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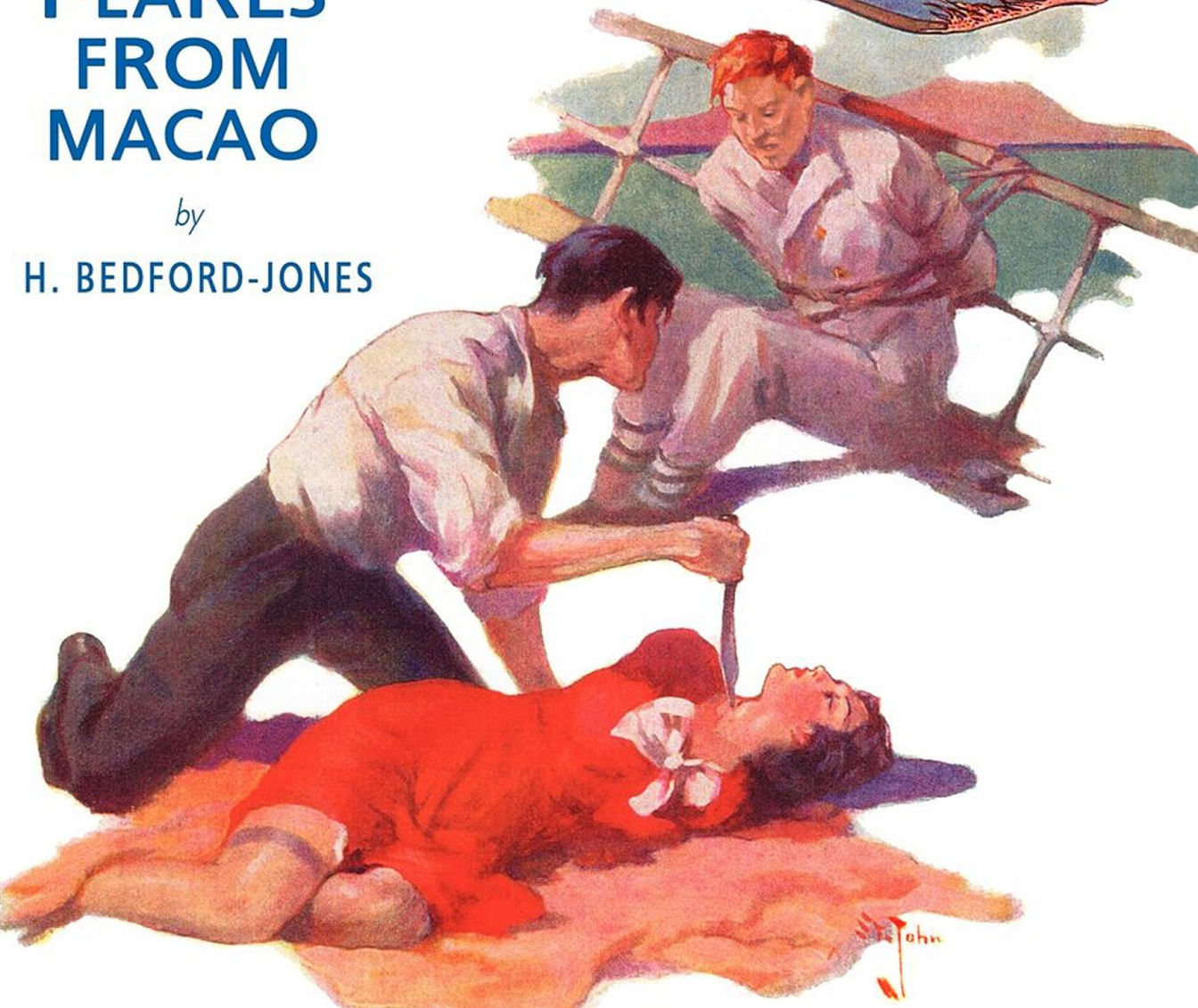
The MAGIC CARPET MAGAZINE

PEARLS FROM MACAO

by

H. BEDFORD-JONES



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"Hell!" said Martin. "He broke his own neck."

Pearls From Macao

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

A vivid thrill-tale of a desperate voyage on the China Sea, with murder striking from the shadows again and again, and a beautiful girl on board

CLEGHORN, who was usually as rough and abrupt as his own name, regarded the other with evident suspicion. He was a small, dapper man, sleek of hair and dress, and Cleghorn towered above him. A long scar ran down the left side of his dark features.

"Yes, I'm Joe Cleghorn. What d'ye want of me?"

"Business, good business," said the other. "Darby is my name."

Cleghorn stopped short, staring. Interest flashed into his sharp blue eyes, into his weather-roughened, large-boned features under the mop of sun-bleached hair.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Darby, eh? Might you, by any chance, be Cap'n Noel Darby of the *Maniteer?* Out o' Frisco?"

"That's me, mister. Cards on the table, I says, and all shipshape."

"Don't mister me, then," said Cleghorn. "I ain't your first officer. I'm a master and got the ticket to prove it. What's more, I got a ship."

"And I ain't," returned Darby. "That's exactly why I want to talk with you. There's money in it for you, Cleghorn. A lot o' money. Not to be sneezed at these days, eh?"

True enough, and in Cleghorn's case most vitally true. Cleghorn owned a two-thirds interest in his own ship, although he was a young man, the youngest master ever to sail out of San Francisco, they said. And right now he was in a jam, a bad jam, for lack of cash.

"What is this, dream money or real?" he demanded.

"Real," said Darby softly. "And a thousand-dollar advance, in cold cash. Where can we talk?"

A thousand in cash? That meant everything, at the present moment. Cleghorn nodded to a café across the street.

"If you mean smuggling, running dope, or filibustering, I'll waste no time on it," he said bluntly. "Otherwise, we can slip over there and have a drink on it."

"Fair enough," said Darby, and took his arm. "It's all on the level. Come on."

They were in the French settlement of Tientsin, and the beer was good. Both men were thirsty, neither was in a hurry to speak. They looked out at the passing flocks of Chinese and whites, at the rattling trams, at the rickshaws and carts, and Cleghorn waited for the other to broach his business.

Not for nothing had Captain Cleghorn been knocking around Orient ports for the past few months with the *Hermione.* He had heard of Cap'n Noel Darby down at Singapore, and had heard nothing good. Darby got into trouble with the Dutch in Surinam, skipped out, was caught and arrested at Singapore, got away, and was on his way to Siam when he lost his ship on a reef. He was a dope-smuggler, a little of everything in a bad way.

Cleghorn knew this, but he needed the money fearfully. His agents had provided no cargo here, after he brought up coal from Saigon; what with demurrage, harbor charges, wages and repairs, he needed a cool thousand before he could clear down the river to sea. His partners back in the States had gone broke. Cleghorn was savagely determined to save his ship, but how to do it was another matter.

Darby produced a whole sheaf of banknotes, thumbed them off, laid them down on the table.

"French notes, but good," he said. "Come to a thousand dollars gold."

"Leave it lay," said Cleghorn. "What's the job?"

"Charter party between friends," said Darby. He had a brisk, suave manner, and his bird-like eyes drove around swiftly. "Ever hear of the *Adamastor?*"

"No."

"Portuguese tub owned in Macao, on the Yokohama run," replied Darby. "Last month she was smashed up on one of those islands the other side of Dairen, on the south Manchurian coast. There's a string of reefs there, bad 'uns. She pitched dead on one of them in that typhoon that swept the coast then. All hands lost except the cap'n, a Portugee

named Silva; he died a day or so after being picked up. One other was saved, but not reported. I've got him aboard now. He was supercargo. Another Portugee, Aranha by name."

"You've got him aboard—where?" demanded Cleghorn. "Got a ship here?"

"No. Got in today aboard the *Lyautey* from Saigon; she's lying down at Taku, and we're stopping aboard here till tomorrow——"

"Who's we?" probed Cleghorn.

"Me. Aranha. Couple more chaps. Four of us. Satisfied?"

"Aye," and Cleghorn nodded. "Forge ahead."

"The wreck's high and dry on this island, charted as Fourteen — barren reef," said Darby coolly. "Cargo of cotton goods and machinery, ruined of course. Native fishermen have probably looted everything loose by this time. Look at this. Bought her from the underwriters."

HE PRODUCED a sheaf of papers, cablegrams, letters, and set several of them before Cleghorn. The latter perused them cannily, but his suspicions of forgery were unjust. They were authentic. They showed that Noel Darby, master, had legally purchased the wreck of the *Adamastor*, wreck and contents both. Cleghorn nodded and returned them.

"You don't waste time."

"Not me. Well, there you are. Cards on the table and all shipshape, eh? Heard about you soon as I got in, and have been looking you up. Chap pointed you out to me."

Cleghorn nodded again. He was suspicious of Darby, and would ordinarily have passed him up without a moment's delay, but now—well, a thousand cash meant everything.

"I want to charter you," went on Darby. "I can pay a thousand down, this here thousand. That just about strips us. We've put all we can rake and scrape into this deal. I can offer you this cash, and a fifth interest in the takings, for a month's charter party. The job should last no more'n a week, but we'll say a month to make sure."

"Yeah?" inquired Cleghorn. "Well, come across. What's in the wreck?"

"About three dozen bales in No. 1 hold," said Darby in a low voice, "right on the top tier. On the manifest as cotton cloth, and baled to match. Any looting fishermen would pass it up sure, even if they got into the hold, which is doubtful. The cap'n didn't tell about it; and he's dead to boot. Aranha knew what it was, bein' supercargo. It was shipped that way, and by the *Adamastor* besides, to save import duty. Some Jap syndicate was behind it."

"Well," said Cleghorn impatiently, "I'll bite; what is it?"

"Ginseng. Manroot," returned Captain Darby.

"Never heard of it." Cleghorn frowned, his bright blue eyes striking out at the smaller man. "Hold on! You don't mean ginseng, that medicine root we grow at home?"

Darby grinned, showing blackened, bad teeth.

"A distant cousin," he explained. "Ask anybody here. Grows in the shape of a man. The Chinks think it has great powers and go crazy about it. This was the pick of the north Manchurian crop; it comes from there only."

"Hell!" said Cleghorn in disgust. "And you wasting my time on junk like that!"

"Junk?" exclaimed the other, staring. "Look here! Prices on it run according to the roots. One with a real man's shape can go into any money—five, ten, twenty thou-

sand gold! And this was the pick of the crop, get me? Thirty-six bales of it lying there, and if each bale wasn't worth about fifty or a hundred times its weight in dollar bills, I'll eat my hat! Opium's nothing to it, cap'n. The Chinks are wild about it, honest, like they are about snakes in wine and dragons' teeth and so forth. There's the thousand. Yes or no? I've got the location exact. We need your ship, we can't raise any more cash, and that's the only reason we're offering you a fifth share in the gamble. Take it or leave it!"

Cleghorn eyed him suspiciously. It was possible, of course; on the other hand, this Noel Darby was a slick rascal and might be putting something over on him. Still, there was the money for the taking. If he lost, at least he would be square with the world. His powerful hand went out and closed on the sheaf of bank-notes.

"Done," he said, and glanced at his watch. "Three o'clock. Come along to the consul's office and get the charter party signed up. Suit you?"

"All shipshape," said Darby, his little glimmering eyes filled with satisfaction. "When can you sail?"

"As soon as I pay my bills and get clearance. Say, midnight? The *Hermione* is down at the anchorage, downriver."

"Suits me," said Darby, and rose. "Let's go."

"But mind you," and Cleghorn paused, for his beer was unfinished, "mind you, no tricks! No dope or smuggled arms. I've worked years to get me a start; my share in this ship means a lot to me, and my ticket's clear. It's all I have in the world, and I mean to keep it clear."

Darby laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. "All shipshape and cards on the table!"

They parted at the consulate, after signing the papers. Cleghorn picked up his first officer, Adams, and got him rounding up the crew, while he himself set to work paying his bills. He paused, however, to ask the consul in regard to ginseng.

"Ginseng?" and the consul laughed. "Manroot, eh? The Chinese are absolutely crazy about it, cap'n. I can take you into some of their shops where a bit of root a foot long is held at ten thousand dollars! Some of it is literally priceless. The Manchurian wild root is of course the best—takes the most fantastic shapes——"

Cleghorn went his way, thinking about three dozen bales of such stuff. When he had asked a few more questions here and there, he became convinced that Darby had told the truth.

In such case, the value of those bales, in any Chinese city, must be staggering. Whether the stuff would still be aboard the wreck, was a question; but Darby was no fool, and was gambling heavily. Fair enough! And having bought the wreck and contents, his legal right to it was unassailable. The chaps who had shipped it as baled cotton cloth and insured it as such were the losers.

Cleghorn was so thinking, as he stopped in at the office of his agent to impart the news and ask for any mail. The agent was busy with a woman, and Cleghorn waited. He gave no heed to the woman, until she turned to look at him. Then he saw that she was young, dark, and utterly magnificent.

"Captain!" He realized that the agent was speaking to him. "I wish to present you to Miss Silva. She wishes to speak with you. Will you go into the private office? If you please——"

"Well! I've had a great time finding you, Captain Cleghorn!" Her hand folded in his like a rose-leaf; he bulked above her, those wide, hard shoulders of

his looking very big, and he knew his hair must be tousled. It always was. Then he found himself in the private office, alone with her, and her first words gave him the shock of his life.

2

"TELL me, quickly!" she exclaimed, as she took the chair opposite him. "My father was the captain of the *Adamastor*. Did you ever hear of her? or of him?"

Cleghorn looked at her steadily. She was excited but her eyes were cool, capable, very steady. In repose, her features were quiet, lovely. In animation, they became imbued with an astonishing energy and vigor. Her English was perfect.

"Yes; not an hour ago, miss," said Cleghorn bluntly. "But you don't look like—well, like a Portuguese——"

She broke into a quick laugh, but he read swift anxiety in her eyes.

"Names don't matter, cap'n. My mother was American; so am I. Who told you of her?"

"Of your mother?" and Cleghorn's blue eyes twinkled.

"No; of the ship."

"The chap who has bought the wreck. A Cap'n Darby."

She caught her breath sharply, stared at him, then sank back in her chair.

"Then he got ahead of me! He has chartered your ship?"

Cleghorn nodded silently.

"And I had counted on getting you!" she said. "I heard of your ship—I wanted your help. There's no one else I can get here. Will you take me as a passenger, please?"

Cleghorn's brows drew down. "No. Haven't a passenger license, miss. And besides—well, it'd do you no good. Everything aboard that wreck is owned by Darby. You couldn't get away with the stuff, if that's what lies in your mind."

Her eyes widened. "What stuff?"

"The ginseng, of course."

"Great heavens!" She uttered an astonishing laugh. "Are you crazy or am I, cap'n? There's no ginseng aboard that ship, that I know about!"

"So? Then let's have your yarn," said Cleghorn whimsically. "Perhaps somebody has lied to me. I know Darby is after some ginseng aboard her."

"That may be," she replied thoughtfully. "I got here yesterday from America; I found a letter from my father, the last he ever wrote. There is something aboard that wreck, cap'n, which I want. I mean to get it. I must get it! It's all he had to leave me."

"What is it?" demanded Cleghorn.

She met his eyes for a long, steady moment, then drew a deep breath.

"You're straight," she said quietly. "I'll trust you. All my father had in the world is in his cabin aboard that wreck. I learned this morning by cable that some Captain Darby had bought the wreck from the underwriters; it was in the papers, too. He couldn't be after my father's things. No one else knew about them. They were in a little compartment of his cabin wall. You must take me with you!"

"No can do," said Cleghorn calmly. "If you'll allow——"

"I'll pay you," she exclaimed. "I'm not broke. I've been at school in San Francisco, and I have money left."

"Hold on," said Cleghorn, laughing. "Why not let me do the job for you? Can't take you on an old tinpot hooker like mine, one woman with a lot of tough waterfront rats. And it's a tough mob, let me tell you. Rats? They're lice. No, it wouldn't do."

"But you must," she returned. "It

would do perfectly well. That's all nonsense about a woman not being safe alone with a lot of men. She's safer than if alone with just one or two. Besides, I can take care of myself."

"Yes, you look it," and Cleghorn grunted ironically. Just the same, he knew there was a lot in what she said. Plenty of skippers' wives or even daughters went along these days. Hm! "All the same, tell me how to get the stuff and I'll do it."

"No," she said flatly.

"Get the point, miss," said Cleghorn, frowning. "Darby has chartered the hooker. He can take you aboard, but I can't, legally. That is, if you were signed on——"

"Is he signing on the crew, or are you?"

"I am, blast it! Don't ask so many questions——"

She laughed quickly. "All right. Sign me on as assistant cook. I'll really be one, too; I can give your cook pointers."

"And Darby will raise hell about it and put you off at Taku."

"I'll chance that if you will."

"Hm! Another thing. Your father's personal effects may be retained by Darby, especially if he thinks they're valuable. You can't get them without his consent."

"He'll give it. Why not sign me on under another name?"

"Bosh! This is no story-book," snapped Cleghorn. "I'll not sneak up on any man, and that's flat. Tell you what I'll do! I'm catching the five o'clock train down to the anchorage. You meet me at the train. If Darby is there, all right. If he's gone ahead, I'll take you aboard and you can talk with him when he comes aboard tonight, around midnight. Then, if he refuses to take you along, you go ashore."

She nodded quickly. "Done. It's a fair gamble, captain. And if I go ashore, I'll tell you how to get the things, and you get them for me."

Cleghorn shrugged. "If I can." He rose and took her hand in his again, wondering at its softness and pink beauty. Like a rose-petal, he thought again. Then she gave him a quick, firm grip and he whistled to himself. Not so soft after all, eh?

"Good-bye, miss," he said quietly. "Five o'clock train. I'll get a place for you."

"Good-bye, and thank you," she rejoined, and left.

CLEGHORN came to the outer office and watched her depart, a slim, slender figure of a woman, all in gleaming white silk. He groaned to himself at thought of such a girl aboard the *Hermione* with his crowd. Then the agent came up to him, with a jerk of his head.

"Magnificent creature, cap'n, eh?" he exclaimed. "When she was a kid, she used to take voyages with her father—old Silva was a good sort. White and straight. Too bad he kicked out! She's well known up and down the coast."

Cleghorn swung around suddenly. "Just what d'you mean by that?"

At the look in his blue eyes, the agent shrank suddenly.

"Lord, man! Nothing bad. Only that she's beautiful—isn't that so? Her dad wasn't one of these Macao half-breeds, but a real Portuguese; fine chap, I tell you. Married an American woman. Well, good luck to you!"

Cleghorn swung away with a nod.

There was no sign of Cap'n Darby at the Tientsin East Station; he had probably gone down-river by steam launch. Cleghorn got a compartment, reserved places for dinner in the restaurant car, and saw the Silva girl hurrying through the gates

two minutes before the train left. He met her, caught her bag from the porter, and swung her up to the right car, barely in time.

Only then did he really take stock of the change in her. The white silks were gone. She wore a neat, trim outfit of serge, a belted coat of the same, a blue beret that held in her luxuriant dark hair, and looked very efficient and business-like.

It was an hour's run to the Tangku station, and two hours by launch on down to the Taku anchorage. In this time, many things happened—at least, to Joe Cleghorn. He found himself talking to this girl with unwonted freedom, talking about himself, about San Francisco, about everything he knew and was. He told her how he had beat his own way up from the bottom, how it had been hard going, how he lacked much that she seemed to have. And she understood perfectly.

"You've got one thing that's rare," she said to him, as they watched the Taku lights glimmering ahead from the prow of the launch, and he pointed out the lights of the *Hermione*. You're straight and unafraid. You wouldn't cheat Darby—and yet you know quite well that he'll put it over on you if he gets the chance."

"Oh, do I?" growled Cleghorn, astonished. "What makes you think that?"

"His record. I've been looking him up. And you're no fool."

He broke into a laugh. "You're a good one yourself, miss!"

"So far as you're concerned, cap'n, it might as well be Marie from now on."

"Thanks," he rejoined. "You know, that—well, that sort of—blast it all! What I want to say is, if you do charm him and go along with us, I'll watch out for you."

"For who?" she questioned archly.

"For you—oh, I see! For you, Marie."

"That's better."

Cleghorn indeed felt, somehow, that this permitted use of her name meant a good deal; it put him in the place of a protector to her. And he had the idea that if she made the trip, she was going to need a protector.

He was not long in confirming this belief. When he had followed her over the rail, and stowed her in a cabin temporarily, he came back and faced his dumfounded officers: Adams, the lean Seattle man, with big nose and scrawny throat; Horton, the second officer, chunky and always more or less drunk; Macintyre, a red-headed youngster who had wangled his ticket out of the examiners and joined Cleghorn as chief engineer, though his assistant was twice his age.

"She ain't going, is she?" demanded Adams dourly.

"She is," said Cleghorn. "And you mind your manners before her, mister. At that, I ain't so sure about her going, either."

"I hope to hell she don't," said Horton gloomily. "Crew's skipped out. Jumped us today and beat it out of here on a Clyde boat that was short-handed. Wait till you see the ungodly lot o' wharf-rats Adams fetched aboard! Beachcombers are angels alongside that gang."

"Well, whip 'em in shape," said Cleghorn. "That's what you're here for. Four gents who chartered us will be aboard before midnight. Everything shipshape when they come. We go with the tide."

"Shipshape, my eye!" Macintyre guffawed. "Wait till you see the drunken scum, cap'n! Might's well say navy style and wish for the moon. Say, when do you introduce us to the dame?"

"Get below and mind your engines," snapped Cleghorn, and the others grinned.

CLEGHORN took one look at the ten alleged able seamen forward, and went to find his passenger. A worse crew he had seldom seen; frayed and sodden dregs of humanity, all of them drunk. His former men had taken the chance to ship and had skipped out, leaving their overdue wages unpaid, but he was scarcely the gainer for that, he reflected bitterly. A few hours more, and all would have been well. Even the steward had gone.

"Well, miss, we'll be off in an hour," he said with his usual cheerful air, as he joined Marie Silva. "By the way, I forgot to tell you. Darby has three others in his party. One of them is from your dad's ship. The supercargo, chap named Aranha."

She stared at him for a moment, her eyes dilating. He saw the color drain out of her face; then she began to tremble.

"For God's sake, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "What have I said?"

She recovered herself quickly. "Aranha!" she repeated in a low voice. "That man? It is impossible! No one else was rescued——"

"Cap'n Darby picked him up, somewhere; gave no details," said Cleghorn, frowning. "Said that Aranha did not report his rescue. It was him knew about the ginseng in the hold. He knew about it, having been the supercargo."

She looked startled. "Aranha the supercargo? But that's not so! He was my father's second officer!"

"Eh? Something wrong here, Marie," said Cleghorn. "I don't think Darby was lying. He'd have no reason to lie about it. What's wrong with Aranha, anyhow, besides this?"

She hesitated. "Nothing, except that I've always detested him. Father was certain that he smuggled stuff, but could not prove it, and Aranha was a good officer and had an interest in the ship."

A knock at the door. "Party coming aboard, sir," came the voice of Adams. Cleghorn turned to Marie.

"You stop here. This is your cabin if you go; next to mine. I'll fetch Darby in here, and mind you don't mention Aranha to him. I'll straighten this out somehow later on."

She nodded, and he left the cabin.

Had Darby lied about the man? Somehow, prone to believe anything of Darby as he was, Cleghorn did not think so. Possibly Aranha had lied to him. In that case, had Aranha told the truth about anything? Things began to look fishy to Joe Cleghorn, but he dismissed the matter momentarily.

THE four men coming over the rail were headed by Darby, no longer looking slick and suave, for he now wore rough serge and an old cap from which the insignia had been ripped. He performed the introductions. Aranha came next, a slender, swarthy man of about forty, with white teeth that glittered when he smiled, and a square, pugnacious face. The other two men brought Cleghorn a surprize. Stoutsman was a red-faced, bulbous-nosed fellow, thick-set, pig-eyed; Rapp was lean, hard, sour of face, with red hair and mustache. Both looked to Cleghorn like seamen.

"Mr. Adams! Will you show these gentlemen to their berths?" said Cleghorn, introducing his mate. "Cap'n Darby, I'd like a word with you, if you please."

"When do you jerk up the hook?" asked Darby, following him to one side.

"As soon as you give the word. Something for you to settle, first. Come along."

Cleghorn knocked at the door of the girl's cabin, took the astonished Darby inside, and introduced her. He sketched

briefly just why Marie Silva was here and what she wanted from the wreck, and watched Darby as he did so.

"That's exactly the way of it," exclaimed the girl quickly, when he had finished. "I'll not be a bother to you, Cap'n Darby, and——"

"Lor' bless you, miss!" broke in Darby, with a jerk of his head. "Cards on the table, I says, and all shipshape. If you can put up wi' things, a lot o' men and all that, then we'll have no kick."

"You don't mind, then?" she returned eagerly. "You'll let me get my father's things?"

"Miss," said Darby earnestly, "I ain't trying to rob the dead, nor a woman neither. So far's I'm concerned, you can take what you like out o' that wreck."

So it was settled. Cleghorn revised his opinion of Darby somewhat, for it seemed to him that the man was quite in earnest, and he accompanied the other outside after a nod to the girl. Then Darby turned to him, fingering the long scar on his left cheek.

"Square of you, cap'n," he said. "Some would ha' took her along and asked afterward. Ain't she a beaut, though! Sure, she's welcome to her dad's personal property."

"By the way," observed Cleghorn, "I dropped on to something today. It happens that your friend Aranha was the second officer aboard Silva's barge."

"Sure, I know it," replied the other easily. "Supercargo also. He said as much."

"Oh! Then it's all right."

Half an hour later, the *Hermione* had her hook out of the mud and was standing out across the gulf of Dairen and the tip of Manchuria, a day's steaming to the eastward.

3

With morning, Cleghorn had taken over the bridge when Aranha appeared and nodded to him. The sour-faced Rapp followed, spat over the rail, and eyed the water.

"Doing a good eight, eh?" said he. Cleghorn gave him a glance.

"Seaman, are you?"

"Who, me?" Rapp grinned. "Not much. Never been to sea a day in my life, except coming up here from Australia, and wish I'd never come, you bet."

Clumsy, thought Cleghorn, and turned away. Rapp and Aranha went over to the lee rail and stood talking together in low tones. Only a seaman could have glanced over the rail and known exactly what the ship was making. Why lie about it? Cleghorn was irritated. Presently Aranha came to him.

"Do you want the location of the wreck, cap'n?"

"I have it, thanks," said Cleghorn. "The island charted as Fourteen, isn't it? We'll make the south'ard of the reef chain and run up to her in the morning."

"Right," said the other. By daylight, his square, choppy features looked an olive shade, an unhealthy greenish, and Cleghorn did not take to him a little bit. "Fourteen's little more than a reef awash at low water."

"How d'you know the wreck's still there?"

Aranha shrugged. "Should be; she's solid, hard and fast on the reef. Another big blow would break her up, but there's been none."

Horton appeared, to Cleghorn's surprize, and beckoned him to the head of the ladder.

"Go on down, Adams' cabin," he said under his breath. "I'll take over."

Cleghorn gave the second officer a

sharp look. Horton was sober, had a queer look in his eyes. With a nod, Cleghorn slipped down the ladder, turned into the passage, and made his way to the cabin of the mate. He knocked and went in.

Adams lay on the deck, face down, a puddle of blood about his body. He had been knifed twice under the left shoulder, and was dead. The body was cold, but no rigor mortis had set in; murdered within an hour, probably just after turning over the deck to Cleghorn.

Two cabins away, Cleghorn found the chief, his door hooked back, scribbling away at a letter; he was always writing letters to his wife. Cleghorn entered, closed the door, and told the astonished Macintyre what had happened.

"How long have you been sitting here like this, with your door open?" he demanded, in conclusion. Macintyre ran his fingers through his red hair, and frowned.

"Since breakfast—over an hour, anyhow."

"Well, who's been along here? Nobody could get to the end of the passage without passing by your door."

"Lord, cap'n! I haven't been watching," said the young chief. "Let's see. Adams came down from the bridge, said hello in passing. Since then, I don't recall anybody except that Portygee chap. Aranha. He went on deck a while back. But he has the cabin next Adams."

"A lot of help you are!" exclaimed Cleghorn. He stuffed tobacco into his pipe and lit it. "Two red-headed galoots on one ship, huh? You and Rapp——"

"That's right, that fellow Rapp did come along!" said Macintyre suddenly. "Just before Aranha went up."

"Sure. They came on the bridge together."

"Nope; I remember now. Rapp came along. Aranha went on deck. After a bit, Rapp followed him."

"Yeah? Picked him up and then came to the bridge, eh?" Cleghorn scowled. "This is one hell of a thing! We've had a red-handed murderer aboard here, and no telling who he is. Your story ain't evidence, so far's Rapp's concerned. Nothing to show he did it."

"Let me run in there and take a look-see," said Macintyre. "Back in a minute. I might pick up something; got a detective streak in me, you know."

He vanished. Cleghorn grunted, and followed him. He found Macintyre on his knees beside the dead man. The engineer glanced up, then rose and held out something. A black horn button.

"This was in his hand, gripped hard. Been torn loose. Find a chap with a button off his coat—eh? What's the matter?"

Cleghorn's face changed. He recalled now that Aranha's coat had two buttons off. If this matched the remaining buttons—well, after all, was that evidence? Still, Aranha could not get away. There was no hurry. Cleghorn handed back the button.

"Take care of that. Mark it with a knife, put it away for evidence."

"What are you going to do?"

"There's a lot I could do, and maybe should do," said Cleghorn slowly. "But just now, I'm going to do nothing. Wait and watch your step."

HE LEFT the cabin thoughtfully, and started for his own cabin, at the other end of the passage. Just before he came to it, the door of Marie Silva's cabin, adjoining his, was flung open and a man came out with a tray. It was Tomkins, a ratty little cockney who had signed on as steward. He touched his cap, and Cleghorn stopped him.

"Been down at the other end o' the passage since breakfast?"

"Me? No, sir. I fetched the lydy's trye a bit ago, and just come for it, sir."

"Any of the men been hanging around here?"

"Lord love you, cap'n! I should sye not."

Marie appeared at the open door, and Cleghorn dismissed Tomkins with a gesture.

"Good morning!" Her hand came out to his, her smile was bright and cheerful. "What are you looking so sober about this morning?"

"Oh, business," returned Cleghorn. "Coming up topside? It's fine, fresh and clear."

"I'll be along in five minutes, yes."

He went into his own cabin, opened the locker, and taking out a blunt pistol, shoved it into his hip pocket. Then he sought the bridge again, and found Horton at the rail, talking with Aranha and Rapp. The second officer came over to him, inquiringly.

"Know anything about it?" asked Cleghorn.

"Not a thing, sir. I looked in on him, and came straight up."

"Right. Say nothing about it. Log it, and then have him prepared for burial tonight. Mac can tell you all I know."

Cleghorn went over to the two at the rail, exchanged a word with them and eyed the coat of Aranha. It was held by one black horn button. Two were gone. One had been pulled clean out. No doubt of things now, in Cleghorn's mind, but he said nothing.

He did not doubt that Aranha was the murderer. To come out with an open accusation, to put the man under lock and key, could of course be done; he had sufficient proof as it was. Still, Aranha could not leave the ship, could not get away, and there must have been a cause for the murder. This baffled him completely. Adams had been stabbed from behind; the killer must have been watching, must have sneaked in and given it to him. There had been no fight. Adams had never seen the man before last night, and had said so. What earthly reason was there for the killing, then?

Cleghorn stepped inside, spoke to the man at the wheel, a bleary-eyed, unshaven ruffian, saw that the course was right, and came out to the rail again. A sharp word broke from Rapp; the two men, there at his left, whirled around and stood staring, slack-jawed, consternation and dismay in their faces. Cleghorn followed their eyes, and saw Marie Silva just topping the ladder. She caught sight of them and halted. Her eyes widened.

"You!" she exclaimed sharply. Aranha moved, came toward her, removed his cap and began to speak. She thrust him aside as though he did not matter, and moved toward Rapp.

"You, Peterson! What are you doing aboard here?" she demanded. Rapp took a step backward.

"No harm, miss, no harm," he replied sullenly. "I'm in on a deal wi' Cap'n Darby. We've chartered this here hooker, miss."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl. She glanced around, saw Cleghorn at the other side of the bridge, and turned toward him abruptly. He saw anger in her eyes; then it was gone. "Well," she observed cheerfully, "it certainly is a fine morning, cap'n! Do you allow the cook's assistant on the bridge?"

"Any and all times, you bet," returned Cleghorn. He saw Rapp and Aranha go down the ladder, and gave her a quick look, his blue eyes very keen. "His name is Rapp aboard here. Where'd you know him?"

"A year ago, when I was home from the States for vacation," she answered steadily, "that man was dad's chief officer. Peterson, his name was then. Dad caught him in some crooked work. Peterson tried to kill him, and went to jail. I don't know just what the crooked work was; dad wouldn't tell me, so it must have been something pretty dirty."

"I see," observed Cleghorn, and rubbing his chin, gazed out at the horizon for a moment. "Hm! He was chief officer, Aranha was second. Now they're with Darby, in on this ginseng deal. Well, the puzzle picture gets more and more involved."

"Cap'n Joe, I want you to read dad's last letter, the one I found here awaiting me," she said abruptly. "We're not going to pull at cross purposes, you and I, and I don't want to hide anything from you."

She put an envelope in his hand. Cleghorn met her dark, confident eyes, and spoke on impulse.

"That's a bargain, then. My chief officer was murdered this morning. Don't know who did it; stabbed. Keep your mouth shut about it."

He turned from her, took the letter from its envelope, and unfolded it. The epistle was brief. After an introductory paragraph, it read:

"In case anything happens to me suddenly, as it may, I want you to know that I am leaving everything in the place you know of. Nobody else can get into it.

"I turned over a very good deal last month with Su Hsien of Macao. He went broke; his gambling house was cleaned out and he needed ready money. I bought his collection of pearls for cash, and have put them away for you. Pearls are always in demand, and these are remarkably fine as you know. Everything is in the tin box, and safer than in any bank."

Cleghorn looked at the girl, as he returned the letter.

"Anybody else read that?"

"Why, no—oh! You mean it's not safe to keep it around? I hadn't thought of that, but you're right. Thanks." She shredded the letter and envelope into scraps, and tossed them fluttering down the wind, then looked at him with a smile. "There! And—you understand why I didn't want to say more, at first?"

Cleghorn nodded. "Sure. Is the amount large?"

"I don't know, but I fancy it must be. Dad put aside a good deal. But tell me, what was that about your chief officer?"

Cleghorn told her, briefly. As he was concluding the account, Cap'n Darby made his appearance, and Cleghorn beckoned him.

"Morning. Just the person I wanted to see. It's about that chap Rapp, cap'n. What's his business?"

Darby looked surprized, touched his cap to the girl, and answered promptly.

"Why, he's a broker of some sort! Aranha got him into the deal, as I didn't have enough cash to put it through, and Stoutsman rather fell down on me at the last minute."

"Oh! Broker, is he? You didn't know that his name's Peterson and that he was first officer under Cap'n Silva last year?"

Darby's gaze narrowed. "Eh? No, that just can't be so——"

"Well, it is," broke in Marie Silva coolly. "What does it mean?"

Cleghorn was watching Darby. The latter gave the girl a quick, probing glance, and his lips compressed for an instant. He was startled, obviously.

"Miss, I don't know," he rejoined slowly. "Why he'd lie to me, I don't see. I'll have it out with him here and now——"

"No," said Cleghorn, and Darby looked at him. "Wait, cap'n, wait! There's luck in leisure, as the saying goes. Who's this Stoutsman? A friend of yours?"

"He runs a saloon in Hong Kong," said Darby. "Used to be a seaman. I've

known him off and on for some years. He's in it for a vacation and has a split in the proceeds. He couldn't put up as much as he'd thought, at the last minute, so we got Rapp into it."

"Yeah?" Cleghorn eyed him sardonically. "Thought you knew your way around better'n all that!"

The other started. His eyes lit up sharply, keenly.

"Eh? What are you driving at?"

"I dunno," said Cleghorn. "But there's something fishy back of all this. If I were you, I'd keep mighty quiet, and watch out sharp. And don't go leaning over the rail on dark nights."

"You're crazy!" scoffed Darby.

"Well, suit yourself." Cleghorn shrugged. Darby looked from one to the other of them, grunted, and left the bridge.

Marie Silva's anxious gaze went to Cleghorn. "You have some idea about it. What is it?"

"Can't tell, Marie. Looks to me as though Darby had been neatly taken in by three crooks. Can't see any reason for it, though, and so far as the game itself goes, they may all be simply playing it their own way. Darby's the last person in the world to be shystered."

"So any one would think," she assented dryly.

TOMKINS appeared on the bridge, touched his cap, and asked if he might make up the girl's cabin. She nodded, and he departed. Then Horton came up, a moment later, saluted Marie, and gave Cleghorn a glance.

"All set, sir. Shall I take over, now?"

"No. It's your watch off; keep it so."

"The chief wanted to see you, sir."

"Tell him to come up here, then."

Horton departed, and Marie Silva presently left the bridge also. Cleghorn, keeping an eye on the course, exchanged a word or two with the bleary rascal at the helm, who gave his name as Martin.

"Quartermaster in the B. P. line, sir—once," said the man.

"Australia, eh?" Cleghorn stared out at the horizon. Rapp had mentioned Australia; probably came from there originally. "Hm! Peterson said he knew you down that way."

Martin darted a sharp look at his expressionless face.

"Well, that was some years ago, sir," returned the man.

Cleghorn's pulse leaped, but he ventured nothing more. The red thatch of Macintyre was rising on the ladder, and he went outside to meet the young chief engineer.

"What's on your mind, Mac?"

"Nothing much. Only I can't find hide nor hair of old Charley Gray."

Cleghorn frowned. "What d'you mean? Assistant engineers don't vanish, do they?"

"Never knew 'em to before this, cap'n. He's nowhere aboard, unless he's stowed away somewhere in a bunker. And a queer thing happened, too." Macintyre hesitated, then went on. "You know that nice new Browning pistol I got in Hong Kong, last thing? Well, it's gone."

"What d'you mean? You think Charley took it and jumped overboard to spite you?"

Mac's eyes had no laughter in them.

"Well, it looks that way, for a fact. That gun was under my pillow last night, and it's gone now."

"Oh!" said Cleghorn. "Steward cleaned up your cabin? Go ask where he put it."

"I just asked him," said Mac. "He knows nothing about it. Swears up and down there was no gun under my pillow when he made up the berth."

"Believe him?"

"He seems an honest little rat. Damned if I know what to believe!"

"Same here," confessed Cleghorn. "Looks mighty queer, all of it. I don't savvy about Gray, though. He must be somewhere about the ship, Mac."

"He's not. He's supposed to be on duty now, too. Think we'd better make any general search for him?"

"No," said Cleghorn slowly. "No. something's up, Mac, and I don't know what it is. Best lay low and keep your eye peeled. Here, take my gun and keep it on your hip. I've got another in my locker. By the way, look in Adams' cabin for his, will you? He keeps it in his wash-stand drawer, right side. If you find it, bring mine back."

"Right," said Mac, and dropped the automatic into his jacket pocket.

Cleghorn, alone at the break of the bridge, gripped the rail hard and frowned at the sun-glittering water. Something very queer—yes! One at least of those men forward, who had come aboard the previous evening, knew that Rapp was really Peterson. Then, the murder of poor Adams. And now a mysterious disappearance. Charley Gray, the assistant engineer, was a rough old rascal, strong as a horse, with a bitter tongue, but true as steel. How on earth could he have vanished bodily? Such things just were not done. He was no doubt somewhere around the ship, perhaps dead drunk in a corner.

Then Cleghorn found Marie Silva ascending the ladder hastily. She stood before him, flushed, her dark eyes excited and angry.

"There's something horribly wrong here, Cap'n Joe!" she broke out. "My bag was locked, and had a pistol in it. Now it's been cut open—a long gash down one side—and the pistol is gone. Nothing else is missing. Tomkins discovered it himself and called me in to see the cut bag."

As Cleghorn had half anticipated, Macintyre did not return his automatic, for Adams' weapon was clean gone. And so was the second pistol in Cleghorn's locker.

4

EVENING found the mystery still unsolved.

Three things stood out sharply, with puzzling prominence. Charley Gray had simply vanished; he was not aboard the ship. Adams had been murdered, and if Cleghorn suspected the murderer, he said nothing, but buried his chief officer calmly. Then, the disappearing pistols. Some one had raided the officers' cabins; some one had cut open Marie Silva's bag and taken the pistol from it.

Cleghorn found his own futility maddening.

Moved by his own helplessness, he that evening confided in Darby. The other three of Darby's party were having a card game in the mess cabin, Horton was on the bridge, Marie Silva had gone to her own cabin. Cleghorn found Darby in the stern, smoking, looking out at the silvery moonlit wake. He told him bluntly what had happened.

"You've searched up for'ard?"

"Yes," said Cleghorn bitterly. "We've searched everywhere. No sign of Gray. No sign of any pistols."

"Well," and Darby tapped his pocket, "nobody's got mine, anyhow! I dunno what it can mean, for a fact. That Rapp-Peterson thing looks bad. You say one of the men for'ard knew him, eh? Might be those three sharks had hooked me, somehow, but why? No sense to it. We're all four partners. Piracy? Ain't likely. They'd not want this ship.

Nothing in her to loot. It's a wonder," he added bitterly, "you ain't suspected me of some crooked work!"

"I have," said Cleghorn frankly. "But I can't see any particular point to suspecting you of anything. As to the murder of Adams—well, I know who did that."

"Spit it out, then," snapped Darby. "All shipshape, I says, and cards on the table! Who?"

"Aranha." And Cleghorn told of the button. Darby swore disgustedly, turned around to the light, pointed to his own coat.

"Hell's bells! Might's well say I did it myself. Same sort o' slop-chest buttons, and one's torn off here. That's no damned good, at least to prove anything. But it does beat all how you can lose not only them pistols, but a perfectly good engineer, aboard a lousy little old well-decked coasting tramp like this!"

Cleghorn caught his arm suddenly.

"What's that? Hear it——"

"On the bridge!" snapped the other. "Come on."

Darby dashed away. Cleghorn followed him forward, hearing again that thin, wailing cry, and then it was cut short. Some one had called him. It was his own name that had shrilled down the moonlight.

Upon reaching the bridge, the two stood staring at each other. Horton stood there, calm, inquiring; he had heard nothing. Cleghorn withdrew, and at the foot of the ladder waited for Darby, and growled an oath.

"Somebody called me, I could swear to it!"

"Aye," assented Darby. "Some one called 'Joe Cleghorn'! Heard it myself. All quiet on the bridge. I'll pop below and take a look. Want to get a couple cheroots anyhow."

He departed. Cleghorn went to the rail, glanced at the forward well deck, glanced aft. He made out nothing amiss, nothing suspicious. The deck lights were all burning. He strolled on aft by the engine-room hatch, and then turned at the quick step of Darby thudding along the deck. Darby extended a cheroot.

"Here. All quiet below, cap'n. Dashed if I can savvy it!"

Cleghorn struck a match; they lit the cheroots. Darby turned to the rail, leaned on it—and then sprang suddenly back with a startled oath.

"What's this? Look here, would you——"

Cleghorn saw him staring at his hand. He touched the rail, found something wet and sticky. Next instant a match showed them the truth. On the rail, dribbling down to the scuppers, was wet, fresh blood. A lot of it.

"That card game still going on?" demanded Cleghorn grimly.

"Yes. My Lord! Where'd this come from?"

A frightful premonition seized upon Cleghorn. He turned, then paused.

"Watch out!" he said sharply. "Run up and tell Horton, like a good chap. I'll be along in a moment."

Then he was gone, through the open door, down to the engine-room gratings. Half-way down, he paused and shouted at the men below.

"Where's Mr. Macintyre?"

"Ain't here, sir," came back the response. "Went topside for a breath of air a while back. Ain't come down yet."

Cleghorn was stunned for an instant. He retraced his steps, his brain in turmoil, passion boiling within him; by a tremendous effort he kept his head, forced himself to be cool, quiet. That was poor Mac's blood on the rail. He had been stabbed and flung over, and had cried

out as he fell. Dead now, beyond any helping.

"HERE is something that I found by the rail," came the voice of Darby.

From him Cleghorn took a little silver pencil with pocket-clip. It was one he himself had given Macintyre. Cleghorn stood there, trembling; grief and fury rushed upon him at once, and then a stifled groan came from his lips.

"It's Mac, the chief," he said in a low voice. "Murdered like Adams. Good Lord! What does it mean? Who's the killer? There must be an insane man aboard here, a madman—and Mac had been warned, too. He was on guard. Now we know how Charley Gray vanished. What's behind it?"

He turned upon Darby. In the moonlight his eyes glittered, his face was convulsed, he was filled with suspicion and hatred. At a word, at a look, he would have seized the smaller man before him like a rat.

Then his passion died out. Darby's scarred features bore a look that could not be mistaken—a look of earnest stupefaction, of deep alarm. The man was sincere.

"Him, of all people!" exclaimed Darby. "Lord, I'm sorry. He was a fine chap, cap'n; what the devil's to do about it? D'ye think Aranha——"

Cleghorn caught at the name.

"Will you see if he's left that game since we were there? See what they say. Keep on your guard——"

"Right," said Darby briskly. "I'm with you all the way, cap'n. Back in a minute."

As he departed, the chunky figure of Horton appeared.

"Hullo, cap'n. What's up? Darby told me about the blood——"

"Mac's gone," said Cleghorn. "And, by the lord Harry, if I find out who's the bloody murderer, I'll wring his neck! Noticed anything queer?"

"Mac!" Horton caught his breath sharply. "Who, me? Not a thing, sir. Who done it?"

"How the hell do I know? Would I be yammering here like a fool if I knew?" cried Cleghorn in a tortured voice. "Watch yourself, old man. It's some of this damned gang we've got aboard us. Look out for that Aranha. None o' them have been killed—and look at us! You and me next. I can't figure this game, but look out!"

"You bet," assented Horton calmly. "I'll get back topside."

Cleghorn was alone once more. He moved out of the moonlight, stepped back inside the door of the engine-room entrance, paused there. No use questioning the men down there; if they did know anything, they'd lie, of course. His thoughts flew to Marie Silva, up there in her own cabin. She must be warned about all this deviltry. She might be the next to go. Cleghorn was stung afresh by his own helplessness, his inability to do anything. He was convinced that Darby was not concerned in it, however; the sincerity of the man was beyond any mistake.

A shuffle of feet on the deck outside, then a voice. The words petrified him.

"——leave her alone, see? Peterson's got her picked out."

"Trust him," came the response, with a low, evil laugh. "Remember him and that dame down in Batavia?"

The two figures passed, oblivious of the man in the shadow. One was Martin, the quartermaster. The words burned into Cleghorn. He stood motionless, then heard Darby's brisk step.

"Hey, cap'n! Where are ye?"

Cleghorn stepped out. Darby flung his cheroot over the rail.

"Game just broke up," he said. "I asked the steward; nobody had been gone, he said."

"Damn the steward! I'll bet he's in on this, too. Listen!" Fiercely, Cleghorn told what he had just overheard. Darby whistled softly.

"Some o' these men you shipped are in on it, sure!" he exclaimed. "Let's you and me go have a talk with this Rapp, mister."

"You're on," said Cleghorn grimly. "Meet you in five minutes below the bridge. I've got a slungshot tucked away in a drawer, and I'll get it, then join you."

Cleghorn started for his own cabin. So this devil Rapp was behind some of this work, eh? At all events, the girl was in no danger; that was one good thing. And now that he was warned, Rapp-Peterson was going to cough up information, and do it in a hurry.

Thus determined, Cleghorn turned into the passage, passed the door of the girl's cabin, shoved open his own door, and reached for the light. His figure was illumined by the light in the passage, the cabin was pitch-black. As he put out his arm, something moved before him. Every sense alert, he ducked, and swerved quickly to one side.

A furious blow glanced from his head —had he not ducked, it would have brained him. Half stunned, he hurled himself to one side, and collided full with an unseen figure. His hands shot out. A grim and furious satisfaction seized Cleghorn as his fingers sank into the throat of a man, sank in with a terrible grip.

Another smash over the head, and another.

Blinded, he sank in his fingers the deeper. The two struggling figures hit against the door, and it slammed shut. Now there was perfect darkness. In his ears, Cleghorn heard the hoarse, frenzied panting of a man, felt the smashing blows of the other's fists and of some blunt weapon. He had not the slightest idea who it could be, and cared not. This fellow had been waiting here to get him, and had come within an ace of it.

That man, gripped about the throat by those fingers of iron, gasped terribly, struggled with blind and frantic desperation to loose the grip, and could not. His strength began to fail. Again Cleghorn caught a terrific smash over the head, and this fourth blow all but knocked him out.

He lost balance, but did not lose his grip. He dragged down the other with him; they fell heavily, rolled against the closed door, and lay there sprawling. Flashes of fire beat before Cleghorn's eyes. He tried to rise, and could not. He felt his senses slipping away. With an effort, he held himself motionless, let all his strength, all his will-power, flow into his hard-gripped fingers.

Even when everything went black before him, there was no slackening of his frightful hold.

5

WHEN Cleghorn came to his senses again, daylight was creeping into the cabin, stealing across his face, wakening him.

He sat up abruptly.

At first he remembered nothing, for his head was very sore and aching, and he was in a most uncomfortable position, twisted with another man, lying solidly against the door. Then, as he put both hands to his head and squirmed aside, he suddenly recollected what had passed the preceding night. With a start, he turned to the still, motionless figure lying there face down, and lifted it. The body

was quite stiff. The face, when he had turned it over, was horrible to see, and black.

It was the face of Rapp. In the man's hand was a slungshot. Fallen on the floor, where it must have slipped from his hold almost at the first, was a long, keen-edged knife. Probably the same knife that had slain Adams and Macintyre.

But now—daybreak! Morning! What had happened, meanwhile?

Cleghorn staggered to his feet. He was bruised and sore, his head felt like a battered apple, but he was himself again and it took a lot to damage him beyond recourse. He caught up the water-bottle from the rack and drank thirstily, heavily. Then he looked at the stiffened body of Rapp, and felt only satisfaction. Here he had the murderer, no doubt of it—and besides, what Rapp had told the men in regard to Marie Silva put him beyond the pale.

Rapp had been in collusion with the men, of course; had known one or two of them in times past. What was his objective here? Well, no matter now. And why had no one come during the night? Sudden sharp alarm pierced Cleghorn. Horton would have looked him up, surely. Had anything happened to the second officer? Aranha must be involved in this affair, probably had murdered Adams. That button still stuck in Cleghorn's mind.

Going to the body of Rapp, he examined it and grunted as he rose with a pistol in his hand. What was more, it was his own missing pistol, the one that had been taken from his locker. This settled things with a vengeance. He pocketed it, then picked up the slungshot. Donning a fresh jacket, he slipped the springy weapon up his sleeve, hauled the body of Rapp away from the door, and stepped outside.

Voices came to him from the adjoining cabin. He heard Marie Silva speak.

"You say he hasn't been around?"

"No, miss," returned Tomkins, the steward. "Sound asleep and 'is cabin locked. Cap'n Darby tried to get in and couldn't."

Cleghorn turned away. He could talk with the girl later. At present, he had other and more pressing things on his mind. First, what about Horton?

He went down the passage to the latter's cabin, tried the door. It was locked, and the key was on the outside. Cleghorn turned it and walked in.

Horton lay in his berth, breathing stertorously, fully dressed. Beside him on the floor was an empty cognac bottle. Another lay in the berth. Cleghorn picked up this latter and sniffed it, about to take a swallow; then he checked the motion. The brandy had an odd smell. He looked at the unconscious Horton, and a whistle escaped him. His first disgusted contempt passed away.

"Doped, by gravy!" he muttered. "Somebody got him drinking, then gave him a doped bottle! Well, they got him out of the way without killing him, that's sure. Then locked him in. Hm! Rapp didn't do this, anyhow."

He went outside, saw nothing of Tomkins, and started for the bridge.

From the ladder, he looked down to the forward well-deck and saw two or three of the hands there staring up at him. He went on grimly. Mounting, he came face to face with Darby, who stood in talk at the starboard rail with Stoutsman. They broke off short, staring.

"Man!" exclaimed Darby, unconcealed pleasure in his eyes. "We thought ye were sleeping your head off! Horton's dead drunk."

"Doped, you mean," said Cleghorn. Glancing into the pilot house, he saw the man Martin there, gawking at him,

and smiled grimly. Then he looked at Stoutsman, whose red, bulbous-nosed face was all shot across with surprize and bewilderment.

"Couldn't knock you up last night," went on Darby quickly. "Couldn't get in at all. Looked bad, cap'n. Stoutsman, here, knows a bit about engines, and he's got things running sweet down below. You know, we can't find Rapp anywhere? Didn't turn up for breakfast."

"He won't turn up for any more breakfasts," said Cleghorn calmly. "He's the dirty devil who stole our guns and has done this murdering. He was waiting for me last night and damned near got me. He's settled. What d'you know about it, Stoutsman?"

"Who, me? Not a thing, cap'n," stammered the red-faced man, so plainly lost in puzzled anxiety that Cleghorn cleared him at once of any complicity in the murders.

Then, glancing around the horizon, Cleghorn started. The *Hermione* was no longer out at sea, but steaming along toward a scattered group of reefs and long, barren islands. Across the north and west rose the Manchurian mountains. He perceived at once that she had somewhat overshot her mark and was coming up now to the reefs. He glanced at Darby.

"Your work?"

"Aye," said Darby with a nod. "In half an hour we'll be at the reef. It lays behind that mass o' rock off the port bow. We'll raise her clear in three or four minutes."

"Good," said Cleghorn. "You and I will have to run her until Horton's on his feet; Lord knows when that'll be!"

HE TURNED into the wheelhouse. Martin gave him a startled, shrinking glance, and Cleghorn came up close to him, pulled the slungshot from his sleeve, and dangled it before the quartermaster. The implement was of braided leather in different colors, beautifully woven.

"Recognize that, do you?" said Cleghorn. "Now, my lad, you're going to come clean—or else you'll feel it as well as see it. Rapp's dead, savvy? Peterson, as you knew him. He's dead, and I killed him, and I'll do you the same in about two minutes."

Martin's face went gray, livid, ghastly.

"So that—that's why he—he ain't been around!" he muttered.

"That's it. He's down in my cabin, dead and stiff, and you'll join him pronto unless you talk," said Cleghorn.

Martin shrank suddenly, and cowered away from him.

"I'll talk, cap'n, I'll tell you everything!" he gasped.

Cleghorn caught sight of Darby, outside, and beckoned. The other came in by the port door and stood listening, his scarred features anything but handsome.

"I met Peterson on the street and he says to ship aboard you," said Martin. "He says we'd have a bloody good thing of it, sir. That's all I know——"

"You lie like hell!" snapped Cleghorn. "Last night you and another man were talking about Peterson and that girl down below——"

He swung the persuader, and Martin let out a cry.

"That's true, sir! Sure! There wasn't no harm in it, sir! Peterson told us queer things were going on aboard here, and to look out for the lady, that he had his eye on her for himself. That's all he said. I don't know nothin' about the murder, cap'n! I swear it! He says last night he'd be around and give me and Swipes some orders, and he ain't come."

"You'll go to join him," said Cleghorn, "if you don't watch your step."

Darby beckoned, and they went outside, to the end of the bridge.

"That clears it up a bit," said Darby. "Rapp had some sort of game afoot, eh?"

"And wasn't alone in it. What about Stoutsman?"

"He's no saint, but he ain't mixed in it," said Darby emphatically. "That man there knows more'n he's told."

"Sure; but he's told enough. Try to get any more out of him, and he'd lie a blue streak," replied Cleghorn disgustedly. "Aranha?"

"I dunno." Darby frowned. "If he is, then Rapp's death will knock him silly. See here, we got to pay attention to business or we'll go on the reef! I know the ground here. I'll con her up to the anchorage myself. There's the wreck, by gosh!"

FOR the moment, everything else was forgotten. Indeed, Aranha came up the ladder, saw Cleghorn with a start of recognition and astonishment, then turned and stared like every one else.

The reef ahead, disengaging itself from the high rocky islet which had concealed it, now showed plainly to view. The tide was now high, the half-mile long reef was almost awash. Midway of its length and driven clear of the water, the wrecked *Adamastor* lay upon her starboard side, half in a deep pool that ran the length of the reef. Her spars were gone, her bows were stove in, but her superstructure seemed intact. Darby was examining her through his glasses, and now lowered them with an exultant word.

"The hatches ain't been touched! I'll take her, cap'n. There's twenty fathom steep to this side of the reef."

He disappeared inside the pilot house, and a moment later the ship came to half-speed.

Aranha turned, met the gaze of Cleghorn, and smiled composedly.

"You haven't seen Rapp, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes," said Cleghorn. "He's down in my cabin now."

"Oh!" Aranha's brows went up in surprize. "Then I'll just run down and call him, eh?"

Cleghorn shrugged, and watched the other depart with a grim smile. As Aranha went down one ladder, Marie Silva came up the other, her lovely features excited. She gave Cleghorn a glance and a swift greeting, and turned to look at the island as soon as she was on the bridge.

"Oh! Isn't it pitiful?" she exclaimed hastily. "Are you going close up, cap'n?"

"We are," said Cleghorn. She swung around to him.

"I forgot—everything's all right, isn't it? The steward said you were sleeping——"

"Everything's all right, you bet," he rejoined, his eyes twinkling. "And you're going in the first boat with me, Marie, so you'd better get ready. It'll be rough work there on the reef; looks all coral, pitted and full of holes. Got any heavy shoes?"

"I'll get them, yes," she returned, and left the bridge hurriedly. Cleghorn turned to where Darby stood beside the quartermaster, giving instructions. The ship was on quarter-speed now, nosing up to the island. Darby touched Martin on the shoulder.

"Get for'ard and break out that anchor. Good holding-ground in twenty fathom."

The engine telegraph swung to "Stop" and the monotonous clank of the engines ceased; all vibration left the ship and she surged forward slowly, steadily. Two hundred yards from the reef, the cable began to rattle and bang in the hawser; presently the ship swung at rest, her nose to the reef, for the tide was on the turn.

"Well?" Darby faced Cleghorn inquiringly. "What's the program?"

"Up to you, cap'n," responded Cleghorn. "I'm going to give the lady a hand, that's all."

"Then we'll take Aranha, Stoutsman and six men. Suit you?"

Cleghorn made a gesture of assent, went out to the bridge rail, and bawled the orders at the men below. They trooped aft to get the No. 1 boat into the water. Then Aranha came up the ladder, his dark eyes staring at Cleghorn, his face ominously set.

"Well?" he demanded, breathing hard. "What's it mean, cap'n?"

"Oh, you found him, did you?" Cleghorn chuckled. "Means that he tried to do me in like he did the others yesterday. Bloody murderer, that's what he was! And I'm not so sure but what you had a hand in it as well."

Aranha faced him steadily. "Careful, cap'n!" he said in a low voice. "Is that an accusation or not?"

"No, it's merely my opinion, and you're welcome to it," said Cleghorn. The other shrugged.

"You seem to want trouble! Well, I'll not oblige you now; I want to have a look under the hatches of that wreck. When we return, we'll settle this affair."

"Suits me," said Cleghorn. "Darby, hold the boat for me, will you? There's something I want to look up below."

GOING down, he met Tomkins, and told the steward to call up some of the men and drop the body of Rapp overboard with a weight to the heels. He left the aghast steward staring after him, and went to Macintyre's cabin.

He spent a good ten minutes in searching it thoroughly but fruitlessly. There was no doubt that Mac had taken care of the telltale button and scrap of cloth, but it was not here. With a grunt, Cleghorn accepted the blow.

"Either he kept it in his pocket," he reflected, "or else his murderer got in here and looked it up. Aranha or Rapp? No telling. Seems silly to think those two chaps would come aboard here with one or two men, to pull murder and piracy! Still, there's a reason back of it, if I could only find it."

Alert, wary, watchful of everything, he went to the galley and got a steaming mug of coffee, wolfed a hunk of bread, and then went to where the boat was waiting under the side. Six men were in her, with Aranha and Stoutsman, and Darby was just helping Marie Silva down. Two minutes later Cleghorn shipped the tiller, and the boat struck out. Behind her, the men left aboard stared down over the rail, watching.

The morning was still, almost a calm. Not even a fishing-craft was in sight, but against the horizon were two smoke smudges, no doubt steamers making for or leaving Dairen. This string of bare reefs and islets was waterless, uninhabited.

"Couldn't have better weather for the job," observed Stoutsman. "Nasty place if a blow came up! We ought to be gone by night, eh, Aranha?"

The latter nodded in silence. His gaze was fastened upon the wreck in rapt excitement. Marie Silva, crowded beside Cleghorn, was also watching the wreck, whose almost perpendicular deck was toward them as she lay. Cleghorn was watching the reef, however, and picked out a spot for landing as the boat surged forward.

"Bow oar! Lay out with that hook and stand by," he ordered.

6

THEY were ashore, scrambling across the face of Fourteen, as the reef was charted.

One man remained with the boat, the others trailed along. Cleghorn and Marie followed Aranha; the others spread out, all seeking the best path across the uneven surface of pitted coral, dotted with pools, and much of it slippery with weed from its recent submergence.

"It'll be a job," said Cleghorn, as he helped the girl across a pool close to the canted deck of the wreck. "You know his cabin, of course?"

"Yes. On the starboard side of the passage, easy to reach."

"Won't find much loose stuff," observed Cleghorn grimly, with a glance over the deck above. "Natives have been here."

This was evident. Everything not smashed loose had been cut adrift, even the windows having been hacked out. That the hatches had not been touched showed that the wreckers were probably passing fishermen in a hurry.

Cleghorn paid no further attention to Darby's party, who scurried about and clustered about the forward hatch. He was busy trying to get into the cabin passage beneath the bridge, which was not easy by reason of the sharply canted decks. When at last he had cleared away the débris of a jammed, smashed door, the girl passed through and he followed, clawing a precarious way along the sloping deck.

The cabin doors were all opened, smashed, jammed, blocking the passage until forced out of the way. A quick cry from Marie, as she disappeared into a cabin.

"Here, cap'n! It looks all right, too——"

It looked far from all right, as Cleghorn perceived on scrambling through the doorway. The floor was a litter of smashed crockery, furniture, moldy bedding, everything imaginable piled up; any object of utility had been carried off. Lockers, chests, drawers were all open and plundered.

Marie Silva, however, had gone to the bed, a French brass bed screwed to the floor, and was working her way around to the head of it. Cleghorn looked at the wall but could see nothing here except a cracked mirror in a wooden frame screwed in place. When she came to this, the girl paused and flung him a laughing glance.

"Now you'll see why everything was sure to be safe! Even if the ship had gone down to the bottom, it would not matter——"

Her face changed abruptly. Fear flashed in her eyes. Cleghorn whirled suddenly and saw Aranha just coming erect in the doorway, watching them with an amused expression. The pistol leaped out.

"What d'you want?"

Astonishment filled the dark, aggressive features as Aranha saw the gun.

"Nothing, cap'n!" he exclaimed hastily. "I—I came to say that Cap'n Darby can't get those hatches open, and asked if you'd come and lend a hand."

"No," said Cleghorn bluntly. "Tell him to play his own game and I'll play mine. Get out of here and stay out."

Aranha flushed angrily, but shrugged and scrambled away. Cleghorn went to the door and watched from there until he saw the man clear out of the passage. Then he returned again.

"All right, Marie! That blighter was curious; Darby sent no message at all, I'd gamble on it. Go ahead, he's gone."

The girl produced a short, blunt screwdriver with good purchase. Evidently she had come fully prepared, knowing exactly what to expect here. She fell to work at the mirror-frame, and a whistle of admiration broke from Cleghorn when he comprehended.

Silva had chosen his hiding-place admirably. No one would have given two glances at this broken mirror screwed against the wall. The very fact of the glass being cracked directed the attention elsewhere.

Then, as he watched, Cleghorn remembered Aranha. The rascal had looked dumfounded at sight of that pistol. His calm, unhurried appearance, his first amusement, the way in which he had entered without the least concealment, went to show that he had not anticipated finding Cleghorn armed—or did it? If Darby had really sent him, this would explain his manner just as fully.

"Slick," thought Cleghorn angrily. "The devil is a smart one, smooth as butter! I'll bet a dollar he's been in cahoots all the time with Rapp; and he sneaked that button out of Mac's cabin, too. But what's their game? That's what stumps me. If I knew that, I'd know just what to hang on him, and why."

After all, he reflected, things had happened with remarkable rapidity. When he was knocked silly last night, holding Rapp in his hands, not twenty-four hours had passed since leaving port. There hadn't been much time or chance to run down killers, with all the things that were happening and the work to be done. But now it would be different. Dairen was just over the horizon, steamers coming in and going out could be reached at almost any time with a smoke signal or rockets, and if Aranha tried any tricks, he would get into hot and quick trouble.

THEN Cleghorn's thoughts shifted as the girl finished her task. The last screw was coming out, and without an effort she pried the mirror-frame away from the wall and lifted it to the bed, carefully. Where it had been, there was revealed a small square door in the cabin wall. Opening this door, Marie produced a tin box six inches wide and a foot long, laid this on the bed, then took up the mirror again.

"I'll just replace this first of all," she said. "No use advertising what we've done."

"Right," he approved. "Let me get around there—I'll do it for you."

Joining her, he fell to work and in no time was driving in the last of the screws. She started to open the box with a little key that was on a chain about her neck, and seeing this, Cleghorn heaved the mattress back upon the bed-springs, and opened out a handkerchief on this.

"Pearls mean money, and so does a tin box like that," he said significantly. "Whatever's in it, throw into the handkerchief and make a bundle you can tuck out of sight. If you carry that box, everybody aboard will know you've got something worth having. With all the goings-on we've had——"

"Oh!" she paused, her eyes widening. "I meant to ask you about it, but we've hardly had time to talk since sighting the wreck. I haven't seen Mr. Macintyre around today, and that sour-faced man, Rapp, hasn't appeared——"

"And won't," replied Cleghorn. "Both dead, Marie. Make up your mind to it, we're bound to have trouble before we're through. I can't explain. I don't savvy it myself, but once we get what we're after, there's going to be some explaining done aboard ship."

She looked at him for a long moment, searchingly, then bent her gaze again to the box in her hands. Unlocked, this came open, and she dumped out the contents on the mattress. There were a number of small Chinese boxes, covered with bright brocades; a sheaf of bank-notes, a heavy purse, probably containing gold by the peculiar dead clink as it fell; and a legal envelope with papers inside.

"Pearls in those boxes, eh?" observed

Cleghorn. "Well, the boxes are devilish unhandy, and to be frank, I think all this stuff is risky. Suppose you dump out the pearls and knot the handkerchief around them. They can't hurt unless you crush 'em. Stuff the other things out of sight. Carry the envelope, and I'll carry the box."

"You will? The empty box?" She gave him a sharp glance. "But I thought you said it might cause too much comment——"

"Sure. I'll throw it away into the pool, and they'll see it's empty. You'll be carrying the envelope. It'll look like we didn't find much."

"I see."

She obeyed, without further discussion. Cleghorn knew nothing about pearls. Whether the glittering rosy globules that piled into the handkerchief were real or imitation, he had no idea whatever. When the last box had been turned out, Marie pushed the cotton and boxes to the deck, knotted the handkerchief, and thrust the little bundle into her breast. After it went the sheaf of notes. The purse she handed to Cleghorn, who grunted at its weight.

"Carry this, please. All ready, if you are."

With a nod, he pocketed the purse and turned to the door. Upon reaching it, he was relieved to find the passage quite deserted.

Tin box in hand, he made his way along, the deck of the passage sloping sharply to his right, the left wall under his feet. Because of the splintered door ahead, exit to the outer passage beneath the bridge was no simple matter. Cleghorn had to clamber around it on his hands and knees, the tin box under his arm, and then let himself slide down into the scuppers.

"I'll go first," he said, on reaching the smashed door, "and catch you."

He worked his way around the door, slid down the sharp slope and then caught sight of the quartermaster, Martin, at one side. Martin was grinning at him. Something whisked around him, and Cleghorn felt a tug that flung him sideways into the scuppers. A rope—he had been noosed——

There was a burst of laughter as they fell upon him.

7

IT WAS quite true about the ginseng in the No. 1 hold, although Aranha had somewhat exaggerated the quantity.

Aranha himself was in a fury of rage and terror over what he had seen that morning in Cleghorn's cabin. The death of Rapp was a frightful blow to him. The men knew it by this time, too. As they straggled over the reef toward the wreck, he knew they were discussing it. His own thoughts and eyes followed Cleghorn and the girl, however, and as he watched Marie Silva's lithe, slim figure climbing aboard the wreck, his eyes narrowed with a hungry, predatory glint in them.

He watched them disappear, then turned from the others and followed. No one observed him, for all were intent on getting aboard and reaching the closely battened forward hatch. He made his way into the superstructure, sublimely confident. What better moment than the present? Give them time enough to show him the way, that was all. Cleghorn would be unarmed, he felt certain—for he had quite forgotten about Rapp having a pistol.

This Cleghorn was altogether too clever, too dangerous, he reflected as he slowly made his way after the two. There was that button, so carefully preserved; that would have been a bad thing in any Admiralty court. But he had it now, had

even sewn it back into place on his jacket. He looked down at it and laughed softly. They would have to go a long way to catch him like that!

At the opening under the bridge, he paused to listen and glance back. Stoutsman and Darby were at the hatch below, the five men were coming along to join them. No hurry there; the men would await his signal before doing anything. Martin was in charge; a good man, this Martin. Then he heard Cleghorn say something, there inside, and after a cautious look, made his way in after the pair.

He waited again cautiously. Silence; this worried him. The girl would know just where the hiding-place was, of course. She would go straight to it and open it up. Aranha clawed his way along the sloping deck, paused there outside the jammed door. Then he heard her speak, exultation ringing in her voice. She was showing Cleghorn the secret.

"Even if the ship had gone down to the bottom, it would not matter——"

She had it open, then! Aranha lifted himself, came erect, moved into the doorway, hand on pistol.

To his mortification and dismay, he saw nothing—but the girl saw him. Cleghorn whirled around, pistol in hand, and only with an effort did Aranha compose himself, slide out of the trap somehow, get away. He cursed as he made his way forward again and joined the group about the hatch. The wedges were being knocked out, the hatch was nearly off.

Aranha caught the eye of Martin, and nodded. So Cleghorn had a pistol after all! Then it was impossible to wait longer. If they waited until he got out here, anything was possible. The last stroke must be delivered here and now. They would get Cleghorn when he came out. And the girl. Aranha smiled at this thought.

Martin passed a low word to the other four men.

Stoutsman was on one side of the hatch, mopping his bald head, and on the other was Darby, leaning forward, directing the men who cleared the hatch. This was raised up on one side and lifted over to the deck, sliding down into the scuppers with a subdued crash. The hatchway showed boxes and crates in mad confusion, the hold but partly filled, all the cargo there shifted into a solid mass on the starboard side.

Darby leaned over, peering down. Aranha came beside him, with difficulty keeping his footing on the sharp slope. Without a word, Aranha threw up his arm; the sunlight glittered on a knife in his hand. It was buried to the haft in the back of Darby. The latter, knocked forward by the blow, pitched headlong down into the hold and was gone from sight. Not a cry had come from him.

At the same instant, Martin and another man whirled on Stoutsman. He sensed their attack, started back, clapped hand to pocket with an oath of alarm. A man behind tripped him, Martin slammed in a blow under his jaw, and Stoutsman, knocked off his feet, went head-first through the air. He landed in the scuppers and lay inert. Martin slid after him, the other man also, with a glitter of knives; then, after an instant, they rose sheepishly and looked up at Aranha, who stood knife in hand by the hatch.

"Hell!" said Martin. "He broke his own neck."

There was a grin, a quick laugh. The knives were put up.

"Who brought that coil of light line? Where is it?" demanded Aranha.

"Right here, sir," said a man, showing the coil.

"Good thing we did," said Aranha coolly, "since there's not a scrap left aboard here. Cut it in two lengths. Martin! You and your pal there get into the

scuppers under the bridge entrance and grab the skipper. He'll be along in a minute. You, Swiggs! Fetch the other length and come with me—get up above the doorway. We'll make sure of the lady."

"Hey!" exclaimed Martin, frowning. "Why not douse him first off, cap'n? He'll talk if we leave him live."

Aranha showed white teeth in a laugh.

"Who's going to let him live, you fool? I want him alive, that's all you need know. When we go aboard, he'll be dead enough."

They went to their positions as he had ordered. Martin and the other, below, hid themselves at one side of the passage, Martin making his line into a running noose. Aranha, above, waited intent and hawk-like, and then drew back when he heard Cleghorn coming, heard him say that he would go first.

CLEGHORN came out, glanced around, slid down toward the scuppers. Martin noosed him very neatly; both men fell upon him, throttling him, subduing him before he had a chance to put up a fight. Marie Silva appeared by the jammed door.

Uttering a laugh, Aranha was upon her with a swoop, passed his line about her arms and body, caught her to him despite her struggles, and looked down at Martin.

"Tie him to the rail there, anywhere!" he ordered. "Then——"

A curse of furious pain broke from him. The girl in his arms had kicked him; now she brought up her knee, drove it into his groin, broke clear of him entirely. The line wound about her arms and body, however, kept her from using her hands. Aranha's companion slid down and caught her, and both of them pitched down the deck. Martin took hold of the girl as she fell, and next instant they had her tied and helpless, while the furious Cleghorn cursed them from where he sat lashed to the rail. They broke into laughter as Aranha joined them, his dark face livid with pain and anger.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, picking up the tin box. "Empty, eh?"

He went to Cleghorn and frisked him, taking his pistol and the purse. Looking into this, he gave a short laugh and flung it at Martin.

"Here! Divide that up among you—earnest of what's to come! Then lay for'ard and get into the hold, and look for the wicker bales I told you about. Nothing else like 'em there, so you can't miss 'em. Oval, wicker, about six foot long. I'll be along presently."

They departed, leaving the girl by the rail.

Aranha ignored her likewise, and turned to Cleghorn. He produced a cigarette, lit it, and smiled into the blazing blue eyes.

"Oh, you are very clever, cap'n, very clever!" he jeered. "But you are clever too late, eh? You were not clever when all your crew went off and you had to get more men. No, you never thought that maybe those men went off so my men could ship with you, eh? My men, all of them. After that fool Darby and his friends put up enough money to serve us. Poor Rapp! You killed him just too late. But then, so much the better for me, eh?"

Cleghorn glared at him, helpless, unable to move a muscle.

Under these taunts, he perceived the truth of everything—the bitter, ghastly truth. He had suspected Darby, but that man of admittedly bad record had simply been a dupe in the hands of this plausible scoundrel. He and Rapp; the two of them had limed the twigs with a likely tale, had caught Darby and Stouts-

man, had got enough money to put over the deal, and here they were.

The crew of the *Hermione*, already behind in wages, had been lured away. Other men, ready and waiting, had taken their place. And it had been done swiftly, perfectly, with a smoothness betraying the brains behind the scheme. Murderous, foul, black brains—for what? Mere ginseng? Far from it. Cleghorn had a glimmering of the truth now, the elusive motive for all this.

Aranha snapped away his cigarette and turned to Marie Silva. He bowed mockingly, met her dark, riotous eyes as they burned at him.

"Miss Silva, you know me, eh?" he observed. "This tin box, it is empty. This purse of gold, it is not very much. You see, not long ago I watch your father one night. Somebody slipped me word that Su Hsien who owned the Flowery Palace gambling-house had gone broke, that he had sold all his collection of pearls to your father. So! That was a valuable tip, eh? And one night I watch, I see your father with the pearls and the tin box. If you look close, you'll see the hole drilled through the partition between his cabin and mine."

Aranha grinned, took out another cigarette, lit it with a flourish.

"But the hole, alas!" he went on, "was not big enough to see where the tin box went. The hiding-place! That I could never find. Then came the typhoon, the wreck. Your father did not take the tin box away with him, that was certain. I was picked up, I kept it secret, got in touch with Rapp and Darby. We found you were coming. Darby thought it was all ginseng—ha! We meant to get there before you; or I did. But you fooled us. You came on the same boat, on the boat we chartered. And Darby, like a fool, gave you permission to come. Well! The rest is clear enough."

He shrugged, waved his cigarette, fastened his eyes upon the girl.

"Now—come!" he exclaimed sharply. "There are pearls and bank-notes; it is a fortune, a real one! The pearls of Su Hsien were famous in Macao. The tin box is empty. Here is Cap'n Cleghorn, a fine man. You like him. Perhaps you want to see me cut his throat, eh? Well, it will not be pretty to see, Miss Marie."

He chuckled and slid a knife into sight.

"What do you mean?" demanded Marie Silva, composedly. "You blackguard!"

"Names don't hurt," observed Aranha. "You hand over the money and pearls, and everything will be all right. I'll not hurt you——"

"Careful!" broke out Cleghorn. "He's a damned liar, Marie. He has other intentions toward you; I heard the men talking about it. Look for'ard, there. You can see poor Stoutsman in the scuppers, half over the rail—murdered!"

"You tell, maybe?" said Aranha, watching the girl. Color flooded into her face under his gaze.

"No, you murderer!" Her voice struck up at him defiantly.

"Oh!" Aranha chuckled softly. He moved closer to her. She lay on the inclined deck, her feet in the scuppers, and he balanced himself beside her, then looked at Cleghorn with a smirk. "What about you, cap'n? Suppose I leave her alone, eh? I don't want her with me. Don't worry! I can get girls of my own, real girls with fire in their blood. I wanted Marie unharmed until I got the pearls—not for the reason you think. No, I don't want her with me. You tell me, and I'll not touch her. But if you don't tell me—eh! You understand. Well?"

"Go to the devil," said Cleghorn. He made a sharp attempt to divert the man's

thoughts. "Don't tell him where we put them, Marie——"

"No use, no use," broke in Aranha. "So you won't tell?"

His knife moved down. The girl shrank before the blood-stained blade, before the grinning face of the man above her. Sweat broke out on Cleghorn's brow. He saw the knife touching the flesh of her white throat, pressing against the skin with slow, insistent pressure——

"Damn you, I'll tell!" he cried hoarsely. "Leave her alone, you dog!"

"Oh! I thought maybe you would," and Aranha straightened up. "That's why you weren't killed, cap'n. So? Where are they? Maybe I search her and find them, eh?"

The girl flashed a sudden look at Cleghorn—a glance he could not fathom, although in it he read warning, alertness, purpose.

"Set me free first," she exclaimed. "Set me free, and I'll show you where they are."

"Eh?" Aranha stuck forward his head, like a turtle, and peered down at her. "Set you free first—you promise, your word of honor?"

"Yes," she returned steadily. "I'll get them."

"All right," he said. "But mind, little girl, you pull a knife on me and you'll die quick! I'm ready for your tricks."

"I have no trick," she said quietly. "Are you afraid of a woman, then?"

Aranha leaned down and began to cut at the line binding her, while Cleghorn looked on with bitter eyes. There was no help for it, of course; if the fellow had taken a notion to search the girl, he would have found them.

"There!"

She came to one knee, wavered uncertainly, then rose and stood in the scuppers, leaning back above the rail. Aranha stood close, suspicious, the long knife ready. But the girl merely reached into her dress and produced the bank-notes.

"Here," she said, holding them out. Aranha snatched them.

"Well? The pearls——"

"Here." She got out the knotted handkerchief, and held it toward him.

8

AS ARANHA reached for the knotted handkerchief, it slipped from the girl's fingers. He grabbed for it wildly.

What ensued came with lightning rapidity.

Arm outstretched, the man leaned far forward. The pearls went down over the rail, to fall on the coral below. The girl's arm flashed out. She half hit, half pushed the leaning man. Flung off balance, he dived head-first over the rail for the rock ten feet below.

Marie's hand slipped into her breast. She flashed out a tiny, dagger-like knife, flew at Cleghorn, and slashed at the line confining him. A cry went up from the men forward, one of whom had seen what happened. Cleghorn found her flushed face close to his, heard her panting breath at his ear.

"Quick! Jump down, get his gun—it is our only——"

He was free. A yell from forward, and another. He came erect, looked over, saw the figure of Aranha sprawled on the rocks below, saw the man's arms moving a little with convulsive effort. Then Cleghorn hurdled the rail and landed square on Aranha's body, without thought of mercy for his human cushion.

The chance! She had won him a chance after all!

His hands slid over the body of Aranha. He found a pistol, jerked it out, darted forward. A man had just leaped over the side, a second was following, Martin was on the rail with a pistol in

his hand. Cleghorn threw up his weapon and pressed the trigger.

At the first shot, Martin pitched back and was gone. The man on the coral before him had whipped out a pistol, but his bullet missed. That of Cleghorn did not; the man went down, shot through the head. The second man struck the ground, then held up his hands in the air.

"Hey! Don't shoot!" he yelled frantically. "I give in!"

"You other two, come down here or you'll get no quarter!" blared Cleghorn. "Quick! You, Marie—come here! I need you!"

Almost at once, the girl joined him, excitement flaming in her face. She went to the prisoner, took a knife and pistol from him, and the other two men dropped from above and let her disarm them also.

"Run to the boat!" ordered Cleghorn. "Shoot the man there if you must—don't let him get away——"

The girl turned, broke into a run, and was gone.

Cleghorn surveyed the men grimly. They had been thunderstruck by the sudden reversal of affairs, supposing Aranha to be dead, as Martin certainly was. The three of them, panic-struck, had surrendered, the girl had flung their weapons into the pool; but now they glared at him, cursing volubly, realizing what it meant if they were taken into port as prisoners. Cleghorn laughed.

"Aye! You'll hang, right enough, all of you! But you'll work first. Pick up Aranha and carry him to the boat——"

He broke off abruptly, his eye caught a movement on the ship. There on the bridge was a figure in whites—the chunky figure of Horton. Exultation thrilled in Cleghorn at the sight. He saw Horton lift a pistol and fire in the air as a signal. Marie Silva, at the boat, had the man there under her weapon. He stood with upraised hands.

Cleghorn turned.

"Where's Darby?" he demanded. One of the men sullenly jerked a hand toward the wreck above.

"In the hold. Aranha knifed him."

"So? Then——"

Cleghorn had forgotten the slimy weed under his feet at the edges of the pool. He took a step. Suddenly his feet went out from under him and he pitched down, losing his weapon.

Instantly all three of them were leaping at him, desperate, frantic. They were upon him like wild beasts. Aranha had stirred, was not dead, came to one elbow, gasping out something inarticulate. Cleghorn rose to one knee, slipped again, just as the first man crashed into him bodily, sending him sprawling.

All three piled on top of him.

Fists and boots thudded into the prostrate, writhing, struggling figure under them. All three men realized instantly that it was their chance for life and freedom. Cleghorn finished, they could take their weapons again and shoot down the girl; as to what was passing aboard the ship, this was far from their thoughts just now.

But, despite their efforts, the man beneath them slowly uprose, shook them off as a bear shakes off dogs fastened to him. One drove in a blow to the mouth, so that the blood gushed from his lips; but now he was on his feet, and Cleghorn's fist smashed in against the man's throat and burst his Adam's apple. Then he turned upon the other two, and beyond them saw Aranha coming erect, still clutching his knife, but dazed and bewildered. The sight spurred him terribly.

The two closed in on him. He ducked, lashed in one lightning blow that doubled up the first man, then staggered under a fist to the ear. Slipping again on the wet weed, he went to his knee. The

man thought him down, and rushed in to finish it. That was unlucky for him, because Cleghorn leaped up to meet him, came up with a crushing right to the face that sprawled the last of his opponents senseless.

Then he flew at Aranha, who was staggering forward. The knife flamed in the sunlight, but it did not descend. Even as it glittered, Cleghorn darted in and struck, struck again. Aranha threw out his arms and fell over on his face, and lay still. Painfully, Cleghorn wiped away the blood from his mouth, then stooped for his lost pistol.

TWENTY minutes later, beside Marie Silva in the sternsheets of the boat, with Aranha at his feet and the groaning, bleeding men bending over slow-moving oars, Cleghorn held the boat out toward the ship, where Horton's figure showed that he was in charge. Suddenly Cleghorn turned to the girl.

"We'll make Dairen tonight and be done with it. But wait! We must go back—I forgot about the pearls——"

"I didn't," she said, and smiled into his eyes as she touched her breast. "I have them. But there's the ginseng——"

"Devil take the ginseng!" exclaimed Cleghorn, and laughed. "Give way, you dogs—lean on those oars!"

The unhappy men obeyed, with terror in their hearts, and the boat came slowly under the ship's side. The men at the rail, cowed by Horton's gun, lent a hand.

"And that," said Cleghorn, "is that! But there's more to come."

And the girl, meeting the flame in his blue eyes, flushed suddenly. But not from fear.

Chained

By ROSE MARY BURDICK

Wife and home and children, they chain me to the mart—
But the lure of far-off places comes tugging at my heart:
High peaks where silver streamlets leap down from crag to crag;
Would I were there to follow! My feet would never lag.

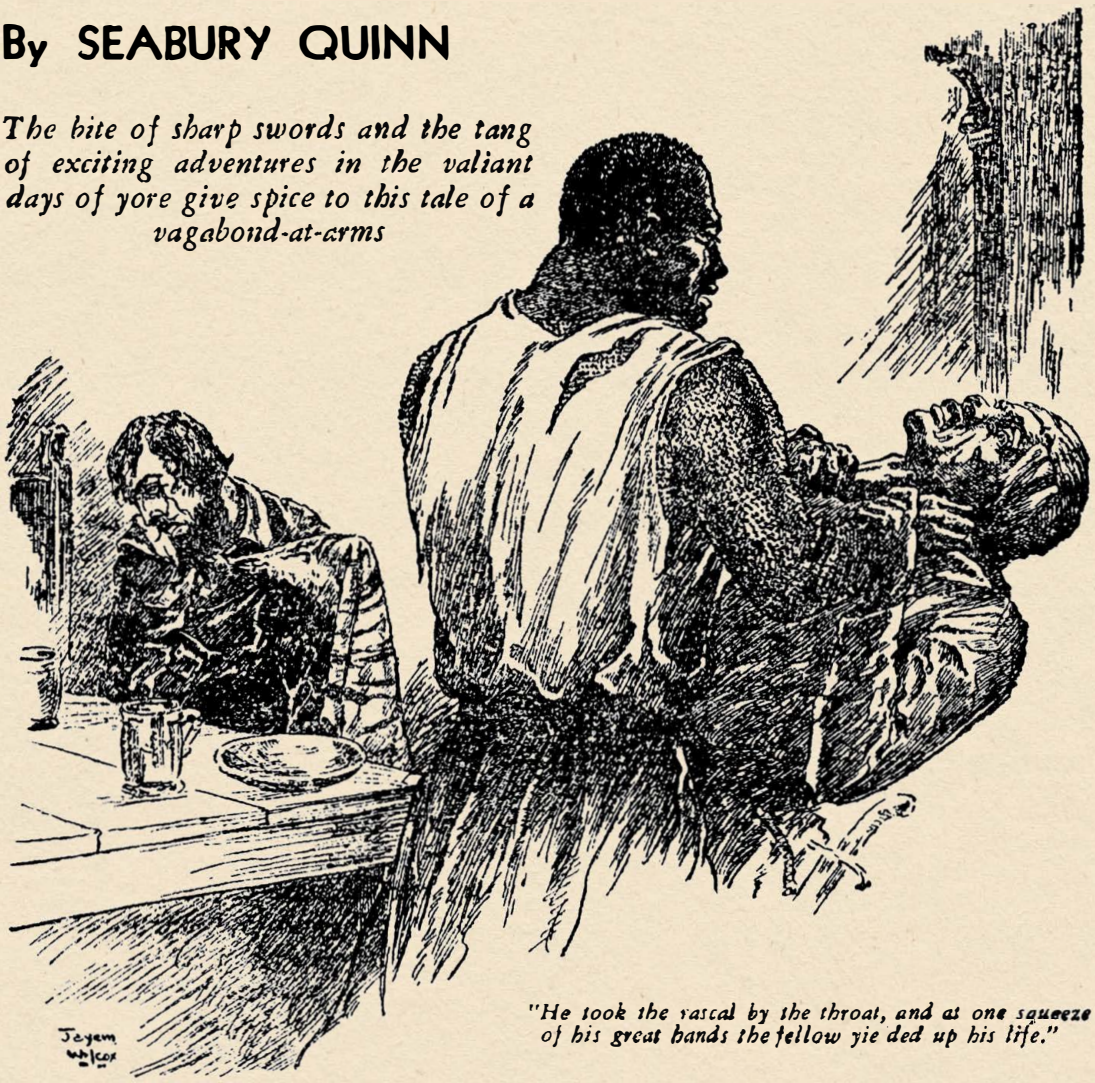
Oh, far! Where leans a feathery palm above a moonlit beach!
It leans and leans, and tries to kiss a shadow, out of reach!
Oh, do not reach it! It will chain, like wife and wedding-ring;
With silken cables 'twill restrain when far-off joy-bells ring.
Were I a palm I'd loose my roots when hurricanes are calling,
And follow all the joyous boats, on bright waves rising, falling.

Oh wife and home and children, they hold me here to duty—
But the croon of rocking billows! the dream of sea-girt beauty!
I'll gladly board the outbound bark, when comes Death's hail to me,
For farther waters beckon, beyond earth's farthest sea!

THE BRIDE OF GOD

By SEABURY QUINN

The bite of sharp swords and the tang of exciting adventures in the valiant days of yore give spice to this tale of a vagabond-at-arms



"He took the rascal by the throat, and at one squeeze of his great hands the fellow yielded up his life."

1. How I Came Upon Black Hassan

AT SUNRISE on my twentieth birthday I crawled from underneath the shelter of a hedge, my beggar's hempen robe all sodden with the night's dews and my face besmeared with dust and soil of the road, and looked about for sign of friendly house where I might find a crust of bread to prize apart my shrunken belly and a sup of water wherewith to wash the dust from out my parched gullet.

Two-score and seven days had I counted the toilful rosary of my weary footsteps from Granada, habited in a mendicant's gabardine, my bowl and clackdish swinging at my girdle, my olive-wood staff tap-tapping on the flints of the road, sometimes extending lazar hands to passing merchant or dame or prancing *caballero,* crying in quavering tones, "An alms, an alms for God His love! Give alms, good folk, or I perish!"

Yet few there were in all that Christian land who had a kindly word or com-

passionate glance for the roadside beggar, and as for gifts, I might well count myself lucky if the wayfarer bestowed nothing worse than a snarling curse or spat contemptuously into my outstretched hand.

And all the while, beneath my whining plaint, and in the thicket of my tangled, unshorn beard, I cursed the arrogant *hidalgos* who rode past me with frown of proud contempt or bitter, heartless jest, for next my thigh beneath my beggar's robe I wore the simitar and hanger my foster-father's old shipmate had given me the night I fled from Africa pursued by hired killers, and underneath my ragged shirt there stretched as fine a coat of chain-mail as ever Muslim warrior wore in battle. Yet outwardly I was a scurvy, unwashed mendicant, nor did I dare cast off my filthy hempen gown and tire me in befitting clothes; for upward of a month before I had defied the power and might of the Holy Office, slaying two of the idol-worshippers when from their very grasp I reft the daughter of Granada's grand master of beggars and gave her back into her father's keeping. Therefore, I trod the road attired in a beggar's rags for greater safety and disguise, the beggar king's amethyst ring safe hid within my girdle, my good sword veiled beneath my filthy gown, and in my bosom hid the withered rosebud bestowed on me as guerdon by the little Beggar Princess.

No welcome at the inns was there for me, for even scraps of food flung outcast dogs were far too good for such as I, nor was a beggar welcome at the farmsteads. Had it not been for the compassion of wretched, starveling peasants, I had yielded up my spirit for very hunger more than once, thus ending all my troubles or ever the Spanish torturers could twist the writhing limbs from off my shrieking body.

Upon the morning of my twentieth year, therefore, I crawled from out the wretched shelter of the wayside hedge and stood at gaze upon the roadway, cozening my wits for means of finding bread, perchance a scrap of meat as well, when, marching toward me, the early sunlight glinting prettily on their caps and gorgets, I espied a little company of men-at-arms.

Ahead there marched their officer, a bearded, swaggering fellow in tall boots of Spanish leather, the tinkle-tinkle of his sword-hilt sounding musically upon the metal bosses of his baldric as the weapon swung and bounced with the motion of his stride. Behind him came two black-browed, bandy-legged footmen equipped with eight-foot pikes, and between them, with many a curse and brutal blow, they drove a bound and stumbling blackamoor of giant stature, a figure once fit to swing a mace or sword in lusty combat with man or djinn, but now so bent beneath the weight of blows and fetters that he scarce seemed able to stumble through the highway's dust, however much his escort helped him with pike-butt, kick, and foul, biting curse.

It may have been the fellow's sight was sharpened past its natural wont by the dole of sorrow he had undergone, it may perhaps have been because I looked on him with something of compassion; at any rate, as he came level with me, he turned toward me his dust-burned, sweat-filled eyes and called aloud in Arabic, the language of my childhood, "Help, master of the helpless; help, protector of the oppressed, they take me to the galleys!" Whereat he raised on high his fettered hands and made the sign which worthy men and true have honored since the moment when great Solomon, the son of David (on whom be peace!), descried the body of his murdered friend upon the hilltop's brow.

"Now tell me, friend," quoth I, addressing the captain of the guard, "what harm hath this poor fellow done that ye drag him thus with chains and blows unto the prison ships? Surely, though his crimes be as great as those of the Iscariot, he merits more of mercy at your hands, for look ye, his wrists and ankles bleed from chafing of the irons, and in good sooth he can not be so dangerous that your men must needs belabor him at every step."

"Sir beggar," quoth the officer, twisting his great mustachios and frowning at me heavily, "those words be over-bold from one of your fraternity. Make way and stand aside for soldiers of the king, or by the sainted eyes of Holy Agnes, there will be two march to the galleys instead of one! Wouldst taste the flat of my sword?" He drew the iron half-way from its sheath, as though to beat me with its blade.

Now at this, the rage and hatred of his kind which I had held in check came seething in my throat, as gall regurgitates from a squeamish stomach. Faint with hunger and privation though I was, I felt that if I could but kill this coxcomb where he stood, right gladly would I give myself into the everlasting hands of Him who shaped the heavens and the earth.

"By Allah and by Allah, thou infidel dog," cried I, "give me the flat of thy blade if thou canst, but first thou'lt taste the edge of mine!" Whereat I ripped apart my beggar's robe and snatching my steel from out its scabbard, made at him, my simitar flashing in one hand, the long, curved dagger gleaming in the other.

Taken aback by the sudden war-like onslaught of one he thought unarmed and helpless, the bravo dragged at his rapier, but so quickly was I on him, and so swiftly did I strike, that before he could disengage his point from the ring of his scabbard, my saber had sheared through gauntlet, flesh and bone; so down fell useless sword and bloody, severed hand into the dust, while with my dagger's edge I struck him underneath the beard, midway 'twixt chin and gorget, letting out his lifeblood with the startled, sheep-like bleat he gave when the blade bit through his hairy, unwashed neck.

Too mazed to take advantage of their numbers, his followers stood and gaped at me as I vaulted past the squirming body of their chief and had at them with sword and dagger. One of them, indeed, directed a pike-blow at my unprotected head, but in the instant that he struck, his prisoner, all fettered as he was, flung himself headlong beneath his feet, oversetting him and causing his morion to topple from his head; whereon I struck him once across the eyes with my simitar, hewing through skin and skull into his brain.

The third man turned and fled, all armed as he was, and I was like to have lost him, for the long skirts of my gown sadly impeded me in the chase, but by happy chance the fellow stumbled when a loose rock turned beneath his foot, and I drove my sword-point through his spine where skull and backbone came together, and all was finished before a man might count two hundred slowly: three Spaniards stiffening in the morning sun, myself revenged for all the slights these savage infidels had put on me, and the giant Moorman freed from the hands of those who would have dragged him to a slavery worse than death.

Smiting the fetters from the prisoner's arms and legs was no light task, for the iron was newly forged at the joints, and for a time it seemed my rescued man was in no better case than before, but I

had no regard for dead men's weapons, since I possessed a better blade than all of theirs together, and by dint of much prizing and tinkering we finally managed to break the irons, though one of the pike-heads and two of the swords were ruined in the work.

For me a change of costume was furnished by the clothes we stripped from the dead officer, though his hat was much too small to match my head and his boots a world too big for my feet; but for the rescued Moor we could do little in the way of vestments, since all the Spaniards' clothes together would scarce suffice to cover him. Therefore we took from off the bodies such store of money as they had, slit the sides of the largest pair of boots to shoe my rescued man, and dug a shallow grave some half-score paces from the road, then turned us round and marched as swiftly as might be across the country lest those coming after our defeated foes might recognize the clothing which we wore and lay us by the heels for murderers and brigands.

"MY LORD is wondrous clever with the steel!" declared the rescued Moorman. "*Bismillah,* but 'twas meat in Ramadan to see him smite the Spanish swine!"

"Have done!" I ordered sharply, for praising a man to his ears alone has always seemed child's talk to me, since he already knows his worthiness and there be none others present to marvel at the story of his prowess. "And how might you be called?" I added afterwhiles, as he fell silent under my rebuke.

"Hassan, O mighty slayer of the three, O father of the fatherless," he answered. "Hassan the Black, and sometimes Hassan the Throttler, but ever after this Hassan your slave, O mighty warrior of the Prophet (on whom be peace!)."

"'Tis well," I made retort, "for I have need of faithful hands and eyes to watch behind my back, good Hassan. Come, let us to yon inn, and see what comfort they have there for us."

2. How the Tiger Changed his Skin

NOW in the common room of the inn where we sat regaling ourselves on mutton pasty came one at sight of whom my eyes watered with envy and my palms itched for very covetousness. About my size and stature he was, tall and well proportioned, with a forked beard like mine, and the wale of an old knife- or saber-cut scarring his face, much as mine was scarred. From head to foot he was arrayed in black—black boots of softest kidskin upon his slender feet, black silken hose upon his shapely thighs, and a doublet of finest sable satin about his body. His hands were clothed in gauntlets of black leather the backs of which were thickly sewn with seed-pearls, and at the wrists and throat of him was lace of snowy whiteness. But it was the cloak he wore that made mine eyes to glisten, for it was fashioned from a tiger's skin, tawny-yellow as minted gold and black as polished ebony, with the white belly-fur making a most gorgeous border. The beast's great head had been left on, with beads of burnished topaz set in for eyes, and the forepaws, all fitted with the monster's claws, were fashioned into sleeves. The whole was lined with scarlet silk, and made the handsomest array my eyes had ever looked on.

Behind this vision of magnificence there walked a tall, ill-favored blackamoor bedight in Eastern raiment, a jeweled turban on his head, and at his waist a curving simitar. In each hand this minion of Shaitan bore a great portmanteau.

The tigerskin-cloaked stranger sat down at a near-by table and hammered

on the board for service, while his attendant stood behind his chair to wait on him.

"See, now, how gentlemen are served," I told Black Hassan, whereat the great lumbering fellow rose and stood himself behind me, leaving his half-eaten pasty cooling on the board.

"And who might your magnificence be?" the other questioned with a smile which was half sneer. "It seems there be two of us here; wilt have a cup of wine at my expense?"

"Aye, marry, that will I, and gladly," I answered, moving to his table, Black Hassan at my heels. "I am called Carlos de la Muerte, your excellency, and this is Hassan, my slave, captured from the Moors by his Most Catholic Majesty's good soldiers and bestowed on me this very morning by an officer of the king's own guard."

"Ha? And didst pay much for him?" the other asked, looking appraisingly at Hassan.

"Oh, some little metal passed between us," I answered carelessly. "Indeed"—I winked knowingly—" 'twixt you and me, I think the captain got more than he expected."

"I doubt me not," the other laughed; "these Spaniards are a childish race, nor can they drive a bargain shrewdly, as we of Italy can."

He drained a quart flagon of red wine; then: " 'Tis passing strange thou'rt called 'Charles of Death', he mused, "since I am known as 'Antonio of Torture' in mine own land. Come, Death, pledge Torture in another bumper!"

" 'Tis strange, indeed," I answered him politely while I made shift to pour the contents of my wine-pot down my boot as his eyes were turned skyward while he drank. "How comes it you are called so?"

"Why, God's truth, because I am a torturer by trade," he boasted, and his smile, which had been somewhat mild before, took on the semblance of a very devil's grin as he spoke. "From early youth I've labored to improve the calling; some of the best masters in Europe have taught me all they knew, but I have bettered their instructions.

"Last month, for instance, I was called by the learned confraternity in Venice to put my art in practise on a woman found guilty of plotting the destruction of the Doge. Ha, she was a pretty wench, and I was moved to much compassion by her beauty; therefore, when all was made ready for her torment, I did proceed thus mercifully——" he leaned an elbow on the table and whispered confidentially:

"First, that she might not feel the pressure of her crown of raven hair upon her head, for 'twas a sultry summer day, I deluged it with oil, then set it in a blaze. The hair thus gotten rid of, I was at many pains to see the poor thing should not be frightened at the hostile glances of the throng which crowded round the scaffold's foot, and so I slit her thus across the brow"—he drew a finger over his forehead from temple to temple—"then pulled the loosened skin downward till it veiled her eyes.

"Next, that her pretty ears might not be affronted by the insults of the rabble, I cut them from her head; then, because she cried aloud, and I was sure she would not want the mob to see her lack of fortitude, I cut her tongue from out her mouth—oh, it took a deal of choking to make her thrust it forth, but we have ways, we brethren of the torturers' fraternity!

"And last of all, because her poor bosoms throbbed and trembled at the ordeal she must undergo, I took them off—with white-hot pincers—then I was ready for the torture; and inch by quivering inch,

slowly, I stripped the white skin from her body, and Hariman, my servant, stood hard by to douse her raw, red flesh with powdered salt as I took off the skin.

"What think'st thou of that, Sir Carlos de la Muerte? Hast any tricks within thy bag to match the one I've told you of? Why, man, thou'rt pale and all a-tremble, canst thou not stand the telling of my gentle pastimes?"

"Aye, by the Prophet his beard!" I thundered, rising in my seat. "I've here a trick thou'lt find not to thy liking, Sir Torturer. Too long hast thou played truant from the fires of hell, and overlong has thy foul carcass encumbered God's good earth. Go bid Satan good-morrow!" Whereat I loosed my dagger from its scabbard and struck him neatly through the eyeball, so the steel found his brain without hindrance, and he died without a cry, and sat there in his chair with hang-jawed mouth, as though the sight of hell amazed him.

And as I smote the master, Black Hassan smote the man. Disdaining sword or dagger, he took the rascal by the throat, and at one squeeze of his great hands the fellow died as a fowl yields its life when a woman wrings its neck.

"*Wah!*" cried great Hassan, his lust for killing roused, "and shall we go now to the kitchen and slay the other Roumi (may Allah curse their fathers!), Master of my life?"

"Nay," answered I. "They've done us no hurt, nor would we help our case by killing them. This son of Satan did deserve to die; besides, I coveted his cloak of tigerskin."

But even as I spoke a bolder plan was forming in my thoughts. "Disrobe that carrion yonder"—I pointed to the man he slew — "and put on his garments. This one"—I kicked the carcass of the torturer—"will serve to furnish clothes for me."

So off we stripped their clothing and arrayed them in our own, then bore them to the room we occupied and hid them in the bed. When this was done, with the tiger-cloak wrapped round my shoulders and the tiger-hood concealing my face, followed by Black Hassan in the other rogue's attire, I sallied bravely from the inn and called for my score, which I paid with a gold piece from the well-filled purse I found inside the dead man's doublet, then swore like forty devils because a coach and horses was not in readiness for us.

Anon, with crack of whip and bellowing of postilion's horn, we rode away, leaving the bodies of the dead in our stead while we exchanged identities with "Antonio of Torture" and his slave.

3. How We Found Shelter in the Convent

THE road was rough and full of gullies, and the horses but poor hacks despite their brave harness and jingling bells, and, to make matters worse, before we had gone a league the right front wheel of our equipage came off, leaving us to cool our heels at the roadside.

"Now, by the tail of Allah's horse," Black Hassan swore, "this likes me not, for the sun is fiery overhead, and soon the dead men at the inn will make their presence known; then——"

"Have done!" I shut him off, but I was thinking much the same, and right anxious was I to be gone, and that right quickly, for well I knew the hue and cry would follow us, and my tiger-cloak was overly conspicuous; yet I was loth to part with it, seeing I had been at pains in gaining its possession.

At last we started out afoot, since the knaves who drove the coach could not repair it and would not sell their nags; and though Black Hassan besought me

earnestly to slay them that they might not tell which way we went, I foolishly forbore to do so, since the poor zanies had done us no hurt, and seemed a harmless pair enough.

It was toward evening that we entered a small town, a pleasant place with watered gardens and stately, white-walled houses, and, above all else, a multitude of churches. I was for stopping at an inn to rest and fortify ourselves with food, but Hassan's prudence won the day, and on we trudged along the moonlit road.

We had gone scarcely half a league, when, looking back across my shoulder, I saw the glint of moonlight upon metal, and in a little time heard the sound of sword-sheath against spur as a band of men-at-arms rode down the highway.

We hid ourselves beneath a hedge and they went past, nor did we act too soon, for scraps of talk which they let fall told all too plainly that 'twas us they sought, and by the morning following, we learned, the countryside would swarm with pikemen sent forth to take us on a charge of murder.

When they had gone we scrambled back into the road and followed in their wake, looking to right and left for sign of some asylum, yet finding none. At length, when I was on the point of lying down to rest, that I might be the fresher to fight them to the death when they discovered us next day, I was attracted by the sound of a woman's voice wailing pitifully in one of the little lanes that branched off the road as brooklets branch from the wide river.

"*Aymé!*" she cried, "and dost thou truly die, poor Beppo? Wilt thou leave me thus all lonely?"

"Is't child or husband that she mourns for?" I asked myself, parting the branches that screened the byway, and gazing down the leafy lane to see who suffered thus.

To my astonishment I beheld a nun in veil and wimple, kneeling in the dust and weeping sorrowfully beside an ass which even as I approached gave one great gusty groan and yielded up its spirit.

"Alas, my Beppo, my excellent beast, why was it thou must choose this time, out of all eternity, to die?" the she-priest asked right tearfully. "Wo me, for I am far from home and the road is thick beset with robbers! Me miserable!"

"Nay, good Mother," I assured her, "'tis not so bad as thou dost think, for here am I, and here is my good man, as valiant a pair of swords as ever were, and we will see thee safely home, though ninety thousand devils and twice as many minor fiends forbid it."

"I thank thee, sir," she answered, rising from her knees and bowing gravely, "and if thou'lt be so kind as to help me with this bag, I'll be the more beholden to thee." Whereat she put a leathern sack into my hands, a sack that weighed right heavily and gave forth pleasant clinking noises as I handled it.

"*Wallah,* Master, let us slay her where she stands!" Black Hassan cried in Arabic. "She is a weak thing, and one twist of my hands about her neck will finish her without a cry. That bag of hers holds gold—I know it does!—and with it we may buy our freedom from the soldiers."

"Be silent, fool!" I bade. "We war not upon women; besides, she has appealed to us for help, and are we to be false to her whose bread and salt we've eaten?"

"Nay, we have tasted no food of hers," he made objection; "besides, the Prophet says——"

"The Prophet (on whom be peace!),

dwells in Paradise, but I am here, and bid thee hold thy blabbering tongue," I cut him short, for though I knew full well the priestess could not understand his words, I feared the aspect of his evil grin might frighten her as he so glibly talked of murder.

And so we walked along the road, and as we walked we talked.

She was the Sister Incarnacion, a member of the convent chapter, who had that day been sent to collect certain moneys due the nunnery by its tenant farmers. Although the house was wealthy, the sisters had no horse or carriages, since these were accounted worldly, and their only beasts of burden were two aged asses, grown fat and lazy for want of work. Upon the elder of these ancient donkeys she had ridden on her errand, but at the farmstead where she stopped the beast had thrust its nose into a sack of dried pease and eaten past its usual greedy wont; then, a mile or so from where we found her, it paused beside a brooklet and drank its fill of water. The pease within its belly thereupon began to swell, and just before they reached the highway the ass lay down and yielded up the ghost. "And I was sore afraid," she finished, "for while by day my holy habit shelters me, at night these roadways swarm with robbers—bad men who might strangle me and take the gold which is the money of the Lord."

At this I looked right guiltily at Hassan, for almost it did seem as though she understood his impious wish to slay her for the money, but what lame answer I would have made was rendered needless by the sound of shuffling sandals on the road, and the frightened hail from a fat and almost hairless friar who came running to accost us.

"And is it truly thou, good Sister Santa Incarnacion?" he cried delightedly. "*Gracias á Dios,* we feared you might be slain, for there be robbers abroad this night—the king's soldiers e'en now hunt for them. One is a tall, ill-favored fellow who wears a tiger's skin by way of cloak, and with him goeth a great, fierce Mussulman who slays with his bare hands. Already they have killed and robbed two-score people in the highway, and burned and sacked a score of houses. *Ay di me,* these be parlous times, good Sister Santa Incarnacion!"

"They be, in sooth, good Brother Ramon," she returned, "but I have been quite safe here with these knightly gentlemen for escort." Whereat methought she looked at me from out the corner of her eyes and smiled a little roguishly.

"But you go afoot," the priest exclaimed. "Where is the good Beppo?"

She told him of the ass's fate what time we marched along the road, and he was busily lamenting the departed beast and dwelling on its many virtues when, without warning, a band of tatterdemalion rogues broke from the bushes at the wayside and ranged themselves across the path.

"Halt thee, fair sirs and lady," their ragged chieftain ordered; "we'll trouble ye for what metal ye may have, and, when we've taken that, we'll argue out the question of allowing ye your lives."

"Wo me, I am a man of God, and may not give thee metal," cried fat Fra Ramon, "but such as I may give, I give thee freely!" Whereat he drew from out the wide sleeve of his robe a monstrous oaken cudgel bound with bands of iron, and springing on the robber knave, he dealt him such a clout upon the head that down the fellow fell, the red blood spurting from his nose and mouth.

"Now by the slippers of the Prophet and by the beard of Allah's goat, are we to be outdone by this shaveling Nazarene

priest?" roared out Black Hassan, unloosing his simitar and joining in the fray.

"Aside, ye knaves, stand from the road of Carlos, surnamed the Tiger, or taste ye of his sword!" I bellowed, matching my stride with Hassan's, and cleaving the nearest rascal to the brisket with my good Damascus blade.

The rogues had been but ten to three when first they had accosted us, and of the ten the doughty priest had disposed of one, while Hassan and I each let the soul from out another as we charged. Their swords were long, but of poor quality, and their swordsmanship was even worse. Three times I felt their points strike against my ribs, but the good shirt of mail I wore beneath my doublet made mock of them, and never did a robber scamp repeat his thrust, for I smote back right heavily with sword and dagger, and each time that I struck, the keen steel bit so deeply that no second blow was necessary. As for Black Hassan, he was like unto a host. His ancient hatred of the Spanish and his natural love for blood led him like twin captains in the fight, and so mighty were his sword-strokes that 'twas hard to say whether more died by his point than by his edge.

The stout Fra Ramon laid on right manfully, also, and it was good to hear the bones crack and smash beneath the flailing of his cudgel. At last, when all was done, six robber villains lay stark and dead upon the road; one dragged himself away on useless legs to die; the rest had fled, leaving us to pursue our way in peace.

But first the good priest and the nun must needs kneel down and say a prayer for the dead, and while they tendered their devotions Hassan and I went through the pockets of the slain, finding lean pickings for our trouble.

ANON we came unto the convent, and were made welcome by the Lady Abbess, a stately dame yclept Lorenza, and, seeing me fall to my knees to kiss her hand, Black Hassan followed suit, and our reputations as members of the faithful were well established.

The good priest, Brother Ramon, could talk well-nigh as much as fight, and his account of what took place on the road detracted nothing from our reputations.

While we sat to refresh ourselves the Sister Santa Incarnacion talked softly with the Lady Abbess, and more than once I thought I heard the gurgle of soft laughter from their lips.

"*Wah,* Master, we may not eat this, for 'tis the cursed flesh of thrice-accursed swine!" great Hassan cried when he had put a bit of meat into his mouth.

"Is Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, a fool, then?" I made reply.

"A fool—Allah?" he asked aghast.

"You heard me, I did say a fool," I answered him. "For surely Allah has caused this food to be set before us, and surely He knows what kind it is. If it be His will that we eat this, 'twere impious to flout it, were it not?"

My reasoning was too subtle for him, and he did great justice to the roasted pig.

"And now, fair sons," the Lady Abbess said, "I know you fain would sleep, for you are weary with the day's adventurings, and slaying two-score people and sacking twenty houses is no poor task in one small day, even for such mighty wights as you.

"Also," she added with a smile that had a deal of kindness in it, "the Sister Santa Incarnacion was held to ransom by the Moors in her younger days, and understands their language. She has told me of your servant's wish that you might throttle her, and how you would not have

her hurt, though she was all alone and helpless in your hands. Further, good Ramon, whose tongue is ever as active as his hands, told me how nobly you acquitted yourselves in battle with the robbers, and we are not ungrateful for your service. Go with God, my sons, and may your sleep be peaceful."

I louted low before her ladyship and turned to follow the convent drudge who waited to conduct us to our quarters, but a loud and formal crying at the gate detained me. "Open in the King his name!" a boisterous voice called out. "We come to search the place for robbers, for we are told two such did enter here!"

An officer accompanied by ten or twelve hangman-faced soldiers clattered into the reception room, and though he bowed respectfully to the Abbess, he nathless kept his hand upon his sword. And with him, as we peered through the small grille of the door behind which we were hid, we saw two survivors of the robber band which fought us in the road.

"These *caballeros* saw them enter with a priest and eke a nun," he said, "and we must search the house for them, good Mother."

"The Convent of the Visitation harbors no robbers, and we have none here but good men and true, lawful subjects of his Majesty the King," the Mother Lorenza answered him. "My word must be your surety, Sir Officers, for if you step one foot beyond this room I'll call on the Archbishop to pronounce you excommunicate—both you and your companions. Go with God, *Señor,* and search no more for robbers within these convent walls."

"But——" the fellow stammered, when Sister Santa Incarnacion broke in:

"These *caballeros* who tell you of the criminals we harbor are themselves two of a band of thieves who did accost us on the road, and would have stolen the convent's rent-roll, perhaps have done violence to my person, but for good Brother Ramon and two gallant gentlemen who came to our assistance. Is it not so, good Brother Ramon?"

"Aye, by the arrows of Saint Sebastian, 'tis true!" returned the friar. "You would do well, *Señior Capitán,* to guard our highways better, not lend such willing ears to slanders from such rogues as these!"

And so we had the satisfaction of seeing the informers led from the house in durance while we went off to dreams and rest to ready us against the next day's doings.

4. *How We Sought the Lady Santa Elma*

WE SCARCE had laid us down, it seemed, when there came a sound of women's screaming, a clatter of weapons and harness, and the loud alarum of a brazen bell rung frenziedly.

"Now by the knees of Allah's camel, what means this hubbub?" Black Hassan cried, leaping from his couch and baring teeth and simitar at once. "Are the soldiers of the Roumi—may the Prophet's curse rest on their noseless mothers!—come again to take us?"

"Nay, I think not so," I answered, drawing what clothes I had laid off as quickly on as well I might and snatching up my sword. "'Tis more like to be some band of rascal thieves intent on looting the gentle ladies of the place."

And thieves, indeed, it proved to be, though otherwise than we had thought. In the great chapter hall were gathered four and forty nuns, the Lady Abbess and her chapter-members, besides as many novices, whose pale faces and distrait looks told all too plainly of some tragedy.

"'Tis Sister Santa Elma," said Sister

Santa Incarnacion; "with force and arms they've taken her away—and slain one of our gardeners doing it. *Aymé!* And she was to have made formal profession on the morrow, for her probationary period was done, and already had she made the preliminary vows."

Now at this I lowered my head and did much solemn thinking. Though I knew little of the forms and outward practises of this strange Christian faith which my mother had told me of in my childhood what time I played about the harem, I had heard certain gossip concerning it, and the burden of it was that often girls and women were taken from their homes and made to enter convents—a life which seemed but little better than the grave to me. The savagery and utter cruelty of the members of the Inquisition, too, had served to prejudice me still further against the Christians, though what I had observed of stout Fra Ramon, jolly Sister Santa Incarnacion and the gentle and gracious Lady Abbess had somewhat turned my mind. I was beholden for my life to these good folk, and thieves had broken into their house. Could I turn back upon my Muslim law of faithfulness to bread and salt, and fail to serve them in their trouble? Or, came the thought, could this young girl have gone willingly with the housebreakers, and were those who seemed her ravishers merely rescuers? Some time I thought upon these things; then, standing forth before the Lady Abbess, I spoke:

"Good Reverend Mother, both I and my companion are deeply in your debt. We owe our very lives and liberty to you, and also we have eaten of your bread and salt, and we are not forgetful of our obligations therefor. Now, hear the proposition which we make: Tomorrow morning we will go forth into the town and search for her the miscreants have stolen from your house. And if we find her we shall question her, and if it be she does desire to return, return she shall, though nine times ninety thousand devils bar the way. But if she liketh not the idea of returning, then we shall tell no man her whereabouts, and——"

"And is it thus ye make requital of our kindness?" her ladyship broke in. "Thou art a stranger to me, young sir, and a puzzle as well, for though you look like a Christian born, your speech and your behavior, as well as your companion, brand you Moorish, and were I faithful to my trust, I should have turned you over to the 'Hounds of God' who watch for breaches of the faith in this good land of Spain."

"Thou sayest sooth, good Mother," I returned, "and to the great and tender woman-heart in you, which is less Christian than you would have us think, we owe our lives and liberty. Therefore, if so be I find the Sister Santa Elma was rescued, rather than ravished, from your house, I will permit her to go her way in peace, but I will come again to you, and on my head shall be such punishment as you shall wish to wreck, even unto that of giving me into the hands of those bloody dogs who serve the Holy Inquisition"—and here I spat upon the ground to show my loathing and contempt for them whose very lives were daily insult unto the gentle Christ they did pretend to serve. "I have spoken, Reverend Mother."

Therewith I drew my naked sword from out its sheath and kissed the blade, declaring in the Muslim manner: "May God do so to me, and more also, if I do break my oath in word or spirit!"

The nuns all looked at me askance, and there was much ado and twittering whispering in the room, for such an oath, I ween, had ne'er been taken in that place before. But the Lady Abbess, con-

sidering me a time, at length broke into a smile. "Carlos, my son," she said, "I am right proud of you; for though perchance you be a heretic, perhaps a follower of the false prophet who is the Antichrist's own self, you also are a man, and what you undertake methinks you will accomplish. Go, then, with God, upon the morrow, and if you find we've lied to you, you're free to go your ways, but if you find we've told the truth, then bring you back our poor, filched birdling to her nest again." Whereat she made the sign of the cross above my head and all the people present murmured a pious "Amen".

RIGHT early in the morning, regaled with eggs and chocolate and some choice fruit from out the convent garden, Black Hassan and I set forth, bedight as common laborers; for my tiger-cloak and Hassan's Eastern costume would have been enough to hang us out of hand, had once the soldiers of the king set eyes on us.

Already I had formed a scheme for furthering our quest, and soon I put it into execution. In Granada some weeks before I had been privileged to rescue the fair daughter of King Ruiz of the Beggars from out the clutches of the soldiers of the Inquisition, and in requital of my services that night King Ruiz had given me a talisman, telling me that did I show it to any beggar in all Europe, he would be bounden by a mighty oath to serve me faithfully. The signet was a ring of amethyst carven with the effigy of Lazarus at Dives' door, and I wore it safe bestowed beneath my ragged doublet.

Anon we reached the market place, and there we were accosted by a mendicant who took me for a countryman come from the farm with eggs and fruit to sell. "An alms, an alms, good husbandman!" he whined. "Give alms, in God His name, or surely I shall perish!"

I made as if to give a coin to him, and as he stretched forth ready hands to grasp the money, flashed forth the ring, saying: "Come apart, my brother, for I would talk with thee."

Bent nearly double with subservience, the creature crawled behind me up a nearby alley, while great Black Hassan looked warily about, lest we be overheard, and I did tell him of my quest.

"I' faith, I do not know, my lord," he answered snivellingly, "but there be many beggars in the city, and if my lord will give his servant time——"

"Aye, time enough thou'lt have, and all eternity, as well, if thou hast nothing to report upon this spot before the echo of the vesper bell has died upon the evening air," I promised him. "Attend me, friend, if thou dost play me false, or fail me in this quest——" I slipped my dagger from its sheath and let him stare the bare steel in the eye by way of warning.

THAT evening as the shadows lengthened in the streets, I sought him in the market place, and soon I did espy him crouching by the wayside cross and wailing dolefully: "An alms, give alms, good folk, for Christ His mercy, or I perish with starvation!"

"And what hast thou to tell me, oh great and uncouth cockroach?" I asked. "Pray to thy patron saint that it be worthy information, or of a verity you've seen your last sunset."

"Aye, good my lord, that have I," the fellow told me, looking fearfully the while at the dagger which I fingered lovingly. "If thou wilt go down to the Virgin of the Waterfall, thou'lt find her whom thou seekest; that much I know, though more I can not tell thee, for more I do not know."

And though I threatened him with death and handled him right roughly, the villain clung to his story as ever louse adhered to Hebrew's beard, nor could I choke another bit of information from him.

The Virgin of the Waterfall stood at the intersection of two mean streets in the meaner part of town. It was a statue somewhat under life in size, portraying the Blessed One in robe of white and star-flecked sky-blue mantle, standing with one white foot on a serpent's head. From underneath the image flowed a tiny stream of water which dribbled down into a basin, and before it burned a flickering sanctus lamp. No light showed in any window round about, and no one passed in the street, which echoed hollowly to our tread as we approached the statue.

"Now by the comb of Allah's cock, methinks we have been cozened right handsomely!" Black Hassan swore. "If aught there be which savors of a nun about this place, 'tis but that graven idol yonder, and the Lady Abbess would surely flog us from her door if we took that to her."

I bent my head awhile in thought, and as I stood there meditating, behold, a fellow muffled in a cloak came slinking down the street, paused to genuflect and bless himself before the image, and—was gone.

"By the beak of Allah's hawk, do I behold what is not here," cried out Black Hassan, "or did a man pass by this way a moment since?"

"If so be you are spellbound, then I am likewise witched," I answered, "for I, too, saw, and now I do not see."

So we approached the image of the Virgin, and while I knelt before it at different distances, Black Hassan eyed it closely. But nothing but an image could we see, nor was there any sign of secret door or entrance to a burrow in the ground.

At length Black Hassan lost his patience. "Give us thy secret, witch!" he roared, seizing the blessed statue's arm in his great grasp, as though to wrench the information from the unresponsive stone, and lo, the image swung upon a pivot as it had been a door, disclosing a narrow passageway cut in the solid wall behind.

"By the wool of Allah's sheep, but that's the way to treat a woman, be she flesh or be she stone!" great Hassan grinned, reaching for his sword and making ready to enter through the doorway.

I followed him, but when I heard the statue softly close on its unseen hinges, and found myself in a damp and darksome passage with water dripping all about, and in my nose the clay-clod odor of the grave, I wished I had not come.

The narrow passage sloped down endlessly, it seemed. Once or twice I put forth searching hands to test its width, but each time drew back quickly, for the close-set walls on either side reeked with a slime as of corruption. The air was foul and mephitic, as in a sepulcher, and the darkness was as the darkness of the tomb.

Anon we reached a level stretch of passageway, then mounted once again upon a sloping path. When we had traversed what I counted by my paces to be the better part of half a mile, we came at last unto a door of oak, bound thick with iron straps, and yielding to our pressure not at all.

"By the ears of Allah's mule, it seems we are to die like rats shut in a trap," Black Hassan laughed. "Shall we go back or stay to die with empty bellies where we are?"

"Neither, thou ape-faced son of Shaitan," I answered him. "Where man has

gone, man may go again, and surely one preceded us in here. Have done; move on!"

We felt the barrier with our fingers as a surgeon searches a fainting man for signs of broken bones; at last we found a narrow slit which might receive a key, but no key did we have, nor knew we where to look for one. But as we fumbled the lock the scuff of footsteps sounded from beyond the door, and though the darkness did hoodwink mine eyes, I knew Black Hassan bared his teeth in eagerness and made him ready for the kill. Nor had we long to wait. A key snicked softly in a well-piled lock, and as the door swung toward us a light which was but a darkness little thicker than the darkness where we stood came through to us.

The fellow never knew what caused his end. Great Hassan's hands closed round his throat as the serpent lashes round his prey, and forth came breath and soul together, squeezed out by one mighty pressure of those long, black fingers.

"*Wah,* it was easy!" Hassan gloated, depositing his prey upon the floor and feeling in his pockets for the keys. "These Roumi be a weak-necked race, my lord; to slay them with bare hands is less sport than throttling of a fowl!"

Into the farther room we walked on silent feet, our sword blades bare and ready for the fight, our eyes looking all ways at once, like those of cats when first they enter a strange place in darkness.

We stood in what appeared a vast, dismantled hall, which seemed not to have known tenancy in years. The richly molded ceiling was draped with spiders' webs, and the squares of colored marble with which the place was paved were loosened and quaked beneath our feet at every step. A broad stone stair with strangely carven balustrade swept upward through the gloom, and on the landing, from a frame of rich gold, the pale face of the painted semblance of a woman peered forth with frightened eyes, her straining countenance outthrust as though to ask our mission in that place of desolation and to warn us to turn back while yet the chance remained.

"Now by the horns of Allah's bull, this is the very anteroom of hell, meseemeth," declared Black Hassan, peering round him, and a chill which came not from the cold, for the night was warm and sultry, made his white teeth chatter one against another like castanets between a dancer's nimble fingers.

"If it be so, I think I hear the foul fiend at his work of torture," I replied, for as we stood at gaze, the shrill and terror-stricken accents of a woman's voice came down the stairs to us.

"Good *señor,* kind and noble sir, I pray thee, let me depart hence; my sisters at the convent miss me sadly, and this was to be the day in which I was espoused to the Lord!" she cried, then stopped her prayers for that a weight of weeping burdened down her words.

"No, by the lute of sainted Cicily, and by her neck which did withstand the Roman's steel, I've brought thee here, and here thou shalt remain until thy stubborn pride be broken and thou consent'st to wed me!" cried a man's deep voice in answer.

"I trow we need not wait for more," I told Black Hassan. "It is the lady Santa Elma, or I be unbelieving dog, and we have heard from her own lips that she would go back to her convent. Forward, man, and let thy step be light, for we know not how many sturdy rogues this fellow hath about him."

Black Hassan's sword whistled through the air with a humming such as might be made by some gigantic bee as he swung

it round his head exultantly. "*Wallah*, my lord," he answered, "if there be two-score or a hundred, 'tis all the same to me. What care we if we sacrifice our lives, for every Christian dog who bites the earth before us means yet another houri for our couch in Paradise!"

I harbored no great faith in the Prophet's promises of after-life, nor did I care to quit the goodly world just yet, for ever in my mind's ear sang the sweet words of the little Beggar Princess, and e'en then my heart beat hard against the faded rosebud she had given me; therefore I stepped upon the stair with careful tread, straining my ears the while that the sound of voices might lead me to the place where the maid and her abductor were concealed.

5. *How We Contended for the Lady Santa Elma*

ABOVE the stairs there stretched a lengthy corridor, devoid of light and, like the hall below, thick-carpeted with dust. But at its farther end the faintest trickle of a stray stream of luminance betrayed an occupant, and even as we noted it, the sound of voices told us it was there that we must seek. A woman's words came to us:

"My plighted one ye slew—'twas murder, sure as ever Cain did do, however much ye call it the duello, and when ye had my father in your debt, ye needs must ask my hand in quittance of his bond. But since the one I loved has gone to dwell with God, and nevermore may I behold him in the flesh, I've vowed me to the Church, and maiden shall I keep me to my dying day, and then, perchance, when God in His good time shall grant me death, I'll meet with my beloved face to face where God Himself shall wipe away all tears and there shall be no partings evermore'

"Now, by the horns of Satan's head, thou'rt beautiful when thou confront'st me thus," a man's deep voice broke in, "but have a care, my pigeon, my little white dove; I am but human, and all thy hoarded sweets are mine to take, should I desire. Already I have been full patient with thee. Come, say thou'lt wed me on the morrow, and thou goest this very night; but persevere in this design of thinking to wed thee to the Church, and by the flies of Beelzebub, I'll force thee, here and now—see, we are all lonely in this great deserted palace, with none to hear thy cries, save mine own hired lackeys, and there is none to say me nay!"

"By Allah His great mercy and compassion, thou liest in thy throat, thou Christian dog!" I answered him, thrusting aside the curtain wherewith the door was hung and holding forth my naked sword in challenge. "If so be thou desirest the maid above thy life, thou may'st make trial of thy sword-skill with me; but if thou'rt the craven coward I do take thee for, thou'lt tuck thy tail between thy legs and slink away like any beaten cur."

"Now who the foul fiend art thou?" he queried angrily. "A Moorman, by thy talk, and a bully by thine actions. Beware, Sir Bravo, for I have those at my command who will make short work of thee and that great, grinning slave of thine——" he glanced contemptuously at Hassan.

"I hight me Carlos, and am surnamed 'The Tiger'," I made answer. "As for my being Muslim, the more I see of Christians the more I do bewail the way they crucify their Lord each day by thought and word and deed, and that great black one yonder is no slave, but my good true companion, the equal of all the hired bullies who wait to do your dastard bidding, though they may number an hundred. But we waste words;

wilt draw and fight me for the maid or let me spit thee like a shotten-herring?" Wherewith I tapped him lightly on the cheek with the flat of my sword, so that the angry blood gathered at the spot, marking the imprint of my blade's width.

A basket-hilted rapier hung on his hip, and as he felt my blow he jerked it from its sheath and threw himself in posture of attack. His steel was longer by a hand than mine, and at the clash of blades I realized I'd met a foeman worthy of my skill, for down slash, up thrust, stab, cut and parry, he flew at me, his straight blade rattling on my curved one like hail upon the housetop in a summer storm and his keen point and edge menacing my breast and face at every turn.

But I had learned the gentle art of fence in a school as good as any in all Spain. Nay, more, the Grecian renegade who taught me swordsmanship had used no masks, and so I fought with head averted, while my opponent, over-confident and rendered under-cautious by his anger, thrust forth his face as though the student's mask still screened his countenance. Beneath his lunging, high-armed thrust I drove my keen Damascus blade, and nicked him on the cheek, so that the flesh hung open and displayed the bone beneath as a rent garment bares the wearer's body. And as he leaped back from the stinging cut I turned my blade and clipped him on the brow, so that a spate of blood flowed downward in his eyes, and well-nigh blinded him.

"Ho, slaves! To me, ye varlets!" the fellow shouted. "I am beset by robbers!"

There came the thud of rope-soled sandals on the marble floor and half a dozen sturdy knaves burst into the room like water spilling from a broken jug.

"*Ya Allah,* Master, here is work for me!" Black Hassan roared. "By the eggs of Allah's hen, ye Nazarene swine, I greet ye joyfully!"

His simitar whistled through the air and clove the nearest foeman through the neck, so that his head toppled from his shoulders as a stone is bounced from off its base when boys play ducks and drakes with cobbles, and down fell head and man, and red gore poured a ruddy flood-tide across the marble pavement.

A second lackey aimed a spiteful thrust at Hassan, but e'er the fellow could aline his steel the black one kicked him in the belly so fiercely that down he went and lay upon the floor all doubled in a knot, his mouth all squared in agony. The third miscreant fared no better, for the edge of Hassan's sword took him in the face, cleaving his jaw half from his head, and back across the room the fellow staggered, a spilth of blood and screams pouring from the gaping wound which once had been his mouth.

But while this play was toward, the other three had passed Black Hassan's guard and leveled harquebuses at me, and it had surely gone most hard with me had not the little maid had wit enough to tear the silken mantle from her shoulders and toss it on the fellows' heads e'en as they blew their matches to touch off the weapons.

Cries and curses and filthy blasphemies came from underneath the silken web in which their heads were holden like silly flies inside the spider's snare, but e'er they could untangle them from out her cloak, Black Hassan was upon them, and through the garment's clinging folds he smote and smote again till down they fell and lay there twitching on the floor, the purple silken cloth all sodden with their lifeblood.

"And now, thou son of a disease, thou offspring of a most unvirtuous she-camel and hyena, it is thy turn to feel Black

Hassan's steel!" the mighty Moorman shouted, advancing on my foe with murder in his face.

"Let be!" I ordered him; "am I to have no sport tonight, great booby, or must thou have it all, thou pig, thou worse than pig?"

But those same words were like to have been my last, for as I turned aside to chide Black Hassan my adversary drove his point directly at my breast, and but for the good shirt of mail I wore beneath my doublet, he would have spitted me as women spit a fowl for the fire.

But stronger than his sword my chain-mail was, and his blade snapped half in two within his hands.

"Give him your sword, good Hassan," I commanded, "for though he be a foul knave, he will die fighting, or Carlos named the Tiger is a liar."

Though grumbling at the order, great Hassan yielded up his blade, and once again we went at sword-play. The fellow's eyes were well-nigh blinded by the blood which trickled from his wounded brow, and too much wine and evil living had sapped his strength, but still his skill was masterly, and time and time again he turned my blade aside.

At length, exasperated by delay, I drove with all my might straight at his heart, but what was my surprize to feel my sword bend double in my hold and shoot me backward like a rock from out a catapult, for underneath his jerkin the villain also wore a plate of steel which turned my point aside and all but shattered the good blade.

And now I must strike him through the face or throat as the warriors of olden Troy discharged their arrows at Achilles' heel. The fence waxed hot, and more than once I felt the nick of steel upon my hands and forearms, and in my face and throat, but mine enemy was tiring fast, and finally cried craven, turning to escape my point and running toward the curtained door.

But this escape Black Hassan would not have, and as the fellow tore madly at the silken hangings, he thrust forth his foot and tripped him, whereat I struck my sword across his neck and hewed his head from his body; then bundling it within a section of the curtain, gave it into Hassan's keeping.

"And now, my Lady Santa Elma," said I, louting low before the girl, "we be come to take you to your convent, if so be it is your wish to go, or we will take you otherwhere, if you will name your wish."

"I thank you, sir," she made reply; "it is unto the convent I would gladly go, there to atone with naked knees pressed on the chapel stones for all the sins with which that most unhappy man's unfortunate soul was stained."

"Why, now, as Allah hears me," I returned, "I think that fifty lives as long as yours is like to be would scarce suffice to pray him out of hell; howbeit, if to the convent you would go, there we shall take you, and the one who says us nay were well advised to have his peace with God already made."

Whereat, bundling Santa Elma in a portion of the curtain, for that her proper cloak was all besmirched with villains' blood and would not have set her beseemingly, we set off for the convent to redeem our lives and bodies which we had placed in pawn against her safe return.

6. *How the Lady Santa Elma Found Her Love*

RIGHT merrily pealed the joy-bells a pæan of welcome from the towers, and gratefully the sisters sang a glad *Te Deum* in the chapel when we brought back the lady Santa Elma, for she who

had been lost was found and she who had been prisoned was set free by the might of our good swords, and great was the dole of praise and thankfulness they gave us at the convent.

And on the morrow all things were prepared for her reception in the sisterhood. I would have had the miscreant's head who stole from her nest fixed on a pike before the convent door, and underneath the same suspended a parchment reading: "Behold, ye people, how Carlos the Tiger and his good helpmeet, Hassan the Black, serve those who injure their friends. Look and be afraid." But the Lady Abbess would have none of it, and ordered the relic be interred within the convent garden while prayers were said above it—a vain and witless thing to do, it seemed to me.

Howbeit, upon the morning came a great procession of monks and brethren from the near-by abbey, my Lord Abbot riding at their head upon a snow-white mule, all brave with silver harness and tinkling bells.

"Would'st thou not remain to see thy little sister taken into Holy Church?" Fra Ramon asked.

"By the Prophet his beard, that would I," I answered him. And so it was arranged.

Accordingly, all dight in sable satin doublet, with boots of fresh-oiled kid-skin on my feet and my great tiger-cloak thrown o'er my shoulders, I made a goodly showing in the chapel, while at my shoulder stood Black Hassan, all tired in robes of Eastern splendor which he had taken from the torturer his slave, making a most brave appearance and drawing more fearful glances than a few from the folk who were come to watch the ceremony.

And now the Lord Abbot, a goodly figure in his chasuble and miter, with pastoral crozier in his hand, stood forth before the altar; and robed in white and garlanded with blossoms, they brought the lady Santa Elma into the chapel, and wed her to the church with candle, book and bell, putting a ring of gold upon her finger, as though in truth she plighted troth unto a human bridegroom. Then from the place they once more led her, and once again they brought her in, still in her bridal finery.

At the door she paused, took from off her veiled head the flowery chaplet and cast it from her. And now, with four nuns bearing rush-lights for an escort, she paced slowly up the aisle to kneel before the altar's lowest step. As she thus kneeled, the veil was lifted from her head and locks of long, black hair fell round her on the floor like leaves beneath the winter's chilling blast as an old nun plied scissors round her head. And now a fairly written parchment with gilded letters—the title-deed to her fair body—was signed by her and placed unfolded on the altar, and with her joined hands outstretched between the Abbot's, she murmured haltingly and low her vows of holy poverty, chastity, obedience and perpetual seclusion from the world, whereat her four conductresses led her away to where a square of carpet lay before the altar steps. She dropped black lashes over blacker eyes and lay down on her back upon the drugget, crossing her hands submissively upon her breast. And now a funeral pall, a great square of black serge emblazoned with a six-foot cross and having skeletons broidered in silver at its corners, was draped above her supine form, so that her body rose like the hummock of a new-made grave beneath the cerecloth, and at each corner of the pall a corpse-light glittered palely. With sacring-bell the awful iteration of the passing-bell was mimicked, and over her was read the office for the dead. Then, from the altar, where gold-embroidered

stoles shone in the candles' yellow light, rolled forth the Abbot's admonition:

"Surge quæ dormis et exsurge a mortuis et illuminabit te Christus—O thou who sleepest deep in death, arise, and Christ will give thee light!"

Compliant to her vow of obedience, she struggled to her knees, the sable pall of death trailing from her shoulders, and still upon her knees, she crept all slowly toward the altar steps, her empty hands outstretched as though she sought an alms.

"Ut vivant morituri et moriantur vivantes——" the Abbot's voice trailed on, and over close-cropped head of black they drew a blacker cowl of serge, blessing it meanwhile as sign and symbol of her death unto the world. But the Lady Santa Elma roused her quickly from her crouching posture, and with eyes fast fixed upon the painted window at the altar's back, she cried out in a voice of ecstasy: "Jaime, beloved—Jaime, *querido,* I come—'tis I, my love; I come to thee!" and slipped again onto her knees, then laid her once again upon the chapel floor, but this time in no counterfeit of death, for with the words of greeting her fair spirit fluttered from her lips.

Great havoc reigned within the church, for some cried this and some cried that what time they bore the sister's corpse out through the door, but my Lord Abbot quickly quelled the rout, for from the altar's rail he said:

"The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken back, blessed and praised for ever be His name! O ye of little faith, behold a miracle of God His mercy and loving-kindness. Ye all do know how three small years ago a wicked *caballero* of this town did challenge Don Jaime de Quesada, this woman's lover, to a duel, and how he slew him with his sword; ye further know how she sought surcease from sorrow as the bride of God, and ye have heard how that same Godless man reft her from her cell two nights agone. Back from her prison-house two knightly battlers for the Lord did bring her, that she might keep her plighted troth with God, but in the moment that He did accept the sacrificial offer of herself, our Lord did grant her greatest kindness, for He did take away her soul to dwell on high for ever with the soul of him she loved before she quit the world. She is not dead, my brethren, she has gone home!"

Whereat the congregation kneeled upon their knees and chanted a prolonged "Amen.".

Now, when the bee-buzz of talk had somewhat quieted, good Fra Ramon came bustling, mightily important, to lead us to my Lord the Abbot, who held his little court in the sacristy hard by the chapel where the Sister Santa Elma had sent her soul to meet the soul of her deceased beloved.

"Pax vobiscum, fair sons," the Abbot greeted us, and:

"On thy soul be peace!" I and Black Hassan answered, wherewith we drew our swords together and flourished them three times about our heads.

Now, when the Abbot did behold the flashing steel, his face went somewhat paler than its usual wont, and methinks his knees did kiss each other beneath the shelter of his gown, but when he saw us lower our points and rest them on the floor, he realized we did but make him salutation, and raised his hand in added blessing, the while his broad, fat face was wreathed in smiles as archery butts are wreathed in roses at a weapon-showing.

"Our good Mother Lorenza and the good Brother Ramon have told us of the yeoman service ye have rendered," he informed us, "and the fight ye made to

rescue her who lately passed to Paradise is worthy to be sung in legend for years to come. Know, therefore, good my sons, that I and Mother Church are not unmindful of your works, whatever be your faith. Behold what we have here for you——"

He signed unto a friar who stood in close attendance, and the fellow did unroll a fair-lettered parchment, all gay with seals of red and gold, made by the hand of my Lord Abbot's own prothonotary, whereon was set forth *in extenso* the service we had done, and signed and sealed by the mitered Abbot in proper person, enjoining all officers of the kingdom, both civil, military and ecclesiastical, to render us full aid and comfort in our enterprises, and in nowise hinder us in any way whatever, on pain of excommunication.

"What think you of that writing?" the Abbot asked when I had done with spelling out the unfamiliar script.

"Why, by the blessed saints who sleep in Paradise," said I (nor did I specify whether I meant Muslim or Christian), "we think it most uncommon handsome, Holy Sir," and down I kneeled upon my knees and kissed his pastoral ring.

"By the hooves of Allah's ox," Black Hassan sware, "I had not thought a swinish Nazarene could show such gratitude!" But as he spoke in Arabic, no single word of which my Lord the Abbot could understand, and as he also kissed the blessed ring, his rather sneering thanks were taken as a full requital of his lordship's kindness.

And so at noon we set forth on our way, our bellies filled with meat, and in my breast the parchment which should give us passport throughout the land of Spain.

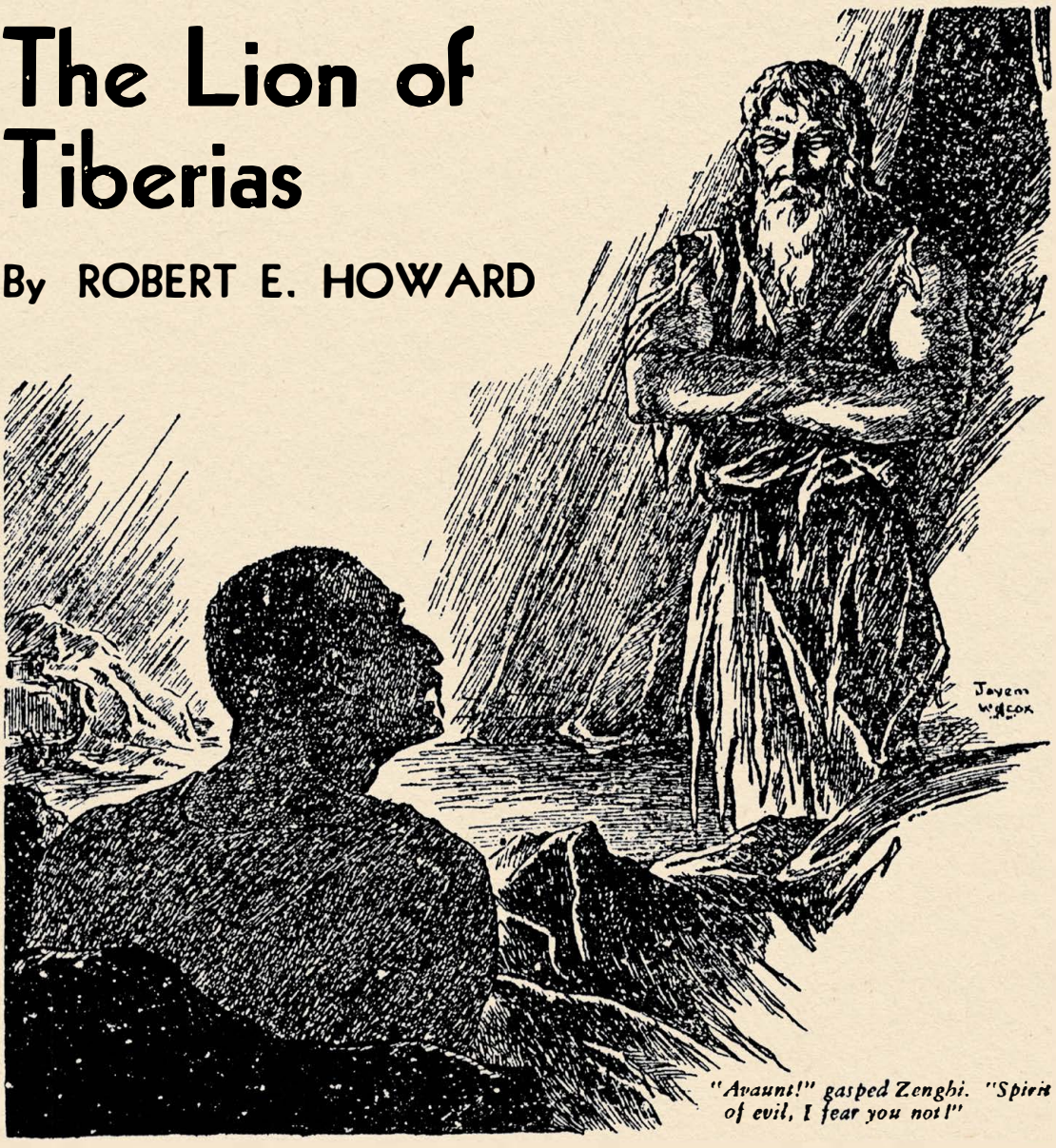
Dancers

By HUNG LONG TOM

The dancing girls
Sway and dance
In perfect rhythm.
Slender bodies
Swaying like flowers
In the wind.
On the willow trees
Hang Willow Lanterns,
And the moon,
An orange lantern,
Glows down
From a perfumed sky.
It is a night of witchery,
Of music
And enchantment,
For the slender girls
Of Wu are dancing.

The Lion of Tiberias

By ROBERT E. HOWARD



"Avaunt!" gasped Zenghi. "Spirit of evil, I fear you not!"

The Magic Carpet takes you back to the stirring days of the Crusades, when Zenghi, Lord of Mosul, rode up the glittering stairs of empire to his doom

THE battle in the meadowlands of the Euphrates was over, but not the slaughter. On that bloody field where the Calif of Bagdad and his Turkish allies had broken the onrushing power of Doubeys ibn Sadaka of Hilla and the desert, the steel-clad bodies lay strewn like the drift of a storm. The great canal men called the Nile, which connected the Euphrates with the distant Tigris, was choked with the bodies of the tribesmen, and the survivors were panting in flight toward the white walls of Hilla which shimmered in the distance above the placid waters of the nearer river. Behind them the mailed hawks, the Seljuks, rode down the fleeing, cutting the fugitives from their saddles. The glittering

dream of the Arab emir had ended in a storm of blood and steel, and his spurs struck blood as he rode for the distant river.

Yet at one spot in the littered field the fight still swirled and eddied, where the emir's favorite son, Achmet, a slender lad of seventeen or eighteen, stood at bay with one companion. The mailed riders swooped in, struck and reined back, yelling in baffled rage before the lashing of the great sword in this man's hands. His was a figure alien and incongruous, his red mane contrasting with the black locks about him no less than his dusty gray mail contrasted with the plumed burnished headpieces and silvered hauberks of the slayers. He was tall and powerful, with a wolfish hardness of limbs and frame that his mail could not conceal. His dark, scarred face was moody, his blue eyes cold and hard as the blue steel whereof Rhineland gnomes forge swords for heroes in northern forests.

Little of softness had there been in John Norwald's life. Son of a house ruined by the Norman conquest, this descendant of feudal thanes had only memories of wattle-thatched huts and the hard life of a man-at-arms, serving for poor hire barons he hated. Born in north England, the ancient Danelagh, long settled by blue-eyed vikings, his blood was neither Saxon nor Norman, but Danish, and the grim unbreakable strength of the blue North was his. From each stroke of life that felled him, he rose fiercer and more unrelenting. He had not found existence easier in his long drift East which led him into the service of Sir William de Montserrat, seneschal of a castle on the frontier beyond Jordan.

In all his thirty years, John Norwald remembered but one kindly act, one deed of mercy; wherefore he now faced a whole host, desperate fury nerving his iron arms.

It had been Achmet's first raid, whereby his riders had trapped de Montserrat and a handful of retainers. The boy had not shrunk from the sword-play, but the savagery that butchers fallen foes was not his. Writhing in the bloody dust, stunned and half dead, John Norwald had dimly seen the lifted simitar thrust aside by a slender arm, and the face of the youth bending above him, the dark eyes filled with tears of pity.

Too gentle for the age and his manner of life, Achmet had made his astounded warriors take up the wounded Frank and bring him with them. And in the weeks that passed while Norwald's wounds healed, he lay in Achmet's tent by an oasis of the Asad tribes, tended by the lad's own *hakim*. When he could ride again, Achmet had brought him to Hilla. Doubeys ibn Sadaka always tried to humor his son's whims, and now, though muttering pious horror in his beard, he granted Norwald his life. Nor did he regret it, for in the grim Englishman he found a fighting-man worth any three of his own hawks.

John Norwald felt no tugging of loyalty toward de Montserrat, who had fled out of the ambush leaving him in the hands of the Moslems, nor toward the race at whose hands he had had only hard knocks all his life. Among the Arabs he found an environment congenial to his moody, ferocious nature, and he plunged into the turmoil of desert feuds, forays and border wars as if he had been born under a Bedouin black felt tent instead of a Yorkshire thatch. Now, with the failure of ibn Sadaka's thrust at Bagdad and sovereignty, the Englishman found himself once more hemmed in by chanting foes, mad with the tang of blood. About him and his youthful comrade

swirled the wild riders of Mosul; the mailed hawks of Wasit and Bassorah, whose lord, Zenghi Imad ed din, had that day outmaneuvered ibn Sadaka and slashed his shining hosts to pieces.

On foot among the bodies of their warriors, their backs to a wall of dead horses and men, Achmet and John Norwald beat back the onslaught. A heron-feathered emir reined in his Turkoman steed, yelling his war-cry, his house-troops swirling in behind him.

"BACK, boy; leave him to me!" grunted the Englishman, thrusting Achmet behind him. The slashing simitar struck blue sparks from his basinet and his great sword dashed the Seljuk dead from his saddle. Bestriding the chieftain's body, the giant Frank lashed up at the shrieking swordsmen who spurred in, leaning from their saddles to swing their blades. The curved sabers shivered on his shield and armor, and his long sword crashed through bucklers, breastplates and helmets, cleaving flesh and splintering bones, littering corpses at his iron-sheathed feet. Panting and howling the survivors reined back.

Then a roaring voice made them glance quickly about, and they fell back as a tall, strongly built horseman rode through them and drew rein before the grim Frank and his slender companion. John Norwald for the first time stood face to face with Zenghi esh Shami, Imad ed din, governor of Wasit and warden of Bassorah, whom men called the Lion of Tiberias, because of his exploits at the siege of Tiberias.

The Englishman noted the breadth of the mighty steel-clad shoulders, the grip of the powerful hands on rein and sword-hilt; the blazing magnetic blue eyes, setting off the ruthless lines of the dark face. Under the thin black lines of the mustaches the wide lips smiled, but it was the merciless grin of the hunting panther.

Zenghi spoke and there was at the back of his powerful voice a hint of mockery or gargantuan mirth that rose above wrath and slaughter.

"Who are these paladins that they stand among their prey like tigers in their den, and none is found to go against them? Is it Rustem whose heel is on the necks of my emirs—or only a renegade Nazarene? And the other—by Allah, unless I am mad, it is the cub of the desert wolf! Are you not Achmet ibn Doubeys?"

It was Achmet who answered; for Norwald maintained a grim silence, watching the Turk through slit eyes, fingers locked on his bloody hilt.

"It is so, Zenghi esh Shami," answered the youth proudly, "and this is my brother at arms, John Norwald. Bid your wolves ride on, oh prince. Many of them have fallen. More shall fall before their steel tastes our hearts."

Zenghi shrugged his mighty shoulders, in the grip of the mocking devil that lurks at the heart of all the sons of high Asia.

"Lay down your weapons, wolf-cub and Frank. I swear by the honor of my clan, no sword shall touch you."

"I trust him not," growled John Norwald. "Let him come a pace nearer and I'll take him to hell with us."

"Nay," answered Achmet. "The prince keeps his word. Lay down your sword, my brother. We have done all men might do. My father the emir will ransom us."

He tossed down his simitar with a boyish sigh of unashamed relief, and Norwald grudgingly laid down his broadsword.

"I had rather sheathe it in his body," he growled.

Achmet turned to the conqueror and spread his hands.

"Oh, Zenghi——" he began, when the Turk made a quick gesture, and the two prisoners found themselves seized and their hands bound behind them with thongs that cut the flesh.

"There is no need of that, prince," protested Achmet. "We have given ourselves into your hands. Bid your men loose us. We will not seek to escape."

"Be silent, cub!" snapped Zenghi. The Turk's eyes still danced with dangerous laughter, but his face was dark with passion. He reined nearer. "No sword shall touch you, young dog," he said deliberately. "Such was my word and I keep my oaths. No blade shall come near you, yet the vultures shall pluck your bones tonight. Your dog-sire escaped me, but you shall not escape, and when men tell him of your end, he will tear his locks in anguish."

Achmet, held in the grip of the powerful soldiers, looked up, paling, but answered without a quaver of fear.

"Are you then a breaker of oaths, Turk?"

"I break no oath," answered the lord of Wasit. "A whip is not a sword."

His hand came up, gripping a terrible Turkoman scourge, to the seven rawhide thongs of which bits of lead were fastened. Leaning from his saddle as he struck, he brought those metal-weighted thongs down across the boy's face with terrible force. Blood spurted and one of Achmet's eyes was half torn from its socket. Held helpless, the boy could not evade the blows Zenghi rained upon him. But not a whimper escaped him, though his features turned to a bloody, raw, ghastly and eyeless ruin beneath the ripping strokes that shredded the flesh and splintered the bones beneath. Only at last a low animal-like moaning drooled from his mangled lips as he hung senseless and dying in the hands of his captors.

Without a cry or a word John Norwald watched, while the heart in his breast shrivelled and froze and turned to ice that naught could touch or thaw or break. Something died in his soul and in its place rose an elemental spirit unquenchable as frozen fire and bitter as hoar-frost.

THE deed was done. The mangled broken horror that had been Prince Achmet ibn Doubeys was cast carelessly on a heap of dead, a touch of life still pulsing feebly through the tortured limbs. On the crimson mask of his features fell the shadow of vulture wings in the sunset. Zenghi threw aside the dripping scourge and turned to the silent Frank. But when he met the burning eyes of his captive, the smile faded from the prince's lips and the taunts died unspoken. In those cold terrible eyes the Turk read hate beyond common conception—a monstrous, burning, almost tangible thing, drawn up from the lower pits of hell, not to be dimmed by time or suffering.

The Turk shivered as from a cold unseen wind. Then he regained his composure. "I give you life, infidel," said Zenghi, "because of my oath. You have seen something of my power. Remember it in the long dreary years when you shall regret my mercy, and howl for death. And know that as I serve you, I will serve all Christendom. I have come into Outremer and left their castles desolate; I have ridden eastward with the heads of their chiefs swinging at my saddle. I will come again, not as a raider but a conqueror. I will sweep their hosts into the sea. Frankistan shall howl for her dead kings, and my horses stamp in the citadels of the infidel; for on this field I set my feet on the glittering stairs that lead to empire."

"This is my only word to you, Zenghi, dog of Tiberias," answered the Frank in a voice he did not himself recognize. "In a year, or ten years, or twenty years, I will come again to you, to pay this debt."

"Thus spake the trapped wolf to the hunter," answered Zenghi, and turning to the memluks who held Norwald, he said, "Place him among the unransomed captives. Take him to Bassorah and see that he is sold as a galley-slave. He is strong and may live for four or five years."

The sun was setting in crimson, gloomy and sinister for the fugitives who staggered toward the distant towers of Hilla that the setting sun tinted in blood. But the land was as one flooded with the scarlet glory of imperial pageantry to the Calif who stood on a hillock, lifting his voice to Allah who had once more vindicated the dominance of his chosen viceroy, and saved the sacred City of Peace from violation.

"Verily, verily, a young lion has risen in Islam, to be as a sword and shield to the Faithful, to revive the power of Muhammad, and to confound the infidels!"

2

PRINCE ZENGHI was the son of a slave, which was no great handicap in that day, when the Seljuk emperors, like the Ottomans after them, ruled through slave generals and satraps. His father, Ak Sunkur, had held high posts under the sultan Melik Shah, and as a young boy Zenghi had been taken under the special guidance of that war-hawk Kerbogha of Mosul. The young eagle was not a Seljuk; his sires were Turks from beyond the Oxus, of that people which men later called Tatars. Men of this blood were rapidly becoming the dominant factor in western Asia, as the empire of the Seljuks, who had enslaved and trained them in the art of ruling, began to crumble. Emirs were stirring restlessly under the relaxing yoke of the sultans. The Seljuks were reaping the yield of the seeds of the feudal system they had sown, and among the jealous sons of Melik Shah there was none strong enough to rebuild the crumbling lines.

So far the fiefs, held by feudal vassals of the sultans, were at least nominally loyal to the royal masters, but already there was beginning the slow swirling upheaval that ultimately reared kingdoms on the ruins of the old empire. The driving impetus of one man advanced this movement more than anything else—the vital dynamic power of Zenghi esh Shami —Zenghi the Syrian, so called because of his exploits against the Crusaders in Syria. Popular legendry has passed him by, to exalt Saladin who followed and overshadowed him; yet he was the forerunner of the great Moslem heroes who were to shatter the Crusading kingdoms, and but for him the shining deeds of Saladin might never have come to pass.

In the dim and misty pageantry of phantoms that move shadow-like through those crimson years, one figure stands out clear and bold-etched—a figure on a rearing black stallion, the black silken cloak flowing from his mailed shoulders, the dripping simitar in his hand. He is Zenghi, son of the pagan nomads, the first of a glittering line of magnificent conquerors before whom the iron men of Christendom reeled—Nur-ad-din, Saladin, Baibars, Kalawun, Bayazid—aye, and Subotai, Genghis Khan, Hulagu, Tamerlane, and Suleiman the Great.

In 1124 the fall of Tyre to the Crusaders marked the high tide of Frankish power in Asia. Thereafter the hammer-strokes of Islam fell on a waning sovereignty. At the time of the battle of the Eu-

phrates the kingdom of Outremer extended from Edessa in the north to Ascalon in the south, a distance of some five hundred miles. Yet it was in few places more than fifty miles broad, from east to west, and walled Moslem towns were within a day's ride of Christian keeps. Such a condition could not exist for ever. That it existed as long as it did was owing partly to the indomitable valor of the cross-wearers, and partly to the lack of a strong leader among the Moslems.

In Zenghi such a leader was found. When he broke ibn Sadaka he was thirty-eight years of age, and had held his fief of Wasit but a year. Thirty-six was the minimum age at which the sultans allowed a man to hold a governorship, and most notables were much older when they were so honored than was Zenghi. But the honor only whetted his ambition.

The same sun that shone mercilessly on John Norwald, stumbling along in his chains on the road that led to the galley's bench, gleamed on Zenghi's gilded mail as he rode north to enter the service of the sultan Muhammad at Hamadhan. His boast that his feet were set on the stairs of fame was no idle one. All orthodox Islam vied in honoring him.

To the Franks who had felt his talons in Syria, came faint tidings of that battle beside the Nile canal, and they heard other word of his growing power. There came tidings of a dispute between sultan and Calif, and of Zenghi turning against his former master, riding into Bagdad with the banners of Muhammad. Honors rained like stars on his turban, sang the Arab minstrels. Warden of Bagdad, governor of Irak, prince of el Jezira, Atabeg of Mosul—on up the glittering stairs of power rode Zenghi, while the Franks ignored the tidings from the East with the perverse blindness of their race—until hell burst along their borders and the roar of the Lion shook their towers.

Outposts and castles went up in flames, and Christian throats felt the knife-edge, Christian necks the yoke of slavery. Outside the walls of doomed Atharib, Baldwin, king of Jerusalem, saw his picked chivalry swept broken and flying into the desert. Again at Barin the Lion drove Baldwin and his Damascene allies headlong in flight, and when the Emperor of Byzantium himself, John Comnene, moved against the victorious Turk, he found himself chasing a desert wind that turned unexpectedly and slaughtered his stragglers, and harried his lines until life was a burden and a stone about his royal neck. He decided that his Moslem neighbors were no more to be despised than his barbaric Frankish allies, and before he sailed away from the Syrian coast he held secret parleys with Zenghi that bore crimson fruit in later years. His going left the Turk free to move against his eternal enemies, the Franks. His objective was Edessa, northernmost stronghold of the Christians, and one of the most powerful of their cities. But like a crafty swordsman he blinded his foes by feints and gestures.

Outremer reeled before his blows. The land was filled with the chanting of the riders, the twang of bows, and the whine of swords. Zenghi's hawks swept through the land and their horses' hoofs spattered blood on the standards of kings. Walled castles toppled in flame, sword-hacked corpses strewed the valleys, dark hands knotted in the yellow tresses of screaming women, and the lords of the Franks cried out in wrath and pain. Up the glittering stairs of empire rode Zenghi on his black stallion, his simitar dripping in his hand, stars jeweling his turban.

And while he swept the land like a storm, and hurled down barons to make

drinking-cups of their skulls and stables of their palaces, the galley-slaves, whispering to one another in their eternal darkness where the oars clacked everlastingly and the lap of the waves was a symphony of slow madness, spoke of a red-haired giant who never spoke, and whom neither labor, nor starvation, nor the dripping lash, nor the drag of the bitter years could break.

The years passed, glittering, star-strewn, gilt-spangled years to the rider in the shining saddle, to the lord in the golden-domed palace; black, silent, bitter years in the creaking, reeking, rat-haunted darkness of the galleys.

3

"He rides on the wind with the stars in his hair;
Like Death falls his shadow on castles and towns;
And the kings of the Caphars cry out in despair,
For the hoofs of his stallion have trampled their crowns."

THUS sang a wandering Arab minstrel in the tavern of a little outpost village which stood on the ancient—and now little-traveled—road from Antioch to Aleppo. The village was a cluster of mud huts huddling about a castle-crowned hill. The population was mongrel—Syrians, Arabs, mixed breeds with Frankish blood in their veins. Tonight a representative group was gathered in the inn—native laborers from the fields; a lean Arab herdsman or two; French men-at-arms in worn leather and rusty mail, from the castle on the hill; a pilgrim wandered off his route to the holy places of the south; the ragged minstrel. Two figures held the attention of casual lookers-on. They sat on opposite sides of a rudely carved table, eating meat and drinking wine, and they were evidently strangers to each other, since no word passed between them, though each glanced surreptitiously at the other from time to time.

Both were tall, hard-limbed and broad-shouldered, but there the resemblance ended. One was clean-shaven, with a hawk-like predatory face from which keen blue eyes gleamed coldly. His burnished helmet lay on the bench beside him with the kite-shaped shield, and his mail coif was pushed back, revealing a mass of red-gold hair. His armor gleamed with gilt-work and silver chasing, and the hilt of his broadsword sparkled with jewels.

The man opposite him seemed drab by comparison, with his dusty gray chain-mail and worn sword-hilt untouched by any gleam of gem or gold. His square-cut tawny mane was matched by a short beard which masked the strong lines of jaw and chin.

The minstrel finished his song with an exultant clash of the strings, and eyed his audience half in insolence, half in uneasiness.

"And thus, masters," he intoned, one eye on possible alms, the other on the door, "Zenghi, prince of Wasit, brought his memluks up the Tigris on boats to aid the sultan Muhammad who lay encamped about the walls of Bagdad. Then when the Calif saw the banners of Zenghi, he said, 'Lo, now is come up against me the young lion who overthrew ibn Sadaka for me; open the gates, friends, and throw yourselves on his mercy, for there is none found to stand before him.' And it was done, and the sultan gave to Zenghi all the land of el Jezira.

"Gold and power flowed through his fingers. Mosul, his capital, which he found a waste of ruins, he made to bloom as roses blossom by an oasis. Kings trembled before him but the poor rejoiced, for he shielded them from the sword. His servants looked on him as upon God. Of him it is told that he gave a slave a rusk to hold, and not for a year did he ask for it. Then when he demanded it, lo, the

man gave it into his hands, wrapped in a napkin, and for his diligence Zenghi gave him command of a castle. For though the Atabeg is a hard master, yet he is just to True Believers."

The knight in the gleaming mail flung the minstrel a coin.

"Well sung, pagan!" he cried in a harsh voice that sounded the Norman-French words strangely. "Know you the song of the sack of Edessa?"

"Aye, my lord," smirked the minstrel, "and with the favor of your lordships I will essay it."

"Your head shall roll on the floor first," spoke the other knight suddenly in a voice deep and somber with menace. "It is enough that you praise the dog Zenghi in our teeth. No man sings of his butcheries at Edessa, beneath a Christian roof in my presence."

The minstrel blenched and gave back, for the cold gray eyes of the Frank were grim. The knight in the ornate mail looked at the speaker curiously, no resentment in his reckless dancing eyes.

"You speak as one to whom the subject is a sore one, friend," said he.

The other fixed his somber stare on his questioner, but made no reply save a slight shrug of his mighty mailed shoulders as he continued his meal.

"Come," persisted the stranger, "I meant no offense. I am newly come to these parts—I am Sir Roger d'Ibelin, vassal to the king of Jerusalem. I have fought Zenghi in the south, when Baldwin and Anar of Damascus made alliance against him, and I only wished to hear the details of the taking of Edessa. By God, there were few Christians who escaped to bear the tale."

"I crave pardon for my seeming discourtesy," returned the other. "I am Miles du Courcey, in the service of the prince of Antioch. I was in Edessa when it fell.

"Zenghi came up from Mosul and laid waste the Diyar Bekr, taking town after town from the Seljuks. Count Joscelin de Courtenay was dead, and the rule was in the hands of that sluggard, Joscelin II. In the late fall of the year Zenghi laid siege to Amid, and the count bestirred himself—but only to march away to Turbessel with all his household.

"We were left at Edessa with the town in charge of fat Armenian merchants who gripped their money-bags and trembled in fear of Zenghi, unable to overcome their swinish avarice enough to pay the mongrel mercenaries Joscelin had left to defend the city.

"Well, as any one might know, Zenghi left Amid and marched against us as soon as word reached him that the poor fool Joscelin had departed. He reared his siege engines over against the walls, and day and night hurled assaults against the gates and towers, which had never fallen had we had the proper force to man them.

"But to give them their due, our wretched mercenaries did well. There was no rest or ease for any of us; day and night the ballistas creaked, stones and beams crashed against the towers, arrows blinded the sky in their whistling clouds, and Zenghi's chanting devils swarmed up the walls. We beat them back until our swords were broken, our mail hung in bloody tatters, and our arms were dead with weariness. For a month we kept Zenghi at bay, waiting for Count Joscelin, but he never came.

"It was on the morning of December 23rd that the rams and engines made a great breach in the outer wall, and the Moslems came through like a river bursting through a dam. The defenders died like flies along the broken ramparts, but human power could not stem that tide.

The memluks rode into the streets and the battle became a massacre. The Turkish sword knew no mercy. Priests died at their altars, women in their courtyards, children at their play. Bodies choked the streets, the gutters ran crimson, and through it all rode Zenghi on his black stallion like a phantom of Death."

"Yet you escaped?"

THE cold gray eyes became more somber.

"I had a small band of men-at-arms. When I was dashed senseless from my saddle by a Turkish mace, they took me up and rode for the western gate. Most of them died in the winding streets, but the survivors brought me to safety. When I recovered my senses the city lay far behind me.

"But I rode back." The speaker seemed to have forgotten his audience. His eyes were distant, withdrawn; his bearded chin rested on his mailed fist; he seemed to be speaking to himself. "Aye, I had ridden into the teeth of hell itself. But I met a servant, fallen death-stricken among the straggling fugitives, and ere he died he told me that she whom I sought was dead—struck down by a memluk's simitar."

Shaking his iron-clad shoulders he roused himself as from a bitter revery. His eyes grew cold and hard again; the harsh timbre re-entered his voice.

"Two years have seen a great change in Edessa, I hear. Zenghi rebuilt the walls and has made it one of his strongest holds. Our hold on the land is crumbling and tearing away. With a little aid, Zenghi will surge over Outremer and obliterate all vestiges of Christendom."

"That aid may come from the north," muttered a bearded man-at-arms. "I was in the train of the barons who marched with John Comnene when Zenghi outmaneuvered him. The emperor has no love for us."

"Bah! He is at least a Christian," laughed the man who called himself d'Ibelin, running his restless fingers through his clustering golden locks.

Du Courcey's cold eyes narrowed suddenly as they rested on a heavy golden ring of curious design on the other's finger, but he said nothing.

Heedless of the intensity of the Norman's stare, d'Ibelin rose and tossed a coin on the table to pay his reckoning. With a careless word of farewell to the idlers he rose and strode out of the inn with a clanking of armor. The men inside heard him shouting impatiently for his horse. And Sir Miles du Courcey rose, took up shield and helmet, and followed.

THE man known as d'Ibelin had covered perhaps a half-mile, and the castle on the hill was but a faint bulk behind him, gemmed by a few points of light, when a drum of hoofs made him wheel with a guttural oath that was not French. In the dim starlight he made out the form of his recent inn companion, and he laid hand on his jewelled hilt. Du Courcey drew up beside him and spoke to the grimly silent figure.

"Antioch lies the other way, good sir. Perhaps you have taken the wrong road by mischance. Three hours' ride in this direction will bring you into Saracen territory."

"Friend," retorted the other, "I have not asked your advice concerning my road. Whether I go east or west is scarcely your affair."

"As vassal to the prince of Antioch it is my affair to inquire into suspicious actions within his domain. When I see a man travelling under false pretenses, with a Saracen ring on his finger, riding by

night toward the border, it seems suspicious enough for me to make inquiries."

"I can explain my actions if I see fit," bruskly answered d'Ibelin, "but these insulting accusations I will answer at the sword's point. What mean you by false pretensions?"

"You are not Roger d'Ibelin. You are not even a Frenchman."

"No?" a sneer rasped in the other's voice as he slipped his sword from its sheath.

"No. I have been to Constantinople, and seen the northern mercenaries who serve the Greek emperor. I can not forget your hawk face. You are John Commene's spy—Wulfgar Edric's son, a captain in the Varangian Guard."

A wild beast snarl burst from the masquerader's lips and his horse screamed and leaped convulsively as he struck in the spurs, throwing all his frame behind his sword arm as the beast plunged. But du Courcey was too seasoned a fighter to be caught so easily. With a wrench of his rein he brought his steed round, rearing. The Varangian's frantic horse plunged past, and the whistling sword struck fire from the Norman's lifted shield. With a furious yell the fierce Norman wheeled again to the assault, and the horses reared together while the swords of their riders hissed, circled in flashing arcs, and fell with ringing clash on mail-links or shield.

The men fought in grim silence, save for the panting of straining effort, but the clangor of their swords awoke the still night and sparks flew as from a blacksmith's anvil. Then with a deafening crash a broadsword shattered a helmet and splintered the skull within. There followed a loud clash of armor as the loser fell heavily from his saddle. A riderless horse galloped away, and the conqueror, shaking the sweat from his eyes, dismounted and bent above the motionless steel-clad figure.

4

ON THE road that leads south from Edessa to Rakka, the Moslem host lay encamped, the lines of gay-colored pavilions spread out in the plains. It was a leisurely march, with wagons, luxurious equipment, and whole households with women and slaves. After two years in Edessa the Atabeg of Mosul was returning to his capital by the way of Rakka. Fires glimmered in the gathering dusk where the first stars were peeping; lutes twanged and voices were lifted in song and laughter about the cooking-pots.

Before Zenghi, playing at chess with his friend and chronicler, the Arab Ousama of Sheyzar, came the eunuch Yaruktash, who salaamed low and in his squeaky voice intoned, "Oh, Lion of Islam, an emir of the infidels desires audience with thee—the captain of the Greeks who is called Wulfgar Edric's son. The chief Il-Ghazi and his memluks came upon him, riding alone, and would have slain him but he threw up his arm and on his hand they saw the ring thou gavest the emperor as a secret sign for his messengers."

Zenghi tugged his gray-shot black beard and grinned, well pleased.

"Let him be brought before me." The slave bowed and withdrew.

To Ousama, Zenghi said, "Allah, what dogs are these Christians, who betray and cut one another's throats for the promise of gold or land!"

"Is it well to trust such a man?" queried Ousama. "If he will betray his kind, he will surely betray you if he may."

"May I eat pork if I trust him," retorted Zenghi, moving a chessman with a jewelled finger. "As I move this pawn I

will move the dog-emperor of the Greeks. With his aid I will crack the kings of Outremer like nutshells. I have promised him their seaports, and he will keep his promises until he thinks his prizes are in his hands. Ha! Not towns but the sword-edge I will give him. What we take together shall be mine, nor will that suffice me. By Allah, not Mesopotamia, nor Syria, nor all Asia Minor is enough! I will cross the Hellespont! I will ride my stallion through the palaces on the Golden Horn! Frankistan herself shall tremble before me!"

The impact of his voice was like that of a harsh-throated trumpet, almost stunning the hearers with its dynamic intensity. His eyes blazed, his fingers knotted like iron on the chessboard.

"You are old, Zenghi," warned the cautious Arab. "You have done much. Is there no limit to your ambitions?"

"Aye!" laughed the Turk. "The horn of the moon and the points of the stars! Old? Eleven years older than thyself, and younger in spirit than thou wert ever. My thews are steel, my heart is fire, my wits keener even than on the day I broke ibn Sadaka beside the Nile and set my feet on the shining stairs of glory! Peace, here comes the Frank."

A small boy of about eight years of age, sitting cross-legged on a cushion near the edge of the dais whereon lay Zenghi's divan, had been staring up in rapt adoration. His fine brown eyes sparkled as Zenghi spoke of his ambition, and his small frame quivered with excitement, as if his soul had taken fire from the Turk's wild words. Now he looked at the entrance of the pavilion with the others, as the memluks entered with the visitor between them, his scabbard empty. They had taken his weapons outside the royal tent.

THE memluks fell back and ranged themselves on either side of the dais, leaving the Frank in an open space before their master. Zenghi's keen eyes swept over the tall form in its glittering gold-worked mail, took in the clean-shaven face with its cold eyes, and rested on the Koran-inscribed ring on the man's finger.

"My master, the emperor of Byzantium," said the Frank in Turki, "sends thee greeting, oh Zenghi, Lion of Islam."

As he spoke he took in the details of the impressive figure, clad in steel, silk and gold, before him; the strong dark face, the powerful frame which, despite the years, betokened steel-spring muscles and unquenchable vitality; above all the Atabeg's eyes, gleaming with unperishable youth and innate fierceness.

"And what said thy master, oh Wulfgar?" asked the Turk.

"He sends thee this letter," answered the Frank, drawing forth a packet and proffering it to Yaruktash, who in turn, and on his knees, delivered it to Zenghi. The Atabeg perused the parchment, signed in the Emperor's unmistakable hand and sealed with the royal Byzantine seal. Zenghi never dealt with underlings, but always with the highest power of friends or foes.

"The seals have been broken," said the Turk, fixing his piercing eyes on the inscrutable countenance of the Frank. "Thou hast read?"

"Aye. I was pursued by men of the prince of Antioch, and fearing lest I be seized and searched, I opened the missive and read it, so that if I were forced to destroy it lest it fall into enemy hands, I could repeat the message to thee by word of mouth."

"Let me hear, then, if thy memory be equal to thy discretion," commanded the Atabeg.

"As thou wilt. My master says to

thee, 'Concerning that which hath passed between us, I must have better proof of thy good faith. Wherefore do thou send me by this messenger, who, though unknown to thee, is a man to be trusted, full details of thy desires and good proof of the aid thou hast promised us in the proposed movement against Antioch. Before I put to sea I must know that thou art ready to move by land, and there must be binding oaths between us.' And the missive is signed with the emperor's own hand."

The Turk nodded; a mirthful devil danced in his blue eyes.

"They are his very words. Blessed is the monarch who boasts such a vassal. Sit ye upon that heap of cushions; meat and drink shall be brought to you."

Calling Yaruktash, Zenghi whispered in his ear. The eunuch started, stared, and then salaamed and hastened from the pavilion. Slaves brought food and the forbidden wine in golden vessels, and the Frank broke his fast with unfeigned relish. Zenghi watched him inscrutably and the glittering memluks stood like statues of burnished steel.

"You came first to Edessa?" asked the Atabeg.

"Nay. When I left my ship at Antioch I set forth for Edessa, but I had scarce crossed the border when a band of wandering Arabs, recognizing your ring, told me you were on the march for Rakka, thence to Mosul. So I turned aside and rode to cut your line of march, and my way being made clear for me by virtue of the ring which all your subjects know, I was at last met by the chief Il-Ghazi who escorted me thither."

Zenghi nodded his leonine head slowly.

"Mosul calls me. I go back to my capital to gather my hawks, to brace my lines. When I return I will sweep the Franks into the sea with the aid of—thy master.

"But I forget the courtesy due a guest. This is prince Ousama of Sheyzar, and this child is the son of my friend Nejm-ed-din, who saved my army and my life when I fled from Karaja the Cup-bearer—one of the few foes who ever saw my back. His father dwells at Baalbekk, which I gave him to rule, but I have taken Yusef with me to look on Mosul. Verily, he is more to me than my own sons. I have named him Salah-ed-din, and he shall be a thorn in the flesh of Christendom."

At this instant Yaruktash entered and whispered in Zenghi's ear, and the Atabeg nodded.

AS THE eunuch withdrew, Zenghi turned to the Frank. The Turk's manner had changed subtly. His lids drooped over his glittering eyes and a faint hint of mockery curled his bearded lips.

"I would show you one whose countenance you know of old," said he.

The Frank looked up in surprize.

"Have I a friend in the hosts of Mosul?"

"You shall see!" Zenghi clapped his hands, and Yaruktash, appearing at the door of the pavilion grasping a slender white wrist, dragged the owner into view and cast her from him so that she fell to the carpet almost at the Frank's feet. With a terrible cry he started up, his face deathly.

"*Ellen!* My God! Alive!"

"Miles!" she echoed his cry, struggling to her knees. In a mist of stupefaction he saw her white arms outstretched, her pale face framed in the golden hair which fell over the white shoulders the scanty *harim* garb left bare. Forgetting all else he fell to his knees beside her, gathering her into his arms.

"Ellen! Ellen de Tremont! I had

scoured the world for you and hacked a path through the legions of hell itself—but they said you were dead. Musa, before he died at my feet, swore he saw you lying in your blood among the corpses of your servants in your courtyard."

"Would God it had been so!" she sobbed, her golden head against his steel-clad breast. "But when they cut down my servants I fell among the bodies in a swoon, and their blood stained my garments; so men thought me dead. It was Zenghi himself who found me alive, and took me——" She hid her face in her hands.

"And so, Sir Miles du Courcey," broke in the sardonic voice of the Turk, "you have found a friend among the Mosuli! Fool! My senses are keener than a whetted sword. Think you I did not know you, despite your clean-shaven face? I saw you too often on the ramparts of Edessa, hewing down my memluks. I knew you as soon as you entered. What have you done with the real messenger?"

Grimly Miles disengaged himself from the girl's clinging arms and rose, facing the Atabeg. Zenghi likewise rose, quick and lithe as a great panther, and drew his simitar, while from all sides the heron-feathered memluks began to edge in silently. Miles' hand fell away from his empty scabbard and his eyes rested for an instant on something close to his feet—a curved knife, used for carving fruit, and lying there forgotten, half hidden under a cushion.

"Wulfgar Edric's son lies dead among the trees on the Antioch road," said Miles grimly. "I shaved off my beard and took his armor and the ring the dog bore."

"The better to spy on me," quoth Zenghi.

"Aye." There was no fear in Miles du Courcey. "I wished to learn the details of the plot you hatched with John Comnene, and to obtain proofs of his treachery and your ambitions to show to the lords of Outremer."

"I deduced as much," smiled Zenghi. "I knew you, as I said. But I wished you to betray yourself fully; hence the girl, who has spoken your name with weeping many times in the years of her captivity."

"It was an unworthy gesture and one in keeping with your character," said Miles somberly. "Yet I thank you for allowing me to see her once more, and to know that she is alive whom I thought long dead."

"I have done her great honor," answered Zenghi laughing. "She has been in my *harim* for two years."

Miles' grim eyes only grew more somber, but the great veins swelled almost to bursting along his temples. At his feet the girl covered her face with her white hands and wept silently. The boy on the cushion looked about uncertainly, not understanding. Ousama's fine eyes were touched with pity. But Zenghi grinned broadly. Such scenes were like wine to the Turk, shaking inwardly with the gargantuan laughter of his breed.

"You shall bless me for my bounty, Sir Miles," said Zenghi. "For my kingly generosity you shall give praise. Lo, the girl is yours! When I tear you between four wild horses tomorrow, she shall accompany you to hell on a pointed stake—*ha!*"

Like a striking cobra Miles du Courcey had moved. Snatching the knife from beneath the cushion he leaped—not at the guarded Atabeg on the divan, but at the child on the edge of the dais. Before any could stop him, he caught up the boy Saladin with one hand, and with the other pressed the curved edge to his throat.

"Back, dogs!" His voice cracked with mad triumph. "Back, or I send this heathen spawn to hell!"

Zenghi, his face livid, yelled a frenzied order, and the memluks fell back. Then while the Atabeg stood trembling and uncertain, at a loss for the first and only time of his whole wild career, du Courcey backed toward the door, holding his captive, who neither cried out nor struggled. The contemplative brown eyes showed no fear, only a fatalistic resignation of a philosophy beyond the owner's years.

"To me, Ellen!" snapped the Norman, his somber despair changed to dynamic action. "Out of the door behind me—back, dogs, I say!"

Out of the pavilion he backed, and the memluks who ran up, sword in hand, stopped short as they saw the imminent peril of their lord's favorite. Du Courcey knew that the success of his action depended on speed. The surprize and boldness of his move had taken Zenghi off guard, that was all. A group of horses stood near by, saddled and bridled, always ready for the Atabeg's whim, and du Courcey reached them with a single long stride, the grooms falling back from his threat.

"Into a saddle, Ellen!" he snapped, and the girl, who had followed him like one in a daze, reacting mechanically to his orders, swung herself up on the nearest mount. Quickly he followed suit and cut the tethers that held their mounts. A bellow from inside the tent told him Zenghi's momentarily scattered wits were working again, and he dropped the child unhurt into the sand. His usefulness was past, as a hostage. Zenghi, taken by surprize, had instinctively followed the promptings of his unusual affection for the child, but Miles knew that with his ruthless reason dominating him again, the Atabeg would not allow even that affection to stand in the way of their recapture.

The Norman wheeled away, drawing Ellen's steed with him, trying to shield her with his own body from the arrows which were already whistling about them. Shoulder to shoulder they raced across the wide open space in front of the royal pavilion, burst through a ring of fires, floundered for an instant among tent-pegs, cords and scurrying yelling figures, then struck the open desert flying and heard the clamor die out behind them.

IT WAS dark, clouds flying across the sky and drowning the stars. With the clatter of hoofs behind them, Miles reined aside from the road that led westward, and turned into the trackless desert. Behind them the hoof-beats faded westward. The pursuers had taken the old caravan road, supposing the fugitives to be ahead of them.

"What now, Miles?" Ellen was riding alongside, and clinging to his iron-sheathed arm as if she feared he might fade suddenly from her sight.

"If we ride straight for the border they will have us before dawn," he answered. "But I know this land as well as they—I have ridden all over it of old in foray and war with the counts of Edessa; so I know that Jabar Kal'at lies within our reach to the southwest. The commander of Jabar is a nephew of Muin-ed-din Anar, who is the real ruler of Damascus, and who, as perhaps you know, has made a pact with the Christians against Zenghi, his old rival. If we can reach Jabar, the commander will give us shelter and food, and fresh horses and an escort to the border."

The girl bowed her head in acquiescence. She was still like one dazed. The light of hope burned too feebly in her soul to sting her with new pangs. Perhaps in her captivity she had absorbed some of the fatalism of her masters. Miles looked at her, drooping in the saddle, humble and silent, and thought of the picture he re-

tained of a saucy, laughing beauty, vibrant with vitality and mirth. And he cursed Zenghi and his works with sick fury. So through the night they rode, the broken woman and the embittered man, handiworks of the Lion who dealt in swords and souls and human hearts, and whose victims, living and dead, filled the land like a blight of sorrow, agony and despair.

All night they pressed forward as fast as they dared, listening for sounds that would tell them the pursuers had found their trail, and in the dawn, which lit the helmets of swift-following horsemen, they saw the towers of Jabar rising above the mirroring waters of the Euphrates. It was a strong keep, guarded with a moat that encircled it, connecting with the river at either end. At their hail the commander of the castle appeared on the wall, and a few words sufficed to cause the drawbridge to be lowered. It was not a moment too soon. As they clattered across the bridge, the drum of hoofs was in their ears, and as they passed through the gates, arrows fell in a shower about them.

The leader of the pursuers reined his rearing steed and called arrogantly to the commander on the tower, "Oh man, give up these fugitives, lest thy blood quench the embers of thy keep!"

"Am I then a dog that you speak to me thus?" queried the Seljuk, clutching his beard in passion. "Begone, or my archers will feather thy carcass with fifty shafts."

For answer the memluk laughed jeeringly and pointed to the desert. The commander paled. Far away the sun glinted on a moving ocean of steel. His practised eye told him that a whole army was on the march.

"Zenghi has turned aside from his march to Mosul to hunt down a pair of fleeing jackals," called the memluk mockingly. "Great honor he has done them, marching hard on their spoor all night. Send them out, oh fool, and my master will ride on in peace."

"Let it be as Allah wills," said the Seljuk, recovering his poise. "But the friends of my uncle have thrown themselves into my hands, and may shame rest on me and mine if I give them to the butcher."

Nor did he alter his resolution when Zenghi himself, his face dark with passion as the cloak that flowed from his steel-clad shoulders, sat his stallion beneath the towers and called to him, "Oh man, by receiving mine enemy thou hast forfeited thy castle and thy life. Yet I will be merciful. Send out those who fled and I will allow thee to march out unharmed with thy retainers and women. Persist in this madness and I will burn thee like a rat in thy castle."

"Let it be as Allah wills," repeated the Seljuk philosophically, and in an undertone spoke quickly to a crouching archer, "Drive me quickly a shaft through yon dog."

The arrow glanced harmlessly from Zenghi's breastplate and the Atabeg galloped out of range with a shout of mocking laughter. Now began the siege of Jabar Kal'at, unsung and unglorified, yet in the course of which the dice of Fate were cast.

Zenghi's riders laid waste the surrounding countryside and drew a cordon about the castle through which no courier could steal to ride for aid. While the emir of Damascus and the lords of Outremer remained in ignorance of what was taking place beyond the Euphrates, their ally waged his unequal battle.

By nightfall the wagons and siege en-

gines came up, and Zenghi set to his task with the skill of long practise. The Turkish sappers dammed up the moat at the upper end, despite the arrows of the defenders, and filled up the drained ditch with earth and stone. Under cover of darkness they sank mines beneath the towers. Zenghi's ballistas creaked and crashed, and huge rocks knocked men off the walls like ten-pins or smashed through the roof of the towers. His rams gnawed and pounded at the walls, his archers plied the turrets with their arrows everlastingly, and on scaling-ladders and storming-towers his memluks moved unceasingly to the onset. Food waned in the castle's larders; the heaps of dead grew larger, the rooms became full of wounded men, groaning and writhing.

But the Seljuk commander did not falter on the path his feet had taken. He knew that he could not now buy safety from Zenghi, even by giving up his guests; to his credit, he never even considered giving them up. Du Courcey knew this, and though no word of the matter was spoken between them, the commander had evidence of the Norman's fierce gratitude. Miles showed his appreciation in actions, not words—in the fighting on the walls, in the slaughter in the gates, in the long night-watches on the towers; with whirring sword-strokes that clove bucklers and peaked helmets, that cleft spines and severed necks and limbs and shattered skulls; by the casting down of scaling-ladders when the clinging Turks howled as they crashed to their death, and their comrades cried out at the terrible strength in the Frank's naked hands. But the rams crunched, the arrows sang, the steel tides surged on again and again, and the haggard defenders dropped one by one until only a skeleton force held the crumbling walls of Jabar Kal'at.

5

In his pavilion little more than a bowshot from the beleaguered walls, Zenghi played chess with Ousama. The madness of the day had given way to the brooding silence of night, broken only by the distant cries of wounded men in delirium.

"Men are my pawns, friend," said the Atabeg. "I turn adversity into triumph. I had long sought an excuse to attack Jabar Kal'at, which will make a strong outpost against the Franks once I have taken it and repaired the dents I have made, and filled it with my memluks. I knew my captives would ride hither; that is why I broke camp and took up the march before my scouts found their tracks. It was their logical refuge. I will have the castle and the Franks, which last is most vital. Were the Caphars to learn now of my intrigue with the emperor, my plans might well come to naught. But they will not know until I strike. Du Courcey will never bear news to them. If he does not fall with the castle, I will tear him between wild horses as I promised, and the infidel girl shall watch, sitting on a pointed stake."

"Is there no mercy in your soul, Zenghi?" protested the Arab.

"Has life shown mercy to me save what I wrung forth by the sword?" exclaimed Zenghi, his eyes blazing in a momentary upheaval of his passionate spirit. "A man must smite or be smitten — slay or be slain. Men are wolves, and I am but the strongest wolf of the pack. Because they fear me, men crawl and kiss my sandals. Fear is the only emotion by which they may be touched."

"You are a pagan at heart, Zenghi," sighed Ousama.

"It may be," answered the Turk with a shrug of his shoulders. "Had I been

born beyond the Oxus and bowed to yellow Erlik as did my grandsire, I had been no less Zenghi the Lion. I have spilled rivers of gore for the glory of Allah, but I have never asked mercy or favor of Him. What care the gods if a man lives or dies? Let me live deep, let me know the sting of wine in my palate, the wind in my face, the glitter of royal pageantry, the bright madness of slaughter—let me burn and sting and tingle with the madness of life and living, and I quest not whether Muhammad's paradise, or Erlik's frozen hell, or the blackness of empty oblivion lies beyond."

As if to give point to his words, he poured himself a goblet of wine and looked interrogatively at Ousama. The Arab, who had shuddered at Zenghi's blasphemous words, drew back in pious horror. The Atabeg emptied the goblet, smacking his lips loudly in relish, Tatar-fashion.

"I think Jabar Kal'at will fall tomorrow," he said. "Who has stood against me? Count them, Ousama—there was ibn Sadaka, and the Calif, and the Seljuk Timurtash, and the sultan Dawud, and the king of Jerusalem, and the count of Edessa. Man after man, city after city, army after army, I broke them and brushed them from my path."

"You have waded through a sea of blood," said Ousama. "You have filled the slave-markets with Frankish girls, and the deserts with the bones of Frankish warriors. Nor have you spared your rivals among the Moslems."

"They stood in the way of my destiny," laughed the Turk, "and that destiny is to be sultan of Asia! As I will be. I have welded the swords of Irak, el Jezira, Syria and Roum, into a single blade. Now with the aid of the Greeks, all hell can not save the Nazarenes. Slaughter? Men have seen naught; wait until I ride into Antioch and Jerusalem, sword in hand!"

"Your heart is steel," said the Arab. "Yet I have seen one touch of tenderness in you—your affection for Nejm-ed-din's son Yusef. Is there a like touch of repentance in you? Of all your deeds, is there none you regret?"

Zenghi played with a pawn in silence, and his face darkened.

"Aye," he said slowly. "It was long ago, when I broke ibn Sadaka beside the lower reaches of this very river. He had a son, Achmet, a girl-faced boy. I beat him to death with my riding-scourge. It is the one deed I could wish undone. Sometimes I dream of it."

Then with an abrupt "Enough!" he thrust aside the board, scattering the chessmen. "I would sleep," said he, and throwing himself on his cushion-heaped divan, he was instantly locked in slumber. Ousama went quietly from the tent, passing between the four giant memluks in gilded mail who stood with wide-tipped simitars at the pavilion door.

IN THE castle of Jabar, the Seljuk commander held counsel with Sir Miles du Courcey. "My brother, for us the end of the road has come. The walls are crumbling, the towers leaning to their fall. Shall we not fire the castle, cut the throats of our women and children, and go forth to die like men in the dawn?"

Sir Miles shook his head. "Let us hold the walls for one more day. In a dream I saw the banners of Damascus and of Antioch marching to our aid."

He lied in a desperate attempt to bolster up the fatalistic Seljuk. Each followed the instinct of his kind, and Miles' was to cling with teeth and nails to the last vestige of life until the bitter end. The Seljuk bowed his head.

"If Allah wills, we will hold the walls for another day."

Miles thought of Ellen, into whose manner something of the old vibrant spirit was beginning to steal faintly again, and in the blackness of his despair no light gleamed from earth or heaven. The finding of her had stung to life a heart long frozen; now in death he must lose her again. With the taste of bitter ashes in his mouth he bent his shoulders anew to the burden of life.

IN HIS tent Zenghi moved restlessly. Alert as a panther, even in sleep, his instinct told him that some one was moving stealthily near him. He woke and sat up glaring. The fat eunuch Yaruktash halted suddenly, the wine jug half-way to his lips. He had thought Zenghi lay helplessly drunk when he stole into the tent to filch the liquor he loved. Zenghi snarled like a wolf, his familiar devil rising in his brain.

"Dog! Am I a fat merchant that you steal into my tent to guzzle my wine? Begone! Tomorrow I will see to you!"

Cold sweat beaded Yaruktash's sleek hide as he fled from the royal pavilion. His fat flesh quivered with agonized anticipation of the sharp stake which would undoubtedly be his portion. In a day of cruel masters, Zenghi's name was a byword of horror among slaves and servitors.

One of the memluks outside the tent caught Yaruktash's arm and growled, "Why flee you, gelding?"

A great flare of light rose in the eunuch's brain, so that he gasped at its grandeur and audacity. Why remain here to be impaled, when the whole desert was open before him, and here were men who would protect him in his flight?

"Our lord discovered me drinking his wine," he gasped. "He threatens me with torture and death."

The memluks laughed appreciatively, their crude humor touched by the eunuch's fright. Then they started convulsively as Yaruktash added, "You too are doomed. I heard him curse you for not keeping better watch, and allowing his slaves to steal his wine."

The fact that they had never been told to bar the eunuch from the royal pavilion meant nothing to the memluks, their wits frozen with sudden fear. They stood dumbly, incapable of coherent thought, their minds like empty jugs ready to be filled with the eunuch's guile. A few whispered words and they slunk away like shadows on Yaruktash's heels, leaving the pavilion unguarded.

The night waned. Midnight hovered and was gone. The moon sank below the desert hills in a welter of blood. From dreams of imperial pageantry Zenghi again awoke, to stare bewilderedly about the dim-lit pavilion. Without, all was silence that seemed suddenly tense and sinister. The prince lay in the midst of ten thousand armed men; yet he felt suddenly apart and alone, as if he were the last man left alive on a dead world. Then he saw that he was not alone. Looking somberly down on him stood a strange and alien figure. It was a man, whose rags did not hide his gaunt limbs, at which Zenghi stared appalled. They were gnarled like the twisted branches of ancient oaks, knotted with masses of muscle and thews, each of which stood out distinct, like iron cables. There was no soft flesh to lend symmetry or to mask the raw savagery of sheer power. Only years of incredible labor could have produced this terrible monument of muscular overdevelopment. White hair hung about the great shoulders, a white beard fell upon the mighty breast. His terrible arms were

folded, and he stood motionless as a statue looking down upon the stupefied Turk. His features were gaunt and deep-lined, as if cut by some mad artist's chisel from bitter, frozen rock.

"Avaunt!" gasped Zenghi, momentarily a pagan of the steppes. "Spirit of evil—ghost of the desert—demon of the hills—I fear you not!"

"Well may you speak of ghosts, Turk!" The deep hollow voice woke dim memories in Zenghi's brain. "I am the ghost of a man dead twenty years, come up from darkness deeper than the darkness of hell. Have you forgotten my promise, Prince Zenghi?"

"Who are you?" demanded the Turk.

"I am John Norwald."

"The Frank who rode with ibn Sadaka? Impossible!" ejaculated the Atabeg. "Twenty-three years ago I doomed him to the rower's bench. What galley-slave could live so long?"

"I lived," retorted the other. "Where others died like flies, I lived. The lash that scarred my back in a thousand overlying patterns could not kill me, nor starvation, nor storm, nor pestilence, nor battle. The years have been long, Zenghi esh Shami, and the darkness deep and full of mocking voices and haunting faces. Look at my hair, Zenghi—white as hoarfrost, though I am eight years younger than yourself. Look at these monstrous talons that were hands, these knotted limbs — they have driven the weighted oars for many a thousand leagues through storm and calm. Yet I lived, Zenghi, even when my flesh cried out to end the long agony. When I fainted on the oar, it was not the ripping lash that roused me to life anew, but the hate that would not let me die. That hate has kept the soul in my tortured body for twenty-three years, dog of Tiberias. In the galleys I lost my youth, my hope, my manhood, my soul, my faith and my God. But my hate burned on, a flame that nothing could quench.

"Twenty years at the oars, Zenghi! Three years ago the galley in which I then toiled crashed on the reefs off the coast of India. All died but me, who, knowing my hour had come, burst my chains with the strength and madness of a giant, and gained the shore. My feet are yet unsteady from the shackles and the galley-bench, Zenghi, though my arms are strong beyond the belief of man. I have been on the road from India for three years. But the road ends here."

For the first time in his life Zenghi knew fear, that froze his tongue to his palate and turned the marrow in his bones to ice.

"Ho, guards!" he roared. "To me, dogs!"

"Call louder, Zenghi!" said Norwald in his hollow resounding voice. "They hear thee not. Through thy sleeping host I passed like the angel of Death, and none saw me. Thy tent stood unguarded. Lo, mine enemy, thou art delivered into my hand, and thine hour has come!"

With the ferocity of desperation Zenghi leaped from his cushions, whipping out a dagger, but like a great gaunt tiger the Englishman was upon him, crushing him back on the divan. The Turk struck blindly, felt the blade sink deep into the other's side; then as he wrenched the weapon free to strike again, he felt an iron grip on his wrist, and the Frank's right hand locked on his throat, choking his cry.

As he felt the inhuman strength of his attacker, blind panic swept the Atabeg. The fingers on his wrist did not feel like human bone and flesh and sinew. They were like the steel jaws of a vise that crushed through flesh and muscle. Over the inexorable fingers that sank into his

bull-throat, blood trickled from skin torn like rotten cloth. Mad with the torture of strangulation, Zenghi tore at the wrist with his free hand, but he might have been wrenching at a steel bar welded to his throat. The massed muscles of Norwald's left arm knotted with effort, and with a sickening snap Zenghi's wrist-bones gave way. The dagger fell from his nerveless hand, and instantly Norwald caught it up and sank the point into the Atabeg's breast.

The Turk released the arm that prisoned his throat, and caught the knife-wrist, but all his desperate strength could not stay the inexorable thrust. Slowly, slowly, Norwald drove home the keen point, while the Turk writhed in soundless agony. Approaching through the mists which veiled his glazing sight, Zenghi saw a face, raw, torn and bleeding. And then the dagger-point found his heart and visions and life ended together.

OUSAMA, unable to sleep, approached the Atabeg's tent, wondering at the absence of the guardsmen. He stopped short, an uncanny fear prickling the short hairs at the back of his neck, as a form came from the pavilion. He made out a tall white-bearded man, clad in rags. The Arab stretched forth a hand timidly, but dared not touch the apparition. He saw that the figure's hand was pressed against its left side, and blood oozed darkly from between the fingers.

"Where go you, old man?" stammered the Arab, involuntarily stepping back as the white-bearded stranger fixed weird blazing eyes upon him.

"I go back to the void which gave me birth," answered the figure in a deep ghostly voice, and as the Arab stared in bewilderment, the stranger passed on with slow, certain, unwavering steps, to vanish in the darkness.

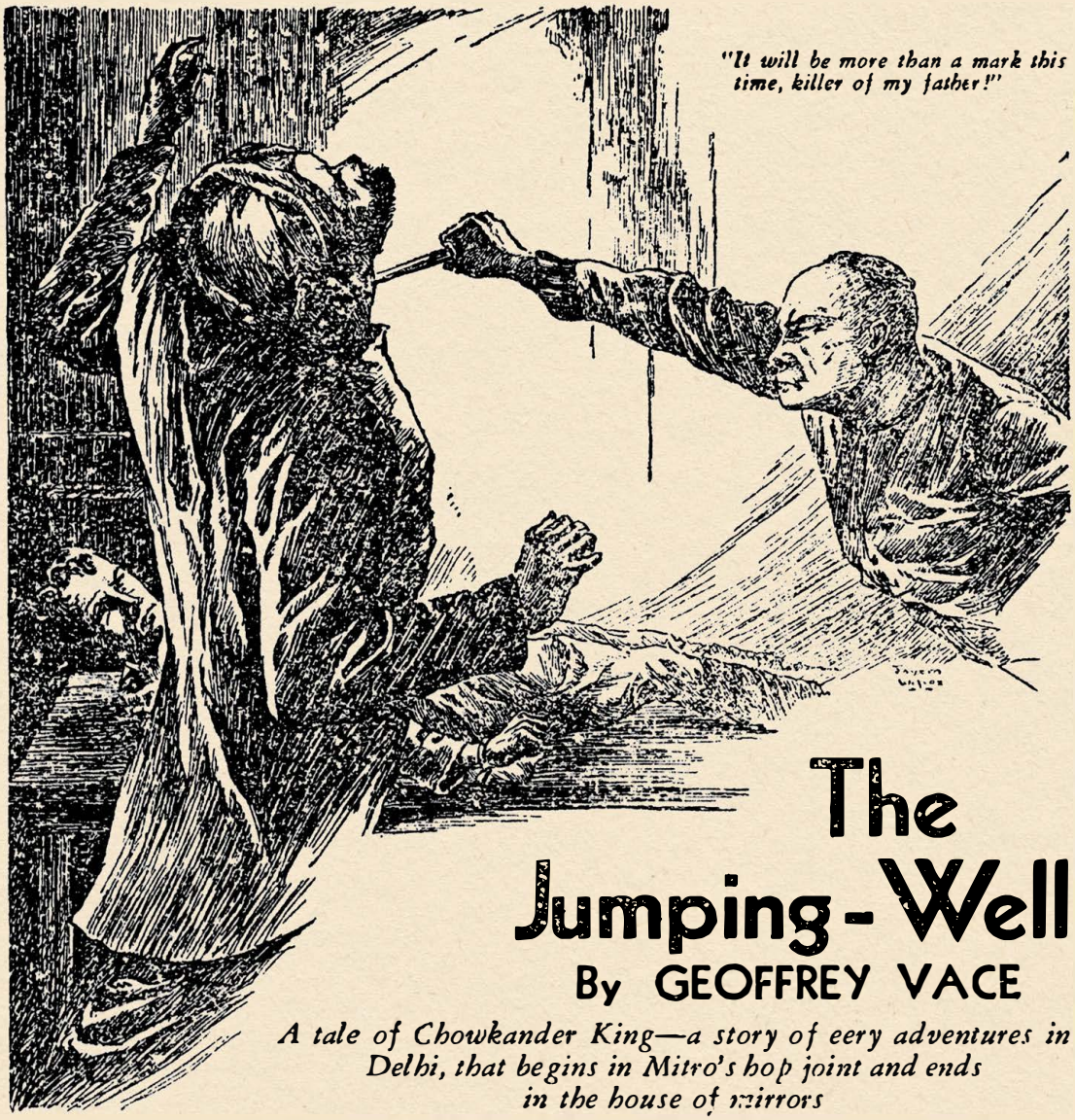
Ousama ran into Zenghi's tent—to halt aghast at sight of the Atabeg's body lying stark among the torn silks and blood-stained cushions of the royal divan.

"Alas for kingly ambitions and high visions!" exclaimed the Arab. "Death is a black horse that may halt in the night by any tent, and life is more unstable than the foam on the sea! Wo for Islam, for her keenest sword is broken! Now may Christendom rejoice, for the Lion that roared against her lies lifeless!"

Like wildfire ran through the camp the word of the Atabeg's death, and like chaff blown on the winds his followers scattered, looting the camp as they fled. The power that had welded them together was broken, and it was every man for himself, and the plunder to the strong.

The haggard defenders on the walls, lifting their notched stumps of blades for the last death-grapple, gaped as they saw the confusion in the camp, the running to and fro, the brawling, the looting and shouting, and at last the scattering over the plain of emirs and retainers alike. These hawks lived by the sword, and they had no time for the dead, however regal. They turned their steeds aside to seek a new lord, in a race for the strongest.

Stunned by the miracle, not yet understanding the cast of Fate that had saved Jabar Kal'at and Outremer, Miles du Courcey stood with Ellen and their Seljuk friend, staring down on a silent and abandoned camp, where the torn deserted tent flapped idly in the morning breeze above the blood-stained body that had been the Lion of Tiberias.



"It will be more than a mark this time, killer of my father!"

The Jumping-Well

By GEOFFREY VACE

A tale of Chowkander King—a story of eery adventures in Delhi, that begins in Mitro's hop joint and ends in the house of mirrors

WHITE men seldom visited Mitro's hop joint. They were unwanted and they knew it; and they were in peril from the moment they passed through Mitro's scarred doorway until the moment they emerged again into the Eastern sunlight. Nor did any man know, entering Mitro's, whether he would come face to face with sunlight again or with almighty Allah.

The face of the boy who slunk through Mitro's little side door that night was not white. It was yellow; and the hands too were yellow, with nails that were long and pointed. One of those grotesque hands clung to the hilt of a thin knife.

Mitro's hop joint was dark. It was always dark. The sun never penetrated that labyrinth of passages, that maze of private rooms. It was dark enough for the yellow face to go without being seen. Down the slender flight of stairs into the narrow corridor, around the bend. Then —one, two, three doors, and a halt.

The handle of the knife beat a sharp tattoo on the panel—sharp, but soft nevertheless. A voice called from within:

"What dost thou want?"

The answer was a mumble, but the door bolt was shot back inside.

A sinister face peered through the crack, a face with sharp, cautious eyes, trying to make out the nature of the visitor in the darkness outside. Mukum Tai was careful. He led the type of life that bade a man be careful even in the little things, like admitting a visitor. The figure he saw was much smaller than his own, only up to his shoulder, in fact. He grinned a little and showed a row of even teeth, white but cruel, in the depths of his black, unshaven beard.

"What dost thou want?" he repeated, and this time his voice was disdainful.

The yellow face looked up.

"You killer of my father, I leave with you a remembrance."

A naked arm flashed up, swinging the narrow stiletto. Before Mukum Tai could withdraw his face the point had seared his right cheek below the eye.

"Later, I shall kill you," the yellow face said, and then it was gone.

Mukum Tai flung the door open and rushed into the hallway, blood from his torn cheek spotting the floor and his white robes. He shouted, and the hop joint of Mitro became alive with men of all castes. But the yellow face of China had disappeared. Like a wraith it had floated into thin air.

Mukum Tai dabbed his eye, and went back into his room. One of Mitro's attendants went with him and took water and plaster.

WHEN Mukum Tai was alone again he sat down to do some thinking. He was still thinking when a code knock sounded on the panel. He made no hesitation this time but immediately shot the bolt and stepped back.

A second Hindoo in silks and turban, pointed turned-up shoes and ragged beard came swiftly through the door, listened intently, then carefully bolted it after him. He turned then, saw the bandage on Mukum Tai's face and the blood on the floor.

"Allah! Fighting again, thou most foolish of lieutenants? Did I not warn thee? Now what good art thou with that torn face? What disguise canst thou affect?"

Mukum Tai held up a protesting hand.

"Not fighting, Sheng Ali," he replied, shaking his head vigorously. "It was that demon son of the old Chinaman I was forced to murder for the sacred torture-beetle thou wanted so badly. Old fool! Did I want to kill him? He would not give me the beetle otherwise."

Sheng Ali grinned.

"It is strange, Mukum Tai, but people are like that. How they hate to part with anything that is their own! Did the boy aim to kill thee, and strike badly?"

"Nay! Not at all. He struck well, warning me that this was just a mark and later he would kill me."

Sheng Ali widened his eyes and nodded his head slightly. The ends of his lips curved up.

"Then we shall have to remove the boy too, before he does more damage."

Mukum Tai paced the room twice, then stopped suddenly in front of Sheng Ali.

"Why hast thou come here tonight?" he asked.

Sheng Ali pulled a shining blade from beneath his garments and tested its edge with his thumb absently.

"This white man, Chowkander King," he said pointedly, "is getting to be a nuisance. Something will have to be arranged very soon. A shipment of rifles goes through the Pass to Gelda Singh the day following tomorrow. Chowkander King is aware of it, I am sure. He must be put off until this transaction is over.

Gelda Singh is ready to attack the forts in the Pass. He only awaits the last rifles and the shells. Those he must have at once. Chowkander King has already warned the British that the pot is boiling, and the Khyber Rifles will have time to muster and repulse Gelda Singh. I have a plan. That is why I came tonight. I must be free for another day or two. Then I do not care. Thou shalt take my place, Mukum Tai, for two days. Dress as I do. Affect my beard and hair. Thou wilt make a fair Sheng Ali, Mukum Tai, though a trifle homely."

Mukum Tai drew back.

"I—take thy place?" he whispered hoarsely. "And be a target for white men's bullets? With the possibility of the white man's rope about my neck? Nay—nay!"

"Silence! Chicken-heart!" Sheng Ali rasped. "The English would not kill you. Would they kill me? Are not the orders to capture me alive? Always alive! They want me to tell the names of the men who are smuggling the rifles to Gelda Singh and the Afridis. The names! They believe that I am a pawn. They do not know that I, Sheng Ali, am the double-crowned king and that the men they spurn are the pawns."

"Listen, thou!" Mukum Tai interrupted suddenly. "An idea has come to me. This scar on my face—suppose thou hadst done it? Sheng Ali and Mukum Tai disagreed. Sheng Ali cut Mukum Tai beneath the eye, for which cut Mukum Tai will kill Sheng Ali! Let the news be circulated through Delhi. Rumor, it travels on the wings of the wind. Mitro shall start it. Chowkander King will hear of it, the way he hears of everything that goes on in Delhi. Mukum Tai is sworn to kill Sheng Ali. The man they want alive more than any man in India! And Chowkander King will watch *me*. Me, Mukum Tai. And I shall only lead him farther from his goal. How sayest thou?"

Sheng Ali paced the floor, one hand on his chin, the other on his elbow.

"There need be no disguise," he mused. "That is better. Disguises are clumsy at best. Your plan is opportune. It is excellent, Mukum Tai. I will leave you to tell Mitro. By tomorrow the rumor will have circulated throughout low Delhi. Keep Chowkander King busy here in Delhi for two days, while I leave for Peshawur and arrange for the shipment of arms to Gelda Singh."

SHENG ALI and Mukum Tai talked longer in low tones. Then Sheng Ali slipped down the dark passage into the narrow street and disappeared.

As he turned the corner, a slender shadow separated itself from the mass and slunk after him. It was a trim shape, clad in regulation army breeches and puttees. A dark shirt, open at the neck, completed the top part of the dress. Chowkander King wore no hat. His wiry shock of hair needed no covering in the cool evening.

Sheng Ali moved quickly, but Chowkander King never lost sight of him. Yet if the Hindoo should have suddenly turned, he would have seen nothing to alarm him. He didn't turn. He came to a low doorway in a two-story brick building and stepped inside.

When King came to that door he stopped a moment. The stop was just to give him time to slip the safety catch from his automatic and grasp its butt inside his pocket. Then he went through the door. He stopped, and waited. There was no sound behind him. Not a soul on the crooked street. In front of him was a short passage terminated by a flight of steep steps.

He passed along the hall in four long strides and climbed the stairs with the soundlessness of a panther.

At the top of the steps he stopped again. He was in a circular hall, and on every side was a mirror. He saw himself in a dozen different places; he saw a dozen different panels, yet none of them was the right one. King bit his lip. He had run into this sort of thing before. It was an ancient Hindoo ruse to delay a chance pursuer for a few moments. He could undoubtedly find the way through, but it would take minutes. And during those minutes Sheng Ali was making good his escape. It was maddening, but it was India.

King went to the top step and turned. For a moment he stood trying to accustom his eyes to the strange light, trying to puzzle that maze of glasses from a distance. As he stood, he felt rather than saw a pair of grinning eyes boring into him. He remained motionless, and the feeling grew stronger. Suddenly there floated over to him a hollow, mocking laugh that tightened his muscles and chilled his spine.

Chowkander King was never a nervous man. Nor was he a foolhardy one. If some one could watch him—some one whom he couldn't see, then he was at a disadvantage. Part of Chowkander King's code was never to work at a palpable disadvantage when it could be avoided. He didn't have to go through that particular door to enter this house. In fact he did not even have to enter this house at all.

He turned swiftly and darted down the steps and along the corridor. As he reached the street door, the laugh floated after him again.

Chowkander King had rooms in Delhi. His business took him about a great deal and he managed to maintain stopping-places at each of India's large cities. Sometimes he had to move in a hurry and it was a help to have a place ready for him. Then there was his Chinese boy, Chin Lee, who cooked for him, mended his clothes, and helped him occasionally in his business as no one but Chin Lee could. And Chowkander King's business? Few men know that. He is neither secret service operative nor detective. He is certainly no thief, and never a superman. But King has a head on his shoulders that makes him the envy of the Foreign Service officers, and the arch-enemy of the native misdoers with which India is overrun.

After leaving the mysterious hall, King went straight to his rooms. Chin Lee met him at the door, bolted it carefully after him, then produced slippers and a pipe. When King was comfortable and his pipe was burning well, Chin Lee squatted at his feet and waited for him to speak. It was a habit of Chowkander King's to think out loud in the presence of Chin Lee.

"Sheng visited Mitro's for the better part of an hour tonight," King mused. "I would like to have been there, and heard what was going on. But a man's a fool to stick his head into that place. Have you ever seen the inside of Mitro's, Chin Lee?"

If there was any sound from Chin Lee's lips King did not hear it.

"Then don't," he went on. "It is a hole of peculiar disappearances. A number of intriguing mysteries have been tracked to the door of Mitro's, and that was the end of them. After going there tonight, Sheng Ali left in a hurry. I followed him to the brick house. It has one of those trick hallways made of glass that used to be so popular with the ancient emperors. I couldn't fathom it at first glance. Sheng Ali must have been watching me. He laughed at me."

He stopped, and smoked for a long time.

"I have an idea," he went on finally, in a slightly lower tone, "that there is more to that retreat than there seems to be on the surface. In the first place, there must be a way out that is not known to us. Sheng Ali is clever—too clever to allow himself to be trapped in a two-story building. Then, there is more. The resident seems to think that Sheng Ali is merely a small pebble on this huge beach of intrigue. I think the resident is wrong. Sheng Ali may be a pebble, but he's a pebble that's too big to toss around. Now—I believe that if I could get quietly into that brick building of the mirrors, I could learn a lot about Sheng Ali and his gun-smuggling assistants. That will be our job for tomorrow."

Chowkander King did not say much more. In a short time he dozed off to sleep. He had spent a strenuous day.

Hardly had his head nodded when Chin Lee got up. Soundlessly, he backed away, his eyes fixed on King's face. There was a trace of triumph in the almond eyes. He walked backward breathlessly until he reached the door. The handle he turned by putting his hand behind him.

Chowkander King did not wake up. Chin Lee closed the door behind him and locked it from the outside.

IT WAS nearly midnight. The narrow, smelly streets of ancient Delhi were empty. Chin Lee made his way by doorways and alleys, often stopping to look behind him, slipping into small openings to allow any chance follower to pass him. But evidently no one was interested in Chowkander King's Chinese boy that night. He came unmolested to the two-story brick building that housed the hall of looking-glasses.

He went through the street door like a wraith. Not a whisper of sound came from his soft shoes as he crept along the passage and climbed the steep stairs. At the top he waited. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Then a little dart of light came from Chin Lee's hand and cast a white spot in the nearest mirror, which reflected the spot a dozen times and made the little hall a place of eery lights and shadows.

Chin Lee began at the first panel and felt carefully along it until he came to the end of it, and the false doorway where it overlapped the next glass. Then the next, and the next. The panels were cunningly arranged. Often he thought he could reach out and touch one, only to find that it was farther back than he could reach without moving—a bit of ancient Hindoo magic merely to harry the pursuer so that the pursued could get beyond the door into the maze of passages on the other side.

Chin Lee worked meticulously. Nor did he tire. He was more than half-way around when one of the panels swung slightly under his hand. He drew his breath sharply and stopped, motionless. For several seconds he waited, listening. Then very carefully he pushed the panel away from him. His light went up, into the opening, and reflected fire from a pair of hideous eyes that were watching him, and grinning.

With a little snapped-off cry Chin Lee drew back, dropping his lamp in his haste. The door did not swing back when he loosed it. The grinning eyes came toward him, and Chin Lee saw a new scar under the right eye that made the face all the more repulsive.

With a little gasp of desperation, he turned toward the steps. Abruptly he stopped, frantic. There was the heavy breathing of Mukum Tai behind him, slowly creeping up. And in front of him,

the wall where the steps had been was blank!

Like a caged rat he twisted about, saw the face of his pursuer coming closer, then threw his frail body against the wall, only to feel nothing but the rush of wind! He was at the head of the stairs. There was no wall. It was the mirrors again!

He seemed to fly down. Then there came a laugh—a soft, hollow laugh that swept down after him.

Chin Lee did not stop running. He did not once look back. By a circuitous route he made his way back to Chowkander King's house and let himself in. In the outer hall he stopped and regained his breath. When his heart had slowed down and he could breathe without panting, he opened the door of Chowkander King's sitting-room.

King still slept. He did not see the Oriental who stood before him, yellow skin turned to gray. Nor did Chin Lee awake King. Instead, he went to his own room and dropped to the floor. For a long time he did not sleep. He thought of a great many things. One of them was the face he had seen, the face with the new scar. Chin Lee had seen that face before, and meant to see it again.

IT WAS morning when Chin Lee awoke. Chowkander King was on his cot. Evidently he had awakened in the night and gone to bed. There was a sudden sharp patter on the door, and a street Arab handed Chin Lee a sealed envelope.

Chin Lee aroused King at once and gave it to him. King scrutinized it carefully, and the ends of his mouth curved in an amused smile.

"Listen to this, Chin Lee. It alters our plans.

Have report that Mukum Tai is gunning, or perhaps I should say knifing, for Sheng Ali. Sheng Ali cut Mukum Tai's face under the right eye in a hop-house brawl. Mukum Tai is out for revenge. It will ruin our plans if he kills Sheng Ali before this Khyber smuggling business is cleaned up. For God's sake, King, get hold of Mukum Tai and stake him down. He's dangerous.

DRAKE.

Drake was Colonel Jerry Drake at the Delhi barracks.

"Mukum Tai—Mukum Tai—who is he?" King mused aloud. "Jerry thinks I know every hop addict and knife-thruster from here to Calcutta. Do we know Mukum Tai, Chin Lee?"

Chin Lee shook his head.

"Knife cut under the right eye. Must be recent too. Yet Sheng Ali has been running too fast lately to stop for any hop-house brawls. Unless—by George! That was it! Mitro's, the other night; Didn't I tell you Sheng Ali was at Mitro's? What are the chances that Mukum Tai got slashed at Mitro's?"

Chin Lee's expression was blank, but a flash of sudden fire went across his Oriental eyes.

"I think, master, it is very possible that Mukum Tai got stabbed at Mitro's," he answered quickly.

"Well," King mused, "we'll have to look for a Hindoo with a scar now. And instead of being Sheng Ali's arch-enemies we become his bodyguard de luxe. Sheng can have a little rest, but we shall have to be right behind him. If he were not quite so slippery, we could hook him, and dare Mukum Tai to get him. And now, we must find a way into that house."

An hour later they left together, Chowkander King tall and angular, striding with the unmistakable gait of a soldier; Chin Lee small, furtive, his sharp eyes missing nothing.

There was little to fear in the daytime. King knew that Sheng Ali was in Delhi. The road outposts were watching for him. Any attempt to get through the lines

would have been reported. And King knew that it was unlikely that Sheng Ali would show himself in the daylight, especially with Mukum Tai after him.

THEY came to the market-place now thronged with people, mulling about, bartering, arguing in loud voices, merchants bellowing their wares, and tourists looking on with interested or amused stares.

Ahead and on the left was the door of the two-story brick building that led to the mirrors. And on the right, in the center of a wide, open place, was one of Delhi's ancient jumping-wells.

Chowkander King stopped.

"Go and watch the well-jumpers, Chin Lee," he said. "I am going to have another try at Sheng Ali's stronghold. It may not lead to anything, but if I shouldn't come back within an hour, go to Jerry Drake and give him the usual message."

Chin Lee nodded, but as King was turning away, he said:

"Master! The ninth panel from the right will swing under the hand." King stopped.

"The ninth panel—what do you know about Sheng Ali's panels? You little devil! Have you been doing some of that private investigating work of yours?"

Chin Lee lowered his eyes.

"I will watch the well-jumpers, Master," he said evasively. "And if you should not come back, I will go to Jerry Drake."

Chowkander King grinned, and went on.

The well-jumpers of Delhi were nothing new to Chin Lee. He had watched them so many times that he knew them by name, and he had ceased to marvel at the feat they performed.

This jumping-well was built hundreds of years ago by the Mogul emperors, who found it vastly amusing to watch their slaves and prisoners jump into an eighty-foot shaft and strike the water below. The shaft is cut open to water level on one side, and four archways are built one above the other so that the curious may watch the jumpers go careening down from the top, the bottom, or from three levels in between.

From each level to the next is a flight of stone steps for the jumpers to climb up, if they are fortunate and do not hit the opposite wall on the way down.

Chin Lee watched the five old men earn a few gold coins from the thrill-seeking tourists. The art of well-jumping is becoming forgotten because the government will not allow young blood to learn it. It is not simply a matter of dropping eighty feet. The jumper needs practise. If he steps off too lustily at the first, he hits the opposite wall and bounds back from wall to wall during the drop, and what reaches the water is not fit to look upon.

Chin Lee watched for nearly an hour, in a curious but disinterested way. The crowd had thinned, until he was practically alone at the well's edge. He watched, down below, a man in the loin-strap of a jumper come slowly up the half-hidden steps. As he watched this man he did not move. Chin Lee was much surprized. This man was the sixth leaper, and Chin Lee had never seen him before in the garb that he now wore. Had the man been in the dress and tall turban of a Hindoo of rank, Chin Lee felt sure that he could have remembered him—one of the lieutenants of Sheng Ali the conspirator.

He drew back as the man came to the top. He watched him look swiftly about, then walk directly to the portable stall of a clothing merchant in the street opposite. This man did not stop to bargain at the

front, but passed at once to the rear. A few minutes later he was back, this time attired in the flowing robes with which Chin Lee was familiar.

A look of cool cunning crossed the Chinese face of Chin Lee. He would have taken after this quick changer of garments, but the sudden tolling of a clock in a distant tower brought something more forcible to his mind. Chowkander King had been gone an hour. To be exact, an hour and five minutes.

Chin Lee turned and ran direct to the home of Jerry Drake, Chowkander King's friend in authority.

"I wish to talk to Captain Drake," Chin Lee said meticulously. The black servant shook his head, and ignoring Chin Lee's English he spoke in Pushtu. The sahib had gone to Peshawur early that morning. He had received an urgent message and had left hurriedly. He would not be back. He, the servant, could not help it. The sahib would not be back. There was nothing he could do.

Chin Lee left in more of a hurry than he had come. He went back to the jumping-well.

CHOWKANDER KING hated to give up. G. H. Q. was raising the devil about this gun-smuggling game, and they had written several potent letters touching his inability to lay hands on Sheng Ali. He smiled, and it was a grim smile. The hall of mirrors had baffled him once, but this was another day. Besides, Chin Lee had said the ninth panel. And King had reason to know that when Chin Lee spoke in such a way, Chin Lee was right.

He came to the door and stepped in. For a moment he waited, to make sure he was not watched from the outside. Assured, he made his way along the narrow hall and up the steps.

It was just as it had been the previous night. The ninth panel--but it was impossible to count them by just looking at them. He placed his fingers on the first and ran them back over the next eight in line. It was easy that way. At the ninth he paused. If Chin Lee were right, this one should move.

He tried it carefully, and felt it swing back under his hand. As it did, there came back to him that uncanny feeling of a pair of hidden eyes watching him. Chowkander King did not like that feeling.

He pushed harder on the panel and made an opening large enough to admit his body. Once inside, he let the glass slip back without turning around. When he did turn, to see how that entrance looked from the inside, in case he needed to find it in a hurry later on, he caught his breath! There was no opening there. No mark on the wall. Just an unbroken blank space where the perfectly fitting panel had slid back.

King stood for a moment, motionless. He was in a small room, the walls of which were so near that he could touch them on three sides. The fourth side was open, and led off to another slender corridor. There was no furniture of any kind, not even a mat on the wooden floor. And over all hung a pall of greenish light that King could not quite make out.

He shrugged, gripped the butt of his revolver in his pocket and walked softly down the hallway. There was another flight of steps going down, and beyond them a door. This door was shut.

King stopped at the top of the steps. The feeling that he was being watched was becoming stronger. Not only watched, but followed. A sudden intuition warned him to turn. He had not heard a sound, but when he spun around, his outthrust revolver was thrashed from his grasp by the sweep of a long knife in

the hand of the biggest Pathan King had ever seen.

Behind the first was a second. They seized King's arms and held him like a baby. One to one, he might have made a good showing for a moment, but eventually these tall denizens of the hills beyond Khyber Pass would have worn him down. To try to down the two of them would be folly.

He saved his strength, and let them lead him to the closed door. They pushed it open and marched him through. There was a well-lighted room beyond. Two Hindoos were sprawled lazily over a flat, bare table. At sight of Chowkander King they jumped to their feet. King knew them both, much to his surprize. Either of these men he had expected to find here, but both together—no. For the man with the white turban and sickly smile was Sheng Ali. The other, with the unhealed scar across his cheek, was Mukum Tai. The arch-fiend and his sworn enemy—together. Yet King did not show his surprize. He merely started on a new train of thought.

"So thou hast come into the tiger's lair, white one?" Sheng Ali said smoothly, when he saw that the hillmen had King powerless. He sat down with a sweeping gesture.

"Loose him!" This to the hillmen. "Take his weapons. Then stand outside the door where thou shalt be within my call!"

The pair disappeared as soft-footedly as they had approached in the hall a moment ago. King rubbed his wrists gently and glanced at the table in front of him. It was a very ordinary table, but for the two iron clamps at one end—two loops of metal just large enough to hold a man's ankles snugly. And two corresponding loops, one on either side, gave every suspicion of being used for holding a pair of thick wrists.

Chowkander King waited patiently. Sheng Ali and Mukum Tai seemed to ignore him for the present. They talked together in low tones in a language with which King was not very familiar. Finally they stopped and looked up. King grinned with genuine amusement.

"Two trusting souls, eh? And one is supposed to be knifing the other. And here I have them both in the same room chinning like a pair of doves."

Sheng Ali smiled suavely. He got up and strode lazily toward King. King could not fail to notice the steel point in his hand.

"The white man is wrong," Sheng Ali drawled. "It is we, Mukum Tai and I, who have the sahib here! And here the sahib shall stay until this last shipment of good British rifles shall go up the Khyber to Gelda Singh. Tonight, sahib, it will be over. The Afridis will be ready. Sheng Ali and Mukum Tai will disappear. Their work will be done. But thou, meddlesome white man, shalt stay here. Here! Until they find you. If they do not find you, thou shalt stay here always, and rot. That table!—ah!—thou hast noticed it! It is marvellous; a thing of power. Power to loosen men's tongues; power to hold men down! But you laugh! The white man laughs. Does he not realize what it means?"

Chowkander King's grin was broad. He stood helpless. He knew it, but he was playing the best game he knew how. The game of time. It would soon be an hour since he had left Chin Lee. And if he did not return in an hour, Drake would come, and the Sikhs.

"I was just thinking, my friend," King said slowly, "that if I am not out of here in a very few minutes with a whole skin, something alarming will take place and

your whole bag of tricks will be blown sky-high. My people keep track of me."

Sheng Ali smiled sweetly.

"We know about your friends, sahib. But they will not help you this time. Your good friend the Captain Drake is in Peshawur. We thought it best to have him away from Delhi until after tonight. He must be well on his way by now!"

King started. They had lured Drake away! Well, there were the Sikhs at the barracks. But somehow he hadn't faith in them without Jerry Drake. It was touch and go, then. One white man against two Hindoos and two Pathan hillmen! King acted as he always did, on impulse. He sprang suddenly at the grinning face of Sheng Ali, taking that brown Hindoo completely by surprize. Before Sheng Ali could move, King's arm had encircled his neck. In a twist, King had the knife in his fist, and was heaving Sheng Ali against the wall.

Mukum Tai backed slowly, and a black muzzle protruded from his robes.

"Thou art a fool, white man," he rasped. "My magic is greater than thine. Put down thy blade."

Chowkander King considered. It was gun against knife. He hadn't a chance. Yet if they got him on that table——

Sheng Ali whistled. The door opened at once and the two Pathans came in.

"Seize him!" Sheng Ali ordered. And in a moment King was powerless in their arms.

"Put him on the table!"

King lay on his back; the bands of steel gripped his arms and legs. He could not move his body. His head lay back. He could lift it enough to see the room. That was all.

SHENG ALI came close to him, scowling with all the dignity he could command. His hair and beard were awry where King had mauled them. King grinned at first, then laughed outright.

Sheng Ali stamped his foot, his eyes flashing fire.

"Fool! White man," he snapped. "All sahibs are fools! You came to save me from death at the hands of Mukum Tai in order that you would give me death at the end of your rope. Mukum Tai is my friend. That mark on his face was not done by my knife, but with the knife of a most foolish Chinese devil who will pay with his life before the next sun. This Chinese devil's father refused to surrender a Hindoo torture-beetle, which could not belong to him. It was necessary for Mukum Tai to kill him to get the beetle. And the beetle? We wanted him —for you, sahib. See—this?"

Sheng Ali held up a coconut shell, empty, hollow. He stripped the white shirt from Chowkander King's belly, and on the bare skin he placed the shell.

"It is nothing, sahib—nothing but a poor beetle who is imprisoned in that shell, who runs in vain to get out. But he can not get out. He must not get out, or the great Shiva frowns and there is punishment meted out to those who own him. But he runs and runs, sahib. At first you will not notice him. But later you will begin to feel him, inside his shell. He will irritate you—more and then more. By the time you are really hungry and thirsty you will be ready to give your life to make my poor little beetle stop his running. The drip of water, sahib, wears away a stone. You——"

A sudden clatter sounded above, far away, muffled, yet it startled the smooth smile from Sheng Ali's face, and moved him to haste. Chowkander King lifted his head as far as he could, and grinned.

Sheng Ali paid no attention to him. He turned to the hillmen.

"They are at the door. Get up. Stop

them! Mukum Tai, come. The other passage——"

Mukum Tai was pushing hastily against the wall opposite the door. Sheng Ali joined him, and together they leaned their weight against a particular spot. A tiny crack showed, and widened with the pressure they put against it. Then a well-constructed opening appeared, and Mukum Tai went through. Sheng Ali stopped to bow and throw a mocking kiss to the helpless King.

"Thou art a fool, nevertheless," he smiled. "And they will never find thee!"

He backed, and the opening began to close. Sheng Ali would have gone through, but the broad shoulders of Mukum Tai blocked the way. Mukum Tai was coming back into the room again; walking backward, his eyes glued upon something he had seen in the passage.

The scuffle above grew louder and was followed by the crash of shots. But King was not interested in them. He kept his head as high as possible and watched that opening in the wall. He saw a hand come through—a hand clutching the hilt of a very familiar knife. And beyond the hand was the yellow face of Chin Lee.

Sheng Ali shouted. Mukum Tai's hand snatched for his revolver. But Chin Lee was lightning. Small, weak as he was, Mukum Tai was no match for him.

"It will be more than a mark this time, killer of my father," he grated. His knife flashed up, found Mukum Tai's throat, and came away. As the heavy body dropped to the floor, sending Sheng Ali back against the wall, Chin Lee leaped to King's side. The iron loops fell away, their simple clasps lying open.

Sheng Ali turned to fight, as Chowkander King sprang up. But the coconut shell fell with a crash to the floor. Dry, brittle, it smashed into a hundred pieces. Sheng Ali's torture-beetle scampered over them and disappeared in a crack in the floor.

The Hindoo let his eyes go to the beetle for an instant. The color drained from his face. The wrath of Shiva was on him! King took advantage of the lull, picked up Mukum Tai's revolver from the floor, and thrust the business end of it into Sheng Ali's stomach.

"This way, my friend," he said quietly.

Chin Lee led the way through the opening in the wall. Sheng Ali followed, protesting to Allah about the escape of the torture-beetle. Chowkander King glanced once at the lifeless carcass of Mukum Tai, and followed Sheng Ali into the tunnel.

The passage sloped upward. It curved suddenly, and King saw Chin Lee silhouetted against a splash of daylight. There was a second cunningly built door, and it stood open.

KING stepped outside, his gun forward for the first move that Sheng Ali might make. He looked up and saw a bright oblong of sky. Below him was a small body of water—dirty, stinking water.

Chin Lee looked back and saw the look of perplexity on King's face.

"It is the jumping-well, master," he said simply, and led the way up the stone steps to the next level. Then up again, to the earth's surface.

Sheng Ali was singularly quiet. He seemed to have suddenly lost his interest in his affairs with the escape of the beetle and the death of Mukum Tai. The muzzle of King's gun kept him moving in the right direction.

Once at the top they paused to get their breath. It was a long climb—eighty feet. Opposite, King saw the door that led to Sheng Ali's hall of mirrors. He saw something else at the same time. Ordi-

narily he had no time for street brawls, but this one seemed different. In fact, an undersized Jewish carpet-seller had separated himself from the crowd of gapers, and was running swiftly toward the trio at the edge of the well. In his hand he brandished a knotted lash, such as Jewish carpet-sellers use to entice their lazy oxen to better speed.

King was aware of a sudden movement behind him. Chin Lee was moving, and moving swiftly. His face had turned a queer shade of green and there was a hunted look in his almond eyes. He glanced helplessly, almost pleadingly at King, shot a sidelong glance at the Jew with the whip, and started off at a run.

"I will return later, master!" he said quickly as he went past.

King watched the pair over a small rise in the ground, heard the sudden clamor as the whole market place took up the chase, and dragged Sheng Ali down in time to avoid being trampled to earth by the onrushing horde.

When the mob had swept past, Chowkander King took a small whistle from his pocket and blew a shrill blast. A pair of Sikh troopers left their posts in the bazar and joined him.

"Take this man," indicating the dejected Sheng Ali, "to Captain Drake's headquarters. Hold him there until the captain returns."

The Sikhs saluted. One of them nodded toward the disappearing mob.

"Shall I order the guard to interfere, sahib?" he questioned. King looked over to where the last stragglers were topping the hill, and grinned.

"Never mind them," he said shortly. "Take care of the prisoner."

CHOWKANDER KING had a long time to wait at his rooms before Chin Lee arrived. When the Chinese boy came in it was with dignity. He had forgotten the past.

"Your pipe, master," he said coldly, handing the briar over. "Dinner will be served at once."

He turned away, but King stopped him.

"Here, you yellow devil! Wait a minute!" King put his pipe on the table unlighted. "I want the answers to a few questions."

Chin Lee stopped and turned slowly. His face was blank.

"It is about Mukum Tai, with the new scar on his cheek, master. I knew the report that Sheng Ali did it was false, master, because it was I who put that scar there. I was at Mitro's that night too. I did it, master, because he killed my father—killed him in cold blood to rob him of the torture-beetle."

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" King held up a hand. "I don't care a hang about Mukum Tai. I saw you kill him with your sacrificial knife, and I knew it was a special occasion. What I want to know is——"

"About the jumping-well, master? I waited for you as you said, one hour. I watched the old men jumping for the newcomers, the tourists from your country. There were the same five as always. But suddenly I saw another. He came up, but I had not seen him go down. He was the sixth. I followed him, and watched him go behind the bazar and change to different clothes. It was Mustapha Ali, one of Sheng Ali's men. I knew him. Suddenly I remembered that the hour was up. I went to the captain's house but he was away. There was no time to get help from the barracks, master. So I went back to the well, which was by that time deserted, the watchers having become bored. I had trouble finding that door, master. But it was there, hidden in the wall, and it needed but a

push to open it. I went into the corridor. I came to the inside door, and I heard the Hindoos talking. But I could not open the door from the tunnel. I went back——"

Chowkander King had risen slowly to his feet. There was a gleam in his eyes —a gleam of amusement. But he did not let Chin Lee see it.

"Look here," he said sternly, seizing Chin Lee by the shoulder. "It seems to me that from the very beginning of this affair you have taken things very much into your own hands. I'll grant you that the privilege of sticking that pig Mukum Tai was yours, and yours alone. But now that is over, listen to me a moment. There is just one thing I want to know. I can't quite figure out why a Chinese gentleman such as you claim to be—a Chinese gentleman, and the conqueror of a notorious pair of smugglers and conniv-ers—should run pell-mell from a harm-less little Jewish carpet-vender armed with an equally harmless whip, and fol-lowed by three-quarters of the population of Delhi. That question is for you to answer. Answer it!"

Chin Lee lowered his head, a hurt look in his eyes.

"I was telling you, master. If you will but listen to me! I was in the corridor. I could not open the door into the room where you were. Yet I could hear them talking. I heard Sheng Ali tell you about the beetle. So I ran back, up the steps. I crossed to the steps which lead to the hall of mirrors. Outside the door was a trav-eling-stall with many carpets. The oxen were unhitched and stood apart. I had an idea. I grasped the halter of one of the beasts and turned his nose toward the door of Sheng Ali's house. At the same time I was obliged to stick him in the rump with my sacrificial knife. Ali his drowsiness left him. He charged up the wooden steps like a regiment of soldiers, which was just the noise I wanted him to make, master. I ran back to the well and went down. It was not long before the door opened. Mukum Tai came out——"

King took up his pipe and lit it.

"What about the rug man? Was he angry simply because you borrowed his ox for a minute or two?"

Chin Lee spread his hands.

"He would not have been angry, mas-ter. But to those hillmen of Sheng Ali's the cow is not sacred. They were angry when they opened the door and saw what was pitted against them. The rug mer-chant's ox is beef, master! They made a stew of him!"

Chowkander King laughed, not loudly, but with just a rumble in his throat. Fin-ally he took Chin Lee by the arm and turned him about.

"You don't look bruised," he grinned. "Evidently the mob did not catch up with you."

"No, master—but it is my conscience. The man is poor, and I had his ox slaugh-tered. I would like to pay him for it."

King pulled his hand from his pocket.

"Well, here's three hundred rupees. There ought to be enough there to buy the golden ox that was killed on Mount Zion—or was that a calf?—I've forgotten. No matter. Whatever is left after you have bargained with the Jew is your own."

Chin Lee showed his teeth in one of his rare grins.

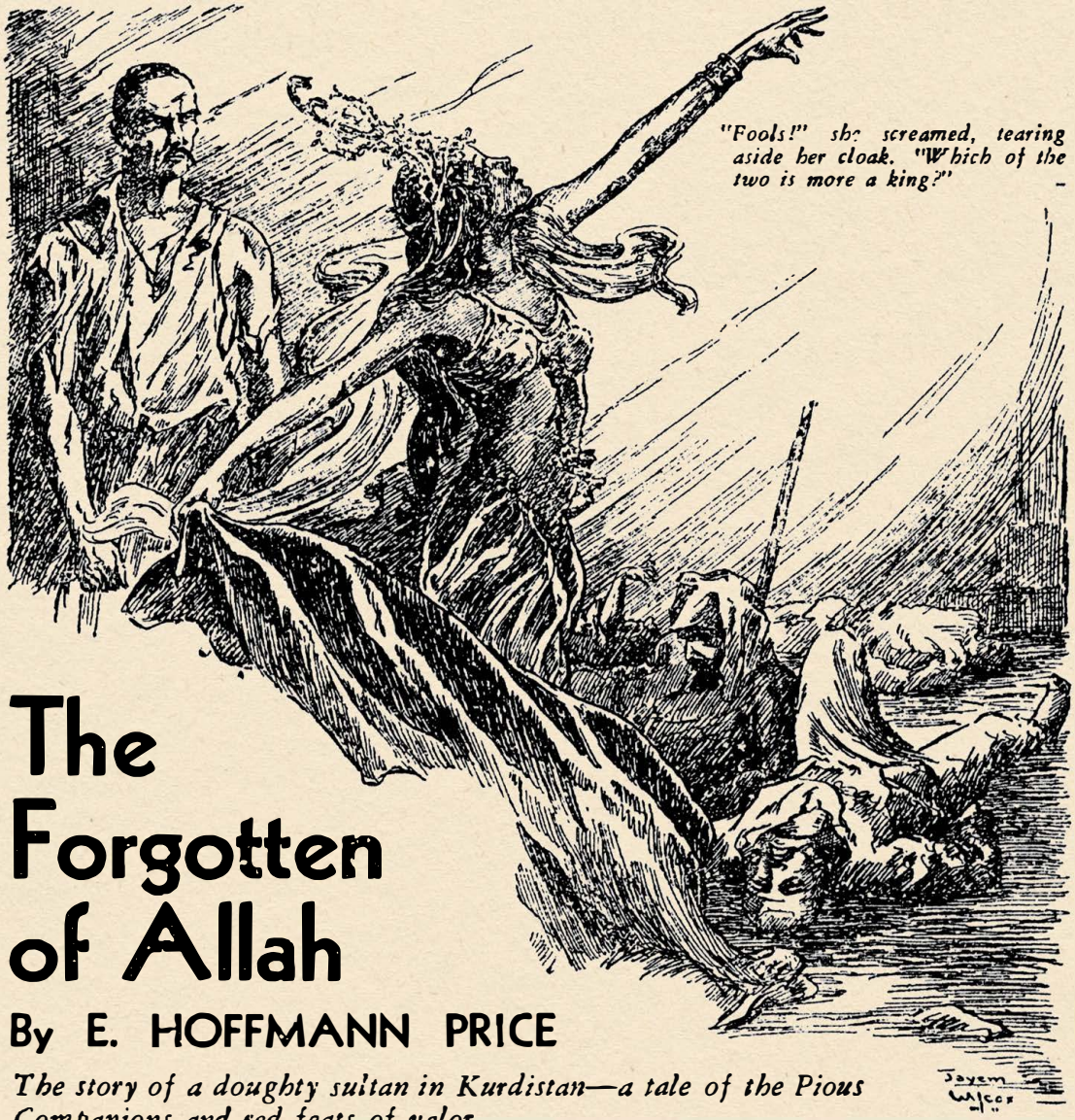
"And Chin Lee!"

The boy turned in the doorway. King struck another match and held it to his pipe.

"Thanks—for everything."

Chin Lee bowed.

"This son of Confucius accepts not the thanks of those he loves. Besides, he is amply repaid."



"Fools!" she screamed, tearing aside her cloak. "Which of the two is more a king?"

The Forgotten of Allah

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

The story of a doughty sultan in Kurdistan—a tale of the Pious Companions and red feats of valor

IN HIS lighter moments, Shams ud Din the sultan was a man of rare humor. And thus it was that instead of following his entirely reasonable impulse to strangle Lailat, his favorite wife, he presented her as a slave to the personal maid of Djénane Hanoum, the one woman of all women Lailat loathed.

Shams ud Din smiled to himself for a whole hour, and then resumed his diplomatic wranglings with Yakoub Khan, who ruled the state across the border, and straightway forgot his jest; but Lailat was eaten by the wrath possible only to a deposed favorite who has become the slave of a slave, and did not forget.

Lailat remembered, and in the end, devised so that destiny came to Nureddin, the sultan's nephew, in a bale of brocades and silken rugs left at his house by an Armenian merchant. Intrigued by the Armenian's haste to depart without pay or present, Nureddin personally unrolled the bale, and wondered what favor would be expected in return for a bribe as rich as the outer layer indicated.

As he unrolled the luxurious fabrics, an amorous, intoxicating perfume greeted him, but did not prepare him for the incredibly lovely girl who emerged from that stifling silken cocoon.

"Mashallah!" gasped Nureddin in admiring wonder.

"Protector of the poor," began the girl, "I am a stranger from Tcherkess——"

She paused for a moment to adjust the tall, curiously wrought head-dress that crowned her copper-red hair, and smiled with her lips and her sea-green eyes, so that no further explanation was necessary.

Then Nureddin saw the embroidered cipher of his uncle the sultan on the border of the veil she had drawn back again into place.

"I take refuge in Allah!" he exclaimed in alarm. "What enemy sent you to me? The sultan would flay us both alive——"

"Nureddin, don't I know that as well as you do?" she purred in rippling Persian ever so faintly accented by her native language. "But I saw you, and loved you from afar. That old gray wolf, your uncle——"

She shuddered; and Nureddin understood.

"So when that Armenian called at the palace with his fineries, I bought the entire bale and told him to return after I had decided what I'd keep for myself, and then deliver the rest to your house."

Nureddin frowned, and reflected on the exceeding folly of letting that amazing girl stay even for a moment in the house.

"Sitti," he said, "that fellow may suspect, and babble."

"He wouldn't dare. His head would go with ours. And I paid him well. Look—I gave the infidel every ring and bracelet."

"Then," said Nureddin, "he'll be in some wine-shop drinking himself drunk tonight."

"Yes. At the one just next to Dervâzeh-i-Suleimani. And he calls himself Nazar Shekerjjian——"

"That simplifies things somewhat," remarked Nureddin, as he fingered the jewelled hilt of his dagger.

The green eyes followed the gesture; and the girl's lips were a curved, carmine sorcery, and her perfume was intoxicating as Shirazi wine.

"I am going to the wine-shop you mentioned," continued Nureddin, "with a gift for this excellent Armenian."

And Nureddin knew that there would be other slayings for the sake of this red-haired girl from Tcherkess; but Nureddin did not know how deep with blood the streets would be in the end.

THAT evening Nureddin returned from a stroll that began at Dervâzeh-i-Suleimani and ended in Jabran's wine-shop. Then he wiped the blade of his dagger, and abandoned himself to the purring sorceries that Lailat murmured in his ear. She spoke of a throne, and of an old gray wolf that would no longer be hunted in vain; and then she mentioned a darwish who sat in the dust by the Herati Gate, all unaware of the part that Lailat proposed for him.

Like all the grasping, plotting brood of Zenghi, Nureddin coveted the life and throne of Shams ud Din, who had lifted himself above the heads of his kinsmen; but Nureddin's enthusiasm was diluted by the recollection of the spectacular fate of his predecessors in ambition.

"Hunting Shams ud Din is hazardous sport," objected Nureddin. "With his own hand he has shot and cut down more assassins than his bodyguard. A handful of the best fighting-men in the country waylaid him once. Not one escaped alive. The steps to his throne are slippery with

the blood of those who have hunted the man of iron."

"They were fools, and the forgotten of Allah!" scoffed the green-eyed girl. "You are cunning as well as strong. And Shams ud Din is no longer the mighty man-slayer he once was. He drinks himself drunk every night, and is secure in his cloak of terror.

"So when Ali Agha returns from the court of Yakoub Khan, he and Shams ud Din will sit in the reception hall to decide the open question of who can put away the most *'arki.* Then you will fire just once, from behind the curtains that screen the alcove facing the entrance of the hall.

"The rest will be simple," continued Lailat. "Ali Agha will be too drunk to resist. So while you make a pretense of fighting with him, yell for the guard. When they arrive, Shams ud Din will be carried to his quarters. Then you will substitute the darwish for the sultan. They are as alike as two rain-drops, and Allah alone could distinguish one from the other. In a short time, the announcement of Shams ud Din's full recovery from his wounds will be accepted as just another proof of his immunity to assassination. And then, Nureddin, you will rule, using the puppet sultan as a mask."

"That is too good to be true," protested Nureddin, but not as vigorously as before. "First of all, this darwish couldn't resemble my uncle as closely as you say. And then, even if he did, that band of his father's picked ruffians, the Pious Companions, would know the difference When he was a boy, the Companions taught him to handle horse and arms. To them he is God and the Prophet in one. The throne is supported by the swords of those old raiders."

"Nureddin," sighed the girl wearily, "how strangely lacking you are in imagination! Just have them sent out to patrol the border. What could be simpler? A courier will come dashing into the throne room with news of revolt in the hills. . . ."

"Sitti," admitted Nureddin finally, "it does sound reasonable. For while the Companions are gone, I can clear the city of Shams ud Din's cronies and cup companions. And that done, we can dispense with this darwish, and I will reign in my own right——"

"Oh, Nureddin!" exulted Lailat, "I knew you'd not neglect your chance. Why did Allah send that darwish if not to help you hunt that old gray wolf?"

"Praise be to God, the Great, the Most High!" exclaimed Nureddin piously; and in the morning he went out to seek the darwish.

NUREDDIN found the darwish sitting in the dust at the Herati Gate.

"Mashallah! As alike as two grains of sand!" marvelled Nureddin, as he studied the lean, hawk-like features of the darwish.

Mahjoub the darwish was quite unaware of the scrutiny of the sultan's nephew: for Mahjoub was engrossed with a long-stemmed pipe loaded with Yamani tobacco mixed with hasheesh. He drank its fumes, and followed fancy where fancy led. A touch of madness, real or feigned, is part of the stock in trade of a darwish, for madness lends the air of sanctity that adorns, or masks, as the case may be, the diverse roles of mendicant, itinerant scholar, versatile scoundrel, or vagabond saint, all of which are covered by the brown robes of these privileged characters. And, combining pleasure with the establishment of holiness, Mahjoub had stepped with both feet into the realm where Man and God are One, where sultans and their nephews and their plots are nothing and less than nothing.

At last, exalted by the richness of his fancies, Mahjoub spoke.

"Aywah! Aywah! Aywah!" he intoned. "This is my day of days, and I am the lord and master of destiny!"

The darwish paused, and solemnly contemplated a vista of splendors, then continued, "Mahjoub has met destiny at the crossroads!"

"Allah and again by Allah!" swore Nureddin. "My uncle's voice and gesture as well as his face."

And then, to the officer in command of his escort of soldiers and footmen: "Thow that fellow into jail. Maybe he'll learn to smoke that stuff in private."

The soldiers pounced on the darwish like a wolf pack.

"Hear with all your ears! See with all your eyes!" he chanted as his escort hastened his march with well-directed kicks. "Mahjoub is master of thrones and crowns!"

Nureddin yawned to conceal his elation, and signalled to his retainers as he wheeled his horse about and rode to the palace. As he rode, he heard the sonorous declamation of the darwish.

"Praise Allah, a happy omen!" exulted Nureddin. "That hasheesh-smoker sees his destiny as clearly as I see mine."

THAT night Nureddin waited in the alcove that faced the brilliantly lighted reception hall of the palace. From time to time he peeped between the curtains that concealed him, and contemplated with satisfaction the flasks of *'araki* that the sultan and Ali Agha, the red-bearded Albanian captain of irregulars, had emptied. The imposing array of liquor yet to be consumed predicted progress in the right direction; and Nureddin, taking this into account with the capacity of the drinkers, had estimated how long it would be before he could start his march to his uncle's throne. As a final touch to the perfection of his scheme, he had armed himself with a revolver stolen that day from Ali Agha, so that the assassination would without a trace of doubt be charged to a drunken quarrel between the sultan and his cup companion.

"So you'll take the chief *wazir's* head tomorrow?" remarked the Albanian as Shams ud Din poured himself a stiff drink and with a pious *"Bismillahi"* drained it at a gulp. "But, my lord, what's that father of many little pigs done now?"

"Nothing at all," replied the sultan, after extinguishing the scorching fires in his throat with a slice of cucumber and a spoonful of curds. *"Wallahi!* And that's the beauty of the idea. This city is a nest of traitors lying awake nights hoping to find me asleep at the wrong time. But when they see Zayd's head on a lance-shaft by the Herati Gate in the morning, every one of the horde of plotters will be discouraged by the thought that I uncovered a scheme so secret that he had not heard a whisper of it. Thus each will suspect his fellows, and they won't be able to get concerted action against me."

"Mashallah!" marvelled the Albanian. "There is craft for you."

"Mashallah!" said Nureddin to himself as he fingered the butt of his revolver and peered between the scarcely parted curtains, "and if that is craft, then he is indeed the forgotten of Allah!"

"One has to be subtle," agreed Shams ud Din. "Since I can't trust my spies, nor the spies I set to watch my spies—by the way, I have a great notion to take a hand at it myself, and see what those fellows are doing tonight, and how many are taking bribes for bringing me false reports."

"I take refuge from Satan!" exclaimed

the Albanian. "Surely you don't mean that? Someone might recognize you——"

"Shaytan blacken thee! We'll go disguised as beggars," explained the sultan, "and no one will recognize us."

"Worse yet, my lord," protested Ali Agha. "You'd not fool any one. You couldn't cry for alms like a beggar. Go as a darwish."

"Alms, O ye Charitable! Thy liberality is my meal, O True Believer!" bellowed the sultan in the voice of a commander of a thousand horse. "Now see if you can do any better, you red-bearded robber of graves!" challenged Shams ud Din.

"My lord," insisted Ali Agha, "your voice would cost us our lives. You couldn't do any worse if you disguised yourself as a dancing-girl! Let's go as merchants, or darwishes——"

"Shaytan rip thee open, O Red Beard! You've become an old woman!" countered Shams ud Din.

And then he poured himself another mighty drink of *'araki,* gulped it, and grinned at his cup companion.

That amiable, drunken grin and squinted eye and head cocked to the left stirred Nureddin to action.

"Drunker than he's ever been. Not even when he sacked Kubbat al Ahhmar. . . . *Ya,* Allah! Where's that messenger with news of revolt in the hills? God blacken his face! . . ."

Nureddin drew his pistol.

"I'll send the Companions a written order——"

Nureddin levelled the weapon. He couldn't miss. But as his trigger finger slowly contracted, Shams ud Din shifted on the diwan, so that the standard of a tall brazen floor lamp blocked the line of fire. The mark could still be attained; but that last instant's shift cracked Nureddin's nerve, and his hand shook as with palsy.

Shams ud Din had once more proved his claim to a charmed life. Shams ud Din was still the old gray wolf that so many had hunted in vain. For a moment Nureddin felt that he was the hunted rather than the hunter; and as his arm sank to his side, he barely restrained himself from headlong flight from the neighborhood of that hard-bitten campaigner who had with his own hands cut down so many assassins.

Then Nureddin collected himself. Shams ud Din would surely move into full view again.

"Ho, there, Selim! Hussayn! Abbas!" bellowed the sultan. And as he waited for the arrival of his attendants, he continued, "By Allah, I'll do my own spying, alone——"

"No, *sidi,* I'll go with you. And as a beggar," agreed Ali Agha.

And then they wrangled as to the details of the sultan's proposed espionage; but Shams ud Din did not move enough to present a fair target.

"O God, by God, by the One True God!" swore Nureddin in despair. "That drunken fool will get out of here untouched, and with his signet ring on his finger——"

NUREDDIN had missed his chance; for while Shams ud Din lurched forward to pour himself another drink, the presence of two of the attendants prevented Nureddin's carrying out his plan. Then the third reappeared, bringing with him the tattered robes he had taken from two beggars sitting at the side exit of the palace.

"Now, by Allah, what's wrong?" demanded Shams ud Din of the secretary who rushed unceremoniously into the *majlis,* halted at the diwan, and presented a sealed message to the sultan.

"Iskander Bey is raiding along the

border again, my lord," replied the secretary. "Here is the complete report. Is there any answer, *sidi?*"

Shams ud Din waved aside the attendants who were setting about arraying him in beggar's rags, unfolded the message, glanced at it rapidly, and then re-read it carefully.

"Allah sift me! Didn't you tell me all was quiet on the border?" he demanded of his cup companion.

"So I did, my lord," replied the Albanian. But it is two days' ride, and in that time Iskander Bey—but to say more is insulting!"

"Qasim, Allah blacken thee! Get me some paper—here, take my ring, and never mind the paper."

Shams ud Din drew from his finger the massive signet that adorned it, and handed it to the secretary.

"Go to the barracks and tell Shaykh Ahmad to ride out with the Companions and not to come back until he has taken Iskander Bey's hide and all of his crew of bandits, and sacked every town within three days' march of the border," he commanded.

"Harkening and obedience, *sidi,*" acknowledged the scribe.

"My lord, may I go with the Companions?" inquired Ali Agha, hoping to prolong the discussion on raiding along the border, and divert the sultan from his masquerade.

"You'd probably come back and say that all was quiet, you red-bearded sot! No, by Allah! Get into those rags, here and now."

"*Sidi,*" protested Ali Agha, "you were wrong in sending the Companions away. Those playmates of your pious father—on whom be the peace of Allah, and His Mercy and His Blessing!—are the foundation of the throne. And I found the border quiet."

The Albanian muttered in his hennaed beard, and poured himself another drink.

Qasim had departed with the sultan's order, and with the signet which would give it force. The three attendants had likewise left the hall. Shams ud Din presented a fair target.

Nureddin levelled the revolver. His hand was steady. The supreme moment was at hand. In that age-long instant of pressing the trigger, Nureddin reviewed the successive steps of his enterprise.

"*Click!*"

The hammer fell on an empty chamber.

Nureddin's subtlety had exhausted itself in the stealing of the Albanian's weapon. He had not noted that it was empty. The golden throne of Shams ud Din in that instant became mirage and fantasy, and despair corroded the soul of Nureddin.

Then he saw the sultan turn toward the door by which the three attendants had left but a few moments ago, and heard him say, "We'll go to Jabran's place."

The Albanian followed his chief, chanting a bawdy song in Turki.

"Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds!" murmured Nureddin. "Allah and my stupidity saved you, and now you go to Jabran's, O Forgotten of Allah!"

Just as Nureddin was about to emerge from his place of concealment, he saw the sultan's secretary coming down the corridor toward the hall. He had missed his master by a scant moment in returning to give Shams ud Din his signet of engraved carnelian.

Qasim had seen the sultan in beggar's rags. . . .

Nureddin's instant decision was followed by a flash of steel as the secretary passed the ambush. Nureddin dragged the secretary's body into the alcove, and

put the signet of Shams ud Din on his own finger: the power and the symbol of power. A slave wearing it in the name of the sultan could command the guard, and demand whatever life and head he fancied. The throne of Shams ud Din beckoned again, and as Nureddin strode down the corridor, he knew that the old gray wolf could not escape this time.

SHAMS UD DIN and the Albanian had in the meanwhile stalked into the stench and glare of Jabran's disreputable wine-shop, selected a comfortable nook in a corner, and after dragging the muttering, drunken occupant of that portion of the diwan to the floor and well out of their way, they seated themselves and called for *'araki* and its inevitable accompaniment of curds and sliced cucumbers and stewed meat.

"*Ya* Allah! A lot of information we'll get out of this den of cutthroats!" growled Ali Agha. "Look at them! Waylaying travellers and snatching purses is their limit."

"Nevertheless," countered the sultan, "my spies report every day right after sunrise prayer, and they always smeli of *'araki* and garlic and hasheesh, and the perfume of those dancing wenches——"

He indicated a Syrian dancing-girl who was pirouetting and writhing to the notes of a *sitar,* her anklets and castanets clicking to the purring drums.

Ali Agha knew the vanity of seeking to dissuade Shams ud Din from his drunken fancy, and resigned himself to listening to the technique of personally supervised espionage.

At the height of the discussion, Nureddin sought and gained admission to the back room of Jabran's den. Jabran, one-eyed, oily, and villainous, greeted his distinguished visitor with respectful familiarity. Nureddin cut short the florid welcome, and led the way to the proprietor's corner by the coffee hearth.

"A pair of the sultan's spies disguised as beggars are making the rounds of the town. They just now entered the front door. If those fellows leave here alive, the sultan will know you're serving *'araki* to true believers, and you know how he handles cases of that kind."

Jabran knew, and shivered at the thought. Shams ud Din was as savage in the extermination of publicly violating the Prophet's prohibition of strong drink as he was enthusiastic about drinking in private.

"That red-bearded fellow will probably start a fight, which will simplify matters. If he doesn't, have some one start a quarrel with him."

Nureddin paused a moment, and stared full at Jabran, eye to eye.

"Remember," he warned, "those fellows must not leave alive. And if you would escape the sultan's vengeance——"

And leaving the unspoken menace for Jabran's inspiration, Nureddin turned and stepped out into the side street to await developments.

In the front room of the wine-shop, Shams ud Din and his companion were still wrangling on the matter of espionage.

"We'd better do our spying somewhere else, or we'll be recognized. You're as convincing a beggar as I would be a dancing-girl."

"Nonsense!" scoffed the sultan. And then, unwittingly prophetic, "Our own mothers wouldn't recognize us in these rags."

"Look at that fellow over there, staring at us already," persisted Ali Agha. "That red-bearded pig of an Afghan——"

"The red-bearded pig is Achmed Khan of the Durani clan, O dung-heap!" shouted the Afghan, rising from his

place and striding toward the Albanian. "And there are too many red beards here already."

So saying, he plucked Ali Agha's hennaed beard.

"Father of many pigs!" raged the Albanian at that mortal affront.

He drew a heavy revolver from beneath his rags, firing thrice before it was fairly extended. The Afghan staggered, and crumpled in a heap.

At Jabran's yell of alarm, a handful of negroes armed with swords and staves came pouring out of the back room. The hangers-on, drawing knives and pistols, gathered in their wake; but they paused before closing in on the Albanian and his smoking revolver.

"Back to your dens, O pork-eaters!" roared Ali Agha gleefully.

He fired until his revolver was empty. Then he and Shams ud Din drew their simitars from beneath their rags, and back to back, received the charge. It occurred to neither to halt the brawl by naming their ranks and titles; a fight was a fight, and the ancient glamor of slaying made their blades leap and dance in a deadly carnival of slaughter.

Those in the rear pressed forward to close with the audacious intruders, forcing the front rank into the flailing sword-strokes of Shams ud Din and the Albanian, while the front line of the attack sought vainly to retreat. Flasks and water-pipes and coffee pots were hurled by those safe from the flickering, shearing blades; and from time to time a pistol barked, causing more consternation among the assaulters than the attacked.

Jabran was frantic. The riot was far out of hand. At any moment the guard would come in and quiet the disturbance by clubbing every one present into insensibility. And then the stakes in the public square. . . .

Jabran shuddered at the memory of what had happened to Khalil, his hapless neighbor who had allowed drunkenness to become scandalously public one night. His untanned skin still was nailed to the Herati Gate.

"*Ya* Allah!" shrieked Jabran in despair. "You can hear it all over the quarter."

"Call the guard, fool!" counselled one at his side. "Hand the captain a heavy purse. And *their* hides will pay."

With enough trials, the wildest shooting will finally find its mark. Just as the sultan and Ali Agha had cut their way to within reach of the door, a heavy brazen coffee mortar hurled from the rear crashed down on the Albanian's head. He dropped in his tracks. The enemy closed in on the survivor. For all his deadly swift sword-play, knives raked and stabbed Shams ud Din, and staves belabored him. Alone, he could cut his way to the door; but the handicap of a disabled comrade was too much even for that seasoned fighter.

NUREDDIN was standing in the shadow of the tavern across the narrow street from Jabran's. Jabran dared not fail him; and he patiently awaited the extinction of Shams ud Din and the Albanian at the hands of the cutthroats of the wine-shop.

He heard the muffled roar of pistol fire. And then the clamor of combat came through the heavy doors of the wine-shop. Nureddin tried to picture the one-sided battle.

"*Wallah!* They can't last long in that madhouse!" he exulted. "Not even that pair!"

But if they did cut their way out—Nureddin's heart stood still, and his blood froze at the thought of the story Jabran would tell when the terrific wrath of

Shams ud Din seared him. He cursed his failure, damned the green-eyed girl whose witchery had persuaded him to hunt the old gray wolf. He wondered during one dreadful instant when he heard the great voice of Shams ud Din full above the tumult whether he could still save himself by mounting and riding break-neck across the border. Then he checked himself: for Jabran's remarks would get no more attention than those of any other wretch in the hands of the executioners.

His courage returned. Even those two grim slayers could not escape from the hands of the scum of the town, for they were fighting for their own lives.

Then Nureddin heard the tread of troops advancing at the double time: a detachment of the guard. In an instant they were upon him. Flight would arouse suspicion; they would shoot him down before they recognized his rank. With a supreme effort, Nureddin collected his wits and his effrontery.

"Ho, there, captain! What's the trouble?"

"Probably some drunken Kurds, my lord," replied the captain. And then, as he beat on the door, "Open, in the name of the sultan!"

Without waiting for a reply, the front rank assaulted the door with the butts of their rifles; and then splintered it with rifle fire. Nureddin, standing to one side, watched the guard pour into the wine-shop. He stood rooted to the ground, numb with the horrible fascination of the sight: Shams ud Din, behind a flaming hedge of steel that sheared and slew, parrying, leaping, flailing death.

The guard charged in to quell the riot.

"Take these dogs and impale them right away!" thundered Shams ud Din, as he crouched behind his blade. "Every last one of them, captain!"

"And who are you?" demanded the commander of the guard.

At those words, Nureddin's head cleared, and the horror left him.

"Praise God! And no wonder they don't recognize him!"

"Who am I?" said Shams ud Din, lowering his sword. "God, by God, by the One True God——"

He choked for an instant at that outrageous question. And then, "I'm the sultan, and I'll have your head if you don't round up this offal and impale them within the hour!"

Jabran, green with fright and misery, snatched at his last hope.

"This madman said he was the sultan, and began slashing right and left! Look what he did——"

He indicated the gory trail of the dancing blades of Shams ud Din and his stout companion.

"We fought for our lives ever since I sent for the guard!"

"Son of a flat-nosed mother!" roared Shams ud Din, "flay this dog alive here and now!"

The captain grinned indulgently. Mad or not, this was a fighting man to have cut down so many of those ruffians.

"Very well, my lord," he agreed. "Put up your sword, and I'll tend to him right away."

"Dog of a Persian!" flared Shams ud Din. "You pretend you don't know me?"

The captain ducked just in time to evade the sultan's leaping blade. But the sultan did not duck the rifle butt that a soldier swung to his head.

Then Nureddin saw his salvation. Here was victory snatched from utter ruin.

"The town is full of sultans," he remarked. "Looks like the same one they threw into jail this morning."

"Impossible, my lord," replied the

commander of the guard. "He couldn't possibly escape."

"Look at him!" commanded Nureddin.

The captain stared for a moment at Shams ud Din, stretched out beside his comrade at arms.

"There is no God but God!" he exclaimed. "The very same fellow. He'll not escape this time, my lord. Looks like the redbeard is dead."

"*Aywah!*" assented Nureddin, kicking the remains of Ali Agha. "Clean him up with the rest of the refuse. And never mind about making a report of this skirmish, captain. My uncle's temper is never improved by tales of sultans running around this way. Particularly since this fellow escaped right under your nose after you had him caged."

"Quite right, my lord," agreed the commander of the guard, seeing the point at once. "Never a word of it."

Whereupon Nureddin set out at once to have Mahjoub the Darwish taken from the subterranean prison vaults into which Shams ud Din was to be flung. To make a convincing sultan of a darwish by sunrise would be a full night's work, reflected Nureddin; and while the sentries would pay no attention to Shams ud Din except to kick him soundly when his ragings became too noisy, the presence of two claimants to a throne, both in the same prison, might lead to complications.

THERE was but one whose services were indispensable to Nureddin's success in putting the puppet sultan through his paces: and that one was Zayd, the chief *wazir*. Shams ud Din's remarks to his cup companion that night, apropos of beheading the prime minister as a means of putting confusion into the hearts of whatever conspirators were lurking about court, gave Nureddin the key to the situation; and thus he made a swift, thorough, and successful search which resulted in his finding the unsigned warrant for the *wazir's* execution the following morning.

"My uncle the sultan," began Nureddin suavely, "is seriously ill, and for the time being he has delegated his authority to me. Now among his papers I found this——"

Nureddin presented the warrant, continuing, "But as far as I am concerned, I wouldn't consider affixing the signet of my esteemed uncle to this interesting document. I assume, of course, that you will give me the same wise counsel and faithful administration of details that you accorded him."

The *wazir* glanced at the signet that adorned Nureddin's finger, and without any inquiry as to details, made an instant decision.

"By Allah, my lord, I am at your service!" he assured.

"Rare good judgment, *ya* Zayd!" approved Nureddin. "For in spite of the low value my uncle set on your services, I may be able to persuade him to change his opinion."

Nureddin found Mahjoub the darwish an apt pupil. The quick wits of the darwish, accustomed to shifting from self-styled saint to mountebank, scholar, or scoundrel-at-large at a moment's notice, were equal to the unusual rôle of substitute sultan. During the weeks in which he stayed in strict seclusion, taking advantage of the reputed illness of Shams ud Din to enable him to practise the gestures and mannerisms of the true sultan, he was able to avoid contacts of any kind whatever. And at the end of that stage, he received certain officers of the court, but remaining behind a screen, and confining his remarks to bare essentials.

"Perfect!" approved Nureddin one day, after witnessing such a reception.

"By Allah and again, by Allah! How will *they* know, when I can hardly tell the difference? Tomorrow you will hold court in the throne room——"

"So be it," agreed Mahjoub. "Only, some one may discover the imposture, and then——"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Nureddin. "A king is a presence, a symbol, and not at all a person, except to those few who in the old days rode boot to boot with him when he took the field and led his raids in person. Those who might have been dangerous have been sent on embassies, and some of the older captains have been sent to patrol the border with the Companions.

"*Wallah!* You are the favored of Allah!" concluded Nureddin. "For the madness you chanted as you sat in the dust at the Herati Gate has indeed come true. Therefore be of good cheer, and be truly a king."

And Mahjoub played his part with a masterly touch possible only to one who enjoys his rôle and is secure in the knowledge of his own ability. Still, it was disconcerting to have two soldiers standing behind his rug with drawn swords to guard his back while at prayer. And picking two or three dishes at random from an assortment of fifty or sixty that came, all securely sealed, from the palace kitchen—a precaution to make the administration of poison more difficult — took the savor from the royal fare, and made it a poor second to the alternate feast and famine of a darwish.

But Mahjoub the sultan had one friend in all that splendor that rested on sword-points and rifle muzzles. That one was old Habib the gardener, who for ever pruned the rose trees that Shams ud Din loved so well, and clipped the faultlessly trimmed hedges that quartered the expanse of tiny streams and fountains of the inner courtyard of the palace: grizzled old Habib who like Mahjoub came from the hills and was one of Mahjoub's own people. And certainly such a position at court would be infinitely preferable to being sultan, for Habib prayed without drawn blades at his back, and was concerned with no decapitations other than of hedges.

In every way the bent old fellow was admirable; and after his years of wandering as a darwish, Mahjoub took infinite pleasure in the brusk uncouth speech of the mountaineer, and in the reverence that transfigured Habib's wrinkled features as he made passing reference to that fierce old slayer, the father of Shams ud Din, and the heroic savagery of the Companions.

NUREDDIN had entirely overlooked Habib in his proscription of those who knew Shams ud Din too well. He had instructed Mahjoub to remember the roses of Shiraz that the sultan cultivated when not engaged in drinking, raiding, or wrangling with the ambassadors of Yakoub Khan. But Nureddin had forgotten that there was a favorite tree which Shams ud Din had cultivated with his own hands; and thus it was that for a passing instant Mahjoub's keen darwish wit was not quick enough to hide from Habib that it was not Shams ud Din who was inspecting the roses of Shiraz.

Habib knew; and Mahjoub knew that he knew.

"Very good, Habib," said Mahjoub, aloud, as he regarded the tree; and then in a low voice, "The Companions have just been ordered into an ambush out there on the border, and they're riding to their death. I'm a prisoner and I can't warn them. Their fate is in your hands, O gardener! So serve the Companions once more if it costs your life!"

The old man muttered inarticulately; but Mahjoub caught the fierce gleam in his eyes, and was content.

The next day, toward sunset, Mahjoub walked again through the gardens. Habib, absorbed in his work, did not perceive the approach of the sultan until Mahjoub was almost upon him. Startled, the old man leaped to his feet, glittering shears clutched in his hand.

The salaam to the sultan was never completed.

The ever watchful escort, in their turn startled by the swift appearance and the flash of steel, levelled and fired their rifles. Habib dropped, riddled by the fusillade.

Mahjoub remembered the conversation of the previous day, and wondered if the soldiers had been truly startled, or if they had acted on orders from the power behind the throne when they tore the old gardener to ribbons with a volley at short range. And lacking means of forming any decision, Mahjoub that night donned a light, tough shirt of mail, and ate corn parched with his own hands: for the glamor and witchery of kingship had not entirely blinded the darwish.

DURING the time that had passed since Nureddin's *coup d'état* had elevated a darwish to the throne, deftly arranged embassies, and disappearances of the sultan's intimates had been so skilfully devised that there was no one left at court who could by the wildest flight of fancy imagine that it was not Shams ud Din himself who dispensed justice and received petitions in the throne room. Yet for all their security, Nureddin and the girl from Tcherkess were not entirely at their ease.

"Almost-a-king," murmured Lailat with just a shade of unnecessary sweetness, "the old gray wolf may die of old age, down there in that dungeon. And he may outlive all of us. . . ."

"Nonsense!" scoffed Nureddin. "His ragings don't even amuse the jailer and the prisoners. He's as firmly established as a madman as the darwish is as sultan."

"Still," persisted the girl, "he's still alive . . . that father of many little pigs, making me the slave of a slave. . . . *Ya* Nureddin, you know I've not asked you any favors so far. . . . I was thinking of telling you what I thought of Djénane Hanoum, but really one shouldn't be spiteful. Anyway, I simply can't sleep nights for thinking of what would happen if he *did* get away——"

"By Allah!" assured Nureddin. "I'm sure I can take care of that."

"Of course you can," agreed Lailat as she discarded a bracelet of uncut emeralds in favor of red gold set with cool sapphires. "But I do wish you'd do something about it. Nureddin, I've made you a king, and the only favor I've asked so far is your uncle's head. I'd be ever so much more at ease——"

"You don't know this Shams ud Din," countered Nureddin.

"O, don't I?" murmured Lailat, as her eyebrows rose in saracenic arches. "Really, Nureddin, you *are* naive. . . ."

Nureddin then and there began to see a trace of reason in Lailat's whim for his uncle's head. Still, reason ought to prevail over a passing fancy of a red-haired girl.

"He's killed a dozen assassins with his own hands already. It's written that no assassin shall kill him—I myself had his life in my hands twice in one night, and each time he escaped—and whoever seeks my uncle's life is seeking his own instead. Let him rage in his cell. Keep him in prison, and he will soon become a madman indeed, as mad as they now think he is."

"But didn't you say the Companions will soon return?" queried Lailat, shifting the angle of her attack.

"On the way back they'll fall into an ambush. None of them will live to return and recognize Mahjoub as an impostor. And anyway, I've sent a messenger to Yakoub Khan to ask him for a regiment of troops that I can depend on in case we should have trouble."

"That *was* clever! You do seem to think of everything!" admitted the girl from Tcherkess. "So you might humor my whim about Shams ud Din. I know him too. He's subtle and clever as Satan the Damned, and I can't sleep nights for thinking that he might get out of his cell. So do give me his head, Nureddin. . . ."

Nureddin sighed wearily.

"I betake me to Allah for refuge from Satan! Have it your own way. I'll send Hassan and Mansur to take his head this very night."

Lailat clapped her hands delightedly.

"Oh, Nureddin, you can't imagine how relieved I am. You'll call Mansur and Hassan right away, won't you?"

"Mansur and Hassan and a detachment of troops," amended Nureddin. "Shams ud Din would tear those two slaves to pieces with his bare hands."

Then he smote a gong, and while awaiting the arrival of a messenger, he basked in the sea-green sorcery of Lailat's smiling eyes, and agreed he'd done quite well in suggesting the decapitation of Shams ud Din.

SHAMS UD DIN sat on the floor of his cell, watching a patch of moonlight filtering through the barred cleft far above him, and marching slowly across the floor.

"Night and the desert and the horses know me. . . ." he quoted, as those fugitive moonbeams reminded him of the blue-white glare and the blue-black shadows of nights in the Nefoud. "But they will soon forget me. Even as I myself will in the end forget that I am Shams ud Din the son of Zenghi. God, by God, by the Very God! Blacken my face if ever again I imprison another man, though he be my worst enemy."

Then he heard the tramp of men marching down the corridor toward his cell, far from the cage in which minor offenders were herded. Out of the blackness came a glow of torches, revealing a detachment of soldiers, followed by Mansur and Hassan, those black envoys of the dark angel who had so often used sword and cord to execute the sentences of Shams ud Din. Now they sought him to slay him in his cage. Well, let them take his head, and Satan fly away with the vanity of kings, and its many-decked parasols, and resplendent captains; let the glittering jest end in a dungeon instead of a battlefield.

And then the savage blood of the house of Zenghi boiled and fumed in his veins. He noted the number of the detachment of soldiers, and reckoned the hopeless odds. Hopeless if he were armed; and with empty hands—yet one could still slay with empty hands. . . .

As the door of his cell clanged open, Shams ud Din glanced again toward the barred cleft high above his head, then stepped into the patch of light to confront the headsmen and the soldiers.

"Son of a disease? Why do you disturb me at this hour?" he demanded of the *dah-bashi* who commanded the platoon.

The *dah-bashi* recoiled before that consuming wrath, then remembered that this was but a madman whose life the sultan for some odd fancy desired.

"We have come to take your head," he replied.

Shams ud Din smiled as at one of his cup companions.

"Neither you nor any man can take my head unless it so please Allah! But first of all, let me pray."

"Granted," agreed the *dah-bashi.*

Shams ud Din flicked the tattered rags he wore, and spat disgustedly.

"*Ya* Allah! I haven't any prayer rug, and this filthy rag——"

"Maqsoud," commanded the *dah-bashi,* "give him your cloak, so we can get this over with, or Nureddin will have our heads."

"Nureddin," said the sultan to himself, as the soldier passed his rifle to his right rank, removed his cloak, and flung it to the floor. "Who else but Nureddin devised this? . . ."

A moment before, Shams ud Din had wondered how many he could slay with his bare hands before they overcame him and hacked him to pieces in his cell; but now his wrath had a personal object, and there was a vengeance to obtain before he died.

He took his position on the soldier's cloak. The headsmen leaned on the hilts of their great two-handed swords. The soldiers stood in column, their rifles at the order, and their minds far away from what was only another bit of routine: another execution.

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" began Shams ud Din, intoning the sonorous first chapter of the Koran. "Praise be to Allah, lord of the two worlds!"

But beneath the mask of prayer, his mind spoke otherwise. He had paced his cage, and stretched and flexed his muscles, trying them daily against the bars of his cage; and now he wondered whether imprisonment had softened his sinews and dulled the agility that had made him death and terror in hand-to-hand fighting in the old days of border warfare. Vengeance keyed him to a pitch that the joy of battle had never reached; vengeance more precious than life itself.

As he prayed, Shams ud Din groped with his toes for the edge of the paving-block that projected slightly above its fellows. And he found it, that block that he had so often and vainly sought to dislodge and use as a weapon. It was at the best only slim support, but still, a starting-point.

The *dah-bashi* and his men waited for the madman to complete his prayer, and thought of the gaming and quarreling and drinking of *'araki* that awaited them on their return to barracks.

SHAMS UD DIN raised his bowed head from the outspread cloak. But instead of rising to his knees, the next posture of prayer, he flashed forward like a beast of prey, catching the *dah-bashi* about the knees and bearing him to the floor. And before the soldiers could collect their wits and crush that incredible assault, Shams ud Din drew the *dah-bashi's* curved knife, ripping the first of the enemy wide open with an upward stroke.

Then came a confusion of men and arms. They hacked and slashed and struck with knife and rifle-butt at the madman whose attack had caught them flat-footed; but instead of seeking to rise, Shams ud Din remained crouched, thrusting, stabbing, hamstringing, and disembowelling. The enemy's blood drenched him, and mingled with his own. They dared not fire into the *mêlée.* They struck into the thick of the mass at whose bottom their victim was, but for each cut that reached Shams ud Din, a dozen missed him and maimed his assailants. Shams ud Din went through the heap like fire through a train of powder. With his knees and feet he struck, with his knife

he cut and thrust, and when his teeth met a throat, they closed fiercely. The taste of blood gave him new courage. He growled exultantly, and slashed anew.

Yet the sheer weight of the assault finally crushed him flat against the floor. He was drained of blood by a score of stabs and glancing cuts. A rifle-butt found its way into the heap and struck his knife from his grasp. For one long, despair-laden instant he groped; and then his fingers closed on the hilt of the two-handed sword dropped by a headsman. He ceased struggling; and the enemy, thinking him finally overpowered, sought to untangle themselves. And as Shams ud Din was relieved of the full weight of the enemy, he emerged from the heap with a mighty leap, shook himself free, and leaped into the clear.

"Dogs and sons of dogs!" he roared, as he whirled the great blade in a flailing sweep that sheared from shoulder to hip wherever it bit, "who will take the head of Shams ud Din?"

Leaping, striking, weaving in and out like a wolf at bay cutting to pieces a pack of hounds, he slew until he was drunk with slaughter. The survivors dared not stoop to pick up their rifles to end the frenzied killer with a bullet. Several had already fled in terror; and panic-stricken by the inhuman rage and dancing blade of Shams ud Din, the rest followed. After them came the slayer, striking as he pursued with great bounding strides.

Shams ud Din paused to cut down a sentry at the entrance of the prison. The momentary interruption of the chase cleared his mind of its red haze. He couldn't kill them all. Some would escape and give the alarm. The thing to do was to take cover, steal a horse, and ride for the hills.

And there, tethered to a ring in the wall at the farther side of the courtyard, was the horse he needed. Life, and vengeance!

"El hamdu lilahi!" he gasped in grateful wonder at that gift of providence, as he started across the broad area. And then he halted.

Coming across the courtyard, just clearing the gateway, was a detachment of the guard led by the officer of the day. The great wrath had left him when he ceased slaying, and Shams ud Din knew that he could not cut his way through such odds. The first to escape from the slaughter in the dungeon had spread the alarm. The guard would shoot him down as he stood there.

THE captain's command rang clear. The guard halted. The cold, full moonlight played on bare steel and levelled rifles. Death was about to pour out of their gaping muzzles.

Shams ud Din dashed his blade to the paving.

"Ho, there, Mamoun!" he shouted. "Steady! Hold your fire!"

The captain started at that calm, commanding voice, and looked about. Only one man faced the guard, and he was empty-handed.

"Mamoun, answer me a riddle," proposed Shams ud Din as he advanced to meet the captain. "What is stranger than a dish of cucumbers stuffed with pearls? Do you remember the night before we sacked Kubbat al Ahhmar? Think, Mamoun!"

Shams ud Din smiled, and wiped the blood from his lips, and the sweat from his forehead.

"There is neither might nor majesty save in Allah, the Great, the Glorious!" exclaimed the captain, staring in wonder at that gory wreck of a man who was saying what only the sultan could have known and spoken. "By your life and by your

head, *ya malik!* I remember the story, the riddle, and the answer. But where is the riot, my lord?"

"The answer is different this time, Mamoun. Listen: Cucumbers stuffed with pearls are not as strange as Shams ud Din flung into jail as a madman. Your guard will be my army with which I will regain my throne——"

"Regain your throne?" marvelled the captain. "But, my lord, I saw you not two hours ago in the *majlis*——"

"What? Saw *me?*" demanded Shams ud Din.

"Yes, by Allah and again, by Allah! In your private reception hall, with Nureddin, your nephew. Either you, or an *efrit* that resembled you."

"Nureddin, that father of many pigs?" raged Shams ud Din. "But *efrit* or Satan himself who masquerades in my place—will you follow me to regain my throne, or to be hacked to pieces in the side streets of this madhouse of a city?"

"To the death and to the uttermost, *ya malik!*" replied the captain. "But better work stealthily, my lord. Nureddin and that evil spirit, or whoever or whatever it is that resembles you as one grain of sand resembles another, have done their work well. The Companions are on the border. And most of the captains of the garrison are newly commissioned friends of Nureddin."

"No matter, Mamoun. Release and arm all the prisoners. Freedom and a purse of gold to each who survives this night's work. Recall the relief now on post, and the one at the guard house. Then go to barracks and get as many of the captains on our side as you can. Nureddin may have left one or two at least.

"In the meanwhile we'll set fire to the bazar and start the loafers and caravan guards from the taverns to looting. Then as the troops turn out from barracks to stop the rioting, we'll catch them from the flank. And taking them by surprize, we can cut right through them, clean out the palace, and dispose of Nureddin."

"We'll have to work fast, my lord," replied the captain. "Nureddin has sent for a regiment of Yakoub Khan's troops, and they're expected any time now. But how——"

"All the better!" exclaimed Shams ud Din. "Things aren't going so well with Nureddin and the impostor, or he'd not have sent to Yakoub Khan for reinforcements. So go to barracks and get busy."

Whereat Shams ud Din called the guard to attention, and marched them toward the bazar. A squad remained behind to liberate and arm the prisoners.

NUREDDIN and the red-haired girl from Tcherkess sat on the roof of the palace. Near by stood an attendant with a lance-shaft on which to raise the head of Shams ud Din when the executioners brought it from the dungeon.

"*Ya* Allah!" muttered Nureddin. "How long does it take those children of Satan the Damned to behead my uncle?"

"Don't be impatient," chided Lailat. "They'll bring you the head of the old gray wolf, and then you'll be sultan indeed. Sultan openly, with Yakoub Khan's troops to support you, and the head of Shams ud Din greeting the morning from that lance-shaft."

"I hope this brilliant idea works out that way. But if some soldier recognizes him—some fellow who served with him in the field—Shaytan rip me open, but what's that?"

"Sounds like shouting and firing in the neighborhood of the bazar," replied the red-haired girl.

From the roof of the palace they saw tall flames rising from the bazar, and

heard the shouting of looters, and ragged, crackling bursts of rifle and pistol fire.

"*Wallahi!* Those drunken caravan guards are at it again!" exclaimed Nureddin as he seized a mallet and smote the brazen gong at his side. "You'd better leave the roof before the riot works its way over here."

Even as he spoke, a stray bullet spattered him with bits of stone from the parapet as it ricocheted and whined shrilly on its way. He turned to the orderly who approached in response to the clang of the gong.

"Run over to the barracks, Abbas!" commanded Nureddin. "Tell the *sarhang* to turn out two or three companies and stop that riot."

But before the orderly could acknowledge the order, a captain stepped forward, halted, and saluted Nureddin.

"*Sidi,*" he reported, "the *sarhang* commands me to tell your highness that three companies are on the way to quell the disturbance. There they go now, my lord."

The captain indicated the barracks at the opposite angle of the square that faced the palace. The first company broke up into detachments to facilitate their progress through the network of narrow alleys that led to the bazar. The two following kept in solid formation, taking the longer route by way of a broad avenue.

"Very good, captain," acknowledged Nureddin. "They'll clean up that mess in a hurry—Allah and again, by Allah! Where did that company come from?"

"Probably a fourth company the *sarhang* sent out——" began the captain.

"I take refuge from Satan!" gasped Nureddin. "They're shooting at each other! Look! They're joining the rioters! And those two companies are scattering. God, by God, by the very God! And there's Mamoun on horse, directing the attack. The whole guard is revolting."

By the ever-increasing glare of the flames they could see the ambushed troops from the barracks breaking under the hail of lead that poured in from every side. And then the roar and rattle of musketry died down as the fighting became hand to hand. The looters in the bazar joined forces with those who had attacked the regulars from the flank, and foot by foot forced them back toward their barracks and the square before the palace.

"Who's that beside Mamoun?" demanded Nureddin. "*He's* leading the attack. Look at him! Riding my uncle's white horse."

A sudden gust of wind fanned the flames to the brightness of day.

"Tell the *sarhang* to turn out every man in barracks!" commanded Nureddin. And then, as the captain turned to leave: "*Ya* Allah! Shams ud Din himself! Slaying mad, cutting them down like wheat. Satan fly away with that red-haired wench and her brilliant ideas! Shams ud Din loose and raging!"

The regulars were falling back as fast as they could toward the palace and barracks. Their retreat was hampered by the remaining companies of the garrison, turned out too late to be of assistance in subduing the riot. The square was a milling confusion of slaughter. High above the clash of arms and the shouting came the great voice of Shams ud Din as he forced his white stallion, now red with blood, full into the pack, urging his motley rabble to the assault. And drunk with slaughter, fired by the presence of their leader, they pressed on his heels, slaying and shouting.

A platoon of the retreating garrison had fallen back to the palace, and taken a position along the parapet.

"A thousand *tomans* to the man who drops that fellow on the white horse!" shouted Nureddin.

But their fire did more damage to their fellows in the square than to the frenzied slayers that followed the sultan and Mamoun.

Numbers, however, in the end favored Nureddin's troops, and, as they retreated, they resumed their formation in some semblance of order. The captains of the rear companies had appraised the situation, and were withdrawing behind the massive walls of the barracks, giving the survivors of the first wave a chance to make an orderly retreat to the palace, whose bullet-marked walls testified to its sturdiness as a citadel.

"*Ya* Zenghi! *Ya* Zenghi!" shouted stout Mamoun, as he saw the odds shifting.

Shams ud Din wheeled his red steed, hacked his way through the press, and joined his captain.

"Crowd them, Mamoun! Whoever gets behind those walls is worth ten of us in the open. Push them, or we are lost—and what will be stranger than a cucumber stuffed with pearls?"

"Look, *sidi!*" yelled Mamoun exultantly. "The day is ours! The Companions are returning!"

By the full glare of the flames they saw Shaykh Ahmad, sword drawn, white beard streaming, charging through the Herati Gate. At his heels followed the Companions, hacked, battered, and dusty. As they cleared the gate, the column deployed into line and swept across the square. Their curved blades bloomed like red flowers of slaughter as they closed in with Nureddin's troops.

AS THE shock of the assault spent itself on the freshly formed line of the enemy, and the charge broke up into individual engagements, Shaykh Ahmad slashed his way along the ragged line and reined in his horse at the sultan's side.

"You have saved the day, *ya Shaykh!*" yelled Shams ud Din above the clamor of men and crackle of musketry. "Reform your men, and drive through! Once more and we'll have them!"

"There is no God but God!" gasped Shaykh Ahmad. "We are dead men, and we came back to die with you!"

"What? What's this?" demanded Shams ud Din. "Dead men?"

"*Aywah!*" assented the old man. "A regiment of Yakoub Khan's troops has been on our heels ever since we crossed the border. We barely got out of an ambush. We returned to warn you. Listen, *sidi*——"

Above the clash and roar of battle, they heard the steady drumming of horses' hoofs.

"They'll be here in a few minutes, my lord," continued Shaykh Ahmad. "And we will die with you."

"No man can meet his doom until it pleases Allah!" retorted Shams ud Din. "Charge again, *ya Shaykh!* Ho, there, Mamoun! Halt your rabble, tear up paving-blocks and throw up barricades. Ayyub, take six men to the guard house and round up all the ammunition you can. Quick about it, Shaytan blacken you!"

And Shams ud Din, blade in hand, rode up and down the line, urging the surviving handful of the guard into line with the Companions, while the liberated prisoners, caravan guards, and riffraff of the wine-shops threw up a barricade.

The thunder of horses' hoofs shook the ground beneath their feet. And then came the roll of kettle-drums. A column of horsemen was galloping through the Herati Gate, and a second through Dervâzeh-i-Suleimani. They were converging on the fire and steel swept square.

Shams ud Din turned to Mamoun, who was herding his rabble into the assault again.

"*Wallahi!*" growled the sultan, "I'll at least not die by the hands of the executioner! And here come Yakoub Khan's troops, summoned over my own seal——"

Shams ud Din reeled in his saddle.

"Just a scratch, Mamoun—there's no throne like a saddle."

He wheeled his horse, saying as he did so, "Let's charge them, Mamoun, you and I. The Old Tiger my father would have done so."

From the parapet of the palace came the deep brazen clang of a gong. Mamoun seized the sultan's reins.

"Steady there, *sidi!*" he yelled. "Those fellows aren't going to charge. And Nureddin is calling for a parley."

Yakoub Khan's troops had reined their horses in to a walk.

As Mamoun spoke, the gong rolled again; and as its sonorous note died, Nureddin appeared on the parapet of the palace.

"Men of Bir el Asad, a madman has led you against your lord the sultan, Shams ud Din," he began. "Deliver him into my hands before he leads you to your death. Lay down your arms, and let me deal with him, while you leave unharmed."

"Son of a pig!" yelled one of the Companions. "Let Shams ud Din appear beside you, and we will believe."

"Shams ud Din is with us, O Father of the Double Tongue!" shouted another.

The group of officers behind Nureddin parted, and into the full glare of the burning quarter stepped Mahjoub the Darwish, resplendent and glittering.

"Here is Shams ud Din, the Sultan, madmen!" resumed Nureddin. "See him and believe. You are outnumbered and surrounded. At the best you can only die with that crack-brain you call Shams ud Din. Him you can not save. Save yourselves——"

"Shaytan rip you open!" roared Shaykh Ahmad from among the Companions. "Our chief is Shams ud Din, and we will ride with him to the finish."

"He is our father and our grandfather!" shouted another.

Shams ud Din spurred his horse forward.

"I am the son of Zenghi, the son of the Tiger, and that impostor beside you is a devil who has taken my form. Nureddin, Allah curse you, I will surrender if you swear that these men of mine go safe and harmless."

He wheeled his horse about and faced his men.

"Lay down your arms, O crack-brains who would ride to your death with me. It is vain for you to die with the forgotten of God. I will not have your blood on my head, you white-haired bandits who served my father."

Shams ud Din turned in the saddle, slumped, then sat erect.

"Nureddin, swear thrice by the great name of Allah that these men go safe and harmless, then do with me as you please."

The silence was broken only by the crackling flames of the bazar.

SHAMS UD DIN'S men had cooled from the frenzy of battle. The ring of steel that surrounded them gleamed thirstily in the red glow of the fire. They had fought in vain. Their chief, blood-drenched, broken, and slashed with a score of swords, had resigned himself to the will of Allah. They flinched before the rifle muzzles that stared at them from the parapet of the palace, and from the enemy holding the barracks. They edged to one side to avoid the volley that was ordained for Shams ud Din.

The sultan flung his red blade clatter-

ing to the paving, dismounted, and turned to face Nureddin.

"Swear, O Nureddin, that they will go in peace, and do with me as you please." And then to Mamoun, who had advanced to his side, "Thou too, thou hungry wolf, go and think of cucumbers stuffed with pearls! Abandon the forgotten of Allah."

Nureddin advanced a pace, and began solemnly to intone the triple oath:

"Wa-llahi-l-azeem! Wa-llahi-l-azeem! Wa——"

A woman's shrill cry interrupted the sonorous oath that was about to attest for the third time the greatness of Allah. A veiled woman had dashed out from a side door of the palace and halted before Shams ud Din.

"Fools!" she screamed, tearing aside her veil and long cloak. "Which of the two is most a king?"

Her hair gleamed with a red-gold fire in the glare of the blazing quarter, and her jewelled bracelets and tall curious head-dress flashed in the lurid glow. Those on the wall and those drawn up in the square stared at the loveliness of Lailat, whose white limbs and shapely form smiled warmly through the gauze that curled about her like a wisp of smoke.

"Men of Yakoub Khan," she said, addressing the officers at the head of the column, "which of these is a king?"

She pointed toward Mahjoub on the parapet.

"Would Shams ud Din hide in his house and let another direct the defense? Who is reddest with the blood of battle, that impostor on the wall, or this man hacked from head to foot?"

A murmuring and a muttering rose from all sides. Steel flashed. The commander of Yakoub Khan's troops was advancing toward Shams ud Din.

One move, and only one, for Nureddin.

"Fire!" he commanded. "Fire, and Shaytan take the wench!"

But instead of firing, the soldiers along the parapet leaped to their feet.

"*Ya* Zenghi! *Ya* Zenghi!" they yelled.

Above the roar of acclamation, Shams ud Din shouted, "Take him alive, and that impostor also!"

Then, to the red-haired girl, "Lailat, you should hate me instead——"

"Allah blacken you, Shams ud Din," replied the girl as she folded her cloak about her, and raised her veil. "I hate you to the death."

Shams ud Din smiled, and turned to the commander of Yakoub Khan's troops.

"The peace upon you, *ya sarhang!* It seems that I won't need your services after all." And then, "Ho, there, Mamoun! Round up this rabble and lead them to the audience hall."

SHAMS UD DIN sat once more in the throne room he had never expected to see again. Clustered about the dais were the white-bearded Companions, and the survivors of Mamoun's guard, and rabble and scum of the town that had fought shoulder to shoulder with their sultan.

A detachment of soldiers escorted three prisoners into the presence: Nureddin, followed by Mahjoub the Darwish, and the red-haired girl from Tcherkess.

Nureddin knew full well the futility of begging mercy of that iron man, his uncle.

"Do with me as you please, *ya malik,*" he said defiantly. "That red-haired wench from Tcherkess used me to spite you, and then she delivered me into your hands. And I have become as a bird without feathers."

"Used you to spite me, Nureddin?" murmured the sultan, smiling whimsically. "Son of my worthless brother, did she ask you to do anything you had never be-

fore dreamed of doing? I might have your hide peeled from your body, here and now. I might feed you molten lead, or have you skilfully torn asunder so that you would be days in dying. But I exalt the great name of Allah, and bear you no malice. . . ."

The sultan made a gesture.

For just an instant Nureddin stood unflinching to face the whirlwind of steel that the gesture had loosed; only an instant, for the white-haired Companions leaped as they drew their swords, and struck as they leaped. And then they retreated, wiping their simitars.

The girl from Tcherkess suddenly eluded her escort, and stopping short of what a moment ago had been Nureddin, threw aside her veil.

"Lailat," said the sultan, smiling again, "you sold me into the hands of my brother's son. And then you stepped between me and the firing-squad to save me. Why?"

The girl met his smile with a smile.

"Old gray wolf," she said, "you gave me to be the slave of a slave. But when you offered your life for the lives of those old hounds of the hills, and that scum of the bazar, my spite failed me, and I spoke. Let them do to me as they did to Nureddin."

The sultan looked past Lailat, and at Mahjoub the Darwish. Then he regarded those who had thrown him into prison, and saw that they wondered which of the two they had flogged as a madman.

"Darwish," said Shams ud Din at last, "it pleased Allah that we two should be as alike as two drops of rain. The Old Tiger my father looted and sacked many cities, and their women served his pleasure: and thus it may be that you and I are brothers, both sons of the Tiger. Therefore take oath never to enter the city again. And also take my blessing, a thousand *tomans*, and an escort to the border."

The darwish bowed, but before he could withdraw from the Presence, the sultan spoke again, this time to Lailat: "Since you think so little of the house of Zenghi as to sell my nephew and me into each other's hands, go with this darwish, and be that your reward and your punishment."

The ancient Companions stared enviously at Mahjoub as he left the throne room, followed by Lailat. And Shams ud Din sat on his throne, sourly smiling his challenge to the survivors of that grasping, plotting clan of Zenghi.

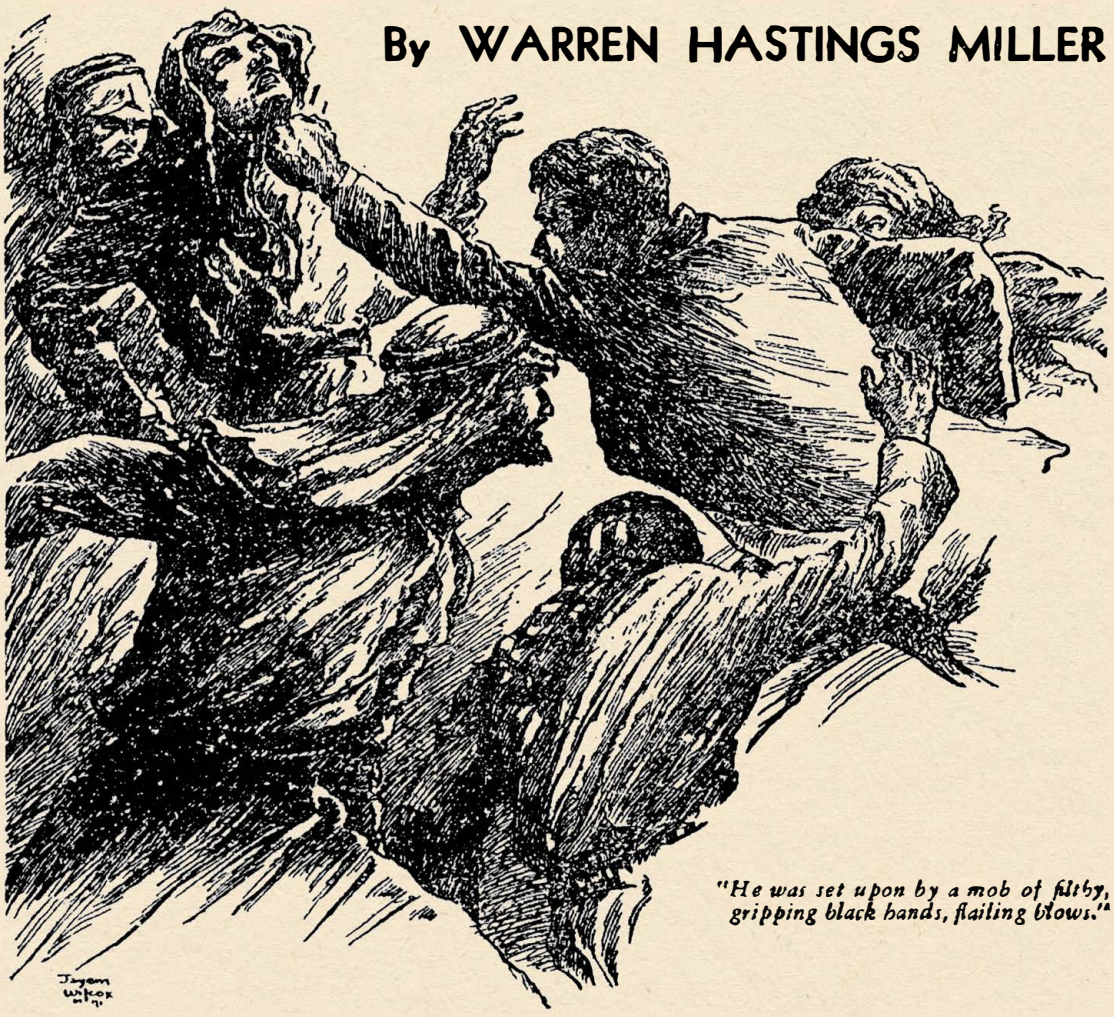
Would but the Desert of the Fountain yield
One glimpse—if dimly, yet indeed, reveal'd,
  To which the fainting Traveller might spring,
As springs the trampled herbage of the field!

Would but some winged Angel ere too late
Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,
  And make the stern Recorder otherwise
Enregister, or quite obliterate!

—*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam.*

The Samaritan

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER



"He was set upon by a mob of filthy, gripping black hands, flailing blows."

The story of a young ship's officer who tried to help an American girl in the souks of Tunis, and plunged into a wild and dangerous adventure

"ALL right, you can go ashore, Adams. . . . But I warn you; you get logged D. & D. once more, you're out, finished, see? The captain won't stand for it. You want to keep out of them places ashore."

"O. K., sir." George did not care to multiply words with old Josiah Turkle, first mate of the *S.S. Coronado.* He left the bridge with a salute and the parting assurance: "I'll be back to take over before twelve, sir."

"You'd better!" snapped the first after him.

George shrugged. He was second officer of the *Coronado,* a big iron-decked freighter of the Shipping Board, now moored to the quay in the port of Tunis. The first was one of those sanctimonious and sternly upright individuals whom

the devil seems to select as his own proper instruments for heaping monstrous injustice upon ambitious and straight-going young officers. His animosity toward George had its roots in nothing more than the mean hope of advancement for a young relative of his on board, a cadet officer of the line. If George was "broke," the third moved up in his place and the cadet would be promoted to third, there being a vacancy.

It surely was dog eat dog in the merchant service, George thought with some bitterness as he picked his way along the dark quays and emerged on the long, tree-shaded avenue of the Boulevard Jules Féry that led to town. He understood perfectly well what the hypocritical old devil was driving at in all this, though Turkle camouflaged it under an impeccable righteousness and an abhorrence of "likker", shore parties, and those works of Satan, "them places." George had never been near one. He was a pretty straight kid, as young officers go. He was bound now for the *souks* of Tunis with the entirely harmless intention of buying silks for his mother and sister. The trouble was that he had been logged twice already on this voyage as coming aboard D. & D., that damning abbreviation of dirty and drunk. Old Man Satan seemed to be using George's own character to further the first's ambitions in behalf of his relative. George was not the man to pass by diabolical injustice right before his eyes—when the wise ship's officer would hold his course and pretend not to see it. There was so much of it in these Mediterranean ports, open, unchecked by any one. Once, in the Piræus, when George had got time off to go see the glories of Athens that he had read about, there was a Levantin brutally beating his child and George had butted in with the growl: "Here, you! Lay off it!" A fine young row, that! All the man's relatives, it seemed, came piling out of doors and alleyways along that dusty waterfront street and George arrived back on the ship in tow of a couple of police, dirty, ragged, bleeding. The worst of it was that he had taken one little drink before heading for the electric tram to Athens and the first had smelled that "likker" on his breath. Excuse enough for the second D. in the log notation, D. & D.

Again, in Leghorn, when they were taking on rags for paper manufacturers in America, he had gone ashore to see Pisa, only six miles off by tram. But there was a daughter of midnight being set upon by Italian street rowdies when he returned to Leghorn late at night. They were tearing the poor finery off her back and beating her. It was too much for George! He had waded in to help. No business of his, but—same result; a dirty and ragged George escorted to the ship by two *carabineri* this time, under arrest for disturbing the peace. They were a hard-boiled lot on this ship, and skeptical of all alibis.

"You want to keep out of these things, Adams," Captain Brennan had lectured with severity. "Mebbe it's as you say; but you got no call to go buttin' in annyhow. It's none of our business what these Wops an' Greeks does."

Maybe; but there was an innate chivalry in George Adams that simply would not let him pass by on the other side.

HE WAS glad to have got past the dark and rowdy dock area of the port without incident. The lamp-lit Boulevard was respectability, more and more handsome shops, cafés, hotels, the population of French, Maltese and Italians out promenading under the live-oaks. Arabdom became more numerous as he passed

the opera house and the governor-general's palace and entered the great mediæval gate of the Porte de France into the native quarter of Tunis.

The Europeans dwindled. At this time of night there were few beyond the Porte de France. A river of nativedom flowed up the Rue d'Inglese in clopping sandals, red fezzes, flowing burnooses. He entered the Souk-el-Attarine and was immediately under arches of masonry, long tunnels lined with *souks* that blazed with electrics within. Black shadows were cast by pillar and vault. Each shop was a cave of color; silks, brasses, leatherwork, jewelry, perfumes. A bearded and Semitic shop-keeper sat cross-legged in each, observing the lone Roumi officer with raised eyebrows. An occasional call invited his custom. The ceaseless river of Arabs flowed by him in a clatter of sandals and swish of burnooses. A jabber of harsh Arabic aspirated all about him. He was in the unmixed Orient here, going about its affairs as if the French protectorate just outside the Porte de France did not exist. He could feel their innate hostility in the very air. He was not spoken to, beyond a hissed: *"Kafir!"* that passed and was gone. But there were eyes on him, the bold and insolent stare of some young fellow his own age, the glower of some magnificent sheikh with stave and voluminous burnoose in embroidered broadcloth. He reached the Street of the Silks, after some turning in this labyrinth of tunnels, and began bargaining.

The *souk* pirate within smiled as he snatched bolt after bolt of silk from his shelves and cast them abroad till his shop sang with the profusion of color. He motioned for George to catch one end of a piece, and they spread out its shining beauty between them. His cunning Semitic eyes glowed in the pale ivory face of the Mzab with curly forked beard as they met George's over the display. "Hunder' franc," he said, knowing that the young officer was either English or American and therefore gullible.

"Too much," George grinned. "I give you fifty." He knew that these *souk* men always asked double what they expected to get and delighted in the gamble of bargaining. For answer the Mzab tumbled out yet more silks, striped in red, orange and silver; in pale lavender, pink and gold; in electric blue, green and black. . . .

"Officer—pardon me. . . . You're either English or American, and I must ask your help——"

His arm had been fairly grabbed by some one in excitement. A rich and rather breathless contralto voice was at his elbow as George turned from the riot of tumbled silks. What he saw was unmistakably an American girl, a tourist, judging from those clothes that were bought somewhere in New York or Chicago. They differed subtly from the prevailing French styles. There was an air to her, of refinement, riches. Her hat, clothes, shoes—American all of them. She was small, slender, rather good-looking. Her deep blue eyes were on him with appeal but had no hint of panic in them, lost in the *souks* of Tunis at night as she evidently was. There was a friendly confidence in him in her throaty voice, a voice that had the command in it of one used to wielding the power of money.

George raised his cap as he let drop the silk. "Certainly. Anything I can do to help?" His gray eyes smiled down at her out of his hard, sunburned and freckled features.

"I've been wandering around in this labyrinth till it isn't funny any more," said the girl. "Which way is the ship, please? I've been out three gates but they all seem to lead to open country."

"You mean the cruise ship, Miss——?"

asked George. He remembered immediately that great steamer anchored off La Goulette that they had passed in coming up the canal to the port. Those cruising ships drew too much water to come in off the roadstead.

"Langford," supplied the girl at his pause." "Alice Langford. My father is Judge Langford of Chicago. . . . All I want is the gate that leads to the French quarter. I lost the caravan somehow." She smiled as George motioned his Mzab to do up in haste two of the silks. "I went into a perfume *souk* and must have been a long while trying them. When I came out they were all gone."

George nodded. By "caravan" she meant those long fleets of cars that met the cruising ship at La Goulette and "did" Carthage and the town. They were shepherded by a cruise manager, harassed soul, who gave just so much time for each sight and then waved all his passengers aboard the cars and went on. This poor kid must have been shocked at finding no caravan remaining in the *souks*. They had gone on to the Dey's palace, probably, and the natives had waved her on in that direction. You could get lost in a single turning. The native quarter of Tunis was two miles across in any direction, a network of crooked alleys and lanes, smith quarters, weavers' quarters, leather-workers, basketry men, a bewildering rabbit-warren that swarmed with native life. She had been wandering about in it for at least four hours.

Also she was being followed, he noted as he looked across the eddies of humanity surging around them and saw two bold, cynical-eyed young Arabs standing watching them in the doorway of a brass *souk* opposite. They seemed to have a proprietary interest in this girl, those two wealthy young bucks. They wore broadcloth burnooses in blue and gray, richly embroidered with silver. Their handsome and lascivious brown faces leered at George and the girl beside him. Lust, not payment, gleamed in their eyes.

He took the package of silk hurriedly and said: "This way, Miss Langford. You want the Porte de France."

She turned and called over to the two young Arabs. "It's all right now, thank you! . . . Shall I give them money?" she asked George. "They said they were showing me the way out of these *souks*."

The two protested, with bows and their hands on hearts, at her hand going to the shopping-bag. This abrupt change in her escort was not to their liking, but only their covert glances of hostility warned George of that. He had snatched the girl from under their very noses by this chance encounter. However, he did not want any row with them. One more time reporting on board after rioting ashore and old Turkle would have him! Hastily he shoved through the press of Arabdom with the girl beside him. The two young gallants fell in behind them and were following, George noted with a glower at them over his shoulder. Well, once at the Porte de France, there would be gendarmes. . . .

THEY passed the Grand Mosque and entered the Souk-el-Attarine. A grinning Egyptian was bowing at the girl and she stopped.

"Here was the place, Officer!" she said with gladness. "I know my way from here. Down that street. Thank you, ever so much!"

These wealthy! How they hated to be beholden to anybody, George thought. Not for one moment longer than was absolutely necessary. But it was his duty to see her through it, clear out to La Goulette. That would involve much loss of time and probably get him back to the ship late, but it could not be helped. Being marooned out at La Goulette would

be even worse than being lost in the *souks* of Tunis for her, if she was too late for her ship.

"I'm going that way too, Miss Langford," he said. "Besides, those two young fellows are still following us."

"Guess I had better not be too brave, had I?" she laughed with a saucy flick of her tongue and a backward glance at those two young blades. "The ship sails at eleven. I can take a taxi and make it."

"Better take the tram," George advised. "It gets out there in fifteen minutes from the Casino station, the third told me." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Quarter after ten now."

She quickened her steps. They passed down the Rue d'Inglese and out into the French city once more. George breathed freer, but those two bucks were still following. She tripped along, talking of all the bits of native life she had observed while lost and hunting for *the* gate. She had not been particularly frightened through it all. Nothing serious could ever happen to Miss Alice Langford, of Chicago and Oconomowoc, she seemed to assume.

A good deal that was serious could happen to her here, George thought. He seemed fated to be taking cans off stray dogs in every port and getting beaten up and logged for it. This girl—he'd have to see her off to her ship, now. There was always trouble with last-minute boats manned by robber Arabs with a rich tourist for prey who simply had to get aboard. He himself would have a time of it getting back to his own ship before twelve. The trams were few and far between around midnight; none after that.

THE big electric train was about to pull out as they reached the Casino station. George helped her up and then followed into the car. The girl protested. "I couldn't think of letting you, Mr.——? I'm all right now. Please!"

George glanced meaningly at the next compartment ahead. Those two had got aboard also. Perhaps they lived out Carthage way, possibly at La Goulette itself, but it didn't look good to him.

"George Adams is my name," he smiled at her. "Second Officer on the *S.S. Coronado* down at the port. I'll have to see you out to your ship, Miss Langford. These bumboat men always make trouble for last-minute passengers."

"Really you mustn't. I'm quite all right," she insisted. "There's always a ship's boat."

Maybe. But in any event she had to get from La Goulette station to the boat-landing. No; he just had to escort her. George returned a hostile stare to those two young Arabs in the next compartment. They were managing to let him know that they would be right along and weren't getting out at any of the stations beyond La Goulette. It looked ominous. They would be dumped out, late at night, into a dark Arab hamlet, a port for feluccas, mostly, and perhaps only one Arab bumboat at the landing as the cruise ship used her own boats. If those two followed them to the landing. . . .

The train stopped and LA GOULETTE shone on a blue-and-white sign on a lonely station wall. George and Miss Langford got out, faced a dark area of warehouse railway sidings, muddy emptiness, dock crane tracks. The girl edged closer to him and took his arm. This place demanded a strong male escort. If there were any gendarmes about they were not in evidence, but all Arabdom was, very much so, in furtive burnoosed figures lurking in the shadows of buildings, coolies and beggars asleep under carts and in doorways, moving wraiths slinking about on some shady business. The pair came out on the starlit empti-

ness of mud flats, refuse, tin cans, bulk freightage. Out over the water half a mile lay a great bar of light in tiers of porthole rows, her big cruising ship.

"Thank the Lord she's still here!" sighed the girl with relief. "But her last boat leaves at a quarter to eleven sharp, we were told."

Further worry claimed George at that information. It was ten minutes to eleven now. Last-minute trips were always difficult with Arab boatmen. They had you and they knew it.

He spied the landing over to their left and made for it. Dim outlines of a native boat with a lantern in its bottom. Two or three ragged pirates sat on her thwarts. And it was the only boat in attendance.

"*Ya hummar!*" called out George in his officer's ring of command. "Take us out to the ship! Swing that lantern, you fellows!"

A surly laugh. Then, truculently, "*Aiwa?* Five hunder' franc!"

"Robbers!" George gritted his teeth helplessly. He had not five hundred francs on him; also the legal fare was fifteen. "*La!*" he called back. "Fifteen francs. Get going or I'll call a gendarme!"

He attempted to usher Miss Langford on board but they were met with a tumult of protest and blocked by stout bodies. "Five hunder' franc!" raved the boat captain, clawing the air and shoving George back. George thrust him out of the way and made room for her. "Pay you at the ship," he said. "Shove off!"

"No good! Now!—*Fluss-fluss!*"

They had thrown George out again and the boat captain was rubbing his thumb on his forefinger for money in hand.

"Give it to him!" whispered the girl in his ear. "I've just *got* to make the ship!"

George blocked her hand from the shopping-bag. "Don't! I'll fix him when we get out there. Shove off, you! I'll call a gendarme!" he vociferated fiercely at the boatmen.

His officer's uniform and savage bite of command might have won for him; but just then came a jeering laugh in the dark behind them, ribald comment in Arabic that heartened the boatmen. They bundled George and the girl roughly out of their boat again and refused flatly now to take them at all. George saw two indistinct figures standing back on the flats in the dark. Those two young Lotharios, without a doubt. And now getting their chance. He would be set upon by all five Arabs, presently. And the girl?

There was only one thing to do, punch hard and quickly, knock these pestilent boatmen overboard, take the oars and row her out himself. With his fists clenched for battle he had turned on them when a hail came from over the dark water: "*Ahoy ashore, there!*"

A ringing English voice. George halted his attack. A young ship's officer like himself was out there, in charge of one of the cruise boats on her last trip ashore before leaving. Miss Langford's people were on it doubtless, abandoning the cruise to look for her.

"Boat ahoy!" he called back.

Out of the dark it came, a white bow, the flash of oars, a lantern raised in some one's hands. Then a feminine voice called out, tremulous with anxiety: "Is that you, Alice, child?"

"It's all right, mother," the girl called back reassuringly.

The boat swept in and two sailors jumped ashore on the landing to hold her. An elderly lady was being helped over the gunwale as Alice leaped into her arms. George heard flurried exclamations banal with emotion: "My child, where *have* you been? . . . Your father's ashore looking everywhere. . . . The police, the Consul,

everybody. . . . We've had to give up the cruise. . . ."

Baggage and trunks were being passed out on the landing. The girl said, "Not a bit of it, Mummy! Stop them. . . ."

"But your father. . . . They won't wait for him. Child, you ought to be whipped!"

George seemed to have been totally forgotten. But presently Alice turned to him: "This officer brought me, mother. It's quite all right. Don't be foolish. Make them take back the baggage."

GEORGE bowed as the mother murmured hasty thanks, but she was more occupied with the cruise. "Your father, Alice. . . . Can you wait just a little, officer?" she begged the young fellow in charge of the boat. "There goes the Carthage train now."

They could see another long bar of electrics gliding out of La Goulette station. It was the next train after the one George and Alice had taken. The steamer blew a prolonged blast, recalling her boat.

"We must go back, ma'am," said the boat's officer. "Stand by, there!"

Came the thump of hurried footsteps, and an immense, burly man charged down on them out of the darkness and swept up Alice in his arms. "Thank God! . . . Sweetheart!" George heard him murmur. "You devil! What do you *mean* by upsetting everything this away?"

Alice disengaged herself. "It's all right, daddy. I got lost, that's all. This officer found me and brought me out to La Goulette."

The man turned on George and gripped his hand. "Thanks, officer. Thanks a lot!"

George murmured something about not mentioning it, nothing at all.

Alice's parent had already turned to the business in hand like a brisk bulldog. "Come, hop, young lady! Put those trunks back, you men——"

Brooooooooo! A long and noisy blast from the steamer drowned out all words. Alice was taking his hand in farewell. "Thanks, ever so much, Mr. Adams!" he heard her voice thinly through that devastating din.

Her father took her arm and she stepped over the gunwale with him. The boat shoved off immediately. Oars flashed. The steamer shut off her whistle abruptly and their voices came across the black waters. "Good-bye! Good-bye!—Hello, ashore? Aren't you one of our ship's officers? . . . No, he isn't, daddy! Some other ship. . . . Hello? Many, many thanks, young man!" They were gone, out of earshot.

"Goo'-bye! Goo'-bye! T'anks!" Ribald and jeering mimicry hooted from those two young Arabs still in the background. Gibes in Arabic that seemed to be obscenities. George turned on them wrathfully.

"Don't get fresh, you guys!" he called out.

"Aiwa?" There was the rasp of savagery in that challenge, hate, murder. The other one growled: *"Kelb kafir!"* [Dog of an unbeliever!]

George stood looking out at the distant boat, mentally left rather blank. These charming people! They had not risen to the occasion, somehow, he thought. The man had not even asked his name, his ship. True, there was the hurry and they were all flustered. They were more concerned with the cruise than with him. His uniform, probably. . . . Anything in uniform belonged to that order of servants who protected and cared for these people as a matter of course—the sacred passengers. And they had left him without a word beyond, "Thanks," without providing for so much as a letter. People

were funny! Langford Senior—a judge, wasn't he?—*might* have asked his name, his ship. Alice wouldn't remember. . . . She had just barely remembered his name. . . . Much they cared about him!

THE group of five Arabs was waiting for him silently. He was in for it! And 'way late for his own ship, too. That was a minor worry at present. He hated to have to launch into another street row and report on board bruised and frazzled and dirty, but there was no help for it. Once more he had aided some one in distress, but the First would not even try to believe that. Only that he had been fighting ashore again. Oh, well. . . .

They parted before his threatening advance. One of them bowed politely, his hand on heart, and asked, smiling: *"Allumette, ya Sidi?"*

He was asking for a match. His guard down, George was fumbling for one when —*Crash!* A terrific blow from the other one smote him on the side of his head. He saw stars, reeled, retained control of his senses only with the utmost effort of will.

Recovering, he went for them both with fierce anger at the treachery. Arms flailed wildly on both sides of him, difficult to ward off. They were immensely strong, lean, and lithe, those two young Arabs, active as cats. They knew nothing of boxing, only the full-arm swing. George drove them with punches straight from the shoulder, trying to win through to a black alley that led to the tram station. Then they both yelled for help, and all Arabdom, it seemed, came rushing out of its concealments and he was being set upon by a mob of filthy burnooses, gripping black hands, flailing blows. He saw stars again, knew the stunned, fluttering blindness of a sinking consciousness. . . .

When he came to again a pair of gendarmes were working over him and one was forcing the mouth of a brandy flask between his teeth. George sputtered and protested feebly against the fiery liquid. His first thought was of what it would do to *him,* that breath of "likker" on being brought aboard the ship. The First would smell it and have him, triumphantly. . . . No story he could tell would convince against that evidence. . . . He fought the flask off.

"Tiens! Tiens! Ça va! Goo-d! Goo-d!" insisted the one pouring brandy till it choked. Then they were helping him to his feet.

George wabbled and staggered, numb and dizzy. He was bruised all over, bleeding from numerous cuts and scratches, caked with mud. They had possession of all his identification papers and were taking him back to his ship, one at each elbow, as he revived under the brandy. But there had been too much of it. Half a flask he had been forced to swallow. It would begin working, presently, and he would be in a state when they reached the ship.

A long wait at the tram station. He was dizzy and needed assistance into the car. George slumped down between the two gendarmes, sick and discouraged. The Puritanical face of old Josiah Turkle swam accusing and terrible before him. A stout contender with the Evil One was old Turkle, strict, implacable. He would not miss this chance to promote his cadet relative! Captain Brennan would be more lenient, a jolly Irishman from South Boston, but skeptical, especially so with D. & D. cases. George thought upon escape from these gendarmes to some hotel for the night, but his head was whirling now. Neat brandy takes its time but is deadly.

THE Casino station at one in the morning. . . . They helped him up, one at each elbow. He stumbled out and was

standing hanging to them on the Boulevard Jules Féry. Jolly and efficient, those two gendarmes; also they were not going to part with him. There was a tip coming to them when he was delivered safe at the ship. In spite of George's earnest and weeping protests they assisted him down the long boulevard, out through the dock buildings, and stopped at the quay side where rose the tall iron sides of the *Coronado* moored to bollards and with a crane alongside.

A hail from the bridge high above. Jabbers of facetious French from the gendarmes, not a word of which was understood by the officer up there. A drunk is always funny to the sons of men. But it wasn't funny to George. He was full of helpless indignation and injured innocence. A yearning desire to explain fogged hazily in his brain, but his head was whirling and his tongue was thick when he tried to put in the essential facts through the torrent of French.

"Disgraceful! Take him, you two, and put him to bed!" The outraged eyes of old Turkle glared upon George. But there was an ignoble satisfaction there, too. Logged three times—and out! Every one moved up one peg. . . .

Turkle had come down the gangway, followed by two sailors, to take the Second in charge. The gendarmes took their tips with a jovial, *"Merci bien!"* and were handing over his papers. George fought off the two sailors.

"Y'all wrong, Mr. Turkle! Y'all wrong, see? I——" He couldn't get a connected story together, strive as his whirling brain might. "Sh' outrage——"

"That's all right, Mr. Adams—tomorrow, sir—mind the step, sir." The two sailors were trying to soothe him; then he was being picked up and carried, kicking, up the gangway and across the iron deck, down a corridor to his stateroom.

They helped him into his berth, where he lay with his head swimming, in a fury of futile rage. Damn them! Damn everybody! . . . They were all alike, when a fellow tried to help. The Levantin boy, who yelled for his relatives when George tried to take his part; the courtezan, who scratched him while the others pummelled; this rich girl, who had left him to face the music, she and her people all intent only on their cruise. Some cheap thanks flung across the dark waters. . . . The Samaritan got—*this!* raged George and slapped his outthrust jaw with a cynical palm.

The jolt put him off to sleep. He fought even against that, for he wanted to reflect further on the bitter injustice of things as they were. These rich people . . . seems they ought to have done *something*. . . . A fellow had trouble enough just keeping in line of promotion in the merchant service without horning in on these outrages ashore. . . . But what could a man do? Leave her alone in the *souks?* . . . Yet this was what you got. . . . Every time. . . . But nature would not be denied, and he sank off into a snoring oblivion induced by alcohol that was none of his fault.

"YOU'RE a beauty!" That jovial crow woke him up next morning. Captain Brennan stood in the doorway.

"Been fightin' again ashore, George?" he asked.

"I helped a girl out to that cruise ship, sir. She was lost in the *souks* and being followed by a couple of Arabs. They and a lot of others piled on me after she left in the boat."

"Elegant alibi!" Captain Brennan laughed. "We all saw that cruise ship anchored off La Goulette when we came up the canal. There's your plot, George!

You didn't git engaged to the gal, with her father's blessin', did ya?" he jeered.

"It's the truth, sir," said George soberly.

Brennan shook his head. "Mebbe. Like the Greek kid story, an' that harlot in Leghorn. . . . Only, how did you come to git loaded again?"

"Some gendarmes found me after the Arabs had laid me out. They shoved a lotta brandy down. *I* didn't want it. Not with the First after me as he is!"

"Well, he ought to be!" Captain Brennan defended the Mate with heat. "You don't seem to be able to keep out of trouble ashore, so what can we do? You're logged three times for D. & D. and that means suspension from all duty for this voyage. And hittin' the beach when we reach New York. I gotta do it, George. The Third has your watch, now, and the cadet takes his. Sorry."

He didn't seem so. He was about to move away when George said, with bitterness: "What he's been workin' for all along, sir! Get me out, and his nephew, young Barton, moves up to Third. Quick promotion, eh?" His lip curled sarcastically.

Captain Brennan's eyes snapped. "It works out that way, I'll admit. But you seem to be helping him all you can. It's against the rules, gettin' into these fights ashore, and you know it."

George said, wearily: "I suppose it don't make any difference how you get into fights either, does it? Could I tell that girl to go chase herself in the *souks?*"

"Sure you couldn't!" Brennan agreed heartily. "Only, *was* there any girl? You'd be surprized, the stories these D. & D. cases makes up!" He grinned cynically. "*I* haven't got any proof, George; only what the First tells me. The cruise ship's gone; and what you goin' to do about it?"

"O. K., sir," said George and sank back into his berth. "I haven't anything but my word of honor. Like the two times before. If you don't choose to believe me——" His eyes closed. They *ought* to believe a guy, once in a while. Hard-boiled lot on this ship! Turkle didn't want to believe anything, and the Captain had heard too many ingenious stories unwrapped by firemen and deck-hands. It wasn't quite fair, though, with an officer and a gentleman.

He opened his eyes again. The captain was still standing in the door and was scratching his head. There was the story; take it or leave it. George had nothing to add. But it seemed that he might have just a bit of help from outside. If Langford Senior was anything of a man, he'd——

THERE were voices coming down the corridor. "Where is he? That door to the left?" George heard a strange voice inquiring. Then Brennan was greeting a young man in civilians: "Hello, Consul! You lookin' for me?"

"No. I want a man named Adams. Is he in here?"

George sat up. He was going to square himself on this ship, once for all. They'd have to believe him now! He smiled happily as the Consul stepped in. "Mr. Adams?—Aerogram about you from the *Resolute.*"

The printed capitals swam before George's eyes as he read:

"U S CONSUL TUNIS PLEASE LOCATE FOR ME SECOND OFFICER ADAMS ON FREIGHTER IN PORT STOP I WISH TO DO SOMETHING SUBSTANTIAL FOR THIS YOUNG MAN WHO RESCUED MY DAUGHTER LOST IN SOUKS STOP ADVISE IF HE ARRIVED SAFELY BACK AT HIS SHIP. JULIUS LANGFORD."

He handed the form to Brennan without a word. The Captain read it, scratched his head with vigor. "Well, I'll be damned!" he ejaculated. Then his hot Irish temper rose as all the implications

of that telegram overwhelmed him. "Why, the old snoozer!" he gasped. His face reddened with fury. "Tryin' to do me out of a good officer, is he? Excuse me, Consul!—MR. TURKLE!" He was out of the stateroom in a leap and they heard him roaring that peremptory hail for the Mate down the corridor.

The Consul smiled at George. "So it was you!" he said. "Believe me, we had a time over that girl last night. I even called on the Governor-General about it. Her father grabbed the last Carthage train to call off his cruise when last I saw him."

George grinned largely. He was not thinking of his own restoration to duty, nor of the retribution coming to the First, nor of their damned cruise. He was thinking that he must have left a trail of gratitude behind him on all three of these affairs ashore, after all. People got around to it, after they had had time to think it over. There was a dignity in that Good Samaritan parable of the Master's, "Who is thy neighbor?" It was proof against all the cynicism and the ribald disbelief of mankind. They gave their homage to the man who lived up to it, in the end.

The Kiss of Zoraida

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

The age-old cruelty of the East lives again in this story of a harem in Damascus

WITH one backward look at the bowery suburbs of Damascus, and the street that was peopled only by the long, faint shadows of a crescent moon, Selim dropped from the high wall among the leafing almonds and flowering lilacs of Abdur Ali's garden. The night was almost sultry, and the air was steeped with a distilled languor of voluptuous perfume. Even if he had been in some other garden, in another city, Selim could not have breathed that perfume without thinking of Zoraida, the young wife of Abdur Ali. Evening after evening, for the past fortnight, during her lord and master's absence, she had met him among the lilacs, till he had grown to associate the very odor of her hair and the savor of her lips with their fragrance.

The garden was silent, except for a silver-lisping fountain; and no leaf or petal stirred in the balmy stillness. Abdur Ali had gone to Aleppo on urgent business and was not expected back for several more days: so the slightly tepid thrill of anticipation which Selim felt was untinged by any thought of danger. The whole affair, even from the beginning, had been as safe as that sort of thing could possibly be: Zoraida was Abdur Ali's only wife, so there were no jealous women who might tattle to their common lord; and the servants and eunuchs of the household, like Zoraida herself, hated the severe and elderly jewel-merchant. It had been unnecessary even to bribe them into complaisance. Everything and everyone had helped to facilitate the amour. In fact, it was all too easy; and Selim was beginning to weary a little of this heavy-

scented happiness and the over-sweet affection of Zoraida. Perhaps he would not come again after tonight, or tomorrow night. . . . There were other women, no less fair than the jeweler's wife, whom he had not kissed so often . . . or had not kissed at all.

He stepped forward among the flower-burdened bushes. Was there a figure standing in the shadow, near the fountain? The figure was dim, and darkly muffled, but it must be Zoraida. She had never failed to meet him there, she was ever the first at their rendezvous. Sometimes she had taken him into the luxurious harem; and sometimes, on warm evenings like this, they had spent their long hours of passion beneath the stars, amid the lilacs and almonds.

As Selim approached, he wondered why she did not rush to meet him, as was her wont. Perhaps she had not yet seen him. He called softly: "Zoraida!"

The waiting figure emerged from the shadow. It was not Zoraida, but Abdur Ali. The faint moon-rays glinted on the dull iron barrel and bright silver frettings of a heavy pistol which the old merchant held in his hand.

"You wish to see Zoraida?" The tone was harsh, metallically bitter.

Selim, to say the least, was taken aback. It was all too plain that his affair with Zoraida had been discovered, and that Abdur Ali had returned from Aleppo before the appointed time to catch him in a trap. The predicament was more than disagreeable, for a young man who had thought to spend the evening with a much-enamored mistress. And Abdur Ali's direct query was disconcerting. Selim was unable to think of an apt or judicious answer.

"Come, thou shalt see her." Selim felt the jealous fury, but not the savage irony, that underlay the words. He was full of unpleasant premonitions, most of which concerned himself rather than Zoraida. He knew that he could not look for mercy from this austere and terrible old man; and the probabilities before him were such as to preclude more than a passing thought of what might have befallen, or would befall, Zoraida. Selim was something of an egotist; and he would hardly have claimed (except for the ear of Zoraida) that he was deeply in love. His self-solicitude, under the circumstances, was perhaps to be expected, even if not wholly to be admired.

Abdur Ali had covered Selim with the pistol. The young man realized uncomfortably that he himself was unarmed, except for his yataghan. Even as he was remembering this, two more figures came forward from amid the lilac-shadows. They were the eunuchs, Cassim and Mustafa, who guarded Abdur Ali's harem, and whom the lovers had believed friendly to their intrigue. Each of the giant blacks was armed with a drawn simitar. Mustafa stationed himself at Selim's right hand and Cassim at his left. He could see the whites of their eyes as they watched him with impassable vigilance.

"Now," said Abdur Ali, "you are about to enjoy the singular privilege of being admitted to my harem. This privilege, I believe, you have arrogated to yourself on certain former occasions, and without my knowledge. Tonight I shall grant it myself; though I doubt if there are many who would follow my example. Come: Zoraida is waiting for you, and you must not disappoint her, nor delay any longer. You are later than usual at the rendezvous, as I happen to know."

WITH the blacks beside him, with Abdur Ali and the levelled pistol in his rear, Selim traversed the dim garden and entered the courtyard of the jewel-merchant's house. It was like a journey in some evil dream; and nothing

appeared wholly real to the young man. Even when he stood in the harem interior, by the soft light of Saracenic lamps of wrought brass, and saw the familiar divans with their deep-hued cushions and coverings, the rare Turkoman and Persian rugs, the taborets of Indian ebony freaked with precious metals and mother-of-pearl, he could not dispel his feeling of strange dubiety.

In his terror and bewilderment, amid the rich furnishings and somber splendor, he did not see Zoraida for a moment. Abdur Ali perceived his confusion and pointed to one of the couches.

"Hast thou no greeting for Zoraida?" The low tone was indescribably sardonic and ferocious.

Zoraida, wearing the scanty harem costume of bright silks in which she was wont to receive her lover, was lying on the sullen crimson fabrics of the divan. She was very still, and seemed to be asleep. Her face was whiter than usual, though she had always been a little pale; and the soft, child-like features, with their hint of luxurious roundness, wore a vaguely troubled expression, with a touch of bitterness about the mouth. Selim approached her, but still she did not stir.

"Speak to her," snarled the old man. His eyes burned like two spots of slowly eating fire in the brown and crumpled parchment of his face.

Selim was unable to utter a word. He had begun to surmise the truth; and the situation overwhelmed him with a horrible despair.

"What? thou hast no greeting for one who loved thee so dearly?" The words were like the dripping of some corrosive acid.

"What hast thou done to her?" said Selim after a while. He could not look at Zoraida any longer; nor could he lift his eyes to meet those of Abdur Ali.

"I have dealt with her very gently. As thou seest, I have not marred in any wise the perfection of her beauty—there is no wound, and not even the mark of a blow, on her white body. Was I not more than generous . . . to leave her thus . . . for thee?"

Selim was not a coward, as men go; yet he gave an involuntary shudder.

"But . . . thou has not told me."

"It was a rare and precious poison, which slays immediately and with little pain. A drop of it would have been enough—or even so much as still remains upon her lips. She drank it of her own choice. I was merciful to her—as I shall be to thee."

"I am at thy disposal," said Selim with all the hardihood he could muster.

The jewel-dealer's face became a mask of malignity, like that of some avenging fiend.

"My eunuchs know their master, and they will slice thee limb from limb and member from member if I give the word."

Selim looked at the two negroes. They returned his gaze with impassive eyes that were utterly devoid of all interest, either friendly or unfriendly. The light ran without a quiver along their gleaming muscles and upon their glittering swords.

"What is thy will? Dost thou mean to kill me?"

"I have no intention of slaying thee myself. Thy death will come from another source."

Selim looked again at the armed eunuchs.

"No, it will not be that—unless you prefer it."

"In Allah's name, what dost thou mean, then?" The tawny brown of Selim's face had turned ashen with the horror of suspense.

"Thy death will be one which any true lover would envy," said Abdur Ali.

Selim was powerless to ask another question. His nerves were beginning to crumble under the ordeal. The dead woman on the couch, the malevolent old man with his baleful half-hints and his obvious implacability, the muscular negroes who would hew a man into collops at their master's word—all were enough to break down the courage of hardier men than he.

He became aware that Abdur Ali was speaking once more.

"I have brought thee to thy mistress. But it would seem that thou art not a very ardent lover."

"In the name of the Prophet, cease thy mockery."

Abdur Ali did not seem to hear the tortured cry.

"It is true, of course, that she could not reply even if thou shouldst speak to her. But her lips are as fair as ever, even if they are growing a little cold with thy unlover-like delay. Hast thou no kiss to lay upon them, in memory of all the other kisses they have taken—and given?"

Selim was again speechless. Finally:

"But you said there was a poison which——"

"Yes, and I told thee the truth. Even the touch of thy lips to hers, where a trace of the poison lingers, will be enough to cause thy death." There was an awful gloating in Abdur Ali's voice.

Selim shivered, and looked again at Zoraida. Aside from her utter stillness and pallor, and the faintly bitter expression about the mouth, she differed in no apparent wise from the woman who had lain so often in his arms. Yet the very knowledge that she was dead was enough to make her seem unspeakably strange and even repulsive to Selim. It was hard to associate this still, marmoreal being with the affectionate mistress who had always welcomed him with eager smiles and caresses.

"Is there no other way?" Selim's question was little louder than a whisper.

"There is none. And you delay too long." Abdur Ali made a sign to the negroes, who stepped closer to Selim, lifting their swords in the lamplight.

"Unless thou dost my bidding, thy hands will be sliced off at the wrists," the jeweler went on. "The next blows will sever a small portion of each forearm. Then a brief attention will be given to other parts, before returning to the arms. I am sure thou wilt prefer the other death."

Selim stooped above the couch where Zoraida lay. Terror—the abject terror of death—was his one emotion. He had wholly forgotten his love for Zoraida, had forgotten her kisses and endearments. He feared the strange, pale woman before him as much as he had once desired her.

"Make haste." The voice of Abdur Ali was steely as the lifted simitars.

Selim bent over and kissed Zoraida on the mouth. Her lips were not entirely cold, but there was a queer, bitter taste. Of course, it must be the poison. The thought was hardly formulated, when a searing agony seemed to run through all his veins. He could no longer see Zoraida, in the blinding flames that appeared before him and filled the room like ever-widening suns; and he did not know that he had fallen forward on the couch across her body. Then the flames began to shrink with awful swiftness and went out in a swirl of soft gloom. Selim felt that he was sinking into a great gulf, and that someone (whose name he could not remember) was sinking beside him. Then, all at once, he was alone, and was losing even the sense of solitude . . . till there was nothing but darkness and oblivion.

THE SOUK

THE April issue of the MAGIC CARPET Magazine seems to have made a ten-strike, to judge from the deluge of enthusiastic letters that has poured into the editorial offices.

"All your stories are great," writes Eric Wedler, of New York City. "Here's hoping I see MAGIC CARPET on the news stands monthly real soon. It's what I've been looking for for years. I wish you all the success in the world."

"There is a vacant quarter in the American magazine world," writes Arreph El-Khoury, of Welch, West Virginia, "and as I see things, the MAGIC CARPET is the only periodical that can fill this gap. Its content matter as well as its physical appearance is very splendid indeed, not to mention the fact that it is supported by a host of authors who really know their material."

A letter from Margaret Ray, of Warrensburg, Missouri, says: "May I break a practise of long standing of NOT writing editors of magazines I like—to congratulate you on MAGIC CARPET? The title itself is a clever choice, and gives you latitude to broaden and vary the type of stories—something ORIENTAL STORIES did not permit. In your first issue under the new name, I especially enjoyed that priceless old thief, Ismeddin, and I'd like to hear more of him. What about a little more humor, Brother Souk? The story about Aladdin was a good start in that direction. One really needs a few laughs in between the hair-raising stuff, you know."

"I just read my first copy of the MAGIC CARPET Magazine, and I can say right now that Carlos de la Muerte is destined to be one of my favorite fiction heroes," writes Robert C. Sandison, of Denver. "Wish you'd make it a monthly; ninety days is too long to wait to see what happens next."

We hesitated a bit before we scheduled Edmond Hamilton's tale of Kaldar, world of the distant star Antares, as we did not know just how this would be received by the readers of a magazine dealing with adventure, mystery and romance; but so far, as the current issue goes to press, the story has received only one adverse vote, whereas you, the readers, have united in a chorus of praise for this tale of a far planet. "This story is out of place in a magazine of Oriental fiction," writes Howard D. Craft, of Springfield, Massachusetts. Josephine Larson, of Kansas City, writes to the Souk: "I'd like to have Merrick go back to Antares. Please have some more about this strange world." Hartley C. Powell, of Baltimore, writes to the Souk: "We must have another story of Kaldar, the strange world of Antares. I want to know if the hero gets back again to 'his world' and how his love affair progresses." Earl

Jones, of New Orleans, writes: "How about a sequel to *Kaldar, World of Antares?* It is a wonderful story."

You will be happy to know that your wish, expressed in these letters, will be granted. *The Snake-men of Kaldar* will be printed in our next issue. While this story is in a sense a sequel to *Kaldar, World of Antares,* it is complete in itself and does not pre-suppose that you have read the other story.

A writer from Newport, Kentucky, who neglected to sign his name, writes to the Souk: "*Kaldar, World of Antares* is one of the best interplanetary stories I have ever read. The whole issue is good. I bought it because I wanted to read *The Desert Host,* and I wasn't disappointed in that, but the Kaldar story and *The Picture of Judas* were so good that I give them first and second place."

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes to the Souk: "I was happy to be able to accompany the MAGIC CARPET into the past where *The Desert Host* thundered through the gates of Babylon. I was thrilled as the MAGIC CARPET flew across space to *Kaldar, World of Antares,* but was disappointed when it made such an abrupt departure. Please publish a sequel in the next issue."

I. D. Arden, of Detroit, writes to the Souk: "In Carlos de la Muerte, Seabury Quinn has created a fictional character that looms as a close rival to his lovable little Frenchman, the ever popular Jules de Grandin, whose exploits have thrilled me in WEIRD TALES. I predict that de la Muerte, in due time (if Mr. Quinn continues to equal *The Vagabond-at-Arms*), will attain the popularity of de Grandin; and that, as every WEIRD TALES reader knows, is saying a whale of a lot. Here's wishing Carlos de la Muerte success and fame and may he continue to be with us as long as the MAGIC CARPET goes places. I was delighted to see Edmond Hamilton aboard the MAGIC CARPET. I enjoyed immensely his trip through starry space, and I thank him for taking me to Kaldar, that strange world of Antares. Tell Mr. Hamilton I am looking forward to more voyages on the MAGIC CARPET to Kaldar."

Writes Jack Snow, of New York City: "I purchased a copy of the MAGIC CARPET recently, and enjoyed it thoroughly. It is a highly attractive magazine and should prove popular. The price is right, the idea is novel, and the stories are varied for every taste. In my opinion, *The Picture of Judas* was by far the most outstanding story."

Our aim will be to fill the MAGIC CARPET Magazine with glamorous stories of distant lands—stories of adventure, mystery and romance that express the witchery of far places. We will print tales of glory and heroism, tales of intrigue, tales of Africa and the Orient and the Seven Seas, vivid action stories that stir the blood. The lure of such romantic names as Mandalay and Singapore and Cairo and Samarcand and Mecca will be expressed in strange tales such as you can not find elsewhere. The glamor of distant places whose very names are being changed by the march of our industrial civilization will be preserved for you in the MAGIC CARPET Magazine.

When we were young, we used to pore over the colored maps in our school geography, and imagine ourselves taking part in glorious adventures in the far places that had especially attractive names. One of these places was Punta Arenas, the southernmost seaport town in South America. But now this name has disappeared from our maps, yielding place to Magallanes, in honor of that intrepid explorer who already had the Straits of Magellan named after him. And Nizhni Novgorod in

Russia—the very name of the city conjures up a colorful panorama of brilliant fairs and Russian folk-songs and tumbling mountebanks and performing bears and peasant finery and merry laughter. Now the name of the city has been changed to Maxim Gorki, in honor of the Russian author and propagandist for communism. It may be all very well to honor these distinguished men—Magellan and Gorki—but it is with a pang of real regret that we see the names of Punta Arenas and Nizhni Novgorod disappear from the map. However, the spirit of such romantic places will be kept alive in the MAGIC CARPET Magazine.

These are not the only romantic names that have disappeared from the map—romantic because of the associations that have sprung up around them. Istanbul is hardly less romantic than Constantinople, which it replaces; but Peiping (the new name for Peking) has not yet the glamorous appeal of the old name. Christiania is now called Oslo; and the old St. Petersburg, which was rechristened Petrograd by the last tsar of Russia, has undergone a further change to Leningrad. Happily, however, Moscow—a name that recalls Napoleon, the bells of the Kremlin, and the Prelude in C sharp minor—has not been altered, but remains with all its glamorous suggestions in the midst of the changing life under the Bolshevik experiment. Urga, capital of Outer Mongolia—a name which calls up visions of Mongol warriors and yak-drawn yurts – is now officially Ulan Bator Khoto, capital of the autonomous soviet republic of Touva Tannou, which is actually, though not officially, a part of the Russian soviet union.

William MacPherson, of St. Louis, writes: "I have just finished my first copy of the MAGIC CARPET, and it is the most absorbing, thrilling and fascinating magazine I have ever read."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in our April issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *The Vagabond-at-Arms,* by Seabury Quinn. *The Desert Host,* Hugh B. Cave's tale of mystic Babylon, was a close second.

My favorite stories in the July 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 Mutations of Madam Butterfly

By JAMES W. BENNETT

A PLAY, touring America a few years ago, was built around a central character, Mother Goddam. She was drawn from life, and the title of the play, *The Shanghai Gesture,* might have been called *The Yokohama Gesture.* Her prototype was Mother Jesus, proprietor of Yokohama's celebrated House of Entertainment: "Number Nine."

As a young geisha, Mother Jesus is said to have been maddeningly beautiful. Japanese artists painted her, capturing for ever the classic grace of a figure like that on a Koriusai print; the folds of her kimono, purple flecked with vermilion; the silver paper fan, poised before darting like a moth. They caught her exotic, supercilious quality.

To her, in those days, a large number of young naval lieutenants had lost their hearts. Reversing the usual procedure, they had been more faithful to her memory than she had been to theirs. Returning years later to the Asiatic Station as pompous captains or admirals, they found her

(Please turn to page 382)

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Berber Loot

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

The fascinating story of a madcap adventure in Morocco, told as only Bedford-Jones can tell it—thrills, romance and sudden death, in a wild hunt for stolen treasure.

King's Assassins

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

A stirring tale of French Indo-China, native intrigue, heroic deeds, and the picturesque monarch Sisavang Vong, king of Laos, who must not be disturbed at his pleasures.

The Snake-Men of Kaldar

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Another mighty tale of Kaldar, world of Antares—a tale of red warfare against a race of monsters on a distant planet.

The Tiger's Cubs

By SEABURY QUINN

The startling adventure into which Carlos the Tiger and Black Hassan were suddenly plunged is told in fascinating style with plenty of thrilling fighting and abundant spilling of blood.

Pale Hands

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

An exquisite story is this, about an American who was one of Abd el Krim's agents, and how he was mocked by the witchery of love and absinthe.

The Young Men Speak

By K. B. MONTAGUE

A gripping tale of the head-hunting Igorots of Luzon, of the hateful Don Pedro of Pangasinan, and of the roaring avalanches that for ever menace the mountain villages.

and others

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE JULY 15

(Continued from page 380)

still a woman of rare charm but one who had been much changed by time. And when Mother Jesus happened to be pointed out to their wives, these old sea-dogs invariably protested:

"No! No! That's not the girl *I* knew. That's her grandmother!"

Although I had often heard of Mother Jesus, it was in the company of curious but eminently respectable passengers from my ship that I first met her. A long procession of us—women as well as men—rickshawed to her house. A red lantern hung conspicuously in front, painted with the numeral 9.

A *né-san* slipped back the sliding screen, bowed and beckoned us to enter. She betrayed no surprize, even when her slant eyes obliquely noted the three foreign women. The white *tabi* on her small feet twinkled with her hurrying, pigeon-toed gait as she led the way for us, out into a garden.

We followed a curving, pebbled path, only dimly lighted by candles that flickered in the squat stone lanterns. There were tantalizing glimpses of queerly contoured rocks, a bronze dragon bowl from which water trickled, a miniature stream crossed by a Lilliputian bridge of damascened lacquer.

The *né-san* led us into a room, facing the garden, with the wall—the *shoji*—pushed back. There she left us. The room was bare, an expanse of blond rice matting and neutral-tinted paper walls. The only note of color came from a glorious, six-paneled screen of vivid gold crossed by a branch of gnarled pine. One of the women of our party gave a delighted exclamation:

"It's a Kano screen—of the Hideyoshi period! I wonder if Mother Jesus would sell it?"

"No," I answered her. "I've been told repeatedly that Mother Jesus is one of the wealthiest persons in Japan."

The woman shivered slightly. "Wealthy? But it's blood money!"

I don't know why that statement should have pricked me, but it did. I contradicted curtly:

"Not precisely. Not in Japan. The Japanese have told me that the profession of *joro* is an honorable one. The girls stay in the *joro* house for a certain length of time—long enough to save enough money for a dowry. Then they marry the small-farmer or petty-merchant class. No one here thinks any the less——"

I broke off, for a woman had moved one of the sliding panels at the rear and was advancing toward us with the toed-in gliding motion that the long folds of the kimono made necessary. She was emaciated, with the gauntness of age, yet still inimitably graceful. Her kimono was of somber gray but of rich heavy silk. Her eyes were deep-set, intelligent and wary. The face was scarred by many lines. As she passed before that gold screen with the gnarled pine, the genius of that Kano School painter seemed vivified. The struggle and the bitterness of life that had stamped itself on her face were reproduced symbolically in the pine. She smiled with a hint of malice and spoke in slightly accented English:

"I am Mother Jesus. It is kind of you to visit me, gentlemen. Your call is not professional, I see, since your wives are with you. Perhaps you have come to talk about Zen Buddhism—since that is the only other reason men have for coming to Number 9."

An embarrassed silence fell over our group. Then I said, a little blunderingly:

"Yes. Do you—well, do you believe in reincarnation?"

Her shoulders moved slightly under the heavy silk of her kimono. "How could I live, if I did not believe in another life? This existence for me is an expiation—for past sins. Perhaps a thousand years past."

"Then, in the next phase of existence, you'll find yourself on a higher plane?"

She nodded. "All good Buddhists hope that. I try to follow the Eight-Fold Path. I shall go on and on." Her eyes glowed luminously. "Until, at last, I shall leave the incarnations of this mortal body and be merged into the infinite whole, Nirvana, nothingness."

That brief spark of exaltation faded. She clapped her hands to summon a *né-san.* "Sssssss, you will drink? I have some good wine of the Widow Clicquot. Chilled in a spring in my garden."

We agreed—rather awkwardly—that we would drink.

"Now, I must go," she said softly. "Your ship was indeed kind to me. I have many customers. . . . You may remain as long as you wish. Stroll in my garden if you desire. . . . *Sayonara!*"

She gave a quick, bobbing bow and was gone.

As we drank our champagne we heard the mournful tinkle of a *samisen,* a persistent minor. A girl's voice rose in an ancient plaint that blended with the soft sibilance of the water falling from the bronze dragon bowl. . . . Then we left.

At the entrance, the small *né-san* was waiting for us. She thrust a slip of paper in my hand, saying: "You' champagne price. Ssssss. One hun'red hirty yen, hifty. Sssss, s'ank you? Prease?"

One of the members of our party gave a gasp. "One hundred thirty yen, fifty? Why, that's sixty dollars gold. Oh, I say, Mother Jesus is still on this earth! She's a long way from being translated into nothingness. It doesn't seem to be sin

that comes high, in Japan, it's curiosity."

As we rickshawed back to our ship, I recalled the many stories I had been told of Mother Jesus. Of her huge contributions when a tidal wave destroyed a coast village—second only to the fund voted by the Government. Of the Buddhist shrines she had erected. Of her quixotic generosity to her girls when they fell ill. I remembered, also, stories of her vindictiveness, once she was aroused. Tales of drunken Westerners who had made insulting remarks to her girls and then had disappeared mysteriously, never to be seen again. Mother Jesus was the stuff of which legends are made. . . . And she has already had a brief immortality —in a play that toured America.

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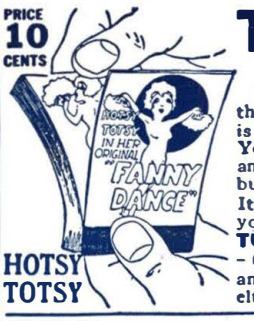

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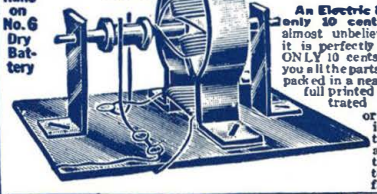

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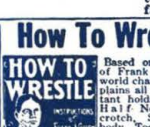

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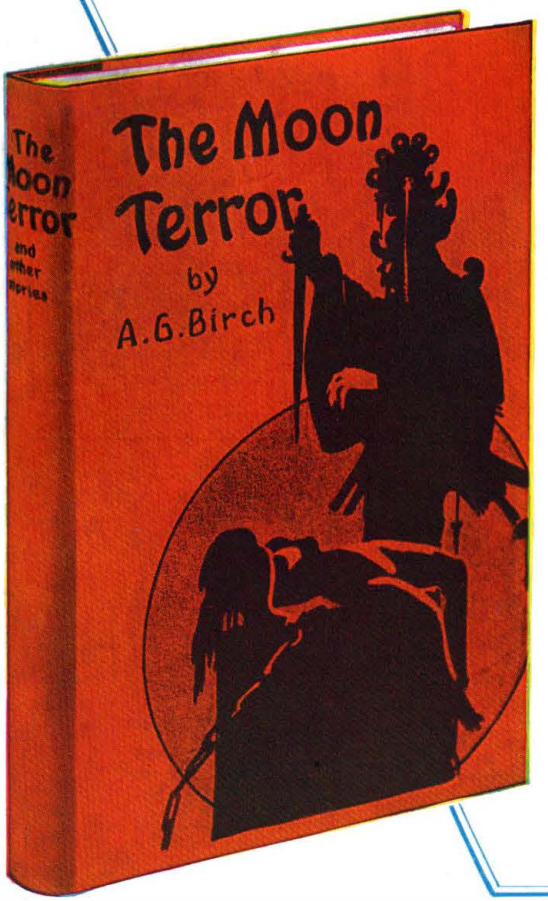

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