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Novelette of the Future
By **RAY CUMMINGS**





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An American Soldier of Fortune Plunges into the



Her slim hand snaked out and grabbed

*A Complete
Book-Length
Novel*

BLOOD *of*

CHAPTER I

Soldier of Fortune

FRANK DUGAN stole his way through the darkness that brooded over the street of the Sleeping Dragon. His eyes searched

the shadows intently; his fingers gripped tightly the automatic in the side pocket of his coat.

The silence was ominous, made all the more so by the weird sounds that came from various other parts of Mukden, where Japan was mopping

At the Coronation of Pu-Yi, All Watched with

Midst of International Intrigue and Furious Battle!



the weapon from the struggling man

the Dragon

By ARTHUR
J. BURKS

*Author
of "Bare Fists," etc.*

up on suspected enemies. Now and again Dugan heard the spanging report of rifles through the darkness, and the thin answering scream of men whose bodies met the leaden slugs of death.

His face was very grim. Japan,

under cover of darkness, could shoot with impunity, blaming the blackness of the night if her slayings destroyed someone whose death might become an "international incident."

Dugan moved on swiftly. It was ten o'clock at night and he had been

Bated Breath—For What World-Shaking Horror?



Frank Dugan

over an hour reaching this dismal street where he was to meet Sung Sing, leader of the *hung hu tze*. Ahead, he saw a red Chinese lantern hanging above a long black blotch which he realized was an open doorway. It was the signal that was to guide the tall soldier of fortune to the meeting place where he was to find the Chinese leader.

Dugan was known throughout the Far East as an intrepid adventurer; and Sung Sing had sent one of his trusted aides to engage the American to take part in a dangerous mission. Dugan had accepted; and the five thousand dollars he had been paid in advance was in a money belt around his waist now. The exact nature of the mission he was to learn from Sung Sing, when he met him in Mukden.

Dugan reached the open door of the house of the red lantern. He peered in and discovered that beyond was thick darkness. There was no sound, nothing to indicate a living presence. He drew out his gun, hesitated for an instant and then stepped silently ahead through the door. He had taken a few steps forward when he paused, as his foot touched something soft on the floor. Carefully

he drew a tiny flashlight from his pocket.

The white disc of light gleamed upon a dead man. It was a Chinese. Bayonets had ripped his body to shreds.

Dugan's heart hammered with excitement. This, he realized, explained why there was no one at the designated secret meeting place. Evidently the rendezvous had been discovered by the Japanese. Whether Sung Sing and his followers had been captured or had escaped was a question that he could not attempt to answer.

He swung around as he heard a slight sound behind him. The light in his hand gleamed upon a yellow face in which dark eyes glittered malignantly, upon an upraised hand. A knife swished through the air—and as it did so Dugan leaped to one side. The hand that held the automatic flashed down, caught the Japanese a hard blow on the head with the heavy barrel.

Dugan did not dare fire the gun. There was no way of telling how many others might have entered the street of the Sleeping Dragon with the Japanese. The man dropped to the floor of the room as the automatic crashed down again.

DUGAN turned the beam of light on the still figure. He was sure that this man had followed him; it was possible there were others who knew that he was in Mukden. But he had come here to meet Sung Sing—that he make some contact with the leader of the *hung hu tze* was vital.

Swiftly Dugan left the house. He hurried back toward the far end of the street, moving as silently as possible through the darkness. Then, abruptly, he paused and ducked back into the shadows as he heard the pattering of running feet.

He waited tensely, his automatic ready. An instant later a tall figure

loomed against the lighter grey that was the entrance to the dismal street. Dugan uttered a startled exclamation as he realized it was a white man who approached.

The new arrival drew closer and Dugan stepped out of the shadows. "Wait!" he said sharply.

The man came to a slithering stop as he recognized an American voice.

"Who are you?" he panted.

"Frank Dugan. You?"

"John Hogarth." The voice was that of an Englishman. "We'd better get out of here. The Japanese were after me."

"Why?" asked Dugan tersely.

"I'm Lewis Paine's secretary. The Japanese suspected Mr. Paine of selling arms and ammunition to the Chinese. He is—he was the head of a big munitions company."

"They got him, then?" demanded Dugan.

"Yes, broke into his house tonight. Shot him and ripped the place to pieces with bayonets. It was horrible—ghastly! I managed to escape with Paine's daughter before she actually knew what had happened." The customary reticences among strangers were forgotten in this situation of terror, where all white men became allies. Instinctively, the two men trusted each other.

"WHERE is she now?"

"Hidden on the outskirts of the town. But we'll have to get away from here as soon as possible." Hogarth peered at Dugan. "What are you doing here?"

"Ever hear of Sung Sing?" asked Dugan.

"Of course." Hogarth listened for a moment—there was no sound of pursuit. "One hears whispers of his being a man of destiny who hopes to reestablish the old Empire in China."

"Well, I came here to meet him," said Dugan. "When I reached the



Sung Sing

place, I found no one there but a dead Chinaman."

"And now what?" asked Hogarth.

"I've got to try and find Sung Sing," said Dugan quietly. He thought rapidly for a moment. "Meanwhile, you had better get the girl. I'll meet you two miles below Yamato Station, toward Hsin Min."

"Right." Hogarth swung around and soon disappeared.

Dugan stood for an instant watching and listening. Far in the distance, the sound of rifle fire continued. He advanced slowly toward the intersecting street. Just as he reached it, his foot struck a block of wood and he tripped, falling forward on his face.

The fall saved his life, for a rifle whanged from somewhere across the street. He saw the flame of it, heard the bullet thud into the wall of a building behind him.

He was up on his feet, running, in not more than a second. He plunged back down the dark length of the Street of the Sleeping Dragon. It was useless to try and find some further trace of Sung Sing now. The Japanese were too hot on Dugan's trail.

The Chinese leader's orders had

*Eliza Paine*

been for Dugan to attend the coronation of Pu Yi at Hsinking without fail, there to await further orders if he were unable to contact Sung Sing in Mukden! The tone of the communication had left no doubt as to the importance.

Dugan had to get to Hsinking, and perhaps, at the same time, he might be able to assist John Hogarth in getting the girl a place of comparative safety. He dashed on, then slowed his pace as he glided silently in among the shadows at the far end of the street.

CHAPTER II

Pursuit

A BUGLE blared behind him. Dugan grinned and increased his pace. The Japanese, who occupied Mukden as a military unit, in their war against China, were tipping their hands that they were after him. They had no intention of allowing him to live to report their activities. Moreover, his connection with Sung Sing had undoubtedly been brought to their attention.

Then a strange sound came from directly ahead.

It was the eerie, plaintive wailing

of a Chinese flute. Instantly Dugan's memory revived tales he had heard, of how certain Chinese could communicate messages by means of the flute of five notes. No foreigner could understand how, and but few Chinese, for to learn the code one must be an expert in the Chinese classics. Dugan didn't understand why, but there it was. Some day, for the fun of it, he meant to find out. He supposed that the Book of Changes held some sort of key to the plaintive sounds of the musical instrument.

THAT the flute was indeed a signal was proved the next instant when another flute answered, over to the left. The flutists might be potential friends to him, but Dugan couldn't be sure of that. It was very possible that Sung Sing might have some such method of communicating with his agents, secure in the knowledge that the Japanese wouldn't understand. But the Yank had no way of verifying his guess. The players might well be Manchukuoans, loyal to Japan.

He dashed on, hearing the pursuit gather behind him, get under way. He spared a second for thought of Hogarth, wondering if the Britisher would get through.

The bugle was answered from dead ahead, then from the left, then from the right, proof to Dugan that he was being hemmed in. He gritted his teeth, went forward. But now he carried his automatic in his hand, its muzzle to the fore. Sudden rain splashed in his face.

The bugle shrilled nearer.

There came the sound of heavy feet, soldiers' feet, he knew, slogging through the mud. Commands in the Japanese tongue rang through the night. He could hear frightened words from the interior of the black huts among which he passed. The natives in this strife-torn district

must by now have forgotten how to sleep.

He veered to the left to miss contacting what he guessed by the sound to be a Japanese patrol. Then he darted back on his original bearing.

There was a high white house to his left. He remembered that the Consul-General had pointed it out to him just after his arrival. It was the home of the late Chang Tso-lin, now unoccupied, directly south of Yamato Station.

A light glowed at the gate of the house's compound for a moment, then blinked out, drenched by the rain.

Dugan bore more to the right. At a dead run he crossed a broad thoroughfare, now absolutely deserted, though usually crowded with rickshas, droskies, bull carts and automobiles—and vanished again among the shacks. But a hail of bullets hammered at him just as he disappeared. Had he had ten paces further to go they surely would have got him.

Shrieks rose from the shacks on either side of the path he had left. He wondered how many innocent Chinese the bullets had accounted for—those shacks were paper-thin.

HE increased his stride. He was breathing easily, felt queerly light and eager. He was tempted to turn back, try conclusions with the patrols. But reason decided against such a foolhardy proceeding, urged him ahead.

A bugle blared almost in his face as he rounded a corner and ran squarely into four men. They were Japanese, by the shape and size of them, and he caught the vagrant gleam of light on cold steel. With sullen bayonets they waited to receive him, but Dugan knew his bayonet stuff. He had taught it during the Great War. He didn't even pause.



John Hogarth

He hurled himself forward.

A bayonet lunged at him. The attacker made no sound, save that which his heavy feet drew from the mud. The weapon was aimed at Dugan's throat. He shot his right hand across his own body, striking its palm against the steel blade, deflecting the aim so that the savage point slipped past his left side. The impetus of the attacker carried him directly against Dugan, who struck twice with savage surety, with the muzzle of the automatic, to make sure.

Each blow crashed home with telling force to the skull of his attacker.

The Japanese went down.

Dugan whirled. The other two Japanese were attacking from either side. Ten paces away the bugler was fleeing, blowing his bugle frantically as he ran, calling for help.

Dugan stopped suddenly.

THE two Japanese, estimating his forward speed instinctively, had aimed to catch him as he passed between them. Dugan could have shot them then as they stood, but the spanking bark of the automatic would have revealed his position in the darkness. The men almost drove

their bayonets into each other, but realized their blunder in time and halted the reflex motions.

Then they realized nothing whatever, for the pistol butt struck twice again—and struck with all the force at Dugan's command. The Japanese fell against each other, their deflected bayonets driven deeply into the mud. As they crashed forward, the two rifles quivered upright on the tips.

Dugan considered for a brief moment. Then he quickly slung the two rifles over his shoulder, so that they were behind him, and only their weight was against him.

The shouts of the pursuers were now very close.

Dugan grinned to himself. He knew well that what he had just done would be an excellent excuse in any international chancery to explain his death, despite his American papers. But he didn't plan to lose sleep over that. He must get on. Putting the rifles into position, he took up the trail again.

HOUSES were scarcer now, proof that he was approaching the edge of the city. Once out in the open, the Japanese would have an excellent opportunity of downing him with bullets. But he had to take that risk. He didn't hesitate.

Dugan was enjoying himself hugely. He had at least an equal chance with his pursuers. They were so many he could hear them without trouble, and the sounds they couldn't help making drowned out from their ears any he might have made.

The set-up, to a born adventurer, was perfect. Endless excitement was certain.

He ran out into the open, zigzagging. Pursuit was still among the houses. Then he stumbled, fell headlong.

He rolled into a deep gully. Its

bottom, when he reached it finally, was a seething, raging torrent. Water was up to his hips when he struggled to his feet, dripping, cursing ruefully.

DUGAN considered for a moment. The Japanese, when they reached this spot, would believe he had managed somehow to float downstream. Instead, therefore, he turned and sloshed his way upstream, walking swiftly, keeping within the edge of the stream to hide his footprints. He must inspect the rifles and his automatic, he realized, dry them at the first opportunity. But now the important thing was to get clear away.

He rounded a bend in the gully just as the Japanese reached the place where he had gone in. They stopped, stared intently about. Dugan almost held his breath as he stood with water swirling about his hips, keeping motionless so as not to betray his whereabouts.

Sing-song commands rattled out. The Japanese started downstream. Dugan waited silently to see if anyone had been ordered upstream on the off chance he had gone that way; his keen eyes watched the skyline for the first warning shape of his enemies.

Five minutes passed and they did not appear. Their shouts had almost died away with distance — downstream.

He waded across the stream, the swirling water rushing to his armpits in the center and almost sucking him under. With difficulty he clambered out on the opposite bank, soaked to the skin, with water cascading from his clothes and sloshing about in his shoes.

Then, satisfied that he was safe for the time being at least, he started forward, bearing to his right to contact the Peking-Mukden line.

He was aided in this by the lights

of a train pulling into Yamato Station from the direction of Hsin Min. All he had to do was keep going straight ahead. The lights of the station were a beacon to show him approximately where he would strike the tracks.

But never once did he grow careless. His eyes were keenly alert to everything against the sky, his ears kept for every sound.

At the end of an exhausting hour he reached the railroad embankment. Panting, he flung himself down. Finally he heard furtive sounds, mere shreds of voices.

One was the voice of a man, the other that of a girl!

CHAPTER III

High Speed



"HOGARTH!" hissed Dugan guardedly. His automatic was to the fore, ready to spit bullets—if it would fire after its immersion—at the slightest suspicious move-

ment from those voices he heard.

Someone gasped.

"Dugan?"

"Yes," said Dugan with relief, recognizing the voice of the Englishman. "This way!"

Two people approached him while he watched warily. A man's spare figure, taller than that of Dugan himself, appeared first through the rainy murk. A hand came out, grasped that of Dugan. Hogarth exclaimed at the cold touch of the automatic. The second figure, slipping and sliding in the mud, materialized like an apparition beside Hogarth.

The Englishman spoke meaningly.

"This is Ellen Paine, Dugan. I'm making myself responsible for her to her father until we can rejoin him. I've told her that we may not

contact him again this side of Peking. Ellen knows that he simply could not get back to her, that he trusts me implicitly."

DUGAN recognized the warning in Hogarth's tones. The Britisher had not told the girl of her father's brutal slaying. Dugan swore under his breath. His own way would have been to tell her at once and get a harsh duty over with. But perhaps this was best.

The girl would be buoyed up by anticipation if she did not know the truth—anticipation that she would soon rejoin her father.

Dugan considered her white face, the brown curls showing under the light cap she wore. He wasn't sure, but he diagnosed her as twenty-two years of age. He put his automatic into his belt to take her hand. It was warm to his touch in spite of the rain.

"I'm a little afraid," she smiled wanly, but her tone was steady, "that Mr. Hogarth isn't telling me the truth. Something inside me tells me that dad has been hurt. There have been whispers against him, stories that he sides with Russia, against Japan. But I'm believing because Mr. Hogarth wants me to believe, and because I have to if I'm to remain sane."

Dugan grunted.

"We'll have to keep moving," he said shortly, "toward Hsin Min. If we travel at top speed we should make it before morning and get a train out."

He had instantly resolved to get the girl into China proper before going on with his work. To see her safely out of this became a wordless agreement between Hogarth and himself.

Dugan led the way at a rapid walk. On the tracks they stepped briskly along toward Hsin Min, feeling in the dark for the ties. The girl did



Men with bayonets strode grimly

not complain, but her breathing was labored within the first half hour.

Dugan hardened his heart to sympathy. If she were allowed to rest, or if the little expedition slowed down to accommodate her, their chances would be nullified. They might all be killed, or be discovered far from any cover when day broke over Manchukuo. And the girl understood, for she offered no protest. Steadily she walked, head high, between Hogarth and Dugan.

After an hour had passed, her small hand clutched forward at the American's sleeve. She was making a game fight. Dugan swore that he hadn't thought to offer her the aid of his hand. But he had had so many things to think about. He spoke tersely over his shoulder to Hogarth.

"Got any money?"

"About a thousand pounds, I should say."

"Good. Bribery is often effective in the Orient."

THEY had definitely dropped Mukden behind them, but Hsin Min, just as dangerous, still seemed far away as the moon. They seemed to be making almost no progress at all, though they were traveling as rapidly with the girl as they would have been able to travel without her.

Dugan found he couldn't blame her for their seeming snail-like pace. But he lengthened his stride a little, nevertheless.

Her hand tightened on his sleeve, her only hint that she had discovered his increase in pace.

"I say, Dugan," protested Hogarth, "can't we slow down a bit? The young woman, you know."

"They're after me, and probably you, too, by now," said Dugan brutally. "We can't waste time. She'll have to stand up under it."

"But maybe she won't be able to."

"Then we'll take turns carrying

her, Hogarth. We've got to travel."

"Don't worry about me," said the girl spiritedly. "I can keep up as long as you can."

There was high courage, determination, in her voice. Something clutched at Dugan's heart as he caught that note. This girl was a thoroughbred. And as hour succeeded hour he allowed himself to think tall thoughts—of the sort of a woman who would tie up with a man who went to the ends of the earth to stick his nose into deadly dangers. And somehow his picture of such a woman fitted the girl who clung to his sleeve and fought her way over the ties.

IT must have been close to four o'clock in the morning when they made out the river between Mukden and Hsin Min, and walked unhesitatingly out onto the trestle. Now they were excellent targets for marksmen—and the Japanese would certainly be guarding this bridge. But they could never cross the river otherwise.

It must be done!

Dugan could scarcely believe it when they reached the other side safely. Then, as one, they swung down to the right and crouched under the embankment, as voices came to them through the murk. Japanese patrols were coming toward the bridge!

Five minutes more on the trestle and they would certainly have been challenged. Dugan let his breath out explosively, then caught and held it when the girl's hand clasped his arm convulsively. He patted the hand, then raged at himself for the display of sympathy.

The Japanese patrol slogged past. Dugan finally whispered the word to continue.

They kept below the embankment until they reached the first houses in the large city of Hsin Min. From



There was the glint of a knife

ahead there drifted back to them the clamor of whistles and shrill, protesting bells of locomotives.

Dugan began to shape the plan in his mind. With money, the thing could be worked.

They skirted the main part of the town through which the railroad passed, and came out beyond the station. Then Dugan drew his two companions close.

"We've got to get out and get through to Shanhaikwan, Hogarth," he said. "We might wait here forever for a train. I've got a hunch. That train, on the main track, is headed for China. We'll get to it somehow, uncouple the locomotive and tender, then take possession of the locomotive. We'll highball out. If we get caught—well, we'll have to risk it. And there's the chance, too, we might meet another train. What do you think?"

"A train pulls into Manchukuo from China about two hours from now," objected Hogarth promptly, "unless the Japanese have drastically changed the schedules, which doesn't seem likely on account of disputes over the railroad. We're bound to meet that train, even if we get away with your plan. It won't do us any good!"

"**B**UT it will at least put us a big distance on our way," Dugan brushed aside the thought of danger. "The only way they can stop us is by pursuit, or by blowing up the track ahead of us. When we meet the other train, we'll start the locomotive backing up, jump off, and proceed from there the best way we know how. Let's go!"

The girl did not demur, nor did Hogarth protest further.

Dugan again led the way, keeping the train between themselves and the lights beyond the station. They reached the train, followed along its length toward the locomotive. Be-

hind the tender, Dugan fiddled noiselessly with the coupling for a moment, came back to whisper to Hogarth:

"All set. Be ready for anything. When we start out, there'll be hell to pay!"

THE Britisher chuckled. The girl gasped. Dugan's eyes were glowing with excitement in the darkness—which hadn't yet lifted or been free of the endless downpouring of rain. They stood under the cab. Beyond the areaway the Chinese engineer and fireman were standing in the cab door, looking back as though awaiting signals.

Dugan went into the caboose with a leap. He had taken Hogarth's automatic, and now two muzzles pushed hard against the backs of the Chinese. He spoke softly to them in Mandarin.

"Turn around slowly, my friends," he hissed. "And if you make a noise, I'll kill both of you instantly."

The men froze. They hesitated for a heartbreaking moment, and Dugan, knowing the usual Oriental indifference to death, was afraid that one or both of them might cry out a warning. He hastened to add a word to which every Chinese reacted as fish to tasty bait:

"*Cumshaw!*"

The word meant, in effect, bribery, and told the men that there was money in it for them if they obeyed orders without question. Slowly they turned. Their bland yellow faces stared into the eyes of Dugan, looked from him to Hogarth and the girl.

If they were surprised or taken aback, there was no way of telling by their expressions.

"One thousand gold dollars to each of you if you get us to Shanhaikwan," said Dugan. "You're already uncoupled. All you have to do is start going."

The Chinese exchanged glances, which still held no meaning for Dugan, but must have indicated something to them. Hogarth, since both of Dugan's hands were occupied, showed them some money in his hands. They moved quickly then, taking their places in the cab.

The cab's wheels squealed as the throttle was opened and the engine sought for traction under the spinning of her huge drivers. The locomotive began to move, gathered headway. Shouts came from behind them. Bullets began to hammer into the cab.

The Chinese knew they were taking chances, but they didn't even look around. On a thousand gold dollars a Chinese coolie could be a potentate for the rest of his life, and his family could live in comparative luxury.

These two would figure out later how to get their families into China proper.

The locomotive gathered speed. Dugan looked back. Another locomotive was being switched onto the main line. Then Hsin Min was lost in the murk behind them. The cab was rolling and rocking from side to side as the speed increased to terrific proportions.

DUGAN led the girl into the tender. He took off his coat and made a seat for her on the coal, out of the fireman's way. Hogarth stood watch in the cab, with one of the automatics in his right hand.

The locomotive seemed literally to jump ahead. Dugan, looking out of the cab, first on one side, then the other, watched for signs of obstructions ahead. But nothing met his gaze except a wall of rain, and the smooth track stretching before them.

It was five in the morning. Their speed was now suicidal, but Frank Dugan grinned contentedly.

CHAPTER IV

Capture



SATISFIED at the moment that everything was running smoothly, Dugan dropped back and spoke frankly to Hogarth.

"All right, Hogarth, dish the dirt.

Frankly, I'm a soldier of fortune engaged by Sung Sing on a special mission. I'm not going to give you the details of that mission, for I won't know all about them myself until I finally reach my boss. But I do know that it is vital for me to be present at the coronation of Pu Yi. How long have you been out here?"

"Five years," said Hogarth.

"Then you know a lot of what's going on. Spill it!"

"Well, Manchukuo is a hotbed of trouble. If there is a war in the offing, it will start here, surely. Everything is for it, nothing against it, and military Japan wants war. She doesn't care much with whom. Now, the whole world knows that Pu Yi is soon to be crowned Emperor of Manchukuo."

"No doubt of that," said Dugan. "Go on."

"Almost anything may happen at that ceremony," said Hogarth. "I mean at the ceremony of coronation. Japan is guarding the Emperor as though he were their own ruler, and he may be just that. They're taking every conceivable precaution against assassination."

"Why?"

"The answer seems fairly obvious, doesn't it? They don't want him killed."

"Is there a chance an attempt will be made?" Dugan knew that there was such a chance, was more than half certain that was why Sung Sing

wanted him at the coronation, but he wanted to learn all he could from Hogarth.

"There's always that possibility when a government changes," the Englishman said. "Japan is taking no chances."

"Well, who would wish to kill him?"

"The Chinese, for one thing. They deposed him in 1912 because they didn't want the Empire any longer, and they aren't fooled now. If he becomes Emperor of Manchukuo, and Japan decides to step into China and take over, China will be right back where she was in 1912. With a Manchu Emperor. Pu Yi has plenty of enemies."

"But if China killed him, Japan would make drastic reprisals."

Hogarth paused for a moment in thought.

"You're overlooking something," he said with a warning glance at the engineer and fireman. "One can't tell coolie from *tuchun* these days. Even this cab may have ears that comprehend English. If China assassinates Pu Yi, you may rest assured that China will not shoulder the blame."

Hogarth left it there for Dugan to draw his own conclusions. Dugan's mind raced over the possibilities.

"**T**HEN, Russia is watching every move Japan makes with anxious eyes," went on Hogarth. "If Japan establishes her empire, her next step may be one of aggression in Siberia. If Pu Yi dies, that will be delayed. There'll be an uprising to put down, which will make for delays that will give Russia time to prepare. China will be against Russia, too, and may thwart that attempt if possible."

"Why?"

"China no more wishes to bend her neck under the Russian yoke than the yoke of Japan. If Russia finds an excuse to move in, China

will become one of the Soviet Republics; a province at a time, perhaps, but inevitably the result will be the Russianizing of all China. White Russian exiles in China would not care for that, for most of them would face certain execution."

"So far, so good. Any reason why White Russians might wish to assassinate Pu Yi?"

"Yes. Fanatics might pretend to be Soviet Russians, do the assassination, and force Japan into a war with Russia—all this in the hope that Japan would win and a new Czar set up over all the Russians under Japanese guidance."

"**S**UPPOSE," Dugan said slowly, "that Japan for all her desire to make Pu Yi emperor, should herself conspire behind the scenes to assassinate him in such a way as to lay the blame on China, in order to have an excuse to advance into the Middle Kingdom; or on Russia in order to spread the other way toward Vladivostok; or in order, in some way, to force war with the United States?"

"All I can say to that," said Hogarth, "is that Japan vigorously denied all evil intentions toward China, even while they were bombarding Chapei and advancing inside the wall at Shanhaikwan and Jehol. One never knows what they'll do."

Dugan was silent for a moment. He knew that in the turbulent maelstrom which hung over the Far East the name of Sung Sing was whispered, by those who understood the chaotic conditions, as "man of destiny." There was Manchu blood in his veins, and he dreamed of re-establishing the old Empire. Sung Sing would be sure that Pu Yi was not assassinated.

Dugan turned to enter the tender to see how the girl was getting along. As though his turning had been a signal, a frightful scream came from her lips. Hogarth in-

stantly covered the engineer and fireman again. Dugan leaped past him to the tender.

A huge Chinese was just coming down over the coal, leaping toward the girl. His right hand, lifted high, held a knife with a curved blade. His face in the murk was ghastly.

Dugan took in the tableau instantly, knew how it had happened. This man had somehow noted what had happened back at Hsin Min and had grabbed the tender as it pulled out.

He was a big man, palpably a native of Manchuria, where they grow them big. He had watched his opportunity and now was prepared to strike a blow for Japan—and the Empire of Manchukuo. He had planned to slay the girl, get past her to the cab, then get the two men. Only her turning, her frightened scream, had tripped the would-be killer up.

Dugan's automatic spat flame and bullets. The lead ripped and tore at the brawny bare chest of the Chinese. The man's mouth went ludicrously open. His knife clattered into the coal, which slid back and forth in a strange black ferment with the wild motion of the tender. The Chinese fell on his face and slid down in a huddled heap, almost at the feet of the girl.

DUGAN jumped past the dead man to the top of the coal heap, looking back to see whether there were any more unauthorized guests. But there were none—and but for a stroke of luck, the whole passenger list might now have been dead.

Dugan came back.

"Look the other way!" he snapped at the girl.

She turned the other way, covering her face with her hands. Dugan dragged the body of the Chinese into the cab, dumped it out, watched it strike the steps and bounce into the

gloom. He rubbed his hands on his handkerchief, returned to the girl.

She was standing against the swaying side of the tender, below the pile of coal, looking very sick. As Dugan stared at her, she swayed toward him. His arms encompassed her. She sagged against him, her face against his wet shirt.

WELL, he scarcely blamed her for fainting. His own heart had gone numb for a split second when he had seen that monster come over the coal. But his hand had worked automatically, and his bullets had sped true to their mark as his finger had worked the trigger without command from his numbed brain.

He placed the girl back on the coat. The rain in her face would revive her. It was the best he could do. He returned to the cab.

A series of explosions sounded from outside. Engineer and fireman turned as though they had been shot. The engineer began to chatter excitedly. His hand moved to the throttle. Dugan had difficulty understanding him. But he got it, with the help of Hogarth.

"Rockets under the wheels," the Britisher said. "Signals to slow down, to prepare to stop."

"Tell 'em to keep moving!"

"But there may be a barricade around a bend ahead which will wreck us. These fellows seem to expect something of the kind."

Dugan shrugged. It would do them no good should the engine pile up somewhere.

It began to slow down. And now he found himself afraid that it wouldn't slow down in time. It was going into a curve at frightful speed, but the engineer applied the brakes, sanding the tracks to help the wheels to grip and hold. It was slowing. The rocking from side to side was decreasing.

The headlight bored into the

CHAPTER V

White Russians

gloom but a short distance. A pile of ties loomed up ahead, squarely across the tracks. But not a soul moved nearby, unless there were hidden men beyond it. Now indeed there was nothing to do but stop—and back up from a palpable trap. But one must stop forward speed before one could back up; and while one was stopped, if only for a second, almost anything might happen.

The cowcatcher halted within twenty feet of the barricade.

"Reverse!" yelled Dugan, then bethought himself of the Chinese word and shouted that. The drivers spun backward — but it was too late.

From both sides of the track nondescript men, all looking like coolies, engulfed the locomotive and tender. The engineer and fireman sat in their places, looks of resignation on their yellow faces, as the men surrounded the cab. Dugan, peering out, could make out several Japanese among the attackers—and several white men he set down as White Russians, with the light of fanaticism in their eyes. The girl, providentially, stayed behind.

Suddenly the engineer and fireman, each from his own side of the cab, leaped for exits.

They dropped to the ground, and even Dugan turned a little sick as bayonets leaped forth and the two men died even before they could offer explanations.

MEN poured into the cab. Hogarth and Dugan backed against the tender; automatics ready, each resolved to save one bullet for the girl. One of the first men in spoke in English:

"Sung Sing counsels submission to arrest. Developments later!"

Sung Sing himself, whose picture Dugan had once seen, was not in evidence.



DUGAN'S heart was in his mouth. Couldn't the attackers see that he and Hogarth were protecting something, hiding something from view? He knew how Chinese

mobs treated women—and his weapons and Hogarth's had already been snatched from them. They could do nothing to protect her, except give their lives in a hopeless struggle.

As yet nobody had looked into the tender. Dugan didn't know whether this was due to carelessness on the part of the attackers, or their belief that only the two men were involved. Or it might be that the agents of Sung Sing, who must be everywhere among these people, were maneuvering the mass of attackers to keep them from seeing the girl.

Still Dugan held his breath. The end for her might well be horrible, if Chinese history repeated itself and she were taken.

It didn't happen.

Instead, irons and handcuffs were brought forth and the two men were securely bound—and hurled into the tender. Dugan managed a look at the spot where he had last seen Ellen Paine.

She was nowhere to be seen!

Had the enemy crept over the coal as the first man had done and spirited her away? Had she tried to escape over the rear of the tender? The latter contingency, he knew instantly, was impossible, for the train was surrounded and had been from the beginning. She couldn't have got away without being seen; and even if this were admitted possible, she couldn't remain long at large in this soldier-and-bandit-filled countryside.

This attack was, ostensibly, by Chinese bandits. But Dugan saw so many Japanese faces beyond the light furnished by the open furnace door that he knew Japanese were in command, and that many White Russians were fanatically following their lead.

And then he saw where the girl had gone. She had used intelligence. A pile of clothing in the lower left-hand corner of the tender was suspiciously thicker than it had last been. The girl had simply crawled under it, folded herself into a ball, and was awaiting developments.

Hogarth and Dugan exchanged swift warning glances. They did not again look toward the pile of rags and cast-off garments.

A Japanese came forward. He was dressed as a Chinese, but there were innumerable things which gave him away when he spoke, in halting English, to Dugan. He seemed to be in command, which argued a certain cleverness, was trying to pass as a Chinese, yet when he addressed the American his speech sounded with a polite, hissing intake of breath which none but a Japanese ever used—a fact known the world over.

THIS hissing intake of breath meant:

"That my humble breath may not blow upon you," and was the acme of politeness. Dugan knew the Japanese would have spoken thus to an enemy awaiting the services of the firing squad.

"It is with great disparagement," said the Japanese, bowing low, "that we loyal followers of His Majesty Pu Yi, must subvise with you, to the end that you will honor us-selves by returning under guard to Hsin Min. There the military court of our great protector, Dai Nippon, may pass upon your case.

"You will, of course, be treated

with most kindness, but if there is a break for liberty there may be resultant a destructive forcing of firing, to the end that the honorable ones may die instant of bullets. The honorable ones carry with them the hopes of this humble Manchukuoan that they will be able to acquit themselves with honor in advance of execution by firing squad."

DUGAN grinned. He found it easy to grin at this bumptious fool, who for all his stupidity, represented a people who knew what they wanted and went after it, perfectly willing to give their lives to attain their end.

The Japanese now backed off and looked over his followers. Dugan studied him, noted how the false queue was twisted into the black hair of the man's head—and that the queue was red! It was so utterly silly, but life and death rode with the jest.

The Japanese signaled to two men. Dugan's eyes narrowed as he looked at their blazing eyes. They were big, stalwart men, both bearing the scars of many battles. White Russians. That they had seen plenty of military service was evidenced by the way they carried themselves.

"These gentlemen will see you back to Hsin Min," said the Japanese, again drawing in his breath, hissing like a snake. "There will be two men to run the locomotive." In rattling Russian, he gave orders to take Hogarth and Dugan back to Hsin Min. There they were to be turned over to the military commander for investigation.

Dugan studied the huge Russians. One of them had a beard which covered his throat. The other was clean shaven. Both were armed with pistols, and had Chinese knives in their belts.

Two Chinese settled into the places recently occupied by the ill-

fated natives who would never have a chance to live in luxury on their thousand gold dollars. One look at them and Dugan knew they could not be bribed—certainly not while the Japanese were within sight and hearing. All seemed utterly under the thumb of their Japanese commander. The crowd gave ground as the Japanese signaled the locomotive to start backing.

The wheels spun. The engine got under way. Dugan and Hogarth stepped back and, as if by common consent, to forestall the Russians from doing the same thing, sat down with their backs almost against the pile of stuff under which the girl was hiding. Their chains clanked as they settled down.

The Russians stood over them, speaking together for a moment. Then the man with the beard deliberately kicked Dugan in the side, a terrific wallop. The other Russian did likewise for Hogarth. Both men were spilled on their sides by the blows. Then the Russians did what it had not seemed to occur to the Japanese to do—went through their pockets thoroughly.

THEIR guards exclaimed with delight at the amount of money they unearthed from the two prisoners. Then, as a matter of course, they fell into an argument as to its proper disposition. Dugan, on the point of expostulating that the money was his and Hogarth's personal property, and that these men would be in serious trouble if they took it, closed his mouth instead. Better not let them know that he understood any Russian.

He did speak to them in English after he managed to sit up again. The terrific kick had almost caved in his ribs, and had left a throbbing pain in his side. When he addressed them, the Russians only looked at him blankly. Now they

spoke freely, after asking both men by gesture if they understood Russian and receiving headshakes of negation.

"If it is known that our prisoners had this money," said one, "the Japanese will demand that we turn it over. It will buy much that we now lack. I do not wish to turn it over. What, then, are we to do?"

DUGAN listened, his breath held tightly in his throat so as to miss no sound. The locomotive was again rolling and rocking as it gathered speed backward toward Hsin Min. The other Russian considered for a moment.

"If we were to slay these two, little punishment would be meted out to us. We cause Japan no trouble with the United States or England, since they can lay the blame on White Russians. We can say that the two men tried to escape and we were compelled to shoot them. If they ask us about money and papers, we can deny knowledge of any such. When the bodies are found, who is to say who has stripped them of everything of value, since they will be found naked anyhow?"

Dugan dared a quick glance at Hogarth. Hogarth's face was pale, but he bowed his head so that the Russians could not see this palpable give-away of the fact that he understood their words.

"You would suggest then," said the bearded man, "that we kill them?"

"It is obviously the thing to do. I am quite sure that Nakayama Matadori intended we should do something of the sort, else why did he send us instead of Chinese or Japanese?"

"Obviously he did so intend. When shall we do this?"

"As soon as we have decided upon the proper division of this money. Plainly the major portion of it

should belong to me, since I had the idea first."

"But I offered the suggestion which would save us from trouble, and will myself slay the two to earn my share."

"I shall remove that difficulty by myself slaying one of the men, so that you cannot offer such a claim."

Dugan looked at Hogarth, wondering if he dared, after all, say anything to him in English. Then he thought of a lingo which not even a cultured Russian linguist would understand — American slang. But would Hogarth get it? Dugan doubted it, but it was worth a try. He tried:

"If I were to crack down on you with a flock of hooey in Yankee slang, would you get me and come back with the right answers?"

The Russians looked at Dugan wonderingly. Hogarth cleared his throat.

"Shoot the works, mug," he said. "I'll get your drift. I was in Mr. Paine's business office in New York for five years."

"Then get this straight the first time. These two roosters are planning a bump-off of us truly, Hogarth and Dugan *et al.* I say we beat the buzzards to it. We've got only our dukes, but maybe we can spread 'em enough for throat clutching.

"I'll take the bimbo with the big growth of parsley. You take the other gorilla. Jump hard and fast and give 'em the works. Then we'll scramble the hash of the yellowbellies in the cab."

"What's the tip-off on when the show starts?"

"We're passing through some burg now. We'll spring our stuff when we're going good again."

"Okay, fella. We'll have to lean against their heat to keep 'em from scragging us."

"I know. Say, what's that spinach-sprouting buzzard looking at?"

Now the eyes of both Russians were on a spot somewhere between Hogarth and Dugan. Those eyes were bulging so that they could have been snapped off with a thumb, as though they had been marbles. Dugan and Hogarth looked in the direction indicated by their set glances.

Right between the two prisoners a tiny well-shod foot, with mud on the sole, had slipped from under the pile of rags. The Russians had seen the shoe and the barest fraction of a well-turned ankle.

Dugan and Hogarth laughed as though at a signal, and looked at their guards.

The Russians were rising to their feet.

Dugan and Hogarth tensed themselves.

"Now!" said Dugan. "We dare not miss! Up we come!"

The two Russians paused as the prisoners came to their feet as one man. Both prisoners lunged together, their hands extended, and as far apart as their handcuffs would permit. Their hands were like talons. Dugan lost sight of Hogarth, but his own hands went to the throat of the bearded man—and his body pressed hard against the man's undrawn weapons.

Behind them the girl scrambled out of the pile of rags.

CHAPTER VI

Sung Sing



DUGAN and Hogarth both knew that they must make an end swiftly, for the Chinese engineer and fireman, hearing the rumpus, the rattling of their chains and the noise made by the Russians, would come to investigate. They had split seconds in which to do the desperate

thing they knew they must, to save their lives.

Dugan struck like a thunderbolt. His hands went to their appointed objective with a surety which long practice, plus desperation, made inevitable. His side went against the Russian's weapon, against the pistol in the man's belt on the right leg. The victim who did not seem to know what hands were for as fighting tools, spent precious time clawing for his weapon, while Dugan squeezed mercilessly against his throat.

Ellen Paine swung past Dugan. Her slim hands snaked out, as the Yank could see from the tail of his eye, and grabbed the pistol. Then she vanished behind him.

The Russian was a powerful brute, and he had no wish to be killed. Now he clawed for his knives, while threshing all about the place, making so much noise that Dugan expected the Chinese to arrive at any moment. And Hogarth was having plenty of trouble, too.

Dugan, as the Russian began to weaken, heard a solid thump behind him, and a faint sigh. Then the falling of a body, and the breath rattling harshly through a constricted throat.

The thumping sounds he deduced to be caused by Hogarth, down on the floor of the tender, banging the head of his adversary against the solid wood.

THE locomotive rolled and rocked on. Still the Chinese engineer and fireman hadn't come to the rescue of their Russian friends. It was strange, unlooked for.

The bearded Russian's eyes were rolling in a contorted face. His body twisted, writhed and heaved. But desperation seemed to have given Dugan the strength of two average men. He merely tightened his strangling grip on the throat of

the Russian, and waited for the man to die.

Then a hand was placed on Dugan's shoulder and Hogarth's voice spoke in his ear. He was amazed at the Britisher's coolness.

"Never," said Hogarth, "try to choke a bearded Russian by getting his beard inside your hands. It won't work. You have to get your hands under the beard!"

IN any other circumstances, the thing would have been absurd. But Dugan, in his eagerness to get his man, *had* squeezed his beard against his throat—and the beard was thick and bushy.

"Here," said Hogarth, "let me show you."

And amid clanking of chains, Hogarth pulled the reluctant Dugan back from his man and dropped down to take his place. The Russian was limp. Dugan glanced to his left. The second Russian sprawled supine on the floor of the tender, sightless eyes staring into the growing dawn, body rolling with the movement of the cab.

Dugan shivered a little. The whole thing was rather awful, but there was one consolation in the slaying. If they had not killed, they themselves would have been slain, and Ellen Paine would go through hell, to die, or wish for death, in the end.

Hogarth rose from the floor. The second Russian was now quiet, motionless also save for the movement lent to his limp body by the rolling of the tender.

Now Dugan remembered the two Chinese and whirled to look into the cab. The men stood in the opening between cab and tender, looking in. They had made no move to come to the assistance of the Russians. The reason was not far to find. Ellen Paine, a look of determination on her face beneath a mask of grime and coal dust, was covering the Chi-

nese with the weapon she had snatched from the bearded Russian. She was holding it in both hands.

Dugan looked hard at the two Chinese, whose bland faces were so noncommittal.

"Well?" he said. "How about it? Do you wish to go the way of your Russian friends?"

One of the Chinese shrugged and answered in English.

"No thanks, if you don't mind—though we could have downed both of you before the lady got that pistol. I am an agent of Sung Sing. This other man is—I don't know what, except that he doesn't understand English. I shall take you both to Sung Sing. He dwells some *li* from the right-of-way, between here and Hsin Min!"

Dugan was suspicious, though the man's excellent English did much to dispel his doubt.

"You come in too handy, my friend," he rejoined, his eyes narrowed. "I can't see how you happen to be right on hand when needed. I don't believe too much in coincidence."

"No, perhaps not," said the Chinese, "but *managed* coincidence is something different."

"Yes? Well, tell me how you do happen to be here."

"IT'S very simple. Last night Sung Sing was in Mukden to contact a man from the United States named Dugan. The gentleman escaped a Japanese trap. I presume it is either yourself or your friend. Sung Sing, who happens to be my honorable master, therefore signaled to his agents in Mukden by use of the five-note flute, telling of your escape, stating that you would surely travel toward Hsin Min, and perhaps manage somehow to get out to China proper.

"His message was passed on from town to town, from native hut to

native hut, by the five-note flute—and his agents merely rallied to the signals. They filtered into every so-called Manchukuoan group which might come in contact with you along the line to Shanhaikwan, especially if you were captured. Simple, isn't it?"

Dugan grinned ruefully.

"Yeah, very simple, maybe—to a Chinese. To me it sounds blamed complicated."

The Chinese smiled.

"THERE are no secrets in China," he said. "We can send messages faster than they can be sent in English over telegraph or telephone lines and rendered into Chinese dialects. Anyway, here we are. Now I'll find out how my friend here feels about us, and about Sung Sing. My own name is Lao Fu."

Lao Fu turned to his comrade, chattered to him in sing-song Mandarin so rapid that Dugan scarcely gathered more than that Lao Fu was asking the man where he stood in this case. The second Chinese began to tremble. His lips quivered and he licked them with a suddenly dry tongue. Lao Fu's face hardened.

"If I were to throw him off the locomotive now, at this speed," he said to Dugan, "we would never need worry further about him. I estimate that we are making something like seventy miles an hour."

Dugan shook his head. He preferred to accomplish his ends without bloodshed, whenever possible.

"No," he said, "slow down and dump him. A long walk may do him good."

"It would be simpler to strangle him with his queue," said Lao Fu harshly. "Then he wouldn't be able to carry tales."

Dugan shook his head. Lao Fu shrugged, stepped into his place and closed the throttle. The locomotive started to slow down. Ellen Paine

still held her pistol pointed at the trembling Chinese.

At Lao Fu's command, now, the man stood in the door of the cab. The locomotive had slowed to half its usual speed, then to a quarter. Lao Fu suddenly put his foot into the back of the coolie and pushed. The man plunged out of the cab with a scream on his lips. Lao Fu grinned at Dugan.

"I obeyed you almost to the letter," he said. "But it came to me that even if the man did carry tales, he would carry them less rapidly if he had one or two broken legs!"

Lao Fu seemed entirely unconscious of the heartlessness of what he had done. He merely stepped back and opened his throttle wide again.

Dugan spoke to Ellen Paine.

"You might sit in the cab," he said. "It's warmer there, and—"

He nodded his head toward the two still Russians. They were not nice to look at. She shuddered, then smiled tremulously. At her request, Dugan gave her his handkerchief and she began to wipe the smut off her face. She took a seat in the cab and he watched her helplessly.

How would all this result for her? Would she end by falling into the hands of enemies? Dugan's jaws set tightly. He wouldn't allow it to happen. Suddenly he realized that if anything happened to her, life would never be the same to him—even though he knew in his heart that he probably would never see her again after this affair was definitely finished.

THE locomotive was traveling again at what appeared to be about seventy miles an hour. Hogarth had taken keys from the pockets of the Russians, and both Dugan and himself were free again. They had retrieved their money, too. They heaved great sighs of relief. Death

had been very close—and Dugan was conscious of the fact that but for the girl, they might well have been killed.

For how was he to know, as a certainty, that Lao Fu had told him the exact truth? How was he to know that the man whom Lao Fu had kicked off might not be the Sung Sing agent, if indeed there were any such, and Lao Fu himself a wily agent of Japan?

DUGAN turned to the girl and moved forward to thank her.

"You've plenty of courage," he said quietly.

She looked up at him. She didn't smile.

"I didn't realize what I was doing," she said. "I just found myself doing it, as though I were obeying orders from someone else."

"It still was courage. And I'm dreadfully sorry that we're going back into Manchukuo—and afraid, for you."

Her face set.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "I know, in spite of Hogarth's white lie, that my father is dead. If he is, then I want to do everything I possibly can to punish and injure whoever killed him."

She might as well have it.

"Yes," said Dugan grimly, "he's dead—murdered. You'll have to depend on Hogarth and me. Need I say that we'll stand by you as long as we are able?"

"I know that, my friend," she retorted, though her eyes filled with tears when Dugan so quietly confirmed her fears by admitting his knowledge of her father's death. "Maybe some day I can thank you adequately for what you've done. Now, the least I can do is to cause you as little trouble as possible. If I'm too much of a burden, drop me somewhere and I'll manage to make out somehow."

That was all between them, in words; yet as he shook his head, Dugan felt that something far more important had been said—without words.

The locomotive stopped just as dawn was breaking. Lao Fu waited until they were off, then opened the throttle halfway and allowed the locomotive, carrying its dead, to go on its way.

For two hours they marched at right angles to the right-of-way. Then they stopped at a hut in a town that seemed to be deserted, a town which had plainly been ravished by the might of Japan, and knocked on the door. It opened to disclose a handsome Chinese—and Sung Sing bowed, smiling, to his visitors.

CHAPTER VII

Cross Country Chase



SUNG SING thrust out his hand to Dugan, even as he stepped aside to allow his visitors to enter. He lifted his voice and an elderly Chinese woman came in, to whom

he barked words in rapid Fukienese. The woman smiled at Ellen Paine and Dugan knew that the girl would be taken care of in a motherly fashion. She smiled at him as she followed the *amah* into an adjoining room.

"You're Dugan," said Sung Sing. It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes."

"And these two will be Hogarth and Ellen Paine."

"Yes."

"We've plenty to do, Dugan." Sung Sing motioned both men to chairs. "We'll talk while we eat. I got a signal an hour ago that you were coming and *chow mein*, cooked

as only my Number One Boy can cook it, will be along shortly. We'll be lucky, however, if we can stay to eat it. In a hollow, back of the town, I have a score of Mongolian ponies, the fleetest I could find, together with my outriders. We'll be traveling soon—"

"Where to?" interrupted Dugan.

SUNG SING looked at Hogarth thoughtfully. There was a question his eyes. It came to Dugan that after all, he knew nothing about either Hogarth or Ellen Paine. The man might be a secret agent of some sort, and the woman might not be Ellen Paine.

But Dugan would have sworn for the girl. He felt he simply couldn't be wrong about her, that if she were other than she seemed to be, he would know it. And if she were all right, she wouldn't be with a man who wasn't. That made Hogarth okay. Besides, Dugan had already told Hogarth that he himself was working with Sung Sing.

"John Hogarth's all right," Dugan said. "Are you sure, for that matter, that you know me?"

"Of course. You have been identified by the man whom I sent to engage your services. He was watching when you arrived. Besides, I've seen your picture, as I know you've seen mine."

Dugan and Sung Sing moved away, out of earshot of Hogarth.

"Sorry I failed to contact you in the Street of the Sleeping Dragon," said Dugan. "What happened?"

"We were discovered by the Japanese," stated Sung Sing. "Unfortunately, one of my men was killed, but we managed to get away." A fanatical light gleamed for an instant in the eyes of the leader of the *hung hu tze*. "What does one man or thousands matter, if we can eventually bring back the old Empire to China. That is the dream of my

heart, Dugan—a dream that must be realized!”

“And my mission is what?” demanded the soldier of fortune.

“To guard and protect Pu Yi. To be sure that he is crowned Emperor of Manchukuo two weeks hence. I have sent for you because I know that you are clever and fearless. As a White Russian you can remain close to Pu Yi at the coronation, and guard him from death.”

“But why do you think I will be able to do more than your own men?” asked Dugan.

“Japan suspects all Chinese of wanting Pu Yi assassinated. He has many enemies among the people of my race who do not desire the return of the old and honorable Empire. But my esteemed ancestors were of Manchu blood—and with my wealth and organization I shall bring back the Empire.”

Dugan felt that Sung Sing was clinging to a fantastic dream, and yet the American adventurer was willing to do everything in his power to insure its success. It might be that in so doing he could serve a double purpose, for if Pu Yi lived it might prevent a war that in time would involve Dugan's own country.

HE was a soldier of fortune because he loved the danger, the zest, of conflict. That he had often battled for lost causes did not matter, nor did the pay he received for his services. It was the adventure of it all that was the breath of life to Frank Dugan.

“Pu Yi will be guarded to the best of my ability,” he said. “But what about him now?”

“There is little danger until the day of the coronation,” stated Sung Sing. “We are sure that those who plot against Pu Yi's life desire to make his death spectacular—something which may prove a cause for

war. And remember, Pu Yi has not been made Emperor of Manchukuo yet!”

“He will be,” said Dugan quietly, but firmly.

Both men smiled their mutual understanding.

SERVANTS came in with food. Sung Sing motioned the men to chairs as Ellen Paine entered, looking much refreshed. Sung Sing bowed to her with old-fashioned Chinese courtesy, his hands reaching for his sleeves as though he had forgotten that he was wearing Occidental clothing and not the huge cuffed gown of his people.

“Miss Paine, of course,” he said, “will be sent safely out of Manchuria. With my organization, that will be simple. I can have her in Peking within a week, and she won't be in danger once. She may get into trouble here with us, for the Japanese are close on my trail, secret as I have tried to keep it.”

Ellen Paine tossed her head. There were spots of bright color in her cheeks.

“I'm not going to China until my father has been avenged, until his murderers have been punished. I'm going with you!”

Sung Sing's face hardened.

“It is no work for a woman,” he said brusquely.

Dugan knew that Sung Sing spoke the truth, that he could get the girl into China proper, as he had said he could. He wondered why he hesitated.

“It will be safe to send her out, with only Hogarth to accompany her?” he temporized.

“It will be safe,” said Sung Sing. “I trust my men implicitly, and there will be such a small body of them, traveling at night, that they can pass unnoticed. The only trouble is that they will travel in a direct line, avoiding all railroads and trails, and

we won't be able to get word to them until they've reached Peking. You won't mind that, Hogarth?"

Hogarth shook his head. But he didn't commit himself further than he had already by his silence. He was watching Ellen Paine, and waiting to see what decision should be reached regarding her.

Dugan, desirous of finding out how matters stood with both of them, spoke brusquely.

"I don't see why, since she knows what she's facing, Miss Paine can't stay with us."

The girl's face suddenly flamed with anger.

"I'm going to Hsinking," she said. "If I can't travel with you, then I'll go on my own. I won't be ordered around by anyone."

Dugan grinned.

"What would you say to that, Sung Sing?" he asked.

"If the matter were entirely in my hands," said the Chinese grimly, "knowing the situation as I do, I would send the young lady out of Manchuria by force, if she refused to go otherwise."

"That's the only way I'll go!" she snapped.

STILL Hogarth offered no objections and Dugan understood the man's feelings. He would be pleased to have the girl's companionship on the trip overland to China, but he wouldn't remain in Manchuria—when there was a way out offered him—merely to be with her and share her dangers.

"I'll go to Peking," said Hogarth.

Ellen Paine looked at him contemptuously, which was unfair. Sung Sing considered a moment.

"I'm afraid you can't, Hogarth," he said flatly. "I was only going to send an expedition to Peking on Miss Paine's account. If she refuses to go, and Dugan decides that she may remain with us, then you'll have

to stay, too. I can't really spare any men." Hogarth's face was white, but he took it very well.

The party had been eating as they talked, wolfing their food, following the lead of Sung Sing. Now they pushed back their chairs. The *amah* already stood in the doorway, a bundle of belongings in her hand, looking away toward Hsin Min. She was ready to vanish. It was time for all to go. Suddenly she turned to Sung Sing.

"MEN come, master," she cried. "Many men on horses. Soldier men."

The party moved swiftly. Sung Sing led the way out of the place by a rear exit, and, twisting and turning among the deserted shacks, they headed in what Dugan guessed to be the general direction of Hsinking.

"They'll find the remains of food on the table, Sung Sing," he muttered. "They'll count plates and know what's up."

Sung Sing shook his head.

"The *amah* will look after that. When the enemy arrives the house will look as though it hadn't been occupied for weeks—like the others here."

"Which reminds me," said Dugan, "what has happened here? There doesn't seem to be a living soul in the place."

"There isn't, except us," snapped Sung Sing. "They were wiped out by the Japanese. The erstwhile inhabitants of this place are buried in the gully where our horses are waiting."

His statement put an effective damper on the party. They increased their stride as though by common consent. They came at length to the edge of a gully, looked down. Men and ponies, the wiry, long-maned ponies of Mongolia, were waiting for them. The faces of the white mem-

bers of the party went whiter still when they saw what else was to be seen in that gully.

Graves, all of them practically new—scores and hundreds of them. Dugan wondered if the inhabitants hadn't been herded into this gully and shot down without mercy. He put the question to Sung Sing.

"Exactly that," said Sung Sing shortly. "Because they were supposed to be harboring men inimical to the Japanese. Some of my own relatives are in those graves!"

THE party mounted, silent in the midst of the mounds which were so significant a reminder of what might happen to them. Sung Sing took command. Dugan offered no protest. Ellen Paine was ordered to the head of the column which was forming with amazing speed. Hogarth followed her. Sung Sing signaled to Dugan, and the two rode side by side at the column's rear. The party started swiftly up the draw.

"If it had been only ourselves," said Sung Sing, "we'd have traveled on foot, keeping to cover. The girl makes the cavalcade necessary."

"But," protested Dugan, "the column was already in readiness. You were going to travel this way before Miss Paine refused to go into China."

Sung Sing grinned tightly.

"Yes," he said. "I knew she wouldn't go. I spent some time in American colleges, where I learned that American women can't be driven. I did try, though I knew it was a waste of time."

The column, at the head of which Ellen Paine rode with the ease of a born horsewoman, was galloping swiftly up the canyon. Their pace was amazingly deceptive, until one looked down to discover that the fleet ponies ran with their stomachs close against the ground, their heads thrust forward, their manes flying—and that the ground was lit-

erally a blur in passing. Dugan looked back. The graves were vanishing around a bend in the gully.

Ahead of Dugan, to the accompaniment of the spanking of a rifle, a pony suddenly went down as though its legs had been knocked from under it. The Chinese rider plunged to the ground ahead of the animal and sprawled out, his head twisted under him at a sickening angle.

Ellen Paine didn't look back; hadn't, mercifully, heard the rifle or seen what it had done.

Dugan and Sung Sing hurdled the dead horse and rider, sped on. Dugan still carried the two rifles, which he had managed to dry aboard the train, which by now must have delivered the White Russians in Hsin Min. He unslung one rifle, passed it to Sung Sing. Each weapon carried only the shells now in the chamber.

Mounted men appeared on the rim of the valley behind them, then plunged down to begin the grueling chase. Dugan refused grimly to waste bullets at the distance. The column sped madly on. The Yank nodded approvingly when Hogarth suddenly placed himself directly behind Ellen Paine. His body would stop any bullet coming from the rear intended for her.

Dugan looked back again.

The pursuers were spreading out, kneeing their animals into top speed.

CHAPTER VIII

Getaway Route



"THEY'LL never catch us now, except perhaps with an occasional bullet," said Sung Sing. "My men are all members of the *hung hu tze*, or Red Beards, as you know. It is the bandit outfit from whose leadership the mighty Chang

Tso-lin rose to world fame. The Japanese hate them like poison and they bend the knee to none, save myself."

"Do they want the old Empire to be reestablished?" asked Dugan as he rode.

"A wise leader does not reveal his plans to everyone," said Sung Sing cryptically. "I do not believe in even my own men knowing too much."

"You're right in that." Dugan leaned forward to urge his pony to just a little more speed. The little animal answered with alacrity, carrying his rider's weight as though it were nothing. Up ahead, Ellen Paine had thrown aside her cap, and her hair flew backward in the sun. Dugan could fancy the light of excitement in her eyes.

Again he looked back.

The Japanese, on the rims of the gully, on the gully floor, were firing as they pursued. He heard the snapping of bullets past his ears, like the striking of a drumhead with a small hammer. He saw spurts of dust kicked up by bullets which went too wide and too low.

Another rider went down, but this time his pony ran on. The man rolled to his back as Dugan rode past him. A bullet had struck him in the back of the skull, had come out in the middle of his face. Dugan was glad that Ellen Paine hadn't seen that. It made even the Yank, accustomed to all sorts of sights of violence, a little sick—and filled him with renewed anger at the pursuers.

THE gully curved. There was a ravine branching off. Four or five of the column disappeared into that gully, and Dugan was amazed, as he went past it the next moment, to discover that the five men had vanished completely.

He turned and looked his surprise at Sung Sing, who grinned.

"The *hung hu tze*," he said, "know

every nook and cranny of this land. The Japanese can't catch them. My men could go into that curving ravine for two minutes and even I couldn't find them. Their very tracks will be rubbed out behind them."

"But we may need all our men," said Dugan.

"They'll be on hand when we need them," said Sung Sing enigmatically.

BULLETS were coming faster now. Dugan looked back once more. The Japanese were gaining. He paused, whirled his pony, flung rifle to shoulder, drew swift bead on the foremost of the pursuers, and pressed the trigger with the expert rifleman's care.

The rifle whanged. A distant man toppled from his pony, sprawled in the dirt. The riderless animal circled back into the pursuing forces. Bullets from the Japanese increased in volume.

Dugan looked back to the front, and gasped in consternation. Ellen Paine had vanished from the column's head as though she had been miraculously erased. One minute and she had been there, hair flying in the wind. Now she was gone.

Dugan started to drag his pony to a halt.

Sung Sing snapped at him.

"She's all right. Can't you see that Hogarth is missing, too? I ordered it. They've gone into another ravine. If you hadn't been busy shooting, you'd have seen the ravine."

"But they may go after her. This time maybe your *hung hu tze* won't be able to protect her."

"The pursuers," said Sung Sing, "are after us. They're not interested in a mere munitions manufacturer's daughter or his secretary. Later they might be, but now we're of first importance. They'll keep on our trail."

Dugan noticed that three or four more of the natives had disappeared

with Ellen and Hogarth. He looked back to see the pursuers pass the mouth of the ravine without even glancing aside. The Japanese had much to learn of warfare in Manchuria, especially this queer game of hide and seek in which the *hung hu tze* were so adept.

Dugan realized suddenly that he had the cooperation of perhaps the best organization to be found at that moment in Manchukuo, an organization better than anything Japan had yet got together. No wonder the children of Dai Nippon were so intent on wiping out "bandits." For as long as the *hung hu tze* rode the soil of Manchuria, Japan would not have conquered the Three Eastern Provinces.

There was much about Sung Sing that Dugan didn't know. There would always be much, for no Occidental, however friendly, ever knew all there was to know about any Chinese.

Next time men branched off from the column, it happened when, for a brief moment, they had dropped the Japanese from sight behind them. The *hung hu tze* looked back at Sung Sing for a signal, got it, turned into a ravine, and were gone from sight by the time Sung Sing and Dugan had breasted the ravine.

Now the column was reduced to a mere half dozen men.

BUT the Japanese, seeing only the rear guard, could not know that the column didn't reach on ahead, as numerous as before, around the curves of the canyon. Sung Sing and his men had selected their getaway route with care and cleverness. Dugan could imagine the savage frustration of the pursuers when they should discover the ruse.

And then, all at once, Sung Sing and Dugan rode alone—and the Chinaman was looking at Dugan strangely.

"Now we take to the open," he said. "I'm a rotten shot. Suppose I merely carry this other rifle and hand it to you when it is necessary. And listen, my friend, pray that your pony doesn't step into a hole and break his leg—for I have much to do yet for China and could not turn my pony over to you. I would be compelled to make my escape without you."

"I'll get along all right." Dugan smiled slightly.

Sung Sing laughed.

"That being understood, here we go," he said.

HE whirled his pony to the right, putting the animal at the wall of the ravine. The Japanese saw the break. Bullets whined all about them. The ponies scrambled up, scarcely breathing hard as yet.

They were now out on a level plain. Dugan looked back. Atmospheric conditions were such that the pursuers looked very close—until he tried to make out details of their dress or outlines, when he realized that they were barely within possible range—but coming on as before.

The Japanese brandished their weapons. They thought that the two had deliberately broken away to throw off pursuit. They fired furiously, fired without taking aim, apparently. The two Mongolian ponies bent to their tasks. Sung Sing and Dugan rode with their bodies close along the necks of their animals.

Dugan glanced back along his pony's rump. As far as the eye could see—though they were less than a minute from the ravine they had left—the whole land seemed to be one level plain. Even the gully had been lost to view.

Sung Sing laughed.

"Nature is a magician out here, Dugan," he said. "And we'll make these Japanese look silly before we've finished, if your horse or mine

doesn't break a leg, or a bullet doesn't get us."

THE Japanese must have begun to understand something of this, too, as though Sung Sing's words had been wafted back to them on the breeze of their flight. Now bullets began coming low, obviously aimed at the legs of the ponies. Dugan held his breath, fully expecting one animal or the other to fall.

Now and again he paused, whirled on a dime, flung his rifle to his shoulder, pressed the trigger—and always when he did this, the leading pursuer toppled from his pony and sprawled on the soil of Manchukuo. Dugan aimed for the men; it wasn't their ponies' fault that they were being used in a relentless chase with murder and mutilation at the end of it.

Gradually, because they held to a straight line, and were not loaded down with equipment as were the Japanese, Sung Sing and Dugan drew away from their pursuers. The Chinaman was eagerly scanning the way ahead.

"In five minutes we'll lose them entirely," he said.

And in about that length of time Dugan gasped, looking down into a canyon to his left. They had approached the place from the canyon's very starting point. Sung Sing slid his pony down the incline. Dugan followed. The pursuers were lost behind them.

Their race continued around a turn to the right, another to the left, then a sharp turn that led away to the left again, to follow which was to take them far to the left of the line of pursuit. Then Sung Sing slowed to a trot, which continued for almost an hour.

By this time the two little ponies were wet with sweat, panting. They had been ridden for what, to them, must have seemed like an eternity.

A turn to the right again—and the sounds of a five-note flute broke on their ears. Sung Sing listened, turned to Dugan.

"You'll be pleased to know," he said, "that Hogarth took it on himself to make a dash for China, all alone."

"Will he make it?"

Sung Sing shook his head.

"He's probably dead by now," he said. "In any case he won't live until sunset. There are other *hung hu tze* in this land, who don't work for Sung Sing."

They turned right into a sort of amphitheater filled with houses. About the houses were all the ponies and all the men who had separated from them along their line of flight. And standing at the door of one of the houses was Ellen Paine.

"Until tonight," said Sung Sing, dismounting. "Then we push on to my headquarters in Hsinking."

CHAPTER IX

Coronation



THE rest of the journey to Hsinking was made without molestation. The *hung hu tze* knew exactly what to do after they had shed their pursuers. The trip was continued by fairly easy stages.

They approached the place after dark; and when the city's lights were seen, Sung Sing gave low-voiced commands—and the land swallowed up the *hung hu tze*. Sung Sing, Dugan and Ellen Paine went on afoot, the Chinese in advance.

He led the way in by a circuitous route, but one which he plainly knew very well. Silence, deep and impenetrable, hung over Hsinking as though the city were waiting for something to happen. An alley, nar-

row, highwalled and odorous, swallowed them. Sung Sing moved without sound. Finally he put his hand back, took that of Ellen Paine, and led them into the cavernous mouth of a black doorway. Steps led down—down without end.

Their feet touched level again. Lights flashed on after Sung Sing had closed a door.

They were in a vast room, with small doors giving off from it, which might have been a throne room. Rich rugs lay on the floor, priceless scrolls on the walls; everywhere were teak-wood stands and tables, screens of lacquer, vessels of bronze and porcelain. Ellen Paine gasped.

Sung Sing smiled tightly.

"Here is our home until we find out what is what," he said. "*Amah Ling!*"

As he called a door opened—and the *amah* they had left in the nameless village where they had first met, entered. Dugan's mouth hung open.

"When a Chinese is loyal," said Sung Sing, "he, or she, is loyal to the uttermost. I knew she would be here. Now, we've plenty of work to do."

"You think something may happen right away?" Dugan queried.

"One of my most trusted men has gone out to see if he can find out what is due to happen at the ceremony of coronation."

AFTER Dugan and Sung Sing had eaten with Ellen Paine, the leader of the *hung hu tze* was informed that his spy had returned. The Chinese hastened out of the room. Dugan and the girl talked lightly and casually until he returned.

"An attempt against Pu Yi's life will surely be made," Sung Sing said. "It is unavoidable. So far I haven't found out the details. My man could get no definite lead. You will have to get busy at once, Dugan."

"Of course," said Dugan.

"Good! Now, for plans for the coronation. You would be instantly recognized. You have made quite a name for yourself throughout the Far East as a daring adventurer. I am arranging papers for you. You will attend the coronation, getting as close as possible, as a Russian officer in full uniform. There will be so many of them there that another will scarcely be noticed."

Dugan nodded in silent agreement, his mind already busy planning ahead.

AND so it happened that, on a certain fateful morning, when the streets of Hsinking were brilliant with flags and streamers, above all of which soared the new flag of Manchukuo; when the streets and the rooftops were packed with scores, hundreds and thousands of people, Dugan went out among the crowd as a Russian officer serving with the Manchukuoans.

He was determined to keep as close as possible, during all the ceremony, to the person of the prospective Emperor. He knew, for he himself had made arrangements, that Sung Sing's men were scattered all through the crowd—with orders to handle expeditiously and surely anyone who even spoke ill against the Emperor.

For if this coronation failed, and China could be blamed, the hordes of Dai Nippon would pour into China from Shanhaikwan and Jehol, rolling over the Great Wall as though it had never existed at all.

But as slow, ceremonious step followed slow, ceremonious step, beginning with the side of the Emperor-Designate from his palace to the place of the ceremony's initiation, and nothing untoward happened, Dugan began to hope that nothing would occur.

He hadn't seen Sung Sing for hours, nor any Chinese face that he

recognized. Ellen Paine had been left in the underground room. The Yank was entirely on his own. He fully expected at any time to feel the authoritative tapping of a hand on his shoulder, but it did not come.

THE ceremony wore its way along. The first part of it was a queer mixture of ancient ritual and modernity—and Pu Yi wore the uniform of a high Manchukuoan official.

But the last part of it, in which Pu Yi must commune with the spirits of his ancestors who had first come out of this land, in order that they might guide him, alone and at a distance from all others, was what Dugan feared most.

It was to take place in a great open space in the center of which was a circular altar, fashioned after the Altar of Heaven in Peking. There Pu Yi's predecessors on the throne of China had gone up alone to commune with the spirits of their royal ancestors.

About this circular altar, which was large enough to have accommodated a battalion at countermarch, were thousands upon thousands of people. Dugan, standing at the edge of the crowd knew that, thinly dispersed among them, were scores of Sung Sing's agents. There was left a vast empty circle between the rim of this mass formation and the altar onto which the Emperor must step to face the heavens.

The Yank knew much of the ancient pageantry, the ceremonious adulation that went into all this, even pruned down as it was by modernity. He knew that when His Majesty advanced to the altar not an eye would be upon him, that every knee would be bent to the ground, every eye cast down.

And it came to him in a flash that here was where it would happen! Here the blood of this last of the

royal Manchus might well stain the marble slabs of the high altar.

Now came a murmur of sound. Then a hush.

Into the circle, garbed in the robes of his great rank, the gorgeous yellow gown with the golden, five-toed dragons on front and back, came a serious, plain-looking young man, his hair cut in the Occidental manner, and wearing horn-rimmed spectacles.

His retainers dropped behind him at the edge of the circle, falling to their knees, though they omitted the *ko'to* because he had expressly prohibited it. The young man went forward alone, his face lifted as though he wished to harken to the spirits he had to come to confer with, as though he wished his fine olive cheeks to feel the caress of the bright heaven-sent sun.

A profound silence held sway in all the vast gathering.

Dugan seemed to have his head bowed, but he was looking sharply toward Pu Yi. He knew that, all around the circle, were minions of Sung Sing who also watched while seeming to do abject homage. Sung Sing himself must be watching from somewhere, taking his life in his hands, as Dugan was doing, to do so.

PU Yi reached the first of the nine steps. Dugan's eyes narrowed. When Pu Yi, whose reign-name was to be Kang Teh, reached the broad flat top of the altar, Dugan knew that he would stand out as the best target a rifleman or pistol shot could ask for.

Dugan's heart almost stopped beating, for something had come to him. If any man now moved to attack the Emperor, the Japanese could not fire upon that one without endangering the lives of hundreds. As though the vast concourse had suddenly realized that, there was a stirring and sighing among them.

How could anyone race forward to

stop an attacker—for it was expressly forbidden, on pain of death, for anyone to approach His Majesty in this, his most dramatic hour.

Pu Yi stood on the altar. He lifted his face to the Heavens—and two things happened, so suddenly that for seconds the vast concourse of souls did not realize what was transpiring.

But Dugan had missed nothing. He was racing toward Pu Yi, running as he had never run before. And racing with him, converging on the figure of Pu Yi, ran a man who might have been of any nationality. When the sun struck his face in one, he might have been American or English or Russian. In another light he might have been Japanese or Chinese, or Korean—and he was racing toward Pu Yi with a knife held high in his right hand.

DUGAN had to increase his speed to heart-bursting proportions to reach his objective in time. He marveled at the fact that Pu Yi, who must have heard the killer's shouts behind him, did not even turn or change his attitude of prayer or communion. Pu Yi had always been protected. Apparently he expected someone still to look after him, depended on it, took it for granted. He had never had reason to be afraid.

Dugan and the assassin, who kept shouting, "Down with all tyrants!" as he brandished his weapon, reached the steps at the same time. To have cut across toward the man would have been to lose him, so Dugan ran straight for Pu Yi, who was still apparently unconscious of anything untoward happening.

Dugan hurled himself at the attacker just as the man went into a tremendous leap, his knife aimed at the back of the sovereign. Dugan caught the wrist of the knife hand. The impetus of his charge carried them out of reach of the Emperor.

Dugan turned his back to the knife man, flipped him over his shoulder with a tremendous heave.

The man's head came in violent contact with the marble top of the altar—and Dugan did not need to look at him again.

Silence, deeper even than before, hung over all. Dugan, as though coming out of a daze, looked about him. Pu Yi had not even glanced his way. The ceremony hadn't even been interrupted. A vast composite sigh went up from the gathered throng.

Dugan, on tiptoe, cap in hand, walked off the altar and back to his place. No one seemed to have looked up. Then he felt the tapping on his shoulder, and heard words preceded by hissing intakes of breath:

"You will please to come quietly. There are many dead men to explain, my American friend."

His arrest passed unnoticed, though he looked around for a friendly face—and saw Sung Sing's. The Chinese, looking at him over his shoulder, was edging his way quickly, almost at a run, out of the crowd.

CHAPTER X

Diplomacy



NOT one friend came forward for the grim-faced Dugan as the American faced the military tribunal composed of "Manchukuoans." He was tried for murder—and the charges but made the hopelessness of the farce all the more apparent and ironical.

He was tried under the name of Nikifor Nicholaivitch for the "murder of Frank Dugan, American, and Martin Hogarth, English," and of robbing them of a sum of money equal to six thousand pounds.

"But I am Dugan. Hogarth escaped to China," he kept telling them.

He could see the amused mockery in the eyes of the court-martial members as they listened to his words. The president told him, in English:

"Hogarth did not escape. His headless body was found two days out of Hsinking, on the route by which you were known to have entered the city."

"I saved the life of your Emperor."

"Your claim is foolish. None saw you do it. There are many who state that Nakayama Matadori did it. For the act, he is to be decorated."

THE calm inevitability of the whole thing infuriated Dugan. He knew exactly what was going to happen. He had been marked for the slaughter. Finally came the sentence, grim with finality:

"To be shot to death by musketry twenty-four hours hence!"

And it was only then, while he waited in a Hsinking prison the execution of sentence, that he was visited by one of his enemies—a man who hissed as he talked.

"If," said that one, with an oily smile, "you tell us exactly why you are in Manchukuo, it may be possible to secure imperial clemency."

Dugan shook his head.

"You've marked me for killing," he said. "Do your worst. If I squealed, who's to know I ever told you anything or received a promise of clemency from you? I'll take with me any secrets I may have."

"Who in truth is Sung Sing? Where is he? Where is Ellen Paine?"

"I know nothing of either," said Dugan, his heart hammering with pleased excitement as these questions proved that his allies were still alive, uncaptured. Surely Sung Sing must know what was happening to him, would do something about it. The

Yank only hoped that Ellen Paine wouldn't endanger her life by trying to see him in prison.

The questioner went away after a last warning.

"You will have one more chance to answer, Dugan," he said.

Dugan grinned.

"The name," he said, bowing low, and hissing as the Japanese had done, "is Nikifor Nicholaivitch—have you forgotten?"

The Japanese didn't even have the grace to be concerned at his tongue's betrayal of his knowledge that an American citizen had been condemned to death.

"One warning," he repeated.

"Yes? When do I get it?"

"Just before you are shot to death. If your answer is no, then you will die."

"And if I squeal, I'll still die. Nothing doing."

Then he was alone. He didn't pace the floor. He still believed that, somehow, Sung Sing would find a way out. He hadn't a chance to break away by himself, unaided. There was nothing to do but await developments.

When night came he slept, and did not dream. Even if there had been no hope he still would have slept, unworried. One died no more harshly by dying unafraid.

NEAR daybreak they came for him, "Manchukuoans" in uniform, with rifles in hands. Those rifles, he realized, were probably the ones which would hurl leaden death into his body.

They took him forth. He took his place among the soldiers, still in the uniform of a Russian officer. The march began, out of the jail, to the place of execution.

The sun was rising, spilling its brilliance over Manchukuo. Dugan marched without faltering. The expressions on the faces of his guards

were wooden, as though they had no interest in what was happening—and Dugan's mind raced ahead to what must transpire unless Providence intervened.

THEY would line up. He would be turned to face them, offered the blindfold which he would refuse. Then he would be asked the question again, in a low voice, and would refuse to answer.

The officer in command of the squad would draw his sword, lift it high, and speak the Japanese equivalent of words used by American firing squads:

"Squad, LOAD!"

"Make ready!"

"At the heart take aim!"

"Fire!"

He glanced down at his left breast, where a white piece of cloth had been pinned to his uniform, over the heart, to serve as an aiming point. He grinned tightly.

They reached the grounds of execution. It was surrounded by people, save only on the side toward which the deadly bullets would travel.

Dugan looked around as the grim preparations went forward.

If Sung Sing were to attack here in force, many lives would be lost, the lives of the innocent. Yet what weapons could be used to save him from execution? He looked for the face of Ellen Paine and was relieved that he could not see it.

Far down a street he saw a long automobile racing to the scene—probably filled with high officials to witness his slaying. The firing squad would wait for them. Dugan became impatient to make an end. It wasn't easy to wait to be shot.

A man came forward, hissed as he asked a question:

"Will you tell?"

Dugan shook his head, grinned, asked for a cigarette—was refused.

The questioner stepped aside, out

of line of fire. The siren of the approaching car screamed. Nobody looked toward it. The officer in command of the firing squad drew his sword, commanded:

"Squad, LOAD!"

Bolts rattled as shells were levered into chambers.

"Make ready!"

Left feet of the soldiers shot forward, taking the stance for offhand firing. Their brown hands gripped the stocks of their weapons tightly. Their right fingers were on the triggers, already tensing.

"At the heart—"

Calmly Dugan faced the squad as the rifles rose to their shoulders. It was too late now for any intervention. Everything seemed a blur, was wiped away. Even if Sung Sing covered the squad now with a hail of lead, enough bullets would still be loosed to destroy Dugan. He faced the squad without flinching.

"—take aim!"

Now the slightest tensing of a trigger finger would slay him. He braced himself subconsciously to withstand the shock of eight bullets smashing into his body.

But there came an interruption before the officer could give the command to fire. The long car smashed right ahead of the rifles, came to a stop.

On the car doors were golden, five-toed dragons, signal of the imperial Manchu house.

THE men who climbed out of the car were a determined crew. There was only one face which Dugan recognized—that of Sung Sing, and he wouldn't have been sure of that had he not lived with Sung Sing for several days. For the Chinese leader and his men were garbed in the traditional garments of *hung hu tze*, even to the false red beards which from time immemorial the Red Beards of Kirin had worn because

they believed they frightened their enemies.

The *hung hu tze* were thoroughly disguised.

As they piled out, their sudden stop ahead of the firing squad disconcerting the executioners, the short machine-guns they carried were plainly in evidence. Dugan, with a start, recognized a dozen Tommy guns, more mete for the streets of Chicago than Hsinking. He grinned inwardly at this evidence of Sung Sing's "foreign" learning—and wondered where the man had got the guns.

"Hurry, Dugan," said Sung Sing. "You can't hold Japanese very long. Grab the car. Make for the palace. Stop for nothing. We'll hold these people as long as we can."

Dugan hesitated.

"And you'll be shot down," he said finally. "I won't go a step without you. I'll take the wheel. They'll fire on us, but we've a chance to get away if they don't think to blast at the tires."

Sung Sing grinned a little, barked something to his men.

DUGAN slid behind the wheel. The feel of it in his hands was intoxicating. He felt, suddenly, as though he had come back from the dead. He saw Japanese crowding in from the mob which had come prepared to witness the execution. *Hung hu tze*, the muzzles of their rifles menacing the firing squad, backed to the car, stepped onto the running board.

"All set!" snapped Sung Sing, vaulting in beside Dugan.

Dugan took a desperate chance in order to demoralize further the slow-thinking, paralyzed Japanese. He meshed gears. The long car roared with power, turned directly into the ranks of the Japanese. One soldier was flung aside by the radiator. The car gained speed. The *hung hu tze* held their fire. Dugan shifted to

second, to high—and the car roared along the streets of Hsinking.

Now the Japanese were firing. Dugan drove with his head bent low over the wheel. Two *hung hu tze* flung aside their Tommies and fell to the street, riddled with lead. Bullets came in through the back of the car, smashing the windshield. Wind ranted and raved through the broken space as the car reached sixty miles an hour.

ALL along the way riflemen cracked down on them, disregarding the imperial dragons on the car's doors. They must have known that His Majesty was not in the car.

A bullet struck the steering wheel, biting a huge piece out of it. Blood spurted from Dugan's hand where a sliver had all but gone through the palm. Sung Sing laughed with him.

"Too bad you have to lose some men, for me," Dugan said to Sung Sing.

The Chinese elevated his eyebrows.

"Not at all. I shall pay their families some money and they'll be happy the rest of their lives. I promised that to my men, when I asked them to help me against the firing squad, and each one of them openly expressed the wish to die in the venture in order that his family be provided for! Death to a Chinese is like taking a walk to a foreigner!"

This accented, to Dugan, the vast gulf between Occidental and Oriental.

At the gates of the palace they left the bullet-riddled car. There were but four men, *hung hu tze*, left of Sung Sing's original crew. These swung the muzzles of their guns on the palace guards.

As the group raced up the steps, with Japanese rifles aimed at them, but triggers held because a single bullet here would dye the steps of the sacrosanct palace with blood of friend and enemy alike, Dugan saw

a smallish man at the top, wearing hornrimmed spectacles. It was Pu Yi, whose life he had saved, and Pu Yi was smiling.

They gathered around the sovereign, whose mild eyes were a little excited—and the rifle butts of the chagrined Japanese were lowered regretfully to the palace steps.

Dugan saluted the Emperor as though he had been an American general. Pu Yi spoke, in excellent English.

"We have enjoyed the excitement," he said. "We are happy that our plans succeeded."

"But for Your Majesty to take a hand in the liberation of a spy!" the Yank grinned. "The Japanese will never forgive you!"

Pu Yi smiled faintly.

"We have little power," he said. "But this has been done in public, and our honorable protectors will hesitate to destroy their own sovereignty in Manchukuo. The political value of our sovereignty is greater than the lives of many Japanese, who will grant us this whim—and upbraid us unmercifully in private—for the sake of appearances. And we owe you something for saving our life at the coronation. Is there something you wish of us?"

"YES, sire," said Dugan instantly, remembering his mission in Manchukuo, "to be attached to the Imperial Staff as an observer until everything has been peaceably settled in Manchukuo."

Pu Yi nodded his head gravely.

"It shall be done," he said, "though we fear thwarting on every side. However, we assure the honorable American of this: that his life will be saved. And now, Dugan *hsien sheng*, deign to enter the palace after us, where one waits to have words with the American gentleman.

"She has been vastly concerned. As the only representative of her

country's government in Hsinking, she has done much to stiffen our weak will and persuade us to take the stand we have in preventing this execution—for Dai Nippon argued that our sovereignty was even more important than the life of an American."

DUGAN'S heart hammered with excited pleasure. So Ellen Paine had somehow got past the guards—aided by Sung Sing, of course—to reach the car of His Majesty. Pu Yi had been able to do little, but that little he had done.

Pu Yi pointed down a long hall.

"She is in a reception room at the end of the hall, waiting," he said as he turned to go through a high door. "When everything is settled, we would like to see you both again!"

Looking back as he strode down the hall, Dugan saw His Majesty standing in the doorway, looking after him. A lonely figure—a man who had had everything, would have everything again, with Japan's help; but one who would doubtless have traded it all for the chance of walking down Fifth Avenue in mufti, without a single head turning in curiosity to look after him.

With a sigh, Dugan—the success of his mission now strictly in his own hands—strode on to meet Ellen.

She was standing all alone in a vast room whose ceiling was upheld by mighty columns around which golden dragons had wrapped themselves. The walls of the room were covered with scrolls showing, in vivid, exhaustive detail, the sufferings of men who went through the tortures of Purgatory; tortures which not any one Chinese could have evolved, but had taken all the genius of China to complete.

Ellen turned, shuddering.

"These give me the horrors," she said by way of greeting. "I've seen them before, but never been able to

become accustomed to them. But how about you?" Her face brightened. "I've taken chances with international peace to help you, and I don't really know anything about you. Don't you think you should tell me?"

He looked at her steadily.

"And whatever I tell you—will it make any difference? Will it keep us from being friends?"

"Why should it?"

Frank Dugan grinned and then sobered instantly.

"I came here at the request of Sung Sing to see that the new Emperor remain alive. I am, in effect, his bodyguard. If I fail I am in disgrace—a nobody—renounced by my own country—merely a soldier of fortune. As long as I succeed—"

ELLEN'S shining eyes showed where her faith lay.

"But why does Sung Sing want nothing to happen to the new Emperor?" she asked.

"Because Sung Sing is of the Manchu blood. He dreams of reestablishing the old Empire. I doubt that he will succeed—and yet I shall continue to guard Pu Yi because I have told Sung Sing I would do so, and because I am loyal to my own country."

Ellen Paine was staring at him, her eyes very wide.

"Then you—" she said. "You, just one man, just one American, are practically charged with keeping the peace of the world! You prevented world war when you thwarted the

assassination of His Majesty! If Pu Yi dies a violent death, *any time*, China and Japan will lock horns again—and the whole world will be in the holocaust within six months. If you fail—"

"**W**HYY should I fail?" asked Dugan. "The biggest step was to get here, to reach Hsinking. We made that. We saved His Majesty's life the day of the coronation. Sung Sing is powerful—and he will remain so as long as he rules the *hung hu tze*. As for his dream of bringing back the old Empire," Dugan shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say?"

Ellen Paine's eyes darkened.

"The murderers of my father and the others who were with him," she began. "What about them—"

"Court justice is out of the question," Dugan said, "either for the loss of your father or those who were with him." He started to mention Hogarth's name and then refrained. "So I have merely offered suggestions to Sung Sing. He was in Mukden that night your father was killed, and knows the identities of the murderers."

He lifted his eyes to the scrolls depicting the tortures of Purgatory.

"Sung Sing, a highly educated Chinese, knows exactly how to deal with murderers. By this time tomorrow, our dead will be avenged. Our duty is now with the living."

They clasped hands—and for the moment, at least, there was a deep peace in His Majesty's palace at Hsinking.