



# VULTURE COAST

by LESTER DENT

*It started as a test flight for the new amphibian. Then came the offshore rescue, pirate craft out of the China Sea, and a grim, terrible test for Power O'Malley, pilot.*

**T**HE CLAMMY FEEL of yellow fingers wrapping suddenly about his throat was Power O'Malley's first warning that the three Orientals he was rescuing from a tiny boat sixty miles off the California coast were other than they had called themselves. A silken cord followed the fingers, slithered down over his flying helmet with a slimy, serpentine swiftness.

Power O'Malley bunched his immense shoulders, turtled his head forward. His hands found a pair of pipe-stem wrists. He clutched them, plucked the screeching Japanese over his head.

Holding the fellow there, he leaped catlike from the streamlined tubing nest of the engine mount to the better footing that the arched snout of the amphibian's hull afforded. A Chinaman and another Japanese scuttled toward him over the top of the cabin.

The Chinaman had a Malay *kris*, a crooked, eighteen-inch blade of glittering steel, in one tawny

fist. The Japanese wielded what looked like a short, thick-bladed sword.

Power O'Malley levered his squirming burden higher, tensed.

A few minutes before, when he had dropped the big Camex Airways amphibian into the bending indigo swell of the windless Pacific, attracted by the frantic signaling of the trio in a tiny dory, he had found what seemed like a weary and badly scared trio of Orientals. They had conveyed their story by a conglomeration of animated gestures and unintelligible pidgin.

It sounded reasonable enough. They had lost their oars and the dory had been carried offshore.

Since the dory was a rickety cockleshell, built to be easily taken apart, and plainly contained no oars, Power O'Malley had seen no reason to doubt the yarn. He had taken them aboard, since he had finished the test flight with the plane Camex had assigned him on his new job, and was headed back toward Santa

Monica. With the inertia crank, he had started the 425-horse-power port motor and was out on the starboard engine mount strutwork when the attack started.

Power O'Malley was a big man. His weight was in the neighborhood of two hundred and ten pounds. His hair was a gory, flaming red and stood on end like broom straws. His face was not particularly handsome. His mouth was too large, his nose had been broken by some accident, and his eyes were a peculiar washed-out blue color. His skin was raw with fresh sunburn.

Power O'Malley's thick forearms corded. He lobbed the Japanese overhead as he would a sack of meal.

His leather boot soles lost the precarious grip they held on the spray-wet veneer. Unbalanced, he went to his knees, straddled the snout of the fuselage. The human missile gyrated to one side.

THERE was a sickening *chunk* of steel and flesh. The body of the stocky Japanese arced backward to land athwart the clipped lower wings.

The blade of the port propeller had struck at the base of the fellow's neck, half dismembered the close-cropped head.

The corpse stuck where it fell, shifted as the plane heaved upon the swell, crimson spewing over the doped wing fabric.

The Chinaman clucked through his teeth and pitched his wicked-looking *kris* back on the top of the cabin. Then he pounced on the end of the garrot cord, which was still about the flyer's neck.

Power O'Malley caught the sword hand of the Japanese as the fellow closed in, flailed desperately with his free fist, trying to drive the wiry, hissing body into the sea.

Vaguely, he was aware of a swirling commotion in the zafferous depths alongside. A strange-looking object protruded suddenly above the surface. The afternoon sun glittered in livid beams from a glass window!

The crooked neck arose sluggishly. A second appeared, then the drab steel plates of a conning tower. The hull of a submarine wallowed into view.

It lay awash not more than twenty yards from the amphibian. The steel plates were slime-coated, foul, bore no name or identifying numbers. The conning tower hatch opened with a metallic clang.

Jeweled spots of flame were beginning to explode in front of Power O'Malley's eyes.

The head of a white man—huge, with an uncut

mat of hair that was strangely bleached and colorless, reared out of the conning tower, pushed upward by a pair of tremendous shoulders and a great, naked torso. The fellow scrambled out on the ribbed deck of the submarine, roared something in a dialect that was unintelligible.

A torrent of yellow-skinned, half-naked figures poured out of the underseas craft. They wore flaming sashes about their waists which were stuck full of automatics, crooked knives, and short swords.

The silk cord digging into Power O'Malley's neck loosened abruptly. He slumped backward, would have gained the water except that one of his assailants kicked him in the stomach. Then they both secured a grip upon his feet and dragged him helpless back on the curved hull of the amphibian.

A wiry yellow figure leaped from the conning tower, splashed to the abandoned dory, dragging an oar, climbed aboard, and sculled the little craft swiftly hack to the submarine. The big white man dropped into the thwarts and was carried toward the plane.

Power O'Malley sat up unsteadily, spitting crimson from his bruised gullet, as the fellow hauled his body atop the hull and stood ponderously erect.

The man bulked over the flyer like a mountain. His arms were great, flabby pendants of muscle which rippled and tufted into knots as he pulled himself aboard. His eyes were strangely fishlike and colorless. A beard the hue of faded manila practically hid his bloated face. His kinky hair was bleached, like a mess of filthy white thread, and grew down almost to his eyes in the center of his forehead.

Power O'Malley grunted. The huge, flaccid body was without coloring pigment! The thick, bulbous lips, the frizzled, upstanding hair—the fellow was a black!

An albino. A white black man!

An agonized, blood-curdling howl erupted behind the flyer, accompanied by the spatter of bare feet on the veneering of the amphibian's hull.

Power O'Malley whirled. The Japanese whose comrade had whirled to death in the hissing arc of the port propeller was leaping upon him, a crooked knife clenched in his fist.

The albino barked sharply in the lingo and wrenched an automatic from his gaudy sash. The Japanese stopped reluctantly, spoke rapidly in his queer, hissing dialect.

"Get up!" the albino spat harshly at the flyer.

"Damn you! You did in Pogi's brother!" His voice was sharp, rasping, with the barest trace of an accent.

AN EXCITED shout arose from the tiny bridge of the submarine. A Chinaman was gesticulating wildly and pointing.

Power O'Malley turned his head. Barely discernible, hull down on the horizon, was a boat which had not been there a few minutes before.

"Climb in the dory!" the albino ordered in an ugly tone. "Quick!" Then he roared a volley of commands in the vernacular. The scene broke into a swelter of activity. Two Chinamen on the deck of the submarine leaped into the sea and swam toward the amphibian.

Power O'Malley eyed the ugly snout of the albino's automatic. He was just beginning to breathe freely once more. The events of the last few minutes had been bizarre, impossible. Then he looked at the rolling, lifeless body of the dead Japanese.

The albino flicked his automatic suggestively. Power O'Malley grunted under his breath and climbed into the tiny shell. Hollywood was less than a hundred miles away, but the thing was beginning to look rather unlike a movie thriller. The Japanese was unmistakably dead.

The albino eased his bulk into the stern, still keeping up a rapid-fire flow of instructions. He tugged an object out of his pocket and tossed it to the Japanese, Pogi, who stood sullenly on the bow of the seaplane.

To the bewildered whirl inside Power O'Malley's red-thatched head was added another puzzle. The object was a hand grenade!

Two Chinamen pitched the gory body of the dead man into the bows of the dory. In a moment they scraped against the reeking steel plates of the submarine.

"Get below!" the albino leader ordered.

The villainous Chinese had a deck hatch open. In a trice the dory was hauled aboard, taken apart, and stowed. The flyer looked toward the oncoming boat. It was still far off.

The last of the half-naked yellow men swarmed into the conning tower hatch. Power O'Malley backed away from the albino's gun, down an iron ladder, dodged as the dead Japanese was pitched down after him.

Levers, glass-faced gauges, speaking tubes, wheeled valve controls, were everywhere. He was in the control room of the submarine.

The body thumped at his feet. A burst of Oriental voices arose on the opposite side of the crowded steel chamber. Sweating bodies surged through a slit-like door in a steel bulkhead.

Power O'Malley had a glimpse of a young woman wheeling about to dart out of sight toward the bows. Her figure was slender, and she was attired in a frock of some gossamery looking fabric which was smeared with grease and oil. The wave of half-naked Chinese blotted her from view, carried her back beyond another bulkhead.

A dozen automatics were leveled on the flyer's person. Twice as many knives and short swords were in sight. Power O'Malley remained where he was, blinking, trying to absorb a mixed impression of tousled hair that was an even more flaming hue than his own, white, cameo-perfect features, and distended, surprised blue eyes.

The bloated form of the albino landed with a force that made the clammy steel plates shudder. He barked an unintelligible order.

A motor whirred somewhere in the bowels of the underseas craft. The conning tower hatch clanged. The craft lurched, seemed to drop away from under their feet.

## CHAPTER II FROM THE CHINA COAST

**T**HE AUTOMATIC in the albino's pursy fist darted forward.

"Over against the bulkhead!" he rapped venomously. "Never mind my woman!"

Power O'Malley shifted his rangy form across the control room, stopped with his back against a glittering array of gauges which banked one bulkhead. The albino squawled out another order. Then he licked his thick, bulbous lips.

"Pogi'd have shived open your belly!" he vouchsafed. "You killed his brother. Lucky for you he knows his bloody boss!"

He elbowed a diminutive Chinaman away from the periscope and planted himself with one colorless eye cocked downward, the other on the flyer.

"Mebbe you ain't heard of me an' my buckos!" he grunted out of the corner of his mouth a few seconds later. "Cap'n Teek and the China coast don't mean nothin' to you, eh? Never mind—it will now, and that damn soon!"

He fell to cursing savagely, then snarled:

"Damn you! You killed my flyer. The only one I got.

Something happened to the other. Pogi wants to slice you, but he ain't, see! You're gonna fly your nice shiny plane for Cap'n Teek and the bloodiest lads that ever hedged a junk into Bajas Bay!"

The thick lips came back in a foul grin. "Ever see a Chink get the death of a thousand cuts?" he queried.

Power O'Malley did not bother to reply. He had removed his leather flying helmet. Now he ran the zipper fastener of his flying suit down to his belt. It was hot in the cramped steel chamber. The air was like living steam, foul with the stink of the unwashed yellow bodies.

"Keepin' your mouth shut, eh?" Teek asked him unpleasantly. "Listenin' to me brag, eh? Well—go ahead and listen. Get an earful. Then, tell it whenever you get a chance, see!"

The fellow laughed uproariously, then took up his conversation where he had left off.

"It ain't nice—they cuts ain't," he assured the flyer. "The China boys do it best. But Pogi, he ain't so slouchy. You knocking off his brother will make him think of new things like slicing fingernails off a little at a time. Pogi is a Jap. 'they're smart lads. Had six of 'em in my crew. All got kicked out of the Jap navy. Submarine service, see. Pogi's brother and another one, they was flyers. Pogi is all that's left now."

He laughed again, a great, crashing sound in the narrow, superheated confines of the control room.

"Never heard of Cap'n Teek!" he roared. "Damn soon will. I got a hundred and eighty yellow boys. Stole this iron fish from the Jap navy. They still think it sunk in the China Sea with all hands."

He turned away from the periscope mirror which now reflected nothing but dull gray water, propped his huge bulk against the gray steel tube, and fished in his gaudy silk sash for a pinch of betel nut.

He was silent for a time while he worked the betel up into his thick jowels with his tongue.

"A damn good coast, this!" he snorted at last.

Power O'Malley cocked his ears with reviving interest. But the fellow closed up like a clam.

NEARLY a half hour later the ribbed steel flooring underfoot jarred slightly. Unmistakably distinct came the dull shock of an explosion somewhere in the green waters outside.

Teek flashed into life. The air of gloating braggadocio fell away with a completeness that was startling. He spouted a string of unintelligible Kwangtungese into the speaking tubes.

The shrill whine of the motors softened. The submarine heaved sluggishly to the accompaniment of hissing compressed air. Yellow men began to crowd into the control room.

The albino ceased his stream of commands. A few moments of waiting, then he whirled, flicked his automatic toward the steel ladder.

"Climb!" he rapped in English.

At the top of the conning tower, a Chinaman had loosened the dogs which held the hatch. Willingly, Power O'Malley clambered out into the blazing afternoon sun. The amphibian was exactly as they had left it, riding the heat-irradiated swell of the Pacific several hundred yards distant. Of the strange boat, there was no sign. Nor was there a trace of wreckage.

Power O'Malley suddenly saw through the mystery of the explosion. The hand grenade thrown aboard the plane—it had been used as a signal. The submarine had cruised in a circle, waiting for the blast which would tell them the horizon was clear. If hailed, the pirates in the plane could easily stave off suspicion by claiming they were making minor repairs.

The underseas craft wallowed about, headed for the amphibian, the swell sheeting over the half-submerged bows in turbulent masses of dull, foam-flecked sapphire. Fifty yards from the plane, the propellers went into reverse.

"How much gas in the plane?" rapped the pirate chief.

Power O'Malley hesitated. He and the albino were alone on deck.

"Go to hell!" he barked, and launched himself for the fellow's automatic.

The move was ill advised. The giant leader leaped backward with an agility that was astounding. He roared an order. Evil-looking Chinese swarmed through the hatches. The yellow men moved like monkeys. The flyer was borne down without a chance to get the albino's automatic and hold the others below deck.

The leader clucked in the dialect. Power O'Malley was released, albeit somewhat reluctantly. The crew broke out a collapsible boat.

"Get in the stern sheets!" the albino directed.

There was nothing else to do. Wiry, half-naked sea wolves were all about him, jeweled ear pendants and golden armlets jangling softly, their sashes bristling with weapons.

The little men were expert seamen. The collapsible dory touched the veneered hull of the plane as lightly

as a settling gull. Pogi scuttled forward, gleaming *kris* in one lemon-hued fist, and fell back with visible reluctance at the second guttural command from Teek.

"Show them how to put gas in the tanks if you need it," the albino commanded. "Enough to take you five hundred miles or so. Fill 'em—run 'em over!"

"Tanks are practically full!" Power O'Malley told him shortly.

Three half-naked and heavily-armed Chinese in charge of the Japanese, Pogi, rode in the leather upholstered seats of the amphibian when Power levered it off the uneasy ultramarine of the Pacific.

Glancing backward, the flyer saw the submarine ploughing south, the knifelike superstructure awash.

The inverted howl of the heavens was taking on a saffron tint that was tinged a deeper hue in the east where the California mainland lay. The sea was shot with lances of mauve which shifted across lanes of deepest indigo. The quick tropical twilight was closing down.

EYES on his tachometer, O'Malley pondered about their probable destination. The course was almost due south. That would mean Lower California. The pirates could hardly have selected a more ideal rendezvous than some rocky inlet along that coast. It was sparsely settled, and Mexican law was still rather sketchy.

As for the submarine, it was undoubtedly following them. The surface speed of the craft was not likely to exceed twenty knots an hour. Submerged, it would be less. In any event, the plane was certain to arrive first. Barring, of course, the chance that the port propeller might have been twisted enough to cause it to chatter, which did not seem likely.

The red-headed girl aboard the underseas craft entered his thoughts, and he spent at least a half hour wondering whether or not she was a prisoner, and whether, with the attention of the yellow crew distracted by the plane, she had not been trying to escape. He arrived at no conclusion whatever. The glimpse he had secured of the young woman had been too fleeting. And the words of the pirate leader seemed to denote possession. Power O'Malley shuddered. What a fate!

It was nearly four hours later that they sighted the pirate stronghold.

Twenty minutes before they actually arrived, Pogi directed the course of the plane eastward with a vicious, hissed command. The dark shore line appeared below the veneered bottom of the hull with

the surf a jagged, dirty chalk mark against the velvety background.

Then they turned southward, twisting with the ribbon of bursting surf until the beam of a searchlight flashed into being, winked several times, and went out. The Chinese in the plane's cabin began to chatter excitedly.

Another surly order from Pogi, and Power O'Malley spiraled the amphibian down upon a rock-walled bay which was only a few acres in area. It was so small, in fact, that he was forced to circle out to sea and come down-wind through the gap in the high cliffs to make a landing.

A floodlight from some point ashore bathed the swirling waters in an aura of white brilliance. A great, hulking craft, awkward looking, with matting sails instead of the conventional canvas, lay anchored inside the bay. A Chinese junk!

At the waterline the cumbersome appearance vanished. The hull was streamlined, designed like a speedy yacht. Power O'Malley decided the motive power of the craft did not come from the ponderous, inefficient sails and that the strange-looking hull probably housed powerful engines.

Looking at the sails again, he saw each bore a huge green serpentine design, the slimy coils of the reptile were twisted in a crude design, the incredibly ugly head reared upward, scarlet tongue projecting. The shimmering luminance of the floodlight beat back from the repulsive thing in emerald rays that were unbelievably hideous.

The big amphibian settled, shuddered slightly, and salt spray drove through the open cabin windows in stinging sheets.

As Power O'Malley gunned the craft past the junk, he saw filthy, vicious-looking Chinese lining the high wooden rail, gaping curiously.

Pogi hissed cryptically. In the soft, creamy glow of the floodlight, the flyer picked up a buoy, headed toward it. The place was alive with Chinese. Scores of lights bobbed about along the steeply slanting beach.

The plane reached the buoy. A dory darted out from shore, four little yellow men at the oars.

Power O'Malley cut the two motors and climbed out of the cabin. He could see the Chinese on shore distinctly. The sand was literally seething with half-naked yellow figures. The lanterns, weird Oriental things of rice paper on frameworks of rattan, danced everywhere. The scene might have been transplanted from a river front in Canton.

The flyer eyed the approaching dory. It was a dozen feet off. The three Chinese were at the nose of the hull, cackling excitedly in their jargon to the newcomers ashore and in the little shell.

Pogi was watching Power O'Malley, his black eyes sparks of hate. He read the flyer's intention almost as soon as it took form, and groped frantically for the kris in his gaudy sash.

BUT he was too late. Power O'Malley was on him. With a quick twist of his hands, he broke the Jap's knife arm between elbow and shoulder.

Then he raised the squealing fellow and swung the short, wiry body like a club. The trio of Celestials went sprawling atop their fellows in the dory, which promptly capsized.

The flyer hurled the squirming Pogi into the floundering group and leaped for the motors. He had left the ignition switches on. The cylinders were hot, steaming from the bath of spray they had received in landing.

The port motor, caught with the first rasping whine of the inertia starter, broke into a stuttering roar. Power leaped for the starboard engine. The yellow men were clambering out of the water with incredible speed.

In a moment they were on him, a maelstrom of cat-like, dripping bodies and flailing fists.

The amphibian, under the pull of the roaring port motor, began to slough about in crazy circles. Chinese from shore poured into the water in waves and flailed toward the plane, automatics and short, deadly-looking carbine rifles held high over their heads.

Power O'Malley beat down two of the wiry devils with his fists, then a third froze about his ankles and hung with the determination of a ferret. The flyer stamped at the writhing body repeatedly.

A fourth and a fifth catapulted upon him. He lost his balance and sprawled overboard.

He landed in a tangle of yellow bodies and a vortex of clutching arms and flickering knives.

A stubby rifle stock flashed in the glow of the floodlight.

### CHAPTER III THE EMERALD SERPENT

**P**OWER O'MALLEY FLOUNDERED back to consciousness after an interval that might have been minutes or hours. It was intensely dark and quiet, he moved his arms and legs experimentally, somewhat astonished to find them free. His big body ached in more joints than he had dreamed it possessed.

An exploring hand in his mat of red hair came away sticky. A tremendous knot ornamented the side of his skull. His flying helmet was gone. His chamois blazer had vanished and his shirt was in tatters. Otherwise, he seemed to be unharmed.

He stood up.

A criss-crossed square of lighter hue became visible in the intense darkness, resolved itself into a barred window in the center of a door constructed of massive planks.

The walls on either side had the feel of crumbling adobe.

The flyer tested the bars with his hands. They gave out a rusty howl of protest.

A repulsive, slant-eyed mask bobbed up in the gloom outside the bars, spat out a volley of angry Kwangtungese, and made a significant gesture with a forefinger across his throat.

Power O'Malley cursed the Chinaman roundly, then, his feelings somewhat relieved, continued to explore his prison. He discovered a soft pine packing case in the middle of the floor. That, and a square section of tarpaulin in a corner, seemed to be the only furnishings. The floor of the chamber was clay, with a soft, clammy layer of dust that was inches deep in spots.

He sat on the box considering ways and means for a long time. Outside the guard stirred often, grunting his displeasure at marauding insects.

From farther away came the occasional sing-song undertone of Chinese conversation.

The throbbing pain in Power O'Malley's neck subsided after a time. With his hands, he worked the thick dust into a sort of pillow, spread the tarpaulin on the floor, and stretched out. There was nothing to be

done until the pirates made the first move. That meant when the submarine reached port, which would not be for several hours.

He dozed off fitfully.

An excited outburst of sing-song Kwangtungese brought him starting into wakefulness. In the brilliant rays of the morning sun the underslung bulk of the submarine was wallowing into the bay of the emerald serpent from the open Pacific.

THE nearer half of the bay was still in the partial gloom of early dawn. The steep, unclean-looking beach was swarming with yellow-skinned pirates who, in the clean sunlight, appeared more villainous than ever.

Small boats put out from shore as the underseas craft was being moored to a buoy fifty yards from the spot where the amphibian squatted like a fat dragonfly on the rippling surface of the bay.

Yellow men dragged a slender, titian-haired figure out of the conning tower hatch. O'Malley felt a surge of surprised relief as he discovered the young woman had a wide swath of silk bound across her eyes. She was a prisoner, then.

Another captive was thrust into view, an elderly man, overweight, his hair smeared with gray over the temples. His white flannel clothing was disheveled and bloodstained. He, like the redheaded girl, was blindfolded.

The two prisoners were shoved into a dory and rowed swiftly to the shore. Then they were escorted to a hut which adjoined O'Malley's prison.

The hulking figure of the albino stopped at the water's edge, was instantly surrounded by a horde of chattering Chinese. He was learning of the attempted escape, O'Malley surmised.

Watching, he discovered the Japanese, Pogi, in the group, his right arm in a dirty cotton cloth sling, but otherwise undamaged, and muttered his disgust. He had hoped heartily the fellow had drowned.

The albino waved his great, flabby arms, roared something in the dialect. Then he strode off without a backward look.

Pogi threw a glance boiling with disappointed fury toward the adobe before he followed in the big man's wake.

Silence fell once more. The sun was mounting rapidly and already the temperature was giving an unpleasant prophecy of the terrific heat that would settle on the windless bowl in midday.

Some time later a Chinaman shuffled toward the adobe bearing a wooden bowl. The guard ordered O'Malley across the room, kicked open the door, placed the bowl in the center of the dust-blanketed floor, then withdrew quickly, keeping his automatic always trained on the big frame of the flyer.

Examination disclosed a mushy mixture of rice, millet and bits of fish. The whole mess stunk abominably. O'Malley was ravenously hungry. He picked at the stuff, albeit not without much grimacing.

Before he finished, a commotion drew him to the door. Teek and a half dozen Chinese were leading the elderly, gray-haired prisoner down to the beach. The man was blindfolded.

HE WAS forced into a dory, although he struggled furiously.

The albino returned, barked an unintelligible order, and the guard opened the door of O'Malley's adobe prison.

"Come out!" grated the pirate leader. "I got a little flight over the border for you. You're damn' lucky I ain't lettin' Pogi carve you."

Power O'Malley grunted profanely and stalked out into the hot sunlight. A startled gasp caused him to turn his head.

Framed in the opening in the barred door of the adjoining adobe was the face of the red-headed girl of the submarine. There was agony in her eyes.

She opened her mouth to speak. A Chinese guard struck at her through the bars with his fist and she dodged backward, out of sight.

The Chinese in the dory were strapping something on the gray-haired man's back. A parachute.

Teek spat betel juice between his blackened teeth.

"You're gonna take us over the border!" he repeated. "You might as well join my outfit now and come along quiet. I'll show you how we work things on the China coast. How does this sound—got my yellow boys planted on a steamer loaded with a couple of million silver Mex dollars for the Chinese government!"

He paused to laugh loudly and bring a huge fist crashing down on his knee. O'Malley pricked up his ears.

"We'll meet the steamer with the sub and your plane," the big man continued. "My boys will take care of the radio operators, then line up the passengers and crew. That won't be hard to do. Not when they pass out word that nobody will be hurt if the bullion is turned over without a fight."

"After we get the stuff aboard the pig boat, we slip 'em a torpedo. Nothing to do then, except stick around and sink the boats. Nobody left to say Cap'n Teek ain't on the China coast no more!" The boasting stopped suddenly. The albino stared upward, cheeks sagging flabbily so that he resembled a fat mastiff, except for the ghastly absence of color in his features.

A seaplane had flashed into view, was roaring in a narrow corkscrew above the rockbound bay, banked vertically.

Pandemonium swept the pirate stronghold. The yellow men dashed about in wild confusion, seizing rifles and stubby sub-machine guns and scuttling for cover. Aboard the junk of the emerald serpent, a false superstructure on the fore deck fell away, disclosing an efficient looking three-inch anti-aircraft gun. The black muzzle swung upward.

TEEK awoke from his paralysis, bellowed an angry order.

The strange plane was a single-motored land craft, equipped with pontoons. A waving arm projected over the edge of the pilot's cockpit.

The albino returned the signal.

The craft shot out to sea, banked, lost altitude, and settled through the narrow opening of the bay. The pilot gunned close inshore and fishtailed about. Chinese waded into the water and made the craft fast a few yards from the beach.

A man leaped out of the cockpit. A stocky fellow with a swarthy skin. A Japanese.

Teek snapped an order, then lumbered delightedly toward the newcomer. Wiry pirates seized O'Malley's arms. Sensing a change in his status, he knocked two of them down, but others piled atop him, bore him down, and dragged him in the wake of the albino.

Pogi dashed up and went into an animated discussion with the albino and the newcomer. The Jap had his *kris* in his serviceable hand. His face was twisted with fury and his words came in a guttural, crackling stream.

Teek said something in the jargon. A look of fiendish pleasure distorted Pogi's countenance. He eyed his crooked blade lovingly.

"Wait!" Power O'Malley heard the albino rumble in English. "After we take care of this other business, Pogi. You want plenty of time, don't you?"

Pogi sidled over and spat in the flyer's face.

"Now you pay much kill my honorable brother," he hissed. "Time—good! Four, five hours I have nothing

to do but think of ways make you squeal. Then—!"

He licked his lips in anticipation.

THE albino chimed in coldly. "The Jap I sent after a plane got back. I thought he wasn't coming. Now we don't need you. Pogi will think up some nice way of takin' you apart when we get back." Changing to dialect, he issued orders.

O'Malley wrenched to free himself, but the yellow pirates were about and over him in a lemon-hued cloud. He was forced back toward the adobe hut.

The white, strained face of the girl was still pressed tightly to the rusted iron bars in the next adobe.

He was pitched roughly upon the dust-covered floor and the ponderous wooden bar thumped solidly. Getting up hastily, he peered through the barred opening and saw the pirates place the gray-haired man aboard the Camex Company's idly heaving big amphibian.

Then the plane took off, the Japanese newcomer at the controls, handling the craft in a manner that showed plainly he was an expert. Teek, Pogi, and two ugly-visaged Chinamen were in the cabin guarding the captive.

The single-motored plane of the buccaneers remained in the shallows a few yards from the slanting beach.

O'Malley eyed this second plane narrowly. It was a seven-passenger crate. A land ship, converted into a seaplane by the addition of duraluminum pontoons, which made it speedier than the larger, two-motored Camex amphibian, but without some of the latter's seagoing or distance covering qualities.

A contrivance of metal arms under the plump fuselage caught his gaze. He grunted. The two years he had served in the navy during the World War told him what the contrivance was. Launching apparatus for a torpedo! Half-naked yellow savages these Chinese pirates might be, but they believed in modern fighting equipment.

He stared about the cell. The wooden box, and the square of tarpaulin were the only movable objects in the place.

He picked up the box, hefted it. Too light to serve as a weapon. He plucked at the square of canvas. The fabric was rotten, tore easily. Had it been sound he could have fashioned a clumsy sandbag by filling a portion with dust scraped from the floor. But that was out.

Four or five hours, the Japanese had snarled in his

strange hissing dialect. Slightly over two hours each way, which meant the United States border must be in the neighborhood of two hundred miles to the north.

#### CHAPTER IV THE BREAK

**T**HERE WAS SEETHING ACTIVITY about the anchored submarine. Chinese were rolling iron drums out of an adobe and ferrying them out to the underseas craft. Crude oil for the Diesels, without a doubt.

Power O'Malley eyed the fragile sides of the packing box, then fell to inspecting the door of the cell, his eyes thoughtful. The adobe walls were a foot thick. The heavy wooden panel was set well toward the inner side, opening inward.

He looked outside cautiously, ascertained the Chinese guard was on his haunches in the shadow of the structure. Then he went to his knees beside the pine box, quietly broke a couple of narrow strips from the top, began raking dust off the floor, and dumping it into the container.

When it was full, he tested its weight. For the next five minutes he worked furiously. Then he stepped back and surveyed the results.

The box rested atop the frame of the door, held by the two strips of white pine and a length ripped from the square of tarpaulin. With the proper amount of luck, it would drop on the head of anyone who entered the cell.

Power O'Malley scraped a pile of dust together near the wall opposite the door, then peered out upon the bustling activity which had gripped the pirate rendezvous.

The Chinese had hoisted a deadly silver-gray torpedo from the maw of the submarine and were clamping it in the launching mechanism beneath the plane. They were busy affixing a war head. The plane had swung around at its mooring until it was nosing into a slight breeze which eddied in from the open Pacific.

Aboard the junk, everything was quiet. The collapsible superstructure was back in place, masking the three-inch gun.

O'Malley waited impatiently. The yellow men

finished placing the war head on the torpedo and set to work emptying five-gallon tins of gasoline into the plane's tanks.

At last all but two of them deserted the plane for other parts of the bay. The flyer whirled quickly, eyed the ceiling. It was of heavy timbers, the bark still in place, covered with smaller poles upon which was spread straw and adobe.

He leaped, clamped both hands around one of the timbers, and swung his feet against the roof.

The first thumping impact brought a clatter of falling adobe. A staccato burst of Kwangtungese erupted outside. An angry yellow face appeared at the barred opening.

The guard gestured irately, ridded himself of a stream of vituperatives, and slipped back into the shade. O'Malley grunted his disgust, leaped again, caught the beam, and kicked.

Had the thick-headed fellow paused to reflect, he would have known it was a physical impossibility for the flyer to break through the thick roof. Long before he tore away the tough poles and layered adobe, his arms would weaken.

But the thought never entered the sluggish brain of the pirate.

Power O'Malley dropped to the floor, crouched. The heavy barrier of wooden timbers swung inward. The Chinaman bounded through, a short carbine rifle thrust defensively before him. In his fingers was a length of fiber cord with which he must have intended to bind his prisoner.

The box did not accomplish the expected.

IT DROPPED before the guard was under it. Instead of crushing his head, it caught him across the arms, smashing the gun out of his hands.

O'Malley straightened, hurled a double handful of dust ahead of him. The rifle exploded, the leaden slug tearing into the adobe wall. The astonished Celestial received the cloud of dust in the eyes. He stumbled backward.

Power kicked the fellow once in the stomach and again in the row of betel-black teeth. Almost simultaneously, he dragged the rifle from under the box and wrenched an automatic from the sagging pirate's sash.

There was no guard at the door of the adjoining adobe. It took only a split second to throw the plank panel back.

"Quick!" Power O'Malley barked at the red-headed

girl. "The plane—"

She was at his side instantly, her face white but unafraid.

"Give me the automatic!" she interrupted swiftly. "I can fly, too. Fight them off while I start the motor!"

They raced across the beach, side by side. Behind them, the guard had not moved. He was stretched out stiff in the hot sun.

The shot had thrown the place into an uproar. Chinese charged across the sand in a mob, roaring, jostling. From the fringes of the mob spattered rifle and pistol shots.

The two pirates working on the plane leaped from the pontoons and ploughed toward shore, brandishing short swords.

O'Malley shot the two, first right, then left, as he ran. Beside him, the automatic in the red-headed girl's hands exploded three times, deafeningly, and in quick succession. With every shot, she scored. The yellow mob ceased howling, came on in ominous, purposeful silence.

There was no more shooting. Knowing the terrific demolishing force which rested in the head of the torpedo, O'Malley had figured on that. The pirates would know the explosion would destroy their junk and the submarine.

The flyer and his companion reached the water, splashed in. Where the plane lay, it was a little more than waist deep.

O'Malley gave the girl a boost to the plane's cabin, cast off the slip-knot in the mooring line, and spun about to empty his rifle into the ranks of the oncoming pirates.

Four times he fired, dropping one of the yellow friends with each shot. Then the hammer clicked. He braced himself atop a duraluminum pontoon, clubbed the empty weapon, and waited.

The plane's motor exploded into thunderous life. Hot, acrid fumes from the exhaust struck his face. The plane sloughed forward, gained speed.

For a few feet the pursuing Orientals gained, then, with increasing swiftness, the space widened.

O'Malley pulled himself up on the pontoon, where his dragging weight would not impede much needed speed, prepared to swing himself into the cabin.

Then, without warning, the motor stopped. The propeller flickered in the brilliant sunlight, became a lifeless blade of polished steel. The plane rocked slightly, settled deeper into the water and began to drop momentum.

"They had the gasoline cut off somewhere!" the girl gasped.

Tagging the echoes of her words came the chattering smash of her automatic. O'Malley cracked the head of the first of the oncoming swimmers with the stock of the carbine. Then a second and a third—and they came too fast.

Clutching fists pulled him down, held him beneath the surface until all resistance oozed out of his giant body.

THEY dragged him helplessly ashore, like so many citrous-tinted ants handling a burden many times their own size.

Others followed, bringing the redheaded girl. The two of them were yanked high on the scorching hot beach and thrown prone. Their ankles were bound tightly, then their wrists, then both were lashed behind their backs, drawing their bodies into a paralyzing knot.

After that they were deposited roughly on the hard earth in front of the adobe prison from which they had escaped, in the full, scorching glare of the tropical sun.

Fully two score Chinese ranged themselves in the shade of the adobe structure, conversing unintelligibly among themselves.

O'Malley saw one man who appeared to be a minor leader seize the senseless body of the unfortunate guard by the hair and drag it further into the shadowed interior of an adobe building. A few minutes later he emerged, wiping his short sword.

The flyer shifted about, managed to turn over. His position rapidly became one of unbearable torture.

He met the gaze of the red-headed girl. She had not seen the fate of the guard. Her lips formed an exclamation which sounded much like: "Damn!"

O'Malley forced a reassuring smile. Lances of agony were shooting through his back and arms.

"We got a rotten break!" he told her.

"We did!" the girl said without humor. "They must have turned off the gasoline expecting us to make a run for it."

"Who are you, anyway?"

Power told her his name. "First day on a new job," he added. "They got me and an amphibian I had out for a test run. Was going on an express and mail run today. They pulled an old Indian trick on me."

In a few additional words, he told her what bad happened. The Chinese, beyond muttering uneasily

among themselves, made no move to interfere with the talk.

The heat was terrific. Already O'Malley's undershirt and laced breeches were soaked with perspiration. The exposed skin on his arms and shoulders was taking on a faint pink hue. Later it would puff up in ugly blisters.

"My name, is Donna Talbot," the girl volunteered when he finished.

Power O'Malley's mouth sagged open. He started to voice an ejaculation of surprise.

"My dad is Stearman Talbot," the girl continued quickly, without noticing his agitation. "He's a banker. We were cruising in the yacht. Just dad, myself, and a crew of five. These yellow rats shelled us from the submarine. They—they killed all but dad and myself, and sank the boat.

"Their leader—the albino—learned from the yacht's papers that dad is—prominent. They are holding us for ransom. That was day before yesterday—when they attacked. Now, they've taken dad somewhere—!"

Her voice cracked, and died.

"Expect they'll drop him over the border with a chute and order him to get the ransom money," O'Malley suggested. "Wonder if he has any idea where this place is, so he can send help?" The girl grimaced and shifted her graceful form on the blistering sand.

"We were blindfolded," she said doubtfully. "I'm afraid he will have no idea where we are. He may know it is somewhere on the coast."

Power O'Malley looked at her intently, saw the terror beneath the attempted sang froid in her blue eyes, and considered swiftly.

"We'll get out of it yet," he assured her. "If the gasoline hadn't been turned off we'd have made it a minute ago. There'll be more chances for us."

That last, he reflected grimly, amounted to a bald lie. He fell silent, busy with his thoughts. They were not pleasant. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind but that he faced certain death with the return of Pogi.

Agony wracked his limbs, growing with each passing second; horrible, convulsive spasms from which it was impossible to get relief. Galling blisters with a pale, leprous color began to erupt where the boiling rays of the sun beat on his bare skin.

Twice stifled groans came from the girl. Power O'Malley did much thinking. They did not speak again, but waited in silence.

## CHAPTER V VENGEANCE

IT SEEMED THAT YEARS had dragged past when the manifold roar of an airplane motor grew up out of nothingness.

"They're coining back," O'Malley croaked through lips which dripped crimson where he had bitten them.

The big Camex amphibian banked over the bay, circled out to sea, came down-wind through the entrance, and wing-slipped to a sluggish and ungraceful landing.

O'Malley watched the craft taxi close inshore. Teek, Pogi, and the Japanese pilot clambered out of the hatch in the top of the cabin, together with the Chinese.

Of Stearman Talbot, there was no sign. Apparently they had dropped the man somewhere over the border, knowing he would make every effort to ransom his daughter. Whether the banker, blindfolded, had collected enough information to lead a rescue party was unpleasantly problematical.

Pogi stumbled up the slanting beach, clutching at his injured arm, and stood over the prisoners, gloating. Several times he kicked the flyer in the stomach with his bare foot.

The albino listened intently to an excited, gesturing Chinaman, the same who had beheaded the unfortunate guard, then glared in the direction of the two prisoners. He began to curse, a steady, withering flow of Kwangtungese.

Then he ran across the sand, tugging at one of the automatics with which his sash bristled.

Watching him, O'Malley knew he was very near death.

But the injured Pogi bounded forward, caught his arm, spoke swiftly in the lingo, pleading eagerly. The albino's attitude slowly altered.

"Okay, Pogi," Power O'Malley heard him say in English, "But be damn' sure you fix it so there'll be no slip!"

"Pliss—no slip!" hissed the Jap. "Nothing go wrong when it run such small way!"

Teek came and looked down at O'Malley, idly kicking hot sand in the flyer's eyes.

"I'll hand it to Pogi," he grinned. "He's got a new idea. You and the damn' twist killed six of my best yellow boys, and laid up that many more. You'll both pay for that. To hell with the ransom!"

The flyer held his tongue; watched the pirate chief make his way along the beach, yelling orders; a grotesque, swashbuckling figure, fit to grace the pages of a tome of medieval buccaneering.

"Dad may get planes together and reach us in time," the girl suggested hopefully.

"There's a chance," the flyer admitted, forcing a ring of cheerfulness. There was another matter on his mind. He decided not to mention it. It was of little consequence—now.

TEEK entered a dory, was carried out to the submarine. Four other dories followed him, emptied their yellow-skinned passengers into the underseas boat. Without delay, the hatches closed and the sub slid into the Pacific, the swell breaking over the barnacle covered superstructure in spume-capped sheets.

Pogi strode toward them, a half dozen Chinese at his heels. They picked up the red-headed girl and the flyer, carried them to the water's edge.

Other pirates rowed out to the single-motored plane, which had been towed back to its mooring buoy, bent a line around the tubing of the undercarriage, and hauled the craft to the beach.

Beneath the fuselage hung the torpedo, silver except for the red-tipped war head, the shining blades of diving and steering rudders, and the oblique knives of the two sets of propellers.

Pogi slashed O'Malley's bounds with his razor-edged *kris*. The flyer writhed about helplessly. His limbs were paralyzed, shot through with a thousand needles as the congested blood began to stir.

A Chinese ran from one of the adobe huts, a quilted sleeping mat in his arms. The flyer was picked up, borne into the water, toward the plane.

An instant later, realization of their intent penetrated his tortured brain.

They lashed him to the torpedo that was slung under the fuselage of the plane.

They made a painstaking job of it. The operation required all of a half-hour. To guard against the possibility of his body overcoming the gyroscope-controlled rudders of the torpedo, they bound the quilted sleeping mat on the opposite side of the metal cylinder where it would partially equalize the head resistance.

At last Pogi, who had gleefully superintended the process, stepped back and began to hiss.

"You have two, three hours for think over different things," he informed them sibilantly. "When we sink ship, you have little bath. Then, *plunk!* You pay well kill my honorable brother. Cap'n Teek very generous let me torpedo ship from plane instead of from submarine like usually do. Plane only use for emergency.

"The white missy—you two like each other, no? She be in plane to watch you make faces and squeal. She see you die in many pieces. Then—she may be let go when ransom comes, but also maybe not."

He wound up his long speech, barked an order in the dialect.

The Chinese picked up the bound form of Donna Talbot, carried her up the beach and deposited her in the adobe prison. They were taking no chances on her dying in the hot sun.

## CHAPTER VI WAITING FOR DEATH

**T**HREE TIMES O'MALLEY WENT into unconsciousness during the hours which followed. Strangely, when his senses returned, he felt refreshed, as if he had been napping. His arms, bloated around the tightly drawn cords, became mercifully numb, insensible to feeling.

A Chinaman leaned in the open door of the adobe hut near the girl, watching alertly. Two more of the yellow fiends lounged in the vicinity.

Sleepy tranquility lay over the bay like a blanket. Aboard the junk of the emerald serpent, a dozen yellow figures stretched out in the shade of the matting sail.

Pogi crouched on his haunches in the shade of an adobe, watching O'Malley's bound form with a gaze which never wavered.

At last the Japanese glanced at a watch, arose, and barked an order. Donna Talbot was brought out of the adobe hut, her ankles and wrists were freed, and she was carried down the beach.

O'Malley caught a glimpse of the girl's face as she was tumbled roughly into the cabin. Her eyes were full

of horror. He tried to force words around his swollen tongue and failed.

Pogi inspected and tested the ropes which held the flyer tight against the greasy steel cylinder of death. Then he climbed into the plane in the wake of the pilot.

Watching, Power saw the pilot swing out against the streamlined wing brace and turn a valve at the wing tank—the valve which had been their undoing. The inertia starter whined shrilly and the motor broke into life.

A half-naked Chinese cast off the mooring line and the plane gathered momentum.

O'Malley gritted his teeth savagely. A new peril presented itself—the possibility that the plane might crack up.

With the three in the cockpit and the unwieldy weight of the burdened torpedo under the fuselage, the plane was greatly overloaded.

To Power himself, it made little difference when the thing exploded. His chances of escape were practically nil. But for the girl, there might be hope.

Sheets of water beat against his be-numbed body with the driving force of bullets. In the course of a few seconds he was bruised and bleeding. The leg of his laced trousers on the side next the water ripped. Brine clutched at his eye sockets, poured in torrents into his nostrils, down his throat. He began to strangle. Then the watery bombardment stopped suddenly.

The Japanese pilot held the plane within a dozen feet of the surface, tenderly nursing his flying speed.

Then they encountered the smoother, brisker sweep of the Pacific ocean current. The monoplane lifted sluggishly. O'Malley twisted his head and looked upward.

Pogi's close-cropped dome protruded through a cabin window, an ugly grin distorting his thin lips.

Power returned the look, wondering if he would be killed instantly when the torpedo was launched. The more he considered it, the more likely it seemed that he would escape the last drowning minutes as the cylinder sped toward the doomed steamer. Heavily laden though the plane was, her minimum air speed would be at least sixty miles an hour. A drop into the sea at that speed would kill him instantly—at least knock him out.

As the plane crept to a higher altitude, the slipstream screaming past his ears cooled. It exerted a reviving influence which was probably all that kept him from oblivion. As it was, he existed in a coma that was unreal and infinitely horrible.

IN SOMETHING less than an hour they arrived at the scene of the looting. They were a little late. The steamer was hove to. It was a large vessel. Many passenger cabins were evident from the craft's construction.

A short distance off, the cadaverous hulk of the submarine was lying awash in the dirty swell.

Straining his bleared eyes, O'Malley saw a small crowd of passengers on the rear deck. Guarding them were the tiny, gnat-like figures of the yellow pirates.

The steamer had plainly put up a fight. Her bridge was a maze of twisted steel and shattered timbers. One funnel had a pronounced cant toward the port rail.

As the monoplane spiraled downward, O'Malley discovered a half dozen bodies sprawled in darkening patches of crimson on the decks. It was fewer than he had expected.

Two small boats were plying back and forth between the captured steamer and the submarine. The huge, strangely white figure of Teek was visible, directing the looting. As the monoplane roared over the masts of the steamer, the giant form loomed monstrous among the wiry, short-statured cutthroats.

There was a rush of frenzied activity, while the small boats made two trips, each time crowded with pirates instead of loot.

Then, from the manner in which the huddled passengers and crew of the steamer broke and scuttled wildly about on the vessel's deck, O'Malley knew the last of the yellow men were off. The last of the loot had been transferred.

From the dripping superstructure of the submarine, the albino waved his gaudy sash. The plane banked, went into a dive.

An instant later O'Malley saw he was to be denied the solace of unconsciousness when the torpedo exploded. The Japanese pilot was going to launch the missile from the surface.

The duraluminum floats struck with a repetition of the blinding, smashing sheets of spray. The salt water ate into his raw flesh with an intolerable agony. The slimy gray shape of the submarine flashed past.

Power O'Malley had a fleeting view of Pogi's leering mask above him.

From somewhere behind him came a shrill squeal, the metallic whine of speeding machinery. The torpedo shuddered, dropped.

There was a terrific shock as the heavy metal cylinder struck the water.

AIR screamed between O'Malley's teeth. The speed of the plane was about thirty miles an hour. The torpedo dug beneath the surface instantly. Seconds dragged into interminably long hours. The flyer did not lose consciousness. Beneath his body, he could hear the throb of the powerful compressed air motor and the scream of the exhaust.

Then, unexpectedly, he bobbed out into the blinding rays of the afternoon sun!

The noise of the compressed air motor and the exhaust had died. The metal cylinder floated sluggishly, slowly sloughed to a standstill.

Power O'Malley flashed into activity, suddenly aware his lashings had shifted.

The impact had forced his body backward where the greased cylinder tapered off into rudders and driving propellers.

Some part of his clothing had brushed the trip lever which controlled the flow of compressed air to the motor.

Half strangled, Power O'Malley felt his cramped body come free. He worked furiously. A plan had entered his brain.

The fiber cords about his wrists, stiff and unwieldy, fell away.

A little geyser of spray erupted a double arm-length away. A report, sharp, spiteful, beat against his eardrums, still roaring with the force with which he had struck the water.

He looked up. The plane had taxied about, was at rest a short distance from the submarine.

Pogi and the Japanese pilot had crawled through the door in the top of the plane's cabin. They were on a wing, firing wildly with automatics.

On the submarine, Teek and his yellow-skinned followers danced about, yelling and gesticulating. Some began to fire with rifles.

O'Malley fought with the cords which held his ankles to the deadly metal cylinder. At such range, it would be a matter of seconds until the pirates scored a hit.

Like blobs of inanimate lead, his legs came free. Swinging his arms like ponderous clubs, he pushed the slender torpedo around in the heaving, mountainous swell.

Hours passed, it seemed, before he had the deadly war head centered on the broadside of the pirate submarine.

Bullets were striking in a steady hail. The surface was a vortex of white foam.

Power O'Malley jammed the tripping lever open. Then he hurled himself away from the flashing blades.

## CHAPTER VII GREEN DEPTHS

**T**HE DEADLY SILVER CYLINDER got under way with the speed of a racing whippet. For the first few yards the propellers pitched spray high into the hot sunlight, then the diving rudders carried the death missile beneath the surface.

In the face of the approaching line of bubbles, wild consternation seized the yellow men on the submarine. Orders rang out, loud and excited, couched in frenzied Kwangtungese. There was no panic. Pirates the fellows might be, but they were fighting men as well.

From the plane and the deck of the underseas craft poured a steady, crashing roar of rifle and pistol fire in hopes of exploding the charge before it reached its target.

A column of water suddenly erupted two hundred feet into the air. Shattered steel, bits of human bodies, and twisted weapons mingled with the flood that poured back on the surface of the Pacific.

The slimy steel hulk of the submarine leaped upward, parted in the middle, and the bow and stern came together like a pair of gigantic shears.

The plane heeled over under the blast until one wingtip touched the sea. Then slowly, almost reluctantly, it righted itself. Pogi and the Japanese pilot were overboard, floundering in the foaming water.

The motor had been idling. Its throbbing tremolo mounted into a roar. The plane moved, gathering speed, weaving crazily across the sea toward O'Malley.

The exhaust dropped to a mutter as the craft came up. Through the cabin windows, Power could see the redheaded girl at the controls.

"Can you climb aboard?" she demanded. "I'm all in!"

Still bound tightly, she had hobbled forward, had opened the throttle, and was handling the rudder bar by a combination that would have shamed a contortionist.

"The silver they got off the steamer is gone," O'Malley told her impersonally as he climbed inside and worked at her bonds. "But the passengers are safe enough. And the steamer itself is probably worth more than the silver that sank."

The girl's wrists came free. She swayed weakly. Suddenly she was inside his arms. Sobs of relief wracked her slender form. Her embrace tightened.

"It's over!" she choked repeatedly. O'Malley shifted uncomfortably and did not return the embrace.

Abruptly the red-head straightened, disengaged herself, and rubbed her bloodshot eyes. Then she smiled up into his embarrassed features.

"The boy friend in Los Angeles," she said evasively, "would raise the devil if he knew that. My nerves went haywire. You won't misunderstand?"

"Not me!" the flyer grinned. "Your dad would run me ragged. He happens to own Camex Airways—the outfit I went to work for yesterday. Besides—I married a blonde two weeks ago!"

The red-headed girl laughed heartily.

"I thought there was a catch in it!" she said. "And you may not lose your job. They were asking a half million ransom. What next?"

O'Malley considered.

"Here comes a boat," he grunted. "You go aboard the steamer and explain things. I'll hop to a Coast Guard station above the border in the plane and notify your dad. Don't let 'em wireless from the steamer. Those pirates probably have that junk equipped with a set. We'll clean out that nest of yellow devils before they have a suspicion their albino ogre of a leader has kicked off!"