FASCINATING TALES OF THE EAST

ORIENTAL STORIES

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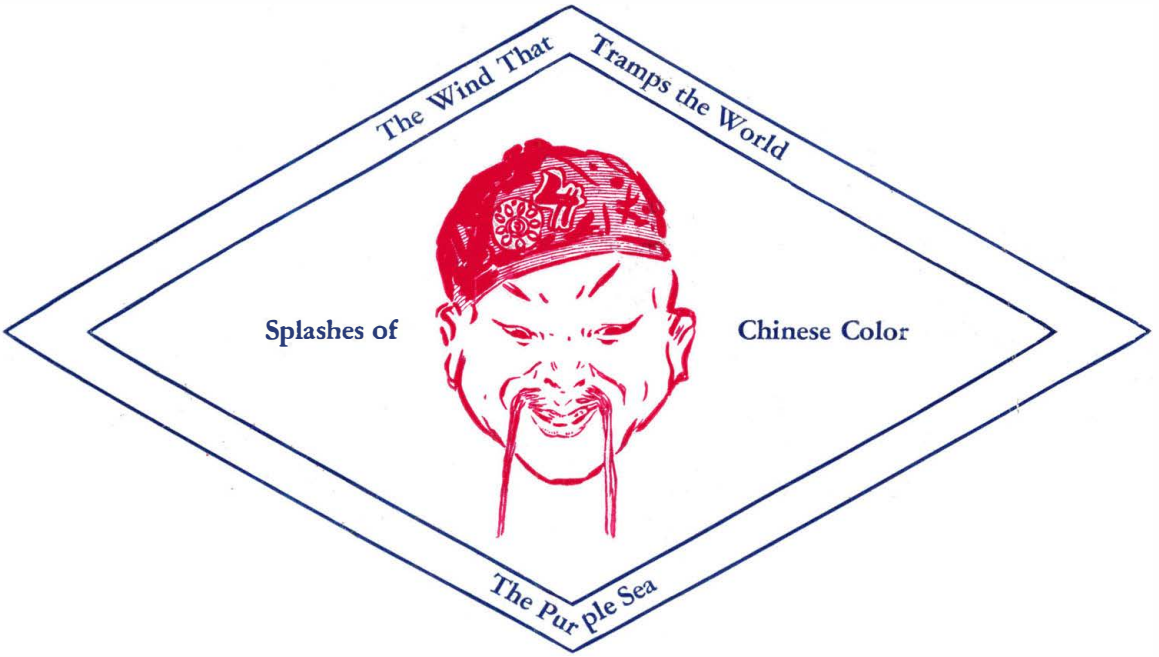

By FRANK OWEN

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VOLUME I

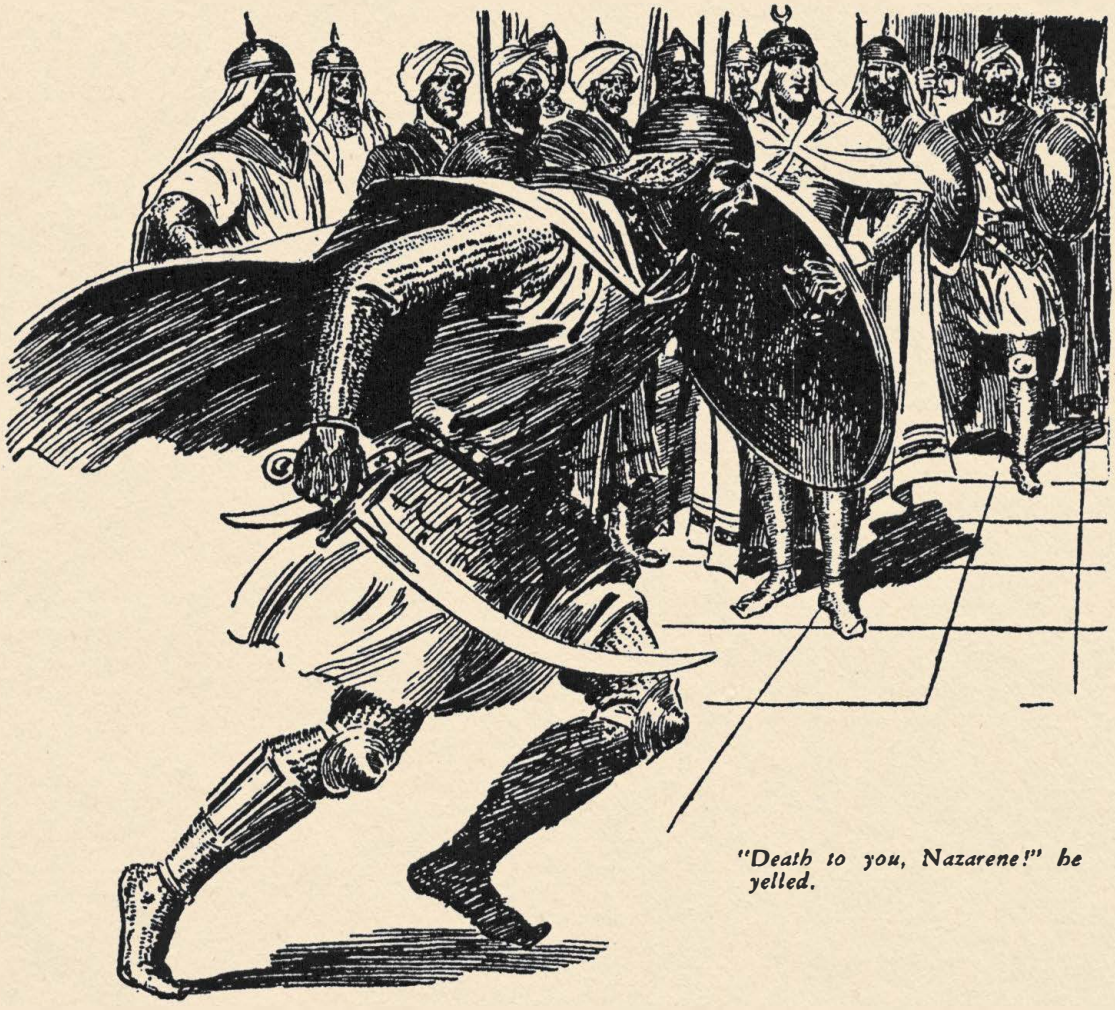
Fascinating Tales of the East

ORIENTAL STORIES

NUMBER 4

Published quarterly by the Popul r Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Application made for entry at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., as second class matter. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $1.00 a year in the United States, $1.20 a year in Canada, $1.40 in other countries. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet St., E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine a e fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publisher's Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Contents for April-May-June, 1931



"Death to you, Nazarene!" he yelled.

Hawks of Outremer

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

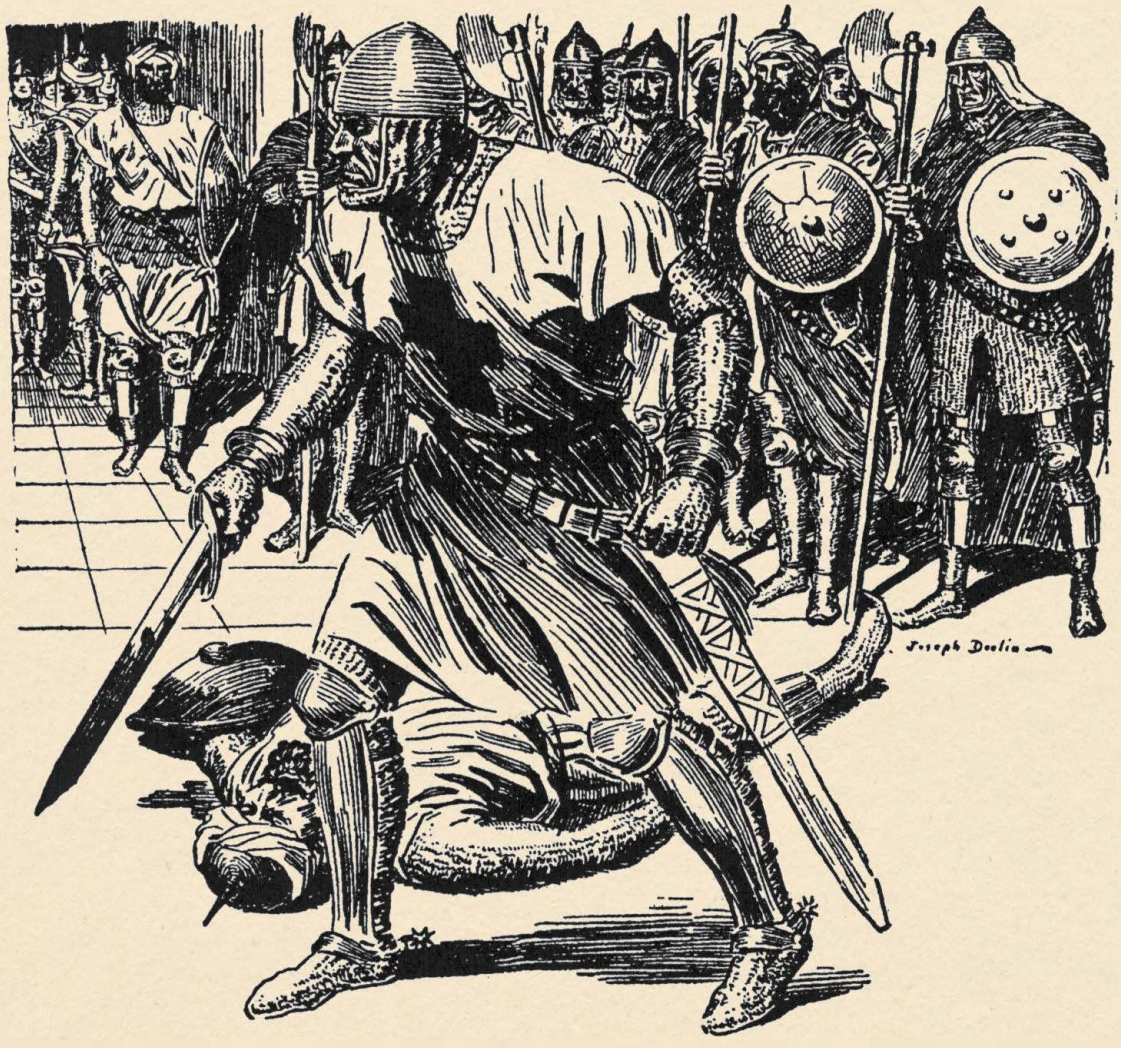
Cormac, the Irish-Norman Crusader, meets Saladin, Lion of Islam, under stirring circumstances—a red-blooded story

"The still, white, creeping road slips on,
Marked by the bones of man and beast.
What comeliness and might have gone
To pad the highway of the East!
Long dynasties of fallen rose,
The glories of a thousand wars,
A m llion lovers' hearts compose
The dust upon the road to Fars."
—Vansittart

1. A Man Returns

"HALT!" the bearded man-at-arms swung his pike about, growling like a surly mastiff. It paid to be wary on the road to Antioch. The stars blinked redly through the thick night and their light was not sufficient for the fellow to make out what sort of man it was who loomed so gigantically before him.

An iron-clad hand shot out suddenly and closed on the soldier's mailed shoulder in a grasp that numbed his whole arm. From beneath the helmet the guardsman saw the blaze of ferocious blue eyes that seemed lambent, even in the dark.



"Saints preserve us!" gasped the frightened man-at-arms, "Cormac FitzGeoffrey! Avaunt! Back to Hell with ye, like a good knight! I swear to you, sir——"

"Swear me no oaths," growled the knight. "What is this talk?"

"Are you not an incorporeal spirit?" mouthed the soldier. "Were you not slain by the Moorish corsairs on your homeward voyage?"

"By the accursed gods!" snarled FitzGeoffrey. "Does this hand feel like smoke?"

He sank his mailed fingers into the soldier's arm and grinned bleakly at the resultant howl.

"Enough of such mummery; tell me who is within that tavern."

"Only my master, Sir Rupert de Vaile, of Rouen."

"Good enough," grunted the other. "He is one of the few men I count friends, in the East or elsewhere."

The big warrior strode to the tavern door and entered, treading lightly as a cat despite his heavy armor. The man-at-arms rubbed his arm and stared after him curiously, noting, in the dim light, that FitzGeoffrey bore a shield with the horrific emblem of his family—a white grinning skull. The guardsman knew him of old—a turbulent character, a savage fighter and the only man among the Crusaders who had been esteemed stronger than Richard the Lion-hearted. But FitzGeoffrey had taken ship for his

native isle even before Richard had departed from the Holy Land. The Third Crusade had ended in failure and disgrace; most of the Frankish knights had followed their kings homeward. What was this grim Irish killer doing on the road to Antioch?

Sir Rupert de Vaile, once of Rouen, now a lord of the fast-fading Outremer, turned as the great form bulked in the doorway. Cormac FitzGeoffrey was a fraction of an inch above six feet, but with his mighty shoulders and two hundred pounds of iron muscle, he seemed shorter. The Norman stared in surprized recognition, and sprang to his feet. His fine face shone with sincere pleasure.

"Cormac, by the saints! Why, man, we heard that you were dead!"

Cormac returned the hearty grip, while his thin lips curved slightly in what would have been, in another man, a broad grin of greeting. Sir Rupert was a tall man, and well knit, but he seemed almost slight beside the huge Irish warrior who combined bulk with a sort of dynamic aggressiveness that was apparent in his every movement.

FitzGeoffrey was clean-shaven and the various scars that showed on his dark, grim face lent his already formidable features a truly sinister aspect. When he took off his plain vizorless helmet and thrust back his mail coif, his square-cut, black hair that topped his low broad forehead contrasted strongly with his cold blue eyes. A true son of the most indomitable and savage race that ever trod the blood-stained fields of battle, Cormac FitzGeoffrey looked to be what he was—a ruthless fighter, born to the game of war, to whom the ways of violence and bloodshed were as natural as the ways of peace are to the average man.

Son of a woman of the O'Briens and a renegade Norman knight, Geoffrey the Bastard, in whose veins, it is said, coursed the blood of William the Conqueror, Cormac had seldom known an hour of peace or ease in all his thirty years of violent life. He was born in a feud-torn and blood-drenched land, and raised in a heritage of hate and savagery. The ancient culture of Erin had long crumbled before the repeated onslaughts of Norsemen and Danes. Harried on all sides by cruel foes, the rising civilization of the Celts had faded before the fierce necessity of incessant conflict, and the merciless struggle for survival had made the Gaels as savage as the heathens who assailed them.

Now, in Cormac's time, war upon red war swept the crimson isle, where clan fought clan, and the Norman adventurers tore at one another's throats, or resisted the attacks of the Irish, playing tribe against tribe, while from Norway and the Orkneys the still half-pagan Vikings ravaged all impartially.

A vague realization of all this flashed through Sir Rupert's mind as he stood staring at his friend.

"We heard you were slain in a seafight off Sicily," he repeated.

Cormac shrugged his shoulders. "Many died then, it is true, and I was struck senseless by a stone from a ballista. Doubtless that is how the rumor started. But you see me, as much alive as ever."

"Sit down, old friend." Sir Rupert thrust forward one of the rude benches which formed part of the tavern's furniture. "What is forward in the West?"

Cormac took the wine goblet proffered him by a dark-skinned servitor, and drank deeply.

"Little of note," said he. "In France the king counts his pence and squabbles with his nobles. Richard—if he lives—languishes somewhere in Germany, 'tis thought. In England Shane—that is to say, John—oppresses the people and betrays the barons. And in Ireland—

Hell!" He laughed shortly and without mirth. "What shall I say of Ireland but the same old tale? Gael and foreigner cut each other's throat and plot together against the king. John De Coursey, since Hugh de Lacy supplanted him as governor, has raged like a madman, burning and pillaging, while Donal O'Brien lurks in the west to destroy what remains. Yet, by Satan, I think this land is but little better."

"Yet there is peace of a sort now," murmured Sir Rupert.

"Aye—peace while the jackal Saladin gathers his powers," grunted Cormac. "Think you he will rest idle while Acre, Antioch and Tripoli remain in Christian hands? He but waits an excuse to seize the remnants of Outremer."

Sir Rupert shook his head, his eyes shadowed.

"It is a naked land and a bloody one. Were it not akin to blasphemy I could curse the day I followed my king eastward. Betimes I dream of the orchards of Normandy, the deep cool forests and the dreaming vineyards. Methinks my happiest hours were when a page of twelve years——"

"At twelve," grunted FitzGeoffrey, "I was running wild with shock-head kerns on the naked fens—I wore wolfskins, weighed near fourteen stone and had killed three men."

SIR RUPERT looked curiously at his friend. Separated from Cormac's native land by a width of sea and the breadth of Britain, the Norman knew but little of the affairs in that far isle. But he knew vaguely that Cormac's life had not been an easy one. Hated by the Irish and despised by the Normans, he had paid back contempt and ill-treatment with savage hate and ruthless vengeance. It was known that he owned a shadow of allegiance only to the great house of Fitzgerald, who, as much Welsh as Norman, had even then begun to take up Irish customs and Irish quarrels.

"You wear another sword than that you wore when I saw you last."

"They break in my hands," said Cormac. "Three Turkish sabers went into the forging of the sword I wielded at Joppa—yet it shattered like glass in that sea-fight off Sicily. I took this from the body of a Norse sea-king who led a raid into Munster. It was forged in Norway—see the pagan runes on the steel?"

He drew the sword and the great blade shimmered bluely, like a thing alive in the candle light. The servants crossed themselves and Sir Rupert shook his head.

"You should not have drawn it here—they say blood follows such a sword."

"Bloodshed follows my trail anyway," growled Cormac. "This blade has already drunk FitzGeoffrey blood—with this that Norse sea-king slew my brother, Shane."

"And you wear such a sword?" exclaimed Sir Rupert in horror. "No good will come of that evil blade, Cormac!"

"Why not?" asked the big warrior impatiently. "It's a good blade—I wiped out the stain of my brother's blood when I slew his slayer. By Satan, but that sea-king was a grand sight in his coat of mail with silvered scales. His silvered helmet was strong too—ax, helmet and skull shattered together."

"You had another brother, did you not?"

"Aye—Donal. Eochaidh O'Donnell ate his heart out after the battle at Coolmanagh. There was a feud between us at the time, so it may be Eochaidh merely saved me the trouble—but for all that I burned the O'Donnell in his own castle."

"How came you to first ride on the Crusade?" asked Sir Rupert curiously.

"Were you stirred with a desire to cleanse your soul by smiting the Paynim?"

"Ireland was too hot for me," answered the Norman-Gael candidly. "Lord Shamus MacGearailt—James Fitzgerald—wished to make peace with the English king and I feared he would buy favor by delivering me into the hands of the king's governor. As there was feud between my family and most of the Irish clans, there was nowhere for me to go. I was about to seek my fortune in Scotland when young Eamonn Fitzgerald was stung by the hornet of Crusade and I accompanied him."

"But you gained favor with Richard—tell me the tale."

"Soon told. It was on the plains of Azotus when we came to grips with the Turks. Aye, you were there! I was fighting alone in the thick of the fray and helmets and turbans were cracking like eggs all around when I noted a strong knight in the forefront of our battle. He cut deeper and deeper into the close-ranked lines of the heathen and his heavy mace scattered brains like water. But so dented was his shield and so stained with blood his armor, I could not tell who he might be.

"But suddenly his horse went down and in an instant he was hemmed in on all sides by the howling fiends who bore him down by sheer weight of numbers. So hacking a way to his side I dismounted——"

"Dismounted?" exclaimed Sir Rupert in amazement.

Cormac's head jerked up in irritation at the interruption. "Why not?" he snapped. "I am no French she-knight to fear wading in the muck—anyway, I fight better on foot. Well, I cleared a space with a sweep or so of my sword, and the fallen knight, the press being lightened, came up roaring like a bull and swinging his blood-clotted mace with such fury he nearly brained *me* as well as the Turks. A charge of English knights swept the heathen away and when he lifted his vizor I saw I had succored Richard of England.

" 'Who are you and who is your master?' said he.

" 'I am Cormac FitzGeoffrey and I have no master,' said I. 'I followed young Eamonn Fitzgerald to Holy Land and since he fell before the walls of Acre, I seek my fortune alone.'

" 'What think ye of me as a master?' asked he, while the battle raged half a bow-shot about us.

" 'You fight reasonably well for a man with Saxon blood in his veins,' I answered, 'but I own allegiance to no English king.'

"He swore like a trooper. 'By the bones of the saints,' said he, 'that had cost another man his head. You saved my life, but for this insolence, no prince shall knight you!'

" 'Keep your knighthoods and be damned,' said I. "I am a chief in Ireland—but we waste words; yonder are pagan heads to be smashed.'

"Later he bade me to his royal presence and waxed merry with me; a rare drinker he is, though a fool withal. But I distrust kings—I attached myself to the train of a brave and gallant young knight of France—the Sieur Gerard de Gissclin, full of insane ideals of chivalry, but a noble youth.

"When peace was made between the hosts, I heard hints of a renewal of strife between the Fitzgeralds and the Le Boteliers, and Lord Shamus having been slain by Nial Mac Art, and I being in favor with the king anyway, I took leave of Sieur Gerard and betook myself back to Erin. Well—we swept Ormond with torch and sword and hanged old Sir William le Botelier to his own barbican. Then, the Geraldines having no particular

need of my sword at the moment, I bethought myself once more of Sieur Gerard, to whom I owed my life and which debt I have not yet had opportunity to pay. How, Sir Rupert, dwells he still in his castle of Ali-El-Yar?"

Sir Rupert's face went suddenly white and he leaned back as if shrinking from something. Cormac's head jerked up and his dark face grew more forbidding and fraught with somber potentialities. He seized the Norman's arm in an unconsciously savage grip.

"Speak, man," he rasped. "What ails you?"

"Sieur Gerard," half whispered Sir Rupert. "Had you not heard? Ali-El-Yar lies in smoldering ruins and Gerard is dead."

Cormac snarled like a mad dog, his terrible eyes blazing with a fearful light. He shook Sir Rupert in the intensity of his passion.

"Who did the deed? He shall die, were he Emperor of Byzantium!"

"I know not!" Sir Rupert gasped, his mind half stunned by the blast of the Gael's primitive fury. "There be foul rumors—Sieur Gerard loved a girl in a sheihk's harem, it is said. A horde of wild riders from the desert assailed his castle and a rider broke through to ask aid of the baron Conrad Von Gonler. But Conrad refused——"

"Aye!" snarled Cormac, with a savage gesture. "He hated Gerard because long ago the youngster had the best of him at sword-play on shipboard before old Frederick Barbarossa's eyes. And what then?"

"Ali-El-Yar fell with all its people. Their stripped and mutilated bodies lay among the coals, but no sign was found of Gerard. Whether he died before or after the attack on the castle is not known, but dead he must be, since no demand for ransom has been made."

"Thus Saladin keeps the peace!"

Sir Rupert, who knew Cormac's unreasoning hatred for the great Kurdish sultan, shook his head. "This was no work of his—there is incessant bickering along the border—Christian as much at fault as Moslem. It could not be otherwise with Frankish barons holding castles in the very heart of Muhammadan country. There are many private feuds and there are wild desert and mountain tribes who own no lordship even to Saladin, and wage their own wars. Many suppose that the sheihk Nureddin El Ghor destroyed Ali-El-Yar and put Sieur Gerard to death."

Cormac caught up his helmet.

"Wait!" exclaimed Sir Rupert, rising. "What would you do?"

Cormac laughed savagely. "What would I do? I have eaten the bread of the de Gissclins. Am I a jackal to sneak home and leave my patron to the kites? Out on it!"

"But wait," Sir Rupert urged. "What will your life be worth if you ride on Nureddin's trail alone? I will return to Antioch and gather my retainers; we will avenge your friend together."

"Nureddin is a half-independent chief and I am a masterless wanderer," rumbled the Norman-Gael, "but you are Seneschal of Antioch. If you ride over the border with your men-at-arms, the swine Saladin will take advantage to break the truce and sweep the remnants of the Christian kingdoms into the sea. They are but weak shells, as it is, shadows of the glories of Baldwin and Bohemund. No—the FitzGeoffreys wreak their own vengeance. I ride alone."

He jammed his helmet into place and with a gruff "Farewell!" he turned and strode into the night, roaring for his horse. A trembling servant brought the great black stallion, which reared and snorted with a flash of wicked teeth. Cor-

mac seized the reins and savagely jerked down the rearing steed, swinging into the saddle before the pawing front hoofs touched earth.

"Hate and the glutting of vengeance!" he yelled savagely, as the great stallion whirled away, and Sir Rupert, staring bewilderedly after him, heard the swiftly receding clash of the brazen-shod hoofs. Cormac FitzGeoffrey was riding east.

2. *The Cast of an Ax*

WHITE dawn surged out of the Orient to break in rose-red billows on the hills of Outremer. The rich tints softened the rugged outlines, deepened the blue wastes of the sleeping desert.

The castle of the baron Conrad Von Gonler frowned out over a wild and savage waste. Once a stronghold of the Seljuk Turks, its metamorphosis into the manor of a Frankish lord had abated none of the Eastern menace of its appearance. The walls had been strengthened and a barbican built in place of the usual wide gates. Otherwise the keep had not been altered.

Now in the dawn a grim, dark figure rode up to the deep, waterless moat which encircled the stronghold, and smote with iron-clad fist on hollow-ringing shield until the echoes reverberated among the hills. A sleepy man-at-arms thrust his head and his pike over the wall above the barbican and bellowed a challenge.

The lone rider threw back his helmeted head, disclosing a face dark with a passion that an all-night's ride had not cooled in the least.

"You keep rare watch here," roared Cormac FitzGeoffrey. "Is it because you're so hand-in-glove with the Paynim that you fear no attack? Where is that ale-guzzling swine you call your liege?"

"The baron is at wine," the fellow answered sullenly, in broken English.

"So early?" marveled Cormac.

"Nay," the other gave a surly grin, "he has feasted all night."

"Wine-bibber! Glutton!" raged Cormac. "Tell him I have business with him."

"And what shall I say your business is, Lord FitzGeoffrey?" asked the carl, impressed.

"Tell him I bring him a passport to Hell!" yelled Cormac, gnashing his teeth, and the scared soldier vanished like a puppet on a string.

The Norman-Gael sat his horse impatiently, shield slung on his shoulders, lance in its stirrup socket, and to his surprize, suddenly the barbican door swung wide and out of it strutted a fantastic figure. Baron Conrad Von Gonler was short and fat; broad of shoulder and portly of belly, though still a young man. His long arms and wide shoulders had gained him a reputation as a deadly broadsword man, but just now he looked little of the fighter. Germany and Austria sent many noble knights to Holy Land. Baron Von Gonler was not one of them.

His only arm was a gold-chased dagger in a richly brocaded sheath. He wore no armor, and his costume, flaming with gay silk and heavy with gold, was a bizarre mingling of European gauds and Oriental finery. In one hand, on each finger of which sparkled a great jewel, he held a golden wine goblet. A band of drunken revellers reeled out behind him—minnesingers, dwarfs, dancing girls, wine-companions, vacuous-faced, blinking like owls in the daylight. All the boot-kissers and hangers-on that swarm after a rich and degenerate lord trooped with their master—scum of both races. The luxury of the East had worked quick ruin on Baron Von Gonler.

"Well," shouted the baron, "who is it wishes to interrupt my drinking?"

"Any but a drunkard would know

Cormac FitzGeoffrey," snarled the horseman, his lip writhing back from his strong teeth in contempt. "We have an account to settle."

That name and Cormac's tone had been enough to sober any drunken knight of the Outremer. But Von Gonler was not only drunk; he was a degenerate fool. The baron took a long drink while his drunken crew stared curiously at the savage figure on the other side of the dry moat, whispering to one another.

"Once you were a man, Von Gonler," said Cormac, in a tone of concentrated venom; "now you have become a groveling debauchee. Well, that's your own affair. The matter I have in mind is another—why did you refuse aid to the Sieur de Gissclin?"

The German's puffy, arrogant face took on new hauteur. He pursed his thick lips haughtily, while his bleared eyes blinked over his bulbous nose like an owl. He was an image of pompous stupidity that made Cormac grind his teeth.

"What was the Frenchman to me?" the baron retorted brutally. "It was his own fault—out of a thousand girls he might have taken, the young fool tried to steal one a sheihk wanted himself. He, the purity of honor! Bah!"

He added a coarse jest and the creatures with him screamed with mirth, leaping and flinging themselves into obscene postures. Cormac's sudden and lion-like roar of fury gave them pause.

"Conrad Von Gonler!" thundered the maddened Gael, "I name you liar, traitor and coward—dastard, poltroon and villain! Arm yourself and ride out here on the plain. And haste—I can not waste much time on you—I must kill you quick and ride on lest another vermin escape me."

The baron laughed cynically. "Why should I fight you? You are not even a knight. You wear no knightly emblem on your shield.

"Evasions of a coward," raged FitzGeoffrey. "I am a chief in Ireland and I have cleft the skulls of men whose boots you are not worthy to touch. Will you arm yourself and ride out, or are you become the swinish coward I deem you?"

Von Gonler laughed in scornful anger. "I need not risk my hide fighting you. I will not fight you, but I will have my men-at-arms fill your hide with crossbow bolts if you tarry longer."

"Von Gonler," Cormac's voice was deep and terrible in its brooding menace, "will you fight, or die in cold blood?"

The German burst into a sudden brainless shout of laughter.

"Listen to him!" he roared. "He threatens me—he on the other side of the moat, with the drawbridge lifted—I here in the midst of my henchmen!"

He smote his fat thigh and roared with his fool's laughter, while the debased men and women who served his pleasures laughed with him and insulted the grim Irish warrior with shrill anathema and indecent gestures. And suddenly Cormac, with a bitter curse, rose in his stirrups, snatched his battle-ax from his saddlebow and hurled it with all his mighty strength.

The men-at-arms on the towers cried out and the dancing girls screamed. Von Gonler had thought himself to be out of reach—but there is no such thing as being out of reach of Norman-Irish vengeance. The heavy ax hissed as it clove the air and dashed out Baron Conrad's brains.

The fat, gross body buckled to the earth like a mass of melted tallow, one fat, white hand still gripping the empty wine goblet. The gay silks and cloth-of-gold were dabbled in a deeper red than ever was sold in the bazar, and the jesters

and dancers scattered like birds, screaming at the sight of that blasted head and the crimson ruin that had been a human face.

Cormac FitzGeoffrey made a fierce, triumphant gesture and voiced a deep-chested yell of such ferocious exultation that men blenched to hear. Then wheeling his black steed suddenly, he raced away before the dazed soldiers could get their wits together to send a shower of arrows after him.

He did not gallop far. The great steed was weary from a hard night's travel. Cormac soon swung in behind a jutting crag, and reining his horse up a steep incline, halted and looked back the way he had come. He was out of sight of the keep, but he heard no sounds of pursuit. A wait of some half-hour convinced him that no attempt had been made to follow him. It was dangerous and foolhardy to ride out of a safe castle into these hills. Cormac might well have been one of an ambushing force.

At any rate, whatever his enemies' thoughts were on the subject, it was evident that he need expect no present attempt at retaliation, and he grunted with angry satisfaction. He never shunned a fight, but just now he had other business on hand.

Cormac rode eastward.

3. *The Road to El Ghor*

THE way to El Ghor was rough indeed. Cormac wound his way between huge jagged boulders, across deep ravines and up treacherous steeps. The sun slowly climbed toward the zenith and the heat waves began to dance and shimmer. The sun beat fiercely on Cormac's helmed head, and glancing back from the bare rocks, dazzled his narrowed eyes. But the big warrior gave no heed; in his own land he learned to defy sleet and snow and bitter cold; following the standard of Cœur de Lion, before the shimmering walls of Acre, on the dusty plains of Azotus, and before Joppa, he had become inured to the blaze of the Oriental sun, to the glare of naked sands, to the slashing dust winds.

At noon he halted long enough to allow the black stallion an hour's rest in the shade of a giant boulder. A tiny spring bubbled there, known to him of old, and it slaked the thirst of the man and the horse. The stallion cropped eagerly at the scrawny fringe of grass about the spring and Cormac ate of the dried meats he carried in a small pouch. Here he had watered his steed in the old days, when he rode with Gerard. Ali-El-Yar lay to the west; in the night he had swung around it in a wide circle as he rode to the castle of Von Gonler. He had had no wish to gaze on the moldering ruins. The nearest Moslem chief of any importance was Nureddin El Ghor, who with his brother-at-arms, Kosru Malik, the Seljuk, held the castle of El Ghor, in the hills to the east.

Cormac rode on stolidly through the savage heat. As midafternoon neared he rode up out of a deep, wide defile and came onto the higher levels of the hills. Up this defile he had ridden aforetime to raid the wild tribes to the east, and on the small plateaus at the head of the defile stood a gibbet where Sieur Gerard de Gissclin had once hanged a red-handed Turkoman chief as a warning to those tribes.

Now, as FitzGeoffrey rode up on the plateau, he saw the old tree again bore fruit. His keen eyes made out a human form suspended in midair, apparently by the wrists. A tall warrior in the peaked helmet and light mail shirt of a Moslem stood beneath, tentatively prodding at the victim with a spear, making the body sway and spin on the rope. A bay Turk-

oman horse stood near. Cormac's cold eyes narrowed. The man on the rope—his naked body glistened too white in the sun for a Turk. The Norman-Gael touched spurs to the black stallion and swept across the plateau at a headlong run.

At the sudden thunder of hoofs the Muhammadan started and whirled. Dropping the spear with which he had been tormenting the captive, he mounted swiftly, stringing a short heavy bow as he did so. This done, and his left forearm thrust through the straps of a small round buckler, he trotted out to meet the onset of the Frank.

Cormac was approaching at a thundering charge, eyes glaring over the edge of his grim shield. He knew that this Turk would never meet him as a Frankish knight would have met him—breast to breast. The Moslem would avoid his ponderous rushes, and circling him on his nimbler steed, drive in shaft after shaft until one found its mark. But he rushed on as recklessly as if he had never before encountered Saracen tactics.

Now the Turk bent his bow and the arrow glanced from Cormac's shield. They were barely within javelin cast of each other, but even as the Moslem laid another shaft to string, doom smote him. Cormac, without checking his headlong gait, suddenly rose in his stirrups and gripping his long lance in the middle, cast it like a javelin. The unexpectedness of the move caught the Seljuk off guard and he made the mistake of throwing up his shield instead of dodging. The lance-head tore through the light buckler and crashed full on his mail-clad breast. The point bent on his hauberk without piercing the links, but the terrific impact dashed the Turk from his saddle and as he rose, dazed and groping for his simitar, the great black stallion was already looming horrific over him, and under those frenzied hoofs he went down, torn and shattered.

Without a second glance at his victim Cormac rode under the gibbet and rising in the saddle, stared into the face of he who swung therefrom.

"By Satan," muttered the big warrior, " 'tis Micaul na Blaos—Michael de Blois, one of Gerard's squires. What devil's work is this?"

Drawing his sword he cut the rope and the youth slid into his arms. Young Michael's lips were parched and swollen, his eyes dull with suffering. He was naked except for short leathern breeks, and the sun had dealt cruelly with his fair skin. Blood from a slight scalp wound caked his yellow hair, and there were shallow cuts on his limbs—marks left by his tormentor's spear.

Cormac laid the young Frenchman in the shade cast by the motionless stallion and trickled water through the parched lips from his canteen. As soon as he could speak, Michael croaked: "Now I know in truth that I am dead, for there is but one knight ever rode in Outremer who could cast a long lance like a javelin—and Cormac FitzGeoffrey has been dead for many months. But if I be dead, where is Gerard—and Yulala?"

"Rest and be at ease," growled Cormac. "You live—and so do I."

He loosed the cords that had cut deep into the flesh of Michael's wrists and set himself to gently rub and massage the numb arms. Slowly the delirium faded from the youth's eyes. Like Cormac, he too came of a race that was tough as spring steel; an hour's rest and plenty of water, and his intense vitality asserted itself.

"How long have you hung from this gibbet?" asked Cormac.

"Since dawn." Michael's eyes were grim as he rubbed his lacerated wrists. "Nureddin and Kosru Malik said that

since Sieur Gerard once hanged one of their race here, it was fitting that one of Gerard's men should grace this gibbet."

"Tell me how Gerard died," growled the Irish warrior. "Men hint at foul tales——"

Michael's fine eyes filled with tears. "Ah, Cormac, I who loved him, brought about his death. Listen—there is more to this than meets the casual eye. I think that Nureddin and his comrade-at-arms have been stung by the hornet of empire. It is in my mind that they, with various dog-knights among the Franks, dream of a mongrel kingdom among these hills, which shall hold allegiance neither to Saladin nor any king of the West.

"They begin to broaden their holdings by treachery. The nearest Christian hold was that of Ali-El-Yar, of course. Sieur Gerard was a true knight, peace be upon his fair soul, and he must be removed. All this I learned later—would to God I had known it beforehand! Among Nureddin's slaves is a Persian girl named Yulala, and with this innocent tool of their evil wishes, the twain sought to ensnare my lord—to slay at once his body and his good name. And God help me, through me they succeeded where otherwise they had failed.

"For my lord Gerard was honorable beyond all men. When in peace, and at Nureddin's invitation, he visited El Ghor, he paid no heed to Yulala's blandishments. For according to the commands of her masters, which she dared not disobey, the girl allowed Gerard to look on her, unveiled, and as if by chance, and she pretended affection for him. But Gerard gave her no heed. But I—I fell victim to her charms."

Cormac snorted in disgust. Michael clutched his arm.

"Cormac," he cried, "bethink you—all men are not iron like you! I swear I loved Yulala from the moment I first set eyes on her—and she loved me! I contrived to see her again—to steal into El Ghor itself——"

"Whence men got the tale that it was Gerard who was carrying on an affair with Nureddin's slave," snarled Fitz-Geoffrey.

Michael hid his face in his hands. "Mine the fault," he groaned. "Then one night a mute brought a note signed by Yulala—apparently—begging me to come with Sieur Gerard and his men-at-arms and save her from a frightful fate—our love had been discovered, the note read, and they were about to torture her. I was wild with rage and fear. I went to Gerard and told him all, and he, white soul of honor, vowed to aid me. He could not break the truce and bring Saladin's wrath upon the Christian's cities, but he donned his mail and rode forth alone with me. We would see if there was any way whereby we might steal Yulala away, secretly; if not, my lord would go boldly to Nureddin and ask the girl as a gift, or offer to pay a great ransom for her. I would marry her.

"Well, when we reached the place outside the wall of El Ghor, where I was wont to meet Yulala, we found we were trapped. Nureddin, Kosru Malik and their warriors rose suddenly about us on all sides. Nureddin first spoke to Gerard, telling him of the trap he had set and baited, hoping to entice my lord into his power alone. And the Moslem laughed to think that the chance love of a squire had drawn Gerard into the trap where the carefully wrought plan had failed. As for the missive—Nureddin wrote that himself, believing, in his craftiness, that Sieur Gerard would do just as indeed he did.

"Nureddin and the Turk offered to allow Gerard to join them in their plan of empire. They told him plainly that his

castle and lands were the price a certain powerful nobleman asked in return for his alliance, and they offered alliance with Gerard instead of this noble. Sieur Gerard merely answered that so long as life remained in him, he would keep faith with his king and his creed, and at the word the Moslems rolled on us like a wave.

"Ah, Cormac, Cormac, had you but been there with our men-at-arms! Gerard bore himself right manfully as was his wont—back to back we fought and I swear to you that we trod a knee-deep carpet of the dead before Gerard fell and they dragged me down. 'Christ and the Cross!' were his last words, as the Turkish spears and swords pierced him through and through. And his fair body—naked and gashed, and thrown to the kites and the jackals!"

Michael sobbed convulsively, beating his fists together in his agony. Cormac rumbled deep in his chest like a savage bull. Blue lights burned and flickered in his eyes.

"And you?" he asked harshly.

"Me they flung into a dungeon for torture," answered Michael, "but that night Yulala came to me. An old servitor who loved her, and who had dwelt in El Ghor before it fell to Nureddin, freed me and led us both through a secret passage that leads from the torture chamber, beyond the wall. We went into the hills on foot and without weapons and wandered there for days, hiding from the horsemen sent forth to hunt us down. Yesterday we were recaptured and brought back to El Ghor. An arrow had struck down the old slave who showed us the passageway, unknown to the present masters of the castle, and we refused to tell how we had escaped though Nureddin threatened us with torture. This dawn he brought me forth from the castle and hanged me to this gibbet, leaving that one to guard me. What he has done to Yulala, God alone knows."

"You knew that Ali-El-Yar had fallen?"

"Aye," Michael nodded dully, "Kosru Malik boasted of it. The lands of Gerard now fall heir to his enemy, the traitor knight who will come to Nureddin's aid when the Moslem strikes for a crown."

"And who is this traitor?" asked Cormac softly.

"The baron Conrad Von Gonler, whom I swear to spit like a hare——"

Cormac smiled thinly and bleakly. "Swear me no oaths. Von Gonler has been in Hell since dawn. I knew only that he refused to come to Gerard's aid. I could have slain him no deader had I known his whole infamy."

Michael's eyes blazed. "A de Gissclin to the rescue!" he shouted fiercely. "I thank thee, old war-dog! One traitor is accounted for—what now? Shall Nureddin and the Turk live while two men wear de Gissclin steel?"

"Not if steel cuts and blood runs red," snarled Cormac. Tell me of this secret way—nay, waste no time in words—*show* me this secret way. If you escaped thereby, why should we not enter the same way? Here—take the arms from that carrion while I catch his steed which I see browses on the moss among the rocks. Night is not far away; mayhap we can gain through to the interior of the castle—there——"

His big hands clenched into iron sledges and his terrible eyes blazed; in his whole bearing there was apparent a plain tale of fire and carnage, of spears piercing bosoms and swords splitting skulls.

4. *The Faith of Cormac*

When Cormac FitzGeoffrey took up the trail to El Ghor again, one would have thought at a glance that a

Turk rode with him. Michael de Blois rode the bay Turkoman steed and wore the peaked Turkish helmet. He was girt with the curved simitar and carried the bow and quiver of arrows, but he did not wear the mail shirt; the hammering hoofs of the plunging stallion had battered and brayed it out of all usefulness.

The companions took a circuitous route into the hills to avoid outposts, and it was dusk before they looked down on the towers of El Ghor which stood, grim and sullen, girt on three sides by scowling hills. Westward a broad road wound down the steeps on which the castle stood. On all other sides ravine-cut slopes straggled to the beetling walls. They had made such a wide circle that they now stood in the hills almost directly east of the keep, and Cormac, gazing westward over the turrets, spoke suddenly to his friend.

"Look—a cloud of dust far out on the plain——"

Michael shook his head: "Your eyes are far keener than mine. The hills are so clouded with the blue shadows of twilight I can scarcely make out the blurred expanse that is the plain beyond, much less discern any movement upon it."

"My life has often depended on my eyesight," growled the Norman-Gael. "Look closely—see that tongue of plainsland that cleaves far into the hills like a broad valley, to the north? A band of horsemen, riding hard, are just entering the defiles, if I may judge by the cloud of dust they raise. Doubtless a band of raiders returning to El Ghor. Well—they are in the hills now where going is rough and it will be hours before they get to the castle. Let us to our task—stars are blinking in the east."

They tied their horses in a place hidden from sight of any watcher below down among the gullies. In the last dim light of dusk they saw the turbans of the sentries on the towers, but gliding among boulders and defiles, they kept well concealed. At last Michael turned into a deep ravine.

"This leads into the subterranean corridor," said he. "God grant it has not been discovered by Nureddin. He had his warriors searching for something of the sort, suspecting its existence when we refused to tell how we had escaped."

They passed along the ravine, which grew narrower and deeper, for some distance, feeling their way; then Michael halted with a groan. Cormac, groping forward, felt iron bars, and as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, made out an opening like the mouth of a cave. Solid iron sills had been firmly bolted into the solid rock, and into these sills were set heavy bars, too close together to allow the most slender human to slip through.

"They have found the tunnel and closed it," groaned Michael. "Cormac, what are we to do?"

Cormac came closer and laid hands tentatively on the bars. Night had fallen and it was so dark in the ravine even his cat-like eyes could hardly make out objects close at hand. The big Norman-Celt took a deep breath, and gripping a bar in each mighty hand, braced his iron legs and slowly exerted all his incredible strength. Michael, watching in amazement, sensed rather than saw the great muscles roll and swell under the pliant mail, the veins swell in the giant's forehead and sweat burst out. The bars groaned and creaked, and even as Michael remembered that this man was stronger than King Richard himself, the breath burst from Cormac's lips in an explosive grunt and simultaneously the bars gave way like reeds in his iron hands. One came away, literally torn from its sockets, and the others bent deeply. Cormac

gasped and shook the sweat out of his eyes, tossing the bar aside.

"By the saints," muttered Michael, "are you man or devil, Cormac FitzGeoffrey? That is a feat I deemed even beyond your power."

"Enough words," grunted the Norman. "Let us make haste, if we can squeeze through. It's likely that we'll find a guard in this tunnel, but it's a chance we must take. Draw your steel and follow me."

It was as dark as the maw of Hades in the tunnel. They groped their way forward, expecting every minute to blunder into a trap, and Michael, stealing close at the heels of his friend, cursed the pounding of his own heart and wondered at the ability of the giant to move stealthily and with no rattling of arms.

To the comrades it seemed that they groped forward in the darkness for an eternity, and just as Michael leaned forward to whisper that he believed they were inside the castle's outer walls, a faint glow was observed ahead. Stealing warily forward they came to a sharp turn in the corridor around which shone the light. Peering cautiously about the corner they saw that the light emanated from a flickering torch thrust into a niche in the wall, and beside this stood a tall Turk, yawning as he leaned on his spear. Two other Moslems lay sleeping on their cloaks near by. Evidently Nureddin did not lay too much trust in the bars with which he had blocked the entrance.

"The guard," whispered Michael, and Cormac nodded, stepping back and drawing his companion with him. The Norman-Gael's wary eyes had made out a flight of stone steps beyond the warriors, with a heavy door at the top.

"These seem to be all the weapon-men in the tunnel," muttered Cormac. "Loose a shaft at the waking warrior—and do not miss."

Michael fitted notch to string, and leaning close to the angle of the turn, aimed at the Turk's throat, just above the hauberk. He silently cursed the flickering, illusive light. Suddenly the drowsy warrior's head jerked up and he glared in their direction, suspicion flaring his eyes. Simultaneously came the twang of the loosed string and the Turk staggered and went down, gurgling horribly and clawing at the shaft that transfixed his bull neck.

The other two, awakened by their comrade's death throes and the sudden swift drum of feet on the ground, started up—and were cut down as they rubbed at sleep-filled eyes and groped for weapons.

"That was well done," growled Cormac, shaking the red drops from his steel. "There was no sound that should have carried through yonder door. Still, if it be bolted from within, our work is useless and we undone."

But it was not bolted, as the presence of the warriors in the tunnel suggested. As Cormac gently opened the heavy iron door, a sudden pain-fraught whimper from the other side electrified them.

"Yulala!" gasped Michael, whitening. "'Tis the torture chamber, and that is her voice! In God's name, Cormac—in!"

And the big Norman-Gael recklessly flung the door wide and leaped through like a charging tiger, with Michael at his heels. They halted short. It was the torture chamber, right enough, and on the floor and the walls stood or hung all the hellish appliances that the mind of man has invented for the torment of his brother. Three people were in the dungeon and two of these were bestial-faced men in leathern breeches, who looked up, startled, as the Franks entered. The third was a girl who lay bound to a sort of bench, naked as the day she was born. Coals glowed in braziers near by and one of the mutes was in the very act of reach-

ing for a pair of white-hot pinchers. He crouched now, glaring in amazement, his arm still outstretched.

From the white throat of the captive girl burst a piteous cry.

"Yulala!" Michael cried out fiercely and leaped forward, a red mist floating before his eyes. One of the beast-faced mutes was before him, lifting a short sword, but the young Frank, without checking his stride, brought down his simitar in a sweeping arc that drove the curved blade through scalp and skull. Wrenching his weapon free, he dropped to his knees beside the torture bench, a great sob tearing his throat.

"Yulala! Yulala! Oh girl, what have they done to you?"

"Michael, my beloved!" Her great dark eyes were like stars in the mist. "I knew you would come. They have not tortured me—save for a whipping—they were just about to begin——"

The other mute had glided swiftly toward Cormac as a snake glides, knife in hand.

"Satan!" grunted the big warrior. "I won't sully my steel with such blood——"

His left hand shot out and caught the mute's wrist and there was a crunch of splintering bones. The knife flew from the mute's fingers, which spread wide suddenly like an inflated glove. Blood burst from the finger tips and the creature's mouth gaped in silent agony. And at that instant Cormac's right hand closed on his throat and through the open lips burst a red deluge of blood as the Norman's iron fingers ground flesh and vertebræ to a crimson pulp.

Flinging aside the sagging corpse, Cormac turned to Michael, who had freed the girl and now was nearly crushing her in his arms as he gripped her close in a very passion of relief and joy. A heavy hand on his shoulder brought him back to a realization of their position. Cormac had found a cloak and this he wrapped about the naked girl.

"Go, at once," he said swiftly. "It may not be long before others come to take the place of the guards in the tunnel. Here—you have no armor—take my shield—no, don't argue. You may need it to protect the girl from arrows if you —if we, are pursued. Haste now——"

"But you, Cormac?" Michael lingered, hesitant.

"I will make fast that outer door," said the Norman, "I can heap benches against it. Then I will follow you. But don't wait for me. This is a command, do you understand? Hasten through the tunnel and go to the horses. There, instantly mount the Turkoman horse and ride! I will follow by another route—aye, by a road none but I can ride! Ride ye to Sir Rupert de Vaile, Seneschal of Antioch. He is our friend; hasten now."

Cormac stood a moment in the doorway at the head of the stairs and watched Michael and the girl hurry down the steps, past the place where the silent sentries lay, and vanish about the turn in the tunnel. Then he turned back into the torture chamber and closed the door. He crossed the room, threw the bolt on the outer door and swung it wide. He gazed up a winding flight of stairs. Cormac's face was immobile. He had voluntarily sealed his doom.

The giant Norman-Celt was an opportunist. He knew that such chance as had led him into the heart of his foe's stronghold was not likely to favor him again. Life was uncertain in Outremer; if he waited another opportunity to strike at Nureddin and Kosru Malik, that opportunity might not come. This was his best opportunity for the vengeance for which his barbaric soul lusted.

That he would lose his own life in the consummating of that vengeance made no difference. Men were born to die in

battle, according to his creed, and Cormac FitzGeoffrey secretly leaned toward the belief of his Viking ancestors in a Valhalla for the souls loosed gloriously in the clash of swords. Michael, having found the girl, had instantly forgotten the original plan of vengeance. Cormac had no blame for him; life and love were sweet to the young. But the grim Irish warrior owed a debt to the murdered Gerard and was prepared to pay with his own life. Thus Cormac kept faith with the dead.

He wished that he could have bade Michael ride the black stallion, but he knew that the horse would allow none but himself to bestride it. Now it would fall into Moslem hands, he thought with a sigh. He went up the stairs.

5. *The Lion of Islam*

AT THE top of the stairs Cormac came into a corridor and along this he strode swiftly but warily, the Norse sword shimmering bluely in his hand. Going at random he turned into another corridor and here came full on to a Turkish warrior, who stopped short, agape, seeing a supernatural horror in this grim slayer who strode like a silent phantom of death through the castle. Before the Turk could regain his wits, the blue sword shore through his neck cords.

Cormac stood above his victim for a moment, listening intently. Somewhere ahead of him he heard a low hum of voices, and the attitude of this Turk, with shield and drawn simitar, had suggested that he stood guard before some chamber door. An irregular torch faintly illumined the wide corridor, and Cormac, groping in the semi-darkness for a door, found instead a wide portal masked by heavy silk curtains. Parting them cautiously he gazed through into a great room thronged with armed men.

Warriors in mail and peaked helmets, and bearing wide-pointed, curved swords, lined the walls, and on silken cushions sat the chieftains—rulers of El Ghor and their satellites. Across the room sat Nureddin El Ghor, tall, lean, with a high-bridged, thin nose and keen dark eyes; his whole aspect distinctly hawk-like. His Semitic features contrasted with the Turks about him. His lean strong hand continually caressed the ivory hilt of a long, lean saber and he wore a shirt of mesh-mail. A renegade chief from southern Arabia, this sheihk was a man of great ability; his dream of an independent kingdom in these hills was no mad hashish hallucination. Let him win the alliance of a few Seljuk chiefs, of a few Frankish renegades like Von Gonler, and with the hordes of Arabs, Turks and Kurds that would assuredly flock to his banner, Nureddin would be a menace both to Saladin and the Franks who still clung to the fringes of Outremer. Among the mailed Turks Cormac saw the sheepskin caps and wolfskins of wild chiefs from beyond the hills—Kurds and Turkomans. Already the Arab's fame was spreading, if such unstable warriors as these were rallying to him.

Near the curtain-hung doorway sat Kosru Malik, known to Cormac of old, a warrior typical of his race, strongly built, of medium height, with a dark cruel face. Even as he sat in council he wore a peaked helmet and a gilded mail hauberk and held across his knees a jeweled-hilted simitar. It seemed to Cormac that these men argued some matter just before setting out on some raid, as they were all fully armed. But he wasted no time on speculation. He tore the hangings aside with a mailed hand and strode into the room.

Amazement held the warriors frozen for an instant, and in that instant the giant Frank reached Kosru Malik's side.

The Turk, his dark features paling, sprang to his feet like a steel spring released, raising his simitar, but even as he did so, Cormac braced his feet and smote with all his power. The Norse sword shivered the curved blade to blue sparks and, rending the gilded mail, severed the Turk's shoulder-bone and cleft his breast.

Cormac wrenched the heavy blade free from the split breast-bone and with one foot on Kosru Malik's body, faced his foes like a lion at bay. His helmed head was lowered, his cold blue eyes flaming from under the heavy black brows, and his mighty right hand held ready the stained sword. Nureddin had leaped to his feet and stood trembling in rage and astonishment. This sudden apparition came as near to unmanning him as anything had ever done. His thin, hawk-like features lowered in a wrathful snarl, his beard bristled and with a quick motion he unsheathed his ivory-hilted saber. Then even as he stepped forward and his warriors surged in behind him, a startling interruption occurred.

Cormac, a fierce joy surging in him as he braced himself for the charge, saw, on the other side of the great room, a wide door swing open and a host of armed warriors appear, accompanied by sundry of Nureddin's men, who wore empty scabbards and uneasy faces.

The Arab and his warriors whirled to face the newcomers. These men, Cormac saw, were dusty as if from long riding, and his memory flashed to the horsemen he had seen riding into the hills at dusk. Before them strode a tall, slender, man, whose fine face was traced with lines of weariness, but whose aspect was that of a ruler of men. His garb was simple in comparison with the resplendent armor and silken attendants. And Cormac swore in amazed recognition.

Yet his surprize was no greater than that of the men of El Ghor.

"What do you in my castle, unannounced?" gasped Nureddin.

A giant in silvered mail raised his hand warningly and spoke sonorously: "The Lion of Islam, Protector of the Faithful, Yussef ibn Eyyub, Salah-ud-din, Sultan of Sultans, needs no announcement to enter yours, or any castle, Arab."

Nureddin stood his ground, though his followers began salaaming madly; there was iron in this Arabian renegade.

"My lord," said he stoutly, "it is true I did not recognize you when you first came into the chamber; but El Ghor is mine, not by virtue of right or aid or grant from any sultan, but the might of my own arm. Therefore, I make you welcome but do not beg your mercy for my hasty words."

Saladin merely smiled in a weary way. Half a century of intrigue and warring rested heavily on his shoulders. His brown eyes, strangely mild for so great a lord, rested on the silent Frankish giant who still stood with his mail-clad foot on what had been the chief Kosru Malik.

"And what is this?" asked the Sultan.

Nureddin scowled: "A Nazarene outlaw has stolen into my keep and assassinated my comrade, the Seljuk. I beg your leave to dispose of him. I will give you his skull, set in silver——"

A gesture stopped him. Saladin stepped past his men and confronted the dark, brooding warrior.

"I thought I had recognized those shoulders and that dark face," said the Sultan with a smile. "So you have turned your face east again, Lord Cormac?"

"Enough!" the deep voice of the Norman-Irish giant filled the chamber, "You have me in your trap; my life is forfeit. Waste not your time in taunts; send your jackals against me and make an end of it. I swear by my clan, many of them shall bite the dust before I die, and the dead will be more than the living!"

Nureddin's tall frame shook with passion; he gripped his hilt until the knuckles showed white. "Is this to be borne, my Lord?" he exclaimed fiercely. "Shall this Nazarene dog fling dirt into our faces——"

Saladin shook his head slowly, smiling as if at some secret jest: "It may be his is no idle boast. At Acre, at Azotus, at Joppa I have seen the skull on his shield glitter like a star of death in the mist, and the Faithful fall before his sword like garnered grain."

The great Kurd turned his head, leisurely surveying the ranks of silent warriors and the bewildered chieftains who avoided his level gaze.

"A notable concourse of chiefs, for these times of truce," he murmured, half to himself. "Would you ride forth in the night with all these warriors to fight genii in the desert, or to honor some ghostly sultan, Nureddin? Nay, nay, Nureddin, thou hast tasted the cup of ambition, meseemeth—and thy life is forfeit!"

The unexpectedness of the accusation staggered Nureddin, and while he groped for reply, Saladin followed it up: "It comes to me that you have plotted against me—aye, that it was your purpose to seduce various Moslem and Frankish lords from their allegiances, and set up a kingdom of your own. And for that reason you broke the truce and murdered a good knight, albeit a Caphar, and burned his castle. I have spies, Nureddin."

The tall Arab glanced quickly about, as if ready to dispute the question with Saladin himself. But when he noted the number of the Kurd's warriors, and saw his own fierce ruffians shrinking away from him, awed, a smile of bitter contempt crossed his hawk-like features, and sheathing his blade, he folded his arms.

"God gives," he said simply, with the fatalism of the Orient.

Saladin nodded in appreciation, but motioned back a chief who stepped forward to bind the sheihk. "Here is one," said the Sultan, "to whom you owe a greater debt than to me, Nureddin. I have heard Cormac FitzGeoffrey was brother-at-arms to the Sieur Gerard. You owe many debts of blood, oh Nureddin; pay one, therefore, by facing the lord Cormac with the sword."

The Arab's eyes gleamed suddenly. "And if I slay him—shall I go free?"

"Who am I to judge?" asked Saladin. "It shall be as Allah wills it. But if you fight the Frank you will die, Nureddin, even though you slay him; he comes of a breed that slays even in their death-throes. Yet it is better to die by the sword than by the cord, Nureddin."

The sheihk's answer was to draw his ivory-hilted saber. Blue sparks flickered in Cormac's eyes and he rumbled deeply like a wounded lion. He hated Saladin as he hated all his race, with the savage and relentless hatred of the Norman-Celt. He had ascribed the Kurd's courtesy to King Richard and the Crusaders, to Oriental subtlety, refusing to believe that there could be ought but trickery and craftiness in a Saracen's mind. Now he saw in the Sultan's suggestion but the scheming of a crafty trickster to match two of his foes against each other, and a feline-like gloating over his victims. Cormac grinned without mirth. He asked no more from life than to have his enemy at sword-points. But he felt no gratitude toward Saladin, only a smoldering hate.

THE Sultan and the warriors gave back, leaving the rivals a clear space in the center of the great room. Nureddin came forward swiftly, having donned a plain round steel cap with a mail drop that fell about his shoulders.

"Death to you, Nazarene!" he yelled, and sprang in with the pantherish leap and headlong recklessness of an Arab's

attack. Cormac had no shield. He parried the hacking saber with upflung blade, and slashed back. Nureddin caught the heavy blade on his round buckler, which he turned slightly slantwise at the instant of impact, so that the stroke glanced off. He returned the blow with a thrust that rasped against Cormac's coif, and leaped a spear's length backward to avoid the whistling sweep of the Norse sword.

Again he leaped in, slashing, and Cormac caught the saber on his left forearm. Mail links parted beneath the keen edge and blood spattered, but almost simultaneously the Norse sword crashed under the Arab's arm, bones cracked and Nureddin was flung his full length to the floor. Warriors gasped as they realized the full power of the Irishman's tigerish strokes.

Nureddin's rise from the floor was so quick that he almost seemed to rebound from his fall. To the onlookers it seemed that he was not hurt, but the Arab knew. His mail had held; the sword edge had not gashed his flesh, but the impact of that terrible blow had snapped a rib like a rotten twig, and the realization that he could not long avoid the Frank's rushes filled him with a wild beast determination to take his foe with him to Eternity.

Cormac was looming over Nureddin, sword high, but the Arab, nerving himself to a dynamic burst of superhuman quickness, sprang up as a cobra leaps from its coil, and struck with desperate power. Full on Cormac's bent head the whistling saber clashed, and the Frank staggered as the keen edge bit through steel cap and coif links into his scalp. Blood jetted down his face, but he braced his feet and struck back with all the power of arm and shoulders behind the sword. Again Nureddin's buckler blocked the stroke, but this time the Arab had no time to turn the shield, and the heavy blade struck squarely. Nureddin went to his knees beneath the stroke, bearded face twisted in agony. With tenacious courage he reeled up again, shaking the shattered buckler from his numbed and broken arm, but even as he lifted the saber, the Norse sword crashed down, cleaving the Moslem helmet and splitting the skull to the teeth.

Cormac set a foot on his fallen foe and wrenched free his gory sword. His fierce eyes met the whimsical gaze of Saladin.

"Well, Saracen," said the Irish warrior challengingly, " I have killed your rebel for you."

"And your enemy," reminded Saladin.

"Aye," Cormac grinned bleakly and ferociously. "I thank you—though well I know it was no love of me or mine that prompted you to send the Arab against me. Well—make an end, Saracen."

"Why do you hate me, Lord Cormac?" asked the Sultan curiously.

Cormac snarled. "Why do I hate any of my foes? You are no more and no less than any other robber chief, to me. You tricked Richard and the rest with courtly words and fine deeds, but you never deceived me, who well knew you sought to win by deceit where you could not gain by force of arms."

Saladin shook his head, murmuring to himself. Cormac glared at him, tensing himself for a sudden leap that would carry the Kurd with him into the Dark. The Norman-Gael was a product of his age and his country; among the warring chiefs of blood-drenched Ireland, mercy was unknown and chivalry an outworn and forgotten myth. Kindness to a foe was a mark of weakness; courtesy to an enemy a form of craft, a preparation for treachery; to such teachings had Cormac grown up, in a land where a man took every advantage, gave no quarter and

(Please turn to page 575)

"Tado fell ferociously on the raised arm."

Tado, Samurai

By LIEUTENANT EDGAR GARDINER

Tado Itima was only a youngster, but he proved himself a man worthy of his Samurai ancestry

"WHAT is it, danna-san?" Tado Itima's voice was anxious as his master, the seiyo-jin, started back from the open safe. He watched Carruthers wipe his face with his handkerchief, saw how the other's hands trembled.

"Call Ferguson!" Carruthers said in so terrible a voice that for once Tado obeyed without question and at a creditable speed. In a few moments Ferguson's grizzled head appeared in the doorway of Carruthers' private office.

"Did you open the safe this morning, Ferguson?" Carruthers' voice was strained. His secretary looked up sharply.

"Indeed, no! You changed the combination last week, you remember, and forgot to give me the new numbers."

Carruthers dropped limply into a chair.

"That's so. I had forgotten," he muttered as he covered his face with his hands.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" Ferguson went on.

"Wrong!" echoed Carruthers. "Wrong! The package I put into the safe last night is missing, a hundred thousand yen of jewels has disappeared into thin air! I dropped them into the drawer at closing time—they'd come in too late for me to send them to the safety deposit vault—and I thought they'd be safe enough there for the night. Now they're gone!" Carruthers was shaking like a leaf.

Ferguson gasped. He eyed the modern steel safe in round-eyed wonder.

"Somebody opened it?" he asked swiftly.

Carruthers nodded slowly.

"Who?" Ferguson's single word came like a rifle bullet.

Carruthers' chin sank slowly to his breast.

"Blessed if I know," he confessed. "I'm the only one who knew the new combination and the safe was opened without forcing the bolts," he went on slowly, half to himself. "Nobody knew of that shipment but myself and Westmore, who sent it from Yokohama. I put it away and now it's gone! It looks bad for me."

"It certainly does," corroborated his secretary.

"I'm sunk!" Carruthers went on glumly. "A hundred thousand yen—fifty thousand gold dollars! And the Chief knows that I was playing the market with A-I common stock!"

Abruptly he started to his feet, his hands clenched.

"I've got to find them!" He glared at Ferguson and at the shrinking Tado just behind. "I've got to find them or I'm done!"

Tado slipped swiftly to the partly open door, mindful of sundry beatings he had received from his master for mislaying various small articles belonging to the impulsive seiyo-jin.

"Playing the market with a falling stock on margin," Carruthers went on bitterly. "A fortune in jewels missing from an up-to-date safe that hasn't a scratch on it, whose combination only I know. Who'd believe me when I report it stolen?" He smiled a thin-lipped mirthless smile.

"It's tough," and Ferguson's grizzled head nodded solemnly. "Was anyone here when you locked the safe?" he went on.

Carruthers shook his head in negation.

Tado darted through the half-open door; his shrill voice was voluble as he quarreled with the porter.

"Come to think of it," Carruthers went on slowly, "I think Takagawa was in here, cleaning up. I'm sure of it! But, h——l! How would that ignorant coolie ever find out the combination? No, that's a bum lead! Let me think."

His hands went to his head again and he slouched dejectedly into his chair, watching with lack-luster eyes as his subordinate softly withdrew.

Carruthers' mind raced in aimless circles as he sat motionless. Who would believe him when he reported the loss? Most of his white associates and some of the Japanese officials knew that he was trading in the common stock of the Asiatic-Import Company; its rapid drop was a matter of jest among his friends when he happened to drop in at the club. One and all they would conclude he had gotten in beyond his depth and had stolen from his employers to recoup. Possibly the firm would have him arrested—

searched. While he might be released for lack of evidence, yet, in that case, he would surely be followed and carefully watched for months—years perhaps. Worst of all, his position as the trusted head of the Osaka branch of the great firm would be gone, and who would employ a thief in any position of responsibility or trust in the Orient?

For as a thief he would stand accused if not convicted. Nor could he go back to the States and fare any better. Before his eyes rose mental pictures of beachcombers he had seen here and there, miserable wretches, despised alike by whites and natives. Idly he had wondered how they lived; well, he would soon know, for he must join them. Even the outcast Eta's life was no harder than that now stretching inexorably before him. As the Japanese would have put it, Carruthers had lost his "face," his honor. Better, like a Japanese in a similar position, to die.

Yet suicide was far from his thoughts; he had not the smiling stoicism of these yellow men among whom he moved. The American impulse to fight was strong within him, to fight regardless of the odds.

TADO sidled softly into the room again. "Danna-san," he whispered, "danna-san!"

Carruthers paid no attention.

Tado's hand stole to the shoulder of this god-like seiyo-jin who had seemed to move so securely, so majestically, among these lesser white men. Like a great samurai, this one, under whom Tado could take service with honor as in happier, far-off days his own samurai father had served under the Shogun.

And now his master was troubled, calamity had spread its somber wings over the god-like one's destiny. What that catastrophe was, Tado neither knew nor cared; his timid outstretched hand meant unfaltering loyalty, be that master's fortune good or bad.

Slowly Carruthers raised his head.

"What is it, Tado?" he asked dully.

"Please, danna-san, Takagawa clean up the office when the honorable one close the seiyo-jin box," Tado whispered. "And just now, Takagawa listen outside the door."

Carruthers' head lifted suddenly, then dropped hopelessly once more. The thought was preposterous. The porter could not possibly have watched his rapid manipulation of the dial, have noted the numbers he stopped at so briefly! As for his spying at the door just now, did not all native Japanese servants spy so in their insatiable curiosity over the doings of the seiyo-jin?

"I've lost my face, Tado," Carruthers said slowly. "I'm done for. You had better find another master." He smiled wryly. "I won't need a servant any more."

Tado drew his slight form erect with all the earnestness of his thirteen years.

"My honorable father wore the two swords," he began. "Often he told me that when one can no longer live with honor one can die with honor."

In spite of his downcast mood Carruthers chuckled.

"Be still, baby," he commanded. "We shall live—yet awhile."

He snapped the safe door shut, gave the disk a rapid twirl and heard the heavy tumblers drop into place. He strode decisively to the outer office, curtly informing Ferguson he would be gone all day. That astounded secretary saw the determined swing of the manager's shoulders, his jaunty demeanor.

"Bet he found it," Ferguson grunted to himself. "Just misplaced it, I guess." He eyed Tado sourly as the little Japanese lad pattered after his master, and that

urchin, after a swift glance at the seiyo-jin's broad back to be sure he was not observed, thumbed his nose derisively at the august secretary. Before Ferguson could do more than curse deeply and emphatically, the two had passed through the crowded outer room where tpyewriters clacked endlessly and straw-sandaled yellow clerks scuffed silently about. In the colorful, crowded street Carruthers halted momentarily, glancing this way and that.

"We, who are about to die, salute thee," he quoted bitterly. Then with a quick change of spirits, "Well, Tado, where shall we go today? It may be our last happy moments together; let's make the most of them."

Tado's little face wrinkled with perplexity. A few moments ago he was sure the seiyo-jin had been in dire trouble, face to face with a supreme disaster, if the lad were any judge; yet now the god-like one proposed a boyish holiday. He seemed more carefree than Tado himself.

A deformed beggar whined for alms at Carruthers' elbow as he awaited Tado's decision. Instinctively the white man tossed the wretch a silver coin. Carruthers wondered how soon he would himself be begging for the silver he now tossed so carelessly away. He scowled heavily and swung about, with unseeing eyes staring into the doorway from which he had just emerged. Takagawa's head withdrew precipitately out of his range of vision; the porter spat a bitter muttered curse at his white employer as he hurried back to attend to his duties.

"First, I would like to go to the gardens," Tado began in his childish treble, "and after that, by 'rickisha to the shrine that sits on the high hill beyond the city and—and——" He grew alarmed as he thought of all his boyish desires, gulped hastily, then finished bravely, though his voice trembled at thought of his great daring—"and then I would like to take the danna-san into the quarter where the beggars live."

He finished that last with a rush. While Carruthers loved to pry into all parts of the teeming city, while he delighted to discover spots where the old Japan still flourished, yet to go after nightfall into the quarter of the Eta, the home of the outcasts and the parasites, was no pleasure jaunt. It was no place for a seiyo-jin, even by daylight; after dark it was as much as a man's life was worth for one to be found wandering there who was as prosperous-looking as Tado's master.

"Righto," Carruthers agreed recklessly. "That's as good as anything. Perhaps in that unsavory hole, Kwannon, the goddess of Wisdom, may give me understanding. Perhaps there she will even up the score."

He hailed a passing 'rickisha, settled himself within, passing a protecting arm about the lad, and gave the necessary directions, quite failing to notice that other similar vehicle that followed unobtrusively in his rear.

THE gardens had been thoroughly explored, the goldfish in the pools had been fed with crumbs of crisp rice-cakes; Tado had stuffed himself with sweetmeats to the point of repletion. The two had loitered along the winding evergreen-bordered road that led to the temple.

Carruthers had dismissed the 'rickisha at the gaudy ornate gate; together, for all the world like a pair of schoolboys, they had puffed and panted up the steep path within the temple-garden walls to the first sacred, red bridge. Just beyond sat a bronze Jizo, god of travelers and children. Mechanically Carruthers gave Tado a few coppers to lay before the shrine, wondering why this patron of weary wanderers was not seated at the

bottom of that steep ascent to assist them to the top.

They paused for breath at the highest point of the second arched bridge, the temple doors yawning just beyond them, its interior cool and dim. Carruthers' gaze passed over the well-tended garden, delighting in its variety of color and form, appreciating everything from the gray stone lanterns peeping, half hidden, among the evergreens, to the bordering mounds of the dead that stretched downward on all sides without the temple walls. These last varied from tiny rock heaps no higher than his knee to imposing piles that almost overlooked the walls enclosing the garden itself. His wandering thoughts were brought back with a jerk as Tado clutched his arm in excitement.

"Look, danna-san!" he whispered. "There at the first bridge! We are followed! All day I have felt it, now I am sure. It is the same one. I saw him first in the gardens, lagging behind us. Now he does likewise at this temple!"

Carruthers looked doubtfully at the Japanese standing on the lower bridge. The squat figure in its blue kimono looked vaguely familiar.

"Nonsense, baby," he grunted. "Who would follow us, and why? You must be mistaken."

"I am no baby, danna-san. I am the son of an honorable samurai. We men do not take fright at shadows. I am not mistaken. I would know that ugly cow-face if I saw it in hell."

Carruthers chuckled delightedly.

"Listen to this little cock crow! Mah! He has not yet shot his pin-feathers and already he imagines himself an eagle!"

Tado subsided sullenly.

"I know what I know," he muttered. "Had I been a baby I would have pointed him out to you and so have given him warning."

Carruthers grew suddenly grave.

"Righto, my young warrior," he said softly. "But why does he follow us?"

"Because of what is gone from the danna-san's strong metal box," Tado hazarded.

Carruthers started.

"I wonder," he mused. "Come, my brave one," he bantered. "We will make sure about this matter, whether he follows us or no."

He led the way about the temple grounds like some aimless tourist. Within the temple a prayer gong boomed four times, the voice of a boy arose across a court as if hurrying laggard monks to assembly. Once more the prayer bell boomed its solemn summons, answered every fourth time by the reverberant echo of a softer bell somewhere far within that walled enclosure.

Tado hummed a droning song popular in the city as the drawling monotonous prayers of the priests arose.

"See, soldier?" Carruthers chuckled. "You were mistaken after all. Not once again have we seen that other."

Tado's head was downcast, but every line of his figure expressed his obstinate refusal to believe. He slipped his foot from the four-inch wooden geta and traced intricate patterns upon the pathway with his big toe.

"But it grows late, Tado. Let us go."

AGAIN Carruthers hailed a 'rickisha. With the approach of darkness his troubles weighed him down once more. The morrow marked the end for him as a dominant figure in the A-I company. Another evening would find him imprisoned or, at least, watched. Either way it meant the end of his dreams, his career. He sighed wearily. He was no nearer a solution to the mystery than he had been when he called Ferguson into his private office that morning. The day in

the open had not stimulated his wits to the point of solving the puzzle.

In the 'rickisha Tado wriggled excitedly within his passive arm.

"Danna-san! Danna-san!" he whispered. "We are followed once more! I do not know if it is the cow-faced one or not. That follower of ame-no-Kagase, the scarecrow god, must have known that we were talking of him; therefore he vanished."

Absent-mindedly Tado drew forth a packet of silky Japanese tobacco cigarettes, lit one and inhaled deeply. A sudden swooping reach of the big seiyo-jin's arm and Carruthers held the packet in his huge paw.

"What? Again?" he questioned. "Must I beat you for your supper?"

"I forgot, danna-san," Tado returned unabashed. "It will not happen again."

"See that it doesn't," Carruthers snapped.

"Indeed, it will not," Tado repeated. "Two only I smoked and now the package is gone," he continued in an undertone.

"The 'rickisha follows us yet, danna-san," he went on, raising his voice once more, as he peered past the other's bulk.

"Faster!" Carruthers exhorted the 'rickisha coolie. Obediently the bare-legged steed quickened his pace. The 'rickisha behind came on at the faster gait, as Tado swiftly informed him.

"Perhaps you were right, worm," Carruthers admitted.

The twinkling lights of the city rose to meet them. Carruthers ordered the 'rickisha coolie to double and turn through the crowded streets, but Tado, peering slyly past his form, announced that their pursuer still hung on their track. Carruthers' left hand slipped into his coat pocket and felt the comforting bulk of the automatic reposing therein.

Tado's lean hand slid inside his kimono and touched the keen-bladed knife secreted there. Only the knowledge that were he to do so he would incur a beating more severe than any he had ever yet received and lose the knife besides, kept him from bringing it forth and patting it.

The 'rickisha drew away from the better-lighted part of the city, the streets grew quieter. Drearier grew the prospect, the houses degenerated to mere hovels, the few pedestrians abroad slunk furtively close beside the matting walls.

Tado thrilled with a tingling apprehension. In the blackness he could no longer distinguish their pursuer. Curtly Carruthers dismissed the 'rickisha at an intersection and proceeded on foot after tossing their panting steed a gold piece and ignoring the handful of silver the coolie proffered in change.

Tado kept close to Carruthers' side, his breath coming unevenly. He kept looking behind him as Carruthers went swiftly forward. Tado's breath hissed sharply through his teeth.

From either side a dark figure had hurtled out of the shadows as the seiyo-jin came abreast of a feeble flickering glow that proceeded from a doorway, together with the smell of bad sake and worse fish. Tado heard the hiss of the boiling pans, the slap of slabs of fish against rusty frying-pans; he glimpsed maid servants, ugly of face, in rusty, disheveled kimonos, rushing about, bearing bottles of the same squat shape as themselves; heard them laughing and chattering with the eaters.

THE cry of warning stuck in Tado's throat as Carruthers swung to meet the foremost. The seiyo-jin's left hand swung upward in a choppy uppercut that smashed soddenly upon the other's jaw, yet too far back for a knockout. The Japanese stopped in midstride under the impact, his head flew back and he sprawled on his shoulders in the dusty street.

With a swift sidewise thrust of his leg, Carruthers shoved Tado out of the way as the other flying figure caught him about the waist from behind. His long length was lifted in that deadly grip as his antagonist tried to whip him from the ground.

Carruthers recognized the grip instantly. Coldly alert, he turned completely over in midair, landing cat-like on his feet, his arms pumping up and down in short, savage, murderous blows.

A knife stung him on the leg. His swift downward glance showed him the other Japanese, lips drawn back in a wordless snarl, aiming another upward blow with the flashing steel.

A tiny figure hurtled in; Tado fell ferociously on that upraised arm; lightning-like his lithe arms shot over and under that other brawny one; Tado's weight dropped with a sickening, crunching snap; the Japanese screamed eerily as his elbow shattered and the knife dropped from his nerveless fingers.

"Mah!" Tado grunted explosively; his own naked blade glittered at the Eta's throat.

"Tado! Stop!" Carruthers snapped, and turned to meet the other once more. The dark figure ducked suddenly, but Carruthers' smashing fury of blows tore the knife from his hand with a paralyzing blow on the man's wrist. No further sound came from Tado and the other Eta; dimly Carruthers wondered if Tado had been killed. He went berserk, raining a storm of blows at his half-seen antagonist whose clawing hands were reaching for his legs.

Once those steel talons hooked about his kneecap in an agonizing grip, but Carruthers tore loose and flung himself bodily after his elusive enemy. They rose to their feet simultaneously; the Japanese had found his knife again.

Carruthers felt a searing pain as the knife glanced against his ribs; his shirt grew warm and sticky with blood as he jabbed viciously at the figure before him, momentarily outlined against the glow emanating from the eating-house.

Again the Japanese rushed him, stabbing wildly. Carruthers leaped to one side, closed in, seized an arm and twisted it violently inward. The Japanese grunted, coughed with a choking, gurgling sound—Carruthers' astounded eyes saw the other's knife protruding from his torn kimono. The seiyo-jin had forced the knife intended for himself into the other's chest, instead. The Eta sagged to the ground, dying. As Carruthers stared aghast, Tado rose, wiping his own dripping blade.

"Come, danna-san," he panted. "Let us run before these fools in the eating-house find the dead and call the police!" Setting the example he hurried forward. In a bound Carruthers was beside him, running like a sprinter.

"The other one——" the man gasped.

"He is dead, too, danna-san," Tado answered. "I did not mean to do it, but he would not lie still. He caught my foot with his good hand and——"

Tado saved his breath for running, his legs twinkled in and out as he strove to keep up with the god-like one. Behind them rose a chorus of shouts, an excited clamor. The diners, attracted by the noise of the battle, had found the dead bodies of the two Eta.

Tado carommed into his master as Carruthers sped into a narrow alley.

"Danna-san! Danna-san!" he panted.

Carruthers slackened his pace.

"What is it, my little fire-eater?" he whispered.

"We must be almost there, danna-san," Tado panted.

"Almost where, my little samurai?"

"Where Takagawa lodges, danna-san," Tado gasped.

Carruthers stopped so suddenly that Tado bounced off his broad back like a rubber ball. He picked the fallen youngster up none too gently.

"What fool's talk is this, little owl?" he growled. But his fingers were as gentle as his voice was rough. "Is Takagawa of the Eta?" he went on.

Tado grinned impishly to himself in the darkness.

"He was," Tado corrected. "And that one whom I killed was his brother," he continued. "It was the cow-faced one who followed us all day."

Carruthers whistled softly.

"What the ——" He stood motionless while his mind raced crazily. With this new knowledge he was again visioning the evening before when he had put away the sharkskin packet of jewels—Takagawa's cat-like lithe tread, his quick nervous movements, his darting glittering eyes. Takagawa, an Eta, an outcast—forced to live by his wits, yet able to worm his way into the A-I office as a porter. This new knowledge about his porter explained many things that Carruthers had noticed almost subconsciously—little things that now bulked large and important. Dimly he remembered, too, of seeing the porter's snarling visage as he had turned away from the office door in the street that morning.

"Where is it, Tado?" he whispered as he glided ahead once more.

ASCANT hundred feet they went forward. Tado peered intently through the thick gloom.

"There, danna-san." His outstretched hand pointed at a hovel a little more disreputable than its neighbors, whose thatched roof sagged drunkenly. A dim fuzzy light showed through the blackness about its walls.

With noiseless tread Carruthers crept closer. His ear caught the low mutter of voices beyond the dirty oiled-paper barrier.

"It is the voice of Takagawa himself," Tado whispered sibilantly in his ear.

Carruthers' fist smashed through the fragile wall, making a jagged rift from floor to ceiling in the oiled paper. Through the opening he had made he caught a glimpse of two figures springing up from beside a rope-seed oil lamp that glared smokily on a rickety stand, saw too——

His left hand was outthrust, the blued barrel of the automatic gleamed wickedly.

"Stand still, Takagawa," Carruthers ordered curtly. "I've got you—and your loot, too!"

The little Japanese porter leaped backward. The gun spat angrily. Tado's round child eyes stared past his master at the sprawled figure of the porter, at the round black hole in his forehead. His ears were deafened by the roar of the gun in that enclosed space, at the excited whining pleadings of the other shaking wretch, an unsavory dealer in jewels and antiques, who had been in trouble with the police times without number.

Slowly Carruthers stepped into the filthy room. Tado scuttled ahead, his greedy hands grasped the glittering baubles strewed on the low table before the smoking lamp and stowed them again in the soft shagreen packet. Deftly he dropped the closed pouch into the gaping pocket of the seiyo-jin's bloody coat.

"Kill this other father of pigs, danna-san," he pleaded. "He is a rat that seeks a hole and is too cowardly to bite."

The other's face turned gray, his pleading grew more vehement.

"Here! One jewel I stole when that—that crow was not looking!" With a shaking hand he dropped the largest jewel of all upon the table, from which it bounced with a rattle, to roll upon the filthy matting.

Tado pounced after it like a cat after a mouse. He rose, the glittering jewel clutched tight, reaching for his knife.

"Let me unlock the gates of speech for him, danna-san," he begged. "Often my honorable father told me of his own youth and the secrets he learned from the Chinese where punishment is an art."

The Japanese spat out something that is the same in all languages.

Tado slapped him across the mouth.

"Be still, Tado!" Carruthers' tones were steel behind their velvety softness. "We will give him into hands more experienced than yours." He glanced at the body of the porter sprawled grotesquely on its back. "Tomorrow we must get a new porter," he smiled, "one that is not an outcast."

"Let *me* hire him, danna-san?" Tado broke in swiftly.

"That you shall, wise one," Carruthers went on heartily. "I am beginning to think you should have had the hiring of this one as well. Then, all this trouble would not have happened."

Tado swelled with pride.

"And no more will my danna-san call me baby?" he asked softly.

"Never again, Tado," Carruthers promised. "Baby you are no longer, but a true samurai and a credit to the race of the Yamoto."

HSUN HSU

By HUNG LONG TOM

In the porcelains of Hsun Hsu
Were recorded
The entire history
Of beauty.
A golden vase he made
Like yellow velvet
On which a gold-girl trod,
Fit mistress for a god.
He created a vase
On which
Was the pink glory of sunrise.
Another was blue
Like the deep night fields of the sky.
But the rarest of all
Was Mirror Black
Wherein were reflected
His countless lovely dreams,
Dreams and purple visions
Which no human hand
Could paint.

BIBI LOVE

By SOLON K. STEWART

The love of a British soldier for an Arab girl—a romantic story of the Mesopotamian campaign

QUALAT AL MUFTI on a summer afternoon in mid '17 was the quintessence of sun-baked desolation.

A few mud huts round which lay a scant two acres under cultivation, the water raised in goatskin bags from the muddy Diyalah, thirty feet below; a few straggly, dispirited date palms, in whose scant shade dozed a dozen tiny donkeys daubed with henna—this was what filled Jennet Carlton's vision as he stood considering whether to go up the river, or down. Pausing a moment, he dropped down the steep path to the water's edge.

The Diyalah runs through a deep channel, through the unproductive clay of Iraq. Along its edge is a narrow strip of beach which the Arabs used as a road, the bluff affording grateful shade from the blazing sun.

The swirl of the water, hurrying from the snow-clad Pusht-I-Koh down to the Tigris, made pleasant music in his ears. A vagrant current of air felt cool and pleasant as it touched the breast of his sopping shirt. So immersed was he in his reflections as he walked that it was only when he was face to face with her, a scant yard away, that he was aware of an Arab woman standing at the water's edge.

Being the walker, he gave the salutation, *"Salaam alekum."*

"Wa alekum es salaam, Sahib," came the smiling answer in deep, full-toned gutturals; and a moment later she added with a laugh, "Goo' night."

The *bibi's* laugh was that of the Occident, rather than the shrill, cacophonous falsetto of the women of Mesopotamia. It affected him like the notes of a melody long unheard. The stumbling accents of her "Goo' night," the first syllables of his own tongue heard on a woman's lips for months, filled him suddenly with the desire for female companionship.

Unslinging his rifle, he sat down cross-legged; the woman sitting on her heels a few feet away.

"You're rushing things, aren't you?" he asked laughingly. "It won't be night for hours, yet."

With a puzzled frown, but smiling lips, she signified that she did not understand—*"Ma afthaham."*

"No," returned Carlton, regarding her with a whimsical smile, "I don't suppose you do.

"Tachi Inglesi? No? Well, we'll speak Arabic, then."

It was more difficult than Hindustani, which he had learned to speak with barrack-room fluency in India. But he made her understand. And in queer, outlandish dialect, of which familiar words here and there enabled him to guess the rest, she told him she was from the hill country near Karind, and had made her way through the Turkish lines near Kizil Robat on her way to Bagdad.

In answer to his question, *"Shismak?"* she told him her name was "Maryam."

In the medium of the Mesopotamian bazars, the weird *lingua franca* whose component parts are English, Arabic, Urdu, with occasional words in French, soldier and hill woman talked of the interminable nothings of the East; their

"My home is in the heart of my master."

low-pitched, monotonously intoned conversation interspersed with the long silences of the desert—silences in which their *jigaaras* took on a vast importance as they watched the drifting smoke curl into nothingness as they puffed.

It was not till the noise of some one descending the bank broke a longer silence that he realized how long he had been talking with this beautiful, wonderfully fascinating Maryam. He asked the time of the Arab.

"Five!" he exclaimed, rising hastily when the man told him. "I'll be late for parade if I don't hurry. It's at a quarter past."

As he stood regarding her full-bodied, graceful, calm-faced beauty, almost without volition the words rose to his lips. He spoke them, hardly realizing their import, or how they would be received.

"Wayn baytak?" he asked; then wondered what she would say; for he knew that he should never ask an Arab woman where she lived.

She regarded him a moment with inscrutable eyes. Then bowing her head, and placing the back of her hand on her forehead, she answered in the poetic Arabic, "My home is in the heart of my master."

As he turned to go, he whispered, *"Ashra"*—at ten. And as he scrambled up the bluff, her voice came to him in the soft sibilant *"Allah yusellemek"*—God give you peace.

WHEN all in the tent were asleep, Carlton rose from his *charpoi*, drew on his boots, and made his way through the star-shot velvet shadow of Mesopotamian night, past the clustered

Arab huts, and scrambled down to the water's edge.

She was waiting; the outlines of her lithesome figure vague and indistinct, merging into the shadow of the bluff.

The inheritance of untold unchanging generations of broad-hipped, high-breasted hill women was Maryam's: the knowledge of the primeval world unobscured by the intellectual veneering of civilization. She knew that when the sun shone upon her, she was warm; knew that the red and gold and saffron splendor of the Mesopotamian sunset, seen from the slopes of the mighty Persian Hills, delighted her eyes; knew that the sound of the rushing Diyalah was music in her ears. The breath of this man warmed her as never the sun had done; the yellow of his hair, the blue of his eyes, the ruddy-golden tint of his skin delighted her eyes as never a sunset had. The sound of his stumbling Arabic-Urdu was the grandest music ever heard.

The warm clasp of his fingers as he seized her hand, bespeaking primordial man, the touch of his lips on her fingers, the temporary abnegation of the dominant male, were to her eighteen-year-old womanhood familiar through a thousand rehearsals since the world was young. In silence she stood looking at his face, dimly seen in the shadow. Then her clasp was about his neck. As he threw his arms about her, straining her against his breast, their lips met in the first long kiss.

It was past midnight when he told Maryam good-night, and made his way back to his *charpoi*. Removing his boots, he crawled into it, tucking the net in carefully. He finished undressing; and lay on his back watching the procession of the constellations across the garnished sky.

As on the first night, darkness had scarce settled on the desert when he made his way to the river. Her eyes luminous in the shadow of the bluff, she was waiting for him in the murmurous darkness.

In the quiet night, the hard, clear light of the stars shining with a brightness found in no other land, they would stroll for hours; his arm about her, his head bent as he whispered in stumbling Arabic, teaching her a few simple English phrases.

For Jennet the glamor of the East was non-existent. He had seen the marsh Arab in all his native degradation. He had seen the desert Arab, after fighting with the Turks against the invader, despoil the bodies of his whilom comrades in arms. He had seen the women of the Mi'dan mutilate the dead. He had seen Arab villages in their bleak, unadorned, squalid filthiness as the British fought their way up from the head of the Persian Gulf. He was no admirer, no respecter, of the Mesopotamian Arab.

Maryam was a far higher type, mentally and physically, than the *bibis* he saw daily. Her laughter first attracted him, being so different from that of the others: more like that to which he was used at home. The wide-eyed, bronze-tinted beauty of her face, the luscious, firm roundness of her lithe body, the inimitable grace with which she carried herself —the inheritance of the East, never to be acquired by the women of the Occident— obsessed him.

Wherein lay her subtle, compelling charm, he did not ask himself. She was simply there; giving him glance for glance, the warmth of the sun imprisoned in her veins, suffusing the bronze texture of her skin with a rich warmth of coloring; the honey tint of the white skin touched by centuries of that ardent sun. The rushing of the winds and streams of the Pusht-I-Koh sounded in the softest cadences of her voice.

In answer to his question, spoken without volition, she had given the answer, "My home is in the heart of my master."

Swept unresistingly along by the impulse of the primordial male, he had taken her in the passive acceptance the East engenders, however cumultuous the emotions. It was an acceptance which had insensibly come to him in the days of searing heat, the nights of brooding silence on the desert.

And he surrendered himself to this love with an intensity which blinded him to every consequence.

Night after night, at imminent risk of court martial, or death at the hands of some nervous Indian sentry, he would steal away to sit with her in the starlight; listening to the interminable babble of the people of the Pusht-I-Koh, the journey down to the plains, the escape from a roving *sotnia* of Cossacks beyond Khaniqin, the perilous threading of the Turkish lines near Kizil Robat; the wondrous heaven-sent consummation of earthly desires—her meeting with Yenne. For that was as near as she could come to the proper pronunciation of his name. But it was one he found entirely satisfactory. He would kiss the full red lips, laying his cheek against hers while she crooned in his ear some weird, melancholy Lurdish love song, containing all the passion and sorrow of the world.

Living a life thus strongly divided between the stern realities of a desert outpost, and the allurements of a desert love every whit as stern, tempered by the tuneless music of the swift-flowing Diyalah, the soft whisper of the desert breeze in the lazy fronds of the palms, a love which was an epic—passionate, ethereal, enduring—the time sped away unnoticed.

INTO the quiet of his tent one afternoon came the strident voice of platoon sergeant Pilkington.

"Fall in outside the cookhouse at seven for three days' rations. Tea at five," he boomed.

Then the afternoon silence of the desert fell once more.

He had no chance to say good-bye to Maryam; was unable to catch a glimpse of her.

In the strenuous days and nights which followed, he moved as one dazed. As day followed day in wearying, endless procession, and the prospect of returning to Qualat al Mufti and Maryam became more remote, he became taciturn and moody; a phase which was replaced by a dangerous sullenness which at first caused wonder, and in the end estranged him from the men of his section, with whom he had been a prime favorite.

Baku had been occupied; and his regiment was guarding the line of communication, billeted in a Persian village in the Pusht-I-Koh. With three days' leave for hunting, he had become separated from the rest of the party, lost his way, and wandered through the mountain passes. Late in the afternoon he stumbled on a hut once used as an outpost, abandoned when the Turks retreated northward beyond Takrit and Kifri.

The wind was whistling shrilly, piling the snow against the mud walls, threatening every moment to tear off the crazy roof of palm-leaf fibers, covered with tarred paper brought on the backs of Lurd coolies from the dump on the other side of Table Mountain, and weighted down with stones.

A lustier gust flung the door open, filling the smoky hut with swirling particles of driven snow. In the cloud of dancing flakes, clutching a blanket-wrapped bundle to her breast, her head and shoulders powdered with the clinging crystals, Maryam stood before him: a gaunt, spectral Maryam, in whose pinched features and luminous eyes was a greater beauty than he had ever seen before.

She stood regarding him in wondering, doubting silence; then walked across and

laid the bundle carefully down by the fire.

As he sat wrapped in greatcoat and blanket, gazing at her speechlessly, half believing it was her eidolon, conjured up in his disordered brain, she bent down, and brushed his cheek with her fingertips, whispering the one word, "Yenne!"

The touch of her fingers, the sound of her deep, full voice, surcharged with love and joy, after months of impotent longing and regret, galvanized him into action. With the lithe motion of a panther he gained his feet, gathering her in his arms with a deep, choking sob of joy.

"By God, Maryam!" and the words were a pæan of thanksgiving, "I've got you back; and I'm never going to let you go again."

"No, Yenne; not go, not go!"

A moment he strained her to his breast. Then in silence he sat her down, and turned to close the door.

"What's the bundle?" he asked, as he sat down by her side.

Her eyes followed his gesture. Then she turned them to him with a look full of meaning. Placing the bundle carefully in his arms, she raised a corner of the blanket.

A tumultuous, surging medley of thoughts rushed through his mind as he looked at the rosy, sleeping face of his son.

In all his thoughts of Maryam, such an eventuality had not occurred to him. Now, he could only sit and gaze at the tiny crinkled face; enraptured, puzzled, dismayed. Still gazing, he listened as Maryam told of waiting till nearly morning the night he left; her fruitless efforts to find him, her life at Qualat al Mufti; her wandering pursuit of more than one mobile column; the birth of Yenne ibn Yenne, high up among the crags of her native Pusht-I-Koh; her finding of this deserted outpost a month before. She was working, she told him, at the advanced base on the other side of the valley, five miles away.

"And you come all this way to live! Why?"

Instantly her face was an impassive mask. The firelight was reflected from the flat surface of inscrutable eyes: eyes which seemed without depth, giving no hint of a human soul within. She shrugged slightly; and her voice was dead and flat when she answered.

"Many mens there. Me bootiful. Have *walad,*" and she waved a hand toward the sleeping child. "Not have any *zoj*—'usband."

He understood. And his teeth bared in a snarl like a dog's, as the hot wave of impotent rage swept through him. Before he could speak, she placed her fingertips on his writhing lips.

"Me *helu*—bootiful. But I belong me Yenne. I swear by *Nesrani* prophet *Yesoo* I keel *Arabi, Inglesi*—any mans who think I am one *gaahiba,* and try to use me so.

"But better this my *bayt,*" and she nodded wisely.

"Yes, Maryam," he agreed softly. "Much, much better."

He looked longingly, searchingly into her eyes, in whose depths he saw the light which seldom appears in those of the woman of Islam. The flame of passion burns often there. The dull glow of obedience to her lawful *zoj* is there. In Maryam's great amber eyes shone the clear light of purity and love.

They had been swept along the current of Life, unresisting, unthinking; heedless of anything but the ecstasy of the moment. But in the soul of the woman had been born a passion great and true as life itself. In the even, toneless words spoke a devotion which would end only at death.

The warm, glowing colors of the East

are spread on Life's canvas with large, bold strokes. But they are laid in on the drab sizing, the hue of tragedy. And the colors with which Carlton's life were limned were wearing thin; though never had they glowed brighter to his eyes than at this moment, when the woman he loved found him; when he felt the pride of fatherhood in all its surging strength, mingled with a vague, indeterminate, unrealized—but potent, inescapable—dread of the future.

LITTLE Yenne was sleeping in the fire's glow when, sounding above the wind's insistent clamor, came a roar like a thousand batteries in action. The earth trembled. The hut's walls gaped as if about to fall and bury them. Shrieking some unintelligible words, Maryam gathered the baby in her arms, sprang to the door, and disappeared in the darkness.

He followed as closely as possible. But reaching the door, he could see no sign of her. An unnamed fear tearing at his heart, he plunged into the swirling snow. He had not taken a dozen steps in the thunderous darkness when the roaring swelled to an unbelievable volume. His nose was assailed by a sulfurous smell. The ground rocked drunkenly. Then, as if his feet had been jerked from under him by invisible hands, he plunged headlong into a drift. He heard a splitting, cracking sound, as if the very earth was riven, felt a quick, sharp pain—and was engulfed in oblivion.

He was recalled to consciousness by icy hands stroking his face, an impassioned voice calling in his ear. His eyes opened slowly to the dull, sodden light of morning; the opaque, leaden clouds banked about the top of the cliff far above.

He was lying on his back in one end of what had been the hut; and knew that the rest was lying a thousand feet below in the bed of the Ab-I-Karind, hurled there by the slide which had left the great scar in the mountain's tortured flank.

Maryam was kneeling at his side.

"What has happened?" he asked weakly, conscious of no pain; knowing only a dull numbness, realizing that death had passed closely by in the hours of unconsciousness.

In a voice hoarse and broken, she told him of the slide, whose familiar warning she had heard, the edge of which had caught him as he followed, flinging him aside, maimed and broken. With the first light of day she had discovered him, half buried in the drift, the ragged boulder across his back. After an hour's heartbreaking toil she had won his body from the stony clasp, and dragged him to shelter.

He complained of thirst; and she melted snow in his billy-can. Fortunately, of her slender store of fuel most remained. When the chill began to creep, she brewed tea from the three days' rations in his haversack.

He found, on trying to swallow some of the bully beef and biscuit, that he had no appetite. He was satisfied with copious drafts of tea. Maryam ate her frugal meal of *khubz;* the thin, flat cake of Arab bread, warmed on the coals.

Nursing little Yenne, and crooning him to sleep, she laid him under the blanket, his head in the hollow of the soldier's arm. Then she squatted by the side of the rude pallet, holding Carlton's hand in both of hers, a piece of burlap drawn about her shoulders. Late in the night she crept under the blanket, and slept with her head on his shoulder.

Morning brought a heavy fall of snow, swirled into their shelter by a wind which cut to the marrow; flecking the blood into their cheeks like the invisible snappers of countless tiny whips. Jennet was hungry; but his stomach revolted at the unpalatable bully beef, the adamantine bis-

cuits, even when she soaked one of the latter in water.

And in impotent rage and misery, like a great tawny lioness ensnared, and snarling her defiance, she paced for hours the narrow granite shelf which formed her world. The sheer drop on three sides, the beetling cliff on the fourth made a cage from which there was no escape—save by one door. But that was swinging slowly open.

On the third day the tea gave out. And then she saw a way of escape—for her and Yenne ibn Yenne.

In a brief lull in the snowing she ventured nearer the edge of the shelf than she had yet been.

It was a perilous climb; not to be accomplished by one not born and bred in the Pusht-I-Koh. A narrow jutting point of rock offered precarious foothold, with a sheer drop hundreds of feet to the cruel rocks. Then, the diagonal crack; broadening and deepening as it neared the top, affording a secure way for such nimble feet and hands as hers. With little Yenne's weight slung on her back she could make it—had made giddier climbs before.

But the other Yenne! Her golden, ruddy Yenne, who loved her—not as Arab men loved; though she vainly strove to realize wherein the difference lay. *Helu?* Yes; she was beautiful. And being beautiful, she was desirable. Yenne had told her so: other men had tried to. But there had been in his eyes a look quite different from that which gleamed in theirs. Once, before that day at Qualat al Mufti, that look had not been distasteful — had pleased her, even. Once or twice she had felt vague promptings, faint stirrings, when men looked at her: felt herself thrilling responsively; knew—instinctively, without thinking—that that light was coming into her own in answer. And she had, though she could not have told why, veiled them; the heavy lashes lying on her cheeks, more provocative, more alluring than ever.

But that was over now. When a man looked at her that way, it filled her with subtle fear and hate; shame and hot anger.

Helu? Yes; she was still beautiful; more beautiful than ever. But when men—*Arabi,* or *Nesrani*—tried to tell her so, it no longer pleased her. Why? Her beauty was for Yenne alone. *Naseeb* — fate. *From the beginning it is written.*

All this flashed through her mind as she looked upward, poised lightly on the brink.

She would die for him, live for him—Yenne, the lord, the master. But she could not, strong as she was, carry him up. Yenne ibn Yenne, yes, Yenne, no.

If she climbed with little Yenne—what then? She drew back, and shut her eyes in thought. These mountains were familiar from childhood. She knew every ridge and valley. Could she gain the top, what then? She pictured the intertwisting maze of valleys and defiles. The scattered dwellers in this part of the Lurd uplands had all left; gone to seek safety in the towns from the marauding bands of Turks and wild hill Arabs.

But there was one place where aid was to be had. There was a path, she knew, along the top, down the shoulder of the mountain into the pass, where it joined the path which had run along the broken ledge on which she stood. It was a fearful, breakneck route, used only by some desperate *haraame,* escaping after a raid. It was dangerous at best, doubly perilous now. But what a wild mountain thief could do through fear, she dared for love. If she could gain the path, she would reach the advanced base. She could find some one who would understand. They could do anything, she thought with pride, these men of Yenne's blood!

They would find a way to save him.

Yes; it could be done—*must* be done! She looked up once more.

The fear which had filled her at the roaring of the slide was as nothing compared to the cold wave of terror and despair which settled on her heart as her gaze rested on the ant-like figure, clear-cut against the sky, far above. To Western eyes it might have been a man or a mountain sheep. To the keen eyes of the hill woman it was clear, unmistakable.

Naseeb! From the beginning it is written.

She had told Yenne the truth, but not all of it. Here was proof of what she said; proof that she had not told all. Fear died; and into her heart swept the protective rage of the lioness, her mate menaced. Raising her hand to her mouth, she sent up the clear, piercing mountain call.

For nearly five seconds she stood watching, before the climbing figure paused. She called a few quick words in Kurdish, and turned to the shelter where Yenne and the baby lay. Both were asleep. His equipment lay where he had placed it. She drew the bayonet, her teeth baring at the rasp of steel. She had lost her knife in the wild flight from the slide. She lightly kissed the man's cold cheek. Thrusting the bayonet in the man's *hizam* about her waist, she covered it with the folds of her *libis*.

THE climb was not as difficult as she had imagined. Swinging over the edge, her feet dangling above the dizzy height, she swung to the projecting point. She got purchase for her feet. A scramble and a tug and she reached the end of the crevice. The rest was easy. Resting a moment, she began the long climb.

The man, hated and feared above all others, had not moved as he awaited her where she had first seen him.

It was a sinister, evil face on which her eyes rested, when at last she reached the top. Deeply pitted by *jidra,* the ubiquitous smallpox of the East; with loose lips and goat-like eyes, it was a countenance in which were all the things loathsome and fearful to Maryam. But, despite its grotesque ugliness, there was—and this was the reason for her secret dwelling—a certain taurine strength; insistent, compelling—fascinating in some sinister way.

She knew—though she strove to keep the knowledge from herself—that but for the memory of Yenne's clear gaze she would have yielded to some responsive emotion stirred to turbid life by his compelling desire. Now, that dread was present no longer. It went at Yenne's coming—gone forever.

He misread the pallor of her cheeks, her shifting gaze; and with the imperturbable patience of the East spoke as if she had parted from him five minutes before.

"But some day, *malika,* thou wilt come to me."

Now, as always, he called her queen; in the husky, broken voice she loathed and dreaded. Before she could answer, he continued.

"Night after night I followed, always to lose thee. And then I found it—there," and with a greasy laugh of triumph he pointed down to the broken ledge. "But another was before me; another who shall not have thee long," and hate blazed in the little twinkling eyes.

Still she was silent; regarding him with wide-open, unblinking stare.

"And so," he resumed, his passion under control, "I went back to the *Inglesi.* I have told them. They know. They will come and take him: take him to be shot that thou bore him a child. It is the law of the *Inglesi askar.*

"But I—I," and as he half extended his arms his splayed fingers were curved

like the talons of some bird of prey, "shall take thee first, *malika.*"

For the first time she spoke; her voice dead and flat, her eyes still on his face.

"They are coming for him?"

"*Nazar!*" and he threw his arm abroad in a wide gesture.

She looked. Far away, black dots against the dreary waste of blinding white, she saw the search party, sent out to look for Carlton when the rest of the hunting party returned with the news that he was lost. She turned again to look at that hateful face. She read there only desire and triumph.

What did she know of these strange *Inglesi,* after all? Only that she loved one of them better than her life. It was only on the Arab that the full weight of the Turkish law had borne down. But the *Inglesi,* conquerors of conquerors, had a different way. She had seen their stern, even-tempered justice falling on *Arabi* and *Inglesi* alike. Ali knew. He was *naazir,* in charge of all the coolies at the base, high in the councils of the *Inglesi.* She was only an ignorant, loving woman. But he knew. She read triumph in his face.

"They are searching for him?" she asked again.

"Ay! And they will lead him before the *shabat,* who will give the order. They will stand him with his back to a wall, the *captaan* will say the word, and the rifles will shoot—*pow!* And he will be dead," and Ali spat on the snow.

"And thou wilt come to me," he concluded, in the certain, patient voice she dreaded. "I know he is there. I will bring them—after I have taken thee. It is for this I have searched two days," and his voice shook with the triumph he strove to repress.

"They will shoot him—my Yenne?"

"Ay."

"*Ahlif!*"

"I swear. By the Beard of the Prophet, it is so."

"But thou wilt never live to see it!"

He had not noticed the slender, sinewy hand creeping under the folds of her *libis,* so intent was he on watching her face; gloating on the white, sick terror he saw, reading in the increasing pallor, the fluttering eyelids, the gasping breath the signs of surrender. But as the sudden light flamed in her eyes, and her cheeks were suffused, he knew—but too late to avert the blow, as swift and unerring as a *haiya's* stroke. The bayonet flashed, and was buried in the folds of his *aba* before he could move a hand, or step backward.

He clawed at his breast, and sank slowly to his knees; the hilt covered with the spouting blood, which smoked as it reddened the snow. Then he fell forward, driving the bayonet home. He slid down the slope, and shot over the edge of the abyss. She watched him hurtle downward, turning round and round as he fell.

MARYAM stooped down, and rubbed her hand in the snow till the spots were gone. She looked round at the snowy desolation. She cast a glance at the black dots of the search party. Then she turned to the crevice by which she had climbed.

She would go back to Yenne and Yenne ibn Yenne. There was now nowhere else to go. *Naseeb. From the first it is written.*

She could never go away, now. Ali's body would be found. Yenne's number was cut in the bayonet hilt. The *Inglesi* would know. Yenne was hers now, forever. For her, he had risked the rifles of *Inglesi* law. To save him, she had put herself outside the law. Well, she was content.

But the door of escape through which she had known they would pass, even

while she climbed to Ali, was swinging wider.

She was a woman. She had no soul. The Koran said it. It was the Law—*Kanoon*. But Yenne worshipped the prophet *Yesoo*. The *Nesrani* said *Yesoo* was the son of Allah, therefore greater than Mahomet. His mother was a woman like her: like her named Maryam. So women *did* have souls, despite the Koran. The law of the *Nesrani* was one wife to one husband. And she was Yenne's. Yenne was her husband—was not Yenne ibn Yenne asleep by his father's and her husband's side the visible proof? Better that Yenne died tonight than be taken in disgrace to face the rifles of the *askar*. He would go to the *Sama* of the *Nesrani*, where the prophet *Yesoo* ruled: not the Paradise of the Mahometan, but to one where the soul of the one wife went also.

Here was the ledge. She swung across the chasm and scrambled up to the granite shelf.

The baby was asleep. But Yenne awoke as she bent over him. His face was gray and drawn. Maryam felt icy fingers grip her heart as she looked at the pinched nose, the sunken cheeks. The shadow of *Azreel's* wings was on him.

It had begun to snow again, heavier than before. Instinct told her it would get colder and colder through the night. Well, she had done her best. It was not to be. By morning she, too, without food, would be in the Paradise of the *Nesrani*. Hand in hand they would go. But she would be the last to go, being the stronger, unless his life could be prolonged till she felt the languorous, delicious warmth creeping through her, following the chill, and she sank into the sleep. . . . She did not fear death. But it was better to go with Yenne. She could keep him alive till the cold gripped her, too.

She whispered softly, clasping one hand under the blanket. The other pressed Yenne ibn Yenne's body to him.

"Yenne? Yenne? You want eat?"

"What is the use, my beloved? I am dying—and there is nothing."

"Yes, you eat, Yenne. We live tonight. In the morning, we die.

"I not want to die," she continued, in the stumbling English learned in happy whispers by the rushing Diyalah, when death was close, but still so far away, "but I must. I not want you to die before me. But," and her mountain-wise eyes scanned the leaden, impenetrable clouds, "is be colder. You not eat, you die quick, and not wait for me.

"I not *Arabi* now. I *Nesrani*, like you. I love you. I gave you man-child. I give you life for little time—till we die together."

Throwing open her *haik* and baring her bosom, shielding the naked flesh with burlap from the wind, she bent low. Putting one firm strong arm underneath his shoulders, she raised him till his lips were against her breast.

The wind began more dismally to moan through the gorge, and about the wrecked hut. The torn streamers of tarred paper and palmleaf fibers flapped dolefully. Yenne ibn Yenne awoke, clamoring for food. She uncovered her other breast; bending forward, her shoulders drooping, an expression not born of the amenities of civilized wifehood or motherhood on her face.

The child was the first to sleep. She deftly wrapped him in the coarse fragment of army blanket, so that he would be alive when the *Inglesi* came. They would know to save him. Yenne's race would not end with him because of her. And ever and anon, supporting him now with both arms, swaying a little to and fro, she sobbed a wordless melody—which might have been a love-song, or a lullaby.

The snow fell steadily. When Carlton

dropped in her clasp, and she laid him back in the blankets, it was piled thick on her protecting shoulders. She gently kissed the eyes she knew would never look into her own again.

Standing upright, she cast a quick, searching glance into the swirling eddies, through which she could not see fifty feet. Already it was colder.

Shaking her head, she fastened her *haik*. She kicked off her heavy sandals. Saying the Mahometan prayer for the dead, she lay down by Yenne's side. Her face wore an expression of ineffable content as she lightly kissed his pallid lips. Composing herself at his side, she drew the blankets over them.

Naseeb! From the first it is written.

The Dragoman's Secret

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Khallaf the Strong inflicted dire tortures on Hamed the Attar, and would have done him to death

I HAVE found that there are but three kinds of women in the world, *effendi:* those whose memory readily departs from us; those whose memory we deliberately put away from us; and those who, were we to live beyond the age of a thousand, we could never forget.

Such a woman was Mariam—a pearl of great price and a jewel among a million—yet for that she was not of the true faith, I nightly ask Allah to forgive me for cherishing her memory. I have had many singular and startling adventures, but none to quite compare with those which befell me when Mariam came into my life.

You would hear the tale, *effendi?* It is one which I have never dared relate to a Moslem; yet I have longed, these many years, to unbosom myself to an understanding friend. You are of a different faith, and might sympathize. But can I trust you with the secret?

Well then, here is the coffee shop at Silat, where we can sit in privacy and comfort, away from the glare of the noonday sun.

Ho, Silat! Two *shishas* stuffed to overflowing with the best Syrian leaf, and coffee, bitter as aloes, black as a Nubian at midnight, and hot as the hinges of *Johannim's* innermost gate.

Aihee! You, who know me as Hamed bin Ayyub, the bent and wrinkled dragoman, should have seen me in the days of my youth—tall and straight as a Rudaynian lance, with hair of raven blackness, a bold and handsome countenance, and the heart of a lion. Those were the days when rare and interesting adventures befell me.

As I told you, *effendi,* I have at times attained considerable wealth. There was one time when, through a series of singular circumstances, I fell heir to the wealth, the home, and the beautiful slave girl of a rich young goldsmith.

For two years I lived with her in great joy and happiness, at the end of which time she bore me a daughter. But when she presented me with the child, Allah saw fit to receive my beloved into His clemency.

As I was unable to care for the child, I

"Now, my loud-talking youth," he said, "we'll have your tongue in a minute."

fared with her to the house of my uncle, who graciously took her into his *harim*, and whose women gave her loving care. Then, as my bosom was constricted with sorrow, and my mind so distracted with grief that I no longer had the power of peace, I sold my house and all that it contained, and having converted all my wealth into gold, purchased a camel with a *shugduf* litter and left the city for the purpose of making the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Jerusalem caravan had already departed, but the great caravan from Damascus was on its way, and I knew that by crossing El Ghor, the Jordan, and camping for a day or two on the Hajj Road until it came up, I would be able to join it.

But alas for the plans of men when they run contrary to the will of Allah Almighty. It was written that I should not complete my pilgrimage, for the first day of my journey had not yet ended when I was beset by a band of fierce *harami*, whose contemptible livelihood is gained by plundering honest men.

I drew my simitar and fought desperately, sending two of their black souls to scorch in *Johannim*. But I was tumbled from my camel by a cowardly blow from behind which laid my head open, and would have split it as a knife divides a

melon had not my turban been stuffed with gold pieces.

Not content with taking my camel and my treasure, those greedy and murderous dogs actually stripped the clothing from my body, leaving me naked and apparently dying, as food for the vultures and jackals. In this condition I swooned away.

WHEN my senses returned to me, I first became conscious of a swaying, lurching motion, which apprised me that I was riding on the back of a camel.

I opened my eyes, and my senses whirled and were like to leave me once more at what I beheld. For bending over me, her gaze solicitous and tender, was a ravishingly beautiful young girl. Her eyes were twin stars of loveliness. The purity and whiteness of her alabaster brow put the beauty of the crescent moon to shame. Her cheeks combined the velvety softness of the peach with the delicate tint of new-blown roses. And her lips were redder than new wine, with seductive curves that were more intoxicating.

But my eyes were not destined to feast on her loveliness for more than a moment, for as soon as she saw that my senses had returned she quickly veiled her face with a blush of becoming modesty.

I closed my eyes once more, pretending to sleep, but glancing at her from time to time beneath my lowered lids. Upon finding that I could not beguile her into lowering her veil by this subterfuge, I was about to give off shamming and speak to her, when there suddenly resounded near at hand the wild shouts of raiders, mingled with the reports of firearms and the clash of blades.

The girl gave a little scream of terror as the curtain of the litter was ripped aside by a huge black hand, and a giant eunuch, longer than lumber and broader than a bench, mounted on a tall dromedary with magnificent trappings, leered in at us, rolling the whites of his eyes horribly, his blubber lips drawn back in a hideous grin.

"*Salam aleykum*, Mariam Khatun," he mouthed. "I, Suwayd, the humble slave of Khallaf al Tamim, bring you greetings from my illustrious master."

"Back to your master, black dog!" she retorted. "Tell him that I am not for such desert scum as he, nor do I fear him. Let him release my servants and permit me to resume my journey, and all will be overlooked. But if he persist in his evil intentions, then will death mom with him in the morning and night with him in the night, nor will he or those who ride with him, live long to boast of this foul misdeed."

The eunuch chuckled contemptuously.

"Not for nothing is my master named 'Khallaf al Tamim,' he said. "Khallaf the Strong takes what pleases him without fear or favor. He but sent his humble slave to ascertain if you were really the Lady Mariam."

So saying, he suddenly tore off her face veil.

During this conversation I had been lying back on my side of the litter, unnoticed by the eunuch, but at sight of this outrage, Allah vouchsafed me strength to sit up. Jerking the veil from his grasp and catching him by the throat, I said:

"For this base act, O ugly abortion of a mangy hyena, you die!"

"Not by your hand, O whelp of a rabid wolf!" he replied, easily twisting my hand away and then jerking me across the girl's lap and completely out of the litter. Weakened as I was by the loss of blood from my wound, I was as a babe in the hands of the black giant, who bent me back over his knees and coolly drew his *jambiyah* to slit my throat.

At this moment there rode up beside us a huge, dark-skinned, black-bearded fellow, nearly as large as the eunuch who held me, and almost as black. He was richly

dressed, and armed to the teeth, and bestrode a milk-white she-dromedary worth a small fortune in any *souk* in the land. I recognized him instantly from his description as Khallaf al Tamim, a *Jabarti* or Moslem Abyssinian, leader of a band of desperate cutthroats whose depredations were spoken of with awe and trembling wherever men gathered. He was reputed to have a large and magnificent *harim* in Hail, and to be under the protection of the Sharif of the Wahabis.

"What is that, Suwayd, which you have pulled from the litter of the Lady Mariam?" he asked.

"A cowardly son of flight who crept in to hide," replied the eunuch with the keen blade of his weapon against my gullet.

"A moment, Suwayd," said Khallaf. "I will tell you when to cut his throat. Let us first learn who he is."

The eunuch, who was evidently a bloodthirsty villain, mumbled something to himself, and his master reined his white dromedary between us and the litter. Lifting the curtain, he looked in, and I observed that Mariam had replaced her face-veil.

"Allah's peace and blessing upon you, Mariam Khatun," he said deferentially. "Your slave, Khallaf al Tamim, would learn if the life of this young dog of a *Badawi* is of value to you."

"No peace and no welcome to you, O black African monkey," she replied spiritedly. "Release him and those of my slaves and followers your scurvy cutthroats have left alive, that I may resume my journey."

"That I can not do, O lady," replied Khallaf, "much as it grieves me, your love-slave, to disobey your lightest wish. I have been commanded by the Sharif Nureddin Yusuf to bring you to Hail to stand trial for sorcery, heresy and proselyting among those of the one and true faith."

"You lie, O Jackal of Abyssinia!" she retorted. "This raid is of your own choosing and for your own purpose."

The brow of Khallaf contracted.

"Your sorcery has told you this, my lady," he said. "I will admit, then, that this expedition is of my choosing. And the reason is that, disguised as a eunuch, I saw you in the *hammam* in Jerusalem, whither I had gone in feigned attendance on one of my female slaves to learn why my women who visited the baths were so impressed by your beauty. It was there I became your love-slave, and there I resolved to possess you. And though Khallaf the Strong takes that which he desires, yet would he prefer that you come to him willingly."

"Neither willingly nor unwillingly shall Khallaf al Tamim possess me," she replied.

"For the present," he replied, "we will let it rest at that. Women are prone to change their minds with the shifting of the winds. But you have not answered my question. Is it your wish that this hider behind your skirts be kept alive?"

"He is nothing to me," she answered, "yet I would be merciful, even to a dog."

"The quality of mercy," replied Khallaf, "is an attribute of Almighty Allah. Humbler creatures, I among them, seldom possess it. Ho, Suwayd! You will take this pig away and slit his throat."

Weakened though I was, I began struggling violently in the grasp of the huge Nubian, feeling that the hour for my death had indeed come. It was true that I was nothing to this girl but a penniless, helpless wayfarer whom she had befriended, so why should she, who did not wish to be placed in the position of asking a favor from Khallaf, sue for my life?

But my struggles were as futile as though I had been a bird in the jaws of a serpent. With a grin of fiendish joy, Suwayd turned his beast to haul me a little

way off, that I might not be slain within sight of the girl.

But we had scarcely started ere there came a cry from the litter of the Lady Mariam.

"Stop! Do not slay him."

"Oh, ho!" said Khallaf, with a knowing grin. "And what is this dog to you?"

"He is—he is my brother," she faltered. "Two days ago he was wounded by raiding bandits, and I have been caring for him in my litter, on the march."

"Your brother!" he sneered. "A likely story! You who are a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter!" He shouted to a dirty, unkempt robber with a hennaed beard who stood a little way off. "Ho there, Humayd! Bring me one of the prisoners."

A moment later, the redbeard rode up, leading a *Badawin* cameleer by a rope, looped around his neck.

"Mark well what I ask you, slave," roared Khallaf, glaring down at the prisoner, "and speak only truth if you would not die where you stand."

"I hear and I obey," replied the cameleer, shaking with fright.

"Then tell me the name of this prisoner?" thundered the *Jabarti,* pointing a black finger at me.

"Alas, my lord, I know it not!" quavered the cameleer. "Two days ago we found him, sorely wounded, and robbed of all his possessions, lying naked and unconscious on the trail near the Hajj Road. My mistress took pity on him, and ordered that we clothe him from our stores and place him in her litter, that she might care for him."

"So! We begin to get the truth!" grinned Khallaf. "Take him away, Humayd."

He swung on me. "Your name, dog!" he demanded.

"You name me a dog," I replied defiantly, "so let that name suffice you, though I am not of your mongrel breed."

"What! You yap at me, cur? Well then, you shall have the treatment of any dog who snarls at his captor. Bind his hands, Suwayd. Then let him walk beside your beast with a rope around his neck. And if he falls——"

The big Nubian grinned knowingly. Then he made his dromedary kneel, none too gently bound my hands, and put a noose around my neck. Though I was so weak I staggered like a man drugged with drink, I was dragged away with the caravan, knowing that to fall would be to die.

2

STAGGERING, stumbling, choking in the dust from a hundred camels' hooves, I managed to keep my feet as I walked beside the mount of the huge eunuch with a rope around my neck. My wounded head throbbed unmercifully, and I was constantly assailed by a terrific thirst, incited by my wound and augmented by the rays of the sun which beat down from the steel-blue sky with terrific heat. And to add to my afflictions, fierce biting flies and pestiferous gnats made merry with my unprotected face and hands.

The caravan stopped at noon, and I, who had been traveling on will-power alone, fell into a merciful unconsciousness. Had I been forced to continue but a few moments longer, my life had been forfeit by the rope.

When my senses came to me once more it was evening. I was lying, unbound, among the other prisoners. They offered me coffee and freshly baked bread, which I took gratefully. After I had eaten, the cameleer who had been questioned by Khallaf, lent me his *chibuk* and a pinch of tobacco. After smoking, I returned the pipe to its owner, and pillowing my head on my arm, fell asleep beside the fading embers of the fire.

It seemed that I had not slept more than

a moment, when I was aroused, bound, haltered, and led away once more by Suwayd, the eunuch.

My strength had been increased by food and rest, and the night was cool, for which I thanked Almighty Allah as I trudged along with the caravan.

We traveled until dawn, prayed the dawn prayer, made coffee and bread, and after a brief rest, pressed onward until noon.

For many days and nights we continued thus, traveling from midnight until noon, and resting from noon until midnight. At the end of that time, we came to Hail, the Wahabi stronghold in the midst of the Nefud desert.

During all this time I had not been permitted to see or speak to my beautiful young benefactress. But she was constantly in my thoughts, nor did I wonder that Khallaf, or any other man who had seen her charms, had become her love-slave, for I was more sorely smitten than ever before or since. If, when I have been received into the mercy of Allah, I find a *Huriyah* of the Virgins of Paradise, who is but half as beautiful as she, then will I be content, and praise Allah forever.

We were hurried to the house of Khallaf, and I down to a damp and evil-smelling cell in the night-black dungeon beneath it.

I was well aware of the fact that the Abyssinian ruffian would not have kept me alive for a moment, had he not thought to fit me into his plans. He believed that my life was of value to Mariam—that by threatening her with my death he might win her consent if not her desire, to enter his *harim*.

And so I laid a plan of my own. I did not know to what length the girl might go to save my miserable life. I did know that she had condescended to request it of this black monster whom she despised, and that I was thus twice beholden to her for my very existence. Being a man of honor, there were but two things for me to do in the circumstances. I must either escape from Khallaf, or take my own life. My plans were made accordingly.

The only entrance to the dungeon was guarded by an aged, hook-nosed, gray-bearded Wahabi, who spent much of his time sitting on the bottom step of the stairway, smoking his *chibuk*. At irregular intervals he patrolled the corridor, casting the yellow rays of his lantern into each of the cells and examining the inmates.

I waited until I judged it must be near midnight, then went to the bars of my cell and waited for him to make his next inspection. He came, presently, shuffling along in his loose slippers and puffing at his *chibuk*. He started back a little when he saw me staring at him through the bars, but I called to him reassuringly.

"Come close, uncle. I have a message for your ears alone."

"What dark secrets you have, keep to yourself, O pig who prays without washing," he replied.

"Nay, but good uncle," I persisted, "this is to your advantage, but it would not be were I to shout it through the corridors."

At this, he came a trifle closer.

"I have here," I said, indicating my handkerchief, a corner of which I had knotted and thrust into my sash, "a precious jewel worth a king's ransom—a jewel that will buy you your heart's desire, be it whatsoever it may."

"You lie," he mouthed, but an avaricious gleam had crept into his eyes, and I knew that he half believed me. "But had you such a jewel, what would that profit me?"

"Come closer and I will tell you," I replied.

He stepped up more closely and I drew the handkerchief from my sash.

"The jewel for my freedom," I whispered to him.

"First let me see it," he replied, holding the lantern high.

"Here, look for yourself," I said, and thrust both hands through the bars of my cell door, extending the handkerchief toward him and making as if I were endeavoring to undo the knot.

He bent over eagerly, holding the lantern still higher. In a trice I had the handkerchief twisted around his neck, the ends drawn taut, so that he could not cry out, but only made queer, gurgling noises.

"The door!" I said, fiercely. "Unlock it quickly, and do not reach for your simitar or cry out—or you die!"

He fumbled for the key, while I gave him just enough air to keep him conscious, and presently finding it, inserted it in the lock and turned it. As the door swung inward, I dragged the half-choked guard in with it.

To bind and gag him, and take his simitar, was but the work of a moment. I then locked him in the cell, picked up his lantern and quickly made my way up the stairs.

On reaching the top of the stairs, I cautiously opened the door a little way. Just in front of me was a hallway, at one side of which a fat *bowab* snored on a low *diwan*. Beyond him was the door which I knew led into the garden.

Leaving my lantern behind and drawing my simitar, I edged past the door. Closing it softly behind me and watching the *bowab* with bated breath, I tiptoed to the next door. It was closed by a huge bar, which I succeeded in sliding back without noise. Then I opened it, stepped out into the night, and closed it noiselessly.

THE garden was bathed in moonlight, and the sweet scent of blossoms was like a breath of Paradise after the stench of the dungeon from which I had just escaped. I was thirsty, and in the center of the garden a fountain splashed musically. But I forgot its allure when I saw a tall figure, carrying a long rifle, arise from beside it and slowly walk toward the garden gate.

Crouching low, I crept through the shrubbery until I was beside the path along which the guard was sauntering. His crunching footfalls drew nearer—passed me. The path was bordered with whitewashed stones. One of these I caught up, and leaping out behind him, brought it down on his head. His knees crumpled under him, and he fell in a heap. I caught his rifle to prevent the noise of its falling, and laid it beside him.

Divesting him of his head-cloth and burnoose, I donned them, and taking up his rifle, walked to the gate. I stood there for a moment, leaning on the rifle and looking about as a guard might have done; but seeing no one in the garden, I quickly slid back the bar and stepped out into the street.

Once out of the garden, I walked swiftly, not knowing in what direction I was going, but bent on putting as much distance as possible between me and the house of Khallaf before my escape should be discovered.

Scarcely had I passed the limit of the garden wall, ere I met a stranger, who saluted me with the *"Salam,"* and asked if I could direct him to the house of Khallaf. Afraid to arouse his suspicions by hurrying on, I paused to answer his question.

But at this moment I heard a stealthy footfall behind me, and knew that I was in a trap. I tired to whirl and engage my unseen antagonist, but a heavy, evil-smelling sack was drawn over my head and arms, and I was thrown to the ground. Then my hands and feet were securely bound, and I was carried for a short distance up a few steps and through a door

into a building where the footfalls of my abductors echoed hollowly, as if it were unfurnished.

One of my captors greeted some one with the words: *"Ishtar Baraket,"* which means: "Ishtar bless thee," and was answered in kind. Then I knew that I was not in the hands of godly men, but had fallen into the clutches of idolaters and casters of magic spells.

Presently I heard a gruff voice say:

"You have him? That is well. He is said to be a close-mouthed fool, but the cords and a few hot coals will set his tongue to clacking."

3

WITH the foul-smelling sack still over my head, I was carried through several rooms, and finally put down on a hard tile floor. Then the sack was taken off, and I faced a group of stern-visaged men, dressed like the Wahabis, but evidently not of them, for of all the Arabs, the Wahabis are the most strict believers.

One of them, a huge, thick-waisted fellow with Persian features and a wiry, iron-gray beard, said:

"What have you done with the Lady Mariam? Where is she concealed? Speak quickly and truthfully, O slave of the Black Jackal, or it will be the worse for you."

"I have done nothing with her," I replied.

The big Persian pointed significantly toward two stout cords which depended from a rafter above my head, and to a pan of glowing charcoal near by.

"Will you speak without these?" he asked.

"She was captured by Khallaf al Tamim," I replied, "but I know not where she is concealed."

"We know she was captured by your Jinn-mad master," he replied, "and you know where she was hidden. For the last time I bid you speak."

"Khallaf is not my master," I answered. "I was traveling with the caravan of the Lady Mariam when he captured it. Just now, I escaped from his clutches, only to be made prisoner by your men."

"That is a lie," he snarled. "Too often have I seen the Black Jackal's garden *bowab* not to recognize you. We will see if the cords and coals will bring the truth to your tongue."

Despite my protests and struggles, my shoes were removed and I was strung up by the thumbs, so that the tips of my toes barely touched the floor. I gripped the cords with my hands, thus drawing myself a few inches higher, and easing my thumbs, but one can not hold himself up thus for a long time. Just as I was beginning to tire, and would have let myself down on my toes, the Persian pushed the pan of glowing charcoal beneath them.

A moment more, and the cords were cutting deeply into my fingers, while the heat from the charcoal scorched my feet painfully. I drew them up, and the motion sunk the cords deeper into my fingers.

"Now will you speak?" asked the Persian.

"I can not tell you what you ask," I groaned.

"You will beg to be allowed to tell me soon, O father of lies," he replied.

Presently my fingers relaxed. Human flesh could stand no more. A searing pain told me my toes had touched the charcoal. I drew them up, but the motion increased the strain on my aching thumbs.

Just then a man entered the room. He saluted all present with the greeting of the idolaters: *"Ishtar Baraket."* And they replied in kind. Then he seated himself beside the huge Persian, and glanced up at me. Our recognition was simultaneous, for he was the cameleer who had befriended me in the caravan, and who had

evidently escaped from Khallaf as he entered the town.

"Why do you torture this man?" he asked the Persian.

"He is the gate-keeper of Khallaf," replied that worthy, "and we would learn from him the secret of where our lady is confined."

"Then cut him down," said the cameleer, "for he can not tell you. He is the wounded pilgrim whom our mistress befriended."

"You are positive?"

"By my head and beard!"

The Persian kicked the pan of charcoal from under me, and with his keen *jambiyah* severed the cords. So overcome was I with pain and exhaustion that I slumped to the floor. One of the ruffians tossed my shoes to me, and I donned them with great difficulty and pain because of my blistered feet and lacerated hands. Then, at a sign from the Persian, one of the men helped me to my feet and led me into another room.

For some time he remained there with me, and I heard the murmur of voices, so low that I could only catch a word now and then. But I gathered that they were trying to decide what to do with me. That I now knew them for members of that secret cult which all true Moslems despise, made me extremely dangerous to them. Yet there were some who feared to do away with me because I had been befriended by their mistress, and they might thus bring down her wrath on their heads.

Presently the talking grew louder—became a Babel. The evil crew seemed about evenly divided as to whether I should be kept alive, or slain.

At length, those who would have me slain won, and I heard the gruff voice of the Persian, as he ordered me strangled and buried in the garden.

When I heard this sentence, I sprang up, and dodging the man who had been sent with me, bounded through the rear door. I came out into the garden, but was pounced upon by a guard stationed there. A moment more and the man I had eluded came running out accompanied by another who had been chosen to act as my executioner.

This man, who had been ordered to strangle me, carried a thin, stout cord in his hands. While the others held me, he made the strangler's loop and came up to cast it over my head.

Life was dear to me, and I was desperate. So as my executioner approached I kicked him in the belly and at the same time flung out my arms, throwing over the two men who held me. The wall was but a few feet away, and I reached it in an instant. Leaping up, I caught its rim with my lacerated fingers, drew myself up, and dropped to freedom on the other side.

Like a frightened hare, I scuttled off down the street, not knowing which way to run, but bent only on getting as far from that den of ruffians as possible. I had scarcely taken twenty steps, however, when I heard a great hullabaloo behind me, and loud cries of: "Stop thief! Catch the robber!"

By this time, morning had just dawned, and the call to prayer was sounding from the minaret of a near-by mosque. A few people were stirring in the street, and all of these, aroused by the cries of my pursuers, sought to detain me and joined in the chase. Soon I had a crowd of more than fifty people after me, all shouting: "Stop thief!" at the top of their voices. Stones and tiles were hurled at me from roof-tops, and snarling curs snapped at my heels. Presently a youth stuck his foot out from a doorway and tripped me. As I fell, a score of persons pounced on me.

I was dragged to my feet by the big Persian who had ordered my death a short time before, and who seemed bent on accomplishing it in public now. Two of his

henchmen held my arms, while he led the cries of: "Death to the thief! Stone him!" which came from the throats of the multitude. A stone whizzed past my ear, and some one threw an overripe pomegranate with poor aim, for it missed me and struck the Persian full in the mouth.

A second stone bruised my shoulder, and a third struck my chest, knocking the breath from my body. I am positive that all would have ended for me, then and there, had not the *wali* and his watch come up at that moment.

THE *wali,* a tall, important-looking individual with a large turban and a bushy gray beard, strode into the center of the disturbance with his stout fellows knocking the rabble right and left.

"What is this brawl?" he demanded.

"We have captured a thief," said the Persian.

"By whose testimony?"

"Mine and others."

"Well then, take him before the *kazi,* that he may be judged according to the law. If he is found guilty he will pay the penalty soon enough without the aid of your sticks and stones."

He signed to two of his burly fellows, who seized my arms and dragged me away.

The *kazi,* a short, pot-bellied Wahabi, whose round and rubicund countenance showed the effect of much good living with little endeavor, stared at me for a moment and said:

"Of what is this man accused? And who will bear witness against him?"

"I bear witness," said the Persian. "He is a thief."

I had it on the point of my tongue to denounce the Persian and his companions as idolaters, and thus not only win the sympathy of the crowd, but compass the destruction of my enemies. Then I suddenly remembered that these fellows, no matter what they had done to me, were the followers of Mariam engaged in an attempt to rescue her from the clutches of Khallaf. It followed that to denounce them would be to lessen if not absolutely to cut off her hope of rescue. I resolved, therefore, that no matter what happened, the identity of these men would not be revealed by me.

"You say this man is a thief," said the *kazi,* addressing the Persian. "What has he stolen?"

"Why, just now he stole my head-cloth and burnoose from my house, and escaped over my garden wall."

"You lie, swine of Iran!" I retorted. "A Persian pig never wore clothing such as this."

"I have worn them for a year, O stench!" he said.

"You saw them for the first time today, O offal!" I answered.

"May your falsehoods return and throttle you, O liar!"

"May your beard turn to a nest of maggots and devour your lying tongue!"

"Enough of this abuse!" said the *kazi,* sternly. "You, Persian, say that this *Badawi* stole your headcloth and burnoose. Have you recovered them?"

"No, O fount of wisdom. He still wears them."

"But how am I to know that he wears your headcloth and cloak?"

"I testify that they are the property of Maksoud, the Persian," cried one of the men who had captured me.

"And I," cried the other, "also certify that they are Maksoud's property."

"The Sunni law," said the *kazi,* thoughtfully stroking his beard, "ordains that for an offense of this kind, a man must part with his right hand. Take the prisoner, therefore, and strike off his right hand, seeing that the wound be properly seared so he will not bleed to death."

"We hear and obey, O paragon of un-

derstanding," replied the two burly ruffians who held me, and were about to hurry me away to carry out the sentence when there was a clatter of hoofs and a company of horsemen rode up. At their head was Khallaf the *Jabarti.*

"Way for Khallaf the Strong!" cried the people. "Way for the blood-brother of our lord, the Sharif!"

"What is this, *kazi?*" asked Khallaf, reining his Awasil mare to a sliding halt. "Where got you this man?"

"Just now he was brought to me, accused of thievery, excellency," replied the *kazi,* "and I have sentenced him to pay the penalty according to the Sunni law."

"The fellow is an escaped slave of mine," said Khallaf. "Turn him over to me, and I will be responsible for him, and for his ample punishment."

"I hear and I obey, O protector of the poor and blood-brother of our Sharif," replied the *kazi,* respectfully.

Two of Khallaf's men quickly dismounted, and after binding my hands behind me, threw me over a saddle-bow.

The Abyssinian was about to ride away when he suddenly spied in the crowd the cameleer who had befriended me on the march, and who had later identified me to the followers of Mariam.

"Seize me that man!" roared Khallaf, and it was no sooner said than done. The cameleer was bound and thrown over a saddle-bow, and the cavalcade moved away.

4

BACK at the house of Khallaf, I was thrown into the selfsame cell from which I had escaped the night before. But this time, the *Jabarti* took no chances. In addition to the old hook-nosed Wahabi who patrolled the corridor, a burly guard stood, naked simitar in hand, in front of my cell door.

I asked for food and drink, and was given a crust of stale bread and a cup of water.

Several hours later I was led from my cell, each arm held by a powerful warrior, and taken into a magnificently furnished room—the *salamlik* or reception room of the Abyssinian. He was seated on a luxuriously cushioned *diwan,* smoking a *shisha,* while one lissom slave girl fanned him with a palm leaf and another proffered sherbet and coffee on a golden tray.

"Bind the dog to the pillar at my right," directed Khallaf.

I was hurried forward, and my hands were drawn back as far as they would reach around the thick pillar, and made fast with a cord.

A moment later the cameleer was brought in. At the order of the *Jabarti* he was similarly bound to the pillar at the left of the *diwan.*

Khallaf took a sip of sherbet from a tiny golden cup.

"Away, all of you," he said, "and send Suwayd to me."

The four warriors and two slave girls departed, and shortly thereafter the huge black eunuch entered, carrying a brazier in which charcoal smoldered, and a small pair of bellows. A long simitar hung at his side, and two curved *jambiyahs* were stuck in his sash. On his ebony features was a look of such pleased anticipation that I knew he was about to commit some act of fiendish cruelty.

"Heat the pincers, my faithful servant," directed the *Jabarti,* "and while they are heating, slit the throat of this cameleer. He must be gotten out of the way quickly, as we have other important business at hand."

"Harkening and obedience, excellency," said the huge Nubian with a broad grin.

He put the brazier on the floor and began blowing the charcoal with the bellows. Projecting from the coals were the long handles of a pair of pincers.

When he had the coals glowing brightly, the eunuch put down his bellows, and rising, walked toward the cowering cameleer. Deliberately he drew a *jambiyah* from his sash, and tested the keenness of its edge with his thumb, while the poor fellow alternately wept and pleaded for his life.

Suddenly he stepped up to the doomed man, and seizing his beard with his left hand, tilted his head back, exposing his throat. The unfortunate wretch uttered a gurgling shriek as the keen blade was drawn across his gullet.

The big Nubian stood there for a moment unconcernedly; then he released his grip on the beard, permitting the lifeless head to fall forward.

"A good stroke, Suwayd," said Khallaf. "Now make ready to deal with the other."

The eunuch once more bent beside his brazier, and blew the charcoal up to a blaze with the bellows.

Then the Abyssinian clapped his hands, and a shapely young girl, swathed in diaphanous *harim* garments, was led in by a black female.

"Welcome, Mariam Khatun," said Khallaf. "I have at last captured the young *Badawi* in whose welfare you are so deeply interested. You will be seated here at my feet, that you may witness what occurs to those who oppose my will."

"I sit at your feet? I?" retorted the girl. "To sit at the feet of a baboon would be preferable. I will stand."

So saying, she wrenched her wrist from the grasp of the black female, who was attempting to drag her before the *diwan,* and dealt her a buffet across her ear that sent her sprawling.

"Let be, Lenah," said Khallaf laughingly to the black girl, "and depart."

Scrambling to her feet, the negress salaamed to her master, and hastily left the room.

"And you, little tigress," said Khallaf, "may stand if you wish, as you can see what happens to this presumptuous *Badawi* standing as well as sitting. First, his tongue, which has named me a mongrel dog, will be torn out by the roots with hot pincers. Then his eyes, which have dared to aspire to the woman of Khallaf the Strong, will be gouged out with the red-hot blade of a *jambiyah.* After which, when a sufficient time has elapsed for him to appreciate the full enormity of his misdeeds, his throat will be cut, even as that of yonder cowardly cameleer."

"Is there no help for it, but that you perpetrate this foul injustice?" she asked. "That you torture and murder an innocent man?"

"Why, as to that, it lies within your province to say," replied the crafty Khallaf.

"*My* province?"

"None other. Remember that Khallaf the Strong is your love-slave. Requite his love, and your lightest wish will be his law."

The eyes of Mariam flashed fire above her white *yashmak.*

"As to that, O great black gorilla," she said, "I should prefer to share his torture and death."

"Perhaps you will change your mind after you have witnessed his agonies," said Khallaf. "Proceed, Suwayd."

The big Nubian, who had been industriously plying his bellows during this conversation, now pulled the pincers from the brazier. Their jaws glowed white-hot as he advanced toward me with a look of fiendish delight.

Seizing the point of my jaw with his left hand, he pushed it down. I moved my head with it, keeping my mouth tightly closed, whereupon he held the hot pincers beneath the end of my nose, causing me to jerk my head back. My mouth flew open, and he inserted the pincers between

my teeth, holding them apart, and searing my lips and tongue.

"Now, my loud-talking youth," he said, "we'll have your tongue in a moment."

He was peering into my mouth and spreading the jaws of the pincers when, like the very tigress Khallaf had named her, Mariam bounded to my rescue. In her hand was a slender dagger she had snatched from her bosom. It rose and fell, buried to the hilt in the breast of Suwayd, who with a loud shriek and a look of horror on his face, slumped to the floor, the pincers clattering from his hand.

Whipping out his simitar, the Abyssinian leaped to his feet just as Mariam cut the rope that held my arms around the pillar.

The hilt of Suwayd's simitar projected from beneath his huge carcass. I seized it, and came on guard as Khallaf descended on me, a thundercloud of wrath and a demon of destruction.

Sparks flew from our clashing blades as we cut and parried, and although my antagonist was larger and stronger than I, these odds were somewhat evened by my superior skill and greater agility.

There came the sound of running and shouting from beyond the door, but in a flash Mariam had reached it and drawn the bar.

Fierce anger flared in Khallaf's eyes when he found himself unable to instantly reach me with his blade. Accustomed to cutting down men of less skill by his hammer-and-tongs methods, backed by his enormous strength, he was both astounded and annoyed by my ability to elude his terrific rain of blows, and to return them in such good measure that he was constrained to spend as much time in parrying as in cutting.

For my part, I knew that we were evenly matched for the moment, but because of my wounds and privations, his greater strength and freshness must prevail in the end.

I was reaching the limit of my endurance, when Fortune suddenly interposed in my favor, for Khallaf stepped squarely into the brazier of smoldering charcoal in which Suwayd had heated the pincers. It must have burned instantly through his paper-thin *harim* slippers, as he uttered a howl of pain, and for an instant, lowered his guard.

In that instant, I smote his neck with all my remaining strength. Allah guided and aided my arm, for his scowling black head flew off and rolled away, while his immense body pitched to the floor.

But scarcely had I rid myself of this enemy, ere the door was broken down, and a company of armed men poured in. At their head was Maksoud, the Persian, who leveled a pistol at my head and pulled the trigger.

5

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the report of Maksoud's pistol, there was the click of steel beneath its barrel. Mariam, seeing his purpose, had struck it upward with her bloody dagger.

"Fool!" she said. "Another move to harm this youth who is under my protection, and I'll have you laid by the heels and beaten to death with the *kurbaj*."

"I crave forgiveness, O Voice of the Great Goddess," said Maksoud, contritely. "This *Badawi* is the possessor of dangerous knowledge, and being a Moslem, might divulge it."

"As to that, I will assume all responsibility," replied the girl. "What of this black baboon's household?"

"The men are dead, my lady," said Maksoud. "The women and children are imprisoned in the *harim*."

"Lock them in the dungeons with food and water for two days," she ordered, "all except the black slave girl, Lenah. Then

strip the house, and make ready for the journey."

"Harkening and obedience, O Oracle of Ishtar," replied Maksoud, and departed with his men to carry out her commands.

In an unbelievably short space of time these sons of idolatry had stripped the house of its valuables, the rich loot of Khallaf's many raids, and had made a caravan ready for departure.

Maksoud, with his face blackened and all but hidden by his *kufiyah* or head handkerchief, which he had drawn across his countenance in the manner of the *lisam*, wore a suit of Khallaf's magnificent apparel and rode his milk-white she-dromedary, thus readily passing for the Abyssinian, for they were of about the same build.

A big negro named Mustafa, who was among the followers of Mariam, wore the clothing and took the part of Suwayd the eunuch, who always accompanied his master on his journeys.

Mariam rode in a litter. Lenah the black slave girl rode in another, bound and gagged. Those of Mariam's followers who had been inhabitants of Hail, but who were now leaving it forever, made up the balance of the caravan.

Wearing *Badawin* garb, I rode the Awasil mare of Khallaf beside the lady's litter.

We had completed a day's journey, rested, and were preparing to resume the second, when Mariam called for Musayn, the *'alim*.

The graybeard came with pen, ink-case and paper, and she bade him write a note as follows:

"To Sharif Nureddin Yusuf:

Greeting!

And after, know that this, the slave girl of Khallaf the Black Jackal has been sent to you on an errand of mercy and warning. Mercy, that you release the *harim* of the *Jabarti*, whom I do not hold responsible for his crimes, and who are locked in his dungeons. Warning, that you gaze on the earthly remains of the villainous Abyssinian and his ruffians, and meditate on the fate of those who attempt to take by force a Virgin of the All-Powerful Mother Goddess.

Attempt to follow and you will be as Khallaf. Be warned, and I prophesy that you will attain

The Peace,

MARIAM KHATUN."

Just as our caravan departed, the slave girl was dispatched in the opposite direction with the note, riding a dromedary and carrying a day's provisions.

We traveled a five-day journey across the desert after that, until we came to a wady where I was compelled to dismount, and ride in a litter blindfolded with Mustafa watching me.

At the end of the seventh day, my blindfold was removed as we entered a pleasant village situated in a grove of palm trees which was watered by a stream that trickled through a narrow valley. The houses were small, but in the center of the village there rose a great temple of the finest white marble, with pillared porticos and a dome of polished brass.

During the entire journey I had caught but fleeting glimpses of the Lady Mariam, always veiled and muffled in her traveling-clothes. But now she drew the curtain of her litter and summoned Maksoud.

"You will house this young *Badawi* in my dwelling," she directed, "while I repair to the temple to give thanks to our Great Mother Goddess for my deliverance. On your life, see that he is treated with honor and respect."

So saying, she closed the curtain of her litter and rode on, while Maksoud, who seemed little pleased with his commission, led me to a small but neat house near the temple. Here the Persian and I were ushered into the *salamlik* by an old and wrinkled eunuch who was a hunchbacked dwarf. When my conductor had made known to him the wishes of his mistress, he clapped his hands, summoning slaves, male and female, who brought us fruits, sherbets, coffee and pipes.

Presently there came to the house a messenger who spoke to the eunuch in a language I did not understand. Upon hearing his words, Maksoud excused himself and left.

I judged that the conversation had alluded to me, as both messenger and eunuch had glanced at me from time to time.

As soon as the messenger left, the eunuch clapped his hands once more, and two Mamelukes entered. To these, he gave instructions in the same strange tongue, and they hurried away.

Presently one of the Mamelukes returned, and bowing low to me, said:

"The bath is prepared, *saidi.*"

"You will be pleased to accompany this slave, my lord," said the eunuch, "that you may be prepared for the test."

"The test?" I asked, bewildered. "What test?"

"All will be revealed to you in good time," said the hunchback, mysteriously.

Puzzled, I arose, and followed the Mameluke through a corridor into a room of marble and carnelian, where a hot bath had been prepared. The steam that arose from the water carried the scent of the rarest and most luxurious of perfumes.

The Mamelukes proved to be skilled bath attendants and masseurs, who scrubbed me with hot water and cold until my skin glowed with the roseate tint of a summer sunset, after which they anointed me with sweet-smelling unguents and cosmetics. Then, while the one tendered me sherbets and broths, the other dressed me in handsome and costly garments that would have done honor to an emir.

I then returned to the *salamlik,* where seven graybeards, attired in long black robes, and wearing black turbans, the fronts of which were adorned with crescent moons—symbols of Ishtar cut from mother-of-pearl—awaited me.

Then, conducted by the hunchbacked dwarf, who had in the meantime decked out his twisted body in festal array, and followed by the seven graybeards in solemn procession, I went out into the street.

From the temple, the tones of an immense gong resounded through the village in measured, throbbing cadence. Then there poured forth from the houses, and from the shops in the *souk,* men, women and children, all of whom marched to the temple, in step with the strokes of the gong.

The hunchbacked eunuch fell in step, I with him, and the graybeards who followed us did likewise.

WHEN we arrived at the temple we avoided the main entrance, into which the village populace was pouring, and went in by a side door. Here a hoodwink was securely fastened over my eyes. Having been warned not to touch it no matter what might occur, nor to speak unless spoken to, I was led away by two unseen conductors who held my arms on the right and left.

They took me down a stairway into what smelled like a musty subterranean animal den. Here my conductors brought me to a halt, and I distinctly heard the approaching pads of a large beast coming stealthily toward me. It stopped just in front of me and sniffed. Its fetid breath fanned my face. Then it began to make low, moaning noises, and I heard the rattle of steel.

Suddenly the hoodwink was jerked from my eyes. Standing just in front of me was a huge, black-maned African lion, rattling the bars of its cage as it endeavored to reach me with its huge paws.

My two conductors were of the black-robed fraternity, but wore, in addition, black masks that concealed all features but their eyes.

One of them spoke in solemn, sepulchral tones:

"Before you, O youth, is a dangerous path. It may lead you to love or to death. Only the great Mother Goddess knows. You are desired by the Oracle of Ishtar for the one night of love which is vouchsafed all her handmaidens by our goddess. But the final choice rests with Ishtar alone. If she accepts you, then will you consummate this love, but if she rejects you, you will die beneath the claws of this fierce beast, and its belly will be your tomb.

"You may turn back now, and escape, unhindered and unharmed, for it is written that those who come to the ordeal must do so willingly. Or you may go on, and stake your life on the issue. Consider the matter, therefore, and name your choice."

I looked at the great beast, sheathing and unsheathing its sickle claws through the bars and licking its slavering jowls in anticipation of the pleasure of rending my flesh and drinking my blood. Then I thought of the lovely Mariam, and knew that, rather than lose this lovely creature, witch and idolatress though she was, I stood ready to die not one, but a thousand deaths.

"I am ready for the ordeal," I said.

The hoodwink was drawn over my eyes once more and I was taken up the stairway into a room filled with a thousand faint rustlings and whisperings, as if it contained an immense audience who waited tensely in awe-stricken silence for something to happen. The air was heavy with the odors of sweet incense, in which I, who had been an attar, detected the sandalwood of Hind and the musk of Cathay.

Here I was helped to mount three large steps, and caused to kneel, after which my hoodwink was removed.

I was in the huge auditorium of the temple, kneeling on a wide semicircular dais that faced an immense statue of Ishtar, wrought from white marble. Save for the feeble light cast by seven candles that flickered in front of the statue, the entire room was in darkness. Just in front of the candles, seven pots of incense smoldered. Behind me, and on each side, I could hear the faint rustling and whispering which is characteristic of a large crowd tensely awaiting some unusual event.

Suddenly there sounded the low wailing of a hautboy in minor melody. It increased in volume, and was accompanied by the jingling of sistrums and the booming of kettledrums. Between the dais on which I knelt and the altar that stood before the image of the goddess, another larger dais was rising from the floor. Like the one I occupied, it was shaped like a half-moon. On this dais were seven girls, robed in flowing, translucent white garments. The one in the center stood with bowed head, arms crossed on breasts, while the three on each side of her jingled sistrums and danced a slow dance of many postures.

In front of each girl, a candle burned and a small pot of incense smoldered. As the platform came up above the level of my own, it stopped, and my heart gave a sudden bound as I recognized Mariam as the central figure of the group.

When the platform stopped, the music ceased and the girls posed as rigidly as if they had been statues. Then I heard a rustling sound behind me, and six men came up out of the darkness, three taking places on the dais on each side of me. I noticed by the candle-light from the other platform that all were dressed exactly as was I.

As soon as they took their places, Mariam turned and faced the image of the goddess. Bowing low, while the three girls on each side knelt, facing her, she said:

"Great Mother Ishtar, I have caused to be brought to thy temple the man of my heart, whom I have chosen for the night of love which thou vouchsafest all thy

handmaidens. He hath signified his willingness to forfeit his life if he displeases thee, and now awaits thy pleasure and thy decision. I beseech thee, O Mother Goddess, that thou wilt grant him his life, which out of his love for me he hath placed in the balance, and thus permit thy handmaiden and thy oracle her heart's desire."

Having finished her petition, Mariam prostrated herself before the idol, and the six dancing girls did likewise.

Then there sounded from behind the immense statue, the whir of many wings, and a flock of white doves flew out above the two platforms. Once, twice, thrice, they circled. Then they slowly descended, hovering above my head and those of the six men who were on the dais with me. Presently one alighted on my shoulder. It was followed by another and another, until the entire flock of white doves had either perched on my body or alighted near me, to strut about, puffing and cooing.

Mariam did not look toward me, but somehow seemed to know just what had occurred, for she arose, and spoke once more to the image:

"Great Mother Ishtar, I thank thee."

Lights suddenly flashed on in the temple, and a great cry went up from the multitude:

"Ishtar has spoken! All glory to Ishtar!"

Mariam and I were placed side by side on a huge litter, and borne at the head of a procession to her house. Here a great feast was spread, and for several hours we acted as host and hostess. Then the guests took their leave, and we were alone.

OF THAT night of love, *effendi*, my voice will ever remain silent, though my heart will always sing. It passed so swiftly that it seemed to last for but a moment, yet in it was consummated the sum of a lifetime of desire. My last memory was that, when morning dawned, I fell asleep, my head pillowed on the snowy breast of my beloved.

When I wakened, I was riding in a *shugduf* litter on the back of a camel. My head ached as if I had partaken too freely of *bhang*. Looking out, I beheld, riding ahead of me, Maksoud the Persian.

I shouted and he turned. Then he rode back and handed me the lead-rope of my camel.

"Just ahead of you," he said, "is El Ghor, and beyond that, the Jericho road to Jerusalem. The pack camel that follows you carries all the valuables of which you were robbed, for it was Khallaf the Strong who robbed you. It carries, in addition, precious stones and gold equivalent in value to half the loot taken from the Abyssinian, for it was you who slew him. Say nothing to your Moslem brethren of what has occurred to you, and so will you attain health, wealth, and the peace. *Ishtar Baraket.*"

And so, *effendi*, there passed out of my life, Mariam, a pearl of great price, a jewel among a million. And though Allah might vouchsafe me a thousand lifetimes, I could never forget her—never cease to love her.

Ho, Silat! Bring the sweet and take the full.

In the sight of Allah, who knows not death, slaying is no great matter; but it is a great matter in the sight of men, who behold death as the end of life.

—*Kasida of El Guri.*

"Fletcher snatched for it and managed to deflect the muzzle."

Tsang, Sea Captain

By JAMES W. BENNETT

The gun-runner for the Chinese Communists finds himself pitted against the shrewd Oriental cleverness of Tsang Ah-bou—a vivid novelette of present-day China

TSANG AH-BOU, a detective, was employed by that unique governing body, the Shanghai Municipal Council—which organization apportions taxes and in turn offers police and other protection to some forty thousand Westerners in China's great port. Such a bald statement, however, does not tell of the strange and highly colored life led by that Oriental, who had attained as near infallibility in his profession as is often given to mortal man.

In appearance Tsang was a rotund Oriental of medium height, not dissimilar

to thousands of his brethren shuffling daily up and down Nanking Road. His face was nearly a full moon, with slit eyes half hidden behind thick, myopic-lensed spectacles. But, where the eyes of his fellows might be lack-luster, trachomatous, or opium-befogged, Tsang's were bright and shrewd. And where the rotundity of others was all too generous fat, Tsang's was a beautiful crisscross of powerful midriff muscles, the heritage of a man who had practised long and arduously at the art of wrestling. Similarly, his leg muscles were unusually well developed and he was capable of exerting cruel and uexpected pressure in a variety of "scissor" holds.

What Tsang Ah-bou thought of the antics of the foolish Occidentals with whom he passed his working-days might be the subject of an interesting dissertation, were one able to penetrate his smiling reserve. Several of his foreign friends were privately of the opinion that Tsang considered them as children, wayward, deplorably lacking in politeness. Nevertheless, once he had given them his friendship, they knew they could depend upon him. They were aware that he would cheerfully risk his life for them—as he had done, times innumerable. And on one occasion, when the difficulty had been financial, he had calmly mortgaged his two "small wives" to raise the wherewithal to tide over a foreign friend. For Tsang, as was right and proper in an Oriental gentleman, boasted of three spouses.

More than once, John A. Fletcher, the young and successful manager of the Sino-American Banking Corporation, had tested the quality of Tsang's courage and staunchness—and found it sterling.

On a certain April morning—the last day of the month, to be precise—with a foretaste of summer in the heat that came billowing into Fletcher's office, he was thinking with some envy of Tsang. The two had met casually in the Municipal Building the day before, and Tsang had said that he planned to visit his ancestral home on the cool lake at Hangchow, there piously to brush the dust off the spirit tablets of his progenitors.

Fletcher's thoughts shifted from Tsang to the problem that lay before him: whether or not to close down his one losing branch bank at the port of Chinkiang on the Yangtzse River. To close would mean a heavy loss, but to remain open might cause a heavier one, for Chinkiang was in the hands of an army of revolutionists. The rebels politically were a vivid pink tint, verging on Bolshevik red. If they attained too much power, they might even threaten Shanghai. . . .

His gloomy thoughts were interrupted by his diminutive Chinese office-boy, who flitted in to announce that a "Conte di Mazzino" wished to see him.

On the heels of the boy, without waiting for permission, a dessicated little European came briskly into the room. The man was garbed in morning coat and gray, pin-striped trousers, a costume too hot for the day which was seeing half of Shanghai in tropic whites. His mustache and imperial were of such a glossy black that Fletcher at once suspected dye. His dark, shiny hair was of an equally suspect hue. He spoke in English, but with a heavy accent and with startling rapidity.

"I am truly sorree to troubl' you, sir, but I 'ave ship, yes, w'ich is eatin' off de head in harbor an' is makin' me pay tonnage dues. De ship, she is register' at Lloyds an' at our Italian consulate. Her worth is more dan one half million of dese Shanghai dollar'. Dis mornin' I 'ave decide' to borrow fifty t'ousand on her, an' go up river to Hankow wit' my large cargo. You will loan me de pittance of de fifty t'ousand, *hein?*"

The little man stopped and smiled ingratiatingly at Fletcher.

"I will—what?" the manager asked, slightly startled.

"Loan me fifty t'ousand! Fifty t'ousand! Fifty t'ousand!" The stranger's voice had grown suddenly irritated.

"I beg your pardon," said Fletcher, feeling a desire to laugh but controlling it. "Why, may I ask, haven't you applied at the Banca d'Italia?"

"But, of course," answered the little man with an increased note of irritability. "Of course, of course. Naturally I would go to my own countrymen's inst'tution. But de Banca d'Italia, she is shut for two days. De manager's wife died. Promptly he close' de doors. I found 'im playing golf at Race Club Links. But he say' he can not open de safe at de bank wit'out his Chinese compradore—who is away takin' fine advantage of de holiday. . . . Now, Mr. Fletch'r, if you are t'rough makin' de quibble, you will write me check for fifty t'ousand. I shall deposit in escrow wit' you de ownership paper' of my ship. You will find dem in perrrfect order. Ship unmortgaged. Value estimate' at Lloyds at sixty t'ousand pounds sterling, w'ere it is insure'. De name is *La Città di Pisa.*"

Fletcher answered promptly: "Leave your papers with me. I'll examine them. Come again after lunch and, if I'm satisfied with the loan, the money will be ready for you."

"But I want de money now! I do not wish to wait until dis afternoon! 'Ere, I offer you de finest of loan' an' I pay your reg'lar interest rate—but I will not 'ave delay! No!"

Fletcher bundled up the various documents that the European had dumped on his desk, rose, and thrust them toward the visitor.

"Sorry. But banking is not done that way. Not at this bank. Although I doubt it, possibly the Hongkong-Shanghai or the Bank of Asia may be able to accommodate you over the counter."

The small man refused to accept the proffered papers. "I am too hasty, I. Always am I goin' off, half-cock'. Dis afternoon? Not before?"

"And not then, unless I am completely satisfied," Fletcher replied with a touch of sharpness.

The dapper little man shrugged three times, bowed gracefully and backed from the office.

HE HAD no sooner left than Fletcher was at the telephone, asking to speak with Baron di Ravenna, the Italian consul.. Briefly the bank manager sketched the man's visit, then asked for information.

It was a vaguely worried voice that answered: "Yes, Fletcher, he was in to see me, the moment we opened the shipping-office today. His vessel anchored last night, and he took out entrance papers. The *Città di Pisa* is registered at our Department of Marine, as well as Lloyds. It's a motor ship of two hundred ninety tons. Our records show that it was formerly owned by the Duc d'Alghierri and now by the Conte di Mazzino——"

"So there is such a person as this Count?" Fletcher interposed.

Fletcher could hear Ravenna give a dry chuckle. "Well, he *is* rather an apparition, isn't he! But, wait a moment, Fletcher . . . Here it is, in my Almanach de Gotha:

" 'Mazzino, Conte di. Cavaliere of the Golden Fleece. Order of Victor Emmanuel. Distinguished War Cross. Commissioned Lieutenant-Commander, Italian Navy, 1914. Married 1915 to the Honorable Lucy Thurston, second daughter Lord Northdown. Born Pisa, 1876. Lives in Livorno at Via Solferino. Sole owner of freight steamship line running between

Livorno and Cagliari, Sardinia. Clubs: Navy, Royal Yacht.' "

"Good heavens, he's quite a distinguished man," Fletcher commented.

"Evidently," agreed the consul. "I suppose he came to you about that loan? Our own bank, you know, is closed today. I mentioned your name to the Count, since you've always been most kind in handling American financial paper for us. But Fletcher, after I did it I began to worry. I'm absolutely sure that the man is all right; I only wish I knew him personally. The trouble is, I'm from Rome and we Romans have a bad habit of thinking that the members of the nobility from other cities are a bit—how would you say it?—upstarts. The Count spoke wretched Italian, but he said that was because he had been spending nearly all his time, the past ten years, at his Sardinian branch. And in Sardinia they talk a patois. Any more information?"

"Thanks, no, Baron. I'll loan the man the money, since you've given him a clean bill. In these days of depression, with the Revolutionists raising cain up-country, I can't afford to turn down a loan as good as this."

But, even as he came to his decision, Fletcher wondered why he was troubled with an obscure premonition that caused him to pick up the documents before him almost with the hope that they would not prove in order.

2

THAT afternoon, promptly at two, the dapper little Latin appeared at the bank. Fletcher's check was waiting for him. Contrary to the manager's forebodings, the papers proved in perfect order. Lloyds' Shanghai representative had further given ship and master a clear recommendation. The *Città di Pisa* was generously insured and the insurance was unincumbered.

What then had he to fret about, Fletcher asked himself in some annoyance. Nothing, except the Count's eagerness in the morning to rush negotiations and an undercurrent of doubt in the consul's voice, because the ship-owner was not a member of the Roman aristocracy.

Yet, his mind continued to trouble him. At last, he gave up trying to work, left the office and motored out to the Columbia Club for tennis. There, under the stimulus of three fast sets, he regained his normal optimism.

But that hard-won state was not to remain for long. At dinner in the bank's bachelor's mess, a wire was brought him. It read:

PIRATES ATTACK CITTÀ DI PISA IN YANGTZE BASIN THREE MILES ABOVE WOOSUNG. CREW AND COUNT DI MAZZINO, OWNER, KILLED. SHIP COMPLETELY GUTTED AND SET AFIRE, BURNING TO WATERLINE.

The wire was unsigned. With an oath, Fletcher bounded from the table. Rushing to the telephone, he got in communication with Lloyd's agent. After reading the wire to him he concluded:

"I am putting in a claim tomorrow through our consul for the amount due the bank on insurance."

"Um," answered the Lloyd's man.

"Well, what do you mean by that?"

"I mean," answered the insurance man slowly, "that this affair looks fishy to me. And I think that as soon as you stop to examine it, it will to you, also. True, pirates occasionally get as far up the coast as Shanghai, but I've never heard of them daring to operate in the Yangtzse right at Woosung. A dozen foreign warships are anchored within five miles of where this is supposed to have occurred."

"Do you mean that you're going to refuse payment?" Fletcher demanded hotly. "You'll find yourself in a court action, if you don't stand back of that insurance."

The agent was imperturbable. "I

should regret a lawsuit." He paused, then added in a lighter tone, "Possibly my suspicions are unfounded. The first thing I'm going to do is cable our agent in Livorno. I realize now that I should have done it when you first asked me for a report on the ship. But then everything seemed to be in order. As soon as he replies, I'll get in touch with you."

As Fletcher left the 'phone, he found the Number One boy waiting to hand him a letter.

"Who sent this?" Fletcher asked, for there was no chit-book with it to sign.

The servant shrugged. "Chinese coolie bring. He say, 'No answer.' An' quick, he go 'way."

"That's queer," Fletcher muttered. The chit-book system was an integral part of life in the casual East. It offered a handy and practical method of gaining a receipt for the delivery of anything—from a lover's billet-doux to a hundred-ton silk-filature machine.

He dismissed the servant and opened the envelope—which was dirty—upon which his name had been printed:

JOHN A FLECHR

The letter read:

Will the honorable Flechr deposit hundred thousand ($100,000) Mex. dollars in broken tile of north face of Lu g Hwa Pagoda one foot from ground. Tile will be marked with black circle of ink. You will go tomorrow night, arriving at Pagoda three 'clock. Go ALONES. Any effort on your part to put boggis money in tile will results in death. Also failure to head this demands will see you most unhappily leaded over with many bullets.

(Signed)
THE BLACKE HAND

Back to the 'phone Fletcher ran. He would report this to Tsang Ah-bou. Here was a task for the small detective, if there ever was one, he muttered. Then, he would call Baron di Ravenna and demand what the Fascist government meant by allowing the Black Hand—notoriously an Italian organization—to gain a foothold in China. A bit rough on the Baron, who was one of the best-liked foreigners in Shanghai! Well, Ravenna would have to suffer a little for the sins of his nationals!

FLETCHER lifted off the hook to telephone Police Headquarters; then he remembered that this was Tsang's holiday, that by this time the small detective must be in Hangchow. The thought suddenly disconcerted Fletcher. A drop of fear began to mingle with the brew of hot anger that was boiling within him. . . . He was aroused from his thoughts by an angry voice coming from the instrument:

"*Wah! Wah!*—Hello! Hello! *Sieuh nieh goh*—what man? [Who is it?]"

"Oh! . . . Give me Police Headquarters."

As the connection was being made, Fletcher writhed inwardly. He hated to tell the story of the day's events, to spread his own stupidity before the bovine Irish desk sergeant. With Tsang, it would have been a different matter. On a chance, he would first ask for Tsang. The detective might be back in the morning; in that case, Fletcher decided, he would wait.

In answer to his query, a heavily brogued voice said:

"Tsang's away for at least three days——" The voice broke off, then continued, "Wait wan minute, sir."

Fletcher waited. Then came the words:

"I've just learned that Tsang's promised to call in from Hangchow, tonight, over long distance. I don't know when, but if you do be wantin' to come down, sir, we'll let you talk with him when he does ring up."

"Right! Hold him on the wire if he calls before I get there. I'll pay the extra toll for the delay."

Tossing the receiver approximately toward the hook, Fletcher bounded out the door and down the driveway to his roadster. Fifteen minutes later, he was sprinting up the steps of Police Headquarters. In the hallway, an excited Chinese waved him into a small, deserted anteroom.

"Honorable sir, Detective Tsang is waiting for you to speak with him! The waiting is very costly! It is long distance! I will close the door. You may speak in quiet."

Fletcher lifted the combination mouth-and-ear piece from its hooks and shouted breathlessly: "Tsang? Is that you?"

"Yes, honorable Fletcher." The Chinese voice at the other end of the wire was calm, yet shaded with alertness. "You may begin."

And Fletcher did, omitting nothing. When he had finished, there was a silence at the other end. In something like panic, he shouted:

"Tsang! Tsang, are you there? Have you heard what I said? Did that damn' 'phone go off?"

Softly the answering voice came: "I hear. But, Prior-born, I think one moment what to tell you to do. Even a water buffalo travels more easily along a path than across a rice paddy. I was trying to find a path."

"But, Tsang," Fletcher said nervously, "I'll do anything you say. What do you think of all this? Of course, I'm not particularly afraid of that threatening letter. I'm more worried about the money I loaned on the ship."

"I do not agree, as to danger, Thrice Honorable. When man has already most easily obtain' money from you by guileful method, is it not his desire to put distance between him and you? To leave you alone? But if he is trying to get *more* money out of you, then, I think, there is danger for you——"

"So you believe the blackmailing letter is written by the same man that got the check out of me?" Fletcher interrupted.

Tsang's answering voice was still calm but slightly long-suffering: "Pre-born, how can I—fresh from sweet labor of burning incense before my ancestors' spirit tablets—tell who has done what? I am possess' of but feeble intellect and that has been greatly strain' of late by too much work. I am very tired——"

"Great Lord, Tsang!" Fletcher interrupted again. "You don't mean you're considering leaving me in the lurch? That you'll go on burning punk for those dead chaps and let me get poured full of lead as a sieve?"

The other end of the wire chuckled. "So you think now there is possibility that blackmailing letter is important? No, Favored of Heaven"—there was a gusty sigh—"my holiday is over. I leave for Shanghai tonight."

"Then I'll see you in my office the first thing tomorrow morning?"

"Unfortunately, no, Prior-born. If I am to be of any values to you, I must work all day tomorrow. I may have to go to fifty places and put the ear to fifty windows."

"In the meantime, Tsang, should I get in touch with Ravenna, the Italian consul? This is running it a bit thick, to import a Camorra over here in the Orient. After all, Ravenna represents Italy, and the Black Hand is certainly a Latin invention."

Tsang had listened to Fletcher with that innate politeness of the Oriental, but when the bank manager had finished, the voice at the other end said quietly:

"But he is good man, Baron Ravenna. Like yourself, Pre-born, he is one of my fine friends. Why should we cause him to lose face, by telling him of this letter? He will groan and be unhappy——"

"Oh Lord, Tsang, stop beating about

the bush! You mean, that for some reason of your own, I am to say nothing to him? Is that right?"

"Preciselys, Heaven-smiting. At moments your penetrating eye is like the piercing gaze of a fish cormorant. You can stare far under water and see the fish."

Fletcher laughed. "Oh, no, I can't, Tsang! And right now, the water is as dark as though a squid had been pumping out ink. But, go ahead, give me your orders. I'll follow 'em if I break a leg doing it."

"Good," came the voice from distant Hangchow. "You will get together a packet of paper, the size of bank-notes. On the outside you will wrap a thousand-dollar bill, of some old currency that is greatly debased, p'haps one of those bankrupt Crédit d'Indo-Chine bills. And——"

"But, Tsang, isn't that the bogus money they warned against using? Yet, God knows, I can't pay over any hundred thousand!"

"I will try to take care of that," Tsang went on, with a hint of firmness. "Then, tomorrow night, as the letter directs, you will go out to Lung Hwa Pagoda. Go by rickshaw. That will be slower and may give you the opportunities to watch and to see if you are being followed. That, I think, is all."

"No it isn't, Tsang! Should I arm myself? Slip a pistol in my pocket?"

The detective's answering voice was unenthusiastic: "If you wish, although I believe it is of small values to you, Preborn. But if you do chance to make shootings, do not begin until you are very sure you know whom you are shootings at. I should not be very happy if you—how you say it, just moment ago?—'pour lead' into *me*. I shall try to be near you at all time.' Let' see. . . . We should have some password, to avoid that painful accident. 'Black Hand,' they felicitously call themselves. For us, then, 'White Hand.' That is it! If you hear man whisper, 'White Hand,' even though he seem stranger to you, you will know either that it is I, or one of my somewhat blockheadish assistants."

There was a long pause at the other end of the wire, as Tsang thus politely indicated his wish to end the talk. Fletcher was loth to break the tenuous connection, but reluctantly he said:

"All right, Tsang. I'll follow your directions. And, speaking of hands, I'm in yours!"

3

FLETCHER awoke early the next morning. Long before sleep actually left his eyes, he was dimly conscious of the stir of events. And it was not in too happy a frame of mind that he took his setting-up exercises and needle shower that was his usual rather pleasant routine.

He had no more than seated himself at breakfast, when the telephone rang. It was the agent at Lloyds.

"Fletcher, this ruddy *Città di Pisa* affair gets more and more puzzling. I've gotten my reply from Livorno. Our representative there says that Count Mazzino left port for a cruise of the South Seas some three months past. He was last reported at Tahiti, en route for New Zealand; that was five weeks ago. No report has been turned in since. However, if he had changed his plans and decided to come up here, it would take a month. That isn't the point that is mystifying me. The cable indicates that the *Città di Pisa* is a pleasure yacht and that this is a pleasure cruise. And——"

"I know," Fletcher broke in excitedly, "but the ship had a cargo! The hold was filled with copra!"

"Exactly!" agreed the Lloyds agent. "The only thing I can think of is that Mazzino may be eccentric and want to play at shipping again. Or the cruise may have cost him more than he could afford and he is trying to make a little money. I've cabled again for more information. But today is May First. What with labor disturbances on May Day in Europe, our Leghorn office will probably be closed. I'll get in touch with you again, the moment I hear anything."

It was on the tip of Fletcher's tongue to say: "I hope I'll be here for you to get in touch with me." But he refrained. Instead, he closed the conversation and went back to a breakfast which, while tastefully cooked, failed to tempt his appetite. The very air seemed charged with ominous implications.

Fletcher had always considered himself a man with a normal amount of courage; yet it was a distinct drain upon his nerves to leave his quarters that night, to set forth in the face of promised danger. He was not complying with the terms of the letter in the matter of money. What if he were stopped, seized, overpowered and the packet of paper with its misleading outer banknote were examined?

At least he would make a fight for it! Sagging his coat-pocket was a heavy automatic pistol. He felt gingerly of it and gained a trace of courage from the touch—although he knew himself to be a wretched marksman. If worst came to worst, he would probably forget the pistol and take to his fists.

But the Camorrists used daggers, didn't they? Not much good, one's fists, against a knife. However, Tsang had been precise in his directions. Confidence would have to be placed in the small Chinese, and Tsang had never yet let him down. On the other hand, the small detective was only human and this was something outside Tsang's ken. Could the Oriental pit his wits against a cold-blooded organization such as this must be? Probably a villainous gang that knew in advance all the subterfuges employed by a squirming victim endeavoring to circumvent its demands. Fletcher shivered.

Tsang had asked him to go by rickshaw. It was a long ride to the Lung Hwa, the Flowery Dragon Pagoda. The note had stipulated that he place the money in the tile before three o'clock; therefore he started on the stroke of midnight.

The intervening hours of the evening, he had played bridge with three of the bank juniors. When his wrist-watch pointed to the moment of departure, he had somewhat quizzically bade the trio good-night, wondering—as he had done with the Lloyds agent—if he was fated to see them again in this world. Yet he had made no reference to his journey. Tsang, in cautioning him against divulging the Black Hand threat to Baron Ravenna, had plainly indicated that he was expected to play his hand in secret.

THE night was balmy; the air seemed drugged with the scent of frangipani and *yu-lan,* Chinese magnolia. Somewhere at the rear of the servants' quarters, a coolie played on a two-stringed, python-skinned fiddle—a persistent minor aria, a sequence of sound that had come down intact without a written note from a Chinese dynasty that antedated the birth of Christ.

A peculiar nostalgia for life attacked Fletcher. China was bizarre, colorful; he loved it; he wanted to live in this land of his adoption for a natural span. It seemed grotesque that he should be menaced here in the very middle of Shanghai's peaceful, well-ordered foreign settlement with its low criminal rate tha•

would put to shame many an American city. Yet he was a banker, a man who handled money; perhaps it was inevitable that he should be picked out as the best possible prospect for a blackmailing band.

The only person to whom Fletcher gave an indication of the hazards confronting him was the rickshaw boy. He concluded:

"If you don't wish to make this trip, I won't blame you; I can call in a public rickshaw from the street. On the other hand, if you do decide to come, I'll double your wages."

"My wage' b'long plenty!" the coolie answered promptly, scowling. "You my mastah. Should I no come 'long wit' you? Am I not fastes' puller in Shanghai? No man can catch—'less he have motocah."

Fletcher climbed into the cart. His servant's loyalty touched but did not surprize him. A faithful people, the Chinese!

The coolie's words acted as a tonic. A quick beat of adventure began to drum in Fletcher's pulse. He was like a soldier, advancing into the unknown; somewhere ahead was the enemy. And somewhere near at hand—he hoped—was Tsang Ah-bou, putting up a barrage to make the advance safe.

Fletcher sank low in his cart as though drowsing, but with eyes alert for signs of following rickshaws. Bubbling Well Road, however, seemed practically deserted. Occasionally his cart overtook and passed a jogging rickshaw with an owner lolling on the back of his neck, napping after too strenuous a session of bridge and whisky sodas at the Shanghai Club. Even less occasionally motor cars roared along the road with a criminal disregard for speed and safety. These, Fletcher tried to scrutinize.

Two of them did not roar. They were of the limousine type, with tonneau curtains drawn. True, that might mean nothing. The Chinese, with their stubbornly held cult of the hareem, might be conveying the women of a family home from some private banquet. Or the shades might simply be the means of shielding the "Thousand Ounces of Silver," that is, a marriageable daughter, from the contamination of public gaze.

On the other hand, those blinds might hide armed, crouching men. Each of the cars had slowed down perceptibly as it had passed Fletcher's rickshaw. Had he imagined it, or had those rear curtains been raised ever so slightly just as the car came up to him? . . . And they appeared to be going in the same direction that he was headed: toward the Lung Hwa, the Flowery Dragon Pagoda.

4

WITHOUT molestation Fletcher reached the outskirts of the city. He thought to discover Tsang's plan underlying this exceedingly risky move. Granted that the note from the Black Hand was ominous, they would probably not act until after he had placed the bogus money in the pagoda tile—probably not even then, for fear that Fletcher might have stationed spies about the pagoda. They might allow the bundle to remain in its cache a week before trying to retrieve it. But not until the bundle was examined should there be any actual danger. By that time Tsang would have woven a fine web of protection about Fletcher, guarding him much as a President is guarded by secret service men, following the receipt of threatening letters at the White House.

The way was now growing more lonely. Suburban Chinese villages had dwindled to small clusters of houses, then fields dotted with mounds of rotted bricks, above-ground graves. The Chi-

nese, he thought, were born, lived, died and were buried on their ancestral acres. An indissoluble part of their native soil. He shivered slightly at these evidences of mortality. The roadside became shaded by a double avenue of trees. It was as though he had entered a long, eery tunnel. The small lantern of the rickshaw cast such a feeble light that it seemed on the verge of being swallowed by the grotesquely looming tree shadows.

Fletcher began softly and tunelessly to whistle. The rickshaw boy slowed down and turned to interrogate the unusual sound from his master.

Fletcher smiled sheepishly. Yes, he had been whistling to keep up his courage. "It's all right, boy——"

He broke off abruptly, for over the face of the coolie had crept an expression of horror. Fletcher jerked around to meet the menace behind him; then the world grew impenetrably black.

A sack had been neatly dropped over his head.

For a moment, instinctively, he fought. He could feel his fist land on a man's face and in answer he heard an interjection in some foreign tongue, not Chinese. His forearms were caught and twisted so cruelly that he wondered despairingly if the bones had been broken. He choked back a groan. He could feel the twine of rough hemp biting into his wrist-bones and ankles. Then he knew the utter helplessness of not only blindness but of inhibited locomotion.

An exploring hand went into his pocket. He could feel his pistol being drawn forth and the packet of imitation money . . . and he knew then an active fear of death.

How would it come? By a bullet? That had been the manner stated in the blackmailing letter. But bullets meant noise. He rejected the possibility. It would much more likely be by a knife-thrust to his heart. He vaguely wondered if that would be painful.

He could hear a whispered voice: "Jus' as we t'ought. No money. Make fool of us."

What was the voice? Not Chinese. Foreign? Not English, certainly. . . . Why didn't they strike? He grew dimly angry at the delay. . . . Had he trusted Tsang Ah-bou once too often? Yet this was not the detective's fault. Tsang had evidently thought that he, Fletcher, would at least be allowed to reach the pagoda in safety. The little detective had not foreseen such a sortie and ambush, a good two miles this side of the old, crumbling monument. Again came the queerly accented voice that held a reminder of another voice he had recently heard; apparently a command, for Fletcher felt himself being lifted and borne by feet and shoulders at a rapid trot.

One thing was clear; for the moment at least they had decided to spare him. He took heart at the reprieve. Desperate though his situation might be, helpless, and menaced in the future, nevertheless there was the hope that as long as he continued to live, just that long would Tsang Ah-bou be given an opportunity to try to effect a rescue.

What had happened to his rickshaw boy? There had been no sound of combat. The boy would have fought, Fletcher knew, had the chance been afforded him. He hoped profoundly that no harm had come to the boy. If the coolie had been hurt, Fletcher told himself, he would do what he could for the boy's family. But possibly the puller had only been stunned and thrown aside on the edge of the road.

THERE was an interminable time during which Fletcher found himself sweating at every pore from the close confinement of the sacking. At last the

jogging movement of his bearers ended. He caught a distant hail. It was answered by the voice of the man whose accents had puzzled him. Again Fletcher was carried forward. There was a sense of being lifted high, then dropped. He was conscious of the worn hardness of boards and of the peculiar blending of smells inseparable from a Chinese sampan: of fish, of leeks, the sour odor of rice wine. There followed now a quick conversation some little way from him, too distant or too guarded for him to distinguish the words. He could only hazard the guess—from the absence of sliding tones—that it was not in Chinese.

The conversation ended. The boat shook as though men were leaping ashore. A moment later he heard the creak of a *yuloh,* that long single oar which propels a sampan through inland waterways.

Where was he being taken? About Shanghai was a network of canals, China's substitute for roads. He was lying on his back. It would not be long before dawn would break. The moments dragged past to the slow creak-creak of the *yuloh.* In spite of his acute discomfort and fear, Fletcher found himself beginning to doze, and from a doze he fell into a troubled sleep. When he awoke, after fighting through a nightmare of being buried beneath a heavy kapok mattress upon which, sitting and amicably discussing his fate, were Tsang Ah-bou and Conte di Mazzino, he found that the sun was beating through the folds of his head covering.

Again Fletcher heard a hail in the distance. He could feel a freshening of the air. Bare footsteps pattered along the deck of the sampan. He was lifted and carried up and up. A gangplank, he postulated, aboard another junk, and by the elevation, a very large one.

He tried to shout and succeeded in uttering a muffled sound. A cruel buffet against the side of his forehead caused him to desist. Again he was set down upon hard boards. Faintly he caught a new smell, the sweet cloying aroma of the Black Seed—opium. What did it mean? Was this a great, two-decker flower boat, dedicated to Oriental lust? Or was it a sea-going junk whose skipper dallied with the dream-giving smoke? He listened for the high titter of singsong girls, that might prove it a Chinese pleasure craft. But about him was that same silence indicative of a secret purpose. Who knows, he thought bitterly, he might have been transferred from the sampan under the very nose of the *Villa Lobos,* or some other American gunboat in the lower harbor.

He was aroused from his pondering by the painful impact of a toe against his ribs.

"Fletch'r," came that same voice he had grown to recognize, "we now take you to a place w'ere you can not make fool of us any more, with your boggis moneys. You had you' chance. Now, before you can get away, you will pay ten times w'at we ask first time. Five hund' t'ousand dollar' for you' life." The voice broke into a laugh that was almost genial. The figure moved away, the feet bare or rubber-heeled, falling softly on the deck.

He left Fletcher a prey to forebodings a hundredfold more sinister than if the alternative offered had been of some specified death. Death alone, Fletcher realized, might not be an evil; it might even be a release.

As he felt himself being drawn deeper and deeper into the depths of imagined torture—knowing that he could not begin to pay the ransom of half a million dollars—another voice came. It spoke in Chinese, uttering two simple, but marvelously pregnant words:

"White hand."

Then, without adding a word of explanation, the speaker shuffled away. His feet gave that telltale slip-slipping sound made by the Oriental.

Once more Fletcher was left in silence, but now his heart was pounding—drumming so painfully that he nearly choked. Hope suddenly flamed. The prearranged password. The voice was Tsang Ah-bou's.

5

THE next five minutes had in store one more jolt for Fletcher, but of a less pleasant variety. The opium-reeking junk that he had imagined himself aboard, suddenly began to throb with the unmistakable beat of engines. The beat increased, and soon he was conscious of a slight rolling motion of the deck on which he had been dumped.

His mind jumped to one conclusion: he was being Shanghaied. The irony of this struck him. In the past, crimps had impressed sailors aboard their ships for the run *to* Shanghai; now he was being carried willy-nilly *away* from this city.

He began to worry over the bank. That Chinkiang situation was serious. With the rebels in power there, it might change overnight for the worse. He should be back at his desk—abruptly he halted this unproductive line of thought. He must take what consolation he could in the fact that he had been permitted to live this long.

Where was the boat taking him? He tried to judge its size by the roll of the deck and the throb of the engines. But he was too much of a landsman. The patter of bare feet approached him. Instinctively he drew himself together, tensing muscles all too uselessly. He could feel hands at his wrists and feet; his bonds were being untied. Then he felt himself lifted upright. A hand grasping his shoulder propelled him forward. He staggered, for the withes about his ankles had been drawn so harshly as to impede the circulation. The propelling hand tightened and he lurched along the deck. He was stopped. He could hear a door being opened.

The next moment his bit of black sacking was removed. He found himself in a large cabin expensively panelled—after the fashion of a dozen years ago—in Circassian walnut. Seated at a flat-topped desk, a beautiful example of the cabinet-maker's art, was the little European who had borrowed the fifty thousand dollars of him. The man was clad now in immaculate yachting whites, brass-buttoned, with a peaked cap lying at his elbow. A bulge in his right-hand coat pocket was the only marring factor in an otherwise perfect sartorial creation.

"What in the name of the devil is the meaning of this?" asked Fletcher bruskly.

The man gave him a preoccupied stare, then waved aside the question. His lemon-yellow hands drummed a tattoo on the desk.

Fletcher gathered his wits together and glanced swiftly out the narrow window just above the desk. The ship-owner caught the glance. Quickly he jerked down a wooden blind—but not before Fletcher had seen the early morning sun reflected redly upon the windows of a familiar group of buildings: the Chinese-American silk filature mills. The ship was moving down the Huangpu River, not three miles from the center of Shanghai.

"Now," said the dapper man at the desk, "let me make apologize, Mr. Fletch'r, for de exceeding' bad trreatment you have been give'. But it might 'ave been worse, *hein?* I could 'ave done several t'ings: put a dagger in your back or dropped you, wit' your hands and feet still bound, into de canal. But I did none of dese t'ings. An' w'y? Because

I t'ink you may be ver' useful to me——"

"Oh, no, I won't!" interrupted Fletcher savagely. "I'm not worth five hundred thousand dollars. So you needn't think you'll get that much out of me for ransom! Or even a tenth of it!"

"Ah, so Beppo 'as been talking to you? He thrreaten you, eh? Well, Beppo is good man, even if he is half-caste. He is fine navigator—but *Dominiddio, I* am master of dis ship! You may set you' mind at rest about ransom. Of course I 'ad 'ope' dat perhaps you might 'ave been frrrighten' into brringing along dat hundred t'ousand I ask for in my letter. But you didn't. In any case, it wouldn't 'ave purchase' your freedom——"

"So you confess that you wrote that blackmailing letter?"

"But of course. W'y not? It serve' its purpose. Are you not here, w'ere I can use you? And believe me I shall——"

"Just what do you mean?" again interposed Fletcher. Then he halted. After all, would it not be well to learn just what this man had in view? "Go on!" he concluded curtly.

"Precisely w'at I shall do. You have de fine reputation. None bett'r. I 'ave rrreports on you from—but no matt'r 'bout dat. Dese rreports say dat you are ver' successful banker wit' de Chinese, because de natives trrrust your word. I am goin' to make use of dat trrust. You will do exactly w'at I say. You will say exactly w'at I tell you to say——"

At this point anger overcame Fletcher's caution. "I'm damned if I will! Just disabuse your mind, right now, of any hope that I'll join forces with you! Is that clear?"

The little man shook his head mournfully. "So bull-in-the-China-shop-ish, you Americans! You do not know 'ow to bend to de wind." He leaned forward until his face was close to Fletcher's. The bank manager suddenly saw that the eyes of the ship-owner were contracted to pin-points—sign positive of the opium addict. The thin lips widened to a smile, cold, completely lacking in all elements of humor. "I shall teach you de art of bending—to my will. Do you know w'at it mean' to be buried—to your neck—under de sun? Only your head expose' to dat pitiless glare, to de flies? Do you——"

A figure appeared at the door. The sinister orator at the desk turned with an exclamation of annoyance. "W'at you mean, interruptin' me, *hein?* 'Ave I not orrder dat I be left alone wit' dis man? You shall be giv'n fifty stroke' wit' a bamboo on your heel'!"

The man at the door, a Chinese, bowed meekly before the storm. "Velly sorry, Mastah! But wheelmans, he say *mus'* talkee you! Wantchee know what to do now. Whedder to take uppah or lowah channel."

As the colloquy was going on, Fletcher eyed the speaker. He was a decrepit-looking old fellow, heavily pock-marked, eyes rheumy and lack-luster, about his whole face a look of such vacuity that Fletcher suspected an advanced case of senile dementia.

At that instant a hoarse blast of the ship's whistle blared almost above Fletcher's head. It was answered in higher key, apparently near at hand.

A mad impulse came to Fletcher: to try to escape. To bolt for the rail, jump overboard and trust to being picked up by that other, passing ship whose nearness had been indicated by its whistle. . . . A man accustomed to quick decisions, he drew himself together, wheeled and plunged for the decrepit Chinese at the entrance. The Oriental instinctively drew back. The way seemed clear. Fletcher glimpsed the railing, the muddy brown water of the Huangpu, and the red-rusty

stern of a tramp steamer, the boat that had given the answering whistle.

With a leap, Fletcher cleared the high sill of the stateroom door, only to feel across his ankles the bar of a dexterous foot. He fell crashing. Darkness, mingled with gaudy stars, settled about him. . . . Later, still stunned, he groped his way to a sitting posture on the deck.

Around him were clustered several Chinese sailors. At the door of his stateroom stood the dapper ship-owner. He reached out and patted the shoulder of the senile Chinese. Using the generic term of the East for the Oriental servant irrespective of age, he said:

"Good working, Boy. For dis, I forget de bamboo on your heel. An' I give you five Mex. dollar more a week wage." He turned to the other Chinese. "An' to you, if you serve me, jus' as faithful', *perbacco,* I rreward you same way. But, to dose who *don't*——"

He swiftly yet graphically pantomimed the motions of a sword in the act of hari-kari.

The sailors muttered a moment, staring fearfully at the dapper yachtsman; then hurriedly they backed away from him. Fletcher also stared. He knew now that in this man resided a desperate force, capable of acts as horrible as they were grotesque. Queerly enough his mind turned to Baron di Ravenna, a man of the finest probity, and he wondered dimly at the difference between the two Italians, each a nobleman, each a member of an old race.

The small Latin spoke to the old coolie, pointing to Fletcher: "I am t'rough wit' dis man for de moment. Take him to Number Three Hold. Give him littl' food an' water." Then his pin-point eyes dropped directly upon Fletcher. "As for you, if you make any other attempt to escape, you'll wish you 'adn't! You'll see how you like it wit' —both your legs brok'n!"

Fletcher felt himself shaken with a sudden fury. A red flame danced before his eyes. He had an insane impulse to catch that immaculately collared throat and throttle it. . . .

"Why, blast you! We'll see——"

Then, close to his ear, the gentlest of whispers, too low for the man at the door to catch:

"No, Master! *Don't!* . . . Remember White Hand."

Startled, without thinking, Fletcher wheeled around. Behind him was a ring of Chinese faces. These were blank with that peculiar, expressionless quality that betokens uneasiness. Like the average of Shanghainese, all were men of medium height or just under. Any one of them might be Tsang Ah-bou. Fletcher knew the uncanny ability in disguise that Tsang possessed. Therein lay one of the secrets of the detective's success. Yet it was more than mere make-up: he seemed able to merge himself into the character that he played. Genius, Lluellan, the Chief of the Shanghai Police, had called this ability of Tsang's, and Fletcher had never desired to challenge the Welshman's statement. . . .

Yet it seemed impossible that any of these simple, almost vapid-faced Orientals could be Tsang. The ancient, rheumy-eyed Chinese now stepped importantly forward. Catching Fletcher's arm, he said in a shrill, senile voice:

"You come on! An' don' make monkey-foolo with me, or I hit you topside you' head, savvy?"

The crowd of Chinese roared with sudden, childish laughter at this threat, emanating as it did from an old man who was a full head shorter than the burly, hard-muscled Fletcher. They opened a way for the pair to pass.

MEEKLY Fletcher moved forward along the deck. His desire to put all to a desperate touch had vanished. For one thing, he was still sick and shaken from his fall; for a second, somewhere in the group behind him was Tsang Ah-bou.

A spasm of nausea shook him. For a moment he reeled. The ancient man shook him by the arm. There was an unusual force in the pressure. Obeying the direction indicated, Fletcher began to descend a stairs. Below was blackness and the nearly overpowering stench of drying copra. . . . It seemed a long time ago now, his talk with the Lloyds agent about the conversion of this pleasure yacht to a copra-bearing steamer. Like a race horse made to carry a manure cart, converting a yacht to this rancid, oily trade.

The darkness grew, insidiously stealing about him, and with it waves of billowing heat. He halted, his body suddenly refusing to take him farther into that fetid cavern. Again the Oriental hand was clamped just above his elbow. His biceps tensed. He tried to jerk away and was surprized to find that he was powerless in that clasp. Yet the old Chinese had seemed feeble, tottering on the brink of the grave. Desperately Fletcher began to struggle, to break that grasp on his arm.

A chuckle sounded in his ear and again that familiar, cautious whisper:

"It is all right, Prior-born. Do not try to fight with me."

Fletcher stopped as though stung. "Tsang!" he muttered. "Tsang——" A hand went roughly about his mouth.

"Thrice Honorable, would you tell the whole ship who I am?"

The bank manager tried to mumble an apology, but the hand remained firmly about his mouth. Tsang's voice exasperatedly continued:

"Sometimes I think you b'long like a little child. First you risk being shot by Mazzino, trying to jump overboard. He has pistol in his pocket, which I think any man could see! And now, you try to tell all the ship who I am."

The hand was grudgingly released. Fletcher gave a shaky smile. His fingers went out and caught the firm shoulder which even Tsang's mastery of disguise could not make flabby with age. He gave the shoulder a quick, thankful squeeze and then stepped confidently down the stairs into the intense blackness of the vessel's hold.

Both men groped their way forward. Tsang muttered: "I have no lantern. I have no match." At last he stopped. "I think this is Number Three Hold."

Fletcher stopped. He could hear Tsang moving about near at hand.

"That funny," the detective muttered.

"What's funny?"

"This cargo here not copra. This boxes." He paused. "I guess I turned around. This is Number. One Hold. But no matter. The Count will not know the difference. Boxes. Funny!"

But Fletcher was not interested at that moment in the ship's cargo. He whispered cautiously, hardly above his breath:

"May I ask a question now?"

Tsang gave an impatient exclamation; then an innate, racial politeness caused him to say: "If you desire, Pre-born."

"What ship are we on?"

But racial politeness was not proof against this stupidity. Tsang clucked through his teeth. "Have you not guessed that yet, my friend? This belong *Città di Pisa.*"

"But I thought that she had been pirated and burned!"

The small detective gave a deep groan. "Yes, my good friend, I suppose you do think that. You are very fine banker, yes! But of crooked men you know not

at all." Tsang's voice grew philosophical. "However, as the old poet says, 'The lordly mandarin duck knows not of the battles of the steel-spurred fighting quail.' "

6

TSANG disappeared, leaving Fletcher alone in the pitch darkness of the hold. The only air there was came from a single ventilation pipe leading to the deck. Copra bugs flew about him, settled and bit viciously. The heat was terrific. His clothes became soaked with perspiration. Thirst then attacked him.

In an endeavor to forget the increasing pangs of thirst, he began to explore the confines of his prison. Tsang had commented in some surprize concerning the presence of boxes in this hold. Fletcher now ran his hands along the surfaces of these. They seemed to be of equal size, each approximately seven feet long, and a yard wide and deep. He soon noted that there were many of them; back and back they were piled.

Suddenly he stopped. A shiver ran a swift course up and down his spine. And in spite of the heat, his teeth began to chatter.

Coffins!

What hellish sort of ship was this? The dapper Latin in command, Fletcher was convinced, was a degenerate. Did the man's moral slackening lead toward awful and ghoulish rites with helpless human cadavers?

Panic surged in Fletcher. The terrific heat, the blackness, the nearness of possible coffins. He turned and ran, stumbling, falling prone, picking himself up to run again, back through the ship to the stairs leading upward. Vaguely he realized that he was unreasoning, but he failed to take into consideration the fact that he had been under a terrific tension the past forty-eight hours.

Up the stairs he climbed. The hatch was down. He pounded upon it, shouting, cursing.

After a moment, he could hear voices outside the hatch. It was cautiously opened. The face of a Chinese sailor peered down. Then the man was shouldered aside and Fletcher could see the tiny, opium-contracted eyes of the ship-owner.

"I t'ought you would not like dat hold. But you come up littl' quicker dan I t'ink. So you 'ave decide to make partners wit' me, *hein?*"

For a moment Fletcher did not answer. The sight of that leering face was like a cold douche upon his sweat-drenched body. His first impulse was to damn the man and stumble back down the stairs. Better the companionship of the dead, better the heat and the stench of copra than to fraternize with this perverted being whose febrile mind might invent torture after torture, for the sheer sadistic pleasure of seeing a victim writhe. Then a second, saner impulse came to him and prevailed. He said quietly:

"If you don't ask me to do anything criminal, why shouldn't I help you?"

" 'Crrriminal?' " The ship-owner laughed as though the idea were humorously absurd. "Not in de leas' crriminal! Unpleasant, perrhaps, for you; but crriminal, no. Come up on deck. Now dat you are a rrational 'uman being an' not a rrranting fool, I give you bett'r quart'rs. A nice cab'n. Trrue, you will still be lock' up, but it will not be bad, dere. I shall send you bottl' wine from my own cellaret. I am gen'rous man, I. To dose pipples who serve me well, I give an' give an' give. I am like a damn' fool, so gen'rous. I shall send you in—le's see—a bottl' of Château Yquiem ——" The Latin halted abruptly and apparently repented of this lavish gesture, for he shook his head. "No. You are

American. You have de debase' palate. You would not appreciate Château Yquiem. It woul' be putting diamonds before swine. I will send in bottl' of good port, instead. A fine Spanish wine but littl' heavy for my taste."

As he delivered himself of this monologue the dapper little man had been leaning down, peering at Fletcher. The bank manager had been standing on the ladder with his head not quite on a level with the deck. He tried to edge himself higher, to see over the side, but the shipowner thrust out an immaculately white buckskinned shoe.

"Stay w'ere you are—until I have sack brought. I'm not sure I wan' you to know yet w'at place we go. After you prove frien'ship for me, den I let you see ever'thing, *hein?*"

Fletcher accepted the verdict not impatiently. After all, Tsang would keep him informed as to their whereabouts. And he would know by the motion of the ship if they were putting out to sea preparatory to going to some other coast port of China. He realized that he was not to be shanghaied, as he had first feared, for reference had been made by the owner to his, Fletcher's, reputation with Chinese merchants. He was to be used in some variety of negotiations. If the small Latin spoke no Chinese, perhaps an opportunity might arise to warn them that they were dealing with a rogue and a monster.

Philosophically, Fletcher submitted to the same bit of black sacking. Before it was slipped over his head, he was given but one fleeting glimpse of the deck. Tsang Ah-bou was not in sight. The bank manager was again propelled along the deck to a cabin, a compartment not far, as well as he could judge, from the captain's stateroom.

This cabin was beautifully furnished but, queerly enough, in a feminine fashion. A heliotrope satin spread lay over the bed, its edges flounced and ruffled. One side of the cabin was taken up by a full-length mirror. To the opposite wall was clamped a woman's dressing-table. Curiously Fletcher examined this table. Along the surface were still traces of spilled face powder. Yet the room gave no impression of recent feminine occupancy. As he examined more closely, he could see that the dabs of powder were touched with a damp mold.

The dressing-table offering no more enlightenment, he turned to a narrow door by the mirror. It opened easily, giving upon a tiny closet. In this reposed a dozen woman's dresses, all apparently of a similar size. On the bottom were neatly ranged pairs of slippers, gold brocaded, cloth of silver, suède, even a pair of tan riding-boots. Fletcher picked up one of the boots. It was heavily bearded with mold, that pervasive substance which attaches itself in the Orient to shoes when not constantly worn or brushed.

He tried to draw some sort of deduction from this, but failed. Tsang would know about it; he would probably sniff like a bloodhound and move to some unerring conclusion. That is, if Tsang were given the chance to enter the cabin.

THE chance was given a few moments later. The key was turned in the outer lock and Tsang slipped in. The shuffling figure so perfectly simulated age that Fletcher could hardly believe it was the brisk, youthful-appearing Oriental he had known so intimately for the past three years. Tsang was bearing a tray with food and wine.

Promptly the detective put a finger to his lips to inform Fletcher that there was to be no conversation. The bank manager nodded; the cabin walls, he realized, were probably thin.

However, he could not refrain from pointing mutely to the various signs in the cabin of a former feminine occupancy. That done, he raised his eyebrows interrogatively. But to Fletcher's disappointment, Tsang only shrugged.

Curiosity proved too much for Fletcher. He risked a whisper: "Do you think the woman is somewhere aboard the ship?"

Tsang gave a terrific frown which seemed to add a score of wrinkles to his speciously lined face. Without a word, he stalked to the door, opened it, then closed it again with a bang of righteous anger.

"Evidently," Fletcher said to himself, "I am not to learn the mystery of this. At least, not for the moment."

He turned to the food which Tsang had brought and ate ravenously. He sipped the ship-owner's port, although he would have preferred coffee.

The motion of the ship continued steady, without pitch or roll, although the engines appeared to be going at full speed. That probably meant the *Città di Pisa* was forging up the Yangtzse. . . .

Up the Yangtzse? Did the little foreigner in command know of the rebels? Did he know that the revolutionists were filled with an unusually virulent hatred for the Westerners in China? "Down with the Imperialistic Nations, France, Italy, England and the United States," was their motto. "Kill the Foreign Barbarians," was their unpleasant and often obeyed slogan.

After eating, sleep dragged mightily at Fletcher's eyelids. He threw himself down upon the ruffled bed and slept. When he awoke, the sun was trying to pierce the wooden shutters of the cabin window, and he realized that it was late afternoon.

For a moment he lay drowsily, listening for the beat of the engines. They were silent. He sprang from the bed and ran to the shuttered window. Outside, apparently at some little distance from the ship, came confused noises. He began to separate and distinguish these: the creak of *yulohs,* indicative of moving sampans; the resonant, echoing twang from a barber boat, advertising its trade by the stridulation of a giant jew's-harp. Farther away came the wail of a long-handled Chinese lute accompanying the excruciating yelps of a singsong girl engaged in rendering a Chinese operatic aria. . . .

Tsang and Fletcher had argued amiably more than once about this variety of Chinese music. Fletcher had contended that it sounded precisely like the wail of an amorous cat. Tsang Ah-bou, however, had argued that it was the finest florescence of music; and that a thousand years hence, when the Western Barbarians had progressed in their musical education to the point China had already attained, they would be applauding similar arias sung in a like fashion.

The music Fletcher now heard indicated a restaurant boat. And restaurant junks in turn predicated a city of some size. Not Shanghai, for even as he slept, he had been vaguely aware all day long of the steady motion of the engines. Not Nanking, the new capital, for the ship had been traveling too short a time. It must be Chinkiang.

A sudden oppression of worry bore down upon him. Chinkiang was the center of the Revolution. This gloomy foreboding thought was suddenly overshadowed by a hail from the river which was answered from the ship's deck. Call and reply were in Chinese. He felt a faint jar as a boat bumped sharply against the side of the *Città di Pisa,* followed by a sputter of exclamations. The impact had evidently thrown some one off his balance.

There was a scurry of feet along the deck, and Fletcher guessed that a ladder was being lowered overside. More sputters followed in agitated Chinese. He caught such phrases as:

"Very good, venerable and eminent sir, be pleased to come up. Here, Cha, help him with great care over the rail! . . . Ey-yah! Oh, son of a turtle, *do* you wish to deposit the honorable gentleman in the river?"

At last the party seemed to have assembled itself on deck. There was much hissing intake of breath in that Oriental sibilation of politeness. Fletcher heard the ship-owner's voice, in the distance. He was saying in English, and somewhat peevishly:

"Well, 'ave dey come? Only two hour' late! For China, dat is good, I s'pose. My time is of no value. *I*, of course, can spen' hours an' hours, tweedling my thumb, waitin' for dem! . . . Ch'ung, bring Fletch'r to my stateroom. Dis will be good chance to experiment; I shall find out w'ether dat stiff-neck' banker has been worth bringing along!"

The door was unlatched. Tsang entered and ran swiftly toward Fletcher. Putting his lips to the bank manager's ear, he breathed with the utmost caution:

"Come with me. Pretend to fall in with any proposing that this Mazzino man may make. No matter what he talk, *you* say to him, 'Yes, Count, can do!' "

Fletcher twisted about irritably, promptly forgetting his earlier plan to pretend compliance with the schemes of the Count. "I'm damned if I will! Do you think that——"

"Yes," interrupted Tsang with a peculiar stern dignity that he could assume upon occasions, "yes, Honorable, I do think that you are going to do so. And why? Because I ask it. It is more than your little personal honor. If I have guess' right, it is the life of many, many people that we may be able to save. Is that clear, my good friend?"

"Y-es."

"Then come. We have talk' too much now. If I am discover'—you will lack even my poor protection from now on."

Fletcher was not blindfolded. His eyes went quickly over the rail. The ship was anchored apparently in the river but near the shore. About her swarmed a city of junks. Over their masts, ashore, he could glimpse the crenelations of a low city wall. The glimpse was brief, but it was sufficient. There was Chinkiang. Chinkiang that was lying gasping and supine under the hands of Red rebels, men who had become so far renegade as to hold as their aim the turning over of China to Russia, presenting that northern nation with yet another Soviet State.

7

IN ADDITION to the ship-owner, there were two men in the Latin's stateroom, as Fletcher entered. The pair were Chinese and were clad in the heavy brocaded silks that indicated Oriental affluence. The buttons which fastened the loops of their jackets were of finest jade. Their long finger nails were encased in white jade protectors.

The elder of the two, and the more richly garbed, was a peevish-faced Oriental of some sixty years. He seemed to be nervous, for he jiggled a silken knee up and down with maddening regularity. His companion was apparently in awe of him and hurriedly concurred with each shrill platitude that he gave forth.

The first few moments of the interview were taken up with the usual polite circumlocutions prior to engaging upon the business of the day. Each stencil that the man proffered, Fletcher mechanically answered in kind, since the ship-owner demanded that he act as interpreter. As

he did so, he tried to guess the elder Oriental's profession.

Too brusk for a merchant; he lacked that touch of blandness, that air of pouring oil on water whether or not troubled, which is characteristic of the commercial Chinese, from wealthy bank compradore to petty shopkeeper. On the other hand, he lacked that cynical detachment invariably found in native diplomats. There was an air of strain, of feverish excitement about him which betokened nerves strung almost to the breaking-point. . . . He informed Fletcher that his name was Leong.

The bank manager could see Tsang Ah-bou, lingering humbly at the door, examining this visitor with a veiled but intense scrutiny. Yet Tsang's mouth drooped with an expression of vapid gawking curiosity so typical of the Chinese coolie that Fletcher had to stiffen his lips to avoid smiling.

When the two visitors had concluded their remarks, the ship-owner demanded impatiently of Fletcher:

"Well, what dey say, *hein?* Dey make lot of talk!"

"Nothing yet. He's just about to tell us," Fletcher answered as the peevish-faced Chinese leaned forward.

"This person has come to discuss the purchase of the arms aboard this ship."

Fletcher tried to school his face not to show surprize. But it was difficult. The answer to so much that was puzzling him was now given. Those boxes—coffins, he had thought them—were rifle cases. He was on a gun-running boat. And, since he was a white man, this Oriental apparently thought him a partner with the ship-owner in the enterprise. He would have to go warily. Learn more, if he could. . . . "Leong," the Chinese visitor had called himself. The name was unfamiliar, not the title of the leader of the revolutionists. Possibly some agent of the rebel generalissimo. On the other hand, each Chinese had a dozen names which he used as fancy dictated, changing without warning or without any reason. Even Tsang Ah-bou; although the detective, familiar with Western prejudices in the matter of taking a name and keeping it, had never made one of those startling overnight changes.

The ship-owner spoke: "As soon as dis chap get t'rough talkin' *la politesse,* you tell 'm I have his rifles."

"I know," Fletcher answered shortly. "I saw the cases, when you put me down in the hold." He turned to the Chinese and conveyed this information.

Leong jerked up his chin with an annoyed motion. "Naturally the rifles are here. They had better be—if your ship is to escape a bombardment by my batteries of red-mouthed cannon there." His hand swept vaguely in the direction of the shore. "Do you think I would allow you to anchor here, otherwise?"

Fletcher held up his own hand and turned to the ship-owner. "He says that the arms had better be here, or he'll throw a few shells into us from shore."

The small Latin gave a slow smile. "For dat littl' bit of bravado, I charge 'im five t'ousand dollar' extra, *hein?* Tell 'im to give me the money he promise' and stop his cat-talk, den we start unloading. I want to do other business here, more important dan dis, den get down river."

At this juncture an idea struck Fletcher—like a sudden flood of light in a darkened room. The owner of the ship spoke no Chinese; the visitor, no English. Possibly the man's satellite understood it, although his face gave no inkling of comprehension. . . . What he so suddenly planned to do, Fletcher realized, was a mad, probably suicidal thing, but it would revenge him against the sinister Latin and, more important, if it succeeded

it would save this revolution-torn land just that much more unnecessary bloodshed. He turned to the ship-owner.

"Just how much money was it our envoy here promised to bring?"

"Fifty t'ousand dollar' in Shanghai paper currency, bills on your bank, my good Fletch'r. And forget w'at I say jus' now about chargin' 'im five t'ousand extra. Get de money."

Fletcher turned blandly to the visitor. "The captain of this ship says that he is ready to unload his cargo just as soon as you turn over to him the agreed sum of two hundred thousand dollars——"

"*Lianga? Lianga?* Two? Two?" interrupted the Chinese with a sputter. "Ey-yah! What do you say: *two hundred* thousand? Thieves! Grave-robbers! Two hundred thousand! Aieee!"

The bank manager turned back to the ship-owner, trying to simulate a worried look. "This native says he won't go through with the bargain. He says that fifty thousand is too much. He will only give you ten thousand."

But the little Latin, instead of breaking into angry curses, sat quite still. His eyes bored into Fletcher, like tiny but inordinately sharp gimlet points.

The bank manager met the look—squarely. Not for nothing did Fletcher have the reputation in Shanghai of being one of the city's best poker-players, even though, due to his bank position, he limited himself to small stakes.

FOR a moment, the ship-owner seemed satisfied by his scrutiny. Then his eye lighted upon Tsang Ah-bou, still gaping with half-witted fervor into the stateroom. A cigarette-stained finger was flung out.

"You, old Ch'ung! Come in here!"

Into the room Tsang shuffled.

"Did dis man"—indicating the peevish-faced arms agent—"say to Fletch'r jus' now dat he would only pay ten t'ousand dollar' for our whole cargo of arms?"

"Oh-a, yes, Mastah! Yes, Mastah!" Tsang agreed, wagging his artfully grizzled head up and down with enthusiasm. "He talkee only ten sousand, and he say ten sousand b'long too much!"

"Good work, Tsang!" Fletcher mentally applauded. For an instant the bank manager had been disconcerted by the Latin's request for corroboration from Tsang. But the detective, whether he liked Fletcher's idea or not, was standing by, like a good sportsman.

The owner gave a thoughtful nod. Then apparently he thought of a further line of proof. "Ch'ung, you speak to dis Chinaman. You tell him dat dis shipment cost me more dan fifty t'ousand. Make 'im see dat I am giving him fine, fine bargain w'en I sell at dat fig'r'."

"Yes, Mastah! Yes, Mastah!" Tsang answered with that same air of pathetic eagerness to obey. Turning to the visitor, he said in the vernacular with an air of deep humility: "O Venerable Leong *Lao-yeh*, my master, the foreign barbarian, wishes me to tell you that the cargo of arms he carries has cost him more than two hundred thousand Shanghai dollars. That he is making a great concession to you in parting with it for that figure."

The arms agent groaned deeply and batted his hands together. He seemed to hesitate. Fletcher had a moment of sharp fear. Would the Chinese accede to this demand? Was he so badly in need of the rifles that he would pay any price? If so, the ship-owner would see through not only his ruse, but Tsang's seconding of it. Why, in the name of heaven, hadn't he made the sum half a million, one that it would be impossible for the visitor to meet?

Leong rose. Curtly he beckoned to his henchman. "Tell your masters," he

said arrogantly to Tsang Ah-bou, "that I refuse their offer."

Then his arrogance seemed to leave him. He walked hurriedly as though afraid, to the side of the ship. Lifting his silken gown, he straddled the rail and began to descend the ladder to the sampan bobbing below.

"But w'at he decide to do?" muttered the small Latin, as he and Fletcher followed to the rail.

Fletcher, remembering the arms agent's threat, earlier in the interview, answered honestly for the first time: "I don't know." There was a sharp shriek below them. In his hurry to get aboard the sampan, Leong had slipped on the last four rungs of the ladder. Falling he landed squarely athwart the gunwale of the boat, and lay there face down. His breath was apparently knocked out of his body, for he was silent. Not so his assistant. That worthy gave forth loud ejaculations of commiseration and horror.

As soon as he could regain his wind, the arms agent stood up in the sampan. He vigorously passed his fist before his own nose in a gesture as though he wished to strike that inoffensive member. Then he emitted an appalling screech of rage, followed by the flooding words:

"I will sink your ship! Not a man aboard your louse-infested steamer shall be alive tomorrow morning. I will show you whether or not you can make playful sport with me, with *me* the Leader of the Sublime Peoples' Revolution! You tallow-hided barbarians! And you renegade Chinese who hire yourselves to the Western Bloodsucking Imperialists! Before tomorrow you die!"

Fletcher stole a glance at Tsang. For the moment, the detective had forgotten to play his part of elderly, half-witted coolie. The gaping lips were closed and over the face had crept an expression of deep perturbation. If Fletcher had not known Tsang to be a man almost inhumanly devoid of fear, he would have said that the Chinese detective was afraid.

Had he, Fletcher, by his bit of chicanery, endangered both their lives? For his own safety he felt small concern at that moment; exultation at the success of his ruse was still too strong within him. He had deflected this shipment of arms; it would not be used to harry a peaceful countryside, to threaten village elders into giving up their pathetic all. For little more than bandits were these revolutionists. . . . On the other hand, if his act had jeopardized Tsang's life, then he was making sorry repayment for the cool heroism Tsang was displaying in worming a way aboard this ship.

The next hours, tonight, would tell.

8

As THE mufti-clad leader of the rebels disappeared shoreward in his sampan, a fast-sinking sun caught the small boat and tinted it a blood-red hue. Standing by the rail, Fletcher thought how appropriate was this gory color. . . . At least, he mused, the owner of this ship was not aware of the threat just made to blow them all skyward by some concealed shore battery. Before the bombardment began, Tsang and he must contrive somehow to escape the *Città di Pisa*—for Fletcher knew the procrastinating Chinese well enough to feel reasonably sure that it would not be started soon.

Then, even as this necessity was first presenting itself, the way was offered. The ship-owner, who had been standing at Fletcher's side also watching the disappearing boat, turned and said:

"Dat man, I t'ink, mean' trroubl' for us. Dat mean' we go ashore, you an' I. I mus' see a man dere. But now dat I have quarrel' wit' military leader, dat other man won't come out to ship, I t'ink.

So I mus' go! I'll have to wait till it get' dark. I don' like goin' 'shore in dark, either. I don' like China! Dis firrs' time I come China an', *per Dio!*—it de las' time!"

He was silent for several moments. Fletcher waited. At last the ship-owner sighed and went on:

"Oh, well, now we *mus'* work out my other plan." His voice grew more cheerful. "De plan I have kidnap *you* for, my good Fletcher, at Lung Hwa Pagoda. I have take' much trroubl' and run much rrisk to bring you along, jus' for this scheme. But I t'ink you goin' to be worth it. If I succeed, I can laugh at littl' general who is here jus' now. I can make him damn mad, t'rowing de rifle cases in river, rright under his nose, *hein? Perbacco,* dat would be fine! T'row dem overboard, rright under his nose! W'at you say to dat, Fletch'r?"

"I'd say, serves him right," Fletcher answered mechanically. He was listening with strained eagerness to the ship-owner's words. Here, before him, loomed some real test. Not merely to gain an interpreter had the Latin taken such elaborate pains to bring him aboard the *Città di Pisa.* And, whatever were the stakes for which the ship-owner played, they were high enough evidently for him to view with equanimity the loss of a fifty-thousand-dollar arms cargo.

The sun now dropped with a great splash of maroon behind the city wall. The Latin twisted about and bawled out an order to lower a lifeboat. Fletcher noted that the deck crew of the ship seemed to be Oriental. With apparent casualness, he looked up toward the bridge. There, he was somewhat startled to see, stood an Eurasian. That was strange!

With considerable furor and more bungling, the Chinese sailors managed to get the lifeboat launched and brought around to the ladder down which the Generalissimo had stumbled and fallen. At the boat's tiller, Fletcher noted with satisfaction, sat Tsang Ah-bou. The small detective's face looked unusually grim. And, while he employed that senile, querulous voice to which Fletcher was becoming accustomed, there seemed a note of genuine underlying annoyance at the thrashing efforts of the boat crew.

The Count was first down the ladder. He moved with a cat-like surety and grace astonishing in a man of his age. A person who had led an active life, Fletcher postulated. The bank manager followed, and they seated themselves.

The sun gave one final gleam and dropped behind the wall of the city. There was a short twilight, and then, except for the illumination of boats, the river was in darkness.

Lanterns at the bows of river craft cast ribbons of lemon yellow, or ruddy gold, across the sluggishly moving current. The cook-fires in the small braziers on junk decks glowed maroon, shifting to dancing, green-blue flames, as hand-bellows were applied. Several large, brightly lighted restaurant boats, two-and-three-deckers, were like strings of gaudy paste jewels, their hulks pricked out with paper lanterns of vermilion, heliotrope, the formerly forbidden hue of deep Imperial yellow. . . .

Before them, drowsing behind the low city wall, lay the Treaty Port of Chinkiang.

The progress of the boat continued to be slow, since not a single oarsman was able to develop the slightest aptitude with his sweep. The ship-owner muttered in his disgust:

"Dis is w'at is known as che-eap Chinese labor, *hein?*"

The small Latin—after Fletcher's seeming obedience this afternoon — had apparently decided that the bank manager

had thrown in his fortunes with the *Città di Pisa.* It would be just as well, Fletcher thought, to keep the ship-owner in that frame of mind as long as possible. He smiled an agreement and began to question the Count, with the vague idea of learning as much as he could of Mazzino's past. But the Italian was a shrewd verbal fencer, too wary to divulge the least item that seemed significant.

At last the thrashing-oared, maladroitly handled boat reached the shore, bumping its way among an increasing press of sampans, barges and fishing-craft of all descriptions. So awkwardly did the lifeboat nose its way in, that it called down upon itself a wealth of Oriental vituperation.

The river gate piercing the wall was still open—although in some Chinese cities this is closed at sunset. A lone soldier in the gray coolie-cloth uniform of his calling patrolled back and forth before the aperture. He stared curiously at them, but made no effort to halt their progress.

The Count commented with some satisfaction on this: "I t'ink I am right, to go ashore. Rebel generrral, he watch' ship all evening, but he don't expect us to go to city. . . . But now, w'at we goin' to do? Now we're here?"

"Where do you want to go?" asked Fletcher. "I know a little bit about Chinkiang——"

He stopped abruptly, for an elbow had jogged his arm. Tsang—who had followed like an unobtrusive shadow behind them — was shaking his head. Taking this cue, Fletcher added:

"But it's difficult to find one's way about in any Chinese city at night. What is the address?"

From an inner pocket, the ship-owner drew a gold-edged, alligator-hide billfold. He extracted a paper from a flap and peered at it, a frown deepened on his forehead.

"I can' see now to read. Here, my good Fletch'r, you look!"

The bank manager read: "Cha Wing-sun, 14 Kingchenling Road."

"Cha Wing-sun——" That was the native banker of Chinkiang, the wealthiest Oriental in the Yangtzse Valley, the man who was reported to be financing the Revolution. Fletcher had met Cha, once. He had even been in the Chinese financier's home, had been taken through Cha's gardens, famous in the Flowery Republic for their beauty. But remembering still the detective's admonitory elbow, Fletcher returned the paper, saying:

"Sorry, but I don't know where Number Fourteen Kingchenling Road is."

"Ey-yah, Mastah, my know! My savvy!" Tsang now broke in. "Can do!"

The Count turned with surprize. "Ol' Ch'ung, you still 'ere? W'at you mean?" He paused, laughed shortly. "Oh, well, someone got to guide us. You go firs'. An' Fletch'r, you nex'. *I* follow las'." The ship-owner's eyes were heavy with suspicion. Then he patted the bulging, lower pocket of his coat. "Per'aps I bett'r tell you. In 'ere is a pist'l. On de pist'l is a nice silencer. No noise. Ol' Ch'ung, I t'ink you aw rright. But, Fletch'r, if *you* try to make funny businesses, to run up side street, to stop man an' ask 'm to help you, den *Dominiddio,* I finish wit' you! I can shoot de wings off a *mosca*—how you say?—a fly! An' quick! You nev'r know w'at hit you!" He paused. "You un'erstan'?"

"Yes, I understand," Fletcher answered quietly. He had not thought of escape. Had the ship-owner but known, Fletcher was anxious to go to the home of the man who was the financial power behind the Revolution. The bank manager had spiked one gun for this sinister little Latin; possibly, before the night was over, he might be able to spike another.

They moved along for several moments

in silence. Then from mild curiosity, Fletcher asked:

"Mazzino, how does it happen that you smoke opium? When you say that you've never been in China before?"

"How you know I smoke it?"

"Smelled the stuff aboard your ship. Also, I've seen your eyes. They're contracted so that you couldn't read that address on the paper."

"Well, you' rright, Fletcher, I do smoke littl'. Not much. It give' me ideas. I can t'ink of more hell, w'en I have half a pipe in me, dan t'ree or four ordin'ry men." He gave a laugh so grating that Fletcher shuddered. "But dis firs' time I have been in China, jus' same. I learn to smoke at Port Said, one time, w'en"—his voice slurred—"w'en my ship was bein' repair'."

Fletcher nodded. The story in essential was probably true. Port Said had the reputation of being the clearing-house for all of the vices of the East, from hasheesh to opium. Then he dared a second question:

"But, if you can't see to read, how can you shoot as accurately as you boast?"

Again that laugh. "I t'ink I can shoot wit' my eyes shut! Wait few minute' until I see somethin' to shoot at, den I show you."

They had been marching in single file with the metamorphosed figure of Tsang Ah-bou shuffling along in the lead. The narrow lane twisted ahead of them, a cavern of darkness. They encountered no other travelers, a state of affairs not unusual in a city overrun by marauding soldiers of the Revolution. Then, ahead, a *wonk* dog barked eerily. Fletcher frowned at this, for the hunger-crazed scavenger animals were known at night to attack humans, particularly foreigners. Normally engaged upon such a walk, he would have carried a stout stick.

Suddenly a growl came from the dark tunnel before them.

"A dog, *bein?* Now my good Fletch'r, I show you how I shoot," promised the ship-owner.

The bank manager was hardly able to distinguish the gaunt, blunt-muzzled brute before a ping-ing-ing at his ear, like the sound of a Flobert cap, caused him to jump. The animal ahead gave a yelp, leaped high in the air, then fell crumpled and lay still.

"You see?" came the voice of the Count. "I am one of great pist'l shots of world. . . . Only I like bett'r anot'er, more large target." And yet again he laughed gratingly.

Fletcher's fists clenched. He felt a sharp urge to turn upon this man, pistol or no pistol, to strangle him as he would have strangled that *wonk* dog. And, he felt, he could do it without a qualm of conscience. . . .

The spasm of anger passed. No, he was committed to another course of action, more devious, less to his liking; but carry on with it he must, for he had tacitly promised Tsang.

The small detective was moving steadily up the lane, confidently twisting and turning. Fletcher had more than once marveled at Tsang's uncanny knack of orienting himself in the darkness of strange Chinese cities. It was an ability not unique with the detective but shared with his countrymen, who for so many generations have passed their lives in the rabbit warrens that make up a Chinese metropolis. Fletcher wondered if Tsang —instead of going to the home of the banker—would attempt to lead them to some house where a rescue might be effected and a refuge offered. He half feared that Tsang would try this. And, having seen the marvelous marksmanship of the Latin ship-owner, he grew less and

less sure they could escape the menace of that pistol.

But Tsang Ah-bou had apparently contemplated no such scheme. Abruptly he drew to halt, turned with a wide-mouthed smile and said to the Count:

"Look, Mastah, my bring you all propah place! Dis b'long house Cha Wing-sun. You look—see." His brown finger was pointed to a gilded sign at the side of a tall gate piercing the street wall. The placard was half in English, half in Chinese. The lower portion read:

CHA—MONEY FOREIGN
BOUGHT AND SELL
BEST RATE

Fletcher dimly remembered the great gate with its colored tiles. Five years before, when he had opened the Chinkiang branch of his bank, he had been tendered a banquet by Cha Wing-sun. He had entered this very gate by sedan chair, and as he had done so, a band had burst into an approximation of foreign music mingled with the snapping of welcoming firecrackers. What a strangely different entry now, with a pistol—practically speaking—at his back!

In answer to Tsang's clatter upon a small brass knocker, a porter came from within and, grunting, swung back the ponderous gates. He lifted high a lantern of melted-buffalo-horn and eyed the trio suspiciously.

"Tell you' master," said the small Latin crisply, "dat we mus' see him at once!"

"You come ship-side in rivah?" asked the servant.

"Yes."

This seemed to satisfy the porter, for he waved them inside.

Fletcher felt a sudden stab of instinctive uneasiness. He had won free of the ship. Now he must immure himself behind high walls. A little of his earlier bravado, his desire to spike yet another of the Count's guns, evaporated. He glanced about him. To escape now he would have to run back, past the shipowner. That would expose him to the deadly aim of the Count. He stared at Tsang Ah-bou. The detective seemed placid. Obediently, almost eagerly, Tsang was trotting after the servant with the lantern.

"Aw rright, my good Fletch'r, go on!" admonished the Count, a satisfied lift to his voice.

And Fletcher found himself entering a courtyard, fronted by a spirit screen of lacquered dragons, gleaming in the lantern glow with suave glints of color. . . .

9

THE court was banked with beds of peonies. In the center lay a small pond upon which floated great cream-white lotus buds. Feeding the pool was a trickling stream that made a cool babbling as it emerged from a miniature mountain, cunningly builded.

Standing by the pool, gazing down into its clouded, carp-filled depths, was a tall, excessively slender man. He was garbed in a gown of shabby serge with scuffed felt shoes. Turning weary eyes upon the approaching trio, he mutely interrogated them.

Then, as the light of the lantern fell across Fletcher's face, a smile of genuine welcome parted the lips of the slender man. He said:

"Ah, Flei-chah, *Lao-yeh,* this is an honor you do my humble house! When I heard, this afternoon, that the foreign ship had anchored in the river, I expected the Count of Mazzino would come, for his agents had written me. But that you should come, too, Flei-chah, that was a pleasure I did not know I had in store."

Fletcher stared for a moment in surprize. Upon first glimpsing the man, he

had thought him a servant. Now he realized that it was Cha Wing-sun, the banker, himself. Fletcher had seen Cha the day of the banquet, five years before, but on that occasion the Chinese financier had been gorgeous in the finery that such a celebration demanded. In the wearing of shabby serge this evening, Cha was subtly showing that he expected to deal not with an equal, but with an inferior, in the meeting with Mazzino. Cha had already gained an impression of the Count's essential roguery, Fletcher thought.

The American made an appropriate reply and introduced the ship-owner. Tsang Ah-bou, Fletcher was careful to ignore. The small detective at once dropped to the background and squatted on his heels, coolie-fashion. The financier paid no heed to Tsang, for he was accustomed to the presence of servants, surrounding the persons of his friends, a part and parcel of life in that casual land.

Cha clapped his thin hands together. A servant, clad in immaculate white grass-cloth, appeared. Tea was ordered. As it appeared, the Count drank thirstily. Fletcher and the host refrained, since to touch it would have signalized the end instead of the beginning of an interview. The act of drinking was done so spontaneously that Fletcher's last remaining doubt of the Latin's lack of familiarity with China vanished.

Cha then directed his two visitors to an octagonal kiosk of lacquered wood which was built out over the pool. The three seated themselves on high Chinese redwood chairs, fluted and carved in the pattern Chippendale copied so extensively in England. Cha turned an inquiring face to Fletcher. Fletcher looked quizzically at the Count.

The ship-owner said softly: "Eh, we begin? Ver' well. Fletch'r, you will tell dis man, firs', dat we are leaving for Shanghai tonight, jus' as soon as dis talk is ov'r. Tell him dat I'm littl' uneasy about dat funny fellow who came dis afternoon about arms, dat I wan' get away. So you no make too much talk. An' *you,* Fletch'r, you tell 'im exactly w'at I say, or——" Casually, he patted the pocket of the white drill coat. "You un'erstan'?"

"So far, yes," Fletcher answered, angered by the threat.

His voice, in turn, angered the small Latin, for the Count raised his voice, to say:

"*Perbacco!* You had bett'r un'erstan'! I kill a man for bein' stupid jus' as quick as for bein' trraitor to me! I have come to get de money w'ich is to be use' in Shanghai to buy over garrison of Chinese city to Revolutionists. Dis Cha knows how much; we sent him telegram yesterday. Tell him to bring out money quick——"

"Oh, see here," Fletcher interrupted sharply, beginning to comprehend the Count's scheme, "I'll tell Cha all that, but you're wasting your time. Why should this banker entrust money to us? He knows that you're a gun-runner——"

Abruptly Fletcher halted, for a smile of sheer malignity had overspread the ship-owner's face.

"Ah, but dat, mos' worthy Fletch'r, *dat* is w'ere you ent'r de picture. Dat is w'y I have spare your life so far an' bring you along up here. *You* are goin' to guarantee dis money! As manager of your large an' mos' wealthy chains of banks all over China! Dis Chinese will advance money mos' willingly, for if it should be los' an' nev'r reach Shanghai, you will repay him from your grreat bank vaults! Is not dat nice littl' plan?"

Fletcher could feel fires of anger beginning to burn within him, but he tried to hold it under control. "And if I do guarantee repayment, how much are you to take away, tonight?"

"Oh, it is not great sum. It will not cause your chain of banks to go crash. I am not sorry of dat, Fletch'r, for you have been such fine partner wit' me, so far, so helpful, dat I rreally wouldn't like to t'ink dat I had cause' all your banks to go burrst——"

"*Will* you tell me the amount this Chinese has agreed to turn over to you?"

"Not so much, I say. Jus' half-million dollar' in cash."

"Only half a million! Only——" Fletcher choked. The sum, it was true, would not bankrupt the Sino-American, but it would end his career. Ten years of hard work, building up the institution from one small bank in Shanghai to a great organization with fifty branches in China. Those ten years swept away. How could he go before his board of directors and say, "Yes, I tossed half a million squarely out the window"?

"No!" he began. "What you ask is too much——" when a warning cough came to him from the figure squatting in the shadows, almost forgotten. Tsang Ah-bou. Tsang had told him to pretend acquiescence to all the schemes proposed by the Count. But did Tsang realize what he was asking now? Demanding that he, Fletcher, ruin his own career and cripple the bank, just to satisfy the insatiable money-lust of this Mazzino who had but one threat to offer after all, death. Would it not be better to risk that, to explain the true situation to the quiet man in gray serge who had been sitting so patiently while this colloquy in a foreign tongue was going on?

The ship-owner apparently read the conflicting emotions in Fletcher's mind, the thought of treachery, for he said with that same oily inflection which held so much venom:

"The prroof of the—how you say?—Nesslerode?—is in de eating. I will know ver' easily, my good Fletch'r, w'ether or not you persuade dis Cha to do my bidding. Eith'r I get dis money in my hands, in cash, in good pap'r, or I leave you 'ere, stretch' on de floor of dis summ'r house, mos' unpleasantly dead. Take your choice, *hein?*"

Again Tsang Ah-bou coughed, a dry, rasping sound, accompanied by an asthmatic wheeze.

Fletcher hesitated no longer. The cough he translated as a signal to acquiesce. Tsang Ah-bou had never yet failed him. Nor had Tsang ever asked him to consent to a dishonorable act. He must blindly trust the small detective. He twisted toward the Count, saying dourly:

"All right!"

"Good!" said the ship-owner. "It is much bett'r for you dat you keep de breath of life! And it is bett'r for me dat I get de money!"

Fletcher turned to the Chinkiang banker. This time, he translated the Count's words without evasion or untruth.

"But, of course," quickly answered the gray-serge figure. "When I was first approached to loan the money, I demanded some sort of guaranty that it would go to the right persons. Now that you promise to underwrite the loan, I can ask for no finer security. The Count seems anxious to get away. I will not detain him."

Again he clapped his thin hands. Once more a servant appeared. Cha gave an order in Chinese, but he spoke so rapidly that Fletcher had difficulty in following it. The latter caught the key words, however: "Half a million."

As they waited for the servant's return, Fletcher turned to Cha.

"May I ask an impertinent question? How does it happen that you, a member of the great compradore class of Chinese, are allying yourself with these revolutionists? They are opposed to capital and to capitalists."

"I might ask you the same," commented Cha.

"But I am doing this out of—of—well, friendship for Count Mazzino," Fletcher answered a little haltingly.

"And I also for the sake of friendship," Cha took up the point quickly. "I was a friend of Doctor Sun Yat-sen, the Father of the Chinese Republic. I was with him in Peking, when he died. He told me that Madam Sun Yat-sen would try to carry on his 'Three Peoples Policy.' Madam Sun is pledged to Russia. And when the Nationalist government turned away from communism and all that Russia stands for, Madam Sun ordered a revolution—to oust the conservatives. Yet at heart I am a conservative. I have eaten much bitterness over this revolution. Its chances of succeeding are not great. If it fails, I shall lose my entire fortune, probably my life. But a death-bed promise in China is sacred. Would I risk the return of the spirit of Doctor Sun to haunt me? There are worse things than the loss of one's fortune. . . ."

The Chinese financier fell silent, and Fletcher questioned him no further. The American knew the tremendous power exerted by the dead over the living in China. Nowhere in the world is the *morte main* so inexorable.

At last a servant appeared, bearing a lantern, a tabouret, and pen and ink—foreign style.

"I have made out a written guarantee for you to sign, thrice honorable Fletcher," Cha said, his voice becoming keen and business-like.

Fletcher's eyes strayed toward the crouching figure, just outside the kiosk. This was Tsang's last chance to create a diversion. But in reply it coughed again.

"All right," Fletcher said to himself. "I suppose I'll have to sign. But how Tsang is going to get me out of this mess is more than I can fathom! Cha is giving over his money in good faith; I won't repudiate."

He signed and handed the paper to the Chinkiang financier. The Chinese banker accepted it with a quick, jerky bow.

"Prior-born, the money will await you at the gate." Cha's hand went tentatively toward his untouched cup of tea.

Fletcher reached for his own cup, drank it and stood up. "I now make my departure," he said in the formal phraseology of Chinese leave-taking.

"May prosperity attend your ten thousand ultimate descendants," answered Cha, a phrase that caused Fletcher to smile somewhat grimly, accustomed though he was to the words, for he was a bachelor.

At the gate a coolie stood, with a leathern sack in his hand.

"Here," Cha said, "is the money you are to take to Shanghai. May it win us a few concessions—even though I do not see how we are ever going to be able to take Shanghai." The financier's voice grew wistful. "Ey-yah! If we only could add Shanghai, I think we would have a chance of winning. But I am keeping you. Will you count the money?"

Fletcher turned to the ship-owner. "Here is your money. Will you count it?"

The Latin shook his head. "If he say' dat, he is not afraid of my finding de sum short. No. Our time is prrecious. I will carry dis. You, Fletch'r, shall go jus' ahead of me. An' old Ch'ung, you lead de way back to de ship! . . ." He broke into a chuckle. "*Bene,* my fine Fletch'r! You are de mos' val'able partner I have ever had! *Dominiddio,* yes!"

10

THE trio had gone but a hundred yards along the winding lane, when Fletcher became dimly aware of a new purpose infusing Tsang Ah-bou. Before, the Chinese had seemed to join with

Fletcher in supinely bowing to the will of the sinister Latin. The detective had acquiesced so consistently that Fletcher had begun to fear the ship-owner was too powerful for Tsang. It was one thing for Tsang to pit his wits against Chinese garroters, thieves and opium-smugglers. Evidently it was another and more difficult task to cope with this resourceful but renegade member of the Italian nobility, a man with a brain as keen as a stiletto, and as deadly. A strange case, Fletcher pondered, that Mazzino, owner of a line of ships, possessing medals for valor, knowing the favor of a sovereign, should now turn his energies to the amassing of ill-gotten money. His motive was not for the money alone, Fletcher suspected; for the Count appeared too debonair in his cold, ophidian way; probably Mazzino was actuated by the love of the hazard, coupled with a perverted joy in inflicting harm.

Tsang abruptly turned from the main lane which led toward the waterfront into a side alley, darker, if that was possible, than the street they had just quitted. Fletcher knew that Tsang was contemplating something, but what? He tried to move warily and he kept his eyes glued upon the detective, ready to obey the least sign that Tsang might give.

While he was thus preoccupied, the voice of the ship-owner broke in upon his thoughts:

"Fletch'r, I t'ink when we get to mouth of river we not stop. Of course, dat banker Chinese, he t'ink I'm big-hearted frien' of his revolution, an' dat I take dis money to revolutionists in Shanghai. No, we keep right on goin'—back to South Seas. I make it nice trrip for you. Nice, if you not make trroubl'. After w'ile, we come to Paumotus. Den I drop you on littl' atoll, *hein?* You live on fish, cocosnut, rain wat'r. Some day, littl' copra schooner, he come 'long, pick you up. You ride 'round wit' him for few weeks an' finally he take you to Raratonga or Tahiti. Den you telegram your bank for passage money, and in one, two years, you're back in Shanghai, all safe, all sound." The Count chuckled and added, "How you like dat, *hein?*"

"I don't like it," Fletcher answered cautiously, "but I don't see what I can do about it."

"Dat's de right spir't! Nev'r cross me and I make you no harm. But, *perbacco,* if I am cross'—I kill and kill and kill! Maybe you don' know w'at fun it is to kill a man, *hein?* We'en you kill, you are like a god, so powerful! Shoot tigers? Bah! Not in the same—how you say?—boats!"

The alley had grown so narrow by now that Fletcher could have touched the blank walls of compounds on either side. The ship-owner, his voice rambling along, expounding his extraordinary philosophy, half sadism, had failed to note the straitening of the way. But suddenly he stopped.

"Ol' Ch'ung, w'at's de matt'r? We no go dis way before. You get los'?"

Tsang turned a worried, wrinkled face. "My think we come out aw light, Mastah. But this place b'long velly dahk; plenty hahd to see, you savvy. We get back to rivah aw light." The words were a perfect blend of uncertainty and assurance.

The Latin swore viciously under his breath. Then he muttered: "Jus' like a Chinese! Bungle! Bungle! Bungle! Well, ol' Ch'ung, you bett'r find a way out! In about one minute, you un'erstan'? Or else I fin' my own way—and leave you here wit' a hole in de back of your head!"

For an instant the eyes of Tsang gleamed, then were veiled. Fletcher caught the gleam and he guessed that Tsang contemplated some action. He had

hardly postulated the thought when the action came. . . .

THE small detective gave a sudden leap to one side, grotesquely agile in one as aged as he posed as being. Almost simultaneously, the sharp ping-ing-ing of the pistol echoed thinly against the damp, moss-and-lichen-covered walls on either side. Fletcher caught the acrid odor of gunpowder and the scorched smell of cloth, for the ship-owner had shot through the pocket of his coat.

But this time, taken unawares and possibly bewildered by the darkness, the Latin missed. The next instant, Tsang was upon him. To Fletcher, the air seemed filled with flying arms and legs. The Count uttered a screaming cry that was pure insanity and, twisting about, he caught Tsang by the throat. The detective gave a whistling gasp.

Fletcher leaned over, his fist drawn back. It was difficult to see, but he knew that Tsang was in deadly peril. Deliberately he loosed a powerful, downward blow. Tsang, at that second, broke the Latin's hold and rolled on top. Fletcher's blow caught the small detective flush on the temple. His hold on the Count relaxed, and he crumpled motionless. Fletcher stared at his handiwork, eyes dilating with horror.

Not so the ship-owner. He jumped to his feet with a cat-like bound and wiped his hands fastidiously. He seemed hardly to be breathing fast. He said calmly:

"T'anks, Fletch'r! You help me. I don' know w'y, but you do. I not forget. I not put you on atoll, now. I jus' take you for trip to Tahiti. . . . And now, you watch me kill dis old fool, *hein?*"

So dazed was Fletcher by his blundering that he did not hear the ship-owner's words. He roused, to see the Latin flick a long knife from a holster under his arm. The Count muttered:

"De pist'l make too much noise, even wit' silencer; walls too close. Dis is better. Silent. Now, my good Fletch'r I show you how we kill men in Sardinia!"

Deliberately the knife was lifted. . . .

With a sobbing curse, Fletcher leaped for the descending arm. Again the attack was unexpected, otherwise Fletcher would never have been able to deflect the blow and knock the blade from the ship-owner's grasp. But after that first instant of surprize, the Latin became a deadly fighting-machine, expending his strength with an appalling fury. Fletcher outweighed the Count by forty pounds, he was in prime physical condition and was fully twenty years the Latin's junior . . . yet it was as though he wrestled with a great python or with a mass of inexorably expanding steel coils. He could feel his body being borne down. His head was caught and the neck twisted. . . .

In his ears grew a dull roaring. He could feel his strength ebbing away. He fought, however, fought with all the bitter determination of a man who knows that his life hangs in the balance.

The twisting pressure on his neck grew. Swirls of red mist now wove themselves before his eyes. A great nausea radiated from the pit of his stomach. He retched, and in doing so, relaxed in spite of his will.

As he felt consciousness dimming, he thought—but could not be sure—that he saw Tsang rise groggily to his knees. . . . Yes, Tsang must be up! For Fletcher could note a sudden lessening in the awful pressure upon his neck, a slackening of that human hangman's noose. An instant later, he was sitting, free; no longer were those insane arms twisting, twisting his neck.

But he found that he was unable to move, even to lift a hand. His body tingled, as the arm will when the "crazy bone" is struck.

As he sat there, a helpless spectator, he was vaguely made aware—in spite of his preoccupation with this peculiar and tingling paralysis—of a struggle, titanic in its violence, going on almost under his feet.

Tsang Ah-bou had apparently gained a partial recovery from Fletcher's sledge-hammer blow. The American saw the detective try hold after hold, wrestler's grips, ju-jitsu locks, only to have them broken. Lluellan, Chief of the Shanghai Police, had once told Fletcher that no man in the Far East could master Tsang, were the detective given even half a chance. But now, Tsang was still plainly handicapped by that powerful, misdirected buffet Fletcher had given him. And in the ship-owner he had an adversary all too apparently proficient in this sort of fray and in addition dangerous as a cobra, fighting with a reptilian venom horrible to watch.

With dim, almost impersonal satisfaction—so drugged was Fletcher by the terrible, punishing grip Mazzino had given him—he watched the ship-owner's pistol slide from the charred and smoldering coat pocket to the ground. Once the Latin's hand went out like a dart of light to recover it, but with equal quickness Tsang kicked it into the shadows.

The detective was fighting coolly, yet he seemed no match for the Latin. With contemptuous ease, the Count broke the holds that Tsang tried. . . . But, when the ship-owner attacked in turn, Tsang was able, just able, to avoid being rendered helpless. Once he was nearly caught by that neck grip which had so effectually disposed of Fletcher. Another time, he groaned, as Mazzino caught and tore at his hand, trying—and almost with success—to break the fingers.

Then Tsang appeared to tire. His parries grew less and less sure. The Count took quick cognizance of this, for he laughed. For Fletcher, it was a heart-breaking sound; it indicated triumph.

A moment later, with a sigh, the small Chinese relaxed. . . .

Fletcher made a mighty, herculean effort to rise, to go to Tsang's rescue. But, beyond lurching forward to his knees, his body refused to obey him. A sobbing moan bubbled through his froth-covered lips. He closed his eyes—to shut out the sight of his friend's death. Tsang Ah-bou—"heart friend"—as the Chinese called it. As gallant a man as ever died, trying to save the life of another. . . .

11

WHEN Fletcher opened his eyes he blinked. Then blinked again. Tsang Ah-bou had not succumbed. Instead he had suddenly gathered his strength to him. A ruse, the American realized. A ruse that seemed to be succeeding, for, although Mazzino had not been taken off his guard entirely, he had apparently lost some vital advantage. Tsang's arms, so chubby-appearing yet in reality powerfully muscled, darted upward. There was a flurry which Fletcher could not follow. The next thing he saw were Tsang's brown hands fastened about the Latin's lemon-yellow throat.

Suddenly the Count's mouth flew open, the tongue protruded. His body grew limp. Tsang gave a final squeeze, released his grasp, and, before the other could recover, he had whipped from his girdle two strips of blue coolie cloth. Quickly he tied the hands and feet of the Latin.

That final effort took its toll even upon Tsang's rugged strength. His breath was coming in gasps and he staggered slightly as he turned to Fletcher.

"Prior-born—are you—greatly hurt?"

The bank manager shook his head. Again he tried to rise but failed. He pointed to his neck.

Tsang leaned over, agate eyes suddenly flawed with pity and fear. His hand went to Fletcher's shoulders and felt gently along the neck vertebræ.

Even at this slight pressure, a stab of pain shot to the base of the bank manager's brain. "Don't!" he whispered dully.

Tsang's voice came softly then, relievedly: "You are all right, my friend. The muscles are strained, they feel cramped, and a ligament is badly torn. You will be better soon. Just rest."

"Tsang——?" Fletcher tried to ask a question. But the words would not come. His eyes went interrogatively toward the ship-owner.

"He is finished," Tsang answered, his breath coming easier now. "But what a man! Although the most peaceable of persons, I have had to make fighting with many men in my time. But of them all, he is the most tough bird, as your American slang say it. Once in Harbin, I fight for many moment' with great large-bearded Russian. And once in Urga with very dangerous Mongol. But this little man, who is not young, who smokes opium, he is a true killer. Like wolf. Or like cornered tiger. Instead of fighting to capture him, part of time I fought to save my own life. And you, Pre-born, did not greatly aid me, hitting my head with your large and so-hard fist!"

"Sorry," Fletcher mumbled. "Tried—tried——" Words failed to come and he stared mutely at Tsang.

"No, my friend, do not talk now. Rest. For there is much before us tonight. I well know that your blow was direct' at Mazzino. But as the old sage says, 'The friendly aid of a brother is more hard to escape than the lightning of Shang-ti. . . .'"

Tsang fell silent, while he breathed great drafts of air in his lungs. After a space, he asked: "You feel little better now, Favored of Heaven?"

Fletcher nodded, for the tingling in his limbs was lessening. "Give — few minutes more—be all right."

"Yes. We wait. Although we should be aboard ship now."

Fletcher looked at Tsang in surprize. "What—we going—back to—prison?"

"Unfortunately we must, Pre-born. Else how we going to reach Shanghai? This city is in hands of revolutioners. No Yangtzse steamers stop here now. Railroad' torn—how you say?—to splinterings. And, too, I have guarantee to myself that ship is brought back to Shanghai. Queer is my life. I have hunt' stolen pearls and stolen bonds, even stolen sing-song girls. But this is firs' time I have ever bring back stolen ship."

"Stolen?" Fletcher queried. "What do you mean, Tsang? It's Mazzino's ship."

Tsang shrugged. His face grew blank. Then he said elaborately, "I mean, Favored of Heaven, that you are now part owner of ship, since you have loaned Mazzino fifty thousand dollars on it."

Fletcher caught the evasion in Tsang's reply and he respected the detective's reticence. However, he did ask:

"But, Tsang, how can we—alone—ever manage to get the ship back?"

The small detective jumped to his feet. "Now I know that you are feeling better, my friend. You begin to ask ten thousand questions. Will you let me help you to try to make a rising?"

Fletcher gritted his teeth and willed his pain-drugged body to move. It answered his demand, with Tsang's aid. He stood swaying, fighting back groans at the inordinate pain.

"Good," said Tsang softly. "That is brave, Thrice-Honorable. Now, make one more efforting—to walk. For we must go. I fear the threat of that peevish general of the revolution. Perhaps he grow'

tired of waiting for us to sail ship downstream, and began firing at steamer."

"But wait, Tsang! Aren't we going to return the money we received tonight? Take it back to Cha Wing-sun?"

Tsang appeared to examine the suggestion, but after a moment he shook his head. "I do not have sympathies with the revolution, but if we return the money you will lose great face with the honorable Cha, who is a good man." The little detective was silent a space, then he said simply: "You are my good friend. I do not wish you to lose face. Cha wishes that money to be gotten down river to the revolutionists who plot in Shanghai. To do so is difficult, almost impossibles. That, I know, is why he accepted the offer of Mazzino's agents to carry it down for him in safetys. Pre-born, you have given him both a promise and a guarantee. Possibly we take too great a risk, but Cha would want us to take it, never'less."

Fletcher at once comprehended Tsang's reasoning. He knew, all too well, the tremendous force exerted in China by "face," in many respects the ruling passion in the Orient. To have combatted it, he would have hurt Tsang; it was almost tantamount to demanding that the small Chinese deny his household gods.

Tsang interpreted Fletcher's silence as consent, for he turned to the quiet, recumbent form of the ship-owner and lifted the man in his arms.

"You will take the bag of money, Pre-born. I will make attending to this fighting fellow."

With the gestures of a man in a slow motion camera, Fletcher reached down and caught the handle of the leathern bag. The procession started, the bank manager staggering like a drunken man, Tsang swaying under the human burden he carried. In the distance a *wonk* dog barked. Somewhere, behind one of the high compound walls, came the falsetto of a sing-song girl entertaining a party of Oriental revelers. Still farther distant, the clash of cymbals and a droning chant attested to the presence of death in a household, and to the efforts of Buddhist priests by their mantras to translate a soul into paradise, but first, to ward off predatory spirits that swarm about the path leading to that far bourn.

Fletcher shuddered. The night was very black, and he was filled with a mortal weariness. . . .

12

TSANG now turned his steps directly toward the waterfront. As Fletcher followed, his forebodings increased. But he was too nerve-shocked by that fiendish wrestler's lock which had so nearly broken his neck, to give voice to them. After what seemed an interminable time, they neared the river edge.

Tsang stopped. "Prior-born," he asked softly, "will you walk ahead a moment?"

"Why? What's the matter, Tsang?"

"No matter, Favored of Heaven." Then, since Fletcher had paused, the detective said resignedly: "My countrymen are a curious race. Can I take this man to rowboat, through a crowd of prying sampan coolies—with his arms and legs tied?"

"But won't it be dangerous to loosen them?" Fletcher peered down at the blood-congested face of the ship-owner. "In time, he'll regain consciousness."

"That's just it, Pre-born. I must make sure that he won't rouse for a while."

Fletcher drew in his breath sharply. Did Tsang mean that he intended to kill their captured adversary? Something Anglo-Saxon rose in Fletcher in sharp rebellion at the thought. To have killed the man in combat, yes, that would have been fair; but to take the Latin's life now,

as he lay choked to insensibility by Tsang's steel fingers—no, he would refuse to countenance it. He put the decision into words.

Tsang Ah-bou gave an exclamation of impatience. "Do you realize, my friend, that any moment the angry general of the revolutioners may begin showing his displeasuring at us, by shooting his cannon into our ship——"

"Yes, I realize, Tsang. But——"

"But, Pre-born, if he sink' the *Città di Pisa* where will we be? This man will soon wake. He will make great outcryings. Soldiers will hear the sound. They will take us to the general's *yamen*. After that—how you say?—for us the fire-squad at sunrise. . . . But I respect your funny morals, Thrice Honorable; that is why I ask you to take steppings ahead so as not to see, while I do small bit of very necessary operating upon him. Just a quick blow with heel of my palm on back of his head. It will not hurt him one-tenth the amount he has hurt you, and it will make him sleep for three, four hours."

Without explaining further, Tsang bent over, lifting the ship-owner easily in one arm. Fletcher saw the brown hand flash up and then down. A sigh escaped from the lips of the Latin and he seemed to sag even more heavily in Tsang's arms. The detective callously dropped him to the ground and unknotted the bonds at the hands and feet.

"Now," Tsang said quietly, "to those who ask curious questions, I can say with blitheness that I take sick man back to his ship."

The detective looked a little wistfully at Fletcher, but the bank manager, realizing that he was being foolishly squeamish, stubbornly refused to commend Tsang's act. With a shrug, the Chinese trotted around a turn of the road, and the river lay before them.

TSANG made his way unhesitatingly through a veritable maze of sampans, using them as a bridge, jumping from boat to boat. Occasionally half-hearted growls of protest arose, but they were not couched in real anger, since the sampan men were accustomed to this method of locomotion among their fellows.

The jar and the pain of such a method of travel was excruciating to Fletcher. He bit back groan after groan. The nausea and the giddiness returned. But doggedly he went on, by sheer force of will making his sick body obey him.

At last, Fletcher espied ahead a stretch of comparatively open water and at its edge the lifeboat of the *Città di Pisa*. Drowsing in the bow were the Chinese sailors who had rowed them ashore.

Fletcher expected Tsang to make some explanation to these men, to fabricate some account that would show why the ship-owner was returning in this supine manner. But the small detective said nothing. Nor did the group show the slightest surprize. After they had seated themselves, Tsang once more taking the tiller, the detective explained the seeming mystery to Fletcher:

"These are my assistants. Patrolmen, now in 'plain clothing'."

Fletcher started. "By Jove, do you mean to say that you were able to get them aboard the ship as sailors?"

"Yes, Pre-born." Tsang's eye roved coldly over the group and his mouth drew down with dour lines. "And what sailors! Such great bungle-ers! I thought many time' that they would give everything away. Fortunatelys, the Count thought it was only Chinese stupidness. Ey-yah! He was jollee right!"

As though a sharp physical stimulus had been applied, Fletcher felt his lethargy lifting. He said with a trace of eagerness:

"I see now why you're so anxious to

take the ship back, Tsang. You've gotten control of it! Why, it will be no trick at all."

Tsang shook his head. "Oh, no. The ship is not yet under my thumbs. True it is that I have a plan. But it may not work. These men are all I have, and they could not run a ship if their necks were within one inch of the executioner's sword. Fortunately, the *Città di Pisa* is not large boat. The Count has two men of his own race in engine room, who take turns watching engine. Up forward, there is Italian cargo man, who can use wheel. But the main—how you say?—steersman is a big-muscle' half-caste, part Chinese, part Italian. He was man, I think, who persuade the Count to come to China. And I think, too, he was man who get Count in touch with Revolutioners in Shanghai and make negotiations for arms shipments and for the money that you have in satchel."

"But, if he's part Chinese," Fletcher objected, "how did it happen that the Count had me to interpret this afternoon with that Leong fellow?"

"That is because Chinese part of him is from Canton. As you know, Pre-born, a Cantonese can no more speak our dialect than if he were Englishman."

"I know. I had a Cantonese clerk in the bank once. He had to talk English to the other clerks to make himself understood. But this half-caste must have been the fellow who was in charge of kidnapping me. I remember wondering about his voice. Also, he was the brute that gave me such a fearful boot in the ribs. They're still bruised and sore——"

Fletcher halted, for the lifeboat was nearing the *Città di Pisa.* A hail in an unfamiliar tongue—vaguely reminiscent of, yet not, Italian — floated across the water ribboned with gold from a score of deck lights.

In reply, Tsang Ah-bou immediately broke into pidgin-English: "Is dat Numbah Two Captain? My bling back Numbah One, all sick. Ey-yah, he plenty sick! My no savvy what b-long mattah."

The voice, coming from the bridge of the ship, changed at once to broken English, heavy with anger: "Sick? Not much! I know w'at matt'r wit' him! He smoke too many pipe of dat opium again! Sometime he smoke so much he not wake up—den I laugh like hell! I s'pose he lose Fletch'r and dat money and everything! *Perbacco,* w'y do I stay wit' him?" The voice rose to an irascible roar.

Tsang again spoke placatingly, almost with a whine: "No, Mastah. *My* bling Flei-chah back. He here. And my bling money, too. Whole bag full. Plenty full."

"W'at?" A flashlight fumbled through the space between ship and lifeboat and illuminated the latter. *"Per Santo Tomaso!* Old Ch'ung, you're good China boy! I give you much money for w'at you do, tonight! Much! All rright! Bring de Captain aboard. Can you get him up ladder?"

"No," whined Tsang. "My too old man. No stlong."

"Den wait moment. I help you."

There was the sound of rubber-soled shoes whispering down the ladder from the bridge and across the deck. The partially slanted eyes of the speaker peered over the rail. His powerful hands reached down.

As he stood up in the bow of the lifeboat, Fletcher examined the face of the half-caste. It was stamped with brutality, from heavy lips to a receding, ape-like forehead. "Like master, like man," Fletcher commented to himself.

Tsang lifted the body of the shipowner, until it was caught in the grasp of the half-caste, who callously dragged it aboard. The detective, followed by Fletcher, next scrambled up the ladder. As the bank manager was painfully pul-

ling himself over the rail, he felt a jerk. The navigator had plucked the leathern bag from his arms with the swooping motion of a cormorant that has sighted its prey. With mingled emotions, the bank manager watched the navigator tuck the bag under his arm. A dull anger mounted to Fletcher's brain at the cool theft, and fear that Tsang was making an error, overrating his own power to recover the bag. It would have been better, Fletcher muttered rebelliously to himself, to have returned the money to Cha, the financier, while there was the opportunity, ashore. Tsang was carrying "face-pidgin" too far! . . .

The half-caste gave Fletcher a look that was in part indifference, in part scorn, as though to say: "Not much of a man, are you, coming back to the ship---with only old Ch'ung to keep you from escaping. . . ." Then he stared at Fletcher more closely. The latter was holding to the rail, eyes closed, face contracted with pain. A smile touched the lips of the navigator and he said softly: *"Per Dio!* If dis Fletch'r hasn't also been hitting de pipe! Dat's good joke! Ch'ung, you bett'r lock him up. We're finish' wit' him, but we don't want him running 'round, shouting 'bout us." The navigator confidently turned his back and mounted the stairs to the bridge.

Tsang Ah-bou lifted the recumbent ship-owner and carried him along the deck to the Captain's stateroom. Depositing the Count within, Tsang turned the key in the lock and dropped the key in his girdle. Then he returned to Fletcher, thrusting an arm about the bank manager's shoulders.

"You feel pretty bad, Pre-born," the detective whispered. "But you'll be better as soon as you can be honorably quiet. We will go now to the cabin where you were lock' up yesterday. There you will lie down and forget everything."

"No!" Fletcher muttered. "I must help you!"

"I'm afraid with feelings as you do, Thrice Honorable, you will be a hindering, not a help. Come!"

Obeying the quiet dominance of Tsang's voice, Fletcher lurched along the deck and into the cabin. He sank on the bed with a groan.

Tsang paused at the door for an instant, looking out, his eyes keen and darting. Then his arm lifted in a signal. The next moment, the tatterdemalion Chinese deck crew which had just come up the ladder from the lifeboat, flitted with stealthy feet, one by one, into the cabin.

In Chinese, he whispered cautiously: "We are now ready. Fong, you will creep up to the bridge, put your pistol to the back of the half-caste and make him steer down river. You know a little about the channel. See that he does not try to run the ship into a sand bar. Do not take your eyes away from him, not for a single instant. . . . And you, Zia, to the engine room. One of the engineers should be asleep on deck. I will settle him, but your job is to take care of the man who is on duty with the engines. Tell him that the Captain wishes to see him on deck. Then as he starts to go up the steel ladder, cover him with your gun. Do not lose your head and shoot, for he must be kept alive, to run the engines. . . . And you, Li. . . ."

Tsang's voice blurred for Fletcher. A great wave of pain caused him to gasp. It was as though a branding-iron had been laid across his neck and pressed there.

When the paroxysm passed, Tsang and the men were gone. Fletcher strained his ears but could hear no sound. Had Tsang Ah-bou failed? Had the half-

caste and the engine crew proved too powerful for the patrolmen? The silence deepened. The suspense became nearly unbearable. Fletcher staggered to his feet. He had to know!

Then suddenly, he saw Tsang standing in the doorway of the cabin. The detective was seemingly as placid as though he had just come from a Chinese banquet, replete with sharks' fins, antique jellied eggs and edible sea slugs. Only Tsang's eyes glittered, too youthful for the crisscross of painted wrinkles that made his visage look so old. In his hand rested a blue-steel automatic pistol. Glancing down at it, he said quietly:

"I do not like to make using of this. Force has never been Chinese method. But tonight our task is difficult. The bridge and the deck we have. There is only the engine. If we get that, a whistle will blow during the next minute or so. If we lose there, we are as badly off as we were when we started. For the engineers can make barricading of themselves in hot engine room, behind steel doors and laugh at us——"

The further words he would have uttered were blanked by a hoarse bellow almost above their heads.

"Ey-yah! The spirits of my ancestors have been good! I knew it would pay to take that trip to Hangchow; my luck has been poor lately; I thought that they were getting restless for the sweet smell of a bit of sandalwood! . . . For the moment at least, Thrice Honorable, the ship is in our hands!"

And again Tsang Ah-bou was gone.

FLETCHER staggered to the door. Although giddy with pain, he forced himself to stand there.

Above, on the bridge, he heard Tsang's voice, speaking into the communication pipe, apparently to the engine room. He was talking in his own tongue, voice firm yet a trifle elated:

"Full speed ahead!"

The *Città di Pisa* pulsed into life. The rhythmic throb of the engines deepened. A stir of air touched Fletcher's hot cheeks. The dim lights of the town seemed to be turning, moving away from him.

"Prior-born?"

Fletcher looked up. Tsang was standing at the head of the ladder leading down from the bridge; he was smiling.

"Set your mind at rest, Favored of Heaven. Our troublements are about over——"

A dull boom had sounded on shore, interrupting Tsang's words. The same instant, it seemed, a shell screamed over the mast of the ship. It disappeared just beyond in the water with a great hiss and a rising cloud of steam.

"Aieeee!" Tsang gave the Chinese exclamation of despair. "The revolutionary general! He see' our ship move—and he fire! He fire' to hold us here." The detective cast worried eyes toward Fletcher. "Plenty troublement now! Prior-born, what do you think? Shall we stay? Or shall we keep on—and take risk?"

"What do you say, Tsang?"

The lips of the Chinese drew firmly together. "If we stay, I think we lose ship, lose money, I lose my prisoner. Sure defeat if we stop this side—and I do not like defeat."

With an effort, Fletcher forced his voice to carry with a note of firmness to the bridge: "Then I'm with you, Tsang! We've got to chance it!"

The detective disappeared from Fletcher's view. An instant later, he heard Tsang's command shouted down the communication tube:

"We are being fired upon. From shore. Hold the engines up to top speed. And

keep them — no matter what happens. Remember—top speed!"

13

WHAT followed then had elements of a strange and awful beauty for Fletcher. The pain across his shoulders produced a queer anesthesia, dulling his fear. . . . A great roaring and whining filled the air. Sharp javelins of light. A crash that shook the ship. Another that caused it to give a sickening lurch. The motion hurled Fletcher to his knees. He crouched there, unable to rise.

Staring down the deck, he saw smoke and a small tongue of flame. He tried to call to Tsang, but in the air clamorous with great reverberations he could not make the sound carry. Had the shell set the ship afire? He beat his hands together in despair at his own physical helplessness. Then he saw a Chinese figure, one of Tsang's men, swiftly running along the deck. The man carried two buckets slung on ropes. A hiss arose, as he decanted the water over that tongue of flame. The little serpent flare disappeared, but the man came again and again, dashing buckets of water on the mass of twisted planking and metal.

A third and a fourth shell ripped through the rigging. Down came a wireless receiving aerial. Fletcher's forehead was gashed by a flying splinter of wood, but he hardly felt it. He tried to listen for the throb of the ship's engines but the roar of that shore battery drowned out all sound. Then he became aware of a steady fan of air on his cheek. The *Città di Pisa* was still moving.

Mentally he tried to hurry the ship, as a man will twist his body and strain to speed a racing horse that he wants inordinately to win. "Go on! Go on! Go on!" he muttered.

A shell struck the water just behind the vessel. A great geyser rose and, for an instant, held like a mist. "That was a near one!" he whispered. A little lower and nearer, and it would have caught the steamer amidships, squarely into the engines.

There was a slight lull. Fletcher wondered if the battery was slackening. He could hear the half-caste on the bridge break out in wild curses—all too plainly inspired by an agony of fear. Then came the cool, almost placid voice of Tsang Ah-bou, inexorably holding the helmsman to his task. The thought crossed Fletcher's mind that Tsang might have been a naval officer, so imperturbable did his commands sound.

The lull was only momentary. Again the shore battery began its demoniac work. But now, Fletcher saw, the shells were definitely falling behind the vessel. The Chinese gunners were not allowing for the speed of the vessel. And its motor engines were unusually fast. On the other hand, they might reset their range at any moment. He asked himself fretfully: "Would they never stop?"

Then, as though in pat answer to his self-query, a silence almost ominous after the appalling uproar fell upon the river. The revolutionists had given up. The *Città di Pisa* had won through.

Tsang approached. The detective was smiling; he appeared as debonair as though that half-hour of concentrated hell was completely to his liking.

"They are very bad shots, Heaven-favored. They were too filled with the eagerness to shoot quickly. They did not aim enough. Although three or four of their shells did hit us! One of them I thought had us——" Tsang pointed down the deck where a thin wisp of smoke still rose from the twisted pile of metal that the sailor had repeatedly doused with water. "Yes, one of their

shots just five feet lower, and our engines——"

He broke off to stare quickly at Fletcher. The bank manager was leaning back against the sill of the cabin, his eyes closed. Tsang's words seemed to be coming from farther and farther away.

"Prior-born, you are ill! Wait——"

Fletcher could feel the mists enveloping him. Time stopped. Then he could feel a glass being pressed to his lips.

"Drink, my friend! Drink, please!"

Fletcher obeyed. He choked at first, then managed to swallow. Neat brandy. Slowly the mists cleared away, Tsang, somewhat grotesquely, emerging from amid their swathing.

"Better now. Thanks."

"I am very glad," said Tsang. He seated himself on his heels near Fletcher in that Chinese posture so difficult for a foreigner to hold longer than a few moments. After a long silence, Tsang spoke:

"Now there is little left to do but to push the ship on—back to Shanghai."

Fletcher could feel the fire of the brandy in his veins, giving him a spurious strength. If only that spot between his shoulders didn't ache so damnably! He turned his eyes toward the detective.

"Tsang, how on earth were you able to get aboard this ship in the first place?"

"It is not a long story, Thrice Honorable, but you are too weary and ill to listen."

"No. I wish you'd tell me. Perhaps it may help me to forget that feeling as though some one were shooting a knife into my neck at half-minute intervals."

TSANG shrugged doubtfully. "Very well, if that is your wish. First, when you talked to me over expensive long-distance telephone, you told of two things: the letter threatening you, and the telegram saying that pirates had burn' the *Città di Pisa.* I knew that no pirates dare' come into channel of either Huangpu or Yangtzse Rivers. Through a spy system, we keep closer watch on Bias Bay and Si-kiang pirates than p'haps you realize. So I say to myself, I say: 'The captain of the ship has sent that wire. And why? To throw Fletcher and Lloyds and the police off his track for a while. To give him time to do something.'

"I rush back from Hangchow and I ask my Chief to give me detail of four plain-clothing men. He does not have any, so he takes uniforms of four patrolmen. They are stupid men, but after tonight I know that they are very brave. While that battery fired on the ship, not one of my men leave his post. . . .

"I put on coolie-cloth and I make myself to look like old man. It is not bad make-up, for no one makes suspectings of a feeble-minded old man. Then, my plain-clothingmen and I take fast police launch. We go down Huangpu. Just as we are going past Chinese-American silk filature mills, I see this ship. More than that, I see dark, foreign-looking man work hard painting out name *Città di Pisa* and painting over it another name. I need no more proof.

"The launch I at once steer ashore to fishing settlement. There I hire a sampan and a fishing-net. My men *yuloh* the boat out to the middle of the river, near the ship, and drop net in water, as though fishing.

"Pretty soon, the skipper of the ship come and lean over rail, watching my men fish. I smile up at him and I say in pidgin-English:

" 'Mastah, you wantchee Chinese boy fo' yo' ship? One time I b'long steward Pacific Mail. Go San Francisco. Talkee little English. An' my men all b'long plenty stlong. Wo'k hahd. We velly poo'. You let us wo'k fo' you, we no ask muchee money'.

"Then, I hold my breath. For if he

say, 'No,' I do not see how I can get aboard that ship. Possibly I can sneak aboard at night, but that is difficult and dangerous. Besides, I have promise' you that I will be near, when you go to Lung Hwa Pagoda.

"But he think' a moment, look' hard at me and at my men. Then he says, slow-like: 'Yes, we do need a deck crew. We short-handed. And you talk English. I've a man aboard that speak' Chinese, but he only talk' Canton-talk, and he can't make Shanghai man understand——' " Tsang Ah-bou paused in his narrative, to remark, "You remember, my friend, we speak of that point tonight, when we come out to ship on lifeboat. Fortunate for me that the Chinese part of the navigatos is Cantonese. It is men from Canton who go abroad, who marry foreign women. We Shanghainese are too proud —but I lose the track of what I tell you.

"Having made a bargain with the shipowner, I send the sampan ashore and my men and I come aboard the *Città di Pisa*. Ey-yah! What a dirty ship! The little captain make my poor plain-clothingmen work like dog' all afternoon, cleaning. I am so old, he jus' have me boss them. Lucky for me!" Tsang laughed dryly. "But I get a little broom and pretend to make sweeping in cabins. I come to this cabin where we now are. It interest me very much. While I am here, the Captain comes walking up deck. He is talking in foreign tongue, that I suppose is the Italian, to the half-breed navigator.

"I can understand nothing of it. Then luck comes to me, for they turn to English. The Captain says:

" 'I am not sure of Toni. He sell' us out if he can. . . .' Toni, I learn later, is the Number One engineer of ship; and just now, Pre-born, he is running the engines below, with pistol at back of his head. The Captain says: 'From now on, I think we better talk English when we make plans, so Toni can't hear.'

"The half-caste answers, 'But how about the China boy you just hire? *He* talks English.'

" 'Oh, he's old man and half-witted. He wouldn't understand if he did hear us. But what I want is to get Fletcher aboard tonight. That blackmailing letter of mine will start him toward Lung Hwa Pagoda. You oughtn't to have any trouble in throwing a sack over his head and bringing him to the sampan and then along that canal down to the ship. But use rough stuff if necessary, because I must have him for that Chinkiang matter. . . .'

"Then the two move away. I have heard enough. Those words solve another knotted problem for me. The Captain does not mean to kill you, even though he finds that you have not brought ransom money. Therefore, I do not need to follow to LungH wa Pagoda. It would be better, I say to myself, for you to be on ship here. Then I can watch and help you if there is danger. So I stay here. Next morning, you are brought aboard."

Tsang Ah-bou dropped into a thoughtful silence. Nor for several moments did Fletcher speak. Through the open door of the cabin, they could see the low blur that was the flat delta land of the Yangtzse, the richest in the world in fecundity. At last Fletcher asked.

"What do you make of it all? There is something dreadfully wrong here. It's in the air. Why should a member of the Italian nobility play absolutely fast and loose with his reputation, as Mazzino has been doing? Borrowing money on his ship, then pretending to burn it? Blackmailing me, then forcing me to guarantee money that he planned to steal?"

Tsang rose from his squatting posture and threw out an arm, embracing the cab-

in with his gesture. "The answer to your question, Pre-born, lies in this room, here."

"What do you mean? That it was occupied by a woman? I thought yesterday that it might have been the cabin reserved for the Count's light o' love. But I began examining the decorations and I realized that they had been put in when the yacht was built. According to all probabilities then, the cabin was built for the Count's English wife. I think I told you, over the long-distance 'phone, that Mazzino was married to an Englishwoman. That was part of the information I got from Baron Ravenna, the Italian consul——"

Tsang threw up a hand. "Yes, I know. You told me. Wait, I will show you something that I found in this room, when I was pretending to dust it."

The small detective fumbled in his girdle and first drew forth a pair of horn-rimmed, thick-lensed spectacles. He settled them upon his rudimentary nose-bridge with a sigh of relief, for he was near-sighted. Next he hauled from that capacious carry-all that serves the Oriental for coat and trousers pocket, a small morocco-bound book.

"Yesterday, I found this in closet there, with woman's clothings. It was on floor of closet, among shoes, as though hurriedly thrown there."

Tsang lifted the book for Fletcher's gaze and the latter gave an ejaculation of excitement:

"By Jove, it's a diary! In English?"

"Yes, Pre-born. Read the last writings; they are of the most interest. Dated March 27th, 28th, 29th. A little over a month ago."

TSANG switched on an electric light, hooded by a shade of pink silk yet sufficient to make reading possible. Fletcher read:

"Captain Bernini tells us today that we shall reach New Zealand a week from tomorrow. I shall be glad. I have a premonition of evil about this voyage. Today I told my husband that, but he only laughed. He said that was because I did not like Bernini. My husband is too trusting. He also laughed, when I told him that I thought the Captain was a drug fiend."

Fletcher turned the page to the next-to-the-last entry. Tsang Ah-bou waited in silence while the bank manager read:

"A glorious day. As my husband says, I think my fears must be the result of too much imagination and not enough exercise. Even Captain Bernini is in high good humor. A vulgar man, almost slimy—the way he sometimes leers at one. Even that brutal-looking half-caste that he brought on at Tahiti as navigation officer seems less repellent. Bernini told me this morning that the half-breed is half Chinese, half Italian, and that he longs to go back to Canton, where he was born. Then the Captain gave one of his peculiar leers and said he thought that his navigator's wish would be granted before very long. I do not suppose he meant anything by such a statement; certainly my husband does not plan to include China on our itinerary. It is too far north. Because of my cough, the doctor's orders were six months in the South Seas. . . . Here I am, becoming suspicious again: but why did Bernini trump up those excuses against our deck man and our two engine-room men and discharge them at Tahiti? And how did it happen that those other Italians and the half-caste were waiting at Papeete, to take their places?"

Fletcher turned the page to the final entry:

"A beautiful sunset. To the right a lonely atoll. The last rays have caught a coconut palm, and it looks as though it were on fire. We haven't seen a ship now for five days, not even an outrigger canoe. Yet I thought we were going to cruise from island to island. For the first time, I think my husband is worried, although he continues to laugh at me. This morning he quarreled with Bernini. I could hear their voices raised. I know it is about our itinerary that they quarreled, for I caught my husband's words: 'But my orders are to head for the Marquesas Islands.' . . . That is queer! A moment ago, I could see the atoll; now it's gone. . . . Why, the ship seems to have turned completely around! There must be something wrong. I'll put this away and go on deck. I can finish it later."

Fletcher softly closed the book. "And those were the last words the Countess ever wrote!"

Tsang Ah-bou nodded. "I wanted you to read that, Pre-born, first. Now that

you have, will you come with me? We're going to interview the man that I've got locked up in the Captain's stateroom. I'd like you to be witness if he makes rash statement. . . . But, wait, let me get you another drink of brandy, before you start."

THIS time Fletcher diluted the raw spirits, but the brandy dulled the pain to the point where he could contemplate the passage along the deck without cringing away from the motion.

Tsang turned the key in the lock and, followed by Fletcher, entered the one stateroom that the yacht contained. On the floor, huddled where the detective had callously tossed him, was the dapper little man. His eyes were still glazed, but a glimmer of consciousness was beginning to creep back into the pupils.

"Now, Captain Bernini," Tsang began briskly, "you are going to make confessing before two witnesses to dastardly murder of your employer, Count Mazzino, and his wife, the Countess."

As though some powerful galvanic battery had been applied to his heart, the small Latin sat upright. His face, however, became like a mask.

"Ol' Ch'ung? W'at dis mean, *hein?* You lose your mind?"

"Do I need make repeating? You are going to confess with great thoroughness, Captain Bernini——"

" 'Bernini?' interrupted the small Latin. 'Dat is name of rascally skipper I put off on atoll, jus' as I plan to do wit' de good Fletch'r w'en we leave China. *I* am Mark Antonio Frascati, Conte di Mazzino, Lieutenant Commander of the Italian Navy on reserve list, Knight of Order of Victor Emmanuel."

"Yes? And your wife——?" prompted Tsang softly.

The small Latin scowled. "W'y you bring up her name? W'y you wring my heart, *hein?* She was beautiful an' good woman. I take her to South Seas for her *polmone*—how you say it?—her lungs. But she die. Too much blood come' from lungs, one day, last month. Hemorrhage. I bury her at sea."

Fletcher groaned inwardly. This man was too clever for Tsang Ah-bou. His story, even, rang true. It might *be* true!

The Chinese detective smiled with a trace of admiration. "That is good story. That is fine story, my friend. What size man was this Captain Bernini that you put off on desert island?"

"How you mean?"

"What size man? Large? Tall? Fat?"

"Oh! W'y, he was—le's see—he was 'bout six feet. Thin."

With a leisurely motion, Tsang drew from his girdle the automatic pistol Fletcher had seen in evidence earlier in the evening. Handing it to the American, he said quietly:

"If this man make' one single little move, you shoot."

Somewhat mystified, the bank manager nodded.

Tsang then moved toward the desk which filled one side of the room. Opening it, his hand moved with precision through drawer after drawer. At last he found the object for which he had apparently been seeking.

"Ah, my good Bernini, you grow little reckless as you become older. You shouldn't have kept this!"

The small man on the cabin floor faced about with a snarl. His eyes gleamed with a baleful light.

"Ey-yah!" Tsang shouted. "Watch him, Pre-born!"

Fletcher jerked up the point of the pistol to cover the man; but with inexplicable speed the Italian caught the weap-

on from the bank manager's grasp. Fletcher, in turn, snatched for it and managed to deflect the muzzle. The same instant there was a deafening roar in the confined stateroom and the knife-like, cutting odor of smokeless powder.

The American stared stupidly about him, then down to the floor. There, sprawled at Fletcher's feet, lay the Latin, coughing and choking. On the breast of the beautifully tailored white drill coat, a powder-scored hole was becoming edged with red.

"My God, Tsang! I've killed him!" Fletcher muttered.

"No, Prior-born." The detective's voice was as calm as though making some simple explanation to a child. "He killed himself—trying to shoot me. You turned aside the pistol muzzle in time. No, his death was an accident—or the will of Shang-ti, the great Overlord." Tsang was silent a moment, staring bemusedly down at the already-dead man. "I am sorry it happened. He cheated—how you say?—the executinger. He died, just as I was finishing case very pretty against him. In his desk I find his passport. It is in Italian, French and English. Here it says:

" 'Physical Description: Height: five feet four. Age: fifty. Weight: one hundred twelve pounds. Born: Sardinia.' The passport is viseed for Tahiti, Straits Settlement, Hongkong and Shanghai. The picture is of this man. The name is Luigi Bernini."

Tsang paused a moment, then added: "I think he will prove to be a man wanted internationally, a gun-runner. One of the —how you say?—scavenger birdling' that gather when news comes of revolution. No more will he run the gun! Tomorrow morning I shall have the exquisite pleasuring of tossing overboard the guns that are stored below. And as each one sinks in river, I shall say: 'There you going. You can not shoot the heart out of my poor countrymen.' I am what you call a military pacifist, yes?"

The detective looked toward Fletcher. The latter stood, face grown pasty white, not heeding Tsang's triumphant words. The Chinese uttered an exclamation of contrition.

"Ey-yah! What a fool, I. I forget you are not use' to scenes like this, Thrice Honorable. And I am not seeming very grateful, when I remember how bravely just now you have save' my life—turning the point of that pistol!"

Tsang's words seemed to steady Fletcher. "Did I actually save you?" he mumbled. "It's—about—time. For you have risked your life, fifty times, to save mine."

"Vieau katchi!" quickly answered Tsang. "For you to save mine was brave. For me to do the same was but part of my humbly tiresome profession, my friend."

Into this Universe, and *Why* not knowing
Nor *Whence,* like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not *Whither,* willy-nilly blowing.

What, without asking, hither hurried *Whence?*
And, without asking, *Whither* hurried hence!
Oh, many a Cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence!

—Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam.

"She swung her lithe body on the steering-oar and watched the bow of the boat."

This Example

By S. B. H. HURST

A tale of love that conquered all obstacles—of a strange voyage across the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal—a story of Burma and the Andaman Islands

THE noon of the steaming Burmese forest was broken by the shouts, the screams, the shooting, and curses in English and Burmese. The fight raged among the trees, drawing nearer to the tiny shack where lived Omane and her husband, recently married. The husband loaded an ancient rifle and stood ready to protect Omane. Bullets spattered against the shack. The fight broke into the little clearing. Sixty dacoits [robbers and murderers] fleeing from a half-company of English soldiers, and fighting as they fled. The fight centered on the shack. The robbers used it for a fort. Finally, they surrendered. Those who remained alive were made prisoners, and compelled to dig graves for the dead.

A soldier seized the husband of Omane and made him dig. He protested he was innocent. Omane protested. She fell at the feet of the lieutenant in command of the soldiers. He was sitting on a fallen tree while the doctor extracted a bullet from his arm. He shook his head grimly. Omane's story was an old one. . . . She was a pretty little thing but her husband had been caught with a rifle in his hands.

"Ask the dacoits, sahib!" Omane sobbed.

The lieutenant shook his head again.

"An old trick," he said. "I caught forty dacoits once and twenty of them swore the other twenty were innocent—were strangers to them! I found out afterward that they had drawn lots to see which of them should plead guilty—to satisfy me!—so that the others could go free! Sorry, young woman. But you may come with us to Rangoon to tell your story to the judge. He has the last say. . . . Get them into line, sergeant!"

Then the soldiers and their prisoners and the sobbing Omane began their march to the Irrawaddy River. Sometimes the soldiers sang. And the chorus of their song was:

"This example is only a sample of what a woman will do for a man!"

Through the forest to the river. A paddle steamer "chunking" down to Rangoon. . . . The trial of the dacoits. . . . Just another gang of dacoits. The English had been losing men and money trying to rid Burma of them for years. Another gang, caught red-handed. . . . The piteous pleas of Omane were an old story. Other pretty little Burmese women had pleaded for their men. *Guilty*, and the usual sentence: *penal servitude for life at the Andaman Islands.*

Next morning the convicted men were marched, heavily ironed, down to the wharf, where the steamer *Shahjehan* waited for them. Omane wept like a tortured child. They were taking her man away from her—forever. She would never see him again. How could anybody be so cruel? She was allowed to cling to him for one moment of agonized farewell. Then the convicted men were marched on board the steamer. The steamer left the wharf and worked to mid-river. Omane felt all her world breaking about her. Nobody would help her. Everybody had been bad to her. She would fight them! Fight them! All alone she would fight the great government. . . . She screamed to a sampan waller.

The man brought his small boat alongside the wharf. Omane jumped into it.

"Follow! Follow!" she screamed. "I will follow and bring him back to me!"

The boatman, who pitied but understood the futility, rowed madly after the steamer. Omane knelt in the bow and prayed to the captain.

"Oh, sahib! Oh, burra sahib, please give me back my man!"

"God!" groaned the captain. "I can't stand this! Full speed ahead!"

The steamer raced to full speed. The banks of the river crumbled in her wash. She left Omane and the sampan far behind. Omane sobbed and prayed. The boatman stopped rowing. Omane stifled her sobs and turned to him.

"Don't stop," she raged. "Go on, boatman! I will follow him to where they are taking him, and bring him back!"

The steamer passed out of sight round a bend of the river.

"Go on, boatman!" screamed Omane.

She tore open the pocket of her little jacket and brought out a handful of valuables—heirlooms of her family.

"I can pay!" she screamed. "Go on!"

The boatman was honest as well as sympathetic.

"To the end of the river I will take you," he said gently. "But it will be useless. At the end of the river you will see the great black water which is too wide and rough for such boats as mine. Many days across the water will they take your man—too far for my boat, and the government will allow no boat to follow where they are taking him. I will take you to the end of the river, where you will see for yourself. Put away your money. A man does not take money from a woman in sorrow!"

Across the low-lying paddy fields a cloud of smoke melted in the sunlight.

"See!" exclaimed the boatman. "That is the last of the steamer. With your man and the other men she has passed out of the river."

They both watched the smoke—Omane feverishly. Animists both, devout believers in all forms of divination; that last smoke of the *Shahjehan* must surely hold a sign! They watched. The morning breeze moved the melting smoke-cloud.

"See!" exclaimed Omane. "See! It takes the shape of a hand! A hand that beckons! Beckons me to come!"

She was smiling through her tears.

The boatman shook his head.

"It waves farewell," he said sadly. "See, it melts and is gone!"

Omane bowed her head, dry sobs shaking her.

"I will take you to the end of the river," said the boatman.

He worked with his oar, and with the tide the boat went on—far past the traffic of sampans. Omane crouched, staring forward. The boatman looked down upon her black, glossy head, and crooned *The Song of the Dying Queen*, which is the saddest song in the world.

TWENTY miles of generosity had this boatman given to a woman whose name he did not know when he put her ashore at a tiny village where the right bank curves at the mouth of the Rangoon River. Omane thanked him. He nodded but said no word. Then he turned his boat and began to row back to Rangoon.

It was a village of fishermen, and Omane at once sought the Headman. That one turned out to be a very ancient person, a wizard of repute, much given to divination, a withered father of his village, who not only knew all about the gods of Burma but was also intimately acquainted with them.

"Father," began Omane, "I want to buy or rent a boat. But not an expensive boat."

He looked at her with watery eyes across the smoke of a little fire over which he was warming a piece of fish.

"Why?" he asked.

"They have taken my man across the water to where they take bad men. I want a boat so that I can follow and bring him back!"

She spoke with the faith of a child.

The Headman stared at her. He could not think she was serious. Then he wondered if she was sane. He peered closely at her. Then he took her head between his hands, and looked deeply into her eyes. He had lived at the end of the river for ninety years, and while the Andaman penal settlement had not been established that long, and while no news ever came from it, he knew something about it. He knew that no man had ever escaped from there. He knew that the convicts were all natives of India and Burma—no white prisoners. He had heard that no man ever tried to escape. The Bay of Bengal was too wide a sea, and there were no boats in which even a desperate man might try to escape, even

if he could get away from the Sikh guards. He had heard, truly, that the irons were never taken off the legs of the convicts. And that the wandering bands of the terrible little natives of the islands, the Andamanese, were an added reason for men never trying to escape. It was said that the Andamanese were cannibals. There was also a guard of English soldiers. . . . All this had the old man heard. . . . And this pretty child wanted to hire or buy a boat to go to the convict settlement—to get her man! . . . Not an expensive boat, she had said.

The Headman released Omane's head, and sat back. She was very pretty. The old man smiled slightly, as if at some fair memory.

"You must be very much in love," he said gently.

Omane admitted it.

"The government will not allow wives at the islands," he explained patiently. "I have heard that sometimes if a convict does something very wonderful, like saving a life, then, after twenty years, the government will, sometimes, allow a man's wife to go there and live with him, and clear the land for the government. I have heard this, but never did I hear of any man's wife going there. It is but the word of the government. And in twenty years you will be too old to care, too old to love!"

"It is never too old to love, father," Omane answered.

"You always knows age better than age knows itself," he rejoined. "Tell me, child, how many others have you bothered with your questions about boats?"

"None," said Omane.

"It is well," said the old man. "Not that any Burman would betray you to the government, which, indeed, would only laugh at your idea as a lion might laugh at a baby mouse; but because I have my pride, and do not wish to be one among many to listen to your tale. But do not bother me any more. It is true that you may *buy* a boat. No man will rent you one when he hears of your strange madness of loving, and of what you want to do with the boat. But what could you do with a boat? You know nothing about boats!"

"I will follow to where they have taken my man, and bring him back," said Omane.

"Yes, so you said. That was why I thought you mad. But your eyes are not mad eyes—except that love is always mad!"

Again he took her face between his hands. He studied her face and eyes for a long time.

"Your soul is set," he said slowly. "And you are a woman! You will get a boat somehow—if you have to steal it. And you will venture upon your mad quest, and you will die in the black water, unless some steamer picks you up and brings you back to Rangoon. Even then I believe you would steal another boat, and again try. I can not stop you! But I can and will tell you things you ought to know, because—I do not know why!—my heart beats for you! Aye, and I am far too wise to waste time trying to stop a woman who craves to rush headlong into folly. I have known too many women! . . . I will find out about the boats. Let your mouth babble about everything else but boats in this village! Say nothing of boats to any man, much less to any woman. Women chatter like monkeys, and would mock you. Go now! But come back to me one hour before sundown. Then I will talk with thee, but more particularly with the gods. Bring a live chicken with you. A chicken seven months old. Be sure it is seven months old. Do not let the seller of the

chicken lie to you! . . . Now go away, for my old eyes see the little gods watching beside my fire. I think they have something to tell me which is not for any woman's ears!"

OMANE went away, awed but happier than she had been for a long time. About the old Headman was mystery and the lure of one who can control the unknown. Her faith went out to him. He could do great things. Besides, she had found another friend who was, also, a counselor. The day dragged far too slowly. But at last the hour came, and Omane went back to the Headman.

"See how the smoke of my fire curls," he muttered. "Watch it curl and with your other eye watch the sun die, little child who would venture out on the black water for love's sake, hundreds of miles beyond where our bravest fishermen venture. Watch the smoke! . . . Are you certain about the age of that chicken? Who sold it to thee?"

"She called herself the woman of Shin-byu-sin!" Omane shivered with a mingling of dread and delight.

"She did, eh? Let me see! She is the one who . . . what does it matter? The world is filled with women who do not interest me! . . . Watch how fast the sun dies! The bats are waking. See—there they fly, where the shadows gather the fastest! . . . Ah, I hear the chatter of the little gods who tell me tales. The little Ones who peer for me with their keen eyes through that black veil which baffles strong men. And with the little gods is their Chief. Into the future can He go, into the past He can go! So His age never changes, because he can either lose a year or gain one at will! See, the smoke curls toward you, pretty child with the great heart! . . . And now—the sun sets and the smoke curls! Be ready! Watch carefully for the last of the suns! . . . See! A moment now! Watch! Ah! . . . Kill that chicken! Quick! Good! A clean cut! . . . Ha, he struggles with his head off! He struggles well when headless! A good sign. There will be much virtue in his liver! Watch, while I cut it out. Ah! Now, with the Chief of the Little Ones at my elbow I will see thy future as revealed by the liver of this dead bird which you bought from the woman of Shin-byu-sin!"

Perhaps the oldest form of divination in the world.

The Headman studied the liver carefully, his old eyes almost touching it. He nodded and muttered. He looked up at Omane, sideways at the smoke of his fire —or at whatever dread things watched him there! He smiled at Omane. . . . The bats whirled uncannily. The fireflies danced and great moths dashed into the light of the fire. Through a sudden velvet night peered all the stars.

"Aye," the Headman smiled again. "Aye, and the Chief of the friendly gods tells me, pretty one, that in some previous life I loved thee! Which must be true, else why do I bother with thee now? But the Chief will not tell me whether you were my wife or my daughter, or a love I did not reach—only that I loved thee deeply. . . . The Chief likes to tease me now and then! 'You loved her,' he says. 'When?' I ask. But he will not tell me, nor yet . . . why am I old? Oh, why am I old? . . . Love follows us from life to life! Now I will tell you what I see in the liver of this excellent bird. . . . What? No? But it seems too wonderful! A liver can not lie! And I never make mistakes. . . . And the Chief here with me! Such luck as this! . . . Child, love of other lives, for such a fortune as this others would charge thee all thou hast! But I will charge thee nothing, because in that other life I loved thee and, apparently, love thee still. *For*

the liver tells me that you will get your man and escape with him!"

"Oh, father!" Omane could scarcely breathe.

"Yet how can it be? From there? But the Chief says 'yes,' and he is smiling at me—and at you! Neither can a liver lie! Some may not be able to interpret its meaning correctly. But that is not the liver's fault. And I never make mistakes! . . . And the Chief nods his head again! . . . Go, my love of other lives, and of this. But speak to no man at all, so says the Chief, except me, until your eyes fall upon your own man. Then call him softly, and he will come to thee. . . . And take this file with thee!"

From among his few belongings he produced a file of English make—a valuable thing to a village Headman in Burma. He put it into Omane's hand.

"No! A gift! Do not insult me by offer of payment! We will pay for the boat. It is an old boat, for all our boats are old, and only the kindness of the gods keeps them from falling apart! But the liver says the boat will hold, that storms will avoid it—and the Chief of the Little Ones smiles. Neither can the Chief lie, for lying is a mania of mortals, and as silly as slapping your own cheek! . . . Those stars! See! . . . Give me your face!"

He took her head between his hands, tenderly. She felt him tremble, as if some echo of youth had touched him. He held her face upward.

"Fix your eyes on those stars! You know nothing of boats. How crazy love makes one! She can not even steer a boat, yet would venture across the water—so far! Fix your eyes on those stars, and remember. Steer for those stars, and, the gods aiding thee, you will reach the Andaman Islands. When you get ashore use thy wit, and do not be seen. It is mostly jungle, and the British are using thy man and other men to clear this jungle. Steer for those stars—a long steering. I have been told that the distance is three hundred and fifty miles. . . . When you get your man, first file off the iron rings around his ankles. Those will not be heavy. Then the ring around his waist, from which chains run to the ankle-irons. Then hide the irons and run, leaving no trail. But do not try to come back to Burma. Continue to follow, in the old boat, those stars. There are other islands to the southeast. Their names I forget. . . . Be circumspect. Ah, the name of the other islands is Nicobar—free land. Go there with your man, and wait for the government to forget. Nay, it never forgets! So lie low until your children grow up, and you are old and no longer lovely. Then the government, which never forgets, will no longer be able to recognize your husband.

OMANE left the land in that frail boat with its one steering-oar and queer sail, in the night. And only the ancient Headman watched her go.

"Fare thee well," he mumbled. "Only mad love would try such a folly as this. Yet the gods—who must also be mad, else they had never made mortals!—the gods are with thee. And the liver of a seven-months-old chicken can not lie! . . . I have given thee much advice—which likely you will forget. For even if I loved thee, and do yet, thou art, still, a woman! But in thee is the *heart of hearts,* which the gods give to a few whom they love greatly. . . . Love! Love is. . . . Push away with that oar. Fare thee very well. God and the gods, and Buddha bless thee. Aye, I would even pray to the God of the Christians on thy behalf. For He is a strong God. God bless thee, oh pretty face that I loved long ago, when the world was younger! Farewell!"

"Farewell, father," whispered Omane. "May the gods reward thee!"

Then she pushed off. The little wind took the sail. The old man watched silently. Slowly the boat became a small blot upon the starlit sea. Now and then the mast creaked gently. . . . The old man could no longer see the blot upon the sea. He wiped his eyes and turned away, shuffling back to his lonely fire.

Upon Omane came a feeling of loneliness and fear. The great black water which she, a girl of the jungles, had always heard spoken of with dread. What a strangely acting thing the boat was! The wind increased slightly as the boat left the shelter of the land and the northeast monsoon took hold of her. Omane looked up at her stars.

"The liver can not lie," she murmured, bolstering up her courage. "And the gods are with me!"

She was faring forth upon what was likely the greatest and bravest venture ever undertaken by a lone woman. She did not know this. She swung her lithe body upon the steering-oar, and watched the bow of the boat. And then she was steering correctly, and panting with ecstasy as she steered. . . . Her stars swung low to the southwest, drifting with the night; but that was ancient knowledge and Omane made allowance and checked her rude navigation.

Two hours before the dawn a strange tangle of stars rose swiftly ahead. The little hands gripped the steering-oar apprehensively. What awful thing was this? It grew in size with terrifying speed, and bore down upon the boat like some angry dragon of the deep, raging at being wakened from ages of sleep. It made a thrashing noise as it came. Omane sobbed brave prayers of incoherent pleadings. This roaring thing of the night was coming directly at the boat. And now she could see the awful eyes of the creature. One was green, the other was red. They glared. . . . The thing was almost upon her. . . . Then it was passing, like a shooting star with the voice of an angry tiger. Omane's boat rocked violently, threatening to capsize. A whiff of smoke reeked in her nostrils. She recognized it, and laughed weakly. The terror had been a steamer, its eyes the lights of the night. She told herself that she would not be frightened if she met another. She did not realize how close she had been to death, that her boat, unseen, had nearly been run down.

THE velvet night passed without further incident. The tide and the monsoon carried Omane far from land. Dawn came over the Bay of Bengal. There was nothing in sight. The sun rose, and Omane basked in it. Then she ate some *napi,* which is a species of intricately cured fish, took a drink of water, and lowered the sail. Under its almost lacy raggedness she crept and went to sleep.

And the day passed with the lazy wind moving the frail boat, idly drifting it in the direction of its goal. Some inquisitive fish came and looked at the love-laden argosy, but no other eyes saw it.

Omane wakened with the sunset, and saw omens of delight in the colors of the sky. She thanked every god who came into her primitively lively imagination; which took some little time. During these devotions she worked at hoisting the sail; for while, of course, religious observance was necessary there was something more important at the Andaman Islands. Then another night of steering and dreaming, undisturbed by steamers. And another day of sleeping under that sail of strangely assorted patches kept together by a miracle.

Yet the loneliness was becoming a

burden. Omane, in the way of the smiling affectionate Burmese, craved some one to chatter with, and her eyes sought something more human than the dreary monotony of the sun-drenched Bay, and a boat that smelled of many generations of fish. She yearned for the flowers and the heavy green restfulness of her jungles; even the bickerings of the parrots and the monkeys. . . . Many gods in the mind are hardly companions. In all her life she had never before been alone.

The burden became a weight, pressing on her faith, but not crushing it. . . . Her tired eyes strained for land, but only saw water. Sometimes a few fish. She had fared upon her quest with the lovingness and ignorance of a little child. With a child's faith. Had she not been as a little child she had never ventured. But the broad bosom of the Bay of Bengal was no place for children.

As the days went by, Omane found herself becoming afraid of it. It became the menace of some huge creatures from which she could not escape. Love and courage were still strong in her soul, and her stars were still in the sky, but the Bay of Bengal had become an enemy from which she might never escape.

The lazy wind lost interest in her. The boat did not move. It lay like a dead thing. And Omane watched her supply of water dwindling, drop by drop.

The torture of thirst. Sobbings and wild laughter, despair and deep dread. And the monotony and agony of that terrible voyage transcended time. Omane hardly knew night from day.

A brown speck upon the wide water, a brown old native boat, containing the most valuable cargo in the world. A woman's love . . . with the anciently evil fingers of death trying to steal it.

Omane no longer saw her stars. She could see nothing but a fog that burned her eyes. She knew there was no fog there, but she was too weak to care—except when through the fog there came the mocking vision of the memory of a strong young Burman on whose arm she had slept through other delicious nights.

And presently she knew nothing at all. A gallant girl lying unconscious at the bottom of the boat.

Time no longer existed, but something roused her. Dimly, she wondered what had wakened her. Vaguely she sensed an unusual smell. . . . A smell. What was it? It seemed that somewhere, very long ago, she had known what that smell was. But that had been ever so long ago. It did not matter—she had forgotten what thing it was that smelled so nicely. It did not matter. She was falling back into unconsciousness, but the smell would not let her go. What *was* that smell? She roused the more, irritated by curiosity. She sniffed and the smell was a stimulant. And then, suddenly, she understood. Sobs broke from her tired breast. A great thankfulness to all the gods filled and lifted her. For the smell was the smell of the good moist earth. It differed not a whit from the smell of her jungles. For the smell was so new and strong that it blotted out the smell of the sea.

Omane struggled to her feet. The boat was aground in a tiny inlet, and branches of trees were hanging over it. Faith was justified. The inlet was one of the thousands of little inlets of the island known as the South Andaman.

Within touch was life, a matter of easy fruit, in a jungle as dense as Omane's home, where she was very much at home. But the infinite caution of the jungle-bred was not forgotten, even when laughter returned like a ghost seeking reincarnation, and finding it. . . . With her first fierce bitings of food she was watching for trace of the terrible little black

men, Andamanese, aborigines of the islands, about which the old Headman had warned her. Human animals, more subtle and deadly than tigers. . . . Fed, she carefully screened her boat, leaving it ready for the hurried flight when she found her man. Then, armed only with the file and a faith dangerous to mountains, she attacked the British Empire!

But where was the enemy? Here was jungle—miles of it. There was the sea. Where was her man? She did not dream how large the islands are. She went forward, remembering the words of the Headman:

"Nobody ever tried to do this thing before!"

It was dawn of the next day before she reached the first of the mangrove swamps. It proved easy crossing, hardly a swamp to one of Omane's training. She looked for a river, but there are no rivers on the islands. . . . She would have to rest that night. What about tigers? A fire was not to be thought of. A fire would keep the tigers away. But . . . she calculated the risks carefully. She could not afford to be killed, because she represented her man's only means of escape. But the fire would surely bring the government upon her. It would be as a signal that she had come to rescue her man. . . . She would have to take chances with the tigers. Magnificent decision of that heroic soul! But there are no tigers on the Andaman Islands. Some few species of wild pigs, one sort of wildcat. Nothing else.

Omane travelled with the caution of her kind. For the first two days she saw nothing but the birds. And no aborigines. She would have said that the gods guided her. They probably did. Be that as it may, the morning of the third day saw her on a rise of land. Below was the harbor of Port Blair, and about the harbor was the penal settlement.

To the south, Viper prison, where the incorrigibles ended their days. And across the harbor, just visible, an old wooden wharf which had seen the assassination of a Viceroy of India by a Pathan convict. The large jails where the convicts slept. The house of the Chief Commissioner. The various offices. The small white barracks of the company of English soldiers. The barracks of the Sikh guards. The Royal Indian Marine steamer, the *Mayo,* at anchor. . . . Omane crept closer. She raised her head and looked again. She dropped and crouched, trembling.

A gang of Burmese convicts was clearing the forest less than half a mile away! With tall, bearded, armed Sikh guards watching the process.

With exquisite caution Omane crept closer. Again she looked. She stifled the agony of disappointment. Her man was not with the gang. She crept away again.

Only Burmese convicts worked in the forest. This to Omane would seem obvious. Yet the truth must have come to her intuitively. She told herself that she would have to wait—until her man came to work in the forest. She could never attack the jails. Surely he would come! They must shift the gangs. She would wait, and watch. When he came she could signal to him. She could see no other plan of saving him. . . . To take the foolish chance of going down to the settlement . . . but that was madness . . . would ruin everything . . . she would be seen at once—Burmese women do not wander about the penal colony at the Andamans . . . the logic of the jungle, which is an extra sense.

Omane crept back into the densest part of the jungle. She found a small cave, and there she made a nest. Here she would sleep. But she also needed the nest

for another reason. And she wanted that nest to be—a nest.

Day after day she ventured forth and crept to where the gang worked in the forest. Day after day she sobbed her disappointment. There were changes in the gang, but never the change she ached for. Where was her man? The terrible thought came that he might be dead. And there was no one she could ask! She gritted her teeth. . . . She would wait there, watching forever if need be. Faith told her he was not dead. Faith said that he would come. All would be well. A softly uttered love call. His startled gaze. Her beckoning. His slip into the brush. Fast work with the file. Some stealthy running through the jungles. The boat. The sea. The Nicobar Islands. Freedom and delight. . . . But it was painful to watch the halting movements of the prisoners. The rings round their ankles. The chains leading to another ring around their waists. Somewhere her man was being compelled to walk like that!

So did the weeks pass. The high-beating heart of the morning. The keen scrutiny. The bitter disappointment. The dreadful loneliness. And a time was coming when she would more than ever need her mate.

Then, one afternoon she waited late. There was nothing to do, and the gang seemed some sort of company. The shadows fell, and the guards marched the gang back to their barracks. Omane started home—back to her hidden nest. She was not as cautious as usual. Weeks of immunity from any sight of danger to one so skilled in jungle ways as she was had made her careless this night. . . . The moths and the bats flying. The dense forest. . . . She was slowly nearing her nest. Then, suddenly, just in time, she smelt smoke. The smoke of a wood fire. She dropped full length in the brush. She made less noise than a cobra makes.

A fire. Men! What men? The terrible Andamanese. Whom even the British had given up trying to tame. Who for centuries, for two thousand years, had had a dreadful reputation—given them by the few shipwrecked men who had ever escaped them. . . .

But Omane was not terrified. The girl who had made the only crossing of the wide Bay of Bengal in an open boat, who dared attack the sacredly guarded penal settlement—she was not one to be afraid. Wild men! But their camp was in her way. She would have to circle it to reach her nest. She crept closer and looked. A fire about which demons moved. A small picture of Hell, imagined by Dante, painted by Doré. Little black men, their origin a mystery to anthropologists. Lower in the scale of life than the Tasmanian bushman. . . . Omane sniffed with the contempt of the well-born for the lower bloods. . . . From what the Headman had told her she had expected to be afraid. Instead, she was annoyed. This dirty camp was in her way. She circled it widely and gained her nest.

Next morning the savages had gone. Omane inspected their camping-place curiously. There were no such creatures in Burma.

She never took the same trail two days in succession. That would be folly. And she always covered the trail as she went along, carefully, with bits of brush in ways she knew. But it began to seem that she would never see her man at work with the convicts in the forest.

So did the weeks pass.

One morning as she lay watching and softly sobbing her disappointment it came to her suddenly that to get back to

her nest in time might be impossible. She began to creep away, stifling her groans lest the Sikh guards hear. At nightfall she gained her nest. There, in the loneliness, her hour came upon her. . . .

Gasping in agony, she heard a sound and looked toward the mouth of her cave. Then she cried out aloud for the first time—in terror. Two eyes that gleamed at the mouth of the cave. . . . A tiger!

But the creature began to make soft murmurs in its throat. The purring of the great wildcat. . . . It purred! Then the eyes turned away, and the cat lay down across the opening of the cave, as if on guard!

A wonderful joy came to Omane. She tried to laugh at her forgetfulness. Had she not been told. Some other girls and herself, listening to the tales of an aged woman:

"And remember this. Should ever thine hour come upon thee when thou art far from home in the jungle, as sometimes it does, suddenly; remember my words and fear not the creatures of the forest. For they will never harm thee. Nay, they will seek to protect thee. Did not my own mother give birth to me this wise? And while she lived her great hour did not a tigress come? Came close and looked at her! And did not the tigress make soft sounds in her throat—even as one woman might encourage another? And then, while my mother gave birth to me, the tigress lay down near her—to guard her!"

Omane remembered and sent out her soul in thankfulness.

So did her hour pass.

And after, with the dawn, and the cat gone, Omane gave further thanks to the gods. In her arms was the most wonderful mite of humanity the world had ever seen. And it was a man child!

Yet never had a baby brought greater care. Omane, cherishing the morsel, crooning softly to him because she dared not raise her voice, could see herself as one apart from other mothers. Had ever any other mother of a first-born son brought him into the world under such circumstances? So she wondered now that her tremendous task had been rendered more than ever difficult.

There were fourteen monkeys in seventeen trees—
Crow, my precious one! Crow!
Who laughed so hard when they wanted to please
By telling the stories monke s know
That the tears from their eyes ran down to their knees!
Crow, my precious one. . . .

She crooned it, that ancient song of the mothers of Burma, and wondered why there seemed to be no monkeys on the island. She wondered where she would hide the baby, and how, when she went forth again to see if her man was working with the gang in the forest. Safe he would have to be. Where? For even the wild pigs are dangerous to babies. And he must be hidden where his voice, should he cry, would not attract attention. Not too far from where the gang was working, yet not too near. Did ever a mother face such a task? . . . So did her thoughts run as she gathered strength again.

Drowsing, she watched the fireflies tangle with the stars at the mouth of her cave, the eclipses of these as the bats sought frantic suppers. Ai! it was good. It was good. And soon she would find her man, and then—away to freedom in the boat, a very happy family. . . . Ai, it was good! . . . Drowsing, she thanked the many little gods. . . . A cloud of fireflies drifted across the stars. A face, benign and very wise. A figure sitting alone in eternal calm. A shame she had forgotten Him. A shame! She had thanked all the little gods, and even the ghost of the chicken, but she had forgotten the Blessed One. . . . So Omane very

respectfully gave thanks to Buddha, who so loved little children.

A few mornings later she left the cave, this little lady of Burma, with her baby in her arms. She had worked out her plan. She would not leave her baby very far from the place in the forest from where she watched the working convicts. Not more than ten feet! He was far too precious to be allowed out of sight. What if he did make one tiny cry—was not the forest filled with birds? What Sikh guard would suspect a baby, even if he heard the tiny sound? And when she freed her man—while the noble file rasped through his irons—would it not fill his heart with peace to be able to see his son immediately? . . . So she crept forward, whispering softly to the child and the minor gods, and gasped again with bitter disappointment when she saw that her man was not with the workers.

So passed several months. The gallant hope of the morning, so soon turned into bitter pain. The joy of the baby that cheered her. . . . Another day, another journey to her watching-place. The nights. And always a great faith. . . . Her clothing had long since gone, but she was clever with leaves—not that lack of clothing troubled her. Besides, it was an impediment to stealth. And the baby needed none. But when the rains came Omane was compelled to devise a tiny thatch for him—after the fashion of grown-ups who work in the paddy fields of Burma. The morning rains are chilly. But the baby became more cute in appearance and more divine in his ways. . . . The monsoon broke with a wet wind, gusty. Omane crept as usual to her spying-place. She gasped, and her heart beat so wildly that she feared the guards would hear it. There with the gang was the man she had dared so much in seeking.

Reaction momentarily weakened her. She lay down upon the wet earth. Her man was not very far away, but too far. Omane dug her nails into her hands. She told herself to be very careful. One slip now and hope would be shattered for ever. . . . Presently her man would come closer, when she could softly give the love call, and he could watch for a chance to slip into the brush. She waited in an agony of impatience. There, he was closer! Would it be safe now? No, there were too many others near him. She hated those others. . . . She waited. She waited all day. Until a guard blew a whistle and the gang was marched back to its jail.

Omane clutched at the earth, sobbing. All the wildness of her blood was running hotly. She passed beyond self-control, but the baby saved her. After all the months of sustained effort—after it all, this hideous delay. If the baby had not been there Omane would have dashed from her hiding-place in mad frenzy, and with tooth and nail and file attacked the guards. Some such madness. The baby, kicking its dimpled legs, saved her from this. Omane became calm again—as nearly calm as was possible.

Next morning she left the cave heavy with hope deferred. It might be more months, if ever, before her man came close to her place in the brush. How could she ever bear it? She laid the sleeping child on a bed of leaves, and crept to her spying-place. She looked. Could it be true? But even as she doubted she softly uttered the love call.

Her man was working alone, less than a dozen feet away. He heard the love call and shuddered. It could not be. He was going mad. The dainty, loved lips that used to make that call were far away in Burma. This was like the horrible, mocking dreams of the terrible nights,

when men babbled all about him in their sleep and the jail was full of ghosts. Lying awake through those awful nights. Thinking. Never to see Omane again. Other arms would hold her. . . . Never to see her again. . . . During those awful nights he had thought he would go mad. The love call had haunted his fitful sleep. Now it had come in the day. . . . He shuddered. He must be mad. . . . Then he saw her eager face peeping through the leaves. Smiling. Beckoning frantically—her little hand. . . . The guards were not watching. The man dropped his mattock and slipped like a cobra into the brush.

PRIVATE BRIGGS had been given three days' leave to go hunting. The short twilight became night as he made camp by the sea. A thin pencil of moonlight moved upon the quiet water. Private Briggs was moved to sentiment. He thought of a girl he knew in London. Then he began to sing:

"This example is only a sample of what a woman will do for a man!"

As he stopped singing he heard a little cry.

"Hell, what was that?" he exclaimed, startled. "Sounded like a kid. But wot would a kid be doing out 'ere? . . . However!"

He picked up his rifle and moved toward the sound. The pencil of moonlight pointed into a little creek.

"Gawd!" exclaimed Private Briggs. "It was a kid!"

Omane was panting like a hunted deer. Her man crouched, ready to spring. The baby, no longer silenced by a harassed hand, crowed gleefully. The moonlight showed the boat clearly.

"Gawd!" muttered Briggs, understanding all. "'Ow did she do it? Wot a woman! For 'er man she done it! For 'er 'usband—a convict!"

Private Briggs spoke to the husband of Omane.

"Don't go to making a bloody fool of yourself!" he warned, touching his rifle significantly.

The man understood the gesture. He still crouched, but he felt hope and courage leaving him. He was helpless against this soldier with the rifle. Omane sobbed. After all her effort, all her bravery, all her pain and all her loneliness—this! She broke down utterly. The baby continued to crow.

Private Briggs meditated deeply.

"It ain't my duty to guard convicts," he thought hopefully. "*That's* the Sikh's mucky job. I'm only here to protect the blooming government if so be a general uprising takes place. Besides, I'm on leave! . . . Gawd, and she come 'ere acrost the bloody Bay in that rotten old boat. Then she had her baby all alone in the woods."

He leaned down and patted Omane's shoulder. She stopped crying and looked up at him appealingly. Private Briggs swore horribly and tickled the baby's ear. The baby gurgled with delight.

"Gawd!" exclaimed Private Briggs. "Him what would stop her now wouldn't be a man at all. After all she's done and gone through with! . . . And it ain't my duty to hinterfere with the police and their mucky work! 'Strewth! . . . And if anybody arsks me 'ow the 'unting was I'll tell 'em it was fair rotten—that all I seen was a few grubby pigs!"

Private Briggs stood up in the moonlight. He grinned at Omane and winked at her man. Then he bent down and kissed the baby. He snapped to attention and saluted. He gestured toward the sea and freedom.

"Pass, friend!" said Private Briggs. "Pass, friend! And all's well!"

The River That Stood Still

By CAPTAIN ED SMITH

Alone and unaided, Kim Chang pursued a murderous outlaw datu in the Sultanate of Pahang

"IT'S like this, d' ye see, Sergeant-Major? Let us once lay hands on the *Orang Kaya Palawan* and our troubles are over. He's the fountainhead, the mainspring of this uprising against the Sultan of Pahang. Without him to lead the other *datus,* to stiffen their backbones, the entire uprising will collapse like a pricked rubber balloon." Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Naylor leaned back in his camp chair, his eyes fixed unwaveringly upon his subordinate.

Sergeant-Major Mackenzie smiled dubiously.

"Very good, sir," he assented. "But finding him——"

"Is like looking for the proverbial needle in the strawstack, I'll admit," his superior finished his remark for him. "That's why I sent word to you and why I am here today. With the native force under you, you have already done some very valuable work. *You* can find this *Orang Kaya Palawan* and bring him in if anyone can."

Mackenzie's heart warmed at that bit of praise from the chief; then a frown crossed his face as he thought of the job ahead of him.

"I'll have a go at it, of course," he went on slowly.

Kim Chang's heart sank suddenly at these words of his *Tuan.* Assuredly it meant more work still for the busy native constabulary under the Sergeant-Major—it meant more work for him as well—and just when he was hoping to ask for a leave of absence to visit his relatives in S'pore. For five days now, Chang had been awaiting the most propitious moment to proffer his request for two weeks' leave. Two or three days' absence could be managed easily enough, but a trip to Singapore—that was different; decidedly so!

Noiselessly he withdrew from the latticed *attap* wall beside the dim doorway where he had been shamelessly eavesdropping and retreated to the rear of *Tuan* Mackenzie's house to bring forth the siphons of soda water, the whisky, the lime juice and the tall tinkling glasses. The conference between the Great One and his *Tuan* was over; soon that other one would depart and his master would plunge back into the jungle once more. But his slant-eyed, Oriental face was impassive as he set the tray on the teakwood table betwen the two white men.

"I'd say, look for him along 'The River That Stops'," Mackenzie was saying as Chang came within earshot once more. "The Malays say it is *hantu*—devil-ridden—and they all avoid it like the plague. But *Orang Kaya Palawan* is the kind that wouldn't mind a thing like that. In fact, it would just fit in with his schemes. A capital place, that, to disappear—and its being so avoided by the other Malays would make it ideal for his purposes."

"The River That Stops!" the Lieutenant-Colonel broke in. "Just where and what is that?"

"I can't tell you, sir, for I've never seen it, though I have heard of it often enough. Chang, here, knows all about it though, and I'll wager he can guide us to it. Can't you, Chang?"

Chang's spirits dropped still lower as he saw his last plans for a vacation go a-glimmering. He merely bowed impassively, however, as he answered.

"Yes, *Tuan*. I know. I can show you."

It befell exactly as Kim Chang had foreseen. No sooner had the Great One left than *Tuan* Mackenzie had gathered together his scant dozen native policemen and had plunged into the jungle. Like Chang, the elephant, he had plowed northward toward the Pahang River, near which lay the course of "The River That Stood Still."

From the few of his countrymen that he met Chang knew that dissension and trouble lay ahead. Many such a one he had met and spoken to, finding them all hurrying to more peaceful spots where profits from trade might be smaller but more secure. Malay rumors might often be misleading, for the Malays were an impulsive and a superstitious race. But the Chinese, a calm, impassive people, content with small but certain profits, industrious, honest—their reports were like themselves: they took everything into account. Which was exactly the reason his *Tuan* sent him out into the roads to interview them while with the rest of his force he lay hidden in the jungle lest word of his coming precede him and warn those he sought.

In one of his inimitable disguises Chang would wander into a village and sit and chat with his compatriots, learning all the latest gossip, the village *chit-chat,* which he brought back and retailed, word for word, to the *Tuan.*

The *Tuan* Mackenzie had told Chang of their quest, though he had kept that news carefully away from the rest of the natives under him. Faithful fellows, these, who would obey the *Tuan* to the letter, follow him to the death, but who always needed a keener mind than theirs to do their thinking for them.

Ahead, another clearing opened in the thick jungle growth; *attap* roofs peeped above the smaller growths in the clearing.

"That'll be Klang," the Sergeant-Major remarked sententiously. "There's a tin mine there. A capital place for you to pick up information, Chang; for a lot of your people are working in the mine. I understand there's even a *kongsi* house, too. But be careful you don't mix up in any *kongsi* [tong] trouble, Chang," he added jokingly.

Imperturbably Kim Chang opened the black pack he was never without, and chose his costume with meticulous care, while the Malays slipped into a denser thicket, where they crouched like immovable shadows. There, presently, Mackenzie joined them.

CHANG was done at last. He presented himself before his *Tuan* in the guise of an old Chinese hawker, a costume complete to the smallest detail, even to the little pack of trade goods slung to the end of a bamboo pole.

"That's capital, Chang!" Mackenzie smiled when he surveyed his houseboy for some moments in astonished silence. "Nobody would ever mistake you for a policeman in that rig! . . . Now, mind, Chang! Don't get into any trouble! Bring me back all the news you can pick up; don't come back until you have something to report. We can't be more than a few miles from the Penang river and so must be well within the territory that the *Orang Kaya Pelawan* harries. I wish you could get him, but that's asking a bit too much. But bring me some news of him if you can and we'll do the rest. I'll be waiting for you right here until you get

back. But whatever you do, don't come back without news of some sort. Cheerio!"

"Good-bye, *Tuan!*" Chang turned away.

"Wait a bit, Chang. You have no weapon." Mackenzie extended his own service revolver.

Chang shook his head in negation.

"I have this." He lifted his little folding paper and wood fan, without which he never went abroad.

Mackenzie looked in the direction Chang seemed to point. Nothing there save the shifting shadows of the jungle. Once more he glanced swiftly over Chang's dark blue costume, from the great horn-rimmed spectacles upon his thin hawk-like nose, down to his embroidered heel-less slippers, but caught no glint of steel, no suspicious bulge. He shrugged slightly, reflecting that Kim Chang was too shrewd to venture into danger without ready protection. He watched his Chinese houseboy glide stealthily through the dense bush with scarce a rustle to mark his passage, saw him enter the tortuous path that led to the village beyond, and as Chang did so the lithe erectness of his figure became at once bowed and bent and feeble, as befitted the character he had assumed.

"Clever—deucedly so!" Mackenzie muttered. "What a find he would be for the cinema! Yet, if he only brings me back word of the present whereabouts of the *Orang Kaya Palawan* I'll be more than satisfied."

His Malay policemen were already settling themselves the more comfortably for the long wait, since Kim Chang could not hope to return until long after nightfall. Those Chinese coolies who worked in the tin mine would not return above ground before evening; they would not gather in the *kongsi* house or at the tiny Chinese shops until the shadows of evening had fallen. Until then, Chang had little hopes of learning anything at all. Perhaps his venture would be fruitless after all, as had many another such been; there was no telling.

With the slow feeble steps of old age and with many a pause for rest, Chang followed the narrow, devious path that led into Klang. He knew not how many unseen eyes might be regarding him. To stride rapidly along as he could so easily have done would have been a fatal defect in his careful disguise.

True to his assumed pose, he devoted his efforts at first, when he entered the village, to futile attempts to sell his pitiful stock of trade goods to the Malay loungers about their huts, gradually working his way toward the mine and the *kongsi* house beyond it. The jungle, he saw, swept down almost to its rear.

Only when he had visited every hut did he condescend to sit wearily down in the dust before the shop of Lim Wong, where the fervent rays of the sun beat down full upon him. The Chinese shopkeeper also conducted more or less desultorily an eating-house for the stray wanderers who might chance to visit the village, and an opium den for the Malay villagers that was filled night after night. Here, if anywhere within that sprawling village, was the best source of news, Chang decided, as he deposited himself humbly in the glowing heat.

From the *datu pengalu,* the Malay headman of the village, he had readily obtained permission to spend the night at Klang; remained now merely the little matter of what news he might chance to gather—valuable news for his *Tuan,* he hoped with all his heart.

LIM WONG looking out of his shop at the sleeping village between brief periods of somnolence, saw the aged wanderer in the dusty heat without the little shop.

"*Hoo la ma!*" he cried out in his sur-

prized Cantonese. "Hello, there! Come in, venerable one, and rest yourself in my disreputable home!"

"Hoo la ma!" Kim Chang returned; "you are very good."

Wearily he seated himself upon the low stool Lim Wong drew out for him and rested while he watched his host brew a pot of fresh tea, then bring forth two bowls of cold rice. Slowly they sipped and ate. For as long as it might take to make nine bows before the household gods they sat in silence.

"You have come far, venerable one?" Lim Wong asked.

"Aih, a weary way and one of small profit, for there are evil men abroad."

His host nodded solemn agreement.

"The honorable one was robbed?" he ventured at last.

Kim Chang nodded slowly.

"The police——" the shopkeeper began.

Chang threw open his little paper fan with a gesture of supreme contempt.

"The police are far away," he said disdainfully. "What to them are the troubles and misfortunes of one so insignificant as I?"

"Aih, that is true talk, father. We be but grains of dust beneath the heels of the foreign devils."

"Were I a mandarin, or a *datu pengalu,* or such a one as the *Orang Kaya*——"

The shopkeeper halted him precipitately, his face a mask of servile fear.

"That one robbed you?" Lim Wong's claw-like hand clutched Chang's shoulder in a painful grip.

Again Chang nodded slowly.

The shopkeeper spat venomously.

"The son of a turtle!" His scowl was malignant. "He levies tribute upon us all, nor dare we refuse to pay. He smokes of my best opium. Even now, he sleeps there behind us with one of his trusted men on guard while he hides from his enemies!" With a long yellow forefinger Lim Wong indicated another little structure behind his shop, almost hidden by the encroaching jungle.

Chang barely repressed his start of amazement while the shopkeeper's eye was upon him. Here was news with a vengeance! With all his heart he wished the *Tuan* Mackenzie were there with his dozen fighting men. So favorable an opportunity might not occur again. In his wildest dreams he had not dared think of anything like this! He and his *Tuan* had pictured the outlaw *datu* as at the head of a large body of fighting men, whom it would take several hundred of Narrain Singh's Sikh troops to subdue. Indeed, that doughty warrior was somewhere in that very region with all the Sultan's forces, following fruitlessly a dozen false clues. They had thought that by clever stratagem they might perhaps separate the *datu* from his friends and supporters, if only for a brief period, and in that short time they hoped to overcome him with the few men under the *Tuan* Mackenzie. And now, Fortune smiling, had placed him wholly within their hands—could Chang but pass the word to his *Tuan* in time. Chang's heart beat rapidly.

Yet almost at once he realized that he could not hurry away to summon the Sergeant-Major and those others. He dared not awaken Lim Wong's suspicions by a hasty departure lest the shopkeeper warn the *Orang* he so hated and feared. Too well Lim Wong knew the fate in store for one who angered the *Orang Kaya Palawan.* Though nothing would please the shopkeeper like the outlaw *datu's* death, yet for the sake of his own safety he dared not inform against him, and he must warn the Malay at the least suspicious thing lest that dreaded one pass his steel through the shopkeeper's heart.

The two sat and exchanged grave civilities, flowery compliments, all the harmless gossip of the countryside, while the evening shadows lengthened and Chang cudgeled his brains for a pretext to depart.

The coolies straggled downward from the mine and Chang rose stiffly to his feet.

"I thank you, my good friend, for your most excellent entertainment," he said gravely. "The bowl of rice was very good."

"*Aih,* it shames me to have to offer you such mean fare, venerable father."

"And the tea was most fragrant."

"Ts, ts; it was only the cheapest of Black Dragon."

Slowly the two moved to the door.

"*Ho hang la,*" said Chang shuffling into the blinding humid heat without. "Good-bye."

"*Ho hang la,*" returned Lim Wong. "May the gods smile upon you and give you much good luck."

Behind him Chang heard a surprized exclamation, he turned to face an enraged Malay.

"Who is this one?" the *datu* thundered at the shopkeeper who shrank back fearfully.

"An ancient countryman——"

The Malay's *kris* flashed wickedly in the evening sunlight.

"Liar!" he exploded. "He is a spy! Ancient! Can you not tell a young man's swelling muscles when you see them?"

The *kris* buried itself to the hilt in Lim Wong's breast, the Chinese shopkeeper sank to the ground, a gout of blood streaming from his lips as he strove to speak.

In one great magnificent leap Chang sprang for that broad squat figure that he recognized instantly as that of the *Orang Kaya Palawan.* A burning pain like fire entered his arm as the other's *kris* slid into the flesh. Sparks darted before his eyes to go out in one great blaze of light as a heavy object crashed down upon his head. Chang's body sagged limply over the dead body of Lim Wong.

The Malay who had slipped swiftly up behind Kim Chang and felled him just as his leader stabbed, now followed that outlaw *datu* as the two glided swiftly about the shopkeeper's tiny shelter, and they disappeared like brown shadows into the thick jungle growths.

VELVETY night had come before Chang opened his eyes and stared stupidly about him. By the bright moonlight that came in through the open window and door he saw that he was lying within the shop of the luckless Lim Wong. Recollection welled up within him. Slowly he raised his arm to feel of his aching throbbing head where a great lump had raised under his neatly coiled queue, now matted with dust and blood. He groaned.

His eyes took in the dim interior of the shop, made out the stark form whose legs protruded stiffly into a bright patch of moonlight. Lim Wong was dead!

Chang lifted his head with an effort. Not a soul in sight; the Chinese coolies from the mine had dared do no more than drag the two bodies within that shelter. Chang realized that but for the thick cushion made by his neatly coiled queue there would now be two dead bodies instead of but one. His hair had saved his life, protecting his hard skull from a blow that otherwise must have shattered it.

After a long period he summoned enough strength to crawl back to where he remembered seeing a calabash of water sitting upon the floor; after another period he managed to regain his feet. He bathed his aching head with the tepid water yet remaining in the gourd, and as the brilliant morning burst upon the village he stole silently into the jungle, fol-

lowing the trail the two outlaws had left.

He had thought briefly of hurrying back to the *Tuan* Mackenzie and his little police force, of telling them what had happened and speeding them like bloodhounds on the track. But at once he realized that he might not do that, for his own honor had been outraged: before his very eyes the two Malays had killed his fellow tongsman, the shopkeeper who had befriended him, had given him rest and refreshment when he was weary. By *kongsi* law, by all the standards that ruled his life, he must take that friend's wrongs as his own, must exact a personal revenge for that foul deed, even as he must for the blow Chang had himself suffered. To go for help, therefore, would be delegating his accounting into the hands of others—it would be a blot on his honor which he must always remember with shame.

He stopped before the little shop only long enough to pick up his folding fan, still lying where it had fallen from his belt when he was struck down from behind and left for dead.

Implacable anger welled within him as he followed these faint marks through the jungle, but his face remained as expressionless as ever. The two before him were gradually swinging to the northward; they were making directly for "The River That Stood Still."

Chang was able to reconstruct the events of the past few days with a fair accuracy. The forces of the *Orang Kaya Palawan* had fallen in with the Sultan's troops under Narrain Singh; in a pitched battle they had been defeated and forced to scatter. The outlaw *datu* was now making his way to his usual hiding-place under such circumstances, from which he would suddenly reappear after gathering his men once more about him to strike a swift blow at the Sultan's forces when the opportune moment might dawn.

Chang gritted his teeth. From this hurried flight the *datu* should never reappear to harass the country or levy unwilling tribute from his countrymen if Chang could prevent it. The trail he was following came out abruptly upon the densely clothed banks of a somber stream. Above Chang's head lianas looped across its course in such masses that they shut out every vestige of sunlight, while the trees themselves rose from out the black water.

That the two Malays must have taken a boat here, Chang was sure, but whether only to cross that crocodile-infested stretch, or whether they had proceeded up or down the stream, he could not tell. Carefully he searched among the entwined roots until he had found another dugout carefully concealed by the *datu's* men. With no little trouble he got it clear and, seated in its stern, a dilapidated paddle in his sound hand, he debated which way to turn. That was decided for him, however, for the current was surprizingly strong; it hurried him downstream rapidly.

For a few miles the stream maintained its hundred-foot width before it narrowed abruptly to less than half of that and shot through a narrow rocky rift, boiling whitely about numerous jagged upthrust fangs before entering another quiet reach.

Chang breathed easily again only when the rapids had been passed in safety. It had been sheer luck that had kept him from overturning in that turbulent stream or from striking upon one of the cruel stone teeth that would have ripped the bottom out of his unwieldy craft. His arm, too, was paining him excruciatingly.

Two more such rapids he passed and abruptly entered a wide sunny space where the trees drew back from the banks in grassy openings. Great black-and-white kingfishers darted above the stream; tinier ones flashed into its depths like living opals; orioles, gorgeous in orange and

black, flitted overhead, and magnificent crowned pigeons, their breasts like burnished silver. Perched in the trees, solemn old toucans stared at him curiously, their odd beaks almost as large as their bodies.

But Chang had no eyes for them. He had scant admiration for the myriad orchids of a thousand varied hues, hanging from every bough overhead, the only earth flower that had come from Paradise at the Fall of Man, according to Malay belief. It pleased him that the birds showed no sign of any recent fright as he drove his dugout to the nearer bank and disembarked. Yet he was disappointed as well: such conduct meant that perhaps after all his intended prey had not come so far. Almost at once he was reassured. His enemies must yet be several hours ahead of him.

Less than a mile away this stream ended abruptly against a great perpendicular rock wall after forming a pool several hundred feet wide at the base of that massive barrier. Perhaps the stream flowed on through an underground channel until it joined the Penang river, as the *Tuan* Mackenzie had asserted — he did not know. To the Malays its sudden and inexplicable ending merely proved that the stream was *hantu*—in the grip of unknown and terrible spirits — therefore, they gave the place a wide berth. That very fact made it a capital hiding-place for those he sought.

Carefully Chang obliterated all traces of his landing and crept silently from one tree trunk to another, searching before him for his quarry. Some inward premonition, some sixth sense, acquired, perhaps, from the wild animals among which he dwelt constantly, caused him to leap aside suddenly even as he whirled about.

Perhaps it was the intent, maniacal glare of the running Malay, *amok*, fixed steadily upon his back that had given him vague warning. The other was almost upon him, his *kris* extended hungrily. Chang's sudden movement caught the other unawares; the weapon missed its mark in Chang's unprotected back.

Chang's outthrust foot tripped the flying figure neatly, sending him rolling heavily upon the ground, and the Chinese was upon his back in an instant, his hands about the other's throat to prevent the threatened outcry. Their bodies flashed over and over as they strove silently for mastery with a tigerish ferocity.

Almost instantly Chang realized that he was no match for the other, weakened as he was by the blow on his head no less than by that *kris*-thrust through his left arm. Sweat dripped from him and he panted for breath. Black specks floated before his eyes as his hands closed despairingly about the thick neck, striving to keep the gloating face with its blackened, sharpened teeth away from his own. Slowly Chang was forced backward. The Malay's face was demoniac in its exultation.

And now the other was reaching out again for his deadly *kris* that glistened wickedly just a few inches beyond his utmost reach. Chang realized that he was powerless to prevent him ultimately from accomplishing his purpose; that his own strength was fast ebbing.

Lightning-like he changed the direction of his own efforts. Surprized by the sudden move the straining Malay overshot his objective, rolling clear over and bringing Chang uppermost once more. As their bodies flashed over the weapon, Chang snatched at it, caught it by the blade, cutting his fingers on the razor-keen edges. He dropped it hurriedly, only to catch its jeweled silver handle as it fell, and almost with the same motion he drove it to the hilt into the brown body beneath him.

Again and again the reddened blade rose and fell. The Malay shuddered and

sank back, his strong hands suddenly impotent, the shout of triumph in his throat dying to a choked gurgle.

CHANG rose slowly erect and wiped the dripping blade callously on the dead man's *sarong,* hoping the while that the blade was not poisoned. Were that the case, his own plight would be desperate enough: the venom would speedily work through his system from the cuts on his fingers. He let the blood flow as much as it would so that the venom, were it there, would be washed harmlessly away.

For a few moments he watched the squat form of his late enemy. This must assuredly be the one who had stolen up and struck him from behind the night before. Why that one had not *krissed* him at the time, he could not understand, unless he had seen his chief do so and had assumed that the Chinese boy was already dying. The other's action had left him alive to avenge his honor now for the cowardly attack.

For one blow Chang had retaliated, the one to himself. Remained yet to redeem the honor of his friend, the shopkeeper, Lim Wong, who had fed him when he hungered. Chang took up the task of retracing the trail of the dead Malay after first making sure that he still retained his precious little fan.

His blue robe was bedraggled and torn. After some hesitation he doffed it and stowed it carefully under a clump of thorny bushes. The Malay's *kris,* now once more within its elaborate sheath, he thrust behind him in his belt where it would be handy to his uninjured arm.

Stealthily he retraced the dead man's trail that led, as he had suspected, up from the great pool where the river vanished. Noiseless as a snake, deadly as a king cobra whose eggs lie hatching in the warm sunlight, his eyes darted everywhere.

They discovered the thread-like film of smoke, almost invisible against the jungle growths, long before they discovered the recalcitrant *datu* who had caused it. Chang crept from bush to bush without one telltale rustle to mark his approach. Almost within arm's length of the *Orang Kaya Palawan* he dropped flat upon his stomach, keeping a dense thorny bush between him and his quarry. Its blossoms gleamed blood-like in the hot sunlight.

A sharp hiss broke the noontime stillness. The somnolent Malay's head snapped erect. He looked about him in startled wakefulness. Another sibilant hiss, vague, threatening. Anxious eyes scanned the thick verdure about the *datu,* the ground beneath his feet.

From Chang's lips came the hunting call of the deadly leopard and once more the other looked about him fearfully, striving ineffectually to locate that sound that seemed to come from all about him.

A fleeting smile crossed Chang's face. The *Tuan* Mackenzie had once said that this *datu,* at least, was absolutely fearless of the *hantu* of the river. Chang had not contradicted that remark. But he knew the Malay mind as a white man could not possibly know it.

Again that venomous hiss, seeming to rise from under the *datu's* very feet. He jumped with startled suddenness, gazing apprehensively up and down the shores of the great pool.

Chang essayed a hollow groan ending in a weird choked gurgle. Again that ghost of a smile as the Malay moved quickly away from the shrubs that sheltered him, fingering his *kris* uncertainly. Almost under his feet sounded that enraged hissing and once more the *Orang Kaya Palawan* jumped. The last vestige of his composure was gone, his fingers

trembled as they twined about his weapon and half drew it from its sheath.

Slowly Chang parted the bushes before him with cautious hands until his head was clearly visible, his bloody scalp gruesome in the brilliant noonday light. Chang's half-closed eyes, his slack jaw, made him seem more corpse-like than ever. Again that choked, gurgling groan seeming to come from nowhere — from everywhere.

The *datu* spun around, saw that awful apparition and turned to flee as the hiss of myriad serpents sounded once more beneath his feet. It was too much. The *Orang Kaya Palawan* took refuge in headlong, ignominious flight, crashing heedlessly through vines and brush that raked his careless skin with their sharp hooked thorns. The vines entangled his flying feet, he shot head foremost into the embrace of a bush that even the lordly elephant avoids in his jungle journeyings. He screamed shrilly, calling upon all his gods for succor, beside himself with terror.

Within Chang's breast contempt mounted swiftly as he watched. Shadow-like, he glided to the side of the raving, struggling wretch. Calmly he drew forth his little fan and pressed its closed end lightly against the Malay's straining back just below the knotted shoulderblade.

"For the wrong you did to Lim Wong," he hissed into the *datu's* unheeding ear.

Chang's cut and bleeding fingers pressed lightly against a hidden spring. Rapier-like, a narrow steel blade shot its six-inch length through those contorted muscles into the palpitating heart beneath. The brown body arched spasmodically, then sank slowly into the immobility of death.

Chang's pressure upon the spring slackened and the steel disappeared once more within its sandalwood hiding-place. The Chinese houseboy rose wearily upright, feeling strangely old and weak in the tremendous reaction from his efforts. His knees were water-weak; they refused to support his body. Desperately he strove to control them to force them to carry him away from that place of death. In vain. Despite his most determined efforts he sagged down almost within those bushes that held the dead Malay in a tenacious grip from which there was no escape. As oblivion descended upon him Chang thought of the *kris*-wounds, inflicted in the previous struggle. The keen blade must have been poisoned after all; when he had cut his flesh upon its keen edges he had signed his own death warrant!

EVENING had fallen when he roused. About his head were clean white bandages, his arm and his fingers were neatly bound up in a manner that caused his heart to leap with joy. But one man he knew of who could so bandage a cut —his *Tuan!* The Sergeant-Major had found him; with his great white magic he had brought him back to life!

Not far away a fire crackled cheerfully in the blackness, to drive away the night marauders of the jungle rather than for the warmth it might afford. Shadows moved blackly against its ruddy glow, one of which now approached and stood gazing intently down upon him. Chang stirred.

"Well!" It was the *Tuan* Mackenzie speaking. "Beginning to feel fit once more, Chang? I guess we found you just in time; you were bowled over, what with loss of blood and all. When you didn't appear at daylight we went out to look for you. At Klang they told us two Chinese had been killed the evening before by two strange Malays who had fled at once into the jungle. One of the dead Chinese was a stranger, the coolies told

us, and when we went to view the bodies that they had dragged within the shop of a merchant there, we could find only one. The villagers said that the ghost of the dead man was following the two miscreants; we couldn't get one of them to follow the pair with us. They were sure that the ghost of the missing body would assuredly slay any and all who entered the jungle on the track of the two men."

The Sergeant-Major chuckled.

"From the description those Malays of Klang gave me I knew that the missing corpse was yours; knew, too, that you weren't dead but merely stunned a bit. I knew you would follow those two until you dropped; so we hurried on as fast as we could pelt. We were all at sea when we came to the river."

Again he paused for some moments.

"I decided at last that you and the Malays that you followed had gone downstream; for you were all too lazy to go up against such a strong current." Mackenzie's smile robbed that last of its sting.

"So we followed the river banks until we came to this clearing, and here we found you and two dead men."

Chang struggled to one elbow.

"Great is my *Tuan,*" he began weakly. "Not even Chang, the elephant, has such a mind. He can follow on a track like the *cheta.* I slew them both, for they had soiled my honor. One of them is the *datu* the *Tuan* is seeking."

"What!" Mackenzie was incredulous.

Chang nodded emphatically.

"That one lies but a little space away."

"So that dead beggar's the *Orang Kaya Palawan,* eh?" Mackenzie began. "We couldn't tell by the time we got here who he was. In this damp heat he was soon unrecognizable. So that was the *Orang Kaya Palawan!*"

Again he paused. "I told you not to get into any *kongsi* trouble," he grinned.

"*Tuan,* the dead shopkeeper was of my own tong," Chang began. "He fed me when I was hungry. I rested in his house when I was weary."

Mackenzie nodded slowly.

"I see, Chang," he said softly. "And so you took up his quarrel as your own. If you hadn't done that you would have lost 'face'."

Chang nodded mutely.

"I was only ragging you when I told you not to try to get our man," the Sergeant-Major went on. " But just the same, I'm damned glad you got him, even if he is dead."

Chang looked up at him with sudden interest.

"*Tuan,*" he began, "concerning a certain matter. My brother writes me from Singapore that there are business matters that require my attention. I ask the *Tuan's* permission to go to attend to them. I shall return within one moon."

Mackenzie eyed him quizzically.

"Does the matter by any chance concern the new slave-girl that Ning Wo has acquired?" he asked with a dry smile.

Chang had the grace to look surprized.

"Great is my *Tuan,*" he answered. "Nothing escapes his memory. For that reason is he the terror of all evil-doers in the broad lands of the Sultan." He stopped abruptly.

"Considering what you have done, Chang, I guess I'll have to let you go," Mackenzie began abruptly. "But, mind you, for just a month; not a day longer. I think you have earned the rest. The Lord Harry knows what I will do without you, though; you're the only cook I know that can make a meal fit for a white man to eat in this God-forsaken country."

THE FANATIC

By KOBOLD KNIGHT

A grim story of the Moplah rebellion in India, a Mohammedan uprising and an English woman who came to Pallampaki to convert the heathen

GUGU PAYAPAN SOORLIE—or just Gugu, as his mother called him for short—was no gurgling infant. His chest measurement was forty-eight inches, with an expansion of six when he gently sighed; he stood five feet and a bit high and was in fact a very healthy, average specimen of the bad Moplah-men who inhabited the fever-stricken backwater country of the Malabar Coast in India.

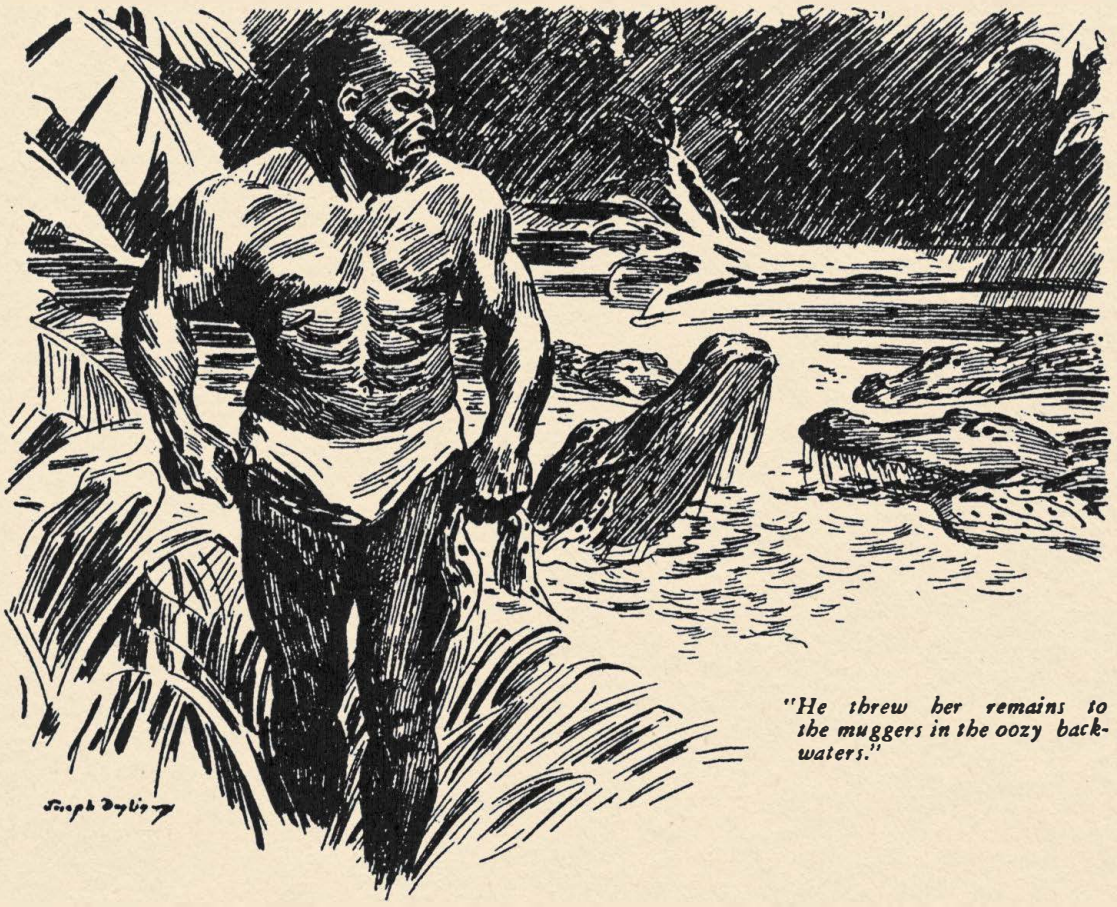
Gugu had the hawk eyes and the hook nose of his ancestors, the Arab pirates who, generations past, scourged the East and left racial legacies on every coast from the Laccadives and the Coromandel to the distant Carolines—and back again. He had inherited much of their fierce, cruel nature and indifference to suffering, early demonstrations of which occasioned his doting mother much pardonable pride.

At the age of fifteen, Gugu one day tired of the everlasting maternal worship, artistically skewered the lady with his ten-inch pen-knife and threw her remains to the muggers in the oozy backwaters. For this precocious prowess he was rewarded with the envy of all the young men in his village—and incidentally earned the immediate displeasure of Saunders Sahib, the European Senior District Police Superintendent.

With his worldly belongings packed tightly in a small chatty-pot, his loin-cloth and his knife, Gugu fled the neighborhood and took up residence farther south in the malodorous hamlet of Pallampaki, wot not to Saunders Sahib of the North. Here, by dint of his strength, his ready aptitude amicably to settle all personal discussions with his trusty blade, and his irreproachable piety—for he was a good Mohammedan—Gugu quickly ingratiated himself with his foster-tribe. Five months later found him installed as yard-coolie at the bungalow of Pemberton Sahib, the young, red-haired, pink-complexioned and newly-appointed representative of His Majesty's Law in Pallampaki.

Young Pemberton, three months out from home, employed his ample leisure, fanned by a punkah and refrigerated by lime-juice and soda, in the earnest composition of a treatise entitled *The Mind of the Oriental.* In Gugu, his new yard-boy, Pemberton found endless "material." Gugu's piety, inherited from those same passionate Moslems who left their ineradicable marks all over the East, set the Moplah turning his shiny eagle-face Mecca-wards at least three times a day—quite regardless of where circumstances and his bungalow duties found him. Pemberton, much impressed, spent hours questioning the ingenuous Gugu—through a Mallialum interpreter—and learning all about it. Much he learnt; among it, why boot-leather was unclean and how the Prophet would one day lift Gugu into Paradise by the little top-knot of hair that grew, like a solitary coco-palm in a convex paddy-field, on the very summit of Gugu's shaven cranium.

It was at about this time that there stalked righteously forth from the provinces of England a spinster lady bent on the salvation of the heathen. Armed with



"He threw her remains to the muggers in the oozy backwaters."

six bales of striped bathing-drawers and two gross of cotton nightgowns wherewith to clothe the heathen's nakedness, countless pamphlets and brochures calculated to bring enlightenment to his soul, and other appurtenances, Miss Laetitia Shane landed like a crusader at Allepei, girt her loins and declared red war on heathendom. She brought with her a secretary in the person of a singularly attractive and no less pious niece—Miss Mollie Shane, aged eighteen.

The vicissitudes of the mission were many and varied. They began with a most sudden reverse and an undignified rout on the night of their arrival—when it was discovered that the Travellers' Bungalow was infested with playful little backwater tarantulas no bigger than saucers! They ended—more or less—after heartbreaking hardship, with the arrival of both members of the party on stretchers and in the throes of a first attack of backwater malaria at Pallampaki—up away and beyond, near the Ghats.

Fate sits like some grotesque telephone-operator at a fantastic central-exchange, here plugging in a new connection, there pulling out an old. At the same time as the Misses Shane (fifty-five and eighteen, respectively) established themselves at Pallampaki, all sorts of other things happened and were happening. Some they knew of; others they did not; but, like troubles, they all came together. The saddest shock to Miss Laetitia was the discovery that her "heathen," hitherto almost fondly regarded as fair and easy game, cherished a faith of their own and practised it with a zeal that was at once

an enlightenment and a shattering of English provincial views! Almost as sad was her suspicion that Mollie was losing enthusiasm. Simultaneously, young Pemberton cast eyes upon Miss Mollie, Miss Mollie flashed back a glance that was indicative of an inner turmoil between pious denial and impious desire—and the Eastern Cupid, cradling two hundred feet aloft in the bows of an ironwood-tree, chortled and blew butterfly-kisses to the benign Gods that are.

Meanwhile Gugu, the yard-wallah, had got into religious difficulties of his own—a contretemps considerably more serious for him than it would have been for his ethical brother in Europe. In between whiles he had gone and had a little love affair off his own bat. As befitted a man pulsating with that intense passion that, incongruously, makes saints or sinners merely as the caprice moves it, Gugu's love-making had been virile—no mere presentation of calling-cards and polite exchange of coy glances. It had involved, first, the slaughter of an arrogant and indignant husband—for the lady, aged thirteen, was already bestowed in respectable wedlock. This was nothing. It had been a fair fight (and it was quite a while since native Pallampaki had enjoyed such entertainment). The really important lapse was occasioned by the ardent Gugu's disregard of an ecclesiastical injunction. The priest, after watching and thoroughly approving the fight, had ordered that a short while should be allowed to pass before Gugu and his new consort entered into their connubial bliss. This in order to propitiate the Gods. Gugu, eaten with passion, had been flagrantly disobedient, and as a result had been summarily excommunicated. The process was morally similar to that practised in other lands—but again it was infinitely more serious. The actual ceremony had been simplicity itself; the priest had whisked out a sharp knife and deftly severed Gugu's top-knot!

FOR a few days after his anathematization Gugu padded the footpath between the police bungalow and the native quarter merrily enough. His hand closing about the haft of his pig-sticker—skilfully concealed under his loin-cloth—gave him reassurance that nothing was more remote than the possibility of an untimely death. He comforted himself by reflecting that the top-knot would soon grow to its original, pre-excommunication height of four or five inches.

But underneath his healthy bravado there persisted yet a little uneasiness. It was a horrible contemplation even in its remoteness—that were death to overtake him the Prophet would have nothing by which to grip hold of him, and thus he would be left lamenting while all other good Moplahs were lifted into Heaven! Each day as he passed by the crocodile-infested swamps on his way to the bungalow he bent his shaven head downward and observed carefully by the reflection in the green, stagnant water just what progress his top-knot had made in the past twenty-four hours.

Slow as that progress was, he was satisfied with it. It was inconvenient, of course—having no top-knot. There were one or two minor disputes he desired to settle with certain bloods of the locality (there were always one or two such discussions on hand), but these, he decided with some perspicacity, could wait awhile. He did not care to embark on them until risk to his immortal soul was minimized by a new sturdy growth of top-knot to accommodate the Prophet's fist—if it came. And then Fate plugged in one of those senseless, illogical connections, and poor old Gugu opened his black eyes as wide as the night-owl's and frantically

racked what brain he possessed — not much—for a means of saving himself.

It came insidiously but surely — the whispered news that Hasan Hadji, the Moplah overlord of those parts, was about to summon the faithful to rise up, massacre the infidels and liberate the land. Old Hasan, grown stiff-limbed and irritable through long inactivity, had decided that it was high time to have another shindy against his suzerain, the Emperor of India. The edict was noised forth in undertones in the darker corners of the mosques—after the manner of the Moplah kind.

The signs that should have warned Pemberton, Pallampaki's policeman, that all was not well in Malabar, passed unnoticed. (One does not blame Pemberton, of course. Three months in India leaves quite a fair bit more about India to be learnt. Besides he was too busy, writing his *Mind of the Oriental.)* But up in the North old Saunders Sahib, saddened and hardened and sharpened by his thirty years among the volcanic Moplah-folk, began to scent the trouble within forty-eight hours of Hasan's fit of irritability—which was as well, and what he was there for. He discovered it the sooner because he was half expecting something of the sort. Such uprisings have been periodical affairs in the territory of the bad Moplah-men ever since first the Arab pirate-dhows swooped down like kites with the sou'-west monsoon—to chase the peace-loving Dravidians into sanctuary beyond the great Ghats. In fact, this particular tamasha was long overdue. So when Saunders found his Moplah syce sharpening his knife on the sly and expectorating vehemently whenever his infidel master's presence polluted the air, Saunders Sahib quickly sat down and drafted a code telegram to the General Officer commanding His Majesty's Forces at Jeltanpur.

The actual wording of the missive is unimportant, but it meant:

"Please send plenty of good s ldiers and popguns to help me down here. Old Hasan's had a bilious attack and there's going to be trouble. Urgent. Don't forget I have half a dozen young pups scattered about the country who can't talk the lingo and haven't quite learnt their jobs. Juldee-juldee.

"SAUNDERS."

If Saunders was jumping about like an electrified cat at his end of the country, friend Gugu, down in the South, was no less perturbed. He was far too devout a Moslem to contemplate keeping out of the row—when Hasan gave the signal for the overture to begin—as a means of safeguarding his soul. Top-knot or no top-knot, he would fight! He reverently attended divine service, was duly blessed and given alleged invulnerability by the same priest who had so lately excommunicated him—and he spent the evenings sharpening his knife until the edge on it would have brought a blush to the hollow-ground blade of a Kropp razor. He gloated openly on the number of Christians he would dismember and visioned himself arriving at the gates of Paradise with a long and valiant record of the "kafir-killing" he had done for the glory of the One True Faith! It was at this point that Gugu always became a little uneasy.

What if an infidel bullet were to kill him—before the top-knot had had time to grow? Dreadful! Then Gugu would go to sleep and dream nightmare-dreams of the Prophet's hand slipping and slithering forlornly about the half-inch tuft of greasy, kinky hair that now adorned Gugu's head. Horrible! It mattered very little that the priest had assured him to the contrary—since his return to the fold. Gugu respected and reverenced clergymen—but he had a sneaking suspicion that one could not believe *quite* everything they said.

"Nerves" is not a very fashionable complaint among the Moplahs. (Those who suffer from it die young. Nerve-specialists die young also—from want of employment.) By the time a week of waiting for Hasan's signal had gone by, Gugu had worked himself into a state that might accurately have been diagnosed as acute neurosis. In this time the top-knot had added another quarter-inch to its height. This was scarcely enough, for it was rumored that the hullaballoo was due to begin in five days' time. Five days! By then the hair might reasonably be expected to have attained to—say—an inch. (To be sure Gugu thought of it as a "thumbnail" — but no matter.) Yoh! What self-respecting Prophet's hand could be expected to get a grip on an inch of hair—a grip firm enough to lift a solid fifteen stone of flesh and muscle? Gugu was at his wit's end!

IT WAS in conversation with Pemberton's head bungalow "butler"—a most superior individual—that Gugu learnt of hair-restorer. The butler, it seemed, had once served a bald-headed planter in the Dooars who had smeared his head with a magic preparation out of a bottle. Swamy! The hair had sprouted upon the Sahib's head like the new grass on the Ghats after a hot-weather rain! There was a bottle of the same preparation standing on Pemberton Sahib's dressing-table. (That was the connection.)

That, actually, the liquid was no more than brilliantine, used to smooth the young policeman's unruly, ruddy locks, was of little moment. For a consideration that deprived the credulous Gugu of his last piece, the butler stole it.

Alas, the brilliantine-bottle was found to be empty! Since his acquaintance with Miss Mollie Shane, Pemberton had had frequent recourse to it—and used it all! Catastrophe upon catastrophe! Gugu, his new-raised hopes thus dashed to the ground, was like a man demented. There was only one thing now to be done. To beg leave of absence and an advance of his month's wages and to set out for the coast; there to purchase from the Parsee merchants a bottle of the precious magic-juice, rapidly apply it to his seedy top-knot and return in time for the beginning of the fracas—so that he might slaughter Pemberton personally and miss none of the glory.

He approached his master. Pemberton did not see eye to eye with him in the matter, forbade leave, declined to advance the ten rupees, set Gugu about his business — and went on to begin "Chapter 13" of *The Mind of the Oriental.* (A most unlucky chapter—as things turned out.)

Gugu stretched his few wits again and begged leave to see the elder Miss Shane. (He had heard stories of how easy it was to get money out of the lady.) He squatted on the compound and wept copious tears, inventing on the spot a long yarn about a mother recently deceased in the vicinity of Allepei. (It had just that little grain of truth in it that gave it conviction—though to be sure Gugu was not truthful in the detail!) But Miss Laetitia had learnt a surprizing lot in the short while she had been in Malabar and very rightly declined to part with ten rupees so abruptly. She suggested a compromise. Provided Gugu would abandon his heathen ways, she conceded, discard his picturesquely draped loincloth, assume striped-cotton bathing-drawers, and at once embrace the manners, morals and particular religion of a people and a country he had never seen—and hardly knew of—provided all this she would ultimately advance him the sum of five rupees.

Gugu, very polite, inquired whether it was possible to accomplish all this uplift

in the short space of five days. Miss Shane returned an emphatic no.

Gugu, realizing that he might hope for little here, mentally resolved that when Hasan Hadji gave the sign, he—Gugu—would attend personally also to the dispatch of this godless woman. (He dwelt on the manner of it for one ecstatic instant. Had Miss Shane been gifted with the faculty of telepathy she would have fainted on the spot.) Aloud, Gugu embarked on a series of untranslatable and unpublishable reflections on Miss Shane's appearance, her integrity and her chastity. Those about her chastity were—happily—baseless. Having rid himself of this homily, to the vast secret entertainment of the interpreter, and added to it a little lecture on the crime of sterility, Gugu swung eloquently upon his hardened heel and padded off to think out further schemes—and to give an extra anticipatory whetting to his knife.

THAT night Gugu unburdened his soul to his newly acquired wife. It was against his better judgment, but, husband-like, he did it. On the following morning his wife, wife-like, gossiped Gugu's trouble to the Shane bungalow ayah. That was how Miss Mollie got to know.

Whether Mollie was moved by religious ardor, whether she merely wanted an excuse to go to Pemberton's bungalow (for Aunt Laetitia had been *rather* strict just lately), or whether the story of Gugu's recent love-affair touched a sympathetic spot in her, it will probably never be known. However it was, she managed to spend the better part of two hours with Pemberton that next morning—discussing Gugu. Actually, only about ten minutes of this time had any relevance to that worthy—but never mind. Then Mollie betook herself with an interpreter to Gugu. She had a plan—and a trump card to work it. Aunt Laetitia's hair had lately been falling out in chunks, and Aunt Laetitia — unostentatiously, of course — doctored it with a potent hair-restorer. Mollie had a small phial of the mixture on her person. She reasoned that a convert at the price of a small bottle of hair-tonic was logically a far greater achievement than a convert at the price of ten rupees. (Wouldn't Aunt Laetitia be pleased when she heard!)

That night found Gugu clad in a pair of the striped-cotton drawers, armed with a pamphlet setting forth in glowing terms —like an insurance agent's prospectus— the rival merits of an alien creed and the undoubted advantages to be had by adopting it—*and* a small bottle of hair-restorer.

Since Gugu was entirely innocent of literary ability, the booklet was soon abandoned. He gazed at it patiently for upward of a solid hour, holding it upside down and waiting for it to perform the magic that had so enthusiastically been claimed for it. But at length, since nothing happened except that his arm became a little stiff, he lugubriously laid it aside. The rest of the night he spent alternately rubbing Aunt Laetitia's hair-tonic on his head and waking his wife to inquire the progress his top-knot had made.

THE thunderbolt fell. Gugu discarded his new religion and his new pants in the blink of an eyelid, oiled himself from head to foot, shouted and twirled himself into a passion, and in the ranks of a few thousand other howling insensate human fiends sought infidels to carve to pieces.

Pallampaki, as a small European community, was very lucky. Thanks to the far-sightedness of Saunders of the North, a small detachment of Carnatics arrived just before the noise began. When the blow fell and the Moplahs, to the last man, went shrieking amuck, Pallampaki was more or less ready for them. But only more or less. Two persons at least among

the Europeans were unprepared. The first was Pemberton, because of his inexperience and because of his *Mind of the Oriental.* (He had rather stuck in the middle of "Chapter 13.") The other was Mollie Shane. Through Pemberton's short-sightedness the girl he loved was carried off within a quarter of an hour of the launching of Hasan's rebellion. It was a question who suffered more, Mollie or the man whose fault it was. Pemberton, half demented, dared not leave the stockade about the village godown that formed the European refuge. There he waited, suffering the tortures of the thrice damned.

Malabar was a shambles. The fiends, seeking death rather than avoiding it, attacked, maimed and butchered until the green of the backwaters was turned to a dull red. And Mollie was among them—somewhere! Pemberton and Miss Laetitia in the stockade worked like devils at barricading the godown, dreading to cease lest they should contemplate Mollie's probable fate and go mad. Toward nightfall, when hope had been abandoned, they leapt again to their weary feet—their feeling a mixture of amazement and terror. Somewhere outside, Mollie's faint, frantic voice called for help!

Pemberton was the first out of the godown; Miss Laetitia, armed only with her shining faith, was next; followed the jemadar and half a dozen of his men. At the end of the narrow village street, deserted since the hour Hasan's hand had struck, Mollie struggled to free herself from the grasp of a powerful, thick-set Moplah! The soldiers, headed now by the demented young policeman, hurled themselves forward. The Moplah let go the girl and with his great knife slew two of the soldiers before the jemadar, with one mighty stroke of his sword, all but severed the fanatic's head from his sturdy, glistening shoulders! The man fell to the baked ground. It was then that Pemberton recognized him. It was Gugu!

Half decapitated, Gugu grinned from ear to ear and lovingly fingered his short top-knot. Allah be praised! There was enough of it to afford the Prophet a good grip! What if he had been remiss in not slaying either the Police Sahib or the ugly, ancient godless woman; he had had no opportunity. But he had now made amends; he had slain two infidels; he would see Paradise. The blessings of the True God be upon the little Memsahib who had given him the hair-restorer!

He grinned gratefully at the hysterical Mollie and reflected that he was not sorry he had saved her from Hasan Hadji and brought her back to her friends. Yoh! But how she had struggled and screamed and scratched — not knowing where he was taking her, and understanding no word of any but an infidel tongue!

He remembered that the plan had involved a certain amount of compromise between his gratitude to the little Memsahib and his religious principles, but he felt reasonably sure that Allah would understand. After all, the subject was a mere woman, and Allah did not attach much importance to females.

He hardly troubled to wonder why her friends were killing him. He half suspected that the old heathen woman (Aunt Laetitia) believed she would go to her paradise if she helped slay one of the Faith. Ho, ho! That was funny! And it did not matter. He himself had just slain two infidel soldiers—Paradise for him! Allah and the little Mem be praised—for the top-knot!

At this the jemadar's blade flashed again, severing the head, so that it rolled, still grinning, clear of the body. Miss Laetitia comforted the sobbing, unnerved Mollie while she watched the execution. She flinched a little as the blade fell, but a hard, zealous light shone in her eyes. A fanatical light—almost!

The Pearl Robber

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, Jr.

Kanaka Johnny swallowed the stolen pearl, but the malicious intelligence of Captain Strokher penetrated his thoughts

JOHNNY'S pearl was absolutely perfect. It was pink and round and transparent and Johnny eyed it covetously and ran his fingers through his fragile black hair. He sat on the edge of the raft and kept his back resolutely turned upon the malicious intelligence of Captain Strokher. Far to the east, barely visible above the rim of the malachite-colored sea five small albatrosses hovered like flies about a sugar bowl.

Johnny idolized pearls. He seldom thought of them in terms of tobacco and gin, but under his tender regard their shadowy sheen crystallized into pictures of dim lagoons and glimmering lava-mountains and the splendor of them whispered into his blood until his heart sang within him. White men, he mused, were outrageously indifferent to the strange, mystic beauty of pearls.

It pleased him particularly to discover that his treasure changed color when he caressed it. He had never before imagined that a pearl could be so beautiful. With a grin of satisfaction he leaned forward and brushed the dried salt from his knees. Then quickly, very quickly, for he feared the intelligence of Captain Strokher, he raised his hand to his mouth and swallowed the pearl. His lean brown body stiffened. Did Captain suspect?

The raft went swimming about before him in a mist as he rose from his knees, and when the dark shadow of Strokher fell athwart the water his heart started and ceased to beat. If Captain did *not* suspect, the pearl would be his to have and to hold, to dream over and to worship forever. But Captain had once boasted that he could read every thought in a Kanaka's narrow brown head! To be sure, Captain would not ordinarily stoop so low as to read a Kanaka's thoughts, but there was always the risk, the possibility. A great fear came upon Johnny. As he stood swaying unsteadily back and forth on the lurching raft his teeth chattered and perspiration broke out on his low forehead.

But now Captain was shouting at him. "Down—you fool! Didn't you hear the whistle?" Johnny groaned. The tremendous act of theft had strained his nerves to the breaking-point, and he no longer had any desire to risk his skin for other men's pearls. But disobedience was an offense of which he dared not be guilty. Reluctantly he loosened the weight at his waist and slipped into the water.

The heavy stone descended beneath him and pulled him rapidly down. Tiny bubbles formed merrily in his wake and as the water deepened and darkened about him his courage revived. The raft and the malicious intelligence of Captain dwindled to abstractions when his thoughts returned to the magic and mystery of pearls. He would steal more pearls, and no one would suspect him. It was so simple and pleasant to steal pearls. Captain was apparently blind to some things, and pearls were enough to tempt any man. He would exchange a few, a very few, for gold, and then he would marry or buy a mangrove plantation. But the round and pink ones he would keep to handle and admire.

He opened his eyes and stared at the white coral bottom. Immediately beneath him fantastic fishes streaked with vermillion and blue and gold darted warily through pellucid shafts of warm sunlight. He chafed under the painful limitations which the water pressure placed upon his movements. He wanted to swim at random, to splash about and explore. But his stone weight carried him relentlessly down.

His keen eyes discriminated between the clusters of living oysters and selected in advance the most promising. The basket would be let down and he would quickly fill it, and then, quite on his own responsibility, he would insert a sharp knife into the putrid and half-opened oysters on the sea floor and extract—perhaps pearls!

Johnny knew that the dead and decaying oysters often contained treasures, drop pearls of unusual girth and occasionally a perfect pearl—round and pink and transparent! But he would put no putrid oysters into the basket. He would save those for himself. He would skilfully remove the pearls and swallow them and no one would suspect. It was absurd to imagine that Captain could read every thought in such a clever head.

Johnny reached the bottom and the basket descended beside him. He was amazingly happy and his heart went thumping and bumping about inside of him. As he tumbled in the shells with bleeding fingers he found himself counting them automatically. Oysters as large as coconuts rapidly accumulated in the web. Johnny almost sang under water.

He had consumed two minutes. The basket was full and he had begun a rapid, almost hysterical exploration of the ocean floor. In a moment the basket would be hauled up and Captain would expect him on the raft. Knowing this, he worked feverishly, prying with his fingers into rotting shells, and shoving the clusters apart with his feet. His head swam and the blood pounded in his ears, but he did not spare himself. With the aid of his knife he at last managed to secure a single drop pearl. For a moment he clutched it, and then, in his eagerness and excitement he let it slide between his fingers. It was when he swooped to recover it that the great clam fastened on his hand.

JOHNNY awoke in a blaze of sunlight. He saw the raft and the hushed, expectant figures through a haze that lifted gradually and painfully. Fear shone in his eyes. He distrusted the raft and the men upon it. Captain was bending above him. Captain's shrewd, boyish face was anxious but not friendly. The sunlight splashed red and green and gold over Captain's youthful head and shoulders. Johnny's perception of things was for a long time blurred. He found himself wondering why Captain's head was wet.

Then Johnny remembered the clam under water. He remembered and sat up. He felt horribly weak and the raft and the men upon it were going round and round, and he had a dull awkward pain in his chest; but he somehow wanted to ask Captain why his hair was wet. Then Johnny understood. Captain had gone down and rescued him from the clam. It was fine and noble of Captain to do that. He would thank Captain as soon as the breath came back into his body. He would thank Captain profusely; he would kneel in the dust before him. That, of course, would be necessary.

He thought of the pearl that he had swallowed and shame flushed red over his cheeks and ears. If Captain knew! He asked himself again whether Captain knew, and then he remembered that Captain could read every thought in his head.

They were pouring something between his swollen lips. He recognized the taste at once. They were giving him gin. He detested gin. He tried to push the flask aside but they forced him to drink. They seemed diabolically determined to make him suffer. And yet with his fear and hatred for the men who were forcing him to drink against his will his gratitude to Captain increased.

Suddenly Captain was speaking. His voice sounded harsh and far away and it frightened Johnny. "You were not worth saving!" Captain said. Johnny got that distinctly, but the rest of the sentence he couldn't catch. Captain was speaking with great seriousness, but his sentences trailed off disastrously. "The pearl . . . in your hand . . . thieves deserve to be thrashed!" And then: "Other pearls! Perhaps he's swallowed dozens. Curse his yellow hide! I never did trust these——" A blank followed, and then Johnny caught a few words again: "X-ray. The only way we can be sure. When he recovers . . . give him more gin!"

"X-ray!" thought Johnny. "What does that mean?"

They poured more gin down his unwilling throat. The liquid burned and horrified him. He wanted to get up, to shout, and assure Captain that he was quite well. His vision cleared. He felt his strength coming back to him. He could move his arms freely now and his whole body tingled. He raised his right arm and looked at his hand. The fingers were slightly bruised, but that was all! Johnny heaved a sigh of relief and gazed gratefully at Captain. But the look of fury in Captain's eyes humiliated him. He knew that he deserved Captain's wrath. He had done a vile and inexcusable thing, and men had been shot for less.

But now that his strength had returned his gratitude to Captain diminished. He thought: "Captain is saving me because I am useful. Why should a white man sacrifice himself for a Kanaka? Out of pity? No, he did not pity me. He hates me. He knows I stole a pearl—he found it in my hand. And perhaps he saw me swallow the large one. He'd shoot me quick if I wasn't useful!"

An expression of contempt stole along Captain's boyish lips and he nodded to the men on the raft. Then—an instant of commotion, confusion of bodies hurling themselves forward and clutch of iron fingers on struggling brown arms—Johnny was bound hand and foot and hurried into a launch that had drawn up to the raft at a signal from Captain.

Johnny was horrified. He screamed and pleaded, but Captain was deaf to his appeals. "You are vile—vile!" Captain shouted. "You steal pearls under water. You pry with your filthy fingers into other people's property. How did you get it into your silly head that you own this lagoon? Tell me that?"

Johnny squirmed beneath the cords that bound him and beat his head against the wet planks. "It was a little pearl," he pleaded. "What is one little pearl? You throw them away—I have seen you throw them away in disgust!"

Captain shrugged his shoulders and spat in Johnny's face. "You shall be made to pay!" he affirmed.

Johnny was taken ashore and stripped. He was left alone in a dark room, and his mind slowly filled with horror. What did they intend to do with him? If they suspected they might—they might cut him open! The thought was horrible. He put it resolutely from him. They would never be so cruel; they would never dare!

HE WAS left alone for several hours in the dark room. No one spoke to him, no voice gave him comfort. He was left alone with his thoughts and

he shivered, and groaned and gibbered meaninglessly.

A man with a gun came for him. He prodded him unmercifully with the barrel and ordered him to walk. "Where to?" pleaded Johnny. "Walk!" shouted the man with the gun. "Pearl stealer!"

Johnny staggered out into a long dark corridor. The man at his heels prodded him cruelly. Johnny walked and his mind was filled with unspeakable foreboding. He threaded several long corridors and dark, humid passageways. Then he came suddenly into a large, brilliantly lighted room. There were tools of fantastic patterns on chairs and tables and several men in ridiculous white aprons stood about as though expecting something—Johnny didn't know what.

Captain was standing in the center of the room, with a bored, peevish expression on his thin face. He wore no apron, but he had a peculiar shade over his eyes.

When he saw Johnny he scowled and spoke abruptly. "Strap him down," he said.

Johnny tried to flee, but the man with the gun pushed him forward. He screamed and fell on his knees. "Please don't!" he pleaded. "It was only a little pearl!" Captain grinned maliciously.

He said something which impressed Johnny, although its meaning was obscure. "A white man can look through and beyond a Kanaka," he said. "A white man sees everything. A white man can see every pearl in a Kanaka's lean yellow body."

Johnny was seized and strapped to a board. The board was hard and cold. Johnny shook and his under lip trembled. He was whiter than Captain.

"Now!" The order was sharp and sudden. A large, disastrous contrivance that glittered was swung directly *at* Johnny. At first Johnny thought that it would crush him, annihilate him. He screamed again and again. But the monster stopped several inches short of Johnny's body.

"Pity me!" shrieked Johnny. "I didn't mean to steal. I filled up the basket, and that is what you paid me for. What is one little pearl when I have worked to please you?"

Captain laughed. His laughter was shrill and menacing. It destroyed the last spark of resistance in Johnny. Great beads of sweat came out on his chest and his chin sagged, but he said no more.

A light was turned on. Captain ignored Johnny's hoarse breathing and glued his eyes to the machine. He would not, for anything, have missed this opportunity of looking through a Kanaka. As he stared and stared he was suffused with a feeling of immense power.

He loved the sensation, the joy, of not knowing precisely what he would find. Would he find one pearl, or two pearls or a dozen pearls? It was a delicious game. Johnny was soon forgotten and only the pearls within his lean body mattered.

The white-aproned men had clustered eagerly about the machine. They were smiling and joking like happy schoolboys. There was nothing sinister about their appearance. They were genial and blue-eyed and obviously animated by a fine scientific curiosity.

"I've found it!" shouted Captain. "It's a pippin! Perfect—a perfect pearl. Round and pink and as clear as crystal. See, right there, above the little intestine!"

There was a general exclamation of surprize and delight. Captain was congratulated. Johnny was forgotten—completely forgotten. Curiously enough, no word came from Johnny—not a sigh, not a complaint.

He seemed no longer to care. Perhaps he was glad that they had discovered the

pearl. It would, in a sense, lift a burden from his mind, and the suspense.

Captain's good luck had softened him. He stepped forward with a pleasant smile. "Don't worry, old fellow," he said. "I don't intend to discharge you. The lesson was needed, but we'll forgive and forget. You thought something terrible would happen, didn't you? Well, I wanted you to suffer. You deserved it. But now we'll shake hands. When the pearl is secured in a natural way, it's back on the job for you!"

Suddenly he drew back. Johnny lay motionless, with shut eyes and gaping mouth, and his arms hung limply at his side.

"Hello," said Captain, "he's fainted. The X-ray gave him a frightful shock. Poor fellow! Well, that means more gin. Get gin somebody!"

One of the white-aproned men stepped solemnly forward. His face was a mask. "Let me examine him," he said. He bent and laid his ear to Johnny's chest. For several moments he remained in a stooping posture. When he unbent, his face was gray.

"He didn't faint," he said.

"No?" Captain seemed surprized.

"No. He's dead. The fright killed him. Kanakas have weak hearts. Poor devil!"

Let There Be Light!

By **ADOLPHE de CASTRO**

Half dreaming on the desert's edge I lay,
And saw the sun with tender touch caress
The sleeping palm to smiling wakefulness
And dow'r with golden tongues the fragrant bay.
Night spirits stole to crannied depths away
While distant mountains, clad in gloomy dress
Of seething vapors from the wilderness,
Raised flaming heads to greet triumphant day.

Low moaned the conquer'd spirit of the night
And called Simoom who, menace-breathing, slept
In fearsome vales, but quickly rose to fight
The nascent dawn; and, shrieking, crashing, leapt
On clouds of dust that whirled and, roaring, swept
The sky—but Allah said: "Let there be light!"

THE SOUK

LAST year, when it was decided to put on the market a magazine devoted entirely to tales of the Orient, there was some doubt as to how such a magazine would be received. We felt, and this belief has been confirmed by the verdict of the readers, that no other field offered such possibilities for glamor and mystery as the East. The success of the venture has been remarkable, considering the economic depression that has prevailed since ORIENTAL STORIES appeared on the news stands. However, until times become normal again, ORIENTAL STORIES will be published as a quarterly. The sales are steadily increasing, and as soon as the demand for copies rises enough to warrant, the magazine will be published oftener.

Until such time as the magazine can be published monthly, all stories will be complete in one issue, as ninety days, or even sixty days, is too long a time to ask you to wait between installments of a serial. We have some wonderful tales in store for you, written by masters of the writing craft, who know their Orient well, and have managed to work the flavor of it into fascinating mystery stories. S. B. H. Hurst has another Bugs Sinnat story for you, set in the Burma he knows so well, and two marvelous stories of Afghanistan. Tsang, whose acquaintance you have made in this issue, will appear again in a fascinating story of intrigue and murder in the native motion picture industry in China. Warren Hastings Miller, known for years as one of the best writers of Far Eastern tales, makes his bow to the readers of this magazine in our next issue with a thrilling story of the burning love of a Dyak woman for her man—a story of spectacular heroism and grim danger in the Borneo jungle. Cormac FitzGeoffrey, the hero of *Hawks of Outremer* in this issue, will appear again in a story of wild outlawry. Paul Ernst, who knows the Sahara desert and the Algerian customs from personal contact, has a story in the next issue which is crammed chock-full with mystery and intrigues and perils. E. Hoffmann Price, one of the most perfect writers of orientales in the world, has written for you a fascinating story about Shaykh Ahmad and his pious companions, that reads like a tale out of the *Arabian Nights*. Chowkander King, detective master-mind of India, will be introduced to the readers of this magazine in the next issue with a thrill-tale that you will long remember, a story of quadruple murder in Delhi, called *Four Doomed Men.* All these stories are replete with the glamor of the East.

The tales in this magazine all have the true flavor of the Orient, and we will not offer you any stories that might as well have been written about Oshkosh or Chicago. The mere fact that a story takes place in Asia does not necessarily make it an orien-

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THE DUST OF DEATH

By HUGH JEFFRIES

ONE man dreamt of empire, and half a million Americans died. One yellow man aided by the stolen brains of a white man of science came close to wiping out of existence the civilization of North America. One man against a hundred and thirty million—odds enough—yet that one man was Doctor Tsu Liang, and on his side was the fungoid scourge. Fighting for him were the puffball and the death that turned men into walking vegetables until at last it killed—half a million.

There is in parts of North America a little fungus, a tiny plant that attacks caterpillars, kills them, grows out from the caterpillar's head, and scatters its death-dealing spores on the wind. How this tiny fungus was developed to gigantic proportions in the Florida Everglades by the Chinese doctor, Tsu Liang, and spread throughout the southern states by the bursting of giant puffballs, threatening destruction to the entire population of North America, is a tale to hold one breathless with the rapid sweep of its spectacular events. This story is one of the features of the May issue of WEIRD TALES. Also stories by Robert E. Howard, Arlton Eadie, Edmond Hamilton, Clark Ashton Smith, and others, appear in this splendid issue now on sale. Printed by the publishers of ORIENTAL STORIES.—Adv.

(Continued from page 570)

tale. The story should express or interpret the East, either through the Orientalism of the characters themselves, or through the conflict between Eastern and Western ways. A manuscript labeled "An Oriental Mystery Story" recently was received by the editor, and was returned to the writer with the notation: "This is not an Oriental story." The author indignantly replied by the next mail: "How do you mean, 'This is not an Oriental story?' The servant in the story is a Hindoo and that makes this an Oriental story." The same "Oriental" effect might have been obtained just as easily by casual mention of a Persian cat or a Turkish towel.

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? It will help us to give you the kind of magazine you want if you let us know. Your favorite story in the February-March issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was that vivid action-story of Genghis Khan, *Red Blades of Black Cathay,* by Tevis Clyde Smith and Robert E. Howard. Frank Owen's tender story of China, *Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan,* ran surprizingly high in the voting, when it is considered that ORIENTAL STORIES prints principally action-adventure stories. Mr. Owen's story was tied for second place with *William,* by S. B. H. Hurst.

"The Dragoman's Revenge, by Kline, was a very clever story," writes Allen Minnich, of Allentown, Pennsylvania. *"William,* by S. B. H. Hurst, is something different from the usual adventure story, which makes it very thrilling."

J. E. Erdmann, of North Bend, Washington, writes to the editor: "I talked with a stranger in Seattle Saturday who was buying ORIENTAL STORIES at a news stand. He remarked that in his estimation the magazine ranked with ADVENTURE of the old days (I thought that the finest and most sincere compliment he could give it). The old ADVENTURE of before the war was my ideal of the quintessence of real virile literature."

"I like your new magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES," writes William Starr, of Easton, Maryland. "There should be a wide market for the type of fiction you are publishing. I like particularly Frank Owen's work. For one who knows something of China and the Chinese people this work rings true. I was interested in Frank Owen's mention (in the story, *Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan)* of Madam Wu Lien-teh, who has recently written a charming historical description of the famous Chinese courtezan and beauty, Yang Kuei-Fei. This remarkable little Chinese beauty, aristocrat and scholar, Madam Wu Lien-teh, has visited us here in America, and I have seen her in her home at Wu-shih-wu Tung Tang Tze Hutung, Peking."

Henry S. Whitehead writes from Dunedin, Florida: "Congratulations on the February-March issue of ORIENTAL STORIES. That leader, *Red Blades of Black Cathay,* is as good an action-adventure yarn as I've ever read in my life, and both you and the authors are to be congratulated. It is a real corncracker! Owen's story about the Chinese courtezan is as different from his (in my opinion) utter pieces of junk, *Singapore Nights* and *The China Kid,* as anything could be. This story is delightful, well written, and has back again the curious little lambent flame which made one or two of his earlier productions so acceptable. E. Hoffmann Price has done himself and the magazine proud, and the other stories are of real excellence—a good number with variety and sound editorial selection paramount."

(Please turn to page 574)

» » IN OUR NEXT ISSUE « «

I STOOD there in the slave mart, idly looking on while they auctioned off girls and women, tall and short, young and old, fat and thin, willing and unwilling. There were slant-eyed, golden-skinned girls from Cathay, supple, brown-skinned nautch-girls from Hind, Nubian maids and matrons whose bodies were like polished ebony, and Abyssinians of the color of coffee. Then came the Circassians, Armenians, Persians, Nestorians and Yezidees, some quite good to look upon. But none interested me.

I turned to go, when suddenly I heard a chorus of "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" from the entire assembly. Looking back toward the auction block, I was smitten with admiration for the witching vision of feminine loveliness that stood thereon. Then, scarcely knowing what impelled me to do so, I elbowed and jostled my way to a position just in front of the platform, and stood like the others, gaping up at the wondrous frail creature who, standing there beside her auctioneer was as a gazelle beside an overgrown wart hog. Nor had Almighty Allah ever before vouchsafed me the privilege of beholding such grace and beauty.

Her eyes were large and brown, and their sleepy lids and lashes were kohled with Babylonian witchery. Her mouth was like the red seal of Suleiman Baalshem, Lord of the Name, on whom be peace, and her smile revealed teeth that were matched pearls. The rondure of her firm young breasts, strutting from her white bosom beneath the glittering beaded shields, was as that of twin pomegranates. And her slender waist swayed with the grace of a branchlet of basil, above her rounded hips.

The flat-nosed, red-bearded auctioneer, after clumsily describing the charms of her whose beauty defied description, called for bids. I had but a hundred sequins, but this girl was worth thousands—

The swift-moving sequence of events that followed when Hamed the Attar, who tells this story, dared to bid against the Pasha for the slave girl make a thrilling story that will hold you spellbound. Read

THE DRAGOMAN'S SLAVE GIRL

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

—ALSO—

O PIONEERS!
By Warren Hastings Miller

A stirring tale of the Borneo jungle, where primitive passions rule, and the burning love of a Dyak beauty inflames with death-lust the rivals for her embrace.

THE HOPELESS QUEST AT AISSOUAN
By Paul Ernst

A thrilling story of intrigue and mystery, plot and counter-plot, murder, deadly peril and sublime heroism in an Arab revolt in North Africa.

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER
By G. G. Pendarves

A grim story of the desert stronghold of Askia Ibn Askia, who ruled as a tyrant over the Zangali people.

THE BALL OF FIRE
By S. B. H. Hurst

The story of a great ruby; of Bugs Sinnat, ace of the Secret Service in India; and a renegade English captain who turned thief and murderer.

SONG OF THE INDIAN NIGHT
By Frank Owen

A moving story about the burning love of a Chinese fisherman for the beautiful Yu Lon—by the author of "Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan."

SHAYKH AHMAD AND THE PIOUS COMPANIONS
By E. Hoffmann Price

An Oriental weird tale of the Sultan Maqsoud, and how he was taken from the Hall of Illusions by the Darwish Ismeddin.

FOUR DOOMED MEN
By Geoffrey Vace

A strange murder mystery in Delhi—four men saw the mammoth jewel, and one after another they died.

Summer Issue ORIENTAL STORIES Out July 15

(Continued from page 572)

A letter from D. Happerfield, of Montreal, says: "Just a hurried line to tell you I have just finished reading the latest issue of ORIENTAL STORIES. It is the magazine I have always hunted for but never found until now. There is not another magazine to equal it. The story I liked the best was *William.* I think Mr. Hurst has the correct sense of humor and has put it in the right place every time. *Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan,* came next. It is very hard to make a choice. My one big, bitter disappointment lies in the fact that this wonderful magazine is not published every month."

Mrs. Jessie A. Walker, of Meggett, South Carolina, writes: "Let's have a few Oriental love stories; for any one who knows anything about the Orient knows that there are some strange love affairs there, especially in India. But I would not want more than two in one issue."

"I have just read the third issue of ORIENTAL STORIES," writes Samuel J. Frey, of York, Pennsylvania. "This is the best yet and I consider *Red Blades of Black Cathay* the finest you have served to us so far. By all means, get stories of Genghis Khan and other historical ones. They create a tremendous amount of interest."

"I would like to see a Japanese artist illustrate your covers," suggests Gordon Cudnea, of Cleveland. "How about the idea?"

Writes Clark Ashton Smith, of Auburn, California, himself an author of note: "I have just bought the current ORIENTAL STORIES, and must congratulate you on the high level you are maintaining. The tales by Kline, Price, and Hoys are particularly good, and distinctively *Oriental.* I think the magazine should be a great success. The covers are highly attractive—more so than those of any other adventure magazine on the stands. The magazine is head and shoulders above the other adventure magazines that I have perused."

MY FAVORITE TALES IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF ORIENTAL STORIES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

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(1)----------	Why?----------
(2)----------	----------

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Reader's name and address:

Hawks of Outremer

(Continued from page 454)

fought like a blood-mad devil if he expected to survive.

Now at a gesture from Saladin, those crowding the door gave back.

"Your way is open, Lord Cormac."

The Gael glared, his eyes narrowing to slits: "What game is this?" he growled. "Shall I turn my back to your blades? Out on it!"

"All swords are in their sheaths," answered the Kurd. "None shall harm you."

Cormac's lion-like head swung from side to side as he glared at the Moslems.

"You honestly mean I am to go free, after breaking the truce and slaying your jackals?"

"The truce was already broken," answered Saladin. "I find in you no fault. You have repaid blood for blood, and kept your faith to the dead. You are rough and savage, but I would fain have men like you in mine own train. There is a fierce loyalty in you, and for this I honor you."

Cormac sheathed his sword ungraciously. A grudging admiration for this weary-faced Moslem was born in him and it angered him. Dimly he realized at last that this attitude of fairness, justice and kindliness, even to foes, was not a crafty pose of Saladin's, not a manner of guile, but a natural nobility of the Kurd's nature. He saw suddenly embodied in the Sultan, the ideals of chivalry and high honor so much talked of—and so little practised — by the Frankish knights. Blondel had been right then, and Sieur Gerard, when they argued with Cormac

that high-minded chivalry was no mere romantic dream of an outworn age, but had existed, and still existed and lived in the hearts of certain men. But Cormac was born and bred in a savage land where men lived the desperate existence of the wolves whose hides covered their nakedness. He suddenly realized his own innate barbarism and was ashamed. He shrugged his lion's shoulders.

"I have misjudged you, Moslem," he growled. "There is fairness in you."

"I thank you, Lord Cormac," smiled Saladin. "Your road to the west is clear."

And the Moslem warriors courteously salaamed as Cormac FitzGeoffrey strode from the royal presence of the slender noble who was Protector of the Califs, Lion of Islam, Sultan of Sultans.

The Mirror

By HUNG LONG TOM

Immortal Li Po
Likens the moon
To a mirror
Flying through the sky.

Perhaps the God of Night
Is searching
For some gorgeous yellow girl
Whose face for a brief instant
Was reflected in the mirror.

Forever will the moon
Keep flying
Across the sky
Till the beloved reflection
Appears again.

For even gods
Can not withstand
The grace of Manchu girls.

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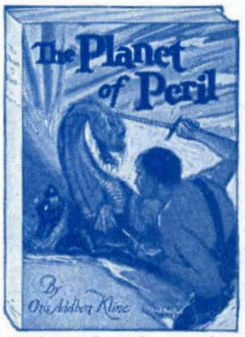

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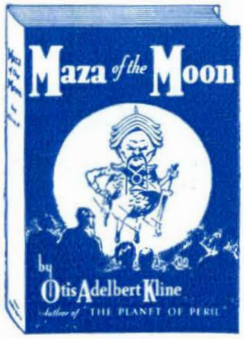

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