

Waters Under the Earth:
Part Two
by Anthony M. Rud

"What perils awaited two Americans in an underground city of gold?"

* * *

BUT INSTANTLY GORMAN SHOOK his head, recalling the wording of the knot writing. It was not as simple as that.

"What's wrong?" whispered Jack, his lips against Gorman's ear as the latter half-turned, intending to turn back in the cramped space.

"No way out here. Another cenote — and over on the other side a keeper of the fires who'd give the alarm," was the almost inaudible answer.

They started to crawl back. Gorman knew that they were high now, very near the bedrock rim, above which was nothing save the four to eight feet of dry, porous earth which covers Yucatan. Then the sunshine of early afternoon! Would he and Jack Chastang ever find a way out of it?

The sudden reverberation of booming drum — a section of tree trunk hollowed and covered with tight-drawn deer-hide — made them pause. Murmuring echoes of voices came, and the sounds of men rushing to some central point.

"The alarm," said Gorman from between clenched teeth. "They don't know what's wrong, but they'll proceed to find out."

A few seconds later and he inched back. "There's a side corridor, a branch. Take it. Feel on the left." They hurriedly got into the back corner; for the refuge they had sought was not more than a dozen feet long and ended in a wall. A door, really, for Gorman would feel the glyphs upon it. Without a light, however, he could do nothing toward deciphering them.

"I see a lot now, Jack," he whispered. "They've got chicleros — chicle-gatherers,

Mayas who have worked for white men — out with them. I heard some shouts in Spanish."

Jack did not answer. The blackness had borne in the peril heavily upon him, it seemed. Together the two men crouched, while outside somewhere the drum throbbed a full 20 minutes, then ceased. Gorman could feel it go on throbbing in his temples.

FLICKERS OF PASSING TORCHES showed that a systematic search was being made. No less than three times a priest in flowered robe and carrying a light, came crouching through the low passage to the cenote. But none of the three even looked into the dead end passage, which seemingly was not in use. Gorman and Jack lay prone, their weapons ready to spout death. But if that necessity came it could mean nothing but the end.

The sounds, however, lessened, grew faint.

"Will they hunt from roof to basement?" whispered Jack.

Gorman started. "Good egg!" he said. "Let's try it now. But one second." He flashed his light upon the door which had blocked his progress, and then reached forward a hand, only to stay it.

"This is simple," said he wonderingly. "A door which opens only one way. A prison? Well, never mind now."

Silent parts of the darkness, they felt a way out, taking the turn of corridor away from the high cenote, then turning sharply left along a passage which was dimly lighted at the end.

The light brightened. The corridor widened. They emerged cautiously on a six-foot gallery which spiraled about an immense

domed chamber, 80 or more feet across, and probably a full 100 feet from the ceiling — just a short distance about their heads — to the floor far below.

"The temple! Look!" whispered Gorman almost in awe.

Across them was a stone god — the ox, Hurid Ku — though it would be hard for one uninitiated to guess what beast was meant. The great figure, with forelegs and shoulders and lowered head carved out of the rock wall, stood on the floor. His horns curved upward almost to their level! The hindquarters still were part of the rock; and the entire expanse of that great carving was covered with multicolored feather work.

The Snake god and the Eagle, neither of these feather coated, completed the awesome trinity. At the feet of each burned an immense, almost smokeless votive fire. And there between the latter two, on a sort of ledge, reposed a great stone which Gorman with a thrill knew was the combined sacrificial stone and "cup of god!"

Here was the real shrine! Here was the temple, and there across this empty dome of temple, between the Snake and the Eagle, would be the river of blood leading away from the sacrifice.

And the treasury must lie just beyond!

Jack was breathing audibly, gazing down spellbound. Gorman took him by the arm, and started around the spiral ramp, which here at the top flattened out to its final level just under the rock ceiling. Gorman's objective was the great stone snake; for from his own experience at Palenque and Chichen Itza, he knew that these images invariably hollowed out — in order to give the priests a chance to light up even the eyes, blow out puffs of smoke from the mouths, and perform other mechanical miracles to impress the worshipers below.

Gorman deliberately said nothing of the treasure search. He hustled Jack around the ramp — and just then at the second loop of the

spiral below them a squad of the armed searchers came out of one of the cave mouths and descended a short distance, to disappear again in another.

The small number of denizens puzzled Gorman, but he was thankful for the fact. Three of that squad had been chicleros, to judge by their boots and other clothing. These, even more than the Sublevados, were his enemies till death.

They had almost reached the Snake, with its great stone arch of neck thrust outward and down, when a horrified sound came from Jack Chastang. Narrow stone steps led down steeply toward the coils of the Snake, and up these now came a screaming girl!

She wore tatters of a flowered robe, and was bare-legged. A sort of yellow sandal was on one foot, and the other was bare. She held her right hand to her left shoulder, and blood flowed between her small fingers!

Gorman was stiffened by surprise. This girl or woman was yellow-haired! And she was pursued now by a Sublevado priest, who came jiggling up the stairs, slashing vindictively with a knife that showed red all the way to the hilt!

Jack Chastang leapt — unseen by the priest. With a startled cry of different timber, the girl passed him, to turn swiftly, catching Gorman by the arm. As in a dream the latter knew that this was a white woman. Could she be the eldest of Severn's girls?

Jack was not worried by any considerations save one. As the robed Maya came, intent on sinking his stained blade into his quarry for some unguessed vengeful reason, Jack caught upraised arm. With his other fist he slugged once, catching the surprised priest flush on the side of the jaw.

The latter staggered away, and Jack made his mistake. He let the man go, knowing he would fall.

The priest teetered back three steps, and then his heel caught the low stone coping.

He seemed to deflate all at once. He fell and both Jack and Gorman leapt forward vainly to catch him.

They caught the flowered fiber cloth of his robe, and it tore. Over he went! He turned slowly in the air, seemed just to kiss the shiny side of the great snake neck there below, and then rebounded enough to clear the right side of the lower coils of rock.

With faces suddenly pale they heard the thunk — soft and horrifying — as the body struck the rock floor below.

"O! O! You are both white men! You — O, you'll be caught!"

"Yes. You're Miss Severn?" whispered Gorman, again in control of himself. "Where can we hide? In the Snake?"

"No. Never mind, he didn't more than scratch me." This to Jack, who was clumsily endeavoring to bind a handkerchief about the girl's arm just at the shoulder, where a cut an inch long bled.

"Come," she breathed. "This — this hide-out isn't permanent, but it's the best I know!"

Light-footed she turned and sped past the stair leading down the Snake statue. Jack ran after her, and Gorman followed, not more than a step behind.

She raced around almost to the Eagle, and then turned sharply to a narrow door on the inner wall.

"Stairs! You'll have to take my hand!" she whispered excitedly from the darkness.

Jack took her hand and passed his other back to Gorman. Then they plunged rather awkwardly down a dark flight, across a short flat space where the walls brushed their shoulders and finally were halted.

"Inside Tonatiuh! The right wing of the Eagle! This is where I — "

"Is it all right to light a match?" Jack asked.

"Not yet. Wait! You will have to stay here in the dark. If — if they saw a light here they would come in. I must hurry now. They

will find Pahna — the priest who fell — and I must explain!"

"One second!" whispered Gorman imperatively. "Your other sisters?"

"Up North in school, thank heaven!"

"You father?"

A small sound of misery came from the unseen girl. "I — don't know," she confessed. "They don't let me leave the temple. Dad is a prisoner somewhere. They can't kill him; that is, Crosschen, the Fire Priest doesn't dare, because Dad was one of them. They've got him a prisoner in some room with a one-way door. I hope to find it sometime. But now — O, I hope they don't catch you. You — one of you was named Gorman, is that right?"

"Still is," said Maya Gorman grimly. "All right, go ahead, Miss Severn. We'll take care of ourselves, and be ready to get you out of this as soon as you say the word."

"I — can't go without — Dad!" she said, her voice breaking a little. Then she was gone, just faint sounds of her steps receding and disappearing.

"My Lord, Chief, that's a girl!" breathed Jack Chastang.

"Yes. Now you hold the fort here, and be ready to help her when she comes back," directed Gorman shrewdly. "I'm going out for a little while."

"Out? Where?" Jack caught his arm in the darkness.

"She can't leave without her father. I've got a strong hunch I know where they've got him. Take care of her if I don't get back, partner!"

And Gorman squeezed Jack's hand an instant. Then he flashed his tiny light twice, and was gone.

Turmoil had started, down on the temple floor. One of the parties of searchers, scanning every inch of the downward way, had chanced to look below the coils of the Snake, where a 10 foot circle of fire burned

with almost even flame rising a few inches and vanished almost without smoke.

There lay a crumpled body, less than a yard from the flame, with a hunched, misshapen figure bending over it, then raising his arms to gesture wildly. This was the Keeper of the Fires at the great temple shrine; he was a hunchback mute.

When Gorman came speedily around the ram, retracing his steps after puzzling a way up from the Severn girl's refuge, others had joined the hunchback; and they were shouting hoarsely, demanding that someone tell them how the priest had died.

Just as Gorman reached the dark corridor leading back and down the one from which they had first viewed the temple, he saw a flying figure come out across the temple floor. It was Miss Severn, and from that height she looked like a child running, with her yellow hair streaming behind. She went straight toward the group surrounding the body; and Gorman waited to see no more. She was some sort of priestess, and they probably would not harm her at once, no matter if she claimed to have killed the priest.

TWENTY SECONDS LATER AND HE reached the blind-end passage just short of the cenote. He snicked the flashlight — and the little bulb was dim. Shrugging, he reached for his last refill, clicked it in place, and then looked carefully at the door or panel which confronted him.

Just the fish glyph, the motif found everywhere in the ancient Mayan cities. Just that one, without any complications. But below it the carrot-figure one, called Atla, and across it the two beveled parallel lines which conventionalized a road or way. Then below this a square, with a mosaic which gave a queer cubistic effect of a man bowed forward in hopeless dejection.

Shaking his head, Gorman pressed the fish glyph. Slowly, solemnly the panel raised a foot, two feet from the bottom...

Then swiftly it dropped back into the original position! It had come down again like the blade of a guillotine!

Staring, Gorman was aware only of a breath fetid, much-breathed air which had come from within the cell. For cell it was, he now was certain.

What a trap for any intending rescuer! The stone panel no doubt weighed half a ton. It would encourage entry, and instantly cut off retreat. But why had Severn, if he really was there, failed to take advantage of the chance to slide his thin frame under and gain freedom?

Speculations were useless. Gorman again depressed the fish glyph, throwing himself prone as the panel started to rise slowly.

"Severn, are you there?" he whispered hoarsely, the moment six inches of the space showed between the heavy stone and the slot at floor level.

A muttered exclamation and a sinister clanking came in answer. Gorman's heart sank. Whoever was inside was chained — and it did not seem possible that it would be the scientist!

While he thought desperately of expedients, Gorman again started the panel. This time he started calling as soon as there was an inch of open space.

"Professor Severn! Are you there? Speak!"

The answer, accompanied by a low-pitched, cracked laugh, chilled his blood.

"You accursed race! You could not learn even the wheel! Fools! Ignoramuses! How could you dream to support yourselves when you refuse even to accept the alms of science? Your forbearers perished because—"

The descending panel cut short the crazed Philippic. Gorman breathed deeply and brushed the cold perspiration from his forehead. He had learned what he had come to discover. Severn was there, but his mind had cracked under the strain of solitary confinement.

Out of the blind alley, feeling his way. A right turn, and ahead of him the low opening to the cenote where watched the three smaller stone figures reproduced in such giant proportions in the temple itself.

Gorman slithered in on his stomach, finding there, a flight of steps down to the manway around the cenote, which now towered in the center of the chamber. The floor was slimy. The smaller fires have smoked somewhat, and gave less light. Gorman, hoping to be able to overcome the Keeper of the Fires without shooting him, stared both ways without seeing anyone. Choosing the left way, he went quickly on tiptoe. No one was in evidence!

Stopping precious seconds to listen intently, Gorman heard queer, staccato rappings or jars, brought to him through the rock. Yes, he could hear them more distinctly when he put his ear against the cold surface.

It sounded for all the world like firearms, muffled and flattened!

Gorman shook his head grimly. If there was shooting going on, Jack probably was making a last-ditch fight. Well, the kid had ammunition enough to hold off the whole city for a time, in one of those narrow passages. Gorman would be in with him just as soon —

He circled the teocalli fire which burned between the claws of the Eagle. Just as he passed the light curtain of smoke, brushing it from his eyes, a bloodcurdling screech smote his ears. Up from the stone seats there in a niche leapt a Sublevado with a spear!

This one was middle-aged, no more. He yelled at the top of his lungs and threw the spear — just as Gorman dropped flat. Other men leapt out of the niche — two men in boots and rough costumes, chickleros! One of them snatched a pistol from his belt, while the other seized the back of his neck and jerked out a wicked knife, ducking and running straight for Maya Gorman!

There was no choice. Gorman shot. The chiclero with the naked knife leapt up in the air as a frog leaps and fell flat, groaning.

Whamm! The pistol thundered, pouring out black smoke from where the second chiclero stood.

Gorman felt a terrific and agonizing smash at the outside of his left hip, and spun around — not before pouring two more shots from the automatic. These did for the man with the pistol.

The second shot, let go just as the slug from that big pistol tore through Gorman's hip, was a wide miss. Unharmed, the Keeper of the Fires, a broad-chested Sublevado with long black hair stringing down his flat forehead into his eyes, came running to grapple with this hated intruder.

Gorman had no chance to fire again. He let go the pistol, which clattered underfoot. He managed to seize the muscular arms outstretched for his own body. The impetus of the attacker bore him back, however. Two steps...three...

THEN SUDDENLY GORMAN DROPPED flat on his back, his right foot going to the pit of the naked brown stomach. Jerking his arms, throwing his foot straight back over his own head, Gorman hurtled the startled Indian a yard from the ground and head first into the rock wall of the cenote!

Instantly the American was on his feet, retrieving the pistol, ready to send in a finishing shot. But none was necessary. Completely fooled by that old jui-jitsu trick, the native had been either knocked unconscious or killed. Gorman could not wait to find out which.

Striding to the niche where the three had been gathered, at the same time he stuffed his handkerchief against the side of his thigh, Gorman saw three round-topped stone stools of the sort Indians back against a wall and use for what they deem solid comfort.

Gorman lifted one of the stools, staggering under the weight as he made for the stairs back toward the prison cell. At the top of the stairs, however, he set down his burden and hurried down. That ancient horse pistol was no use as a weapon. But it weighed about seven pounds, and might do excellently for another purpose — one which worried Maya Gorman. He thrust up to take his burden again.

Back at the one-way prison door he depressed the fish glyph. Then this time as the panel slid upward, Gorman put the eighteen-inch-high stone stool under one side. The panel clunked down — and held! For several seconds there was a snuffling sound of air escaping, proving the pneumatic hydraulic nature of the apparatus. But this ended. The panel stayed fixed, and all Gorman's strength, in trial, was insufficient to yank the stone stool out in his own direction.

From inside came that muttering and chuckling. Gorman, feeling that this probably was precious time wasted, still was unwilling to leave his old acquaintance. Bellying to the floor, he wriggled under the end of the panel, repressing nausea at the smells which assailed him.

Then he flashed his light. Description of that cell may well be scrimped. It was six by eight feet, but the ceiling was fairly high. Clad in tatters, with a scraggly three-week growth of white hair sprouted from his seamed cheeks, the wreck of Prof. Vernon Severn squatted there on a pile of rushes.

He was held by a single golden anklet, to which was attached a heavy iron chain — no doubt brought as loot to Suchun by the Sublevados, since they had no iron of their own. The chain was anchored to something behind a hole in the back wall.

Shutting his mind to the old man's babbling, Gorman grimly seized the foot above which was the anklet. Yanking off the broken shoe, Gorman pressed the anklet down against the stone. Reversing the heavy pistol he had captured from the chiclero, using it as a

hammer, he struck thrice with all his muscle, "ovalling" the iron in the manner convicts of old days used to know. Then despite squeals of pain from Severn, he practically dislocated the ankle, and pulled the foot through. Immediately then he did his best to knock the joint back into shape, and put on the battered shoe for the oldster.

All the time he had been working Gorman had been repeating, "I'm Gorman! I'm Gorman! I've come to get you away from here!" in the faint hope that this might penetrate the mists befogging Severn's mind.

It had the effect of quieting Severn. Gorman shoved him to the entrance, pushed him through and followed. Once outside he straightened, breathing with a vast relief the comparatively clean air of the tunnels.

"We must hurry. Your daughter is back there," said Gorman, taking the arm of his charge and hustling him as fast as possible out to the main tunnel, then left toward the temple ramp. There were no sounds of firing now that Gorman could distinguish, and he feared greatly for the Severn girl and Jack Chastang.

Severn began to mumble, and to try to hang back. It seemed that perversely he wanted to go in the opposite direction but Gorman bore him along until they came into the temple. There Gorman took a chance and went ahead, cautioning Severn to wait while he looked down.

The old man did wait, though Gorman sensed there was something peculiar in his attitude — something shifty and oddly triumphant. He was muttering some words about "flood gates" in a low voice.

Then Gorman yanked himself back, standing half paralyzed for an instant. A whole army of Sublevados and chickleros had come in to seat themselves there on the floor of the temple! They were almost silent, too, which was strange. It seemed as though some awesome rite were about to begin.

Then came the ear-burdening, quivering, overpowering sound of the tunkul

struck thrice. It was sunset, the time when worship of the Eagle god ceases, and that of the Snake god begins.

Gorman got back and started to draw old Severn with him in a quick, crouching trip around the ramp to the hiding place Miss Severn had showed them.

That was the moment the crazed old man had been awaiting, it seemed. As Maya Gorman took his left arm, whispering a crisp admonition for silence, Severn suddenly screeched at the top of his lungs! He swung about before the astonished American could throw up a guard, and struck Gorman squarely on the forehead with a flat stone he must have secreted somewhere in his tatters of garments!

Gorman went down as if pole-axed, completely unconscious. Still screeching some of his crazy nonsense about floodgates, the old fellow turned and bolted into the dark tunnel corridor he had just quitted.

From the crowd below arose a questioning clamor, but it was stilled in another moment. Out of the broad ledge there between the Snake and the Eagle, the ledge which held the sacrificial stone and the "cup of god," walked a tall figure clad in flame-colored fiber cloth, with feathered headdress and feather work girdle, both arms uplifted in the direction of the outthrust head of the Snake!

Back of him came four Sublevados, bearing two prisoners for the sacrifice to Kukil Kan. One was the blue-eyed youth from America, and the other was a girl with streaming yellow hair — from whom the figured robe of a priestess had been torn.

"We come, bringing Fire and Food to the Kingdom of the Dark, O wise and generous Kukil Kan!" began the sepulchral voice of Crosschen, whom the tribesmen called the Fire Priest.

Lying hidden there behind the low stone coping across from the statue of the Eagle, Maya Gorman was completely unconscious only for the matter of about one

minute. He awoke to hear the echoing resonance of the Fire Priest.

Down below were some 300 Indians, half of them Sublevados, who were curious to know what the screeching had meant. But they would wait to find out until this horrible ceremony was completed. Doubtless, they imagined that the sounds had been caused by or with the knowledge of Crosschen and the other H-men — wizard priests — but the facts were otherwise. For all his assumption of omniscience, Crosschen himself was unaware of the disturbance which had diminished and died just at the moment he appeared.

Filled with the blood lust of his religion, and the fanaticism of the crusader who intended to rid Yucatan and Quintana Roo forever of the white man, he was putting all his soul into his plea to Kukil Kan.

Gorman halted himself, just as he reached hands and knees, frowning and listening — then looking swiftly about for old Severn, who had vanished.

From below came a confused murmur, a sort of pagan litany. And just as it died, there came a single piercing shout in the voice of a man:

"Maya Gorman, can't you save her?"

IT WAS JACK CHASTANG'S LAST appeal. Hands were clamped over his mouth, so that he could not interrupt again the rite of sacrifice before the knife stilled his tongue forever.

Gorman raised himself cautiously, looking over the coping. His eyes suddenly bulged. There across the sacrificial stone, face upward, lay the golden-haired Severn girl! And Crosschen the Fire Priest had unsheathed the obsidian knife.

With a bitten-off groan, Gorman grabbed both his weapons. For the shot downward and slanting straight across the temple, he chose the Colt revolver in preference to the automatic. He rested it on the coping to still his shaking hand. The Fire

Priest whirled about, lifting the obsidian blade on high —

Crash!

The shot thundered, but for a second or two it seemed that nothing had happened or would happen. A vast hush hung on the air. The Fire Priest seemed turned to stone like one of his own demi-gods. Gorman fired again, and knew he had missed!

Yet the spell was broken. Crosschen slowly leaned backward, toward the unseeing eye of Kukil Kan. He went backward stiffly, as a tree falls. He struck the coping with the small of his back and went over, his feet sliding over reluctantly. He fell 40 feet as the crowd below groaned, struck the lowest coil of the Snake, and was bounced sidewise somewhere into the worshippers.

Gorman had not waited to see. Limping, reeling a little from his head wound and the loss of blood from his thigh, he ran as fast as he was able around the ramp — and there saw himself balked, unless he could find a way through the maze of corridors and stairs on the inner wall!

The ledge with the sacrificial stone was a good 20 feet below him, a sheer drop. And now one of the attendants of the Fire Priest had picked up the knife dropped by Crosschen as he fell back, and was turning to plunge it into the living sacrifice!

Two guns leapt and spat orange fire in Gorman's hands. The assistant crumpled, with three heavy slugs through his chest. Then Gorman took one forward step and leaped, straight down at the three other brown men there who had been stricken with a sort of palsy, looking upward at his this unexpected avenger.

The rock ledge and two bodies of living men seemed to fly up and smile at Gorman. The cushion of flesh and bone broke his fall somewhat, but sent him spinning toward the coping. One of the Sublevado priests fell, his back broken, but the other two,

yelling fury and surprise, leapt forward at Gorman.

He just managed to get up one gun, the automatic. And he shot as fast as he could aim, while world spun round and round, and he knew this would be his last effort, unless —

Yes, he had to do one thing more. The priests fell, twitching out their lives. Gorman made the supreme effort, and oddly found that his head rather cleared when he raised it. He was broken — ribs and maybe more — but he could do what he had to do. He crawled over, took out his jackknife, and cut the bonds of both Miss Severn and Jack Chastang.

"Save one shot for her...boy," gasped Gorman, and fainted.

"Oh, look, there's Daddy!" cried the girl, pointing down.

Jack, gripping the two partly emptied guns, followed her pointing hand. And out of a black corridor on the lowest slant of the ramp, danced a tattered, wild figure, shouting something frenzied about floodgates!

And then the flood came! Straight out of the corridor and back of the mad professor-priest belched a solid cylinder of water — like the spout of a fire hose a thousand time magnified.

It caught and bore Severn out over the throng on the floor of the temple, oddly suspending him in midair for several seconds before letting him fall and vanish.

With a thunderous road the water of all the cenotes poured out and down into the temple, and into all the subterranean workings of the ancient city of Suchun!

"O, Daddy!" cried the girl. But then she wiped her streaming eyes quickly and turned to Jack Chastang.

"Come! I don't know — it may fill with water — even this far! Can you carry him?" And she touched Maya Gorman's limp figure.

"I sure can! Is there a way out? Can you shoot?" cried Jack joyously, thrusting

both weapons into her hands and squatting down to lift Gorman over his shoulders.

"Through the top of the pyramid!" she cried, and led the way.

HIS EXCELLENCY, GENERAL Eduardo Jose Mendel Juan Diego Rosillo y Campostella, in charge of the punitive expedition of rurales encamped to westward of the pyramid of Suchun, had 40-odd Sublevado captives who would lead him into this and the other single stronghold of the outlaw Indians.

His Excellency was very happy. This was an unexpected stroke of luck, this flooding out of Suchun, a city he had been trying to enter for some weeks. The fact that most of the Sublevados and chicleros who had used this as a base for forays were drowned saved just that many executions in front of a wall.

When word was brought that a white girl, very lovely, and two white men — one of them wounded — had been rescued from the accursed Sublevados, the General stroked his mustachios, smiled, and went to see the Norte Americano girl.

The General had something of a shock. He found the girl, of whom they had heard because of her father, Professor Severn, and she came up to advance notices — yes, even if she wore the scarlet rebozo of a native woman instead of her robe of priestess.

The young lady, however, was installed as a nurse for a man whom Rosillo y Campostella recognized with a jerk and a sudden straightening of the back. Senor Gorman! The man to whom the Mexican Government had given its highest honors, and to whom it had offered the Governor-Generalship of Yucatan with only the proviso that he become a Mexican citizen!

Lawrence Gorman was conscious. He grinned at the officer, and accepted a handshake. But from that moment both Lois Severn and Jack Chastang were more than

safe; they were honored guests. The General heard that he would be very happy to help them and Maya Gorman. For himself was there not the conquest of the Sublevados and the chicleros who had taken refuge with this outlaw tribe?

Jack's blue eyes grew round with wonder when he learned a little of the manner in which his beloved "Chief" was regarded by official Mexico.

"I knew he was man, Lois!" he whispered privately to the nurse. "But they seem to think he's sort of a tin god on wheels! Do you know what he did to make 'em that way?"

Lois Severn shook her head. "I was North at Vassar until last Summer," she said. "Dad mentioned Maya Gorman two or three times as the only man besides himself who understood the Indians. I think there was something in regard to reforming the peonage system on the great haciendas. But that was long ago."

"I'm going to ask him!" declared Jack.

"Not for at least a week!" smiled the nurse, but her voice was firm.

The week passed. But Maya Gorman did not wish to talk of the old, painful times. His eyes were wistfully happy as he saw the close friendship growing between these two youngsters. If things broke right, as soon as his ribs healed and the somewhat festered wound in his thigh could be dressed for the last time, he meant to try for a stake for both of them, a stake which would allow them to go back to the United States, marry, and have whatever happiness a secure fortune could bring.

He talked at length with the Mexican general, learning that six feet of water stood in the Mayan temple of Suchun, and that all the lower labyrinth of tunnels was flooded. Rurales had hunted every nooks and cranny of the place above water level, and there were no more Indians in the place.

The original city of the Sublevados, the one in which they had taken refuge prior to forming a union with the outlaw chicleros, was Akchimook. This had been entered, and the small garrison captured or destroyed. To all intents and purposes, there were no more Sublevado Mayas.

The Fire Priest, leader of their insane crusade, had driven them to raids for two purposes — immediate ones, which had to be accomplished before the whites could be driven from Yucatan and Quintana Roo.

First, they had to lay in huge stores of supplies, since they grew very little corn or other field products. Secondly, they had to capture women for mates, in order to insure a growth of the tribe in the future. These raids had been further and further afield, but had been disappointing. Ravaged fields were not planted again. It had looked as though the Sublevados eventually would starve themselves to death through their own ferocity. It was much more satisfactory to the Mexican general, however, to get the public kudos for conquering them. He was very pleased with himself.

Gorman mentioned a wish to get permission to hunt for possible treasure in the old city. The General smiled skeptically. He assured Gorman that whatever he found he could have, but the American wanted specific assurances from Mexico City. So the General sent a mounted messenger to the nearest telegraph line with orders to wait for an answer. The General put in the wire that Gorman's illustrious services to the cause of subduing revolutions were well worth all the old relics he could find in Suchun...

While they awaited reply, Gorman got the story of the tragedy at the nunnery, bit by bit from Lois Severn. It was not quite as horrible as he had thought. Mrs. Severn had been dying of a heart ailment, coronary thrombosis, and had actually been dead for a matter of 12 hours prior to the raid of the Indians.

Even then Prof. Severn had not regarded their plight as serious. When Gorman had been there, eight years earlier, Severn had penetrated only to the white door or floodgate, which Gorman had opened by means of the glyphs. There had been no Sublevados in possession then, though they sent emissaries to the great shrine of the temple at regular intervals.

In the interim Severn succeeded in penetrating the hidden city and explored it from top to bottom. When the Sublevados came, he induced them to initiate him into their priesthood and thenceforth had the run of the place.

When his oldest daughter, Lois, returned finally from college, it pleased them both to have her ordained as a priestess. And she rather enjoyed the weird life — until the time came that two of the priests began to behave toward her in a most unsanctified manner.

The first time her father assaulted one called Pahna. For that offense Severn was thrown into the cell and chained. He did not emerge until Gorman freed him.

The second time, another priest named Akbatl invaded the room, or boudoir, which Lois had in the breast of the Eagle statue. She eluded him and fled over to the Snake, where she expected to find other priests.

There was only Pahna, however. He knifed Akbatl, killing him, but then thought the time propitious for his own advances. Lois had been trying to escape him — he was suddenly blood-crazed, it seemed, when repulsed — at the time Jack Chastang intervened to save her.

"And — I think that's all," Lois said, color high in her cheeks. "Poor daddy saved us at the last, but you gave him the chance! I — hope you'll both be my friends always. They say the water probably won't drain out of there for years, so — well I can't hope to get daddy's body for burial."

Here tears came swiftly to the blue eyes.

"What are you planning back home in the states?" asked Gorman quickly to get her mind in another channel. He had said nothing about his plans for a treasure hunt to either of the young people as yet!

"I can get a place with either of the Rockefeller or Carnegie Foundation," she replied. "You see, I learned a lot of about glyphs, and the Mayan civilization..."

"Hmph," said Jack disparagingly. "Well, that may be all right, for a time." He put weighty significance on the last phrase. "Me, I'm going back in the ring until I have a good stake. Then — " he paused, and further words seemed to shrivel up he met the blue eyes, quickly dropped from his gaze.

"I'm getting up this afternoon," announced Maya Gorman dryly. "Then in a day or two, I'll let you young colts escort the old man up to the top of the pyramid — the way, I understand, that we all we all escaped from Suchun."

"You mean — ?" cried Jack, starting up, eyes alight. He had not wanted to bring up the subject of the treasure again, for fear Gorman preferred to drop the whole idea.

That second there came a scratching at the tent flap, and a mounted messenger leaned over, extending a blue flimsy Army telegraph. "For Meester Lawrence Gor-man!" he announced.

Silently Gorman spread it on the blanket over his knees, inviting them to read.

YOU MAY TAKE AS YOUR OWN
ANYTHING FROM SUCHUN
WHICH YOU CAN CARRY ON SIX
MULES STOP FIESTA ARRANGED
FOR YOUR ARRIVAL WITH
COMPANIONS AT MEXICO CITY
STOP KINDLY ADVISE US THE
DATE.

(Signed)
Herarra
Secy. to the Pres.

"Now you go out, Jack, and find the six strongest mules there are in Yucatan!" grinned Gorman.

Four days later, with Gorman able to climb slowly with time out for rest now and then, they reached the flat top of the pyramid, from which a priest at sunrise and sunset gave the signal for the sounding of the tunkul.

The way down through the pyramid, thence into the temple of Suchun, was masked well against the ignorant ones; but Maya Gorman knew the story of most of the glyphs. In 10 minutes he had a swinging stone ajar, and their lights played into the descending stairway.

The great temple was chill, dank and silent, the votive fires forever quenched. All of the trio felt shivers along their spines when they stood again on the ledge beside the sacrificial stone. Their flashlights, new ones secured from the rurales, just would illuminate the open mouth of the Snake god, if played outward and upward. They would not show more than what looked like a black curtain over the bottom of the temple — the water which had flooded from the cenotes.

"I'll read the direction I got from the knots," said Gorman prosaically, and this time in reading he omitted the parenthetical explanations which Jack Chastang remembered,

"In the shrine of the Serpent and the Sun god, follow the River of Blood from the cuauhxicalli, 18 paces. Lift rocking stone. Descend to the sacred inhli where in the black waters are hidden treasures of our priesthood,"

"That sounds easy — now," shivered Jack and held the girl closer. "I'll never forget lying here, though..."

Down the slanted trough where in past ages the steaming life-blood of thousands of sacrificial victims had flowed, Gorman slowly paced off the 18 steps. Lois and Jack followed.

"This is all new to me," she said in a hushed voice. "I never heard of any rocking

stone, or any other cenote. I — don't see where one can be."

Gorman did not reply. He had bent down, looking for glyphs but finding none. About a yard further — perhaps his paces had been too short — however, there was an uncompromising upthrust of rock shaped something like a ship's capstan. On hands and knees, turning his flashlight all about the base, Gorman found what he sought. It was a join, an irregular suture in the masonry which must have gone undetected for a thousand years, unless someone knew enough to search for it exactly at the right spot.

"Come here, Jack," bade Gorman, and the young man leaped to obey. "Push this!" and he indicated the rock upthrust.

Impetuously Jack bucked into it like a football back hitting an opposing line. And the stone did rock, though only Gorman actually saw it raise part of an inch at the point of jointure below! Jack grunted, thinking he had failed.

"It will move," said Gorman quietly. "Put on steady pressure. Here, I'll help as well as I can. You can shove, too, Lois, if you'd like..."

With the three straining, the stone gave, complaining with the disuse of centuries.

One whiff of the dead air which smote his nostrils and Gorman made them wait a full hour; but then they descended a curving flight of stairs, went 30 feet outward through a narrow passage, and entered a circular chamber,

"Inside the coils of the Snake! There is the cenote!" said Maya Gorman, indicating with his flashlight a circular bowl about 20 feet in diameter, and looking to be about 15 feet in depth. It was filled with black water to the brim.

"But — how?" queried Jack, puzzled. "I thought all the floodgates were opened!"

"Not this one," Gorman chuckled grimly. "See around the walls? Those jars?"

and he swung his flash at a good hundred pottery receptacles about the size of funeral urns. "I'll bet the priests of the Old Ones had grain stored there. This water was their own private supply, to be used in drought. They weren't going thirsty or hungry, no matter what happened to their own subjects!"

So it proved. But when Jack wanted to strip down to shorts and try a dive for treasure in the small cenote, Gorman would not permit it.

"Wait," he bade. "I've heard of snakes, alligators, and other such guardians of treasure," he said. "There must be a tap somewhere. They'd have to clean this cenote once in a long while if the water was drinkable..."

AFTER STUDY, GORMAN SELECTED a place where there was a gap between coils of the serpent. "The tap's here," he said, turning to the bottom wall of the cenote. Barely discernible there were glyphs, partially covered with a moss which had grown on the moisture sweated through the rock bowl. Gorman scraped away with his knife. Then he nodded to himself. A simple triangle of glyphs, with a snake mask, a fish, and blunted horns of a deer. He experimented, since the directions were far from clear. The deer horns grated in as he pressed. He reached over to press or turn the fish...

Splash! A round plug of masonry came out into his lap, followed by water under pressure. He got hastily out of the way, watching the water seek the outlet between the coils of the Snake. They all heard it fall into the water which covered the floor of the temple 60 feet below.

"As soon as that's down, Jack, take a careful look — for monsters! If there are none, you can slide in and try for treasure. You brought a rope, I think."

Before all the water had drained, however, the three knew that there was something in the bottom of the cenote.

Stacked piles of bars or boxes, covered with green slime. Then at last four squat jars appeared. "Get one of those, Jack!" bode Gorman. "There are no monsters, it seems." He braced himself with the rope, as Jack slid eagerly down.

Three minutes later they were all gathered close, while Gorman pried off the lid of the half-gallon jug. Crash! It flew off, and rattled on the stone floor.

Under the rays of the flashlight red and green and blue stones winked up at them. The jar was filled chiefly with uncut emeralds and turquoises, with a few Oriental rubies of the sort which are found in corundum matrix!

"The treasure!" croaked Jack from a throat suddenly dry. "No diamonds, though, I—"

"Hm," said Gorman, holding up one green stone the size of an English walnut.

"This looks to be a perfect emerald. If it is — and this size — it will outprice any diamond you ever saw or heard of!"

Breathlessly they got the other three jars. One was filled completely with opals — less valuable, but marvelous in fire and pearly texture. The other two jars matched the first. The piled stuff they first had glimpsed was bar gold and silver. This they did not touch for the moment. The jewels they poured carefully into a mule pack they had brought, and strapped it together tightly to prevent rattling.

TWO WEEKS LATER THE THREE were in Mexico City. They had come away without the gold or silver, letting General Rosillo y Campostella smile at Gorman from behind his hand. That was all right with the bronzed adventurer. He knew well that he, Lois, and Jack all were millionaires. He would take the train for New York. They would journey more slowly by boat, after the President's reception for Gorman, and their marriage — on their honeymoon.

Gorman bade them farewell, kissing Lois for the second time. There was no regret, and no wistfulness in his smile now. These young people were suited to each other. He, Gorman, would spend a year at least in the North, getting back his strength and resilience. Then — who could know? There might be love and happiness still waiting for a 40-year-old veteran of the adventure trail. At the very least there could be more adventure!

Some eight weeks later General Rosillo y Campostella, with an Indian guide and one trusted lieutenant, stood gazing down into the cenote where still were stacked bars of gold and silver. The letter in the officer's hand was Gorman's letter, telling him how to reach the stuff.

"Valgame Dios!" breathed the General, a little stentoriously. "And he left with six unloaded mules! In truth these gringos are as crazy as I thought!"

THE END