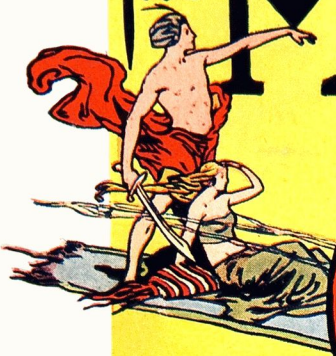


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By S. GORDON GURWIT

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"One of the men tapped Olga on the shoulder."



Speed Planes for Moscow

By S. GORDON GURWIT

A thrilling tale of the Russian Five-Year Plan and a romance that was surrounded with perils and death

STODDARD turned to the window with a growing fascination. The semi-oriental splendors of Moscow stretched away, following the banks of the Moskva. The city was crowned with a diadem of gold and blue domes and minarets like ivory lace against the lapis lazuli sky. Farther up the banks of the river, the ramparts and bastions of the Kremlin rose against the heavens; and beyond that, the lonely leagues of mel-

ancholy steppes stretched to the far horizon.

Somewhere, a great bell was vibrating dimly. The American grinned. He thought of Napoleon, Tchaikovsky, the 1812 Overture.

Behind him, there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," called Stoddard.

The door opened and a young man entered; a handsome young man, with a

fair, Circassian face, dressed in the Russian worker's blouse and boots. He smiled.

"*Dubra utra!*" he greeted; and as Stoddard shook his head, he continued in English: "Good day! You speak no Russian? But I speak the English, so we will be able to talk, *n'ei?* I am Kazanovitch. You are *Tovarish* Stoddard. Welcome to Russia!" He extended his hand.

"Thanks!" smiled Stoddard, shaking the proffered hand. "Glad you speak English. Russian's rather difficult for me, though I've been studying it. I've just been admiring the view here from the window."

The other nodded, smiling. "It gives one to think, not?" he answered. "Moscow is truly Muscovite. I am engineer, *Tovarish* Stoddard. I am to bring you to the *Tovarish* Direktor, then to take you to the technician's quarters. I was not told"—he looked around the room swiftly—"you have brought a wife with you?"

"No. I'm not married."

"Not? Many of the foreign engineers bring their wives with them. You will like the technicians' quarters. There are other American engineers; also English and Italian and German. I think, me, all the young engineers are come to help us with the *Piatiletka*. Thanks! I enjoy the American cigarette so much—they are very good. You are one of the American comrades?"

"No," smiled Stoddard. "This is just a job to me. I needed it. Conditions are rather slow back home."

Kazanovitch nodded knowingly.

"The capitalist world is destroying itself," he announced, inhaling hungrily at his American cigarette. "When the *Piatiletka* is finished, we will overthrow it with its own weapons." He was tre-

mendously sincere; his eyes fairly sparkled with a misty fanaticism.

Stoddard said: "Never had time to think about it. I'm merely an aviation engineer. I came here to build high-speed planes. The first one, I understand, is to make a good-will flight—non-stop—to Tokyo."

Kazanovitch nodded. "Come," he smiled. "I take you to the *Tovarish* Direktor. He do not speak the English, so I will tell you what he will say; then I take you to the technicians' quarters. I do not live there, but I go often to be with the men."

"You are an engineer?"

"Oh, yes! I am aviation engineer. We all work together for the *Piatiletka*. But I live in another place. I have the girl." He smiled.

"Oh, you're married?"

"Married? Oh, no. I live in free union. My Olga she do not believe in marry. But it is just the same. My sister, she live with me. She is young. She member of party too, division of education. She is—what you say?—detail by bureau to be guide for you." He chuckled. "Our *Tovarish* Direktor do not like that, but he can not change executive ukase. It is nothing. You come one day too soon, and she can not come today. So I come instead."

"I see!" said Stoddard. Free union! Well, this was Russia, and there wasn't any use in marriage anyway, when either party to a marriage could appear before the proper authority and get a divorce in a few minutes by simply asking for it.

THEY walked along the busy streets, Stoddard avidly examining the crowds. This was a new world, started from a new beginning; this was the proletariat, engaged in the greatest social experiment in history. *Piatiletka!* The

Five-Year Plan! He saw it emblazoned everywhere.

He scanned the strange Slavonic faces, Tartar faces, Mongol faces. Nearly all were dressed in workers' blouses, the women in short, knee-length skirts. Stoddard grinned. It was all so foreign, so different, it might have been a scene on a different planet. Since his arrival in Russia, he had moved as if in a dream. Lucky break to get this job, just when he was desperate for money.

"My sister she speak the English," Kazanovitch was saying, "and she will show you everything."

"Look here," said Stoddard, "why can't *you* do that? I'm not much of a hand with women; I'd rather have a man."

"In Russia, women are the same as men," interrupted Kazanovitch. "How you say? The same status? Nadine, she knows the English, that is why. I have much work and Nadine is division of education."

Nadine. Stoddard shrugged. The boy—he could not be more than twenty-four—was fair and good-looking; very much wrapped up in his work and his party. If the girl, his sister, looked anything like him, Stoddard thought, he wouldn't mind. He asked:

"Where do you live, *Tovarish* Kazanovitch?"

"It is on the Tverskaya, near the Triumph Arch. I will show you after you are settled. You shall come to us in evening, with Nadine, and we will smoke and drink the *chai*—the tea. I have much to ask you about the America. When starts the revolution there?" he finished, with ingenuous seriousness.

"Haven't the faintest idea," replied Stoddard. "Is there one going to start?"

"But, of course! In your agricultural areas the proletariat defy the capitalist

holders of mortgages. In some states, they have captured the government. It was in the newspaper—the *Izvestia*. We have lecture which tell us that soon a great army of ex-soldiers marches on your Washington!"

Stoddard grinned. "That so?" he said. "Sounds bad, the way you tell it. You see, I've been working in England for two years and haven't been home."

Kazanovitch snorted with a fine scorn.

"The capitalist regime is over," he announced; "the day of the proletariat is here. This—what you say—depression?—is collapse of capitalist system!"

"It's something, all right!" agreed Stoddard.

IN A huge building, on the Kouznetsky Most, they entered to find the executive office of the *Tovarish* Direktor. While they waited in an anteroom, Stoddard asked:

"Is the Direktor an engineer, too?"

"Oh, no. He is an ex-worker, sent here to direct; but he is not a technician. He is appointed by and answers directly to the Gosplan. The foreign and Russian engineers work under him."

Just then the door opened and several American engineers came out whom Stoddard had met the day before. They were all frowning and sober-faced. When they saw Stoddard, they walked over and shook hands.

"Hello, Kazanovitch," said Dean, the senior engineer. "I see you've got Stoddard in tow. Well, Stoddard, what do you think of it all?"

"Haven't had much time to think," grinned Stoddard. "I've only been here a few days, and I haven't seen much; but it's a tremendous thing, isn't it?"

"Yeah!" growled Burch, the younger American. "Tremendous hooley! These guys get all tied up with red tape and

there's nothing done! Hell—how can we keep up the schedule when we don't get any of the raw material to work with? That damned factory in Tiflis is behind so far——"

Dean's signal plainly indicated caution. Burch stopped. Dean turned to Stoddard and said:

"They talk too much here. We came over to lodge our protest against the trial of the Englishmen. See you at quarters tonight, Stoddard—and I wish you'd sign the protest, too."

"What protest? I haven't even begun to work here, you know——"

"That makes no difference. You're one of the foreign engineers and your name should be on the protest. They're trying four English engineers on charges of sabotage and espionage, and we're protesting. They'll railroad those guys sure as shooting——"

Campbell, the third engineer, who had heretofore been a listener, waved his hand and remarked:

"Cut it out! We'll talk to Stoddard at quarters tonight. Kazanovitch will be getting the idea that we're trying to interfere with the *Piatiletka*. See you tonight, Stoddard. Come on, let's go!"

The three American engineers left and Stoddard sat where he was. He looked at Kazanovitch. That young man's expression was stony.

"They are not tolerant, your Americans," he said. "They forget that we are building a completely new world." He brightened suddenly. "Come—we will now see the Direktor."

THE Direktor sat behind a paper-littered desk. Dressed in the usual worker's blouse, there was nothing of the executive about him. One look at his porcine face, topped by the stiff hair, brushed so that it stood up, was enough

for Stoddard. A typical Slav; a *mujik*—an ignorant serf—bewildered by his duties and dangerously vain with his own importance.

He shook hands with Stoddard, eyed him shrewdly, smiled mechanically and said something in Russian. Kazanovitch translated:

"He wishes you welcome to the U. S. S. R., and hopes great things from you. We have heard about the speed plane you built in England, and he says you will have a free hand to build speed plane here. He says he will see you again at my rooms tonight. Come, we go now."

Again they all shook hands, Kazanovitch leading the way out.

"We go to eat," he informed Stoddard. "We will go to the workers' restaurant of our section."

Outside, they boarded a tram-car and went to the edge of the city.

And again Stoddard stared about him when he reached the restaurant. One corner was a lounge, or club. A corner, draped in red, was dedicated to Lenin; in the center was the anti-God demonstration with the inscription: "Religion is the opium of the people." Vivid posters covered the walls. Stoddard had now learned to make out the word "*Piatiletka*," and he saw it everywhere. Portraits of Lenin, Karl Marx and Stalin were thickly hung in every available space.

One of the German engineers joined them as they sat smoking, and Kazanovitch introduced him.

"Comrade Stoddard, this is Comrade Hoering. He works with us in the drafting division."

The German grinned and answered in excellent English:

"How do you do? We heard that you were coming, Stoddard. Glad to have you with us. I spent a couple of years in

Detroit, which accounts for my English. Hope to see you again." He departed and Stoddard again faced Kazanovitch.

"Well, what now, *Tovarish* Kazanovitch?" he asked.

Kazanovitch grinned boyishly. "I like for you to call me *Tovarish*. It is a good word—comrade. But for you I will be called Sergei. That is my name."

"All right, Sergei! I like that better, too. It's a bit easier to say. What do we do now?"

"I show you to your quarters, where you will live. Tonight, you shall come to my rooms and we shall have the party. I shall ask other engineers to come and to bring their ladies. Do you like that?"

"Whatever you say, old man."

2

NADINE KAZANOVITCH proved to be about twenty-one years old. And she took Stoddard's breath away. She was more than pretty, she was beautiful; even in her worker's blouse and her knee-high skirts. She looked like a Circassian, he thought. She was naïvely young, fanatically proud of the fact that she was an executive party member of the educational wing, and was doing her share in the *Piatiletka*.

About twenty people were crowded into Sergei's small rooms, engineers from the various sections; and some had brought their wives. Several of the American engineers had brought their wives along from the States. Hoering came alone; the Russian engineers had feminine companions. Stoddard wondered which were orthodox wives and which were free union.

He met the young and pretty girl with whom Kazanovitch lived in his free union and was freshly surprized. The girl was sweet, modest-looking, and met his eyes

with a frank directness. She felt no shame in her union with Sergei. Stoddard shrugged. These younger people had grown up after the revolution. All their standards and their entire philosophy of life were different.

"Taught them," Stoddard told himself amusedly, "by disillusioned skeptics who dream of creating a Utopia with fallible human material."

The air was thick with cigarette smoke; both men and women sat on chairs, on the floor, on a couch, talking eagerly. A huge samovar was doing constant duty, as was a large plate of *alvah*—a candy some preferred to sugar. On the table were delicacies brought by the foreign engineers from the finely stocked bazar reserved for the foreign technicians.

Dean came over to Stoddard's side and handed him a paper.

"Sign that," he requested. "That's our protest against the arrest of the English engineers. Sign it now, before the *Tovarish* Direktor comes here—they expect him, I hear—and we'd rather not have him see it. Nadine's a good scout and she won't repeat anything I say."

"But I don't know anything about it," protested Stoddard. "Maybe——"

"Sign it! The charges against the Englishmen are all hooey—trumped up. We know it. I'll tell you about it later."

Hoering came over and reached for the paper.

"Let me sign it," he said. "I haven't had a chance to and I want to be with the rest of you." He signed, grinned and walked away. Dean eyed him briefly and handed the protest back to Stoddard, who shrugged and signed. Nadine watched him through half-shut eyes.

"That is foolish," she said. "The protest will do no good. The *Piatiletka* must go on—and we can not allow anything to stop it."

"Do you believe those English engineers were really guilty?"

"The Soviet does not lightly accuse. Judges will examine the evidence and render a just verdict."

Strong undercurrents were evident in the air. They were all technicians, working in the same section; but the foreigners were alined against the arrest of the English engineers, and the Russians, for the most part, were so full of the history-making *Piatiletka* that they desired to go to any fantastic length to further it.

"Tell me," said Stoddard, watching the girl, "something of yourself. You are not married?"

She laughed. "No—I do not believe in marry. We live in free union with those we love—like Sergei and Olga. That is more fine."

"But if a man and girl are genuinely in love——"

"Love? That is a pathological necessity, but we Russians do not allow it to become a psychic obsession. Marry is, after all, bourgeois."

He smiled at that. The youth in him stirred under the topaz fire of her eyes, the allure of the firm contours of her resilient young body.

"You are to be my guide for a few days," he said. "I like that. To simplify matters, would you call me Jim instead of Stoddard?"

"Jeem? I like that more better. Jeem. And you will call me Nadine."

"And I like that a lot better," he smiled, looking at her. For all her equipoise, a slow fire mounted under the peach-tint skin and she looked away.

"Tell me of yourself," she ventured.

"There's nothing much to tell. I'm just an aviation engineer, interested in speed planes."

"What else you do?"

"Fight and swear," he said, hopefully.

She smiled. "How old you are?" she asked, naïvely.

"Thirty. It's a wonderful age. One begins to be observant." He proved this immediately by an admiring glance at the golden hair and the contrasting dark-brown eyes. She eyed him briefly.

"You are young for to be so famous for the speed plane. Oh, yes, we have heard much of your new kind of plane."

LATER, on the way to his quarters, Campbell edged up to him while Dean and Burch walked ahead.

"Let me tip you off," he said quietly. "Be careful what you say and whom you say it to. You're a bachelor, so they detailed that pretty little Nadine to show you the ropes. But remember, that's a trick—they do it to all the bachelors—give 'em a good-looking guide like that. The idea is that if you fall for them, it ties you tighter to the job, and the girls are supposed to engender loyalty to the cause."

"I've seen a lot of women," said Stoddard, "but I'm still single."

Campbell nodded. "Yeah. But be careful. This whole thing is a dynamite mine—it might go off any minute. Don't talk too much to Nadine about your ideas regarding the administration. She's a swell youngster, but you never can tell who is Gay-Pay-Oo."

"What is that?"

"It's the secret police. The place is full of 'em. Don't ever mention the name. It's hell on wheels. They got those Englishmen."

"What for?"

"Sabotage and espionage."

"Anything to it?"

"Nothing! The Englishmen are fine, clean chaps—came here to work; but they'll get a prison sentence sure, unless England intervenes."

"You mean they're innocent and will get a prison sentence anyhow?"

"Something like that, Stoddard. Whenever the *Piatiletka* falls behind, the executives and the administration must have a goat. I'm tipping you off to do your work, say nothing, see nothing, and don't make a confidant of any woman here. A lot of Russian women are Gay-Pay-Oo."

"I see! And that protest we signed?"

"Won't do any good. They manufacture evidence here so fast you can't keep track of it. It's just a form we put through, simply to go on record. This is a great game, Stoddard." He lowered his voice. "Get this: We Americans know something about it. We investigated on our own—but we don't dare say anything because we can't actually prove anything. There's a German here—an engineer named Hoering. Remember him? Well, there are several German engineers working here. We believe they framed the Englishmen."

"But—good Lord, why?"

"Don't you see? It isn't the tempest in the teapot that it looks. There's Japan playing roughhouse in Manchuria and taking big hunks of the map. They're playing merry hell with the Soviet's railways and possessions. Some think they want Vladivostok."

"Even so—so what?"

"Well, don't you see? If the foreign engineers here get in trouble, their native countries will protest; and there's liable to be some trouble—trade embargoes—severance of relations—even the threat of war. If Russia is kept busy in the west and is made to embroil herself with England and France and Italy and America, she will be less likely to think about what's going on in Asia. That gives Japan a free hand to get what she wants—

and we believe Hoering and his pals are working for Jap pay."

Stoddard stared. "Do you actually mean that?"

"Certainly! You're new here—be careful. Don't do or say anything that will get you hauled in by the Gay-Pay-Oo, get it? Look out for Hoering—and be careful what you say to Nadine!"

3

THE airplane factory was a huge affair, not unlike American factories constructed solely for mass production. Weary-faced workers flitted about the whirring mazes of machinery. The factory also turned out engines for tractors.

Stoddard threw himself enthusiastically into the work of turning out his first model speed plane, constructed on somewhat revolutionary lines; it was to look like a huge bat. It was to be very fast, and he thrilled to the joy of creation, the feel about him of beloved tools and familiar machinery.

The two great Russian flyers, Kriloff and Dushoff, were to fly the plane, non-stop, from Moscow to Tokyo on a goodwill trip.

Stoddard caught the sense of huge forces working blindly, groping for system and failing through the lack of concrete, comprehensive leadership. And he found himself almost helpless against the eternal red tape that tied every one's hands.

By almost superhuman efforts, his tireless energy managed to have the new plane ready in a month; then he waited for the engine to be installed. It wasn't bedded down until a month later.

He had seen much of Nadine, of Sergei and Olga. These four had formed the habit of gathering together around the samovar in Sergei's rooms, talking eagerly and drinking tea.

Nadine's beauty, her cool, direct topaz eyes, gradually penetrated Stoddard's reserve. Tacitly, they had gravitated toward one another until Stoddard now saw her every evening.

One Sunday, they journeyed to the Sparrow Hills, behind Moscow; and there, from the terrace of the hotel, they looked down on the semi-asiatic splendors of the old mother city of the Russians, stretched out on the steppes below.

After their meal, they strolled to a seat under a tree far below the gay terrace; and Nadine sat down, dreamily watching the plains and the winding, shining Moskva below her. She had brought a guitar along, but she laid it aside. Around them, other couples sat or stood or walked. All the world seemed gay, with summer plumage on tree and bush and ward.

"I love our Russia," she murmured, her eyes on the vast panorama. "It is big—vast with promise—the hope of the proletariat world."

Stoddard's eyes were on her face. He wondered what it would be like to take her in his arms and rain kisses on that cool cheek.

"It's strange, Nadine," he said. "You and Sergei do not look like the other Russians—you are both so very fair of skin; and then, both of you have light hair and dark eyes. Are you natives of Moscow?"

"For centuries," she said, dreamily. "We have lived in Moscow for long time, my family. Sometime, I show you the house where my people lived. But long ago, they come from Kazan. There—before the revolution—they are Graf—what you say? Baron?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Oh, aristocracy? I might have guessed it!"

In the old order of things this exquisite young girl would have been a Graf-fene. It fitted her, he thought. She held

herself with a royal grace, and had, at times, the stateliness of a queen.

"We are of the old Boyar and Circasian races," she was saying; "but all that is past. Class distinctions belong to the world of capitalism and monarchy. It has no place in Russia."

"But I'm surprized that the party makes room for you and your brother, knowing that you belong to the hated aristocracy."

"There is no more aristocracy. The past is dead. The present recognizes only workers, who strive for the advancement of the *Piatiletka*; who will be the torch-bearers for all the world of workers. And Sergei and I are ardent workers."

He nodded. The cause had no more enthusiastic workers than these two. He shrugged. He was beginning to understand Russia better.

"Still, I'd imagine that you'd have trouble with the Gay-Pay-Oo——"

"That is bad talk," she cautioned, leaning forward suddenly. "You must not say that name, Jeem, never!"

"Why? Every one knows that they're the secret police—is it a crime to mention them?"

"It is not good, Jeem. They know—they see—everything—everywhere."

"Well, suppose they do? I'm sure that anything you might say is safe with me; and you wouldn't tell them if I expressed any uncomplimentary opinions, would you?"

Her face hardened all at once; the youthful luminance went out of it.

"I am not sure," she said. "I believe—I would! Nothing must stand in the way of the *Piatiletka*. There is no room in Russia for traitors!"

He eyed her curiously, hurt. "Would you tell if your brother uttered traitorous things?"

Her face was white now, the eyes hard.

"Yes, I would!" she insisted. "Sergei is no exception. We have no exceptions!"

"I see! You have nothing in Russia but the—*Piatiletka!*"

For several heartbeats he watched her face, then he shrugged. Was this cruelty or fanaticism? Under his intense scrutiny, her eyes came back from the landscape to his; and the absurdly long lashes dropped.

"Why should we talk of things like that, Jeem?" she asked, her entire mood softening. "There are so many nice things to say. It is summer and the world is gay. Here"—she picked up her guitar and tuned it swiftly—"I brought this so I could play and sing for you. Maybe some of the songs of the old Russia?"

SEVERAL strolling couples near them turned to look, but they were dismissed with a knowing smile. The others understood. She played and sang several of the fiery Russian folk-songs; homely folk-songs, by authors whose names were lost in the maze of the years; songs that, whatever their weaknesses or their faults, had in their music that echo of human passion and of mortal pain which more ethical composers, with their purer science, had missed.

The guitar became a live thing in her hands, its vibrant strings pouring out their harmony under her touch. When she finished she turned to him brightly.

"You like?" she queried.

He was stirred. She saw the meaning in his eyes and turned her own away.

"Only the Spaniard and the Russian understand the guitar," he said. "I had no idea you were so accomplished a musician, Nadine."

"The guitar," she said, "is but a light thing, but better accompaniment for the voice than piano. I like it. It is all fire. An organ is the music of the spheres; a

violin is the emotion and sorrow of the human heart, but the guitar has passion and tenderness—and——"

"And love," he finished quietly. "Do you know, Nadine, that I love you?"

Her lips trembled for a heartbeat; the direct, cool eyes flickered.

"Yes," she nodded, "I think so. I like you, Jeem—very much. Since first you come. It is strange——"

"I want you to marry me, Nadine," he said, tensely.

He could see a pulse beating hard in the delicate column of her neck.

"Still you have the bourgeois ideology, Jeem, not so?" she murmured. "Very well, I marry you and we can get divorce when your work here is finish and you go home."

Stoddard squirmed. "No!" he snapped, tersely. "When you marry me, you stay married to me; and when I leave, you leave with me!"

The delicate arch of her brows lifted slightly.

"I could not leave Russia," she objected. "Here, we are building a new world. I care not to go to live in an archaic capitalistic bourgeois country, long past its usefulness. Jeem—I do not believe in marry. Why can we not be together—in free union—like Sergei and Olga? That is much more fine——"

"You don't know what you're saying!" He was outraged, angry.

"Why not? I am free to do what I wish. I do not answer to any one but myself——"

"That is not love!"

"Why is it not love? You think a few words mumbled by a third party—a ritual—will consecrate——"

His eyes held her with a species of hypnosis. Her fluent speech stopped. She faltered. A new tenderness crept into the topaz eyes; she reached for his hand and he clasped her fingers tightly.

"You will marry me," he said, savagely, "in the regular fashion, and we'll stay married——"

"*Nitchevo!* But the other foreign engineers live here with the girls they love—in free union—and when they leave, they——"

"Sorry, sweetheart," he said, tensely. "You see, the difference is—I *really* love you."

THAT night, while he and Nadine, Sergei and Olga were gathered around the samovar in Sergei's rooms, there was a knock on the door. On Sergei's call to come in, four men entered. They wore leather jackets, and huge automatics were strapped to their sides.

There was a swift exchange in Russian which Stoddard did not catch; then one of the men tapped Olga on the shoulder. Fiercely, Sergei protested. Olga's face had blanched horribly; Nadine was speechless.

Plainly terrorized, Olga kissed Sergei hurriedly and was led out by the men. There was no further protest. Sergei sat down as one in a daze, white, stunned. Nadine ran to his side.

"What is it?" demanded Stoddard. "Who are those men—and where has Olga gone with them?"

"She is arrested," said Nadine, bleakly. "The Gay-Pay-Oo!"

"But why? Surely, you people are the most loyal—what has she done?"

Sergei shrugged. "Who knows? It is a trick—it must be a mistake. Olga is loyal to the cause. I must see about this immediately——"

Nadine tried to hold him in the chair. "Not now—you know it would be useless, Sergei. Tomorrow, we will go——"

"This is outrageous!" snapped Stoddard. "I wonder that you better-class Russians stand for the Gay-Pay-Oo. This is only a modern Cheka——"

Nadine's eyes warned him as she looked meaningfully from him to the door.

"Damn them!" suddenly cried Sergei. "They can't do this to me and my Olga, Jeem! We have given all we have to give. We are loyal. Olga is my wife!" He flung off Nadine's arm and stood up, his eyes blazing. "I go to see what this means!" And despite anything they could do or say, he flung out of the room.

Nadine sat silent, crushed. When Stoddard gently took her into his arms, the high-strung youth in her broke. She suddenly buried her face on his shoulder, clung to him trembling and sobbed convulsively.

On his way home to the technicians' quarters, he turned it all over in his mind. He had grown to like Sergei and Olga. He knew them to be loyal to the cause. Why the sudden intrusion of the dreaded Gay-Pay-Oo? And Nadine. His lips set firmly when he thought of her, alone, silent, promising that she would wait until morning when he could help her obtain information as to the reason for Olga's arrest.

As he neared his own rooms, a burst of liquor-tuned feminine laughter, shrill, high-pitched, cut through the night like a knife. It came from another quarter of the building, where some of the technicians were evidently holding a party.

He paused a moment to look at the shrouded form of his new plane where it stood on the concrete apron, guarded by a sentry. The crack flyers, Kriloff and Dushoff, would fly her to fame—one hop from Moscow to Tokyo. She would make it, he knew. It would establish him in the foremost ranks of aviation engineers; his name would rank with Vickers, Curtiss, Wright.

He was surprised to see a light snap on in his own room as he approached, and doubly surprised to find Hoering, the

German engineer, sitting in a chair and smoking.

"Hello!" he said. "This is a surprize." He did not like Hoering, and the placid, pig-like face, with its high cheek-bones, reminded him of some predatory animal.

"Hello, Stoddard!" Hoering smiled without warmth. "Couldn't sleep—that mixed party is making too much noise. Thought I'd come in here and talk to you."

The calm intrusion irritated Stoddard. The man took too much for granted. He eyed Hoering with a shrewd appraisal, mindful of the warning the American engineers had given him. What was he doing here?

"How's the plane coming?" asked Hoering.

"Fine. Be ready in a few days for her trial flight. We're waiting for some new wire."

Hoering smiled bleakly. "And you'll wait!" he prophesied, shaking his bullet-head sadly. "I know these Russians. Dreamers! This *Piatiletka* is a joke. They'll never make it. They're far behind now—and millions of dollars' worth of expensive machinery rusts, idle, because some peasant forgot an important cog. A little more of this and I'll tear up my contract and quit."

"So?" said Stoddard, non-committally.

"I mean it, Stoddard! It gets disheartening. Millions of miles of red tape, demanded by a vast bureaucracy that interferes with work. The serfs won't stand for it much longer if the food shortage gets worse. Can you imagine, they passed a law that train crews will be shot if they have an accident! That's why all our raw material is late. And now, the trial of the English engineers for economic treason. Pure rot!"

Stoddard lit a cigarette and wondered. Was Hoering trying to draw him out?

Trying to make him commit himself? Hoering was uttering treason himself. It wasn't natural to talk like that to a comparative stranger. His dislike crystallized.

"Surely, Hoering, you didn't come here to tell me all this?" he answered. "You've been here a long time, I understand. You know it all better than I do. If I didn't like it, I'd break my contract and quit."

Hoering eyed him sharply. "Maybe I will," he said, rising. "I see you're in no mood for talk tonight. I'll go to bed. *Spakoinee nautch!*"

"Good-night," echoed Stoddard. "See you again, I'm afraid."

He locked the door and stood for a moment in deep thought. Was it possible? He made a swift search of every corner of the room, of every drawer; he looked in all the pockets of his clothes. He had received only one letter since coming to Russia. It was from an American engineer he had met in England. This letter he drew out of a coat pocket. Inspection quickly revealed that the original contents was missing from the envelope, and in its place was another and strange missive, written in a curious code. The import was plain. Stoddard swore softly. Planted! Hoering had tried to frame him—still, was it Hoering? He couldn't be absolutely positive. He burned the strange letter at once. If the Gay-Pay-Oo came, there would be no manufactured evidence here!

4

IT WAS a white-faced Nadine he encountered the next morning when he went to Sergei's rooms.

"Jeem!" she cried. "They have arrested Sergei!"

"But—what for?" he demanded.

"I do not know. You will help me, Jeem? We will go at once to see if we

can do something." Her face was hard. "The *Tovarish* Direktor was here."

"What did he want? Can he help?"

"He says he may be able to help—but he wants pay." Her face flushed suddenly.

"I—see!" he answered, slowly, his eyes searching hers. "That's how it is, eh? The swine! I'll wring his fat neck for him——"

"Careful, Jeem, what you say," she cautioned fearfully, glancing at the door.

"What did you answer?" he asked.

The calm, topaz eyes, unafraid, looked full into his.

"What could I answer, when I thought of you, Jeem?" And suddenly she was in his arms, clinging fiercely, desperately, with a wild young strength that amazed him. Her eyes were wet with unshed tears, and a high courage came to her aid.

"He is a filthy *mujik*—a barbarian—that Direktor," she whispered. "He hinted that I—I—may be arrested—that I may be under suspicion because I live here with Sergei and Olga! But I would rather die than consider free union with him. We will go to the Kitia Gorod—that is ancient Chinese city—where Sergei and Olga are being held for trial. We will see and you will help me, Jeem——"

"I will," he promised, grimly. "I'll do everything I can. How do you know they're in that place?"

"The Direktor told me that is prison for bad case, and I think——"

"There must be some higher powers than the Gay-Pay-Oo," he said. "We will go to the higher ups——"

"There are none," she answered. "I do not think they answer even to Stalin. They are a power to themselves!"

"Come on!" he said tersely, with a quirky grin. "Let's go!"

THEY walked the streets to the Kitia Gorod—the walled Chinese city that goes back to the days of the Mongol

domination of Moscow. Every now and then Nadine smiled bravely to him; but the fear that clutched at her heart was visible in her fine eyes.

At the arched entrance in the huge wall that led to the Chinese city they were stopped by an armed sentry. They could not enter. No amount of argument would move the stolid Slav. He had his orders. There was no headquarters of the Gay-Pay-Oo here; he knew of no prisoners. They would have to go to the Kremlin, to the Administration Building, and see the proper official and get the proper passport to enter here. That was all.

And it was useless. They finally turned away in defeat. Nadine went to her rooms and brooded, and Stoddard saw everybody he could think of; but it seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed Sergei and Olga. There was no trace of them anywhere. No one knew anything about them. No one would even speak of them.

At length, driven by desperation, Stoddard went to his own *Tovarish* Direktor, much as he hated the man when he thought of the price he had asked Nadine to pay for his good offices.

"Look here, Direktor," said Stoddard directly, motioning to the interpreter, "you said you could possibly help Sergei Kazanovitch and his wife. You know them both to be loyal to the cause. I want something done at once."

The fat-encased little eyes glittered as they swept Stoddard with a blazing hatred. He knew Stoddard was Nadine's accepted cavalier. He had heard that they were actually going to be married, but his desires were bound by no bourgeois scruples. This tall American had robbed him of a woman he coveted; stood between him and the stinging lusts that poured like a torrid fire in his veins.

"I can do nothing, *Tovarish* Stoddard," he announced, through his interpreter. "I

know nothing of them whatever—and any personal aid I may be able to give should be asked for by some member of the family.”

“Tell him,” directed Stoddard to the interpreter, “that I’m going to be married next week and that I desire to break my contract. I want a permit to leave Russia with my wife.”

The interpreter spoke. The Direktor smiled, spoke blandly.

“The Direktor says,” the interpreter reported, “that it is impossible. You can not so soon desert the economic front. You have contract and Russia insists on fulfilment. Besides, if your wife is Russian subject, it is impossible.”

Stoddard understood. The Direktor would do nothing. He was probably in back of the whole business to force Nadine’s hand and freeze Stoddard out. He would demand his pound of flesh—Nadine would buy his intervention on his own terms, or he would be actively arrayed against them. A vitriolic hatred consumed Stoddard for this complacent-looking sot, with his mane of stiff hair and his porcine features. He wheeled and walked out of the room without another word.

THE American engineers shrugged their shoulders. They could do nothing. The United States did not, officially, recognize Russia. They had no accredited ambassador. They warned him to hold his tongue and play a waiting game. When the trial was held, he might be able to help them, not now.

Nadine had sunk into an apathy from which it was difficult to arouse her. She sat, after her hours of work, in her rooms, all alone, deep in thought. Every day, when Stoddard finished his work, he came to her. In his arms, she lay silent,

frozen, all the high fire stricken from her, all the youthful joyance stilled.

They waited for the trial. About a week later the *Isvestia* printed the first news. There had been no public trial. A court martial had decided that Sergei and Olga Kazanovitch were guilty of treason to the party; of sabotage, economic obstruction; certain papers found in their rooms confirmed this without a doubt. As treasonable members of the party an example had to be made of them as a warning to others. They had been shot to death as decreed by the judges. That was all.

Stoddard left his work and rushed to Nadine’s rooms with the newspaper in his hands. She had just returned from her classes and she greeted him with a lighting of her eyes that always caused his heart to flutter for a moment.

“Nadine,” he began; then she saw the paper he carried. Her face blanched all at once, and she reached for the paper. She found the item and read it through to its end. She looked at him once, with stricken eyes; then she, who was as strong as a young tree, swayed and fell senseless at his feet.

He placed her on the couch and did what he could for her. She opened her eyes presently and he talked to her, earnestly, in a caressing whisper. Hard, unyouthful lines were etched upon his face; grim resolve straightened his mouth.

“You see, dear,” he finished, “it’s no use. They didn’t have a chance—no one will have a chance.”

She nodded, mute.

Swiftly he told her of the planted letter in his own room and his suspicion of Hoering; the warning the American engineers had given him. She clutched at him in sudden terror.

"Jeem!" she sobbed. "You are in danger——"

He shook his head. "Not yet," he answered. "You are in worse danger, Nadine. You will do as I say?"

Again she nodded. He bent and kissed her, and then left. The shock of Sergei's and Olga's execution had laid a hard finger upon his heart. Grimly, he returned to his work, tense, silent, tireless.

IT WAS during the afternoon that Burch came to his side.

"Keep on with your work," he said, smiling disarmingly. "Don't let on—smile. I got a tip they're going to pinch that girl, Nadine, in the morning. Smile, you idiot! I don't want any one to suspect that I'm saying anything serious. The joint's alive with spies and watchers. Nice day, eh?"

Stoddard smiled. He lit a cigarette slowly, stared at some blueprints and nodded.

"Wonderful weather. Who—the Gay-Pay-Oo?"

"Right! But be careful, Jim. There's nothing you can do, so don't try."

"Is that so? Is the tip hot?"

"Sizzling! One of the bright lights in the *Tovarish* Direktor's office. I've been feeding the little crook American cigarettes—even trade for inside stuff. The way I get it, the Direktor's behind the whole works. He wants that gal, see? Now don't try anything heroic, or they'll put you against a wall and pepper your liver, Jim. Better let the dame go—I'll get you another one—and one's as good as another. This one's got the Direktor's initials on her, so lay off. No use queering a swell chance for recognition on account of just one girl!"

Stoddard nodded, still smiling.

"All right, lunkhead," he said casually,

"See you tonight. Tell Dean I want to talk to him, will you?"

Burch nodded and walked away, a seraphic smile on his impish features.

5

AT SIX o'clock that evening a whistle blew and the next shift of workers dragged wearily in to take up the work of the *Piatiletka* where the last shift had left off. Stoddard went to his room and rested. He lay flat on his back and stared at the ceiling, hour after hour, until the black night came and painted the sky with pin-points of star-fire. As the clock struck ten, he rose and walked out of the building.

He wandered to the concrete apron where his plane stood. The sentry saluted.

"A perfect night, *Tovarish* Stoddard," he said. "You have come to look at your little pigeon?"

"A fine night, Comrade," answered Stoddard, in his halting Russian. "Yes, I have come to look carefully. In the morning, the great Kriloff will want her to fly. Tonight, I must make sure."

"But, *Tovarish* Stoddard—it is orders—no one must touch her after your shift is done."

Stoddard snorted. "Yes, I know. Those are my orders, but they do not apply to me. I work many hours extra for the *Piatiletka*. Tonight I must make sure that all is well. Help me take off the cover."

"But, I can not, *Tovarish!*" objected the sentry. He knew his orders, and yet, he was not sure if they applied to this foreign engineer from whose brain the plane had sprung. "It is a ukase that no one——"

Stoddard laughed. He caught a flash of a shadow moving near the hangar.

"Sorry," he said, as he stepped closer, "but this has to be done!" His right fist

flashed, carrying the weight of his ample bone and muscle. The sentry dropped.

Almost instantly, a dim figure in the garb of a mechanic darted from the shadows to his side.

"All right!" snapped Stoddard. "Pick up his rifle and parade back and forth." He was instantly obeyed by the mechanic. Stoddard took a length of wire from his pocket and secured the sentry; then he ripped the covers from the plane, kicked away the chocks from in front of the wheels and climbed into the tiny cabin.

Here, he leaned forward and snapped on the lights on the instrument board. He primed the motor, switched on the inertia starter, and the engine broke into a sudden roar.

With racing heart, Stoddard warmed the motor and kicked open the door. The mechanic climbed in and sat by his side. Stoddard opened the throttle and the plane moved forward. An alarm rang stridently somewhere; flood-lights suddenly went on, illuminating the huge field. Another sentry came running from across the field, but Stoddard veered the plane directly at him. The man had no stomach for the charging monster with its deadly propeller. He dropped his rifle and fled to one side.

Stoddard laughed suddenly. This was something like it! With the feel of the stick in his hands, he felt the master.

"I got her all ready this afternoon," he shouted to the mechanic. "Some of the American engineers helped me. She's good for five thousand miles without a stop. Look! There goes another soldier. I'll race her across the field to the far end, and they'll think that I'm trying her out. Lord! Isn't she fast?"

The mechanic did not answer, but slumped into the seat, still holding the sentry's rifle. Shouts arose from the lighted field. Stoddard paid no heed. He

raced here and there and made for the concrete runway. A glance at the illuminated "sock" showed him the wind's direction. He selected one of the diverging runways, faced into the wind, lifted the tail, gave her the gun, and the plane rose in the air.

A little prayer came to Stoddard's lips. Unconsciously, he spoke it aloud:

"God! I hope the motor is warm enough to go to work and doesn't conk on us! I'll climb slowly—but I must clear those wires at the end of the field. Can't see 'em! Here we go!"

Swiftly, surely, the little speed plane rose and thundered away through the night skies, headed straight west. Ten throbbing, droning minutes went by. The lights of Moscow had faded behind them, and there was no sign of any pursuit. They were all alone in a tiny world of their own.

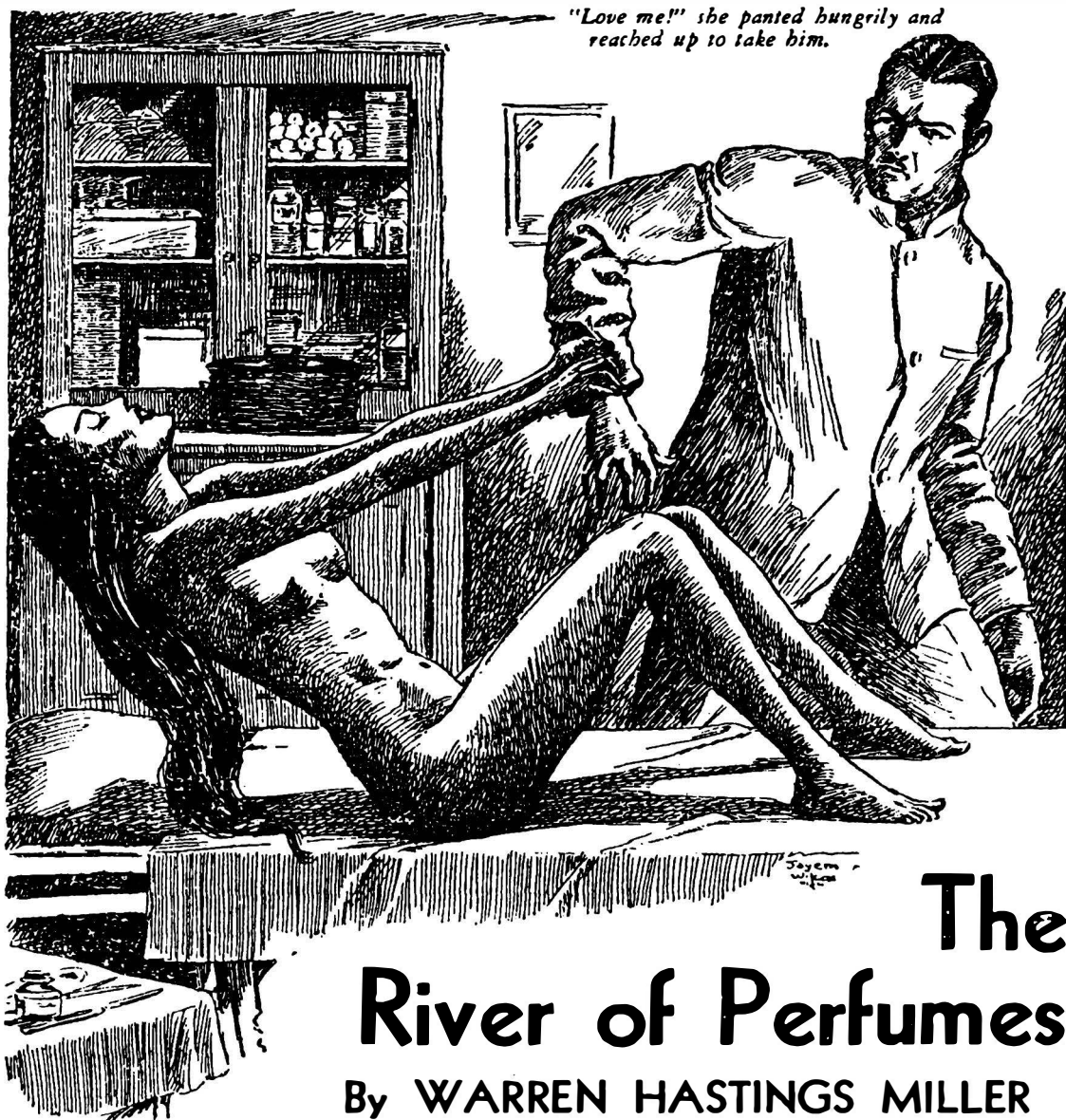
"No one can catch us now," exulted Stoddard. "We're doing nearly two hundred! I'll have you in France or England before dawn!" He stole a look at the mechanic. The tear-brightened topaz eyes that met his caused his hand to shake. The ship wobbled, as if striking an air pocket. "Here!" he continued, sternly, "this won't do! A mechanic should be helpful. Lean over and kiss me!"

The mechanic meekly obeyed.

Stoddard laughed. "Tastes like moist rose petals!" he said. "Boy—I can see where you're going to be quite a help."

He looked down at the dark earth, the slim, silver ribbon of the Moskva.

"Good-bye, Russia!" he cried. "To hell with your Gay-Pay-Oo and your *Piatiletka!* We'll go home and get a job—any job—so long as the good old stars and stripes fly overhead! By the way—I could use another helping of moist rose petals. Would you mind, Nadine, leaning over?"



The River of Perfumes

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

She drove men to madness by her sheer beauty, this little maid of Indo-China—an Oriental tale of love, lust, and sudden death, and a wild adventure

A FAIRY temple of pearl and rose seemed to be floating toward him on the dark waters of the River of Perfumes. Doctor Barrett rose in haste and clapped his hands for his house-boys. The temple undulated and swayed somewhat under the oar-strokes of the pirogue that floated it. It was fringed with translucent globes of color from its paper

lanterns; it was lit within, so that its silken walls radiated a luminous pearly-white glow. Coming through the scented night, over a black mirror of waters that was all reflected color from the lights of the Emperor's palace downstream, it thrilled Barrett.

"God! It takes Indo-China to stage a scene like this!" he exclaimed.

He spoke sharply to Number One: "My instruments, Song Ha. Serum. Alcohol. Bandages. You go chop-chop. Court lady coming."

He thought it another cobra case. The Emperor's gardens were extensive along the River of Perfumes. Cobras got in. There would be a tiny pin-prick on a soft ankle and then one of the beauties of his numerous harem would presently feel numb and faint. Her abundant vitality would sicken and pale; within half an hour she died.

It was that embarrassment that had caused the Emperor Bao Dai, on his return from his studies in France and investiture on the throne, to summon Doctor Barrett from Siam. Jim Barrett, of Georgia, U. S. A., was young, exceedingly handsome in the dark Southern type, and courageous. He had to be, for he was a graduate of that school of courage, the famous Snake Institute of Bangkok. The work there, carried on with death peering over one's shoulder at every step, had resulted in a serum effective against cobra bite. Its saving beneficence had spread all over the East as various progressive rulers heard of it. The men trained there were much in demand; hence Barrett's job as palace specialist here in Hué.

He stood on the wharf ready for immediate action as the float neared. His boys were lighting the lane of paper lanterns that led up to his Annamese house of stucco and brick. The victim would be carried in and the serum administered. It was astonishing to watch the arrest of that paralysis, the slow return of rose-ivory color to the girl's round cheeks, her rosebud lips. Many a raving beauty Barrett had so watched return to this world. They were pretty, these Indo-China girls. He would readily concede to Mrs. Sun Yat Sen, in her youth, the honor of being

the prettiest woman of any race, but these palace beauties ran her a close second. They were the pick of all the Five Provinces of Indo-China.

The results of that restoration to life had been embarrassing to him—at first. A rush back of amazing vitality, a surge of overwhelming passion—directed at the first male in sight, the handsome white doctor—the clasping him to her, as the starfish enfolds the mollusk. . . . He had resisted them—at first; then realized that it was part of his reward. It was all the girl had to give.

But no eunuchs bore any case for Doctor Barrett when the floating fairy temple arrived. Instead, Prince Tou Dac, one of the numerous brothers of the Emperor, stepped out on the wharf, alone. He kotowed with ceremony and shook hands with himself under the long blue silk sleeves of his mandarin robes. The red jade button on his black cap proclaimed his rank of Prince Imperial.

THE doctor saw that this visit had nothing to do with professional services and set himself to the honorifics due to Prince Tou Dac's rank. Tea was brought, as they seated themselves in the reception room. The Prince glanced around the room with loud smacks of appreciation of the doctor's honorable tea. He admired its carved teak, its cloisonné, its ceramics, its luxuriant embroideries in vast hangings of color. He beat about the subjects of the weather, Annamese politics, the state of the doctor's health, for some time, and then finally asked:

"The serum for cobra bite; does it cure as well with all snakes, Honorable Doctor?"

Barrett grunted non-committally. He was not giving that secret away! As a matter of fact, the serum had no effect against the Russell's viper, nor the cro-

talid asp venom, but there was no sense in publishing that fact. Such failures were excused on the score of being brought in too late.

Tou Dac took his grunt for an affirmative. "My people do not like all these changes, Honorable Foreign-devil," he said next.

That change of title from doctor to foreign-devil was subtle. So was "*my* people." Barrett eyed him fixedly. He did not like Tou Dac. The Emperor always dressed in the latest style from Saigon when he had any business in hand with Europeans; Tou Dac clung to his mandarin robes. He was a reactionary, and also older than Emperor Bao Dai. He had plenty of claims to the throne that were private grievances, ignored, however, by the French Protectorate.

"Look here, Your Highness," Barrett said, nettled, "there's no use in grousing over changes; they're bound to come. You remember the rebellion of 1916, when the French had their hands full at home? That failed utterly, didn't it? Not a chance in the world now!"

Tou Dac nodded. A gleam of desperation lurked in his eyes. He seemed like a leopard pacing the bars of its cage and no way out. Finally he broke out with: "She is the most beautiful girl in all the world, Doctor! Men are driven mad with the bare sight of her. I, even I, who have loved so many. . . . Perhaps, with your knowledge, you can help me. If so . . . any reward you care to name. . . . *Aiee*, little Nanya Chan! I am on fire! I have not slept for nights! But she is for the . . . the house-boy of M'sieur Saint."

His lips curled with bitter scorn over that description of the Emperor as the head-servant of the French Resident-General. He would lose his head for that remark if it were even repeated in a whis-

per about the palace. But an Annamese smitten by love parted with all his caution, his loyalty, his shrewdness, his honor. Barrett knew them. He knew the girls, too; their passion was wild, abandoned, insatiable. They were but traps of flesh, clamping tight with arms and heels the man caught in their toils. He said:

"Truly, love is a fever in the young, and even the aged are not exempt, Prince. But this girl; if she is for the Emperor, you had best go on an expedition somewhere and forget her. She'll fade. There are lovely ones also up in Tonkin."

"*La!* I want her *now!*" Tou Dac was beside himself. "I spoke to you about the snakes, hoping that there might be an—er—accident to the Emperor, and I would reign. But you say you can cure any snake-bite? *Howagh!* And little hope in a revolution, by which I might be put on the throne. . . . Remains—*you.*"

He was frankly revealing his mind. Extraordinary, in a subtle and reserved native prince! She must be a remarkable girl, this Nanya Chan, Barrett thought. And he had no intention of being used in her abduction. It was dangerous to offend Tou Dac, but—

"Suppose she happens to be bitten while walking in the gardens," Tou Dac mused, out loud. "She will be brought here in haste. And then, after her cure—" His eyes gleamed. He could see his kidnapping sampan swooping down on the floating temple with the girl convalescent in its fairy shrine; himself flying with her into wild Laos. He was desperate enough for that.

"Good Lord!" Barrett protested. "You aren't going to do anything so foolish as that, Prince! You are Minister of the Interior here, aren't you? You have vast provinces of Annam to look after. You have your share of this government, your

part to take off the Emperor's shoulders——"

"*Hoo!*" Tou Dac broke in. "We are all but puppets. We gabble and we koto and we deliberate—and the French do what they please. Decrees are put before us to sign. We sign. . . . They are poison to me, those decrees! I know what is good for my people. I sign with tears, with rage. The French mean well, but they know not what they do. *Ho-agh!* Gladly I give up all that farce for nights of love with *her!* O Pearl!—O Beauty!—O thou ruby treasure, Nanya Chan!"

He was quite mad. "Nevertheless I wash my hands of it, I warn you," Barrett told him sternly. "Go away and forget her. You won't have a chance in Laos with the French hunting you down. . . . Sorry, Prince; I would be a bad friend to you if I assisted in this idiotic scheme in any way."

"You can't help yourself, Doctor!" Tou Dac exulted. "A Hindoo snake-charmer that I know will manage it. He will cause her to be bitten and you will cure her. She will be brought over here. The rest is for me. . . . No; I've thought the way out, at last, after groping for three nights!"

The doctor shrugged; then eyed him defiantly. "A little word from me to the Emperor. . . . Mind, I wouldn't give you away, except that I am convinced that you've lost your reason temporarily."

Tou Dac nodded courteously, conceding the point. "I am desolated, Honorable Physician," he said silkily. "But you shall *not leave this house tonight!* Nor any of your house-boys. It would be . . . unhealthy."

His eyes glittered through the spectacles. Barrett shrugged his shoulders. He would see about that! Tou Dac commenced the honorifics of bowing himself out. Barrett could see that he was set on

this kidnapping, having found a workable plan. He kotoed back, with more cordiality and real feeling than when Tou Dac had come here as a reactionary prince in the doctor's regard, disliked and feared by the white colony as hostile to all modern progress in Indo-China. After all, there was a deal to be said for his side of it. . . .

And this infatuation, for which he would gladly throw away a kingdom for love, commanded a man's sympathy. Barrett approved—except for Tou Dac's age. It was difficult to guess that age beyond the evidence of those hard and seamed features, but he could not be less than fifty. The girl would not be over sixteen; Barrett had the physician's natural repugnance for such a mismatching of ages as that. Give her a man near her own age to love. . . .

He sat smoking over it after Tou Dac had gone. What should he do? He had been forced into his part in this abduction; there was no escaping that. He could not let the girl die. As a trusted white retainer of the Emperor's, it was also his duty to let him know about an affair like this and let him take his own steps. His higher duty to Tou Dac was furthermore to save him from himself, from this folly. But—"Bab!" Barrett exclaimed impatiently over that smug Puritan meddling. "Who am I to say what's good for him? Let him have her. I'll get a knife in my ribs for my pains if I meddle in this. She must be some beauty!"

SHE was. Tou Dac moved fast. Within two hours Barrett saw a commotion down at the water-gate of the palace along the River of Perfumes. Paper lanterns bobbed agitatedly. An illuminated orchid, in rose-violet and pale yellow, came floating swiftly upstream. An enor-

mous orchid of silk on a sampan it was, with its purple tongue curving over from astern as a sunshade and canopy. The swift thumps of its oar betokened haste.

Barrett called his boys and hastened down to the wharf. The Annamese rower jumped out and cast a turn of rope around a cleat. Within the orchid, the heart of the lotus, was a couch in a riot of silken pillows, and on it lay a glittering little court beauty. She scarcely breathed. Her eyes were closed, and the pallor of death had driven all the rose from her cheeks. Barrett gasped at the sheer beauty of her; then signed to his men to carry her in haste. The sampan man squatted for a long wait.

On the operating-table the hospital boys were quickly divesting her of her blaze of embroidery encrusted with jewels, then her filmy under-silks. Their sponges began bathing her with the powerful alcohol. Barrett gasped again. Never had he seen a more perfect woman's form. She was made for love. Her intense glossy blue-black hair was brushed back tight from a round and smooth forehead, giving an aspect of innocence and girliness. The nose was piquant, saucy. Her mouth was a red flower, in which one would bury one's lips as in a rose. And her eyes . . . they now drooped, closed, under downy lashes of black and were arched over with thin pencil-bows of black brows, but they would be opals of brown and red fire when they opened.

"Oh, you little beauty!" Barrett breathed hard in a tumult of emotions. He sought for and found, just under her knee above the shapely turn of her calf, the two red pin-pricks of the cobra. He made two sharp incisions that welled blood; then he sucked it and the venom out, spat it away. It was only preliminary, that draining of the reservoir; the venom was already all through her blood, para-

lyzing all nerves as it went. Barrett drove in the sharp hypodermic needle above the wound and pressed steadily on the serum plunger. A second hypodermic, applied under the curve of her left breast to protect the heart. A third, injected in the smooth curve of her right thigh where it swept into the slender sweep of her waist. Then he stood and waited.

Slowly, miraculously, her quick, tight respiration lengthened. The paralyzed muscles relaxed. A faint glow of rose color appeared in her palms, her breasts, her feet. The pale ivory skin took on richness, the soft glow of health.

"Enough with the alcohol," he said.

They wrung out the sponges, gathered up basins, and left. Barrett braced himself for the recovery. . . .

SHE was charming. They all were charming, in a physical way; but it took charm plus intelligence to enchant an educated white man. Her eyes alone could tell him if there was intelligence. They were mainly little pretty animals, without the ghost of a thought beyond finery, the seduction of men, the delights of food. Barrett could easily understand that this girl would set all men mad with her perfections, so far as they went. Good enough for Orientals; they did not demand anything more. . . . He wondered if this one would act differently. . . . No; she hadn't a chance with what he was about to give her.

Her eyelids fluttered. Barrett had ready a beaker of a strong vital solution that flooded all over the more important organs, whipping them into an intense activity and setting the heart to pounding furiously so as to restore circulation. Gently he parted her flower lips and made her swallow the dose.

She stirred, presently, moved her whole body slightly to a more comfortable position. Then her eyes opened. They stud-

ied him a moment. They were rich with intelligence, humor, keenness. A pretty wrinkle of puzzlement appeared on her brow. Then they changed swiftly to the glowing fires of passion. Her arms opened to receive him.

"Love me, O man!—Love me!—Love me!" she panted hungrily and reached up to take him.

Barrett eluded her. No. . . . He had made a bargain, in a way, with Tou Dac. She was for Tou Dac if he had courage and ingenuity enough to carry out her abduction. He must refrain. He was on fire himself, but he shook his head and tried to raise a warning hand.

Quick as a leopard she snatched at it, dragged him down upon her. She was not to be denied. Fierce, lithe, strong, she enveloped him, locked him fast.

SOME time later Barrett's detachment asserted itself. The girl was now content just to sit up and look at him; then would come a fresh wave of affection and she wanted his arms again. She was completely and utterly in love with him. Her eyes danced, sparkled, blazed, invited; repelled in sheer mischief, to relent and invite again. Her laugh was like music, her voice caressing, wise, merry, deep with feeling as she talked. Barrett wondered when, if ever, she would return to the normal and rather disdainful girl who wanted now to go back to the palace. That reaction always set in.

But it did not with her. An hour had gone and she was still absorbed in him. She was charming, vivacious, intelligent, abounding in humor. Her exotic beauty was intoxicating. Barrett considered the appalling fact that he, too, was fast falling in love with her. He had heard of love at first sight and had scoffed. Now he was experiencing it. . . . The rest had been mere physical dalliances that

satisfied, in a way; this was the real thing.

He fought against it. Sardonicly his inner mind was telling him that he was being moved to do precisely as Prince Tou Dac had done—throw away everything, position, professional standing, comforts of home and income, even his social status in the white colony of Hué, all for love of this Oriental beauty. He must not permit it. . . . He glanced in the general direction of the wharf.

"They will begin to be uneasy about you at the palace," he hinted.

"*Aieeee!*" Her brown eyes grew round. "The palace? You would not send me there, delight of my heart? It is to my death! The Emperor will find that I am not now virgin and"—her graceful hand with its tapering fingers clutched at her throat—"no more little Nanya Shan!"

Shan? Of course! He had been misled by Tou Dac's pronunciation, the harsh *ch* of Chan. She was a Shan girl. Barrett had heard of them. Ask the English! They had the bulk of that race over in Burma, across the river from Laos. "Why, how ridiculous! They make charming little wives!" Barrett heard in memory that sharp rejoinder by an English officer's wife to an ignorant American who was questioning a marriage with "a yellow woman," to use his own coarse phrase. Nanya was a Shan. She had those rare Burmese qualities of humor, comradeship, capability and intelligence that, better than the Japanese, set them apart from all other Oriental girls as worthy any man, even the haughty white man. She was no pretty doll!

But Barrett was now much disturbed. He had known immediately that he was risking her very life when first in her embrace. He should have denied himself, at once. The Emperor would simply have her strangled. Never before had a closely guarded virgin been sent to him as a

patient from snake-bite. It had taken Prince Tou Dac's Hindoo snake-juggler to accomplish that.

"Let me stay with you for ever, my heart's joy!" Nanya begged. "You that have brought me love! I worship you! *Aiee*—I die if you are not near—always!" She cast herself on him with passion. Barrett clasped her to him with renewed fervor, in a tumult of pity, perplexity, remorse. A rebellion against parting with her—ever—gripped him. Like Tou Dac, he felt, wildly, that nothing else in life was of any importance compared to the love of this starry and vivid beauty. And he had it, and Tou Dac hadn't. . . .

He was her first love. She had never been permitted to so much as look at any youth since the beauty-child of some obscure Laos village waxed into a womanhood fit for the Emperor. There is nothing more ardent or enduring with any woman than that love for the man first to open the gates of life to her. She would remember the white man all her days. . . .

But there weren't going to be any days, not for Nanya. Strangled, tomorrow, in some closet in the palace. Barrett did not know what to advise. He did not mention the sheer cruelty of returning her again, but she read the doubt in his eyes. She sighed, reached for the heap of jewel-encrusted finery, and her hand came away with a steel *da-sye* in it, a glittering needle of a blade five inches long.

"Love me, one last time—my all—my heart's treasure!" she murmured passionately on his breast. "Then this dagger! I swear it before the Buddha."

Tears made her eyes gorgeous as she looked out over the dank River of Perfumes in farewell. Its scented aromas of frangipani and moon-flower and lotus came in languorously through the marble laceration of Barrett's windows. Out there all

was beauty, peace, lights on the black flowing mirror of the river, glistening foliage winnowing in the breeze. It was her farewell to life; but to die was sweet in the first rapture of love, in the odors of blossoms, in the arms of her man. She could care for no other after him. . . .

Barrett rose with resolution. He had decided. Her life was precious to him now. He *was* her life; she preferred death without him. Her devotion was equal to that supreme sacrifice. And with her lay supreme happiness. Like most bachelors of long standing, he was hungry in heart for the mate of his dreams to come into his life. But he had found no one so far. She would be for ever a delight; vivacious, charming, intelligent—and a raving beauty in any style of womanly apparel she chose, European or Asiatic. His position here? *Bah!* His services as a specialist commanded employment anywhere in the East! He must get her out of this. . . .

"Wait," he said. "Put on those filmy underthings. Do up the rest. . . . Boy!" He clapped his hands. "Bring coolie suit, chop-chop!" To Nanya: "We go, Nanya, dearest! Out of this! Out of Indo-China. Away! Bangkok—Singapore—Rangoon—where you will! There is no need to die."

"Oh, my love!" In her eyes shone rapture. She reached at once for the filmy things. Rodin would have wept over the poem of her body as she stepped into them.

But his problem bristled with practical difficulties as Barrett explored into what he was letting himself in for. Escape out of the house was impossible; Tou Dac's daggers guarded every egress from its gardens, for white man or house-boy, and Nanya was now dressed as such. There was but one way left open; back to the sampan waiting at the wharf. And

that sampan would be swooped upon by another sampan, bearing Tou Dac, hot for his girl and aided by a dozen retainers. . . .

Where would Tou Dac attempt her abduction? Somewhere during that brief trip down the River of Perfumes to the palace water-gate. Tou Dac's eyes would be on her sampan every moment. No matter which way it left the wharf, he would pounce in pursuit. He would listen to no evasions either; the girl, or her dead body in proof that she had succumbed to the cobra bite, one or the other, would have to be on board.

BARRETT eyed Nanya critically. That long black gown of coarse silk worn by both sexes, with its straight lines, hid her graceful curves. She wore the flat turban of many turns of thick ribbon silk—but under it beamed her piquant ivory face, all a-sparkle with merriment. It would never do! Her beauty glorified any clothes; men would not look at them, but at her. And gasp—and remember. Tou Dac could trace her, anywhere they went.

"Can you row, dear one?" Barrett asked.

She nodded, smiled, gripped his forearm. Lord, she was strong! He resisted, but his arm was nearly bent back. That training of the dance since childhood had given her endurance and lithe strength. "Many times, on the Mekong, have I paddled the pirogue, beloved one," she told him, with her saucy eyes dancing.

"We're fixed, then," Barrett said with relief, and stepped into his laboratory. Presently he emerged with a brush and chemical pigments; also a good Colt revolver was now strapped on his belt. Caste marks with the brush disfigured Nanya's lovely face; frightful lines of worry, labor, and semi-starvation smeared her

eyebrows and grooved her piquant cheeks. She looked now like a sampan rowing-woman, gaunt with toil.

"You'll do," said Barrett. "Come."

Together they went down to the wharf, she following him as the white man's coolie. Barrett spoke sharply to the squatting sampan man:

"Go! Help them up at the house. She must be carried. Careful, now!—Coolie, make ready the bed," he ordered Nanya.

She stepped clumsily aboard and busied herself with the pillows under the great canopy tongue of the orchid. Barrett watched the sampan man till his shuffling figure darkened his doorway.

"Quick, Nanya! Take the oar," he called softly. "Straight down the river," he directed her. "Keep to the middle when passing the palace. Keep rowing, no matter what happens."

He was gone in a dive into the heart of the lotus. Swiftly he blew out the paper lanterns. Then he banked the pillows close around him, so as to hide as much as possible his lean masculine form. Over them he drew a large coverlet of eyelet-embroidered silk, then loosened the revolver in its holster. The strokes of her oar kept up steadily.

Barrett could only guess how Tou Dac would manage his abduction, but he could picture the raiding sampan dashing alongside and the Prince leaping aboard to snatch up his prey out of the heart of the lotus. He was ready for him! The oarsman? Ah, there was uncertainty enough in his plan to sicken the heart! He could not foretell what she would do when the crisis came! The Prince's retainers would deal summarily with any sampan rower who showed the least resistance. At least three of them would board with the Prince to help carry off the girl. And she would fly to his defense, reckless of risks to herself. She

had given him proofs enough of that devotion. . . . It was a fool plan, Barrett groaned miserably. He wished he hadn't tried it, but it was the best that he could think of. Once down to the river-mouth, there would be tramp steamers off the bar of Hué.

Where were they now? He could hear the distant cries of the sampan man discovering that his boat was gone. A powerful waft of frangipani perfume reminded him of a great tree of that species that grew by the garden wall some distance above the water-gate. Then came the pungent odor of teak in full blossom. To him who knew it, the River of Perfumes was a guide in landmarks by its smells alone. Those teak trees were near the water-gate; they were passing it, unchallenged.

Then her oar-strokes quickened. The craft leaped ahead. "My lord!" her voice called to him. "Boat following, fast!"

Barrett heard the faint rhythmic dip of many paddles in the silence of the river. "Jump overboard, Nanya!" he called tensely. "Meet me down the river—left bank. I'll take care of 'em! It is Prince Tou Dac, who comes to take thee."

"*Aarrh!*" That cry of rebellion against the lust of men raged from her lips. She had found love; its exaltation scorned the thought of the loveless palace girl, the plaything of princes. "That withered old ape?—Better the dagger, my heart! I have it with me."

Barrett almost broke up his ruse in his anxiety. "*Don't!*" he cried. "Jump and swim ashore. They will take you for the sampan rower. You can meet me below——"

THERE was no time for more. A ferocious gabble of yells barked out, close at hand, over the River of Perfumes. Paddles splashed furiously. A heavy,

wooden bump careened the sampan as a great long war pirogue swept alongside.

"*Jump!*" Barrett yelled; then lay tense under the coverlet, one hand gripping his revolver butt. There was commotion on board, the sampan rocking wildly under the thrust of sandals, a violent leap of some powerful man down into the heart of the lotus. Gripping hands tore away the coverlet for a gloat over the languid beauty ensconced in the pillows, and then—Prince Tou Dac arrested his clutch in midair. His mouth gaped open. He was looking down into the bore of Barrett's revolver.

"Hands up! *Back!*—Back to your pirogue, all of you!" That order was imperative as Barrett leaped up with a thrust of his left hand. Tou Dac gave back before the revolver, his hands on high; then he found his voice.

"Doctor Barrett!" he grated, his eyes all ferocity, astonishment, bafflement. "What do you here? Where is she? What does this mean?"

"It means," said Barrett bitingly, "that you are not to have her, Prince. I sent her back to the Emperor some other way——"

"*You* did! You dared, dog of a white man?" A white-hot glare of rage made Tou Dac's eyes feral. The chains of his wrath were loosed. "Upon him! *Kill!*" He clutched for Barrett's pistol with that harsh shout.

Barrett eluded his groping talons with a swift circular twist of the gun that brought its barrel down viciously, with all his force, on Tou Dac's turban with the movement. The Prince crashed down across his legs. But close behind him followed a circle of long, curved *dab-syes* thrusting for Barrett's life under their guarding arms. He could back no further into the orchid shrine.

"*Mawng Shwé!*" That piercing silvery

voice was no sampan man's! It arrested them all, to glance back at her. Nanya stood dragging at the dagger within her coolie robe. She was tensed to leap to his help. She had not jumped overboard. Her accents were of extreme terror for the life of her love. The raiders grinned diabolically. They had them both now! The Prince would come to. . . . Two of them faced her way; the rest crouched to close in on Barrett and finish him.

"Don't! Keep away, Nanya!" He bared clenched teeth at her; then fired as rapidly as he could pull trigger. The rest was a confused hurly-burly of struggle in the darkness, the sulfurous flame and smoke of his revolver at close quarters, cuts, stabs, blows, men groaning and stumbling. He was conscious of her in the thick of it, active, swift-turning as any dancing-girl, meeting their slashes with thrusts of her dagger, warding off with quick blow of her arm some fatal stab at him. And then it was all over and the bower smoldered with red patches of fire on its pillows and reeked with powder-smoke fumes.

Barrett, bleeding from gashes and sobbing for breath, flung his assailants hastily over the gunwale, one by one, back into the pirogue they had come from. Then he sat down and let the sampan drift; on down the River of Perfumes. Nanya lay dead among the pillows. She had given her life to save his. . . .

LISTLESSLY he watched the Prince's pirogue drift away. There was commotion now along shore over the shooting, but what did it all matter? Her loss was too cruel to be borne. To have a great love awakened in his own heart, after all these empty and cynical and unsatisfied years in the East, only to— He had seen that fatal stab at the last moment. On guard for herself, it would

never have more than scratched. . . . But there was one greasy knife-hand in his grip at that moment. A successful wrench, and it would have killed him. . . .

Mechanically he slapped out with a wetted palm those patches of fire that threatened to become flame too near her body. And then he got up and bent over her. By heaven, there was just a chance! They knew that it was essential to take her alive. The Prince would execute, with exquisite tortures, that man who dared really harm her. A man can take the force out of his blow at the very last instant, if his mind so directs. Barrett felt her again, a faint thread of hope lighting his gloom. His first examination had been hasty. Dead; he had been only too sure of it! But she was still warm. And, after a long time, Barrett nodded and a throb of poignant joy flooded all over him. Yes, her heart was still going; in the faintest of beats and at long intervals. . . . That heart was his. . . .

Frantically he set to work to do what had long been left undone. It would be a fight to save her. And he had no stimulants, no laboratory, no aids of any kind save his own medical skill—and his own fierce will-power. He raged with the intensity of that and prayed fervidly! "God! Have mercy! Give her back to me! . . . They shan't have her! They *shan't!*" His thoughts raved against the powers of darkness as he worked over her, alternately begging God and defying Death. He knew, now, the agony of a lost loved one; and there is no greater. He sobbed ungovernably as he bandaged.

And then he had done all he could for her. He went back to take the oar. The sampan had long since drifted past the excited crowds in the palace gardens; it now leaped ahead down the River of Perfumes, impelled by Barrett's vigorous and stinging strokes. A quiet happiness

suffused him as the boat entered the city area of Hué and passed lines of thatched-roofed pirogues moored side by side along both banks. There was just a chance, yet! Reach a steamer and a medicine chest, and he could bring her around. . . .

IT WAS no longer the River of Perfumes, but a river of stinks and industrial smells. Tall black factory chimneys in the night; rice mills; moored steam launches, lighters. All were asleep in the dead of night. Then came a faint tang of salt air, and Barrett quickened his strokes. Lagoons; the lighterage port of Thuan-an; and then, at last, tramp steamers anchored out in the offing.

Barrett hailed one: "Ship ahoy! Can you take a couple of passengers?"

A gabble of Malay from some scrang on watch. "Am waking capman, boss."

Presently a sleepy officer, in pajamas and naval cap, stood by the rail. Barrett repeated his query.

"Aye. We're leaving for Singapore on the turn of the tide. If that suits ye, come aboard."

Barrett surged with satisfaction. Good! Singapore! There would be French complications over this affair at either Saigon or Hanoi.

A rope ladder was lowered. Up it he bore his limp burden. He kicked the sampan adrift. A lantern shone on their faces as the grizzled Scotch captain sized up his passengers.

"Man, she's a beauty! Ye're in luck, I'd say," he commented with a knowing twinkle over the old, old story—in the East. White man taking a little trip with a native girl. . . .

"She's my wife." Barrett shut that off sternly. "Your medicine chest, Captain. She got hurt, badly, by a jealous native. I'd like a stateroom if you can manage it."

"Oh, aye." The captain shrugged and gave him up. He had seen that brief infatuation for a native girl too. It always ended badly—for the girl. Nevertheless he hurried off for the ship's medicine chest.

Barrett faced his attitude defiantly. He loved her, sincerely, and with his whole heart. Let them take it as they would! She was a treasure. In Singapore he would look around for a position at the court of some Oriental potentate whose gardens were pestered with snakes. . . .

And it was in the stateroom berth that Nanya finally came to. Her eyes opened, looked up at him with recognition. Then they glowed on him with a steadfast adoration. Barrett could do nothing but murmur tenderly her name.

She was too weak to touch. She held onto life but with the merest thread as yet. But she was gaining on it. An arch look came, presently, into her eyes; her lips quirked.

"Man," she said feebly, but there was the faint music of laughter in her voice. "My man! . . . What is your name?"

Barrett smiled down at her delightedly. They had omitted that trifle, up to the present. "Jim," he told her. "Jim Barrett, love."

She puzzled prettily. "Djeem? . . . What a funny noise! I have a better one, my all. Mawng Shwé, my Golden Prince! Kiss me. . . ."

Barrett ventured to do so. He held her, very gently, and drank in the poignant happiness of it. She was adorable, this gift of the River of Perfumes; she was worthy the best that was in him; and she was his. . . .

The love-theme from *Madam Butterfly* was singing in his soul; it would never end like that tragedy, he vowed before God.

Alleys of Darkness

By PATRICK ERVIN

A story of Singapore and Dennis Dorgan, hardest-fisted slugger in the merchant marine, and the maze of intrigue that enmeshed him



"I stepped in and hooked my right so his jaw."

WHEN the gong ended my fight with Kid Leary in the Sweet Dreams Fight Club, Singapore, I was tired but contented. The first seven rounds had been close, but the last three I'd plastered the Kid all over the ring, though I hadn't knocked him out like I'd did in Shanghai some months before, when I flattened him in the twelfth round. The scrap in Singapore was just for ten; another round and I'd had him.

But anyway, I'd shaded him so thor-

oughly I knowed I'd justified the experts which had made me a three to one favorite. The crowd was applauding wildly, the referee was approaching, and I stepped forward and held out my glove hand—when to my utter dumfounding, he brushed past me and lifted the glove of the groggy and bloody Kid Leary!

A instant's silence reigned, shattered by a nerve-racking scream from the ring-side. The referee, Jed Whithers, released Leary, who collapsed into the rosin,

and Whithers ducked through the ropes like a rabbit. The crowd riz bellowing, and recovering my frozen wits, I gave vent to lurid langwidge and plunged outa the ring in pursuit of Whithers. The fans was screaming mad, smashing benches, tearing the ropes offa the ring and demanding the whereabouts of Whithers, so's they could hang him to the rafters. But he had disappeared, and the mad-dened crowd raged in vain.

I found my way dazedly to my dressing-room, where I set down on a table and tried to recover from the shock. Bill O'Brien and the rest of the crew was there, frothing at the mouth, each having sunk his entire wad on me. I considered going into Leary's dressing-room and beating him up again, but decided he'd had nothing to do with the crooked decision. He was just as surprized as me when Whithers declared him winner.

Whilst I was trying to pull on my clothes, hindered more'n helped by my raging shipmates, whose langwidge was getting more appalling every instant, a stocky bewhiskered figger come busting through the mob, and done a fantastic dance in front of me. It was the Old Man, with lick on his breath and tears in his eyes.

"I'm rooint!" he howled. "I'm a doomed man! Oh, to think as I've warmed a sarpint in my boozum! Dennis Dorgan, this here's the last straw!"

"Aw, pipe down!" snarled Bill O'Brien. "It wasn't Denny's fault. It was that dashety triple-blank thief of a referee——"

"To think of goin' on the beach at my age!" screamed the Old Man, wringing the salt water outa his whiskers. He fell down on a bench and wept at the top of his voice. "A thousand bucks I lost—every cent I could rake, scrape and border!" he bawled.

"Aw, well, you still got your ship," somebody said impatiently.

"That's just it!" the Old Man wailed. "That thousand bucks was dough I owed them old pirates, McGregor, McClune & McKile. Part of what I owe, I mean. They agreed to accept a thousand as part payment, and gimme more time to raise the rest. Now it's gone, and they'll take the ship! They'll take the *Sea Girl*! All I got in the world! Them old sharks ain't got no more heart than a Malay pirate. I'm rooint!"

The crew fell silent at that, and I said: "Why'd you bet all that dough?"

"I was lickered up," he wept. "I got no sense when I'm full. Old Cap'n Donnelly, and McVey and them got to raggin' me, and the first thing I knowed, I'd bet 'em the thousand, givin' heavy odds. Now I'm rooint!"

He threwed back his head and bellered like a walrus with the belly-ache.

I just give a dismal groan and sunk my head in my hands, too despondent to say nothing. The crew bust forth in curses against Whithers, and sallied forth to search further for him, hauling the Old Man along with them, still voicing his woes in a voice like a steamboat whistle.

PRESENTLY I riz with a sigh and hauled on my duds. They was no sound outside. Apparently I was alone in the building except for Mike, my white bulldog. All at once I noticed him smelling of a closed locker. He whined, scratched at it, and growled. With a sudden suspicion I strode over and jerked open the door. Inside I seen a huddled figger. I jerked it rudely forth and set it upright. It was Jed Whithers. He was pale and shaking, and he had cobwebs in his hair. He kinda cringed, evidently expecting me to bust into loud cusses. For once I was too mad for that. I was probably as pale as he was,

and his eyes dilated like he seen murder in mine.

"Jed Whithers," I said, shoving him up against the wall with one hand whilst I knotted the other'n into a mallet, "this is one time in my life when I'm in the mood for killin'."

"For God's sake, Dorgan," he gurgled; "you can't murder me!"

"Can you think of any reason why I shouldn't put you in a wheel-chair for the rest of your life?" I demanded. "You've rooint my friends and all the fans which bet on me, lost my skipper his ship——"

"Don't hit me, Dorgan!" he begged, grabbing my wrist with shaking fingers. "I had to do it; honest to God, Sailor, I *had* to do it! I know you won—won by a mile. But it was the only thing I *could* do!"

"What you mean?" I demanded suspiciously.

"Lemme sit down!" he gasped.

I reluctantly let go of him, and he slumped down onto a near-by bench. He sat there and shook, and mopped the sweat offa his face. He was trembling all over.

"Are the customers all gone?" he asked.

"Ain't nobody here but me and my man-eatin' bulldog," I answered grimly, standing over him. "Go on—spill what you got to say before I start varnishin' the floor with you."

"I was forced to it, Sailor," he said. "There's a man who has a hold on me."

"What you mean, a hold?" I asked suspiciously.

"I mean, he's got me in a spot," he said. "I have to do like he says. It ain't myself I have to think of—Dorgan, I'm goin' to trust you. You got the name of bein' a square shooter. I'm goin' to tell you the whole thing.

"Sailor, I got a sister named Con-

stance, a beautiful girl, innocent as a new-born lamb. She trusted a man, Sailor, a dirty, slimy snake in human form. He tricked her into signin' a document—Dorgan, that paper was a confession of a crime he'd committed himself!"

Whithers here broke down and sobbed with his face in his hands. I shuffled my feet uncertainly, beginning to realize they was always more'n one side to any question.

He raised up suddenly and said: "Since then, that man's been holdin' that faked confession over me and her like a club. He's forced me to do his filthy biddin' time and again. I'm a honest man by nature, Sailor, but to protect my little sister"—he kinda choked for a instant—"I've stooped to low deeds. Like this tonight. This man was bettin' heavy on Leary, gettin' big odds——"

"Somebody sure was," I muttered. "Lots of Leary money in sight."

"Sure!" exclaimed Whithers eagerly. "That was it; he made me throw the fight to Leary, the dirty rat, to protect his bets."

I begun to feel new wrath rise in my gigantic breast.

"You mean this low-down polecat has been blackmailin' you on account of the hold he's got over your sister?" I demanded.

"Exactly," he said, dropping his face in his hands. "With that paper he can send Constance to prison, if he takes the notion."

"I never heered of such infermy," I growled. "Whyn't you bust him on the jaw and take that confession away from him?"

"I ain't no fightin' man," said Whithers. "He's too big for me. I wouldn't have a chance."

"Well, I would," I said. "Listen,

Whithers, buck up and quit cryin'. I'm goin' to help you."

His head jerked up and he stared at me kinda wild-eyed.

"You mean you'll help me get that paper?"

"You bet!" I retorted. "I ain't the man to stand by and let no innercent girl be persecuted. Besides, this mess tonight is his fault."

Whithers just set there for a second, and I thought I seen a slow smile start to spread over his lips, but I mighta been mistook, because he wasn't grinning when he held out his hand and said tremulously: "Dorgan, you're all they say you are!"

A remark like that ain't necessarily a compliment; some of the things said about me ain't flattering; but I took it in the spirit in which it seemed to be give, and I said: "Now tell me, who is this rat?"

He glanced nervously around, then whispered: "Ace Bissett!"

I grunted in surprize. "The devil you say! I'd never of thought it."

"He's a fiend in human form," said Whithers bitterly. "What's your plan?"

"Why," I said, "I'll go to his Diamond Place and demand the confession. If he don't give it to me, I'll maul him and take it away from him."

"You'll get shot up," said Whithers. "Bissett is a bad man to fool with. Listen, I got a plan. If we can get him to a certain house I know about, we can search him for the paper. He carries it around with him, though I don't know just where. Here's my plan——"

I listened attentively, and as a result, perhaps a hour later I was heading through the narrer streets with Mike, driving a closed car which Whithers had produced kinda mysteriously. Whithers wasn't with me; he was gone to prepare the place where I was to bring Bissett to.

I DRIV up the alley behind Ace's big new saloon and gambling-hall, the Diamond Palace, and stopped the car near a back door. It was a very high-class joint. Bissett was friends with wealthy sportsmen, officials, and other swells. He was what they call a soldier of fortune, and he'd been everything, everywhere—aviator, explorer, big game hunter, officer in the armies of South America and China—and what have you.

A native employee stopped me at the door, and asked me what was my business, and I told him I wanted to see Ace. He showed me into the room which opened on the alley, and went after Bissett—which could not of suited my plan better.

Purty soon a door opened, and Bissett strode in—a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, with steely eyes and wavy blond hair. He was in a dress suit, and altogether looked like he'd stepped right outa the social register. And as I looked at him, so calm and self-assured, and thought of poor Whithers being driv to crime by him, and the Old Man losing his ship on account of his crookedness, I seen red.

"Well, Dorgan, what can I do for you?" he asked.

I said nothing. I stepped in and hooked my right to his jaw. It caught him flat-footed, with his hands down. He hit the floor full length, and he didn't twitch.

I bent over him, run my hands through his clothes, found his six-shooter and throwed it aside. Music and the sounds of revelry reached me through the walls, but evidently nobody had seen or heard me slug Bissett. I lifted him and histed him onto my shoulders—no easy job, because he was as big as me, and limp as a rag.

But I done it, and started for the alley. I got through the door all right, which

I was forced to leave open, account of having both hands full, and just as I was dumping Ace into the back part of the car, I heered a scream. Wheeling, I seen a girl had just come into the room I'd left, and was standing frozen, staring wildly at me. The light from the open door shone full on me and my captive. The girl was Glory O'Dale, Ace Bissett's sweetheart. I hurriedly slammed the car door shut and jumped to the wheel, and as I roared off down the alley, I was vaguely aware that Glory had rushed out of the building after me, screaming blue murder.

IT WAS purty late, and the route I took they wasn't many people abroad. Behind me I begun to hear Bissett stir and groan, and I pushed Mike over in the back seat to watch him. But he hadn't fully come to when I drew up in the shadows beside the place Whithers had told me about—a ramshackle old building down by a old rotting, deserted wharf. Nobody seemed to live anywheres close around, or if they did, they was outa sight. As I clum outa the car, a door opened a crack, and I seen Whithers' white face staring at me.

"Did you get him, Sailor?" he whispered.

For answer I jerked open the back door, and Bissett tumbled out on his ear and laid there groaning dimly. Whithers started back with a cry.

"Is he dead?" he asked fearfully.

"Would he holler like that if he was?" I asked impatiently. "Help me carry him in, and we'll search him."

"Wait'll I tie him up," said Whithers, producing some cords, and to my disgust, he bound the unconscious critter hand and foot.

"It's safer this way," Whithers said. "He's a devil, and we can't afford to take chances."

M. C.—3

We then picked him up and carried him through the door, into a very dimly lighted room, across that 'un, and into another'n which was better lit—the win-ders being covered so the light couldn't be seen from the outside. And I got the surprize of my life. They was five men in that room. I wheeled on Whithers. "What's the idee?" I demanded.

"Now, now, Sailor," said Whithers, arranging Bissett on the bench where we'd laid him. "These are just friends of mine. They know about Bissett and my sister."

I heered what sounded like a snicker, and I turned to glare at the assembled "friends". My gaze centered on a fat, flashy-dressed bird smoking a big black cigar; diamonds shone all over his fingers, and in his stick-pin. The others was just muggs.

"A fine lot of friends you pick out!" I said irritably to Whithers. "Diamond Joe Galt is been mixed up in every shady deal that's been pulled in the past three years. And if you'd raked the Seven Seas you couldn't found four dirtier thugs than Limey Teak, Bill Reynolds, Dutch Steinmann, and Red Partland."

"Hey, you——" Red Partland riz, clenching his fists, but Galt grabbed his arm.

"Stop it, Red," he advised. "Easy does it. Sailor," he addressed me with a broad smile which I liked less'n I'd liked a scowl, "they's no use in abuse. We're here to help our pal Whithers get justice. That's all. You've done your part. You can go now, with our thanks."

"Not so fast," I growled, and just then Whithers hollered: "Bissett's come to!"

We all turned around and seen that Bissett's eyes was open, and blazing.

"Well, you dirty rats," he greeted us all and sundry, "you've got me at last, have you?" He fixed his gaze on me, and said: "Dorgan, I thought you were a

man. If I'd had any idea you were mixed up in this racket, you'd have never got a chance to slug me as you did."

"Aw, shut up," I snarled. "A fine nerve you've got, talkin' about men, after what you've did!"

Galt pushed past me and stood looking down at Bissett, and I seen his fat hands clenched, and the veins swell in his temples.

"Bissett," he said, "we've got you cold and you know it. Kick in—where's that paper?"

"You cursed fools!" Bissett raved, struggling at his cords till the veins stood out on his temples too. "I tell you, the paper's worthless."

"Then why do you object to givin' it to us?" demanded Whithers.

"Because I haven't got it!" raged Bissett. "I destroyed it, just as I've told you before."

"He's lyin'," snarled Red Partland. "He wouldn't never destroy such a thing as that. It means millions. Here, I'll make him talk——"

He shouldered forward and grabbed Bissett by the throat. I grabbed Red in turn, and tore him away.

"Belay!" I gritted. "He's a rat, but just the same I ain't goin' to stand by and watch no helpless man be tortured."

"Why, you——" Red bellered, and swung for my jaw.

I ducked and sunk my left to the wrist in his belly and he dropped like his legs had been cut out from under him. The others started forward, rumbling, and I wheeled towards 'em, seething with fight. But Galt got between us and shoved his gorillas back.

"Here," he snapped. "No fightin' amongst ourselves! Get up, Red.—Now, Sailor," he begun to pat my sleeves in his soothing way, which I always despises beyond words, "there ain't no need for

hard feelin's. I know just how you feel. But we got to have that paper. You know that, Sailor——"

Suddenly a faint sound made itself evident.

"What's that?" gasped Limey, going pale.

"It's Mike," I said. "I left him in the car, and he's got tired of settin' out there, and is scratchin' at the front door. I'm goin' to go get him, but I'll be right back, and if anybody lays a hand on Bissett whilst I'm gone, I'll bust him into pieces. We'll get that paper, but they ain't goin' to be no torturin'."

I strode out, scornful of the black looks cast my way. As I shut the door behind me, a clamor of conversation bust out, so many talking at wunst I couldn't understand much, but every now and then Ace Bissett's voice riz above the din in accents of anger and not pain, so I knowed they wasn't doing nothing to him. I crossed the dim outer room, opened the door and let Mike in, and then, forgetting to bolt it—I ain't used to secrecy and such—I started back for the inner room.

BEFORE I reached the other door, I heered a quick patter of feet outside. I wheeled—the outer door bust violently open, and into the room rushed Glory O'Dale. She was panting hard, her dress was tore, her black locks damp, and her dark eyes was wet and bright as black jewels after a rain. And she had Ace's six-shooter in her hand.

"You filthy dog!" she cried, throwing down on me.

I looked right into the muzzle of that .45 as she jerked the trigger. The hammer snapped on a faulty cartridge, and before she could try again, Mike launched hisself from the floor at her. I'd taught him never to bite a woman. He didn't

bite Glory. He threw himself bodily against her so hard he knocked her down and the gun flew outa her hand.

I picked it up and stuck it into my hip pocket. Then I started to help her up, but she hit my hand aside and jumped up, tears of fury running down her cheeks. Golly, she was a beauty!

"You beast!" she raged. "What have you done with Ace? I'll kill you if you've harmed him! Is he in that room?"

"Yeah, and he ain't harmed," I said, "but he oughta be hung——"

She screamed like a siren. "Don't you dare! Don't you touch a hair of his head! Oh, Ace!"

She then slapped my face, jerked out a handful of hair, and kicked both my shins.

"What I can't understand is," I said, escaping her clutches, "is why a fine girl like you ties up with a low-down rat like Bissett. With your looks, Glory——"

"To the devil with my looks!" she wept, stamping on the floor. "Let me past; I know Ace is in that room—I heard his voice as I came in."

They wasn't no noise in the inner room now. Evidently all of them was listening to what was going on out here, Ace included.

"You can't go in there," I said. "We got to search Ace for the incriminating evidence he's holdin' against Jed Withers' sister——"

"You're mad as a March hare," she said. "Let me by!"

And without no warning she back-heeled me and pushed me with both hands. It was so unexpected I ignominiously crashed to the floor, and she darted past me and throwed open the inner door. Mike drove for her, and this time he was red-eyed, but I grabbed him as he went by.

Glory halted an instant on the thresh-

old with a cry of mingled triumph, fear and rage. I riz, cussing beneath my breath and dusting off my britches. Glory ran across the room, eluding the grasping paws of Joe Galt, and throwed herself with passionate abandon on the prostrate form of Ace Bissett. I noticed that Ace, which hadn't till then showed the slightest sign of fear, was suddenly pale and his jaw was grim set.

"It was madness for you to come, Glory," he muttered.

"I saw Dorgan throw you into the car," she whimpered, throwing her arms around him, and tugging vainly at his cords. "I jumped in another and followed—blew out a tire a short distance from here—lost sight of the car I was following and wandered around in the dark alleys on foot for awhile, till I saw the car standing outside. I came on in——"

"Alone? My God!" groaned Ace.

"Alone?" echoed Galt, with a sigh of relief. He flicked some dust from his lapel, stuck his cigar back in his mouth at a cocky angle, and said: "Well, now, we'll have a little talk. Come here, Glory."

She clung closer to Ace, and Ace said in a low voice, almost a whisper: "Let her alone, Galt." His eyes was like fires burning under the ice.

Galt's mugs was grinning evilly and muttering to theirselves. Withers was nervous and kept mopping perspiration. The air was tense. I was nervous and impatient; something was wrong, and I didn't know what. So when Galt started to say something, I took matters into my own hands.

"Bissett," I said, striding across the room and glaring down at him, "if they's a ounce of manhood in you, this here girl's devotion oughta touch even your snakish soul. Why don't you try to redeem yourself a little, anyway? Kick in

with that paper! A man which is loved by a woman like Glory O'Dale loves you, oughta be above holdin' a forged confession over a innocent girl's head."

Bissett's mouth fell open. "What's he talking about?" he demanded from the world at large.

"I don't know," said Glory uneasily, snuggling closer to him. "He talked that way out in the other room. I think he's punch-drunk."

"Dorgan," said Bissett, "you don't belong in this crowd. Are you suffering from some sort of an hallucination?"

"Don't hand me no such guff, you snake!" I roared. "You know why I brung you here—to get the confession you gyped outa Whithers' sister, and blackmailed him with—just like you made him throw my fight tonight."

Bissett just looked dizzy, but Glory leaped up and faced me.

"You mean you think Ace made Whithers turn in that rotten decision?" she jerked out.

"I don't think," I answered sullenly. "I know. Whithers said so."

She jumped like she was galvanized.

"Why, you idiot!" she hollered, "they've made a fool of you! Jed Whithers hasn't any sister! He lied! Ace had nothing to do with it! Whithers was hired to throw the fight to Leary! Look at him!" Her voice rose to a shriek of triumph, as she pointed a accusing finger at Jed Whithers. "Look at him! Look how pale he is! He's scared witless!"

"It's a lie!" gulped Whithers, sweating and tearing at his crumpled collar like it was choking him.

"It's not a lie!" Glory was nearly hysterical by this time. "He was paid to throw the fight! And there's the man who paid him!" And she dramatically pointed her finger at Diamond Joe Galt!

GALT was on his feet, his small eyes glinting savagely, his jaws grinding his cigar to a pulp.

"What about it, Galt?" I demanded, all at sea and bewildered.

He dashed down his cigar with a oath. His face was dark and convulsed.

"What of it?" he snarled. "What you goin' to do about it? I've stood all the guff out of you I'm goin' to!"

His hand snaked inside his coat and out, and I was looking into the black muzzle of a wicked stumpy automatic.

"You can't slug this like you did Red, you dumb gorilla," he smirked viciously. "Sure, the dame's tellin' the truth. Whithers took you in like a sucklin' lamb.

"When you caught him in your dressin'-room, he told you the first lie that come to him, knowin' you for a soft sap where women's concerned. Then when you fell for it, and offered to help him, he thought fast and roped you into this deal. We been tryin' to get hold of Bissett for a long time. He's got somethin' we want. But he was too smart and too tough for us. Now, thanks to you, we got him, *and* the girl. Now we're goin' to sweat what we want out of him, and you're goin' to keep your trap shut, see?"

"You mean they ain't no Constance Whithers, and no confession?" I said slowly, trying to get things straight. A raucous roar of mirth greeted the remark.

"No, sucker," taunted Galt; "you just been took in, you sap."

A wave of red swept across my line of vision. With a maddened roar I plunged recklessly at Galt, gun and all. Everything happened at once. Galt closed his finger on the trigger just as Mike, standing beside him all this time, closed his jaws on Galt's leg. Galt screamed and leaped convulsively, the gun exploded in the air, missing me so close the powder singed my hair, and my

right mauler crunched into Galt's face, flattening his nose, knocking out all his front teeth, and fracturing his jaw-bone. As he hit the floor Mike was right on top of him.

The next instant Galt's thugs was on top of me. We rolled across the room in a wild tangle of arms and legs, casually shattering tables and chairs on the way. Mike, finding Galt was out cold, abandoned him and charged to my aid. I heered Red Partland howl as Mike's iron fangs locked in his britches. But I had my hands full. Fists and hobnails was glancing off my carcass, and a thumb was feeling for my eye. I set my teeth in this thumb and was rewarded by a squeal of anguish, but the action didn't slow up any.

It was while strangling Limey Teak beneath me, whilst the other three was trying to stomp my ribs in and kick my head off, that I realized that another element had entered into the fray. There was the impact of a chair-leg on a human skull, and Jed Withers give up the ghost with a whistling sigh. Glory O'Dale was taking a hand.

Dutch Steinmann next gave a ear-piercing howl, and Bill Reynolds abandoned me to settle her. Feeling Limey go limp beneath me, I riz, shaking Steinmann offa my shoulders, just in time to see Reynolds duck Glory's chair-leg and smack her down. Bissett give a most awful yell of rage, but he wasn't no madder than me. I left the floor in a flying tackle that carried Reynolds off his feet with a violence which nearly busted his skull against the floor. Too crazy-mad for reason, I set to work to hammer him to death, and though he was already senseless, I would probably of continued indefinite, had not Dutch Steinmann distracted my attention by smashing a chair over my head.

I riz through the splinters and caught

him with a left hook that tore his ear nearly off and stood him on his neck in a corner. I then looked for Red Partland and seen him crawling out a winder which he'd tore the shutters off of. He was a rooin; his clothes was nearly all tore offa him, and he was bleeding like a stuck hawg and bawling like one, and Mike didn't show no intentions of abandoning the fray. His jaws was locked in what was left of Red's britches, and he had his feet braced against the wall below the sill. As I looked, Red gave a desperate wrench and tumbled through the winder, and I heered his lamentations fading into the night.

SHAKING the blood and sweat outa my eyes, I glared about at the battlefield, strewn with the dead and dying—at least with the unconscious, some of which was groaning loudly, whilst others slumbered in silence.

Glory was just getting up, dizzy and wobbly. Mike was smelling each of the victims in turn, and Ace was begging somebody to let him loose. Glory wobbled over to where he'd rolled offa the bench, and I followed her, kinda stiffly. At least one of my ribs had been broke by a boot-heel. My scalp was cut open, and blood was trickling down my side, where Limey Teak had made a ill-advised effort to knife me. I also thought one of them rats had hit me from behind with a club, till I discovered that sometime in the fray I'd fell on something hard in my hip pocket. This, I found, was Ace Bissett's pistol, which I'd clean forgot all about. I throwed it aside with disgust; them things is a trap and a snare.

I blinked at Ace with my one good eye, whilst Glory worked his cords offa him.

"I see I misjudged you," I said, lending her a hand. "I apolergize, and if you want satisfaction, right here and now is good enough for me."

"Good Lord, man," he said, with his arms full of Glory. "I don't want to fight you. I still don't know just what it was all about, but I'm beginning to understand."

I set down somewhat groggily on a bench which wasn't clean busted.

"What I want to know is," I said, "what that paper was they was talkin' about."

"Well," he said, "about a year ago I befriended a half-cracked Russian scientist, and he tried in his crazy way to repay me. He told me, in Galt's presence, that he was going to give me a formula that would make me the richest man on earth. He got blown up in an explosion in his laboratory shortly afterward, and an envelope was found in his room addressed to me, and containing a formula. Galt found out about it, and he's been hounding me ever since, trying to get it. He thought it was all the Russian claimed. In reality it was merely the disconnected scribblings of a disordered mind—good Lord, it claimed to be a process for the manufacture of diamonds! Utter insanity—but Galt never would believe it."

"And he thought I was dumb," I cogitated. "But hey, Glory, how'd you know it was Galt hired Whithers to throw my fight to Leary?"

"I didn't," she admitted. "I just ac-

cused Galt of it to start you fellows fighting among yourselves."

"Well, I'll be derved," I said, and just then one of the victims which had evidently come to while we was talking, riz stealthily to his all fours and started crawling towards the winder. It was Jed Whithers. I strode after him and hauled him to his feet.

"How much did Galt pay you for throwin' the bout to Leary?" I demanded.

"A thousand dollars," he stuttered.

"Gimme it," I ordered, and with shakin' hands he hauled out a fold of bills. I fluttered 'em and saw they was intact.

"Turn around and look out the winder at the stars," I commanded.

"I don't see no stars," he muttered.

"You will," I promised, as I swung my foot and histed him clean over the sill.

As his wails faded up the alley, I turned to Ace and Glory, and said: "Galt must of cleaned up plenty on this deal, payin' so high for his dirty work. This here dough, though, is goin' to be put to a good cause. The Old Man lost all his money account of Whithers' crooked decision. This thousand bucks will save his ship. Now let's go. I wanta get hold of the promoter of the Sweet Dreams, and get another match tomorrer night with Kid Leary—this time with a honest referee."

Another story of Sailor Dorgan will appear in our next issue



The Shadow of the Vulture

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A stirring tale of Suleyman the Magnificent, Sultan of Turkey, and a red-headed wanton who held the fate of Europe in her hands as Turkish guns pounded Vienna



"He saw the feathered end of an arrow quivering under her heart."

ARE the dogs dressed and gorged?"
"Aye, Protector of the Faithful."

"Then let them crawl into the Presence."

So they brought the envoys, pallid from months of imprisonment, before the canopied throne of Suleyman the Magnificent, Sultan of Turkey, and the mightiest monarch in an age of mighty monarchs. Under the great purple dome of the royal chamber gleamed the throne

before which the world trembled—gold-panelled, pearl-inlaid. An emperor's wealth in gems was sewn into the silken canopy from which depended a shimmering string of pearls ending a frieze of emeralds which hung like a halo of glory above Suleyman's head. Yet the splendor of the throne was paled by the glitter of the figure upon it, bedecked in jewels, the aigret feather rising above the diamonded white turban. About the throne stood his nine viziers, in attitudes of hu-

military, and warriors of the imperial body-guard ranged the dais—Solaks in armor, black and white and scarlet plumes nodding above the gilded helmets.

The envoys from Austria were properly impressed—the more so as they had had nine weary months for reflection in the grim Castle of the Seven Towers that overlooks the Sea of Marmora. The head of the embassy choked down his choler and cloaked his resentment in a semblance of submission—a strange cloak on the shoulders of Habordansky, general of Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria. His rugged head bristled incongruously from the flaming silk robes presented him by the contemptuous Sultan, as he was brought before the throne, his arms gripped fast by stalwart Janizaries. Thus were foreign envoys presented to the sultans, ever since that red day by Kossova when Milosh Kabilovitch, knight of slaughtered Serbia, had slain the conqueror Murad with a hidden dagger.

The Grand Turk regarded Habordansky with scant favor. Suleyman was a tall slender man, with a thin down-curving nose and a thin straight mouth, the resolution of which his drooping mustachios did not soften. His narrow outward-curving chin was shaven. The only suggestion of weakness was in the slender, remarkably long neck, but that suggestion was belied by the hard lines of the slender figure, the glitter of the dark eyes. There was more than a suggestion of the Tatar about him—rightly so, since he was no more the son of Selim the Grim, than of Hafsza Khatun, princess of Crimea. Born to the purple, heir to the mightiest military power in the world, he was crested with authority and cloaked in pride that recognized no peer beneath the gods.

Under his eagle gaze old Habordansky bent his head to hide the sullen rage in his eyes. Nine months before, the general

had come to Stamboul representing his master, the Archduke, with proposals for truce and the disposition of the iron crown of Hungary, torn from the dead king Louis' head on the bloody field of Mohacz, where the Grand Turk's armies opened the road to Europe. There had been another emissary before him—Jerome Lasczky, the Polish count palatine. Habordansky, with the bluntness of his breed, had claimed the Hungarian crown for his master, rousing Suleyman's ire. Lasczky had, like a suppliant, asked on his bended knees that crown for his countrymen at Mohacz.

To Lasczky had been given honor, gold and promises of patronage, for which he had paid with pledges abhorrent even to his avaricious soul—selling his ally's subjects into slavery, and opening the road through the subject territory to the very heart of Christendom.

All this was made known to Habordansky, frothing with fury in the prison to which the arrogant resentment of the Sultan had assigned him. Now Suleyman looked contemptuously at the staunch old general, and dispensed with the usual formality of speaking through the mouth-piece of the Grand Vizier. A royal Turk would not deign to admit knowledge of any Frankish tongue, but Habordansky understood Turki. The Sultan's remarks were brief and without preamble.

"Say to your master that I now make ready to visit him in his own lands, and that if he fails to meet me at Mohacz or at Pesth, I will meet him beneath the walls of Vienna."

Habordansky bowed, not trusting himself to speak. At a scornful wave of the imperial hand, an officer of the court came forward and bestowed upon the general a small gilded bag containing two hundred ducats. Each member of his retinue, waiting patiently at the other end of

the chamber, under the spears of the Janizaries, was likewise so guerdoned. Habor-dansky mumbled thanks, his knotty hands clenched about the gift with unnecessary vigor. The Sultan grinned thinly, well aware that the ambassador would have hurled the coins into his face, had he dared. He half lifted his hand, in token of dismissal, then paused, his eyes resting on the group of men who composed the general's suite—or rather, on one of these men. This man was the tallest in the room, strongly built, wearing his Turkish gift-garments clumsily. At a gesture from the Sultan he was brought forward in the grasp of the soldiers.

Suleyman stared at him narrowly. The Turkish vest and voluminous khalat could not conceal the lines of massive strength. His tawny hair was close-cropped, his sweeping yellow mustaches drooping below a stubborn chin. His blue eyes seemed strangely clouded; it was as if the man slept on his feet, with his eyes open.

"Do you speak Turki?" the Sultan did the fellow the stupendous honor of addressing him directly. Through all the pomp of the Ottoman court there remained in the Sultan some of the simplicity of Tatar ancestors.

"Yes, your majesty," answered the Frank.

"Who are you?"

"Men name me Gottfried von Kalm-bach."

Suleyman scowled and unconsciously his fingers wandered to his shoulder, where, under his silken robes, he could feel the outlines of an old scar.

"I do not forget faces. Somewhere I have seen yours—under circumstances that etched it into the back of my mind. But I am unable to recall those circumstances."

"I was at Rhodes," offered the German.

"Many men were at Rhodes," snapped Suleyman.

"Aye," agreed von Kalmbach tranquilly. "De l'Isle Adam was there."

Suleyman stiffened and his eyes glittered at the name of the Grand Master of the Knights of Saint John, whose desperate defense of Rhodes had cost the Turk sixty thousand men. He decided, however, that the Frank was not clever enough for the remark to carry any subtle thrust, and dismissed the embassy with a wave. The envoys were backed out of the Presence and the incident was closed. The Franks would be escorted out of Stamboul, and to the nearest boundaries of the empire. The Turk's warning would be carried post-haste to the Archduke, and soon on the heels of that warning would come the armies of the Sublime Porte. Suleyman's officers knew that the Grand Turk had more in mind than merely establishing his puppet Zopolya on the conquered Hungarian throne. Suleyman's ambitions embraced all Europe—that stubborn Frankistan which had for centuries sporadically poured forth hordes chanting and pillaging into the East, whose illogical and wayward peoples had again and again seemed ripe for Moslem conquest, yet who had always emerged, if not victorious, at least unconquered.

IT WAS the evening of the morning on which the Austrian emissaries departed, that Suleyman, brooding on his throne, raised his lean head and beckoned his Grand Vizier Ibrahim, who approached with confidence. The Grand Vizier was always sure of his master's approbation; was he not cup-companion and boyhood comrade of the Sultan? Ibrahim had but one rival in his master's favor—the red-haired Russian girl, Khurrem the Joyous, whom Europe knew as Roxelana, whom

slavers had dragged from her father's house in Rogatino to be the Sultan's *barim* favorite.

"I remember the infidel at last," said Suleyman. "Do you recall the first charge of the knights at Mohacz?"

Ibrahim winced slightly at the allusion.

"Oh, Protector of the Pitiful, is it likely that I should forget an occasion on which the divine blood of my master was spilt by an unbeliever?"

"Then you remember that thirty-two knights, the paladins of the Nazarenes, drove headlong into our array, each having pledged his life to cut down our person. By Allah, they rode like men riding to a wedding, their great horses and long lances overthrowing all who opposed them, and their plate-armor turned the finest steel. Yet they fell as the firelocks spoke until only three were left in the saddle—the knight Marczali and two companions. These paladins cut down my Solaks like ripe grain, but Marczali and one of his companions fell—almost at my feet.

"Yet one knight remained, though his vizored helmet had been torn from his head and blood started from every joint in his armor. He rode full at me, swinging his great two-handed sword, and I swear by the beard of the Prophet, death was so nigh me that I felt the burning breath of Azrael on my neck!

"His sword flashed like lightning in the sky, and glancing from my casque, whereby I was half stunned so that blood gushed from my nose, rent the mail on my shoulder and gave me this wound, which irks me yet when the rains come. The Janizaries who swarmed around him cut the hocks of his horse, which brought him to earth as it went down, and the remnants of my Solaks bore me back out of the *mêlée*. Then the Hungarian host

came on, and I saw not what became of the knight. But today I saw him again."

Ibrahim started with an exclamation of incredulity.

"Nay, I could not mistake those blue eyes. How it is I know not, but the knight that wounded me at Mohacz was this German, Gottfried von Kalmbach."

"But, Defender of the Faith," protested Ibrahim, "the heads of those dog-knights were heaped before thy royal pavilion——"

"And I counted them and said nothing at the time, lest men think I held thee in blame," answered Suleyman. "There were but thirty-one. Most were so mutilated I could tell little of the features. But somehow the infidel escaped, who gave me this blow. I love brave men, but our blood is not so common that an unbeliever may with impunity spill it on the ground for the dogs to lap up. See ye to it."

Ibrahim salaamed deeply and withdrew. He made his way through broad corridors to a blue-tiled chamber whose gold-arched windows looked out on broad galleries, shaded by cypress and plane-trees, and cooled by the spray of silvery fountains. There at his summons came one Yaruk Khan, a Crim Tatar, a slant-eyed impassive figure in harness of lacquered leather and burnished bronze.

"Dog-brother," said the Vizier, "did thy koumiss-clouded gaze mark the tall German lord who served the emir Habor-dansky—the lord whose hair is tawny as a lion's mane?"

"Aye, *noyon*, he who is called Gombuk."

"The same. Take a *chambul* of thy dog-brothers and go after the Franks. Bring back this man and thou shalt be rewarded. The persons of envoys are sacred, but this matter is not official," he added cynically.

"To hear is to obey!" With a salaam as profound as that accorded to the Sultan himself, Yaruk Khan backed out of the presence of the second man of the empire.

HE RETURNED some days later, dusty, travel-stained, and without his prey. On him Ibrahim bent an eye full of menace, and the Tatar prostrated himself before the silken cushions on which the Grand Vizier sat, in the blue chamber with the gold-arched windows.

"Great khan, let not thine anger consume thy slave. The fault was not mine, by the beard of the Prophet."

"Squat on thy mangy haunches and bay out the tale," ordered Ibrahim considerately.

"Thus it was, my lord," began Yaruk Khan. "I rode swiftly, and though the Franks and their escort had a long start, and pushed on through the night without halting, I came up with them the next midday. But lo, Gombuk was not among them, and when I inquired after him, the paladin Habordansky replied only with many great oaths, like to the roaring of a cannon. So I spoke with various of the escort who understood the speech of these infidels, and learned what had come to pass. Yet I would have my lord remember that I only repeat the words of the Spahis of the escort, who are men without honor and lie like——"

"Like a Tatar," said Ibrahim.

Yaruk Khan acknowledged the compliment with a wide dog-like grin, and continued, "This they told me. At dawn Gombuk drew horse away from the rest, and the emir Habordansky demanded of him the reason. Then Gombuk laughed in the manner of the Franks—huh! huh! huh!—so. And Gombuk said, 'The devil of good your service has done me, so I cool my heels for nine months in a Turk-

ish prison. Suleyman has given us safe conduct over the border and I am not compelled to ride with you.' 'You dog,' said the emir, 'there is war in the wind and the Archduke has need of your sword.' 'Devil eat the Archduke,' answered Gombuk; 'Zapolya is a dog because he stood aside at Mohacz, and let us, his comrades, be cut to pieces, but Ferdinand is a dog too. When I am penniless I sell him my sword. Now I have two hundred ducats and these robes which I can sell to any Jew for a handful of silver, and may the devil bite me if I draw sword for any man while I have a penny left. I'm for the nearest Christian tavern, and you and the Archduke may go to the devil.' Then the emir cursed him with many great curses, and Gombuk rode away laughing, huh! huh! huh!, and singing a song about a cockroach named——"

"Enough!" Ibrahim's features were dark with rage. He plucked savagely at his beard, reflecting that in the allusion to Mohacz, von Kalmbach had practically clinched Suleyman's suspicion. That matter of thirty-one heads when there should have been thirty-two was something no Turkish sultan would be likely to overlook. Officials had lost positions and their own heads over more trivial matters. The manner in which Suleyman had acted showed his almost incredible fondness and consideration for his Grand Vizier, but Ibrahim, vain though he was, was shrewd and wished no slightest shadow to come between him and his sovereign.

"Could you nothave tracked him down, dog?" he demanded.

"By Allah," swore the uneasy Tatar, "he must have ridden on the wind. He crossed the border hours ahead of me, and I followed him as far as I dared——"

"Enough of excuses," interrupted Ibrahim. "Send Mikhal Oglu to me."

The Tatar departed thankfully. Ibrahim was not tolerant of failure in any man.

THE Grand Vizier brooded on his silken cushions until the shadow of a pair of vulture wings fell across the marble-tiled floor, and the lean figure he had summoned bowed before him. The man whose very name was a shuddering watchword of horror to all western Asia was soft-spoken and moved with the mincing ease of a cat, but the stark evil of his soul showed in his dark countenance, gleamed in his narrow slit eyes. He was chief of the Akinji, those wild riders whose raids spread fear and desolation throughout all lands beyond the Grand Turk's borders. He stood in full armor, a jeweled helmet on his narrow head, the wide vulture wings made fast to the shoulders of his gilded chain-mail hauberk. Those wings spread wide in the wind when he rode, and under their pinions lay the shadows of death and destruction. It was Suleyman's simitar-tip, the most noted slayer of a nation of slayers, who stood before the Grand Vizier.

"Soon you will precede the hosts of our master into the lands of the infidel," said Ibrahim. "It will be your order, as always, to strike and spare not. You will waste the fields and the vineyards of the Caphars, you will burn their villages, you will strike down their men with arrows, and lead away their wenches captive. Lands beyond our line of march will cry out beneath your heel."

"That is good hearing, Favored of Allah," answered Mikhal Oglu in his soft courteous voice.

"Yet there is an order within the order," continued Ibrahim, fixing a piercing eye on the Akinji. "You know the German, von Kalmbach?"

"Aye—Gombuk as the Tatars call him."

"So. This is my command—whoever fights or flees, lives or dies—this man must not live. Search him out wherever he lies, though the hunt carry you to the very banks of the Rhine. When you bring me his head, your reward shall be thrice its weight in gold."

"To hear is to obey, my lord. Men say he is the vagabond son of a noble German family, whose ruin has been wine and women. They say he was once a Knight of Saint John, until cast forth for guzzling and——"

"Yet do not underrate him," answered Ibrahim grimly. "Sot he may be, but if he rode with Marczali, he is not to be despised. See thou to it!"

"There is no den where he can hide from me, oh Favored of Allah," declared Mikhal Oglu, "no night dark enough to conceal him, no forest thick enough. If I bring you not his head, I give him leave to send you mine."

"Enough!" Ibrahim grinned and tugged at his beard, well pleased. "You have my leave to go."

The sinister vulture-winged figure went springily and silently from the blue chamber, nor could Ibrahim guess that he was taking the first steps in a feud which should spread over years and far lands, swirling in dark tides to draw in thrones and kingdoms and red-haired women more beautiful than the flames of hell.

2

IN A small thatched hut in a village not far from the Danube, lusty snores resounded where a figure reclined in state on a ragged cloak thrown over a heap of straw. It was the paladin Gottfried von Kalmbach who slept the sleep of innocence and ale. The velvet vest, voluminous silken trousers, khalat and shagreen boots, gifts from a contemptuous sultan, were nowhere in evidence. The paladin

was clad in worn leather and rusty mail. Hands tugged at him, breaking his sleep, and he swore drowsily.

"Wake up, my lord! Oh, wake, good knight—good pig—good dog-soul—will you wake, then?"

"Fill my flagon, host," mumbled the slumberer. "Who?—what? May the dogs bite you, Ivga! I've not another asper—not a penny. Go off like a good lass and let me sleep."

The girl renewed her tugging and shaking.

"Oh dolt! Rise! Gird on your spit! There are happenings forward!"

"Ivga," muttered Gottfried, pulling away from her attack, "take my burganet to the Jew. He'll give you enough for it, to get drunk again."

"Fool!" she cried in despair. "It isn't money I want! The whole east is aflame, and none knows the reason thereof!"

"Has the rain ceased?" asked von Kalmbach, taking some interest in the proceedings at last.

"The rain ceased hours ago. You can only hear the drip from the thatch. Put on your sword and come out into the street. The men of the village are all drunk on your last silver, and the women know not what to think or do. Ah!"

The exclamation was broken from her by the sudden upleaping of a weird illumination which shone through the crevices of the hut. The German got unsteadily to his feet, quickly girt on the great two-handed sword and stuck his dented burganet on his cropped locks. Then he followed the girl into the straggling street. She was a slender young thing, barefooted, clad only in a short tunic-like garment, through the wide rents of which gleamed generous expanses of white flesh.

There seemed no life or movement in the village. Nowhere showed a light.

Water dripped steadily from the eaves of the thatched roofs. Puddles in the muddy streets gleamed black. Wind sighed and moaned eerily through the black sodden branches of the trees which pressed in bulwarks of darkness about the little village, and in the southeast, towering higher into the leaden sky, rose the lurid crimson glow that set the dank clouds to smoldering. The girl Ivga cringed close to the tall German, whimpering.

"I'll tell you what it is, my girl," said he, scanning the glow. "It's Suleyman's devils. They've crossed the river and they're burning the villages. Aye, I've seen glares like that in the sky before. I've expected him before now, but these cursed rains we've had for weeks must have held him back. Aye, it's the Akinji, right enough, and they won't stop this side of Vienna. Look you, my girl, go quickly and quietly to the stable behind the hut and bring me my gray stallion. We'll slip out like mice from between the devil's fingers. The stallion will carry us both, easily."

"But the people of the village!" she sobbed, wringing her hands.

"Eh, well," he said, "God rest them; the men have drunk my ale valiantly and the women have been kind—but horns of Satan, girl, the gray nag won't carry a whole village!"

"Go you!" she returned. "I'll stay and die with my people!"

"The Turks won't kill you," he answered. "They'll sell you to a fat old Stamboul merchant who'll beat you. I won't stay to be cut open, and neither shall you——"

A terrible scream from the girl cut him short and he wheeled at the awful terror in her flaring eyes. Even as he did so, a hut at the lower end of the village sprang into flames, the sodden mate-

rial burning slowly. A medley of screams and maddened yells followed the cry of the girl. In the sluggish light figures danced and capered wildly. Gottfried, straining his eyes in the shadows, saw shapes swarming over the low mud wall which drunkenness and negligence had left unguarded.

"Damnation!" he muttered. "The accursed ones have ridden ahead of their fire. They've stolen on the village in the dark—come on, girl——"

But even as he caught her white wrist to drag her away, and she screamed and fought against him like a wild thing, mad with fear, the mud wall crashed at the point nearest them. It crumpled under the impact of a score of horses, and into the doomed village reined the riders, distinct in the growing light. Huts were flaring up on all hands, screams rising to the dripping clouds as the invaders dragged shrieking women and drunken men from their hovels and cut their throats. Gottfried saw the lean figures of the horsemen, the firelight gleaming on their burnished steel; he saw the vulture wings on the shoulders of the foremost. Even as he recognized Mikhal Oglu, he saw the chief stiffen and point.

"At him, dogs!" yelled the Akinji, his voice no longer soft, but strident as the rasp of a drawn saber. "It is Gombuk! Five hundred aspers to the man who brings me his head!"

With a curse von Kalmbach bounded for the shadows of the nearest hut, dragging the screaming girl with him. Even as he leaped, he heard the twang of bow-strings, and the girl sobbed and went limp in his grasp. She sank down at his feet, and in the lurid glare he saw the feathered end of an arrow quivering under her heart. With a low rumble he turned toward his assailants as a fierce bear turns at bay. An instant he stood, head out-

thrust truculently, sword gripped in both hands; then as a bear gives back from the onset of the hunters, he turned and fled about the hut, arrows whistling about him and glancing from the rings of his mail. There were no shots; the ride through that dripping forest had dampened the powder-flasks of the raiders.

Von Kalmbach quartered about the back of the hut, mindful of the fierce yells behind him, and gained the shed behind the hut he had occupied, wherein he stabled his gray stallion. Even as he reached the door, some one snarled like a panther in the semi-dark and cut viciously at him. He parried the stroke with the lifted sword and struck back with all the power of his broad shoulders. The great blade glanced stunningly from the Akinji's polished helmet and rent through the mail links of his hauberk, tearing the arm from the shoulder. The Muhammadan sank down with a groan, and the German sprang over his prostrate form. The gray stallion, wild with fear and excitement, neighed shrilly and reared as his master sprang on his back. No time for saddle or bridle. Gottfried dug his heels into the quivering flanks and the great steed shot through the door like a thunderbolt, knocking men right and left like tenpins. Across the firelit open space between the burning huts he raced, clearing crumpled corpses in his stride, splashing his rider from heel to head as he thrashed through the puddles.

The Akinji made after the flying rider, loosing their shafts and giving tongue like hounds. Those mounted spurred after him, while those who had entered the village on foot ran through the broken wall for their horses.

Arrows flickered about Gottfried's head as he put his steed at the only point open to him—the unbroken western wall. It was touch and go, for the footing was

tricky and treacherous and never had the gray stallion attempted such a leap. Gottfried held his breath as he felt the great body beneath him gathering and tensing in full flight for the desperate effort; then with a volcanic heave of mighty thews the stallion rose in the air and cleared the barrier with scarce an inch to spare. The pursuers yelled in amazement and fury, and reined back. Born horsemen though they were, they dared not attempt that break-neck leap. They lost time seeking gates and breaks in the wall, and when they finally emerged from the village, the black, dank, whispering, dripping forest had swallowed up their prey.

Mikhal Oglu swore like a fiend and leaving his lieutenant Othman in charge with instructions to leave no living human being in the village, he pressed on after the fugitive, following the trail, by torches, in the muddy mold, and swearing to run him down, if the road led under the very walls of Vienna.

3

ALLAH did not will it that Mikhal Oglu should take Gottfried von Kalmbach's head in the dark dripping forest. He knew the country better than they, and in spite of their zeal, they lost his trail in the darkness. Dawn found Gottfried riding through terror-stricken farmlands, with the flame of a burning world lighting the east and south. The country was thronged with fugitives, staggering under pitiful loads of household goods, driving bellowing cattle, like people fleeing the end of the world. The torrential rains that had offered false promise of security had not long stayed the march of the Grand Turk.

With a quarter-million followers he was ravaging the eastern marches of Christendom. While Gottfried had loitered in the taverns of isolated villages,

drinking up the Sultan's bounty, Pesth and Buda had fallen, the German soldiers of the latter having been slaughtered by the Janizaries, after promises of safety sworn by Suleyman, whom men named the Generous.

While Ferdinand and the nobles and bishops squabbled at the Diet of Spires, the elements alone seemed to war for Christendom. Rain fell in torrents, and through the floods that changed plains and forest-bed to dank morasses, the Turks struggled grimly. They drowned in raging rivers, and lost great stores of ammunition, ordnance and supplies, when boats capsized, bridges gave way and wagons mired. But on they came, driven by the implacable will of Suleyman, and now in September, 1529, over the ruins of Hungary, the Turk swept on Europe, with the Akinji—the Sackmen—ravaging the land like the drift ahead of a storm.

This in part Gottfried learned from the fugitives as he pushed his weary stallion toward the city which was the only sanctuary for the panting thousands. Behind him the skies flamed red and the screams of butchered victims came dimly down the wind to his ears. Sometimes he could even make out the swarming black masses of wild horsemen. The wings of the vulture beat horrifically over that butchered land and the shadows of those great wings fell across all Europe. Again the destroyer was riding out of the blue mysterious East as his brothers had ridden before him—Attila—Subotai—Bayazid—Muhammad the Conqueror. But never before had such a storm risen against the West.

Before the waving vulture wings the road thronged with wailing fugitives; behind them it ran red and silent, strewn with mangled shapes that cried no more. The killers were not a half-hour behind him when Gottfried von Kalmbach rode

his reeling stallion through the gates of Vienna. The people on the walls had heard the wailing for hours, rising awfully on the wind, and now afar they say the sun flicker on the points of lances as the horsemen rode in amongst the masses of fugitives toiling down from the hills into the plain which girdles the city. They saw the play of naked steel like sickles among ripe grain.

Von Kalmbach found the city in turmoil, the people swirling and screaming about Count Nikolas Salm, the seventy-years-old warhorse who commanded Vienna, and his aides, Roggendrof, Count Nikolas Zrinyi and Paul Bakics. Salm was working with frantic haste, levelling houses near the walls and using their material to brace the ramparts, which were old and unstable, nowhere more than six feet thick, and in many places crumbling and falling down. The outer palisade was so frail it bore the name of Stadtzaun—city hedge.

But under the lashing energy of Count Salm, a new wall twenty feet high was thrown up from the Stuben to the Karnthner Gate. Ditches interior to the old moat were dug, and ramparts erected from the drawbridge to the Salz Gate. Roofs were stripped of shingles, to lessen the chances of fire, and paving was ripped up to soften the impact of cannon-balls.

The suburbs had been deserted, and now they were fired lest they give shelter to the besiegers. In the process, which was carried out in the very teeth of the oncoming Sackmen, conflagrations broke out in the city and added to the delirium. It was all hell and bedlam turned loose, and in the midst of it, five thousand wretched noncombatants, old men and women, and children, were ruthlessly driven from the gates to shift for themselves, and their screams, as the Akinjis swooped down, maddened the people

within the walls. These hellions were arriving by thousands, topping the sky-lines and sweeping down on the city in irregular squadrons, like vultures gathering about a dying camel. Within an hour after the first swarm had appeared, no Christian remained alive outside the gates, except those bound by long ropes to the saddle-peaks of their captors and forced to run at full speed or be dragged to death. The wild riders swirled about the walls, yelling and loosing their shafts. Men on the towers recognized the dread Mikhal Oglu by the wings on his cuirass, and noted that he rode from one heap of dead to another, avidly scanning each corpse in turn, pausing to glare questioningly at the battlements.

Meanwhile, from the west, a band of German and Spanish troops cut their way through a cordon of Sackmen and marched into the streets to the accompaniment of frenzied cheers, Philip the Palgrave at their head.

Gottfried von Kalmbach leaned on his sword and watched them pass in their gleaming breastplates and plumed crested helmets, with long matchlocks on their shoulders and two-handed swords strapped to their steel-clad backs. He was a curious contrast in his rusty chain-mail, old-fashioned harness picked up here and there and slovenly pieced together—he seemed like a figure out of the past, rusty and tarnished, watching a newer, brighter generation go by. Yet Philip saluted him, with a glance of recognition, as the shining column swung past.

VON KALMBACH started toward the walls, where the gunners were firing frugally at the Akinji, who showed some disposition to climb upon the bastions on lariats thrown from their saddles. But on the way he heard that Salm was impressing nobles and soldiers in the task

of digging moats and rearing new earth-works, and in great haste he took refuge in a tavern, where he bullied the host, a knock-kneed and apprehensive Wallachian, into giving him credit, and rapidly drank himself into a state where no one would have considered asking him to do work of any kind.

Shots, shouts and screams reached his ears, but he paid scant heed. He knew that the Akinji would strike and pass on, to ravage the country beyond. He learned from the tavern talk that Salm had 20,000 pikemen, 2,000 horsemen and 1,000 volunteer citizens to oppose Suleyman's hordes, together with seventy guns—cannons, demi-cannons and culverins. The news of the Turks' numbers numbed all hearts with dread—all but von Kalmbach's. He was a fatalist in his way. But he discovered a conscience in ale, and was presently brooding over the people the miserable Viennese had driven forth to perish. The more he drank the more melancholy he became, and maudlin tears dripped from the drooping ends of his mustaches.

At last he rose unsteadily and took up his great sword, muzzily intent on challenging Count Salm to a duel because of the matter. He bellowed down the timid importunities of the Wallachian and weaved out on the street. To his groggy sight the towers and spires cavorted crazily; people jostled him, knocking him aside as they ran about aimlessly. Philip the Palgrave strode by clanking in his armor, the keen dark faces of his Spaniards contrasting with the square florid countenances of the Lanzknechts.

"Shame on you, von Kalmbach!" said Philip sternly. "The Turk is upon us, and you keep your snout shoved in an ale-pot!"

"Whose snout is in what ale-pot?" demanded Gottfried, weaving in an erratic

half-circle as he fumbled at his sword. "Devil bite you, Philip, I'll rap your pate for that——"

The Palgrave was already out of sight, and eventually Gottfried found himself on the Karnthner Tower, only vaguely aware of how he had got there. But what he saw sobered him suddenly. The Turk was indeed upon Vienna. The plain was covered with his tents, thirty thousand, some said, and swore that from the lofty spire of Saint Stephen's cathedral a man could not see their limits. Four hundred of his boats lay on the Danube, and Gottfried heard men cursing the Austrian fleet which lay helpless far upstream, because its sailors, long unpaid, refused to man the ships. He also heard that Salm had made no reply at all to Suleyman's demand to surrender.

Now, partly as a gesture, partly to awe the Caphar dogs, the Grand Turk's array was moving in orderly procession before the ancient walls before settling down to the business of the siege. The sight was enough to awe the stoutest. The low-swinging sun struck fire from polished helmet, jeweled-saber-hilt and lance-point. It was as if a river of shining steel flowed leisurely and terribly past the walls of Vienna.

The Akinji, who ordinarily formed the vanguard of the host, had swept on, but in their place rode the Tatars of Crimea, crouching on their high-peaked, short-stirruped saddles, their gnome-like heads guarded by iron helmets, their stocky bodies with bronze breastplates and lacquered leather. Behind them came the Azabs, the irregular infantry, Kurds and Arabs for the most part, a wild motley horde. Then their brothers, the Delis, the Madcaps, wild men on tough ponies fantastically adorned with fur and feathers. The riders wore caps and mantles of leopard skin; their unshorn hair hung in tangled

strands about their high shoulders, and over their matted beards their eyes glared the madness of fanaticism and bhang.

After them came the real body of the army. First the beys and emirs with their retainers—horsemen and footmen from the feudal fiefs of Asia Minor. Then the Spahis, the heavy cavalry, on splendid steeds. And last of all the real strength of the Turkish empire—the most terrible military organization in the world—the Janizaries. On the walls men spat in black fury, recognizing kindred blood. For the Janizaries were not Turks. With a few exceptions, where Turkish parents had smuggled their offspring into the ranks to save them from the grinding life of a peasant, they were sons of Christians—Greeks, Serbs, Hungarians—stolen in infancy and raised in the ranks of Islam, knowing but one master—the Sultan; but one occupation—slaughter.

Their beardless features contrasted with those of their Oriental masters. Many had blue eyes and yellow mustaches. But all their faces were stamped with the wolfish ferocity to which they had been reared. Under their dark blue cloaks glinted fine mail, and many wore steel skull-caps under their curious high-peaked hats, from which depended a white sleeve-like piece of cloth, and through which was thrust a copper spoon. Long bird-of-paradise plumes likewise adorned these strange head-pieces.

Besides simitars, pistols and daggers, each Janizary bore a matchlock, and their officers carried pots of coals for the lighting of the matches. Up and down the ranks scurried the dervishes, clad only in kalpaks of camel-hair and green aprons fringed with ebony beads, exhorting the Faithful. Military bands, the invention of the Turk, marched with the columns, cymbals clashing, lutes twanging. Over the flowing sea the banners tossed and

swayed—the crimson flag of the Spahis, the white banner of the Janizaries with its two-edged sword worked in gold, and the horse-tail standards of the rulers—seven tails for the Sultan, six for the Grand Vizier, three for the Agha of the Janizaries. So Suleyman paraded his power before despairing Caphar eyes.

But von Kalmbach's gaze was centered on the groups that labored to set up the ordnance of the Sultan. And he shook his head in bewilderment.

"Demi-culverins, sakers, and falconets!" he grunted. "Where the devil's all the heavy artillery Suleyman's so proud of?"

"At the bottom of the Danube!" a Hungarian pikeman grinned fiercely and spat as he answered. "Wulf Hagen sank that part of the Soldan's flotilla. The rest of his cannon and cannon royal, they say, were mired because of the rains."

A slow grin bristled Gottfried's mustache.

"What was Suleyman's word to Salm?"

"That he'd eat breakfast in Vienna day after tomorrow—the 29th."

Gottfried shook his head ponderously.

4

THE siege commenced, with the roaring of cannons, the whistling of arrows, and the blasting crash of matchlocks. The Janizaries took possession of the ruined suburbs, where fragments of walls gave them shelter. Under a screen of irregulars and a volley of arrow-fire, they advanced methodically just after dawn.

On a gun-turret on the threatened wall, leaning on his great sword and meditatively twisting his mustache, Gottfried von Kalmbach watched a Transylvanian gunner being carried off the wall, his brains oozing from a hole in his head; a Turkish matchlock had spoken too near

the walls. The field-pieces of the Sultan were barking like deep-toned dogs, knocking chips off the battlements. The Janizaries were advancing, kneeling, firing, reloading as they came on. Bullets glanced from the crenelles and whined off venomously into space. One flattened against Gottfried's hauberk, bringing an outraged grunt from him. Turning toward the abandoned gun, he saw a colorful incongruous figure bending over the massive breach.

It was a woman, dressed as von Kalmbach had not seen even the dandies of France dressed. She was tall, splendidly shaped, but lithe. From under a steel cap escaped rebellious tresses that rippled red gold in the sun over her compact shoulders. High boots of Cordovan leather came to her mid-thighs, which were cased in baggy breeches. She wore a shirt of fine Turkish mesh-mail tucked into her breeches. Her supple waist was confined by a flowing sash of green silk, into which were thrust a brace of pistols and a dagger, and from which depended a long Hungarian saber. Over all was carelessly thrown a scarlet cloak.

This surprising figure was bending over the cannon, sighting it in a manner betokening more than a passing familiarity, at a group of Turks who were wheeling a carriage-gun just within range.

"Eh, Red Sonya!" shouted a man-at-arms, waving his pike. "Give 'em hell, my lass!"

"Trust me, dog-brother," she retorted as she applied the glowing match to the vent. "But I wish my mark was Roxelana's——"

A terrific detonation drowned her words and a swirl of smoke blinded every one on the turret, as the terrific recoil of the overcharged cannon knocked the firer flat on her back. She sprang up like a spring rebounding and rushed to the em-

brasure, peering eagerly through the smoke, which clearing, showed the ruin of the gun crew. The huge ball, bigger than a man's head, had smashed full into the group clustered about the saker, and now they lay on the torn ground, their skulls blasted by the impact, or their bodies mangled by the flying iron splinters from their shattered gun. A cheer went up from the towers, and the woman called Red Sonya yelled with sincere joy and did the steps of a Cossack dance.

Gottfried approached, eyeing in open admiration the splendid swell of her bosom beneath the pliant mail, the curves of her ample hips and rounded limbs. She stood as a man might stand, booted legs braced wide apart, thumbs hooked into her girdle, but she was all woman. She was laughing as she faced him, and he noted with fascination the dancing sparkling lights and changing colors of her eyes. She raked back her rebellious locks with a powder-stained hand and he wondered at the clear pinky whiteness of her firm flesh where it was unstained.

"Why did you wish for the Sultana Roxelana for a target, my girl?" he asked.

"Because she's my sister, the slut!" answered Sonya.

At that instant a great cry thundered over the walls and the girl started like a wild thing, ripping out her blade in a long flash of silver in the sun.

"I've heard that bellow!" she cried. "The Janizaries——"

Gottfried was already on his way to the embrasures. He too had heard before the terrible soul-shaking shout of the charging Janizaries. Suleyman meant to waste no time on the city that barred him from helpless Europe. He meant to crush its frail walls in one storm. The bashi-bazouki, the irregulars, died like flies to screen the main advance, and over heaps of their dead, the Janizaries thun-

dered against Vienna. In the teeth of cannonade and musket volley they surged on, crossing the moats on scaling-ladders laid across, bridge-like. Whole ranks went down as the Austrian guns roared, but now the attackers were under the walls and the cumbrous balls whirred over their heads, to work havoc in the rear ranks.

The Spanish matchlock men, firing almost straight down, took ghastly toll, but now the ladders gripped the walls, and the chanting madmen surged upward. Arrows whistled, striking down the defenders. Behind them the Turkish field-pieces boomed, careless of injury to friend as well as foe. Gottfried, standing at an embrasure, was overthrown by a sudden terrific impact. A ball had smashed the merlon, braining half a dozen defenders.

Gottfried rose, half stunned, out of the debris of masonry and huddled corpses. He looked down into an uprushing waste of snarling impassioned faces, where eyes glared like mad dogs' and blades glittered like sunbeams on water. Bracing his feet wide, he heaved up his great sword and lashed down. His jaw jutted out, his mustache bristled. The five-foot blade caved in steel caps and skulls, lashing through uplifted bucklers and iron shoulder-pieces. Men fell from the ladders, their nerveless fingers slipping from the bloody rungs.

But they swarmed through the breach on either side of him. A terrible cry announced that the Turks had a foothold on the wall. But no man dared leave his post to go to the threatened point. To the dazed defenders it seemed that Vienna was ringed by a glittering tossing sea that roared higher and higher about the doomed walls.

STEPPING back to avoid being hemmed in, Gottfried grunted and lashed right and left. His eyes were no longer cloudy;

they blazed like blue bale-fire. Three Janizaries were down at his feet; his broadsword clanged in a forest of slashing simitars. A blade splintered on his basinet, filling his eyes with fire-shot blackness. Staggering, he struck back and felt his great blade crunch home. Blood jetted over his hands and he tore his sword clear. Then with a yell and a rush some one was at his side and he heard the quick splintering of mail beneath the madly flailing strokes of a saber that flashed like silver lightning before his clearing sight.

It was Red Sonya who had come to his aid, and her onslaught was no less terrible than that of a she-panther. Her strokes followed each other too quickly for the eye to follow; her blade was a blur of white fire, and men went down like ripe grain before the reaper. With a deep roar Gottfried strode to her side, bloody and terrible, swinging his great blade. Forced irresistibly back, the Moslems wavered on the edge of the wall, then leaped for the ladders or fell screaming through empty space.

Oaths flowed in a steady stream from Sonya's red lips and she laughed wildly as her saber sang home and blood spurted along the edge. The last Turk on the battlement screamed and parried wildly as she pressed him; then dropping his simitar, his clutching hands closed desperately on her dripping blade. With a groan he swayed on the edge, blood gushing from his horribly cut fingers.

"Hell to you, dog-soul!" she laughed. "The devil can stir your broth for you!"

With a twist and a wrench she tore away her saber, severing the wretch's fingers; with a moaning cry he pitched backward and fell headlong.

On all sides the Janizaries were falling back. The field-pieces, halted while the fighting went on upon the walls, were

booming again, and the Spaniards, kneeling at the embrasures, were returning the fire with their long matchlocks.

Gottfried approached Red Sonya, who was cleansing her blade, swearing softly.

"By God, my girl," said he, extending a huge hand, "had you not come to my aid, I think I'd have supped in hell this night. I thank——"

"Thank the devil!" retorted Sonya rudely, slapping his hand aside. "The Turks were on the wall. Don't think I risked my hide to save yours, dog-brother!"

And with a scornful flirt of her wide coat-tails, she swaggered off down the battlements, giving back promptly and profanely the rude sallies of the soldiers. Gottfried scowled after her, and a Lanzknecht slapped him jovially on the shoulder.

"Eh, she's a devil, that one! She drinks the strongest head under the table and outswears a Spaniard. She's no man's light o' love. Cut—slash—death to you, dog-soul! There's her way."

"Who is she, in the devil's name?" growled von Kalmbach.

"Red Sonya from Rogatino—that's all we know. Marches and fights like a man—God knows why. Swears she's sister to Roxelana, the Soldan's favorite. If the Tatars who grabbed Roxelana that night had got Sonya, by Saint Piotr! Suleyman would have had a handful! Let her alone, sir brother; she's a wildcat. Come and have a tankard of ale."

The Janizaries, summoned before the Grand Vizier to explain why the attack failed after the wall had been scaled at one place, swore they had been confronted by a devil in the form of a red-headed woman, aided by a giant in rusty mail. Ibrahim discounted the woman, but the description of the man woke a half-forgotten memory in his mind. After dis-

missing the soldiers, he summoned the Tatar, Yaruk Khan, and dispatched him up-country to demand of Mikhal Oglu why he had not sent a certain head to the royal tent.

5

SULEYMAN did not eat his breakfast in Vienna on the morning of the 29th. He stood on the height of Semmering, before his rich pavilion with its gold-knobbed pinnacles and its guard of five hundred Solaks, and watched his light batteries pecking vainly away at the frail walls; he saw his irregulars wasting their lives like water, striving to fill the fosse, and he saw his sappers burrowing like moles, driving mines and counter-mines nearer and nearer the bastions.

Within the city there was little ease. Night and day the walls were manned. In their cellars the Viennese watched the faint vibrations of peas on drumheads that betrayed the sounds of digging in the earth that told of Turkish mines burrowing under the walls. They sank their counter-mines, accordingly and men fought no less fiercely under the earth than above.

Vienna was the one Christian island in a sea of infidels. Night by night men watched the horizons burning where the Akinji yet scoured the agonized land. Occasionally word came from the outer world—slaves escaping from the camp and slipping into the city. Always their news was fresh horror. In Upper Austria less than a third of the inhabitants were left alive; Mikhal Oglu was outdoing himself. And the people said that it was evident the vulture-winged one was looking for some one in particular. His slayers brought men's heads and heaped them high before him; he avidly searched among the grisly relics, then, apparently

in fiendish disappointment, drove his devils to new atrocities.

These tales, instead of paralyzing the Austrians with dread, fired them with the mad fury of desperation. Mines exploded, breaches were made and the Turks swarmed in, but always the desperate Christians were there before them, and in the choking, blind, wild-beast madness of hand-to-hand fighting they paid in part the red debt they owed.

SEPTEMBER dwindled into October; the leaves turned brown and yellow on Wiener Wald, and the winds blew cold. The watchers shivered at night on the walls that whitened to the bite of the frost; but still the tents ringed the city; and still Suleyman sat in his magnificent pavilion and glared at the frail barrier that barred his imperial path. None but Ibrahim dared speak to him; his mood was black as the cold nights that crept down from the northern hills. The wind that moaned outside his tent seemed a dirge for his ambitions of conquest.

Ibrahim watched him narrowly, and after a vain onset that lasted from dawn till midday, he called off the Janizaries and bade them retire into the ruined suburbs and rest. And he sent a bowman to shoot a very certain shaft into a very certain part of the city, where certain persons were waiting for just such an event.

No more attacks were made that day. The field-pieces, which had been pounding at the Karthner Gate for days, were shifted northward, to hammer at the Burg. As an assault on that part of the wall seemed imminent, the bulk of the soldiery was shifted there. But the onslaught did not come, though the batteries kept up a steady fire, hour after hour. Whatever the reason, the soldiers gave thanks for the respite; they were dizzy with fatigue, mad with raw wounds and lack of sleep.

That night the great square, the Am-Hof market, seethed with soldiers, while civilians looked on enviously. A great store of wine had been discovered hidden in the cellars of a rich Jewish merchant, who hoped to reap triple profit when all other liquor in the city was gone. In spite of their officers, the half-crazed men rolled the great hogsheads into the square and broached them. Salm gave up the attempt to control them. Better drunkenness, growled the old warhorse, than for the men to fall in their tracks from exhaustion. He paid the Jew from his own purse. In relays the soldiers came from the walls and drank deep.

In the glare of cressets and torches, to the accompaniment of drunken shouts and songs, to which the occasional rumble of a cannon played a sinister undertone, von Kalmbach dipped his basinet into a barrel and brought it out brimful and dripping. Sinking his mustache into the liquid, he paused as his clouded eyes, over the rim of the steel cap, rested on a strutting figure on the other side of the hogshead. Resentment touched his expression. Red Sonya had already visited more than one barrel. Her burganet was thrust sidewise on her rebellious locks, her swagger was wilder, her eyes more mocking.

"Ha!" she cried scornfully. "It's the Turk-killer, with his nose deep in the keg, as usual! Devil bite all toppers!"

She consistently thrust a jeweled goblet into the crimson flood and emptied it at a gulp. Gottfried stiffened resentfully. He had had a tilt with Sonya already, and he still smarted.

"Why should I even look at you, in your ragged harness and empty purse," she had mocked, "when even Paul Bakics is mad for me? Go along, guzzler, beer-keg!"

"Be damned to you," he had retorted,

"You needn't be so high, just because your sister is the Soldan's mistress——"

At that she had flown into an awful passion, and they had parted with mutual curses. Now, from the devil in her eyes, he saw that she intended making things further uncomfortable for him.

"Hussy!" he growled. "I'll drown you in this hogshead."

"Nay, you'll drown yourself first, boar-pig!" she shouted amid a roar of rough laughter. "A pity you aren't as valiant against the Turks as you are against the wine-butts!"

"Dogs bite you, slut!" he roared. "How can I break their heads when they stand off and pound us with cannon balls? Shall I throw my dagger at them from the wall?"

"There are thousands just outside," she retorted, in the grip of madness induced by drink and her own wild nature, "if any had the guts to go to them."

"By God!" the maddened giant dragged out his great sword. "No baggage can call *me* coward, sot or not! I'll go out upon them, if never a man follow me!"

Bedlam followed his bellow; the drunken temper of the crowd was fit for such madness. The nearly empty hogsheads were deserted as men tipsily drew sword and reeled toward the outer gates. Wulf Hagen fought his way into the storm, buffeting men right and left, shouting fiercely, "Wait, you drunken fools! Don't surge out in this shape! Wait——" They brushed him aside, sweeping on in a blind senseless torrent.

DAWN was just beginning to tip the eastern hills. Somewhere in the strangely silent Turkish camp a drum began to throb. Turkish sentries stared wildly and loosed their matchlocks in the air to warn the camp, appalled at the sight of the Christian horde pouring over

the narrow drawbridge, eight thousand strong, brandishing swords and ale tankards. As they foamed over the moat a terrific explosion rent the din, and a portion of the wall near the Karnthner Gate seemed to detach itself and rise into the air. A great shout rose from the Turkish camp, but the attackers did not pause.

They rushed headlong into the suburbs, and there they saw the Janizaries, not rousing from slumber, but fully clad and armed, being hurriedly drawn up in charging lines. Without pausing, they burst headlong into the half-formed ranks. Far outnumbered, their drunken fury and velocity was yet irresistible. Before the madly thrashing axes and lashing broadswords, the Janizaries reeled back dazed and disordered. The suburbs became a shambles where battling men, slashing and hewing at one another, stumbled on mangled bodies and severed limbs. Suleyman and Ibrahim, on the height of Semmering, saw the invincible Janizaries in full retreat, streaming out toward the hills.

In the city the rest of the defenders were working madly to repair the great breach the mysterious explosion had torn in the wall. Salm gave thanks for that drunken sortie. But for it, the Janizaries would have been pouring through the breach before the dust settled.

All was confusion in the Turkish camp. Suleyman ran to his horse and took charge in person, shouting at the Spahis. They formed ranks and swung down the slopes in orderly squadrons. The Christian warriors, still following their fleeing enemies, suddenly awakened to their danger. Before them the Janizaries were still falling back, but on either flank the horsemen of Asia were galloping to cut them off. Fear replaced drunken recklessness. They began to fall back, and the retreat quickly became a rout. Screaming in blind

panic they threw away their weapons and fled for the drawbridge. The Turks rode them down to the water's edge, and tried to follow them across the bridge, into the gates which were opened for them. And there at the bridge Wulf Hagen and his retainers met the pursuers and held them hard. The flood of the fugitives flowed past him to safety; on him the Turkish tide broke like a red wave. He loomed, a steel-clad giant, in a waste of spears.

Gottfried von Kalmbach did not voluntarily quit the field, but the rush of his companions swept him along the tide of flight, blaspheming bitterly. Presently he lost his footing and his panic-stricken comrades stampeded across his prostrate frame. When the frantic heels ceased to drum on his mail, he raised his head and saw that he was near the fosse, and naught but Turks about him. Rising, he ran lumberingly toward the moat, into which he plunged unexpectedly, looking back over his shoulder at a pursuing Moslem.

He came up floundering and spluttering, and made for the opposite bank, splashing water like a buffalo. The blood-mad Muhammadan was close behind him—an Algerian corsair, as much at home in water as out. The stubborn German would not drop his great sword, and burdened by his mail, just managed to reach the other bank, where he clung, utterly exhausted and unable to lift a hand in defense as the Algerian swirled in, dagger gleaming above his naked shoulder. Then some one swore heartily on the bank hard by. A slim hand thrust a long pistol into the Algerian's face; he screamed as it exploded, making a ghastly ruin of his head. Another slim strong hand gripped the sinking German by the scruff of his mail.

"Grab the bank, fool!" grieved a voice,

indicative of great effort. "I can't heave you up alone; you must weigh a ton. Pull, dolt, pull!"

Blowing, gasping and floundering, Gottfried half clambered, was half lifted, out of the moat. He showed some disposition to lie on his belly and retch, what of the dirty water he had swallowed, but his rescuer urged him to his feet.

"The Turks are crossing the bridge and the lads are closing the gates against them—haste, before we're cut off."

Inside the gate Gottfried stared about, as if waking from a dream.

"Where's Wulf Hagen? I saw him holding the bridge."

"Lying dead among twenty dead Turks," answered Red Sonya.

Gottfried sat down on a piece of fallen wall, and because he was shaken and exhausted, and still mazed with drink and blood-lust, he sank his face in his huge hands and wept. Sonya kicked him disgustedly.

"Name o' Satan, man, don't sit and blubber like a spanked schoolgirl. You drunkards had to play the fool, but that can't be mended. Come—let's go to the Walloon's tavern and drink ale."

"Why did you pull me out of the moat?" he asked.

"Because a great oaf like you never can help himself. I see you need a wise person like me to keep life in that hulking frame."

"But I thought you despised me!"

"Well, a woman can change her mind, can't she?" she snapped.

Along the walls the pikemen were repelling the frothing Moslems, thrusting them off the partly repaired breach. In the royal pavilion Ibrahim was explaining to his master that the devil had undoubtedly inspired that drunken sortie just at the right moment to spoil the Grand Vizier's carefully laid plans. Su-

leyman, wild with fury, spoke shortly to his friend for the first time.

"Nay, thou hast failed. Have done with thine intrigues. Where craft has failed, sheer force shall prevail. Send a rider for the Akinji; they are needed here to replace the fallen. Bid the hosts to the attack again."

6

THE preceding onslaughts were naught to the storm that now burst on Vienna's reeling walls. Night and day the cannons flashed and thundered. Bombs burst on roofs and in the streets. When men died on the walls there was none to take their places. Fear of famine stalked the streets and the darker fear of treachery ran black-mantled through the alleys. Investigation showed that the blast that had rent the Karnthner wall had not been fired from without. In a mine tunnelled from an unsuspected cellar inside the city, a heavy charge of powder had been exploded beneath the wall. One or two men, working secretly, might have done it. It was now apparent that the bombardment of the Burg had been merely a gesture to draw attention away from the Karnthner wall, to give the traitors an opportunity to work undiscovered.

Count Salm and his aides did the work of giants. The aged commander, fired with superhuman energy, trod the walls, braced the faltering, aided the wounded, fought in the breaches side by side with the common soldiers, while death dealt his blows unsparingly.

But if death supped within the walls, he feasted full without. Suleyman drove his men as relentlessly as if he were their worst foe. Plague stalked among them, and the ravaged countryside yielded no food. The cold winds howled down from the Carpathians and the warriors

shivered in their light Oriental garb. In the frosty nights the hands of the sentries froze to their matchlocks. The ground grew hard as flint and the sappers toiled feebly with blunted tools. Rain fell, mingled with sleet, extinguishing matches, wetting powder, turning the plain outside the city to a muddy wallow, where rotting corpses sickened the living.

Suleyman shuddered as with an ague, as he looked out over the camp. He saw his warriors, worn and haggard, toiling in the muddy plain like ghosts under the gloomy leaden skies. The stench of his slaughtered thousands was in his nostrils. In that instant it seemed to the Sultan that he looked on a gray plain of the dead, where corpses dragged their lifeless bodies to an outworn task, animated only by the ruthless will of their master. For an instant the Tatar in his veins rose above the Turk and he shook with fear. Then his lean jaws set. The walls of Vienna staggered drunkenly, patched and repaired in a score of places. How could they stand?

"Sound for the onslaught. Thirty thousand aspers to the first man on the walls!"

The Grand Vizier spread his hands helplessly. "The spirit is gone out of the warriors. They can not endure the miseries of this icy land."

"Drive them to the walls with whips," answered Suleyman, grimly. "This is the gate to Frankistan. It is through it we must ride the road to empire."

Drums thundered through the camp. The weary defenders of Christendom rose up and gripped their weapons, electrified by the instinctive knowledge that the death-grip had come.

In the teeth of roaring matchlocks and swinging broadswords, the officers of the Sultan drove the Moslem hosts. Whips cracked and men cried out blasphemous-

ly up and down the lines. Maddened, they hurled themselves at the reeling walls, riddled with great breaches, yet still barriers behind which desperate men could crouch. Charge after charge rolled on over the choked fosse, broke on the staggering walls, and rolled back, leaving its wash of dead. Night fell unheeded, and through the darkness, lighted by blaze of cannon and flare of torches, the battle raged. Driven by Suleyman's terrible will, the attackers fought throughout the night, heedless of all Moslem tradition.

Dawn rose as on Armageddon. Before the walls of Vienna lay a vast carpet of steel-clad dead. Their plumes waved in the wind. And across the corpses staggered the hollow-eyed attackers to grapple with the dazed defenders.

The steel tides rolled and broke, and rolled on again, till the very gods must have stood aghast at the giant capacity of men for suffering and enduring. It was the Armageddon of races—Asia against Europe. About the walls raved a sea of Eastern faces—Turks, Tatars, Kurds, Arabs, Algerians, snarling, screaming, dying before the roaring matchlocks of the Spaniards, the thrust of Austrian pikes, the strokes of the German Lanzknechts, who swung their two-handed swords like reapers mowing ripe grain. Those within the walls were no more heroic than those without, stumbling among fields of their own dead.

To Gottfried von Kalmbach, life had faded to a single meaning—the swinging of his great sword. In the wide breach by the Karnthner Tower he fought until time lost all meaning. For long ages maddened faces rose snarling before him, the faces of devils, and simitars flashed before his eyes everlastingly. He did not feel his wounds, nor the drain of weariness. Gasping in the choking dust, blind

with sweat and blood, he dealt death like a harvest, dimly aware that at his side a slim pantherish figure swayed and smote—at first with laughter, curses and snatch-
es of song, later in grim silence.

His identity as an individual was lost in that cataclysm of swords. He hardly knew it when Count Salm was death-stricken at his side by a bursting bomb. He was not aware when night crept over the hills, nor did he realize at last that the tide was slackening and ebbing. He was only dimly aware that Nikolas Zrinyi tore him away from the corpse-choked breach, saying, "God's name, man, go and sleep. We've beaten them off—for the time being, at least."

He found himself in a narrow winding street, all dark and forsaken. He had no idea of how he had got there, but seemed vaguely to remember a hand on his elbow, tugging, guiding. The weight of his mail pulled at his sagging shoulders. He could not tell if the sound he heard were the cannon fitfully roaring, or a throbbing in his own head. It seemed there was some one he should look for—some one who meant a great deal to him. But all was vague. Somewhere, sometime, it seemed long, long ago, a sword-stroke had cleft his basinet. When he tried to think he seemed to feel again the impact of that terrible blow, and his brain swam. He tore off the dented head-piece and cast it into the street.

Again the hand was tugging at his arm. A voice urged, "Wine, my lord—drink!"

Dimly he saw a lean black-mailed figure extending a tankard. With a gasp he caught at it and thrust his muzzle into the stinging liquor, gulping like a man dying of thirst. Then something burst in his brain. The night filled with a million flashing sparks, as if a powder mag-

azine had exploded in his head. After that, darkness and oblivion.

HE CAME slowly to himself, aware of a raging thirst, an aching head, and an intense weariness that seemed to paralyze his limbs. He was bound hand and foot, and gagged. Twisting his head, he saw that he was in a small bare dusty room, from which a winding stone stair led up. He deduced that he was in the lower part of the tower.

Over a guttering candle on a crude table stooped two men. They were both lean and hook-nosed, clad in plain black garments—Asiatics, past doubt. Gottfried listened to their low-toned conversation. He had picked up many languages in his wanderings. He recognized them—Tshoruk and his son Rhupen, Armenian merchants. He remembered that he had seen Tshoruk often in the last week or so, ever since the domed helmets of the Akinji had appeared in Suleyman's camp. Evidently the merchant had been shadowing him, for some reason. Tshoruk was reading what he had written on a bit of parchment.

"My lord, though I blew up the Karnthner wall in vain, yet I have news to make my lord's heart glad. My son and I have taken the German, von Kalmbach. As he left the wall, dazed with fighting, we followed, guiding him subtly to the ruined tower whereof you know, and giving him drugged wine, bound him fast. Let my lord send the emir Mikhal Oglu to the wall by the tower, and we will give him into thy hands. We will bind him on the old mangonel and cast him over the wall like a tree trunk."

The Armenian took up an arrow and began to bind the parchment about the shaft with light silver wire.

"Take this to the roof, and shoot it toward the mantlet, as usual," he began,

when Rhupen exclaimed, "Hark!" and both froze, their eyes glittering like those of trapped vermin—fearful yet vindictive.

Gottfried gnawed at the gag; it slipped. Outside he heard a familiar voice. "Gottfried! Where the devil are you?"

His breath burst from him in a stentorian roar. "Hey, Sonya! Name of the devil! Be careful, girl——"

Tshoruk snarled like a wolf and struck him savagely on the head with a simitar hilt. Almost instantly, it seemed, the door crashed inward. As in a dream Gottfried saw Red Sonya framed in the doorway, pistol in hand. Her face was drawn and haggard; her eyes burned like coals. Her basinet was gone, and her scarlet cloak. Her mail was hacked and red-clotted, her boots slashed, her silken breeches splashed and spotted with blood.

With a croaking cry Tshoruk ran at her, simitar lifted. Before he could strike, she crashed down the barrel of the empty pistol on his head, felling him like an ox. From the other side Rhupen slashed at her with a curved Turkish dagger. Dropping the pistol, she closed with the young Oriental. Moving like some one in a dream, she bore him irresistibly backward, one hand gripping his wrist, the other his throat. Throttling him slowly, she inexorably crashed his head again and again against the stones of the wall, until his eyes rolled up and set. Then she threw him from her like a sack of loose salt.

"God!" she muttered thickly, reeling an instant in the center of the room, her hands to her head. Then she went to the captive and sinking stiffly to her knees, cut his bonds with fumbling strokes that sliced his flesh as well as the cords.

"How did you find me?" he asked stupidly, clambering stiffly up.

She reeled to the table and sank down in a chair. A flagon of wine stood at her

elbow and she seized it avidly and drank. Then she wiped her mouth on her sleeve and surveyed him wearily but with renewed life.

"I saw you leave the wall and followed. I was so drunk from the fighting I scarce knew what I did. I saw those dogs take your arm and lead you into the alleys, and then I lost sight of you. But I found your burganet lying outside in the street, and began shouting for you. What the hell's the meaning of this?"

She picked up the arrow, and blinked at the parchment fastened to it. Evidently she could read the Turkish characters, but she scanned it half a dozen times before the meaning became apparent to her exhaustion-numbered brain. Then her eyes flickered dangerously to the men on the floor. Tshoruk sat up, dazedly feeling the gash in his scalp; Rhupen lay retching and gurgling on the floor.

"Tie them up, brother," she ordered, and Gottfried obeyed. The victims eyed the woman much more apprehensively than him.

"This missive is addressed to Ibrahim, the Wezir," she said abruptly. "Why does he want Gottfried's head?"

"Because of a wound he gave the Sultan at Mohacz," muttered Tshoruk un- easily.

"And you, you lower-than-a-dog," she smiled mirthlessly, "you fired the mine by the Karnthner! You and your spawn are the traitors among us." She drew and primed a pistol. "When Zrinyi learns of you," she said, "your end will be neither quick nor sweet. But first, you old swine, I'm going to give myself the pleasure of blowing out your cub's brains before your eyes——"

The older Armenian gave a choking cry. "God of my fathers, have mercy! Kill me—torture me—but spare my son!"

At that instant a new sound split the

unnatural quiet—a great peal of bells shattered the air.

"What's this?" roared Gottfried, groping wildly at his empty scabbard.

"The bells of Saint Stephen!" cried Sonya. "They peal for victory!"

SHE sprang for the sagging stair and he followed her up the perilous way. They came out on a sagging shattered roof, on a firmer part of which stood an ancient stone-casting machine, relic of an earlier age, and evidently recently repaired. The tower overlooked an angle of the wall, at which there were no watchers. A section of the ancient glacis, and a ditch interior to the main moat, coupled with a steep natural pitch of the earth beyond, made the point practically invulnerable. The spies had been able to exchange messages here with little fear of discovery, and it was easy to guess the method used. Down the slope, just within long arrow-shot, stood up a huge mantlet of bullhide stretched on a wooden frame, as if abandoned there by chance. Gottfried knew that message-laden arrows were loosed from the tower roof into this mantlet. But just then he gave little thought to that. His attention was riveted on the Turkish camp. There a leaping glare paled the spreading dawn; above the mad clangor of the bells rose the crackle of flames, mingled with awful screams.

"The Janizaries are burning their prisoners," said Red Sonya.

"Judgment Day in the morning," muttered Gottfried, awed at the sight that met his eyes.

From their eyrie the companions could see almost all the plain. Under a cold gray leaden sky, tinged a somber crimson with dawn, it lay strewn with Turkish corpses as far as sight carried. And the hosts of the living were melting away.

From Semmering the great pavilion had vanished. The other tents were coming down swiftly. Already the head of the long column was out of sight, moving into the hills through the cold dawn. Snow began falling in light swift flakes.

The Janizaries were glutting their mad disappointment on their helpless captives, hurling men, women and children living into the flames they had kindled under the somber eyes of their master, the monarch men called the Magnificent, the Merciful. All the time the bells of Vienna clanged and thundered as if their bronze throats would burst.

"They shot their bolt last night," said Red Sonya. "I saw their officers lashing them, and heard them cry out in fear beneath our swords. Flesh and blood could stand no more. Look!" she clutched her companion's arm. "The Akinji will form the rear-guard."

Even at that distance they made out a pair of vulture wings moving among the dark masses; the sullen light glimmered on a jeweled helmet. Sonya's powder-stained hands clenched so that the pink, broken nails bit into the white palms, and she spat out a Cossack curse that burned like vitriol.

"There he goes, the bastard, that made Austria a desert! How easily the souls of the butchered folk ride on his cursed winged shoulders! Anyway, old warhorse, he didn't get your head."

"While he lives it'll ride loose on my shoulders," rumbled the giant.

Red Sonya's keen eyes narrowed suddenly. Seizing Gottfried's arm, she hurried downstairs. They did not see Nikolas Zrinyi and Paul Bakics ride out of the gates with their tattered retainers, risking their lives in sorties to rescue prisoners. Steel clashed along the line of march, and the Akinji retreated slowly, fighting a good rear-guard action, balking the head-

long courage of the attackers by their very numbers. Safe in the depths of his horsemen, Mikhal Oglu grinned sardonically. But Suleyman, riding in the main column, did not grin. His face was like a death-mask.

Back in the ruined tower, Red Sonya propped one booted foot on a chair, and cupping her chin in her hand, stared into the fear-dulled eyes of Tshoruk.

"What will you give for your life?"

The Armenian made no reply.

"What will you give for the life of your whelp?"

The Armenian stared as if stung. "Spare my son, princess," he groaned. "Anything—I will pay—I will do anything."

She threw a shapely booted leg across the chair and sat down.

"I want you to bear a message to a man."

"What man?"

"Mikhal Oglu."

He shuddered and moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Instruct me; I obey," he whispered.

"Good. We'll free you and give you a horse. Your son shall remain here as hostage. If you fail us, I'll give the cub to the Viennese to play with——"

Again the old Armenian shuddered.

"But if you play squarely, we'll let you both go free, and my pal and I will forget about this treachery. I want you to ride after Mikhal Oglu and tell him——"

THROUGH the slush and driving snow, the Turkish column plodded slowly. Horses bent their heads to the blast; up and down the straggling lines camels groaned and complained, and oxen belled pitifully. Men stumbled through the mud, leaning beneath the weight of their arms and equipment. Night was falling, but no command had been given

to halt. All day the retreating host had been harried by the daring Austrian cuirassiers who darted down upon them like wasps, tearing captives from their very hands.

Grimly rode Suleyman among his Solaks. He wished to put as much distance as possible between himself and the scene of his first defeat, where the rotting bodies of thirty thousand Muhammadans reminded him of his crushed ambitions. Lord of western Asia he was; master of Europe he could never be. Those despised walls had saved the Western world from Moslem dominion, and Suleyman knew it. The rolling thunder of the Ottoman power re-echoed around the world, paling the glories of Persia and Mogul India. But in the West the yellow-haired Aryan barbarian stood unshaken. It was not written that the Turk should rule beyond the Danube.

Suleyman had seen this written in blood and fire, as he stood on Semmering and saw his warriors fall back from the ramparts, despite the flailing lashes of their officers. It had been to save his authority that he gave the order to break camp—it burned his tongue like gall, but already his soldiers were burning their tents and preparing to desert him. Now in darkly brooding silence he rode, not even speaking to Ibrahim.

In his own way Mikhal Oglu shared their savage despondency. It was with a ferocious reluctance that he turned his back on the land he had ruined, as a half-glutted panther might be driven from its prey. He recalled with satisfaction the blackened, corpse-littered wastes—the screams of tortured men—the cries of girls writhing in his iron arms; recalled with much the same sensations the death-shrieks of those same girls in the blood-fouled hands of his killers.

But he was stung with the disappoint-

ment of a task undone—for which the Grand Vizier had lashed him with stinging words. He was out of favor with Ibrahim. For a lesser man that might have meant a bowstring. For him it meant that he would have to perform some prodigious feat to reinstate himself. In this mood he was dangerous and reckless as a wounded panther.

Snow fell heavily, adding to the miseries of the retreat. Wounded men fell in the mire and lay still, covered by a growing white mantle. Mikhal Oglu rode among his rearmost ranks, straining his eyes into the darkness. No foe had been sighted for hours. The victorious Austrians had ridden back to their city.

The columns were moving slowly through a ruined village, whose charred beams and crumbling fire-seared walls stood blackly in the falling snow. Word came back down the lines that the Sultan would pass on through and camp in a valley which lay a few miles beyond.

The quick drum of hoofs back along the way they had come caused the Akinji to grip their lances and glare slit-eyed into the flickering darkness. They heard but a single horse, and a voice calling the name of Mikhal Oglu. With a word the chief stayed a dozen lifted bows, and shouted in return. A tall gray stallion loomed out of the flying snow, a black-mantled figure crouched grotesquely atop of it.

"Tshoruk! You Armenian dog! What in the name of Allah——"

The Armenian rode close to Mikhal Oglu and whispered urgently in his ear. The cold bit through the thickest garments. The Akinji noted that Tshoruk was trembling violently. His teeth chattered and he stammered in his speech. But the Turk's eyes blazed at the import of his message.

"Dog, do you lie?"

"May I rot in hell if I lie!" A strong shudder shook Tshoruk and he drew his kaftan close about him. "He fell from his horse, riding with the cuirassiers to attack the rear-guard, and lies with a broken leg in a deserted peasant's hut, some three miles back—alone except for his mistress Red Sonya, and three or four Lanzknechts, who are drunk on wine they found in the deserted camp."

Mikhal Oglu wheeled his horse with sudden intent.

"Twenty men to me!" he barked. "The rest ride on with the main column. I go after a head worth its weight in gold. I'll overtake you before you go into camp."

Othman caught his jeweled rein. "Are you mad, to ride back now? The whole country will be on our heels——"

He reeled in his saddle as Mikhal Oglu slashed him across the mouth with his riding-whip. The chief wheeled away, followed by the men he had designated. Like ghosts they vanished into the spectral darkness.

Othman sat his horse uncertainly, looking after them. The snow shafted down, the wind sobbed drearily among the bare branches. There was no sound except the receding noises of the trudging column. Presently these ceased. Then Othman started. Back along the way they had come, he heard a distant reverberation, a roar as of forty or fifty matchlocks speaking together. In the utter silence which followed, panic came upon Othman and his warriors. Whirling away they fled through the ruined village after the retreating horde.

7

NONE noticed when night fell on Constantinople, for the splendor of Suleyman made night no less glorious than day. Through gardens that were

riots of blossoms and perfume, cressets twinkled like myriad fireflies. Fireworks turned the city into a realm of shimmering magic, above which the minarets of five hundred mosques rose like towers of fire in an ocean of golden foam. Tribesmen on Asian hills gaped and marvelled at the blaze that pulsed and glowed afar, paling the very stars. The streets of Stamboul were thronged with crowds in the attire of holiday and rejoicing. The million lights shone on jeweled turban and striped khalat—on dark eyes sparkling over filmy veils—on shining palanquins borne on the shoulders of huge ebony-skinned slaves.

All that splendor centered in the Hippodrome, where in lavish pageants the horsemen of Turkistan and Tatory competed in breath-taking races with the riders of Egypt and Arabia, where warriors in glittering mail spilled one another's blood on the sands, where swordsmen were matched against wild beasts, and lions were pitted against tigers from Bengal and boars from northern forests. One might have deemed the imperial pageantry of Rome revived in Eastern garb.

On a golden throne, set upon lapis lazuli pillars, Suleyman reclined, gazing on the splendors, as purple-togaed Cæsars had gazed before him. About him bowed his viziers and officers, and the ambassadors from foreign courts—Venice, Persia, India, the khanates of Tatory. They came—including the Venetians—to congratulate him on his victory over the Austrians. For this grand fête was in celebration of that victory, as set forth in a manifesto under the Sultan's hand, which stated, in part, that the Austrians having made submission and sued for pardon on their knees, and the German realms being so distant from the Ottoman empire, "the Faithful would not trouble to clean out the fortress (Vienna), or purify, improve,

and put it in repair." Therefore the Sultan had accepted the submission of the contemptible Germans, and left them in possession of their paity "fortress"!

Suleyman was blinding the eyes of the world with the blaze of his wealth and glory, and striving to make himself believe that he had actually accomplished all he had intended. He had not been beaten on the field of open battle; he had set his puppet on the Hungarian throne; he had devastated Austria; the markets of Stamboul and Asia were full of Christian slaves. With this knowledge he soothed his vanity, ignoring the fact that thirty thousand of his subjects rotted before Vienna, and that his dreams of European conquest had been shattered.

Behind the throne shone the spoils of war—silken and velvet pavilions, wrested from the Persians, the Arabs, the Egyptian memluks; costly tapestries, heavy with gold embroidery. At his feet were heaped the gifts and tributes of subject and allied princes. There were vests of Venetian velvet, golden goblets crusted with jewels from the courts of the Grand Moghul, ermine-lined kaftans from Erzeroum, carven jade from Cathay, silver Persian helmets with horse-hair plumes, turban-cloths, cunningly sewn with gems, from Egypt, curved Damascus blades of watered steel, matchlocks from Kabul worked richly in chased silver, breast-plates and shields of Indian steel, rare furs from Mongolia. The throne was flanked on either hand by a long rank of youthful slaves, made fast by golden collars to a single long silver chain. One file was composed of young Greek and Hungarian boys, the other of girls; all clad only in plumed head-pieces and jeweled ornaments intended to emphasize their nudity.

Eunuchs in flowing robes, their rotund bellies banded by cloth-of-gold sashes,

knelt and offered the royal guests sherbets in gemmed goblets, cooled with snow from the mountains of Asia Minor. The torches danced and flickered to the roars of the multitudes. Around the courses swept the horses, foam flying from their bits; wooden castles reeled and went up in flames as the Janizaries clashed in mock warfare. Officers passed among the shouting people, tossing showers of copper and silver coins amongst them. None hungered or thirsted in Stamboul that night except the miserable Caphar captives. The minds of the foreign envoys were numbed by the bursting sea of splendor, the thunder of imperial magnificence. About the vast arena stalked trained elephants, almost covered with housings of gold-worked leather, and from the jeweled towers on their backs, fanfares of trumpets vied with the roar of the throngs and the bellowing of lions. The tiers of the Hippodrome were a sea of faces, all turning toward the jeweled figure on the shining throne, while the thousands of tongues wildly thundered his acclaim.

As he impressed the Venetian envoys, Suleyman knew he impressed the world. In the blaze of his magnificence, men would forget that a handful of desperate Caphars behind rotting walls had closed his road to empire. Suleyman accepted a goblet of the forbidden wine, and spoke aside to the Grand Vizier, who stepped forth and lifted his arms.

"Oh, guests of my master, the Padishah forgets not the humblest in the hour of rejoicing. To the officers who led his hosts against the infidels, he has made rare gifts. Now he gives two hundred and forty thousand ducats to be distributed among the common soldiers, and likewise to each Janizary he gives a thousand aspers."

IN THE midst of the roar that went up, a eunuch knelt before the Grand Vizier, holding up a large round package, carefully bound and sealed. A folded piece of parchment, held shut by a red seal, accompanied it. The attention of the Sultan was attracted.

"Oh, friend, what has thou there?"

Ibrahim salaamed. "The rider of the Adrianople post delivered it, oh Lion of Islam. Apparently it is a gift of some sort from the Austrian dogs. Infidel riders, I understand, gave it into the hands of the border guard, with instructions to send it straightway to Stamboul."

"Open it," directed Suleyman, his interest roused. The eunuch salaamed to the floor, then began breaking the seals of the package. A scholarly slave opened the accompanying note and read the contents, written in a bold yet feminine hand:

To the Soldan Suleyman and his Wezir Ibrahim and to the hussy Roxelana we who sign

our names below send a gift in token of our immeasurable fondness and kind affection.

Sonya of Rogatino, and
Gottfried von Kalmbach.

Suleyman, who had started up at the name of his favorite, his features suddenly darkening with wrath, gave a choking cry, which was echoed by Ibrahim. The eunuch had torn the seals of the bale, disclosing what lay within. A pungent scent of herbs and preservative spices filled the air, and the object, slipping from the horrified eunuch's hands, tumbled among the heaps of presents at Suleyman's feet, offering a ghastly contrast to the gems, gold and velvet bales. The Sultan stared down at it and in that instant his shimmering pretense of triumph slipped from him; his glory turned to tinsel and dust. Ibrahim tore at his beard with a gurgling, strangling sound, purple with rage.

At the Sultan's feet, the features frozen in a death-mask of horror, lay the severed head of Mikhal Oglu, Vulture of the Grand Turk.

Five Merchants Who Met in a Tea-House

By FRANK OWEN

*A bizarre Chinese fantasy about five men whose thoughts gave beauty
to the wanton girl of their dreams*

THIS is the story of five merchants who met in a tea-house on the road to Canton. From various sections of China they had come, and their paths converged in the tea-house. They were not friends: they had never met until that auspicious occasion when

they paused at the house of Lum Lee to sip of the beverage that makes all men brothers.

Ling Yoong, who came from Peiping, was a jade master, well known throughout all the provinces. Where jade was concerned his word was law, and not in-

frequently he was called in by wealthy Manchus, war lords, and even far-off Indian potentates, to appraise odd bits of jade and nephrite carvings. Few there were in all of China to compare with him in choosing jewels or women. Although he was an expert in all jewels, most of his attention was given to jade, for jade like women is endless in variety; no two specimens are alike, and like women it is alluring, pleasant to the touch and comforting.

On this particular day when he arrived at the tea-house he was in a most amiable mood. He was fat and bland and smiling. The world was good. That trip had been very satisfactory. He had picked up many gorgeous jewels and knickknacks which he was carrying to the lady of his heart, a collection of snuff-boxes that was worth a fortune; for Mai-da, the lady of his dreams, was an art connoisseur, a collector of antiques, rich porcelains and jewels. What Ling Yoong did not know was that Mai-da found it very remunerative to be a collector. Many of her gifts she kept and displayed to advantage, but not a few of her presents found their way into the hands of a shrewd shopkeeper who dwelt on Lantern Street.

Never had Ling Yoong come across so lovely a collection of snuff-boxes as he now was carrying with him: porcelain snuff-boxes of great age, boxes of lacquer, malachite, bamboo, snaky-crystal, coral, and aventurin. And he also was taking to her jade seals, beautiful pendants of cloisonné enamel and a complete tea-set of eggshell porcelain decorated with famille rose enamel. No wonder that Ling Yoong was very happy as he breathed the sweet aroma of the tea.

Dien Lee, the second merchant, was handsome, young and fabulously wealthy. His face was like the full moon and his

nose was almost flat against his face. He had inherited his rug, silk and tapestry business from his father. From his father too he had inherited his love of women and silk. For fine silks are as soft and fragrant as the body of a beloved woman. Dien Lee traveled miles on end to secure bits of silk and rich tapestries of which he had heard legendary stories. He joyed to strip girls nude and then clothe them in silks as fragile as moonbeam mist and as brilliant as the sun at dawn. And it almost seemed as though the silk and the skin of the beloved woman blended and became one; for the love of a man can bring out the beauty in a woman. It is almost as though from his love she draws a divine light that makes her body glow. Now Dien Lee was returning to Canton with silks from the far north, the softest silks he had ever beheld or touched. And with them he intended to drape the gorgeous body of his lady.

Chu Kai was a philosopher and a dreamer, older than either Ling Yoong or Dien Lee. All his life he had devoted to the study and care of chrysanthemums. From the daisy the Chinese developed this lushest of all flowers, and it was the ambition of Chu Kai to develop it into something even more beautiful.

It was his wish that some day he could imbue a chrysanthemum with a soul, a flower that would love, that would sway toward him as he approached, or lift up its head for his kiss, a flower that would tremble at his embrace even as did that lovely lady in Canton toward whose home he was hastening. And he was carrying a gift for her, the rarest gift in the floral world, a perfectly blue chrysanthemum, the only one of its kind in the world; not an ordinary blue, but blue like the velvet sky of night in which the soft stars sleep. Perhaps some day he would be able to

raise a chrysanthemum as beautiful as the lady of his dreams.

Chu Chen was a business man. He had spent his life in counting-houses, along the various wharves of China, and his thoughts were in the various warehouses of the world. He was a rice king. It was his boast that at one time one quarter of all the people of China existed on his rice; but Chu Chen was a past master at exaggeration. Nevertheless he was wealthy. He considered rice the very blood of China. It represented life. He cared more for it than anything else beneath the sun except the lovely lady in Canton, the lady who was all his and now waited for him in her Cantonese garden.

Voong Wo, the last of the merchants, dealt in tea. He was older and more complacent than any of the others. He liked to sip tea and think of the Canton lady of his dreams. She gladdened the pictures which he imagined existed in the perfume. Now he was hastening to her with a gift of tea that was as precious as jewels, tea from Ming Shan Mountain in Western Szechuan, the rarest of all known teas, cultivated by Buddhist priests. For tea is the soul of life.

Now the tea-house of Lum Lee was called "The Tea-House of the Jasmine Gate," and merchants from far and near liked to stop and sip of the flower-scented tea for which it was famous. Lum Lee was a Tea-Master. His father before him had been a Tea-Master. For generations the family of Lum Lee had been Masters of the most elusive of all beverages. And when Lum Lee poured tea he made a perfect ritual of it. It must be served in cups of finest china, so delicate that they might have been fashioned from the petals of a flower. To bring out the best that is in tea it must be handled with reverence. Never would he

serve customers when there were harsh noises filtering into the shop. For tea is sensitive. It can only give of its best when it is serene. Tea is liquid poetry. It is music. It is the soul of China.

Everyone who entered the tea-house talked in hushed whispers. No man was ever served unless he was dressed in suitable attire. Lum Lee kept extra suits which he loaned to those whom he wished to make his guests. And the windows of the tea-house opened upon a garden. Through the room floated the mingled perfumes of peach blossoms, wisteria and sandalwood. Tea-drinking is a religion. To the man who has faith, tea gives much: dreams, contentment, rest.

On this day the tea-house was deserted except for the five merchants who were strangers to each other. They sat at separate tables and sipped the amber beverage. And then they were no longer strangers, for the aroma of the tea rose from all their cups until it mingled with the perfume of the room. Lee Lum noticed that they were beginning to nod to one another. Impulsively he did something which had never before been done in the history of his house. He invited them all to sit about a common table, a round table which was the pivot of the room.

"Tea makes all men brothers," he said as they eagerly complied with their host's suggestion. While he withdrew to bring new cups, they conversed in whispers with one another.

"I am Ling Yoong," said the first. "I am a jewel merchant. I have been on a long journey. Now I am returning to the woman I love, who dwells in Canton."

"I am Dien Lee," said the second, "a merchant in tapestry and rare silks. I too am returning to Canton to the woman I love."

"I am Chu Kai," said the third, "a

flower merchant. I specialize in chrysanthemums. Like the others, I am returning to Canton to the home of the mistress whom I adore."

"I am Chu Chen," said the fourth, "a rice merchant, and strange though it may seem, I too am on a love mission to Canton. My girl is of a beauty that no painter could portray."

"I am Voong Wo," said the fifth and last of the merchants. "It is fitting that I should pause at this house, for I deal in tea, tea of a hundred different flavors and countless different blends. But no tea has a flavor sweeter than the lips of her whom I worship. I am even now en route to her house in Canton."

Now Lum Lee had returned with the new tea. He placed a cup before each of the merchants.

"In truth," mused Chu Kai, "it seems that we are in a manner brothers even though we have only met this hour. For each of us is being drawn to Canton by the vibrations of love. And now we have paused to sip tea together. And by drinking this tea we become even closer. It is an invisible tie binding us together."

Then in silence they sipped their tea, while the perfume of wisteria and roses floated in from the garden and the wind sighed softly through the treetops. And the aroma from each cup swirled upward until it formed a golden spiral, a staircase down which a beloved woman walked.

And each of the merchants beheld the tea-vision, the fragrant dream of loveliness. And each merchant recognized the woman as the girl whom he loved above all other women. And now slowly she began to dance. She cast aside her thin draperies until she danced nude on the table before them, a glorious golden girl, with glowing slender body. Fragrance of wisteria, fragrance of tea, fragrance of

the body of that golden girl. On and on she danced until the tea grew cool and the aroma lessened. Then the vision faded, melted into the air, dissolved into the perfumed atmosphere of the tea-house. Nor did any of the merchants at the table explain to the others what he had seen.

For a few moments in a lifetime these men were brothers, held together by the alchemy of tea.

Now they separated. They had little to say, for each was lost in dreams and purple fancies.

And each took the road to Canton which he preferred, the road that would take him most quickly to the house of his lady.

TWO days later, the five merchants met again. This time they met before the gateway to the garden of Mai-da who was the favored one of Ling Voong, so naturally he was annoyed. Still he was a Chinaman and had learned to hide his true feelings behind a mask-like expression. But now there was no cordiality among the merchants. They lacked the tea of Lum Lee to make them brothers, to hold them together in a common bond. They gazed at each other askance, as one might peer at thieves. There was hatred in their eyes, whereas only a few days before there had been naught but dreams and brotherly love.

They hesitated awhile, each hoping that the others would depart. But as no such thing happened, at last reluctantly they passed through the Gate of Welcome like warriors returning from a lost battle. There was no lightness in their step. There was no friendliness. They were no longer brothers. They walked around the spirit screen, then into the spacious gardens of Mai-da, gardens in which were many Moon Bridges over a

running stream in which ducks and swans swam gracefully about. Among all the white beautiful birds there was one black swan. Each merchant noticed it and cursed. They imagined that it was an evil omen.

And now they beheld Mai-da coming down a flower path. Each merchant stepped forward. "Beloved!" he cried. But the ducks and swans were making such a clamor that she did not hear them. Nor did she even notice their approach. Her arms were held out to a young man who was just stepping out of a small boat at the tiny river's edge. The next moment she was in his arms.

The five merchants gazed upon the scene horrified. For of each merchant, Mai-da was the beloved woman, the woman whom he worshipped above all others. No wonder she was beautiful, magnificent to gaze upon, for each of the merchants had given of his best to her. She bloomed and became more gorgeous, fed on the worship of these men. The beauty of women is painted with love. The adoration of many people creates the soft tones and colors that bring out her perfection of grace and form.

Ling Yoong had always gazed upon her with eyes of enchantment. She was like a rare jewel. Her eyes sparkled like diamonds, her lips were rubies, her teeth were pearls, and her hands were pink coral. Now he saw her in the blackness of her duplicity. The fire died in her eyes, the glow of her lips faded, her teeth became less white, her hands lost their pink freshness. He was disenchanting. And he turned away.

Dien Lee had seen her body, silk-soft and glowing. He had loved to strip her nude that he might array her in fine silks. But now the silk-bloom had gone from her body. It would be sacrilege to array

her in these rare silks he had brought. Her body was ordinary. It was purchasable. It could be used by any man who could pay the price. His silks deserved a better mistress than Mai-da. And he turned away. For the first time his vision was clear. He could see her as she really was.

And Chu Kai the dreamer and philosopher gazed upon her sadly. He had always thought of her as a lovely poem. There was music in her voice. There was fragrance on her lips. But now the poetry was harsh. It lacked design. Gone was all rhythm and harmony. It held no allure for him. The music was stilled. Sadly he turned away.

Chu Chen had always loved the grace of Mai-da, the lovely manner in which she came toward him. She was like a dryad of the hills; her step was fairy magic, her laugh was music. But now he looked at her coldly. No longer did she have grace for him. When a woman shares her grace with all men it belongs to none. And Chu Chen turned away. Above all he was a business man. His business with Mai-da was done.

Then Voong Wo the tea merchant gazed upon her. Inasmuch as for years he had dealt in tea he was keenly sensitive to every change of mood. How he had loved to walk at night with Mai-da through the garden, his arm about her waist, his hand cupping the soft warm curve of her breast! And when she yielded to him he had imagined that something divine was happening to him. He was ennobled, transformed, transcended. Now he gazed at her with harsh eyes. There was really nothing extraordinary about her appearance. She was kissing the boatman in a rather vulgar manner. And Voong Wo, too, turned away.

Now once more the five merchants were on the road outside the garden of Mai-da's house.

"Let us return to the tea-house of Lum Lee," suggested Ling Yoong. "I feel as though I need the steadying influence of that divine beverage."

"A good idea," echoed Dien Lee.

"But," mused Chu Kai, "will the aroma of the tea be as sweet now that there is no beloved woman for us to dream about?"

"After all," declared Chu Chen, who was a clever, shrewd business man, "what is one woman more or less? Truly it has been well said by the old philosophers that to educate a woman is to educate a monkey. To this I wish to add that to love a woman seriously makes a man equally ape-like. Women are like melons, to be plucked and eaten when they are ripe. They should be enjoyed quickly ere they spoil, but if one proves to be tasteless or disappointing there are many more melons."

And Voong Wo, the fifth merchant, who had traded much in tea and therefore was steeped in its quaint philosophy, said, "After all, we haven't lost much. A single woman. Divided among the five of us there would hardly be enough for an evening's enjoyment. We have lost her. What matter? Better far had she been destroyed as a child. She had a mother and father who were too genial. Now on the credit side, what have we gained? Each of us has found four brothers. We five are held together by the spirit of the tea. I say as merchants we have all made a good bargain, one treacherous woman for four brothers."

And they continued onward together to the tea-house of Lum Lee.

Meanwhile in the garden of Mai-da's house, the remaining lover who had come by boat stood gazing at her, much perplexed. What had he ever seen in this girl?

There was no fire in her eyes. Her teeth were not pretty. Her form was not graceful. She walked in an ugly fashion. Her voice was harsh and no longer were her lips fragrant. He must have been drunk when he fell in love with this girl on the preceding night as his boat drifted down the river past her garden. Perhaps the moon had etherealized her form as she bathed nude at the river's edge. Under the moon the siren song she murmured had seemed sweetly plaintive. After all, he had enjoyed the nightly interlude. What matter that by day the girl was disappointing? And yet it was strange, she had seemed to be almost divine as she came walking down the path toward him. He must be growing prematurely old. He was no longer a good judge of women. As soon as he conveniently could, he made excuses and retired.

Mai-da did not mind his going, nor was she aware that five merchants had come to the garden and departed. She sighed softly. Perhaps Ling Yoong would soon be back with her. More jewels, more love. It was easy to put up with his embraces when he paid her so well.

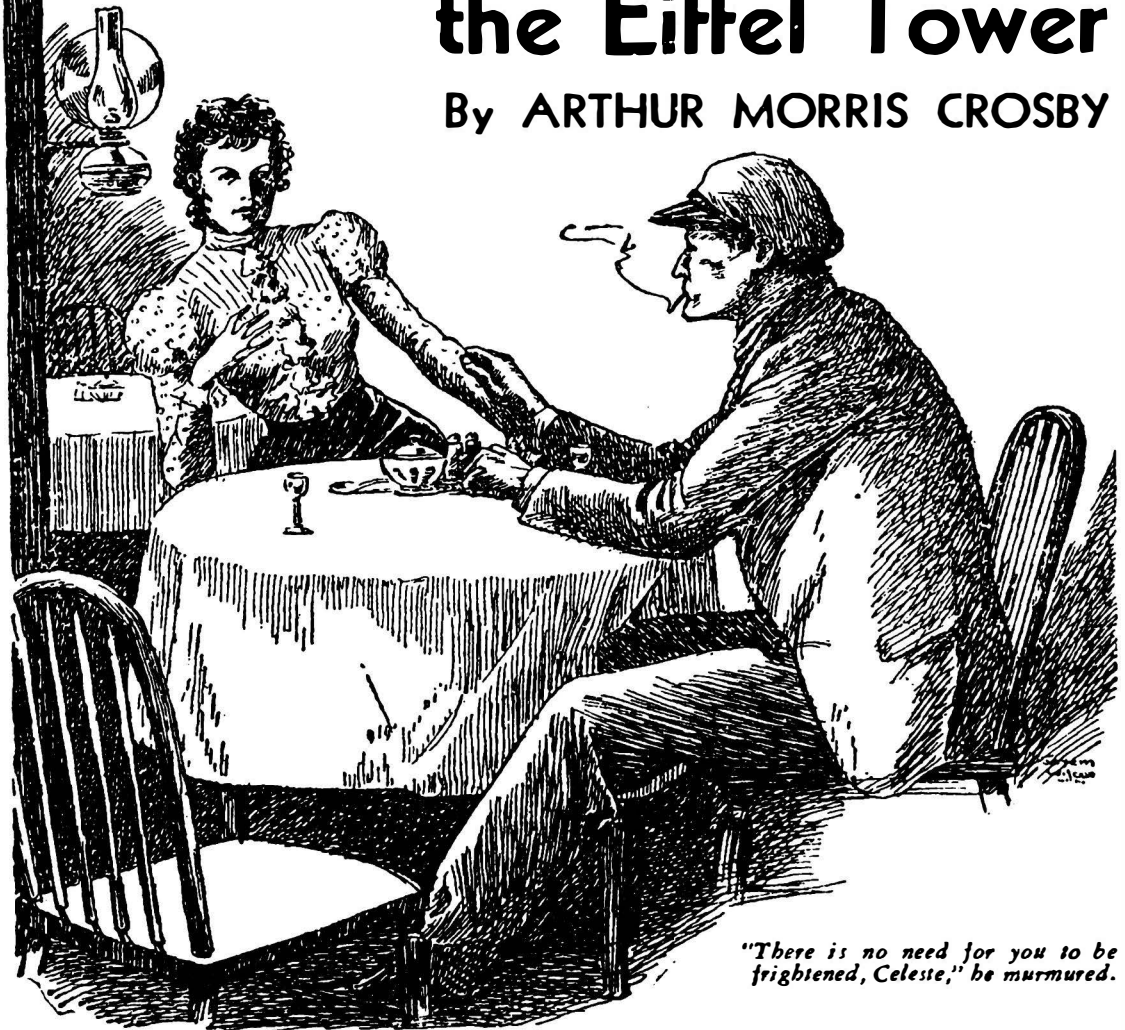
She smiled complacently. Nor was she aware of the sorry condition into which her beauty had fallen. Each of the merchants had withdrawn the attributes of loveliness with which he had endowed her and naught but wreckage remained.

Although Mai-da did not know it, it was time for all her men to choose another melon.



The Little Affair of the Eiffel Tower

By ARTHUR MORRIS CROSBY



"There is no need for you to be frightened, Celeste," he murmured.

Henri the Fox scorned to use the gross means of hired assassins, but his methods were just as effective—a tale of the Paris underworld

HENRI RENARD leaned his trim figure against the base of the Arc de Triomphe and reflected that it was of a certainty a glorious spring day; that, indeed, it was a perfect day for a murder.

Now, with some people, murder is a sordid sort of business, to be done only at night, or on gloomy, dismal days. Not so, however, with Monsieur Henri Renard. Had it not truly been said of him,

and that by none other than Monsieur le Prefet himself, that he was an artist, a connoisseur, an expert? Not for him to descend to such gross means as knives, or pistols, or hired assassins. Besides, what was there to gain by removing from one's path an undesirable, if one were not to be permitted to enjoy such hard-won surcease? *Peste!* There were little point in baking a cake if one could not eat it.

The sentiment pleased Henri.

He removed a cigarette from his lips and allowed himself a thoughtful smile, watching the cloud of smoke spiral up and up against the blue roof of the sky until a vagrant wind caught it and twisted it into nothingness. "Pouf!" said Henri to himself. "Just like that, or"—he snapped his fingers—"perhaps like this. At any rate, very sudden and—*mon Dieu!*—very complete."

He replaced the cigarette between his lips, letting it droop so that the glowing end produced a comfortable feeling of warmth at the point of the chin, which, in Henri's case, was very sharp and protruding. The day was in April, and though sunny, yet nourished a chill that had been bequeathed by a late winter. Any extraneous heat, however slight, was welcome.

He turned so that the rising sun (for the hour was that when fashionable Paris still lingers over its breakfast coffee and in consequence Monsieur Renard's business day was yet to begin) might warm his back, and thrust his long, sensitive fingers deep into the pockets of his blue breeches. Thus he remained, the picture of lazy grace, eyes half closed, his cigarette kept alive by a scarcely perceptible movement of his cheeks, for five minutes. At the end of that time, his cigarette had burned nearly to his nether lip. Henri stirred as a man might who has been dozing and cast an appraising glance down his narrow nose. Apparently satisfied that there was nothing to salvage, he shrugged his shoulders, opened his mouth, and the stump of cigarette fell to the pavement. Henri contemplated it a moment, then crushed it with his heel. "So," he muttered, "everything comes to an end, even the smallest of pleasures. It is a melancholy world."

He pried himself loose from the comfortable support of the massive stone

blocks and began to take a lively interest in the stream of life now beginning to pass under the arch. His quick glance fell upon a short, pompous figure of a man swinging along the sidewalk toward him, thumping the pavement with a cane, his overcoat and jacket open to the breeze. Across the bay-window of a stomach stretched a heavy gold chain. Henri smiled. "It is truly an invitation," he said; and sauntered toward the stranger.

Abreast of him, Henri suddenly twisted, with a sharp cry of pain, and lurched into the arms of the other, instinctively raised to receive him.

"Ah—pardon, *m'sieur!*" gasped Henri, wincing, and still holding fast to the shoulders of the short gentleman. "A thousand pardons! It is my ankle—this beast of a sidewalk——" He pointed to where the cement had cracked, leaving a raised edge.

The gentleman was solicitous.

With much puffing, he steadied Henri, who groaned and grunted in the most alarming manner, holding the gentleman quite fast, as in a lover's embrace.

"It is indeed reprehensible—the sidewalk," agreed the pompous man, recovering some of his pomposity and trying to free himself from Henri's embrace. "But your ankle—you should do something." With an effort he pushed Henri up straight and kept him away with a pudgy arm.

Henri's smile was a benediction. "It is only occasionally, *m'sieur*, that it so atrociously fails me. But then, such a mortification! I have seriously incommoded you—again, a thousand pardons." He touched his cap and hobbled off. Passing behind a parked cab, he hurried across the street, his ankle miraculously healed, and down a side-street. At the corner, he paused to glance affectionately at the gold watch and chain which he drew from

his pocket. "The gentleman," he mused, "has most excellent taste. Nor should I, perhaps, being so much in his debt, censure him for his abominable breeding in vulgarly displaying it. The War, alas! has changed so much." Shaking his head, he slipped the watch back into his pocket and strode rapidly along.

EMERGING on the Boulevard de Courcelles, he followed the crowd to the Place de Clichy, stopped to purchase a copy of *Le Temps* from a wounded veteran, and then passed into that labyrinth of streets and alleys that lies, dismal and forbidding, at the foot of Montmartre.

Arrived at length before the door of a delicatessen, he pushed it open and entered the smoky interior. An old crone, sitting at a counter, half concealed behind swaying strings of sausages, welcomed him with a grunt.

"*Sacré*," said Henri, holding his nose. "What an abominable odor of everything indecent! Where is your saint of a husband?"

Before the old woman could reply, dingy curtains at the back of the shop parted and a leonine figure emerged.

Henri greeted it with his unsurpassed smile.

"I have brought you, papa," he said jovially, "a little trinket, for which I will accept the truly insignificant sum of five thousand francs." He laid the watch and chain on the counter.

The old woman's eyes lighted with an avaricious gleam. The old man said nothing, but took up the watch in talon-like hands and minutely inspected it. Snapping the lids shut, he growled, "It is not without value—I will give you one thousand francs."

Henri's face darkened. "Old fool," he said in a low voice, "the watch and chain are worth not a sou less than ten thousand francs. You know better than to trifle

with me. The nose of the police is acute. It needs but to be given the scent."

The old man muttered ferociously into his thicket of beard. "It is nothing less than robbery," he lamented.

Henri shrugged. "You will not be disappointed," he observed. "I am not one of your worst customers, eh, *maman*?" He tweaked the old woman on the cheek. She grinned up at him with toothless gums. Meanwhile, slyly, the old fellow had reached for the jewelry.

Henri's quick eye forestalled him. He swept the watch into his pocket.

The old man's clumsy effort to get possession amused him. He threw back his head and laughed loudly. "Ah," he admonished, shaking his finger, "the lion is too slow for the fox, *mon ancien*. Had I not business of great importance on hand, I should find means of punishing that greediness. Come—five thousand francs! I have not the time to waste, bandying words with you."

Mumbling strange imprecations, the old man disappeared into the dim recesses of his shop, to reappear presently with a wallet. From this he thumbed out fifty one-hundred franc notes, Henri counting them aloud with him. Simultaneously they exchanged notes for watch and chain. Henri counted the notes again and stuffed them casually into a pocket of his trousers. At the door, he turned. "It interests me to wonder what you do with all your money, *mon papa*," he said pleasantly.

"It is no business of yours!" roared the old man. "Begone!" he made a fierce gesture toward a long, vicious-looking meat-knife. Henri laughed. With a graceful bow to the old hag, he beat a quick exit.

OUTSIDE he followed the dingy street, past grimy, leering houses, up the slope of Montmartre. There, in the very

shadow of the beautiful church which surmounts, as an angel of light the Valley of Darkness, this grisly and romantic eminence, he pushed his way between swinging doors into a gaudy café. The air was fragrant with an aroma compounded of coffee, cigarettes, beer, and cognac. Even at this still comparatively early hour, the place was nearly filled. Henri cast a rapid glance about him. "Ah, *les touristes*," he muttered under his breath, and puffed out his cheeks contemptuously.

He went to a far corner and sat down at a single table. He lit a cigarette and surveyed the scene. Mingled with the sight-seers was an occasional member of the artists' set, for whom Henri had almost as great disdain. He took a piece of paper from a pocket of his jacket and with a stub of a pencil wrote on it. Folding the paper, he wrote again. Then he strolled over to a table near by, where sat a pallid youth in a vivid green smock.

Henri tapped him on the shoulder. "Will you deliver this, *mon enfant*, at the address I have marked? It is only round the corner."

He put a gold piece, than which nothing is rarer in France since the War, in the youth's palm. The boy stammered in his astonishment. "It is my way of giving thanks to Our Good Lady," murmured Henri piously. The gold had been a part of the chimney-hoarding of that queer old Comtesse Gaillard, whose man-of-all-work Henri had once been and who had so suddenly deceased this life during an attack of ptomaine poisoning from eating canned peas. (So had said the doctors. And correctly. But they did not know, and Henri never saw fit to tell them, that he had instructed the old lady to boil the peas in the opened tin.) That chimney-hoarding Henri himself hoarded and resorted to only on festive occasions. So

now he folded the young man's limp fingers over the coin and added, "Hurry!"

Still dazed, the young man departed.

Henri sighed and returned to his table. "And I suppose," he mused, "the poor fellow really expects to become another Corot."

A waiter, smirking, shuffled to the table. "Two glasses of benedictine," said Henri, without locking up. When they came, he sat slightly bent forward, watching the door, his slender, pickpocket's fingers twirling one glass by its stem, round and round. . . .

As she paused in the doorway, it was plain to be seen for whom Henri waited. Tall she was, and willowy, with small, exact features and jet-black hair that matched her eyes. Watching her, Henri smiled and, if so fastidious a man could be guilty of so animalesque an act, almost it might be said that he licked his chops.

When the girl located him through the fog of tobacco smoke, she started and the powdered white of her cheeks seemed to grow a little more white. Steadying herself with an obvious effort, she walked slowly toward him.

Henri was already on his feet, bowing her with studied grace to a chair which he had moved over from an adjacent table. The girl slipped into it, rather than sat down, and regarded him with vague, troubled eyes, as he took the chair opposite.

"Céleste," murmured Henri, "you are more beautiful than when I went away." His gaze fell ardently on the perfect curve of her neck and throat. "One would most certainly believe that you were of the Ballet at the Opera, instead of furnishing entertainment to the ribald habitués of Pierre's. It is that which disturbs me."

"I didn't know that you had returned," she said in a low voice.

"No?"

Henri smiled, pushing one of the cordial glasses toward her. She took it mechanically, her dark eyes still intent on his lean features. Henri must have seen that she was in desperate fear; for he leaned forward and patted her hand. "There is no need for you to be frightened, Céleste, my angel," he murmured. "Should you not rather rejoice that your Henri is back?"

"They told me," she went on in a dull voice, "that you were in prison at Lyons—sentenced for ten years."

"It was, alas, too true. But surely, my dove, you could not expect your Henri to remain long in such provincial surroundings. *Ma foi!* It was not to be endured. Not with Paris calling—and you." He squeezed her hand and, for an instant, she averted her head. Then, with a quick movement, she faced him squarely. "Why have you sent for me?" she demanded. There was a flash of bravado in her manner.

"Because," he answered her evenly, over the rim of his glass, "I have heard stories, my dear, that have set me wondering; stories that have persuaded me that the memory of Henri Renard is less potent than his presence."

"You could not have expected me to become a nun," she said defiantly.

"A nun? But no, my sweet." Henri's tone was as smooth as the liqueur which passed so smoothly down his throat. "But no. Of a certainty one could not charge you with leanings toward the devout life. Yet, a measure of—what shall I say, my priceless one? Fidelity? No, that is perhaps too strong a word. Rather let us say loyalty. Yes, of loyalty to a memory. Because it can never be said of me, my beloved, that I treated you in any way ill—is it not so?" The sneer that twisted his narrow lips belied the lingering tenderness in his voice.

The girl shuddered. "No," she breathed, "I had nothing to complain of."

"And yet, so soon after my civil decease, you permit the company of that overgrown baboon of a Pierre's son!"

"How did you know?" the girl flung at him.

Henri's eyes became little slits. A bit of color tinged his sallow cheeks. "Ah," he whispered. "Then it is so. . . . I was not quite certain."

The girl perceived her blunder. She bit her lips, flinging her head back recklessly.

"Well, what of it?" she cried. "You had gone—for all I knew you were dead. He was kind—I was lonely. I am not made of stone, God knows." Her lip was quivering. Suddenly she flung her head down on her arms, on the table-top, and unuttered sobs shook her.

Renard watched her silently. A few persons at tables near by regarded the couple curiously a moment and then became interested again in whatever had interested them before. Scenes like this were not uncommon in Montmartre.

Henri took out a cigarette from a beautifully jewelled case and lit it, coolly releasing a huge cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. When a woman weeps, there is nothing to do but wait.

PRESENTLY, the spasmodic movement of the girl's shoulders ceased. She raised her head and looked at him with eyes red, but without a trace of a tear. "You are a beast," she said, pouting, and thrusting back her hair from her forehead.

"That may be," agreed Henri, pleasantly conscious of the subtle change in her attitude.

"Well, what are you going to do?" the girl demanded.

He spread out his palms in a gesture

of complaisance. "Invite your François to lunch."

She stared at him, incredulous.

He laughed at her expression of blank disbelief. The rows of even white teeth, which were his one vanity, gleamed even in that poor light.

"But why not?" he said. "Surely, do I not owe him a debt? I can see that he has taken good care of my Céleste—you were not so plump when I went away." He leaned over and pinched her arm.

"You can not mean him any good," she said, ignoring the act.

"Why should I wish him evil? Have I not said that I am in his debt?"

"You will not harm him?"

"*Peste!*" said Henri, chuckling. "That is worthy of a place in *Le Rire*. Do you know how much I weigh? Not over forty kilograms. And that baboon of yours—*ma foi!* he is a gorilla. He can not weigh less than a hundred. What could I do to him?"

"I do not know—I only know that you are a devil."

Henri's enormous good humor vented itself in a horse-laugh. "A devil, eh? First it's a beast, and now it's a devil." He called for two more glasses of benedictine, sprawling happily in his chair, hands in his pockets, his eyes bright and mocking. Beast and devil he undoubtedly was, although opinions sometimes differ in these matters. But that he was a handsome rascal, there was no denying; and Céleste smiled.

Henri smiled back and flashed the cigarette case at her.

"Would you like it, rose of my heart?" he queried. "I got it for you. It belonged to a *nouvelle riche* from Idaho. I met her at Cannes—in the Casino. Little pig—how she squealed when I grabbed it from her!" He shoved the bauble across the table.

Céleste eyed it. A new gleam came into her eyes, as she turned it over and over.

"It is a pretty trifle," added Henri, airily. "It will go well with the wrist-watch I have selected for you at Cartier's."

"Cartier's!" The girl looked at him hungrily, her cheeks flushed.

"But yes, my angel. Your baboon has, after all, only a jungle taste." He pointed to a cheap watch held to her slender wrist by a tawdry bit of ribbon. "Could I endure that my Céleste's charms should be so outraged? It is not to be thought of! The watch I mention," he blithely lied, "I saw today in the window. I immediately priced it and left a deposit of a thousand francs as an option. I desired time to look about; but I confess that I have not found a better, nor one so nearly matching my Céleste's beauty."

The girl's face was radiant. With feline contentment, she curved her lithe body toward him. It could never be said of Henri Renard that he did not know his women. He stroked her white arm; then, with a swift movement, leaned forward and kissed her on the lips.

She pulled away. A shadow crossed her face. "You do not blame me?" she asked anxiously.

"My angel—I could not blame you did you consort with the Devil himself. Beauty like yours is above the censure of earth-born mortals."

She smiled at his extravagance, as she had always—ever since the day when he had flung, one by one, all his apprentice's paintings into the charcoal burner and had moved his belongings, such as they were, to her cozy two-room apartment overlooking the twin towers of Notre Dame. Art for him, from that time on, had meant simply skill in extracting purses from the pockets of their owners

and keeping out of the clutches of the police. That he had failed in the one affair at Lyons was due not to any remissness on his part, but to an ironic fate which had put a banana peel under his foot at the precise moment when he was about to dissolve into the crowd. The opulent burgher who had unwittingly delivered up his watch had at the same instant discovered his loss—the rest had followed as a simple matter of course.

"But François——" she persisted. "After all, he was good to me in his way."

Henri waved aside the suggestion contained in her tone. The gesture was one of a superb magnanimity, of Christian forbearance and tolerance.

Céleste smiled and coiled herself, more completely cat-like.

Henri, watching her with a quicker beating of his heart, realized that, like a cat, she was entirely faithless. A saucer of milk—to continue the metaphor—and she was entirely happy.

He sighed and shrugged his shoulders. There were times, of which this was one, when he considered how pleasant it would be to have a girl who was absolutely dependable. But he thrust this weakness from him. *Peste!* Were not such women invariably dull and uninteresting? And where would he find such beauty as Céleste's?

He beckoned to the waiter and gave him money to cover the bill and a generous *pourboire*. Then he patted Céleste's hand and helped her out of her seat. "It is time," he murmured, pulling her arm through his, "that I go to meet that baboon of a François—he will soon be coming from work. And you, my angel—you will wait for me after your first dance at Pierre's? I have a presentiment of a sort that Pierre will not want you to dance

tonight." He squeezed her arm and she flashed him a look that made him dizzy.

On the sidewalk, outside the café, he left her, turning at the corner to blow her a kiss and receive one in return. A raw-boned English woman, just dismounted from a sight-seeing bus, exclaimed, "How charming—what atmosphere!" and gazed at him through a lorgnette. Henri made her a grimace under the vizor of his cap and reflected that, at another time, he might have inspected the contents of her bulging handbag. . . .

ON THE way down the slopes of Montmartre, he stopped at a pawnshop and asked the broker to show him ladies' wrist-watches. "And none of your tricks," he added, scowling.

"But no," protested the proprietor with dignity. He was a wizened, misshapen creature and his attempt at dignity was so comical that it put Henri immediately in good humor.

After some haggling, he selected a dainty Swiss creation with a chased platinum case that might have belonged to some comtesse impoverished by the War, priced as a special concession at fifteen hundred francs. Henri counted out the notes and the broker fitted a ribbon to the watch and handed it over.

"And now, *mon brave*," said Henri, "I desire a box of Monsieur Cartier's to hold fittingly this treasure."

The pawnbroker smiled indulgently. "A fresh lot came in this morning," he said. Grunting with the effort of reaching up on a shelf, he produced a plush-lined case bearing the counterfeit device of the famous jeweller in the Rue de la Paix. The watch lay resplendent in its chaste nest. Henri was satisfied. Humming a gay tune of the gutters, he swung on down toward the river.

Arrived at length at the Pont D'Iéna, he leaned on the balustrade and gazed at the spidery beams and spans of the Eiffel Tower.

A stout citizen edged close to him. "It is to me," the stranger confided, "ever a mystery how those fellows can keep their balance." He pointed to several black objects walking along the steel beams. "Every day since they have started to make repairs on the Tower, I have come here to watch. *Ma foi!* How they crawl about! It gives one the vertigo merely to watch them." The plump stranger shivered.

Henri regarded the little citizen amusedly. The tail of his coat bulged with significance, and Henri, one eye cocked at the top of the Tower, swayed toward the fat rump. Then he caught himself up sharply—he could not afford now to have an accident. "You have the great right," he agreed pleasantly, sighing with extreme reluctance at having to pass up so golden an opportunity. "But—*chacun à son gout.*" He waved his hand and crossed out of sight behind a string of market wagons homeward-bound.

HE SWUNG along the embankment until he reached the great sprawling base of the Eiffel Tower. Here he paused and gazed up into the maze of steel. Workmen were descending; the hour was nearly twelve. As they reached the ground, a ridiculously tiny whistle blew from nowhere in particular and the men, laughing and gesticulating, hurried toward a work-shanty that lay in the mottled shadows of the amazing structure. One of them topped his fellows as the Tower itself tops Paris. To him Henri stepped with quick silence, and tapped him on the shoulder. The giant, a youth of some twenty-five summers and

a head of thick, straw-colored hair, turned and his jaw fell. "I—I thought," he stammered and broke off, his face a brick red, though whether from embarrassment or anger, Henri could not then precisely determine.

"You thought," Henri finished for him, flashing all his teeth in the sunlight, "that I was safe at Lyons for at least ten years. . . . But you should know, my friend, that I never stay where I am not genuinely welcome. It is inexpressibly bad manners."

The young giant hitched about awkwardly. Henri Renard's French—the polite French of the boulevardiers—disturbed him. "What do you want of me?" he growled, rolling down the sleeves of his shirt over arms that were bigger than Henri's thighs. The splendid muscles played back and forth like the sinews of a percheron.

The gesture was not lost on Henri, but he pretended not to notice it.

"François," he said affably, "I have come to take you to lunch and to thank you."

The young giant threw back his head and his roaring laughter echoed among the girders.

"That's good!" he cried. (Henri winced at the gross accent of the slums.) "That's good! By Christ! I'll accept any man's invitation to lunch and ask no questions. But what have you to thank me for?" He glowered down at Henri, diminutive in comparison.

"Why"—Henri spread his palms—"for taking such good care of Céleste—what else?"

"Look here!" cried François, gripping Henri by the arm so that it hurt—Renard carried the black bruise for days—"Be careful what you say! You deserted her—I was her friend. . . . Have a care!"

The flush was most certainly of anger

now, thought Henri, and added to himself, "One may do so much with an inflammable nature." Aloud, he said, "Pouf! my François—do I not know? It is a debt of gratitude I owe you—I acknowledge it freely. I would repay it."

The giant eyed him dubiously. "Céleste won't go back to you," he said defiantly. "She told me she was through with you, dead or alive."

Henri shrugged. "Dead—yes, of a certainty. But alive"—he grimaced—"well, one can not blame her . . . and you have such an engaging personality."

"Eh?" grunted François, struggling to stretch a jacket over his taurine shoulders.

Henri laughed merrily.

"Look you, M'sieur Renard," rumbled François menacingly, "I will go with you to lunch, because I want to talk, away from the ears and eyes of these comrades"—he nodded toward his fellow-workmen who were clustered in a group curiously watching the oddly assorted couple—"but I don't like your laugh."

"The intensity of your dislikes is equalled only by your frankness in expressing them," replied Henri cordially. "Unfortunately, it is my nature to be gay—and the gay man necessarily laughs. I can not change my nature."

He took François by the arm and they walked along the river-edge until they came to one of those tiny cafés that adorn the sidewalks of Paris. Two tables stood on the sidewalk under a huge green umbrella much faded by unrelieved exposure to sun and rain. They sat down at one of the tables and the proprietor, a swarthy Gascon, attended upon them. Henri ordered chicken livers with truffles, and a bottle of green chartreuse.

FOR several minutes they ate in silence. Henri, watching his companion through the fringes of his eyelashes, could see that his brain was ponderously work-

ing on his problem. At length the giant laid down his knife—his fork he had not touched—and scowled.

"I have decided," he said heavily, fumbling for the right words, "that I can't let you see Céleste. You are through—it is final."

The sudden wave of wrath that swept him at the words, Henri dissembled under the most naïve of smiles. He raised his hands and let them drop in a gesture of compliance. "I must indeed," he said, "have forfeited all my claims. Besides, how could Henri Renard hope to compete with François Martaud, the champion strong man of Mo'martre? I am resigned." He smiled enigmatically into his glass.

"I don't trust you," went on François. "You must leave Paris."

"Even that can be arranged," said Henri urbanely.

The giant seemed baffled by this ready acquiescence. "You must leave Paris at once," he pursued doggedly.

"Tut," chided Henri, with some impatience. "Do not distress yourself. Have I not seen how the wind blows? When a lady's ardor cools, it is less acceptable than yesterday's soup. I come not to bury Cæsar—but, faugh! why do I cast pearls? It disturbs me that I must leave Céleste in your tender care . . . but not in the sense you think."

François looked at him with a frown. "What do you mean?"

"Only this," said Henri coolly: "It is a perilous trade you ply—if I go away and, ah, anything happens to you, *mon brave*, what becomes then of the gentle Céleste?"

"Bah!" said François. He tossed off his glass and reached for the bottle. "Nothing can happen to me," he boasted. "There isn't a cat in all Paris more sure-footed."

"Even cats fall—sometimes. And here is a paragraph concerning a gentleman of your profession, doubtless also of experience, who fell from one of the Loire bridges." Henri tapped his newspaper. "What a splash he must have made!"

"*Diab!e!* Are you trying to frighten me?"

Henri refilled the cordial glasses and drew a long sip before replying.

"Frighten you?" he repeated. "No. But I can not escape anxiety—with Céleste's interests so much at stake. . . . Tell me," he said suddenly, "don't you ever consider your danger? Haven't you ever reflected, as you walk your airy beams, what one single misstep can mean?"

"No!" cried François.

"Have you never experienced fear?"

"Fear!" burst out François, with a strident laugh. "I don't know the word!"

A smile flickered across Henri's face. "But this fear," he pursued evenly, "it is not the ordinary fear that you and I have sometimes known. It is something far different. It is like the terror which sometimes comes in the blackness of night—when you suddenly awake seized with a nameless dread."

"I say, you can't frighten me!" cried François, with a searing oath.

"No, no, my friend," said Henri somberly, "it is not my intention. But I can't help thinking—it is a frightful thing to fall from a great height. And I have read that, once the structural-steel worker knows fear, real fear, he is doomed . . . doomed, I say."

The word was like the sudden thrust of a knife. It came, sharp, tense, malignant, from Henri's half-closed lips. It seemed to cut into the mind and soul of the young giant opposite him. For François sat there staring, staring with eyes

red and watery, eyes in which gleamed for the first time a look of horror.

Henri watched him an instant. Then he leaned forward, and when he spoke, his words were sharp, as though plucked from a violin string.

"You fool!" he said, his voice low and tense. "Can you not see the danger that lurks at every step? Ah, I can see you walking your high beams! Of a sudden, you become conscious of your height. You are afraid to look down. But you can not help yourself! Something grips you, like a cold hand at your throat. You begin to tremble violently. A great nausea seizes you. If only you could hold on to something for an instant—until this spell passes! But there is nothing—nothing—only that slender walk at your feet. Ah, now truly do you know fear—*fear*, I say! The sweat pours out all over you! You become suddenly dizzy! The Tower reels! You sway—you stagger—you clutch frantically at the air! . . . And—ah——"

Henri let his glass, which he had been gradually pushing to the edge of the table, fall to the pavement. The silvery tinkle, as it shattered into a thousand pieces, struck the silence of the little café like the iron clanging of the gates of Death.

Something must have snapped in the brain of the giant. He was on his feet, his face blanched, his huge form shaking.

"You—you hell-hound!" he cried. A torrent of unspeakable words poured from his twitching lips. He flung his glass at Henri's head and staggered away in the direction of the Tower. Henri shrugged and with his delicate fingers flicked away the few drops which he had been unable to dodge.

The proprietor appeared.

"Your friend," he said, his voluble hands expressing his surprize. "I saw him leave—he is perhaps ill?"

"No," said Henri, his face all smiles

again, "my friend is not ill. He is very much frightened. I told him a story—he is such a child—and it frightened him. He has too vivid an imagination. Also, I fear, he is a little bit drunk. I must apologize for his clumsiness in knocking off the glasses."

"Ah, the chartreuse," said the Gascon proudly, "it is strong. The glasses—no matter." With his foot he scraped the shattered remnants under the table.

"It is delicious," breathed Henri, his eyes fixed dreamily on the clustered girders of the Tower, where already black objects were crawling like ants. "It is nectar—you will please to bring me a litre. I shall remain here for a while."

"A litre!" The proprietor stared spell-bound in admiration and disbelief. Then, rolling his eyes and shaking his head, he disappeared within the darkness of his shop, to reappear presently with a bottle, from which he carefully wiped away the dust of ages, and a fresh glass. "My son," he said, placing bottle and glass tenderly on the table in front of Henri, "if you drink all of this——"

"*When* I have drunk all of this," corrected Henri, "I shall feel like Lohengrin—but perhaps you do not keep up on the Opera."

"No, no—I have no time for such vanities."

"It is a pity," said Henri, narrowly watching the translucent liquid as it flowed smoothly into the glass. "The Opera is an education." He twisted the cork into the bottle and set it upon the table. "My friend," he smiled at the proprietor, "I should like to be left alone—to my meditations."

"But, of course!" The proprietor withdrew, bowing and scratching his head. From time to time he peered out through the narrow door at this odd customer. Henri continued to sit at the little table, sipping his chartreuse and gazing, in that dreamy way, at the Eiffel Tower. . . .

THE afternoon wore on; the shadows lengthened. Still he sat there.

Suddenly he stiffened to attention! His dark eyes flashed. His lips parted. . . .

Down the breeze had come a harsh cry—a cry of terror. There was a commotion at the foot of the Tower. Men went running by.

The little Gascon himself dashed up, hatless and breathless, a market-basket, swaying ludicrously on his arm, threatening to strew the sidewalk with onions and artichokes.

"I was on my way back from the provisioner's," he gasped; and it occurred to Henri to wonder why he had not seen him go. "It is your friend—the big young man who was here. . . . He fell from the second landing—my God, such a sight!" The little proprietor was trembling all over.

Henri drained the last drop of chartreuse.

"It is the will of God," he said piously. "We must bear these shocks with fortitude." He wiped his lips with a dainty linen handkerchief. He flung a fistful of notes on the table. "Take it all, my good man," he said with a flourish. "Lohengrin"—and looking at him, one would not have suspected the blasphemy—"Lohengrin goes now to greet Elsa!"



Passport to the Desert

By G. G. PENDARVES

Algeria—a story of intrigue and a perilous adventure involving an American girl and an Arab bandit and slave-dealer

1. *The Turquoise Ring*

JACK DEANE adjusted his field-glasses and looked down the gloomy gorge of El Fumm. It was a desolate haunted place. Towering granite walls shut out the sky.

"Good Lord!" He stared into the depths below at a red-brown burnoose caught among the rocks. "It's a man—dead, or badly stunned."

With the eye of an expert climber he examined the narrow ledge winding across the cliff-face, then cautiously lowered himself into the chasm, creeping by slow zigzag degrees to the fallen man.

"Ugly-looking customer! Desert thief! I'll bet he lost that eye putting up a good fight." A trickle of blood oozed from beneath the Arab's *chechia*; he hung limply across the rock, his face gray, his mouth open. Jack pulled out his flask and lifted the wounded man's head.

The Arab opened his fierce bright eye.

"It was a sharp stone, *billah*, that caught my head," he explained. "To thee, *effendi*, I owe my life. By this Gorge of Death, never shall One-Eye forget thy deed."

To divert the stream of gratitude, Jack held out the brandy flask. "Better keep this. You may need it."

The long difficult climb to the ledge above safely accomplished, One-Eye took elaborate farewell.

"May Allah have thee in his keeping!" The Arab drew a ring from his finger and held it out to Jack. "Take this in proof of gratitude, *effendi*! It is my *wasm*—the tribal mark of the Zendas.

Now hast thou a passport to the desert better than a two-edged sword."

In token of love and fealty he touched Jack's hand to breast, lips, and forehead, and, turning, walked slowly away through the gloomy gorge.

Left alone, Jack looked curiously at his gift. The ring was of wrought silver in which a turquoise was set with strange effect. Like a clear blue eye, the stone seemed to return Jack's gaze. "One-Eye's *wasm*, eh! And very fitting, too—nearly as remarkable as the man himself!"

2. *A Secret Enemy*

DRIVING slowly through the crowded streets of Zilfi one afternoon, Jack had an uneasy premonition that something evil was close at hand. Frequent narrow escapes had bred in him a sort of sixth sense of late. Some one was deliberately trying to kill him. He had made an enemy—a secret, persistent, unrelenting enemy. The whole thing was inexplicable to him, for his friendly encounter with One-Eye five years ago had proved a good omen. Ever since, he had lived on the best of terms with the Arabs, and the recent attacks on his life seemed unaccountable.

That little warning bell in his consciousness saved him. He twisted like an eel as the bearded *marabout* sprang. The gleaming blade only ripped his coat-sleeve in its downward thrust.

The old man was off through the crowd like a minnow in a pool. Across the crowded *souk* Jack followed, but was delayed by an Arab with an enormous



"A semi-nude figure emerged from the cave, making for the intruders with curses and unearthly yells."

bunch of bananas, and lost sight of the *marabout*. He returned to his car and drove off hot and angry, for these affairs were becoming a serious nuisance. He recalled one after another, as he drove on in the golden sunshine and purple shadows of the afternoon.

There was the spider—the deadly *Galeodes arachnida*. He had waked one night to see a dark figure jump off his balcony, and brilliant moonlight had revealed the spider running over his sheet. The affair of the boulder had been a nasty one, too. Placed so ingeniously at the corner of the sea-road, it had almost sent his car crashing a thousand feet to the rocks below.

This last attempt in the open street showed that his secret enemy was losing patience. He could think of but one man who might conceivably be planning his death so deliberately—Omar Ben Saif.

Leaving the car at a garage, he made his way down to the sea-road, and found Linda, his fiancée, already at their trysting-place. Sitting together on the rocks

by the dazzling sea, Jack explained what had delayed him.

"I can't figure it out at all," he went on. "The only one I know who might have a reason for getting me out of the way is Ben Saif. I shall be twenty-six next week, and am entitled then to be made a full partner with my brother, Fenton, in the firm of Deane & Son. He seems anxious enough to take me in with him, but I'm doubtful if that rascally Ben Saif will like it—and he sends the bulk of our cargoes. It's my belief that he's using our ships for private enterprises of his own."

"Yet your brother trusts him."

"In some ways I understand the Arabs better than Fenton does. He was a thorough-going American boy when dad first settled in Zilfi, and built up the shipping business. But I was born out here. True, I went home for my education, but I've lived in Algeria all the rest of the time. I flatter myself that I know the people."

"Mother thinks you are much too friendly with them. She was complaining

about it to Fenton after we'd been sight-seeing with you. Said she disliked going about Zilfi with you, because the Arabs came up and talked as if they were boys of your own class at Harvard. Poor mother, she's terrified of them."

"Mrs. Webb prefers Fenton to me as a future son-in-law. He is her ideal of a steady, industrious, wealthy man."

"She's got another grudge against you now."

"What's that?"

"The ring One-Eye gave you! It's a pity she heard that story about it. She's all upset over your having such a notorious bandit for a friend."

"Hardly a friend!" Jack laughed. "He wouldn't know me from Adam if we met now. I had a mustache five years ago, and I was wearing sun-goggles—not to speak of a bad heat-rash. Anyhow, you may be sure I'll not be the one to claim friendship. He's the biggest rogue in the Barbary States."

"I wish we could have the luck to meet One-Eye when we go to El Fumm tomorrow. It would be thrilling to say I'd met such a famous character."

"Not a chance! The French are hot on his trail after that last hold-up of his in the desert. He won't come within a hundred miles of Zilfi now. Much more likely to meet some of Ben Saif's ruffians at El Fumm; that's the reason I objected to having a picnic there. I don't see why Fenton insisted on it."

"He wanted to please me. I'm terribly anxious to see the gorge. Aren't you exaggerating the danger? El Fumm's only a few hours' ride from Zilfi. Why don't you want us to go?"

"Don't want *you* to go," he corrected. "You wouldn't guess the intrigue and plotting out here in Algeria beneath the surface of apparent order. Slavery's always existed in this country, and the Arabs can't see any moral reason for its

suppression. It goes on under the noses of the French. Quietly and secretly—just like bootlegging at home. It never stops."

"But where does El Fumm come in? Is it being used as a slave route? Oh"—Linda drew a deep breath of enlightenment—"you mean Ben Saif uses it—that he's a slave-dealer?"

"There's no proof yet, but he's under suspicion. The government can't afford to make mistakes."

"It's strange your brother is so indifferent to Ben Saif's reputation."

"Fenton finds it convenient to shut his eyes and ears. He won't listen to me. Pretends to think what I hear in the *souks* is just rumor and gossip. He and Ben Saif are hand in glove. Fenton makes no attempt to hide their intimacy. So far the government hasn't interfered. But Ben Saif is being watched, I don't believe Fenton realizes how closely."

Linda pondered. "I see. And, of course, as soon as you're a partner in the firm, you'll be able to do something about it."

"Yes, if they don't wreck the firm's reputation entirely before I get into it."

"Even if Ben Saif is all you suspect, he wouldn't dare to interfere with us at El Fumm, though."

"You might be in serious danger. It wouldn't be the first time a girl's been carried off in these mountains. El Fumm's a desolate spot. You'd disappear before we knew what hit us."

"Jack! They wouldn't steal a white girl like that! Ben Saif could never get away with such a ghastly outrage!"

"Dear, you don't begin to understand the subtle game that slave-dealers play out here. It's the hardest thing in the world to pin anything on to them. Ben Saif's cutthroats would rather die than breathe a word against him. In Algeria, a traitor's fate is—horrible!"

"You don't think——" Linda hesi-

tated, her eyes troubled. "Fenton's acting very strangely. I wonder if he——" She broke off abruptly, and got to her feet. "It's nothing—just a foolish idea! I'm so anxious about you, that's all. But we really can't back out of the expedition now. Everything's arranged. Mother's all set for El Fumm. Nothing will put her off now."

"I suppose not," agreed Jack unhappily, as they left the sea and turned to walk back to Zilfi.

3. *The Affair of the Orange*

THROUGH the Bab-el-Ghrabi, Gate of the West, they passed into the white-walled town, and, by winding streets, reached the market-place.

Ochered, crumbling walls of ancient buildings enclosing the square were brilliant with sun and opalescent shadows—blue, dusky purple, and gold-flecked green, they quivered beneath balconies and outthrust tilings, under arched doorways, and among the baskets and pyramids of fruit before the gaudy booths.

"What gorgeous color!" Linda was enchanted.

Across the *souk*, in the shadow of an archway, a little fruit-seller in black *gandourah* and dingy turban smiled ingratiatingly, beside a red-gold pyramid of mandarin oranges. Linda stopped and took one from him. He showed all his teeth in a yet broader grin, pressed another orange into Jack's hand, and spoke a few words in Arabic.

Jack peeled his fruit carelessly, absorbed in watching Linda. His mind was full of plans. Next week he would be a partner in the firm of Deane & Son. He and Linda would be married. . . .

The black-clad fruit-seller got to his feet in one swift movement, observing Jack narrowly; the whites of his eyes gleamed as he furtively withdrew and

melted into the darkness of the narrow lane beyond the archway.

Preoccupied, Jack broke off a quarter of the orange he was absent-mindedly peeling. His eyes were fixed on the fruit, but for a moment what they saw did not register in his brain. Then his absent gaze focused sharply.

The flies!

For a paralyzed second he watched them drop off, or fall dead within the hollow cut of the partly broken skin, standing up like tulip petals about the fruit.

"Linda!" He snatched at the remaining quarter of her orange.

Watching with eyes full of horror and apprehension, he saw flies hover and sip. His breath almost stopped, then came in a gasp of relief. Thank God, it was all right! Only from *his* orange the flies fell dead—poisoned! On Linda's orange they sipped, and crawled, and sipped again, unharmed.

"I thought they'd got you, too!"

"What was it, Jack? Darling, don't look at me like that! I don't understand."

"Poison! My orange was poisoned—something deadly. That fruit-seller——" He glanced round and discovered that the vender had vanished. "Where'd the little rat go? No matter, I'd never have caught him. Let's get home out of this."

She clung to him, thoroughly unnerved, the bright glory of the day suddenly darkened by creeping fear. "Jack, this is all too horrible! You can't go on from day to day, never knowing when or how they'll strike!" She shuddered, recalling the black flies speckling the dust as they fell from the poisoned orange. "I ought to tell you that—you may have guessed it, anyhow!"

He looked at her in silence, waiting.

"I'm afraid you'll be angry that I sus-

pect him." She hesitated. "It's Fenton! He wants to marry me. He wouldn't accept my refusal. I'm afraid of him."

"You—afraid?"

"Yes, yes! But that's not all. Jack, he's jealous of you. Oh, I know, I've seen his face—his eyes!"

"Why, Linda! You must put the brake on now and then. You're not trying to tell me that Fenton's out for my blood?"

"Oh, I know it sounds absurd to you. But I have the feeling that his jealousy is somehow connected with all the rest . . . with your partnership and his business with Ben Saif! Perhaps Fenton is not so ignorant of Ben Saif's secrets; perhaps he's not merely a catspaw!"

4. *In the Hold of the S. S. Pearl*

JACK guided his horse carefully, for the Empty Land was rough going. Here and there, over the dun levels, Zilfi and other small towns lay like scattered beads, their domes and white walls twinkling in the sun.

He was making for the little port of Biodh, where he expected to find Deane & Son's newest ship, the *S. S. Pearl*, in harbor. To his surprize, only a few fishing-boats rocked gently alongside the quay. He rode on to the cliffs, and saw the *Pearl* standing well out to sea, about a mile up the coast.

He was puzzled. It was unusual for their ships to leave the quay until the last possible minute—hours, sometimes days after the scheduled time. Native exporters made no effort to comply with shipping rules and regulations. They regarded the white *effendi's* passion for fixed hours as inexplicable, even impious. A ship could sail only when Allah willed. How useless therefore to strive against his decrees!

So they travelled across the Empty Land with their laden camels, bringing cargoes of fruit, wine, olive oil and cork

down to the little harbor. If no ship was there they made camp, and smoked, and dreamed away long idle days until another ship arrived.

Yet the *Pearl* lay anchored well out to sea a good twelve hours before she was due to sail.

Suddenly a launch drew out from an inlet a mile or two up the coast, and headed directly for the anchored ship.

He frowned. "Fenton's launch! Now what the devil——?"

He watched the launch cut across the sea—pink as cherry-blossom in the rising sun—and run in against the *Pearl's* star-board side, which was hidden from his sight. In a few minutes it streaked back to the coast again.

"I'm going on board if I have to swim out there," he vowed, dismounting, and giving his reins to the servant. "Wait here for me," he ordered, and tramped off with long swinging strides down to the harbor.

Pierre, harbor-master, was vehement in answer to Jack's inquiries. Recently arrived in Algeria, the young Frenchman was full of homesick contempt for everything in the country.

"No, *M'sieur!*" Pierre's voice squeaked with indignation. "I was not informed why the *Pearl* put out to sea before her time. The good God alone knows why people do things in this country!" The little sailor rolled despairing eyes skyward.

"I want you to row me out to the *Pearl*."

Pierre chose the least clumsy of the fishing-boats moored in the harbor, and began to pull toward the distant ship.

"**A**HOY there!" Jack sent out a stentorian hail as they drew near the *Pearl*.

A turbaned head was thrust over the side, then vanished hastily.

Jack admonished Pierre in a low voice. "Get up a row of some sort with the captain. Say anything, do anything to keep him off my track. Half an hour alone on that ship is what I want."

"It will be a pleasure, *M'sieur!* For long I have desired to insult that pig of an Arab captain."

The little Frenchman carried out orders to the letter, goading the captain to fling a cup of coffee across the chartroom table. During the profane and noisy duet that ensued, Jack escaped unnoticed, and made straight for the ship's hold.

No one stopped him. Those of the crew he met saluted indifferently. The affairs of the white *effendi* were nothing to them. He went down a ladder into the hold.

Reek of tar, rope, and sacking mingled with spicier odors as he stood for a moment at the foot of the ladder. He struck a match and moved slowly forward among the heterogeneous cargo. Skirting a damp sticky mound of date-sacks, he came to a sudden pause, staring. . . .

Although he had feared and expected to see it, the thing appalled him. The match went out between his fingers. He lighted another hastily, the small action serving to steady him, and looked again at the young Arab girls huddled up in a narrow space before him. They drew their *haiks* across their faces as they confronted him.

Slaves!

His questions elicited very meager information. He gathered that the launch had brought them to the ship at different times during the past night; obviously there were more of them than could have been carried on the single trip he had seen. They had come a journey of many moons from desert oases in the south. They did not know who had brought them, or where they were going. Un-

blinkingly their dark eyes regarded him from between the folds of their veils.

"It is written," they echoed with the fatalism of the East.

Reaching the chartroom once more, he found that he had not been missed, and that Captain Robah—sprawled on the floor—would feel little interest in any one on board his ship for some time to come. Beside him knelt a frightened servant, endeavoring to staunch the blood from a cut on his head with a corner of his gold-embroidered tunic.

Pierre, waving the neck of a broken brandy bottle, waited with a rapturous smile for Jack's approval.

"Good! You've made a fine job of it."

The two hurried on deck, went down the ship's side to their waiting boat, and pulled quickly back to land.

FENTON, in pajamas and silk dressing-gown, was enjoying an after-breakfast smoke on his bedroom balcony, when Jack appeared.

"I've just been down to the harbor and found your rascally old captain had put out to sea. I couldn't understand it, so I went to see why. Good reason—he'd been taking slaves aboard."

"What?"

"Yes, slaves! Three or four dozen girls."

Fenton ground the stub of a cigarette viciously, his eyes avoiding Jack's. "Slaves! On board the *Pearl!* If the government gets wind of this we're ruined!"

"I judge they've been taken from oases in the southern territory."

"That's Ben Saif's country!"

"Those slaves have got to be taken off the *Pearl* as quietly as they were sneaked on," Jack said at last.

"It's a damned ugly business," Fenton growled, "damned ugly!"

"Who ordered Captain Robah to anchor out at sea?"

"I did. To oblige Ben Saif. He wanted to smuggle a few cases of his special *liqueur* on board. I let him borrow the launch."

Jack ran his fingers through his hair, slumped down at the breakfast table, and twiddled a teaspoon thoughtfully. He spoke with slow emphasis. "It's a thin yarn, isn't it? You'll never get away with it—not to the French!"

Fenton moved to stand directly opposite his brother, a dark purplish color rising on his flat cheeks, his pale eyes blinking rapidly. "See here, Jack, I've been every kind of a fool you like to mention. But I swear I did not believe Ben Saif would do a thing like this. You'll learn when you're made a partner, my boy, that there was a mighty big inducement to turn a deaf ear to all the rumors about him."

Jack waved the teaspoon emphatically. "Get hold of Ben Saif. Tell him to take those slaves off, and take himself to the devil as fast as he can. We're through with him."

The purple tint in Fenton's face deepened.

"I'll tell him that and a trifle more. I'll make it so hot for him that he won't two-time me, or any one else in Zilfi, again. The scoundrel!"

"I suppose it's our duty to report this business, but the firm would suffer badly if we did. The French are getting really fussy about slaves. We can put a stop to Ben Saif's trafficking along this coast anyhow."

"He's due at my office at eight-thirty; so I'll get along, and put the fear of Allah in him."

"I suppose the El Fumm excursion is all fixed?"

"Why, yes!" Fenton's voice was con-

ciliatory. "There'll be no danger of interference from Ben Saif now, as you feared. He won't try any more monkey tricks with us."

5. At El Fumm

THE *fonduk*—starting-point for the expedition to El Fumm—was the usual rectangular enclosure typical of North Africa, with arcaded walls, small stone prayer-chambers where the faithful besought Allah's blessing on their journeys, and single high narrow entrance-gate. Two *garstas* having recently arrived, the caravanserai overflowed with temperamental camel-drivers and their dusty, complaining, evil-smelling beasts.

Followed by servants and horses, the picnickers passed through the narrow gate. A few donkeys, laden with firewood and hampers of food, pattered on neat little hoofs at the end of the procession. Their patient eyes reflected a truly Arab resignation to their fate.

As the horses began to pick their way between granite boulders and lentisk bushes, Jack edged his mount alongside his brother, letting the others pass on. "You've seen Ben Saif?" he asked.

Fenton's eyes held a cold gleam. "Don't worry! I've told him where he gets off."

"He doesn't scare easily. Besides, he knows it's not to your interest to report slaves on board your own boat."

"Don't worry!" repeated Fenton. "I've got things fixed just the way I want them now—and then some."

The bitter hate in his brother's eyes fairly startled Jack. He felt for a moment as if it were directed against himself, and his pleasant, whimsical face became very grave. Fenton's temper, when roused, was a nasty one—very nasty indeed. Such cold venom was an ugly thing to witness even though Ben Saif was its object.

Linda's fears and warnings, her conviction that in his brother he had a deadly and determined rival came back to his mind as he spurred on to join the rest. Of course she was wrong . . . and yet—

"This place gives me the shivers." Mrs. Webb was wilting badly after two hours over the sun-baked plain. "It's like a cemetery."

"You're right," agreed Jack; "El Fumm's the dreariest spot in North Africa, I believe. But you'll own it was not my choice of a happy hunting-ground."

The dark gorge looked as haunted as the Arabs believed it to be. Its long tunnel was dank and sepulchral in spite of the blazing sun. The sound of rushing water reached their ears—the voice of a hidden torrent foaming at the base of mile-high cliffs, seeking escape from its gloomy prison to the sunlit world beyond.

Suddenly a shrill voice startled the sight-seers. A horrible, semi-nude figure emerged from the square-mouthed cave at the entrance to El Fumm. Making for the intruders with curses and unearthly yells, the old man leaped and gibbered, his long beard blowing about his withered neck, a wreath of yellow flowers pressed down over blazing eyes.

"All right, Linda!" Jack touched her arm reassuringly, as he moved to stop the capering madman. "We've disturbed the old *marabout* at his devotions, it seems. I'll try to soothe his ruffled feelings."

A handful of cigarettes, a few small coins, and a ceremonious apology soon pacified the offended saint. With a wide, toothless grin, he invited Jack to inspect the treasures of his cave. To humor him, Jack followed to his grotto, but halted on the dark threshold and peered into the gloom, mindful of possible danger. He waited, alert and wary, one hand on

the butt of his revolver, until his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness. A flickering lamp burned in the shrine. The grotto was small and untenanted save for the *marabout*, who knelt before his tiny altar, fumbling a string of beads and muttering rapidly.

"Jack! Jack!" Linda's voice, calling on a high quick note of terror, struck to his heart like a knife.

He wheeled swiftly. At that moment he collided with Fenton, and the impact sent him reeling backward. He staggered, recovered himself, and burst out of the cave with the force of a young bull charging into the arena. Mrs. Webb was stumbling awkwardly across the rock and stubble toward him. The servants, huddled in a frightened group, stared and pointed down the gorge.

His eyes followed their gaze. He could see nothing.

He turned to Fenton. "What was it? Where is she?"

Winded by the force of their collision, Fenton crouched gasping outside the cave, one hand pressed to his side. "Over there!" He waved vaguely to the gorge. "Arab knocked me down . . . can't go after her . . . sprained ankle. . . ."

"Jack! Oh, Jack!"

Faintly the cry reached his straining ears. Head thrust forward, body tense, he strove to pierce the gloom of the gorge. Suddenly he saw her. She was slung over the shoulder of a desert man in dark *burnoose*, who was running, swift and sure-footed, along the giddy path, into the yawning blackness of El Fumm. Tailless monkeys watched him from the lofty crags. In the narrow roof of sky above, vultures hung, brooding like evil spirits over the abyss.

JACK was a good athlete, almost as lean and hard as the Berbers themselves, but as he started in desperate pursuit, he

realized that he was outmatched. The delay caused by Fenton had given the Arab an excellent start. Loose stones underfoot, and tough polished tree-roots lay in wait to trip him on the narrow, giddy trail. Cursing his heavy riding-boots, he slackened speed. He dared not take them off. His feet had not the tough calloused soles of the desert man running barefoot ahead.

Resolutely he thrust aside his fears for Linda—fears that sent his wits spinning—and began coolly to plan and calculate his chances. Nothing was to be gained by overtaking the Arab on this narrow ledge, where a struggle would send all three into the chasm. There was only one chance—to catch them before the Arab could plunge into the dense cork-oak forests at the farther end of El Fumm.

He forced himself to look to his footing, to keep his eyes from watching the glimmer of white on the brown back ahead of him. As he followed the dizzy path, he was no more conscious of its peril and the yawning depths below, than of the stones hurled by the monkeys above. To decrease the distance between himself and the swift-footed Arab was his only thought.

The last two hundred yards of the gorge took a sharp turn. As the brown *burnoose* vanished round a shoulder of the rock, he set his teeth for a terrific spurt. Luck was with him, as flinging all caution to the winds he dashed forward and scrambled round the intervening bluff.

He was gaining. The Arab was impeded by Linda's weight, but they were very close now to the dark sheltering trees, and the distance widened as the kidnapper put forth a last desperate effort.

They were gone! At the spot where they had vanished, Jack stared desperate-

ly round. A flash of white sent him full tilt toward a clearing near by.

He reached it too late. Only the trampled earth where the Arab's horse had stood; only the sound of hoofs over the rustling leaves; only a glimpse of Linda's white dress in the crook of her captor's arm! He drew out his revolver, but stuffed it back with a curse. He couldn't risk trying to shoot the horse with Linda on its back. If he could only get nearer! But the Arab guided his beast with cunning skill, weaving his way without hesitation through the tangled woods.

The trail grew steeper, winding up to bare rounded hills. Soon, neither sound of hoofs nor glimpse of white dress guided him any longer. Drawing clear of the trees at last, he saw them a mile ahead. The horse cantered lightly and easily over the smooth slopes. They were on the road that led to the mountains, and he watched intently, making certain of their direction.

Yes, they were going to Ubbeyt. The mountain road they followed led to no other goal. Assured of this, he flung himself down in the lee of a great boulder, panting and exhausted. It took all his resolution to lie there while he gathered strength for the long pursuit, knowing that every minute bore Linda farther from him.

Twenty miles lay between him and Ubbeyt. But in that mountain village he could count on one good friend. Tollog the Shaikh would give what help he could, lend him a horse and put him on the right track.

His mind flashed back to the rest of the picnic party. They must have left El Fumm by now. Probably they were hurrying to give the alarm at Zilfi. Certainly none of them could, or would, follow him. Fenton was helpless with a sprained ankle. No bribe or threat would

induce the servants to enter the haunted gorge. And Mrs. Webb would be expending her energy in telling the world her grief.

6. *Night in the Hills*

THE sun, throwing down long javelins of fire in its flight, was hurrying westward as Jack took the mountain road to Ubbeyt. He loped along in a jog-trot that ate up the long miles steadily, his shadow lengthening behind him on the white dusty road. The hills humped massive green shoulders in his path, as he doggedly advanced toward the black jagged line of the Atlas Mountains.

Soon, from deep valleys on every hand, crept purple mists and shadows to veil the hills and shroud the clear shining of the afterglow. A chill wind blew fitfully from snow-capped ranges. Night, like a black veil dropped before his face, made him falter and stumble in the dark.

He was devoutly thankful to see the moon rise at last, round and full and brilliant. Jackals howled dismally from barren hillsides as he toiled on. Dark bird-shapes swooped and hovered. Bats squeaked and circled about his head. Inky shadows, sprawling across his path, concealed stones and hollows which brought him crashing to his knees. But he stumbled on, husbanding his strength, fighting the impulse to shout, to dash blindly into the darkness in a last desperate effort to overtake Linda.

As the moon climbed he made better speed. His thoughts, less occupied by the path, turned to the tangled web of his fears and suspicions. He was convinced that Ben Saif had planned Linda's capture. He knew he was following her into a baited trap. She was being used as a lure to get him where Ben Saif wanted him.

It was Fenton's part in the affair that

worried him. That his brother had delayed him purposely at the cave seemed certain. But did this mean that he was fully cognizant of all Ben Saif's schemes? Had he agreed to them even to the point of murdering an inconvenient younger brother?

Breasting a steep hillside, at last he caught sight of the village of Ubbeyt. In the moonlight it gleamed white on a distant mountain spur. His eyes, keen as a falcon's, raked the rough track which led to it. No horseman, no object of any kind moved there. Yet he stood watchful, alert, waiting for evidence of something he expected to see.

He counted at least half a dozen tiny red points of light. They flickered intermittently at shadowed angles of the road between himself and Ubbeyt. He knew those red sparks to be glowing *kief* pipes. Not one solitary figure was visible, but each pipe stood for an Arab with gun and twisted knife.

"Ah, I thought so!" his parched lips whispered the words in disgust. "This is Ben Saif's work, all right. No one else would be smart enough to post sentries. That damned scoundrel's the only competent Arab in Algeria. I'll have to leave the road and crawl over these cursed hills to the far side of Ubbeyt."

The detour took even longer than he had feared. He was cut, scratched, bleeding, and weary to death when he reached the hill above Ubbeyt, and crept through the scrub and coarse yellowed grass in the cactus-hedge about the village.

He wondered if he could manage to summon his friend, Tollog, without rousing other sleepers. He crouched down near the hedge and gave a long rasping parrot cry—the signal his Arab friend knew well. Again and again he repeated it, his eyes on the white walls of the shaikh's house.

HE HAD begun to despair of making the old man hear, when a bearded face and red *chechia* were thrust from a window. A hand signalled to him, and the head withdrew. In a minute or two, Tollog's lean wiry body wormed itself through a thin place in the cactus-hedge, and cautiously advanced to where Jack lay. Not until the two had crawled up the hill and gained a strategic position overlooking both road and village, did Jack explain himself.

"*Uggurah!* I knew not it was a white *Sitt* he held in his arms. She was swathed in his burnoose close as a young ear of corn in its leaves. I caught no glimpse of her face, and she sat before him on his horse without sound or movement."

Tollog's words brought a stifled bitter curse to Jack's lips.

"What road did they take past Ubbeyt?"

"The road to Beni-Ghat, *effendi*. The Berber told me he was going back over the hills to Biodh."

"Back to the coast—to Biodh!" Numbing fear dawned in the chaos of Jack's mind.

"*Allah ya' sallamah!* God save you!" was Tollog's pitying reply. "She will doubtless be put on board a ship with other slaves for Arabia."

"Not while I'm alive!" The mad *marabout* himself had not looked more savage than Jack. "Get me a horse, Tollog, and I'll pay you anything you ask. These sentries——"

"Leave them to me, *effendi!*" Tollog wagged a benevolent beard. "They are thirsty as the desert sands, the miserable ticks of an ass's tail. I will take them *lakby* to drink. They shall hear and see nothing when thou dost ride from Ubbeyt, I promise thee!"

Tollog made good his boast. The strong, fermented juice of the palm

scarcely needed the drug he added to it. In a short time Jack rode from Ubbeyt under the paling stars, while on the road behind him some half-dozen veiled and bearded men lay snoring noisily in the dust.

He rode his strong, surc-footed mountain pony hard. At Beni-Ghat the road forked, and Jack took the track leading back over the hills to Biodh, as Shaikh Tollog had advised.

Dawn found him emerging from the hills to the gray level of the Empty Land. Beyond it the sea was brightening in the east, as it had been twenty-four hours ago, when he had looked down at that stretch of water and seen the *Pearl* riding at anchor, with her cargo of slaves on board.

The light, reflected from the gleaming water, struck his aching eyes with intolerable glare. The harbor was empty, save for a few fishing-boats. Neither at the wharf nor out at sea was there any glimpse of the *Pearl*. She had sailed.

Down on the quay, Jack marked the many cargoes that had come too late. There must indeed have been desperate need of haste.

Was Linda on board the *Pearl*? She couldn't have been put on at Biodh. A cold conviction seized him. The Berber had taken her by the other road from Beni-Ghat to some spot farther up the coast. Tollog had been deceived in thinking she was to be brought to Biodh.

7. *The Truth—or Some of It*

"YES, yes! I can understand you feel that way, Jack! But try to be reasonable. Linda's in no real danger."

"Then you and I have different ideas about danger." Jack strode up and down the private office of Deane & Son, dusty and unshaven, his eyes desperately anxious under his rough thatch of hair. "You've

kidded yourself about Ben Saif all along. You're still doing it. What possible reason have you for not wanting him shown up?"

Fenton ran a finger round his immaculate collar, and shot a quick glance at his brother, standing at the other side of his broad desk. "The trouble with you is," he began impressively, "that you imagine our business can be run on the same lines out here as if we were in Boston, and dealing with dyed-in-the-wool New Englanders. Now about Ben Saif, let me tell you——"

"You're stalling! I came to tell *you* something! I'm on my way to report at Headquarters. Linda's gone, and I'll burn up the whole of the Barbary coast to get her back, if necessary."

"Linda's safe, I tell you." Fenton's calm was beginning to wear thin. "If you'll give me twenty-four hours, I'll have her back in Zilfi again. It's only a question of money. That's all Ben Saif wants. Just leave him to me, I'll fix him."

"You're the last man on earth to handle him now, if what you told me about the infernal racket you kicked up with him yesterday was true. He'll double-cross you again as he has before. He'll take the money and keep Linda, too. This can't be handled privately now. I don't care what it costs the firm in money, or reputation either. Linda's safety is all that counts."

"Linda's safety is not endangered, you headstrong young fool! It's you who'll put her on the spot if you interfere."

"Did Ben Saif take those slaves off the *Pearl*?"

"Certainly he did. I superintended the job myself."

"Now I know you're lying!" Jack put two extremely dirty hands on the polished desk, and thrust his angry face within a foot of his brother's. "I've been to Biodh

this morning, and found that the *Pearl* weighed anchor within an hour of my visit to her yesterday. *She sailed without putting off those slaves!* And more than that—your launch took Linda out to the *Pearl*?"

Fenton stared into Jack's face with pale eyes that blinked just once, but gave no further sign of perturbation. "Quite an amateur detective in your own way," he remarked, mechanically straightening the pens and pencils on the blotter under his hands.

"It's true, isn't it?" Jack still leaned across the desk.

"How should I know?" parried Fenton, his face mask-like as he sorted pens and pencils. "And how do you know?"

"I asked the coast guards."

"And they saw Linda put on board?"

"I'll admit it's only a guess about Linda. But I'm determined that ship's going to be searched for her anyhow. I'll use the slaves to get the French going on the job."

"Once and for all, Jack, I tell you Linda's perfectly safe. You'll see her again tomorrow morning as surely as you see me now."

"And just how can you swear to that little fact? There's only one reason that can make you so all-fired certain! You and Ben Saif planned the kidnapping together! You're both out to get me, and you're using Linda, you——"

"If you'll only listen to reason, no one's going to get you. You've guessed half of it, however; so I might as well acknowledge that the kidnapping was an arrangement to which I gave my consent—a most unwilling consent. Ben Saif had me cornered. The girl's perfectly safe." Fenton drew back from Jack's furious gesture. "She's being held until Ben Saif gets clear away. He didn't trust you. He didn't believe you'd keep it dark about

the slaves until he'd made his getaway."

"I'm through with you! I'm off to report all I know about Ben Saif's dirty work, and your part in it, too."

"No!" Fenton took up a heavy ruler.

Jack flung himself bodily across the desk. He knocked Fenton backward, and the two of them crashed to the floor. They fought silently, with the suppressed antagonism of years. Rolling and scuffling over and over in blind rage, neither was aware that a door opened close by, or that a man entered softly.

"*Gibani!*" Ben Saif closed the door behind him, and stood for a minute to watch the struggle. At last, seeing Fenton's purpling face, the Arab unwound his sash in deliberate fashion, and joined in the fight. Jack was tied up and gagged almost before he recognized his new antagonist.

"All haste is from the devil, and tardiness from the All-Merciful!" quoted Ben Saif with pious unction. "Jack, *effendi*, thou wilt learn patience in the long years which I pray Allah may grant to thee. The slave's yoke is heavy, but are not thy shoulders broad to bear it?"

Fenton took a bottle of brandy from a wall-cupboard, and his eyes met Jack's with bitter scorn. "So now you know!" He filled and raised his glass. "Here's to your future career! You'll be celebrating that birthday of yours on board the *Pearl* in a day or two."

Jack lay still, his eyes fixed on Fenton's face. It was not a pretty sight, with its bloodshot eyes and mottled flush.

Fenton went out with Ben Saif. The door was slammed, and Jack heard the sharp click of its double lock.

8. *Another Visit to the S. S. Pearl*

AT THE end of a grim twelve hours, Jack still awaited Fenton's return. He had slept at intervals, uneasy sleep

with dreams that were a punishment, but it had partly restored his strength. Through the windows of his prison he saw the sky change to flaming gold and crimson sunset, fade to shadowy purple, deepen at last to profound night-blue. Brilliant stars blinked. Voices, laughter, the distant sound of native music died. Night, and sleep enfolded the little white town.

When the door opened to admit Fenton and Ben Saif once more, he lay in the half-stupor of exhaustion, and took them for another nightmare dream. But he began to believe them unpleasant facts when his bonds were loosened, and the gag removed.

The food and drink put before him cleared his wits. Strength and confidence revived. He felt new springs of hope rise. After all, he was alive! That was something.

He began to expect a miracle. True, his enemies held all the trumps, but there was still another round to be played, still a chance that luck might deal him a winning hand at the finish. Bound and gagged once more, he kept up his courage during the ride that followed, by concentrating on the lucky but improbable break for which he hoped.

After an interminable drive, the car stopped somewhere on the seacoast. His gag was finally removed, and, with wrists bound behind his back, he walked across the sand-dunes to where Fenton's launch awaited them. The outline of the *Pearl* loomed up about a mile away on the moonlit waters, a light smoke rising from her funnels.

Jack watched that smoke-veil with a sinking heart. So the *Pearl* had steam up all ready to start! He didn't quite know what else he had expected. But the sight of her brought home to him how very slim was any chance of escape.

As he climbed the ship's side, and set foot on the white deck, he looked round instinctively for Linda. No one was visible. His tottering hopes crashed about him as he reluctantly followed his captors down the companionway.

In the cabin, Captain Robah awaited them. Jack leaned back against a white and gold pillar, and returned the venomous regard of his three enemies with what insolence he could muster.

His heart almost stopped as Linda appeared in the doorway.

She was standing very still, her face was white and tear-stained, her shadowed eyes were fixed earnestly upon him. Her face grew whiter still as she saw his bonds, his exhaustion, and the despair in his eyes which not all his will could hide from her.

"Jack! Jack!" she whispered with shaking voice. "I thought I should never see you again!"

She clasped him to her, and for a minute they stood forgetful of everything save themselves.

Fiercely jealous, Fenton put a shaking hand on Linda's arm. He could bear it no longer, even though he had planned this farewell scene himself. He had wanted Jack to drink the very dregs of torment, to go straight from Linda's arms to a slave's yoke. Sharply he pulled the girl back, looking from one to the other, with envy that almost choked him.

"I have a choice to offer you." His pale eyes made Linda shiver. "Please listen very carefully unless you want Jack to die at once."

"Don't believe his lies." Jack's voice was low and shaken. "Don't be trapped into giving your word to anything."

"Keep quiet!" Fenton snapped savagely, then turned back to Linda. "Your first and wisest choice is to marry me. If you

consent to this, Jack will become a slave with the privilege of seeing you once a year. I must point out that he will live just as long as you keep silent. If you betray me, he will die by torture—the desert tribes are good at that sort of thing!"

Extremity of fear kept Linda silent. With horror she stared into Fenton's pale eyes. Her white lips strove to answer him, and failed.

"You may prefer the second choice, after all." Fenton's eyes were merciless as they met the utter loathing in the girl's. She could not have regarded a swamp-adder with more intense aversion.

"The alternative to marrying me is this: I will have you both flung overboard to the sharks."

"To the sharks! Murder both of us . . . like that! Oh, no, no! You'd never dare! You couldn't get away with it . . . you couldn't!"

"Quite simple." Fenton glanced at Jack, and, satisfied by the expression of his brother's face, smiled at Linda. "Ben Saif has reputable witnesses ready to swear the two of you were carried off into the desert and abandoned. We shall allow a reasonable time to elapse for you to die of thirst, and for the vultures to dispose of you. Then we shall produce two skeletons of you—they're all ready, and waiting among the sand-dunes for their cue."

Jack did not respond to the anguished appeal in Linda's eyes. He couldn't. His mind was picturing her tossed overboard to the hungry sharks. For himself, he preferred death—even the cruel death offered—to the long purgatory of a slave's existence. But she must not die.

Linda turned again to Fenton. Her eyes loathed him. The four men watched her silently. The very walls of the cabin seemed waiting in hushed expectancy for her decision.

A LOUD yell sounded above. A babel of voices broke out. There was a rush of feet. A long clear whistle cut through the noise with penetrating command. Two sailors in torn dirty rags burst into the cabin.

"The French! A cutter approaches!" they babbled fearfully. "By Allah, they are coming to search the ship! They will shoot us all! What evil chance! What *shaitan* has betrayed us?"

"Get back, miserable mud-fish that you are!" Robah's heavy hand and loud voice drove the men out. "Let the accursed Nazrani search—what have we to fear?"

Jack's eyes flashed to Linda's. Was a miracle to happen after all? His body tingled, his heart thumped against his ribs. Then he suddenly became aware of a new element in the situation between Fenton and the Arabs.

In spite of Robah's bravado with the frightened sailors, Jack was convinced there were slaves on board. The captain and Ben Saif seemed to consider themselves completely masters of the situation, but if the slaves were stowed away so secretly that there was no danger of discovery, why was Fenton so uneasy?

Clearly all was not going as his brother expected. Had the Arabs something up their sleeve—a surprize for their confederate?

"You take it coolly!" Fenton's voice was as sharp and uneasy as his look. "Where have you stowed the slaves? The French won't miss much!"

"By my beard, there are no slaves, *effendi!*" The captain showed his white teeth. "I put them ashore before you came on board."

"No slaves . . . no slaves on the ship?" Fenton's surprize was almost grotesque.

"You have made a mistake." Ben Saif regarded him contemptuously. "You sought to play your own game. You meant to find safety for yourself, while

I paid the price for both of us. *Ya bissabi*, you thought to cast Ben Saif like a worn sandal to the dunghill."

"What do you mean?" Fenton made desperate efforts to control his rage.

"I mean that I sent a spy after you today. You went to the French to tell them I had put slaves on board the *Pearl* without your knowledge or consent. You asked them to send a cutter tonight, knowing that I should be here, and hoping to witness my capture. All this my spy heard as he lay outside the room where your treacherous, lying tongue betrayed me. Do you not recall the old beggar who lay in a fit outside the commandant's room as you left it? It is a marvel that poor one sees and hears so much during fits so terrible! But, Allah be praised, he recovers rapidly. He was able to report every word that you said."

The tramp of feet sounded on deck above. "*Uggurah!* They come aboard!" said Robah. "May Allah prosper their search."

"But"—Fenton started forward—"I must see them—tell them——"

"Already has your tongue told much, too much!" Ben Saif made a fierce gesture to the captain. "In there, until this farce is over."

Robah manipulated a panel of the wall, which slid back to disclose a small cupboard of a room. Into this the Arabs bundled Fenton with Jack and Linda. All three were gagged and securely bound. Satisfied that they could make neither sound nor movement, their captors left them and closed the panel.

A long agony of waiting ensued. Jack fought and struggled to loosen the cords that fastened him, to spit out the gag. He nearly strangled himself in the attempt, but it was no use. The Arabs had made an excellent job of it. He was forced to give up at last, and, as he lay

with pounding heart and aching muscles, voices from the cabin reached his ears.

He listened, his gloomy thoughts brightened by the knowledge that Fenton was also overhearing the conversation, and that it must be gall and wormwood to him.

"I offer the deepest apologies, Sidi Ben Saif!" came the clear, crisp accents of the French officer in charge. "There has been some deplorable mistake. You shall receive an apology from Headquarters, in addition to my own, at the first possible moment. We acted on the best authority, from information received. I regret exceedingly to have held you prisoner while the search was conducted, but we had our orders."

"It is understood." Ben Saif was suave. "I have many enemies, alas! Many who envy my wealth and authority. Jackals run ever in the lion's train. You do not tell me the name of your informant." Jack could imagine Ben Saif's mocking smile. "It is for me to speak it then. It was Deane, *effendi*, who came to you with lies under his tongue concerning me. May his face be blackened! May his soul rot in Gehenna!"

"Certainly! Certainly, Sidi Ben Saif! It is understood! Great injustice has been done you."

"Not to you, the blackening or the shame!" Ben Saif raised his voice, and Jack understood the reason for it as he heard the Arab's last vindictive words. "Not on you, nor even on those who sent you is mine anger! But that traitor who sought to ruin me—he shall pay the price!"

The voices ceased. Footsteps were heard retreating. Silence fell. In a few minutes the panel-door was opened. Robah dragged the prisoners back to the cabin and pushed them roughly down on a long seat. Their gags were removed,

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and their agonizing tight bonds were loosened.

Jack despaired. The cutter was gone. He had enjoyed Fenton's unmasking, but it did not improve the situation for Linda and himself. On the contrary, Ben Saif would not spare the brother of one who had so utterly betrayed him.

And Linda! What would happen to her?

"No one plays a game with me—and wins it!" Ben Saif assured Fenton. "You tried to use your brother and me as pawns in your double-dealing. Jack, *effendi*, wished also to destroy me, and for that he shall pay dearly. Moreover, being of your accursed blood, he is not fit to live. But you shall pay a greater price."

"You're wrong." Fenton strove for his old decisive manner. "Let me explain. I——"

"You desired," Ben Saif interrupted, "to rid yourself of me. You have made a fortune through our slave-trafficking. But it was inconvenient that I should know the origin of your wealth, thereby holding the whip-hand over you in future."

Fenton began to stammer, to plead, to bargain.

Ben Saif laughed at him. "A great sum you offer for a worthless life! Is it not wisdom to crush the scorpion when it lies before one's tent? *Ya, amma*, thou blind one! Now shall your traitor's mouth be filled with dust.

9. *The Wasm*

"THIS one's launch?" Ben Saif asked the captain, gesturing contemptuously toward Fenton.

"Yussuf ran it up into a cove until the cutter was gone. He awaits but our signal to bring it alongside again."

"Give the signal, then."

Ben Saif turned to Linda. "I will take you to a place of safety among my friends, *mademoiselle*. To my so beautiful oasis I will take you. Ah, not that oasis of which the French have knowledge! No—for doubtless they will search for you.

will take you far south to my desert stronghold, inaccessible to all save the desert-born. There you shall repay me for my losses and trouble over this affair."

Blind, suffocating rage seized Jack. The Arab's words stung him to battle like a galvanic shock. Tied though his wrists and ankles were, he launched himself at the speaker like a human battering-ram, attacking head-foremost in a dive that took the other completely off his feet.

With an astonished grunt, Ben Saif went down like a ninepin, as Jack butted him savagely. Unfortunately, in place of the Arab's yielding and vulnerable solar plexus, a solid teak table-leg met Jack's head. He lay stunned, while Ben Saif got to his feet and drew a long gleaming *telek* from his girdle.

Linda shrieked as she saw the dagger. She stumbled awkwardly across the floor. Ben Saif paid no heed to her at all; he was staring down at Jack with a surprise so great as to be almost stupefaction. When Linda tried to interpose her slender body between Jack and the glinting knife, Ben Saif put her aside as if she were an importunate child. He bent over Jack and took up an object fastened by a long chain about the unconscious man's neck.

In his infuriated attack on the Arab, Jack's shirt had been ripped open to the waist, exposing the turquoise ring he wore beneath. Its strange blue eyes seemed to regard Ben Saif with solemn reproach as he stooped to take it in his hand.

One-Eye's *wasm*! The magic passport which meant more to a traveller over the

unknown Sahara than an army with banners. Ben Saif looked at it with wonder; then, knife in hand, he bent over Jack. Linda shrieked again.

"*Uggurah!* 'Thou foolish one!' With a firm hand Ben Saif led her back to her seat. He returned to Jack, and with one slashing cut of the *telek* severed the cords about his prisoner's ankles. A second cut freed the wrists.

Recovering consciousness to find his enemy splashing water over his head and chest, Jack was under the impression that it was a preliminary to some form of torture. He set his teeth and glared at Ben Saif. To his surprise, the Arab met his fierce look with a smile, and took his hand to touch it to lips and forehead.

"Will some one wake me up?" muttered Jack. "Is this a salute to a brave man about to die—or what?"

Ben Saif, who had found the English language a useful acquirement in his far-flung enterprises, answered with a yet broader smile. "A brave man, yes! But to die, no! May Allah grant thee long years! Where did you get this ring, *effendi*? This is the *wasm* of the famous One-Eye. How is it that you possess this passport and mark of favor from one so powerful?"

With a rush of new hope, Jack faced the Arab squatting beside him. "You recognize the ring?"

"*Billab*, truly I know that *wasm*. God be praised, I saw it before my *telek* cut thy soul from out thy body. By the life of thee, why hast thou kept this thing hidden from me?"

"Never guessed One-Eye was a friend of yours!" Even now, Jack did not altogether trust this change of front, and his doubtful glance searched the Arab's face narrowly.

"*Ullab alem!*" Ben Saif was deeply hurt. "God knoweth my thoughts are all for thy good, *effendi!*"

"Go ahead, then, if that's how you feel. Cut loose these two, and we'll begin to talk."

Without hesitation, Ben Saif freed Linda. He stood before Fenton in obvious doubt, the long twisted dagger balanced in his hand. Fenton shivered as he met the Arab's eyes, fiercer and more menacing than the gleaming knife. A moment's tension; then, with a snarl, Ben Saif cut Fenton's bonds.

"Is it enough?" he asked. "Now will you tell me where you got that ring, *effendi*?"

"Surely," agreed Jack, one arm holding Linda closely. "It was given to me by One-Eye in the gorge of El Fumm five years ago. He had slipped off the path, and I heaved him up on deck again. That's all there was to it. One-Eye swore eternal friendship and gave me this ring as a memento of our meeting."

Ben Saif stood, staring incredulously at Jack.

"Five years ago! At El Fumm! You saved the life of One-Eye?" He repeated the words in amazement, his eyes still frowningly intent on Jack. "Allah! How many times I have come near to destroying you—you whose life is sacred to me. By my *wasm* here, Allah hath spared us both."

"Your *wasm*?" Jack blinked in amazement at Ben Saif's words, and the genuine remorse with which they were spoken.

"By Allah, and by Allah, I will show you that the *wasm* is mine own! Look!"

Ben Saif slipped off his hooded white burnoose. Erect as a palm-tree he stood in the red and brown striped *gandourah* and black, tightly bound turban of the Zenda tribe. A broad red leather belt clipped his slender waist, supporting a miniature arsenal of weapons. Lean, and long, and swarthy he faced Jack. Desertman unmistakably!

With a swift movement, he put up a hand to his left eye.

"One-Eye! You are One-Eye!"

"I am One-Eye." The man Jack knew as Ben Saif smiled at the profound astonishment he had caused. He held the glass eye he had removed. The sunken hollow of his left eye-socket, and the peculiar wrinkling of surrounding muscles, altered the Arab's dark face indescribably. His remaining eye took on a strange and sinister brightness. "I am One-Eye, whose life you saved, *effendi*!"

With eyes on the savage bandit figure, Linda whispered incredulously, "You will let us go?"

One-Eye made a magnificent salaam. "*Mademoiselle* is free to command me."

He escorted them up to the main deck. Fenton brought up the rear like some neglected cur that hopes for a stray bone. No one spoke, or looked at him.

ON DECK, the captain glowered in angry astonishment at the three unbound prisoners. His fingers involuntarily sought the handle of his dagger. Ben Saif explained in a few brief guttural words.

"May Allah reward him!" Robah saluted Jack with grudging respect. "But this one?" The captain spat contemptuously in Fenton's direction. "Is this traitor to go free? Is thine honor not to be avenged?"

"Mine honor holds the name of Deane for ever sacred." There was a regretful note in One-Eye's voice, and he turned his gaze from Fenton as if resisting temptation.

"By the hundredth name of Allah!" swore Robah, "thou art unwise in this."

"I have spoken," One-Eye answered haughtily.

After a long, vindictive look at Fen-

ton, Robah spat again, then turned to Linda. Carefully he assisted her over the ship's side, and down the ladder to the launch. Jack followed. Last came Fenton, stumbling and uncertain, to make straight for the tiny cabin and a certain locker where drinks were stored.

With Linda close beside him, Jack took the wheel, and was only vaguely aware that Robah at last left them to return to the *Pearl*. Intoxicated by freedom and happiness, he steered for land.

Leaving the launch safely moored at the water's edge, he and Linda began to walk over the sand-dunes to the car, looming black and solid in the misty dawn.

"Good Lord! Fenton! I suppose he's blind to the world by now! I'd forgotten he existed."

Jack hobbled stiffly back to the launch, hoisted himself on board, and went into the small cabin. At first he thought the place was empty. Then he caught sight of his brother.

Fenton lay sprawled on the floor, a dagger in his heart. The distorted face and horribly staring eyes were things Jack strove ever after to forget.

With a tremendous effort he pulled himself together at last, left the cabin, dropped awkwardly over the side of the boat, and rejoined Linda.

"Robah had no honorable scruples

about the family of Deane. Fenton's dead."

She took his hand in silence, and in silence they walked over the sands, leaving the launch with its dreadful passenger behind them. Sea-birds wheeled and cried about the boat, waves lapped and rocked it softly. In its cabin Fenton lay still, oblivious to his requiem as dawn rose in the east.

THREE months later, when their grim encounter with the bandit had been forgotten in a more wonderful adventure, One-Eye again reminded Jack and Linda of his existence.

A camel-driver stopped the pair in the streets of Zilfi, and put a packet into Linda's hand. With a few words to Jack, and a quick salute, the man made off.

"He says it's a gift to you from One-Eye!" translated Jack.

Linda unwrapped crimson folds of silk, and stared at the ring in her hand—a perfect oval sapphire, curiously set in a hollow meshwork of gold.

"One-Eye's *wasm!*" she exclaimed.

"Hm-m-m! Wedding gift with the bandit's blessing! You ought to be happy. You've done very well for yourself in the short time you've been in Zilfi, I'll say! Picking me for a husband, and the biggest rogue in the Barbary States for a friend!"

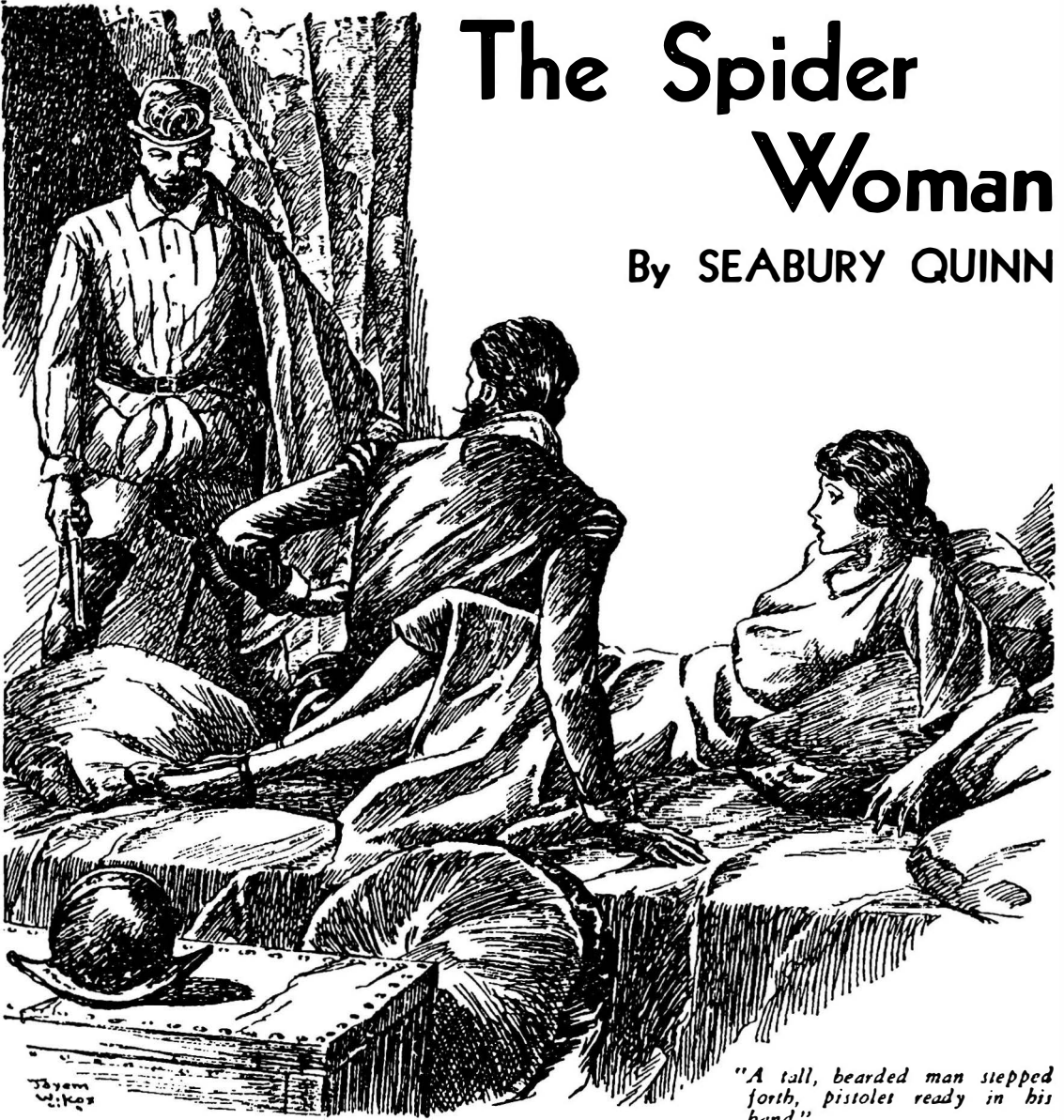
Ah, with the Grape my fading Life provide,
 And wash the Body whence the Life has died,
 And lay me, shrouded in the living Leaf,
 By some not unfrequented Garden-side;

That ev'n my buried Ashes such a snare
 Of Vintage shall fling up into the Air
 As not a True-believer passing by
 But shall be overtaken unaware.

—*Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyam.*

The Spider Woman

By SEABURY QUINN



"A tall, bearded man stepped forth, pistols ready in his hand."

A terrific adventure of Carlos the Tiger in the Netherlands, and a lovely woman spy who told him how to conquer a Spanish stronghold

1. How We Met the Santa Isabella

RIGHT sharply sped the freshening breeze behind the straining sails of the Dutch ship *Jufvrouw van Haut* as I and my companions sailed from Portugal toward Holland. The barque was laden with supplies for those who

laughed derision at the King of Spain in the Low Countries; beeves and wine and good white wheaten flour for making bread, besides some store of powder, ordnance and weapons to aid the Dutchmen in their fight for freedom, and she lay low upon the water, heavy laden with her burthen, so that she wallowed

like a cow at milking-time the while she forced her way against the rising sea.

"St. Nicholas send the wind will hold," the sailing-master muttered as he scanned the far horizon. "With such a heavy cargo we should be no match for any skulking Spanish galley."

"Be of good cheer," spake Nuno Cabral, who, as my second in command, shared the quarter-deck with the Dutchman and with me; "the wind will hold, and we shall sight the shore of Holland ere another sun has sunk, I trow."

"*Wallah*, speak not foolishness," returned Black Hassan, who loitered at the rail beside me. "Know'st not that twenty times ten thousand *djinn* and devils fill the earth and air and sea to hear such idle boasts as thine and send a plague of fogs and tempests as a punishment for those who seek to tell the future? Aye, by the beard of Allah's goat, methinks I see there upon the larboard bow a sign of that same fog!"

He swung his great black hand athwart the sky, and sure, upon the far horizon, we could see the fleece-white ranks of sea-fog marching over the waters straight upon us.

The fog came on apace, and with it came a monstrous, choking calm which sucked the wind from out our sails as children drain the sweet juice from an orange, and though the Dutchmen prayed right lustily, and Hassan cursed and swore so that it was a joy to hear him, the white smoke of the sea came thickly and more thick until it wrapped us round like any blanket, and a man could toss a biscuit farther than his sight could pierce the slowly swirling whirls.

"Now, by the horns of Allah's ox, this likes me not, *effendi*," great Hassan muttered, spitting in the sea between his parted fingers. "*Wah*, it is as if the troubled ghosts of all the drowned who lie beneath the waves had risen from

their sandy graves to welcome us with beckoning arms into their midst!" He bent his thumb across his palm, encircled it with the third and second fingers of his hand and thrust the first and little fingers forward like a pair of horns. "In the glorious name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, I take refuge from Shaitan, the stoned and the rejected," he intoned, and:

"Be silent, great uncouthness," I ordered sharply, for though I had small fear of ghosts or phantoms, having never yet beheld a dead man who could swing a sword or drive a dagger home, his idle prattle worried me. "Hast naught to do, great zany? Then get thee to the fore-castle and help the men prepare their weapons for the time when we shall meet the Roumi."

Right sullenly he touched his hand to brow and lips and heart, the while he muttered a rebellious "hearing and obeying," and turned upon his heel to do my bidding, but ere he took a second lagging step we both became stock-still and bent our futile gaze across the fog-enshrouded sea, for from the deep, impenetrable cloud of whiteness came the sound of voices and the creaking of the cordage of a ship.

"By Allah's glorious name, they'll run us down!" Black Hassan cried, and then, before I had the wit to shut his gaping mouth, he bellowed:

"Ahoy, bear off to starboard; we be in your path!"

"*Que barque es? Quien es?*—What ship is that? Who are you?" came the answering hail, and at the Spanish words the Dutch ship's master wept and wrung his hands.

"O God!" he cried in trembling accents. "O merciful, sweet Lord, deliver us from out their hands!" To me he wailed:

"They'll break us on the rack and roast us at the stake; they'll tear the nails from off our hands and feet and gouge the eyes from out our heads; they'll——"

"By God, by God, by the One True God, they'll know they've had a deal of fighting ere they do it!" shouted Hassan; then, to the men who gathered in the fore-castle and waist:

"Ho, children of the Devil, spawn of mangy camels and unmentionable diseases, make ready for the fray. They come, the Spanish dogs. Make ready, little, gentle lambs, to give them fitting welcome!"

Therewith he raised the silver pipe which hung about his neck and blew a shrill blast, and every man rushed straight to fight him for the battle.

While this was toward, my little orderly, Luiz Castro, had scurried down below and fetched my sable body-armor and my tiger-cloak, and helped me don them. Thereon I set to ordering my men.

OUR ship was built for cargo-bearing and naught else. Great beam she had, and eke a right imposing height, but she answered slowly to the helm, and as for speed, a man might walk as fast as she could run before the breeze. Also, she bore but four small carronades for armament, and these so poorly mounted that their muzzles could not be depressed or elevated more than ten degrees. Therefore I knew that we must fight it hand to hand, and so I placed my men.

Upon the forward deck I stationed musketeers and pikemen under Nuno Cabral's orders, while upon the poop I took a company in my command. Black Hassan held the rest amidships, and in the crosstrees of the masts I set my surest marksmen with orders to pick off the steersmen of the Spaniard when she came in view. This done, I oversaw the shoot-

ing of the guns, filling them with double powder charges and a helmetful of nails and iron-scrap, for well I knew that solid shot would be of no avail against the enemy when fired from out such puny ordnance.

Thus, all prepared, we waited for the tide to bear us toward our foeman, or cause the other ship to drift near us, and whilst we stood in readiness there came to us the silver singing of a trumpet's voice, the bang of booted heels upon the deck, and every indication that the Spaniard made him ready to attack.

Once more the hail rang out across the water: "*Que barque es?*" and I made answer boldly:

"We are the *Jufrouw van Haut* out of Haarlem, commanded by Mynheer Dirk van Bost, and he who speaks is Carlos de la Muerte, called the Tiger. What wouldst thou?"

"We summon your submission in the name of his Most Catholic Majesty, Philip, King of——"

"*Wah*, king of filthy, mangy dogs and leader of a louse-bitten pack of curs!" broke in black Hassan tauntingly. "Come take submission from us, Spanish swine, if so be ye have the gust to fight!" And as he spoke he drove a glowing iron in the touch-hole of the nearer cannon, setting free a monstrous boom and scattering slugs and broken iron harmlessly into the water.

And now the wrathful Spaniard made him ready in good earnest. We could hear the stamp and shout of men as they hied to their quarters, hear the creak and groan of ropes and rollers as the guns were set in place, and while we waited for our foeman to emerge from out the fog there came another sound, the plaint of wood which rasped on wood, the rhythm of the overseer's hammer as he beat the stroke, and the whining cry and

smack of whips as they rose and fell and rose to fall upon the naked backs of rowers. Like a mongrel cur surrounded by her whelps the Spanish ship sailed with a convoy of swift galleys, and these were darting forth from out her shadow to attack us as we lay becalmed upon the fog-bound sea.

Now, when he heard the creaking of the row-locks Mynheer van Bost was like to die for very terror, for though he was a good enough mariner, he carried but a scanty crew, and all his fortune was encompassed in his ship and cargo. Likewise, he had seen somewhat of the Spaniard's gentle ways with captured Dutchmen, and so he trembled in his boots and wrung his hands in ecstasy of terror, and when Black Hassan saw it he was very wroth.

"O man," he called, "hast thou no faith in Allah's mercy? Hast thou no faith in Carlos de la Muerte, called the Tiger, or in the strength of us who fight beside him? Canst thou not see that we are even match for any tubful of pork-eating unbelievers who ever sailed the seas? Wherefore art thou frightened?"

But Mynheer van Bost was not to be persuaded.

"Ye know them not," he wailed; "their ships are floating fortresses and their men will surely overwhelm us!"

"All things are as Allah ordereth," the black replied, thrusting his irons anew into the brazier of glowing charcoal which stood beside the guns, "and in His glorious name we take our refuge from the Stoned One and his followers." Then, to the men of his command:

"Look sharply, thou sons of Shaitan, they come, the sons of noseless mothers!" Even as he spake, the galleys darted from the fog like dragons slithering from their lairs.

Black Hassan's teeth were chattering with excitement as he gazed along the

barrel of his gun what time he held his glowing iron ready over the touch-hole. The sea was calm, but a long ground swell raised the waters, and our pot-bottomed craft rocked lazily upon the ocean's bosom.

Then, as the nearer galley came alongside and our hither rail dipped low, he thrust his iron in the gun-breach and a roar like forty-thousand fiends with belly-ache resounded as the carronade thundered out its welcome to the foe.

The Spanish troops were massed upon their forward deck, all ready with their pikes and boarding-hooks, and the crafty Hassan had withheld his fire till his muzzle pointed fairly at them; wherefore the charge of nails and broken iron took them full in the face, sweeping the deck well-nigh clean of men and killing or maiming all the crew.

Wild screams and cries and lamentations rent the air as the gun-smoke cleared away, but though the Dons were shaken, they were brave, and the second galley followed hard upon the first.

Now the commander of the second boat had seen what treatment we had given his companion, and so he steered a different course, not attempting to collide with us bow on, but turning his craft so that he faced the same way we did, then shipping his oars on his near side and running cleverly alongside us.

Hassan's gun could not be lowered so that he could fire into the galley, and ere his men could make shift to fend the Spanish off with poles, their grappling-irons had made fast upon our side and their crew of forty stalwart knaves were swarming up the side.

But while we made us ready to repel them with our arms the Dutchmen had been far from idle, and ever as the Spaniards clambered toward our decks the ship's cook and two scullions came up from the galley with a mighty cauldron

of boiling water, while the carpenter was ready with a pot of seething pitch.

WITH pike and ax and flashing sword did Hassan's men assault the foe as they climbed up the side, while the mighty Black One spat upon his hands and whirled his spiked mace round his head, then smote and smote again, cracking iron casques and skulls as though they had been egg-shells. The ship's cook, too, poured pailful after pailful of boiling water on the boarders, and the carpenter bailed over seething pitch with his great ladle, and the tortured cries which rose where like the cries of souls but newly come to hell when first they feel the everlasting fire.

So merrily worked my doughty men that it was scarce five minutes ere the Dons retreated to their decks and were fain to cut their grappling-ropes and put away; but Black Hassan would not have it so.

"Forward, lambs; down upon them, little, sucking doves, fairest flowers out of Satan's garden!" he roared; and, led by him, the defenders tumbled overside and landed on the Spaniard's deck, thrusting merrily with pike and sword and hewing lustily with ax and hatchet.

"By God, by God, by the One True God, let not a one of them escape from Satan's hands!" the black one shrieked, and right well his men performed his bidding, so that ere a man could count an even hundred they had maimed or slain the last man of the galley's crew. Then, heaving the disabled overboard and leaving the dead upon the deck, they went below and struck the shackles from the galley slaves, and with a mighty roar of triumph clomb back to our deck.

"Well done!" I cried to Hassan, and would have called him to the poop with me, but he had other business. With

pitch from out the carpenter's great kettle he smeared the galley's deck, then sent three varlets down into the hold to fetch a cask of oil, which same he broached and poured upon the captured boat.

"Now, by the tail of Allah's horse, we'll send them back their property!" he laughed, and as his men took poles and pushed the galley off, he flung a blazing brand into her hold.

She burned right mightily, and the lapping waves bare her blazing through the fog back to the ship from whence she came. Anon we heard great clamor and the rush of many feet, and as the Spaniards sought to quench the blazing galley and breast her from their side, we mocked them with harsh laughter and many foul insults for that they now must fight the very boat which they had launched to capture us.

But the same slow waves which took the galley from us were surely drifting us against the larger ship, and half an hour later we could make her out against the fog; a great, high-castled craft with crosses bossed upon her idly flapping sails, and her name, the *Santa Isabella*, picked out in golden letters on her prow.

There was not wind enough for steerage way for either of us, but the *Santa Isabella* lay broadside on, and as we drifted toward her she let go with eight guns. But so poorly were they served that but one shot went through our bulwarks, two through our sails, and the rest flew by as harmlessly as birds.

"Now, up into the crosstrees, musketeers!" I ordered, and in a moment our ratlines were all black with swarming men. Then, while the Spaniards ran about their deck and howled conflicting orders at each other, we shot them down like ducks.

But slowly we approached the *Santa Isabella*, and the enemy made him ready

for close-quarter fighting. Her bulwarks towered over ours, and I realized that they must surely board us in a little while. Therefore I set the men to work to bear the carronades up upon the forecastle and poop, lashing them in place as firmly as might be and bearing down their muzzles till they swept the waist of the ship. Thereon I loaded them with musket-balls till they were like to burst and massed the greater portion of my men upon the higher decks, leaving in the waist a few to keep the Dons in play a moment when they should have boarded us.

And now the grapnels were flung forth, and side to side the two ships ground together, their timbers growling with the pressure like ill-tempered dogs.

"*Viva el Rey, viva Cristo!*" cried the Spanish with a mighty cheer as they swarmed down upon us.

Black Hassan met them with his men drawn up in wedge formation, he and his great mace at the peak, the sides all bristling with pikes. "Carlos, Carlos, *Tigre, Tigre, Tigre!*" he roared defiance in the Spaniards' faces, and struck the foremost of them such a blow that he was swept from off his feet and hurled so swiftly into the next man that both of them fell backward into the ocean.

The fight was quick and bloody for a moment, but the Spaniards pressed on us so hotly that any one could see that Hassan and his company must swiftly die beneath the flailing swords unless they sought retreat; so I blew my whistle, and at its shrilling all the black one's men did break and scamper agilely to cover, and while the Spaniards stood in wonderment that they had won the deck so easily, we touched our heavy-loaded cannon off, sweeping the packed deck with a leaden hail of death.

And now the tide of battle turned, for full a hundred men had boarded us,

though now of all that number scarce a score remained, and of them not a one but had some grievous hurt. There were no more than fifty or a hundred left upon the *Santa Isabella*, and we could match them blade for blade, and so the hare became the hound, and up their side we clambered with fierce yells, beating all resistance down and slaying ruthlessly.

"Allah, Allah, Allah, Carlos—Carlos el Tigre!" sounded Hassan's battle-cry, and:

"Carlos, Carlos; *viva Carlos!*" cried the men, and from poop to forecastle we swept the Spaniards in a bloody tide. At last their leader gave the sign of yielding, whereat I blew upon my whistle to call a truce to slaughter.

"*Señor*, I am Don Sebastiano de la Montalva y Moreno, captain in the forces of his Most Catholic Majesty. I yield me to your arms, with these my brave companions, and put my trust in your knightly chivalry that you will entreat us honorably as prisoners of war," announced the captain of the Spanish ship. "Whom have I the distinguished honor of addressing?"

Now, at his words my heart was like to burst with pride, for all the Spanish race are proud as Lucifer, and to be thus spoken to by one of such importance was proof enow that I, the vagabond and fugitive, had risen in the world until I stood on equal terms with any man. So in my turn I made a courtly bow and answered:

"I am Carlos de la Muerte, called the Tiger, and these are soldiers of my army. The circumstances of my birth were such that I never owed allegiance to a king, and the flag 'neath which I fight is mine, and not another's; hence I treat with you as equal of the greatest, and make what terms I wish, for there is none to say me nay."

Thereafter we went into consultation, and though Hassan besought me tearfully that we should make the captives walk the plank, I would not have it. By the terms of the capitulation I took the *Santa Isabella* and all her mighty store of guns and ammunition, also the great bulk of treasure which was in her hold and which she brought from the New World. The Spaniards were allowed their arms and armor and all their personal belongings, and for their safe dispatch to shore we gave them the ship's boats, and built them several rafts of timber also. Likewise, I gave his jeweled sword back to Don Sebastiano and bade him bear his ensign with him, permitting that he lower it with his own hands.

"Don Carlos," he assured me as he went overside, "I am not one who forgets lightly. Should ever the fortunes of war be reversed, and I stand where you have stood, I bid you to remember how you have entreated me, and look for some requital of your generous terms."

Then, when all was finished and the Spaniards had departed, I ran my Tiger ensign to the masthead and transferred my men unto the captured ship, and, with the Dutch barque as leader, we took up our voyage to Holland.

2. *How We Made a Sorry Bargain*

Now, when we were all safely come to Zeadyn, and had tied up against the pier, I made me ready to treat with the Dutchmen concerning our employment. To impress them with our worthiness I ordered everything in readiness for a fine parade, and when the steeple-clocks were at the stroke of ten we did debark and march gallantly along the street till we were come to the Town Hall.

We made a goodly showing. First of all came I, dight in my suit of plain black stuff with plain black body-armor, my

black-plumed hat upon my head, my red-lined cloak of tigerskin thrown over my shoulders. Close at my heels came Black Hassan all in Moorish armor, his great two-handed mace across his shoulder like a musket, his long saber clanking at his heels. Then Nuno Cabral, second in command, led on the men, six men to a file, four files to a squadron, two squadrons to a wing, three wings composing the battalion; pikemen marching in the middle, musketeers with even-slanted pieces at the sides, in between the pipes and kettle-drums and trumpets—tramp, tramp, tramp, their booted feet struck on the cobbled roadway as I led them toward the Town Hall where the Dutch commander was. We deployed in even ranks upon the public square, and as we came to halt the halberdiers brought down their lance-tips, the musketeers stood fast with gun-stocks on the ground, muzzles held arm's-length out at the right, and the drums beat out a ruffle while the trumpets sounded forth a triple flourish.

But though the townsfolk crowded round and gaped at great Black Hassan in his Moorish armor and at me in my bright tiger-cloak, there was no cheering for us, but rather a subdued and sullen murmur.

"By Allah's bones, my master," muttered Hassan at my elbow, "these be a churlish set of knaves. Perhaps it were better if we left them to their fate and sailed away to battle with the Spaniards on the sea. There be rare pickings there, while here——" he paused and spat upon the paving-stones in token of disgust.

"Let be," I answered sharply. "Do you accompany me into the Town House, where we will see what welcome waits us from the Netherlander general. Certes, he can not withstand the offer of our help." And so we went into the house.

And there before the fire the general

sate, a great, thick-bellied man called van der Coopen, with a jaundiced eye, who looked upon us coldly and spoke with no great courtesy when we had told our errand.

"Mercenary soldiers, quotha," he answered in a heavy, oily voice; "we've had our fill of mercenary soldiers, and God wot it is a sorry lot of bargains they have been. Stanley and Yorke delivered Deventer and Zutphen to the Spanish, Von Eude's German cavalry deserted when the Spaniards breached the walls of Antwerp and helped them sack and slaughter the inhabitants. Mercenaries, ha! To eat our substance in the lulls between the fighting, and turn traitor or craven when the time to fight arrives!"

Now when I heard these words I was exceeding wroth, and the blood flushed up into my cheeks and my two hands itched to clutch the Dutchman by the throat, but still I held myself in check, and: "*Mynbeer*," quoth I, "I doubt not that many of your hirelings are a scurvy lot, but we are not the ones to ask that you should buy our goods unsampled. Be good enough, therefore, to tell us somewhat of the things which trouble you; name some task that you would have us do, and we shall do it gladly; then, when you've seen the temper of our metal, say whether we be worthy of your hire."

Thereat the general laughed right heartily, but methought there was a crafty twinkle in his eyes as he replied: "If thou'lt agree to take the fortress of San Salvador beside the River Viesel, I'll undertake to hire ye, every mother's son, and pay ye in advance, to boot. But performance before pay, my fine young fighting-cock. What say ye?"

"Why, by the Prophet's beard, that's very bravely spoken, good *Mynbeer*," said I. "What of this fortress?"

"'Tis an outpost of the enemy, a nut so hard to crack that we have lost an even thousand men assaulting it," he told me with a sneering laugh. "Dost think that thou canst take it, good Sir Tiger-Man?"

"Mayhap," I answered. "There be men and men, and one battalion such as mine, with me for leader, haply may work with more success than all the dunderheads you've sent against the place. We'll talk of this anon, *Mynbeer*."

Then we marched back unto our ship, and I and Nuno Cabral and Black Hassan entered into council. On horses hired in the town we rode out to reconnoiter the position, and found it strong, indeed. Star-shaped, full twenty feet the bastions rose, all built of solid masonry, and round their foot there ran a wide, deep moat, protected on its farther side by a criss-cross of sharp stakes of the kind called Friesland cavalry, whereon a man would surely pierce himself if he essayed to clamber over them. The wall-tops were notched for cannon fire and loopholed for musketry. Well could I understand how futile were assaults made on the place, and how the Spanish garrison, safe-walled within that fort, could thumb their noses at the laboring Dutchmen who sought to wrest the stronghold from them.

"Now, by the wool of Allah's sheep, methinks thou'st writ a sorry bargain for us, master," muttered great Black Hassan, and stout Nuno Cabral, who delighted in assault upon the strongest fortresses, shook his head and tweaked his beard in token of dismay.

"Were we ten times as strong in men, and aided by artillery, as well, we should be insufficient to the task of seizing that strong place," he told me. "Naught but a siege, protracted and delayed, could make it yield."

"Aye, and while we sat around the walls and howled like starving dogs

beneath a butcher's window, the Spanish forces from beyond would fall upon our rear and cut us into bits," added Hassan with a great gusty sigh. "I fear that we shall have to tell that monstrous ball of fat that he has won the wager, after all, and we can not take the fort for him, may Allah send an earthquake to devour him!"

But I was not content to have it so, and so, instead of going to the Dutchman and owning we were beaten, I went back to the ship and sat me down to study. But though I thought until my head felt heavy as a cannon-shot, I could not frame a likely plan.

3. *How I Met La Araña*

WHEN eventime was come, and I no nearer to a safe plan for the capture of the fort than I had been at noon, I shook me like a dog who rises from a long and troubled sleep, and went walking in the town, inspecting first the shore patrols which I had set to watch the waterfront and keep my men from harm if they mingled over-freely with the wenches and the wastrels in the taverns. And as I walked with head bent low in thought I chanced to pass a lightless alley-way, and came all suddenly to pause as I heard the scuffing of rough shoon on the kidney-stones and a woman's voice raised in a plaint for help. "How now?" I asked, loosening my simitar and dagger in their sheaths and stepping cautiously, for in the darksome byway a man could leap on me unobserved, and I had little wish to stand before the face of Allah ere my time were come.

"Help, *Mynbeer*, help!" the woman called again, and I stepped still farther in the gloom to see what filthy business might be toward. And that same step was like to have been my last, for even as I peered before me, one who huddled in an angle of the wall leapt forth and

drove a poniard straight into my breast, so that had I not been guarded by my shirt of secret mail, he had surely let my heart's blood and my life together from my body at the single stroke. But the good chain-mail held true, and his knife-blade broke off in his hand as though it had been but a rotten carrot, and before he had a chance to call upon the name of God I passed my dagger once across his throat. And thereupon he fell down on his back and made unseemly noises while he kicked his feet against the paving-stones and died.

"One infidel dog gone to feed the fires of hell!" I hailed right gleefully. "Who else would taste the steel of Carlos called the Tiger?" But not a word made answer, for the other knaves were wrestling silently with a woman at the far end of the alley, and even as I stepped across the body of the one I slew, taking care that his vile blood should not befoul my boots, I saw them push her into the canal and turn to run away.

"Now by the sacred slipper of Mohammed (on whom the salute!) this will not do!" I called. "Stand fast, ye knaves, and tell me what this means." But they paid me no heed, and would have run away completely had I not bethought me of a trick which I learned in childhood, and flung my dagger at the farthest lout so that he fell stumbling to the pavement with five inches of good steel between his shoulders and the red blood running from his mouth. And as he fell his grasping hands seized on the legs of his companion, so that he fell face forward, too, and ere he could arise I was upon him.

He rolled away as I struck at him with my sword, but I struck and struck again, so that though I missed him at each blow I kept him rolling to escape my steel until he reached the curb and toppled over into the canal. Then I retrieved the dag-

ger from his fellow's corpse and stood a while upon the water's edge, taking counsel with myself whether I should dive in after him and slay him with my steel, or let the water strangle him.

But as I paused in thought a blubbering hail came to me: "Help, help; I be sinking!" and from the dark canal a girl's white face looked up pleadingly.

"Have courage, mistress, I am coming," I called back, and leapt into the tide.

The woman's farthingale had buoyed her up somewhat, so that she was more wet than hurt by her immersion, and when I reached her with a few quick strokes I found it no great task to keep her chin above the water, while I towed her to the curb and drew her out upon the bank.

As daintily as any cat she stepped upon the shore and shook the water from her dripping garments, then, to my amazement, turned and laughed right merrily. "By my faith, *Mynbeer*, we be a sorry-looking pair, we two," she told me mid soft gusts of laughter. "Your beard is wet as any drowned rat's tail, while I must look like some old beldame ducked for scolding in the village pond. Willt come with me and dry thyself? My house lies not so far away."

"A little wetting is no great affair," I answered shortly, for her laughter liked me not, "but it were better that I saw you to your dwelling, else you are like to meet with other scurvy knaves and not find rescue nigh."

She made a little growling noise deep in her throat, as one who mocks a harmless puppy's show of fierceness; then, as I offered no response, she tucked her small hand 'neath my arm and walked along demurely as a village maid upon her way to Sabbath worship. And so we paced along the darkened streets, and three times as we walked methought I heard

the patter of pursuing steps, but each time I turned round I saw no follower, and so, deciding it was but some homeless dog which sought for bones by night, I thought no more upon the matter.

ANON we reached the gate of a walled garden, and with her key she let us in and led me toward the house. Thrice did she rap upon the door with the heavy signet of her ring, and at the third alarm an ancient, withered crone came hobbling to the portal and admitted us. "*Gracias*—" she began, but my conductress cut her short and told her hurriedly:

"Light the fire up, Margot, and brew some chocolate for *Mynbeer*, for he is wet unto the skin from leaping in the Brandt canal to save me from untimely drowning."

The ancient woman looked at her from out her lashless, rheumy eyes, but spake nothing further as she turned and led us up the stairs, kneeled down upon her knees and set the logs which lay all ready on the hearth to blazing merrily.

"Await me here, *Mynbeer*, and dry you by the fire," the younger woman bade. "I go to make myself more fitting for your entertainment."

The smoke steamed from my garments as I stood me by the blaze, and turned me round and round before it like a joint of meat upon the spit, till I was dry and snugly warm again. This done, I sate me in a richly cushioned chair and gazed about the room, for it was wondrous handsome, being carpeted with rugs the like of which I had not seen since I was last in Barbary, and hung with cunningly wrought tapestries depicting scenes of valor and of gallantry, with here and there a painting of some soberer religious nature. Silk cushions of bright hues were strewn upon the divans which stood by the walls, and a brazen lamp suspended

by a gilded chain from the low ceiling cast an amber light into that portion of the room not lighted by the blazing logs. In a copper brazier smoldered aromatic herbs which sent their scented smoke in lazy spirals toward the roof.

"How now, *Mynbeer*, dost like my nest?" a soft voice asked me from the curtained door, and I roused me from my reverie at the sound.

She was a pretty minx. Abundant chestnut-colored hair, rippling with rich shadow-laden waves, was wound in heavy coils low on her neck. Her face was small and pointed at the chin, with a small nose whose delicately cut nostrils seemed to palpitate above the thin, crimson mouth. Devoid of color as a mask of carven ivory, her pale countenance was enhanced in pallor by the redness of her lips and the shadow of the curling, silken lashes which framed her pansy-purple eyes. She had changed her stiff brocade for a clinging gown of purple tissue that hung light as any veil upon her slender, girlish form, and as she grasped the doorway curtain with one pale and ringless hand the loose sleeve of the garment fell away, and showed an arm as white as sculptured marble. On her feet were silver sandal shoon, and I saw her toes were long and straight and slender as the fingers of a well-kept hand.

I drew my breath in quickly, for the vision was enticing, and I was young and filled with all the fire of youth; yet some caution held the rapid beating of my heart in check, for here I knew there stood no ordinary woman, but some creature of enchantment whom men loved to their undoing, as men had loved the Trojan Helen in the days of long ago.

"And dost thou like my nest, *Mynbeer*?" she asked again, but:

"Call me not *Mynbeer*," I answered

roughly. "I am no beer-besodden Dutchman to be called *Mynbeer*."

A strange light came into her purple eyes. "No Dutchman, thou, I might have known it," she admitted with an intake of her breath. "A Spaniard, then; a *renegado*, possibly?"

"A Spaniard—I?" I answered; then, lest I soil her dainty carpets if I spat upon the floor, I spat into the fire. "By Allah's self——"

"A Moorman!" she exclaimed, and her eyes were big with wonder. "A Moorman—here?"

"And why not?" I responded. "Is not clean Moorish steel as good as any—aye, and as sharp, as thou didst see some little time aback when those low rascals flung thee in the water?"

She crossed the room and sate upon the divan facing me, and the perfume of her gown and hair rose to my brain like the working of some subtle drug. "Then thou art he who came to General van der Coopen, the Governor, and offered him thy services this morning?" she asked, while she studied me as though I were some rare beast at a show.

"I am that same," I told her, "and like to go away as empty as I came, for he would have me prove myself by a task which any man might quail before."

She laughed a short and mirthless laugh. "In sooth, thou'rt like to leave the shorter by a head," she answered, while her big eyes shone with secret merriment. "Dost know who I am, and who it was thou slew'st for to succor me tonight?"

"Why, as to that, I think it no great matter," answered I. "Thou wert a woman, lovely and in trouble; they a set of scurvy knaves who played the truant overlong from hell. Need more be said?"

"Indeed and indeed," she told me, while that same slow smile of sadness once again spread o'er her face. "I am

Lysbeth van Goorl, called sometimes La Araña, and those were van der Coopen's secret spies ye slew. For months they had hung on my trail, like sleuth-hounds following a roe; tonight they seized me in their net and were bearing me before the Governor when ye interfered. I do not think his Excellency will be greatly pleased when he learns the part ye've played, unless, perchance——" She stopped her speech and looked at me with dreamy, speculative eyes.

"Yes, mistress, unless what?" I prompted as she forbore speech, but continued looking at me, half in pleading, half in irony.

"Unless ye do redeem yourself and take your ransom to him," she replied. "Seest thou this head of mine? It's pretty, is it not? A soft and lovely thing to rest upon your shoulder, or within the hollow of your arm? A something ye might gaze on fondly as it lay upon the pillow by thine own, when morning's sunbeams drove the shadows of the night away? Nay! 'Tis something far more valuable. 'Tis worth its weight in minted gold, for that's the price upon it.

"See"—she slipped from off her seat and kneeled upon her knees before me, while she bowed her sweet head docilely and tapped my sword-hilt with her pearl-tipped fingers—"there is your sword and here my bowed and naked neck. Hew off this head of mine and bear it to the Governor. Long has he sought it, and in vain. Last Candlemas he swore an oath that he who brought him La Araña's head should have full amnesty and pardon for any crime or crimes, howe'er so great, which he might have committed, and the even weight of that same head in broad gold pieces, as well. Strike quickly, good Sir Moorman, that I may not suffer overmuch, and buy thyself free pardon and preferment with the prize I offer thee."

"Now by great Solomon, the son of David (on whom be peace!), what foolishness is this?" I asked, amazed and angered. "Dost take me for some Spanish swine that ye should dare this thing of me? Rise, lady, and let there be no talk of hewing heads away between us, unless, perchance, they be the heads of those who do thee injury."

Anon she sate beside me on the divan, and as timidly as any little bird that chirps and creeps within its nest, her lily fingers crept within mine own. "And why art thou hight La Araña?" I asked her after-while, for my lips meantime had been full busy with other things than speech.

"La Araña—the Spider—as thou'lt learn, if thou shouldst live so long, is the chiefest of the Spaniards' spies, the shrewdest gatherer of information that they have," she answered me. "For years she has been here and there, sucking secrets from the military leaders of the Dutchmen and their allies as a spider drains the blood from hapless flies. Aye, and enmeshing the strongest of them in the meshes of her tresses as the spider traps the helpless, foolish moth within her web. Through La Araña's subtlety have many been made traitors and endured the death of shame upon the scaffold or before a file of musketeers. Hundreds—aye, and thousands—of brave men have been butchered in the field, because, forsooth, the Spaniards knew the secrets of their battle strategy beforehand. She is a woman with a fair and seemly body framed for love, but a body with no soul within it; she is a woman with the shrewd brain of a man within her head, but without a heart beneath her white and pliant breast; she is a ruthless, soulless, heartless spider-woman, an enemy more dangerous than a regiment of horse, a cruel, inhuman monster, shaped in woman's form, and only fit to die. Say,

wilt thou slay me now? For I am La Araña!" Therewith she kissed me full upon the mouth with gently parted lips.

All gently did I disengage the soft and scented arms from round my neck; then, whilst I held her two white hands within mine own, I asked her:

"Thou art a woman of the Dutch; thy name proclaims as much; how comes it that ye fight with charm and brain against your countrymen and for the bloody dogs of Spain?"

4. *How La Araña Came to Be*

A LOOK of wonder overspread her face. "Ye do not shrink from me—from La Araña? Ye would not slay me now, when I have told ye all?" she asked me in amaze.

"I would not slay thee now or ever," I replied. "I am the Tiger only to mine enemies, and thou'rt no foe of mine. Besides, Carlos de la Muerte does not kill where he has kissed. Wilt tell me now why is it that thou warrest on thy countrymen?"

She loosed her little hands from mine and rose and sate herself across the fire from me, then raised her fingers to her eyes as though to pinch away the tears. "I scarce can yet believe it," she declared. "Ye know me for the thing I am, yet ye do not flinch from me nor curse me, nor offer me a hurt. Art truly gentle as ye seem? Dost soothly wish to know why I make war upon my blood-kin as upon a bitter foe?"

"Soothly," answered I, and took her hands in mine again. "Mayhap I can still further serve thee, Lysbeth, as I have already done. If so it be, thou needest but ask my help, for maugre thou hast said about thyself, I still am not persuaded."

Now, when I spake her thus, it seemed the very visage of the woman changed.

M. C.—8

She was no longer Tryian Helen or fair Circe of the Isles, a woman-bait to catch men in a trap, but just a woman, soft and simple and in much great trouble. The very hand that rested in my hand seemed resting there for comfort rather than seduction.

"How old am I?" she asked me, and I shook my head in puzzlement.

"Why, one or two and twenty; perhaps a year or so the less," I answered.

"Nay, I'll not see twenty-six again," she told me with a weary smile, "but oh, my friend, I feel as though I had been old and wrinkled on that dim, far night when the moon gave birth unto the stars, for I have lived and suffered much in this short life of mine.

"It was six years ago when I was betrothed to Adrian van Tassel. Our bans were published Michaelmas; we were to wed the morning of All Saints. Then came the Spanish.

"All the Low Countries lay beneath an interdict; children, men and women held their lives forfeit if the Spaniards took them captive, and so the minions of King Philip raged throughout the town, burning, sacking, slaying all who fell into their path. I was in the house of my affianced, who was a lawyer and a man of peace and not a soldier; yet the Spanish captain fain would force him to the square where the Dutchmen captured under arms in the surprize attack awaited execution. But I kneeled upon my knees before him and cried mercy, and for me he granted it.

"If thou wilt come to be with me I'll spare the lives of all within this house and put a mark upon the door that none may enter for to rob it," he agreed, whereat the man to whom I was betrothed and eke his aged father and his mother did plead with me most piteously that I would grant myself pliant to the Span-

iard's offer. Round me they crowded, kissing my hand and the hem of my garment as though I had been a queen or saint, and saying that the thing I did was holy, noble sacrifice.

"And so I went away with Don—with the leader of the Spaniards, and in the camp I dwelt with him till Christmastide was come; then orders took him to the siege of Haarlem, and I was left to go my ways in peace.

"Back to my native town I went, the heart within me burning for the sight of home and friends and kindred, and with me I did bear some trinkets of remembrance for those I held most dear, for the Spaniard had entreated me right fairly, and I was left no beggar when he went away.

"The candles burned all brightly in the houses as I passed along the village street, and at every doorstep stood the wooden shoon for good St. Nicholas to fill, and by the door of Vrouw van Tassel stood another pair, a small and dainty pair all bright with fresh new gilding. But when I struck the knocker on the door there came no instant answer to my summons, though I used the secret knock which Adrian and I had used to make us known to one another. And finally came Adrian, my betrothed, and with him came a young and pretty doll-faced woman who laced her arm in his and looked at me in wonder as I stood there in the snow.

"'Adrian, 'tis Lysbeth—I!' I cried, and held my hands, all full of gifts, out to him, and:

"'Who is this woman, husband?' asked the girl who stood within the circle of his arm.

"'Bah, 'tis some strumpet of the town come to beg for alms or play a wicked, wanton's trick on us!' he answered as he slammed the door against me.

"Father and mother had I none, but to the home of her who reared me, my old aunt, I went, and she came forth from out the chimney-place where she nodded by the fire, and cursed me for a wanton and a harlot and a leman of the Spaniard, and drove me from her door into the snow.

"Then was mine anger kindled hot against my blood and kin and all my countrymen, and in the snow of Christmastide I stood and raised my hands to heaven and called down judgment on them for that they had accepted sacrifice of all I had to give when their extremity was great; yet now, when the danger I had saved them from by my self-sale was passed, they turned me from their doors with foul insult.

"And so, from that day forward I have gone my secret ways, now in this place, now in that, beguiling with a Judas-kiss, betraying all who fell beneath the witchery of my beauty, taking bloody toll for all the insults I had suffered at my countrypeople's hands, and receiving Spanish gold in return for services more valuable than any mercenary soldier's. Dost see why I am La Araña, and why I fight against my countrymen, Don Carlos?"

"I see that thou wert greatly wronged and that thou hast excuse for all thy deeds," I answered. "Further, I, who owe no duty to the Stadts General, but am a mercenary soldier like thyself, can pass no judgment on thee, Lysbeth. We mercenaries fight for friend or foe, according to our pay, our only loyalty to him who hires our swords, and that enduring only while our hire is paid. As yet I hold no patent from the Governor or the Stadts, and so we are not enemies in fact or deed. But this I tell thee, Lysbeth van Goorl, if on tomorrow's morning General van der Coopen should hire me, my first act would be to put thee in restraint, that thy lovely

face and agile wit should work me and my men no harm. What sayest thou, will it be truce until we fight for different flags, or——"

"No truce for thee, my fine young cockerel!" spake a man's deep voice behind my shoulder, and from beyond a heavy tapestry hanging on the wall a tall and bearded man stepped forth, a pistol with glowing match held ready in his hand. "Draw forth thy sword and dagger and fling them on the floor," he ordered with a smile more threatening than any frown.

5. How Old Foes Met Again

"EXCELENCIA! Do not so, I pray!" the girl besought, wringing her white hands together. "This night he saved me from the Governor's spies when they had made me prisoner. He is no Dutchman, nor a ladrone in their pay, but a kind and very knightly gentleman, who, even when he learned that I am La Araña, forbore to do me hurt and spake me well with kindness and full courtesy."

"The more fool he," the Spaniard answered with a sneering laugh.

"Ah, but if I ask this of thee—I who never yet have asked a favor since——"

"Be silent, drab!" he bade her harshly. "I am upon my liege lord's business, and not all your harlot's tears can stay me from my duty. Besides, I have a bone to pick with this black crow of infamy, this *renegado*, this scar-faced pirate and sea-robber.

"Dost recognize me, sirrah?" he turned his face full on me, so that the lamplight fell upon his features.

"Don Sebastiano——" I began, amazed, and:

"——de la Montalva y Moreno, captain in the forces of his Most Catholic Majesty," he finished with a pasquin bow. "Thou hadst thought to see the last of

me when thou turned me loose upon the ocean in a little boat, no? But we were rescued by a galley ere we'd rowed a league, and—come, shed thou thy sword and dagger, pirate dog, I have no words to waste on thee. Anon, within the fortress of San Salvador we'll see if thy neck be tougher than a hempen rope, unless the torturers have finished thee before the halter gets a chance."

"Nay, *Señor*," I protested, "this is graceless, surely. When we overcame thee in fair fight upon the *Santa Isabella's* deck, thou didst surrender and received due courtesies of war. Had I been pirate as ye name me, I could have slaughtered thee and all thy crew; yet I did release thee with thy personal belongings, forbearing even to hold thee prisoner for ransom. Thy ship was prize of war, 'tis true, but thy person——"

"Silence, dog, thy very words convict thee!" he spat an angry answer. "My ship was prize of war, thou sayest? Ha, what war was there 'twixt thee and Spain? Thyself admitted that ye'd never known allegiance to a king; hence thou wert masterless, and fighting for no country and no flag, ye did assault a treasure ship with force and arms; therefore be ye pirate, and as pirate shall ye die, for now I hold the upper hand and—*Santa Maria!*"

The look of one who sits unwarned upon a nail came on his face.

"Let drop thy pistol, Spaniard, and hold up thy hands above thy head, or by our Lady thou'lt not live to draw another breath," a husky whisper sounded from behind him.

He did as he was ordered; then: "Now step two paces forward in the room," the same low tones commanded, and as the haughty Don obeyed I saw behind him the small form of my little orderly, Luiz Castro, who, scarce reaching to the Spaniard's shoulder, held a long and naked

dagger-point against his back above the heart.

Swiftly I drew my sword and put its point against Don Sebastiano's throat, and whilst I held him pinned against the wall, small Luiz bound his wrists together with a cord from off the window-curtain.

"There be three more beneath the window in the garden, Master," the lad informed me as he knotted fast the knots about the Spaniard's wrists, "but I fooled them bravely. As they stood watch I hurled a great stone into the bushes, and while they searched to see what made the noise, I slipped beneath their very noses and followed in this one's steps. And none too soon did I arrive, meseemeth."

"Was it then thy feet I heard behind me in the street?" I asked.

"Aye, Master. When ye left the ship I followed in thy wake. I saw thee fight the three knaves in the alley and pull madonna from the water, then come with her unto this house. I waited in the street for thee, and presently I saw these ravens come and hold a parley with an ancient crone, who would have sent them off, but they refused to go. Eftsoons the three took station in the garden while their leader here did mount a trellised vine unto the window of this room—and I came after him. Say, now, Master, shall I slit his gullet?" He whetted the edge of his knife across the palm of his small hand.

"Nay," answered I the while I plucked my beard in thought; then, of the girl I asked:

"Lady, it was in thy house that these things came to pass; what is thy judgment in the matter?"

The Spanish captain laughed a scornful taunt: "Don Sebastiano de la Montalva y Moreno, captain in the army of His Majesty of Spain, is subject to the judgment of a pirate and a slut! Señor

Don Carlos de la Muerte, *el Tigre*, of the Kingdom of Cockaigne, and the white and pure Queen of Babylon, the fairest strumpet of them all, would sit in judgment on a gentleman of Spain!"

The girl's soft eyes flashed sudden fire and her slender bosoms heaved as though she fought for breath. "Strumpet thou hast named me—woman of the town and of the camp—and thou hast named me rightly!" she replied. "And who was it made me so? Who forced me to his will by threats against the ones I loved? Who reft me of my home and kin and honorable marriage, and soiled me with the sin of lechery? *Thou*. Sebastiano de la Montalva, thou art he!"

The Spaniard eyed her coolly. "What I have done I did for Spain and for the true religion," he replied. "I do not need to justify myself before the eyes of any man."

"Thou sayest truth," I answered, "but thou must justify thyself before the eyes of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful.

"Loose his hands," I bade small Luiz; then, when this was done:

"Draw, Spaniard, and defend thyself," I ordered, "for within the semi-hour thou shalt stand before the face of God and receive the judgment of thy sins. On guard, thou offspring of a noseless mother, thou brother of a naughty sister!"

And then we fought.

Right valiantly the Spaniard swung his sword, for he was no novice at the game, and more than once his keen point drew the blood from me as right cut, left cut, down-stroke, up-thrust, we made sword-play through the dimly lighted room.

THE little Dutch girl knelt upon her knees and raised her hands in prayer. "Oh, Lord God of Battles, let the weapons of my champion prevail!" she be-

sought heaven. "Look down on outraged virtue and deflowered innocence, and let Thy righteous judgment deal with my seducer according to his sins against the fatherless and helpless. Amen!"

"*Mujercilla!*" spat the Spaniard as he gave back from my sword. "Dost think that heaven hears the prayers of such as thou? Take thy petition down to hell in person!" Dodging from my threatening point he lowered his blade and with a sudden snake-stroke ran it through her body.

"By God, by God, by God's own self, thou diest for that caitiff blow, if for naught else!" I shouted, and like the tiger-beast whose name I bore, I leapt upon him.

His sword-point struck my brisket, and I laughed aloud at his discomfiture as the steel bent back against the meshes of my shirt of mail and I drove my dagger deep into his breast and turned the blade about for greater torment.

"Go down to hell and tell the Devil Carlos sent thee—aye, and grope thy way in blindness over the fiery coals!" I told him; then, as he gasped his life away upon the floor, I leant over him and one by one dug out his eyes with my sharp dagger-point.

"The pistol, lad," I bade my little orderly, and snatching up the weapon blew the match to life again as I leaped into the window-place and gazed into the garden down below.

The Spaniards loitered at their posts, and one I shot ere they could know I looked at them, and as his comrades bent above him I clambered down the trellis, drove my good sword clean through the nearer one, then set upon the other with the fury of the damned. The fight was short, for at my second stroke I hacked his head well-nigh from his shoulders; then, with my saber swinging by the

sword-knot from my wrist, I climbed again the trellis and kneeled down beside the dying girl.

"Carlos, *caro mio*, I thank thee for thy championship," she whispered, and the little goutts of blood were already forming at the corners of her mouth. "It was a knightly act, *amigo mio*, but I would ask one more of thee. Raise me up and take me in thy arms, then kiss me like a brother, not a lover. Many are the men who have clipped me to their bosoms, many more have kissed me on the mouth, but never since the days of my lost innocence has any treated me as thou hast."

I nursed her head within the hollow of my elbow and kissed her on the lips and brow, and then:

"I suffer, Carlos," she complained, "and all is growing dark. Is it death?"

"Yea, it is death," I answered in a whisper. "Wouldst thou that I should pray with thee? I know a Christian prayer." So then:

"Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name . . ."

we prayed together, she falteringly and slow for that her strength was ebbing fast, I haltingly because I had not prayed that prayer since I had stood, a little child, beside my mother's knee in the harem in Algiers.

At length she whispered chokingly: "A legacy from La Araña, Carlos *mio*—remember, if thou still art minded to assault the fortress of San Salvador, that guile counts more than guns, and that a woman enters freely where a man is barred."

"What meanest thou, *cara mia*, by that parable?" I asked, but:

"Oh, hold me tightly, Carlos!" she besought. "They stand all robed in ghostly white to speak my accusation—those many men whom I betrayed to death!"

"Nay, 'tis the blessed Jesu and His

company of angels thou dost see," I comforted. "What says thy Christian Bible: 'Though thy sins be as scarlet, yet will I wash them whiter than snow.' It is the blessed Lord who waits to welcome a repentant sinner, I tell thee, Lysbeth."

"The blessed Lord!" she gasped. "Ah—Carlos!" And the blood flushed forth from out her mouth.

So died the Spider-Woman, La Araña, courtesan and spy, betrayer of men's trust and barteress of love, in the arms of Carlos de la Muerte, with his name upon her lips.

6. *How I Bargained for a Burial*

NEXT day there was a great commotion in the town. A Spanish plot to take the place by stealth had been discovered, it was said, for four dead Spaniards had been found in the dwelling-place of a notorious woman spy, who had doubtless entertained them while they hatched their foul plots, and perished with them when *Mynbeer* the Governor's spies came on them. In proof of this it was told how the Governor's most expert spies had lost their lives in saving of the city, for their bodies had been found beside the Brandt canal. But how they came so far from La Araña's house, and whether they had suffered mortal wounds and staggered from the place after dispatching the woman and her co-conspirators, none could surely say. Only, all knew, the Governor's spies were dead, and so were all the Spaniards and their woman colleague.

This was the simple story as it was started. But as the rumor sped from lip to lip, the tale grew monstrous great; so by the time it reached its hundredth teller it was two hundred Spaniards who had perished as they drew a cordon round the Governor's residence to take him in his sleep and despoil the city's treasure chests.

One thing was natheless certain. The Spaniards' heads had been struck off, and with them that of her who gave them aid and comfort, and while their bodies had been burned to ashes in a bonfire, their heads were stuck on sharpened stakes and set up in the public square for oafs to gape and wonder at.

Now when I heard this I was passing wroth, and taking with me a stout whip of plaited bullhide and Black Hassan and good Nuno Cabral, I marched to the City Hall and called upon the Governor.

"How now, Sir Mercenary," he demanded, "hast come to tell me that my bargain is too hard for thee, and ye dare not seek to prove your mettle against the fortress of San Salvador?"

"Nay, by the Prophet his beard, I've come to tell thee no such thing," I answered him right angrily. "I come to strike another bargain with thee, good *Mynbeer*, and thou'lt be wise to enter into it. First, in return for the capture of San Salvador, I do demand that I be made a Sergeant-Major-in-the-Field, with due commission from the Stadts and a salary of five hundred gilders every month. Next, I would that all my men be hired to serve under me, and that every man receive a good hard dollar every day for wages. Last of all, but first to be attended to, I do demand that straightway ye do give to me the head of her who perished yesternight, to be right honorably buried in the churchyard with a parson to read prayers over it and a file of musketeers to fire a last salute above the grave. What sayest thou, thou monstrous ball of fat? Dost accede to my terms, or wilt thou feel the sting of this my whip?" And thereupon I uncurled my lash and sent it whistling through the air above his head.

Then he would fain have called his guard and had us clapt in irons, but great Black Hassan reached out gently and put

fingers round his throat and grinned into his face so horribly that he forbore outcry and readily acceded to our terms.

"Now lower me that head from yonder pikestaff," I told a sturdy varlet of the Governor's guard who lounded before the door, "and see thou to it that it toucheth not the earth."

"And who art thou that ye give orders thus?" the knave demanded, whereat I struck him twice across the face with my stout whip, so that the blood gushed from his cheek.

"Wilt argue with the Tiger, carrion?" I asked. "*Wab*, then taste the Tiger's claws, and know from them how terrible can be his teeth."

And so he took the head from off the pike, and I wrapped it in a square of fair white linen which I'd taken from a table in the Governor's house, and bare it with me to a skilful Jewish churgeon who knew such things, and bade him spice it with sweet herbs and aromatics that it might not know corruption, and to close the half-shut eyes and compose the wilted features in a look of peaceful sleep; then shut it in a carven leather casket well shelled in lead and have it ready for the burial that night.

7. *How We Assailed San Salvador*

Now morning was far spent when these things had been done, and so I turned me to the task which I had set myself. All night my thoughts had dwelt upon the words which *La Araña* spake whilst she lay dying in my arms, and by day I had their meaning in my mind.

"Guile counts for more than guns, and a woman enters freely where a man is barred," she had said, and from that hint I planned my strategy.

A score and ten of my stout men I singled out for that their stature was

below the average, and them I dight in woman's weeds, with baskets full of eggs and vegetables on their arms, and their swords well hid beneath their flowing skirts.

Then in groups of twos and threes they walked along the road till they were come unto the fortress of San Salvador, where they sat down as though they had been countrywomen waiting for the ferry-boat to bear them over the River Viesel to the Spanish lines beyond, where they might sell their wares.

When all were sat hard by the fortress gate, I and all of the remainder of my troop, some horsed, the rest unmounted, came at furious pace adown the road, yelling as it were a pack of fiends but lately loosed from hell.

And when the huckster-women saw us come they cried and beat their breasts and rent their hair for very terror, and ran shrieking to the fortress for succor. And the Spaniards let the drawbridge down for them to enter, whereat some smote the guard and others cut the hawsers of the bridge, so it could not be lifted, while still others rushed into the castle armory and held the door against all comers, so the garrison could not come unto their muskets or their pikes, and only those who mounted guard upon the bastions were ready to receive us armed when we thundered over the bridge.

"Carlos! Carlos!—Tigre! Tigre! Tigre!" sounded high the battle-cry as my musketeers emptied ball on ball into the startled Spanish ranks, and my pikemen and my axmen swept upon them, striking limb from body, hewing head from neck; thrusting, cutting, stabbing, smiting, bearing down all opposition in the fierceness of their charge.

Great feats of valor did Black Hassan do with his two-handed mace, and Nuno Cabral, too, and even little Luiz Castro

did himself proud with sword and dagger; while as for me, had twice times forty thousand Spaniards barred my path, I should have cut a lane through them, for I battled for the right to give a fair head honorable burial in the churchyard's sacred close.

And so we took the fortress of San Salvador, and lowered the hated ensign of the King of Spain, floating from the masthead in its stead my own good banner broidered with the likeness of a snarling Tiger's head.

And when the sunset came, the Gov-

ernor arrived with all his company, and I bade him welcome to the fortress I had taken, and to him I did give the keys; then, whilst his troops were stood in order at the gate, I lowered down my flag from off the ramparts, and he raised the standard of the Stadts General in its place.

And on a fair white parchment was my patent then engrossed, commissioning me a Sergeant-Major-in-the-Field, and setting forth at length the terms of hiring for myself and men. And thus did I commence my term of service with the Dutch.

Hindoo Student's Prayer

By KATHARINE C. TURNER

Blacken not my face before my father,
 O my teacher!
 I'm a great-boled Lebanon cedar to my father,
 O young teacher!
 I'm the amber dust beads to his hand,
 The whitest camel on his land;
 Blacken not my face before him, master.

I'm the black-loamed Ganges plain to you,
 My teacher!
 I'm a long-eared stubborn ass to you,
 Young teacher!
 The blind-eyed beggar on his perch,
 The whirling dervish in his church,
 I'm the crippled coolie porter to you, master.

But please blacken not my visage to my father,
 Worthy teacher!
 I'll pray for thee at matins; spare my father,
 O young teacher!
 You're a staff to some old man;
 Were you ne'er youth-warped in your plan?
 Smear me not with blackened soot before him, master,



WITH this number our magazine enters its fourth year. Two volumes were published under the old name of *ORIENTAL STORIES*, and the third volume has gone into literary history under the new name, the *MAGIC CARPET Magazine*. Three years of depression could not kill the magazine, and it now rests with you, the readers, to make it possible for us to issue the magazine once every month, instead of only four times a year as at present. If each one of the present readers of the *MAGIC CARPET Magazine* will get one of your friends to buy the magazine, it will then be possible for the publishers to issue the magazine twelve times a year. You have supported the magazine through bad times, and we want your support during the good days that seem to lie ahead.

The *MAGIC CARPET Magazine* is built on a new idea: that the entire contents of each issue be glamorous. By glamor we mean the illusion of reality attained by the witchery of literary craftsmanship. The stories all have the allure of far places. Stories of mystery, romance and adventure find their natural habitat in this magazine, and heroic tales of glory and splendor grow in this literary garden of their own right.

"A toast to the excellent October issue of the incomparable *MAGIC CARPET!*" writes Frederick John Walsen, of Denver. "It most certainly is a wonderful magazine and if I did not know that I was around my own home, I should feel as if I were in Istanbul or Mecca or some other distant and romantic place of adventure. There has never been a finer issue: it was simply superb! *The Tiger's Cubs* by Seabury Quinn takes first place for its unexcelled action and splendid description. Mr. Quinn is one of the finest authors, if not the finest. Every issue of the *MAGIC CARPET* should contain at least one of his fine tales. *Berber Loot* by H. Bedford-Jones claims second place for its forceful thread of narration and excellent plot. *The Young Men Speak*, *Death in My House*, *The Snake-Men of Kaldar*, *King's Assassins*, *Pale Hands*, and *A Woman of the Hills* are also very fine stories. *The Pool* by Hung Long Tom was one of the best poems of that kind that I ever had the pleasure to read. I notice that your very excellent artist, M. Brundage, favors the scantily clad women covers. It is not that I, myself, mind this, but to the person who does not know the magazine it might seem to be a cheap, common periodical. Please, for the sake of these, refrain from too much exposure of the women's anatomy."

A letter from Bruce Bryan, of Los Angeles, says: "*Pale Hands* by E. Hoffmann Price is a great story. By the way, is the fragment of verse quoted by Price his

own or from some well-known poem?" [We remember that Mr. Price told us he had picked up this poem somewhere in his browsings in Oriental literature, but whether the translation is his own or not, we do not know.—THE EDITORS.]

"As usual I have nothing but praise for the MAGIC CARPET," writes Frances Manno, of New Orleans. "My favorite stories in your latest issue are *Berber Loot*, *The Tiger's Cubs*, *Pale Hands*, and *King's Assassins*. There has been much discussion in the Souk as to whether this fine magazine should be issued every month, instead of four times a year as at present. Well, we seem to appreciate it better since it is being published quarterly. I'm for the MAGIC CARPET. Long may it reign supreme of all adventurous and thrilling story books."

Thomas S. Gardner, of Johnson City, Tennessee, writes to the Souk: "Allow me to congratulate you on the MAGIC CARPET. Quinn's hero, Carlos de la Muerte, is rapidly becoming a character in fiction of that type. And Hamilton's stories are always enjoyable. *Pale Hands* by E. Hoffmann Price was an excellent psychological study."

Writes E. Brown, of Newport, Kentucky: "*The Young Men Speak* gets my vote for first place in the October MAGIC CARPET. It has an unfamiliar background, good characters and plot. I liked *The Snake-Men of Kaldar* in every way. *A Woman of the Hills* has a vivid central character, and so much atmosphere, force and sense of reality in such short length. *The Tiger's Cubs* and *Death in My House* were also very fine, and the Hung Long Tom poem. But why the naked woman cover?"

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of the MAGIC CARPET Magazine? The most popular story in the October issue, as shown by your letters and votes, was *The Tiger's Cubs*, Seabury Quinn's romantic tale of adventure in Portugal; although E. Hoffmann Price's exquisite little tale, *Pale Hands*, was a close second in popularity.

MY favorite stories in the January MAGIC CARPET are:

Story

Remarks

- (1) -----
- (2) -----
- (3) -----

I do not like the following stories:

- (1) ----- Why? -----
- (2) -----

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in the Magic Carpet Magazine if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Souk, Magic Carpet Magazine, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

The Mayor's Four Chins

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE French commercial traveler and I had each been drawn to Soerabaya by the *jaarmart*. I had heard that the palace dancers of the Sultan of Jolo would perform at the fair. He had come to pick over the sarongs for sale there to send back samples to the design department of his Lyons silk factory. Several times that day at the *jaarmart* I had run across him chaffering with anxious Javanese women over some hand-worked bit of batik that had taken a year in fabricating. And once, as I was about to close a purchase of a souvenir sarong I found him peering under my arm (for he was not more than five feet tall) and shaking his head. In a whisper, he informed me that the batik I was considering had been made, not in Djocokarta in a peasant's hut, but in Manchester, England.

That evening at the hotel I ran across him again and invited him to have a gin *pabit* with me. He seated himself with a pleased smile at my offer but abstemiously ordered only Perrier water. His name, he told me, was Jaccquard.

As we were sipping our drinks a woman approached. Monsieur Jaccquard said to me in rapid French:

"It is a countrywoman of mine. For the living, she sings and makes the naughty little dance. She is most lonely here—may I ask her to join us?"

"Of course."

Monsieur Jaccquard beckoned to her and drew up a third chair. Her name, I was informed, was Mademoiselle Pauline.

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By EDMOND HAMILTON

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The woman threw herself down with a flounce of dingy skirts, sighed, muttered a succession of *Mon Dieux* and demanded champagne. Monsieur Jaccquard started, a pained look came into his eyes; then gallantly he signaled to a mournful Javanese bar boy.

Sipping her wine, the woman gave me an ogling look over the rim of her glass and said in English:

"You are Amerrrrricain, *hein?*" Then, without giving me time to agree, she went on: "I s'ink Amerrrrricains are vary, vary nize." She took another sip, set down her glass, sighed again, and with a complete change of tone she said: "Eet ces 'ard! I haf not the license. Any time now, the polis' will come down on me lak zat!"

"Zat" was the slap of a palm, none too clean, on the bamboo table before her.

"But why don't you get a license?" I asked.

"Ah, *ciel!* And w'y don' I?"

She looked at the chubby little *commis voyageur*.

Monsieur Jaccquard shook his head sympathetically.

"I know. You haf not the money. License is too high. It is rrrruinous! But w'at will you do?"

Mademoiselle Pauline shrugged.

"I weel seeng an' dance here as long as they let me. Then I weel go to Singapore. If I were not so damn' virrrrtuous I could get license frree! By staying wiz the Dutch *mairie*—'ow you say——?"

"The mayor?" I supplied.

"*Oui!* But 'e is lak a grrreat peeg! Wiz 'is little blue eyes! And w'at I don't lak most 'bout 'im is 'is chin! 'E 'as t'ree—no, four—chin'!"

As Mademoiselle Pauline spat out a thoroughly uncomplimentary description of the Burgomaster of Soerabaya, the thought crossed my mind that she was

typically low-caste French—a combination of peasant and gamine. The chin was thin and pointed. The eyes were hollow, weary yet incessantly active. Her thin legs—carelessly displayed at times well above the knee—were encased in sheer beige silk hose that ended in blue-toed slippers exaggeratedly high in the arch and heel. Her hips were pure peasant, unusually broad. In age, she must have been between forty and fifty.

As the talk went on, sometimes in French, sometimes in English, I learned that she was staying at the hotel. I wondered how—since she hadn't the necessary gulden to pay a dancer's license—she managed to remain here. *I* was finding the tariff exorbitant!

After a time I excused myself and went to my room. I was thoroughly weary after the heat and the dust of my day at the *jaarmart*.

I undressed slowly, killed a scorpion that was endeavoring to roost for the night in one of my shoes, then stood at the open window in the oppressive tropic blackness, longing for a touch of breeze. But none came. I lifted the mosquito curtain of my bed and yanked out that long devilish bolster of Malaysia, known as a "Dutch Wife," which if clasped to one's bosom while asleep is said to be a prime cholera preventive. I preferred the risk of cholera to the heat of that attenuated feather pillow.

At this moment, a soft apologetic knock sounded at my door.

"Come in," I said.

THE door opened. Into my room walked the French commercial traveler. Monsieur Jaccquard's face, I saw, was peculiarly puckered. There were traces of tears on his chubby cheeks. He

(Please turn to page 126)

COMING NEXT ISSUE

The King of the World

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

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**NEXT
ISSUE**



**ON SALE
FEB. 1**

(Continued from page 124)

stood for a moment in silence, his throat working; then he blurted out:

"I mus' in honor ask you queer question. Would you lak a nize *bonne amie* tonight? A littl' frien'? Somesing better zan zat!"

The toe of his canvas oxford touched the Dutch Wife that was plumped on the floor.

"What *are* you talking about?"

He scemed slightly dashed by my question, but, gulping again, he persevered:

"Mademoiselle Pauline, wiz whom you drrank the littl' wine tonight, is in grrreat troubl'. Jus' after you leave us, the manager of her cabaret telephone that polis' have come and demand' a license. One hundred gulden. The Mayor have say to her that he weel fcex ect up—if she weel come an' live wiz him. But he is terrible man! By Gods, he weel brrreak her *esprit!* She say she weel die firs'! She say she weel keel herself tonight! I have beg her not to! An' I have give' her fifty gulden—which is all the money I can spare; for me, it is mos' large. But you—you do not have the same tie of *la patrie*. You can not be expect' to give. So, to you slie make offer. She weel stay wiz you tonight—for the ozzer fifty gulden which she mus' have."

"I see," I said a trifle maliciously. "The lady is going to share her—her charms between us? Is that to be the arrangement?"

He gave me a quick hurt look.

"But, no. You do not understan'. I—I am *père de famille*: father wiz wife an' sev'n children. To my wife I am mos' true. All-ways."

Monsieur Jaccquard, I realized, was in deadly earnest. The truth, I saw, was to be handled with gloves. Were I to tell him the plain facts—that this wretched tramp of a woman held not a scintilla of

appeal for me—he would be hurt. It was evident that he considered she was doing me an inordinate favor. Yet, I was touched by his eagerness to help her. Perhaps he was right; perhaps, in despair, she would kill herself—although she had said that if the police threatened her she would move on to Singapore. On impulse I thrust my hand under the mosquito bar, lifted my pillow, drew out my billfold and extracted fifty gulden. I said slowly to Monsieur Jaccquard:

"Tell Mademoiselle that I am honored by her offer but that under the circumstances I can not be considered less generous than you. You will give her this and explain that I wish no payment."

He suddenly sputtered in French:

"But perhaps she will not take this gift from you. You are not French. And she is proud, that one! She may not wish to be in your debt!"

"Nonsense! Tell her—oh, tell her that, like you, I am also the father of a family."

He looked at me uncertainly.

"But I had the understanding that you were the bachelor."

"That was a mistake on your part. I have—uh—I have eight children."

Monsieur Jaccquard gave me a shrewd glance; there was a glint in his limpid blue eye. He reverted again to English:

"You mus' have marry vary, vary young! . . . But I understan'. You are nize fellow! One of the bes'! An' tonight, believe me, you have save' a life!"

I DID not again see Mademoiselle Pauline in Soerabaya, although I was informed by my Lyonnais friend, the next morning, that she had made her peace with the police and had thus been able to spurn the unwelcome advances of the Mayor-with-the-four-chins. We departed, the next afternoon, Monsieur Jaccquard

for Batavia, and I direct to Singapore. Our farewells were made with many expressions of mutual esteem. . . .

A month later, I was taken to a Singapore *café chantant* by an English friend, a rubber planter. We had hardly seated ourselves before there appeared on the dance floor—in an energetic whirl of skirts—Mademoiselle Pauline. The spotlight was in her eyes and she did not recognize me. In her broken English she sang an exceedingly bawdy song and then did an equally bawdy can-can.

My English companion gave a snort.

"So that's the famous Pauline, is it? Well, if you ask me, she can't sing and she can't dance. I suppose she's getting by on her notoriety."

"What notoriety?" I asked sharply.

"Why, that scandal, over in Soerabaya. The way she hooked the Mayor of that town was—as you Americans say—nobody's business! Poor devil, she leeches him for thousands! She dangled him on a string for about a year. Last month, they found that he had been peculating funds—to spend on her. They jailed him. But they couldn't pin anything on her. Things got a little warm for her there, so she levanted, came over here."

Again Mademoiselle Pauline came on and danced—a forced encore, for the applause following her first effort had been almost conspicuous by its absence. This time, she looked me squarely in the eye. It was a bland look, completely unrecognizing. I might have been a bit of the rather garish decoration on the wall back of me. . . . I made no effort to jog her failing memory. . . .

Nevertheless, I decided that, were I ever fortunate enough to run into him, I would give Monsieur Jaccquard a piece of my mind. In fact, I was in the mood to add assault and battery to my argument.

I had that good fortune, the very next

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afternoon. I heard a delighted voice chirruping at me from across the foyer of the Hotel de l'Europe:

"Allo! Allo! Allo! Cheerheeo, my frien'! I ahm glad to see you again!"

Monsieur Jaccquard grasped my hand, beamed at me and rushed on, without giving me a chance to get a word in edgewise.

"Tonight I leave for Marseilles. An' I ahm all—how you say?—all set to tell my wife 'bout you. My wife not lak Americans; she say you are Shylockers. But w'en I tell her how you help zat poor countrywoman of mine, why, by Gods, she never will dare say it again!"

I gave Monsieur Jaccquard a sour, suspecting look. But the eyes that looked into mine were limpid and blue, absolutely guileless. I put a sudden, sharp clamp on my tongue. I knew now that as far as he was concerned my suspicions were unfounded. He had not been implicated in Mademoiselle Pauline's adroit "touch." . . .

After all, we had been lucky, Monsieur Jaccquard and I. The Mayor of Soerabaya was in jail!

Rivers

By HUNG LONG TOM

China's
River of Sorrow
Is a Yellow River
That shines like gold.

Life's
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Is gold that flows
Like a Yellow River.

Man Can Now Use Strange Inner Power

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The story of a new and revolutionary teaching which reveals a strange inner power so dynamic and forceful that it can carry man to complete happiness, health and financial success is told in a 5,000-word treatise, "Key to Your Inner Power," recently compiled by Yogi Alpha, internationally known psychologist and philosopher.

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