomorrow. We can start a couple of days or so after that, huh?”

Mr. Keen’s eyes gleamed whimsically and for an answer he gave his nephew’s hand an affectionate slap before he left the balcony. It brought a delighted grin to Hal’s face, a grin that remained for quite a little time.

In this happy frame of mind he scanned the streets as far as his eye could reach. They gleamed brilliantly under the lights and the figures of the people seemed almost mirrored on the shining pavement. The heavens, however, were starless and black, obscuring all but a dim outline of the mountains.

An interminable procession of cars and people brought his glance back to the street surrounding the hotel. Suddenly he noticed a man of small stature, standing in the shadow behind the street light opposite. He stood so still that Hal had difficulty in convincing himself that it was a human being.

On the spur of the moment, he leaned forward to try and get a better view. The movement attracted the man and he relaxed with the agility of a cat, whipped out a cigarette and striking a match against the post, lighted it, glancing furtively toward the balcony meanwhile. In another second he was off down the street, striding along in a nonchalant manner.

“Either a Spiggotty or an Indian,” Hal murmured aloud. “Funny ... I could have sworn he was standing there in the shadow watching me. I wonder...”

CHAPTER X

VISITOR

After Mr. Keen left the hotel with Mr. Brody next morning, Hal wandered aimlessly about his room. Feeling rather lightheaded but better, he ventured out into the sitting room that connected his uncle's bedroom with his own and sank gratefully into a chair. Suddenly a knock sounded at the door.

"Who's it?" he asked in the brisk, cheery manner so characteristic of him.

"Chuoco," a deep voice answered from the hall. "I come see young Mr. Keen, yes, senior?"

Hal laughed heartily. "Yes, come in, Chuoco, whoever you are!"

A little dark man was Chuoco, yet he entered the sitting room one vast smile. Small glittering eyes he had that fixed themselves on Hal interestedly.

"You sick, eh?" he asked solicitously.

"Not so's you can notice it," Hal grinned. "I'll be fine in a couple of days. What do you want and who are you, Chuoco?"

"Me, guide," he explained simply. "I take job for you through jungle when you go. I cook like everything."

"Mm," said Hal, puzzled. "How do you know I want to go through the jungle?"

Chuoco's smile did not diminish. "Most 'Mericans do. I need job bad, senior. When you go, you give Chuoco job, eh?"

Hal studied the little man intently and saw that he was a half-breed. "But I haven't anything to do with giving you a job, Chuoco. I'm going on a long trip with a man named Mr. Brody—he's the one you'll have to talk to. I know he wants a guide—we're going way beyond Vacamonte and he'll need a responsible man."

"I know Vacamonte," said Chuoco nodding his head eagerly. "I have people Vacamonte, in mountains. I know ever' place here."

"Well, Mr. Brody'll be glad to talk to you then. You wait until he comes back tonight. Either that or you can see him at the Tivoli in Panama tomorrow. We won't be starting for a few days anyway."

The man, sensing a polite dismissal, turned toward the door, then hesitated. "You speak good for me to Senior Brody, eh?"

"Sure thing, Chuoco. I'll always do what I can for a fellow out of a job. See you later!"

Chuoco's smile had vanished into the corridor when Hal, after a second's contemplation, recalled him.

“See here, Chuoco,” he said tersely, “do you happen to be the fellow that was standing across the street last night under that light?”

Chuoco’s smile widened perceptibly.

“Yes, senor. I remember. I wait maybe till you get better so I can talk to you. Then this morning I come.”

“Mm,” said Hal with a puckered brow, “I still don’t get it! How did you even know about me?”

“Ah, ever’body knows what you did in harbor yes’day, senor,” replied the half-breed. “I think that young man’s so not afraid of water or anything, he not afraid to go way up in jungle for fun, eh?”

“That’s some deduction, believe me,” Hal observed admiringly. “I must say you deserve to have a job when you figure out things as closely as that. All right, Chuoco, adios!”

The man was gone for fully fifteen minutes before Hal was able to put the incident out of his mind. When he did it was with a puzzled shrug of his shoulders, and he told himself that poverty must of necessity make one bold, be it American or Panamanian or San Blas Indian.

“Guess I’d do the same thing myself if there wasn’t any grub in sight,” he reasoned honestly.

Chuoco’s smile lingered in his mind all day so that when Mr. Keen returned in early evening Hal was beginning to wax enthusiastic in the cause of the half-breed.

“You see, he looked so down and out, Unk,” Hal explained. “Worn cotton shirt and ragged canvas trousers that might have been white a couple of years ago. Even his shoes....”

“Rather a unique way to make application, I dare say,” Mr. Keen admitted. “Yet there’s something admirable in such aggressiveness—he ought to have the job for that reason, if not for any other. No doubt Brody will let him have it.” He looked at his nephew and smiled expansively. “Do you know, Hal, it’s remarkable the way you draw adventure and adventurous people to you—a sort of law of gravitation unto yourself. Your little exploit of yesterday has not only reached the ears of Colon—there’s a lengthy account of it in tonight’s papers, given out, I presume, by your admiring friend, the purser. By that same token, I brought up a little note from him, dictated by Coly. Clerk at the desk gave it to me as I came in.”

“Guess it’s to say goodbye,” Hal murmured wistfully, as he took the note from his uncle and opened it. “Purser says, ‘hope you are better, Keen ... am writing a few lines for Walters who is, as I guess you know, distinctly on the mend. He wants me to say so-long (as he phrases it) and hopes to see you before long. Also he asks if you will do him the favor of getting someone to guide you up along the old Mendoza Trail (which must be nearly impassable).

However, at about twenty miles from Chepo there are some old stone ruins of a French fort called L'Inconnu (the unknown), so called because of its lost origin. Only the older guides know of it. At any rate at the southeast corner of the ruins you must walk twenty paces east and five paces south. Eight feet is the depth at which the treasure was buried (Walters is quoting from memory), but during the many years that have passed the ground must have sunk a great deal more, he says. Consequently you are not to get discouraged, but swing the old machete and ply the shovel with a will....”

“But look here, Hal,” interposed Mr. Keen, “why go to all that trouble when he even suspects that those fellows skipped down here with the stolen map seven months ago, eh?”

“Just a minute, Unk,” Hal answered. “To quote the purser: ‘Walters says that he feels sure that the treasure has been stolen long ago, but to make sure he wants you to be certain of it in your digging so that you can make an affidavit to that effect as soon as possible and send it back to Clear Brook police, for he thinks that that will be one point in his favor at least.’”

“Maybe so,” Mr. Keen said skeptically. “The Clear Brook police might contend differently. However, it would be doing your bit, Hal, but I warn you that that district is worse than impassable—it’s a pest hole up there, I’ve been given to understand. You’ve got a pretty big order on your hands.”

“Yes, but it might mean Coly’s life if I didn’t carry it out,” Hal reminded his uncle spiritedly. “What’s a little trouble and inconvenience when a fellow—a friend’s life is at stake? Gosh, Unk, that’s the least I can do for him now.”

“Yes, I guess it is. If things don’t look much better for him when we get back to the States, Hal, I’ll see what influence I can use on the poor boy’s behalf.”

“You’re a brick, Unk!”

“Not at all—I just believe his story. Was that all the purser had to say?”

Hal folded the letter up and nodded. “Just sent his best regards and said that Coly hoped he wasn’t asking too much of me nor putting too dangerous a task in my way. Can you imagine?”

Mr. Keen chuckled. “I’d write him right straight away and tell him that he’s done you a favor by asking you to go. *Danger!* Coly doesn’t know you as well as I do, I’m afraid, Hal. He might know that merely suggesting an exploration of impassable trails and jungle dangers is meat and drink to you—you reckless, red-headed youngster!”

They laughed together, affectionately, then Mr. Keen looked thoughtfully at Hal. “Just happened to think,” he said, “the cliff where they found that skeleton lies right beneath a part of the old Mendoza Trail. It’s somewhere in the vicinity of the Chagres River, and on the way to Vacamonte.”

“Mm, coincidence! That’s great! But say, Unk, what about that skeleton?”

“Just as I said, it’s in a state past identifying. One thing we learned, however, the doctor filed the certificate with a report that the remains were those of a male between twenty-five and thirty years of age. So there’s still hope that Alan Brody’s alive.”

“Good. What did Mr. Brody say about it?”

“He was convinced by the doctor’s report, but he said he was curious, nevertheless, to take a look around that cliff. That man’s the spirit of hope. He might as well carry out his wish, though; you’ll have to travel in that neighborhood in order to get to L’Inconnu.”

“Chuoco ought to come right in pat then, huh? He says he knows all about the country from Panama to Vacamonte.”

A sudden ominous rumble sounded in the east and, typical of the tropics, the sky had darkened in a moment. The next second Colon was in the midst of a torrential downpour. Mr. Keen hurried over to the French doors opening out upon the balcony and pulled them shut.

“There’s a shaggy looking individual caught in it,” he observed, looking down into the street.

Hal rose from his chair and with idle curiosity looked over his uncle’s shoulder.

He whistled lightly at the sight of Chuoco standing beneath a large, waving palm tree across the street, drenched but smiling, as he looked toward the balcony windows.

“Poor bird!” Hal said sympathetically. “That’s Chuoco. Let’s call him over and bring him up here, huh?”

“He’ll be as dry as the street in five minutes,” said Mr. Keen. “These fellows down here don’t mind it—they know their tropical showers and like them. What interests me is this watchful waiting of his.”

Hal chuckled. “He won’t lose track of me, I guess, for fear of losing his job. If that fellow doesn’t get what he’s after it won’t be any fault of his.”

“And if he does get it, it’ll be your fault,” smiled Mr. Keen.

Had Hal been attentive and heard this lightly uttered prophecy he would soon have had occasion to remember it. But as it happened, he did not hear one word for he was lost in wonder at the brevity of a Panama thunder-shower.

It had hardly passed and Chuoco still stood beneath the palm tree opposite. He looked quite dry and happy. Certainly his smile resembled not a little the enduring quality of the lurid sunset.

CHAPTER XI

A NECESSARY EVIL

Hal and Mr. Brody stopped their mules for a moment and glanced back at the Tivoli Hotel standing so white and majestic in the gleaming sun. Ancon Hill on which it was situated looked down on the narrow, crooked streets of Panama City and their eyes rested for a moment on this old civilization before they passed away from it on their journey.

Hal especially gazed with all the fervor of his romantic youth upon the sight of the bay, spreading out beyond the city. There was something clean and cool looking about the many ships riding at anchor in the languid roll of the blue Pacific. Their spars and rigging gleamed in the near-noon-day sun, casting myriad golden shadows upon the lateen sails of fishing smacks as they came harborward in graceful procession.

“Well,” said Hal presently, “now for the dive through that hot, dusty looking jungle, huh?”

Mr. Brody’s gray eyes had a happier gleam in them as he looked at his young companion. “Rather a long dive, I dare say,” he said, smiling. “We wouldn’t get very far if we couldn’t stay in the jungle any longer than a swimmer can stay under water, eh?”

“Senor Brody maybe wish he could get out of jungle before he go in, eh? Maybe young Senor Keen wish too, eh?”

Both travelers turned and looked a few feet ahead at Chuoco who was sitting patiently and smilingly upon his mule. His short, squat figure looked almost ludicrous between the two bulging saddle bags. Hal gave him a good-natured grin.

“That’s how much you don’t know about little Hal, Chu,” he said. “I never start anything that I think I’m going to wish I could get out of afterward. I’ll always finish what I start out to do—as long as I’m conscious. And I bet that goes for Mr. Brody too!”

“It does go for me,” said Mr. Brody earnestly. “That is why I decided to take you along with me, too, Hal. I realized you were a kindred spirit. One needs such a companion on this sort of journey—one who is willing to plunge into everything, coming and going—the heat, the eternal dampness, the insects and myriad jungle dangers. We could go a safer way, but I have my reasons,” he added, lowering his voice.

“And I, mine,” said Hal, thinking of Coly. Then: “Was this the way you came that day....”

Mr. Brody nodded. "The day we last saw Alan. It was not more than eight miles from the hotel. I'm going to try and explore as many miles of it as the growth will permit, for where they found that skeleton is fifteen miles beyond and if someone else could wander there and lose his life, why not my son?"

"There's something in that, believe me," said Hal enthusiastically. "Anyway, you can depend on me to do whatever you want to do—I know how I feel about doing my best for Coly."

"Good boy!" Mr. Brody applauded spiritedly. "And now for the plunge, eh?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Hal returned gaily. "I feel as if I'm sitting on top of the world, that's how good I feel!"

They both laughed heartily and turned their mules toward the sparse woodland on the edge of the jungle. Chuoco, who had been sitting by and smiling abstractedly throughout the conversation, nodded politely and gave his animal a prod with the worn heel of his shoe.

"Senors take plunge," he murmured with polite mockery. The next moment the animal had taken him off in the lead and out of earshot of his employers.

"Say, I don't quite get that fellow, do you know it!" said Hal. "That smile and the couple of cracks he's strung off within a couple of minutes...."

"I know. I've been thinking the same thing myself. Sort of as if he's laughing up his sleeve at us, eh? But that's the way some of these natives and half-breeds are—you can give them just so much rope. Do them a favor and they repay you with silent ridicule."

"Gosh, I hope I haven't picked out a lemon, but he came to me and talked so straightforward. And then being out of a job and all."

"Hal, my dear fellow, there's no need to berate yourself, no matter what Chuoco turns out to be. I would have given him the job if he had first come to me. Besides these fellows have all got to be put in their place and I'll handle that, I promise you. He's just brazen, that's all. What most concerns me at present is that he turns out to be a rather decent cook and an excellent guide. And I guess he's that—most of these San Blas half-breeds are. In any event, we can't afford to be without a guide once we get out of the Santa Luz district, for that's where my knowledge of that jungle trail ends."

"Is that anywhere near where the skeleton was found?" Hal queried, ducking his head away from the first low-hanging verdure that they had encountered.

"It's about ten miles this side," Mr. Brody answered. "So you see, Hal, we're going to depend a whole lot on Chuoco and if he doesn't do anything else well, but guides us right, we need have no qualms. We can cook our own meals if we have to, and take a little of his polite insolence as a necessary evil."

“And maybe we won’t have to take that,” Hal said with a quiet chuckle. “I’ve acquired an awful punch and a tremendous kick during my first year in college, if I do say so myself. Besides if our little friend Chu gets too fresh with his wise cracks, I’m big enough to sit down on him, and I mean that literally.”

Mr. Brody laughed outright and glanced quickly at his young companion’s powerful physique. “I believe you could do anything with that brawn, Hal,” he said admiringly. “I believe you could almost conquer the jungle itself.”

“Hardly. But I know one thing, jungle or no jungle—it won’t conquer me without a struggle.”

And that was destined to be the truest thing that Hal ever uttered.

CHAPTER XII

CHUOCO

Hour after hour they hewed a trail for themselves as they went along, swinging their machetes back and forth with tireless effort. It seemed to Hal an interminable green tunnel through which they passed, the growth being as thick above their heads as on either side. He marvelled at the certainty with which Chuoco picked his way.

“Don’t know how he does it,” said Hal, “or you either for that matter.”

“One gets used to it after coming here so many times,” said Mr. Brody. “Besides, it isn’t nearly as thick through here as I’ve found it sometimes. Looks to me as if someone’s been through here either this morning or last night. This stuff grows overnight, you know.” Then he called to Chuoco,

“Doesn’t it look to you as if someone’s been through here in the last few hours?”

Without turning around Chuoco shrugged his shoulders and said, “Me no can tell, *senor*. Maybe so.”

“Liar!” Mr. Brody muttered good humoredly. “These half-breeds can’t tell you the truth even when there’s no occasion for lying. I just thought perhaps he’d have some knowledge of whether or not the Sanitary Inspector was due through here. He probably does know it, but it’s too much effort for him to tell the truth.”

Hal decided that he was beginning to learn something of a San Blas half-breed. “Still, he could be worse,” he observed cheerfully. “He told me before that he’ll get me some nice pineapples for supper, and man, how I love pineapples.”

And get them, Chuoco did. They had their fill of them as dessert at supper besides having an appetizing meal and lay back in their hammocks after it was over, idly watching the half-breed as he went about his task of cleaning up.

The little clearing which they had made was soon filled with the shadows of a brief green twilight. They talked in subdued whispers until Chuoco’s fire blazed brightly against the dark background of the jungle. Hal roused himself at sight of the cheerful blaze.

“Nothing like it, huh?” he addressed Mr. Brody. “Chase away the spooks, etc.”

Mr. Brody laughed. “Surely you don’t think of things like that—you don’t believe in them?”

Hal grinned. “I never thought I did. Guess this place just sort of suggests it.

I'm the greatest bird for suggestion you ever saw. Feel things somehow—feel them sometimes long before they even come to pass. Crazy, huh?"

"No," said Mr. Brody understandingly, "just highly impressionable. I have an idea that perhaps the skeleton has something to do with it. Just the suggestion of being in the neighborhood where it was found would affect you that way. But don't let it, Hal, we're nowhere near it tonight. In point of fact, we have about two hours' travel in the morning before we reach it."

Hal stepped to the ground and lit his pipe, then strolled over to where Chuoco had spread some palm leaves before the fire. "After we give that spooky neighborhood the once over," he said, sitting down and gazing into the flames, "where then?"

"L'Inconnu," said Mr. Brody. "Do you happen to know of some old French stone ruins by that name, Chuoco? Senor Keen wants to go there and he was told that it's some twenty miles from Chepo. Do you know anything about it?"

Chuoco squatted down before the fire and rolled a cigarette. As he lighted it he looked through the darting flames at Hal and smiled.

"L'Inconnu I know very well, senor," he murmured ingratiatingly, "very well. It is a place of what you 'Mericans call legend, eh? Five hundred years my people say it was built by French missionar'—nobody know who. Many people killed there—nobody know how. It is what you 'Mericans call spook."

"Bosh!" Mr. Brody exclaimed and drew his mosquito net about him. "If many people died there it was from the fever and the only spooks, I guess, are the owls and tree frogs and an occasional monkey walking in his sleep."

Chuoco smiled broadly. "We come L'Inconnu day after," he murmured.

"Day after tomorrow?" Hal asked.

Chuoco simply smiled and puffed leisurely on his strong-smelling cigarette. Hal yawned and got up, stretching his long arms until his hands were concealed by the overhanging growth. Suddenly he yelled and bringing his hands down quickly, shook a gigantic spider from his right index finger. The hideous thing scampered away.

"Better be careful, Hal," warned Mr. Brody, "you never know what this place conceals. Above, below, to the right and to the left of you. Always keep your machete within reach."

Chuoco glanced up slowly. "Senor, big fellow, eh? He reach moon maybe."

"Yes, and I can reach down just as well, Chu," said Hal with a mirthful wink over at Mr. Brody. "If you get impudent I can take you in one hand and sweep you up just like this." He reached down and playfully made a sweep at the little man.

Chuoco sprang to his feet like a cat and as he ducked out of the reach of Hal's long arm, a strange expression appeared on his swarthy face. It was not

more than a second, however, before his usual smile again shone forth.

“Senor fool,” he said quickly. “Senor like fun?”

“Sure, I do,” said Hal, and climbed back into his hammock. “I’d show you some fancy tricks, Chu, only I’m too doggone tired. Too much jungle for a tenderfoot like myself—too much in one day.”

He drew his black mosquito netting about him and closed his heavy lids. But, utterly tired though he was, it seemed almost impossible for him, to sleep. A half hour passed, perhaps, and he had done no more than drowse. Too, the continued smell of Chuoco’s vile tobacco filled the air and annoyed him as it floated past his nostrils.

Hal looked drowsily from under his half-open lids and saw the half-breed sitting almost motionless before the dying fire. Now and then his small, sharp features were revealed through the thick yellow smoke as it spiraled above his dark head. He was looking directly toward the hammocks, staring almost, and Hal was suddenly struck by his expression. There was something strange, something he could not quite explain, about the man’s face then.

Presently he realized what it was.

Chuoco was not smiling. And when he did not smile he looked like a different person, cruel, treacherous and strange.

CHAPTER XIII FOREWARNED

Hal's respect for Chuoco's scouting ability was considerably strengthened next morning when, after two hours on the trail, the half-breed suddenly began swinging his machete directly north. He told them, upon being questioned, that it was a short cut to the cliff.

"Cliff, him 'bout fifty feet," he explained. "Not so high down to swamp but it come out of jungle quick and people fall off in swamp if they don't go other way."

"I guess he means that the jungle takes an abrupt turn there, eh?" Mr. Brody remarked. "Perhaps that's how the poor chap was killed."

"Sounds likely," Hal admitted. "You seem to know all about it, Chu?"

Chuoco made a clucking noise with his tongue. "I guide up on this place many times, senior. Like you 'Mericans say, I know San Gorda Swamp at foot of cliff like book. It ver' big swamp, ver' dangerous. Full of alligators, senior."

Hal shuddered and turned to Mr. Brody. "This bird knows the whole place like a book it seems to me," he whispered, "swamp and everything else."

Mr. Brody nodded and winked significantly at his companion. Then he raised his voice. "Who found that skeleton in the San Gorda Swamp, do you know, Chuoco?" he asked.

"Me, senior," replied the half-breed, urging his donkey ahead. "I happen come this way from Vacamonte and when I look over cliff I see it. Then I go straight to Panama and tell police."

"You—you didn't climb down and get it up or anything, did you?" Hal asked with a shudder.

"No, senior. Chuoco no like alligators either. I just come back with police and stand on cliff."

"Have you any idea who the poor unfortunate man is, Chuoco?" asked Mr. Brody sympathetically.

"No, senior," Chuoco replied with a benignant smile, and swung his machete with careless grace until he was well in the lead again.

Hal reined his donkey close to Mr. Brody. "Do you know what," he said confidentially, "I feel awfully funny about Chu. Ever since last night."

"Just what way, Hal?"

"I don't know," Hal admitted, "I can't explain it in so many words. You would have to see his face as I saw it last night after I turned in. I caught him staring at us—he didn't know I was awake and I got a good look at him just as

he was. That's it, Mr. Brody—*just as he is!* Natural like. Just as he feels and looks when there aren't tourists around. You know what I mean?"

"I think I do, Hal. You mean his face was in repose?"

"Exactly. And he wasn't smiling."

Mr. Brody smiled. "But that isn't anything so terrible, Hal. The man can't be smiling all the time."

"But he does smile all the time, Mr. Brody, and you know it! We never look at him but what he has that great big smile ready. Almost too big a smile, sort of. Too big to be real. And that's why it struck me as being so queer when I caught him off his guard that way—without any smile at all. He looked like another fellow, that's a fact. Gosh, it gave me the creeps to look at him without the smile, do you know it?"

"You might have been catnapping in spite of yourself and having a bad dream," Mr. Brody suggested kindly, "and when you half woke and saw him, the firelight and smoke might have made a kind of distorted picture of him, eh? Don't you think it might have been an illusion of that sort?"

"Maybe," Hal answered thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid I've put Chuoco in an unfavorable light by talking about half-breeds the way I did," Mr. Brody said apologetically. "I didn't mean to talk disparagingly about him—I don't know the man any more than you do. The impression I meant to convey was that his kind are all natural liars and rogues and learn early in life never to tell the truth about anything for fear it might incriminate them in some way. They all have some shady transaction to their credit—or discredit, whichever you will. But on the whole they mind their business and their business is guiding tourists in and out of this infernal jungle. I dare say Chuoco is not one whit better or worse than his fellows."

"And that's not saying much, huh?" Hal laughed.

"Not a great deal, I guess. But enough for our purposes, eh?"

Hal nodded and turned his attention to a chattering group of monkeys which had suddenly made a noisy appearance in the neighborhood. They swung diligently from one slimy tree limb to the other, scolding and making awkward grimaces as they stopped to watch the passing strangers. One, who was manifestly the leader, waved his two little hairy arms and rubbed his little old face and eyes as if to see these intruders the better. Chuoco leaned over the side of his donkey and picking up the dried husk of a pineapple aimed it with playful precision at the little fellow, muttering meanwhile some unintelligible malediction.

"In San Blas that probably means a curse of some sort," said Mr. Brody softly.

"Well, in plain old New Yorkese I mean to say that hereafter I'm going to keep my eye on that smiling little Spiggotty, or whatever he's called around

here,” Hal whispered.

Mr. Brody leaned over and patted Hal on the shoulder. “You *better* keep your eye on him, young man, if you don’t want to get lost in the jungle. Smile or no smile, it’s worth your while to keep an eye on him,” he chuckled.

“Granting that,” said Hal seriously, “once I get an idea I can’t get it out of my head. And whether he’s all right or not, I’m not taking any chances, Mr. Brody. Do you know that letter that I had in my pocket? The one Coly dictated to the purser telling me the location of that buried treasure?”

“You mean the stolen treasure?” Mr. Brody corrected smiling. “Yes, I remember you telling me, Hal. What about it?”

“I got it out when Chu and you were busy at breakfast and I memorized the location of that place, word for word,” Hal answered. “Then I tore up the letter. Good or bad, I’m not taking any chances with that half-breed, Mr. Brody—*no, sir!*”

CHAPTER XIV SAN GORDA SWAMP

San Gorda Swamp was the abode of the devil, so Chuoco told them. The abode of every known member of the reptile family, its still, green surface was as immovable as the jaws of death which the torpid pond so cleverly concealed. The alligator roused himself not very often and that was only when some worthwhile tidbit came his way, human or other.

One comes upon this almost unholy territory by an abrupt turn of the jungle that few but the natives know. One swings his machete along the path of least resistance—straight ahead—and that is where one makes the fatal mistake in the San Gorda district, for the path of least resistance is a trap and lets one in a flashing second out of the jungle growth and over the narrowest of cliffs down into the bottomless pit of death.

They had tied their donkeys more than a hundred yards back and stood viewing the big swamp. Hal experienced a feeling of disgust. Here was Nature at her worst—here she was a loathsome, sickening monster throwing off vilely sweet, dank vapors and seeming to grin at her beholders as a few feeble rays of the tropical sun shone upon her green slimy breast.

They stood very silent and still. They could not do other for a misstep might prove fatal. Hal mentioned this to Chuoco, in a deep, awed voice. Would not this happen if one of them stepped out a little too far on the slippery rocks of the cliff?

Chuoco smiled reassuringly. “Not ’xactly, senor,” he murmured. “There is few rocks sticking up out of swamp. Senors could hold on them but it is deefecult.”

“I suppose they’re covered with the slime of the morass, eh, Chuoco?” Mr. Brody queried, thoughtfully.

“Yes, senor, like this cliff. It would be what you ’Mericans call deefecult. No fun, eh?”

“Not so’s you can notice it,” Hal grinned. “I think after all I prefer to duck the tarantulas and spiders and step on the scorpions if I see them first. At least a feller has a chance on dry ground. No sir,” he added philosophically, “I prefer to have those hairy critters walking all over me rather than blow a last few bubbles in that big bowl of green mush.”

Mr. Brody laughed heartily. “I guess all of us have that preference, Hal. But sometimes,” and here his voice became strangely sad, “we haven’t any choice. I’d gladly go down there myself if I thought it would yield to me the

secret of Alan. But it wouldn't."

Hal's heart was out to him at that moment. "Gosh," he said feelingly, "don't even let yourself think that that's what happened to him, Mr. Brody. You don't really think that, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Broody brightening. "I really don't and that's what gives me hope. I still feel he's alive and as long as I do I'll be restless and unsatisfied. If I had proof positive that he was dead I could reconcile myself to it all. Singular, isn't it?"

Hal nodded and turned to Chuoco. "How about it, fellow, have you ever had any idea about Mr. Brody's son? I mean have you ever heard any opinions expressed among your people about it, where the kid went to, or anything about him?"

Chuoco shrugged his shoulders vehemently. "I don' understand, senior," said he. "Chuoco don' know what you talk."

"I'm talking about Mr. Brody's son, Alan," said Hal. "The one that disappeared in the Santa Luz district seven months or so ago—a kid about twelve years old, with brown eyes and blond hair. Am I right, Mr. Brody?"

"That's Alan's description exactly," Mr. Brody answered. "He has rather an olive complexion also, strangely in contrast with his very blond hair. But Chuoco knows all about it—every native on the Isthmus has been given his description, that is, every native within police-patrolled districts. Eh, Chuoco?"

"We not have police back Vacamonte where I come from, senior," Chuoco explained. "I stay up there six months, a year last. I don' hear nothing 'bout boy."

"Well, that's that, huh?" Hal said, glancing about the slippery rocks on which they were standing. "There's nothing more we can learn here, I guess, huh?"

"Nothing, indeed," Mr. Brody answered a trifle wistfully, "except perhaps that peculiar looking, slab-like rock that's sticking up out of the swamp. Over there directly in the sunlight—notice it?"

Hal shaded his eyes with his brown hands from the blurring effect that the eternal green of the place had upon his vision. He peered over the entire surface for a time but could not distinguish the rock.

"Can you see it, Chu?" he asked the half-breed.

Chuoco smiled superiorly as if he but pitied Hal's obtuseness. He took a step or two forward on the slippery rock almost at the very brink of the cliff and allowed a hollow little laugh to escape him. Then he raised a long brown finger and pointed.

"Does not senior see in the sun where dark looking alligator reaches out a little, eh?" he chuckled. "Senior does see, eh?"

"Sure, now I do," said Hal, not a little annoyed at the man's attitude. And

on the impulse of the moment, he added, "You see, I'm used to looking at clean, wholesome things, Chu—fresh, sparkling rivers and oceans, and sweet dry woods and windblown mountain tops, not such slimy stuff as you people have here." He was instantly contrite. "I'm sorry, but this atmosphere sort of makes me sick and mean."

"And human," smiled Mr. Brody. "Hal, no excuses. Chuoco understands, eh, Chuoco?"

Chuoco smiled and nodded. "Me not mad. Me understand. Senor is fire like his hair."

Hal grinned appreciatively. "That's me, Chu. I flame up and puff—I'm cooled down like that. C'mon, let's go."

Chuoco nodded politely and with his usual cat-like agility attempted to step backward. As he did so, he slipped and his leg went out from under him.

Screaming helplessly, he was sliding straight toward the cliff's edge when Hal's long brown arm reached out and grabbed him. Despite the tensity of the moment, there was something almost ludicrous in the way he put the half-breed to his two feet, yanking him back to safety by a determined grasp on the nether portion of his trousers.

A swift tearing sound indicated that his tenacious grip had rendered Chuoco's ragged hip pocket completely in twain, but the half-breed did not seem to notice it, so thankful was he to his rescuer. He was voluble in his thanks, then turned his back on San Gorda Swamp with a visible shudder, hurrying off in the direction of the mules.

Hal stood, rather bewildered himself, with half of Chuoco's hip pocket in his fingers. Contents and all had come away and at first glance this seemed to consist only of a dark calico handkerchief. On second glance, however, he saw that something was rolled up inside of it, and tied loosely by the corners of the handkerchief.

Hal's first instinct was to call Chuoco—indeed he even took a few steps forward on that impulse, but Mr. Brody put out a detaining hand.

"I'd wait a moment or two until the chap calms down," said he. "Did you see how white and shaken he was? If he saw how near to death that ragged pocket almost brought him he might faint or even die on our hands! Great Scott, that was close!"

Hal held the rags out on his palm. "He would have been a goner if that had given way when I first grabbed him, huh? Close shave is right. Wonder what he's got tied up in this thing? Money?" He felt of it curiously. "No, but something hard—mm, feels like a ring. Sweetheart's, I suppose. Oh, well, I'll give it to him soon as he gets some color in his face."

With that he started to stuff the calico square in his pocket and quite by accident the knot became unloosed, revealing the ring. Hal looked at it,

hesitated, then put it in Mr. Brody's hand with a low whistle.

"Am I seeing things or what, Mr. Brody—what initials are those on that thing?" he asked in a whisper.

Mr. Brody studied it closely. "Hmph, it's an antique, Hal. Initials are S.J.W." He turned it over curiously. "There's a date inside the band—'49. Guess it means eighteen forty-nine, eh?"

"Guess it does," Hal answered and his face looked troubled. "Come on, Mr. Brody. Chu's got the mules ready—we'll be going. Put that in your pocket, huh? And don't say anything about it—not even about the handkerchief or the torn pocket. See—I'll chuck them in the swamp ... there ... now mum's the word about the ring, huh? Guard it as you would—well, guard it as if it was worth a million and act dumb if he asks us anything about it."

"Why—why," asked Mr. Brody in amazement, "what's the matter, Hal? What's all this about a simple signet ring?"

"Sh! Simple? Listen, Mr. Brody—it isn't as simple as you think—I'm certain of it. I'm certain that that ring once belonged to Silas J. Wainwright, as I'm certain that I'm alive right now. S. J. W. and the year '49," he repeated as if to himself. "We'll look at it later—tonight, maybe, when Chu is busy with supper."

"I'm beginning to comprehend now, Hal," Mr. Brody whispered excitedly. "You mean it's the ring that was stolen from young Walters' friends—the one stolen along with the map?"

"Righto. And if we find the secret spring that opens up that little compartment containing the gold dust—why, it's sure *the ring!* C'mon, Mr. Brody, he's waiting for us."

CHAPTER XV

SUSPICION

There was a curious silence among them during the rest of that day's journey. Chuoco had not fully recovered from his experience of the morning, nor did he show any disposition to talk about it. Certainly he seemed not to have discovered the loss of his handkerchief and Hal and Mr. Brody were singularly relieved.

Toward middle afternoon, when Chuoco was driving his mule a good distance ahead, Mr. Brody signaled Hal. "I've found it," he whispered, holding out the ring. "*Look!*" He ran his finger along the smooth part of the metal, then pressed it firmly and the surface of the ring was raised, revealing an inner compartment that was filled with glittering dust. "Gold!"

Hal nodded confidently and looked quickly toward where Chuoco was jogging quietly along. "That's the ring, Mr. Brody. But the question is, how did *he* come by it?"

"It would be interesting to ask him. Rather the answer would be interesting, eh?"

"It would be fatal to ask him, that is, just yet," Hal said glancing thoughtfully ahead. "I told you before I didn't like that smile, that he seems to cover up something with it. Well, I was right evidently, huh? He's covering up a pile, believe me. That ring could tell a long story."

"What ought we do about it, I wonder?"

Hal was thoughtful for a little while. Then he said, "Unk would watch developments, I think. I'll do what I think he would do if he was here. He always says that murder will out and that a criminal will backtrack when you least suspect. The trouble is, a fellow's got to be observant and know just when they're going to backtrack. Can't be asleep on the job."

"You're your uncle all over, Hal," Mr. Brody smiled. "I guess you won't be likely to fall asleep on this job, eh?"

"Not while I'm conscious," Hal averred stoutly. "This is beginning to make me think, you know it? I've got my suspicions and I've got them good!"

"Be cautious, though, Hal," Mr. Brody warned him. "No impulses—remember we're in the wilderness and dependent upon that half-breed's knowledge of the jungle. He knows it as we don't!"

"I know, Mr. Brody. You can depend on me not to do anything rash. If Chu's the only thing I have to handle in this business, I can handle it—I can handle him, believe me!"

“You certainly demonstrated that much this morning,” laughed Mr. Brody. “With one hand, too!”

Hal chuckled. “He’s not big enough to worry about. What puzzles me is whether he’s the only nigger in this woodpile?”

“That’s a new phase of it, eh? But then these guides usually work alone.”

“Just the same, you hold tightly on to that ring, Mr. Brody. And keep your eye on him. What I don’t see, maybe you will!”

Just as they stopped for supper a shower deluged them, bringing forth a legion of gigantic spiders after the clouds had drifted away. Hideous insects dropped upon them from time to time and Hal was infinitely glad to retreat to the seclusion of his mosquito netting when the meal was over.

Mr. Brody soon followed suit, for Chuoco insisted that L’Inconnu could not be reached that night. They would rise early, he said, and reach the old French ruins shortly after sunrise.

Consequently, Hal and Mr. Brody had had a good night’s sleep long before midnight. They awakened at the same time and could just about discern each other in the glowing embers of the dying campfire.

Hal looked around and saw instantly that Chuoco was not in his hammock. Neither was his mule anywhere in sight. He sat up, alarmed.

“This is good,” he said. “Where do you suppose he’s gone?”

“Singular,” Mr. Brody admitted. “I wonder where....”

“Have you got the ring?” Hal whispered.

Mr. Brody slapped his pocket. “Safe,” he assured Hal. “Call him. Your voice is deeper than mine. Perhaps he couldn’t sleep and has just gone for a little ride.”

Hal called, deep, loud and long, but succeeded only in arousing a medley of jungle echoes. Tree frogs croaked discordantly and far in the distance he heard the melancholy wail of an owl. There was something disturbing about it and he felt genuinely glad that Mr. Brody was with him in the hot, dank wilderness.

“What do you suppose has happened? Could he have deserted us?” Mr. Brody stepped to the ground, plainly disconcerted.

“Looks blamed funny,” Hal admitted, stepping down and lighting his pipe.

“Wait a moment, Hal. I’ll get a cigar from my duffel bag and we’ll talk this thing over.” He walked with a thoughtful air, and dug down in the water-proof duffel bag.

Hal turned from the fire a second later and found Mr. Brody staring, openmouthed at him. “What’s wrong, huh?” he asked quickly.

“The guns, Hal. I put two revolvers in that bag of mine—put them there with some extra shells. In case of emergency, you know! Well, the cigars are intact all right.”

“Well?”

“But I can’t seem to find those two guns!”

“Man alive!” Hal gasped.

CHAPTER XVI

QUESTIONS

They talked it over until they were weary. It was two o'clock and they had not come to any definite conclusion. Finally they decided to get back under their netting and sleep until dawn.

"We can't do much until then, anyhow," Mr. Brody reasoned. "Chuoco has the flashlights, everything, in his saddle bags. But it does look as if he's made his exit, doesn't it?"

"It looks darn funny, that's all I can say, Mr. Brody! Anyway, we'll watch the last of this wood burn up, and then sleep for an hour or two, huh? All I can say, it's a dirty half-breed trick!"

The wood had almost burned out when Hal heard a sound. Nearer and nearer it came until he realized that it was the light footfall of a mule coming toward them. Each successive thud hitting the soft jungle floor echoed longer in their waiting ears.

At last the animal approached and on its back, placid and smiling, sat Chuoco. If he was surprised to find them awake, he did not betray it by so much as a flicker of his dark eyelids.

Hal jumped up, towering above the half-breed even when he had the mule's back to elevate him to some semblance of manly stature.

"What's the idea, Chu, huh? What's the idea, anyway?"

Chuoco sat quietly, looking up at his questioner, blandly. "Senor seem worried, eh? Senor get mad, all excited, eh?" he murmured.

"Who wouldn't be worried!" Hal roared, his voice filling the clearing with a deafening echo. "Who wouldn't get mad! How did we know but that you'd gone and ditched us! Gosh, we woke up all of a sudden and found you gone! For heaven's sake, that's enough to make a wild man wild! Where'd you go, huh?"

"What's the matter, couldn't you sleep, Chuoco?" Mr. Brody asked.

Chuoco's eyes gleamed. "Ah, senor, that's it! Chuoco could not sleep—so...."

"Don't prompt him any more, Mr. Brody," Hal said angrily. "Let him tell his own lies. Let him tell them in his own crooked way!"

"Now, now, Hal. Give the man a chance! Don't fly off the handle!"

"All right," Hal conceded. "I'll give him a chance!"

Chuoco chuckled complacently. "Senor is again cooled off, eh? Ver' well, senor, I tell you—I could not sleep so I take mule and ride. It is the truth. I ride

an' I think how maybe we not so far from L'Inconnu after all. So more I ride and soon I see I think right. L'Inconnu, she is only little more than hour from here."

"Only an hour's ride?" Hal queried. "Gosh, that's not so bad, then. Did you go all the way there and back?"

"Yes, senior. It is ver' nice soon we get from here. Jungle not so thick at L'Inconnu. Senors can see stars all night tomorrow night and not get lonely, eh?"

"All right, Chu. Never mind the wise cracks, though. Little Hal is one bird that doesn't get lonely—I can always find something to do! But L'Inconnu sounds pretty attractive to me, doesn't it you, Mr. Brody? Gosh, I wouldn't mind looking up and seeing the stars overhead, instead of fifty dozen spiders. Well, then, how about turning in until dawn anyway?"

"Good suggestion, Hal," Mr. Brody answered, flinging the butt of his cigar among the embers. "As long as we're so near the place, there doesn't seem to be any need for hurry."

Suddenly Hal bethought himself of the missing guns and he wheeled around on the half-breed once again. "Do you know anything about the guns, Chu?" he asked tersely. "I'm not accusing you, mind you, but it's darn funny how they could slip out of Mr. Brody's duffel bag by themselves!"

"Senor Brody maybe didn' bring 'um," suggested Chuoco, quite unruffled.

"Yes, I did, Chuoco," Mr. Brody said. "I remember feeling of them only this afternoon when we were riding along."

Chuoco shrugged his shoulders. "You think I take 'um, senior, you search saddle bags. You search me too, senior. See have I got 'um?"

Hal refrained from this strong-arm method. He searched the saddle bags, however, and found them devoid of guns. Chuoco's mocking eyes had a gleam in them and he went so far as to turn his pockets inside out for their inspection. Suddenly he pointed to his absent hip pocket.

"Me show that too, senior, but it is gone, eh? You maybe tear it out when you save me at cliff, eh?"

Hal felt a flood of warmth at his neck and throat, but he held the half-breed with a steady eye. "Mm, that's too bad, Chu," he answered. "Come to think of it, it did tear away in my hand, but I was so excited I don't know what I did with it. Why, did you have anything in it?"

Chuoco smiled on. "Maybe so, senior, maybe not, eh? Maybe it was much—maybe nothing, eh? You 'xcited too this morning. Now we sleep, eh?"

"Yes, now we'll sleep," Hal answered.

And with a sigh of relief, for some reason, Mr. Brody repeated the words also.

"*Now we'll sleep!*" he said decisively.

CHAPTER XVII L'INCONNU

L'Inconnu resembles not a little a heap of gigantic stones as one approaches. But upon swinging into the rather large clearing which surrounded it, one realizes that despite its unknown origin and uncertain age, there is still some semblance of formation about it.

"Does look like a mission—resembles the California type somewhat," Mr. Brody observed as they tethered the mules to some nearby trees. "Long, low rambling place I imagine it must have been. Picturesque. See how far back it runs there?"

Hal turned his glance toward it and took mental note of where the southeast corner might be. At the northeast end, a rude thatch hut had been thrown up and, by the fairly good condition of the place, he judged that it had not weathered very many tropical storms.

The mules all attended to, Chuoco bowed obsequiously. "Senors like L'Inconnu, eh?" he asked softly. "Like I say jungle not so thick, eh? Senor can see stars and moon tonight, eh?"

Hal looked a trifle suspiciously at the fellow. For some undefinable reason there was something in the man's tone that annoyed him. Was he making fun of them? It was hard to say. Certainly he was smiling neither more nor less than he had done ever since they started from Panama.

"I'm not worrying about the stars or moon or anything, but something to eat is what I'm after," Hal said. "Suppose you see what you can dig up for us, Chu—just a little snack to do us until lunch time, huh, Mr. Brody?"

"Wouldn't go bad, Hal. No indeed! A cup of coffee and a biscuit or two, eh? How's our water supply holding out, Chuoco?"

The half-breed smiled superciliously. "Two day yet, senor. I can tell by jug. Long 'nuff for me, eh?" He folded his arms and did not move from the spot.

Hal scratched his head. "What's the idea, Chu? Aren't you going to get us a snack?"

Chuoco shook his head slowly. "Me don' cook 'gain till senor talks with me, eh? We go in hut out of sun and talk."

"Talk about *what*?" Hal demanded irately. "What's the idea of this high hat stuff?" He turned to Mr. Brody inquiringly. "I don't think he's got all the gray matter a fellow's usually required to have, do you? Can you imagine that? You hire him to cook and he wants to talk?"

Mr. Brody's brow was puckered. "What is it, Chuoco?" he asked kindly. "What do you want us to talk about?"

"Ah, Senor Brody not what you call fiery, eh? You tell Senor Keen to not get mad and talk 'bout L'Inconnu to me, yes?"

Hal threw up his hands in despair.

"You're a hard nut to crack, Chu. Anyway, I'll try and keep calm and see what you have up your sleeve. What do you want me to say about L'Inconnu?"

"What senor knows," replied the fellow, and a bit of his brilliant smile vanished.

"That's a good one," Hal countered in gay tones, yet he was beginning to feel a strange sense of foreboding. "What could I know about this place? I came here to find out myself. And you ought to be able to tell me, Chu, if anyone can. You ought to know it like a book and I guess you do!"

But Chuoco was firm. "I ask senor to tell me!" he persisted softly. "You tell, eh? What secret L'Inconnu tell you that you tell me?"

The awful truth was slowly beginning to dawn in Hal's alert brain. He would not allow himself to admit the thought, for it did not seem possible that such a thing could be. He looked at the half-breed's face and saw that but little of the smile remained.

"Listen, Chu," he said flatly, "let's cut out this funny business and get down to facts. No more beating around the bush—what do you want of me?"

The last vestige of a smile left the half-breed's face. A cold glitter was in his little black eyes and as he turned around, Hal was aware of something familiar about that face, familiar yet terribly vague.

"Senor Keen," he said coldly, "I bring you here to find out 'bout treasure—*gold!* You friend of Senor Walters, eh? You talk him on ship—he tell you come L'Inconnu, find if gold stolen, eh? Well, gold is here, senor, but I know not where. I dig an' dig six months but I don' find right spot—see? So I bring you here to tell me where to dig!"

Hal gasped inwardly but he kept an outward composure that was admirable for one of his temperament. He was tempted even then to take the brazen little fellow and give him a good, sound thrashing. Instead he looked down into his face and laughed easily.

"You brought me here, huh?" he chuckled. "Chu, you're a riot in yourself, do you realize that? Anyway, now that you've told me so much, why not blurt out the rest you know, huh? Why not tell me from beginning to end how you came into this dirty business? You might as well, for you'll have to do it sometime, and there's no time like the present. You know as well as I do that in two seconds I could fling you around and send you flying through these trees."

A mocking smile spread over Chuoco's swarthy features. "Ah, senor too

kind to hurt me, eh? At heart senior kind, eh?”

“Yes, and that’s the trouble,” Hal admitted grudgingly, and suddenly felt the sustaining hand of Mr. Brody on his broad shoulders. “Now be reasonable, Chu, and don’t get me riled. Then I’ll be reasonable with you. How do you know all this about Mr. Walters and myself—come on, ’fess up! I tell you, it’ll be worth your skin to do it!”

Chuoco moved lightly away toward the hut and smiled engagingly as he went. He beckoned gaily for them to follow and gave every indication that the explanation, in some mysterious manner, lay within the rude thatched structure. Mr. Brody slipped his arm through Hal’s.

“There’s no doubt of it—he’s a rogue, Hal. But don’t let him make you lose your head. What he’s got up his sleeve is hard to tell.”

Chuoco stopped just as he reached the opening and turned to them. “Senior Keen maybe talk now, eh? Seniors, you like to meet Senior Dorsey, eh?” he asked purringly and waved his arm gaily.

Suddenly there appeared in the narrow opening of the hut, a youngish looking man with a large hooked nose and rather vacant eyes. He bowed solemnly and as he raised his arms, Hal was aware that he was pointing two guns straight at them.

Chuoco laughed shrilly and, seemingly from nowhere produced a revolver of his own. “You not say how do to Senior Dorsey, Senior Keen?” the half-breed asked mockingly.

“Shut up, Chu!” Hal said, and his voice was cold as ice. “You’re nothing short of a rat. I’m through with you entirely, do you hear me? You’re simply not to be considered in this at all.” He swept his glance toward Mr. Dorsey. “Now, what is it, Mr. Dorsey—as one white man to another, what is it?”

Mr. Dorsey sucked his left cheek into a hollow and looked respectfully at Hal. Nevertheless, the guns stayed put. “I came a long way, buddy,” he said in a high pitched voice, “and I mean to get the lowdown on this treasure business. I’m sorry about that, Walters, but it can’t be helped. Every man for himself, hah?”

“It would appear so, my dear chap,” Mr. Brody put in. “Are those guns really necessary? Really I can vouch for Hal. He’s not as redoubtable as his stature would lead one to believe. And I’m sure we can meet on less warlike ground, can’t we?”

Mr. Dorsey looked at the half-breed but after a quick significant glance exchanged, he did not relinquish his formidable posture.

“Sorry, sir,” he said apologetically, “but Chuoco don’t think Keen is to be trusted without some a—er—reminder. As for myself—well, like I told youse, I’m anxious to get the swag and beat it back to the States. I don’t like this stinkin’ jungle noway, believe me. So all youse got to do, Keen, is to be

reasonable and tell us where that stuff is cached.”

“Why ask me, Dorsey?” Hal said coldly. “What about your companions who murdered Mr. Wainwright or it might have been you, for all I know? Don’t they know? Don’t you know?”

Mr. Dorsey’s pallid face instantly colored. “We didn’t murder the old gent, and that’s the truth. He dropped from fright, I guess, an’ I guess he fell backwards and hit his head against the iron thing in the fireplace. But that ain’t neither here nor there, gents, it’s worth my skin to get that treasure now and I’m goin’ to get it!”

“Dorsey, answer me one question!” Hal said decisively. “Where are your friends and why don’t they know to tell you all this?”

“Benson is dead,” Dorsey answered obligingly. “It was him that they found—his skeleton, at the foot of the cliff. Perry disappeared too, so I guess maybe he went in that swamp along with Benson. Chuoco thinks that’s what happened. He was their guide and....”

Hal caught the withering glance that the half-breed sent Mr. Dorsey. He chuckled. “What did you do, Chu, push Benson and Perry in San Gorda Swamp?”

Chuoco smiled. “No, senor,” he answered mincingly, “I was going to, but they went ’way from me—got lost. Then one day I see skeleton.”

“And how did you know it was Benson?” Hal asked sharply.

“By ring in coat, senor. He carry ring always. Now we tell you much, you tell us, eh? Benson take map down San Gorda with him, I guess. We want to know now!”

Hal’s upper lip curled in contemptuous scorn. “Oh, you do, huh?” he asked mockingly. “And what....”

“Listen, Keen,” Dorsey interposed. “This little guy wrote to me and gave me the dope about Benson and met me down in the harbor that morning. I ain’t in so well with the police in N.Y. and I had to kind of ease off that ship. Now I ain’t willin’ to have murder on my list or anythin’ like that because—well, because we’re white men. Get me? Why don’t youse be reasonable, Keen, and give us the dope about the location of the stuff. I know you got the dope—I heard you talkin’ to Walters a coupla times. Just tell us and Chuoco’s willin’ to take youse back to some district where youse can find your way back to Panama O.K. He ain’t goin’ to leave youse in the lurch if you’re reasonable.”

“And what if we told the police all this the moment we got back to the city?” Mr. Brody asked.

“By that time I’ll have the stuff and me and the half-breed’ll be where the police ain’t thinkin’ of ever lookin’—see!” Mr. Dorsey explained.

“And if I don’t meet these demands, Dorsey, what then?” Hal asked sarcastically.

Mr. Dorsey moved each of the revolvers significantly. “Them’s my orders, buddies, them’s my orders,” he said.

CHAPTER XVIII GREED OF GOLD

“So senior stubborn, eh?” Chuoco asked scornfully. “Senior no talk?”

Hal and Mr. Brody sat side by side on a rotting tree stump and faced their two captors calmly. A half hour had passed without either side getting anywhere in the matter. Suddenly the older man spoke.

“Chuoco,” he said in that commanding way he had, “have you no sense of decency, no sense of honor at all? Don’t you realize that Keen cannot meet your demands and keep his self-respect? Can’t you realize that on his word the life of his friend rests?”

Chuoco was relentless. The greed of gold surmounted everything else and glittered in his eyes. “Senior Brody can make him speak, yes?”

Mr. Brody looked into Hal’s face despairingly. “Why not tell him, eh?” he whispered. “After all, I am witness to what this Dorsey has confessed and that alone will exculpate Walters. They couldn’t possibly hold him further, Hal, don’t you see that?”

Hal nodded. “I do see, Mr. Brody, and I don’t want you to have to suffer anything for this business either,” he whispered in the older man’s ear. “And as far as Coly’s concerned, he’s already out of the mess just on the strength of what we’ve heard from Dorsey. But there’s something else—that treasure rightfully belongs to Jean Wainwright if there’s any treasure to be had. She needs all that’s coming to her, Coly told me. So why should I let a rotten fellow like this half-breed have that and lose my life for it anyhow?”

If Chuoco heard any of the conversation he pretended not to, but stood at a discreet distance mumbling to Dorsey.

Mr. Brody looked at Hal inquiringly.

“Lose your life?” he asked. “What do you mean, Hal?”

“I mean that Chu’s got the blackest kind of a heart,” Hal murmured. “I can see right through him—he admitted he was intending to kill Benson and Perry, didn’t he? Whether he really did or not is another matter, but it’s certain that he only got Dorsey to come on here because he thought he could tell him where the stuff was hidden. Evidently he thought he knew it by heart or something. Anyway, Dorsey isn’t going to get off any easier than we, you mind what I say! He can’t use Dorsey and he’ll get rid of him somehow. And whether I tell or not the result will be the same.”

“You mean that he’ll...” Mr. Brody could not seem to utter the words.

“He won’t kill you if I have anything to do with it,” said Hal stoutly. “I got

you into this and I'll get you out of it!" Suddenly he shouted at the half-breed. "Listen here, Chu, I'm not going to tell you! But there's one thing you ought to know—Mr. Brody here, hasn't anything to do with this. He doesn't even have a vague idea where that stuff is located. Furthermore, it'll go hard with you, if you lay hands on him. His wife wouldn't leave a stone unturned if he should disappear too, the way his son did. And if my uncle doesn't get a telegram from me sent from Vacamonte tomorrow, he'll have the police on your trail quicker than you can bat an eye. Think it over."

"Not only the police, but the entire group of marines, eh?" said Mr. Brody. "Chuoco, don't you realize what'll happen when Mr. Keen's uncle gets wind that all is not well? You're simply playing with fire!"

"I play with fire to let Senor Keen go 'way," Chuoco answered politely. "But with you, Senor Brody, you can go. I tie you on mule an' he lead you back Santa Luz. By that time you come untie and you can't find way back here without guide, eh? It take you two, three days away from here. Then I make Senor Keen talk an' shut up for good an' I go way off in mountains with my people where other Senor Keen an' police can't find me." He chuckled complacently and turned to Mr. Dorsey again.

Presently Mr. Dorsey turned obediently on his heel and went into the hut. When he reappeared he carried in his arms a great mass of rope.

"Sorry to have to do this, Mr. Brody," he said apologetically, "but this guy seems to think it's the safest way. I'll tie you on your mule and send you on the way. Now sir, will you step up?"

Chuoco took charge of the two guns at that point and maintained a patient vigil over his big captive. Hal's fingers tingled to thrash the fellow, but he knew that the slightest move might be fatal, for too much water had flowed under the half-breed's bridge already. The gleaming blue barrels of the weapons bespoke determination, no matter what the cost.

Despite the despair and heartache that Hal felt at watching Mr. Brody's present humiliation, he told himself that it wasn't the end of things. It couldn't be! There was some way out of it—there would have to be! He'd think of some way to circumvent this petty rogue. He must!

And so, difficult as it was for him to sit by and see the cold cunning of the half-breed's face, he tolerated it, because he knew it was the only way to save Mr. Brody's life, and by that same token, his own. For Hal knew instinctively that Chuoco was fully aware of the danger in sending a man through the jungle tied to the back of a mule. With no way to protect himself from divers death-dealing denizens, what chance had he?

It was a death sentence in itself and Hal knew it. Therefore he spent the next few minutes thinking hard, yet watching with growing wrath the bonds that Dorsey was putting about the kindly and trusting Mr. Brody. Suddenly he

looked Chuoco full in the face.

“Listen here,” he said grimly, “I’ve got a proposition to make to you. Give me until tomorrow and let Mr. Brody stay here with me. You can leave Dorsey in charge if you think we’re going to get away, and you can go to Vacamonte and send that telegram to my uncle.”

“Senor read my mind, eh?” Chuoco countered. “I think long time before, I do that just same. But no, Senor Keen, I do not leave Senor Brody stay. He like you too much. Just same he go an’ you stay here ’till I come back Vacamonte day after, eh? Then you talk by that time? Maybe? I see. I take Senor Dorsey Vacamonte with me.”

“All right,” said Hal, “then I’ll stay here and decide what I’m going to tell you when you come back.”

Chuoco smiled benignly. “Ah, senor is now reasonable. That is good then. We leave you tied up tight by tree. Senor Dorsey make fine job, then you have plenty time think, eh? It is fine!”

Hal’s hopes took a downward trend, but he put a brave smile on the matter and grinned courageously at the gun muzzles. “All right, Chu, everything’s settled. I’d just like to say goodbye to Mr. Brody in case anything happens.”

“Certain, senor. Chuoco stay right here watch close. As you ’Mericans say, make it snap’, eh?”

Hal gritted his teeth and approached Mr. Brody, who was by that time thoroughly tethered to the mule’s back. It went to his heart to see the man smiling patiently notwithstanding his evident discomfort.

Hal leaned over. “So long, Mr. Brody,” he said aloud. Then whispering: “Keep the animal going slow—I’ll get to you somehow—I don’t know how—keep up hope!”

Mr. Brody nodded brightly. “You do the same, Hal,” he murmured. “*I know you will! So long—for a little while!*”

Unashamed, Hal fought back a tear as he saw the mule prodded away from the clearing and into the jungle.

CHAPTER XIX

CAPTIVE

Hal was plunged into the blackest of despair when his own bonds were completed. For, under Chuoco's supervision, every twist of rope had been strengthened to insure the captive against any chance of freeing himself. And when at last Dorsey's strong fingers had tied the last knot, he realized that not one shred of hope remained.

Chuoco said nothing more but mounted his mule. Dorsey, too, was silent and averted his gaze from the captive's appealing glances, looking back but once with that same vacant stare that Hal had come to know as distinctly his.

He listened to the dull thud of the departing mules until he could hear them no longer. Nothing remained after that, nothing but a feeling of lost opportunities and a continual sense of shame at the tragedy which his impulsiveness would bring to Mr. Brody and his wife. He couldn't think of that for more than a second without groaning helplessly. What a situation for him to have created—how utterly futile were all his plans and hopes in the face of it!

Over and over he chided himself for his stubbornness and tried in vain to think of some way in which he might have circumvented the crafty half-breed. Yet his common sense and instinctive knowledge of the man told him that no matter what guile he had displayed, it would have been for naught. Chuoco had planned from the beginning that nobody but himself should have that treasure, if it was to be had, and nobody but himself should live to know it.

This reasoning comforted Hal for a time. He did not feel so terribly guilty about the man who had gone to his death. It was all too apparent that they were doomed from the very first time Chuoco had stepped into his life. No matter who had guided them up the lonely unmarked Mendoza Trail to L'Inconnu, the result would have been the same. Chuoco would have been waiting in any event—he was the writing on the wall.

Hal sighed desperately and looked about him. There were some pineapple plants behind L'Inconnu ruins and two banana trees heavily laden drooped wearily under their mellow burden. The air was a riot of fruit odors and jungle scents, and as the late afternoon waned they served only to taunt the stomach of the boy and increase his appetite.

A brief moment of sunset brought with it thirst. His lips were just beginning to feel dry and he had a constant desire to moisten them with his tongue. Suddenly it occurred to him that darkness would soon throw its shroud

about him—he would be alone and unprotected, even worse off, perhaps, than was Mr. Brody at that moment, for no moving mule could carry him out of the reach of scorpion or tarantula or venomous snake should they chance upon that tree during the two nights and two days before Chuoco's return. Truly, he was captive in more ways than one.

Yet it was characteristic of Hal to entertain some little vague hope in spite of these threatening dangers. He had never known actual fear—he was not really afraid at that moment. It was just the utter loneliness of falling night and the wistful thought of his beloved mother and his fond uncle that made him cry out against the human snake who had deprived him of his freedom. Two nights and two days of this——would he be alive when Chuoco returned?

Shadows crept into the clearing and he watched idly as the old ruins were swallowed up by the darkness bit by bit before his very eyes. Soon he could not longer see the rude thatched hut and he got the absurd idea that the many spirits who had lived and died at L'Inconnu were observing his distress. Certainly it pleased him to think that perhaps old Silas Wainwright was somewhere among that phantom company, applauding him for carrying on in Jean Wainwright's cause and the cause of his friend, Coly. At least he had done what he thought was best.

As happens in moments of great distress, he gave undue thought to these spiritual things until his mind was almost chaotic. He heard sounds when silence reigned supreme and before the new moon crept high up in the heavens he had constructed a mental L'Inconnu of bygone years and could see with his mind's eye a vivid Silas Wainwright, burying his hard-earned treasure in the shadowy old yard at the southeast corner.

"Twenty paces east, five paces south," he found himself chanting. He tried in vain to move his cramped arms under the tight, cutting bonds. "Gosh, I'll go crazy if I keep on thinking such things."

One by one the stars came out and glittered overhead in all their glory. The moon was brilliant and he thought, grimly, of Chuoco's cruel promise that they should see the moon and all the heavenly bodies with ease that night. The jungle was not so thick at L'Inconnu, he had told them. No indeed it was not. Not for him. But for Mr. Brody—what was it? Would he see the moon?

Hal gulped down a dry sob and tried to keep the muscles in his arms and legs going. It was almost impossible but he kept up a sort of internal motion by twitching them and so warding off the dreaded cramps that threatened at the least sign of relaxation.

Those ghouls of the night, the vampires, wheeled into the clearing and floated silently to the eastern end of the ruins which had just caught the brilliant end of a moonbeam. Two of them there were, spreading wide wings before they alighted atop the crumbling stone, and staying just long enough to

murmur hoarsely before they went upon their ghostly errands.

Hal shouted after them and his voice sounded harsh and strange in that silence.

When the echo of it had quite died away, a company of monkeys passed but seemed not to see him, staying on the farther side of the ruins. He listened to their merry chattering until that too was silenced. What time was it getting to be? Could he sleep? In that position?

His eyelids were heavy and drooped at intervals in spite of his uncomfortable position. He dreaded the thought of his cramped limbs upon awakening, should he finally fall asleep. But would he wake at all, ever? There was an even chance that he wouldn't for even as he stood thinking about it he could see something crawling through the darkness beyond, something glistening and slimy....

CHAPTER XX

DORSEY

The booming concussion of some giant tree falling to earth brought Hal to with a start. His legs and arms were pretty well cramped, he realized at once, but he was still safe and unharmed. Manifestly the snake had gone its way—he had been too overcome by sleep to watch or care. And now with the entire clearing flooded by moonlight, he could see all around and breathed gratefully that there was nothing more dangerous in sight than a small army of lizards.

He tried to feel cheered by this one blessing and succeeded for a time. Then the moon began to drift westward as the morning hours approached and he was plunged into the awful gloom for long black hours that took a strong will to keep any feeling of cheer.

“I’ve just got to do it!” he would exclaim times without number.

Always his thought was for saving Mr. Brody, never himself. That buoyed him up wonderfully and he never lost sight of the purpose throughout those following hours of torture. It was all that made him bear without a sound the merciless rays of a tropical sun once it had risen and beat continuously down upon his bare head throughout the long morning.

He sighed prayerfully when he looked up and found it had reached the zenith. Soon it would be middle afternoon—the heat would not be so intense and then would come the cool of night. He decided that he could stand the treacherous darkness better despite its attendant dangers. At least he would not have such a thirst. And his hunger? That he did not dare think of—he wondered that he had survived it so long.

About mid-afternoon his exhaustion caused him to lose all sense of time and place. Mercifully, he drowsed hour after hour, benumbed from head to toe, and blissfully forgetful that his parched tongue and lips were cracked and swollen. Even as sunset drew near he slept on and when the twilight shadows once again filled the clearing of L’Inconnu he was vaguely conscious of it and that was all.

Perhaps he dreamed that a scorpion crawled perilously on the limb overhanging his thick, red curly hair. Perhaps it was but a terrible nightmare that he stood and watched with eyes dilated and mouth agape as the hideous insect strutted back and forth upon the bark. It was very vivid to him later, this remembrance of having seen the creature’s lobster-like body moving the poisonous stinger above its head and threatening the helpless captive below. He cried out hoarsely.

It brought him out of the torpor in which he had been for so many hours. It brought him near enough to consciousness to know that no insect threatened him then for his feverish eyes sought the limb above him and he was quite convinced that if a scorpion had been there, it was there no longer. He shut his eyes again, grateful to lapse out of the thoughts that could bring him naught but torture and anxiety. For night had come and the moon was rising in the east.

Infrequent noises drifted out of the thick jungle and assailed his ears but he did not stir or pretend to hear them. A delicious languor was slowly enveloping him. He did not have the power to concentrate on his shortcomings—he had completely forgotten about Mr. Brody and in a half delirium, murmured that he didn't give a continental what happened. Hope had fled, vanished entirely.

It was in this approaching state of danger that certain sounds could be heard from a distance. If Hal heard them at all, he was not capable of distinguishing them or of realizing their significance. Certain it was that he did not hear the plaintive calls that issued from the north, calls that were unintelligible, yet insistent.

Nearer and nearer they came until one could have recognized them as being but a half mile from L'Inconnu. Yet Hal heard not but nodded and mumbled in those rambling nightmares that crowded all else out of his mind. Certainly his grip on things would have been instantaneous had that call come a few hours earlier.

Was it too late?

He was drowsing almost drunkenly when at last the figure of a man stole into the clearing, looking right and left with furtive glances. Suddenly he saw Hal and a curious happy light came into his eyes, eyes that were usually devoid of expression.

Hal would have shouted for joy had he been able to see just that much. Certainly his youthful enthusiasm would have known no bounds could he have witnessed the frenzy with which that youngish looking man fell upon the bonds that held him captive and ripped them asunder with his knife. And when the last one had fallen away the fellow put a supporting arm under the drooping figure and spoke almost tenderly.

“Keen,” he said, “Keen. Come out of it, hah? It's me—Dorsey! You know—*Dorsey!*”

CHAPTER XXI

ONE WHITE MAN

Dorsey had worked over Hal's prostrate form for a half hour before circulation was complete. He had been unable to moisten the young man's parched lips with water but being resourceful he hurried behind the ruins and brought forth a good sized pineapple. He gouged a great hole in it and was soon forcing the sweet cool juice into the boy's throat.

"Come on, Keen," he was saying, "take a long drink. It's better than nothin' at all. Youse'll be fine in a minute."

Hal gradually recognized his rescuer through the mist of his sluggish mind. He drank his fill and slept heavily after that while Dorsey slumbered lightly and uneasily. Just before dawn the man was relieved to see his patient sit up and look more natural.

"Feelin' better, Keen?" he asked quickly.

"Dorsey!" Hal gasped. "Then—this all wasn't a dream, huh? I didn't dream you came and fed me pineapple juice."

"Not on your life you didn't, kiddo!" Dorsey answered happily. "I'll tell the world I thought you was a goner or somethin'."

Hal looked at the man and it suddenly dawned on him that there was something strange and unusual about Dorsey's presence there. "How did you get here, Dorsey?" he asked, looking around. "Where's my mule—the one you rode off on with Chu?"

"Kiddo, I'm lucky to be here myself, much less a mule!" the man exclaimed. "I got here—*and how!*"

"You mean you left Chu?"

"Yeah, and he left me after when he found it out. Now listen, Keen, I know you ain't feelin' so spry, but this ain't a healthy neighborhood for me or for you. We gotta clear outer here while the clearin' is good, believe me. That means now, if not sooner because it ain't gonna be long before that rotten little half-breed comes smilin' inter this clearin' again. Besides, my conscience don't feel good about that guy Brody. We're gonna take this rope what you was tied with and I got one o' them macheeties (or whatever their name is) inside that hut and the big surprise of the day—I slung one o' them thirty-eights in there just before me an' the greaser sailed outer here yesterday afternoon!"

Hal's generous mouth widened in a smile. "Dorsey, I'm with you! But we've got to hurry. Think how long Mr. Brody's been gone—how many

hours?”

Dorsey frowned. “I ain’t good at ’rithmetic, Keen. Just let’s hurry.” And as he hurried toward the hut, Hal called.

“When did you leave Chu?” he asked worriedly.

“Las’ night ’bout midnight,” the man answered, and came hurrying out of the hut again with the machete and revolver. “Think you feel like plugging along, Keen?”

“Sure,” Hal said cheerfully. “I guess it was just thirst and no circulation, huh?”

“Sure,” Dorsey said confidently. “We’ll scoop a handful of bananas and eat ’em on the way. Know anythin’ ’bout the rest o’ the way what that greaser calls the Santa Luz district?”

“No, but we can hope for the best. We’ll trust to instinct, huh? How did you get here if you left Chu last night?”

“Instinct, but mostly because I knew I was a skunk for treatin’ a white man like I treated you and Mr. Brody. It ain’t never goin’ to rest good on my conscience, Keen—*never!*”

“Forget about it,” Hal said, coming from behind the ruins with a fair-sized bunch of mellow bananas. They started forth through the jungle briskly while Dorsey swung the machete.

“The only thing this jungle’s good for is to remind a guy how much nicer and safer New Yawk is, hah, Keen?” he remarked after they had gone a little way.

Hal chuckled. “We’ll both appreciate home after this. That’s if we ever get there,” he added.

“Just what I thought when I left the greaser last night.”

“How did you happen to do it?” Hal queried curiously.

“Do you think I left here happy, buddy?” Dorsey countered indignantly. “Say, I ain’t never had such a load on my mind as when I sailed out o’ that clearin’ with the greaser. I kep’ sayin’ to myself over and over that maybe you could git loose but I knew the way he made me tie you so tight, that you couldn’t. Not in a hundred years if the tree didn’t fall down with you. Anyways, I made up my mind I’d give that guy the slip the first chanct I got.”

“And you did?”

“And how!” Dorsey exclaimed, stopping for a moment to indicate just how. He swung his machete high above his head for all the world like some old time conqueror. “We had to stop to sleep, see? I pulled the old possum stunt for a long time ’til I heard the greaser snorin’. Then I up and got ready to light on my way.”

“And Chuoco woke up, huh?”

“Like a cat, buddy. He was up in a second and before I knew it, he aimed

at me. Somethin' clipped my shoulder like a flash an' I had the quickest hunch I ever had in my life. I fell down heavy like, fell plump on the ground on my face an' I didn' move."

"Did he really shoot you, Dorsey?" Hal asked, worried.

"Just a clip on the shoulder, buddy. It ain't nothin'—it don't even hurt." And seeing Hal's anxious face, he added, "I'll get it fixed up soon's we get to a human bein's place. Maybe you kin git out the bullet then, hah? Just now we gotta scoot."

"All right," Hal said, "but if you feel a bit of pain, Dorsey, tell me. I'll get it out somehow. Sure it's only a flesh wound?"

"Yeah," he answered indifferently. And as his machete again went into motion, he continued, "The greaser thought he killed me, I guess."

"He did?"

"Yere. He got near me an' sort o' listened, I could tell the way he was breathin'. While he did that I kinda held my breath and that did the trick. It wasn't long before I heard him movin' around and all of a sudden I could tell he was leadin' the mules away."

"I bet the suspense was awful, huh?"

"You said it. That guy would o' killed me anyhow, I guess."

"Didn't I say that yesterday? Boy, I could read his face. You weren't any use to him after he found out that I knew where that stuff was."

"Well, you'll have to forget about it anyways, kiddo. Youse are lucky to be alive."

"Thanks to you!"

"Forget it. I almos' killed you, don't let that slide. But now that you mention it, Keen, I kin remember how disappointed he looked when I told him that my buddies, Benson and Perry, didn't learn me to memorize anythin' about that map. He wrote to me soon's Benson was found and said if I could come down he'd meet me in th' harbor of Colon any time I came. I guess Benson told him that the bulls everywhere kinda knew me—that's why I didn't come down first off. But one thing, I ain't never done no shootin', Keen—never!" he added as if to impress Hal thoroughly with this one outstanding virtue.

Hal chuckled. "So Chu was the gink that hit me on the head with that paddle too, huh? Whew, what a whack that was!"

"Yere, an' I'm mighty sorry for that too, fella. I didn't tell him to do it, neither, but that shows what moider he has in his heart all the time. Anyways I shouldn' o' told him 'bout you an' Walters bein' chummy. Then he wouldn' of bothered you. I can see now he was just crazy to get hold of that stuff—he still is."

"Then you were the one that went to Walters' house that night, huh,

Dorsey?”

“Yeah, I tried to see if I could make him spill it, but it wasn’t any use. But it’s true what I told you ’bout the old man fallin’ and strikin’ his head. He’d gone to bed and I guess he heard us ’cause he came sneakin’ in and when he saw there was three of us, he went down like that.”

Hal followed along thoughtfully for a while, then: “Do you really think your pals were lost in the swamp, Dorsey?” he asked.

“Looks like it, all right,” the man answered as hurriedly as he walked. “I ain’t heard from either o’ them since Benson wrote to me that he and Perry was down here and had hired a half-breed guy named Choo-o-co to take them up to Lenconoo, or whatever the name is, where the stuff is. That’s the last I heard.”

“Chuoco might have lied about them—he might have pushed them into the swamp,” Hal suggested.

“I thought o’ that, too,” said Dorsey vehemently. “Anyways, he ain’t leavin’ me for dead if I know it first! An’ he ain’t leavin’ you nor that nice guy Brody. Ain’t he goin’ to be surprised?”

Hal looked at the back of the man’s head and smiled. “Realize what you’ve given up, Dorsey—what you’ve given up to save me, and I hope, Mr. Brody? Why, it’s what you came down here for! Treasure! Buried gold! Gosh, it isn’t every day a fellow gets a chance like that!”

“No, and it ain’t every day that a guy like me learns that I ought to be punched for treatin’ youse guys like I did for the sake o’ that dirty little Choo-o-co! It ain’t every day I learn that it ain’t white to do what I did.”

“Am I to understand you’re reforming, Dorsey?” Hal asked whimsically.

“I know I ain’t never takin’ any orders from any half-breed again to turn on white folks, that’s what I know!” he exclaimed earnestly. “So help me!”

Hal became philosophical. “Human beings are queer, Dorsey,” he said. “I never thought when I watched you tying me up yesterday that you were even capable of having a human feeling.”

“That shows how a guy like yourself can be fooled, hah?” said Dorsey. “I got a heart, Keen, just as one white man to another....”

CHAPTER XXII

SEARCH

Dorsey was still slashing his way when the afternoon began to wane. They had found the spot where Chuoco, Hal and Mr. Brody had camped the second night on the trail. Sometimes they thought that they hadn't strayed off the invisible path and other times that they had.

"It's darn hard to tell," Hal had remarked after a close study. "If only we'd find some trace of the mule."

Dorsey kept cheerful in order to keep up his flagging spirits, he said. "I ain't goin' to let myself think he's a goner, Keen," he explained. "If I do, well, there ain't much use of me carin' whether school keeps or not."

Hal was drawn to Dorsey, drawn more and more with each passing hour. Simple and ignorant though he was, there was a kindness in his nature that could not be denied. And the strange part of it was that it took the cruel Chuoco to bring this out. The man himself admitted it.

Just before sunset they stopped to rest. Hal was thoroughly weary and Dorsey insisted that he take a nap. "Won't hurt you none, fella. Jest grab forty winks and we'll talk over what can be done next. It ain't goin' to be dark for over an hour yet."

Hal was too fatigued to protest. He lay back on the big dry palm leaves that Dorsey spread over the ground, and fell asleep within a few minutes. With his ear so close to the earth he became aware after a time of a steady thud, thud, rising and falling along the trail. He sat up.

"Mule coming, Dorsey!" he announced.

"How d'ye know?"

"Just heard it with my ear on the ground. Can't hear it so well sitting up, but I bet we'll get it in a little while."

Dorsey looked startled. "Well, nothin'll happen if we see the greaser first. Without his gun he ain't worth powder to blow him. Besides you could put it all over him, Keen."

"And I long to do it, Dorsey, but I have an idea that Chuoco wouldn't try and follow us at all. He'd be taking too much of a chance in any case and he's too much of a coward for that. What he likes is to keep a fellow under subjection with a couple of guns. Not one, but two!"

"Yere, so I noticed. Then you don't think it's him?"

Hal shook his head. "I'm certain, but we won't do anything rash. We'll keep under cover till we're sure it isn't a trap. Maybe Brody, huh?"

“I was hopin’ so myself, but I ain’t darin’ to think I got such good luck without payin’ for it. Listen, I hear it now, fella.”

Hal sat silently, listening and ready. Once in a while they could hear the swish of a machete and as it drew near the sound of soft whistling accompanied it.

“Neither Chu nor Mr. Brody,” Hal said, disappointed. “Listen, it’s a popular song he’s whistling—let me see! What’s the name of it?”

“Don’t ask me,” answered Dorsey. “I ain’t got no ear for music.”

Hal laughed outright and before his merry tones had died away a mule came plodding into view and sitting astride it was a man in the unmistakable togs of the Sanitary Inspector. He greeted the wanderers cheerfully.

“Good evening, boys!” he said pleasantly. “Been a nice day!”

Hal shouted for sheer joy. “Man, how welcome you are!” he exclaimed. “Do you happen to have water and a little something to eat for two starving birds like ourselves?”

The man smiled. “I’m one of those fellows that carry a little bit of everything in my pack. Never can tell when I’ll meet someone who’s going to need supplies. What is it first, boys?”

“Water,” said Hal. “Then you can get out your first aid kit and dress a wound and after that maybe we can draft on your food supply.

“And mosquito netting,” he added, exhibiting the insect bites that covered his arms and neck. “Boy, I don’t want to sleep another night in this neck of the woods without netting.”

“Me and you both,” said Dorsey cheerfully.

The Inspector stared at them. “My goodness, you fellows do look as if you’ve been through a thing or two,” he said with sudden activity. “Who needs first aid and what’s all this that’s been going on?”

“Dorsey here is the wounded one, Mr. Inspector,” Hal smiled. “While you’re getting out your first aid kit and fixing him up we’ll tell you. It’s a long, long story.”

“And it ain’t got no happy endin’, neither, Mr. Inspector,” Dorsey warned the man beforehand. “It ain’t ended yet, is it, Keen?”

“Not so’s you can notice it,” Hal answered. “It isn’t ended with me yet, I know that. I’m not through with Chuoco, don’t forget. But that’s beside the point, huh? The Inspector is waiting to hear.”

“Take your time, boys, we’ve got the whole night before us. I’m not moving on until morning.”

“Well, I’d like to move around a little before dark,” Hal said. “You see we’re looking for Mr. Brody—do you know him—have you seen him?”

“No,” said the Inspector, “but I do know him. Everyone in the city knows him and knows his story, too. Were you one of the party that started up here

the other day?”

“Started, is good,” Hal replied. “This is one of the many starts.”

The Inspector gave them water and then proceeded to attend to Dorsey. “Go right on with it, Keen,” he said. “If I need your help, I’ll give you a sign. Now then?”

“We started out with a guide by the name of Chuoco. Do you happen to know of him, Mr. Inspector?”

“Hmph! Guess I do,” answered the Inspector without any attempt to disguise his contempt of the name. “I ought to know him! Been on this route for twenty years or more. A devil if there ever was one—half devil and half Indian. Lives with his people and a bad lot they are too. That is, he lives with them when he isn’t scalawagging through here on some shady deal when he’s guiding tourists. A scoundrel he is, and that’s a tame name for him at that.”

“I guessed it just a little too late, Mr. Inspector,” Hal said. “But before we go further—where does he live, or his people, rather?”

“Live? If they lived it wouldn’t be so bad. They hide, that’s what they do, Keen, hide in the mountains from time to time when Chuoco’s putting over some deal!” he said vehemently, and bathing Dorsey’s shoulder with gauze dipped in some antiseptic solution. “Xpect that’s what’s been keeping them under cover for almost a year now. A dirty ragged tribe of villains they are, keeping to themselves in a mountain pass called Cerro Lolita. Police don’t go near them—afraid of them, I guess, and from what I hear, Chuoco’s sort of the brains of the gang. He’s hung around with white folks enough to learn their ways and their talk, and I believe he can read and write a little bit, too.”

“Mm,” said Hal. “That sounds great! Cerro Lolita, huh? Hard to get to?”

The Inspector shook his head. “Go straight north as the crow flies from here. There’s a plateau nice and grassy that spreads out after you leave the jungle and beyond it is a good wide trail that leads up to the pass. The only trail too! That’s why they can keep off the police and unwelcome visitors. They see everybody first.”

Hal grinned and clapped his hands decisively. “That’s that, then,” he said. “And now that you’ve told us what you know about Chuoco, I’ll tell you what we know about him. Particularly the part that concerns Mr. Brody....”

CHAPTER XXIII

A JUNGLE NIGHT

A Sanitary Inspector is all things, but of all things he is a man. His mission in life is humanity, to serve, to listen, and to keep the jungle streams flowing down to the rivers, free from death-dealing insects, insects that carry the dreaded yellow fever in their gauze-like bodies.

"I'm fighting 'em all the time," he told his listeners after they had concluded their narrative. "I'm fighting to keep their sting from bringing death to people they come in contact with. And in most cases I guess I succeed. That's what ought to be done with that tribe of Chuoco's. Somebody ought to be able to go up there and take the sting out of 'em and their death-dealing methods. We can't pour poison in their water like I do in the jungle streams, poison that kills off the insects, but maybe somebody could bring 'em to justice and force them to a showdown, eh?"

Dorsey nodded vehemently. "That'd take nerve, Inspector," he said. "I ain't so sure I'd fancy the job myself 'cause they got the up-and-up on their enemies by havin' a one-way street, hah?"

Hal laughed. "There's always another end to a one-way street," he said logically, "or it wouldn't be a street at all. The other way might be full of dangers, but anything that's worth going after is difficult, huh, Dorsey?"

The Inspector had bandaged up the injured shoulder and pronounced it as being started on the road to recovery. Then after he had packed away his first aid kit he turned to Hal.

"You're pretty worried about Mr. Brody, aren't you?"

"I'll never forgive myself if anything's happened to him," Hal answered. "It was me that recommended Chuoco, that's why I feel so bad about it."

"And that isn't doing any worse than many another unsuspecting fellow has done before you, I guess," said the Inspector. "Chuoco's likely to take in an angel with that smile of his."

"But without it, beware!" said Hal.

They made the most of the twilight and kept up the hunt until the deepening shadows drove them back to the shelter. The Inspector made a cheerful fire and after they had strung up their hammocks they sat down with him for a good night smoke.

Dorsey eyed the hammocks with pleasure. "Even that looks good to me," he said honestly. "Since I said toodle-oo to that ship I ain't slep' on nothin' but damp ground and that's a fact. That greaser piloted me off out of the city right

away.”

The Inspector puffed on his pipe placidly. “Glad to know I’ve been able to give you some comfort, Dorsey,” he said. “I always keep a few extra on my travels through here. One never knows how many people in need of a hammock one will meet before sunset.”

Dorsey looked off into the darkness wistfully. “Now I’m anxious to get back to New Yawk,” he said stoutly. “I got things kind of off my mind excep’ for Mr. Brody and I’ll be one guy less tonight that ain’t mixed up in that dirty business.”

“Why didn’t you come down with Benson and Perry in the first place, anyway?” Hal asked curiously.

“Cause I didn’t like the smack of the thing, Keen,” Dorsey answered frankly. “I just quit on ’em after I saw the old man and I ain’t had an easy night till tonight. That’s a fact.”

“‘Open confession!’” quoted Hal. “Dorsey, you weren’t cut out to be anything but a nice, clean-cut bird, do you know it? I’ve got faith in you and it’s going to stay put as long as you live.”

Dorsey looked across the fire gratefully as if to say that he would try and live up to it. Like most people he was drawn to Hal’s bigness, bigness of soul as well as body. And as he confided to the Inspector in an off moment, he was positive that the young giant’s guardian angel must have been Jack the Giant Killer himself.

They slept soon, slept the sleep of the exhausted. And though in the wee hours of the morning the weird, plaintive cry of the sloth filled the clearing, it did not awaken them. It was only when a lonely owl gave its last nocturnal cry that Mr. Dorsey sat up with a start.

“Did you hear that?” he asked, not a little shaken.

Hal, who had awakened at his movement, shook his head drowsily. “I haven’t heard anything, Dorsey. What of it? It’s only an owl.”

“Yeah, and you know what that means to them that hears it?” asked Mr. Dorsey, in awed, frightened tones.

“It means that all good people should be asleep,” Hal grinned. “That’s what we are, huh, Dorsey? And that’s what we were doing. Now go back to sleep and forget it. It just frightened you, I guess.”

“Frightened me is right, Keen. What’s more, it’s kinder upset me ’cause I always heard that it means hard luck.”

“Bosh!” Hal laughed. “He cries every night probably—dozens of them do. Why should it mean hard luck to you any more than to me or the Inspector?”

“Cause I heard it and those that hear it get the bum luck!” Dorsey insisted. “Anyways if it comes it comes, I guess! I intend to face things anyways so maybe that’s what it means, hah? It’s a reminder maybe that I shouldn’t forget

I *gotta* face 'em.”

“And face them like a man, huh, Dorsey?”

“O.K. So after all what can an owl bring me that I ain't brought myself already, hah?”

Hal nodded and wondered if, after all, the cry of the owl did not portend something? Wise old bird that he is, might his wailing notes not be words of wisdom to the ears of such men as Dorsey? Hal was inclined to think they might.

CHAPTER XXIV

EVIDENCE

The first move they made in the morning was straight toward the cliff of San Gorda. Hal had a hunch, and it seemed to be the only place off the unmarked, lonely trail that they had not searched.

The jungle growth still showed the signs of having been roughly trod upon when only a few days before Chuoco had led the way through with his machete. Memories of the half-breed's smiling replies, memories of the talk he had given them on the evils of San Gorda came now vividly to Hal's mind. "The abode of the devil," was what the little fellow had called it and he repeated it to his companions as they neared the lonely place.

"Seems to me that Chuoco makes every place he stops the abode of the devil," said the Inspector. "He's a crafty one, there isn't a doubt. I'd like to know the true story of Benson's death. Perry's, too!"

Hal made no comment for he had made up his mind what to do about the half-breed and he was determined that nothing should hold him back. But he had put it out of his mind for the immediate present. They still had a serious problem to solve.

The sickening odor of stagnant water and rotting vegetation reminded him that they were near the swamp. Passing through some thick growth and around two giant, slimy trees, the Inspector stopped. Dorsey, too, halted abruptly and shuddered visibly at the vile looking place.

Hal shaded his eyes from the sun and peered intently over the still green surface below. Boldly he stepped forward and stood at the very brink scanning the few scum-covered rocks that stretched up out of the pond directly underneath. Suddenly he made a queer throaty noise and stepped back, motioning to his companions.

"Look—down there!" he exclaimed in horrified tones. "A saddle and some rope, that's all!"

He turned away, mentally and physically sick and did not look again. What use was there? The thing had happened—it was over. Nothing now could recall it, not even the deepest contrition. He waited until Dorsey joined him, white, shaken and speechless, and together they plunged back through the morass while the Inspector followed on his mule a few feet behind, grim and silent.

They did not refer to it again, but talked intermittently of other things during the hasty breakfast which the Inspector insisted upon sharing with

them. Dorsey looked blankly ahead and Hal talked in monotones of his plans.

"I suppose I'll have to go back," he said dully. "Unk will be furious with me."

"Come now, why should he?" the Inspector asked.

"Maybe he won't say a word and that will be worse. Oh, well!"

Dorsey tried to show his sympathy to the best of his ability. "You ain't done nothin', Keen, nothin' compared to me. And I ain't sayin' a word—what's the use? You know what we talked about this mornin'? About that owl and facin' things? So forget it!"

Hal forced a smile, but it faded as quickly as it came for a young boy had stolen through the trail and stood before them as silently as a serpent. The Inspector started, then laughed.

"Why, hello, Lorenzo!" he said in greeting. "Where are you going?"

"I come for you," answered the young Panamanian shyly. A brilliant smile overspread his brown face. "I come to bring you by my hut—surprise!"

"Hmph!" the Inspector exclaimed. "Surprise, eh? So you came for me?"

"You—anybody," the boy answered. "It all same. Just some 'Merican."

The Inspector smiled at Hal. "Lorenzo's a son of the jungle, Keen. He's been born and brought up in a hut a little way up the river and I've been seeing him on my route ever since he had sense enough to remember a face. It isn't very far—about five hours' journey. We can take turns with the mule. One makes the same time anyway, only it saves the shoe-leather and clothing."

"Mine's beyond saving," Hal said sardonically, indicating his ragged shirt and duck trousers. "What about you, Dorsey?"

"Whatever you say, Keen," said Dorsey, rising. "Does this take us back to civilization or away from it?"

The Inspector smiled. "It takes us nearer only we go nearer the river—the Chagres River." He fell to clearing up the remnants of their makeshift breakfast.

Hal soon was lending a willing hand. "What do you suppose he wants?" he asked nodding toward the smiling boy.

"That's always a gamble," the Inspector answered. "They want many things sometimes, these natives. But they're my very good friends. I've learned a great deal on this job and some of my knowledge has been gained from the poor ones back in the most remote parts of this jungle. You'd be surprised. Well, guess we're ready, eh?"

"Mm. After you finish your errand, Inspector, you can launch Dorsey and me toward Panama—and the music!"

The Inspector smiled and clapped Hal on the shoulder. "We human beings always worry about things that seldom come to pass, do you realize that, Keen? And I dare say in this case you're wasting a lot of good energy that

ought to be saved for the triumphant moments. Now we're off!"

Lorenzo turned obediently and slunk through the long green jungle tunnel with only an occasional swing of his machete. Hal marveled at him.

"It all looks the same to me," he said looking about. "Mango trees, bananas—trees, trees, trees! I couldn't tell you whether I was coming or going!"

"Same with me," Dorsey agreed.

"Sense of direction, that's all," said the Inspector. "You'd soon develop it if you came through here every month of the year."

They came out on the banks of the Chagres River, that strange stream of which no source has ever been discovered. Hal breathed deeply of the soft, sun-warmed breeze that played through the jungle grass and was reminded of a poem that Mr. Brody had quoted, and which he was destined never to forget.

"Beyond the Chagres River
Is the Jungle's poisonous breath;
Lurk the serpent and the fever,
'Long the paths that lead to death."

CHAPTER XXV

A FIRM RESOLVE

The boy Lorenzo's home was the most insignificant hut that Hal had ever seen. Indeed there was not much even to signify that it was a home save for a reed mat that lay before the small entrance, and a lanky white hen strutting and cackling about the place.

The boy looked from the Sanitary Inspector to Hal and smiled shyly. Then he called something in Spanish and beamed upon the visitors. There was a movement from the doorway where a dark little native woman stood, obviously Lorenzo's mother. Behind her appeared none other than Mr. Brody, his gray eyes dancing with glee.

Dorsey almost fainted. Hal was speechless for a moment until he realized that it was not Mr. Brody's spirit but the man himself.

"It's me, Hal," he laughed, "alive and dying to get back and get a meal at the hotel."

"Mr. Brody," Dorsey stammered, "we—I—came back!"

"So I see, Dorsey. But never mind any of that now—the main thing is that Hal and I are both alive and well."

"But how?" Hal asked. "How did you do it, tied up the way you were?"

Mr. Brody came out of the hut. "I didn't do it, Hal," he answered, "it was the poor mule. I had some worrisome moments, I can tell you, for I realized that he was heading me straight for the cliff. And I was powerless to stop him! He had guided me all right that first night—I even slept. But the constant strain was too much for the poor animal and on he went. No one has any idea how I felt when we left that cliff!"

"You mean you landed in San Gorda Swamp yourself?" Hal asked amazed.

"Just at the edge, fortunately. The strain of the leap unloosed some of the ropes and as the mule hit the surface of that slimy place I had presence of mind enough to reach out and grasp one of those rocks that dot the edge of it. The mule sank at once, and how I got up the side of that place, I'll never quite understand myself."

Hal felt deliriously happy. "Gosh, you were lucky and I don't mean anything else, believe me! Then you wandered here, huh?"

Mr. Brody nodded. "Yesterday. These people were angels to me! And what a mess I was in!"

Lorenzo's mother spread some reed mats on the floor and motioned hospitably for them to be seated. Presently Hal was telling of his own

miraculous rescue by Dorsey. Each one had his say and then came the Sanitary Inspector's turn.

"I just came in at the end of all this excitement," he said regretfully.

"But boy, it was good to see you!" Hal said sincerely. "If you want a little adventure, though, Inspector, you can guide us up to L'Inconnu. I heard you say you'd be going there this week."

"And so I did. Certainly, I'll take you. What's the matter, haven't you had enough excitement yet?"

"I'll say I have," Hal admitted. "Still, I don't get tired of it. But what I want to go back for is the treasure."

"Are you quite positive it's still there, Hal?" Mr. Brody asked anxiously. "Don't take any more unnecessary chances, for goodness' sake!"

"I'm not taking them at L'Inconnu, not now," Hal assured him. "Chuoco's probably safe in hiding up at Cerro Lolita. He knows what charges you and I could make against him, if we wanted to. And we're going to!"

"What are you talking about, Hal?" Mr. Brody asked, looking anxiously at him.

Hal laughed. "Oh, I'm perfectly sane about it, Mr. Brody," he said. "This business hasn't affected my mind at all except it's made me see some things darn clear. I don't mind telling you I've got a scheme up my sleeve and it's going to take me to Cerro Lolita as soon as I get the treasure business off my mind. Now listen...."

"Hal, you're crazy!" Mr. Brody said seriously. "I know you are!"

Hal laughed protestingly. "I'm not—gosh! Listen, I'm going to get that treasure if it's to be got. Then I'm going to entrust it to the Inspector here if he'll take the responsibility, and also if he can carry it. He can bring it on back to Panama and I'll go on to Cerro Lolita."

Dorsey looked interested.

"And then what?" he asked.

"That's where my scheme comes in and that's what I can't tell you because I don't quite know myself. All I have in mind is that I want to look it over."

"They'd murder you just as quickly as look at you!" warned the Inspector.

"I'm figuring on that, too," Hal said stoutly, "but you see Mr. Brody will have been in Panama many days by that time and long enough to have got the U. S. interested in her citizens being molested down here. The charges filed and the government aroused—what'll happen? Why, they'll send a company of marines up with the Spiggotty police to see that Chuoco is taken and arrested. I'm going to figure close on to the time they get there so's I won't be taking any chances."

"Hal, it takes only one minute to shoot you!" Mr. Brody said nervously.

"Yes, but I'll make it perfectly clear that my Uncle and a lot of others I

know have got things going. They're not going to kill me so quickly then."

Mr. Brody could not be convinced and tried in vain to persuade Hal to go peaceably back to the Tivoli in Panama. "Where you'll get a decent change of clothes and a good meal and bath—Hal, won't you?"

Hal was obdurate. "Listen, Mr. Brody, somebody's got to make that rascal pay and if I don't go up there and make it impossible for him to get away, then he'll go right on with his shady schemes and tricks and even murder. Who knows what he's done, huh? He'll do the same things to others that he tried to do to us. No, I've got my mind made up, believe me. So you tell Unk, will you? I'll write him a note on one of the Inspector's blank reports. And please see that he gets it right away because things have got to fit together."

"That's just it, Hal!" said Mr. Brody in one last plea. "Sometimes things just don't fit together."

"Well, in that case, I'll depend on my size to carry me along. Dorsey's got a gun well filled and I don't have to fear that somebody else will be beaten over my shoulder like it happened the other day. Anyway, I can hop on them all if it comes to that."

Mr. Brody gave up in despair and while the Inspector applauded Hal's courage, he did not exactly approve. It was too great a risk for him to go there alone, he said.

Suddenly Dorsey straightened up. "Say, what's the idea, Mister?" he asked indignantly. "Who said he was going alone?"

Hal looked up in surprise. "Do you mean that you'd go with me, Dorsey?" he asked.

"Go with you!" Dorsey repeated. "Say, listen, buddy, I thought it was understood right along that this kind of a game is just my speed. I guess I got a little business with that half-breed myself, ain't I?"

"I guess you have, Dorsey," Hal admitted laughing. "I guess you have!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A FRIENDLY GESTURE

It took longer than Hal had counted on to dig up the treasure. They did not come across the worn rusty box until almost the evening of the second day. Wrapped in some sort of rotted burlap it had sunk along with a few other tarnished trinkets more than fifteen feet deep in the damp ground. Consequently, when the weighty box was lifted up from its long resting place, their curiosity was more or less perfunctory and no ceremony marked the event.

“It’ll take too much time to open it,” Hal remarked when they had set it down on the ground outside of the hut at L’Inconnu. “Looks as if it would take a locksmith to pry it, huh?”

The Sanitary Inspector looked at it closely. “Hmph, that old bird, Silas, didn’t mean for anybody to get it without a little effort, eh?”

“Especially no half-witted, thick-headed greaser,” said Mr. Dorsey scornfully. “And I bet that Mr. Silas whoever he was didn’t fill that box up with no shady schemes neither, hah? In them days it was all work and no play and then when a guy got his bag filled, he’s bumped off with yella fever—ain’t that Fate, hah?”

“It was pretty tragic, I think,” Hal said. “And now after all these years when his great-granddaughter and his granddaughter who is old Miss Wainwright are almost down and out I’d be a fine sort of bird to have let Chu know where that was hidden, huh? Gosh, it isn’t right, of course, to make other innocent people suffer, but that’s Fate, too. Mr. Brody had to suffer a little bit and I did, too, just so’s that rapsallion couldn’t have what didn’t belong to him. A fine chance the police or anybody else would have had if he had laid his hands on this!”

“And by that same token, I’ll feel very much relieved when I deliver this safe into your uncle’s hands, Keen. I’ll be almost afraid to sleep in the meantime.”

“But none of those fellers bother you much, do they?” Hal asked anxiously.

The Inspector admitted that they didn’t, but it was decided that the safer way was for him to make his trip back to Panama by traveling at night and catnapping through the day. Hal felt a sense of security after that decision and though they all slept lightly during that night, there was an atmosphere of general good spirits at dawn.

The two adventurers parted from the Inspector and the treasure before the sun was well up. They were armed with a revolver each, some water and food. Hal would have appreciated two mules for their convenience also, but having received much more than he expected, he was satisfied.

“Anyway, my shoes and trousers are such a mess they can’t look any worse,” he said. “And by the time we get back to Panama Unk won’t know me at all. It’s good for the soul to get like this, huh? Makes a feller feel like fighting.”

Mr. Dorsey agreed that it did. He confided that he felt much more confident about squaring his grievance with Chuoco now that Hal was with him. “See, I ain’t so strong like I might be, Keen,” he admitted honestly. “I do kinder light work and it don’t develop muscle like you got. But I’m livin’ a good honest life now and it’s better to be honest than have muscle, hah?”

Hal agreed. “You’ll feel stronger inside anyway, Dorsey,” he added. “Scheming and this shady business doesn’t pay, not even in Panama.”

“Don’t I know it!” Dorsey exclaimed. “That’s why since that Wainwright business I’ve been a dishwasher. It’s light, but honest. Besides, I met a nice girl, Keen, a waitress, and girls like an honest fella in the end, don’t you think so?”

Hal felt a twinge of pity for the man. So candid, so simple and naive. He was like a child indeed. “What about your job now that you’re down here?” he asked after a moment.

“They’ll give it back to me,” said Mr. Dorsey proudly. “I got one of them leaves of absence—ain’t that what you call ’em? They think I came here on business. Anyways, I’m glad that things happened to keep me from fallin’ back and bein’ tempted, Keen. I’d much rather marry my girl with a dishwasher’s pay than with that gold of old Wainwright’s. Yeah, I’m certainly glad, I can go back and ask her to marry me with nothin’ on my conscience.”

“And I think Unk can use his influence in getting you a fair hearing, Dorsey,” Hal assured him. “Your story is straightforward and if they try to pin anything on you, why, you’ve got friends who’ll stand back of your character now.”

“I sure am glad to hear you say that,” Dorsey said with genuine emotion in his voice. “Marie, that’s my girl’s name, knows all about me and she knows I’m trying to do all right. She’d feel awful, honest, if they clapped me away for that business. It’s the one thing I didn’t know about, and that’s the truth. Benson and Berry told me they was just going to call on the old man and ask him if he’d let them come down here and hunt for that treasure. See, they knew I was reformed and wouldn’t do nothin’, so that’s the excuse they give me. I just walked out on ’em.”

He fell into a long account of his lady’s beauty and charm and of the happy

life they contemplated together. Hal listened with interest and enjoyed the man's native simplicity so much that he was surprised to find the day on the wane.

They slept soundly that night and did not hurry to be off in the morning for there was not more than five hours' journey, according to the Inspector's schedule, before they would sight Cerro Lolita. And upon that important phase of their trip, Hal gave brief instructions.

"You're not to do anything but listen to what I say after we get there, Dorsey," he explained from where he sat on a rotten tree stump. "I have everything in my mind what I'm going to say. All you have to do is to look vacant."

"My natural look, hah?" Dorsey said whimsically.

"Now, now," Hal grinned. "Even so, it comes in handy. Also don't be surprised at anything I say—*not anything!* I'm out to try an experiment and see if I can work it. And if Chuoco should try and quiz you alone, say you came back for me because you knew I was on your side."

"And what I don't understand, I'll blame on his bum English, hah?" Dorsey suggested. "That's a good old gag in a tight squeeze. No savvy!"

"You'll do, Dorsey," Hal said, resting his arms on his hips.

Dorsey swung his machete back and forth idly. Suddenly he was aware that Hal had become strangely silent and looking down, he saw to his horror that a tarantula had dropped on the young man's arm, from the tree above.

"Don't move, Keen!" he hissed. "If you don't move, it won't bite you!"

Hal felt his skin prickle under the loathsome hairy creature, but he kept perfectly still. Suddenly Dorsey raised his machete directly above his arm, then lowered it ever so gradually while the polished steel blade gleamed brightly in the sunlight.

The point of the blade was within a few inches of the creature's body, and Hal's arm. A tense moment passed, then suddenly the tarantula moved slightly, raising its black head the least bit.

Dorsey kept the blade steady and presently Hal saw what was his purpose, for the creature raised its body bit by bit. It was fascinated by the gleaming blade for it could see another tarantula upon that highly polished surface—its mirrored self. Carefully, scarcely seeming to move, Dorsey brought the gleaming blade closer and closer to the creature, and then with one swift movement suddenly dashed the monster to the ground and trampled it under foot while Hal sat too horrified and bewildered to realize that he was out of danger. At last he found his tongue.

"Dorsey, you're a brick!" was all he could say.

"That ain't my trick, Keen," the fellow admitted frankly. "I learned that from Chu the day he first took me in the jungle. He said it was the best way to

kill them devils and I guess it is. That's the only decent thing I learned from that greaser, and that's a fact!"

"Even the devil has one virtue," Hal said.

"Yere, I guess. Anyways, maybe we better be starting for Cerro Loleeta right away, hah?"

Hal smiled.

"Wonder how we'll like it, Keen?"

"It's more of a question of how much Cerro Lolita will like us," Hal answered.

And they started on the last lap of their strange quest.

CHAPTER XXVII

CERRO LOLITA

A little past noon they came out on the plateau and sighted at once the wide, ribboned trail leading up to Cerro Lolita. Waving palms covered the slope and as they stood beneath the afternoon sun everything seemed a profusion of green. Hal nodded as he gave a last, backward glance at the jungle.

Dorsey smiled. "Still, Keen," he said sagaciously, "we know what we just left, but we don't know what we're coming to, ain't I right?"

"Maybe," said Hal, "then again, maybe you're not right. There's one thing sure, Dorsey, a fellow can't go wrong when he acts like a Roman in Rome. Turn it around and we can act like San Blas half-breeds when we're up in Cerro Lolita, huh?"

Dorsey's eyes widened in admiration. "I gotta hand it to you, Keen, that's a fact. What yer got up yer sleeve I don't know, but your method is O.K., buddy. You mean you're goin' to beat the greaser at his own game, hah?"

"Righto. Just listen and watch, Dorsey, that's your cue!"

They strode across through the thick jungle grass, strongly conscious that someone had already discovered them. Dorsey thought they must keep a lookout. But if they did it was not to interfere with Hal's plans, for he strode along, imposing in his almost negligee costume, and swinging his long arms carelessly at his sides.

Cerro Lolita was a sort of haven. A little grassy canyon, it was cleverly hidden between gigantic mountain walls and suffered little from the onslaughts of nature. And on this particular afternoon as Hal and Dorsey reached the end of the trail, this obvious note struck them more forcibly than anything else for at that moment they had nothing else to think about or fear. Its lazy inhabitants were enjoying the peace and solitude of the siesta. Being indolent themselves, they had not the brains nor imagination to believe that others could be active and aggressive while they were sleeping.

Hal nodded delightedly. "All we'd want it to be," he said, looking round at the miserable hovels that these people called home.

Somehow the dirt and filth of these dozen or so huts looked strangely out of place against such a picturesque background. The majestic grandeur of the range, the cool clean green of the verdure, seemed to rise scornfully out of the pass. At least they could be above all that.

Hal's bright eye picked out a hovel that looked slightly better than the rest,

albeit its only distinguishing mark was a lonely flower blooming beside the filthy doorway. Dorsey glanced at the scarlet shrub approvingly.

Hal nodded and walked through the thick dust of the path straight toward the shack with Dorsey close at his heels. In front of the doorway, they scuffed their feet to attract the attention of its inhabitants.

Soon a dark eyed slatternly woman came to the opening, clothed in gaudy colored rags. If she was surprised at this sudden presence of strangers she did not show it, but looked aslant at them from under half-opened lids.

“Si, senors!” she said when Hal and Dorsey politely bowed. “What ’um want?”

“Chuoco, senora,” Hal answered and his strong white teeth flashed in a wide grin. “We want see him.”

The woman shrugged her shoulders. “What you talk?”

“We friends of Chuoco,” Hal insisted. “There’s something we want tell ’um.”

The woman looked at them indifferently. “Me don’ know Chuoco,” she said doggedly.

At the sound of their voices, subdued as they were, Hal knew that he had aroused some of the sleepers. He could feel rather than see faces peering at them from inside their filthy fly-ridden doorways.

He stepped a little forward. “Senora, I come tell Chuoco ’bout gold—good news, senora. I not enemy—neither is friend here. We want make friends with Chuoco ’cause of gold.”

The woman stared hard at them and her face was almost expressionless. A sort of flitting shadow in the hovel just opposite made Hal think of his revolver, but he had presence of mind not to put his hand to his belt, and he was thankful for that afterward. The shadow proved to be an Indian rising from the doorway opposite, where he, too, had just completed his siesta.

Hal smiled engagingly after that. “Senora tell Chuoco, huh? I tell him better because I can’t go back my Uncle in Panama.” He leaned forward confidentially, “Senor Brody dead, maybe I be dead too, huh? Then I dig gold and nobody know. I come Chuoco—I no have shovel. Chuoco take.”

There had been no sound from within, yet at this last bit of intelligence so confidentially spoken, Chuoco’s little squat figure had floated across the doorway. Not a smile did he have on his face but looked at his callers sullenly, suspiciously.

Hal grinned. “Hello, Chu,” he said cheerfully. “You’re just the bird I want. There’s a lot to be talked over. Dorsey here got frightened and ran away from you but I talked him into coming back with me and seeing you. How about it—do you want to listen to a good proposition?”

Chuoco stood watching them, his arms folded on his breast.

“Don’t look so dumb about it, Chu, you ought to know I couldn’t fall in with your plans right away, I had to think about Mr. Brody going back and telling my uncle. But now that’s over. We saw his mule’s saddle in San Gorda.”

Chuoco smiled perceptibly and a cold shiver ran up and down Hal’s spine. He showed no fear, however, but gave the half-breed an answering smile. Dorsey chuckled.

“Ain’t that a hot one, Choo?” he asked playfully.

Chuoco’s smile was expansive as he said, “Come in!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

RUSE

The hard brown earth served as floor and rug combined and the only furniture the hut possessed was a low table with the legs broken off so that it squatted close to the ground. Manifestly they cooked over an open fire made directly in the center of the hovel for there were unmistakable signs of food on the charred earth and heap of dead embers. Overhead, a hole had been made to allow the smoke to find its way out as best it could.

Chuoco motioned them to sit down where a dark, ill-smelling blanket was spread. After they were seated he sat down himself, directly opposite, and Hal was aware that the woman had vanished.

“Just had a hunch this was your shack, Chu,” he said blithely. “That your mother?”

Chuoco grunted assent.

“That’s good,” Hal said, “then it was all right for us to talk to her about the gold, huh, Chu?”

“Don’ talk too much to anybody ’bout gold, senior,” the half-breed warned them coldly. “Talk only me. Now what you got say, you and Dorsey, eh?”

“Well, you know how Dorsey ran away and you clipped him? Well, he wasn’t hurt so badly, and he found his way back. Naturally, he wanted the stuff just the same as you and I do. Anyway, he let me loose because I was getting sick from standing and he told me what had happened. Then like I told you, we went to look for Mr. Brody and we saw that saddle and part of the rope in San Gorda. That’s when I got my big idea—the idea of joining you, Chu!”

“Si?”

“I mean I realized how foolish I had been too and that if we all shared alike we could beat it away together till this thing blew over. Nobody would know but that I’d been killed too, understand? And you could use me, Chu—I’m a big bird and I can fight. I’m sick and tired of things home and I’d like to live like a hobo—you know! The only thing, Dorsey and me better keep away from the jungle. I’ll give you the location of the stuff and you can go to L’Inconnu, huh! It’s safer. He and I can stay here.”

Chuoco beamed. “That better talk, senior! You what ’Merican call good sport, eh! It is fine. I go tomorrow, eh!”

“I’d start tonight, in a little while, if I were you. So you get there tomorrow afternoon. Then maybe nobody’ll be out hunting us yet, don’t you think so? Did you send my uncle that telegram!”

“Yes, senior.”

Hal grinned maliciously. “That’s great! He’ll think I was lost on the way back. Dorsey just better keep out of the way. Gosh, his pals did him a dirty trick too, huh, Chu?”

Chuoco looked puzzled.

“Sure,” said Dorsey, jumping into the breach, “they double-crossed me! I didn’t know they were coming down here without me. Benson got what was coming to him and if Perry went too, he deserved it. Anyways they were hogs. They would have wanted it all. But with me, I don’t care just so long as I can keep under cover. I ain’t at all anxious to go back to New Yawk.”

Hal got out his pipe and filled it. “It wouldn’t be a half bad idea if you were sure that Perry wouldn’t come sneaking around some day to make trouble. That’s what he’s afraid of, Chu. He don’t want his friends to know where he is—they might think he told us the secret and do something to him.”

Chuoco lighted one of his vile-smelling cigarettes. “Senors need have no fear,” he chuckled softly. “Senor Perry and Senor Benson both go same way. I make ’um go with gun. I make mistake, senior. I think first Senor Perry have map so I make Senor Benson jump off cliff, then I find Senor Benson have map. It in San Gorda swamp.”

Hal swallowed before he could smile. The man was a fiend—a monster!

“Well,” he said lightly, “Dorsey don’t have to worry about them then, huh?”

Dorsey’s laugh sounded a trifle thin. “Ain’t I glad of that! They wasn’t no good anyways. Double-crossers!”

Chuoco’s chest puffed out visibly. “I be fair,” he said purringly, “if senors don’t want much.”

“Sure, we don’t want much,” Hal assured him. “I just want to get away from home and Dorsey wants to keep away from New York. That’s all.”

Chuoco puffed away complacently. He moved about a little, then sat with his legs crossed under him. Suddenly Hal leaned forward.

“Say, Chu,” he said in a confidential whisper, “why can’t we all make a little money out of Brody’s kid?”

Chuoco’s face looked queer. “Eh?” he asked.

CHAPTER XXIX

DEDUCTION

"I said, why can't we all make a little money out of Brody's kid?" Hal repeated naively.

"What senor mean?" Chuoco demanded coldly.

"I mean it's never been proved that the kid really went down in San Gorda so why not make believe he's alive and think up some ransom scheme, huh? We could think up some way to get the money and then when it came time to produce the kid we could heat it where they'd never find us."

A slow smile lighted Chuoco's swarthy features. "Senor Keen, he is clever, eh? That is good—fine!"

"Sure," said Hal enthusiastically. "Now that Mr. Brody's gone it would get hold of the mother more than anything—she'd fall for that right away!"

The half-breed ground out his cigarette in the earth, then leaned forward. "Maybe senors be s'prised if I tell 'um little Senor Brody here—here at Cerro Lolita, eh?"

Hal met it like a man and grinned. "You old son of a something," he laughed, "you sure do keep the tricks. Gosh, if he's here, all the better!"

It was just as well that Dorsey hadn't agreed to be spokesman of the affair, for at that moment he couldn't speak. His teeth were chattering and he felt completely overcome with horror at this latest revelation.

Chuoco was gaining fast on Hal's flattery. "I no try ransom before because little Senor Brody he know too much. He get lost that day near cliff when I knock senors off and I turn and he ask me did I kill senors!" He chuckled. "What I do? I have take 'um or he tell. I keep 'um all this time, not know what do."

"I bet not," Hal said endeavoring to keep his voice firm.

"We talk 'um ransom, eh?" asked the half-breed sweetly. "I like 'um talk more money."

"Sure," Hal agreed, "but don't you think you better get started for L'Inconnu? We can talk about the ransom when you get back. Plenty of time then."

Chuoco bowed before Hal's wisdom and rose. "Senor maybe like see what fine boy little Senor Brody is?"

Hal nodded. "All right, Chu," he said ingratiatingly, "bring him on and let him stay with us till you get back. I'll keep an eye on him and if I think he's worth it we'll think up a good big price for him, huh?"

Chuoco's laugh made Dorsey's blood run cold.

"Ah, that is fine, senior," he said, very pleased. "But first you tell me 'bout L'Inconnu?"

Hal told him graciously. He could now tell it with ease and laughed within himself to think how easily he had won the half-breed over with so much talk of gold and money. But he was discerning enough to see that the man was also scheming and planning his own part of the affair. He had by no means won, though his triumph seemed already great.

Neither he nor Dorsey spoke when Chuoco slunk out of the hut. They were canny enough to know that their every movement might be watched, and every word uttered, heard by alien ears. Consequently they did a great deal of talking with their eyes and expressed not a little horror with eloquent gestures.

It was only a few minutes before Chuoco came back leading the boy by the hand. He was quite tall for his age and his olive skin was now bronzed from the tropical sun. His hair, however, had been bleached by the fierce rays until it resembled not a little a great pile of straw.

As the boy caught sight of Hal's fair skin and red hair, his face dimpled and his brown eyes sparkled. "You not Indian, mis—senor?"

Hal laughed. "A red-headed Indian, kiddo," he said gaily. "Who're you?"

The boy looked up at Chuoco questioningly. "Who?" he asked artlessly.

Chuoco smiled. "Tell 'um what I tell 'um," he said softly.

The boy smiled happily. "I can only tell Chuoco's friends I am Alan Brody," he said in a whisper. "To other people I say I am Chiri."

"Well, we should worry, kid," Hal said blithely. "You are you, that's all, huh? Come over here and shake hands with little Hal."

The boy laughed and it made Hal think of a tinkling brook that rippled behind his mother's house at Ramapo. Suddenly he could visualize the beauty of the mountains that rose beyond the house in contrast with the strange evil that hovered over the scene before him, and he had a longing to reach out for all that was clean and wholesome.

"You biggest feller I ever see, Mr. Hal," Alan said firmly. "I like you."

"Atta kid!" Hal applauded, taking the boy's hand. "You'll like Dorsey here, too. He's a good scout."

Alan extended his hand graciously to Dorsey and smiled. "I like you too," he said shyly.

Dorsey gulped. "Good kid!" he had difficulty in saying.

Chuoco looked at Hal. "He fine kid, senior, eh? He bring big money?"

"Sure, big!" Hal agreed and had a strong impulse to reach out and thrash the fellow then and there.

"We talk all same later," the half-breed said and went toward the door. "I have keep you here till tomorrow, eh? You no go out from here till I come

back, eh?”

“You’re the doctor,” Hal answered evasively. “We’ll give you the widest margin imaginable.”

“Eh?” asked Chuoco puzzled.

“I said we’ll be glad to see you come back,” Hal lied. “Going now? Well, so long!”

They watched his feet going out of the doorway and listened until they could hear him going down the path. Alan smiled archly at Hal.

“Chuoco he take shovel and axe,” said the boy unconsciously falling into the patois that he had been hearing for so many months past.

Hal looked at him, reached out and drew him down beside him. Then he pressed his mouth close to the boy’s ear. “Alan, can you keep a secret?” he asked.

The boy’s eyes widened. “Cross my heart and hope to die!” he said with true Yankee enthusiasm.

Hal nodded. “All right,” he whispered, “then you mustn’t tell anybody around here. Not even if they beat you for it? All right, I’ll tell you. You’re going to see your father in a very few days. Maybe tomorrow!”

Alan’s face grew white and his eyes grew misty. Suddenly he said, “I knew I wouldn’t be kept away from my father and mother forever. *I knew it, Mr. Hal!*”

“Well, doggone it,” Hal said vehemently, “you knew a bookful!”

CHAPTER XXX

DEVIL'S ABODE

Alan kept them informed of any chance eavesdroppers by playing in and about the doorway. They were alone for several hours and found plenty of opportunity to talk. Dorsey's speech was limited to monosyllables by the shock of the half-breed's revelations.

"How did you know, Keen?" he asked in a frightened whisper.

"About Alan?" Hal answered. "I had a hunch about it ever since that half-breed assassin took us to the cliff that day. Mr. Brody and me, I mean. I sort of read it in his face. Then I was more convinced than ever that day at L'Inconnu when he almost admitted about poor Benson and Perry. I know they were pretty mean sports, but that was a terrible death, huh, Dorsey?"

Dorsey shuddered. "Terrible when you knew 'em like I did. The fella isn't all there, hah? Honest, he's like a crazy guy the way he laughs about how he does things. I can't stand it!"

"Well, we won't have to stand him any more unless things don't fit together," Hal said. "And that isn't likely to happen. Tomorrow noon, Chuoco's due to walk right into the police and a couple of our own buddies, I guess. At the same time we have a little program scheduled for this sequestered vale or I'm going to miss my guess. Come to think of it, I took an awful chance on sending word back with the Inspector that I intended producing Alan Brody tomorrow, huh? I was by no means sure, Dorsey—I was even a little puzzled as to why Chu hadn't ever asked any ransom for him before. Knowing him to be such a golddigger, it was the one nigger in my woodpile. But I got him to spill the story himself. Alan knew too much!"

"Honest, you're a wonder, Keen," said Dorsey admiringly, "you got a brain if you have got such a blazin' lookin' head! It's in the blood and that's a fact! You'll be in your Uncle's shoes some day, hah? Well, I wish you luck!"

Hal smiled. "And I wish you luck too, Dorsey. Luck with Marie. I've got a girl to meet yet too—Jean Wainwright. Wonder what she's like? After a fellow goes to so much trouble to see that a girl gets what's coming to her, the least she can do is to invite him to her house, huh? Anyway I'm tickled that it will come out all right for Coly."

"And maybe Mr. Brody won't be glad to see that kid of his!" Dorsey exclaimed. "He's the kind of a guy that'll never forget you for it, you know that, Keen? I bet you'll get a reward or somethin'!"

"Bosh! This has been dead easy so far! All we have to worry about is how

things fit together. If it cracks up at L'Inconnu and Chu comes walking back here before the wind breaks for us, why *good night!*”

“Don’t make me nervous, Keen!” Dorsey pleaded. “Ain’t it bad enough we have to stay here in this filthy dark hole—this murderer’s den—the murderer of my pals? Honest, Keen, you could have knocked me over with a feather!”

“Just a plain assassin, that’s what he is,” Hal agreed. “I know it was all I could do to talk along with him—’specially about the kid. I was just burning all the while to push those little smiling eyes of his right out. But forget about him, Dorsey. You’ll probably never lay eyes on him again.”

“I hope I don’t!” said Dorsey fervently. “But one thing, I won’t forget about him, because I always got that thing in my shoulder to remember him by. Anyways it’s hurting me enough to remind me who did it!”

“Hurting you? Why didn’t you say something before?”

“Didn’t even bother me till just before. Now I feel kind of feverish. Maybe that bullet did lodge some place, hah? I only thought it was a flesh wound, honest. Maybe it is, but it shouldn’t be hurtin’ me now if that’s all it was, hah?”

“No, it shouldn’t,” Hal answered. “You’ve got me worried, Dorsey. This is a pretty bad time and place for you not to feel well.”

“Just my luck,” said Dorsey. “I ain’t fancyin’ it around here neither, but it’s that low down greaser’s fault. I hope he gets all that’s comin’ to him an’ more besides.”

“Did you tell the Inspector what you thought it was?” Hal insisted anxiously.

Dorsey nodded. “I told him I thought it was a flesh wound.”

“Evidently it isn’t,” Hal said, noting the man’s flushed cheeks. “Come on, Dorsey, lie down—I know it isn’t the nicest of places to lie but the rest might help.”

Dorsey was forced to lie down on the foul blanket shortly afterward. He developed a high temperature within a short time and Hal had his hands full, first to coax Chuoco’s mother into the hovel and then to make her understand the necessity for having some clean cloths and pure water for the sick man’s wound.

Alan, like most Anglo-Saxon boys his age, did little errands and performed little services throughout the early evening that proved invaluable. But despite Hal’s constant watchfulness and tender care, Dorsey was manifestly worse. By midnight he was in the throes of delirium.

Such a night Hal never was likely to spend again. No one in the little tribe seemed to know what to do except one ancient looking man who offered to perform some sort of black magic upon the sick man. Except for that proffered assistance, the men and women alike would not come near the shack. Not even

Chuoco's mother could be coaxed in as Dorsey grew constantly worse.

"They think it's an evil spirit," Alan confided to Hal. "They think it's an omen of bad luck for them."

"I hope it is!" Hal declared. "Chuoco brought this on, kiddo. He shot Dorsey a few days ago. Shot him in the back."

"Chuoco's evil spirit, Mr. Hal, don't you think so?" the boy asked.

"Evil spirit?" Hal repeated. "He's worse than that, kiddo! He's the whole San Gorda Swamp, if you ask me, and that's the abode of the devil. He said so himself! He ought to know."

CHAPTER XXXI TO A MAN

There was something stale and flat in the way in which a company of marines and a special detachment of Panaman police stormed the citadel of Cerro Lolita. To be sure, there wouldn't have been much resistance anyway, according to Hal's schedule, for he had timed the attack to take place during the languid siesta period. Nevertheless, it lacked even the ordinary zest of capture, for its superstitious inhabitants had already been captured by the evil spirits hovering around the hovel where Dorsey lay dying of a fatal wound infection.

Hal's heart was more like lead than anything else, even when he handed Alan Brody over to his overjoyed father. The sheer rapture of reunion seemed almost out of place in Dorsey's presence. Denis Keen, who had flown up in the same plane with Mr. Brody, tried to console his adventurous nephew.

"The chap should have come right on out to Panama as soon after it happened as it was possible for him to come," he said. "I know it's poor consolation, but they've got that rascal that's responsible for so much heartache and tragedy and at least he'll pay the penalty for all of it. And Hal, you've been splendid!"

"Not now, Unk. Some other time. I did just sort of take to Dorsey. And it makes me feel badly when I think of how proud he was of his girl, Marie. Life's funny. A feller's got to take the sweet with the bitter, huh? Here I've been able to get Alan and put these miserable people in jail where they belong for keeping the kid, and yet I can't even feel good about it when I think that maybe I shouldn't have let Dorsey come along. I should have made him go into Panama, just as you say."

"And now you're going to make yourself miserable with vain regrets, eh?" his Uncle asked. "Hal, you've got a splendid brain for deduction and the true detective's instinct for ferreting out the impossible, but when it comes to reasoning for yourself and your friends, you're hopeless. I dare say Dorsey would berate you if he could hear such talk."

"Maybe he can," Hal said dismally.

Mr. Keen looked over at the blanket a moment, then motioned to Hal. "He'll never hear any more talk, my boy, neither yours nor anyone else's. Be glad that you spared him the energy required to protest such nonsensical talk. And let's go outside and pay our respects to a man!"

Hal clasped his Uncle's arm gratefully. "Dorsey was a man, Unk! And

you're a brick for saying it."

CHAPTER XXXII

FAREWELL

Two weeks later, Hal and his Uncle stood on the top deck of the shining white liner taking a last look at the harbor of Colon. The gangplank had been drawn up and a small group of men cast off a mammoth rope. Soon, a narrow ribbon of water separated them from the pier.

“Glad to get away from this eternal heat, aren’t you?” Mr. Keen asked.

“Heat?” Hal repeated. “I suppose so. Guess I didn’t hardly know it was hot, so much happened. It doesn’t seem real, does it?”

“What doesn’t seem real?” Mr. Keen asked, being just old enough to be obtuse where Youth’s emotions and enthusiasms were concerned.

“It doesn’t seem real that I took part in so much over there in the jungle,” Hal answered patiently. “The jungle’s a nightmare anyhow. Just think how people are born there, and live and die there. Never anything else. And the Sanitary Inspector, he likes it too!”

“Habit, Hal,” said his Uncle briskly. “Get used to anything, I suppose. By the way, I saw in last night’s paper that Coly’s been completely exonerated by the court.”

“Sure, I saw it. He’s going to be down at the pier to meet us. He’s bringing Jean Wainwright and her aunt along.”

“Hmp, that’s nice. Coly better look out for his Jean, eh?”

Hal grinned. “Not so’s you’ll notice it. She likes horses and I’d like her for that, but girls don’t mean so much to me, yet. Funny though, I feel awful broken up about that girl of Dorsey’s. Can’t forget that heartbroken cable she sent me thanking me for cabling her the details.”

“Shows you’re sentimental too,” said his Uncle, not unkindly. “No use you taking that too much to heart. She’s young and she’ll probably meet another Dorsey within a year. That’s the way life is, Hal.”

“Mrs. Brody sent me a nice cablegram too,” Hal said looking wistfully back at the whiteness of Colon. “I feel awfully glad about that part, of course, glad that I could make her happy and Mr. Brody happy too. Suppose she’ll be down to the pier with bells on! Wish I could have made everybody happy while I was at it.”

“Snap out of it, Hal. You’ve let Dorsey’s death affect you just a little too much. Be thankful for what blessings you have and let it go at that. Be thankful you’re directly responsible for Chuoco’s capture. He’ll never shoot another Dorsey in the back or push human beings in the swamp to die. He’ll never

abduct another Alan Brody either! Isn't that enough to make you feel somewhat compensated for Dorsey's misfortune?"

"Unk, you don't understand!" Hal explained. "I'm a queer sort of gink, I guess. And I went through something in that jungle that'll live with me forever. Not just Dorsey alone—*everything!* He contributed the biggest share, I'll admit, but it wouldn't get me for so long a time. When I'm up home again and winter comes, and I see the snow and all, I'll forget about it. But while I can still see the green of the jungle, I'll have that strange feeling."

"How?" asked Mr. Keen, plainly puzzled.

"Gosh, I can't explain it," Hal answered. "You would have had to feel as I felt when they buried Dorsey right at the edge of the jungle there."

"Pretty spot that," Keen remarked. "Chagres River's a pretty old stream, I guess, too."

"Yes," Hal murmured and looked down into the frothy lane that the ship was leaving in its wake. He stared down into the sunlit water, green and sparkling as it danced around the hull.

"Well," said Mr. Keen lazily, "guess I'll go into the saloon and see if I can find Mr. Brody and Alan. Coming in?"

"Not now," Hal answered thoughtfully. "Later."

Alone, he gazed back toward Colon and could visualize beyond it the ancient city of Panama. Somewhere on that vast horizon stretched the jungle and at a spot hallowed by death lay all that remained of Dorsey. He liked to think of the river flowing so close, the river whose source never has been discovered.

It made him think of L'Inconnu, and after a solemn moment he took a mental farewell of it all. Yet insistently there came to mind, with every roll of the ship, that memorable bit of verse which Mr. Brody had taught him. He wondered at the vagary of Fate that she should have made of that little poem a sort of invisible tombstone to note the passing of his good friend Dorsey.

"Beyond the Chagres River
Is the Jungle's poisonous breath;
Lurk the serpent and the fever,
'Long the paths that lead to death."

END

[The end of *Kidnapped in the Jungle* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh (as Hugh Lloyd)]