

Transpacific Plunder

By Frederick C. Painton

Tony Blaine knew it was a bad idea to be in that Manilla bar in the first place—after all his first take-off as chief pilot of the Pacific Cruiser was less than four hours away. And when that girl approached him, deep down, he knew trouble was also going to aboard this flight.

TONY BLAINE knew he was a fool to prowl through Manila's native quarter in full uniform. Every time he passed a light, the gold emblem of the Pacific Airlines on his white cap glittered an advertisement that he was in the wrong place. The chief pilot's wings on his left breast, white against his smart suit of blues, showed that here was a transport pilot who should be home in bed resting for the eight-thousand-mile air voyage to San Francisco which would start in precisely four hours.

But the girl was beautiful. She was mysterious. And he was willing to bet that she was in trouble.

So he strode on, keeping her slim white-clad figure in sight. The fact that his own future career as a chief pilot depended on him taking off in the *Pacific Cruiser* at seven A.M. didn't matter at the moment. A lot of people called Tony a romantic fool. A lot of people were right

The night was hot with the humid breath of outlying jungles; the sweat was moist on his lean, long body. But the girl appeared cool and lovely, swinging along gracefully a hundred yards or so ahead of him. She was entirely too lovely to be going into a native quarter where white people who are white people never go.

Thinking back, Tony decided that a girl of her type had no business in a tough night-spot like Felipe's. Tony knew his professional hostesses, he could swear that she wasn't one of them. Which made the fact that she had deliberately picked him up all the more queer.

You could say that Tony should never have gone to Felipe's in the first place and you would be right. A man making his first Transpacific hop as chief pilot should tend to his knitting,

particularly if his work on this hop would decide his superiors to keep him on. But Tony liked color, glamour, a thrill, so he went to Felipe's.

He had been drinking a glass of ginger ale (chief transport pilots drink nothing harder and stay chief pilots), studying the motley assortment of Eurasians that make Manila smelly and colorful, when she had drifted to his table.

Usually such girls say, "Hello, good-looking, howsabout a drink?" She, however, slipped effortlessly into a chair beside him, looked him in the eyes.

"Will you buy me a drink and talk to me?" she had said.

He had the silly idea at once that she was deathly afraid. The pupils of her eyes were too large; her soft white skin, free of rouge, had a deep paleness, and her slim, boyish figure was tense, unrelaxed. He liked her low, soft diction.

Tony was not usually shy where women were concerned. But this girl struck him all of a heap just as if an electric current had passed between them. He nodded, flushing, and yelled for a waiter.

She ordered sherry. "My name is Nara," she told him.

"Nara" Tony repeated; "I'm Tony Blaine—"

"Yes, I know. You're chief pilot and you'll fly the *Pacific Cruiser* tomorrow to America."

Tony found his tongue at last. "With stops at Guam, Wake Island, Midway, Honolulu," he grinned. "Can I book you?"

Her fingers clenched; her red mouth pinched tightly. "If you only could," she murmured.

"You'd like to go home then?"

"I never wanted anything else so much."

Then why not go?"

"They haven't built a bridge yet, and you can't thumb your way."

"Oh!" Tony said. "It's that way?" He decided he was being panhandled. Well, why not? He put his hand into his pocket. "If a few—" he began.

"It won't," she cut in, "but thanks for the good thought."

The drink came and she sipped at it silently. Every so often she glanced over the yellow and brown faces, and then her whole body quivered.

"Anything wrong?" Tony asked.

"No, of course not," she jerked.

Tony shrugged. "I just thought if there was, I could help."

She jumped to her feet, her mouth was suddenly flat, her pallor deepened. "I can't do it, I simply can't," she muttered. She turned from the table.

"Hey, just a moment," Tony called.

But she hurried to the rear of the room and disappeared.

Tony probably lost a minute paying the check, reaching the street and circling the building. He was in time to see her heading straight for the native quarter.

Now, following her, Tony wondered why she had talked to him.

As she burrowed deeper into the myriads of thatched and dirty huts, he insensibly increased his pace. And she stopped, whirled and faced him.

"You're being a fool," she told him; "go back to your hotel."

"No," Tony said.

Her fingers interlaced; she stamped her foot. "You're mad," she cried tensely. "Don't you know you're playing into their hands?"

"Whose hands?"

She ignored the question. "Please." she begged. "I'm perfectly all right here. I'm in no danger. But you are. Please go back."

Tony decided she was lying.

"You come with me," he suggested, "and then we can talk."

Her shoulders rose and fell. "Oh, please!" she whispered. "You—look out!"

As she cried the warning, her hand, holding a white leather handbag with a heavy clasp, rose and smashed down on a tightly shaven skull that suddenly appeared behind Tony. He whirled, fists

doubled and raised. Out of an alley two more men had rushed silently at him. Tony planted both feet and his arms worked like pistons.

"Run," screamed the girl. "Quick!"

With the words she belted the shaven-skulled Chinese to the ground. Tony heard the sock of it and grinned.

"That was a honey," he called.

One man had gone down before his fist, but another one whose arm held a blackjack charged in. Tony swung from his heels.

The Chinese grunted, his chin rode away on Tony's white knuckles and then his feet came up and his neck hit the ground first. Tony turned back to help the girl who was still swinging the handbag vigorously. But as he did so, he left his back exposed and four more men flooded suddenly out of the alley. These men wasted no movements and made no sounds. One of them struck at Tony's skull with a long heavy object. The blow slanted down, knocked Tony sideways, he turned, striking out blindly. His uniform cap fell off. His yellow hair was not pad enough for the second blow.

A blackjack can create an awful headache and Tony had a honey. He suppressed a groan and peered through squinted lashes. He saw a room cut off from other parts of a house by rattling bamboo screens. There was a beautiful rug beneath him and red-lacquered Chinese furniture scattered around. His hands and feet were tied so tightly that the thin strands of rope bit into the flesh and pained. The girl was sitting, bound securely, her back to the opposite wall, staring dully at him.

"You asked for it," she said. "I told you to go back. Now they win anyway."

Tony forced a cheerfulness he was far from feeling.

"Who are they?"

"Chang Tze."

"And who," Tony asked, "might Chang Tze be?"

She tried to shrug, and her tight bonds brought a brief expression of pain. "Chang Tze is—well, Chang Tze."

"Very illuminating," said Tony.

He scrooged his head, wrenched his wrists and got a peak at his wristwatch. It indicated four minutes to three. At seven the *Pacific Cruiser*

should be taxiing past Corregidor. His eyes flashed dangerously. She saw the movement.

"You're not going anywhere," she said. "That was the idea."

"What idea?"

"I was sent to Felipe's to pick you up to bring to—to—take you to my room. They were to get you there—Chang Tze, I mean."

She looked so miserable Tony deliberately was flippant,

"Dear old Chang Tze," Tony murmured. "I must meet that gent. Meanwhile, as I get it, the prime purpose of this run-around is to prevent me taking off for Guam." His mouth set grimly as he thought of the consequences to himself if he were delayed here too long.

"Yes," she nodded.

"We progress. Now, if you could tell me why my crate and I are not to take off for Guam on schedule, all will be made clear. Do you know?"

"Only that Chang Tze wished it."

Tony frowned, puzzled. What earthly good a delay in his take-off would be to any one he could not see. He was carrying five passengers and six hundred pounds of mail

It was, for everyone except himself, a routine flight. But he suddenly realized that if he were not there Jock Martin would fly the trip and Tony would be definitely through as a Transpacific pilot. His teeth suddenly clicked. He hunched his body across the floor.

II

"If I back up to you and you turn around your fingers could undo these knots," he said.

An expression of horror swept her face.

"Oh, you mustn't. If you try to escape they might kill you."

"And if I don't try?"

"You'll be released sometime tomorrow. Chang Tze said so."

"Good old Chang Tze!"

Tony suddenly dropped his flippancy. "Now, listen here, Nara, why are you mixed up in this?"

"Why do you want to know?" she flared.

"I've been asking myself the same question," he admitted. "Anyway, I've got to know."

He moved forward until his back was against her knees. She drew away from him.

"I won't," she muttered. "They'll hurt Jerry—"

"Ah, Jerry!" cut in Tony. "Tell me more about Jerry."

Slowly her voice came. "Jerry's my brother."

Then, as if pent-up words suddenly flooded across her tongue, she began to talk. Tony had always had the idea that in real life brothers like this Jerry never become hop-heads; didn't aid, as an outside man, in the robbery of the Manila and Orient Bank; didn't thus get in the power of a wily Chinese master-mind named Chang Tze. Those things didn't belong to reality. They sounded like a movie. Yet he had to believe her. One look at her face was convincing.

"I came out here to take Jerry home," she went on, "but he wouldn't go. He's just—weak. Then my money went. And Chang Tze said if I'd bring you to my room he'd see to it personally that Jerry and I got passage home on the next Dollar liner. I tried there at Felipe's—but I couldn't"

"What a set-up!" muttered Tony. "If this Chang Tze happens to be crazy about you, everything is perfect."

Nara flared and crimsoned. "Chang Tze has a wife."

"Thank you, Miss Goddard," a clipped voice spoke from the door. "I think your explanation was highly accurate."

Tony pivoted on his haunches. In his mind's eye had been built a picture of Chang Tze as a fat, grave Chinese with impassive yellow face, inscrutable slit eyes—in short, a Fu Manchu! What he saw was a slim, debonair oriental of perhaps thirty, with close-clipped stiff black hair parted in the center; a high forehead above a long, narrow face of slightly saffron tint; and a body nearly six feet tall and powerfully made. Even Tony had to admit that Chang Tze was a lot of man.

The Chinese took a cigarette from a gold case, lit it with a patent lighter.

"Miss Goddard is right, Mr. Blaine. I mean neither you nor her any harm, and you will be free this time tomorrow with nothing disturbed except the schedule of the Pacific Airlines."

"Rather drastic, aren't you?"

Chang Tze laughed. "My dear man, can you fancy what your Far East manager would say if I were merely to request a delay?"

"I wouldn't know all of his words," said Tony.

“Quite! So I’ve come here to say that if you both will give me your—er—what is the word—paroles, not to try to escape, I can release you from this uncomfortable binding.”

“The answer is no,” Tony said promptly.

Chang Tze shrugged. “In that case, then, you’ll have to endure. As for you, Miss Goddard, you failed me tonight at Felipe’s, but since Mr. Blaine followed you, and the affair came out right, I shall keep my word. You and your brother shall sail Saturday on the President Monroe.”

Nara said nothing.

Chang Tze stared at Tony, a deep glitter illuminating his eyes. “To escape would be very unfortunate, Mr. Blaine. I am determined to delay your plane’s departure fifteen hours. Nothing”—he hesitated, repeated—“nothing will be permitted to stand in the way of that fact.” He glanced carelessly at a platinum wrist watch. “So? It is late. Sorry to leave you so uncomfortable. But it is your own choice. One of my men will release you around noon. Jerry has had a pipe or two, Miss Goddard, and is quite comfortable, so do not worry about him.”

His eyebrows went up and down in a sort of salutation; his head dipped; then he slid through the rattling bamboo curtains.

Tony waited quite a while before he tried again to back up to Nara. “That hombre,” he said softly, “reminds me of a black cobra—they’re so beautiful to look at.” He twisted his head. “Start on the knots, Nara.”

“But—”

“Stop arguing. I’ve work to do. A little matter of my career as a pilot.”

“But my brother—”

“Well think of him after we get out of this.”

“Oh!” She exhaled a deep breath. Their eyes met for a space. Then she twisted, and Tony could feel her slender, cool fingers working on the horsehair rope knots.

She did not have time to work. Scarcely five minutes later a Chinese in black satin with felt shoes came through the rattling bamboo and squatted in the corner. He spoke in Cantonese dialect and his gestures translated the words to mean that Tony was to get away from the girl.

Tony did so. His eyes met hers; asked the question about the knots. A slight nod satisfied

him. He relaxed on the blanket and began to twist his hands. The horsehair began to yield.

When he had his hands so that a single jerk would pull them free, Tony said:

“The moment I reach for my ankle ropes he’s going to jump me. Could you leap up and hop into him before you fall down?”

“I can try.” Her voice was cool.

The Chinese regarded them with suspicion; and his body seemed to lean a little closer. Tony frowned. This was going to be tough. The knife near the Chinese’s hand didn’t lessen the toughness.

“Well,” sighed Tony, “let’s go.”

His hands jerked outward and reached for the knot at his ankle bonds. The Chinese cried out, came upright as if propelled by springs. The knife glittered in his hand. Nara Goddard, Tony saw, jumped up, took a hop, tottered, took another. The Chinese shrilled something in a high-pitched voice and then she plunged into him.

They both went down with a crash. Tony nodded. “I didn’t think he’d use that knife on her.”

The chief trouble was that when the Chinese brutally kicked her away from him and bounced to his feet, Tony was not quite free. About all that had happened aside from loosening one knot, was that his hands were no longer numb. He took a look at the knife, at the Chinese’s eyes behind it. He jackknifed upward, and as nearly as a man can do two things at once, reached to intercept the downright slash, and drove a terrific punch to the saffron face. It was a good thing he didn’t miss. The shock of hitting that chin kept him from falling over. He hung to the knife-wrist, fell over. The breaking bones in the Chinese’s arm made grinding noises. The Chinese screamed. Tony grabbed the knife and banged the hilt against the Chinese’s temple. The man lay senseless.

Then Tony cut Nara free. “Do you know a way out?” he asked.

“Yes, by the back—toward the bay. Hurry! There are others.”

Knife in hand, Tony preceded her, guided by her whispered directions. They encountered no one. And presently tidewater sucked and gurgled around rotting piles and they were in the maze of waterfront alleys. Tony forged ahead.

Near a hut hung with fish nets he paused and said, "Which way now?"

He got no reply. He turned.

"You'd better—" he began, and stopped abruptly.

Nara Goddard was not behind him. She was nowhere in sight. He stared at the maze of alleys among thatched roofs and knew she had vanished into one of them. But which? He swore softly and made a *paseo* among one or two, but saw nothing. She had vanished as quickly as she had come.

Slowly he made his way to the hotel. He did not call the police. He was afraid she might get too involved. He tried to sleep, but her image floated in his mind's eye. He wanted to see her again. But how?

III

Beyond the float was the enormous Moscher flying boat, built especially for the Pacific Airlines. Its length of ninety feet was greater than Columbus' Pinta; its wing span of one hundred and thirty feet lifted fifty-one thousand pounds, more than half of which was pay load. It was like a beautiful gull in the morning sun.

The first officer, Steve Macklin, was aiding passengers aboard. The flight engineer, Dunk Ross, was in his cubbyhole under his four beloved Hurricane motors, warmed and ready for the long drone to Guam. Petey Dink Hale, radio officer, was checking the beam recorder.

Tony Blaine bent over the dispatcher's desk for his clearance papers.

A few marines from the destroyer Markham loafed around, admiring the huge flying boat. They had automatic pistols under their blues.

"Funny, somebody wanting to delay the take-off," Old Man Rankin grumbled. "You're sure you were not drunk?"

"She wouldn't lie," Tony said dreamily.

Old Man Rankin glanced up quickly. "You sound like a love-sick calf," he growled. "Forget her. You've got a half million dollars' worth of crate to fly to Frisco. Think about that."

"Okay," grinned Tony.

"And keep the schedule if you want to keep the run. Here are your clearances." He handed the papers to Tony.

"You have one big shot on board, fellah," Rankin went on. "One gentleman and two secretaries, to wit, J. Finley Block."

"Not the Finley Block," said Tony.

"The Finley Block no less. His yacht run aground somewhere in the Yellow Sea, so he left it, sick of it all, and is flying back. He is subject to sea and air sickness, he has the jitters, a lousy temper, all the money in the world but ten dollars. So give him a good ride."

Rankin leaned closer. "And I hear that he's carrying two million bucks in currency in that brief case," he whispered.

"I don't believe it," said Tony. "First place, two million dollars is just three words—they don't mean anything. Secondly, two million dollars even printed on rubber would take up too much room."

"Well, maybe so," said Rankin, "But he's got a bad cut on the face and a sprained leg and arm where somebody tried to knock him off early this morning. He came to the crate under a police escort and a cop said that his secretary shot a guy who tried to rob him."

"Oh-hoh," said Tony, thoughtfully. "I wonder—"

"Wonder what?"

"Nothing," said Tony. "Anything else?"

Tell Hanrahan at Midway his relief will be out on the next plane. Steve has your last weather report and it's all clear."

As Tony came down the ramp Flight Engineer Dunk Ross started his Hurricanes. The water behind the giant flying boat rippled to the man-made gale. For the beginning of an eight-thousand-mile voyage, the longest over-water flight in the world, the start seemed oddly casual.

"Okay, Steve?" Tony asked.

"Okay, Skipper," the first officer replied.

Tony nodded and together they passed up the long commodious fuselage toward the pilot's bin. Tony had a fleeting vision of a man of fifty or so, his head bandaged, his face a snarl, staring at him with gimlet eyes. Two slick-haired secretaries sat with him, dark swarthy young men. An oldish woman who, Rankin had said, wrote travel books, sat opposite. Her name was Ostrander.

Tony summoned Miguel, the steward. "Where's passenger Number Five?" he asked.

Miguel smiled. "In lavatory, Skipper. He is Chinese."

Tony looked toward the lavatory, then at his watch. "Okay, I'll see him later."

He passed into the office, hitched himself onto the seal and made the belt fast. On the dock the signalman scanned the skies for possible planes beyond Corregidor or Cavite, and gave him the high-hall. He wound the stabilizer fin to get lift on the rear, called through the phones to Dunk.

"Eighteen hundred revs!" he cried.

"Okay, eighteen hundred!"

The four motors howled. The pontoons threw spray. The great monster stormed across the still water under the frowning walls of ancient Spanish bastions. Tony tested the motors then signaled a take-off.

Across the drowsing city the roar and thrum of the motors settled to a deep thunder. The plane body threw her V of spray, climbed onto her step and began to make knots. To the right a fishing skiff whisked past. Then, dripping, the pontoons lifted and the huge plane swam upward like a gull toward the thick cottony clouds.

Tony checked his wind-drift and swung the crate until the compass point settled on the course. Next stop Guam, seven hundred miles away. Winds light and west. He climbed to five thousand feet. Tony held her for a while. Then Miguel thrust his head into the office.

"*Senor* Block wishes to speak to you. Skipper," he yelled.

"Ah," said Tony, "the voice from the mount. Okay, Steve, take her."

He raised his hands, then unfastened his belt and climbed out. That was the trouble being a chief pilot; you had to go back and chin with the distinguished passengers.

As he started down the passageway, he suddenly stopped stock still. Passenger Number Five was in his seat.

"Chang Tze!" Tony exclaimed, eyes wide. "Well, can you top that?"

The dapper Chinese held a book, and it wasn't one of Confucius' maxims, either; but a black-covered book with a startling red title, "When the Clock Ticks."

Tony's eyes narrowed. He walked down the aisle, ignoring the peremptory summons of the gimlet-eyed old man.

"What does this mean?" Tony demanded.

Chang Tze smiled languidly. "What does what mean, Mr. Blaine? Are you alluding to last night?"

"No. How the devil did you get on this plane?"

"That, Mr. Blaine, is a simple thing. I bought a passage to Honolulu. I paid for it, I was assigned my seat." He shrugged. "Here I am."

"Exactly," said Tony softly, "and at Guam you climb down and off."

"Really?" Chang Tze's smile broadened but it did not extend to his eyes; these were cold and hard like black marbles. "Now, believe me, Mr. Blaine, you won't do anything like that. Your people operate an airline to take passengers to a given destination on a ticket bought and paid for. To put me off before then is to make your company liable to a very expensive lawsuit. To say nothing of diplomatic complications. I am a Chinese, you know, and your line running into Macao does so because the Chinese permit it." He smiled again gently. "Do I make myself clear, Mr. Blaine?"

Tony suppressed a remark that was highly unedifying. "You do. But believe me, if you—but what about this assault on me? The attack on Miss Goddard?"

"That happened in Manila, Mr. Blaine. Then was the time to make a police complaint had you wished to."

"Ah!" muttered Tony. "You know all the answers."

The Chinese smiled tranquilly.

"I'm in command of this plane," Tony said grimly, "and the rules of the sea prevail. We even have handcuffs if we haven't a brig. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Blaine." The Chinese still smiled.

Tony started to turn away. "Where's Miss Goddard?" he asked abruptly.

For an instant Chang Tze's eyes were puzzled. Then a mask of imperturbability dropped.

"I'm sure I don't know. After you escaped I thought it was your responsibility."

Tony stood staring. Suddenly, behind him a harsh, disagreeable voice boomed.

"Are you the pilot of this airship?"

Tony turned. He stared at J. Finley Block. "Yes"

“Well, I sent for you. What’s the idea of keeping me waiting?”

“I’ll bet,” thought Tony, “he kicks dogs and beats horses.”

He dismissed Chang Tze from his mind for the moment and slid into the compartment of J. Finley Block.

“What is it you wish?” he asked.

“I want to see a chart of your course from here to Guam.”

In the rack to hold magazines the Pacific Airlines, through Miguel, had placed a lurid colored Mercator’s projection of the far eastern segment of the world. On this in a red line was traced the five-leg air jump across the Pacific. The map was distorted, of course, and the red mark was a general line and not a specific course. But it served other passengers. They said as much. “Bosh! Nonsensel Tommy-rot!” roared Mr. Block. “I want a chart. I can read charts. I’m a navigator. And I want to see just where and how we go.”

There was nothing in the rules denying a passenger a chart. Mr. Block undoubtedly knew the father, brother and wife of the president of the line. Tony went forward to the chart drawer and brought back that segment appertaining to the route to Guam.

“Is that all?” he asked curtly.

“Yes, but be more polite next time. That’s what you people are paid for—giving service.”

Tony discovered the dark eyes of the two swarthy secretaries trained on him like guns. Tony’s eyes went to the brief case, standing on end between them.

“Okay,” he said.

He disliked Mr. Block intensely. He sought out Miguel, who was getting Mrs. Lanhard Ostrander a glass of water.

“Got a gun, Mig?”

“*Si, Señor!* Also a knife.”

“The gun’s enough. See that Chinese? Keep your eye on him all the time. If he draws a gun, if he makes a pass at Mr. Block and his secretaries, draw on him and knock him over. By that I mean hit him with a slug so he can’t get up.”

Miguel’s button eyes went wide. Then, remembering his training in the Philippine Constabulary and the stewards’ school, he drew himself up.

“*Si*, skipper, leave that bozo to me.”

Tony also had an automatic, in a holster in the office. He got it out, snicked back the collar, saw that the clip was full, a live cartridge in the breech. He put it in his right-hand pocket. Steve watched all this, beating his feet on the rudder pedals, turning the wheel against a series of cross-currents. The warming sun was creating up-drafts.

“What’s the big idea?” Steve asked.

“We’ve got a Frank Buck cargo,” Tony told him. “You may have to clutch that stick all the way to Guam.” He paused. Then: “Petey, keep that radio ready for a fast S.O.S.”

Petey stared, wide-eyed. “What’s up?” he gasped.

Tony took a peek at the altimeter standing at six thousand. A glance at the last weather report Petey had just penciled indicated light winds, unlimited visibility for the next four hundred miles. Everything was swell, he thought, except the passenger list.

Suddenly, just as Tony had turned to go back in the cabin, Steve Macklin jerked upright in his seat.

“For the love of Mike!” he exclaimed. “Look!”

Tony turned. Steve had released his grip on the control wheel that pulled the ailerons; this wheel was mounted on a post that controlled the elevator flippers. As he now released his grip the post moved slowly forward, the nose dipped in the beginning of a glide.

“Hey!” said Tony. “Do it again.”

Steve pulled back the wheel, the nose came up, but as soon as he let go the nose dipped again.

“You’re out of trim,” snapped Tony, pointing to the stabilizer wheel which adjusted the rear fin to lift the aft load.

“I am not,” snapped Steve. “She was riding smooth as a baby carriage four minutes ago when I took the weather report.”

Tony whistled. “The devil!” he muttered, and whirled to return to the cabin. As he did so the oval door opened. Tony looked into the pale lovely face of Nara Goddard. Blood seeped from a cut near the line of her hair. “Good grief!” gasped Tony. “How did you get here?”

“Last night,” she cried hurriedly, “after I left you I went back. About Jerry. I overheard the new plan. To seize your plane. I couldn’t get to you—they were looking for me. And when Chang

smuggled two of his men aboard and concealed them aft, I watched and crept aboard, too. I hid in the tail. Just now—I tried to get out to warn you—they saw me. I fought”—she shrugged, drooped against the door. Tony made peculiar sounds. He started around her into the cabin. Swiftly she stiffened, blocked his passage. “Don’t go back,” she cried. “Chang Tze’s men—they—” Tony muttered an oath and thrust her aside. Gun drawn, he stepped past her into the cabin. “I tried to stop them,” the girl cried. “But that one—” Tony saw Chang Tze with a blue-steel six-gun covering J. Finley Block and his secretaries. But what stopped Tony was the sight of two Chinese standing over Miguel, bleeding and senseless. One whose face was scratched and bleeding held a tommy-rod and his nervous eyes were on Tony. So was the tommy-rod muzzle. It looked as big as a cannon snout.

IV

It was the transference of the weight of the two Chinese and Nara from the tail fuselage that had put the airliner out of flying trim. This he realized in that first swift glance.

“Drop the gun, Mr. Blaine.”

Tony looked at Chang Tze, then he stared at the young Chinese with the tommy-rod. He knew the beady-eyed youth would shoot at the slightest false move. Tony shrugged and threw his gun on a green plush chair.

“Thank you,” said Chang Tze. “Miss Goddard, smuggling herself aboard after my men has forced matters. But it won’t make any difference.”

“What are you trying to get away with?” Tony asked.

“Trying?” Chang Tze smiled, a rising inflection casting ridicule. “Your choice of words is humorous, Mr. Blaine. You will turn your back and walk into the pilot coop. You will shut the door. And I strongly advise that you do not try to get out until I give you word.”

Tony thought of the radio. He thought also of a fire axe under the bow hatch. He turned without speaking. Doing so, he saw J. Finley Block. The great financier’s face was yellowish green, and his eyes were ugly with fright. His two secretaries had shrunk down in the seat, bodies tense, eyes cunning. Tony knew they were not secretaries

then; they were bodyguards. He knew, too, that this hold-up was aimed at whatever it was J. Finley Block carried in that brief case.

He strode forward. Nara Goddard stood as he had left her. Now that the situation had developed, she appeared very cool.

Tony forced a smile. “Now that you’re here,” he said, “take a seat and fasten your safety belt.”

She sensed the accent of the order, knew that Tony planned something.

“Right,” she nodded. “Lo Sing who has the machine gun needs his opium badly. I might get that gun from him if you could handle Chang Tze.”

Tony’s deeply tanned face lifted in a grin. “I’ll keep it in mind. Sit tight for now.”

“Keep going, Mr. Blaine,” Chang Tze called.

Tony went into the pilot coop and closed the duralumin door. Steve and Petey looked around.

“Well, what happened?” they demanded.

“The crate’s been grabbed,” Tony said. “Move over, Petey, I want that radio. Some Chinese are going to rob Block.”

Tony put on the headphones, opened the circuit. “*FLIGHT SIX CALLING MANILA. FLIGHT SIX CALLING MANILA.*”

Presently: “*MANILA CALLING FLIGHT SIX. GO AHEAD, BLAINE.*”

Tony made a clipped report. As he talked he gestured for Petey to take the hatch off the bow compartment. In here were stored the nautical equipment that a transpacific flying boat must carry: anchor, anchor winch, oars for the life raft, axes and canned provisions. An axe didn’t seem much good against a tommy-gun but it was a weapon and you never could tell.

After reporting, Tony told Manila: “There was a torpedo boat destroyer off Guam somewhere—the Winslow, wasn’t there? Find her. Tell her we’re on course one, three hundred miles out of Corregidor for Guam. Get her position and call me back. Find out where she can be in another two hours. We’re making one hundred and sixty air miles with a seven knot north wind. Visibility unlimited, altitude six thousand. If the Winslow can’t be handy in two hours, check us as flying on time. Then you can tell them where to pick us up any time she can get on our course.”

Manila: “Okay, Blaine. Don’t do anything drastic until I call you.”

Tony waited until Petey crawled back through the hatch with the fire axe. He took the axe, handed back the head-phones.

"Don't pay any attention to Manila unless they're sensible," Tony said angrily. "Don't do anything drastic, they say. And my crate hijacked, the mails interfered with, passengers lives endangered. Phew!"

Clutching the fire-axe he opened the telephone circuit that connected with Dunk Ross, seated in an upper compartment of the fuselage in close contact with his beloved motors.

"Aye," said Dunk.

"Tony, Dunk. Listen! How's the Hurricanes?"

"Why, they're perfect. Why?"

"Could they stand twenty-two hundred revs for about ten minutes?"

"Wide open? Why, sure, but why?"

"Stand by when I give the order and goose 'em high and wide."

Tony cut the circuit. His lips were thin and straight. The angry light in his eyes grew to a fierce blaze.

There was but a single door to the fuselage cabin, and a man would be a fool to face a machine gun to storm it. The idea of climbing out on the wing and entering through the loading hatch was preposterous. He couldn't even wink his eyelids in a hundred and sixty mile wind. His mind considered other possibilities. There was only one.

With the axe he might hack his way through the flooring that separated Flight Engineer Dunk Ross's cubicle from the cabin. It was duralumin and a few quick strokes would make a hole big enough to drop through. But then what? A machine gun would shoot twenty times before he could swing his axe.

He stared thoughtfully through the shatter-proof glass at the dappled ocean far, far below. The waves ran in white ridges endlessly. No land was in sight. No smoke plume signaled the presence of a ship. This was a lonely ocean, and nowhere was there help. He thought of Nara Goddard. Could she make a diversion and not get killed?

Suddenly the door to the pilot's coop opened partly. Chang Tze, holding his long-barreled gun handy, peered in.

"Mr. Blaine," he said.

Tony turned, hiding the axe with his body.

"I presume by now you have warned Manila and called for aid," said Chang Tze,

Tony said nothing.

"It does not matter in the least. What you are to do now, Mr. Blaine, is turn the plane around and head for the south end of Mindanao—Point Vrastra to be exact."

"I won't do it," said Tony flatly

The Chinese's face grew taut. "Do not force me to extreme methods," he warned softly. "I am trying to complete this task without great harm to anyone. But, believe me, Mr. Blaine, I'm going to Point Vrastra—with or without you."

"So what?" Tony demanded.

"So this, Mr. Blaine You will turn around or I shall shoot you and compel the co-pilot to direct the plane where I wish it to go. I am a navigator and you cannot fool me."

He raised the gun muzzle as he spoke and the round glittering snout of it aimed at Tony's stomach. The 45 slug at such close range would tear a fearful hole. Tony had sense enough to know when resistance was idiocy. He saw help from the Winslow gone for good.

"Okay," he said shortly. "Bank her, Steve."

"The course," said Chang Tze. "is three points south of due east until I tell you differently."

Steve, pale, gave Tony a look. Tony nodded. Steve kicked right rudder, turned the wheel. The great single wing dipped to the right almost vertically. The nose came up; the tail skidded to the rudder pressure. The *Pacific Cruiser* wheeled like a gull and the sun slanted in on the windows of the opposite side.

"Very good," said Chang Tze. "Now—if you please, you little man—"

"Hey!" cried Petey. "Leave that radio—"

"Keep your hands off," snarled Chang Tze, "or I'll shoot."

Tony watched for a chance to grab the gun as Chang Tze ripped out the sending radio. But the Chinese was too alert. A coil of wire in his hand, he hacked away. Manila might call frantically, "*FLIGHT SIX. MANILA CALLING FLIGHT SIX,*" but there would be no reply.

"That is all, gentlemen," said Chang Tze calmly. "Remain in here. Attempt to alter the course and head for Manila and see what happens."

Tony watched the door close, heard the lock on the other side click. He sighed. He knew now it was up to him and no one else. He picked up the axe.

“Hold her on the course, Steve, I don’t want him to get suspicious.”

“What are you going to do?” Steve cried anxiously.

Tony grinned mirthlessly. “Put in a bid for a harp and halo.”

He climbed the short ladder that led to Dunk Ross’s control room. Dunk sat strapped to his chair, his blue eyes steady on the motor instruments fixed to a panel before him. He was a short, stocky chap whose greatest joy in life was hearing a motor purr like a sewing machine. He stared at Tony and the axe.

“What the devil?” he said. “We’ve turned—”

Tony cut him off and told him what had happened. “We’ve got to win the crate back or look for new jobs.”

He passed the life raft doughnut and went to the right of the water tank. Over his head the engines purred without a change in rhythm. Mentally visualizing, Tony reached a point as far astern as he figured the Chinese with the tommy-rod could be standing. This would be just ahead of the last passenger compartment.

His eyes marked out a possible hole that would not cut any of the fore-and-aft brace members. The axe rose.

“Three whacks have got to do it,” he muttered.

Smack! The axe fell, cut through the duralumin like a hot knife through butter. Drawing it up, the sharp edge sliced against the softer metal, cut a long gash. Swiftly now the axe fell again, crosswise. Two sides of a triangle had been made, plenty long enough to admit a man’s body. The third stroke, crosswise, Tony struck with all his strength. The axe gashed a strip a foot and a half wide.

Without stopping, Tony bent down, ripped the duralumin piece back. Hot air gushed up at him. Gripping the axe he prepared to hurl it.

The tommy-gun beat his throw by a split-second. The Chinese was in full, sight, mouth agape, face startled. He shut his eyes, jerked the trigger, and a stream of slugs plowed through the soft duralumin. Tony had his hands up to throw the axe.

A great thumping occurred in his head. Everything went black.

V

Dunk Ross was looking into Tony’s eyes when they opened. The flight engineer had a milk color that turned turgid red when he saw that Tony was conscious.

“You fool! Lighting into a machine gun with an axe. You ought to be dead.”

“Yeah,” said Tony, sitting up with a groan. “Maybe I’d feel better at that.”

His head throbbed like an accordion and the flesh of one cheek was held firmly in a mask of dried blood. Dunk mopped this off and applied adhesive plaster to the gutter of flesh the bullet had taken out of Tony’s scalp; a gutter that left a permanent part.

“What’s happened?” Tony asked.

“Nothing. You’ve been out about twenty minutes. We’re heading back to Manila. A Chink came in and told Steve if he blinked twice in succession he’d get a pat on the chest with a shovel.”

“Did Steve believe him?”

“We’re, flying straight for Mindanao!”

Tony was surveying the hole in the floor. It had not changed either; and he saw at once that even if the previous attempt had failed, he had advanced far enough to have the hole finished. If he could just get ten seconds or so leeway in going through it—

“Listen, Dunk,” he whispered, “go forward and tell Steve I’m dead. Have Steve tell the Chinese so. Make a big to-do. Put it on as if you liked me.”

“And why?” growled Dunk.

“Never mind why—do it.”

Tony got a long drink of water and felt better. He washed the moist perspiration from his neck and then crawled on his stomach to the hole’s edge where he could survey a part of the fuselage cabin below. The first thing he saw was Nara Goddard’s pale face. She was staring straight ahead at something beyond Tony’s vision. She was nervous, taut, but there was no fear in her eyes.

By resting his chin on the duralumin deck Tony could make out J. Finley Block and his two

bodyguards. They were tied up and the brief case was missing. Tony couldn't see anyone else.

He waited patiently until he could catch Nara's attention. In the meantime, apparently, Dunk Ross's message had got down there, for a Chinese with an automatic pistol moved forward, then a few seconds later this Chinese and Chang Tze came back. Tony could almost have touched their hats. He would have liked to touch them—with the axe blade.

He looked around for the axe, but this had evidently fallen through the hole when he was wounded, for it was not in sight. He sighed. This was going to be tougher than ever. He stared at Nara—waiting. She finally turned her gaze as if called from the rear, and their eyes met. The shock of seeing him almost betrayed his presence. She tensed, swayed, and then forced herself to look away.

Presently, cautiously, she looked again. Tony began to make careful signs. He repeated them a half dozen times, pointing, nodding his head. Finally her eyes told him she understood. She was not tied, and by cautious use of her hands told him all three Chinese were at the moment in the stern of the flying boat near compartment two. She indicated she could not get the axe.

Tony crawled to Dunk Ross's tool box and drew out a large spanner wrench, also a long, heavy-headed crescent wrench. He returned and tried to tell her with his eyes to fall flat after she had done her stunt and not get herself killed. She was getting whiter and whiter. Twice she shook her head; her eyes pleaded with him not to take the chance.

Tony figured there was always a chance as long as you were kicking. He was just preparing for a lightning drop when two of the Chinese went forward. This was a break. Tony tensed himself for their return. Presently one came back, leading a well-tied Dunk Ross, shoving him along roughly. Immediately behind him followed the Chinese with the tommy-rod. The Chinese's gaze turned upward toward the hole. Tony came down through the hole like a load of coal down a chute. He hit and landed on the Chinese's shoulders. The crescent wrench described a glittering arc and it seemed to Tony the Chinese had a skull like an egg-shell, for it yielded like wax under the blow. The man collapsed soundlessly. Tony went with

him, just as Nara leaped up, jumped on the second Chinese's back and vigorously clawed him.

What happened instantly afterward made a confusion of sound, movement and action. Tony was up, the tommy-rod in his hand, and aimed. Nara had fallen backward, pulling the other Chinese with her. So there was nothing in the way of Tony's tommy-rod but the dapper figure of Chang Tze.

The latter had been confused; he was still bewildered, not quickly adjusting himself. And in the time that it took him to realize that Tony was there, Tony had the gun thrust forward. "Would you like to shoot it out?" Tony asked softly. A man's eyes can tell the whole story of his mind if you're watching him. Chang Tze's instinctive desire was to pull the trigger of his gun. This was succeeded by a brief flash of reflective delay in which, Tony knew, the man was weighing the chances. And weighing them, Chang Tze knew the tommy-rod would get him even if he got Tony. And he didn't want to die. The first movement to raise the long-banded gun brought it up an inch or so, but now it dropped, hung loosely in the palm for a brief space, and then the weapon fell with a thud to the floor.

"A fool and his life are soon parted," the Chinese said. "I underestimated you, Mr. Blaine. You are stubborn, fool-hardy, and not as dead as I thought."

The tension vanished; Tony laughed. "The compliments overwhelm me. Tie him up, Nara, and give me that gun."

She also handed him a knife taken from Chang Tze, and he cut Dunk Ross's bonds. The Scotch-American was furious.

"They look me without me hitting a wallop—not a wallop."

Tony grinned, pushed him out of the way and saw that the remaining Chinese and Chang Tze were well lashed with cord. He let Miguel out of the lavatory, and ignored the man's wild excited burst of Spanish.

"Where's the brief case, Chang?" Tony asked.

Chang calmly pointed to where the brief case rested on Chang's small grip. Curiosity overwhelmed Tony for a second. What was in the brief case anyway?

He permitted himself a look, and his eyebrows went up like half-moons.

“Wow!” he muttered.

There was no two million dollars in the bag, but he had never seen so many tidy bundles of hundred-dollar bills in his life. Fifty to a package and there were at least a hundred packages jammed in until the brief case would hold no more.

He closed the brief case and remembered Block. With Chang’s knife he cut the ropes holding the financier. “Any man who would carry that much money with him invites trouble,” Tony said.

“Who asked you for an opinion?”“ snarled the older man. “Release my men.”

Tony blinked. “What big teeth you have, grandmother,” he said.

Then, turning, as he reached for the two bodyguards, he called, “Dunk, tell Steve to swing around and back on the course. Check the gas and see if we’ve enough to make Guam.”

If he didn’t have enough to make the tiny island and have a three-hour reserve, he’d have to turn back to Manila. Those were orders.

He had laid aside both machine gun and pistol as he cut the bonds of the two bodyguards. Dunk Ross had gone into the pilot’s office. Tony turned to Nara.

“Much obliged,” he said, “Now, maybe we can have some peace.”

“Not until after this,” snarled one of the bodyguards.

Before Tony could interfere, the man seized the tommy-gun and pistol. With the pistol he bent forward, put the muzzle almost to the helpless Chinese’s head and pulled the trigger. What was left was such a ghastly mess that Tony’s stomach bounced against his ribs and down again.

He sprang forward, whirling a fist at the man.

“You rat!” he yelled. “That was murder.”

“So what?” snarled the man, avoiding the punch and leaping backward. He stood crouched, vicious, and very dangerous.

“There’ll be another murder if you don’t put those lunch-hooks over your head,” he rapped.

Tony stepped backward all right. But his head swiveled and he stared at J. Finley Block, fighting mad and shaking with the fury of it.

“What does this mean?” he demanded.

The other bodyguard spoke to his companion. “Take the gun, Deamer, and let this lug have it if

he gets too fresh. I can handle this crate if I have to.”

The other man took the tommy-rod. “This guy is real helpful,” he chuckled.

J. Finley Block was staring at the ocean chart “Not so bad, Phil,” he said to the first bodyguard. “If we swing off at twenty-seven-thirteen we could make it in four hours.”

“Okay, Jerk, fix up the course and we’ll see the mug holds it”

He walked up to Tony, but careful not to get in the line of fire. He slapped Tony so hard Tony almost fell over.

“You heard what Deamer said, didn’t you?” he growled. “Get going.”

For once Tony didn’t meet a situation calmly. He lost his head and swung. The blow didn’t hit, but a slug whammed past his ear so close he knew it was no accidental miss; that Deamer could have killed him had he wished. The man’s eyes blazed in fury.

“Try it again,” he snarled.

Mrs. Ostrander screamed, “I’m dying. I—”

“Well, die and get it over with,” snapped Phil. “Get forward—you—” he snapped at Tony.

Tony caught a sardonic smile on Chang Tze’s face as he backed up. But the Chinese did not speak; he obviously did not wish to attract attention to himself. Tony continued to back toward the pilot’s coop. Still bewildered, he was forced into the coop, the door locked after him.

“Tony, Manila’s on the air,” Petey cried. “And what do you think? What do you think?”

“I could be arrested for what I think,” snapped Tony. “What’s Manila say?”

“This isn’t J. Finley Block on board,” gasped Petey. “It’s Gentle Jerk Mardon—some well-known crook. J. Finley Block’s dead—murdered. They hid his body and it was just discovered today. You’ve got orders to arrest Mardon and put him in irons. He stole six hundred thousand in cash from Block’s yacht and burned the boat.”

Tony blinked. His breath came and went in a great sigh.

“Just a nice quiet party,” he murmured. “Just a honey.”

The great sea plane droned on at five thousand feet. The sun had swung across the apex of the sky and was falling hotly toward the green Pacific. Tony had been forced to use his sextant to plot a position. With sinking heart he saw that Guam lay nine hundred miles due east. And four motors eating dozens of gallons per minute.

Behind him, in the doorway to the pilot's coop, the man Deamer stood with a cocked gun ordering Tony to bear twelve degrees south.

Snatches of conversation as the crook, Gentle Jerk Mardon, figured feverishly on position, had explained most of the plan to Tony. He knew now that the wrecking of J. Finley Block's yacht had not been chance, but part of a well-laid scheme to rob the old financier.

Due to the unsettled regime in Tientsin, where Block had been bargaining for concessions, the famous industrialist had been forced to take the six hundred thousand dollars in cash instead of draft, and had at once set out for Kobe to deposit the money through the Anglo-Japanese bank. Mardon, whose criminal reputation in the Far East was evidently greater than Tony had known, had learned of this. Himself and his two men had shipped on the yacht after knocking out three of the crew. It was Deamer as quartermaster at the wheel who had piled up the yacht in a calm sea. The man, Phil had shot and killed Block when the latter resisted.

The yacht's landing launch had been seized, the money loaded aboard and the yacht set on fire. Apparently it had not entirely burned, for Manila radioed that a Japanese destroyer had seen the blazing craft and saved most of the crew and recovered the dead body of Block.

At the moment, Mardon was carrying out the last detail of his plan. Somewhere east and south of Mindanao was a boat—the *Kitty T*—and Mardon intended to reach this boat, scuttle the *Pacific Cruiser* and vanish from human sight.

It was a swell plan and right now seemed headed for completion. Tony sat silent on the chief pilot's throne, trying to find a new way of getting control of his plane.

Chang Tze was still alive, but could he be trusted? Nara Goddard had already risked much and was carefully watched.

"Put her on three sixteen," growled Deamer from the doorway.

Tony banked the plane until the number appeared on the compass card. He felt Steve's and Petey's eyes on him. They were ready to do anything, but waited for his order.

The original plan he had intended to use against Chang Tze kept returning to Tony's mind. A glance backward beyond Deamer revealed the spanner and crescent wrenches carelessly thrown on the seat in compartment two. It was twelve feet or so to this compartment. He saw Chang Tze in compartment four, bound like a mummy. The bodies of the other two Chinese had been tossed overboard.

Slowly he weighed what had to be done. Phil Catella, the second gunman, was guarding Dunk Ross in the flight engineer's station. Mardon was conning the chart in compartment one so that the drawn gun in his hand threatened the rest of the passengers and Nara Goddard. Nara Goddard was not tied.

Tony took a big breath and made up his mind.

Just then Mardon called:

"We've got to speed up, Deamer, or we'll miss the Kitty in the darkness."

"Turn 'em up," Deamer ordered. "Nineteen hundred revs anyway."

Tony opened the telephone circuit to Dunk. "Turn 'em up twenty-two hundred, Dunk, twenty-three if you can get it."

"What's the idea of that?" growled Deamer suspiciously.

"You wanted to make time," said Tony evenly. "We can do twenty-two easy and with this wind we can touch one hundred and ninety."

The engines were roaring louder, and with the slight tail wind the air speed indicator slid around the dial to the right.

"Okay," said Deamer, "but don't burn them motors up. We got three hundred miles yet to do."

"Sure not," agreed Tony, and his eye caught Steve's and held it. "We'll roll 'em plenty with these engines. Give me some help on the wheel, Steve."

Steve's eyes suddenly glittered. A pilot needs no help at the controls. Steve's hands gripped the duplicate wheel. His hands rested lightly on the wheel, his feet just touching the rudder. Tony began to signal.

First the wheel turned slightly to the right. The right rudder pedal deflected slightly, returned to normal. The ship swayed slightly.

"Fasten your belt," Tony said harshly to Steve. "We're hitting rough air."

"Okay," said Steve.

Tony, however, did not fasten his own belt. He said to Steve, "Take her a minute" He stood up.

Deamer stiffened. "Well, where are you going?"

Tony merely stared. "A man has to go certain places at certain times, guy."

"Oh!" said Deamer. "Well, make it snappy. . Hey, Jerk! Keep your eye out; this lug has to go places."

"Okay, Deamer."

Tony descended into the fuselage past Deamer, and in passing felt the muzzle of the gun gouge him cruelly in the back. He passed Nara, whose eyes had not left him since he had appeared in sight.

"Fasten your belt," he muttered helplessly.

His stride never stopped as he spoke. The increased drum of the four motors kept Mardon from hearing. Tony reached Chang Tze, and still without breaking his stride said:

"If I untie you, will you play ball? They're going to kill you shortly."

He was past before he saw Chang Tze's answer. He went on to the lavatory. Pity welled in his heart as he saw Miguel, cruelly bound, rolling limply on the floor. In the lavatory he searched for anything that could be a weapon. But there was nothing.

He returned presently, and in passing Chang Tze, the Chinese's snapping black eyes gave him assent. The slightly parted lips said, "Yes," without moving.

Tony hesitated, fastened the seat belt buckle.

"Hey, get away from that Chink," growled Mardon.

"Bumpy air and we're supposed to look after our passengers," snapped Tony.

"Yeah, well, we'll do the looking after. Get forward."

Tony resumed his seat, passed the copper tongue of the safety belt through the loop, and threw it over. He felt Deamer Dunn's eyes watching his every movement.

"Okay, Steve," Tony said. "I'll take her."

But his eyes told Steve to keep his hands on the wheel, which the first officer did. Steve already sensed what was coming.

The flying boat's speed indicator touched one hundred and eighty, held there. Under Tony's hands the controls were instantly responsive to the slightest movement. The sweat gathered in glittering beads on Tony's forehead.

Could the bus take what he was about to give her?

Steve's glance told him plainly that the first officer did not think so. Steve's lips were pallid; they made the "O" of a "No."

Deamer Dunn was lighting a cigarette, a difficult maneuver when not taking the gun off Tony's back. Now, if ever, was the time.

Under Tony's pull the control post came back slightly; the flying boat's nose went up. Instantly Tony's right foot jammed the rudder full right. His bronzed hands with knuckles whitened by strain, cramped the aileron wheel way over.

"Look out," Tony yelled, "bad air!"

Over sharply heeled the flying boat. Tony was trying to barrel roll a fifty-one thousand pound, four-motored transport flying boat. Trying to toss twenty-five tons of plane as you flip a card. No one had ever tried it; no one knew rightly if a plane built for straight flying could take the stresses that such a maneuver at three miles a minute would entail.

Twenty-five tons of rushing monster continued to careen. Duralumin groaned. Fabric strained, brace wires bonged like struck piano notes. The downward surge of the right wing continued and the great monster went over on her back. Instantly Tony caught the turn, held her there. Flying upside down. One of the biggest planes in the world.

"Take it, Steve," he yelled. "Hold her."

He unbuckled his belt and fell out of the seat on his shoulders and rolled to come upright and stand on the roof of the pilot coop. The transport plane was not made to fly upside down. The wings began to knife downward. They were losing altitude fast.

VII

"Get aft, Petey, and hit hard," Tony yelled.

He sprang at Deamer Dunn. The crook had lit on his head, and this, together with the upset in his sense of balance, confused him and he lay on his back near the ceiling light. Around him piled loose gear. He saw Tony coming and the gun flashed upward and spouted fire. Only his dizziness saved Tony's life. The bullet went wild.

Tony had him before another shot could be fired. Both hands seized the gun-wrist. Tony pivoted on his belly, got his feet under him and then stretched out his legs so that both feet were fairly planted in Deamer Dunn's face. Then he jerked with all his might on the gun-wrist.

Deamer Dunn screamed with pain. The gun dropped as the fingers were paralyzed by the wrench. And as Tony grabbed the gun, he bore down heavily with his feet and pushed Deamer into a mess of magazines and a loose blanket that had gathered on the wall. He jumped to his feet, and looked into a pistol held by the old man, Jerk Mardon.

The gun flashed and the powder bit into Tony's face and the blaze of it scorched his uniform collar. His own gun roared an echo to the explosion. At close range the bullet plowed into Jerk Mardon's right chest, tore on out, broke a window. The impact whirled the old man and he went down in a twisting motion. He did not groan or speak.

All this took precious seconds, and Tony had not time to turn when Phil Catella ran down from the engineer's coop. Catella shot Petey, who blocked him. Petey yelled and went down. Phil Catella leaped at Tony, firing again. Tony felt the iron go into him and then Catella's body smashed into him and knocked him kicking.

The man's face was blazing, and as Tony crashed to the ceiling, the gunman braced himself with one hand gripping the bottom of an upside-down chair hanging down from the floor above. Phil Catella took deliberate aim. Tony tried to swing to bring his own gun to bear. He could not. He heard Nara scream and felt the swish of her dress as she leaped over him. She grabbed at Catella's arm. Tony saw that she was too late.

Catella pulled the trigger. As the gun roared a monkey wrench hurled out of nowhere and struck the gunman in the face. His nose folded against his face; one eye vanished in a sudden spurt of blood. Tony had up his gun and he pulled the

trigger. The automatic fired four shots before his trigger finger relaxed.

Catella was no longer there. He had fallen down on Nara. She was struggling under the dead weight of a man whose chest was almost blown through his back. Almost immediately Chang Tze came leaping over Tony and picked up the gun.

"Drop it, Chang," rapped Tony.

The Chinese hesitated, saw the look in Tony's eyes and dropped the gun.

"It is a lot of money," he smiled, "enough to retire on."

"Pick up the gun, Nara, and watch him," snapped Tony and scrambled toward the pilot's coop.

His hip was numb and he could feel the blood drooling down to his knee. It was hard walking. Steve heard him, his head looking down at Tony.

"I can't hold her, and we've only got two thousand," he yelled.

Tony thrust the gun under Steve's thigh.

"I'll take her," he said. "Go back when I right her and take charge. If anybody goes haywire, let 'em have it."

"Okay," said Steve, "but she won't come back. She won't turn."

Tony practically stood on his head getting into the upside-down seat. The big flying boat had to turn. Otherwise she would slide belly up into the Pacific. Tony got himself buckled fast. Now he could see the altimeter needle, sliding with furious speed toward zero. The air speed indicator had fallen, and the engine rhythm was definitely upset by the bad gas feed.

He took the controls just as blood spurted from Steve's mouth and nose. Right and left Tony rocked the boat, feeling the controls soft and flabby. But the crate did rock, came halfway over, dropped back, and indicated definitely that she would love to spin if Tony would rock her just once more. It was worth a try.

Tony reversed the controls, put the elevator full on and kicked left rudder. The boat nosed down and with a jerking moan the wing, the left wing, shot downward. The roll had become a diving spin. Tony could feel she was going to twist, come over on her belly once more, and keep right on turning. Over-controlled. But, panting, feeling agony now as his wounded thigh had to bear the strain of rudder pressure, he caught her just as she

was making the second turn. The plane shook as if coming apart. Objects tumbled hither and yon. The dead Deamer hurtled toward the coop.

There was such a strain on the brace members that Tony felt he saw the wings waver on the body. The control post eased back toward his lap. Less than a thousand feet above the waves the dying boat straightened out. Tony called Ross.

“Aye—what now? Don’t you know you can’t roll this kind of a crate?”

“Yes, I know,” grinned Tony. “Give me eighteen hundred and keep ‘em there. We’re going to Guam, and we’re late.”

Tony hit Guam right on the nose. High up here as he signaled to cut the engines, the tip of a blood-red sun could be seen. The morning mist and night still clutched the tiny palm green island below. He circled over the modern hotel, built by Pacific Airways, and dropped rapidly to the lagoon.

Fifteen minutes later he stood in the dispatcher’s office. Hanrahan, the dispatcher, said, “Sure good to see you. We figured you were lost”

Tony gave him the details for the report and went out to where greaseballs were removing the corpses.

Chang Tze stood there, Nara and Steve nearby. Little Petey was at the infirmary, a bullet in his shoulder.

“I shall go now, Mr. Blaine,” said the Chinese equably.

“You have won. I hope you and I do not meet again. One of us will get hurt”

“Who,” said Tony, “do you think it will be?” Chang Tze smiled. “Let us leave that to anyone’s guess. Good-by.”

Tony held his arm. “How did you know Mardon had stolen all that money and was going to be aboard? Why did you try to hold the Pacific Cruiser by snatching me?”

Chang Tze smiled amusedly. “The Japanese on the destroyer did not know the murdered man was Mr. Block at first and delayed their report.” He paused, hesitated, then: “I also was after Mr. Block’s money, and the Chinese steward aboard the yacht is a kinsman of mine. He radioed me the truth while the Japanese were trying to find out. I made my plans. The first failed. To get another

opportunity I had to delay your plane. That also failed. In fact, I failed all around.”

He clicked his heels together, held out his hand. “Will you shake hands, Mr. Blaine?”

Despite the pain of his hip wound, Tony laughed. “There are no good crooks, Chang, but if there were you’d be tops. So long.”

He gripped the hand, shook it and went to find Nara Goddard. He found her gazing at the bullet-flecked fuselage of the flying boat.

“A nickel for your thoughts,” he said.

“They’re not worth it,” she told him, swinging so that he could gaze into her clear eyes. “Jerry’s sailed for San Francisco and I was wondering where I’d get the money to meet him there.”

“You’ll need a job,” said Tony. He looked at the sky. “The stars foretell a good job for you. Running a three-room apartment and learning to cook Spaghetti Caruso. I’m crazy about Spaghetti Caruso.”

“But—but—” she began.

“I know. You hardly know me. But I’ll grow on you. Want to try?”

He held out his hand and she suddenly smiled and surrendered hers.

“It’s an idea,” she said softly.