

by Ralph Milne Farley and Stanley G. Weinbaum

The seas crept with green. It crawled up the shores and smothered the hills!

IT was the year 2000. America was at war, fighting for her very life against the Asiatic Union. And yet the American people—even army officers—found time for recreation. Recreation was a necessity, to take one's mind off the titanic struggle.

Lieutenant Richard Lister, clad in swimming trunks, sat on a beach rug, staring moodily out across the Pacific Ocean toward the Seal Rocks and beyond, his hands clasped across his tanned knees, his bronzed face tense.

"Let's not talk about the war; let's talk about us!" he exclaimed to Sally Amber, who sat beside him.

The girl turned her strange, dark eyes inquisitively upon him.

"You shouldn't feel that way, Dick," she said seriously. "Particularly as you're in such an important branch of the service. I'm not kidding; I mean it. Where would the country be without your Bureau of Military Biology and Bacteriology? We'd all be wiped out by the Asiatic Union's germs!"

"Sure. And if it weren't for their bacteriologists, they'd be wiped out by our germs. It's a deadlock, I tell you, like this whole war. Look at Alaska: For more than a year now the Khan has been holding that little corner from Rocky Point to Cape Espenberg, and we haven't been able to budge his line a single inch, nor has he been able to budge ours. Each army is protected by one of those impenetrable Beckerley electrical fields.

"Alaska is the key to the whole situation, with the Khan there in person. If we could just get through his Beckerley field, and put an end to him, the whole Asiatic Union would crumble. It's only his personality that can hold together such naturally hostile groups as the Siberian Russians, the Japs, the Chinese, the Tartars, and so forth. Without him, they'd be at each other's throats in a few hours!"

"Well, why doesn't somebody do something about it?" asked Sally, impishly.

"Lord knows we've tried!" Lister exclaimed. "Ten or a dozen brave Americans have gotten through the enemy lines, and tried to assassinate him, only to be captured, and subjected to horrible torture and death."

The girl shuddered, and pulled one corner of the beach rug up around her shoulders.

"I don't suppose I'd rate as a 'brave American,' " she said.

"I'd take a chance on your bravery," Lister declared.

"Why doesn't America land troops in Asia?" Sally asked.

Lister stared at her sharply.

"You know as well as I do," he said. "Although America controls the seas ever since we annihilated the Khan's fleet off the Marianas six months ago, yet he has ten million men under arms in Asia. What good would it do us to land our five million against such odds? No, we've got to lick the mad Khan in Alaska—somehow."

"He isn't mad!" snapped Sally, unexpectedly.

"How do you know?"

"I've—I've—well, I've seen him."

"I didn't know you'd ever been in Asia."

"There are lots of things about me that you don't know," she retorted. "My father is dead, and I am quite wealthy. I've traveled a lot. Three years ago I was in the eastern capital—Harbin; and, what's more, I've been in Moscow, the western capital, too."

"So you've seen the mad Khan," mused Lister. "Did you ever see the woman they call Princess Stephanie? What's she like? She's supposed to be very beautiful."

Sally shrugged. "Oh, she's all right, if you like that type," she replied airily. "She's dark and has Khazar blood in her, and she's about my age—and any-way, why are you questioning me? Go on with your little lecture."

"About us?" he asked hopefully.

"No." She reached out one slim hand, and gently patted his knee. "About the Beckerley electrical fields. What are they? How do they operate?"

HE FROWNED thoughtfully, try-ing to phrase his answer in words that a girl would understand.

"It's an application of Morelle's ex-periment with electrical eddy currents," he said. "I'm a botanist, not an elec-trical engineer, but I know that the idea involves the refraction of lines of mag-netic force.

"It works like this: Over each army on the Alaskan front the scientists have created a dome of electrical tension—a magnetic field. Any shell or drop bomb passing through this magnetic field is instantly heated to white heat by the electrical eddy currents induced in it by the field, and is thus caused to explode in mid-air.

"Every city is likewise protected by a Beckerley field. You know how each auto-copter, on leaving the city limits of San Francisco, has to stop and be pushed through an iron-shielded subway until it's beyond the Beckerley field? Well, that's because the gasoline in the tank would be heated to the flash point by the walls of its container."

"How about solid shot?" asked Sally.

"That can pass through a field, of course, but what chance has solid shot of doing much damage? Our own cop-ters could down any possible fleet of enemy planes long before they could drop enough solid missiles to do appre-ciable harm to a city; and as for the Alaskan front, the most that either side could do would be to chip a few rocks in the Yukon Hills.

"No, the situation's a deadlock; the Khan is swept from the sea, but his enormous army prevents our invading Asia, and neither side can advance an inch in Alaska because of the Becker-ley fields. It can't even become a war of attrition, because both the Asiatic Union and the United States are en-tirely self-supporting, and can never be starved into submission."

"Do you think so?" asked Sally Am-ber in an odd voice. Suddenly she shrugged her smooth, brown shoulders as if to change the subject. "Will Ad-miral Allen be here Saturday?" she asked casually.

"Why, no, I don't think—" Lister caught himself abruptly. Allen had told him, in the very strictest of confidence, of a proposed attempt to cut the Asiatic supply line to Alaska by a concentrated attack on Behring Strait. The Pacific fleet, idle since the engagement near the Marianas, was to sail secretly before dawn on Saturday.

He glared. "Why do you ask such a question?" he snapped. "If I knew, I shouldn't tell, and you know it."

Sally laughed. "Silly!" she chided. "It was just that I was considering hav-ing him and you and that flying detec-tive, Jim Cass, to a little dinner at my apartment Saturday. You see, I still haven't met Jim Cass, and you've spoken of him so often that I'm curious. After all, if he's a friend of yours, Dick—"

She smiled very tenderly at him.

Lister shook his head. "Captain Cass is no friend of mine," he declared. "He's just an officer of the military intelligence who breezes into my labora-tory from time to time, and pokes around looking for clues and trouble. He gives me the creeps. I never knew such a cold-blooded man! He'd turn his own mother over to a firing squad, if he thought it would help win the war."

"Well, wouldn't you or I do as much for our country?" asked Sally. "And, besides, his very coldness intrigues me. I want to meet him."

"Suit yourself," said Lister. "Have we time for another swim?"

She puckered her lips disapprovingly. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed decidedly. "The water's so full of that horrible green slime that it's no pleasure to swim. Let's start back to town."

"It is bad," he agreed. "It's just a variety of confervae—what we com-monly call algae. There have been some complaints of it in the drinking water, too. It's harmless, but they ought to chlorinate the city reservoir." He rose and stretched. "Let's dress and get started, then."

It was not quite 2:00 p. m. when they landed Sally's convertible helicop-ter in front of the building near the Presidio that served as the office and laboratory of the local unit of the Bu-reau of Military Biology and Bacteri-ology. Lister stepped reluctantly out of the machine, and turned to Sally at the

wheel.

"Tonight?" he asked hopefully.

She shook her head. "Sorry. I have to dine with some family friends."

"Tomorrow night, then?"

"I shouldn't. I—"

"But you will," he stated positively. "Heaven knows if I'll be stationed here long, and I don't want to waste a mo-ment."

"Why?" she asked sharply. "Do you expect to be transferred?"

He bit his tongue. "No, but—"

Needed distraction came. He whirled and saluted a dark, sinister-looking army officer descending the steps of the build-ing.

"Sally, here's Captain Cass at last. I thought he'd be in today! Sir, this is the Sally Amber you've heard me talking about so much."

Jim Cass took the hand Sally ex-tended. "No wonder Dick's been rav-ing," he said, staring at her appraisingly with his cold, blue eyes. "I apologize for thinking he was nuts. I didn't be-lieve he had the good taste—"

His stare changed to a puzzled frown. "Say, haven't we met before?"

"If we had," said Sally, "I wouldn't have forgotten it."

But Captain Cass stood staring, long after her copter was indistinguishable among the cross currents of traffic.

CASS was no closer to the solution when he dropped in on Lister the fol-lowing day. The biologist, in labora-tory smock, was busy with the war-time routine of checking water samples from half a dozen coastal cities, and had but little time to listen to his superior.

"Oakland," he muttered, "bacterial count seven per c. c.; that's normal. Monterey, eleven; that's safe. Vera Cruz—say, did you ever see so much algae in the drinking water? Look at that beaker on the window sill. That's after two hours' exposure to sunlight, and it's as green as pea soup already. What's more, I saw reports from Chi-cago that it's just the same there. And —this is queer—from London as well."

"What's that fuzz on the trees?" asked Cass thoughtfully, looking idly out of the window. "I never saw that here before."

"Yeah. I noticed that. It's just a tree lichen, something like Spanish moss. A cryptogamous plant—that is, a spore-breeder. It's related to—— By the Lord! It's confervae, too, just like the alga!"

"Well? So what?"

"So nothing, except that whatever has stimulated the algae in the sea and in the drinking water, has also stimu-lated the lichens and the fungi. The cryptogamoids are the sort of plants that grew on earth during the carbonif-erous age, the age of coal."

"Maybe we're in for another age of coal, huh?"

"Hardly." said Lister, laughing. "There are several theories as to what caused the carboniferous age, such as a higher concentration of carbon di-oxide in the air, or a world-wide tropi-cal climate, or intense sun-spot activity, which would induce frequent and vio-lent electrical storms on the earth, and hence produce an abnormal amount of ozone in the air. Ozone is a particularly dense form of oxygen, and is able to filter out the death rays—"

"Death rays?" exclaimed Cass, prick-ing up his ears. He had been paying very little attention to Lister, but here was something in his own line—some-thing the military intelligence ought to know about. "Death rays?"

Lister laughed again. "Not the kind of death rays the army is interested in," he said. "But there are certain invi-sible rays of sunlight which have a fatal effect on living creatures. Ozone filters them out.

"It's one of the remarkable instances of the balance of nature that there is normally just enough ozone in the outer layers of the atmosphere to keep out the quantity of that invisible light which would be fatal to human life, and yet let in just enough to keep the algae within reasonable bounds. Now if— Say! I

wonder!"

"You wonder what?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all!"

"Lister," said Cass pointedly, "you seem to be able to be very close-mouthed about some things, and to some people. I wonder how you are with women."

"What do you mean?" asked Lister, with a guilty premonition.

"Well, for example, you didn't hap-pen to say anything to Miss Amber about the sailing of the fleet, did you?"

Lister flushed. He hadn't, of course; and yet she might have gath-ered it from some of his remarks. But then, what if she had?

"Of course not," he growled. "Speaking of the fleet," he added, "I'm going over to see Admiral Allen right now."

ARRIVED at the admiral's quarters, Lister came directly to the point. "Sir," he said, "I've been thinking about all these algae. At the rate they are in-creasing, you may find your whole fleet stalled in a mass of jelly before you get to Behring Strait."

"I've thought of that," Admiral Allen replied soberly, and yet with a twinkle in his eyes which Lister couldn't quite fathom.

"But have you heard the latest reports, sir?" Lister persisted. "The Chi-cago River is clogged. The stuff is beginning to plug the water mains everywhere. I know it's becoming a nuisance here in San Francisco. In Texas, the Spanish moss is beginning to collect in masses heavy enough to break tree branches.

"All over the country railroad ties are turning into pulpy beds of assorted fungi, puffballs, and a hundred other varieties. The resulting decay has even caused derailings. In the moister areas, trains actually have to plow their way through vast accumulations of lichens, which have found the shaded cuts and half-decayed ties an ideal environment in which to exercise their new vitality."

"It's even worse in Asia," the ad-miral replied. "They say that on the tundras the lichens are growing into heaps like haystacks on the railroads, and that the algae have blocked rivers and caused floods. That's why, even at the risk of getting our entire fleet stuck in the slime, we must attack the Khan while this unexplainable growth of plants is endangering his source of supplies."

"I didn't know that," said Lister.

"Well, keep it under your hat, and don't breathe it to a soul. It is secret information that has just come in from the intelligence service. Have you any idea as to the reason for all this? I was just going to send for you, when you showed up."

"Something may have caused an ab-normal increase in the ozone of the outer layers of the atmosphere, and this ozone may be filtering out those wave lengths of sunlight which ordinarily hold algae in check."

But Admiral Allen was one of those practical men who have little patience with scientific explanations of anything. So he suggested, "Might it not be some new device of Asiatic warfare?"

"I hardly think so, sir. The Khan wouldn't use this weapon which appears to be hurting him even worse than it is us."

II.

THAT EVENING, when Dick Lis-ter and Sally Amber were seated in a restaurant, she again broached the sub-ject of the algae.

"I hear it's even worse in Asia than in America," she said.

"How do you happen to know that?" he asked in surprise.

"It's so, then? Oh, everybody isn't so close-mouthed as you, Dick," she re-plied demurely. She raised her lovely dark, innocent eyes.

"Do you suppose it might be an Asiatic weapon? Or perhaps—since it seems to be even worse in

Siberia than here—an American weapon?"

Embarrassed, he mumbled, "How should I know?"

"But you do know something about it, don't you?" she shot at him.

Caught off guard, he stumbled. "Eh ? Oh—why, yes. The Beckerley fields —" He broke off, frowning in irritation.

"Sally," he growled, "that curiosity of yours is going to get you into trouble one of these days. This is wartime, and feminine curiosity is no excuse for pumping officers. I know that you are O. K., but others might not trust you. How'd you like to stand court-martial as an Asiatic spy, just because you ask too many questions?"

"Perhaps I am one," said the girl, smiling and raising her delicately penciled brows.

"It's no joking matter, Sally. People have been shot against a wall for less than that."

"I can see," said the girl dryly, "that Captain Cass has been lecturing you."

"How—" began Lister, then bit his lip.

"How do I know? Oh, I can read men like a book—any woman can. Captain Cass doesn't like me. And I don't like men who don't like me."

She pouted prettily.

"I'm glad he doesn't," declared Lister. "It would suit me if nobody liked you, but me."

HE RECALLED this conversation the next evening, when Cass strolled nosily into his laboratory, where he was working late over some analyses.

"Nice mess of algae," Cass observed, squinting at Lister's experimental tank. "They say the stuff is clogging the Atlantic harbors."

"You could damn near walk across the Golden Gate this morning," Lister replied, and went on to detail the latest news: train schedules disrupted in the northwest, ships stuck in harbors everywhere, even in the open seas, particularly the north Pacific.

But Captain Cass was not listening. He was leaning over Lister's glass-topped desk, peering intently at something beneath the glass—a snapshot.

"What's this?" he asked sharply.

"Just a snap of Sally. Not a very good one; print's blurred."

"Um!" said Cass. His eyes narrowed. Then he said, irrelevantly, "Have you any theory about what's causing all this growth of algae?"

"Yes," Lister admitted, pursing up his lips judiciously. "But I'm not going off half-cocked. When I've verified certain points, I shall report to Washington—not to the intelligence service."

"Well, seeing as you won't tell the intelligence service anything, the intelligence service will tell you something—and for your own good. Listen carefully, and don't fly off the handle: I was attached to the Harbin legation three years ago, before the war. I got to know a lot about the Khan's eastern capital. Maybe you never heard of the woman called Princess Stephanie—or did you?"

"Yes. What about her?"

"Wait a minute. Stephanie was the daughter of Dmitri Kazarov, the Khan's chancellor. He was killed fifteen years ago in the Japanese revolution, and the Khan himself took over the raising of Stephanie. It wasn't given much publicity, but, in a town like Harbin, people talk, and they were still talking when I was there. It seemed the Khan gave her a queer education—a very queer one."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean he raised her to be the greatest spy in history. She was taught every important language, and to speak each like a native. She was taught to be at ease in every situation and every level of society. She learned military science, so as to be able to identify important information. And, when it began to be evident that she was going to be a very beautiful girl, she was even taught the knowledge of human nature! But above all—above all, I say—she learned to be cold and heartless, and immune to love. She can act the part of a woman in love, but there is no feeling in her—no feeling except the desire to serve Asia!"

"But I don't see—"

"You will. When Stephanie was six-teen—that was three years ago, when I was in Harbin—the Khan forbade her to appear in public, lest foreign resi-dents learn her features and impair her usefulness. When she rode out-of-doors, no one was permitted within five hundred feet of her, and no one save her palace intimates really saw her face.

"But"—Cass grinned aggravatingly—"I happen to have extraordinary eye-sight, as a copter observer should, and I used to watch her from the prescribed distance. Once I even turned a pair of night glasses on her. She was a beauty, all right."

"I begin to suspect, sir," said Lister grimly, "that you're about to say some-thing you're going to be sorry for."

"Perhaps. Anyway, since the war began, there have been a lot of rumors about a brilliant feminine Asiatic spy—the Nightshade. It's my opinion that the Nightshade is the Princess Steph-anie, and as for the rest, I know only this—that Sally Amber looks like Stephanie!"

"You're utterly insane!" blazed Lis-ter. His voice rose. "It's ridiculous! Sally's no Asiatic. Does she look like an Oriental? Her skin is as white as marble—when she isn't sun-tanned, I mean. Her speech is thoroughly Ameri-can. Her eyes—"

He stopped; suddenly he had visual-ized Sally Amber's eyes—dark, pure, lovely; but, beyond doubt, with the slightest possible oriental cast.

"Exactly!" declared Cass, in reply to Lister's unspoken thought.

"Lieutenant, how long have you known this girl? Are you sure that her tan is tan, and not her natural color? And isn't she about the right age? And doesn't she spend a lot of time cultivating the friendship of peo-ple like you, who possess important mili-tary knowledge? Whether she gets any-thing out of you is a different story, but you ought to know whether she tries, whether she ever asks leading questions, or anything like that."

"She doesn't!" snapped Lister, then groaned. He himself had chided the girl more than once on her curiosity. "Look here, captain," he said, "if Sally is an enemy spy—it's inconceivable— but if she is, I say, it's America first with me, much as I love her. Lay off of her, will you, and let me find out."

"I'm not so hard-boiled and pitiless as you think."

"How do you—"

"How do I know what you think of me? Because it's my business, as an intelligence officer, to know what peo-ple think. But, as I was saying, I'll trust you. I'll give you your chance. I'm flying tonight on a certain mission, and shall not return for two days. Un-til then, the case is in your hands. But, if you have not solved it by then, I shall take it over."

LISTER'S mental turmoil brooked no delay. Despite the fact that, if Sally were dining out, she must have already left, he rushed across town to her apart-ment. She—or some one, at least— was home, for the library lights were glowing. He ignored the slow auto-matic elevator, and dashed up the four flights of steps to her floor.

He arrived in front of her door breathless and perspiring. There he paused, striving to calm himself.

Suddenly, he was aware of voices be-yond the door. He listened, but it was impossible to distinguish words. He fancied he heard the tones of a man, but even that was not a certainty.

He rang the bell. There was a sud-den silence in the room beyond; and then, after a considerable interval, the sound of footsteps. Sally herself opened the door, her face seeming strained and tense. But she smiled as she recognized Lister.

"Dick!" she exclaimed. "What's the matter? You're breathless!"

He strode past her. The room was empty of occupants, save for Sally and himself. "To whom were you talking?" he asked grimly.

"I was using the televisiphone. Why?"

"I thought I heard a man's voice in the room here."

"Dick!" she said reprovingly. "I had no idea your jealousy would lead to such imaginings." She looked up at him with her dark eyes sober. "You know you have no cause to be jealous."

"It isn't that," he replied miserably. Suddenly he burst out, "Sally, what were you doing in Harbin

three years ago?"

If there was a momentary flicker in her eyes, it was almost imperceptible. "Why, I was traveling. You know I love to travel."

"You say you saw the woman Stephanie there," he pursued. "Did any one ever tell you that you looked like her?"

Decidedly her eyes widened now. "Why—yes. Of course I've heard that. But, Dick, you don't think—" She laughed. "How absurd! You don't think that I'm the Nightshade, do you?"

"Who said anything about the Night-shade?" he snapped. "How did you know that Stephanie and the Nightshade are the same person?"

"Why, everybody hears those ru-mors, Dick."

"You mean that you hear everybody's rumors," he returned grimly. "Why are you so interested in everything that has to do with the war or the service—everything from fleet sailings to algae? Sally, you're not telling me the truth."

"How ridiculous!" she indignantly declared. Then, suddenly, her mood changing, she moved close to him, look-ing up at him out of innocent, dark eyes. "You trust me, don't you?"

"Heaven knows I want to!"

Her lovely, provocative lips smiled. "Then kiss me!" she whispered.

He obeyed, fiercely. As always, her lips burned like soft fire, but, suddenly, she threw back her head, and thrust her hands against him, as though to push away from his embrace. One of her scarlet finger nails drew a sharp gash across his throat. With hurt surprise in his eyes, he released her.

"You—were hurting me," she ex-plained, apologetically. But her eyes were watching him like a cat. "I'm sorry I scratched you."

"It's nothing," he muttered. He felt curiously dizzy—no wonder, he thought, in the grip of such violent and opposing emotions. But abruptly he found him-self sitting in a chair with his head on his hands, and the room seemed to gyrate around him like the cabin of a copter.

Through a haze of dizziness he heard a man's voice, and then Sally's in an-swer. "No, no," she said. "This was much better. If I'd called you there would have been a fight and a disturb-ance, and see how peacefully he sinks into stupor"

"I bow to you, Kazarovna," said the man. "There is but one Stephanie."

"I am glad that it turned out as it did," said Sally's voice. "He is the one who knows about the algae. And now Asia shall know."

III.

WHEN next Lister was aware of a world about him, it was a world of a most unstable nature. Minutes passed before he realized that he was in a plane, soaring over an apparently endless ex-ppanse of brilliant white clouds. There was a further interval before he per-ceived that Sally Amber was sitting, calmly smoking, beside the man who piloted the machine, and that he him-self was handcuffed very effectively to the aluminum arms of his seat. His head ached dully. Then, full realiza-tion dawned upon him. He was a pris-oner in the hands of agents of the Khan.

His movement caught the girl's at-tention. She rose and made her way to the seat facing him.

"I hope you're not feeling too ill," she said gently. "I'm sorry, Dick. Drugging you was necessary."

"Then it's true!" he groaned. "You are the Nightshade—a sneaking Asiatic spy!"

"Like a sneaking American spy," she retorted. "Dick, I serve my country in the best way I can, just as you and that Cass person and the rest of the Ameri-cans serve yours."

She smiled. "He's a clever fellow, that Captain Cass. I'm afraid his sus-picions will damage my value in Amer-ica."

"Well, not until—" He bit his lip, and hurried on, "Of course he will. He'll get those snapshots I have of you, and turn them over to his department. You're cooked as a spy from now on, Sally."

"Oh, not that bad," she said. "You forget that every picture you have of me was taken with my camera. My camera is a very queer little mechanism; when I use it, it takes sharp, clear pic-tures, but

when my friends use it, some-how the prints seem to come out blurred. Or hadn't you noticed that?"

He had, of course. He asked glumly, "Where are we headed for?"

"Asia," said Sally.

"Yeah, I thought so, since we're in a plane instead of a copter." Pound for pound and horse power for horse power, Lister knew that the planes were still more efficient than the copters, and the fact that Sally was using a plane meant a long flight.

"Why?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Don't you know? Because we have to have certain information from you. I'm sure it won't do any good to offer you safety for it, Dick; but I can promise, if it makes any difference to you."

"It doesn't," he responded grimly. "I won't sell my country for my personal safety. Anyway, I haven't the least idea what information you think I can give you. Your bacteriologists are as good as ours; our epidemics haven't been any more successful than yours."

She shook her soot-black hair. "Not bacteriology nor epidemics, Dick— algae!"

"Algae! Why?"

"Because you know the causes of this plague of slime in water, and lichens on land. It's an American weapon, and Asia needs the secret. It means every-thing—everything to us!"

"Indeed?" he said guardedly. "Why everything?"

"Don't act so innocent, Dick. You know quite well what the plague of lichens is doing in Siberia. It's clogging the rail lines, and the algae is block-ing the rivers. You know how impor-tant it is to keep our Alaskan expedi-tionary force supplied with coal and oil to power the Beckerley fields, and you know that if our fields fail for lack of fuel, the war's over. We're licked.

"You Americans use Alaskan coal, but our coal has to come all the way from the Stanovoi Mountains, either by water across the Sea of Okhotsk, or by rail up through Dezhnev. And it's becoming impossible to keep the rails open; Siberia is being strangled by your accursed lichens."

"Well, what about the water route?"

"Water! Ships are stalled all over the seven seas. Look there!"

He glanced through the floor window at the Pacific, five thousand feet below, visible now through a vast opening in the clouds. The sea had a curious aspect; it was not blue, but brilliant grass-green. Peering closer, he made out two tiny vessels idle on the surface.

"As bad as that!" he muttered, won-dering what was happening to Allen's mighty fleet. Would the admiral attempt to cross the choked ocean? To Sally he said, "That's fine. The more strangled Siberia gets, the better it suits me."

For the first time in their acquaint-ance a sign of irritation showed in her face. "It won't be for long!" she snapped angrily. "We'll get the secret out of you. Make no mistake about that, Dick!"

"And you," he said thoughtfully, "are sweet little Sally Amber, who said that she loved me."

Suddenly, her face was gentle. "And if I do love you?" she murmured. "If I do, would that make a difference to you, Dick?"

He laughed bitterly. "Do you think I'd believe you now? I know all about Princess Stephanie and her education. If you love anybody at all, it's the Khan!"

"Not the Khan, but Asia," she said. "The Khan is nothing to me, except for what he means to my country. For he himself, Dick, trained me from child-hood to be immune to love. And yet —and yet, Dick—I have never met a man whom I—like—as I do you. You mean less to me than Asia, but more to me than any human being in the world."

"And that," he sorrowfully asserted, "is another one of your pretty lies."

For a long moment, she was silent. "No. It isn't a lie," she said at last, rising and returning to her place be-side the pilot.

SHE ADDRESSED not another word to Lister until seven hours later, when they were soaring over Honshu, and snow-tipped Fujiyama slid beneath. Then she returned to the seat facing him, smiled very gently, and said softly, "I am terribly unhappy about this, Dick."

"Humph!" he said. "You ought to be triumphant."

"But I'm not. Listen to me, Dick. The Khan's intelligence division is not gentle. A number of the operatives are Mongols, and their methods of extract-ing information do not include kindness. It hurts me to think of you under tor-ture, Dick."

"You ought to have thought of that last night."

"But I can save you from it. If you'll tell me what I want to know about the plague of algae and lichens, I'll guarantee your safety. Isn't that the best way—for both of us?"

"No, Sally. I'm not saying that I have the information you want, but you can be sure, that, whether I have it or not, I'll never tell Asia anything that might help."

She sighed and left him, but her glo-rious, dark eyes were troubled. They were still troubled when the great

Khingan range loomed on the horizon, and the plane slanted down into Har-bin. She even seemed to pale when at last a slant-eyed guard took the key from her, and released Lister from his seat; and she followed the grim parade, as half a dozen men herded him into the centuries-old stone fortress that served as a military prison.

She did not enter the dark stone-walled cell; but, as the door swung shut, Lister glimpsed her pale face in the corridor. Her lips formed a silent phrase; he could have sworn that it was, "I'm sorry."

Well, it was too late now for her sorrow to help him, even if he believed in its sincerity. And he smiled bitterly, as he thought of the wild mistake that had led to his abduction. The algae and the lichens. Asia strangling in the grip of a plague that arose from so simple a cause that—if he told—a schoolboy could see the remedy.

Luckily for America, the cryptogams flourished most luxuriantly in Asia; and, until he told, all advantage lay with the Western continent. Until he told! He ceased to smile, and set his jaw grimly. He was not going to tell. Tor-ture or none, he had to be strong enough to keep silent.

Hours passed. He heard conversa-tions in the corridor outside, but they were in some Asiatic tongue, and meant nothing to him. Then a chance colloquy in *lingua Franca* told him that the Khan was not in Harbin, but was still with the troops on the Alaskan front. At last a guard brought him a jug of water, slimy-green with algae, and a slab of coarse bread; but this man, a Mongol, spoke neither English nor *lingua Franca*, or at least refused to speak them.

It was deep night when four grim Orientals and a stolid Siberian led him from his cell to a chamber that seemed sunk far underground. A single, dim electric light illuminated it, and a dozen pairs of cold eyes surveyed him—and one pair that was not cold. Sally Am-ber sat at the head of the narrow table, and she met his gaze with eyes that were wide, troubled, and apprehensive.

Then she addressed him. "Dick," she said softly, "I have told the interlocu-tory committee that you will give them what knowledge you have concerning this plague of mosses and algae. They have promised me your safety if you tell, and I have assured Comrade Plotkin that you would."

"Then, as usual, you lied," said Lis-ter grimly.

Plotkin spoke out of the depths of his beard. "You see, Kazarovna," he rumbled, "only one method works with these stubborn American apes. I think it best we try that method."

"Oh, no!" gasped Sally Amber. "Let me question him first. He'll tell me. I can get it from him. Please—" She broke off suddenly as Plotkin's icy eyes surveyed her curiously.

"Will you tell?" he asked Lister, and then, at the latter's stubborn silence, "Very well. The pincers under the arm-pits first, I think. An ounce or so of flesh from the proper places can some-times unblock the stream of informa-tion."

SALLY—or Stephanie—choked back a sob and covered her eyes. The four Mongol guards forced

Lister's arm upward; for a moment, he struggled, but realized instantly that it was utterly use-less. The stolid Siberian seized a glit-tering little instrument, and the pincers tore a ragged tatter of flesh from his armpit. He bit his lip fiercely to sup-press the groan of pain that sought ut-terance, but there was no sound in the chamber save Sally's stifled sob.

"Why so unstrung, Kazarevna?" asked Plotkin amiably. "Surely the Princess Stephanie has witnessed more extreme measures than this."

She smiled wanly. "Of course. It's just that I haven't yet recovered from my sojourn in America—a—a horrible place!"

Plotkin nodded and turned back to Lister. "Shall we try it again?" He smiled. "Or would you prefer a variation?"

"Neither," said the biologist, "I'll tell." Impassively he met the startled, relieved, unbelieving eyes of Sally. If she was acting, he thought, it was cer-tainly good acting!

"Good—good!" rumbled Plotkin. "You're much wiser—or at least less stubborn—than some of your country-men whom we have found it necessary to question. Now then, let us hear the secret."

"You'd better take this down care-fully," said Lister. "It's rather intri-cate."

He waited as Plotkin spoke in Rus-sian to a man at his side, then began: "The plague of algae and lichens," he said slowly, "is due to the great in-crease in numbers of thallogens. If the confervae were checked, the trouble would disappear."

"And what," barked Plotkin, "are thallogens?"

"Thallogens are the third grand di-vision of the cryptogamia. The group consists of the ulvae and fuci, besides the confervae."

"Can't you put that in understand-able language?" snapped Plotkin.

"I can express scientific information only in the language of science," said Lister, his eyes on Sally's fascinated one. "Your own scientists will have to translate it for you."

"Is that all?" asked the Siberian eagerly.

"That is all. Reduce the confervae, and there will be less thallogens. And when there are less thallogens, the algae and lichens will cease to trouble you. It's really very simple."

"Take him back to his cell," rumbled Plotkin. "And this had better be true, my friend, unless you crave further treatment."

"Every word of it is true," Lister asserted.

It was still deep night when, three hours later, the door of his cell opened, and a slim figure slipped stealthily in. For a moment he thought it was a boy; then he recognized Sally, wearing the shorts and rolled hose of a cop-terman. She closed the door quietly behind her, then rushed abruptly into his arms.

"I can't stand it!", she sobbed. "Why did you do it? Plotkin is furious—in-sane with rage. He'll have you rotted bit by bit with acid! He'll—he'll—Why did you trick him, Dick?"

Lister looked down into her white face. "Is this acting, too?" he asked coolly. "After all, the Princess Stephanie, the Nightshade, isn't supposed to be able to care what happens to a man."

"But I do! I love you, Dick. I care for nothing except you and Asia, but I can't bear to see you killed or tortured even for Asia." She paused, sup-pressing her sobs.

"Plotkin is wild," she said. "He wired a copy of your statement to the university at Tsitsihar, and back came the scornful reply that all that your words meant was that the plague of algae is due to an increase in the amount of algae."

He smiled. "Well? Isn't that true?"

"Yes, but— Oh, Dick, it's becoming horrible! They've kept the cities supplied with water by adding calcium chloride to the supply, but all through the country—all through the world, I guess—wells are choked and rivers smothered, and oceans have become heaving masses of slime. And on land the mosses spread like flames of gray fire!"

He was still suspicious, though he held the girl tightly in his arms. "Is this an attempt to play on my sympathies?" he asked. "I warn you, Sally, I'll tell you nothing."

"I don't care whether you do or not! Don't you understand, Dick? I love you!"

"If you love me, you'll help me escape from here."

She pushed herself out of his arms, and stared at him with indignation at his disbelief. "And why else do you think I came?" she asked in a very low voice. "Follow me, quickly, before Plotkin cools down enough to put his mind on the details of your torture."

She stepped to the door, rapping sharply. It opened instantly, and they passed into the dim corridor beside a young Russian guard who looked at Sally with tragic eyes. She spoke softly; the man extended his bared arm, and the girl scratched it hastily with one of her finger nails. Lister watched the man as he sank slowly into a limp sprawl on the floor.

"Thus it will seem like American trickery," she whispered. "But I am afraid he will die for treason, none the less."

"Why did he do it?"

"Because," she said simply, "he loves me."

LISTER followed her up a narrow flight of stone steps, wondering how many of the barred doors in the corri-dor hid American prisoners. At last, she paused. "Wait here," she whispered, and moved from his view along a passage.

He heard a low-voiced conversation in Chinese, and then Sally was at his side again. "Come on," she called softly. "I've sent this one with a fake message to Plotkin."

Lister followed her up yet another flight of steps, and emerged suddenly into starlight. They had attained the roof of the structure, and he glanced apprehensively at the lights of Harbin all around. Sally was slipping toward a copter, a tiny, single-man observer.

"Quick!" she breathed, "get in."

"Both of us?" He frowned doubt-fully at the tiny craft.

"We must. For I have to show you what to do. This alone would not carry, you far."

He crowded in beside her. The tiny cabin swung like a pendulum as the vertical screw whirred and whined, and bored its way heavily aloft. Sally flashed her green passage light, waiting anxiously for the reply from the ground.

"There!" she exclaimed in relief. "They've turned off this section of the Beckerley field. I have a pass, but if they had discovered your escape they might have blocked all passage—espe-cially mine, I think; for I am sure that Plotkin has ceased to trust me."

The craft whined into darkness. The lights of the city diminished and dimmed; and, at last, Sally relaxed, leaning more comfortably against him in the close quarters of the cabin.

"We're beyond searchlights at last," she said. "Now they'll have to wait until dawn to pursue us, and by dawn we might be anywhere in this half of Asia, for all that they can tell. If this corkscrew only holds together—"

It did. When the red sunrise flashed up on the sea, they were directly over a narrow promontory that struck south into the waters. Lister gasped as he saw those waters, for surely this was the most amazing sea ever glimpsed by earthly eyes, at least since the plesiosaur looked over the oceans of the car-boniferous age hundreds of millions of years ago.

It was a brilliantly smooth, green sea, seeming at first as motionless as turf. But, as the copter dropped toward the beach, Lister could distinguish motion, a slow heaving of the slime as if the vast expanse were breathing. There were no breakers, for the algae had at last tamed storm and wind, and the seas permitted the wind to slip as smoothly above them as if the waters had been covered with a film of oil. The one thing that sent a tremor of disgust through Lister was the sight of sea birds stalking dismally over a crust of slime that had dried enough to sup-port them, gobbling up billions of flies.

SALLY wasted not a glance on the scene. "The south cape of Taiwan," she said, as the copter grounded on a slimy beach, "or, as you call it, Formosa. There's a boat here—"

"A boat? How can we use a boat—in that?"

"Listen a moment. In that shed, there's one of the experimental side-wheelers, a quick adaptation by our scientists, who had foreseen this outcome, if the algae were not checked. Side-wheels can push a light hull right over the algae. They don't foul like pro-pellers. This one has a dynoline en-gine, and a

range of about a thousand miles."

"A thousand miles! I can't get any-where on that!"

"You can get as far as I want you to get," she retorted with narrowed eyes. "You can reach Hongkong—that's British—or you can make Hai-phong in French Indo-China. Hong-kong is much the closer."

"But they're neutral! I'll be in-terned, if I go into a neutral port. I want to get back to America and my job."

"And I," said Sally softly, "want to see to it that you don't. I'm being enough of a traitor to Asia now, without letting a dangerous enemy like you return to service. All I want is to see you safe, Dick."

She turned away, and he followed her to the shed she had pointed out. There was the boat, true enough, a thirty-foot, open affair with six-foot paddle wheels like a miniature old Mis-sissippi side-wheeler.

"Do you see this?" asked the girl, indicating a curious device of twisted glass tubing. "That's a sun-alembic. You put sea water in it, and the evapo-ration creates a partial vacuum in which the sea water can be distilled for drink-ing. The sun does it, just as it does with the rain.

"Under here is concentrated food for about a month. Can you take care of a dynoline engine? If the algae clog the cooling coils, you must stop and clean them at once."

"I know all that, but what about you, Sally? Will you be safe after this?"

"I can take care of myself." Her tone was confident enough, but Lister could see that she was under a terrific strain in this struggle between duty and desire. "Oh, Dick," she said shak-ily, "if this war is ever over—"

"It won't be long now. As soon as the Khan's supply of fuel to Alaska fails him, he's ended."

"Ah, but he's laying—" She caught herself, flushing miserably.

"Laying a pipe line, eh?" finished Lister. "I rather thought he would. He'll power the Beckerley fields with oil, eh?"

Sally laughed bitterly. "The down-fall of the Nightshade!" she declaimed. "No wonder they fear love in a spy. Dick, that is the first slip that I've ever made, and my one consolation is that long before you can get to any place from where you could send that infor-mation to America, it will be too late. The work will be completed and pro-ected by fields. And so—good-by."

With the feel of her lips still on his, he watched the copter flutter its way into the north; then turned to the craft he was to use, whose only name was a Chinese ideograph. It slid easily into the slip; and, without further hesita-tion, he started the engine, engaged the paddles, and was on his way.

His progress was a queer species of locomotion. The blades threw up vast lumps of green slime that fell behind with sullen, splashless *plumps*; and the light craft, thrust forward by the in-credibly powerful dynoline engines, slid easily along the surface of the magot-infested slime. It was not unduly slow; he judged that the boat made twenty-five knots.

Formosa was a receding shadow when he passed the first stalled ship. This was a Dutch freighter, and the crew—or what was left of them, since many had doubtless been put ashore by cop-ter—crowded the rail to watch his pas-sage. He waved, but there was never a sign of response.

Suddenly, he realized the cause of the grim silence; his craft bore gold and purple stripes—the colors of the Khan—and the Dutch, with Borneo, Celebes, and New Guinea in the very shadow of the vast Asiatic Union, had no love for the Khan.

His coil clogged, and he paused to clean the slime from the screens. It was at this moment that the idea struck him; he sat suddenly erect, staring east-ward where the China Sea met the mighty Pacific. Why did he have to go to Hongkong or Haiphong—or any neutral port, for that matter?

What other possibilities were there? He glanced at the map of the East In-dies, affixed to the cowl of the motor. There was Luzon, of course; but the Philippines, during their half century of independence, had grown far closer to Asia, in sympathy, than to the United States.

There were the Marianas, where Ad-miral Allen had all but annihilated the Asiatic fleet, and where surely there must be an American garrison, if he could but reach them. But the Mari-anas lay two thousand miles out in the Pacific, close to Guam. He had, fuel for half that distance, but—

HE SWUNG the craft about and set it lurching back toward the Dutch freighter. The maintenance crew watched him sullenly as he approached. He pulled close under the hull and shouted, "Any of you understand Eng-lish?"

A man pushed to the rail. "Yes! What do you want?"

"Listen! I'm American, not Asian. Look!"

He was not in uniform, since the biological branch did not require it, but he displayed his identification tag, with its red-white-and-blue shield plainly visible.

There was a stir. "What do you want?" asked the man above him, but in friendlier tones.

"Just some information. I want to know if there's an American or British ship stalled between here and Guam. I want to buy some fuel. You been in touch with any?"

There was a long conversation in Netherlands dialect. At last Lister's in-formant spoke again. "De Britisher *Resolute*—she stuck—by latitude 21'20" and longitude 135'60"."

Lister looked at his map, marking the position. It would do; it was almost exactly a thousand miles east of his present position, and might be a close gamble with his fuel, but it was worth the try. If he reached the Britisher and got fuel, he could then certainly make Guam or the Marianas, and give to the American army the news that the lichens had blocked the Siberian rail-roads, thus cutting off the fuel supply to the Khan's Alaskan Beckerley fields, but that the Khan was frantically lay-ing a pipe line.

Between the giving out of the Khan's coal supply and the arrival of his first oil, there might be a brief gap of time, during which his Beckerley fields would be dead. If America only knew this, and could strike then, the war would be won. Lister must try to get the information to America in time!

So he set the boat lurching away into the east. Little by little, the Dutch ship faded toward the horizon, and For-mosa was a dark cloud sinking ever lower. At last he was alone on a dead, green sea that barely moved, and his passage left no wake save a slightly darker green scraping, that slowly closed behind him. No fin cut the slimy sur-face, and but few birds soared, for their slime-bred prey was too abundant to draw them far from land.

He set his course carefully on a great circle, to conserve his fuel. The mal-odorous slime sickened him with its stench. The perpetual lurching of his craft added to his nausea. Day faded into a starry darkness, and darkness into day.

He made it. At the second mid-night, with scarcely a pint of dynoline remaining in his tank, the lights of the *Resolute* flashed out of the darkness.

But convincing the captain was al-most as difficult a job as the passage itself.

"It's deuced irregular!" That official grunted. "We're neutrals." But at last, because England had India and Papua and the Malay States, and hated Asia and all its component parts by tradition and policy, the British captain acceded to Lister's request, and Lis-ter set out again with a full tank.

He had tried to get the captain to send a code message by radio to America for him, but to that the captain had proved adamant.

IV.

EARLY NEXT MORNING, on glancing back, he spied a plane, wing-ing swiftly out of the shadows that still clouded the west and the distant China Seas. Soon it arrived, and circled far above him, then slanted downward in a wide spiral. The double-headed golden eagle of the Khan's air force glittered on its wings.

The machine swung close. An arm waved vigorously, gesturing in the di-rection of the west. The pilot was ordering him back.

Lister stared with narrowed eyes, but permitted his boat to jog right ahead. He was not going to be turned back so easily as that. All the same, he had a feeling anything but comfortable, for he was completely at the mercy of the Asiatic aviator, should the latter choose to use bullet or bomb.

The plane circled again. Suddenly Lister realized with a start of amaze-ment that the craft was attempting to land—to alight on that sticky mass of heaving slime! It was impossible!

But the plane seemed able to achieve the impossible. Its pontoons skipped lightly over the treacherous stuff, bound-ing toward him. It was all but down safely, and then—then the inevitable! Either the plane dipped or the sea heaved—Lister could not tell which—and the idling propeller struck a mass of green slime. Very gently, the plane lifted its tail and nosed over, the green corruption spewing from the spinning blades. And the pilot—for a single instant Lister had a clear view of the form that was catapulted through the air—was plunged into the impassive algos. All that remained was a quickly filling depression and the sinking plane.

But he had seen enough. Sally Amber! It was Sally who struggled somewhere in the depths of that nauseating sea. And he—he was as help-less to aid her as though he were a thousand miles away.

He spun the wheel; the boat bounced and jogged toward the spot. As near as he could bring it without disturbing the gradually closing dent in the slimy surface of the sea, he halted the craft. He seized the twenty-foot rope fastened to the bow, and tied one end of the rope firmly around his arm. Then, fixing his gaze on the spot, he plunged down into the slime.

It was like trying to swim in heavy oil. To move his arms at all required a great effort, and then he was not sure whether he was going down, or up, or sidewise, or was just churning. The stuff clogged his nose, his eyes, his ears—even his mouth, when in an unguarded moment he opened it.

His hand struck something solid. It was an instant before he realized that it was Sally's ankle. He clutched it in a grasp of desperation, and gave a yank on the rope tied to his arm. Pulling in on the rope was difficult, as he had only one free hand with which to work. Once he lost hold of the rope in the slime, and had to start all over again, groping along it from where it was tied to his arm.

He scarcely knew when he reached the surface, so thick was the coating of muck he carried with him. He thrust the girl across the gunwale, and then had to stop to clear his nose and mouth before he could even breathe. He clambered into the boat.

Sally was not unconscious, but her nausea made her almost as green as the algae she clawed out of her eyes.

"Thank you, Dick," she said, "for the rescue. I'm ashamed that I needed it."

"Why are you here, Sally?"

Her eyes hardened a bit. "Why are you here, Dick? I told you to make for Hongkong or Haiphong."

"But I didn't promise to, Sally."

"Perhaps not, but do you think I can let you get to an American ship or port, with the information you have? It's bad enough that I let it slip, and that I helped you to escape, but I will not play traitor to Asia any further than that! Do you understand?"

"How'd you find me?"

"It occurred to me, after I left you, that you might try just what you did. I got back to Harbin before Plotkin thought of connecting me with your escape—if he's thought of it yet—so I was able to get a plane. I flew over the China Sea between Taiwan and Hongkong, until I was sure you weren't on that route. Then I flew east.

"For two days, I've been scouring this area. You see, I anticipated that you'd head for Guam. But now, Dick, you're going where I say. We're going back to Luzon. The Philippines are neutral, but they're friendly to Asia, so I can have you interned there, and yet, with a little influence, go free myself. Start your engine."

He did. The boat took up its east-ward course.

"Turn about!" she snapped. When he merely smiled, she reached suddenly into the bosom of her aviator's shirt and produced a tiny Japanese auto-matic, one of the diminutive nine-cali-ber, but deadly with its high-velocity, chrome-jacketed bullets. "Put about, Dick!"

With a movement so casual that she was caught completely off guard, he kicked the weapon from her hand, and it spun off into the slime. "We go my way, Sally," he said quietly.

She sobbed, "I ought to have killed you! But I couldn't, and this is the result."

Abruptly she turned her glorious deep eyes upon him. "Dick, do you know what will happen to me, if you take me to Guam? You know what they do to spies! Do you want me to be shot against a wall?"

"Lord!" he muttered. "I didn't think of that. Listen, Sally. The Pelew Islands are Japanese, and they're

not far off my course. I'm going to land you there about midnight, and you're going to be thoroughly bound, and very tightly gagged, so you can't rouse any pursuit. After the war is over, maybe you will forgive me."

"I forgive you now, Dick," she said softly, but with a puzzling note in her voice. "The Nightshade is dead. I'm no good as a spy when you're involved. But I warn you that I shall still try to defeat you!"

He swung the boat onto its new course. "If you can, Sally."

SUDDENLY he noticed something which altered all his plans! Staring out over the horrible, slimy sea, he noticed a change. In addition to the green, there were now vast patches of brown —of dying algae!

For a moment he failed to grasp the significance of this. Then, so suddenly that Sally jumped, he shouted, "I see it all now! It has happened!"

"Wh-what?"

"The Khan's Beckerley fields are off in Alaska! His Siberian railroads are blocked at last by the fungi! He's out of fuel! It can't be our fields that are off, for our coal mines are too close behind our lines to be cut off in this way."

"How can you know that any Beck-erley fields are off?" asked Sally.

"The—the—" He caught himself, then proceeded, "We're not going to Pelew Island, after all. We're going to Guam. This information can't wait; for, if the American lines know it and advance at once, the war's over. Our Beckerley fields are on, and yours are off!"

"How—how do you know?"

"I'll tell you, for it can't do any harm now. You wanted to know what I knew about this plague of algae, didn't you? Well, I'll tell you, Sally. It isn't an American weapon; it's an accident!"

"An—accident?"

"Yes, or a by-product. It's the re-sult of the Beckerley fields. I got the hunch when I learned that the center of the trouble seemed to be Alaska. Up in Alaska there are two enormous fields of force within a few hundred feet of each other, ours and yours. Between them is a hundred-mile-long zone of terrific electrical strain. What's the re-sult? Ozone! Tons of ozone pour-ing up into the air, until the very en-velope of air around the earth was affected.

"The normal ozone content increased, and this layer of ozone around the earth cut off the sun's death rays which had been maintaining the balance of nature. Relieved from the restraining influence of the death rays, the cryptogamia—the lichen; and fungi and algae—in-creased to abnormal quantities.

"But it's over now. Ozone is un-stable and goes rapidly back to normal. The ozone in the air is decreasing. The death rays are getting through again.

"How do I know? Because the algae are dying, and that can mean only one thing—that there are no longer two Beckerley fields opposing each other in Alaska, pouring ozone into the air. There is only one Beckerley field—ours. The Khan's shield is gone, and all we need do is advance!"

Sally was very pale now. "I wish you hadn't told me this," she whispered. "Oh, Dick, don't you see that it means that I just have to stop you? If you love me, throw me into the slime of the sea, for I'd rather die than live these next few hours trying to kill you!"

His triumphant face sobered. "Hours?" he echoed. "It will take us three days to reach Guam. Sally, when I need sleep, I'm going to tie you up. And I hope you don't resist, because Lord knows I don't want to hurt you."

But she yielded quite submissively when, a few hours later, he twisted the painter rope about her wrists and an-kles. He remembered her trick of the drugged finger nail, and carefully avoided giving her another similar op-portunity. Then he set and locked the gyro steering compass, and curled up on one of the seats to sleep.

When he awoke, the boat was still slapping along across the slime. Sally was still securely tied and apparently in. the same position, but the bottom of the boat was wet with some colorless fluid.

"What's this?" he snapped.

"It's your fuel," said Sally trium-phantly. "I drained the tank."

He gasped! But in a moment he broke out in a chuckle of relief. "That isn't dynoline," he said. "That's the fresh water from the sun-alembic I was saving against a cloudy day. The wa-ter tank's air-tight, and the algae can't get in."

Sally sagged despondently in her place. "Will you untie me?" she asked dully. "I'm very cramped,"

HE VENTURED an attempt to sleep only once more, and this time lying full length against the fuel tank, while he bound Sally not only hand and foot, but lashed her to the gunwale as well. And when he awakened, she had kicked the sun-alembic to bits.

"Why'd you do that?" he asked an-grily. "Although we don't need water for the one day that's left to travel, it would be a convenience."

"I did it so that if we miss Guam we'll be dead before some scouting American plane happens to run across us."

"We won't miss Guam," he promised grimly.

As the hot, stinking day wore on, the grueling grind began to tell on Lister. All about them the algae was turning brown, and the stench was almost un-bearably nauseating.

"I'm going bats," he told the girl. "A crazy poem keeps hammering at my head. I've got to pass it on, or I shall go bats. Did you ever hear the short-short-short story about Algy? All this rotting algae is what suggested it to me, I guess."

Sally turned intent catlike eyes on him, aroused from her lethargy by the possibility of his cracking.

"Go on. Tell it to me," she urged insidiously.

He laughed harshly, discordantly, gave his head a violent shake, and ran the back of his hand across his tired eyes.

"It goes like this," he said:

"Bear met Algy.

Bear et Algy.

Bear was bulgy.

Bulge was Algy."

Suddenly, he gave a wild laugh. "That's all wrong this time!" he de-clared. "By Heaven! The bear isn't eating Algy this time. Algae is eating the bear—the Siberian bear. We've got them licked, if we ever reach Guam."

"We never will reach Guam," the girl taunted him.

"Won't we?" he exclaimed. "Look! A low shore line showed in the dark-ening east. "Guam!" he announced, sober and sane once more.

Sally was disconsolate. "I've lost, then," she whimpered. "Please, Dick, be kind to me, and—let me kiss you now, in case anything happens."

He knew what she meant. He had worried enough over the question of what would happen to the lovely Night-shade; for, despite his assurance, he knew that Captain Cass was aware of Sally's identity. The two days of grace were long since up—Cass would have reported the circumstances of Lister's disappearance.

Cass' description of Sally, together with the blurred photographs in Lis-ter's office, would certainly identify the girl. Nothing could save her from a wall at sunrise. So he drew her into his arms with a tenderness born of despair.

Just in time he realized her intent. He caught her wrist as she struck with her drugged finger nail at his throat.

"Damn you, Sally!" he blazed. "Now I'm going to give you a dose of your own medicine. There's only one way you're safe to have around, and that's unconscious!"

But she read his purpose. Before he could seize her forefinger, she had clenched it into a stubborn little fist, and she fought him with a strength that was amazing. But at last he saw the way: disregarding her blows against his face, he slowly, inexorably, crushed her clenched fist in his hand. She cried out in pain

as her own finger nails were driven into the flesh of her palm, and then, suddenly, her eyes widened, fluttered, and closed, and she sank first to her knees, then in a limp heap at his feet.

IT WAS DEEP NIGHT when he carried her up the side of the U. S. cruiser *Dallas*, stalled in the algae off Agana. Thrusting her into the arms of the ship's surgeon, he rushed to report to the commanding officer his information: that he knew, from the browning of the algae, that the Khan's Alaskan Beckerley field was off. The message did not need to wait for coding, for America still held the secret of non-interceptible radio.

Scarcely an hour later came back the news that America had triumphed in Alaska.

Later in the night came the flash that the Khan was dead—his body had been positively identified. America broadcast this news to the world.

By morning, rioting and dissension had broken out all over Asia. The Asiatic Union was disintegrating. It was the beginning of the end.

There was jubilation aboard the *Dallas*, but Dick Lister could not share in it. True, yes, he had saved America. He was a great national hero. The president in person had radioed his thanks.

So Dick Lister pretended to be elated, to join in the celebration—for, of course, he had to. But, through it all, two faces haunted him: the piquant oriental features of the girl he loved, and the grim, inexorable, duty-mad features of Captain Cass. Regardless of the fact that the war was now over and won, regardless of the part which Lister had played in winning it, Cass would never rest until he had brought death to the archspite of the late enemy.

And so, as soon as he could, Lister broke away from the jollification, and dragged his leaden feet toward the ship's hospital. There he stood with the ship's doctor, looking down on the still unconscious Sally.

"A very beautiful girl, your fiancée," said the doctor.

"Yes. We were kidnaped together by the Khan's spies, and she was really more important than I in accomplishing our escape. This is just exhaustion—and, of course, excitement." But he knew that Captain Cass would certainly spike that story.

"Well," observed the doctor, "your coming is almost the first excitement I've had out of this war. I hope you're right about the algae being over, for it's been ungodly dull being stuck here in all this slime. One casualty is all I've seen, and that one at a distance. A young officer tried to land his plane on the algae a week ago, nosed over, and was lost. They never recovered his body."

"It's a difficult thing to do—find a body in that green muck," said Lister reminiscently. "Who was he?"

"He was—let's see—a Captain Jim Cass. We knew who it was, 'cause we'd been expecting him."

Captain Jim Cass! A week ago. Then Cass had never returned to America. He had died before the end of the two days of grace which he had granted Lister. And his knowledge of Sally's identity had died with him. Now no one would ever know!

With a sob of joyous relief, Dick Lister dropped to his knees beside the sleeping form of the girl he loved.