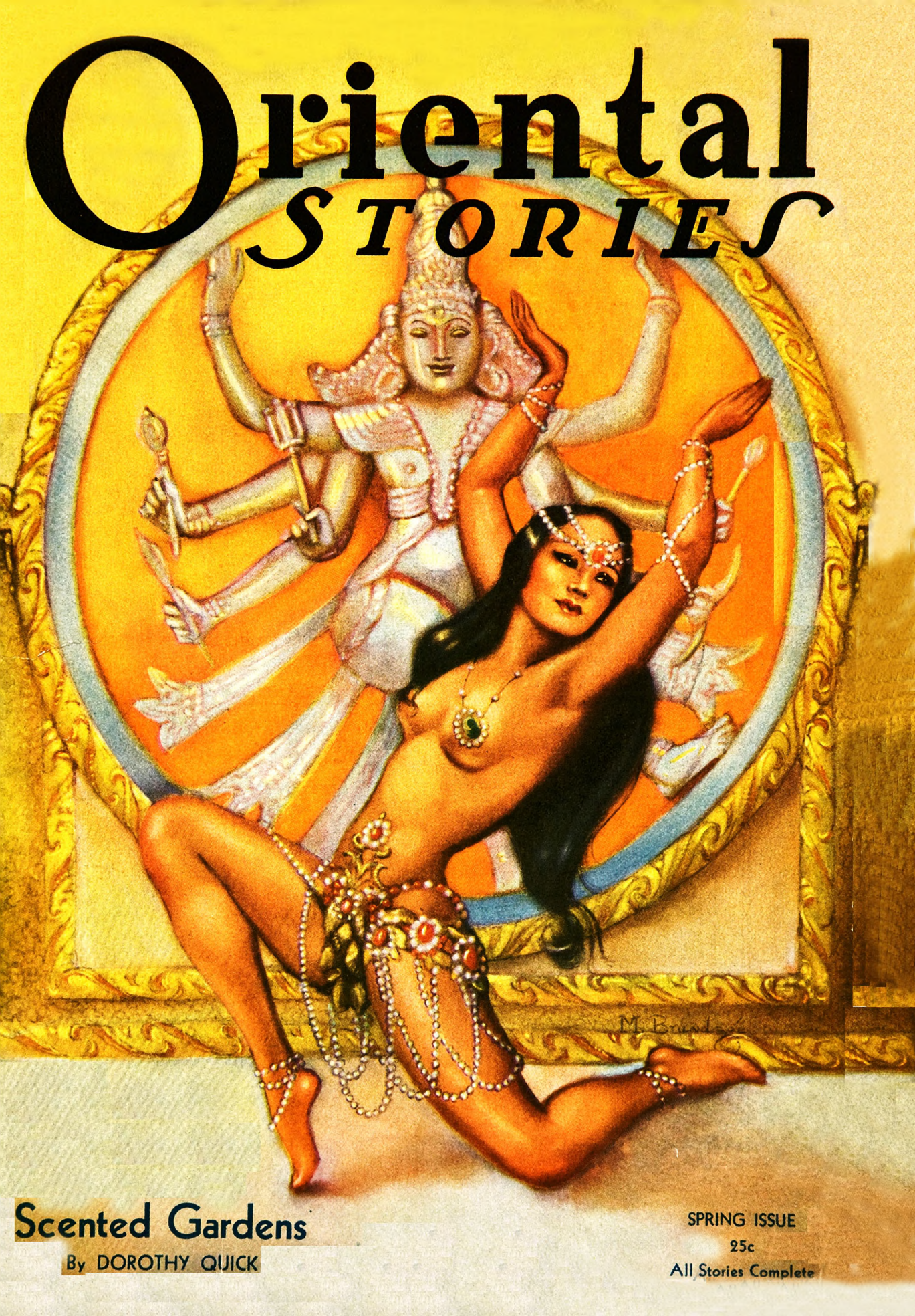
Oriental STORIES



Scented Gardens

By DOROTHY QUICK

SPRING ISSUE

25c

All Stories Complete

missing page

VOLUME II

Oriental STORIES

NUMBER 2

Published quarterly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2467 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter September 8, 1930, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Indiana, under Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $1.00 a year in the United States, $1.40 a year in Canada, $1.20 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 are 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 of Spring Issue, 1932

JUNGLE GIRL

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

An epic of terrific dangers in the Wa country of Burma, and the loyalty of a stout-hearted girl

"YOU aren't going to let *her* come, are you?"

Bradford Hastings was a hard-boiled soldier of fortune but this was too thick for him. Men could look at the Black Pagoda and laugh in ribald merriment; no woman, however fallen, should be subjected to the insult of its obscenity, in Brad's code. Sir Archer, however, only laughed and said: "Why not? You cawn't faze Irene, my word!—Come on with you, girl!" he called back to the tonga bullock cart.

Brad's lips set in a line. The girl, Irene, was Sir Archer Bolton's tent mate on safari, one of those arrangements that

"His outflung arm snatched for those threatening muzzles."

wealthy Englishmen make when Lady So-and-so prefers to remain in London, or Calcutta. Brad knew no more than that about her. But it seemed a brutal humiliation to expose her to the Black Pagoda. It rose before them through the tamarisk trees, tier on tier of lewd dancing carved figures, an immense stupa of black basalt covered with representations of every known form of human eroticism, the world's most obscene religious monument.

"Swine!" Brad growled under his breath and looked back anxiously toward the tonga where the girl was already getting out. "It's a rotten thing to do, Sir Archer! She oughtn't to come——"

"Eh? Look here, Yank." Bolton grinned sardonically. "You 'tend to what you came here for, may I suggest? Study the bally statues and give me your opinion on them as an archeologist. The girl's my affair, quite."

Brad shrugged his shoulders under the rebuke. Perhaps he *was* being unduly sentimental about it. She was probably as hard and callous as her sort anywhere and had entered into this arrangement with Bolton of her own free will. He and

Sir Archer had come here to make a decision rather momentous to Brad. If, in his judgment, the art of this pagoda was pre-Khmer, then Bolton would put in heavily to finance a treasure expedition into Burma where Brad had discovered ruins strikingly like these, the same cult apparently. In the Wa country beyond the Salween it was, devilishly expensive to get to, and devilishly dangerous when you did get in there. Brad did not want to antagonize his prospective partner over this girl. He stifled further protest. Her voice was calling from the tonga, rich, laughing: "Oh, don't mind me, you men! I can stand anything, in India!"

She was coming after them through the tamarisks. Big, beautiful, splendid in line and form, even that solar topee and linen travelling-dress could not hide the regal beauty of her. The splendor of her brown eyes, the aureole of her hair—Brad thought her too pretty to come from anywhere in England or India. Australia and America produced types like that. Her glance was not bold, but warm, generous, comradely. Her eyes were filled with mirth as she advanced innocently, ignoring alike Brad's warning look and Bolton's callous curiosity over how she might take it. She expected another of India's bizarre wonders, a bit shocking perhaps, but amusing. . . . And then the Black Pagoda rose before her, its every cornice and skyline and wall an apotheosis of procreation in stone, of lascivious dancing figures that to her would be simply raw, crude, disgusting. Her gaze rested on them just one moment; then she had stopped abruptly, flushed, embarrassed; it grew to mortification, the consciousness of insult, of wanton humiliation. Tears welled in her eyes and white teeth closed over her lower lip. She was looking at Bolton, first with a hurt injury, then with scorn and hostility.

"Just what have I done to deserve this?" she inquired with a certain dignified acerbity.

Bolton cackled and leered. Brad could not see anything funny in it, nor any motive, except that perhaps the noble lord was tired of her and was letting her see how little he cared. She had turned without a further word and was hastening back to the tonga in long strides. She immediately got in under its canvas cover, like that of a prairie schooner.

Brad could imagine her lying on the straw there, sobbing, humiliated before him, an utter stranger, furious with Bolton, but helpless.

"That's a damn shame!" he growled savagely at Bolton.

Sir Archer left off guffawing. "Eh, what?" he asked, astonished. "Topping! Did ye see her blush? Didn't know Irene *could*, what?"

"You swine!" Brad snapped, still more savagely. "*No* woman should have been submitted to such degradation——"

"*In*-deed!" Flashes of anger came into Bolton's gray-green eyes. He towered over Hastings, who was lean, wiry, and of medium height. One of the most famous of Calcutta's big-game hunters, Bolton was big and bony-limbed, a giant of six feet four, hard as nails. But there was something about Hastings that bade a man beware. The Hindoos devoutly believed that he was the reincarnation of the great proconsul himself; certainly his reputation as an intrepid explorer would give a man pause.

Bolton checked himself. "I say; don't let's quarrel over her. Not worth the row, is it? Man, you don't know her," he gloated reflectively. "They're all alike. Let's get on with this business. If you say so, I'll put in. As many thousand rupees as you'll need. I know nothing about these ancient Oriental arts, except that

this one seems a bit more poisonous than the rest, what?"

They laughed as they studied further the terrific monument. Those figures of animals entwined with female human forms were held by some archeologists to be representations of Krishna, who sometimes took animal form and came down on earth to dally with the daughters of men. But Brad was sure the whole stupa was made long before Krishna or any other of the Aryan gods.

"Pre-Khmer, all right!" he pronounced judgment. "It's the same cult as the one in Burma. I'll stake my reputation on it, Sir Archer!"

BOLTON took the news with characteristic repression of any enthusiasm. His eyes studied the pagoda with a vacant expression in them that told Brad he was thinking of something else. "Eh? So they are identical with the carvings on that coffer you found in the Wa country? Just where, may I ask?"

Brad laughed. "That's my secret. All I want is the funds. You can go along if you like; but I warn you these Wa savages are black cannibals and head-hunters not easy to manage. It's touch and go in there, get out with the treasure alive if you're lucky."

"*Hum!* . . . Rubies up to your knees, you said? In that porphyry—wasn't it?—coffer? Why did they leave it in Burma?" Bolton queried, unconvinced.

"Because they had to," Brad argued. "These degenerates who built this pagoda were no fighting men. All they could do was run, like rabbits. They fled out of Burma and across the Bay when the Khmers crossed the Mekong into what is now eastern Burma. They got no further inland than this point in India."

That was quite apparent. You could look out to sea across the Bay of Bengal from this sole monument of that ancient erotic cult in all India.

"Granted," said Bolton, "but you haven't convinced me yet that the rubies weren't brought with them when they migrated. Seems extraordinary. That ancestor of yours may have looted this pagoda of 'em long ago, for all I know."

Brad grinned at that reference to the ruthless Hastings of long ago, who nevertheless founded India. "It's been searched for, hundreds of times, every conqueror from the Aryans down. We know that. What finished this cult was a magic stone they had in the temple. It caused shipwreck to a Mahommedan dhow here, in the times of Shah Jehan—*by deflecting its compass.* Get that, Sir Archer. A meteorite, it must have been. They are common in the Shan Hills of Burma. Well, the captain of that dhow fell upon these people and massacred the lot for setting his ship ashore. Carried off their magic stone to Mecca, where you can see it now. That's history, of record. But you see how quick disaster can come to people who will not or can not fight. My idea is that they had to abandon that coffer in Burma, perhaps under an attack very like our Arab captain's. Something sudden; no time to pack up, let alone open a great porphyry chest sealed with cement. I couldn't myself, without steel wedges and a maul. I had to pass it up and get out of the Wa hills as best I could. But there's the legend. 'Rubies in which a man could wade to his knees,' as the Arabic scripts have it. I'll stake my reputation they're in that coffer."

Bolton smiled at him sardonically. He did not appear at all convinced or inclined to risk a single rupee on it. Perhaps it was the influence of the pagoda, but his eyes showed he was now thinking of something else, for no man could stay here long and not be affected. He

leered at Hastings, grinned once meaningly up at the ribald dancing figures, and said:

"You'll excuse me for a bit? We'll talk this over later. I'm going back to the tonga, if you don't mind. Wait around a bit."

Instantly Brad's repugnance returned. The fellow was no partner for him, but a mere hog, for all he might be titled and famous and wealthy. The girl's feelings were nothing to him, nor Brad's rights as an explorer either. The suspicion that Bolton was merely fishing for information with all that elaborate skepticism over the treasure in Burma leaped into Brad's mind and stuck. As for that helpless girl——

"No; we'll thrash this out now," Brad objected. "Either you back me on what I have said or you don't. And you'll leave her alone, for the present. You saw how she took your alleged joke. Don't be a brute!"

Rage flew into Bolton's sallow and pockmarked face. His long jib nose wrinkled with the savagery of a lion's and his lips rose over bared and set teeth: "Why, you damned—impertinent . . . Out of my way, you——" His gasp of fury ended in a lunge of both powerful bony fists.

Biff! Hastings had countered and smacked in a swift left to the jaw, with a speed and steam to it that smoked. Bolton staggered back, then recovered and ripped in with punches like piston rods. Brad dodged agilely, then stepped in with a hook to the chin that lifted the big man's jaw as if smitten by a sledge-hammer. He had not meant to hit so hard, but it was said of him in Calcutta that you might as well argue with a steel connecting-rod as with that right of his. The noble lord went down with a crash. His head doubled up against the monument with his topee crushed in all over it.

"I'm sorry," said Brad. He smiled, but he felt uneasy. With him a good punch exchanged settled any little difference, and every one felt better. But this man was a rotter at heart, brutal, sensual, greedy—and unforgiving. He was looking at him now with eyes that were snaky, mere slits of malevolence. He rasped, hoarsely: "Quite! You'll be more than sorry, Yank! And not a rupee do you get out of me. You can find some one else to back you in your silly Burma trip."

And with that he got up without a further glance and staggered off toward the tonga cart.

2

BRAD stood clinking the few rupees in his pocket and looking up at the pagoda ruefully. Perhaps he had been idealistic in the defense of that girl. He should have avoided this quarrel. Oh, well, he had only done what the commonest chivalry dictated. There was but one thing left him now, to see Soy Yuen in Calcutta and borrow the money from that Celestial. And go it alone. There was enough of the great Hastings in him to insist that the loot belonged to the man intrepid enough to risk an expedition to take it. He alone knew the location of that carved porphyry block in Burma that might be the treasure coffer of the ancient erotic cult. The Chinese, then, and go it alone.

Brad got out of the way train in the Calcutta station hours later, rather tired and frazzled. His head still rang with that exchange of punches. And India at a hundred in the shade is not helpful about any recovery but is more likely to develop something worse. He took a *ticka gharry* and drove to the Chinese quarter. Its streets blazed in color and flamed with vertical signs having gold characters on red and swaying in the dusty breeze. Cornices, galleries, roofs, all in intricate tile

figuring that glistened in blues, yellows, greens.

He stopped at a hole-in-the-wall that was Soy Yuen's place of business and was ushered into a back room. It was cool with iced air passing through the flues of the *tang*, that brick bench and lounging-place that is warmed by fire drafts in cold weather. Soy Yuen, resplendent in blue mandarin silk, greeted him ceremoniously. Tea was brought and they were some time with honorifics over that. Then:

"The honorable explorer is in need of some trifling cash from my insignificant coffers?" inquired Soy Yuen blandly.

Brad grinned. He had come to Soy Yuen before. Archeology was a paying business if you combined it with loot. The trouble with Brad was that he couldn't keep any money. Indigent friends, people in trouble, they seemed to smell it out on him and he was soon broke again. The other trouble with archeology was that, while a museum would accept his gifts, they seemed to want the jewel in the eye of Shiva where a glass one would do just as well for the gaping crowd. Therefore you had to have discreet backers. . . .

"There's a bit of treasure I have located in Burma," Brad told him carelessly and enlarged on steamer and railroad fares and the expense of a safari into the jungle.

Soy Yuen rubbed his hands and smiled. "I get half?" he asked.

Brad did not move. That was the usual; but this was an immense loot, rubies up to your knees. It went against his sense of the fitness of things. He had agreed to that with Bolton, but then the big-game hunter would be along and would share the risks. To give this Celestial an untold fortune for the loan of a mere five hundred rupees was too much.

"I risk my life this trip," he demurred. "It's up in the Wa country."

The Celestial's eyes narrowed. Chinese Yünnan was next to that territory. And he had dealings with caravans that came into Burma there. . . .

"The honorable explorer is going alone?" he asked. "It is a great risk for my unworthy rupees."

Brad knew that he did not mean that but was angling to find out just how much resistance Brad could make to a Yünnan caravan discreetly tipped off. He said, hastily: "Oh, no. Have to pay half a brigade of guards in there. I'll want a thousand rupees; maybe two thousand."

Soy Yuen did not believe him. The thing would be better done in the Wa country with just three men, Brad and two stout Mahommedan retainers. A brigade would simply rouse the Wa to war. Their villages were impregnable to attack in the outrageously steep Shan Hills, but they fell out of them with celerity on any strangers, greeting them with ironwood spears, long bows, and a nasty implement bristling with prongs that they hurled into a man's gizzard. Soy Yuen took a sip of tea and said, placidly:

"Three hundred rupees. It is all this beggarly pauper can spare." Brad saw that trap. "Not less than two thousand, I should say. You get twice that when I come back."

Soy Yuen reflected awhile. "Done," he said and clapped his hands for the cash box.

It was too easy, that victory, Brad thought. He was on his guard as he went out into the street with twenty hundred-rupee notes in his wallet. Soy Yuen had got out of him two facts: there was a vague but big treasure involved; Brad alone knew of its location. That last was the point. He could be made to give up that information under Chinese tortures.

Brad had no illusions on that point. Soy Yuen had plenty of people in Yünnan who could attend to the rest of it. . . .

HE DID not call a *gharry* this time. That coach of the East was too confined, had no view save through its shuttered windows. Brad raised a finger and immediately passing 'rickshaw men stopped and charged him. A circle of four Hindoo coolies standing in their shafts at salaam surrounded him. He picked the one with a red cone jutting up out of his khaki turban, a villainous old rascal of a Pathan, but these could fight.

This was better. In a 'rickshaw a man could look around on all the street world and be aware of anything suspicious. Brad made sure of the automatic in its shoulder-holster under his linen jacket. Some time during the drive to his bungalow he would be called on to use it, he was certain. The crowd parted in rivers of color before the shouts of his coolie, Chinese, Bengalis, hill-men, fakirs, Tamils from the south, lascars from ships in the Hugli, Eurasians, *babus,* once in a while a ruddy white man, in topee, jacket, and running-shorts—all India in one street. A Pathan was pulling him; it only needed the Sikh policeman resplendent in silk turban and scarlet cuffs at the street crossing to make the Oriental picture complete. Brad wondered, fancifully, if he really was the reincarnation of that great proconsul, Hastings, who had founded all this. The *gurus* were sure of it; he had one trait in common, that was sure, the courage to go it alone. The great Hastings did not hesitate to arrest a powerful Indian potentate, in his own palace, with but a handful of men at his back. He went it alone most of the time—and founded India. A couple of clerks—he and Clive. . . .

Brad's eyes, however, were on the human scenery. Three or four conical-hatted Chinese seemed to be keeping up indefatigably with the 'rickshaw. Soy Yuen's assassins, no doubt. Brad was aware of them with a certain grim pleasure. Two could play at that!

It was growing dark with tropical suddenness and the street lamps were shining out by the time he had entered the magnificent residential quarter of Bullygunge, a quarter of broad avenues overhung with huge banyan trees and embowered with palms, bamboo, merions, in which gardens the houses of the British nabobs were set. He looked about for his Chinese trackers but there was no sign of them. They had cut across, after seeing him out of the native quarter.

More light now. An avenue of golden mohrs with the light and feathery foliage of the locust family led to the modest suburb where his bungalow was located. Brad drew the automatic and held it ready. Here, any time now.

There were no more street lamps. Open country lay out beyond. The avenue had become a lane that wound through the accidental placement of enormous trees. Black gloom brooded under their shade. He was on the alert, but not a footfall could he hear, nor see the glint of a conical hat in the shadows. Ahead a quarter of a mile was the glow of light amid trees from his bungalow windows.

And then the 'rickshaw rose bodily with a queer twisting movement and he was catapulted out of it. Brad struck off reaching hands in the dark with the barrel of his gun, was struggling fiercely in the clasp of skinny arms like cords of steel. The Pathan yelled once and charged; then fell with a gurgling, sickening noise. Silently the fight raged. They were trying to take him alive. Twice a cloth bound around his throat and both times the automatic exploded with muffled report as

Brad freed himself. More and more of them seemed to materialize out of the dark shadows of the great trees overhead. Just one strong coolie had been pattering noiselessly behind his 'rickshaw and had overturned it with a heave on its axle, but it had been the signal for numerous confederates to pile in. Brad fought in a wrangle of them, with fist and feet, with the clubbed barrel of his pistol. It was time to yell for help, he realized, as weakness grew from kick and blow. He had few neighbors and those were far back from the road. But there was Number One at the bungalow, a stout Afridi who feared nor God nor devil.

And then he couldn't yell. A sharp pain in his body grew to flames of agony. They had used the knife, at last; not fatally, but enough to render him powerless. He was going. He tried to raise the automatic again and couldn't. That cloth was tightening savagely around his neck again. . . .

And then—*whang!* A heavy report and the spurt of red flame broke from the gloom among the tree trunks by the roadside. *Whang! Whang!* A police revolver of some kind. . . . There were squalls of Chinese, sudden flight. Brad lay gasping. A white figure was moving out toward him. A woman. Then she was kneeling beside him and asked, tremulously:

"Mr. Hastings! Are you hurt badly?"

It was the girl Irene. Her breath came heavily, as if she had been running. She was working over him hurriedly, staunching the blood, fixing up a tight compress. She looked nervously over her shoulder, time and again, as she worked, on watch lest they should come back, evidently. Brad could do nothing but conquer the swooning tendencies of his wound and wonder. What was she doing here? Why had she come? And just in the nick of time, too!

SHE finished with the compress, then picked him up and struggled with him up the road. She seemed to have but one idea, to get him away from here and hurry to the bungalow. It was taxing her strength and Brad knew it couldn't last.

"Take me by one wrist—my arm over your shoulder," he directed.

She set him down, her breath labored. "Oh, I forgot the pistol!" she said. "He mustn't find it! Can you wait?" Her accents were of extreme terror. At Brad's nod she was off down the road and presently returned with the big revolver in hand.

"If he should ever find out!" her frightened whisper came to him.

"Now show me how I should carry you."

"Wait a bit! They won't come back. They thought you were a Sikh policeman with that gun. I don't understand this," Brad said perplexedly.

"It's *him!*" she whispered with force. "Oh, he's been brutal since the pagoda! He beat me. I don't understand it. What have I done? And I loved him!"

She began to cry. The first disillusion. It was always so with the tent girl. Sooner or later something set her lord and master off her and she got cruelty, dismissal into the streets. Brad listened to a pitiful tale blurted out between sobs. She was an American, a Miss Pyne from Virginia. She had landed alone off the steamer in Calcutta, in a strange land, not knowing a word of the language—and there was no one on the dock to meet her. A brother who was to be there had died suddenly of cholera up-country. One glass of raw milk, taken inadvertently. . . . At the hotel she had met Bolton. The rest was the usual thing. Lies; a sudden and ardent courtship; a *babu* marriage that she thought was legal.

"I found out, then, that he was married,

who he really was," she concluded. "What could I do but make the best of it? And I loved him—oh, how it hurts now! Lady Bolton was nice about it. I've been with him on safari six months now. And then that awful pagoda. . . ."

Brad listened with sympathy. With her came first the primeval instincts of womanhood, for a husband and children, that did not let her be too suspicious of a secret and off-hand *babu* ceremony. Aldermen did the same thing in our United States and no questions asked. Now the gods were at her, all the machinery of religion and civilization, whose gods would thrust her down into the gutter. She had been betrayed more vilely than ever any pitiful creature who had fallen before the weakness of her sex.

She went on: "Enough of me. . . . Those were Bolton's men, those coolies. They were hired to kidnap you and bring you to the big house. And I overheard what they were going to do to you; burn your eyes with red-hot gun barrels to make you tell about some treasure in Burma. I couldn't stand *that!* No. . . . To no man. . . . I went into the gun room and got this." She moved the big police revolver slightly. "I slipped out of the house and ran. Heard your shots. . . . And now I must get back—God help me if he should find out!"

She started to pick him up again, in a sudden fresh access of terror. Brad showed her the wrist trick; then staggered to his feet to aid her. "Over your shoulder. . . . That's it. And thanks, Miss Pyne! It seems inadequate, that poor word."

"Enough for me!" the girl said in her rich voice. "Miss Pyne! You don't know how those two words restore my self-respect! Am I really her in your eyes and not the girl Irene?"

"Certainly!" Brad said. She was lugging him over her shoulder and the lights of his bungalow were nearing. She was big and strong, tall as himself, though a head shorter than Bolton. The attraction that Nature has arranged of the large girl for the medium-sized man for averaging the species was making itself felt with Brad. He thrust it away. Women were not to be thought upon, for him. His life was too roving and adventurous, too dangerous to share with another human, whose heart would be broken if he never came back.

"Put me down now, Miss Pyne. Hosain should not see you. I can make it alone from here."

They were on the road not far from the bungalow greenery. He swayed uncertainly on his feet as she took his hand.

"Sure you can?" she asked solicitously. "Then good-bye. I really must hurry back. And oh, thanks for calling me Miss Pyne! It means so much to me."

A hunger for freedom, for respect, was in her eyes. It was coupled with apprehension lest her absence from the gilded cage be noted. Brad thought rapidly. What he would like to advise was for her to keep *on* going, now that she was away from Bolton. Down through the city and aboard the first steamer for home. . . . But she could not do it on less than two thousand rupees—every note he had on him! It would have to wait.

"The thanks are all on my side, rather!" he told her. "They nearly had me when you opened fire. It's up to me to see you on a steamer back home as soon as I can manage it. This is nothing but an unfortunate episode in your life, Miss Pyne. I'll arrange for your escape when I get back. The courts in America would annul that *babu* marriage instantly. They would arrest him for bigamy if he ever set foot on our shores, by Heaven!" he exclaimed with bitterness.

"Oh, Mr. Hastings!" Her eyes were alight with the hope, the truth that his presentment of her misfortune gave. In America she would become once more Miss Pyne, her status that of a divorced girl, for ample reasons. "How you have given me hope! But I must run now—good-bye!"

Again terror had claimed her. They struck hands like a couple of men and she was gone in the night.

BRAD stepped carefully, slowly. He was no weaker, but the least stumble would be disastrous. He reached his bungalow steps and called for Hosain. The door opened and the big, whiskered Afridi, all in white with white turban and red sash, stood looking at him.

"Heaven-born!" he exclaimed and rushed down and caught his master in arms of iron.

Deft was Hosain. A peg of whisky and soda, a brief rest, and some magic compound of herbs applied to the knife-stab, and Brad was sitting easy in his bachelor home and planning what next was to be done. Bolton had determined upon grabbing the ruby treasure for himself: that was the first bald fact that emerged. After their quarrel at the pagoda he had arrived at that decision. Since Brad alone knew where it lay in Burma, he had hired the Chinese to kidnap him this night. When they returned with a tale of being driven off by the police, what would be his next move?

Go to Burma himself, Brad answered that question. Being a big-game hunter, to stalk human prey would be right in his line. All Bolton had to do was to keep track of Brad's own movements and be in the jungle at the same time as he arrived at the porphyry casket or sarcophagus or whatever stone coffer it was that contained the treasure of that ancient erotic cult. At the moment of opening it he could expect two shots from a double elephant rifle, one for himself, the other for Hosain. And they would not miss! Bolton had nerves of steel before a tiger's charge. He was the best shot in India.

The way to beat him at that game was to get there first. A quick move this very night. Recovery from this wound could wait upon the steamer voyage. . . .

"Hosain!" Brad clapped his hands and his valiant retainer appeared, salaamed. "Catch kit. My double Rigby. The Winchester .35 for yourself. Catch tikkut, Rangoon boat, tonight. Bring back taxi. Go!"

"Hoo! Protector of the Poor, thou art not able to walk! Let the Huzoor rest till morning. Lo, the fire-boat sails not till eight!"

"It is nothing. Go! There is rest when we are on the steamer."

Hosain salaamed with palms crossed on his forehead. He could be heard packing their jungle kit, taking down the rifles and stowing them in leather cases. Then he appeared, salaamed noiselessly, and went out, and his sandals could be heard pattering down the road. Brad lay back in the long India chair with the automatic handy on a table near by and a peg at his elbow. He dared not relax or sleep. Bolton *might* try another alternative; to raid this bungalow tonight with a wounded man alone in it. He and the remainder of those Chinese. . . . Without Hosain, the dealings necessary to gouge that information out of him might very well take place right here—tonight!

3

"WHERE have *you* been?" Bolton was harsh to her now, his eyes cold and hard. Irene's eyes snapped anger at him. Their brown soft-

ness of the girl who had once loved was replaced by a glitter as hard as his own. Courage had come to her with Brad's statement of the reality of her position in this world. In Calcutta she might be the nameless bauble of a rich man; in America she would have justice and her name be restored.

"What's that to you?" she demanded. "You don't even love me any more. I suppose your next move will be to throw me out into the streets."

"Not a hope!" He laughed harshly. "Come, now, no nonsense—where were you?" He was moving on her menacingly.

She gave back a step. "If you want to know, I had to go into town for something."

"*What* something?"

"To—to see about my hair," she lied. "The *babu* said——"

"Likely story!—Syce!" He clapped his hands. The syce, who had charge of all the family cars, appeared in the great hall hung with horned game heads. "Did this *Mem* take any of the cars tonight?"

"No, Sahib."

"That's enough. Go!" He turned angrily on Irene. "So you were out alone and on foot in Calcutta at night, eh? Extraordinary!" Jealousy flared up in his eyes. "Your sort, eh? Remember, you belong to me! You'll find yourself in the street, else!"

"I wish you would!" Irene said bitterly. "I'm through."

He seized her wrist and twisted it. "Tell me, or——"

The pain, the brutality of it exploded her. She fought, then. An ill-directed blow, but strong. He had let go, but his face was red with the smack. It was contorted with rage, fury.

"Leave me! Go to your wife," she rasped at him. "I'll not put up with it——"

"Oh no, you——" he growled and rushed at her with gritted teeth. Desperately she fought him off. Terror at his superior strength, backed by an insane cruelty, was sickening her with the hopelessness of it all. Then a sharp voice called—"*Archer!*"

Lady Bolton had come into the hall. He stopped, glared at her.

"Disgraceful! Shall I have to telephone the police?" Lady Bolton said coldly. "Come here, Irene."

Irene faced them both. "I want nothing, Madam, but freedom to leave this house. At once! I'll put myself under the protection of our consul——"

"That she won't!" said Bolton with passion. "I forbid it."

"She certainly shall," retorted Lady Bolton icily. "My child, you may telephone now, if you like." Imperious was that grand dame of England. She permitted, with cynical indifference, her husband's irregularities on safari, but he had to be decent with them, according to her code. Her common womanhood with them intervened when he did not.

And she had the whip hand of him with that mere threat to make his goings-on public. The American consul would have some stern things to say to him if this got out. He capitulated.

"I'm sorry, Irene," He held out his hand. "I've a rotten temper. Be good, now, and let's forget."

Acting! She would not trust him one foot now. She was retreating toward Lady Bolton, who was inquiring with a mild acerbity: "And may I inquire what all this row is about, Archer dear?" Then the syce reappeared in the hall door.

"Car ready, Sahib."

What for? Immediately Irene's fears

over Bradford Hastings returned in full force. This great palace formerly belonged to a Hindoo potentate and was full of vaults and underground dungeons where almost anything might go on and the world never know. Were they going to raid Mr. Hastings at his bungalow? Due to her, the first plot had failed. But Bolton was not the man to let a mere police scare stop him. And Mr. Hastings was alone and wounded at the bungalow. . . .

"Right. I'll be down in a minute." Bolton had turned with that answer to the syce. It gave Irene the moment she needed. She had joined Lady Bolton over near a window. And a glance down at the driveway showed her the gleaming lines of his open roadster, a fast low car that Bolton often used. Standing around it were those conical-hatted Chinese.

It was time for some acting on her part now. She hated him, but she looked on him softly. "All right. I'm a good sport!" she said. "I was out of the house and he wanted to know where," she smiled at Lady Bolton. "Suppose I go along and tell him all about it?"

"As you like, child." Lady Bolton lifted her eyebrows with indifferent scorn. Anything, so long as there was peace in her remarkable household.

Bolton was looking at Irene with a peculiar grim smile. "I believe I *will* take you along!" he declared. "I've yet to hear just why any one in this house should find it necessary to go out into the streets of Calcutta at night. Get a coat. Hurry."

"Well, make it up or let her go!" Lady Bolton agreed, with that same cold disdain with which she agreed perforce with all her husband's irregularities. "Mind you treat the girl with humanity or I'll bring her consul into it—that's flat!"

She swept out of the room. Irene felt sorry for her. Love had long been cold and dead between them, murdered by him. Irene dissembled with Bolton by a glance of her old affection and trust in him, then ran for her room, grabbed up a coat, and thrust the big revolver into one of its pockets. She could only hope that he had not yet missed it from the gun room.

But he had. He was carrying a small American repeater when she joined him down at the car. They got in, with the syce at the wheel and the Chinese crowding the running-board. The car had hardly started down the driveway before he began, acidly: "Look here, young lady, from now on I'm keeping you close by my side, understand? I wouldn't trust you two feet! And can you explain, by any chance, how one of the police revolvers happens to be missing from the gun room?"

That was a broadside that nearly unnerved her! She sat frozen rigid. "I'm sure I don't know," she finally managed. Her right hand was stealthily reaching for that gun. Just in time she managed to ram it down between the seat cushions and the leather side-upholstery. His arm suddenly curled around her waist and he drew her to him. She submitted. He was only feeling for that revolver as his hand caressed her.

"Oh, well," he said. "Damn you! You great, big, beautiful—Can't make it out, 'pon my word I can't!"

The man was half insane, what with physical love for her and his suspicions. "The revolver gone . . . you out somewhere . . . shots at my men on the road. . . ."

She was growing desperate with the net of logic closing around her. . . .

The car whirled on through the dark avenues of Bullygunge and now it turned

out into the highway. Mr. Hastings' bungalow lay not two miles out there. Anything to gain time! She said: "I told you, once, I had to see about my hair. This climate——"

"Never mind that lie. Look here, I'm going to chuck all this. All I want is *you!* The rest is silly nonsense, all this life in Calcutta, the nabob's palace, the boring social functions without end—all mortgaged to the hilt, but she doesn't know it! I'm clearing out. I'll marry you and start afresh in Burma. Make you wealthy, no end. Queen it in your own palace, what? All it wants is a bit of doing. Rubies, no end, over there in the jungle, and we'll go get 'em. How'd you like that kind of safari?"

"Love it!" she said. How inconsistent he was! Bored by this life in Calcutta—and offering in the next breath to set her up very like it in Burma! And she didn't care to be another Lady Bolton. But if he would only keep on while the car sped! One return to brass tacks with the question, "Why did you do this?" would be difficult, very!

"Right! Good girl. You'll go, eh? And help?"

"It would be fascinating, hunting treasures," she agreed.

"We've got it. You'll see, tonight. I've got a bit of business with Hastings, and then I'm clearing out on the Rangoon boat tomorrow morning. She can face the crash for all of me!"

The heartless swine! If ever a man needed killing it was he. . . . Irene said nothing beyond, "Serve her right!" She watched developments keenly. The car came to a stop, was eased off the road and into the dark shadows under the merion trees, those same big trees where she had advanced shooting two hours before. She managed to drop the revolver over while they were all getting out. Presently Bolton kicked it with his foot, stooped and picked it up. He eyed her with reawakened suspicion immediately.

"You dropped it here, my guess, what? No Sikh policeman would, that's sure!"

"Oh, nonsense!" Irene laughed in his face. "You know I wouldn't handle a gun any more than I would a snake! I'm afraid of them, really."

That was true, so far as he knew. Never on safari had he been able to induce her to take part in any hunt. But he was not convinced this time.

"You come right along with me, young lady," he said harshly. "I was going to leave you in the car, but——"

He handed the revolver to one of the Chinese. Mistrust glowered in his eyes as he turned on her again. "No; you walk in front of me. I assure you I would do you in if I dared!" More sinister, that civil diction of his, than any coarse outburst of wrath! Nothing but the invisible power of the American consul protected her, Irene realized. It would be invoked by Lady Bolton unless he could account to her, plausibly, for any disappearance of this his latest fancy in tent girls.

They moved silently through the gloom toward Mr. Hastings' bungalow. No light glowed within it now. Irene's anxiety rose to a tumult of fears as she conjectured that they must be all asleep in there, the wounded man sunk in the stupor of exhaustion, his servant snoring back somewhere in the domestic quarters. And what an awakening! To violence and torture. . . .

Her feelings toward Brad were those of gratitude and girlish hero-worship. He would be for ever Mr. Hastings to her. He was older, famous in his line, as one of the most intrepid explorers in all India.

He never got much out of his loot. Directors of museums got not only the archeological treasures, but also wheedled him out of endowments for this and that scientific crusade. There was so much yet to be done in the East, mainly against disease, human misery. The impulse of her first venture to save him had been plain humanity, the promptings of a generous heart. Now she saw that it had to be done all over again. But how? The steel barrel of that repeating rifle in Bolton's hands was guiding her, silently, a pressure against her waist on one side or the other, now and then a poke in her back. They all stopped at a hundred yards from the bungalow and some distance in back from the road. It was about midnight and all India slept. Not even a torch-bearing coolie on that road. Hastings might have been in the center of Tibet for all any human help was near. The Sikhs did not patrol out beyond the city limits.

BOLTON waved expressive hands and gave a few whispered directions. His Chinese scattered to surround the house. Irene was left alone with him. A shove by the rifle muzzle told her they were to move up nearer, on this side. She puzzled disquietedly over what she could do this time. Nothing. To scream was to be knocked senseless instantly. Get away from him she could not. They had arranged no signal. All were to meet around the bungalow veranda and enter it simultaneously. She would be too late with any outcry then. . . .

Prrrrr! The sound of a motor-starter broke suddenly on the silence. A sharp hiss of irritation escaped Bolton. Then he was prodding her and both were stumbling rapidly toward the road. Irene saw the dim outlines of a car in front of the bungalow. Then it had started with a grind of gears and was moving swiftly down the road. She saw a white figure in sun-helmet at the wheel and knew that it was Mr. Hastings. The rifle barrel was jutting over her shoulder—in the hands of a man who had never missed a bounding sambhur deer in all his twenty years of shooting. An agonized instant of apprehension for him; a gasp of determination —and she had lurched against that barrel and knocked it aside.

Yearrp! The sharp, ripping tear of it rang out in the night, mingled with the *ka-ponk!* of the bullet striking the car. Cursing he snapped down the lever for another shot while trying to disengage himself from her. Irene clutched him blindly, in what she hoped was going to be a faint. Savagely he wrenched himself free and fired again. The car sped on down the road and vanished in the gloom. He turned on her then, raging, his face contorted. "Damn you! . . . Damn you! . . . *Damn* you!" He struck out at her with that last fierce objurgation. Irene saw stars and her senses whirled into swift oblivion as she felt herself falling. A heavy thump of the plowed earth and she knew no more. . . .

4

BRAD and Hosain stood on the banks of the Salween looking over at the Wa country of northeast Burma. Behind them, many days, lay Rangoon, that city of the great golden pagoda that shares with Washington and Paris the distinction of being one of the handsomest cities in the world. They had got safe aboard the boat that night in Calcutta. Brad remembered a curious and dimly seen tableau, a tall figure in the night that must have been Bolton aiming a rifle at him as the car gathered way, and the girl, Miss Pyne, in front of him. He had seen that lurch of hers that had caused the one

shot at close and fatal range to miss. He had dwelt upon it, often, since. Gratitude. A lively appreciation of her grit in sticking to it till he was safely away. It had all come out as he had conjectured. Bolton had raided the bungalow, but he and Hosain had foreseen that. They had packed and started as soon as Hosain got back with the taxi. Brad thanked his stars he had taken the wheel himself. The Hindoo chauffeur would have stopped and bawled aloud at the first shot. And then that lurch of hers, when it had all seemed hopeless. . . . She was a glorious creature, physically, but Brad repressed that attraction. Not for him a wife! His life's work forbade it. Single he could take risks blithely and win out; married, there would always be that deadening fear over her bereavement that would hold him back. The thing to do for her was to see her safely on a steamer for home, just as soon as he could provide the funds. A strong and manly friendship between them; nothing more.

He and Hosain had come up by the Mandalay train to Myktila Junction, then the spur to Taung-gyi, and thence by Shan ponies a hundred and fifty miles from the railhead to the Salween. Not a rumor of Bolton anywhere in the country, though they had inquired, and *dak-bungalow* news travels far and wide among the natives. Brad was sure he was not done with Bolton yet. It would be just like him to cross the Bay at this season, in a chartered launch, and then work down along the coast to Bassein where he could follow by railroad. As far as Taung-gyi; and then?

Car, most likely, Brad ruminated. Wealthy and well known, Bolton could get hold of a car somehow in Taung-gyi. He would come along this same road, the famous Shwe Lanh, that immemorial trek into Siam used by men and armies for the last twenty-five centuries. He would make up the time lost in the launch by that car drive; in fact, he could not be far back at that moment if still after that treasure, Brad concluded.

Well, he would have to leave the car at the Salween. No man crossed that mighty stream, whose sources were unknown somewhere up in China, save by swimming or on a raft. No sampan would venture over on the Wa side. Brad eyed those tumbled green mountains, six thousand feet to their summits and inhabited by savages, with the cool and pleasurable anticipation of the born explorer. It was dangerous in the extreme in there, but better head-hunting savages for neighbors than civilization with an antagonist like Bolton at large in it! He was waiting for nightfall. Hosain had bought four long joints of eight-inch bamboo at the last Shan village and had them now concealed in the jungle above the rocky flood line of the river. This night they would rope these into a raft and slip across into the Wa country, unseen by its scouts.

A naked black runner came panting to where Brad sat in his sketchy camp and handed him a *chit*, a folded scrap of paper. It was from the *chowkidar* at the last *dak-bungalow* on the Shwe Lanh. It read, in that Hindoo's script:

> Sahib in wagon without ponies is sign book. Memsahib and four Kachin soldier is with.
>
> Yr. obdt. Servant,
>
> COOMASAWMY.

BRAD touched a match to the script. *That* rupee expended for information had been well placed! But, *"memsahib?"* Why, of all times, had Bolton insisted on bringing the girl with him, when this was a matter between men? Stalk and be stalked would be their game in the Wa country. She would be an impossible encumbrance there, for you had to be on your guard against the Wa every moment. They made short work of all strangers in their hills. Brad tried to

fathom it and couldn't. Possibly he suspected her and was not letting her out of his sight again. Well, he would have to leave her on this side of the Salween. No man could trail another in search of treasure in the Wa mountains with a girl beside him and hope to get away with it. It would mean his death and hers. The only way to get through the country at all was to keep on high ground, coming down into the valleys for water at night. You moved, with caution, often crawling on your belly, from one mountain to the next, always with an eye on the Wa villages perched on their inaccessible promontories. And God help you if you met a Wa! That naked savage would rouse them all out like hornets unless you were lucky enough to shoot him down at sight. Thus was the government census of them taken, by one intrepid Intelligence officer counting the village huts from the hillsides, and thus Brad proposed to revisit that peculiar porphyry coffer he had once discovered here.

"Make up the raft, Hosain. We cross."

The Afghan was used to those sudden decisions of Hastings Sahib, but this time he did not move. "Ho! Thou art a bold man, Huzoor!" He grinned in his beard. "Lo, we be hewn in pieces if the Accursed-of-God spy us."

"A sahib follows," said Brad and pointed meaningly back toward the Shwe Lanh, the Golden Road.

"So soon? *Hoo!* Leave him to me, Huzoor!" Hosain drew his finger across his throat and laughed.

Well now, go to! That was one easy way to dispose of Bolton! But not in Brad's code.

"Nay, we poke the hornet's nest instead," he said with an eye on the mountain flanks across the Salween. "If thou art pursued, Hosain, is it not a good thing to jump through a hornet's nest and let them sting thy pursuer?"

Hosain roared with merriment. "May Allah salute you, Huzoor! 'Tis well thought upon. Go to, now." He was busy with ropes and baggage.

What Brad really hoped for was that Bolton would leave Irene on this side, once he saw that the Wa were aroused and ready to greet his crossing with snickersnees. He and Hosain would slip through them somehow, in broad daylight, leaving a screen of energetic cannibals between them and Bolton with his four Kachins. It was a daring move in any event, but better than remaining here to be ferreted out by them. Bolton would lose no time in moving on the river after reading Brad's name in the *dak-bungalow* book. He had come in a fast car and was not five miles behind at that moment.

THEIR raft floated out into the swift Salween current shortly after. Brad had marked a waterfall tumbling over a precipice direct into the river across the Salween as the place to land. It was some distance downstream and would be reached by keeping the raft at a slant and letting the current breast her over. They paddled assiduously and presently there was no doubt at all about their being discovered. Barbaric barks, howls, whoops very like those of the Burma gibbon, resounded through the hills. They got a glimpse, through two folds of the mountains, of a Wa village with its ramparts of sodded earth perched on a rock promontory and the roofs of huts and forked crotches of peeled trees jutting above the ramparts. Each crotch represented a head taken for religious purposes. A long file of armed black men was pouring out of a hole in the rampart; then the movement of the raft shut off vision of that ominous sortie.

Brad steered to reach shore a short distance above the waterfall. Long cane arrows with ironwood tips were now

chunking down freely around them. You could but watch for them and dodge. The slanting line of a long bow, a fierce black head having the hair locks done up in two horns, then—*whoo!-chunk!* the arrow had sped and was whistling down close over shoulder. Turbulent people, the Wa!

"Take the rope ashore—*jump!*" Brad ordered as the raft touched rock just off the sloping rock banks. "Let her swing."

The current did the rest. They were half drowned, in behind that waterfall, with sheets of spray falling endlessly. But the bulk of it landed some distance out, as Brad had conjectured. It was a place to watch the river awhile, unseen from the opposite bank; also a difficult locality for the Wa to get at them.

They had crossed none too soon. A long river sampan with thatched roof was now coming up the river along the opposite shore; then Bolton appeared on the bank with his four Kachin riflemen. The girl was still with him.

Brad ground his teeth with apprehension at that sight. The fellow had not left her at the *dak-bungalow*—possibly, of course, so that she could not get away from there to warn them unknown to him. He *might* have the decency to leave her in safety, after making sure that Brad and his man were not on that side! They were searching the banks now; then they had gathered at the disturbed ground of Brad's old camp, with its marks of boot prints and bamboo lengths. The sampan came up along the bank and Bolton motioned for her to get in.

Brad brought himself up with a round turn in the indignation aroused by that sight. He had his own work to do here; just how much should he jeopardize it over anxiety for the safety of Miss Pyne? She was nothing to him . . . no, she was everything. Because, once before, she had risked everything for him—and this was the visible result. Bolton might be jealous of him—not likely, being one of those lords of the earth, the Englishman—but one thing was certain: he was suspicious of her, had found her out somehow. Brad puzzled over what he could do to help her now.

There was not much he could do at present. Briton-wise, Bolton was stubbornly bent on forcing a crossing. The sampan moved out. When over half-way across, rifles began to blaze from the Kachins massed in her bows. Occasionally the heavy report of his tiger rifle rang out, punctuating the din. Of the girl Brad could see nothing. They had made her lie down in the boat to be safe from roving arrows. Clouds of these were flying out from the hills and raining around the sampan. It drove on indomitably and was soon ashore. The war cries of the Wa redoubled.

"*Aiwa!* Go we now in haste!"

That wise counsel from Hosain brought Brad back from an absorbed interest in what was going on up-river. The Afghan had shouldered their pack and had his .35 repeater in hand. It was high time for them to move. Brad's strategy had been entirely successful. The Wa were out after Bolton like hornets, and more of them were pouring out of villages farther back. But there was no guarantee that a party of them would not leave the main defense and come over here to deal with these two seen on a raft. There were, no doubt, a few of their scouts still watching this waterfall.

Hosain tapped the long curved knife in his belt. "No shooting, Sahib. Lo, a throat or two and the way lies open!"

Brad nodded. All right, except for the girl. He owed it her, getting her out of this mess. Would have to manage it somehow. . . . He took a last look upstream before walking ashore off the raft. The Kachins had landed and dug in. A heavy roar now and then told that Bolton

was leading their advance with the double tiger rifle. No view of Irene at all. The native paddlers crouched in the sampan, waiting for further orders, but there was not a sign of her white linens under its thatch roof.

HOSAIN was already climbing the scanty ledges that rose up the precipice face at natural slants. Brad followed, double Rigby in hand. There was nothing else to do just now. Beside them thundered down the white cascade, making all the rock surface slippery and uncertain. A careful climb raised them some fifty feet above the Salween; then Hosain had gained the brink and Brad saw his curved knife flash out. Silence, for a while; then a crash in the underbrush. Presently Hosain's bearded face grinned sardonically over the rim.

"May dogs defile his grave!" he whispered hoarsely. "Come, Sahib."

The way seemed clear. They crawled upward slowly though dense and coarse growth and soon were ascending the upstream flank of that mountain saddle through which the waterfall poured. They were up above the Wa zone now and could hear the fight raging around the turn of the mountain. But now was the golden chance to get a good start inland. Hosain had started moving off that way. Brad called him back.

"In the Name of Allah!" the Afghan demanded, astonished. "Go we not while the heathen all fight?"

"No. This way" — Brad pointed around the river flank of the mountain. "We must see what the sahib who pursues is going to do, first."

Hosain shook his head but followed. What Bolton was going to do became plain as they rounded the shoulder of the hill and could look below. He had a wounded Wa, who screamed under brutal torture. A Kachin helped the inquisition with kicks and blows. They were making him talk. The information required was evidently whether any other white man had crossed, and where. . . . A significant glance over Bolton's shoulder downstream followed the wave of a lean black arm. And then that Wa received a bayonet thrust that finished him.

Brad watched that pantomime below with Hosain cursing at his elbow for them to be gone in haste, while there was yet time. Still he could not go. Irene? To leave her in this uncertainty? He could see the boat, but no sight of her. Bolton was working back toward it now, having got what he wanted out of that Wa.

"Hasten, Heaven-born! They find our raft and come upon us, *mashallah!*"

"Wait." Bolton had reached the sampan by now and his Kachins were retreating slowly to join him. And then an outcry floated up from the coolies: bawls, howls. Bolton had given one glance in under the roof and was now knocking them about in a tempest of rage. A wild hope surged up in Brad's heart. Had she escaped while her tyrant was ashore? He looked out over the shining flood of the Salween, hoping to see a head swimming back toward the Burma side. But there was none. She must be on this side, then —and at the mercy of Wa savages. Better that than Bolton, Brad thought for her grimly.

And then Hosain beside him spat. *"Pthu!* We are undone, Huzoor. Lo, the woman!"

He was pointing down through the jungle brush. Brad saw the gleam of a white topee through the tree tops below, the foreshortened lines of her dress. She had gone downstream, by the mercy of God, and was now climbing up on this very hill.

"Peace, thou!" Brad shut off gruffly his Afghan's protests at being thus handi-

capped with a woman. "Come! And start thou not a single stone with thy clumsy feet!"

They worked down toward her, with stealth. Bolton was now running along the bank and yelling her name, in varying accents of entreaty, exasperation, savage command. His eyes were everywhere, the big tiger rifle poised for instant shooting. The girl had sunk down, panting, in the concealment of a thick growth of young bamboo several hundred yards above the river. Brad and Hosain crept toward her in a slow, slithering descent that moved no bush. She seemed to be without further plan than to rest there, free of Bolton for a while, and at peace from bondage and violence.

"Pst!" Brad signalled cautiously. She raised her eyes and saw them. A gleam of hope transfigured the dejection and anxiety graven on her features. Then she was climbing up warily to join them.

"Oh, Mr. Hastings!" Her whisper came strained and urgent as she reached them. "Go! Don't mind me. He has a warrant for you . . . those Kachin soldiers. *Do* go! I saw your raft behind the waterfall. He will find it and catch you."

Brad smiled cheerfully, while a grunt of disdain came from Hosain—who liked neither this woman nor these prospects of certain pursuit.

"Don't worry, Miss Pyne! We can take care of ourselves. The only question is—you. Are you game for a rough-and-tumble in the hills? He's rather strenuous to keep up with!" Brad laughed with a toss of his head at Hosain. "You really must. We can't think of leaving you here."

Her eyes widened with fresh alarm, negation. "You mustn't!" she protested. "I'd only be a burden to you. I don't care what becomes of me now. I've been through too much—*ugh!* I'll stay hidden here till they are all gone."

"Hoo!" said Hosain. He made a significant gesture across his throat. "The Wa will find and eat thee, *Mem.*"

That would undoubtedly be her fate, unless Bolton found her first.

Brad urged: "You mustn't think of it, Miss Pyne. You can keep up! Come, we've no time to lose! And we'll not move till you do."

She looked down nervously at that ultimatum. Bolton had collected his Kachins at the boat. They were shoving off, quite evidently with the intention of landing again near the waterfall. They would take up the trail within five minutes more.

"All right—since I must," said Irene.

Hosain immediately set off at a terrific pace around the mountain flank.

5

THEY were back three mountains into the Wa country. Far below them purled the running stream that marked the site of that ancient temple city that Brad had discovered during his earlier archeological expedition. This time he had two essential implements in his kit that he had not then: a pair of steel wedges. The lack of those had been all that had stopped him from prying up the cover of that immense block of porphyry carved all over with obscene dancing figures. It had a cleavage line under the moss of centuries.

This time Brad had the wedges, but the job was as impossible as ever. The valley below was filled with war parties of the Wa. Bolton, in his persistent pursuit, had stirred them up in increasing numbers. The distant whip of his Kachins' rifles, never more than across a valley behind them, was a constant warning that where they went he would fol-

low. They had tried to throw him off more than once, but it was hopeless with the girl along. She left a trail of sharp heels; if not those, a slip or a stumble that could not be remedied. She was in rags, but indomitable as ever. She had given up begging them to leave her; it only wasted time. Her magnificent body looked hard and fit; her eyes were cheery and radiated happiness, the happiness of freedom, of regained self-respect. This wild life in the bracing uplands, so like her Virginia hills; the nightly campfire where Hosain kindled a few sticks in some rock cranny and boiled their rice and dried fish; the daring scouts downhill for water in the night; they were all incidents of the free treasure-hunter's existence, taking his life in his hands every moment though he was. To share it with Mr. Hastings and his stout Afghan, with nothing but respect, comradeship, and solicitude on their part, was like coming to life again to Irene. She had told him, once, of her last trip with Bolton, a closely guarded prisoner from the moment of that night in Calcutta when she had knocked aside his rifle. And then she had never referred to it again. Bolton had hustled her in the car straight for the Hugli shipping, had chartered a motor launch that night and crossed the Bay to Rangoon. Thence by train to Taung-gyi, where he had hired a car and had also sworn out a warrant for Hastings' arrest by some tale to the district superintendent. He had been given the four Kachins to aid him. The rest Brad knew.

"Looks as if he is stopped, Hosain." Brad was making that statement with some relief as they sat together on a small outcropping grown about with the spiky leaves of pandanus palm. Across from them to the west they could see the glint of sun on rifle-barrels scattered in the thick brush of the mountainside. Bolton and his people were not five miles behind in an air line, but down in the valley flowed a tributary brook, and a file of black Wa were moving up its bed. They had come down the zigzag path from one of the three villages in sight, two score Wa by actual count, the sun shining on their long bows and spears. They made a formidable barrier that would take Bolton some time to break through. Brad swung an arm to the north.

"See that bend in the main stream, Irene? That's it. Rubies enough there to see you home rich in your own right, if we can manage it. There's a full moon after ten tonight. Game to take a chance with the Wa?"

He laughed gayly at her evident reluctance. But it was not the danger she was thinking of but the future implied for her in his words. How obtuse men were! To send her home rich . . . she did not want to go home. . . . No. It would be tame, after this existence she had tasted. To be with him, always. To share with him this freedom, this life with the tang of daring always giving it the spice of excitement. She had proved herself a good campaigner. And her heart knew, now, that she loved him with the devoted adoration of a setter dog. Home rich, forsooth! Bravely she had tried to keep out of her eyes the message they had for him. . . .

"I'd let him go take the darned treasure if I were you," she said. "He'd get killed doing it, maybe."

"Nix!" said Brad. "We've left a trail like a cow. He'll come here first, if he gets through."

"Not after he spies your temple city ruins he won't!" she objected. "You don't know him! Grab. He's just got to have the money, you know. Maram Das has a mortgage on everything in Calcutta. We've led him right to your rubies, so far. Once he comes here . . . let's stand by and see the show."

Fear for him was back of that, really. But Brad remained obtuse. "There's you," he said. "He knows you are with us. Those heels of yours!"

He wrinkled his nose at her laced hunting-boots that had given them so much trouble. Confound the man, he was so impersonal about it!

"He'll attend to me afterward," she said. "I couldn't throw him off in this jungle. Suppose I stay here and let him come, while you two go on and get the treasure and escape? You can do it, without me hindering you all the time."

"Don't be foolish!" Brad negatived that suggestion in haste. Her heart gave a leap. But his next words made him just a man, impervious to her charm, centered in his work as an explorer. "No. It's time to fight him for it now," Brad said with acerbity. Hosain grunted with delight and laid hand on knife.

"Ho, Huzoor! Say but the word and you'll be rid of him, by the Face of the Prophet! That a warrior of my inches should run like a rabbit for two days, when all it needs is but a thrust of the knife!"

Hosain girded up his loins and made to leave instanter. An hour's scout by him back over the trail would end Bolton's career with celerity, as he had said. Brad stopped him with the chuckle, "Peace, thou spawn of Es-Sassin! Thus deal not the white sahibs. We'll wait here a bit and see how it goes."

It was going as usual with Bolton's encounters with the Wa. They were no match for his Kachins. Jungle-wise as the Wa themselves, they had rifles the vicious *spang* of which could be heard echoing across the valley. That party of Wa was invisible as so many snakes in the brush now. An arrow soared out occasionally. A naked savage, spear in hand, leaped into view only to fall as the swift bullet caught him. The fight was moving slowly down into the valley. Then they had crossed and were on this hill flank.

"Time to get going!" Brad ordered. "One last move. Yonder—see it, Hosain?" He pointed out a steep promontory that fell down into the basin and caused the bend in the stream. The flat left by the curve was grown with tall teak where once had stood the temple city of the erotic pre-Khmers.

"We wait there till night. Raid the crypt when the moon comes up. If he gets that far he'll have something else than the Wa to think about!"

THEY set off in their usual order, Brad leading, then Irene, the rear brought up by Hosain. Around the vast amphitheater they worked, always half a mile up. They could see into the Wa villages from here, the dirt squares within their fortifications, women and children moving about, more women working in the poppy fields outside that gave them their only export. The warriors were all out on the warpath—some of them reconnoitering this very hill, most likely, since Bolton's fire could be heard echoing in here. Brad turned and gave her his automatic.

"You move this catch to make it fire," he said in low tones. "Just point it, like your finger."

She nodded and gripped the weapon. Hosain grunted approval. It was the first time he had seen a woman of any kind become a belligerent. And he worshipt courage. . . . Also the Huzoor was leading them where his gifts as a sniper would have joyous play, for they were working down now to the lower nose of that promontory.

Bzzt! That was their first contact with the Wa. An ironwood club with its head bristling with sharp bamboo prongs buzzed into them and tore a rent in Ho-

sain's burnoose. A rustle in the underbrush, the movement of a branch. Brad held up one hand as they all stopped with weapons poised. Not a shot, till you saw something to fire at! The rustling continued, then a crash farther downhill.

"Now!" Brad whispered and led on in haste. Yells came up from below, barbarous and menacing. That Wa scout had hurled his throwing-stick and scuttled below to give the alarm. Brad headed for a ledge cropping out along the promontory and they were soon moving out along it in single file, crouching like cats.

"This will do. Keep thou the left, Hosain. You watch here, Irene. Back a little. That's right. . . . I'm going on a bit." Brad crept on around the point with those few brief directions and they settled down for a siege. The hillside below was filled with rustlings. The Wa were coming up on all sides, but you could see nothing but the occasional point of a bow jutting out beyond a bush.

Whang! The bellow of Hosain's heavy .35 opened the fight. There was an unearthly howl and a chuckle from him. Then *Boom!—Boom!* the double bark of Brad's Rigby. Crashes in the bush. Two black apparitions that rose into sight and stumbled, kicking. Irene was tremendously excited. It was the first time she had been in a battle, and she could not lie crouched back on the ledge as directed. She leaned forward with the automatic gripped like a hammer in her fist and peered over the ledge. Directly below was a frowsy horned head, buried in the green bush, with lean arms tensed like a crab. Instinctively she realized that that meant a bent bow with the arrow aimed at *her*. In a swift throw of the gun she had pointed it and fired.

Wheeung! The wind of that arrow had fairly brushed her hair! It stuck quivering in the soil behind her. She ducked flat in a spasm of terror at first. Then: *"Hoo!* Well shot, *Mem!"* came a rollicking laugh from Hosain. "Thou hast him!"

She raised her head with fierce delight. Why, she had but to point this thing in her hand and it gave her power! She was no longer the weak woman, a burden to these men, the erstwhile slave of that odious Bolton, but a human being with a strong right hand of her own! She could help Mr. Hastings now! Eagerly her eyes sought a fresh mark in the savagery attacking them below.

And then she had plenty of marks, for the Wa charged recklessly. They feared nothing that breathed or moved. Their arrows swished up over the ledge in a storm. Hosain's repeater bellowed and the heavy smashes from Brad's rifle kept up continuously. Irene fired as fast as she could point. She blazed with the tense excitement of it, the *Ying!-Ying!* of arrows striking all around her, the sudden leaping figures that must be stopped at any cost lest they come too near. Then—*Chunk!* a heavy club like a snake whirred over the ledge and smote her left shoulder and she was cruelly cut.

"Ouch!" she yelped involuntarily. It hurt abominably! She wanted to cry, and did weep when she saw blood crimsoning the white of her dress, her own blood. Was she going to die? There were tales of these things being poisoned and no cure for it. . . .

Brad was at her side in a few moments. He said nothing, only worked swiftly. Some sort of purple powder seemed to ease the pain; then he was bandaging her shoulder, stopping now and then to grab up her pistol and fire. The arrows whistled on; now a long ironwood spear that crashed slithering along the ledge surface. This was what war was like, she thought, turmoil, violence; deadly, hissing

things that meant your life if they touched. It was no place for a woman. But, by Heaven, she was no more a woman, she was a man, a comrade in this trio, able to fight with them, to share in anything they might do. She wanted that automatic again!

Brad had grabbed it up and shoved in a fresh clip. "Shoot, Irene! They're getting too close. You'll do. . . . Have to watch my end now."

He was gone along the ledge and immediately his rifle opened up again. Irene heard a yelling confusion directly below and crept to the ledge brink. Diabolical war-cries greeted her; the long slants of arrows. She ducked low and pointed. This one! That one! Things happened every time she pulled trigger. There was a vindictive soul-satisfaction in it that she had not known was in her. She cursed them bitterly, with words generally guarded from her ears but heard too often from Bolton. And then they broke and vanished in cover and there was respite.

BRAD came back immediately. A handkerchief was gripped around his hot gun-barrels. He had a rip in one arm that ran blood. He did not seem to be aware of it, but she eyed it with alarm.

"Oh, Mr. Hastings! Let me!"

"It's nothing. . . . Oh, Hosain! How's it?" he called out.

"Ho! A scratch or two, Huzoor! Yea, they ate bullets, these heathen who wear no pants! . . . Coming, master!"

The "scratch or two" looked fearful to Irene as their Afghan came in. The man reeked blood. She did not know which of them to go at first! They seemed unconcerned, for both were principally interested in cooling their rifles with canteen water soaked on that handkerchief. She got possession of it after a while and tied it tight over Brad's arm; then was helping Hosain tear strips off his burnoose and bind up these scratches that were gaping arrow wounds and the peculiar circular cut of the throwing-stick.

"Messy things to have in one's gizzard!" Brad joked. "I think they'll try getting above us, next. Had enough of these rushes!"

What they were going to do about that dangerous flanking maneuver Irene could not imagine. Attacking this ledge from above would give them all the advantage of a plunging fire, where the arrows would not soar overhead harmlessly. Hosain said, coolly:

"*Yallah!* Let them drive up the hill, Huzoor! That gives us the valley. What say you, is there cover in the old temple city?"

They looked at it with interest at that suggestion. Below in the bend it lay, the goal of this trip, the prize. Its square foundations were plain as a plan from here, walls within walls, covered with tall teak, and in the center was the ruin of a great temple foundation. Here once rose a tall pylon very like the Black Pagoda of India. And in its crypt was still that great porphyry coffer containing the treasure of rubies, "in which a man might wade to his knees." Brad had once before entered it unknown to the Wa. You crept down under matted jungle roots, abolished whatever cobras might be housekeeping in the crypt, and there you were.

"Might have a try at it," he said. "We'll be smoked out here, that's certain! And one man can hold the crypt entrance against any number of 'em. Let's see how our friends back there are making out."

He looked significantly over shoulder at the hillsides of the vast amphitheater. Below was a profound silence, the Wa

bushmen up to some movement ordered by their chiefs—probably uphill on both sides, well out of range of rifle fire. But back where Bolton's people were coming they could hear the occasional whip of an Enfield; nothing else.

"By the Beard!" Hosain exclaimed. "These ears have been listening for some time, but there has been no song of the big sahib's rifle. The Father of Evil and not to be trusted, that one! Yea, full of villainies as a camel in Kabul! What thinkest thou, Huzoor?"

Brad conjectured uneasily. Was it possible that Bolton had abandoned his Kachins and pushed on alone? It would be just like him. His greed would move him to let them bear the brunt of the advance while he slipped through the Wa and came on here as fast as he could follow their trail. And a lone stalk was his long suit with big game. He delighted in it, indomitable, masterful, fearless. And he had undoubtedly heard their fight, since they could hear his rifles going back there. They would have *him* on their hands as well as the Wa if they stayed here much longer. The absence of any report from that big tiger rifle of his was ominous.

"We make a dash for it," Brad decided. "It's not much of a drop off this ledge. Can you do it, Irene?"

Always that doubt about her! Irene's eyes flashed at him. "Silly! Just give me a hand, that's all!"

"Ho! Let me take her, Sahib," insisted Hosain. "Allah knows she is not light! Thou first."

He could carry a piano. Brad turned and dropped off the ledge with a handhold on bushes growing along its rim. He landed in the brush below, and his appearance was immediately greeted by a howl from the jungle farther down. Yells above answered that alarm cry. Hosain unwound his turban swiftly and lowered the double rifle; then Brad heard him growl, "Now, *Mem!* Thy wrist; and let yourself go as one lowers a sack of millet. Art ready for her, Huzoor?"

She swung out. Presently she had landed with a soft crash in his arms. Brad steadied her. Magnificent, the sweeping curves of that perfect form of hers! They roused an appeal in him that called for all his self-control. . . .

"Steady, Irene!" he found himself saying shakily. To tighten his clasp, to answer that glimpse he had caught in her eyes, now turned away in confusion. . . .

"I'm all right," she said, rather breathlessly. *"Look out!"*

She jumped aside, and none too soon, for one of those devilish throw-sticks buzzed right between them and crashed against the cliff. Their moment had passed. But Brad was now fighting hard against her. Tied up to a wife?—*Ugh!* He, the free adventurer! Part of him rebelled against that. But another part of him was experiencing the strong power of love. Sent from Heaven, this girl! If he must have a mate, *what* a sharer of his risky enterprises? She feared nothing, loved the zest of his jungle life, was generous of heart—that heart that had been so brutally betrayed by Bolton. That war of the emotions was occupying but seconds in Brad's racing thoughts. He quivered with the sensation of her while at the same time raising the Rigby and his eyes busy seeking out in the bush that Wa picket. It was growing dark with the disappearance of the sun over the peaks to the west. Difficult to discern such a thing as a moving branch. . . .

Bang! The sharp punch of Hosain's .35 rang out above, then his sardonic croak of satisfaction. *"Aiwa!* Run thou, Huzoor and the *Mem! I* follow—killing toads, if it please God!"

He had hit on a good plan to cover their escape. "Come!" said Brad. "That grove of teak!"

They moved on it in haste, in a long slant through the brush downhill. Twice the Rigby bellowed out, and once the spiteful crack of her automatic slashed the brush behind him. There was more than one Wa picket left below to watch the ledge. Apparitions in the bush, sudden, to be nailed before they could throw a spear.

THEY reached the temple city walls, of huge stone grown thick with roots and creepers. Behind them were shouts on the hillside, the occasional crack of Hosain's repeater. At the gate Brad paused and drew his flasher. The danger inside was mainly cobras; also a leopard might have made his lair here. Cautiously they advanced to the inner gate, the flasher on every foot of weedy grass. Green eyes shone in the darkness, vanished with a crash in the tangled jungle.

Brad waited at the second gate. Soon the burly form of Hosain appeared, muttering imprecations upon the Wa in general. He set down the rifle and swung the pack off his back with a grunt of content.

"Thy hammer and thy wedges, Huzoor!" he said. "Take, and it is reward enough for this old back! *Aiwa!* Twenty pounds of iron—and would that they were rupees!"

Brad laughed as he dug for those treasures. "Peace, thou who can carry an elephant! There will be rupees enough to buy all the girls in Peshawar! Watch thou at this gate. . . . Come, Irene. Bring my rifle."

Burdened with a sixteen-pound maul with a short handle that Hosain had packed for many a weary mile, he led on to the crypt. Before them rose the enormous foundations of what had been once a tall pagoda. Massive and lurking with serpentine death it fronted them in the light of the flasher. Brad took her automatic and stooped to enter a low door cut through the aged stone. It had trackmarks of a beaten trail leading down under the overhanging roots that warned him it was now the lair of a leopard. He expected to see the brute spitting at him in a corner, but the crypt was empty. He paused awhile, to search every foot of the room with his eyes and listen for the low hiss of snakes. The great porphyry coffer filled its center like the sarcophagus of a king. And it was no thing for Irene to see. . . . He had intended to give her the first handful of rubies at the dramatic moment of reaching in when the wedges had done their work, with her beside him. But it wouldn't do; the coffer's carved decorations were too outrageous. She would have to wait outside.

A prolonged hiss and the swift movement of a hooded head, raised like a club and coming around the coffer, bade him aim and fire. The flash and roar of it caused an exclamation of concern for him from her. She stood just back of his elbow and was asking:

"Are you all right, Mr. Hastings? May I come in?"

He backed out. "Just a snake. No; you'd best stay outside and keep guard."

"Nonsense!" she laughed. "Who's going to hold these wedges while you drive?" she asked practically.

"That's so. . . . I can't do much with a sixteen-pound maul with one hand. . . . Well, don't look at it too close, I beg of you! It's worse than the Black Pagoda."

"I won't. What's it to me anyhow?" she asked with a somber dignity. "I've suffered enough. . . ."

He led in. Setting the flasher in a crack, they went swiftly to work. A dull cleavage of parting cement greeted the first few blows of the maul, she holding the wedge with face averted. She did not care to see. All that was a reminder of an odious episode not her fault. She was still Miss Pyne, as he had said, and life lay before her to begin anew. She dared not hope it might be with him. . . .

They started the other side of the coffer lid. Slowly it rose as the wedges drove home. There was a crack of two inches, now, at one end. Brad shoved his hand in there. There was the rattle of things rounded and polished inside; then his hand came out, and it burned red with pigeon-blood glow of rubies sparkling in the light of the flasher.

He grinned triumphantly at her. "Hold out your hand, Irene!"

The rubies dropped, with a resplendent fire of a rajah's ransom, into her cupped palm.

"A little debt that I owe you," said Brad. "Just one—means America and home for you!"

It was his moment; but she held them lifelessly. "I do not—want—to go—home," she scarce breathed, the tears welling in her eyes.

"Irene!"

He stood for a moment breathless with the implications of it, his heart pounding wildly. And then a nasty laugh broke in on them both—and the double bore of the muzzles of two long barrels was covering them from the door of the crypt. Behind it crouched a dim, khaki-clad figure, gigantic, tensed like a crab with arms gripping the rifle, the glint of eyes looking over the sights—Bolton!

She had moved with the swiftness of light, snatched up the pistol and aimed it, brushed Brad behind her with a single stroke of her arm.

"Shoot, if you like!" she defied him. "This goes off at the same time."

"Get out of the way, you——" He grated out hoarsely the vile name. "Come out of it, Hastings, or I'll shoot clear through her!"

His tones were murderous. Brad had dropped instinctively to the floor. His Rigby leaned just out of reach against the coffer, but it was hopeless to try to do anything with it. The girl stood a martyr, in a very few seconds more, unless he did something to prevent it. She had not moved.

"All right!" he called out. "You win, Bolton. Easy! Don't shoot her!"

"No!" She stamped her foot. "Don't you move that gun off me, Bolton!" she cried warningly as his barrels started to lower on him at sound of Brad's voice. "Shoot when you like! I don't care!"

Her voice rang with scorn, with hate, with sacrificial tones protective of her man. Brad leaped to his feet in a headlong lunge, with desperate intent to get between them in time. His outflung arm snatched for those threatening muzzles. He caught the grim gleam of triumph in Bolton's eyes and knew it was hopeless—a split-second left him of life. And then —*wheep!* The bright flash of steel cut horizontally out of the dark and he saw the convulsive lift of Bolton's head. *Branngg!* both barrels of that tiger rifle went off together, in thundering blasts close over his shoulder.

Brad groped through the murk, stunned, smarting with red fire, his ears ringing, bewildered. His hands found her—and suddenly they were entwined in a fierce rapture, of joy that each was still alive, of passion triumphant and overwhelming. Gradually the smoke cleared, but they heeded it not. The flasher shone on, lighting up the gray walls, the dull fires of ruby treasure

dropped and neglected on the floor. It did not exist, for them. . . .

Something was being dragged from the doorway and flung unceremoniously into the briers outside. A bearded face grinned in the entrance, over a gory and sickle-shaped Afghan knife. *"Hoo!"* said Hosain. "Praise be to God! Thy servant heard a stick break, and saw, and came in haste. *Yallah,* there was no time to do more than cleave the infidel dog's head from his shoulders! Is it well with thee and the *Mem,* Huzoor?"

Brad did not answer. He could only stare idiotically at Irene in his arms. He could not look enough at *her.*

Hosain blinked at them benignly. *"Aiwa?* The Sahib will excuse? There are Wa, mayhap, at the gate. . . ." He withdrew with salaams.

Irene turned to him. There was glory in her eyes now.

On a Chinese Vase

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Lovely as on the boughs of spring
Beneath the fallen suns of Ming,
  There bloom the flowers of the plum,
  Where bloomless autumn shall not come
That came for all the years of Ming.

And here the flower-white herons peer
Unmoving on a waveless mere;
  And ever past the green bamboo
  The halcyon flies toward the blue
From waters where the herons peer.

Enchanted realm of porcelain
Whereon the sunken suns remain,
  Wherein the perished blossoms bloom!
  An ancient spring defers its doom
Within this land of porcelain.

"Come forward, Tuan Parson," he ordered.

Java Madness

By JOSEPH O. KESSELRING

A grim, powerful story of what the loneliness and tropical heat of a Java tea plantation did to a white man

IMMEDIATELY afterward Marsdon was to regret his excessive severity; was to realize that the exhibition meant only another step down for him. At the time, though, he was an unthinking, pitiless machine. His big hand holding the heavy whip rose and fell with automatic regularity. The swishing lash descending on the naked back of the brown man at his feet cut flesh like a blade; spattered blood on his polished boots.

In time his arm grew tired. He threw down the whip. He spoke to a group of natives who, silently and unemotionally, had watched the punishment.

"You have seen what happens to one who steals," he said. "Remember it. Now drag him away from here."

As he turned to enter the house he experienced a slight feeling of nausea. It was familiar to him. It invariably followed the inexplicable spells of coldly insane rage that had lately been recurring more and more often.

Laneh was sitting on the floor by the door as he entered. She, too, had dispassionately watched the flogging.

"Well," he sneered impulsively, "he'll be a nice-looking thing now to make eyes at; won't he?"

The brown girl shrugged and rolled her gorgeous black eyes toward him.

"No, *tuan*—what for Laneh make eyes at Baku?—no."

It was then that he felt regret. He knew that he had beaten the boy very nearly to death (he thought and spoke of him as a boy, but Baku was twenty-eight and quite large) not because he had stolen, but because Laneh had "made eyes" at him. The thought sickened him.

It was a considerable step down. Bad enough that he should recognize a native house-boy as a rival in a rotten affair—and beat that house-boy instead of kicking Laneh out of the house; but that he should reveal his recognition of that rivalry to the girl herself!

Yes, he was slipping—rapidly; he knew it. His shaven face, clean linen and polished boots worked alone now to hold him up—and they were becoming an ever increasing burden. Java did that to a man, they said—if he were alone there long enough. For years he had scoffed at the idea; but lately, especially since the last rainy season——

God! If the company didn't send some one soon!

HOWARD MARSDON was manager of the Salajalur tea plantation. A fertile hollow scooped by the giant hand of nature in the peak of a small mountain, it was fenced on all sides by jungle. A lovely bowl painted gold and crimson and silver and green, pressed belly down into the top of a dungheap, it burned by day in a hellish sun and was choked both day and night by the fetid, creeping breath around it.

The rainy season, though, was the worst of all. Marsdon would never have slipped but for that. Weeks without end when the ground, the house, one's food, one's clothes and even one's flesh were constantly smeared with slime—when boots and belts and the silken draperies around the house would cover with green mold in spite of all efforts to keep them clean of it—when crawling things assailed the house by the millions. . . .

And through it all nothing to do with oneself. Oh, one could catch up with work and get ahead of it—and read—and play solitaire—but a week or two of that and then one began to listen to the rain. Drip—drip—gurgle—swish—drip—drip. . . .

It was during the last rainy season that Laneh had moved in as *housekeeper*. Marsdon had held off for five years, taking great pride in what he believed was his strength. The secret of his strength lay in the fact that no girl one-tenth as bewitching as Laneh had presented herself in that time.

At first Laneh had seemed to help. She was dainty and charming in her wild, native way and, as her duties as housekeeper consisted merely of religiously serving *tuan* Marsdon, she appeared quite a success.

Laneh soon found, however, that her lord's good humor could be greatly increased by many drinks of whisky.

Hitherto Marsdon had sternly limited himself to six jolts a day—but Laneh coaxed so prettily.

He didn't delude himself. He knew what it was doing to him. One morning he had stumbled to breakfast without shaving. That had frightened him. He realized then that Laneh was not enough, in fact, was worse than no one; that what he needed was white company. So he had written demanding a white assistant from home.

The company had promised a man, but two months had passed since then and no further word of the matter.

Well, it would have to be soon. Nerves—nerves.—Jove, yes!—but didn't a man's sanity depend upon his nerves?

NEXT day the news arrived. A man was following by the next boat. He would get in at Samarang. A day later Marsdon would meet him at Kollakoll. The man's name was James Parsons.

Marsdon felt as though a tight cord round his head had loosened. Gad! A white face to look at. A white man to talk to. White ideas. A fellow like himself. He would cut down his liquor immediately—and Laneh must go.

But when he told her, Laneh couldn't seem to grasp the idea. She was sitting at his feet gazing up at him.

"*Tuan* is tired of Laneh?" she questioned.

"No, Laneh, it's not that," he lied, "but you can understand that with a stranger in the house the thing won't go, that's all."

"*Tuan* stranger does not want Laneh in house?" Her black eyes glinted as she spoke.

"Oh, nonsense," he responded testily, "he knows nothing of you. But we'll let it go now. You may stay till he arrives; then you must leave."

"Laneh belongs. *Tuan* stranger does not belong," she murmured as she glided from the room.

AT KOLLAKOLL at the appointed time Marsdon peered anxiously around. There were about a dozen arrivals. A young, thin, pale-faced chap whom Marsdon's glance had passed as unlikely approached him.

"Mr. Marsdon?" he inquired.

Marsdon turned. The effusive welcome he had planned died. He had been expecting a man. This was a boy.

"You are not Parsons, are you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! Well, come along, then." Marsdon could muster no further greeting. He was bitterly disappointed.

On the road home, however, he strove to overcome his chagrin. After all, the fellow was white. He told him something about the plantation, spoke of crop prospects and labor problems, then of the isolation he would have to contend with; finally he mentioned Laneh and the position she had occupied at the house. He thought it better to tell him about Laneh now than to have him find out about her later.

He intended to finish the confession (for such he felt it to be) with the announcement that now Laneh would go; but Parsons interrupted him.

"Do you mean," he blurted, "that this—this woman has *lived* at the house?"

Parsons was young, thoughtless and new to the country and Marsdon should have considered these things. But Marsdon's taut, raw nerves allowed him to consider nothing. He went red.

"Yes," he snarled. "Do I understand that you disapprove?"

Too late the newcomer saw his mistake. He stammered as he replied:

"Oh—well, I—but it is none of my business."

"Right!" snapped the older man. "And remember that; will you?"

The balance of the journey was made in silence.

AT THE house they discovered Laneh still installed despite orders and sullenly prepared to battle for her rights. She found that unnecessary, however. Marsdon, reacting stubbornly to Parsons' apparent disapproval, had decided that she would stay.

He sneeringly introduced them, the new man as *tuan Parson,* leaving off the s, and Laneh as his *housekeeper;* then, after instructing the new house-boy to direct *tuan Parson* to his room, he went immediately to his quarters. Laneh followed.

"Welcome, *tuan besar!*" she murmured, dropping to the floor at his feet.

"Get out!" he growled.

She arose.

"*Tuan* Parson did not want Laneh to leave?" she inquired.

"*Tuan* Parson *did* want Laneh to leave," he snarled. "And that is why Laneh is not leaving. But to hell with *tuan* Parson! Bring me whisky and then get out!"

"*Saja, tuan* — yes, lord." And she obeyed.

Marsdon sat on the bed, drank whisky and stared moodily ahead. The tight, throbbing sensation had returned to his temples. He had builded so on this, and now the structure of his hope had crashed. The fellow was impossible. They would have nothing in common. He was a narrow-browed child. Already he hated the sight of him.

Marsdon held his head and moaned. His nerves were in an even worse condition than he had suspected.

After a time he arose and crossed to a table in search of his pipe and tobacco. He found the pipe, loaded it and reached for a match. He stopped and stared. Lying crumpled in a small, brass ash-tray was a hand-rolled cigarette stub.

Marsdon did not use cigarettes.

Frowning, he picked it up. The wrapper consisted of a section of dried, gray leaf—strictly a native device. Marsdon swore, and, for the first time since entering, glanced around the room.

The fact was that Baku, the dismissed and beaten house-boy, had visited Laneh in the absence of *tuan besar.*

Marsdon's eyes halted at a pistol holster hanging on the wall. It was empty. When he had left for Kollakoll it had contained a large, fully loaded revolver. He moved to a dresser and pulled open a drawer. Its contents gave evidence of having been disturbed. Lifting up a false bottom of the drawer he drew forth a sheaf of currency, counted it and threw it back.

Neither Baku nor Laneh had been aware of the false drawer bottom.

Tossing off another glass of whisky he strode unsteadily from the room and called: "Laneh!"

"*Saja, tuan.*" She dropped to her heels before him.

"Get up!" he ordered; then savagely: "Who was here in my absence?"

"No one, *tuan besar,* but Laneh and Subkit." Subkit was the new house-boy.

"You lie!" he roared. "Who stole that revolver and ransacked my room?"

"*Tida taue, tuan*—I do not know, lord."

"You filthy little liar, I'll"—he grasped her by the arm and struck her across the face with his open hand—"I'll get it out of you if I have to——"

"Oh, I say!" It was Parsons. He entered the room. "After all, old chap, she's a woman, you know."

Marsdon released the girl. He wheeled. His face was purple.

"Back in your room, you impertinent young pup!" he rasped. "I know what I'm doing! Back into your room and stay there! Do you hear me?"

"Why, yes, I do. But look here, old chap, you're not speaking to a coolie, you know."

"I'm not sure of that—yet. And in future you'll drop that 'old chap' stuff and address me as 'sir'; you understand? Now back in your kennel!"

His voice rose shrilly and his bloodshot eyes glinted insanely as he advanced threateningly toward the young man. Parsons paled and retreated.

From his room he listened while his new boss conducted a third degree, first upon Laneh, then upon others. But tongue and fist and whip were unavailing; the invariable response merely echoed Laneh's denial. *"Tida taue, tuan*—I know nothing, lord."

Marsdon tired at last and gave it up. Had he been normal he would have been the first to realize that such tactics were futile. Your Java folk and an occasional coolie can ofttimes be persuaded by kindness, but under coercion they become unknowing animals.

He stumbled to his room, bawled for more whisky and, babbling like a lunatic, rapidly drank himself into unconsciousness.

NIGHT came on then with its tropical speed. A jewel-studded, black blanket seemed to sweep from the east and cover the sky in moments. It brought first a death-like hush, followed, as though upon signal, by the open and stopped diapasons of the jungle. The piping, reedy song of unnumbered insects blending with the treble cry and sonorous roar of countless beasts rolled up a harmony that was weird and majestic—or horrible.

For, to James Parsons, sitting listening at the window of his room, it *was* horrible. He felt a beat in it—a morbidly prophetic beat—a beat that could pound like an ever-striking club at a man's brain—a beat that could drive incessantly until its unholy, minor message of dissolution and insanity had been accepted in full.

Parsons was bewildered. They had told him at home that the plantation was a lovely garden spot nestling on top of a tropical hill; the last part of which was very true and the first part of which was true for about three months of the year. They had not told him that it was completely isolated and surrounded by reeking jungle.

Then they had told him that his superior was a fine type of English gentleman who would take him in hand like an older brother and teach him the business; which they believed to be the truth and which would have been the truth had Parsons arrived a year before.

As it was, the atmosphere of the plantation and Marsdon's brutal behavior were a distinct disappointment and shock to him. And Parsons, who was only twenty-one, had just finished school and had never before been away from England, was in no way equipped to stand up under disappointment and shock.

He was not a coward, but as he stared into the night that to him seemed alive with something intangibly awful, and reflected that he was trapped in this place with a superior who appeared mad, and with no hope of release for months, he shuddered.

MARSDON instructed him next morning in the details of accounts, correspondence, filing and rough bookkeeping. The manager was surly and said

nothing beyond the words of direction, but, being sober, he seemed sane at least.

Parsons took courage from this indication and, later, as Marsdon was leaving the house for a round of inspection, addressed him.

"Mr. Marsdon——" he began.

Marsdon paused at the door.

"Mr. Marsdon, I—I imagine I pushed in a bit annoyingly last evening and I—I'm sorry, sir. You see, I'm so unfamiliar with—with everything here and I—well, I imagine it might get to be very lonesome here and I hope we can be friends, sir." He smiled boyishly as he finished.

Marsdon regarded him for a moment in silence; then:

"Yes, I had hoped so myself," he replied noncommittally, and left.

Marsdon had been gone for perhaps two hours when Laneh entered the room in which Parsons was working. She came from a small chamber just off Marsdon's bedroom.

Laneh usually slept the morning through, arousing herself an hour or so before tiffin; then, having eaten and it being time for her siesta, she drowsed another two hours with the rest of the tropic world.

This slothfulness would in time pile ugly fat on her, but at present she was only twelve and it merely served to give her a depth of health and beauty that was quite startling.

Parsons glanced up as she entered and greeted her briefly. She responded: *"Slamat tidor, tuan!"* with lowered head; then she raised her head and after her head, her eyelids—which, of course, had the effect of the deliberate unveiling of two giant, flawless, black pearls set in smooth, dull gold.

Yes, Laneh was only twelve—but she was a Malay twelve.

Parsons continued his work as she slowly moved about the room touching this piece of furniture and that with a small bit of silk in apparent fulfilment of her duties as housekeeper. After a time he looked up and discovered her eyes on his face. She lowered her gaze, but spoke.

"Tuan Parson not want Laneh to live in house?" she asked.

"Look here," he corrected, a trifle miffed, "my name is not Parson, you know, it's Parsons."

She moved somewhat nearer his desk.

"Tuan Parsons not want Laneh to live in house?" she repeated, and fastened on him her most bewitching gaze.

He flushed under it, then frowned.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you are talking about," he said bruskly, "but I rather think it is none of my business where you live."

She furrowed her brow at his response and moved still nearer the desk.

"Tuan Parson *not* want Laneh to live in house," she declared harshly. *"Tuan* Parson would have Laneh thrown from house." She leaned closer to the desk. "So it is—but *tuan* Parson will be very sorry that——"

At that moment Marsdon appeared at a door behind her. She heard him and stopped speaking; then, straightening slowly, she smiled malevolently at Parsons and, without looking at Marsdon, glided from the room by the door through which she had entered.

For a moment Marsdon stood without moving, his face livid, his lips drawn back in a snarl. He crossed the room to the desk.

"Get up!" he ordered hoarsely.

Parsons, paling, rose to his feet. He opened his mouth to speak.

Without warning, Marsdon's heavy

fist swung up. It caught the smaller man full on the cheek, sending him hurtling backward over his chair to the floor. For a second he lay still, then whimpered and put a shaking hand to his bleeding face.

"And if I ever catch you so much as looking at her again," Marsdon rasped, "I'll make you wish that you had never been born—you hypocritical rat!"

With the warning the manager turned on his heel and left the room.

PARSONS sat at his desk the rest of that day in a haze of pain and bewilderment. Outside, the sun was blazing hot, and the house was like a bake-oven. His bruised face throbbed angrily and his body burned as with a fever. His previous hopelessness and horror had increased tenfold.

When night came on at last, he stole from the house like a criminal. He felt that he would have to get away from the place for a few moments or go to pieces. Following a dim path that led to a slight eminence at the right of the house, he ascended.

There would be a moon later on, but just now the night was dark and he stumbled often as he walked. The heat of the day was yet in the ground and, eddying up around him in waves, it brought the perspiration streaming from his body in weakening quantities.

At the crest he stopped and turned. The lights of the house shone in malignant yellowness a good five hundred yards away. He was out of sight and hearing.

Suddenly then he gave way. The choking lump in his throat seemed to burst, tears streamed from his eyes and he dropped to the ground and wept unrestrainedly.

He was really little more than a boy.

For many minutes he wept, then, still clutching the earth, gradually became more calm. And with his recovery, and almost as though deliberately accompanying it, a cool breeze struck the rise and a great, fat moon pushed its silver rim up from the horizon.

Feeling the breeze, Parsons raised on his arm and saw the moon; and not the moon alone, but a sight of such awesome, breath-taking splendor that his tear-swollen eyes opened wide in amazement.

Stretching away and down before him the sloping jungle seemed to be burning in a glory of silver phosphorescence. All around him as far as he could see the wind-swayed leaves of the dense growth slowly rippled and tossed like a sea of cold, white fire. Here and there streaks of color faded eerily in and out—blues and purples that seemed to roll up from below and sink again. Occasional tall trees rose clear of the sea—lazy tongues of the heatless flame.

The full spirit of the weird scene was one of peace—cool quietude. Parsons, gazing in fascinated wonder, felt it. The weight of dull horror slipped from his mind like a bad dream. After a time he sat up, blew his nose and settled himself to review his lot with new-born calmness.

After all, he decided finally, Marsdon's trouble was probably just a matter of nerves—and small wonder after having been alone in such a place for so long—and if he, Parsons, would just keep his head and exercise patience for a while very probably he could win the other man over. And anyway it was the only thing to do if he were to come through the affair with his sanity intact.

Thus, with a firm resolve to maintain an attitude of stoicism in the face of anything and everything, he rose and started back to the house.

As he neared the veranda he observed a figure approach it from the opposite side. The figure climbed the steps and he saw that it was Laneh. She entered the house.

Laneh had left the house but a few moments after Parsons. She had watched his going from the darkened recess of her room, then, speeding to Marsdon's room, had certified that *tuan besar* was in a thoroughly drunken stupor and, leaving him with a sneering Malay curse, had glided off into the night.

She had followed the opposite direction from Parsons, moving off to the south, down a slight grade, past the vile-smelling *billiek* huts of the coolie laborers, to come, finally, to a group of *tjemaras* trees and the welcoming arms of Baku, the disgraced house-boy.

Baku was resplendent with the big pistol stuck in his belt. The weapon made him feel like a large, brown god. He wore it continually. He also wore a murderous-looking *kris*.

"And has my Flower discovered the hiding-place of the fortune of the evil *tuan?*" Baku had inquired, following a great deal of amorous embracing.

But his "Flower" had had to report unfavorably. She knew that the money was in the evil *tuan's* room, but in spite of diligent searching had been unable to locate its hiding-place.

"But, my Flower," Baku had urged excitedly, "we *must* have that money. Without it we are trapped here, I in the jungle and you in his arms. With it we will have power to go to far places in safety together."

Yes, yes! She had agreed with him. Well, she would look further; if it could not be found then something else must be done. *Goena-Goena,* black magic, perhaps. And if that failed—well, he had the pistol; hadn't he?

Oh, yes—he had the pistol. His chest had swelled and he had strutted fiercely.

Laneh had seen Parsons approaching as she had entered the house. Inside she found *tuan* Marsdon sitting by a table in the living-room. With tousled hair, purpled face and bloodshot eyes he offered a forbidding appearance. On the table in front of him was a whip. At the sight of her he spoke.

"Where have you been?" he rasped, his hand feeling for the whip.

She came no farther than the doorway.

"Laneh has been walking in the cool night, *tuan besar,*" she murmured.

"With whom?" he questioned, rising, the whip in his hand.

Behind her Laneh heard Parsons enter the house; heard his footsteps approaching along the hallway.

"With *tuan* Parson," she said quickly and, turning, fled along the hall to her room, where she locked herself in.

With a curse Marsdon started for the doorway she had just left. Six feet from it he stopped. Parsons had appeared. Marsdon's fist tightened over the whip handle.

"Where have you been?" he snarled.

At sight of the whip and the expression on his superior's face Parsons blanched. Remembering his determination, though, he closed his jaw tightly. His answer, coming through his teeth, was steady.

"I have been out for a stroll," he said.

"With whom?" Marsdon asked, swinging the whip and moving a step closer.

"I have been alone."

"You lie!" The hand holding the whip tensed and jerked.

"I am not lying." Parsons' voice was quiet and his gaze held steadily to the eyes of the other. "And if you strike me with that whip you will sometime regret it."

For seconds Marsdon glared at the younger man; then, raising the whip, he looked at it and, throwing back his head, burst into a crazy laugh. At last:

"So, you don't want the whip; eh?—you rat!" he muttered. "Very well"—he hurled the lash into a corner and dropped into a chair—"there are other ways. Subkit!" he called.

The house-boy appeared immediately. *"Saja, tuan."*

"Wait," ordered Marsdon and turned to Parsons.

"Before you came out here," he began, "you signed a contract; didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that contract stated that your duties would be assigned to you by me; didn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent!" He turned to the house-boy. "Subkit, I am giving you an assistant. Parson, here, will relieve you of such duties as scrubbing, dish-washing, taking care of the poultry and tending the vegetable garden." Then to Parsons: "You have heard?"

Parsons' fists were trembling and he was deathly pale, but he answered: "Yes, sir."

"Very well, that will be all."

Parsons moved to go to his room, but Marsdon spoke.

"Where are you going?"

"To my room."

Marsdon laughed sneeringly.

"The assistant house-boy's quarters are in the cook house," he said. "Subkit will conduct you there now and will bring you your things at his leisure."

It cost him an effort, but Parsons left the room without a reply.

Two weeks passed and conditions at the Salajular remained the same. Parsons, at first driven well-nigh to desperation by the sneering abuse of Marsdon, the sly taunting of Laneh and the stigma of his menial duties, finally had discovered that his own mental attitude toward his troubles could make them either bearable or unbearable.

He found that by taking each task seriously no matter how lowly it might be, he was able to accomplish it more swiftly and satisfactorily and, in the bargain, retain a frame of mind that was calm and philosophic.

Some duties, in fact, he had developed a real interest in. One of these was the care of the poultry. There was a pen of thirty odd of the birds located fifty feet back from the house.

Parsons' interest in the chickens had been aroused when he discovered that their number was being systematically diminished. He knew that the nightly marauder was some sort of jungle beast, but to date he had been unable to catch or identify it.

One night shortly before sundown he was at work in the chicken coop. He had been using a hammer extensively for an hour and had made considerable noise. Toward the end of his task he heard footsteps approaching, then a voice addressing him from without. He recognized the voice as Marsdon's.

"Come out here!" the manager had growled thickly.

The entrance to the coop was small and it required considerable worming for Parsons to obey. When he had done so, and had risen to his feet, he recoiled from the sight of his superior.

Marsdon had hit bottom.

Clad in filthy shirt and trousers that had once been white he was minus coat, collar and shoes. His mottled face carried a three days' growth of beard and his swollen, blood-flecked eyes glittered with the glassiness of lunacy. He carried a whip.

"You are enjoying yourself; aren't you?" he muttered, swaying toward Parsons.

"Why—yes, sir, I'm trying to," backing away.

"Stand still!" savagely striking his own leg with the whip. "Yes—you are enjoying yourself — pounding, pounding — while I sit in the house and go mad from that pounding! That's why you pound!—isn't it?—to drive me mad!—isn't it?"

"Why—no, sir. I just——"

"Liar!" he shrieked the word. "Liar! You think you'll drive me mad! Well, I'll show you——"

He suddenly raised the whip and brought it swishing down on the young man's shoulders.

"I'll show you!" he screamed.

Parsons grabbed for the lash, but the stronger man tore it from his hands. Again Marsdon struck, this time full on the other's face and head. The pain was intolerable. Parsons' arms covered his face. He backed away whimpering.

Marsdon followed. The lash rose and fell, searing like a white-hot rod. Parsons went to his knees—to the ground. Through a red haze of pain he saw the coop entrance in front of him. Desperately he wriggled forward. The whip raised bloody welts on his back. Forward. The lash raked his legs. Forward, screaming—then in at last, and sheltered by the little hut, to subside in agony to his face. Marsdon staggered away cursing insanely.

Parsons didn't hear him go. For a half-hour he lay there on his stomach in the dirt—sobbing—oblivious to everything but his suffering.

In time, though, the fever of his hurts abating somewhat, he rose to a sitting posture. Gradually his sobs diminished and stopped. He continued to sit—staring unseeingly.

Slowly a cold resolution formed and crystallized in his now calmly reasoning mind. Definitely, he thought, it was either Marsdon's life or his.

Night had fallen when he crawled from the coop a few moments later. Turning, he reached back into the little house and, lifting a heavy box and adjusting some boards, automatically finished the task Marsdon had interrupted. As he limped off into the darkness he carried a hammer in his hand.

MARSDON went directly to his bedroom. With a hand that shook unbelievably he tossed off half a tumbler of gin. Outside he had suffered an attack of nausea that had turned his stomach inside out. He sank weakly into a chair by the table.

"His own fault," he muttered. "Damn him! His own fault."

The impression of relentless pressure at his temples had increased greatly. His brow contracting with the pain of it, he held his head and stared at the table. After a time he lurched to his feet, crossed the room and gazed at his reflection in a mirror. He threw back his head and laughed wildly.

"Done for!" he bawled hoarsely. "Sunk! Damn him!"

Beating his temples with his fists he staggered back to the chair—and the bottle.

Somewhat more than a half-hour later Marsdon still was sitting by the table. Elbows propped up, head tightly gripped in his hands, blindly swaying, rocking, muttering, he failed to see a face that flashed for an instant at the window in front of him, then was gone.

Another minute and he failed either to see or to hear a figure that stole softly into the darkened house—paused—listened—then silently crept forward and peered through the doorway at his back.

The eyes of the figure gleamed beast-like at sight of the manager's bowed form; the inevitable whip on the table brought its lips back in a snarl—its body down in a tense crouch. With the stealth of a giant cat it moved—forward—nearer.

Marsdon rocked. The figure neared—a noiseless phantom. Then a sound—a loose board. Marsdon stiffened, his hands dropped, his head turned—but too late.

Snake-like, a noose dropped over his shoulders and the chair back; with a snap it tightened, pinning his arms to his sides and his body to the chair. Marsdon struggled. Loop after loop pressed his chest, his hips, his legs, binding him tighter—tighter—till his struggles ceased and he could move only his head.

Tugging a last knot, the figure straightened breathlessly and, grinning evilly, stepped around the chair.

It was Baku—in all the glory of pistol and *kris*.

The blood seemed about to start from the flesh of Marsdon's face. He spoke chokingly.

"You filthy, stinking pig! I'll——"

Baku interrupted him. He picked up the whip and struck the manager a cutting blow across the mouth.

"The evil *tuan* will keep silence while Baku speaks," he said.

Again Marsdon began an outburst and again the lash seared his face.

"The evil *tuan* will do well to listen politely to the words of Baku," advised the native.

Marsdon glowered at the brown man in front of him. Vaguely it occurred to him that his position might be one of danger.

"What do you want?" he growled.

The native's eyes narrowed. He threw down the whip and drew nearer Marsdon.

"Two things, O evil *tuan,*" he said softly. "Two things I want and will have—very soon. First, the fortune in money possessed by the evil *tuan*. Second"—he leaned closer—"*the life of the evil tuan.*"

Marsdon paled momentarily. He knew that the native's words were not an idle threat; then he laughed.

"Idiot!" he scoffed. "You may be able to kill me, but do you think for a moment that I'll tell you where that money is?"

Baku smiled.

"I think you will, O evil *tuan.*"

"I'll roast in hell first—pig!" And Marsdon spat at Baku.

The brown man snarled and seized the whip, but paused ere lifting it, smiled and threw it down again.

"Yes, O evil *tuan,* you are right," he murmured. "You *will* roast in hell first if you do not tell."

Still smiling he moved toward the smoking-stand by the door. Half-way there, however, he stopped abruptly, drew the pistol and leaped for the wall out of sight of the door. Tensely he waited, the pistol aimed. Marsdon, facing the other way, was unaware of all this.

Seconds, and the draperies of the door stirred, then moved apart. Slowly a hand was thrust into the room—it held a hammer. A face followed—swollen, purple-streaked, one eye completely closed. Baku leaped.

"Come forward, *tuan* Parson!" he ordered. "Come very slowly—or I will shoot you!"

Parsons, bewildered at this turn of events, obeyed. Baku urged him to a chair facing Marsdon. At the sight of his assistant and the hammer which he still carried Marsdon laughed harshly.

"Too late, pig!" he jeered. "Another pig has beaten you to it!"

Parsons did not respond. Baku took

possession of the hammer, then, stepping back, quietly regarded the younger white man. He shook his head in pity and, turning, displayed his naked, scarred back.

"You see, *tuan* Parson?" he said softly. "We are brothers in suffering. We both seek the life of the evil *tuan*. Shall we like brothers watch him go to his death?"

Parsons made no answer. He was staring in hatred at the sneering Marsdon. Baku sighed.

"But the white mind is strange," he said. "Perhaps I had better tie you. Yes, I shall tie you. But be assured that no harm shall come to you—for you are my brother in suffering."

Baku moved to the window, tore down the curtains and, twisting them into ropes, bound Parsons to the chair. Straightening, he gently touched the young man's swollen face. "My brother," he murmured, and turned to Marsdon.

"The evil *tuan* will now tell Baku the hiding-place of his fortune," he commanded.

Marsdon responded with a torrent of profane abuse.

"Baku asks for the last time," warned the native.

"Bah! You fool! You're going to kill me anyway; why should I tell you?" And once more Marsdon spat at the brown man.

"No—you are the fool," said Baku quietly, wiping the spittle from his chest, "and you will tell."

Again he crossed to the smoking-stand, picked up a box of matches, returned and opened the box in front of Marsdon. The manager paled.

"What are you going to do?" he rasped.

Baku made no reply, but drew forth a match.

"You stinking swine!" hoarsely, "you don't dare!"

Again no reply. Baku bent to the right and struck a match by the manager's hand. Marsdon felt its heat.

"Burn then, damn you!" he shrieked. "Burn me, you scum! I'll never tell you!"

PARSONS watched. Since taking the chair his eyes had not left Marsdon. Hatred was new to him, but, gazing at that purple, bloated face, his emotion of intense dislike seemed old—older than either of them—and quite natural.

There was something exciting about it, too, and, from his position of advantage, something satisfying. It was going to be good to see Marsdon die. Even when the threat of torture was offered he felt only gratification.

He watched. Marsdon screamed once when Baku applied the burning match to his hand; then, his big jaw closing like a vise, only gurgling, animal-like noises were heard. His body strained crazily in its bonds.

Baku consumed a match. Marsdon's taut body slumped in the chair, his mouth opened, he groaned. Baku, without emotion, drew forth another match.

Parsons stared.

He saw a face that had aged twenty years in twenty seconds. He saw perspiration pour from a brow with a thousand lines, down over eyelids closed tight in nameless agony. He saw those eyelids open, saw the blood-filled eyes of a man in hell looking into his. In his nose was the acrid odor of roasted flesh.

Parsons went deathly sick. He heard Baku strike the match.

"Baku, wait!" he gasped weakly.

"Saja, tuan." Baku blew out the match.

"The money, Baku—I know where it is."

"Saja, tuan?" eagerly.

"Yes—you see, I—I wanted him to suffer a bit first. The money—it's—it's in the chicken coop."

"Chicken coop?" in puzzled surprize.

"Yes—inside—buried at the left of the door."

Baku's brow cleared. He smiled compassionately.

"Ah, yes, I see. That was why the evil *tuan* beat you; because you discovered the hiding-place of his fortune. Well, I shall go now for the fortune—and when I return, together will we watch him die. Then will I share with you the fortune so that you may go far away. I do this because you have been my brother in suffering. *Tuan* Allah smile upon us both. Now I go."

PARSONS did not watch the brown man as he left the room. He sat stiffly in his chair, eyes wide, heart pounding.

Marsdon turned a pain-dulled gaze on the younger man.

"What's the game?" he muttered.

Parsons silenced him.

"Listen!" he whispered.

Five—ten—twenty seconds they sat thus, tense, not breathing. A clock in the room ticked explosively.

Then, through the dead silence, it came to them: a muffled crash; bubbling, throaty noises; the thrashing sound of a large, live thing on the ground in its death struggle. At last, silence.

Parsons' eyes closed—his chin dropped to his chest. Marsdon spoke.

"What—what happened to him?"

Parsons raised his head. His voice was flat and dull when he answered:

"A trap in the chicken coop. Two hundred pounds of stones in a box. It fell on his head—on his head—on my brother's head. Oh, God! The poor devil!"

Parsons struggled and tore himself loose from his bonds (it was not difficult, for Baku had tied his brother gently), rose to his feet, then sat down again and buried his face in his hands. Marsdon watched him, his eyes blank with wonder; finally:

"Why did you do it?" he whispered.

Parsons leaped to his feet.

"Because your skin is white!—you swine! And may God damn you for it!—you filthy beast!" And Parsons struck the bound man across the mouth with his fist.

Marsdon's expression did not change; his gaze remained fixed. Suddenly, though, great tears appeared in his eyes; they rolled down his cheeks, a steady stream, and dripped on his filthy shirt like rain. With an oath Parsons went behind him and undid his bonds, found a jar of vaseline and tossed it on the table.

"Smear that on your hand," he said shortly. "I'm leaving."

But Marsdon, his arms hanging inertly, had sunk forward. Gradually his big body began to shake. Great sobs convulsed him. He went to pieces like a broken-hearted child.

Parsons watched him for a moment; then, taking a towel and lifting the burned hand to the table, he dressed it. He was finishing when Marsdon's other hand came groping along the table, found Parsons' arm and rested there.

Parsons looked at the hand on his sleeve, sighed and, reaching forward, momentarily gripped the shoulder of his superior.

Neither man saw the curtains of the doorway move slightly then. Nor did they hear the sly, little, brown queen of diplomacy, Laneh, as she stole from the door where she had been watching and listening, moved to her room and, gathering her few belongings, disappeared into the night.

Scented Gardens

By DOROTHY QUICK

Strange passion came to the young queen in the gardens of the rajah's palace, and swift was the rajah's vengeance

I, ARA, the Queen, am weary of the scented gardens. I have too long imbibed their beauties and breathed in the oppressing fragrance of rarest flowers. I have watched white peacocks spread their plumage until my eyes grew heavy, and I have walked the velvet grass in monotonous splendor.

I have bathed in the golden pool, and I have been rowed upon the crystal lake until I tired of its smiling calm. I have plucked great roses and torn their petals from their stems one by one to make the hours pass more quickly. It seems strange, but always I have been associated with gardens—my father's, the temple's and the King's—and each has been more lovely than the one before.

I was not unwelcome to my father and mother, as is the usual case with girl babies born in our land of India. Before me were three stalwart boys. Thus I was made much of.

My father was a wealthy man and the garden was in proportion to his means. In it I spent my days.

When I was but a tiny thing, they laid me on a crimson robe and let the sun bathe my naked body. Thus I grew strong and soon was running about the grass. My brothers played with me and my mother sang me sweet songs.

The first six years of my life were unadulterated happiness. Then my mother grew pale and no longer ran about with me to chase the butterflies. Instead she lay on the crimson robe in the shadow of a tamarack tree and watched us at play with listless eyes. Crimson pillows were heaped into a bed for her and made her wan face all the paler.

One day I brought to her a pure white rose that had just opened its petals to the sun. She stretched no hand for it, nor did her eyes meet mine. She lay white and still, and when I touched her hand it was quite cold.

I cried aloud. Kya, my nurse, with my mother's women, came running. When their lamentations rent the air, I knew my mother had been gathered to the Gods.

We were bidden to follow my mother's body to the temple. Wrapped in white, it was placed upon the funeral pyre. Each one of us laid a stick upon it and then, when it was piled high, my father lit the flame. Soon naught but ashes were left, and they were scattered to the sacred river Ganges.

After that the garden lost its sweetness and Kya talked much of poverty. Still the time passed pleasantly until I was ten years of age.

Now I was alone in the women's quarters with Kya. I saw little of my father, who had grown morose and sad since the passing of my mother. But one day he came to me, and holding me before him gazed long upon my uncovered face.

"You are very like your mother," he said slowly. "The same deep-set black eyes with their heavy lashes, the same long black hair that is a siren's mesh; the same sweet face and the very selfsame mouth that will in time drive some man mad for love of you!"

Then he stepped back and looked me up and down. "Yes, you are very like,"

"She looked up into Bharda's eyes. They were mad with hate."

he went on. "Slim as a gazelle you are, with your budding breasts and your velvet skin! Tall and slim and beautiful you are, my daughter, and even more beautiful you will become."

He was right, my father, on that day six years ago; that is, if mirrors do not lie. Yes, I am beautiful, and my beauty has made me a Rani. But I hate my beauty! A Queen is only a slave. Jewels, fine garments, palaces and servants to do her whims may indeed be hers, but she is subject to the will of the lord she can not love.

Such thoughts were far from my mind when my father spoke. In fact, had any one opened the future for me and said, "You shall be a Queen," I should have leapt with joy. As it was, I was glad that I had been found fair.

My father sighed, and his sadness spent my joy. "Ara," he said, "of all my wealth there is naught left. I must go out into the world as your brothers have done. For you a choice is left. Why I give you that I do not know except that your mother dreamed you might be wed for love and find your happiness as she had done."

For a second he covered his eyes with the back of his hand. There was a great silence. For perhaps the first time in my

life fear swept over me. Then my father went on in his low and sad voice. "Haj Mudhal has asked for you in marriage, my daughter. He is willing to take you without a dowry."

"No, no!" I screamed, being overcome with terror. Haj Mudhal, an obscene old man, was the Bluebeard of our land. Often had Kya told me of him and the wives he took unto himself, young and fair, who lived but for a little while. Gross and terrible he was and I revolted from the mere mention of his name.

"So I thought you would feel, child of my heart. Yet in my impoverished state I can not give you a husband of your choosing. Still I give you another choice —the temple."

His voice trailed off into space and he waited for my answer. Quickly it came. "I choose the temple!" And verily, if he had offered death, I should have met it gladly rather than be delivered to Haj Mudhal.

And so it was the temple. I said goodbye to the garden, to Kya, and at the temple doors my father said farewell to me, kissing me once upon the forehead. I saw tears glistening in his eyes as he put my hand in that of a priest. Then he was gone. I walked through the doors and heard them close upon me, as I thought, for ever.

I WAS sent to the school for dancing-girls, and because I was very fair and quick at learning all the postures of the dance, they devoted much time and thought to my training. The old mother of the school took the place of Kya. No matter how harshly she scolded the other girls, her voice softened when she spoke to me.

She it was who interested the eldest priest in me. He called me his "daughter" tenderly and taught me to read and write. In time I read to him from out the sacred books, for his eyes grew feeble. Because of this I had more freedom than the other girls.

Here, too, I loved the gardens. The women's place had only a small one, around which the house was built, but the temple garden was larger than my father's. High-walled, with a pool in the center, it was full of cool, green plants. I had to cross it as I went to the eldest priest; so with his permission, whose word was law, I often lingered in its greenness, and the priests paid me no notice.

So life went by placidly as the unruffled waters of the lake. Again I was very happy.

One by one the girls I played with were wedded to the God. Of this ceremony they never talked, for on their lips was placed a seal of silence. When the marriage was over, they went to live in another part of the house, and I only saw them when we met in the temple. There I led the dances, and I was called the Virgin of the God.

So the years passed, slipping away into the stream of life. Each day was like a rose petal tossed to the breeze of time. I was fifteen, and knew that my marriage with the God could not be put off much longer, even though the old mother and the eldest priest had delayed the ceremony from year to year. I was sad and forlorn contemplating that soon I must become a nun, with naught to do but pray eternally, and sing in the temple where now I danced.

I WAS alone in the garden looking deep into the pool as though I would read my fortune in its depths. It was the hour when the priests gathered for their noonday repast, so the garden was deserted. I

let loose my veil, for it was hot. All at once I heard steps behind me, and turned, to be caught by two strong arms that held me firmly.

It was Sevi, a young priest. "Ara," he stammered, "I love you!"

I tried to free myself but could not. His grasp was iron. I looked up into his handsome face. His shaven head and smooth unwrinkled skin shone in the sunlight, and his brown eyes glowed with a strange fire. Against my will his lips met mine.

It was my first kiss, and yet I felt from it no joy, only a new sensation which I could not define.

When he released my lips, he whispered softly in my ear, "Oh, Ara, you who are so beautiful, give me of your beauty! I am parched with a thirst that you can quench, and I burn with a fire that only you can extinguish."

"Priest Sevi," I said, "I do not understand, but I do know that this is a sin. Let me go, I beg of you!"

"Oh Flower, trembling on the stem of knowledge, will you not bloom for me?" he begged, as he released me.

"I belong to the God," I answered, "yet I would know what is this—love?"

"Love is the need to hold the loved one in your arms. It is the thrill of lips upon lips, the joy of hand touching hand, of two made into one," he told me.

I shook my head. "I feel no joy."

Sevi sank upon his knees before me. "Forgive me," he pleaded. "One day I saw you in my master's room without your veil, and since then I have been as one who is mad. I have lain awake in the night, biting my lips until they bled to keep from calling out your name. Now I am sane again, knowing there is no hope. I shall always remember this moment that I held you in my arms."

I told him I forgave him and asked him yet again, "What is love?"

His eyes met mine, and ever shall I remember their intensity. "Love," he said, "is the desire of a man for a woman and the longing of a woman for a man. It is the need of the one for the other. Love is the life-giving force of the world. Without it one stands in a barren desert, and with it the desert becomes a flowering garden. Love is truly heaven on earth!"

"I would know love," I whispered, aghast at my own daring.

He smiled sadly upon me. "I pray that when you do, your love will be returned." Then he went back into the temple to pray to the God for forgiveness.

I could not pray, although I knew that in those few short moments I had committed many sins; my unveiled face, the kiss, and speaking to Sevi as a man, not as a priest. But greatest of all was the desire that I should know love, the love of which he had spoken.

Now, I, the Rani, know the love of a man for a woman, but still desire to know the love of a woman for a man. My heart is dead within my bosom waiting for love to bring it to life. But it is idle to hope, for I can never know. As my lord can not make me love him, I shall never love. To the Pink Palace no man can come save only the Rajah. Heaven on earth is not for me.

AFTER that day in the garden I was full of strange restlessness. Always I felt Sevi's eyes upon me with their hopeless look. Then I could not understand, but now I understand, alas, too well!

Then came the day of the great festival. For months we had been making ready for it. Once every ten years the

Rajah came to the temple to make a special offering to the God. It was for this day that the eldest priest had kept me. After it, though much against his will, he must give me over to the God.

The old mother herself prepared me for the dance. First she and her slaves bathed me with sweet-scented waters, then perfumed my naked body, stained my nails with brightest henna, darkened my eyes with kohl and reddened the curve of my lips. When this was done and my loosened hair combed until it glowed, the old mother bound the deep-glowing ruby about my forehead. Between my breasts she hung the emerald of green lights, and encircled my waist with the jeweled girdle of the Goddess. From it hung strings of pearls that shimmered with every move I made.

Pearls wound my ankles and my wrists. Truly, I was robed in jewels!

A silken veil was thrown over my head and a cloth-of-gold garment sewn with diamonds was wrapped about me before they placed me in the golden chair in which slaves carried me to the temple.

I made obeisance to the God, then turned and bowed to the Rajah who was enthroned opposite the God. The sides of the huge room were lined with priests, nuns and dancing-girls. About the Rajah were his courtiers and near the God the eldest priest, with Sevi at his side.

Slowly the music started. Two girls glided forth from the sides and took the veil from my head. Two more came and took the mantle from my shoulders. Then I was left alone in the center of the great hall, with only my hair and jewels to cover me. From everywhere I could hear murmurings of my beauty.

After a little I forgot the room and the people. I heard only the beat of the music. I swayed with it, to and fro. Then as it became louder, I began to dance. I danced as I had never danced before; faster and faster came the melody, and there was madness in its tune! I spun round and round until, exhausted, I sank to the floor. The music came to a sudden end with a blast of trumpets.

I looked up and saw the Rajah rising to his feet. "A boon!" he cried. "I, Bharda, ask a boon of the God!"

From the other end of the room came the response: "The face of the God is turned toward Bharda. Let the King tell his desire."

For an instant there was no sound in all that huge hall. The Rajah was a handsome man, like to a sturdy oak with his deep-hued skin and heavy brows. Thick-set he was, with black hair and heavy-lidded eyes. His lips were full and sensuous. All this I saw in a second.

Again his voice rang out, "Bharda, the King, asks but a simple gift from the God. He craves the dancing-girl!"

Now I caught my breath, who liked not the looks of this man. From far away I heard the reply of the eldest priest.

"Oh King, this girl is promised to the God! She is the Virgin of the Temple, and ill would it be for the God if his bride were to be given for a concubine."

There was silence in the temple, but it was a silence fraught with possibilities. The Rajah's eyes were upon me. I felt them travel over my body and, despite myself, I trembled. Even as I did so, the Rajah spoke.

"Once every ten years the Rajah brings gifts to the temple and departs with one gift from the God. I have named my gift."

Sevi leaned forward and whispered in the eldest priest's ear. From far off I

could see him. Then I heard the eldest priest say, "It would be indignity to the God to give this girl to be a slave. She shall be yours if you will call her wife."

The Rajah's eyes flashed. For a moment he hesitated. Of a sudden he laughed a mighty laugh. Then he looked at me again while he cried, "So be it! And to do more honor to the God, she shall be Queen!"

Now a murmur went over the hall, and then there was a mighty shout of joy.

With great state the eldest priest descended from his throne and escorted by Sevi and his attendant priests, came toward me.

Sevi bent to raise me up. As he did he whispered, "I could not bear that you should be a nun. You will be Queen because of me. Remember that!" Then they led me to the King.

Now the Pink Palace and the scented gardens are mine. The rarest of jewels and ropes of pure white pearls were also the Rajah's gifts to me. I have but to name a wish and it is granted. I am called Ara, the most blessed of women. Yet, with all these things, my heart is a barren desert upon which no flower grows.

The Rajah loves me. The Goddess of Love smote him between the eyes that day in the temple. That is why I have been put over all the other wives and given the name and place of Rani. Too, there is method in his love, for in all the palace and the houses of the women there is but one son, Irjuna, he who is reaching manhood, of whom they tell such wondrous tales. The Rajah wants another son, a surety against the blows of fate, and I am to supply that need, I who am the love of his life. Yes, truly Bharda loves me, and I pretend that I love him. Yet when I hear his step upon the rose-hued marble floors, my heart leaps not within my breast. Ah, now I know what love could be, but I do not know love. In all my splendor I am sad, longing for that which is not! There is no hope. No man but Bharda comes within the walls that shut me in. So I must drench my soul with the beauty of the scented garden and forget that women, too, may love.

2

LOVE has come into the scented garden! This is the way of it.

My lord, the King, was called forth to one of his provinces to settle a dispute between two rival hordes. The gates of my palace were locked with Bharda's golden key. The stalwart eunuchs guarded every entrance. Bharda bade me a fond farewell and bound the chief eunuch to obey my slightest word. But of a truth I had no wish except to lie idly on my blue-green cushions and listen to sweet music while I dreamed.

So two days passed. Then suddenly a whim seized me. I would go into the garden alone as I had done when I was a child. I would sit under the shadow of a tamarack tree and pretend I was back in the temple.

I forbade my women to accompany me and I wandered forth alone. For a little while I played with the roses. Then, because my pearls were heavy on my neck and head, I took them off and laid them on my veil beside the pool. My hair loosened, floated in the breeze. I kicked my jeweled sandals off and began to dance. This way and that I swayed until I espied an orange butterfly. I started in pursuit of it. The brilliant thing flew on until it neared the wall, then floated up over my head, beyond my reach!

I found myself in quite the most deserted part of the garden. Against the

wall was a tree that grew upon it and sent shady branches out toward me. Observing that I was screened from view of the palace by bushes that grew between me and the garden, I gave in to a sudden weariness that had beset me. I sank to the velvet grass and for a moment closed my eyes.

How long they remained shut I do not know, but when I opened them I almost cried aloud, for seated on the lowest branch of the tree was a youth! Even now my heart beats faster as I think of his beauty. Tall and slim, with smooth bronze skin and well-cut lips, his hair fell in straight folds about his ears. With deep brown eyes he gazed intently upon me.

"How camest thou here?" I gasped.

He smiled and his white teeth gleamed. "The wall was kind," he said. "In just this spot there grows a tree on the other side."

"But why——?"

"I came to see the new Queen of whose beauty the whole kingdom sings."

"Have you not seen her at the festival?" I asked.

"I was not there," he told me, "and at the time of the coronation I was far away. Now I can never see her, save at some great event, which may not come for many days. Tell me, is she as lovely as they say?"

I laughed, but when my eyes met his my laughter died away as a tiny breeze on a still summer's day. For in that moment love was born. Yes, I, the Queen, could have bowed down gladly as a slave before him. The cold heart that could not leap for Bharda was fluttering in my breast like a wild bird, striving to be free.

"Who are you?" I entreated in a voice that trembled.

"What does it matter?" he cried, and came toward me.

I rose unsteadily, and all the while our eyes gazed deep.

"What does it matter who I am, or who you are, when I love you?" he cried again, and took me in his arms.

I made no cry. Our lips met.

After a while my new-found love brought fear for my beloved.

"You must go," I whispered. "If you should be found here it would mean death!"

"I would risk a thousand deaths for one instant in your arms," he replied; then with a swift glance about him, "We need not fear. We can not be seen. This is Love's arbor. The Fates were kind who brought us hither."

But I knew I had been absent from the palace far too long. With kisses and soft words I begged him go, with the promise I would meet him again the next day.

"Farewell, my beautiful," he cried, "fairer than the roses thou art! The touch of your lips is more glorious than the passion flower. And you, yourself, are like the lily, pure and white in your slenderness. Suffer that when I come again I shall gather the flower and hold its loveliness for ever to my heart!"

Words would not come to me, but in my eyes he must have read his answer, for with a soft "Tomorrow!" he was gone.

All through the night I lay awake tossing upon my silken cushions. All that was good in me urged my duty toward Bharda, but ever a voice whispered, "Life is short, and there is nothing real but love!"

ON THE morrow, swift as a swallow, I sped to his arms. Then I knew the truth of Sevi's words, "Love is truly heaven upon earth."

One day I asked him for his name

that I might whisper it throughout the night. "Call me Irjuna," he said. "I serve the Prince."

"Then call me Ara," I returned. "The Queen is my mistress."

While we laughed together in the sunlight, I heard a step and suddenly turned cold. "Be still," I murmured in his ear, and with a carefree air stepped out through the bushes to confront whoever it might be.

Coming toward me was Setti, my favorite maid. She of all my women was the only one I felt I could trust. Often I had wanted to confide in her, if only to have some one to talk to of my love through the long hours between our meetings. But I had hesitated. Now I decided to trust to her devotion.

I knew that Setti loved me, for once, shortly after I had come to the Pink Palace, when we had been idling by the golden pool, an adder had thrust its ugly head up from the long grasses and glided toward Setti. The other maids had screamed and fled, leaving her to what they knew was death. I, who had lost my fear of serpents in the temple, rushed swiftly and caught it up. I knew just where to place my hold and how to press my fingers until the breath was gone from it. Then I tossed it away.

Setti had then vowed her devotion to me for all time. Thus, when she flung herself on her knees before me and gasped, "Lady, I feared for you," I told her the truth and won her to my service. And now she keeps guard during the time I am with my love.

Ah, but our stolen hours are sweet! Yet even of my joy I am afraid. Bharda comes home ere three days pass. But two little weeks of heaven have I had. Tomorrow I must confess I am the Queen, for when my lord, the Rajah, has returned, all will be changed.

Truly, fear has descended upon me like darkened clouds. I would rest for ever in my lover's arms, contented with caresses. But tomorrow I must tell him I am Queen.

3

FROM high up in my prison tower I can look down upon the scented garden and the Pink Palace. They are beautiful, yet there is a desolation about them, for they are quite empty. There is no sound in all the halls of the palace that once was mine. In the garden, the white peacocks do not spread their tails. Over by the wall, the friendly tree and sheltering bushes have been torn from their roots, and where they were is a mound of fresh-turned earth with a great gap beside it. I do not dare to look lest I go mad before my time has come to rest therein. Truly I have been close to madness!

I remember how I dreaded the morrow because I had to tell my love I was the Queen. Ah, what a little thing that seems now, and how long ago!

Setti tried to lighten my fears, but depression held me in its grasp. Depression? No, it was Fate warning me. But of what use are Fate's warnings if Fate makes them not clear?

I went toward my love with heavy heart, but smiles upon my lips.

"Sweet flower of my life, I love you!" he whispered over and over again. And I told my love as many times.

Finally, when the fullest force of his passion had subsided, I stirred a little in his arms. "Beloved, there is a confession I must make!"

He kissed my eyelids, first one and then the other, while he said, "I, too, have something I must say."

"Let me speak first," I begged, and when he gave assent, I haltingly laid

bare my secret. "Pray do not love me less, most cherished of all men, because I am Ara, the Queen!"

With a groan he released me and buried his face in his hands. "My love, my love!" I cried, "I could not love you more were I the slave-girl that you took me for. I swear to you! I——"

He raised his head, and I stopped short, curbed by the look of anguish in his eyes. "I might have known," he said. "Ara, the fairest of women! Who could it have been but you, who are so beautiful? I climbed the wall to catch a stolen glimpse of Bharda's Queen, and then I stole her from him! I swear by all the gods, if I had known that you were Ara, I never should."

I sought to comfort him. "You need not suffer so, my love, nor fear to love me. I am not of royal blood. I was——"

He interrupted, and his soft sweet voice was sad. "You do not understand. I love you—nor would I have it otherwise—but I would not have taken you, nor would you have been so free to give if you had known I was—Irjuna!"

Now, I, too, was silent. Irjuna, Bharda's son! The horror of it smote me. Tears forced themselves from my eyes and wandered down my cheeks. Irjuna saw and gathered me to his arms again. "Do not weep, beloved," he cried. "We did not know. The Gods brought us together. Why should we question their will? At least they have given us happiness, if only for a moment." So he comforted me and for a while I lay quiet in his clasp.

At last I said, "I ask no further gift from the Gods. Irjuna, night and day, always, I shall love you!"

"I understand," he answered. "I know we must not meet again. Is that what you mean?"

I bowed my head. I could not put it into words.

My love was the braver. He who was known for his courage, thus nobly spoke: "I, too, shall always think of you and love you with my heart and soul. I shall have no wife but you, my Ara, for you and I have been truly wedded, and so we shall ever be! This is farewell!"

He bent down and pressed his lips to mine, but even as I returned his kiss, we felt hands tearing us apart.

I looked up into Bharda's eyes. They were mad with hate!

"So!" he said, and his voice was ominous and cold, "I find my wife and my son! Of a truth, you have said farewell!" And he laughed a bitter laugh that struck terror to my very soul.

I freed myself from the guard who held me, and threw myself at Bharda's feet sobbing out the truth. Irjuna stood proudly with his arms laced back on either side by the Rajah's soldiers. "I swear we did not know!" he said.

Bharda would not hear. "I understand only too well. Come, my son, you shall see me drink my fill of her caresses before she dies, and she shall reach Gehenna with my kisses on her lips!"

He gave his orders. When Irjuna tried to speak, he struck him hard across the mouth. I cried aloud, only to be served the same. As I remember, so great was my mental torment that I did not even feel the blow.

THEY dragged us into the palace and cleared my chamber. Irjuna they bound securely to a golden chair, while they tied my wrists and ankles to the posts of my divan; then we were left alone with Bharda.

Bharda had made no idle threat. He pressed his odious caresses upon me, and

spared me nothing until I prayed for death to come swiftly. Yet all the while I made no sound, nor did I beg for mercy. I suffered silently. Only when my lover's eyes met mine could I see the reflection of my own anguish.

Presently Bharda turned to Irjuna with subtle cunning. "Tell me, my son, do you still desire this woman?"

Now Irjuna spoke for the first time. My whole life hung upon his answer.

"Oh, Father, if you will give us leave to go away together, I will for ever bless your name!"

Bharda leered. "You shall pay for that!"

He clapped his hands and the guards returned.

"I will be merciful. You shall have no further torment. Swift death shall be your portion. First you," he pointed to Irjuna, "then your lover," and he extended his hand toward me with the emerald ring turned in a way that meant—death!

Irjuna laughed, not bitterly, like Bharda, but with a happy tone. "I thank you for your mercy, my father," he said quietly. Then his voice grew soft and gentle as he looked at me. "Good-bye but for a little, Ara, my love. I go to wait for you!"

Those were such wondrous words, and yet indeed such fatal ones. Before I had time to reply, Bharda raised his hand to stay the executioner's uplifted dagger.

"So," he snarled, "you and she would cheat me yet again and live for ever in each other's arms! Think you I will send you so resignedly to bliss? Not so! You, Irjuna, shall die, for I could not keep you prisoner who are too well loved by all my people."

His voice broke a little, for he had loved Irjuna and gloried with pride in him. But he went on firmly.

"You can wait for her, Irjuna, but she will not come quickly. In the Ivory Tower she shall spend her years longing for you. Whenever the whim seizes me I shall visit her. You may think of that while you wait for her," he sneered.

Irjuna answered not. At Bharda's orders they unbound him and brought him to the foot of my divan. There was a swift flash of steel. . . .

So died Irjuna, the Prince, son of Bharda—and my love.

I sank into a merciful oblivion with Bharda's last words ringing in my ears. "Take her, who was the Queen, away!"

I have been in the Ivory Tower for six long weeks, alone, save for the guards who stand behind the screen and watch me carefully. Bharda has come twice to torment me with his kisses. Of a truth, I liked his anger better than his love and his laughing, when I plead for death. So the days have dragged slowly by.

But today, something was thrown in my window. An instinct prompted me to wait until the guards were busy with their food. Then stealthily I picked up the object. It was a ring, wound about with a paper on which was written:

"Lady, as you saved me from the adder, so shall I save you. Inside this ring is a swift and painless poison. Use it if you will."

If I will! Now by the gods, never have I received a more welcome gift! All Bharda's pearls were not so precious as this white powder that brings me my release!

To you, Bharda, I leave this record that you may know how I have beaten you. The name of the one who has given me my freedom, I shall erase from these pages. Now it is done, and I am *free!* Free to go to Irjuna, my love, who waits for me. Together we shall find true happiness in the Gardens of Paradise!

The powder has a bitter taste, but it leads me surely to eternal light!

Farewell, Bharda. Irjuna, hail!

On the Roofs of Tunis

By PAUL ERNST

The quest for the Seal of Caesar leads two Americans into a madcap adventure and deadly perils in hand-to-hand fighting on the roofs of Arab Old-Town

SLOWLY the two men walked down the winding, crooked way. The souks of Tunis! Heart and soul of the old Orient, these native markets are; and of all the world-famous bazars, those of Tunis are second in importance and glitter only to the bazars of Constantinople itself.

The two had left the crowded tourist souks, and were making their way along the more purely native lanes. Hence they were jostled by robed figures and surrounded by ancient odors that might have come straight from Arabia a thousand years before.

As they strolled, Walter Dwight, the older of the two, a powerfully built man with a shock of blond hair, and light blue eyes that made him glaringly conspicuous in this brunette land, glanced about him with lively interest but with no particular aim in view. But Kane Holworthy—young millionaire adventurer who employed Walt as combination secretary-companion-mentor on his travels—kept peering into one gloomy shop entrance after another in quest of a definite article.

Kane wanted a Roman antique. More specifically, he wanted one of the dainty, beautifully carved intaglios which the sons of Rome used to set in rings and pendants. He had been told that Tunis, only a few miles from the vast ruins of old Carthage, was the best place on earth in which to buy Roman relics; and he had figured out for himself that the souks would be the most likely spot in the city to offer him what he wanted.

He had been told differently. Monsieur Chavannes, who kept a jewelry shop in the new French part of Tunis, and who dealt chiefly in old Roman gems, had specifically warned him to make all such purchases of reputable jewel houses—to stay away from the smaller Arab venders whose codes of honor, while sufficient unto themselves, were distinctly different from the European and American codes.

"You will see many Roman relics for sale in the souks," Chavannes had told him. "Some will be genuine—some will be made in Germany, as are most of the crates and crates of old Roman coins the Arab boys try to sell you in the streets. Only an expert can tell the difference. And you, Monsieur Holworthy, are not an expert!"

"But you haven't in stock the kind of thing I want," Kane had protested. "I'm out for something better than you carry."

Chavannes had shrugged. "When 'something better' is picked up, the French government will confiscate it for the museum," he murmured. "I can keep in stock only things already in museum possession in duplicate, or articles too chipped for the authorities to want."

"Therefore," Kane had replied laughingly, "the souks! I'll wager some of those shops wouldn't be too careful to turn over to the government any particularly fine pieces they might buy or find!"

And so he was out today to see if, in some dark little shop on the fringe of

"The bared blade flashed as it was raised high."

the souks, he couldn't discover something unique and precious in the way of Roman intaglio gems.

"If it wasn't so confoundedly dark in here," he grumbled cheerfully to Walt, "a fellow might be able to see something once in a while."

It certainly was dark. Though but mid-afternoon, the day was excluded from the tortuous, alley-like streets by continuous arched roofs that passed from one side to the other, bridging the distance from rooftop to rooftop overhead. The only light allowed to relieve the gloom filtered in through small square openings in these curious street-roofs.

"Lucky for you it is dark," replied Walt. "What you can't see, you won't buy. And what you don't buy will be just so much saved. You know the slogan of the East: 'Let the buyer beware'."

"Oh, you and Chavannes!" responded Kane. "A couple of croakers. You'd feel funny if I *did* pick out a museum piece, wouldn't you?"

And at that moment both saw it—a shop that was extra small and smelly and dark even for that district of small, smelly, dark shops. And on its single counter near the cobbles of the souk was an array of Roman antiques.

Quickly Kane approached it. There was

a trayful of Roman coins, an amphora or two, something that looked like an earring and was labelled Phenician, and three intaglios cut in the opaque, milky stone called Tears of Carthage.

THE merchant got to his feet from his cross-legged reclining position and, with much rubbing of hands, prepared to attend the two Americans.

"I'm looking for an extra fine Roman intaglio," Kane explained in laborious French. "What have you?"

The merchant drew out the tray on which were the few intaglios Kane had first seen. But Kane shook his head. They were no better, nor larger, than the ones he had seen in Chavannes' shop.

"Is that all you have?" he said, prepared for one more disappointment.

"That is all," said the merchant, after a slight hesitation. "But there are coins —see—of a fineness not to be matched in the city——"

"Minted in Germany," said Kane with a wave of the hand.

It was a chance shot; but it hit the mark. The merchant's dark eyes shifted a bit, and he winced.

"*Monsieur* is an expert in such matters," he murmured. "Had I but known, I would have shown at once that which I have—an intaglio that would make mad the government did they but know it was in my possession."

The merchant looked carefully toward the street. Then he drew a gayly striped drape across the counter. After that, his dark eyes darting about as though he feared a file of gendarmes would appear at any moment, he drew out a little wooden box and slid back its lid.

Kane sucked in his breath with an audible hiss as he saw the contents of the box.

An intaglio lay there in a bed of soiled cotton that was a finer specimen than he'd dreamed of finding. Blood-red it was, of carnelian, an oval about an inch across. Cut in it with superb precision—showing to perfection under the magnifying glass the merchant held for him to look through —was a portrait of a kneeling warrior protected by a shield on which was carved a head of Medusa. Save for an infinitesimal chip on one side, it was in as perfect condition as though it had come from the gem-cutter's only yesterday.

But a further wonder was to come—a revelation concerning the intaglio that placed it in the class of the fabulous.

"This, *Messieurs*," whispered the merchant, "is one of the seals of Cæsar—the official seal of the first of the Roman governors of Carthage. It is, as you will agree, a priceless stone."

"Not so priceless," said Kane as coolly as he could. "I imagine two hundred dollars of American money would buy it."

The merchant began to put the seal away. Kane offered more. The merchant wasn't interested.

Finally, after half an hour of haggling, the seal of Cæsar was Kane's for nine hundred and fifty dollars.

KANE, as he hurried through the souks back toward the Hotel Transatlantique, was intoxicated with his success. Walt, a little older and a little more cynical, was not quite so much so. But even he unbent, and admitted that Kane was a rare bargain finder, after an incident in the main book store of French Tunis.

The incident was the finding of a little book that listed famous Roman gems. And in it was a picture of the provincial seal of Cæsar. And on the seal was carved the kneeling warrior protected by the Medusa shield!

"We've got a priceless museum piece!" breathed Kane. "We'd better be careful——"

He stopped abruptly, and peered behind him.

"Walt, it's seemed to me we've been followed all the way from that squint-eyed merchant's shop to the book store. Have you felt it, too?"

"Yes," said Walt soberly, "I have. We'll be on the alert the rest of the way to the Transat, and see."

They did see. Without doubt a certain figure in a ragged burnoose of blue French broadcloth had made it his business to see where the two Americans went. They ascertained that as they walked into the doors of their hotel.

In Kane's room they discussed the problem that confronted them.

"Some one saw us buy that seal," declared Walt, "and some one is out to steal it from us. And no wonder! I'll bet it's worth ten times what you paid for it!"

"Twenty!" said Kane largely. "But I guess we can keep the wolves away from it."

"How? We don't want to carry it with us—we might find a knife in our backs up some dark alley. We can't hide it safely in our rooms. We might give it to the hotel to keep——"

"That's out!" said Kane promptly. "They haven't sealed envelopes for valuables in these hotels, so the proprietor would know just what he was guarding in his safe. He might be a conscientious devil who'd report it to the authorities. Then it would be confiscated for the museum."

In the face of Walt's objections, Kane finally decided to hide it in their rooms. And Walt had to admit that the hiding-place Kane selected, though somewhat trite, was a good one.

He simply dropped it in the inkwell set into the writing-desk.

"There," he said, "that'll be safe. Now we'll hire a car and drive out to Marsa Plage for dinner, as you suggested this morning."

They did; and on their return there was that lying on Kane's bureau top which caused him to shout to Walt in the adjoining room. It was a note which read: "If you wish the seal of Cæsar, you will find it again where you found it this afternoon. The price will be the same."

"The shifty-eyed bandit!" raged Kane. "The hook-nosed, double-crossing thief! The——"

"You've looked in the inkwell?" Walt broke in.

"No. What's the use? The seal is gone, of course. Now what'll we do?"

Walt shook his head. "It doesn't look very hopeful. We can't go to the police and have the shopkeeper pinched—we'd lose the intaglio, and we might get in hot water for not reporting it besides. I guess you'll have to buy it all over again—if you want it that badly."

"I guess I'll do nothing of the kind!" rapped Kane. "Do you think I'm going to stand for this? Not on your life!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to that shop—now—right this minute—and get my seal back. That's what I'm going to do!"

Walt stared at him in amazement. "But you can't do that! This isn't America. The souks, except for one or two main avenues, are closed at night—most of them barred off by big bolted doors. Europeans and Americans are supposed to keep out of there. If they do go in, it's at their own risk."

"Well, I'm going in. Am I going alone?"

A quizzical grin came finally to Walt's lips.

"No," he said, "you're not."

Rapidly they began to disguise themselves for their dangerous trip.

THE disguise was simple—they planned merely to throw a burnoose apiece (which they'd bought as curiosities earlier in their stay) over their clothes, roll up their trouser legs out of sight under it, and put on their feet the heelless slippers common to the Arabs. Thus equipped, with the capes of the burnooses turned up over their heads, they thought they could pass as natives in the blackness of the souks at night.

"I get the plot of this, all right," said Walt, after they had passed through the lobby with the casual explanation that they were on their way to a masquerade. "This merchant has the one, splendid antique for sale. He picks his suckers carefully, and sells it to them. Then he steals it back—and repeats the process, either with the original victim, or a new one. He's probably made a fortune out of Cæsar's seal already."

"His fortune-making is through, then," snapped Kane. "This time the sucker is going to turn!"

"Suppose our brown-skinned confidence man has the seal on his person instead of keeping it in his shop?" countered Walt. "You can't go searching all through the souks for him."

"He won't have it on him," said Kane confidently. "He'll figure as we did—that the carrying of so valuable a thing would tempt some one to slip a knife between his ribs. Bank on it, we'll find the seal in his shop."

They stopped talking, then. They had got to the huge old stone gate leading into the walled old-town. A little soberly they passed under its shadow—and into that domain which, after dark, is the absolute realm of the Arab. Their rash adventure had begun; and any consequences it might bring would have to be borne by them alone.

Past the main thoroughfare to the right which led to the food souks, they went; and up the fork to the left that tapped the souks given over to perfumes, slippers, leather and brasswork, and fabrics.

On every side of them, slipping like ghosts through the almost unrelieved darkness, strolled hooded Arabs, their loose slippers slapping the cobbles with soft precision as they walked. Going slowly, trying their best to imitate tread and carriage of their neighbors—and as yet completely undiscovered in their disguise if the fact that no one had turned to look at them proved anything—they reached the tunnel-like entrance to the side alley on which was located the shop they meant to raid. And here they stopped in dismay.

This entrance, as were most of the smaller ones, was barred at the main avenue by a great, nail-studded wooden door like the door to a courtyard. From building wall to building wall it extended; and from cobbled pavement up to the roof arching over the passage. *This* way, at least, was cut off from them!

"We'll try the next," muttered Kane doggedly.

They went on to the next alley mouth. This was open. They went up it for several hundred yards, finding it roughly parallel to the first. At length they came to an alley leading left and back toward the one they wished to reach. But this, too, was barred by one of the massive doors. Evidently that part of Arab-town was one it was thought best to seal like a vault

against the sudden invasion of the gendarmerie!

"What next?" whispered Kane.

Walt glanced overhead. Then he stared ahead of them and back the way they had come. No one was in sight; no ghostly gray figure showed in the almost pitch blackness.

"We might go up through that skylight in the roof," Walt said doubtfully. "Then we could make our way over the rooftops to the next alley, and drop down into it."

They gazed at each other for a long moment. The plan was feasible; the rooftops crowded one after another over all the souks, all the same height from the ground, and separated from each other only by breast-high walls. A man could make his way over them as over a level plain. But——

On the roofs, in this warm spring weather, was where the hareems of the Arabs slept. And the fate of two infidels who might be caught gazing at unveiled Arab women could only too easily be guessed! Furthermore, on at least a third of the roofs were kept the snarling, currish Arab dogs common to that part of the country. It was doubtful that Walt and Kane could go far without rousing several of these animals to yap at their heels and give them away.

IT WAS carrying their lives in their hands—more exactly, carrying them loosely in the crooks of their little fingers —to make such an attempt. It seemed all out of proportion when the stake was only a blood-red bauble of cold stone. Nevertheless, after only a second or two of hesitation, the two walked to a spot under the nearest crude skylight.

It was only about nine feet from the cobbles. By standing on Walt's shoulders, Kane could reach it easily enough. He pulled himself through, leaned far down to haul Walt up with a back-breaking effort; and the two found themselves in the forbidden and dangerous world of the Arab rooftops.

It was a beautiful world, however dangerous. White as snow stretched the breast-high walls dividing roof from roof. White as snow rose the mound and minaret of a mosque in the distance. No moon showed; but the great, brilliant stars leaning close from the sky gave light enough to gild everything with dim silver.

Moving cautiously for fear of crashing through wooden supports centuries old, the two men crawled over the narrow lane which was the roof of the street, and got to the wall of the nearest roof proper. Raising their heads inch by inch, they peered over it.

On rugs of Kairouan, very much *en deshabille,* three women slept. A small hareem, that of a man only moderately well off. There was no dog in sight.

Slowly, noiselessly, Walt and Kane scaled this first wall that intervened between them and the alley that was the objective point in their mad adventure. Still slowly and noiselessly, they stole over the flat rooftop to the next wall.

The roof beyond this—why, they were not versed enough in Arab habits to know —was deserted; and they crossed it rapidly. There followed a third roof, on which were five Arab ladies reclining in the languorous abandon of sleep. This too was successfully negotiated without any of the sleepers waking.

Across the fourth roof they could see the narrow, flat space that denoted the roof of the next alley—the one they were straining to reach. Only thirty feet or so away, it was. The two men began to think their task an easy one after all. . . .

"Down!" snapped Kane suddenly, as

their heads drew level with the top of the near wall of this last roof. But the warning was too late.

Across the wall from them sounded a low growl, which swelled in a moment to a fierce, resounding bark. Whereupon, pandemonium broke loose.

The dog bayed like a thing possessed. Never before, thought Kane fearfully, had a dog succeeded in raising such a fuss! And then, from adjoining roofs, other excited barks grew into a swelling chorus that in a few seconds was participated in by every dog—and there were hundreds of them—within a square mile.

"My God!" groaned Walt. "You can hardly hear yourself think! We're in for it now."

The two looked at each other in dismay. Already the shouts of men and the alarmed shrill voices of women were joining the canine chorus. All about them there were stirs of movement on various roofs, as though an enormous single animal were stirring in its sleep and writhing myriad tentacles in inquiry. And in the center of these tentacles—surrounded on every side by a sea of rooftops each of which was beginning to seethe with bewildered, hostile humanity, were Kane and Walt.

"Had we better retreat?" whispered Kane, glancing back along the way they had come.

Walt followed that glance, then shook his head. "No. We wouldn't have a chance. Forward is our best bet. Before us is only one roof to cross. Behind are three!"

Abandoning all attempts at silence, with swiftness as their most hopeful ally now, they vaulted the wall before them.

Instantly, snarling and snapping, one of the snow-white dogs of the desert was at their heels. To the accompaniment of a chorus of frightened shrieks from a huddled group of women on one corner of the roof, Kane caught the dog under the jaw with a terrific kick. As a kick it wasn't much; the loose slippers he was wearing weren't hard enough to stun. But it was sufficient to catapult it off to one side where it slunk without further attempt to attack them.

THEY neared the opposite—the last—wall and prepared to vault it onto the rooftop over the alley. Then Walt halted for an instant. From a square hole by his feet protruded a turbaned head. A stalwart Arab was just climbing up the ladder to the roof to see what all the noise was about.

For an instant his eyes glared into Walt's. And in those savage amber eyes, Walt read that the man knew him for an infidel.

With a shout, the Arab scrambled higher up the ladder. Walt raised his foot high and stamped on the turbaned head. There was a guttural curse, and the Arab slipped from the ladder to fall heavily to the floor beneath. Meanwhile, Kane had scaled the wall and was on the alley top. Walt joined him, and together they sped to the nearest skylight. Forgotten now was all thought of the seal of Cæsar; the main object was to get off those glaring white roofs that silhouetted every living thing so plainly in the starlight.

"Jump!" urged Walt, as Kane hesitated by the open skylight. "It can't be worse down there than up here."

Kane jumped. So close behind him that he almost landed on his back, jumped Walt.

"This way," he panted, leaping down the lane toward even deeper shadows than those that surrounded them.

The shadows were never reached. Around a half-bend in the passage before them appeared four Arabs, gesturing ex-

citedly and questing like hounds in search of the cause of the disturbance on the rooftops above.

With a single move, Walt and Kane jumped backward into a shallow hiding-place—a small arcade bounded from the street by a row of warped pillars. These pillars, striped like barber poles, raised a faint chord of memory in Kane's mind; but it was not until a little later that he realized their precise significance. Now he was too busy wondering what was to be the next move in what had become a desperate struggle for life.

The Arabs proceeded methodically down the alley toward their all too insufficient hiding-place. As they came, one tested doors and poked into shadows along the right side; one did the same on the left; and two walked militantly in the center of the street. It was a hard combination to beat—an impossible one, it seemed for an instant.

Then Walt's voice sounded in a stifled exclamation.

"The door to this shop behind us," he whispered. "It seems loose at the bottom. . . ."

The "door" he referred to was not so much a door as a roll-curtain of steel, much like the roll-top of an old-fashioned business desk. It pulled down from the top, to fasten with a modern padlock at the bottom, precisely as most European store windows are secured at night.

At Walt's whispered exclamation, Kane reached down and tested the door. It *did* seem insecurely fastened. An instant's exploration with desperate fingers told him why.

There was a padlock there, all right; and it was duly locked shut around the heavy staple driven into the wood floor. But—the staple was loose. Lock and staple and all moved as he pried at the door.

Meanwhile the Arab search-party had got within fifty feet of them. Kane rapidly told of his discovery, and he and Walt bent to the task of forcing the door up, bringing with it the loosened staple.

There was a crackling sound—agonizingly clear and loud—and the staple ripped loose from the rotted ancient wood. The door went up. The two rolled under it, and slammed it down again, just as the four Arabs rushed past it with shouts and savage exclamations. Walt and Kane could hear them hammering at the similar steel door next to the one behind which they lay. So close had the four located the source of the crackling crash made by the loosened staple.

"*This* is no place to hide in!" said Walt in a low tone. "Those beggars will be in here next, poking about——"

He stopped abruptly, and looked around. There was practically no light in the place—only a few dim gleams of starlight coming in from the skylight overhead—but even so, Walt had seen enough to make him certain of something.

"This shop!" he whispered. "Hanged if it isn't the one where you bought the intaglio this afternoon!"

"Why—it is!" said Kane, staring around. The next instant he had darted for the single counter, near the door, and started pawing through a small drawer he had seen the merchant pull out eight hours before.

"Don't be an ass!" Walt said softly in the near-darkness, as he divined what Kane was doing. "Let the thing go, and come here and help me with the door if our friends outside try to pry it up."

"I'll be right with you if they try that," promised Kane. "In the meantime I can't let a chance like this go by. I'm going to find that intaglio if I have to take the whole shop apart—Ah!"

His fingers had come in contact with a small wooden box in the drawer. Hastily he ripped the cover off. He saw a dim, oval splotch set in white that he knew to be cotton.

"Got it," he said exultantly, transferring the seal from the box to his vest pocket under the mantling burnoose. Then he leaped to Walt's side, and strove to find a finger-hold on the corrugations of the door. The Arabs in the street outside had got into the adjoining shop, found it empty, and were now congregating to search this shop.

"They're efficient devils," conceded Walt. "Here—put your foot on this ridge at the bottom of the door. That'll help hold it down."

KANE did so and—at that moment there came a pounding of metal on metal; the staple outside had settled into place, giving the impression that the padlock was what fastened the door, and the Arabs were battering it open.

Then the pounding stopped, and the two Americans heard a stream of guttural Arabic, evidently in protest, in a voice that sounded familiar.

"That's the owner of this shop, come to protect his property!" whispered Kane. "I remember that voice."

There was more guttural conversation; then came the scrape of a key, and a distinctly heard click as the padlock snapped open. There was a heave at the door, almost upsetting Kane and Walt. . . .

There followed a rapid sentence in Arabic that the two men could understand as well as if it had been uttered in their own language: "The padlock is open but the door still holds—they are in here!"

The door rattled to another onslaught. It was raised a foot or more, carrying the two men bodily up with it; then it dropped as the Arabs lost their finger-holds.

"Can't stay here!" said Walt jerkily. "Next time let them open it—give it to 'em while they're off balance."

Kane nodded, and both stood away from the door. They heard the Arabs fumble for hand-holds. . . .

The door flew upward as five backs bent to the expenditure of a terrific amount of force where no force was required. Three of the five men fell forward on their faces; the remaining two barely caught themselves—to be toppled over next moment by two well-planted fists that collided with their jaws.

Walt's man went down, and out. Kane's rolled on the floor in a daze, leaving three against two as the men who had fallen sprang to their feet and leaped for the intruders.

Kane saw the squint eyes of the merchant glowering into his, and with a shout he smashed his fist into the hawk-nose just under them. A crimson flood spurted, but the man came on again. With him was one of the other two—making odds that Kane knew he couldn't meet for long.

His fists worked in and out with scientific precision, like rams at the ends of two pistons. He felt flesh and gristle crumple under his clenched fingers as he sent home the blows—now a right to the pit of the merchant's stomach, now a left to the chin of the other Arab, who was snarling threats in his native tongue.

Beside him he heard Walt panting as he struggled with the brawny native who was striving to evade his fists and get him in a wrestling hold. Then, as his arms began to burn and ache with the continued intense effort, Kane heard Walt grunt, heard a sharp crack of bone on flesh that was swiftly followed by the thud of a body hitting the floor.

Whereupon, and none too soon, Kane saw one of his assailants whirl about to meet an unexpected attack from the rear, and was free to deal with the clawing merchant. In two minutes he had knocked that worthy out. An instant later Walt disposed of his man.

The two jumped toward the door, intending to escape into the street. . . .

They halted, and stared at each other in dismay. From both directions in the dark passage outside they could hear sounds of running feet!

"Well," panted Kane, "there's nothing for it but the roofs again. If we ever get out of this alive——"

Walt didn't wait to hear what Kane would do if he ever got out of this. He had caught hold of the counter and dragged it under the small skylight. On this he piled two boxes that brought him within reach of the hole in the roof. Over this hole was set a single iron bar, effectively blocking it to the passage of a human body.

Walt grasped the bar, drew up his knees, and dropped with his whole weight on it. The bar quivered but did not give.

"You too," he gasped to Kane.

Both men clutched the bar and let their bodies sag at arm's length from it. Under their combined weight the bar tore through its ancient supports, and in a moment they were once more on the cruelly illuminated rooftops.

Off to the north they could see the reflected glare of lights over French Tunis, and the great black shadow formed by the old stone gate. Beyond that gate lay safety—if they could ever traverse the quarter-mile or so of roof-tops that lay between.

THEY heard a shout from the next roof. A lone figure scrambled over the wall and dashed recklessly at them. In the bright starlight the two saw a sliver of silver that could mean only one thing —a knife blade. At the same instant a commotion under their feet told them that the crowd below had burst into the shop.

Straight at the man with the knife they raced. The bared blade flashed as it was raised high.

Kane caught the descending wrist, twisted it with all his strength and raced on after sending its owner smashing to the roof with a throw that must have cracked the man's arm.

The barking of the dogs had continued constantly since their first shrill yapping. Now it increased, if that were possible, till the night was filled with echoing ululation. All over the upper layer of Arab-town—a world from which the women had now entirely disappeared—darted savage robed figures in search of the infidel trespassers it was now definitely known had stolen impudently into their private realm.

A gathering crowd of Arabs began to stream directly toward the two. Walt grabbed Kane's arm and motioned for him to hide in the shadow of a near wall.

Motionless, almost breathless, the two crouched there; but the mob continued to pour toward them, over walls and benches like a vari-colored flood, as though some instinct were directing them toward the trespassers.

The faces of the two were white and set. If that mob caught them they would be literally torn to pieces! And the mob could do it with impunity; no one in Tunis knew where Walt and Kane had gone when they left the hotel; they would simply be listed, in police investigations, as mysteriously missing.

It was at this point that fate stepped in, as it sometimes deigns to do in behalf of men who are more impetuous than discreet.

There is in Tunis a revolt going on. It is a bloodless rebellion, but a recognized one. That is, the revolt of the women.

Many a rich Arab has sent his daughters to French convents for education in the last two decades; and those daughters have picked up dangerous ideas of feminine freedom along with book learning —and have returned to sow them in the minds of friends less traveled but no less impatient of ancient restrictions and hareem rules. When one of these comparatively modern Arab girls happens to end in the hareem of some more than usually stiff-necked and conservative Arab, bitterness usually arises—a bitterness in which the girl's most natural reaction is to hate and fear all things Arabic, and turn yearningly toward things European or American.

It happened that the house on which Walt and Kane squatted precariously, with the savage mob drawing nearer every second, was one of the many in old-town that sheltered such a rebel. So it was that Walt and Kane heard a rustle of garments from the open square in the roof beside them, and then heard the sound of some one ascending a ladder toward the roof entrance.

In silent co-operation, they bent over that opening ready to strike together at any turbaned head that might protrude. But the head when it appeared was not turbaned. It was covered instead with long hair, black as the holes in the sky between the stars, fine and silky as down. And under it was a face as softly beautiful as the face of any houri in a Moslem paradise.

"*Messieurs,*" whispered this distracting apparition, "follow me at once."

For only a second they hesitated, stopped by the natural suspicion that this was a trap. The suspicion was swiftly laid: had the girl meant to deliver them to the crowd she had only to raise her voice—and, even in a moment so crowded with excitement, she would never have come before them unveiled as she was.

They followed her down the ladder, into a sumptuously furnished room, and along a passage lit with perforated sheet-brass lamps to a chamber in which were bales of materials, bundles of rugs and, off to one side, a huge chest. Their host, it appeared, was a merchant.

"Into that chest," whispered the girl. "You will be safe there until such time as it is wise for you to leave this house."

"Why do you do this?" Kane asked in a low tone, gratefully clasping her hand.

The girl shrugged but said nothing. It was not given the two men to know that at that moment she was thinking of a sour old man who called her wife and read her a daily lecture on the immodesty and general unworthiness of the modern Arab female.

WALT and Kane clambered into the chest, and lowered the lid above them. Large as the box was, it held the two of them as close-packed as sardines in a tin. Should any Arab investigator open it and find them, he could kill them both before they could lift their cramped arms.

"It's rather ghastly—what a splendid fit this box is as a coffin!" whispered Kane. And then the two were silent, lying breathlessly in their hiding-place.

The slow minutes were like hours. Faintly, they could hear a continued disturbance on the roofs above them. Then they heard a male voice right in the room. The male voice asked a question in Arabic. It was answered by the calm, sweet voice of the girl who had led them to the chest. The male voice made some further remark; then retreating footsteps

told the two Americans that the room was once more empty.

Like dragging centuries, two hours passed. The constant, ear-splitting din of the dogs died out. No longer did agitated steps resound on the rooftops. Arab-town sank gradually into something like normality; though still, here and there in the alley-ways, little groups of robed figures searched nooks and shadows for the despised infidels who had dared to set foot there at night.

Finally, at long last, the two fugitives heard a light rapping at the lid of the chest. They sat up, pushing the lid open above them, and blinked at the beautiful face of their rescuer.

"It is safe now," she said; "as safe as it will ever be," she added doubtfully. "Come with me."

Staggering a little until their legs stopped tingling with restored circulation, Walt and Kane went with her on tiptoe to a door.

"Beyond is the street," whispered the girl. "Follow it to the right till you come to the first turn. Take that to the left, straight to the main thoroughfare which leads past the *parfumeries* to the gate. And pray do not be so rash as to venture again at night into Arab old-town."

"Truly, we will not!" vowed Kane. "A thousand thanks, *Madame*. . . ."

"It would seem," said Walt, as they turned wearily, with the first streak of dawn, into the lobby of the Transatlantique Hotel, "that romance is not dead yet. Haroun al Raschid, centuries and centuries ago, had nothing on us!"

"He didn't," agreed Kane. He felt in his vest pocket. "And we went through all that just to retrieve this silly seal. By the way—I think we'd be wise to take the boat to Marseilles tomorrow morning instead of staying on here till the end of the week as we'd planned. That merchant recognized me, I know, just before I knocked him cold in his shop. Under the circumstances he can't go to the police any more than we could, be he might try a little private war against us."

So it was that, a little later, Walt dipped pen into inkwell to write cancelling reservations on the week-end boat, which they had originally planned to take. And so it was that his pen came in contact with something in the well.

"Good heavens!" blurted Walt, staring at the thing he had fished out of the ink. "Kane! Look!"

It was the seal of Cæsar.

But in Kane's vest pocket was the seal of Cæsar.

They compared two oval bits of blood-red stone, and saw with amazement that line for line—even to the tiny chip out of one side—the two were identical.

"So that's the reason I found this to-night right in the same box and the same drawer I saw the merchant get the seal from in the afternoon!" ejaculated Kane, in the tone of one who suddenly understands many things. "I thought such nerve was nothing short of incredible. . . . Just for curiosity, we'll stop in at Chavannes' on the way to the dock."

They did. And at sight of one of the duplicate intaglios Kane showed him, Chavannes' keen gray eyes twinkled.

"How much did you pay for this?" he asked.

"Enough," admitted Kane, choosing not to mention the exact sum he had given—and to keep entirely silent about the fact that they had nearly added their lives in payment for the blood-red little oval. "Why?"

Chavannes reached into a tray and drew out still a third "seal of Cæsar."

"Made in Germany," he said. "A good imitation, as imitations go—worth at least six dollars in your money."

Lord of Samarcand

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A stirring tale of Tamerlane and the shock of Tatar troops that overwhelmed the Turkish sultan, Bayazid—a vivid story of the last days of the lord of Samarcand

THE roar of battle had died away; the sun hung like a ball of crimson gold on the western hills. Across the trampled field of battle no squadrons thundered, no war-cry reverberated. Only the shrieks of the wounded and the moans of the dying rose to the circling vultures whose black wings swept closer and closer until they brushed the pallid faces in their flight.

On his rangy stallion, in a hillside thicket, Ak Boga the Tatar watched, as he had watched since dawn, when the mailed hosts of the Franks, with their forest of lances and flaming pennons, had moved out on the plains of Nicopolis to meet the grim hordes of Bayazid.

Ak Boga, watching their battle array, had chk-chk'd his teeth in surprize and disapproval as he saw the glittering squadrons of mounted knights draw out in front of the compact masses of stalwart infantry, and lead the advance. They were the flower of Europe—cavaliers of Austria, Germany, France and Italy; but Ak Boga shook his head.

He had seen the knights charge with a thunderous roar that shook the heavens, had seen them smite the outriders of Bayazid like a withering blast and sweep up the long slope in the teeth of a raking fire from the Turkish archers at the crest. He had seen them cut down the archers like ripe corn, and launch their whole power against the oncoming spahis, the Turkish light cavalry. And he had seen the spahis buckle and break and scatter like spray before a storm, the light-armed riders flinging aside their lances and spurring like mad out of the mêlée. But Ak Boga had looked back, where, far behind, the sturdy Hungarian pikemen toiled, seeking to keep within supporting distance of the headlong cavaliers.

He had seen the Frankish horsemen sweep on, reckless of their horses' strength as of their own lives, and cross the ridge. From his vantage-point Ak Boga could see both sides of that ridge and he knew that there lay the main power of the Turkish army—sixty-five thousand strong—the janizaries, the terrible Ottoman infantry, supported by the heavy cavalry, tall men in strong armor, bearing spears and powerful bows.

And now the Franks realized, what Ak Boga had known, that the real battle lay before them; and their horses were weary, their lances broken, their throats choked with dust and thirst.

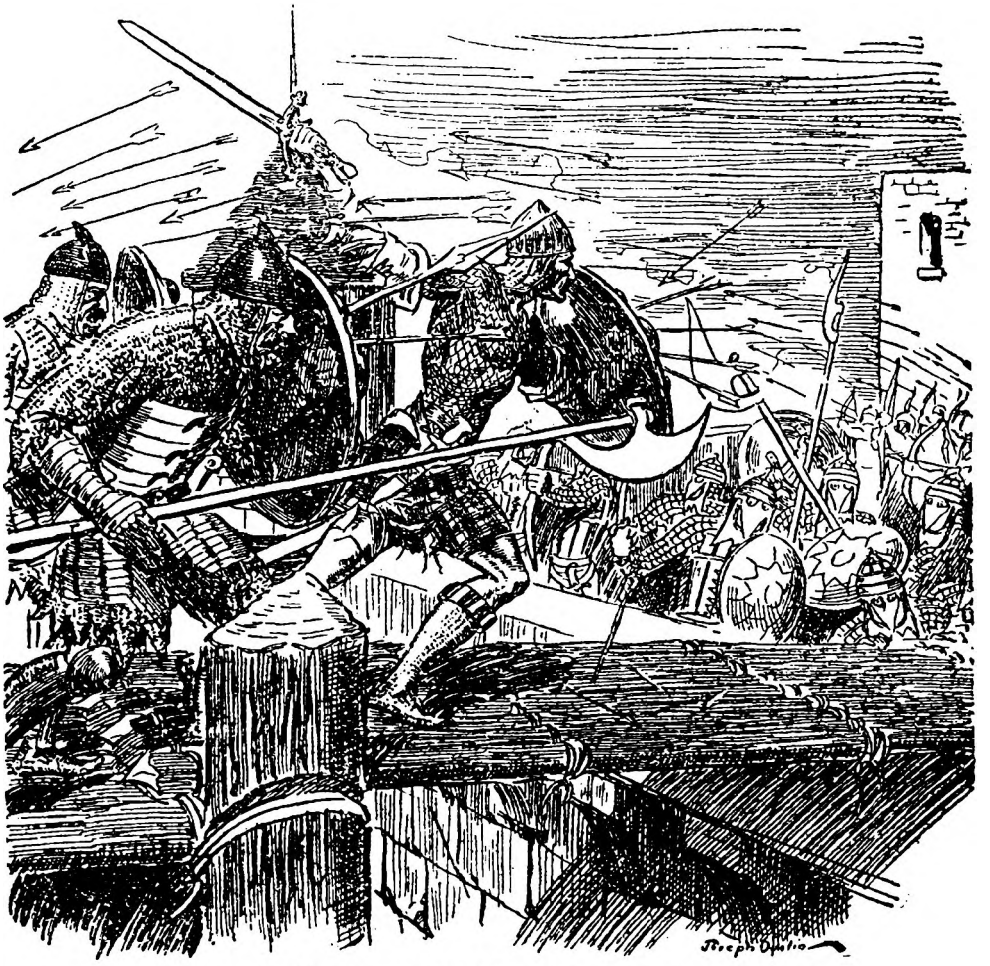
Ak Boga had seen them waver and look back for the Hungarian infantry; but it was out of sight over the ridge, and in desperation the knights hurled themselves on the massed enemy, striving to break the ranks by sheer ferocity. That charge never reached the grim lines. Instead a storm of arrows broke the Christian front, and this time, on exhausted horses, there was no riding against it. The whole first rank went down, horses and men pincushioned, and in that red shambles their comrades behind them stumbled and fell headlong. And then the janizaries charged with a deep-toned roar of "Allah!" that was like the thunder of deep surf.

All this Ak Boga had seen; had seen,

too, the inglorious flight of some of the knights, the ferocious resistance of others. On foot, leaguered and outnumbered, they fought with sword and ax, falling one by one, while the tide of battle flowed around them on either side and the blood-drunken Turks fell upon the infantry which had just toiled into sight over the ridge.

There, too, was disaster. Flying knights thundered through the ranks of the Wallachians, and these broke and retired in ragged disorder. The Hungarians and Bavarians received the brunt of the Turkish onslaught, staggered and fell back stubbornly, contesting every foot, but unable to check the victorious flood of Moslem fury.

And now, as Ak Boga scanned the field, he no longer saw the serried lines of the pikemen and ax-fighters. They had fought their way back over the ridge and were in full, though ordered, retreat, and the Turks had come back to loot the dead and mutilate the dying. Such knights as had not fallen or broken away in flight, had flung down the hopeless sword and surrendered. Among the trees on the



"Drawing his claymore, Donald strode out upon the bridge."

farther side of the vale, the main Turkish host was clustered, and even Ak Boga shivered a trifle at the screams which rose where Bayazid's swordsmen were butchering the captives. Nearer at hand ran ghoulish figures, swift and furtive, pausing briefly over each heap of corpses; here and there gaunt dervishes with foam on their beards and madness in their eyes plied their knives on writhing victims who screamed for death.

"Erlik!" muttered Ak Boga. "They boasted that they could hold up the sky on their lances, were it to fall, and lo, the sky has fallen and their host is meat for the ravens!"

He reined his horse away through the thicket; there might be good plunder among the plumed and corseleted dead, but Ak Boga had come hither on a mission which was yet to be completed. But even as he emerged from the thicket, he saw a prize no Tatar could forego—a tall Turkish steed with an ornate high-peaked Turkish saddle came racing by. Ak Boga spurred quickly forward and caught the flying, silver-worked rein. Then, leading the restive charger, he trotted swiftly down the slope away from the battlefield.

SUDDENLY he reined in among a clump of stunted trees. The hurricane of strife, slaughter and pursuit had cast its spray on this side of the ridge. Before him Ak Boga saw a tall, richly clad knight grunting and cursing as he sought to hobble along using his broken lance as a crutch. His helmet was gone, revealing a blond head and a florid choleric face. Not far away lay a dead horse, an arrow protruding from its ribs.

As Ak Boga watched, the big knight stumbled and fell with a scorching oath. Then from the bushes came a man such as Ak Boga had never seen before, even among the Franks. This man was taller than Ak Boga, who was a big man, and his stride was like that of a gaunt gray wolf. He was bareheaded, a tousled shock of tawny hair topping a sinister scarred face, burnt dark by the sun, and his eyes were cold as gray icy steel. The great sword he trailed was crimson to the hilt, his rusty scale-mail shirt hacked and rent, the kilt beneath it torn and slashed. His right arm was stained to the elbow, and blood dripped sluggishly from a deep gash in his left forearm.

"Devil take all!" growled the crippled knight in Norman French, which Ak Boga understood; "this is the end of the world!"

"Only the end of a horde of fools," the tall Frank's voice was hard and cold, like the rasp of a sword in its scabbard.

The lame man swore again. "Stand not there like a blockhead, fool! Catch me a horse! My damnable steed caught a shaft in its cursed hide, and though I spurred it until the blood spurted over my heels, it fell at last, and I think, broke my ankle."

The tall one dropped his sword-point to the earth and stared at the other somberly.

"You give commands as though you sat in your own fief of Saxony, Lord Baron Frederik! But for you and divers other fools, we had cracked Bayazid like a nut this day."

"Dog!" roared the baron, his intolerant face purpling; "this insolence to me? I'll have you flayed alive!"

"Who but you cried down the Elector in council?" snarled the other, his eyes glittering dangerously. "Who called Sigismund of Hungary a fool because he urged that the lord allow him to lead the assault with his infantry? And who but you had the ear of that young fool High Constable of France, Philip of Artois, so that in the end he led the charge that

ruined us all, nor would wait on the ridge for support from the Hungarians? And now you, who turned tail quicker than any when you saw what your folly had done, you bid me fetch you a horse!"

"Aye, and quickly, you Scottish dog!" screamed the baron, convulsed with fury. "You shall answer for this——"

"I'll answer here," growled the Scotsman, his manner changing murderously. "You have heaped insults on me since we first sighted the Danube. If I'm to die, I'll settle one score first!"

"Traitor!" bellowed the baron, whitening, scrambling up on his knee and reaching for his sword. But even as he did so, the Scotsman struck, with an oath, and the baron's roar was cut short in a ghastly gurgle as the great blade sheared through shoulder-bone, ribs and spine, casting the mangled corpse limply upon the blood-soaked earth.

"Well struck, warrior!" At the sound of the guttural voice the slayer wheeled like a great wolf, wrenching free the sword. For a tense moment the two eyed each other, the swordsman standing above his victim, a brooding somber figure terrible with potentialities of blood and slaughter, the Tatar sitting his high-peaked saddle like a carven image.

"I am no Turk," said Ak Boga. "You have no quarrel with me. See, my simitar is in its sheath. I have need of a man like you—strong as a bear, swift as a wolf, cruel as a falcon. I can bring you to much you desire."

"I desire only vengeance on the head of Bayazid," rumbled the Scotsman.

The dark eyes of the Tatar glittered.

"Then come with me. For my lord is the sworn enemy of the Turk."

"Who is your lord?" asked the Scotsman suspiciously.

"Men call him the Lame," answered Ak Boga, "Timour, the Servant of God, by the favor of Allah, Amir of Tatary."

The Scotsman turned his head in the direction of the distant shrieks which told that the massacre was still continuing, and stood for an instant like a great bronze statue. Then he sheathed his sword with a savage rasp of steel.

"I will go," he said briefly.

The Tatar grinned with pleasure, and leaning forward, gave into his hands the reins of the Turkish horse. The Frank swung into the saddle and glanced inquiringly at Ak Boga. The Tatar motioned with his helmeted head and reined away down the slope. They touched in the spurs and cantered swiftly away into the gathering twilight, while behind them the shrieks of dire agony still rose to the shivering stars which peered palely out, as if frightened by man's slaughter of man.

CHAPTER 2

"Had we twa been upon the green,
And never an eye to see,
I wad hae had you, flesh and fell;
But your sword shall gae wi' me."
—*The Ballad of Otterbourne.*

AGAIN the sun was sinking, this time over a desert, etching the spires and minarets of a blue city. Ak Boga drew rein on the crest of a rise and sat motionless for a moment, sighing deeply as he drank in the familiar sight, whose wonder never faded.

"Samarcand," said Ak Boga.

"We have ridden far," answered his companion. Ak Boga smiled. The Tatar's garments were dusty, his mail tarnished, his face somewhat drawn, though his eyes still twinkled. The Scotsman's strongly chiselled features had not altered.

"You are of steel, bogatyr," said Ak Boga. "The road we have traveled would have wearied a courier of Genghis Khan. And by Erlik, I, who was bred in the saddle, am the wearier of the twain!"

The Scotsman gazed unspeaking at the distant spires, remembering the days and nights of apparently endless riding, when he had slept swaying in the saddle, and all the sounds of the universe had died down to the thunder of hoofs. He had followed Ak Boga unquestioning: through hostile hills where they avoided trails and cut through the blind wilderness, over mountains where the chill winds cut like a sword-edge, into stretches of steppes and desert. He had not questioned when Ak Boga's relaxing vigilance told him that they were out of hostile country, and when the Tatar began to stop at wayside posts where tall dark men in iron helmets brought fresh steeds. Even then there was no slacking of the headlong pace: a swift guzzling of wine and snatching of food; occasionally a brief interlude of sleep, on a heap of hides and cloaks; then again the drum of racing hoofs. The Frank knew that Ak Boga was bearing the news of the battle to his mysterious lord, and he wondered at the distance they had covered between the first post where saddled steeds awaited them and the blue spires that marked their journey's end. Wide-flung indeed were the boundaries of the lord called Timour the Lame.

They had covered that vast expanse of country in a time the Frank would have sworn impossible. He felt now the grinding wear of that terrible ride, but he gave no outward sign. The city shimmered to his gaze, mingling with the blue of the distance, so that it seemed part of the horizon, a city of illusion and enchantment. Blue: the Tatars lived in a wide magnificent land, lavish with color schemes, and the prevailing motif was blue. In the spires and domes of Samarcand were mirrored the hues of the skies, the far mountains and the dreaming lakes.

"You have seen lands and seas no Frank has beheld," said Ak Boga, "and rivers and towns and caravan trails. Now you shall gaze upon the glory of Samarcand, which the lord Timour found a town of dried brick and has made a metropolis of blue stone and ivory and marble and silver filigree."

The two descended into the plain and threaded their way between converging lines of camel-caravans and mule-trains whose robed drivers shouted incessantly, all bound for the Turquoise Gates, laden with spices, silks, jewels, and slaves, the goods and gauds of India and Cathay, of Persia and Arabia and Egypt.

"All the East rides the road to Samarcand," said Ak Boga.

THEY passed through the wide gilt-inlaid gates where the tall spearmen shouted boisterous greetings to Ak Boga, who yelled back, rolling in his saddle and smiting his mailed thigh with the joy of homecoming. They rode through the wide winding streets, past palace and market and mosque, and bazars thronged with the people of a hundred tribes and races, bartering, disputing, shouting. The Scotsman saw hawk-faced Arabs, lean apprehensive Syrians, fat fawning Jews, turbaned Indians, languid Persians, ragged swaggering but suspicious Afghans, and more unfamiliar forms; figures from the mysterious reaches of the north, and the far east; stocky Mongols with broad inscrutable faces and the rolling gait of an existence spent in the saddle; slant-eyed Cathayans in robes of watered silk; tall quarrelsome Vigurs; round-faced Kipchaks; narrow-eyed Kirghiz; a score of races whose existence the West did not guess. All the Orient flowed in a broad river through the gates of Samarcand.

The Frank's wonder grew; the cities of the West were hovels compared to this. Past academies, libraries and pleasure-pavilions they rode, and Ak Boga turned

into a wide gateway, guarded by silver lions. There they gave their steeds into the hands of silk-sashed grooms, and walked along a winding avenue paved with marble and lined with slim green trees. The Scotsman, looking between the slender trunks, saw shimmering expanses of roses, cherry trees and waving exotic blossoms unknown to him, where fountains jetted arches of silver spray. So they came to the palace, gleaming blue and gold in the sunlight, passed between tall marble columns and entered the chambers with their gilt-worked arched doorways, and walls decorated with delicate paintings of Persian and Cathayan artists, and the gold tissue and silver work of Indian artistry.

Ak Boga did not halt in the great reception room with its slender carven columns and frieze-work of gold and turquoise, but continued until he came to the fretted gold-adorned arch of a door which opened into a small blue-domed chamber that looked out through gold-barred windows into a series of broad, shaded, marble-paved galleries. There silk-robed courtiers took their weapons, and grasping their arms, led them between files of giant black mutes in silken loin-cloths, who held two-handed simitars upon their shoulders, and into the chamber, where the courtiers released their arms and fell back, salaaming deeply. Ak Boga knelt before the figure on the silken divan, but the Scotsman stood grimly erect, nor was obeisance required of him. Some of the simplicity of Genghis Khan's court still lingered in the courts of these descendants of the nomads.

The Scotsman looked closely at the man on the divan; this, then, was the mysterious Tamerlane, who was already become a mythical figure in Western lore. He saw a man as tall as himself, gaunt but heavy-boned, with a wide sweep of shoulders and the Tatar's characteristic depth of chest. His face was not as dark as Ak Boga's, nor did his black magnetic eyes slant; and he did not sit cross-legged as a Mongol sits. There was power in every line of his figure, in his clean-cut features, in the crisp black hair and beard, untouched with gray despite his sixty-one years. There was something of the Turk in his appearance, thought the Scotsman, but the dominant note was the lean wolfish hardness that suggested the nomad. He was closer to the basic Turanian rootstock than was the Turk; nearer to the wolfish, wandering Mongols who were his ancestors.

"Speak, Ak Boga," said the Amir in a deep powerful voice. "Ravens have flown westward, but there has come no word."

"We rode before the word, my lord," answered the warrior. "The news is at our heels, traveling swift on the caravan roads. Soon the couriers, and after them the traders and the merchants, will bring to you the news that a great battle has been fought in the west; that Bayazid has broken the hosts of the Christians, and the wolves howl over the corpses of the kings of Frankistan."

"And who stands beside you?" asked Timour, resting his chin on his hand and fixing his deep somber eyes on the Scotsman.

"A chief of the Franks who escaped the slaughter," answered Ak Boga. "Single-handed he cut his way through the mêlée, and in his flight paused to slay a Frankish lord who had put shame upon him aforetime. He has no fear and his thews are steel. By Allah, we passed through the land outracing the wind to bring thee news of the war, and this Frank is less weary than I, who learned to ride ere I learned to walk."

"Why do you bring him to me?"

"It was my thought that he would make a mighty warrior for thee, my lord."

"In all the world," mused Timour, "there are scarce half a dozen men whose judgment I trust. Thou art one of those," he added briefly, and Ak Boga, who had flushed darkly in embarrassment, grinned delightedly.

"Can he understand me?" asked Timour.

"He speaks Turki, my lord."

"How are you named, oh Frank?" queried the Amir. "And what is your rank?"

"I am called Donald MacDeesa," answered the Scotsman. "I come from the country of Scotland, beyond Frankistan. I have no rank, either in my own land or in the army I followed. I live by my wits and the edge of my claymore."

"Why do you ride to me?"

"Ak Boga told me it was the road to vengeance."

"Against whom?"

"Bayazid the Sultan of the Turks, whom men name the Thunderer."

Timour dropped his head on his mighty breast for a space and in the silence MacDeesa heard the silvery tinkle of a fountain in an outer court and the musical voice of a Persian poet singing to a lute.

Then the great Tatar lifted his lion's head.

"Sit ye with Ak Boga upon this divan close at my hand," said he. "I will instruct you how to trap a gray wolf."

As Donald did so, he unconsciously lifted a hand to his face, as if he felt the sting of a blow eleven years old. Irrelevantly his mind reverted to another king and another, ruder court, and in the swift instant that elapsed as he took his seat close to the Amir, glanced fleetingly along the bitter trail of his life.

YOUNG Lord Douglas, most powerful of all the Scottish barons, was headstrong and impetuous, and like most Norman lords, choleric when he fancied himself crossed. But he should not have struck the lean young Highlander who had come down into the border country seeking fame and plunder in the train of the lords of the marches. Douglas was accustomed to using both riding-whip and fists freely on his pages and esquires, and promptly forgetting both the blow and the cause; and they, being also Normans and accustomed to the tempers of their lords, likewise forgot. But Donald MacDeesa was no Norman; he was a Gael, and Gaelic ideas of honor and insult differ from Norman ideas as the wild uplands of the North differ from the fertile plains of the Lowlands. The chief of Donald's clan could not have struck him with impunity, and for a Southron to so venture—hate entered the young Highlander's blood like a black river and filled his dreams with crimson nightmares.

Douglas forgot the blow too quickly to regret it. But Donald's was the vengeful heart of those wild folk who keep the fires of feud flaming for centuries and carry grudges to the grave. Donald was as fully Celtic as his savage Dalriadian ancestors who carved out the kingdom of Alba with their swords.

But he hid his hate and bided his time, and it came in a hurricane of border war. Robert Bruce lay in his tomb, and his heart, stilled forever, lay somewhere in Spain beneath the body of Black Douglas, who had failed in the pilgrimage which was to place the heart of his king before the Holy Sepulcher. The great king's grandson, Robert II, had little love for storm and stress; he desired peace with England and he feared the great family of Douglas.

But despite his protests, war spread

flaming wings along the border and the Scottish lords rode joyfully on the foray. But before the Douglas marched, a quiet and subtle man came to Donald MacDeesa's tent and spoke briefly and to the point.

"Knowing that the aforesaid lord hath put despite upon thee, I whispered thy name softly to him that sendeth me, and sooth, it is well known that this same bloody lord doth continually embroil the kingdoms and stir up wrath and wo between the sovereigns——" he said in part, and he plainly spoke the word, "Protection."

Donald made no answer and the quiet person smiled and left the young Highlander sitting with his chin on his fist, staring grimly at the floor of his tent.

Thereafter Lord Douglas marched right gleefully with his retainers into the border country and "burned the dales of Tyne, and part of Bambroughshire, and three good towers on Reidswire fells, he left them all on fire," and spread wrath and wo generally among the border English, so that King Richard sent notes of bitter reproach to King Robert, who bit his nails with rage, but waited patiently for news he expected to hear.

Then after an indecisive skirmish at Newcastle, Douglas encamped in a place called Otterbourne, and there Lord Percy, hot with wrath, came suddenly upon him in the night, and in the confused mêlée which ensued, called by the Scottish the Battle of Otterbourne and by the English Chevy Chase, Lord Douglas fell. The English swore he was slain by Lord Percy, who neither confirmed nor denied it, not knowing himself what men he had slain in the confusion and darkness.

But a wounded man babbled of a Highland plaid, before he died, and an ax wielded by no English hand. Men came to Donald and questioned him hardly, but he snarled at them like a wolf, and the king, after piously burning many candles for Douglas' soul in public, and thanking God for the baron's demise in the privacy of his chamber, announced that "we have heard of this persecution of a loyal subject and it being plain in our mind that this youth is innocent as ourselves in this matter we hereby warn all men against further hounding of him at pain of death."

So the king's protection saved Donald's life, but men muttered in their teeth and ostracized him. Sullen and embittered, he withdrew to himself and brooded in a hut alone, till one night there came news of the king's sudden abdication and retirement into a monastery. The stress of a monarch's life in those stormy times was too much for the monkish sovereign. Close on the heels of the news came men with drawn daggers to Donald's hut, but they found the cage empty. The hawk had flown, and though they followed his trail with reddened spurs, they found only a steed that had fallen dead at the seashore, and saw only a white sail dwindling in the growing dawn.

Donald went to the Continent because, with the Lowlands barred to him, there was nowhere else to go; in the Highlands he had too many blood-feuds; and across the border the English had already made a noose for him. That was in 1389. Seven years of fighting and intriguing in European wars and plots. And when Constantinople cried out before the irresistible onslaught of Bayazid, and men pawned their lands to launch a new Crusade, the Highland swordsman had joined the tide that swept eastward to its doom. Seven years—and a far cry from the border marches to the blue-domed palaces of fabulous Samarcand, reclining on a silken divan as he listened to the measured words which flowed in a tranquil monotone from the lips of the lord of Tatary.

CHAPTER 3

"If thou'rt the lord of this castle,
Sae well it pleases me:
For, ere I cross the border fells,
The tane of us shall dee."
—*Battle of Otterbourne.*

TIME flowed on as it does whether men live or die. The bodies rotted on the plains of Nicopolis, and Bayazid, drunk with power, trampled the scepters of the world. The Greeks, the Serbs and the Hungarians he ground beneath his iron legions, and into his spreading empire he molded the captive races. He laved his limbs in wild debauchery, the frenzy of which astounded even his tough vassals. The women of the world flowed whimpering between his iron fingers and he hammered the golden crowns of kings to shoe his war-steed. Constantinople reeled beneath his strokes, and Europe licked her wounds like a crippled wolf, held at bay on the defensive. Somewhere in the misty mazes of the East moved his arch-foe Timour, and to him Bayazid sent missives of threat and mockery. No response was forthcoming, but word came along the caravans of a mighty marching and a great war in the south; of the plumed helmets of India scattered and flying before the Tatar spears. Little heed gave Bayazid; India was little more real to him than it was to the Pope of Rome. His eyes were turned westward toward the Caphar cities. "I will harrow Frankistan with steel and flame," he said. "Their sultans shall draw my chariots and the bats lair in the palaces of the infidels."

Then in the early spring of 1402 there came to him, in an inner court of his pleasure-palace at Brusa, where he lolled guzzling the forbidden wine and watching the antics of naked dancing girls, certain of his emirs, bringing a tall Frank whose grim scarred visage was darkened by the suns of far deserts.

"This Caphar dog rode into the camp of the janizaries as a madman rides, on a foam-covered steed," said they, "saying he sought Bayazid. Shall we flay him before thee, or tear him between wild horses?"

"Dog," said the Sultan, drinking deeply and setting down the goblet with a satisfied sigh, "you have found Bayazid. Speak, ere I set you howling on a stake."

"Is this fit welcome for one who has ridden far to serve you?" retorted the Frank in a harsh unshaken voice. "I am Donald MacDeesa and among your janizaries there is no man who can stand up against me in sword-play, and among your barrel-bellied wrestlers there is no man whose back I can not break."

The Sultan tugged his black beard and grinned.

"Would thou wert not an infidel," said he, "for I love a man with a bold tongue. Speak on, oh Rustum! What other accomplishments are thine, mirror of modesty?"

The Highlander grinned like a wolf.

"I can break the back of a Tatar and roll the head of a Khan in the dust."

Bayazid stiffened, subtly changing, his giant frame charged with dynamic power and menace; for behind all his roistering and bellowing conceit was the keenest brain west of the Oxus.

"What folly is this?" he rumbled. "What means this riddle?"

"I speak no riddle," snapped the Gael. "I have no more love for you than you for me. But more I hate Timour-il-leng who has cast dung in my face."

"You come to me from that half-pagan dog?"

"Aye. I was his man. I rode beside him and cut down his foes. I climbed city walls in the teeth of the arrows and broke the ranks of mailed spearmen. And when the honors and gifts were distributed among the emirs, what was given me?

The gall of mockery and the wormwood of insult. 'Ask thy dog-sultans of Frankistan for gifts, Caphar,' said Timour—may the worms devour him—and the emirs roared with laughter. As God is my witness, I will wipe out that laughter in the crash of falling walls and the roar of flames!"

Donald's menacing voice reverberated through the chamber and his eyes were cold and cruel. Bayazid pulled his beard for a space and said, "And you come to me for vengeance? Shall I war against the Lame One because of the spite of a wandering Caphar vagabond?"

"You *will* war against him, or he against you," answered MacDeesa. "When Timour wrote asking that you lend no aid to his foes, Kara Yussef the Turkoman, and Ahmed, Sultan of Bagdad, you answered him with words not to be borne, and sent horsemen to stiffen their ranks against him. Now the Turkomans are broken, Bagdad has been looted and Damascus lies in smoking ruins. Timour has broken your allies and he will not forget the despite you put upon him."

"Close have you been to the Lame One to know all this," muttered Bayazid, his glittering eyes narrowing with suspicion. "Why should I trust a Frank? By Allah, I deal with them by the sword! As I dealt with those fools at Nicopolis!"

A fierce uncontrollable flame leaped up for a fleeting instant in the Highlander's eyes, but the dark face showed no sign of emotion.

"Know this, Turk," he answered with an oath, "I can show you how to break Timour's back."

"Dog!" roared the Sultan, his gray eyes blazing, "think you I need the aid of a nameless rogue to conquer the Tatar?"

Donald laughed in his face, a hard mirthless laugh that was not pleasant.

"Timour will crack you like a walnut," said he deliberately. "Have you seen the Tatars in war array? Have you seen their arrows darkening the sky as they loosed, a hundred thousand as one? Have you seen their horsemen flying before the wind as they charged home and the desert shook beneath their hoofs? Have you seen the array of their elephants, with towers on their backs, whence archers send shafts in black clouds and the fire that burns flesh and leather alike pours forth?"

"All this I have heard," answered the Sultan, not particularly impressed.

"But you have not seen," returned the Highlander; he drew back his tunic sleeve and displayed a scar on his iron-thewed arm. "An Indian tulwar kissed me there, before Delhi. I rode with the emirs when the whole world seemed to shake with the thunder of combat. I saw Timour trick the Sultan of Hindustan and draw him from the lofty walls as a serpent is drawn from its lair. By God, the plumed Rajputs fell like ripened grain before us!

"Of Delhi Timour left a pile of deserted ruins, and without the broken walls he built a pyramid of a hundred thousand skulls. You would say I lied were I to tell you how many days the Khyber Pass was thronged with the glittering hosts of warriors and captives returning along the road to Samarcand. The mountains shook with their tread and the wild Afghans came down in hordes to place their heads beneath Timour's heel—as he will grind *thy* head underfoot, Bayazid!"

"This to me, dog?" yelled the Sultan. "I will fry you in oil!"

"Aye, prove your power over Timour by slaying the dog he mocked," answered MacDeesa bitterly. "You kings are all alike in fear and folly."

Bayazid gaped at him. "By Allah!" he said, "thou'rt mad to speak thus to the Thunderer. Bide in my court until I learn whether thou be rogue, fool, or madman.

If spy, not in a day or three days will I slay thee, but for a full week shalt thou howl for death."

SO DONALD abode in the court of the Thunderer, under suspicion, and soon there came a brief but peremptory note from Timour, asking that "the thief of a Christian who hath taken refuge in the Ottoman court" be given up for just punishment. Whereat Bayazid, scenting an opportunity to further insult his rival, twisted his black beard gleefully between his fingers and grinned like a hyena as he dictated a reply, "Know, thou crippled dog, that the Osmanli are not in the habit of conceding to the insolent demands of pagan foes. Be at ease while thou mayest, oh lame dog, for soon I will take thy kingdom for an offal-heap and thy favorite wives for my concubines."

No further missives came from Timour. Bayazid drew Donald into wild revels, plied him with strong drink and even as he roared and roistered, he keenly watched the Highlander. But even his suspicions grew blunter when at his drunkest Donald spoke no word that might hint he was other than he seemed. He breathed the name of Timour only with curses. Bayazid discounted the value of his aid against the Tatars, but contemplated putting him to use, as Ottoman sultans always employed foreigners for confidants and guardsmen, knowing their own race too well. Under close, subtle scrutiny the Gael indifferently moved, drinking all but the Sultan onto the floor in the wild drinking-bouts and bearing himself with a reckless valor that earned the respect of the hard-bitten Turks, in forays against the Byzantines.

Playing Genoese against Venetian, Bayazid lay about the walls of Contantinople. His preparations were made: Constantinople, and after that, Europe; the fate of Christendom wavered in the balance, there before the walls of the ancient city of the East. And the wretched Greeks, worn and starved, had already drawn up a capitulation, when word came flying out of the East, a dusty, blood-stained courier on a staggering horse. Out of the East, sudden as a desert-storm, the Tatars had swept, and Sivas, Bayazid's border city, had fallen. That night the shuddering people on the walls of Constantinople saw torches and cressets tossing and moving through the Turkish camp, gleaming on dark hawk-faces and polished armor, but the expected attack did not come, and dawn revealed a great flotilla of boats moving in a steady double stream back and forth across the Bosphorus, bearing the mailed warriors into Asia. The Thunderer's eyes were at last turned eastward.

CHAPTER 4

"The deer runs wild on hill and dale,
The birds fly wild from tree to tree;
But there is neither bread nor kale,
To fend my men and me."
—*Battle of Otterbourne.*

"HERE we will camp," said Bayazid, shifting his giant body in the gold-crusted saddle. He glanced back at the long lines of his army, winding beyond sight over the distant hills: over 200,000 fighting men; grim janizaries, spahis glittering in plumes and silver mail, heavy cavalry in silk and steel; and his allies and alien subjects, Greek and Wallachian pikemen, the twenty thousand horsemen of King Peter Lazarus of Serbia, mailed from crown to heel; there were troops of Tatars, too, who had wandered into Asia Minor and been ground into the Ottoman empire with the rest—stocky Kalmucks, who had been on the point of mutiny at the beginning of the march, but had been quieted by a harangue from Donald MacDeesa, in their own tongue.

For weeks the Turkish host had moved eastward on the Sivas road, expecting to encounter the Tatars at any point. They had passed Angora, where the Sultan had established his base-camp; they had crossed the river Halys, or Kizil Irmak, and now were marching through the hill country that lies in the bend of that river which, rising east of Sivas, sweeps southward in a vast half-circle before it bends, west of Kirshehr, northward to the Black Sea.

"Here we camp," repeated Bayazid; "Sivas lies some sixty-five miles to the east. We will send scouts into the city."

"They will find it deserted," predicted Donald, riding at Bayazid's side, and the Sultan scoffed, "Oh gem of wisdom, will the Lame One flee so quickly?"

"He will not flee," answered the Gael. "Remember he can move his host far more quickly than you can. He will take to the hills and fall suddenly upon us when you least expect it."

Bayazid snorted his contempt. "Is he a magician, to flit among the hills with a horde of 150,000 men? Bah! I tell you, he will come along the Sivas road to join battle, and we will crack him like a nutshell."

So the Turkish host went into camp and fortified the hills, and there they waited with growing wrath and impatience for a week. Bayazid's scouts returned with the news that only a handful of Tatars held Sivas. The Sultan roared with rage and bewilderment.

"Fools, have ye passed the Tatars on the road?"

"Nay, by Allah," swore the riders, "they vanished in the night like ghosts, none can say whither. And we have combed the hills between this spot and the city."

"Timour has fled back to his desert," said Peter Lazarus, and Donald laughed.

"When rivers run uphill, Timour will flee," said he; "he lurks somewhere in the hills to the south."

Bayazid had never taken other men's advice, for he had found long ago that his own wit was superior. But now he was puzzled. He had never before fought the desert riders whose secret of victory was mobility and who passed through the land like blown clouds. Then his outriders brought in word that bodies of mounted men had been seen moving parallel to the Turkish right wing.

MacDeesa laughed like a jackal barking. "Now Timour sweeps upon us from the south, as I predicted."

Bayazid drew up his lines and waited for the assault, but it did not come and his scouts reported that the riders had passed on and disappeared. Bewildered for the first time in his career, and mad to come to grips with his illusive foe, Bayazid struck camp and on a forced march reached the Halys river in two days, where he expected to find Timour drawn up to dispute his passage. No Tatar was to be seen. The Sultan cursed in his black beard; were these eastern devils ghosts, to vanish in thin air? He sent riders across the river and they came flying back, splashing recklessly through the shallow water. They had seen the Tatar rearguard. Timour had eluded the whole Turkish army, and was even now marching on Angora! Frothing, Bayazid turned on MacDeesa.

"Dog, what have you to say now?"

"What would you?" the Highlander stood his ground boldly. "You have none but yourself to blame, if Timour has outwitted you. Have you harkened to me in aught, good or bad? I told you Timour would not await your coming, nor did he. I told you he would leave the city and go into the southern hills. And he did. I told you he would fall upon us suddenly,

and therein I was mistaken. I did not guess that he would cross the river and elude us. But all else I warned you of has come to pass."

Bayazid grudgingly admitted the truth of the Frank's words, but he was mad with fury. Else he had never sought to overtake the swift-moving horde before it reached Angora. He flung his columns across the river and started on the track of the Tatars. Timour had crossed the river near Sivas, and moving around the outer bend, eluded the Turks on the other side. And now Bayazid followed his road, which swung outward from the river, into the plains where there was little water—and no food, after the horde had swept through with torch and blade.

The Turks marched over a fire-blackened, slaughter-reddened waste. Timour covered the ground in three days, over which Bayazid's columns staggered in a week of forced marching; a hundred miles through the burning, desolated plain, strewn with bare hills that made marching a hell. As the strength of the army lay in its infantry, the cavalry was forced to set its pace with the foot-soldiers, and all stumbled wearily through the clouds of stinging dust that rose from beneath the sore, shuffling feet. Under a burning summer sun they plodded grimly along, suffering fiercely from hunger and thirst.

So they came at last to the plain of Angora, and saw the Tatars installed in the camp they had left, besieging the city. And a roar of desperation went up from the thirst-maddened Turks. Timour had changed the course of the little river which ran through Angora, so that now it ran behind the Tatar lines; the only way to reach it was straight through the desert hordes. The springs and wells of the countryside had been polluted or damaged. For an instant Bayazid sat silent in his saddle, gazing from the Tatar camp to his own long straggling lines, and the marks of suffering and vain wrath in the drawn faces of his warriors. A strange fear tugged at his heart, so unfamiliar he did not recognize the emotion. Victory had always been his; could it ever be otherwise?

CHAPTER 5

"What's yon that follows at my side?—
The foe that ye must fight, my lord,—
That hirples swift as I can ride?—
The shadow of the night, my lord."
—*Kipling.*

ON THAT still summer morning the battle-lines stood ready for the death-grip. The Turks were drawn up in a long crescent, whose tips overlapped the Tatar wings, one of which touched the river and the other an entrenched hill fifteen miles away across the plain.

"Never in all my life have I sought another's advice in war," said Bayazid, "but you rode with Timour six years. Will he come to me?"

Donald shook his head. "You outnumber his host. He will never fling his riders against the solid ranks of your janizaries. He will stand afar off and overwhelm you with flights of arrows. You must go to him."

"Can I charge his horse with my infantry?" snarled Bayazid. "Yet you speak wise words. I must hurl my horse against his—and Allah knows his is the better cavalry."

"His right wing is the weaker," said Donald, a sinister light burning in his eyes. "Mass your strongest horsemen on your left wing, charge and shatter that part of the Tatar host; then let your left wing close in, assailing the main battle of the Amir on the flank, while your janizaries advance from the front. Before the charge the spahis on your right wing may

make a feint at the lines, to draw Timour's attention."

Bayazid looked silently at the Gael. Donald had suffered as much as the rest on that fearful march. His mail was white with dust, his lips blackened, his throat caked with thirst.

"So let it be," said Bayazid. "Prince Suleiman shall command the left wing, with the Serbian horse and my own heavy cavalry, supported by the Kalmucks. We will stake all on one charge!"

And so they took up their positions, and no one noticed a flat-faced Kalmuck steal out of the Turkish lines and ride for Timour's camp, flogging his stocky pony like mad. On the left wing was massed the powerful Serbian cavalry and the Turkish heavy horse, with the bow-armed Kalmucks behind. At the head of these rode Donald, for they had clamored for the Frank to lead them against their kin. Bayazid did not intend to match bow-fire with the Tatars, but to drive home a charge that would shatter Timour's lines before the Amir could further outmaneuver him. The Turkish right wing consisted of the spahis; the center of the janizaries and Serbian foot with Peter Lazarus, under the personal command of the Sultan.

Timour had no infantry. He sat with his bodyguard on a hillock behind the lines. Nur ad-Din commanded the right wing of the riders of high Asia, Ak Boga the left, Prince Muhammad the center. With the center were the elephants in their leather trappings, with their battle-towers and archers. Their awesome trumpeting was the only sound along the widespread steel-clad Tatar lines as the Turks came on with a thunder of cymbals and kettle-drums.

Like a thunderbolt Suleiman launched his squadrons at the Tatar right wing. They ran full into a terrible blast of arrows, but grimly they swept on, and the Tatar ranks reeled to the shock. Suleiman, cutting a heron-plumed chieftain out of his saddle, shouted in exultation, but even as he did so, behind him rose a guttural roar, *"Ghar! ghar! ghar!* Smite, brothers, for the lord Timour!"

With a sob of rage he turned and saw his horsemen going down in windrows beneath the arrows of the Kalmucks. And in his ear he heard Donald MacDeesa laughing like a madman.

"Traitor!" screamed the Turk. "This is your work——"

The claymore flashed in the sun and Prince Suleiman rolled headless from his saddle.

"One stroke for Nicopolis!" yelled the maddened Highlander. "Drive home your shafts, dog-brothers!"

The stocky Kalmucks yelped like wolves in reply, wheeling away to avoid the simitars of the desperate Turks, and driving their deadly arrows into the milling ranks at close range. They had endured much from their masters; now was the hour of reckoning. And now the Tatar right wing drove home with a roar; and caught before and behind, the Turkish cavalry buckled and crumpled, whole troops breaking away in headlong flight. At one stroke had been swept away Bayazid's chance to crush his enemy's formation.

As the charge had begun, the Turkish right wing had advanced with a great blare of trumpets and roll of drums, and in the midst of its feint, had been caught by the sudden unexpected charge of the Tatar left. Ak Boga had swept through the light spahis, and losing his head momentarily in the lust of slaughter, he drove them flying before him until pursued and pursuers vanished over the slopes in the distance.

Timour sent Prince Muhammad with

a reserve squadron to support the left wing and bring it back, while Nur ad-Din, sweeping aside the remnants of Bayazid's cavalry, swung in a pivot-like movement and thundered against the locked ranks of the janizaries. They held like a wall of iron, and Ak Boga, galloping back from his pursuit of the spahis, smote them on the other flank. And now Timour himself mounted his war-steed, and the center rolled like an iron wave against the staggering Turks. And now the real death-grip came to be.

Charge after charge crashed on those serried ranks, surging on and rolling back like onsweeping and receding waves. In clouds of fire-shot dust the janizaries stood unshaken, thrusting with reddened spears, smiting with dripping ax and notched simitar. The wild riders swept in like blasting whirlwinds, raking the ranks with the storms of their arrows as they drew and loosed too swiftly for the eye to follow, rushing headlong into the press, screaming and hacking like madmen as their simitars sheared through buckler, helmet and skull. And the Turks beat them back, overthrowing horse and rider; hacked them down and trampled them under, treading their own dead under foot to close the ranks, until both hosts trod on a carpet of the slain and the hoofs of the Tatar steeds splashed blood at every leap.

Repeated charges tore the Turkish host apart at last, and all over the plain the fight raged on, where clumps of spearmen stood back to back, slaying and dying beneath the arrows and simitars of the riders from the steppes. Through the clouds of rising dust stalked the elephants trumpeting like Doom, while the archers on their backs rained down blasts of arrows and sheets of fire that withered men in their mail like burnt grain.

All day Bayazid had fought grimly on foot at the head of his men. At his side fell King Peter, pierced by a score of arrows. With a thousand of his janizaries the Sultan held the highest hill upon the plain, and through the blazing hell of that long afternoon he held it still, while his men died beside him. In a hurricane of splintering spears, lashing axes and ripping simitars, the Sultan's warriors held the victorious Tatars to a gasping deadlock. And then Donald MacDeesa, on foot, eyes glaring like a mad dog's, rushed headlong through the mêlée and smote the Sultan with such hate-driven fury that the crested helmet shattered beneath the claymore's whistling edge and Bayazid fell like a dead man. And over the weary groups of blood-stained defenders rolled the dark tide, and the kettle-drums of the Tatars thundered victory.

CHAPTER 6

"The searing glory which hath shone
Amid the jewels of my throne,
Halo of Hell! and with a pain
Not Hell shall make me fear again."
—POE: *Tamerlane.*

THE power of the Osmanli was broken, the heads of the emirs heaped before Timour's tent. But the Tatars swept on; at the heels of the flying Turks they burst into Brusa, Bayazid's capital, sweeping the streets with sword and flame. Like a whirlwind they came and like a whirlwind they went, laden with treasures of the palace and the women of the vanished Sultan's seraglio.

Riding back to the Tatar camp beside Nur ad-Din and Ak Boga, Donald MacDeesa learned that Bayazid lived. The stroke which had felled him had only stunned, and the Turk was captive to the Amir he had mocked. MacDeesa cursed; the Gael was dusty and stained with hard riding and harder fighting; dried blood darkened his mail and clotted his scab-

bard mouth. A red-soaked scarf was bound about his thigh as a rude bandage; his eyes were blood-shot, his thin lips frozen in a snarl of battle-fury.

"By God, I had not thought a bullock could survive that blow. Is he to be crucified—as he swore to deal with Timour thus?"

"Timour gave him good welcome and will do him no hurt," answered the courtier who brought the news. "The Sultan will sit at the feast."

Ak Boga shook his head, for he was merciful except in the rush of battle, but in Donald's ears were ringing the screams of the butchered captives at Nicopolis, and he laughed shortly—a laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

To the fierce heart of the Sultan, death was easier than sitting a captive at the feast which always followed a Tatar victory. Bayazid sat like a grim image, neither speaking nor seeming to hear the crash of the kettle-drums, the roar of barbaric revelry. On his head was the jewelled turban of sovereignty, in his hand the gem-starred scepter of his vanished empire.

He did not touch the great golden goblet before him. Many and many a time had he exulted over the agony of the vanquished, with much less mercy than was now shown him; now the unfamiliar bite of defeat left him frozen.

He stared at the beauties of his seraglio, who, according to Tatar custom, tremblingly served their new masters: black-haired Jewesses with slumberous, heavy-lidded eyes; lithe tawny Circassians and golden-haired Russians; dark-eyed Greek girls and Turkish women with figures like Juno—all naked as the day they were born, under the burning eyes of the Tatar lords.

He had sworn to ravish Timour's wives—the Sultan writhed as he saw the Despina, sister of Peter Lazarus and his favorite, nude like the rest, kneel and in quivering fear offer Timour a goblet of wine. The Tatar absently wove his fingers in her golden locks and Bayazid shuddered as if those fingers were locked in his own heart.

And he saw Donald MacDeesa sitting next to Timour, his stained dusty garments contrasting strangely with the silk-and-gold splendor of the Tatar lords—his savage eyes ablaze, his dark face wilder and more passionate than ever as he ate like a ravenous wolf and drained goblet after goblet of stinging wine. And Bayazid's iron control snapped. With a roar that struck the clamor dumb, the Thunderer lurched upright, breaking the heavy scepter like a twig between his hands and dashing the fragments to the floor.

All eyes turned toward him and some of the Tatars stepped quickly between him and their Amir, who only looked at him impassively.

"Dog and spawn of a dog!" roared Bayazid. "You came to me as one in need and I sheltered you! The curse of all traitors rest on your black heart!"

MacDeesa heaved up, scattered goblets and bowls.

"Traitors?" he yelled. "Is six years so long you forget the headless corpses that molder at Nicopolis? Have you forgotten the ten thousand captives you slew there, naked and with their hands bound? I fought you there with steel; and since I have fought you with guile! Fool, from the hour you marched from Brusa, you were doomed! It was I who spoke softly to the Kalmucks, who hated you; so they were content and seemed willing to serve you. With them I communicated with Timour from the time we first left Angora—sending riders forth secretly or feigning to hunt for antelopes.

"Through me, Timour tricked you—even put into your head the plan of your battle! I caught you in a web of truths, knowing that you would follow your own course, regardless of what I or any one else said. I told you but two lies—when I said I sought revenge on Timour, and when I said the Amir would bide in the hills and fall upon us. Before battle joined I knew what Timour wished, and by my advice led you into a trap. So Timour, who had drawn out the plan you thought part yours and part mine, knew beforehand every move you would make. But in the end, it hinged on me, for it was I who turned the Kalmucks against you, and their arrows in the backs of your horsemen which tipped the scales when the battle hung in the balance.

"I paid high for my vengeance, Turk! I played my part under the eyes of your spies, in your court, every instant, even when my head was reeling with wine. I fought for you against the Greeks and took wounds. In the wilderness beyond the Halys I suffered with the rest. And I would have gone through greater hells to bring you to the dust!"

"Serve well your master as you have served me, traitor," retorted the Sultan. "In the end, Timour-il-leng, you will rue the day you took this adder into your naked hands. Aye, may each of you bring the other down to death!"

"Be at ease, Bayazid," said Timour impassively. "What is written, is written."

"Aye!" answered the Turk with a terrible laugh. "And it is not written that the Thunderer should live a buffoon for a crippled dog! Lame One, Bayazid gives you—hail and farewell!"

And before any could stay him, the Sultan snatched a carving-knife from a table and plunged it to the hilt in his throat. A moment he reeled like a mighty tree, spurting blood, and then crashed thunderously down. All noise was hushed as the multitude stood aghast. A pitiful cry rang out as the young Despina ran forward, and dropping to her knees, drew the lion's head of her grim lord to her naked bosom, sobbing convulsively. But Timour stroked his beard measuredly and half abstractedly. And Donald MacDeesa, seating himself, took up a great goblet that glowed crimson in the torchlight, and drank deeply.

CHAPTER 7

"Hath not the same fierce heirdom given
Rome to the Cæsar—this to me?"
—POE: *Tamerlane.*

TO UNDERSTAND the relationship of Donald MacDeesa to Timour, it is necessary to go back to that day, six years before, when in the turquoise-domed palace at Samarcand the Amir planned the overthrow of the Ottoman.

When other men looked days ahead, Timour looked years; and five years passed before he was ready to move against the Turk, and let Donald ride to Brusa ahead of a carefully trained pursuit. Five years of fierce fighting in the mountain snows and the desert dust, through which Timour moved like a mythical giant, and hard as he drove his chiefs, he drove the Highlander harder. It was as if he studied MacDeesa with the impersonally cruel eyes of a scientist, wringing every ounce of accomplishment from him, seeking to find the limit of man's endurance and valor—the final breaking-point. He did not find it.

The Gael was too utterly reckless to be trusted with hosts and armies. But in raids and forays, in the storming of cities, and in charges of battle, in any action requiring personal valor and prowess, the Highlander was all but invincible. He was a typical fighting-man of European wars, where tactics and strategy meant

little and ferocious hand-to-hand fighting much, and where battles were decided by the physical prowess of the champions. In tricking the Turk, he had but followed the instructions given him by Timour.

There was scant love lost between the Gael and the Amir, to whom Donald was but a ferocious barbarian from the outlands of Frankistan. Timour never showered gifts and honors on Donald, as he did upon his Moslem chiefs. But the grim Gael scorned these gauds, seeming to derive his only pleasures from hard fighting and hard drinking. He ignored the formal reverence paid the Amir by his subjects, and in his cups dared beard the somber Tatar to his face, so that the people caught their breath.

"He is a wolf I unleash on my foes," said Timour on one occasion to his lords.

"He is a two-edged blade that might cut the wielder," ventured one of them.

"Not so long as the blade is forever smiting my enemies," answered Timour.

After Angora, Timour gave Donald command of the Kalmucks, who accompanied their kin back into high Asia, and a swarm of restless, turbulent Vigurs. That was his reward: a wider range and a greater capacity for grinding toil and heart-bursting warfare. But Donald made no comment; he worked his slayers into fighting shape, and experimented with various types of saddles and armor, with firelocks—finding them much inferior in actual execution to the bows of the Tatars —and with the latest type of firearm, the cumbrous wheel-lock pistols used by the Arabs a century before they made their appearance in Europe.

Timour hurled Donald against his foes as a man hurls a javelin, little caring whether the weapon be broken or not. The Gael's horsemen would come back blood-stained, dusty and weary, their armor hacked to shreds, their swords notched and blunted, but always with the heads of Timour's foes swinging at their high saddle-peaks. Their savagery, and Donald's own wild ferocity and superhuman strength, brought them repeatedly out of seemingly hopeless positions. And Donald's wild-beast vitality caused him again and again to recover from ghastly wounds, until the iron-thewed Tatars marvelled at him.

As the years passed, Donald, always aloof and taciturn, withdrew more and more to himself. When not riding on campaigns, he sat alone in brooding silence in the taverns, or stalked dangerously through the streets, hand on his great sword, while the people slunk softly from in front of him. He had one friend, Ak Boga; but one interest outside of war and carnage. On a raid into Persia, a slim white wisp of a girl had run screaming across the path of the charging squadron and his men had seen Donald bend down and sweep her up into his saddle with one mighty hand. The girl was Zuleika, a Persian dancer.

Donald had a house in Samarcand, and a handful of servants, but only this one girl. She was comely, sensual and giddy. She adored her master in her way, and feared him with a very ecstasy of fear, but was not above secret amours with young soldiers when MacDeesa was away on the wars. Like most Persian women of her caste, she had a capacity for petty intrigue and an inability for keeping her small nose out of affairs which were none of her business. She became a tale-bearer for Shadi Mulkh, the Persian paramour of Khalil, Timour's weak grandson, and thereby indirectly changed the destiny of the world. She was greedy, vain and an outrageous liar, but her hands were soft as drifting snow-flakes when she dressed the wounds of sword and spear on Donald's iron body. He never beat or cursed

her, and though he never caressed or wooed her with gentle words as other men might, it was well known that he treasured her above all worldly possessions and honors.

Timour was growing old; he had played with the world as a man plays with a chessboard, using kings and armies for pawns. As a young chief without wealth or power, he had overthrown his Mongol masters, and mastered them in his turn. Tribe after tribe, race after race, kingdom after kingdom he had broken and molded into his growing empire, which stretched from the Gobi to the Mediterranean, from Moscow to Delhi—the mightiest empire the world ever knew. He had opened the doors of the South and East, and through them flowed the wealth of the earth. He had saved Europe from an Asiatic invasion, when he checked the tide of Turkish conquest—a fact of which he neither knew nor cared. He had built cities and he had destroyed cities. He had made the desert blossom like a garden, and he had turned flowering lands into desert. At his command pyramids of skulls had reared up, and lives flowed out like rivers. His helmeted war-lords were exalted above the multitudes and nations cried out in vain beneath his grinding heel, like lost women crying in the mountains at night.

Now he looked eastward, where the purple empire of Cathay dreamed away the centuries. Perhaps, with the waning of life's tide, it was the old sleeping home-calling of his race; perhaps he remembered the ancient heroic khans, his ancestors, who had ridden southward out of the barren Gobi into the purple kingdoms.

THE Grand Vizier shook his head, as he played at chess with his imperial master. He was old and weary, and he dared speak his mind even to Timour.

"My lord, of what avail these endless wars? You have already subjugated more nations than Genghis Khan or Alexander. Rest in the peace of your conquests and complete the work you have begun in Samarcand. Build more stately palaces. Bring here the philosophers, the artists, the poets of the world——"

Timour shrugged his massive shoulders.

"Philosophy and poetry and architecture are good enough in their way, but they are mist and smoke conquest, for it is on the red splendor of conquest that all these things rest."

The Vizier played with the ivory pawns, shaking his hoary head.

"My lord, you are like two men—one a builder, the other a destroyer."

"Perhaps I destroy so that I may build on the ruins of my destruction," the Amir answered. "I have never sought to reason out this matter. I only know that I am a conqueror before I am a builder, and conquest is my life's blood."

"But what reason to overthrow this great weak bulk of Cathay?" protested the Vizier. "It will mean but more slaughter, with which you have already crimsoned the earth—more wo and misery, with helpless people dying like sheep beneath the sword."

Timour shook his head, half absently. "What are their lives? They die anyway, and their existence is full of misery. I will draw a band of iron about the heart of Tatary. With this Eastern conquest I will strengthen my throne, and kings of my dynasty shall rule the world for ten thousand years. All the roads of the world shall lead to Samarcand, and there shall be gathered the wonder and mystery and glory of the world—colleges and libraries and stately mosques — marble domes and sapphire towers and turquoise minarets. But first I shall carry out my destiny—and that is Conquest!"

"But winter draws on," urged the Vizier. "At least wait until spring."

Timour shook his head, unspeaking. He knew he was old; even his iron frame was showing signs of decay. And sometimes in his sleep he heard the singing of Aljai the Dark-eyed, the bride of his youth, dead for more than forty years. So through the Blue City ran the word, and men left their love-making and their wine-bibbing, strung their bows, looked to their harness and took up again the worn old road of conquest.

Timour and his chiefs took with them many of their wives and servants, for the Amir intended to halt at Otrar, his border city, and from thence strike into Cathay when the snows melted in the spring. Such of his lords as remained rode with him—war took a heavy toll of Timour's hawks.

As usual Donald MacDeesa and his turbulent rogues led the advance. The Gael was glad to take the road after months of idleness, but he brought Zuleika with him. The years were growing more bitter for the giant Highlander, an outlander among alien races. His wild horsemen worshipped him in their savage way, but he was an alien among them, after all, and they could never understand his inmost thoughts. Ak Boga with his twinkling eyes and jovial laughter had been more like the men Donald had known in his youth, but Ak Boga was dead, his great heart stilled forever by the stroke of an Arab simitar, and in his growing loneliness Donald more and more sought solace in the Persian girl, who could never understand his strange wayward heart, but who somehow partly filled an aching void in his soul. Through the long lonely nights his hands sought her slim form with a dim formless unquiet hunger even she could dimly sense.

In a strange silence Timour rode out of Samarcand at the head of his long glittering columns and the people did not cheer as of old. With bowed heads and hearts crowded with emotions they could not define, they watched the last conqueror ride forth, and then turned again to their petty lives and commonplace, dreary tasks, with a vague instinctive sense that something terrible and splendid and awesome had gone out of their lives forever.

In the teeth of the rising winter the hosts moved, not with the speed of other times when they passed through the land like wind-blown clouds. They were two hundred thousand strong and they bore with them herds of spare horses, wagons of supplies and great tent-pavilions.

Beyond the pass men call the Gates of Timour, snow fell, and into the teeth of the blizzard the army toiled doggedly. At last it became apparent that even Tatars could not march in such weather, and Prince Khalil went into winter quarters in that strange town called the Stone City, but Timour plunged on with his own troops. Ice lay three feet deep on the Syr when they crossed, and in the hill-country beyond the going became fiercer, and horses and camels stumbled through the drifts, the wagons lurching and rocking. But the will of Timour drove them grimly onward, and at last they came upon the plain and saw the spires of Otrar gleaming through the whirling snow-wrack.

Timour installed himself and his nobles in the palace, and his warriors went thankfully into winter quarters. But he sent for Donald MacDeesa.

"Ordushar lies in our road," said Timour. "Take two thousand men and storm that city that our road be clear to Cathay with the coming of spring."

When a man casts a javelin he little

cares if it splinter on the mark. Timour would not have sent his valued emirs and chosen warriors on this, the maddest quest he had yet given even Donald. But the Gael cared not; he was more than ready to ride on any adventure which might drown the dim bitter dreams that gnawed deeper and deeper at his heart. At the age of forty MacDeesa's iron frame was unweakened, his ferocious valor undimmed. But at times he felt old in his heart. His thoughts turned more and more back over the black and crimson pattern of his life with its violence and treachery and savagery; its wo and waste and stark futility. He slept fitfully and seemed to hear half-forgotten voices crying in the night. Sometimes it seemed the keening of Highland pipes skirled through the howling winds.

He roused his wolves, who gaped at the command but obeyed without comment, and rode out of Otrar in a roaring blizzard. It was a venture of the damned.

In the palace of Otrar, Timour drowsed on his divan over his maps and charts, and listened drowsily to the everlasting disputes between the women of his household. The intrigues and jealousies of the Samarcand palaces reached to isolated Otrar. They buzzed about him, wearying him to death with their petty spite. As age stole on the iron Amir, the women looked eagerly to his naming of a successor—his queen Sarai Mulkh Khanum; Khan Zade, wife of his dead son Jahangir. Against the queen's claim for her son—and Timour's—Shah Ruhk, was opposed the intrigue of Khan Zade for her son, Prince Khalil, whom the courtezan Shadi Mulkh wrapped about her pink finger.

The Amir had brought Shadi Mulkh with him to Otrar, much against Khalil's will. The Prince was growing restless in the bleak Stone City and hints reached Timour of discord and threats of insubordination. Sarai Khanum came to the Amir, a gaunt weary woman, grown old in wars and grief.

"The Persian girl sends secret messages to Prince Khalil, stirring him up to deeds of folly," said the Great Lady. "You are far from Samarcand. Were Khalil to march thither before you—there are always fools ready to revolt, even against the Lord of Lords."

"At another time," said Timour wearily, "I would have her strangled. But Khalil in his folly would rise against me, and a revolt at this time, however quickly put down, would upset all my plans. Have her confined and closely guarded, so that she can send no more messages."

"This I have already done," replied Sarai Khanum grimly, "but she is clever and manages to get messages out of the palace by means of the Persian girl of the Caphar, lord Donald."

"Fetch this girl," ordered Timour, laying aside his maps with a sigh.

They dragged Zuleika before the Amir, who looked somberly upon her as she grovelled whimpering at his feet, and with a weary gesture, sealed her doom—and immediately forgot her, as a king forgets the fly he has crushed.

They dragged the girl screaming from the imperial presence and hurled her upon her knees in a hall which had no windows and only bolted doors. Grovelling on her knees she wailed frantically for Donald and screamed for mercy, until terror froze her voice in her pulsing throat, and through a mist of horror she saw the stark half-naked figure and the mask-like face of the grim executioner advancing, knife in hand. . . .

Zuleika was neither brave nor admirable. She neither lived with dignity nor met her fate with courage. She was cowardly, immoral and foolish. But even a fly loves life, and a worm would cry out under the heel that crushed it. And per-

haps, in the grim inscrutable books of Fate, even an emperor may not forever trample insects with impunity.

CHAPTER 8

"But I have dreamed a dreary dream,
Beyond the Vale of Skye;
I saw a dead man win a fight,
And I think that man was I."
—*Battle of Otterbourne.*

AND at Ordushar the siege dragged on. In the freezing winds that swept down the pass, driving snow in blinding, biting blasts, the stocky Kalmucks and the lean Vigurs strove and suffered and died in bitter anguish. They set scaling-ladders against the walls and struggled upward, and the defenders, suffering no less, speared them, hurled down boulders that crushed the mailed figures like beetles, and thrust the ladders from the walls so that they crashed down, bearing death to men below. Ordushar was actually but a stronghold of the Jat Mongols, set sheer in the pass and flanked by towering cliffs.

Donald's wolves hacked at the frozen ground with frost-bitten raw hands which scarce could hold the picks, striving to sink a mine under the walls. They pecked at the towers while molten lead and weighted javelins fell in a rain upon them; driving their spear-points between the stones, tearing out pieces of masonry with their naked hands. With stupendous toil they had constructed makeshift siege-engines from felled trees and the leather of their harness and woven hair from the manes and tails of their war-horses. The rams battered vainly at the massive stones, the ballistas groaned as they launched tree-trunks and boulders against the towers or over the walls. Along the parapets the attackers fought with the defenders, until their bleeding hands froze to spear-shaft and sword-hilt, and the skin came away in great raw strips. And always, with superhuman fury rising above their agony, the defenders hurled back the attack.

A storming-tower was built and rolled up to the walls, and from the battlements the men of Ordushar poured a drenching torrent of naphtha that sent it up in flame and burnt the men in it, shriveling them in their armor like beetles in a fire. Snow and sleet fell in blinding flurries, freezing to sheets of ice. Dead men froze stiffly where they fell, and wounded men died in their sleeping-furs. There was no rest, no surcease from agony. Days and nights merged into a hell of pain. Donald's men, with tears of suffering frozen on their faces, beat frenziedly against the frosty stone walls, fought with raw hands gripping broken weapons, and died cursing the gods that created them.

The misery inside the city was no less, for there was no more food. At night Donald's warriors heard the wailing of the starving people in the streets. At last in desperation the men of Ordushar cut the throats of their women and children and sallied forth, and the haggard Tatars fell on them weeping with the madness of rage and wo, and in a welter of battle that crimsoned the frozen snow, drove them back through the city gates. And the struggle went hideously on.

Donald used up the last wood in the vicinity to erect another storming-tower higher than the city-wall. After that there was no more wood for the fires. He himself stood at the uplifted bridge which was to be lowered to rest on the parapets. He had not spared himself. Day and night he had toiled beside his men, suffering as they had suffered. The tower was rolled to the wall in a hail of arrows that slew half the warriors who had not found shelter behind the thick bulwark. A crude cannon bellowed from the walls, but the clumsy round shot whistled over their heads. The naphtha and Greek fire

of the Jats was exhausted. In the teeth of the singing shafts the bridge was dropped.

Drawing his claymore, Donald strode out upon it. Arrows broke on his corselet and glanced from his helmet. Firelocks flashed and bellowed in his face but he strode on unhurt. Lean armored men with eyes like mad dogs' swarmed upon the parapet, seeking to dislodge the bridge, to hack it asunder. Among them Donald sprang, his claymore whistling. The great blade sheared through mail-mesh, flesh and bone, and the struggling dump fell apart. Donald staggered on the edge of the wall as a heavy ax crashed on his shield, and he struck back, cleaving the wielder's spine. The Gael recovered his balance, tossing away his riven shield. His wolves were swarming over the bridge behind him, hurling the defenders from the parapet, cutting them down. Into a swirl of battle Donald strode, swinging his heavy blade. He thought fleetingly of Zuleika, as men in the madness of battle will think of irrelevant things, and it was as if the thought of her had hurt him fiercely under the heart. But it was a spear that had girded through his mail, and Donald struck back savagely; the claymore splintered in his hand and he leaned against the parapet, his face briefly contorted. Around him swept the tides of slaughter as the pent-up fury of his warriors, maddened by the long weeks of suffering, burst all bounds.

CHAPTER 9

"While the red flashing of the light
From clouds that hung, like banners, o'er,
Appeared to my half-closing eye
The pageantry of monarchy."
—POE: *Tamerlane.*

TO TIMOUR on his throne in the palace of Otrar came the Grand Vizier. "The survivors of the men sent to the Pass of Ordushar are returning, my lord. The city in the mountains is no more. They bear the lord Donald on a litter, and he is dying."

They brought the litter into Timour's presence, weary, dull-eyed men, with raw wounds tied up with blood-crusted rags, their garments and mail in tatters. They flung before the Amir's feet the golden-scaled corselets of chiefs, and chests of jewels and robes of silk and silver braid; the loot of Ordushar where men had starved among riches. And they set the litter down before Timour.

The Amir looked at the form of Donald. The Highlander was pale, but his sinister face showed no hint of weakness in that wild spirit, his cold eyes gleamed unquenched.

"The road to Cathay is clear," said Donald, speaking with difficulty. "Ordushar lies in smoking ruins. I have carried out your last command."

Timour nodded, his eyes seeming to gaze through and beyond the Highlander. What was a dying man on a litter to the Amir, who had seen so many die? His mind was on the road to Cathay and the purple kingdoms beyond. The javelin had shattered at last, but its final cast had opened the imperial path. Timour's dark eyes burned with strange depths and leaping shadows, as the old fire stole through his blood. Conquest! Outside the winds howled, as if trumpeting the roar of nakars, the clash of cymbals, the deep-throated chant of victory.

"Send Zuleika to me," the dying man muttered. Timour did not reply; he scarcely heard, sitting lost in thunderous visions. He had already forgotten Zuleika and her fate. What was one death in the awesome and terrible scheme of empire.

"Zuleika, where is Zuleika?" the Gael repeated, moving restlessly on his litter,

Timour shook himself slightly and lifted his head, remembering.

"I had her put to death," he answered quietly. "It was necessary."

"Necessary!" Donald strove to rear upright, his eyes terrible, but feli back, gagging, and spat out a mouthful of crimson. "You bloody dog, she was mine!"

"Yours or another's," Timour rejoined absently, his mind far away. "What is a woman in the plan of imperial destinies?"

For answer Donald plucked a pistol from among his robes and fired point-blank. Timour started and swayed on his throne, and the courtiers cried out, paralyzed with horror. Through the drifting smoke they saw that Donald lay dead on the litter, his thin lips frozen in a grim smile. Timour sat crumpled on his throne, one hand gripping his breast; through those fingers blood oozed darkly. With his free hand he waved back his nobles.

"Enough; it is finished. To every man comes the end of the road. Let Pir Muhammad reign in my stead, and let him strengthen the lines of the empire I have reared with my hands."

A rack of agony twisted his features. "Allah, that this should be the end of empire!" It was a fierce cry of anguish from his inmost soul. "That I, who have trodden upon kingdoms and humbled sultans, come to my doom because of a cringing trull and a Caphar renegade!" His helpless chiefs saw his mighty hands clench like iron as he held death at bay by the sheer power of his unconquered will. The fatalism of his accepted creed had never found resting-place in his instinctively pagan soul; he was a fighter to the red end.

"Let not my people know that Timour died by the hand of a Caphar," he spoke with growing difficulty. "Let not the chronicles of the ages blazon the name of a wolf that slew an emperor. Ah God, that a bit of dust and metal can dash the Conqueror of the World into the dark! Write, scribe, that this day, by the hand of no man, but by the will of Allah, died Timour, Servant of God."

The chiefs stood about in dazed silence, while the pallid scribe took up parchment and wrote with a shaking hand. Timour's somber eyes were fixed on Donald's still features that seemed to give back his stare, as the dead on the litter faced the dying on the throne. And before the scratching of the quill had ceased, Timour's lion head had sunk upon his mighty chest. And without the wind howled a dirge, drifting the snow higher and higher about the walls of Otrar, even as the sands of oblivion drifted already about the crumbling empire of Timour, the Last Conqueror, Lord of the World.

RED MOONS

By VIRGINIA STAIT

The spell of India pervades this strange love story like a rich incense

"RED moons are blood moons." This is an Indian proverb, but it is so much more than a proverb that it might be called a statute of law. It furnishes an excuse for all things, from misdemeanors to crimes, and was once accepted as justification for offense by an English judge in an Indian court.

From that remote period when the first tribes of the Aryan race came to the Indian peninsula, it has come down to the India of today. The Hindoos say it can make a priest fit for nothing but to dig his own grave, it can turn a proper devil loose on every man—himself. I could tell you stories of blood-curdling horror under red moons, but an English record has priority.

The moon had been red two nights. For the last half-hour Neal Wolfenden had walked up and down his cousin's room. That was a long time for Neal to walk with something on his mind, as obviously there as the shoes on his feet. Hayden Neal Wolfenden asked no questions. In fact he was not thinking of Neal, for he had heard for the first time that day the wonderful song of Touggourt and he was still under the domination of its burning desolation.

Neal's shoulder touched a bookcase in turning and he spoke abruptly, as though a spring were released. "I say, Hayden, I am in the biggest mess of my life."

Neal was frequently in a mess, and Hayden—they were first cousins—had pulled him out more frequently than either could remember. Hayden was thirty-two, ten years older than Neal, who regarded his cousin as an older brother, kin-made for every difficulty. The elder was named for his uncle as, later, Neal was named for his father. Hayden did not use his middle name, however, so there was no confusion.

"It's damnable." Neal stopped in his walk and stared at the other. "I don't see how you keep out."

"I don't altogether, but these young affairs of yours are not interesting to me," Hayden chaffed.

"And I promised the colonel——" Neal said reflectively. He meant his father, Colonel Wolfenden, a martinet but a most lovable man also, on whom Neal was dependent for a generous allowance. His soldier's pay in India would not have bought him mufti.

"I promised the colonel, too," answered Hayden, remembering unforgettable words when Neal had followed him to India. Hayden reached out a hand to the young fellow's arm. "Sit down and tell me all about it." Then, as silence followed, he added, "I suppose it's a girl and she won't have you?"

"Two," answered Neal solemnly.

"Again! Two can't be as bad as one."

"You won't laugh when I tell you—it's little Audrey Trevelyan."

Hayden carried his mind back to that England Neal had left two years ago. *Audrey Trevelyan?* The fifth daughter of Mrs. Trevelyan whose boast it was that all her girls married before the age of twenty. But two divorces had followed these cluster marriages. So they had done up Neal—he should be extricated.

"He flung himself on Neal and there was a short struggle."

"Tell me," Hayden said quietly.

Neal poured forth the beginning. At the touch of the first key Hayden knew the tune. The old story of a girl and boy, for ever unfinished — but always differently woven. The heat thrust itself from the red moon as from the sun, only that its fever beat with weirder thoughts and imaginings, with curious schemes for outwitting the devil, in this country which he owned in part. Hayden felt all this undercurrent as he listened to Neal's talk, as the young fellow loosed a flood of explanation, a tirade of self-condemnation.

"It is so easy to get engaged." Neal's words would have been ludicrous, had he not been in such real trouble. "I thought it very—you know—up-to-date to get engaged and have my future wife come out to me. And she—she is a dear little thing, Hayden. Brave, too. Do you know what she said to me when I asked her, 'If it were not for that well-known speech of my mother's, that her girls married so soon, I would say yes. As it is I say no!' But she did not mean it and I persuaded her to alter it."

"And I suppose all this is to tell me you want me to get you un-engaged, by

some hook or crook. I won't do it. There was the affair with Maria Conyers and I got you off, and with Maud Kelvin and with—I can't even remember the names."

"But this time—listen, Hayden. This girl is as different from her family as if she had been brought up in a cloister, but Trevelyan did make it tight for me before I left. She said she had heard of girls whose engagements were only engagements, when the men were going to India, and she wanted to know—and I swore," Neal's eyes looked tortured, "that I meant every word."

The moonlight poured in. Hayden pushed his chair out of it roughly. "Then, if she is so perfect, why don't you marry her? I suppose you will tell me next that she is on her way here?"

"Hayden, it is as serious as life and death. It was all arranged before I left and today I heard she will be here *at the end of this month.*" Had he said "Judgment day will be here at the end of this month," his words could not have had more force.

Neal was in some terrible web of circumstance. Hayden's scornful look vanished and only his man's strength and determination were visible.

"Tell me the worst," he said quickly.

The words seemed torn from Neal, like some sharp instrument removed from a wound, and the torpid heat was the blood on the blade. "I am married!" he said.

HAYDEN had expected some complication, something monstrous, perhaps, for Neal was in and out of things like an ant to its hill, but it had not occurred to him that there was anything really wrong. This was almost unbelievable. Married! And it had been kept secret!

"Neal!" he cried, as he refused the evidence of his ears.

The young man threw himself into a chair by Hayden and finished his story.

The girl was Anglo-Indian, but he loved her and they had been married hurriedly. India spends at once in love and hate. Other things may be slow, but never in India these two poles of passion. He had scarcely given a thought to Audrey; not for months, anyway. They had written irregularly, but, it seemed, when the time came for the marriage, settled so long ago in England—*two years,* two years was a lifetime here—Mrs. Trevelyan had hustled things together, put notices in the papers, collected an outfit and announced to every one that Audrey was going to India to be married.

And people had loaded her with presents. Mrs. Trevelyan had pulled every wire in the universe; she was actually sending him presents that she had collected by wholesale extortion.

Neal paused to get his breath and one hand clenched on the arm of his chair.

"But I have thought of a way out, if only—you have never failed me, Hayden."

The red moon crept up, inch by inch, and looked down, mysteriously old, fiendishly knowing. By its light Hayden saw Neal's face, drawn, tense, as one under torture.

"Go on," said the older man.

"I have thought it out, Hayden, if *you* married her—just for a time—it would save me and this poor girl." He hurried on, not giving the other time for a word. "We are not so unlike and these suns age one. I will exchange at once into some other regiment and that N. of your middle name *is* Neal. Marry her when she comes, old fellow, to give her protection, and then tell her it has been so long since you have been together, it would be better for both to remain as if

engaged for a time. Then—there are a hundred men here to make love to her, to want to marry her. It would be easy enough to make her dislike you, to separate formally. Hayden, don't you *see?* It can be done and she will be saved. Oh, I know what it would mean for her, after all this fuss, *not* to be married. Disgrace almost. She could never live it down. You will save her and——" He reached out his hand to Hayden.

It was the right pause. Hayden greatly loved him, but this diabolical thing! Still, half unconsciously, his brain began to piece it together. He saw the weak and the strong points. Neal's life was in the balance. This would ruin his career for all time. Could he be saved, though? Would not some other deviltry——

"Neal," and Hayden's voice was quiet, but with some quality in it that his cousin had never heard before, "if I help you in this matter—I don't say I will—will you promise me to run straight?"

He did not put forth any argument. Neal's drawn face said that he knew it all, the two roads, defeat and conquest. But no sooner had these words passed Hayden's lips than Neal's face altered. "The future is not," say the Hindoos. Neal might have taken it for his crest.

"I will! I will! Hayden, I should have told you of Charca, but she was trying so hard to make herself English that she begged me to wait. She is really wonderful. She knows almost as much as I do about—things. In a short time——"

"In a short time she will be ready to take to Wolfenden Court," finished Hayden ironically.

Neal stood up. "Yes, she will. Wait until you see her."

Hayden liked that touch of faith. Yet, how long would it last? There had been such countless scrapes, morasses. He looked up to find Neal's eyes on him.

"I will let you know as soon as possible," he answered to their appeal.

THEN followed a long wrestling for Hayden with the gods of good and ill. The very air of India is unrestrained: it is an Italy mad with the pain of beauty; it is a knight reaching the things of a desperado; it is a torch and an iron club. His life meant little to him. Neal had followed him to India and Hayden had promised the colonel—second only to his own father——

If this were not covered up in some way Neal's every prospect in life would be ruined. It might be so now, owing to his marriage, but this added complication would be black disgrace from which there was no escape. England and India, his world—and that is all that matters to each of us—would cast him out, officially and socially. If you are between the flood and the fire, choose the flood—and learn to swim.

And the moon remained red and engulfed all things, from one man's thought to the movement of the English army.

Ten days later Hayden told Neal he consented to his plan with certain provisos. Neal must not only go away but remain away until he, Hayden, had done with this business. That would mean as soon as he could decently tell the girl the whole story, as soon as he could get a separation and provide for her future in some way. Of course she might fall in love with a man here; if so it would make it easier for all concerned.

And, in case of his sudden death, Neal must swear to him that the entire story would be told her in twenty-four hours. Also that, as soon as it was possible, the things would be done for her that he proposed. She *must* be provided for. Hayden had seen English women adrift in

India, the most pitiful of derelicts. Mrs. Trevelyan was living on the last remnant of her husband's money and was deeply in debt, too. He happened to know of this before he left England. As soon as he married her—he winced at the word —he would make some adequate provision in his will.

He looked to Neal to see that it was faithfully carried out in the event of his death. Life and its counterpart here are frequently nearer than day and night. It was the only mitigating thing that could be done for Audrey Trevelyan, declared Neal. He was a rich man. Neal promised by every god in his hierarchy, by every *dakkhan* god in India.

Hayden's preparations were so simple, seemingly, that they were scarcely remarked by his men. They were near Simla and it was the season there. The company was gay, each man with one or two "affairs." Hayden, with his silence and reserve, might have had a dozen wives for all they knew—or cared.

Neal called his cousin "Neal" before he left, and Hayden's letters began to arrive addressed in this manner. There are too many Foreign Legions in every country for any man who has a hurt to turn a blade in his neighbor's wound.

The announcement from Hayden that he expected to be married soon, but would leave his wife in Simla, caused little talk. The company drank his health, promised each other some money toward a present if it came off, and immediately forgot it. As I said, Hayden was a reserved, silent man.

IN DUE time Audrey Trevelyan reached India. She was met by a grave man, older than she remembered Neal, but so sunburned—it was like another skin.

"You are Miss Trevelyan," Hayden said formally, and reaching out his hand took hers in a firm grasp that was, in some degree, reassuring. For it was the first time Audrey had been separated from her mother for any length of time and she was beginning to question many of the things that, heretofore, she had taken for granted. Mrs. Trevelyan's opinions, orders, laws were supreme; there had never been opportunity for a sortie.

"Were you—were you expecting me?" Audrey asked nervously, and then knew they were the last words she should have said. She flushed.

Hayden did not answer. He was trying to reconcile fact with hearsay. What he saw was a slight English girl with dark hair and deep violet-blue eyes, a small mouth, very serious now, a slender white neck and little hands and feet. But it was her expression that arrested him, as if she had been playing a childish game of hide and seek and found the seek was beyond her bravery.

The full meaning of what she had done she had not realized until now—*now,* with her future husband standing near, a stranger. Hayden read it, and if his hands could have reached Neal that young fellow would have known a *juta.*

"Expecting you?—what a question! I have taken rooms for you at the *Taza Burha* Hotel, where a friend is staying, Mrs. Radner. She will want to take you home with her for a time."

"Yes," Audrey said, and there was a quiver in her voice. "Of course I have no friends here, but I——"

The tall man by her side, with the clear-cut features and honest gray eyes seemed to understand. Hayden was somewhat like Neal, but where the latter was boyish, weak, irresolute, Hayden was strong, determined, a soldier "made for the dagger and sword."

"Of course we must have some talk

together before you see any one. That was what you meant?"

She nodded and he drove her in his car directly to the hotel. "Now, I insist upon this," Hayden said, as they stood a moment in the great entrance way, "I want you to go to your room and rest for two hours, at least. Then come down and you will find me here, in that place." He motioned to a certain apartment, cut off from the lobby. "I will see that we have that to ourselves when you wish to talk to me."

She assented and Hayden watched her ascend the great stairway. She held to the rail as if terribly weary, exhausted mind and body by it all. He decided that it would be a thousand times worse than he expected. He had planned that all intercourse with her must be curt, so that he could prepare the way for her dislike, prepare to free himself, but—she was in every way different from what he expected. In all this desolate, radiant India she had no one but himself, and a month ago he did not know, or care, if she were in the world.

IN TWO hours Audrey came down, uncertain in her slow steps. Hayden went to the foot of the staircase and waited.

"I hope you have rested," he began, noting that she seemed more childish with the removal of her heavy cloak, but at the same time that a woman's heart looked from her eyes—and was afraid.

"Cha e bi 'lkull taiyar hai," salaamed one of the hotel boys. He was dressed in a crimson jacket and trousers and wore a tarbush. The hotel-keepers seldom adhere to the native garb if a more startling one can be found, and Egyptian, Japanese and Turkish costumes are curiously intermingled with the Indian.

"He says tea is ready. Would you rather have something to eat first, before we talk?" But, even as he asked the question he knew she would decline. She would know now, to the last grain of sand in her desert.

"Then, we will be alone here." He turned into the room of which he had spoken and she saw him motion to a boy standing near, who took up his position by the door.

There was a low seat piled with cushions, which she took, and he stood near her, looking down at the small creature who had so strangely come into his life. She wore a soft gray gown that looked cool and her hair, which waved a little, was done up in a Greek knot at her neck. Her color rose in her cheeks as she met his eyes. Yes, she was a lovely bit of England.

"Let me speak first," she begged. "On the steamer, away from my mother," the unconscious words told a volume, "I began to think we were too hasty, that we ought to reconsider—at least to take time——" She broke off, her eyes not meeting his now.

She was making it less difficult, thought Hayden, almost as though she had known.

"I understand," he answered, "and I propose this, with your approval. We will be married, so that your position here among strangers will be as it should, so that you may tell your own people. But I will explain to Mrs. Radnor that, as it has been long since we have been together, we prefer to call it an engagement. She is a most charming woman; she will quite understand." Hayden had made what arrangements were possible with Mrs. Radnor before the arrival of Audrey, but to tell her that would be brutal.

If Mrs. Radnor understood, Audrey

did not. "But I had so much rather we were unmarried!" she cried, and she brought forth her reasons.

Hayden swept them aside. She must be safeguarded in every way that was possible. Only one who had lived in India knew the thousand and one things, difficulties that amounted to insolences, presumptions that were veiled insults, if a young woman lived long here without adequate male protection. Finally Audrey, not without a great deal of persuasion, consented to be married that evening and then go to Mrs. Radnor's home in Simla.

Mrs. Radnor was a handsome English woman of middle age who was living in India to be near her son, attached to the staff of General Sahib Losten. And thus and so Hayden arranged matters until he could further adjust them—to the demands of a red moon.

When they had finished talking he took her to Mrs. Radnor, ordered dinner for them and went out to walk some of the hours away until he had—a wife.

He had not thought much about a wife in his life. Military service meant almost everything to him, for he was of that numerous army in England, a younger son. Though his mother had left him a fortune the family were partial to the eldest son, and Hayden had been shipped from his university and training school almost directly to India. Sometimes he had thought of a wife, in those vague musings that come and go between a man and his cigar, but he had never visioned her in the concrete.

And now, between sunset and moonrise——. She was certainly not of the stuff which made Mrs. Trevelyan. One remark of hers hurt him, "I had rather die than marry a man who did not care." He thought she said those words, but they were indistinct and he did not question it. He preferred to think other things—what an ass Neal was!

HAYDEN returned to the hotel at eight o'clock, just as the moon was showing a red rim above the hills, that appeared, under its strange, despotic light, to have been burned over. He had made all the arrangements, had told Mrs. Radnor of them, and there remained but one thing he must tell Audrey before they separated. He repeated this to himself and then was amused by it. How could he forget?

It was a very determined-looking soldier, in a wonderful uniform—it seemed to Audrey—who took possession of her at eight o'clock and carried her to the same room in which they two had arranged part of their future. This time a couple of hotel servants stood guard at the great doors. Inside there were three of Hayden's friends, two Simla young men who regretted there was to be no wedding feast, and Mrs. Radnor's son, the witnesses.

Audrey was still in the gray gown, but Mrs. Radnor had fastened to it a great spray of white roses, Cashmere roses, as all roses sold in India are called, and they fell from her shoulder nearly to her feet. Her face was colorless, almost as white as the flowers. Hayden noticed it, as he noticed each detail of her appearance, from the lashes of the violet-blue eyes to the curves of her small shoe.

He bent his head quickly. "Are you all right? Would you like—anything?"

"Do you think," she whispered with unsteady lips, "it is best?"

"I know it is," he replied, and in an effort to change the current of her thoughts, "I am sorry I forgot the flowers."

She looked down at them and a little real pleasure stole into her eyes. Hayden

always remembered that glance. Why had he not thought of the roses? Why make this more of a horror to her than absolute necessity demanded?

The priest made the ceremony as brief as possible. He had performed six marriages for six brides who had come out with Audrey on *H. M. S. The Exeter,* and he was tired.

Audrey lifted her eyes to Hayden's face as the last words were said, but he stood still and in a moment the young men were speaking to her, Mrs. Radnor was laughing and her son was kissing Audrey's little hands, lifting first one and then the other to his lips.

"*Pace tua,*" he said smiling. "If I had only known you before, I should have asked for something else."

Hayden's eyes were still upon Audrey and she saw that the thought of a kiss had occurred to him and that he refrained. In a few moments the room was empty save for husband and wife. Hayden placed a chair for her near a window, where they could see the throng passing in the street, Khattak, Turk, Sikh, Brazilian, Moro, Arab.

"I thought it best to give this to you after"—there was the slightest hesitation—"we were married. It is yours now." Hayden produced a small silver purse and gave it to Audrey. "I want you to use it in any way that will make you more comfortable or be pleasant for you. When you need more you have only to remind me, if I should unpardonably forget."

"Money," she said, looking down at it. "Oh, I couldn't!"

"How much have you?" he asked, determined, soldier-fashion, to make things conform to his ideas.

The color crept back to her face and answered him.

"The voyage always takes it," he said casually. "But India is a place of money—to spend and to make. You must take it," he put his hands behind him as he refused the purse. "That is finished," he said with a smile, the tenderness of which escaped them both, "and now I want you to promise me something."

He had decided upon this after he met the steamer. For he would keep some of the vows of the marriage service, his money and time and thought should guard her.

"I want you to promise me if you are ever in any difficulty, from the smallest to the largest thing, *if the least need arises,* you will send for me?"

"I do not think it will be necessary. I like Mrs. Radnor, I am sure she will——" The words "take care of me" were almost said, but she withheld them.

"It is my business to take care of you and I am going to do it," he replied almost roughly. "You will promise?"

She looked up at him and the command in his face was so strong that she answered, "Yes," and then added, "if it is absolutely necessary."

HAYDEN had endeavored to decide all the questions that would arise, that *could* arise, from this red-moon madness before Audrey Trevelyan reached India. Now he saw that many of them would have to be altered. He had not considered how absolutely alone and dependent she would be. The matter of the money had not occurred to him until he was taking that long walk through the streets just before the marriage. Mrs. Trevelyan had nothing but what was fourfold in debt. Hayden wondered how she had contrived to pay Audrey's passage—he supposed that would for ever remain a secret concerning the last daughter to be married!

He had decided, before he knew Au-

drey, that he would allow an interval of two weeks before going to see her after the marriage—he had it all cut and dried —this to be followed by longer and longer intervals. But now he altered his opinion. He had been wrong. He must see if she needed anything, that she *did* spend that money. India required many things that England did not—she probably did not have a shilling. He would go to see her in a short time, in a week. . . .

But that question that burns like perpetual fire between the East and every dissenting individual, the removal of shoes before entering a sacred place, was causing trouble at Dunhuri. Some wandering vandal had walked in the Sagtonah temple and every step left heavy gray mud! There was the devil of a row. Officers were ordered to remain at their posts, guards were doubled. The offender had escaped and this made it worse.

Hayden had to remain at Dunhuri, but the thought of Audrey, new to these rumors, was disquieting. He wrote her a note, and not having considered how he would address it, dashed it off without any beginning. After a moment's hesitation he signed it, "yours faithfully." Yes, he would be that to her until he was but a faint memory.

It was many days later before he was able to get away. He had not notified Audrey that he was coming, and as he walked from his car to the door he wondered if she would be at home. It was the hour for visiting, and Mrs. Radnor had many friends.

The servant's *"Han Sahib"* was a relief. He was shown into a large room containing a delightful collection of Indian and English things. There were cabinets enameled in stone that held a few heirlooms, carvings that would have done for lace and pottery, from the plain Indian water jar to the exquisite jars brought from Tanjore.

In a few minutes the *khansaman* returned. The ladies were in the garden, if the Sahib would not mind the great effort of following him. But the Sahib strode out of the room ahead of the speech. Through the carab and betel palms he caught a glimpse of a gown and heard voices.

Mrs. Radnor was talking to a man who was looking in another direction and that direction was where Audrey walked along one of the paths between two men. And he, Hayden, had been afraid she was lonely!

They had decided that the marriage was to be kept a secret for the present, but the engagement was no secret. Mrs. Radnor could not go about telling every one that Audrey was engaged, thought Hayden, but—she should have arranged matters better. Still, in some way, by some telepathy, the men seemed to understand that they were not in demand by this one who came among them so masterfully, and Hayden and the girl were alone before long.

"You received my note?" he asked.

The trees, with their different exotic greens, dark almost as polished iron, light almost as lustrous silver, made a wonderful frame for her fair skin and violet-blue eyes. She wore a violet dress—Hayden thought it was violet, it almost matched her eyes—and it seemed to be some marvelous bloom of India, indefinable, unfamiliar, ardent.

"Yes," she answered, somewhat startled by his sudden appearance, and as he waited she added, "I was not frightened. There is something in this land——"

"That claims you as your own blood to blood," Hayden went on, as they both looked through the trees where, in the distance, could be seen a man falling on

his knees with his face to Mecca, "that makes you understand the devotion of the natives, their willingness to go at once on the farthest journey." Some reply from the tender depth of the brooding East came to him and he said, as if deciding a question for himself, "It is unlike every other land. The foreigner feels akin and does not measure difference but gathers remembrance—from things older than his birth."

They were silent while his eyes observed her closely. She was thinner than he recalled and there was a tension that he did not like—was she in any distress?

"Audrey," he said, and the name came naturally to his lips, "are you troubled about anything? If so," a thrill of some sensation, not unpleasant, passed through him before he uttered the words, "you must tell me."

"Everything is all right, only — I should not have come."

If she had not come! The words were a revelation to Hayden. He had been arranging for this and that contingency, but suppose there had been no contingency? Suppose he had never known this girl with the clear eyes and straightforward ways of the heart?

"You could not have done anything else," he answered, and bit off the "dear" that was nearly uttered as he forcibly wrenched his thoughts to the part he was to play. Had he not decided on the way here to tell her she would not see him for the next three weeks?

But he did not find the words and finally went away, thinking some long thoughts. And a gay, yellow moon looked down on him that night.

SIX weeks passed. In that time he had been to see her six times, but, owing to some indisposition on the part of Mrs. Radnor there were two occasions when the girl was not visible. And, of course, it threw out all Hayden's plans. When one could not see one's wife, to tell her he would *not* see her——

The next night the moon came up, red, blood-red, and its fires were fed by every diabolical thing in India, from the theft of a purse to the wholesale butchery of a small outpost numbering five young English soldiers. And there was war in the eyes of every Englishman in India, and there was *churi* death in the eyes of every native.

Hayden returned to his barracks one evening worn out by the strenuosities of the day. Guards had to be redoubled, ammunition ordered — there was not enough for the additional forces and no one knew if it could be procured—emissaries received and sent away about various small matters, with a word of warning or conciliation as the case required. No two cases were ever alike.

So Hayden, finished at last with the day's duties, returned to his rooms to find—Neal. Hayden would have been less astonished to see the great Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, whose territory is eighty thousand square miles.

"Neal!" he exclaimed. Instantly there shot through Hayden the thought that he did not want Neal here, he did not want to see him now at all—the man who had been dearer to him than a brother.

"I know how glad you are to see me, and surprized, too," the young man said affectionately. "It has been hell where I was for the last three days. I tell you the Indians are *raw* about this, almost as raw as we are."

His face was drawn with fatigue; he twitched now and then and looked like a man who had been on a long spree.

"Surprized is not the word," answered Hayden. "I consider you have broken your oath by coming here."

Neal smiled. "Suppose that oath is no longer necessary?" He settled back in his chair as though he needed its support. "My wife, Charca, is dead," he said slowly. "She was bitten by a poisonous snake and had no knife near and I—was away. I have returned to make things straight with you, as far as I can," and his hand touched Hayden. "You have told her?" he asked.

"No, there has been no time."

"No time? Why, you were married nearly two months ago!"

"There has been no time," repeated Hayden, and he spoke shortly.

Neal looked at him closely. "You have been going through hell, too," he said, "and I put you there. Well, I am going to do all I can to straighten it out. I heard about Audrey at Kanwar."

Hayden looked at him steadily. "What did you hear?" he asked.

Neal replied to the autocratic tone. "I say, old fellow, this massacre did get you. Know any of them?"

"No—what about Audrey?"

"It was Donegal who told me, that she was the prettiest little thing India had seen for some time. Said there were at least a dozen men in love with her already."

Hayden straightened himself. "Did he mention the fact that she was engaged?" he asked.

"Oh yes, Donegal said there was some sort of an old lover arrangement, but the men asserted they would show her the difference between old love and new."

There was an eager tone in Neal's voice that did not escape Hayden.

"What, exactly, do you propose?" There was tension in Hayden's very attitude, but Neal was absorbed in his future.

"I am going straight to her and tell her the whole story. Then, as soon as it can be arranged, I will marry her, if she is at all like the Audrey I knew."

"Your love for your wife is dead, I suppose?"

Neal looked at him in astonishment. "Why, Hayden, you speak as though—as though you don't altogether approve. I thought you would, Kowta fashion! You remember he shouted until he broke a blood vessel. This is the only course possible and 'Old Stiff' was good enough to change me back here. Of course I will wait a decent interval — I did love Charca."

Hayden noticed he spoke of his love in the past. Would he never be grown? Then the absurdity of any conflict between them flashed across his mind. Of course he was only thinking of Audrey, that she had not had time to recover from the first shock. He could give Neal his queen at chess and still score, if he desired it. *Audrey was his wife.*

"You must allow a decent interval, Neal. She will be shocked about Charca."

"Of course I will be guided entirely by you and, Hayden, I really wanted to hurry it because of you. As to being shocked, there is no difference between a poniard and a dagger, you know."

Neal did not smile as he said the words, but there was so much youthful assurance about him and, too, a certain relish of the situation, that for a moment Hayden saw red. He turned on the other furiously. "You young idiot!" he exclaimed and then checked himself. To quarrel with Neal would not elucidate matters. The terrible affair must be straightened out in some other way.

"It's the red moon," Neal said airily, getting to his feet. "I won't do one thing until you think it over and decide, Hayden. You've been my salvation again."

And the moon travelled up the sky that night and looked wickedly down. Men

strained in their sleep to accomplish the retributions that lay sub-consciously in their minds. The Hindoos are fire-worshippers in sects, and sometimes the fire must be lighted nine times to be pure. Never, however, from a red moon, that only remembers cremation.

The matter could not remain static now, decided Hayden. She would know, in time, of Neal's return. Simla and Dunhuro were as near each other as the thumb to the fingers.

In a week Neal seemed to have quite recovered from whatever effect his wife's death had upon him; the morning star and the setting sun are almost one in India.

It was very evident that Neal desired to inform Audrey. How black it was! It seemed to Hayden, with Neal's return, to have taken on many more degrees of sable. The man who loved her and wanted to marry her was here, and he, Hayden, was not even the spent betel leaf from yesterday. A woman will forgive the one man everything, but not that another should dare to be a substitute.

Neal wanted action. Doubtless he would represent events to her from his standpoint. What matter? There was no way in which they could be represented that would not prove him, Hayden, guilty—criminally guilty, perhaps. He did not know what it would be in the eyes of the law—and he did not care. What would it be in her eyes? His affection for Neal would be no justification to any woman. Red moons! Unless one lived under them one could not know their blood, as no man could know the meaning of outcast unless he were a pariah.

THE days flowed and ebbed. One morning Hayden told Neal that he could go to Audrey and say whatever he desired. "There is but one restriction," he finished, "you will try to tell it so that it will be—endurable."

"Of course I will. I would not hurt the girl I am to marry." It was said rather exuberantly than otherwise. It was youth, free of bit and rein.

Hayden met him upon his return. It was twelve o'clock and the sun burned a mighty brazier in the sky. Hayden had dismounted and his horse followed him under the shade of a mango tree. When Neal reached his cousin he dismounted also, but it was a different Neal from the one who had left Hayden that morning. This was a Neal crushed, overwhelmed, panic-stricken. He did not speak until Hayden said, "Tell me," so sharply that the young man moved, as at a sudden drum-beat.

"She is absolutely stunned. I felt I had killed her. Mrs. Radnor is away. I thought, perhaps, you should go to her, only, she said——"

"What did she say?"

Neal hesitated. Then he encountered Hayden's gaze, the unspoken drum-beat.

"Of course she was so astounded that she did not know what she was doing. She said she never wanted to see you again, under any circumstances."

Hayden had the reins of his pony in his hand, he gathered them up now.

"I shall go to her," he answered, and then, answering too some desolate look in Neal's eyes, he added, "I am glad you told me."

"Thorn bush and cactus and aloe tree——" The words beat time to his horse's flying feet. How did the Eastern song go?

"Thorn bush and cactus and aloe tree—
Feet go to her, a heart must avow;
Thorn bush and cactus and aloe tree—
Sunlight or moonlight, lips kiss her now!"

The distance was short and he did not pull up until his horse began to pant from

the extreme heat. Then he lessened his pace, but no definite thought formed in his mind as to what he would do. Only, so far as Neal's life and his own were concerned, she should be spared all that was possible.

He flung the reins to some *bibishti* and entered the hall. At the houses of well-to-do foreigners there were always servants about who had no definite duties and sometimes it was an assistance and sometimes the reverse. It saved Hayden a few moments now.

He brushed Mocah aside as if he did not exist and found Audrey in the big salon. She was standing and her attitude, the droop of her head, her colorless lips, hurt him to the quick.

"Audrey!" he exclaimed.

She turned slowly, as if in a dream, and he saw her eyes were tear-stained. But when she recognized him her entire little body breathed defiance.

"You! I told Mr. Wolfenden——"

"I know what you told him, but could any man remain away when he knew you were suffering? Will you not let me tell you that it has been one of those things that will grieve me as long as I live? Audrey——"

"You have no right to call me that—to speak to me! It is one of the unforgivable things! I am going to see a lawyer this evening—it shall be undone tomorrow!"

But her strength gave way then and she caught at the back of a chair. It slipped on the polished floor and she swayed a little. Hayden caught her and put her in it. She was white, as though every drop of blood had been drained from her body, and her eyes were filled with the fear of the unknown, as a creature at bay.

"Audrey, you *shall* listen." Hayden was standing, with one hand on her chair, looking down on her, compassionately, but also with determination. "Neal has always been to me as a young brother. At any time of my life I would have suffered death for him and, had this been known, his career would have been at an end. It is impossible for you to be freed tomorrow, but I shall do everything in my power and, as soon as possible, you *shall* be free."

She did not seem to hear him. The color was returning slowly to her face, but her eyes were gazing down another vista, farther than her release.

Suddenly Hayden *knew*—knew that he loved this girl, who had been cast on the shore of his life, knew that his love for Neal was not to be measured with this new force which had been with him since he said that strange "I will." She was absolutely the opposite of everything he had expected from a daughter of Mrs. Trevelyan. The little things tell the whole tale, the large tell only one facet.

Mrs. Radnor was devoted to the girl and each servant loved to wait upon her and—Hayden had seen her rescue a monkey from a pariah's dog at the risk of being bitten. She had not spent the money he had given her; her few gowns were the ones she had when she arrived. The flowers she selected were always fresh and suitable for the occasion.

All these things passed fragmentarily through Hayden's mind. He moved abruptly to the window and looked out at this vast land, with its intense mysteries, its everlasting claims to soul and body. He did not wonder that the Indians were religious, that many of them lived on heights which ignored this life as being too transitory; yet, if his days must go on without Audrey, what figures could measure the years?

She was his wife! He turned to her and she read something in his face which made her lashes fall momentarily. When she looked up again the something had altered to a determined course.

"Will you trust me with it all for a little while?" he asked gently. "It is of the utmost importance that this should be managed so that there will be no gossip, or as little as may be, and—you are young. Time will not ride a race-horse with you." There was silence and he added, "Men have trusted me with their lives; would you not give me a month?"

Audrey saw that his words meant far more than he said. Hayden was not handsome, but strength and courage were written upon him in unmistakable letters. His uniform seemed but to clothe these qualities adequately. Something of this she had felt from the moment he met her at the steamer, and she felt it the more now, even though he had injured her as no one was ever injured before.

"Yes," she answered at length, reluctantly.

"There is one thing more. Will you think of me, sometimes, with as little hostility as you can? Had I known what I know now it would have been impossible for me to have done this thing. Only say you will try?"

Audrey flared, as a match to its box. "No, I will not! If I can add any more—hostility to my thoughts, I will!"

Time, perhaps, might serve him, thought Hayden, but he remembered the bitter remark of a great Orakzian, "Time can be a constant rope." Hayden went directly to his lawyer, an old man of great experience, and told him, without reservation, the whole story, even told him the fact of his love. It was a wild, strange story, though Mr. Ferrers was accustomed to the madness and torture, the love and fanaticism of the East.

The lawyer pieced it together in his mind, asked one or two questions and nodded his head as he welded his links. Finally, however, he sent Hayden away with a lighter feeling in his heart than he had had since he knew Audrey.

WHEN Hayden reached the barracks he found that his *pankha-wala* was ill. The boy was extremely attached to Hayden and was a good servant. He had been suddenly seized with fever, and the native doctor had administered a quart of medicine which he proudly assured Hayden contained no less than thirty-four ingredients. Hayden turned him out of the room, sent for his own physician and prepared to battle for the boy's life.

Bakoomha was ill a week. Hayden had great trouble when the boy's father came, a man who adhered to the strictest caste rules. These begin with an infant's nursing and pursue an endless course; sleeping, washing, anointing; sitting, rising, walking; working, fighting, dying. The rules for defilement and purification are numberless. It seemed to Hayden that Kalakaa added a thousand things each day to the number he recited as necessary. "Caste" is a Portuguese word meaning cast, mold, race, kind and quality. Surely Kalakaa knew every shade of these divisions.

Hayden scarcely left the boy and he only saw Neal for a few moments at a time. But in the long hours by Bakoomha's bed Hayden's mind trudged over many things and he recalled that in some way Neal seemed different. There was an air of buoyancy at times and at other times an air of furtiveness that amounted to bravado and concealment occasionally. It was as though there were two Neals, both different from the one he had known. To be sure, it reminded Hayden of the time in England when

Neal had been entangled with both Maria Conyers and Maud Kelvin, but this was a blacker impression, so to speak. He might be taking some drug, so easily obtainable for the slightest pain, so difficult to do without afterward.

On the day Bakoomha was distinctly better, Hayden called for his horse and rode to Simla. Mrs. Radnor lived in a house with a beautiful garden in front, separated by a low hedge from a large public park. This was a jungle in places and was an added source of anxiety to Neal at this time of native unrest.

The driveway was being altered, therefore horses and motors were stopped outside the entrance. As was usual, three or four servants were hanging around on the chance of receiving a *paisa* or *ana*. Two horses were there now and Hayden recognized both. One belonged to Sinclair, a rich, handsome subaltern who had not been long in India. The other was Neal's pony. And then Hayden understood.

It was love again, or its pretense, that had brought that brightness to Neal's eyes, that gayety to his movements. And it was because he wished to conceal it for a time—Hayden turned his thoughts to this thing, this intimate possession that is apart from the possession of every one else in the world. He understood, an accolading sword had touched his own shoulder.

He drew rein for a moment and then rode on. Anger burned him, fevered him. No, he would not go to Audrey now. Neal had had everything, the love of that other woman for whom he had seemed to care, the love of Audrey in her white youth—Neal *must* wait until she had a divorce. In unmistakable language it should be made plain.

THAT same evening Hayden took Neal out under the stars that blazed fiercely, so that they left streams of light on water, as do moons. The palms were very still, with only a remote stir now and then, as if in answer to some call they only heard. The heat lifted and lowered, an unseen current, upon which one could drift, beneath which one could drown. A wonder-scene that to both men was nonexistent.

"I saw your pony at Mrs. Radnor's, Neal."

Neal turned and scrutinized his cousin. Hayden looked as resolute as a statue. So he was going to put this thing through in *his* way, as though he, Neal, had nothing to do with it—and it was the girl who would have been his wife now if—if he had merely kept his marriage the secret it was—or denied it! If he had done as other men would have done! Truly a red moon reveled at times.

"Well," went on Hayden, "what have you to say about it?"

Neal made a sound that, if it had come from an animal, would have been a snarl. "You saw my pony at the house of the girl I intend to marry—who is almost my wife now."

"And *is* mine," Hayden said quietly.

Neal swore. "That is going rather far. I have come back to release you entirely in the matter. You need not feel," he went on angrily, "that you have anything more to do with it—unless, of course, they call on you to make some statement in a divorce court. Audrey said she hoped it would be over soon."

"Neal," and there was in a line in Hayden's forehead that Neal had only seen once or twice, "this whole matter rests in my hands until Miss Trevelyan is free. I am only taking the authority any Englishman would take if he could ever condone, in the smallest degree, his

share in this affair. Neal, leave it to me for a little while. As to anything else"—he must be just—"your visits to her, your personal relations, you can do as you please. Even Miss Trevelyan has consented that I manage the business component for the present."

"Very well," Neal answered grudgingly. "You know," he proceeded after a moment, "a number of men are going there and I think one or two of them are really in love with her, Whelford and Holman. Under the circumstances I suppose any one can pay her attention, even myself."

A flame of anger burned in Hayden as Neal said the light words, and Hayden wondered at it. Did he really care in this agonizing way?

Neal laughed at the other's expression. "As to anything else—you can do as you please," he said, repeating his cousin's words, and the latter saw that Neal considered himself invulnerable, even to the heel.

THE air was cushioned heat, that bore down upon one even in the highlands. Simla was generally pleasant and this summer proved it by its contradiction. Grass and leaves turned brown and blew away like charred paper. The ground cracked and out of it came strange creeping and flying worms and insects. Wild things pressed at night and spoke in voices of the heat, in voices of animals that prey upon the dead, long wailing notes of unbelievable desolation, of unimagined cruelty.

And with it all some mystery and charm pressed closer too, the clamor of longing, unloosed by purple twilight, irradiated by stars. The air was full of curious, divine promise, and one reached out to it as a Mohammedan to Mecca.

Hayden decided that he must do his wooing as soon as possible and he determined to take Mrs. Radnor into his confidence. They were firm friends and she had a broad outlook, almost a man's capacity for viewing a question from its different sides. Also she was greatly attached to Audrey. During her illness the girl had ministered to her in every way and now Mrs. Radnor regarded her almost as her daughter.

Besides, thought Hayden, it would be playing a square game and he was heartily sick of the game that had been forced upon him. His alert, soldier's figure squared itself as he wondered why it had not occurred to him before, when all his thoughts circled about one interest.

The following evening, as he neared Mrs. Radnor's, he saw Neal's pony disappear under the Jamelons and he saw two other ponies, each held by a *ghorewala*. It was hard on a married man!

"*Is taraf, Sahib,*" and Hayden thought there was silent amusement in the face of the groom as he indicated a clear space for Hayden's horse, away from the mischievous mouths and quarrelsome heels of the other ponies.

Hayden swung himself off. It would probably be easier to see Mrs. Radnor with other men here, but difficult to obtain a word with Audrey if she were averse to it. . . . She would be averse.

Tea was "on" and there was much laughter and talk. One of the belles of Simla was there, Leslie Fordith, and she talked to both officers. Neal was sitting by Audrey and speaking to her in a low tone. As soon as her eyes encountered Hayden's, even as she bowed to him, she turned decisively to Neal.

It troubled Hayden only momentarily. The savage in him spoke. Why, if it were necessary he could capture this girl and take her straight up those wonderful Himalayan heights!

Mrs. Radnor was at the urn, a little apart from the others. After a time, Hayden said, "I want particularly to speak to you; I believe this is my opportunity."

Mrs. Radnor arose at once. "Come here," she said, and Hayden followed her to a small recess. She was a charming woman, but she owed her chief charm to the thousand and one kindnesses which she bestowed as though she received benefits. To give her one's confidence was to have it padlocked.

Hayden knew he was perfectly safe in telling her whatever he desired, yet he hesitated. He would forfeit her good opinion, and for her friendship he cared a great deal.

She looked at him and smiled. "I have pieced some things together and you are going to tell me where my seams are rough. Of course it is Audrey. Now I know this, that the poor child has a mother who practically forced each daughter into marriage as soon as she left the schoolroom. Audrey, hearing only the side her mother purposed, thought it wonderful and was ready to fall in love with any one who came along. It goes without saying," she gave Hayden a little complimentary nod, "she fell in love with you. Then came the separation, bridged by Mrs. Trevelyan with all sorts of delusive things, after which Audrey was shipped to India. Meanwhile you had concluded, rightly, that she must have time to balance, weigh, this for that and, therefore, your decision that the marriage should be called an engagement; yet you would not have her here alone, without adequate protection."

She held up her hand as Hayden would have spoken. "Let me finish, I would see how far wrong I am. Now you are sorry you married her in this way, for you have discovered your love for her is greater than it was and she—she is learning that there are other men in the world and one of them is—Neal Wolfenden, your brother almost. A curious, a terrible situation, even for India," she finished thoughtfully, and Hayden could see she was recalling strange events, abnormal situations she had known in this country of fire and frost.

So did Mrs. Radnor throw about the situation the mantle of her wonderful charity. If only it had been true! Then, with her understanding smile, "But I am at your service in any and every way you can suggest. And not only that, but I have been tempted to take some unasked part in this. Audrey is a *darling*. I don't wonder the men are in love with her, but something must be done to end the situation; I think she is suffering."

Hayden leaned forward. "Suffering—you think?"

"Yes, and I believe there *is* more to it than I know. Now tell me—whatever you wish."

And Hayden told her, not minimizing his part, but shouldering the blame. If he had looked after Neal more closely it might have been avoided, was the thread he wove through the whole matter.

Mrs. Radnor was astonished, but also, it was plain to read, thrilled by the whole thing. "It was," she searched for the word, "tempestuous of you, but I think it was splendid! To save his career—and you did not think much about Audrey until she arrived—and now!

"She is saved from Neal," went on Mrs. Radnor, "for a man as unprincipled as *that* shall never have Audrey."

She held out her hand to him. "Trust me," she concluded.

"You don't think I am treating him too outrageously?"

"You mean?"

"In trying to win Audrey's love. Did I not make it clear?"

"So delightfully clear that I wanted to hear you repeat it," she teased. Then her tone changed. "It is right, Audrey deserves a better fate—his wife just dead!"

Hayden had told her all with the exception of one thing that the lawyer, Mr. Ferrers, had decided. It put temporary hope in Hayden; he could not part with it to any one yet.

A lizard ran across the room and it made a little diversion, causing the men to move about as Audrey screamed. They pursued it with energy, but it was gone like a flash, almost too quick for the eyes.

THE two officers took their leave then, but Neal, looking thunder at Hayden, remained. Mrs. Radnor, however, administered affairs in her own household and, before Neal knew what she was about, she had collected him and Leslie Fordith and was showing them where a rose garden was to be, the roses to rival those of Cashmere.

Inside the bungalow the world narrowed to Adam and Eve.

"I have seen Mr. Ferrers," said Hayden, as he stood with his arm on the mantel. Hot or hotter, the Englishman will have a mantel and a fireplace. "He counsels patience while he looks into the case."

"It not being his case," Audrey said bitterly.

Hayden's smile did not reach his lips. There was a pause and then he spoke earnestly. "Could you not consider me your friend, for a time at least, until this matter is settled?"

"After what you have done, do you think there could be anything but——"

"Finish it," Hayden said, but he drew himself together as if prepared for a blow.

Audrey gazed at him and then her mouth quivered and she turned her head aside. "You know what it is," she said, desperately at bay for the moment. "Except for Mrs. Radnor I have no one in India who cares one iota whether I live or die."

"*I care.*" Hayden's voice was tense.

"Yes, you care because you would save your cousin. I might do all sorts of things, make this public, bring suit against you for—for marrying me. Aren't there such things as reprisal suits?"

"You should not ask the enemy," Hayden's tone was light, his eyes gravely tender.

"But I want to know and—I am always afraid of lawyers."

"Audrey, if I were to tell you something would you listen—unprejudiced?"

"I don't believe I could," she answered honestly.

"If I asked you to try for five minutes, would you do it?"

"For five minutes," she conceded reluctantly.

He did not hurry. He began at the beginning and went over the whole thing until he came to the time when he met her at the quay. Then he stopped speaking and turned to her more fully. He was still standing by the mantel and in his undress uniform he made a splendid picture, a soldier every inch, with that outstanding quality of justice which reaches, at times, something very high and noble and distinguishes the English officer. Audrey, too, was standing, poised for flight as soon as it was possible.

"When I first saw you I knew you were entirely different from what I had thought. When I married you——"

But Audrey reached out her hands in protest, as though her nerves refused any longer to bear the strain.

He took them in his own as he said, "Audrey, don't you know I love you?"

She twisted herself from him as she cried, "No, no! No, no!"

"Is it impossible? Could you not think of it?"

But she did not answer, only freed herself from his hands and the next moment was gone from the room. Hayden stood there a long time.

NEAL turned a wrathful face to Hayden the next day when they met and went by him without speaking. He reminded Hayden of an enraged child, furious and not quite knowing in what direction to expend his anger. And the moon was wrought gold, but just at its edge it burned like dull coals that the least wind would whip into flame. India lay torpid but alive, pitilessly alive. Her mysteries seemed very near, as though, if one listened long enough——. India knows patience as a century plant. Dunhuro waited with the rest.

Something terrible and slow-burning about it reminded Hayden of the patience of Alau-d-din in sacking the ancient city of Chitar, the fortress-capital of Mewar. He invested it to gain possession of the perfectly beautiful princess, Padmani, who was married. Failing to take the city he asked but for one glimpse of Padmani and was allowed that one. He waited before a mirror and she passed behind him and he saw her reflection for a moment. Years passed and he returned and captured the city, but not Padmani, for, with all her women, she went through the rite of *jauhar,* the funeral fire. So it seemed to Hayden then. He felt that a storm was brewing, a fire storm that would spend itself on him alone.

Therefore he was not surprized when Colebrooke, his best friend, told him that there were many rumors flying about concerning his marriage, Audrey, Neal.

"Tell me what they are," Hayden said, knowing that some of the storm was over his head.

"I hate to repeat such lies, but they say that you wife has fallen violently in love with your cousin and that, owing to some irregularity in the marriage, she will bring suit against you for a quarter of a million. And with the money Neal will retire from the army. Also it is said —dear fellow, I hate to tell you—that you have ill-used her shamefully, beaten her until she screamed for help. It is whispered that Neal is fostering these rumors."

Hayden did not move, but he appeared to be witnessing the desecration of some shrine.

"Do you think it is true, about Neal?" he asked.

"Don't you know, Hayden, that Neal is going to the dogs? They say he is mixed up with some Indian woman in the same place where he married. I can't *know* of any of this, but the colors of day tell the hours. Neal is different. He seems to be playing the last tricks in his pack of cards. It seems to me," he hesitated, but the whole hand is better for an ax than an *urgli,* "that he is trying to injure you. Men do go to pieces here until right and wrong are the same hue."

Colebrooke paused for some answer, but not receiving it said, "You know the particular reason I am telling you all this —otherwise it would be but froth?"

"Yes, I know. It may mean investigation in High Quarters." Hayden said the words slowly—they were unbelievable words.

"I have done what I could to refute it. It is not often I circulate things, but this is the truth. I told Harcourt, the devil's adopted son for gossip, that Neal had a wife."

So everything was known, thought Hayden, but as darkness misrepresents.

"Neal's wife is dead."

"Are you sure? She was alive a short time ago, at the time you were married."

"She has since died."

"Who told you, Hayden?"

"Neal."

"Ah——" Colebrooke's exclamation mortared the bricks of his story.

"TO WIN or lose it all." The old saying came to Hayden as he mounted his horse for the well-known road to Simla—to Audrey. Something would have to be decided soon. Colebrooke told his tale for a very particular reason.

An investigation in High Quarters would mean disaster for him, Hayden, utter ruin for Neal and a-talked-about-woman for Audrey. How he loved her! He would relinquish his soldier life and go with her wherever she would if only she cared for him in the least. The adorable curves of her mouth, the small hands that had pushed him so violently away—what would he not give for these possessions?

He was somewhat startled by a group of men who passed him, scuttling along on wiry ponies. For they were Khattaks and evidently out for plunder, for anything from a human being to that human being's handkerchief. Utterly lawless, as unafraid as idols, as determined as beasts of prey, they are a scourge. No part of a city is safe when they are abroad, yet there is no law to lock them up until they offend.

Hayden, watching them, saw them ride in the direction in which Mrs. Radnor lived, the richest part of Simla. The large natural park, which reached to her garden, could have hidden hundreds of men. They would have been entirely concealed by the interlocked growth of vines, shrubs and trees. This park, opening directly from Mrs. Radnor's grounds, made here and there beautiful vistas, but Hayden had frequently thought the situation of the house unsafe.

The evening came down quickly. One could almost hear the sound of curtain rings as they clicked together for its closing. The moon rolled up, a ball of fire, near, clamorous, menacing. Birds hushed themselves suddenly, as if on choked song, and insects stabbed in the strange light with more ferocity. The flowers poured perfume for some last blood-sacrifice, and the intangible back and forth of India broke down unseen walls and crowded close. It pervaded one, as water seeps into earth, as heat storms the whole body. *Yih kya hai?* asked the soul of the hierarchy of all things. What is it? *Yih kya hai?*

"Where is Mrs. Radnor—Miss Trevelyan?" Hayden asked.

"The *memsahib* has a headache, *matha,*" he touched his head, "and the new *memsahib*—out there." He pointed to the grounds.

Hayden turned on his heel, but at first could not find Audrey. Then, where a group of rose-trees made audible color, he caught a glimpse of something white and heard voices. One threatened.

He thought of the Khattaks and in a few moments was by Audrey's side. But it was Neal who was with her, a drinking, domineering, ungovernable Neal.

"You are always coming between us!" rang out Neal's voice. "As if I had not warned you! As if Audrey did not belong to me entirely! I tell you I am going to end it! Mecando shall take the matter in hand tomorrow. It is my promised wife with whom you have played fast and loose. I believe," he glared at Hayden with the shrewdness of the drunkard, "you have dared to make love to her!"

'Yes, Neal, I have," Hayden said quiet-

ly, "and furthermore I shall always love her, whether she is your wife or not."

Audrey turned very white. Hayden put out his arm to her, thinking she would fall, but Neal struck it away. His anger was terrible. He looked as he might have looked if he had been climbing a great mountain, and the blood was ready to pour from eyes and mouth.

"Audrey, go into the house. Neal and I will settle this matter without you."

"No," Audrey said, "there is nothing more to say or do. This is the end. I will not marry either of you, and——" But she broke down and her sobs were as though the brooding passion of the night had gathered into these sounds.

Neal turned suddenly, impetuously. "I will make it the end," he said, and something flashed into sight that the red moonlight played with as it named murder and sudden death.

Audrey uttered a cry that Hayden only heard afterward. For he flung himself on Neal and there was a short struggle. Then Hayden stood back and slipped the pistol into his pocket. Neal was on the ground breathing heavily, but perfectly conscious.

Hayden raised him. "Neal, you are to go straight to barracks and wait there until I see you. But first—whom did you intend to kill?"

"You," he answered dully. "Any one who comes between lovers deserves black death."

"Yet, only a short time ago, you said you loved your Indian wife."

"I did," he said simply, "but Daballa came between us—now *she* is dead."

"*Is she dead,* your wife, Neal?" Hayden's voice would have penetrated stone.

"Yes, she is dead. If she had lived, my Charca——"

"Go," said Hayden, and the other departed into the red menace of the night.

IT HAD not taken a minute, the words with Neal, but when Hayden glanced around Audrey was not there. He had not heard her light feet leave. He bent down and examined the grass. Yes, some was crushed in the direction of the great park. He did not wait to make very sure. If she were in the house she was safe; if not——

There were great shadows under the trees, black in every shape of fantasy. She had on white, he thought as he hurried on—thank heaven she had on white!

"Audrey!" he called into that wilderness of moonlight and dark, into that drowning sea of palm and deodar. There was no answer, and he did not expect one. But he still called and it seemed to him that all the spirits of evil came from their hiding-places and mocked him with her name. "Audrey! Audrey! Audrey!"

When he felt that he had gone to the utmost reaches of two worlds he saw something white under an acacia. In a moment he was by her side and had lifted her in his arms. She was not unconscious, but some terrible fear looked from her eyes, as if it had been painted there before she was blinded. She tried to speak but no words came.

Even while he was moving away with her, a sound reached Hayden that did not come from the forest trees or shadows and he knew that death and Audrey had not been as far apart as the two sides of a sword. Then a word rang to a word, *"Khurkhura!" "Khurkhura!"* It was the war call of the Khattaks, which is seldom allowed a man to hear and live. But it was faint, receding. They had been frightened away.

Cries from the house reached him—they were becoming alarmed at Audrey's absence. Hayden answered them and soon was in the hall, in the drawing-room. Audrey's eyes were open, were

upon him. After Mrs. Radnor had assured herself there was nothing really wrong, Audrey said to Hayden, indicating the servants, "Send them away; I want to tell you——"

Hayden ordered them from the room, but her *ayah* merely stood a little apart. She would wait for ever, but near her *memsahib* until the violet-blue eyes iterated what the white lips voiced. Voices can make mistakes.

"Wait a little," Hayden said. "I shall give an order and come back and remain with you until you tell me all you wish. But you must rest first." He turned to her *ayah*. "Where is the phone?" he asked.

She opened the door and pointed and as he left the room he said to her the one word, "Wine." She bowed her head understandingly.

Hayden phoned to Dunhuro for men to be sent at once to search the park. He could have phoned headquarters at Simla but by the time they reached the spot the Khattaks might be in—*barf*. If there was the slightest chance, his own men would seize and use it, to a thorn's point.

When he returned to the drawing-room, Audrey's *ayah* was bending over her with the wine, murmuring little tender words as one does to a child. But Audrey refused it, though the horror of what she had been through was still painted in her eyes and her hands were clasped nervously together. Hayden took the wine and the *ayah* returned to her position.

"Audrey, when you have taken this I will talk to you."

"I do not want it," she began, but took the glass, nevertheless, and put it to her lips.

"All of it," he said, when she had taken a spoonful, and unwillingly she obeyed. The color came back slowly, first to her lips and then, faintly, to her cheeks.

"Now tell me everything. Your *ayah* will not hear you and knows too little English to understand if she did." He bent over her quickly, assailed by a terrible thought. "Those men—they did not hurt you?"

Her eyes darkened as she answered, "No, no, it is not that."

"Then it can be nothing very bad."

But she shook her head. "It is your cousin, your almost-brother, as you called him to me."

"Neal is a young ass." Hayden said the words carelessly. It mattered so little now. She was unhurt by those devilish Khattaks when she might now——. He remembered their known inhumanities and only His Satanic Majesty knew of their unknown. A shudder went through his strong frame.

Audrey's hand was within reach and he took it, to reassure himself that she was still alive, near. She did not seem to notice it. Her brows were knit.

"It is—oh you don't know him! He has been absolutely reckless in his talk of late. This evening he swore you should not live to see tomorrow, but I thought he was just drunk. Now, you see——" Audrey's eyes grew wide with fright.

"It means nothing," Hayden said reassuringly. She had had too much to endure this day; she should be spared all that was possible the rest of the way. "I have never known any one to threaten and kill. Of course Neal is reckless because I have learned to love you, but that is all. Try to believe it."

"He is entirely different from what I thought once, so different that I——" She left it unfinished, but the joy that poured into Hayden's heart was overwhelming.

She moved her hand away. "Since I

have been here," she said slowly, as if reluctantly paying a debt, "I have learned the things that men do and dare and think it only their duty. I know the difficult, dangerous part that Englishmen play in affording protection to millions of people who can not protect themselves and do not wish for it. It is a revelation to me."

Hayden understood that she numbered him with those who achieved. He would have none of it. "Each Englishman is a pawn in the game," he said lightly, "and has to be, with the fighting races, the Rajputs always ready for war, the Gurkhas constantly 'sharpening their *kukris*.' But there is something more you would tell me?"

Audrey's eyes fell beneath Hayden's and she moved a bit restlessly.

"No, it was about Neal I felt I must speak. You will—take care?"

Hayden controlled himself, for the desire to draw her close, to have those words repeated until they were written in dancing flame on the fire storm of this air was well-nigh compelling.

"You mean—Audrey, you can always tell me anything you wish, knowing I will not misunderstand."

Audrey raised herself with difficulty on her elbow and looked around the room in a bewildered way. "He has certainly gone?" she asked. Then catching the eyes of Lissur, her *ayah*, she said, "You can go, Lissur. I am—quite well."

But when the woman left she sank back on the couch where Hayden had put her and rested a moment before saying, "It is Neal of whom I am afraid—for you. There is something—wrong."

Hayden wondered what she knew, or thought she knew, but he said nothing, only waited in the sound of those two words, "For you."

"Do you know of the Indian fear of red moons? Neal has been talking so much about them, the numberless superstitions, stories, with which they are connected. He seems to think that they are the *excuse* for evil here, that anything he does——" She broke off.

Hayden bent down, his eyes searching her for the pitiless truth, whatever it might be.

"Audrey, if I saved him for you, would you be glad?"

"No, no! No, no! I am afraid of him!"

Her words came in a little burst of revelation and then she started and looked up, realizing that she had said far more than she intended.

"I will let you take your time, I will never hurry you, but could you not say one word to me to answer this love that will be my earthly altar until I die? I have never thought love would come into my life, or if it did that it would be but another color in the East, for my years have been completely filled by my soldier duties. Now—you have heard that old truism, 'The world an ancient murderer is.' If I can not make you care it will be murder for me of all that lies nearest the heart."

A muezzin's call rang out, clear, appealing, constraining, with all the soul-hungry cry of the East, with all its roadless deserts and contradictory winds, its caressing suns and claiming swords, its penalties and its paradises—*"Ishhad lâ allah illâ 'llah; Ishhad lâ allah illâ 'llah; Ishhad lâ allah illâ 'llah."*

Only the thrice-repeated words lingered on the air, filled, surcharged it. Hayden reached out his hand and took Audrey's. "Not now, but in days to come, Audrey?" he questioned.

He leant toward her for the answer and just caught it through the storm of the last of the muezzin's cry, *"Inna 's-salát khair min an-naum."*

HAYDEN went away with such overpowering wonder and joyance that he did not think of Neal until he drew rein at the barracks. What would he do with him? Not as his superior officer but as his elder brother? How tell him this? Reckless, vacillating, lovable, he yet had that quality of unforgiveness which is one of the ingredients of a weak character.

But Hayden did not have to determine. When he reached Neal's bungalow he saw a little crowd of natives and English had gathered there and from their strained and yet curiously still attitudes he knew something terrible—was finished.

"What is it!" he asked, as he drew rein. *"Yih kya hu'a hai!"*

His syce and Lance Fielding, a brother officer, came forward. The syce put one hand on his arm and the other slipped his foot from the stirrup. "Forward!" he said, and Fielding waited a moment. It was one of the few military commands Kurmur knew—usually given in English—and he said it as he had so often heard it from Hayden's lips. Perhaps no word could have steadied Hayden more. Forward! That was all one had to do in life—in death.

"Tell me, Fielding."

"Neal returned an hour ago, looking as though he had fever and was under its delirium. A woman met him near the door of his bungalow and there were angry words. He lifted his arm as if to strike her, but she put her hand on it, holding it while she pressed her other hand to his lips. I was going to them—I did not like it—when it all seemed to be over. The woman disappeared and Neal went to his room. Kurmur heard him fall and came for me. He was dead, Hayden, before I reached him."

"Poisoned?" Hayden just managed to say the word.

"Yes, poisoned. Kurmur said the woman is Charca's sister and was in love with Neal before his wife's death. She was jealous of his first wife as, now, of your wife. He intimated she might have been responsible for Charca's death."

THAT was all they ever knew of the matter. There was no doubt that Neal had been poisoned, but the woman disappeared as completely as though she were a sand of the Sahara, as though she were a bubble of the Ganges.

Nothing lasts for ever, say the Hindoos, but patience. In patience Hayden waited until the shock and grief of Neal's death was partly folded away by time. Audrey suffered with him in sorrow and remorse, from which the living are never free.

But by and by he went to her again and as he took her hands in his he knew his unasked question was answered.

"But I can never be your wife until we are married again!" she declared. "There is no law against two marriages, is there?"

"There is no law," he answered gravely.

Hiding her face against him she whispered, "I want a white dress and veil—and Cashmere roses that *you* will give me this time."

The last words of a dying Indian priest rushed to Hayden's heart in his passion of joyousness.

"Open the window!" the man said, to all that eternity toward which he had lived. *"Jhilmil kholo! Jhilmil kholo!"*

The Djinnee of El Sheyb

By G. G. PENDARVES

A strange story of North Africa, and the terrible fate that awaited all who entered the accursed city of the marabouts

1. The Haunted City

"IF THE *effendi* would but wait until daylight! At all times the city is evil, a place for men to avoid. But now the sun is gone, all the devils that haunt El Sheyb come with the darkness! Master, master, be warned by others! In the beginning many dwellers in El Sheyb did not wish to leave their city—rich merchants who had built great palaces within the walls, and the old and sick who desired to die where they had lived so long. Yet, in the end, all left . . . all!"

"What do you mean—in the beginning people stayed? Beginning of what?" asked Graham Trent, his thin clever face and steady eyes turned on his panic-stricken servant.

"The beginning of the haunting!" The Arab's eyes rolled fearfully toward the distant massive walls of El Sheyb, where they loomed up on the crown of a great rounded hill against the fading glory of the western sky. "Ten years ago El Sheyb was a rich city, where all the caravans going south across the Red Wilderness rested to buy provisions, to trade, to hire guides and camel-drivers. The great *fonduk* hummed like a hive of bees, *effendi!* Men and beasts flowed in and out like the waters of a great sea. And the market-place"—Musa glanced over his shoulder and lowered his voice—"the market-place was filled with all the treasures of the Sahara. There was nothing one could not purchase there. Ivory, gold, ostrich feathers, salt, sheep, horses, camels—the Iforas traded their finest *mehara* at El Sheyb. The Hoggar Touareggs exchanged their plunder of merchandise there for salt and grain. Moors, in satins and velvets like the sunrise itself, bought and sold rare and costly trifles of perfume, silks, jewels for the women of their hareems. All the news of the desert—from Adrar to the Nile, and from the coast cities of the Middle Sea to the Hausa States in the south—all passed through the market-place of El Sheyb!"

Musa shook his head and sighed with extreme mournfulness.

"Well?" Trent was interested. He had chosen Musa for his intelligence, and was finding him worth the high wages he demanded. "What happened?"

"All is gone . . . all is gone!" The sleeves of Musa's wide *burnous* flew up like two white wings from his outstretched arms. "Only the owl's voice of ill-omen is heard now, where once many hundreds of people laughed and sang and gossipped in the sun. Only the lizards crawl in the dust where the great caravans went to and fro. The city is left desolate."

"What was it? Drought—fever?"

"Nay, *effendi!* Alas, the beauty and wealth of El Sheyb roused the envy and hatred of evil spirits—those *djinn* that dwell among the winds on the mountain tops.. One came"—Musa's voice was a mere whisper now—"a most powerful *djinnee*—to dwell in El Sheyb! It drove out all that lived within the walls—all save the priests. The *marabouts* still live in their fortress on the walls of the city."

Trent pushed back his sun helmet, and

"His mind refused to believe in the horrible inferno which his eyes were registering."

stared at Musa with a perfectly grave face. He knew better than to insult the man by laughing at his yarn, and, besides, he had a private and particular reason for learning all he could about El Sheyb, no matter how fantastic the tale.

"So the priests live there in safety?"

"Even so, but it is in my mind," confided Musa, "that these priests are as evil as the *djinnee!* They belong to a strange sect from the mountains beyond Damascus—the Yezidees! They had no honor among the people in former days, when the city was great and rich. These priests lived then, as they live now, burrowing in dark places like unclean animals. They were not as the Holy Men of other tribes. But this is for thine ear alone, *effendi,* for the priests of El Sheyb are much honored now that they dwell alone and unharmed amidst such danger. Yet I think it is not holiness, but evil that keeps them there."

"I'm with you!" agreed Trent, wondering how Musa could be so enlightened and reasonable, and at the same time entertain such overwhelming belief in *shaitans* and *djinn.*

"You haven't told me yet just what this *djinnee* of El Sheyb did to drive out all the inhabitants."

"It tormented them in many ways." Musa was growing more reluctant to

speak, now that darkness had crept up around them, blotting out the wide horizons, enveloping even the grassy dunes near by.

Trent concealed his growing interest, asking indifferently, "Have you seen any of these victims of the *djinnee?*"

"I carried out the body of my friend, Daouad ben Izzar, who was as a lion for courage. It is not many months since he and two others—students of the great university at Medersa—laughed at the stories told, and said they would prove them false. Two were killed — their heads broken by the heavy stones that lay scattered around them. Daouad ben Izzar lived, but he has been like a child ever since, his mind destroyed."

"Any others?" Trent lit a cigarette with hands that shook very slightly with excitement.

"Yes, *effendi!* Hast thou not heard of the white man who went also to discover the secret of El Sheyb, and to prove the tales were foolish? The young *effendi* from thine own land, *Dinya el-jedida* [the New World], whose name was even the name of our own people. Adhem *effendi!*"

Trent's heart gave a great leap in his breast. He remained silent with a tremendous effort.

"I believe I did read something about it in the papers," he said casually.

"The government was very angry. The city was searched from wall to wall. The priests were turned out of their holes like rats. But nothing came of it. How should anything come of fighting with a devil of the wilderness? As well fight the great *gibli* [south wind] when it blackens the face of the desert, burying man and beast in its wrath.

Complete darkness covered the desert now, a brief space between sunset and moonrise, black as the shaft of a mine.

"Well, from what you say, Musa," Trent was calmly conversational, "this is the best time to call on the *djinnee* and find him at home!"

"Effendi!" a gasp like an escaping steam jet sounded in the hot darkness.

"I'm going on to El Sheyb as soon as the moon rises. I'm not making light of your stories, Musa, but curiosity is one of my major vices. I must know what it is that has reduced a proud flourishing city to dust and ruins."

Musa's prayers and—judging by the sound—tears, had no effect on Trent at all, and when the silver moon rose at last, flooding the desert with dim green haze and misty shadows, Musa was still pleading.

Trent mounted his horse, camels being of no use in that rock-strewn district, and turned its head toward the haunted city. Musa got on his own animal with a tragic air and reined up beside his master.

"Master, I go to die with thee!"

They rode on like two ghosts in the desert silence, and the strange dim moonlight was not wholly accountable for the greenish-gray color of Musa's skin, as they halted before the deeply shadowed archway of the eastern gateway in the walls of El Sheyb. Trent slipped down from his horse, and put the reins in Musa's trembling hands.

"You must stay here with the horses, Musa! Can't take them into this rabbit warren—they'd break their legs in these uneven streets. Wait an hour for me. If I am not here then, ride back to Hezroor and get the Commandant on the job."

Musa watched the tall thin figure swallowed up in the black archway, emerge in the moonlight beyond, and vanish round the corner of a tortuous narrow lane. The faithful, terrified servant groaned aloud:

"Now may Allah set a watch before his steps! By the life of this moon, I shall never see his face again!"

TRENT went on blindly toward what he hoped was the market-place of El Sheyb. He knew far more about the city than he had confessed to Musa, or to any one else. He had come out here with one specific purpose: to find out what had happened to his friend, Joe Adams, who had disappeared so mysteriously a year ago within this deserted city. Joe Adams, whom government rewards and search parties had failed to produce. Joe Adams, the chum of Trent's earliest recollections, the staunch friend of later days, whose disappearance had changed Trent from a boy to a man with a purpose nothing could set aside.

Joe Adams, whom the natives knew as Adhem *effendi,* had vanished here in El Sheyb, and Trent was prepared to sell his soul to ferret out the reason for that sudden vanishing.

For weeks he had wandered about among neighboring towns and villages, gleaning any scraps of gossip that might help him. He had formed a distinct plan of the labyrinth of streets that formed El Sheyb, and had actually sketched out a rough diagram from bits of information. He knew the market-place was the center of the huge web of narrow ways. He knew that the priests lived in the ruined fortress on the western walls of the city. Therefore he had entered by the eastern gate, and with compass and his rough plan he stumbled on to his goal.

Several times he doubled back on his own tracks, returning to some carved door he recognized, some broken row of columns. The desert night wind began to sough uneasily between the high narrow walls as he stumbled along the uneven sand and half-concealed stones underfoot. Owls flapped almost across his face, quick darting creatures flicked round his feet, and the climbing moon painted the broken crumbling houses in startling black and white.

But the only thing that haunted Trent was the jolly freckled face of the boy he had known. Above the uncanny wail of the wind, and the cry of the owl, he heard the deep chuckling laugh of the friend he sought in this ruined city.

A sudden sharp turn, a dive under a broken arch, a few steps in the shadow of a wall, and he stood in the brilliant moonlight. Facing him was the great market square—a vast sandy place, hemmed in on all sides by blank, flat-roofed buildings, typical Arab houses, with massive doors in the shadow of deeply hewn arches, and narrow slits of windows cut in the solid masonry just beneath the roof.

He walked slowly forward to the center of the square, circling round on his heel in the sand, gazing at the white walls, which returned his look with blank complacence, so sure they seemed of hiding behind their smooth whiteness whatever secret thing they held.

He took out a cigarette, was in the act of lighting it when the match was put out by a sharp puff of wind, and in the same moment something hard and pointed took him under the ear. The blow was so unexpected and sudden that he almost fell. He whirled to meet the empty air!

Stones thudded in the sand at his feet . . . he was being pelted on every side by a fusillade of pebbles that stung him from head to foot. He dashed to the shadow of an archway, and was driven thence by a new and concentrated attack. He ran across the square to the opposite wall, stones rattling dangerously about him. His helmet protected him, but as he incautiously lifted his face to peer at the flat roof-line, a flying stone cut him deeply on his cheek, and he jammed down his heavy helmet and ran to the shelter of a broad pillar.

Behind this he glanced round the moonlit square. All was utterly silent,

The roof-line within his compass showed no break in its continuity—neither head nor hand of an enemy was visible.

He ran out again, the stones flying savagely the moment he reappeared, and fired rapidly at several archways from which the missiles seemed to be aimed, but no sound answered the sharp bark of his weapon. But now the pebbles and stones came more swiftly and the stones were large enough to cripple him if they caught him in a vulnerable place.

Crack! A large jagged piece of rock warned him—a few inches lower and his knee-cap would have been dislocated. He limped hastily to the steps by which he had entered the square, and stumbled down them to the darkness beyond. Even here the shower of stones rattled down to his feet, and one caught the top of his helmet so directly that he knew the assailant was close to him.

There was nothing for it but retreat. Slowly, painfully Trent retraced his steps. As long as he kept on his way all was quiet—only the hoot of the owls and the sigh of the wind about him. But if he stopped for a moment, every roof and wall about him seemed to spit out stones and rocks. He moved blindly along the wretched, twisting ways of the city, bruised, bleeding, and furiously determined to return.

That El Sheyb sheltered a mob of murderous rascals was clear. But who were they? Why did they want to keep the city empty? What secret lay behind their persecution and stoning? And above all, what had happened to Joe Adams? Had he been stoned to death here? Did his bones lie buried in that dangerously haunted market-place?

"Master, master!" cried Musa, as he caught sight of Trent's tall limping figure, his linen suit rent and dusty from head to foot, his eyes cold and furious above an ugly wound on his cheek. "Master . . . the *djinnee!* Thou hast seen . . . thou——"

"No!" was the grim reply. "No, I have not seen—yet! But, believe me, I am going to see this *djinnee,* if it's the last thing I see on earth!"

2. *Trent Becomes More Curious*

FRANK PLYMTON viciously ground the stub of his cigarette into the receptacle before him. His narrow black eyes flicked a glance at the man opposite him, then darted round the ornate dining-room as if seeking amidst its palms and pillars and arched alcoves an answer to some problem in his mind.

"Like all tourists, you either minimize or exaggerate the difficulties of life in a country of this sort," he said at last. "If you lived and worked in this oasis-town of Hezroor, as I do, you'd get a new set of values altogether. Now, in dealing with these natives, one of the first essentials is to learn not to meddle with their superstitions. Ignorance on this point has killed more men than an outsider can possibly realize. They'll stand injustice, and even cruelty, up to a certain point, but laugh at their ghosts and devils and you're a doomed man!"

"I am not laughing," protested Trent. "I don't grudge El Sheyb its pet *djinnee!* I only want to know just why I was stoned out of the place last night. From all sides, too! The *djinnee* must have his whole family staying with him at El Sheyb just now! A pity the Arabs themselves are so much less energetic than their devils. Really, I am curious to get to the bottom of this extraordinary performance. And why do you suppose the priests go on living there? Where do they get alms in that deserted place? Has the *djinnee* adopted them and agreed to feed them in return for the pleasure of their company?"

Graham Trent grinned at his obviously irritated companion across the table. His tall loose-jointed body contrasted strongly with Plymton's neat compact frame, as did the mocking humor of his blue eyes, thick fair hair, and wide benevolent brows differ completely from the other's small and rather reptilian face and head.

"You were exceedingly lucky to get out alive." Plymton's voice was as cold as his eyes. "Only a year ago, an American tourist, as reckless and inquisitive as yourself, spent a night in El Sheyb, and never returned. He's been missing from that day to this. His name was Adams—Joseph Adams. Perhaps you remember the affair?"

"I believe I do remember reading something about it in the papers at the time." Trent spoke carelessly, but his gray-blue eyes darkened suddenly.

"You knew Adams?" Plymton suggested, tapping a cigarette nervously on his case, and stealing a lightning glance from under lowered eyelids. "You are here to make inquiries about his disappearance? That would account for your interest in El Sheyb."

Trent heard the note of sharp anxiety in his companion's voice. Intuition ran through him like an electric shock. *Plymton knew what had happened to Adams!* Perhaps he was responsible for that disappearance! At the thought, Trent's lean hands twitched. He longed to get up and shake this little rat of a man . . . shake his secret out of him. But he only leaned back in his chair, masking that sudden deep conviction of his with a smile. This beast before him was coiled, alert, ready to spring. It was up to him to soothe it with eyes and voice, to lull it into a false security.

"Hardly!" Trent sounded a trifle bored. "You know my plans. I've been touring the Mozabite country and this southern region of Algeria for months, writing a book, you know, on primitive Saharan religions. The yarns about El Sheyb and its *djinnee* are known all over the country, of course. I've been coming across the fairy-tale in various forms for weeks now. And since I am here in Hezroor, not ten miles from the haunted city, naturally I want to explore it."

Trent rattled on, apparently full of good-will and the desire to satisfy the other's curiosity; but his smiling good-humor masked a sudden intentness that shone in his blue eyes as if a lamp had been turned on behind them.

"Well, now you *have* explored it—why not leave it at that?" persisted his companion. "I assure you it's a risky, silly game to set yourself against native prejudice and custom. El Sheyb is avoided by common consent. Not a man, of all the thousands that pass yearly through this town of Hezroor on the caravan trails, not even the savage Touareggs, care to face El Sheyb and its menace. I know what I'm talking about."

"You look as if you did," Trent assured him warmly. "But all you say only increases my interest in this haunted town. That *djinnee* gave me more souvenirs in the way of cuts and bruises than I needed —it's my turn to give a few little gifts to him."

His exasperated companion appeared to have every sympathy with the *djinnee's* ill-will toward Trent, and rose abruptly, his chair grating harshly on the green and white tiled floor.

"Don't hurry, old man!" Trent's long body unfolded like a jointed ruler, as he, too, rose, and stood looking down pleasantly at Plymton with hands thrust deep into his pockets. "I was just about to ask you how the full moon affects the *djinnee,* and whether you considered Friday night a lucky one to return my visiting-cards at El Sheyb."

Plymton visibly came to attention.

"Friday . . . you are going to——" Then he pulled himself up, the glitter in his small eyes quickly veiled. "You're a fool!" he asserted in thin cold tones. "I warn you for the last time—if you return to El Sheyb you're practically committing suicide."

"My death won't lie on your conscience, at least." Trent looked down at the taut angry little man with a beam. "You've done your best to save me from my folly. But now, don't hurry off like this—I shall feel I've really annoyed you. How about getting a couple of these French officers to join us at cards?"

"Sorry—quite impossible, Mr. Trent," was the stiff reply. "I'm a busy man—very busy! No time to amuse all the tourists who come here, even though I try to protect their interests as far as possible."

"Well, just listen to this model of industry! It's nine o'clock; surely you're not going to work the old treadmill any longer tonight! Mining must be a strenuous occupation in this country."

Plymton's cold bright eyes gleamed, the muscles of his face taut beneath the pale skin.

"At least I have enough work to keep me out of mischief," he responded tartly. "I'll say good-night, then, Mr. Trent. When—or if—you return from El Sheyb, no doubt we'll meet here again. Good luck!" he added, over his shoulder, his neat well-shod feet carrying him toward the entrance of the little French hotel.

Trent watched his exit, rocking slightly on his heels, with hands still in his pockets. A very alert, speculative look replaced his smile.

"D'you understand the meaning of good luck?" he asked in French of a native waiter who was advancing toward his table.

With a grin, the Arab plunged into voluble detail, illustrating his remarks with expressive pantomime.

"No, that's where you are all wrong, my poor deluded turtle-dove," Trent informed him sadly. "It means, according to my dinner guest: 'May you be everlastingly damned.' "

3. The Secret of El Sheyb

A FEW days later, Trent stood once more in the market-place of El Sheyb. It was very early morning, scarcely full daylight, for he had left Hezroor well before dawn, stealing away with the greatest possible secrecy. Even his faithful Musa had been kept in the dark about his plan to return here, and Trent fervently hoped that the cold vigilant eye of Mr. Frank Plymton had not witnessed this second assault on the mysteriously haunted city. He had seen no one in his ride across the desert, but visibility was difficult in the semi-darkness that preludes the dawn; he was entirely easy in his mind, because he was well aware of that strange wireless communication in the desert, and he gave his opponent credit for being both vigilant and suspicious of his movements. With luck though, he hoped he had eluded Plymton successfully this morning.

He had begun to realize that Joe Adams' disappearance was probably a mere incident connected with some scheme in which Plymton was deeply involved, and that the latter was not taking any chances with regard to himself. What was this strange drama in which the *djinnee* took so active a part? What made the desertion of El Sheyb so necessary? Ten years before Adams had come here on his ill-starred archeological trip, the city of El Sheyb was deserted—haunted! Had Adams taken too close an interest in the *djinnee?* Had he interfered, as Trent was now interfering, and been removed?

Trent frowned as he stared about him.

No sign or sound of human life. Up on the western walls rose the dome and towers of the ancient fortress, where he knew the priests and their families were herded. Those same priests had been responsible, he felt sure, for his stoning a few nights ago.

At a loss where to begin his search for an unknown thing in an unknown city, he first tried the doors which fronted on the square. All were locked and barred against him. An examination of adjacent streets and buildings, however, proved that barred doors were an exception, rather than a rule, in El Sheyb.

In the majority of the narrow dark streets that branched off in all directions from the square, the untenanted houses showed gaping entrances where the wood had been removed. In some, a door hung crazily on broken hinges, swinging inward to a dismal weed-grown courtyard.

With a pocket-torch, and the obstinacy of a bloodhound on the trail, Trent began once more to peer and poke about the main buildings round the market-place. The brazen sun climbed higher and higher. Lizards darted across the sandy earth, while overhead a dark hovering shadow hung now and then in the cloudless blue vault—a hawk or an eagle—poised for a moment, then dropped earthward to its prey with headlong dizzy swoop.

Still Trent explored busily in the dark tortuous ways near the square. He came to a sudden stop, steadied the little beam of light from his torch on a particular stone slab set almost flush with the ground.

On the stone was carved the Hand of Fatmeh, the four long fingers and out-curved thumb, like a tulip leaf, standing out dark and polished with use against the block from which it had been cut. Trent put his hand over it, twisting with strong sensitive fingers. It gave easily under his touch, and the whole block opened inward like a stone door, revealing a stairway which descended precipitately into the bowels of the earth.

He leaned over, craning his long neck as far as possible, trying to probe the gloom within. The crumbling uneven steps appeared to continue indefinitely. He threw down stone after stone, but heard nothing save the rap-rap-rap of the missile down a few steps . . . then silence.

"Hm-m-m-m! Apparently not a well."

Stowing his torch safely away, he put one long leg over the sill, slowly drawing the rest of his body after it, and began to make his way downward, facing the worn, almost perpendicular steps in sailor fashion.

Down . . . down . . . twenty, thirty, forty steps he counted before his feet felt level ground beneath them again—level relatively speaking, for the earth was full of pits and hollows, and the rocky roof overhead forced him to crawl on hands and knees.

As he penetrated farther into the darkness, the air grew stiflingly hot and fetid. He stopped . . . sniffed! What *was* that strange rank odor? Could this be the lair of some wild beast? Suppose the creature met him in this tunnel! It was too narrow to turn back; he'd have to go on now and take a chance. The air grew more foul, and every moment he expected to feel the fangs of some beast at his throat . . . it might be watching his every movement . . . backing down the tunnel before him.

His hands and knees were cut from the rough stones . . . the tunnel widened . . . he drew his revolver and waited. Surely here—now—this was the place for the thing in the darkness to attack him!

Nothing came, only he heard a faint sound. A sound of metal . . . a sudden sharp rattle and then silence again. Trent crouched for several minutes, his weapon

ready, his eyes peering into the thick murk ahead.

At last he moved on again. The tunnel grew still wider, took a sharp turn; the roof overhead lifted abruptly, and he got stiffly to his feet and eased his cramped limbs cautiously. Inch by inch he crept forward again. Once more that metallic rattle reached his ears, and a hoarse dull moaning followed that chilled his blood.

One more turn—it was the end. Beyond he saw a dim yellow haze, and what appeared to be an enormous cave hollowed out from the rock foundations of the city. He crept forward, one more yard, then stood on the threshold of his dark passageway, and stared at the scene before him.

He leaned up heavily against the wall in the first shock of discovery. His mind refused to believe in the horrible inferno which his eyes were registering. But as the details grew more and more clear, his shocked senses began to adjust themselves. Slowly, reluctantly he turned his head to look round the vast vaulted chamber. Its roof was lost in shadow, but on ledges of the rocky walls primitive lamps were set, which shed flickering uncertain gleams over the appalling scene, the crude oil adding its nauseating stench to the intolerable atmosphere.

"Slaves!" breathed Trent, his face livid, his eyes bleak as a winter's sea.

On the bare earthen floor of the rock chamber, men, women and children lay huddled in every attitude of fatigue and despair, like creatures of some deepest crypt of Dante's purgatory. They were lying chained together in groups, each group fettered to great iron staples in the walls of their dungeon. The majority lay in leaden stupor, but the silence was broken now and then by the clank of a chain . . . a moan . . . a child's whimpering cry.

Sudden terrible anger seized Trent. His brain began to race. The pattern of the crime on which he had stumbled began to grow clearer every moment.

"Plymton and those cursed priests! He pays them . . . they . . . he . . . run this thing between them. Plymton . . . Plymton is the *djinnee* of El Sheyb! He scared off all the inhabitants . . . then he and the priests worked this *djinnee* business together!"

A new thought struck him.

"Adams! He must have found this out, too . . . discovered the secret of El Sheyb. They murdered him! I must get back to Hezroor . . . I must get back!"

He turned to retrace his steps, hurrying as much as possible; a terrible feeling of urgency suddenly possessed him. He must get back . . . if he didn't . . . if he was prevented, these poor wretches were doomed . . . Joe Adams would never be avenged!

Remembrance of the latter's disappearance pricked him uneasily as he pushed his way back along the narrow tunnel, but he felt slightly comforted to reflect that if another white man vanished in El Sheyb, it would greatly imperil Plymton's dangerous traffic.

He reached the bottom of the steps at last. Up, up endlessly, eyes, feet, and hands occupied in finding and keeping his balance. His head was just below the top step . . . his groping hands on its uneven edge . . . when the square opening above him was suddenly blocked. A pair of brown hands seized his wrists . . . a dark grinning face looked down into his.

More hands reached over, and past this face . . . his fingers were torn from their grip while his feet kicked vainly for a foothold. Slowly . . . inch by inch . . . he was dragged upward and across the threshold into the narrow street beyond.

Abruptly jerked to his feet, he faced a small band of natives, tattered specimens

of *marabouts*, with pale vulpine faces, shifty eyes, and vicious mouths. Trent scarcely wasted a glance on them, his eyes blazed into the cold opaque ones of Plymton, as the latter stepped with a smile toward him.

Trent's fist shot out and caught him under the chin with a swift ferocity that sent him backward among his scoundrels. Two of them rolled on the dusty earth with him, and before they could rise, Trent drew his revolver and stood prepared to account for himself—his back against the opening in the wall.

Plymton got to his feet, dusty and venomous, and drew his own weapon. Before either man could take aim, Trent's feet were jerked from under him by an Arab who had followed him from the slave-pen—a guard whom Trent had not seen in that murky dungeon. The rabble of priests fell upon him as one man as he fell, trussed him up like a fowl, and looked to their master for further orders.

"Take him up there." Plymton jerked his head toward the squat crumbling fortress of the *marabouts*. "He wanted to meet the *djinnee*—now he's going to do it!"

4. *In the House of the Holy Men*

"OF COURSE, I realize it won't do for you to disappear as Adams did. I have other plans for you."

Plymton exhaled a cloud of smoke from an evil-smelling French cheroot into his prisoner's face. Trent, still bound, was propped up against the wall of a small stone cell in the vast rambling ruin of the priests, his fury unextinguished by hours of thirst and discomfort, but burning unseen and deadly beneath a mask of stony indifference.

"Go ahead, *djinnee!*" he replied insolently. "Unfold your subtle scheme for my undoing."

"Subtle is the right word. Yes, you shall go back to Hezroor in a few days, before the government machinery gets going on your behalf. I shall take you back myself, and become a hero for having found you here and rescued you."

Plymton blew out another cloud of smoke, smiled unpleasantly at his own thoughts, and resumed:

"You return safe and sound . . . save for one trifling thing!"

He paused, watching Trent narrowly for some sign of apprehension. The latter merely yawned, remarking:

"Very thoughtful of you to take all this trouble to amuse me like this."

Plymton inadvertently bit a piece off his cheroot, spat it out viciously, and leaned forward.

"You'll return to Hezroor a drivelling mouthing idiot! You'll go back without your memory—as powerless to injure me as a month-old baby!"

Trent's eyes remained dreamy and indifferent, and he gazed at his companion as if he were an insect crawling past his line of vision. The latter rose abruptly from his wooden bench, pitched his cheroot into a corner, thrust his twitching hands into his pockets, and snapped out:

"You don't believe it! Wait . . . I'll show you just how you're going to look, and how you'll act! I've used this drug on more than one who interfered with me, and I can use it again."

He vanished under a low archway into a labyrinth of cells and passages beyond, leaving his prisoner alone in his narrow room, through the walls of which a fiery sunset cast a warm red glow.

Trent closed his eyes wearily, his thoughts milling in endless confusion, the problem of his escape completely beyond his grasp at the moment. The sound of Plymton's returning footsteps reached his quick ears, accompanied by a

shuffling, scraping sound that puzzled the listener.

"Sounds as if he were dragging something . . . what the deuce?"

The faint uncertain noise resolved itself into something more definite. It was another person walking with the heavy dragging steps of decrepit old age. Nearer . . . nearer it approached. Plymton's voice was audible, as if he were addressing a wild beast, and a high-pitched meaningless jabber of words answered him.

Trent glanced up under half-closed lids as Plymton re-entered his cell, but his eyes opened widely enough when he caught sight of the ragged pitiful figure that shuffled at the other's heels, a man whose reddish beard straggled over a torn and stained *gandoura;* a white man, whose fine strong features were marred by an expression of blank idiocy, with eyes dull and vacant under penthouse brows, and loose lips working constantly in grotesque grimaces.

But Trent recognized him instantly. The splendid head, rugged features, and red dusty hair were unmistakable. Even the voice—broken, foolish, and unmeaning—was horribly familiar in tone. Sick with horror, Trent stared speechlessly, while Plymton drew back to glance from one to the other in deep enjoyment.

"You recognize an old friend, I see!" Plymton took the imbecile by the arm and dragged him in front of Trent. "Now if you want to see yourself as others will see you in a few days, Adams here will be as useful as a mirror. I've experimented with this drug until I know exactly the amount and number of doses which will make you look like Adams's twin brother," he boasted, delighted to brag of his knowledge. "Barring the color of your hair, and a few details of that sort, *this* is what you will be before the end of the week . . . capering and grinning in the streets of Hezroor. The children—even the dogs—will run from you. You'll be known as an awful warning—*the man who has seen the djinnee!* It will make things safer than ever for me here in El Sheyb. I'm beginning to feel grateful to you, Trent."

The latter fixed his gaze on a rent in Adams's robe, avoiding the tragic, hollow eyes and awfully twitching lips. He fought for control. The walls, the dusty floor, the figures of Plymton and Adams spun in a red mist about him.

He thought his heart would burst, it hammered so agonizingly against his cruelly tight bonds. His thoughts were chaotic . . . flashing like bright swords in the whirling blackness of his mind. Slowly his reason gained the ascendancy as he fought down his choking blind fury and focussed his whole energy on his problem once more.

The problem of outwitting Plymton. The problem of saving not only the wretches he had seen in the dungeons, not only this tragic remnant of his friend, but also those hundreds of victims who would fall later into Plymton's hands, if he were allowed to continue his career unchecked.

Could he . . . bound, helpless, on the verge of unspeakable disaster . . . could he play the winning card even now in this hideous game?

Through the long hours he continued to wrestle with this problem. He grew feverish as the night wore on, and his imagination took wilder flights. Impossibly daring, intricate plans darted into his mind with the brilliance of electrically illuminated advertisements, to be wiped out with the same disconcerting suddenness of those glittering signs.

After all, what could he do unless . . . unless——

Unless Plymton untied his hands before giving him the drug!

There was a chance in a thousand that this might happen. Yet, if this miraculous chance did occur, he would have only the briefest time . . . his hands and fingers would be numb and useless . . . no, it was madness to go over all this again. He'd never get a break like that.

But if he did! And once more the thing began to thrash round and round in his feverish overwrought mind. The dark silence of his prison was broken only by the sighing of the desert wind, the cry of a jackal, the melancholy hoot of some solitary owl on its hunt among the ruins of the deserted city.

IN THE gray dawn he unglued sticky eyelids to see Plymton standing before him in company with several gaunt *marabouts*. One of the latter carried a small earthen bowl. In Plymton's hands Trent noticed a tiny phial which the former was shaking gently, but ostentatiously, before his eyes.

He felt a queer sudden sickness at sight of the thing. A few drops of liquid —an innocent-looking enemy! But Trent would infinitely rather have faced the deadliest snake in the Sahara. Death—even agonizing death—was preferable to this . . . this vile thing which would send him out among his fellow men a drivelling wreck, from which all must turn in nausea and disgust.

An impulse seized him to swear that he would never reveal the secret of El Sheyb, if Plymton would fling away that little phial and set him free.

The words trembled on his lips . . . his dry tongue refused to frame them. Then his own mocking humor came to his rescue. What a fantastic notion! As if a rotter of Plymton's caliber would take his word of honor! Honor and Plymton! Plymton the *djinnee* . . . the slave-dealer!

He gave a gasping chuckle as the temptation passed.

"The Right Honorable Plymton! Sounds well, don't you think?" he asked. "Lord High Djinnee of El Sheyb! Or would you prefer—Frank, the Very Reverend Master of Marabouts! Now, that's a very good one; it's a pity to wreck a brain so inventive as mine!

"Oh, come!" he went on, desperately trying to stave off the moment when that little phial would be unstoppered. "Don't I have the ordinary privileges of the condemned man? Where's the hearty breakfast — the expensive cigar — the fancy touches so necessary for a scene like this? Are you afraid to let me sit up and drink your loving-cup decently?"

"Afraid!" Plymton laughed. "That's the best joke I've heard from you. If you could see yourself at this moment! You may have your last wish, by all means. There's a lot more where this comes from, and if you don't drink it, you'll have the next dose administered in a way that will certainly spoil your last moments.

"Cut his hands and arms free!" he ordered one of the priests.

Trent leaned back in an apparent access of exhaustion, his eyes closed. His numbed, swollen arms trailed helplessly on either side of him, as the priest cut the rope.

"I can't move a finger," he complained, keeping his eyes tightly shut—he dared not trust them in that moment of sudden hope. Even yet . . . even yet he might fail! The first part of the miracle had happened. But the second——

Plymton's harsh laugh grated on his ear again.

"You'll be having lunch with your friend. The Heavenly Twins! What a pretty pair . . . making faces at one another over your bowls of *cous-cous!*"

The native who had cut his bonds, rubbed Trent's hands and arms. In a

short time he was able to move his stiff fingers, but his grip was very weak and fumbling when he took the fatal cup at last from Plymton's hands, and looked at the water into which the phial's contents had been emptied.

Slowly he turned his eyes to look up at his enemy. The latter's face was white and tense with excitement, his eyes glittering under their smooth, hooded lids. Trent raised the small bowl with trembling hands.

"To the *djinnee* of El Sheyb!" he said, and Plymton shrank from the sudden unmasked and utter contempt in the blue eyes that blazed into his. "May he speedily join his brethren below!"

He put the bowl to his lips, drained and set it down, and leaned back against the wall again with closed eyes.

"Pleasant dreams, Mr. Trent!" The other was mockingly polite. "A pity you will not remember them—or anything else! Well, now you have breakfasted, I can go and have my morning coffee. It will take an hour or so before you become really interesting. I'll be back directly, but I fear—I very much fear that you will not recognize me when we meet again."

Trent's heart thumped so violently that he feared the other would notice his agitation. No matter—he would only ascribe it to fear. Was the second miracle really about to happen . . . was there a chance . . . was there a chance for him?

He refused to open his eyes, or answer any of his enemy's taunts. In a few minutes, tired of baiting an unresponsive victim, Plymton left the cell, grinning over his shoulder as he went. Two of the priests squatted on their haunches to keep guard; the rest departed with their master. Trent lay huddled up against the wall, his face hidden in the crook of his arm.

5. *The Debut of a Djinnee*

"*WA HYAT Ullah!* He hath seen the *djinnee* of El Sheyb! Look . . . look . . . the unbeliever who hath seen the *djinnee!*"

"*Gibani!*" replied another inhabitant of Hezroor, putting up a hand to avert the evil chance. "Terrible are the devils of El Sheyb! Truly it is an accursed city!"

"By the life of my son!" agreed another.

A loud cry burst from a young native in the crowd, who dashed up to the two men just entering the gates of Hezroor, and put a protecting hand on the arm of the taller of the two.

"Master, master! Did I not warn thee? Did I not say to thee a hundred times how evil was El Sheyb? Now thou art lost, by Allah, thou art lost!"

The faithful Musa's tears ran down as he began to walk beside the afflicted man whose arm he held. It was an early morning hour in the oasis-town, and the streets and squares were full of men with their camels and donkeys, who had come in from outlying hamlets and farms with their fruit and grain and vegetables.

"He hath seen the *djinnee! He* hath seen the *djinnee! Billah*—he will see no more in this life! His eyes are sunken and dull as the river mud which the sun has left dry! His hand trembles as doth the palm-tree before the *gibli!*"

Slowly, very slowly the dreadful little procession forced its way through the fascinated and awe-struck populace. Whispers . . . exclamations . . . calls on Allah for protection followed the three men like a rising tide, increasing in volume as the crowd swelled and gathered in their wake.

Plymton led the way, his face a mask, his sun-helmet pulled down to hide the gleam in his eyes. Behind him came Trent, with Musa at his side. The latter

tried to guide his master's erratic aimless steps along the cobbled ways, and indignantly strove to keep the mob from jostling too closely.

"Shameless and accursed ill-doers that ye are!" he cried. "It is but the sun-fever which hath stricken the *effendi!* By Allah, and by Allah, give way there, you miserable clods of earth!"

"No fever cuts a man's soul from his body thus," answered a swarthy shekh gravely. "This is one whose soul is in hell! Lo, his body wanders empty and witless to its grave!"

Musa, guiding Trent like a child, protecting him like an infuriated tiger with a helpless cub, followed in Plymton's wake. The latter made no attempt to second Musa's efforts, but strolled on quite casually, choosing always the busiest streets, the most crowded squares.

Trent's unfocussed vision passed over every face that confronted him. He mouthed and gibbered unceasingly, his fingers snapping restlessly, his head wobbling on his sagging shoulders as though some spring that fastened it had worked loose.

At last they reached the building where Sidi ben Ali, the Caid of Hezroor, conducted his daily business. With some difficulty, Trent's dragging feet were guided up a steep flight of steps to the shade and comparative coolness of the bare white-washed room which served as office to the Caid. The latter was hard at work, and with him were the commandant of the outpost, and the army surgeon of Hezroor. To these three men Plymton unfolded the saga of Trent's catastrophe.

"I had warned him emphatically, time and time again!" he concluded finally. "If the poor chap could speak for himself, he'd tell you I did my utmost to prevent his going. He simply laughed at me for my pains, intimated that I was something of a fool to be so credulous and superstitious, and went his own way!"

"These cursed tourists!" growled the commandant, tugging at his white mustaches irritably. "Why does the good God permit such animals to exist, I ask you? This may mean war among the tribes in our district. If the order comes from headquarters to turn the *marabouts* out of El Sheyb, then the Shabba tribe will resent it, of a certainty! Other tribes will be implicated . . . and I shall be blamed for everything! It is insupportable to have tourists in a place like Hezroor."

The Caid regarded Plymton from beneath his snowy turban with habitual serenity.

"And thou—thou didst know of the danger of El Sheyb! Yet thou wert not afraid to enter the accursed city?"

"I was in the beastliest funk," admitted Plymton. "But, after all, he was my countryman, and I felt a sort of responsibility, in spite of the way he jeered at my advice."

"It is well thou hadst courage to go and bring him forth from El Sheyb."

"*Mon Dieu!*" interrupted the doctor. "Not so well, Sidi ben Ali! It would have been of greater benefit to *Monsieur le touriste* if the *djinnee* had been allowed to finish his work, and give him the coup-de-grâce! As it is——"

A gesture and roll of his eyes completed his sentence as he turned toward a corner of the room, where Trent—or rather, the shell of what had once been Trent—sat with vacant look, and long limbs sprawled. His head rolled uneasily—as lost and pitiful a thing as an abandoned ship rocking at the mercy of the wind and tide.

"Any chance of his recovery?" demanded the commandant abruptly.

The doctor shrugged. "Impossible to say. I will keep him under supervision and do what I can, but I am not a brain

or nerve specialist. As well prophesy how the wind will blow next month, as say how a patient of this sort will behave."

"I'll put him up," interpolated Plymton quickly. "I am very anxious about him, and feel a sort of responsibility, as I said before. He can stay with me. There's plenty of room, and my servants haven't half enough to do. He'll be well cared for, and my place is near enough to make it convenient for you to drop in any time you like, Doctor."

"Yes. Very amiable of you, *Monsieur,*" replied the army surgeon. "What do you think, gentlemen? We might delay the report for at least a week, on the chance of his recovery. A pity to stir things up unnecessarily at headquarters."

"I see nothing against it. A good plan, in my opinion." The commandant was obviously relieved.

The Caid, however, looked doubtfully at Plymton, his plump brown hands folded placidly across his massive middle.

"I, myself, was about to propose that in my palace there is room for this poor afflicted one," he began slowly. "Moreover, my nephew is but recently returned from the long years of his studies at Paris, Vienna and Algiers. He hath distinguished himself greatly, by the aid of Allah the Compassionate, and the sickness of the brain hath been the object of his greatest endeavor to comprehend. With all respect and deference to your own great wisdom, *effendi,*" he bowed gravely to the army surgeon, "perhaps this poor one's case is one my nephew would understand and cure."

Plymton shot a swift perturbed glance at the benevolent face of the stout Caid. It would take at least a week longer to wreck Trent's brain beyond recovery. He had not dared to keep him any longer at El Sheyb. But now . . . if he slipped through his fingers at this stage——

"I'd feel a whole lot better if I could have the poor fellow under my roof," he protested with entire truthfulness. "I ought never to have let him go that second time, and I'd really like to do my best for him now."

TRENT had begun to shuffle blindly about the room, rubbing his dirty fingers over the walls. He reached the door in his aimless wanderings, and stood there tapping his teeth with his knuckles, making strange guttural noises in his throat, grinning foolishly.

The Caid settled deeper into his seat, and regarded Plymton obstinately.

"I see you are anxious—it is natural! Yet, as ruler of Hezroor and the district beyond, which includes El Sheyb, I also have a responsibility, *effendi.*"

Plymton controlled his temper and nerves with difficulty. Was this old fool going to wreck all his plans at the last moment?

"But——" he began.

"Thank you, Sidi ben Ali, I have a strong conviction that your drinks would be far more beneficial to me than his!"

Trent's tall figure stood erect and straight before the door. His clear blue eyes were fixed sternly on Plymton.

"Hold him!" he rapped out. "I'm not ill! I'm not the drooling idiot he hoped to make me! And I'm here to explain *what he is!*"

Plymton made a dash, but Trent's long arms seized and held him in a vise, and dumped him back in his seat as if he were a child.

"He's mad . . . mad!" gasped Plymton. "He doesn't know what he is saying . . . he'll murder the lot of us if you don't stop him!"

Trent retired to the door again, and stood with his back against it.

"I have discovered his secret. And because I did so, he drugged me as he drugged my friend, Joseph Adams, to

prevent my betraying him. Fortunately for me, and others, I am well up in drugs and narcotics — made a special study of them at one time. The thing he tried on me was one I have seen used both here and in Persia—a rare drug—but the antidote is not rare at all. I was forced to drink his filthy drug . . . *but I had the antidote!* I always carry a few things in my belt for poison and snake-bite, and this antidote was among them."

Plymton was tensing himself for another rush, when the commandant's large hand closed round his forearm.

"Have the goodness to continue, *Monsieur!*" the soldier requested.

"Can you guess his secret? He is the *djinnee* of El Sheyb! He and the priests have invented this legend and driven every one out of the city so that he can carry on his poisonous trade. He is a slave-dealer! There are hundreds of the poor wretches in the vaults under the market-place at this very moment!"

There was a long stunned silence. The two officers sat staring at Plymton as if he were too loathsome to be true. The Caid seemed turned to stone, his black eyes burning in an ashen face.

It was the terrible stillness that heralds a storm. Plymton was not deceived. He licked his dry lips—his feet and hands as cold as ice. The storm would destroy him . . . batter him out of existence, as a monsoon in its raging sweep uproots a trifling weed.

Ponderously Sidi ben Ali got to his feet and strode to the door. Trent himself shivered as he caught the implacable hate in the Caid's face, and he moved from the door as hastily as a boy before his master. Ben Ali raised one arm, flung the door wide, and pointed to the desert, quivering in a haze of blinding heat.

"Forth . . . forth, thou thing accurst! Forth to the wilderness to seek other devils like to thyself! May thy torments endure for ever!"

The commandant and the doctor rose from their seats as if to interfere. Then the latter shrugged and sat down.

"Better so. Dramatic, but certainly practical, *mon commandant!* A man is lost in the desert, that is all. Nothing but that to report. No mud stirred up, no official inquiries here in Hezroor. Very neat finish."

The commandant nodded slowly, and, with Trent and the Caid, he watched the mean, shrunken little figure disappear down the narrow street facing the office door.

By sunset the news of Plymton's identity with the *djinnee* of El Sheyb, and the miraculous recovery of Trent *effendi*, were noised about the city. As the white walls of Hezroor were dyed crimson in the reflected glory of the western sky, a great crowd stood to hurl their last curses at a small black speck moving toward the flaming horizon.

Far out over the rolling immeasurable sea of sand the black speck was toiling on . . . on . . . on . . .

The fiery clouds dimmed to palest amethyst . . . purple . . . dusky blue. Brief darkness fell.

When the moon rose, the little toiling speck had vanished into the vast and secret wilderness.

If a slave and an emir call themselves thy friends, prefer the slave; in thy day of need, he will not be thinking of his riches. —*El Mokri.*

The Dancer of Quena

By DUDLEY S. CORLETT and BRUCE BRYAN

The story of a fruitless pilgrimage to Mecca, and a revenge that cheated itself

DOWN in the dark bazar of Quena, Lola danced. And when Lola, incarnate spirit of wild cadence, danced, other dancers ceased in their efforts and all activity was stopped for the moment. None desired to miss a single movement of her exotic body. Her slim figure swayed in seductive attitudes for the delight of numberless Islamite pilgrims. For from this old town on the banks of the Nile in Upper Egypt, pious Moslems set forth each year to visit the tomb of the Prophet in Mecca. Before they started upon that arduous journey, which always entailed great self-denial, it was customary for them to indulge liberally in the flesh-pots of the Lotus-land.

I chanced to be a spectator on this particular occasion, owing to the fact that as Native Inspector for His Majesty's government it was my duty to make report of the behavior of these annual travelers. Lola, the chief attraction of the Bazar of the Dancing Girl, was of Syrian parentage. The extreme fairness of her skin together with her delicacy of feature had earned her the name of "Pearl." Dark eager hair overshadowed a full-pleated skirt of purple silk, and the magenta scarf which bound her small breasts glittered with gold sequins that trembled to her every motion. Beautiful as a hashish dream was she to all men, whatever their faith.

"O Pearl-of-my-delight," murmured a soft voice beside me, where I sat sipping the sickly sweet coffee of the East and drinking in the flagrant charms of the whirling maiden, "could I wear thee for a single night! But thy price . . . Allah have mercy!"

He was a young Bedawi of the desert, dark-skinned and proud, magnetically attractive. Accompanying his father from some far oasis in the vast void of the Sahara, he was pledged to that holy Hadj, the sacred pilgrimage required of every Mohammedan at some time in his life, if self-sacrifice can make it possible. Already they had journeyed six weeks, and Mecca was still far distant like a jewel in the moon. The saddle-bags on their lone camel contained little save dried dates, parched corn and beans. Precious were the water-skins for the long desert marches, but most precious of all were the two white, seamless garments which they must wear in the sacred streets, and which they would use for shrouds should Allah decree that they die in the Holy City.

But here he was in the Bazar of the Dancing Girl, seeking a meed of carnal diversion ere the last lap of his journey. As the throb of the drums beat faster, more palpitating with sensual appeal became the pantomime of the dancer. The labored breathing of the Bedawi attested his interest to the assembled onlookers, who cast derisive glances at him and muttered some jest to each other.

"By the beard of the Prophet, if I possess thee not, love will scorch my body as the sun smites the desert sand!"

But if Lola heard she gave no sign, continuing her weaving, her bending and posturing.

"What do you know of love?" I inquired with some amusement. "Such pearls are not for you. Rather do they belong to such scurvy specimens as yonder hoary rake," and I jerked my thumb toward a sorry Hebrew who slumped in one corner of the room, lust bulging out of his watery eyes. "They have the money to buy young beauty, though their enjoyment is like the feeding of fungi."

The Bedawi cast fierce eyes upon the pallid creature cringing in the corner. Crooked fingers caressed greasy curls clinging to sunken temples, while greedy little orbs devoured the semi-nudity of the girl.

"Swine!" exclaimed the youth. "I could strangle the dog with thumb and forefinger."

Flinging back the locks which escaped in confusion from a head-dress of linen bound with a cord of camel's hair, he turned his eyes on me.

"I am a man!" he announced grandiloquently. "My name is Said, son of Said. Am I to blame if my manhood is starved for the want of a little silver?"

"Allah will provide," I quoted glibly.

"Ay! As He does for the outcast jackal —with bones from the graves of criminals!" His gaze returned to the dancer.

SUDDENLY the surge of the drums ceased, and Lola's bizarre dance abruptly ended. The suspended animation of the little room revived. There was a low babble of voices, a contented sucking of amber mouthpieces, and the succulent sipping of aromatic coffee. The Pearl descended from the small stage and commenced to collect her tribute in a gaudy tambourine. Staid Occidental though I thought myself, the voluptuous grace of her alluring figure, coupled with her compelling nearness, inflamed my senses. Had her semi-mythical Syrian father suddenly appeared and offered her to me for a handful of gold pieces, I am certain I would have borne her off then and there. But of this parent nothing was known, and of her mother even less.

With infinite self-assurance she moved amongst the men gathered from all the tribes of northern Africa. White teeth flashed as painted lips coaxed reluctant coins from unwilling purses. The Bedawi vainly and almost frantically searched his leathern belt lest one stray coin remained. My sympathy was aroused, and into his palm I pressed a heavy silver disk. The gratitude that spread over his bold features was reward in itself.

"May Allah provide you with at least the consolation of a single smile!" I exclaimed with a laugh.

Lola approached our neighborhood, her coquetry increased. She had early marked the presence of a white man, and as in her estimation all such possessed unlimited wealth and little wit wherewith to keep it, I was her fair prey. But being undesirous of the public demonstration of a dancing-girl's gratitude, and wishing to divert her amorous attentions to the lovesick boy at my side, I proffered but a stingy coin. Contemptuously, she turned from me to the Bedawi, and again I flamed inwardly at her sheer beauty. Noting the poverty of the youth's garments, she was about to turn away from him, too, when something in the pleading of his eyes caught her attention. Slowly she extended the tambourine, and with a superb gesture of careless opulence he tossed in his offering.

The girl's eyes widened, and she looked at the Bedawi closer. Then, as if in response to some unspoken request, she whispered, "I will meet thee outside," and smilingly went her way.

DAWN found me riding to accomplish my routine native inspection work before the heat of the day set in. On my return I passed close to the Arab cemetery and paused to watch two gravediggers toiling in the sand.

"Whom do you bury?" I inquired.

"A Bedawi pilgrim, *mafetish!*" came the reply.

I was struck with a sudden fear. Pilgrims suspected of having hidden wealth were often murdered, and dancing-girls were used to lure them to their fate. Had my gift unwittingly brought about a tragedy? I was about to question them further when, with a low chanting, four men entered the quiet place bearing upon their shoulders a wooden bier. Within, lightly covered by a drab shawl, lay the shrouded form of a man.

It was with considerable relief that I discovered Said, the Bedawi, to be one of the bearers. Patiently I waited astride my horse till the body had been laid in its shallow grave with the face toward Mecca. Then I called him to me.

"Whom have you laid to rest?"

"My father," was the quiet, unfaltering reply. "He had been suffering from a fever, and I—I should not have left him alone."

"Then you were with Lola last night?"

He nodded. After all, my unfortunate gift had indirectly purchased a tragedy. The knowledge made me feel sad. But what avails it to question the ways of destiny?

"I suppose now you will not go on to the Holy City?" I pursued.

His eyes sought the far eastern horizon, shimmering in the diabolic sun.

"But I must, sir. I have another mission now."

Dismounting, I led the way to a shady sycamore. With an empty purse this lad of seventeen intended to face the hardships of that perilous journey alone!

"What is this new mission?" I asked.

As one who knows himself a friend, he spoke with frank innocence, his words eloquent of a lover's passion.

"Lola took me to her home. All the way she nestled close and pressed her lips to mine, rubbing them against my breast and sighing in her white throat. She filled my pipe and brewed coffee; and then she danced—for me alone. By Allah! the houris of Paradise are not more desirable than the Pearl of the Nile!"

"And was she . . . kind to thee?" I ventured, desirous of learning more of this intrigue which might have been lifted from the pages of *The Thousand Nights and a Night.*

The light in Said's eyes faded.

"She made me a promise. If I bring her a phial of water from the zem-zem well in the Holy City—then will she give me all I ask, and more."

"And it is for this foolish request of a common dancing-girl that you will face the terrors of the Hadj, braving the simoon and khamsin, alone?" My incredulity was evident.

"Like that of my father yonder," he returned solemnly, "my fate is in the hands of Allah, the compassionate."

"Yes, but why the philtre?" I urged. "Such a trifling request——"

His eyes were serious with the beliefs of the East.

"The *imam* has told Lola that ere taking a lover born of the faith, she must first purge herself. Nothing but the zem-zem water will suffice."

It was useless to pursue the subject. His camel was tethered near by, in readiness for a quick start. Cursing hoarsely, it rose beneath him. High on the padded hump perched the Bedawi as the golden beast stretched out its long neck and sped across

the warming sands. The last I saw of them was a dim silhouette on a lonely ridge, ere the desert took them into its stifling embrace.

FOUR months passed, and Quena sweltered in summer heat. So suffocating were the nights that I slept, like the rest of the population, stripped on the roof beneath the stars. Scarcely able to breathe, tormented with prickly heat, I was about to rise from my intolerable bed when I became aware of a ghostly figure climbing over the parapet. A thief, was my instant thought, and I reached for my revolver. But a familiar voice bade me have no fear. Said, the Bedawi boy, had come back, and this time he carried a simitar thrust through his sash. The desert had failed to claim this son of Hagar, but had returned him even more bronzed and taller than ever. Yet in the moonlight his face showed gaunt and haggard, and in his eyes dwelt an infinite sadness that went deeper than the material discomforts of his pilgrimage.

"Welcome back, Said," I greeted him. "You are a welcome diversion to one who can not sleep on such an accursed night. Tell me what has chanced."

The bond of our friendship loosed the flood-gates of his sorrow.

"*Effendi,* I have seen the marvels of Mecca, kissed the fringe of the Kubba, and drawn water from the sacred zemzem well," he cried. "The way was hard, but in my dreams she sometimes came to give me strength. Otherwise I must have died in torment. On the day of sacrifice, when solemn men became screaming fanatics champing the mad-foam in their teeth, I was all but crushed to death in the drooling mobs!"

He raised a brown arm and buried his smoldering eyes in it, as if to shut out a haunting image. After a pause in which the heat beat mercilessly upon my senses, he resumed.

"I found the sacred well, I fought the seething press, and in the end I filled my phial with the precious water."

"Yes," I soothed. "And after the long trip it is good to be back, is it not? Your perils and fatigues will be forgotten in Lola's smile."

His eyes sought mine, a curious light behind their smoldering depths.

"You have not heard. I rode for miles into the desert, and at nightfall halted on the edge of a small oasis. I made camp but did not venture into the fringe of palm trees. There was a fire gleaming there, and who can tell what manner of men will be found in the sand? Nay, I kept apart, and after supping commended myself to Allah and slept. I woke with a feeling of terror. The stars shone above, but they had moved along their courses. My hand sought my bosom where I had hidden the holy water. It was gone. I stared across toward the palm fringe and perceived that the embers of the fire were dying out, but between them and me were two creeping shapes. Fury awoke in me and I dashed heedlessly after them. They ran, and one was fleet; the other was slow."

Again he paused with that regard for effect characteristic of the Orient.

"I caught the slow one and drove my knife between his shoulders. But when I stopped to search him I did not find the sacred fluid. The fleeter of the two thieves I was unable to overtake. Returning to camp, I slept fitfully until dawn, when I mounted my camel and dejectedly set out again for Quena. I would arrive with empty hands—I would lose Lola, my priceless pearl. But I could not go back to Mecca; it was more than flesh and blood might endure."

I stared at the impassioned Bedawi cu-

riously. Was it the heat of this thrice-excoriated night that so inflamed his countenance? He went on.

"As I came to the spot where I had slain the robber I saw a robed form rise from its knees beside the prostrate one. It was the second thief, and he straightened up and shook his fist at me. 'Worm-eaten dog of a false Prophet!' he roared in impotent anger. 'Thou hast slain my brother, and subtle shall be my vengeance. I will strike thee a lingering pain in the heart, Bedawi, yet shalt thou live to suffer!'

"He was a black-bearded Syrian of ferocious mien, and his words shook me. I wondered why he did not choose to fight me.

"With this threat, however, he fled to his horse, mounted in a flying leap, and galloped away. I was too weary to pursue, and when I came close to the body of him I had slain I stood gazing down at it. It was the first human creature my hand ever sped from this world to whatever place is reserved for infidels after death. A sudden thought occurred to me. Last night I was in a blind rage; perhaps I had not searched the garments of the dead man thoroughly.

"Actuated by this idea I made my mount kneel so that I might look again. The phial of zem-zem water was lying on the dead thief's breast in plain view. Kneeling there in the sand I uplifted my soul in thanks to the Holy Mohammed. Then taking the Syrian's simitar, I continued on my way with a singing heart, unmoved by the threats of revenge hurled at me by the wrathful brother."

"It would seem that you have triumphed after much discouragement and danger," I congratulated the youth.

"But you have yet to hear the end of the tale," he reminded gently. "Fever left me weak, my camel died in the desert and I left his faithful bones to whiten the shifting sands. When I finally arrived in Quena the health inspectors would have seized my water to boil it according to law. Would that they had, for then that which has chanced might not have occurred! Thinking that such is not the order of the Prophet, I hid the water-phial in my hair and lied to the officers."

I offered no comment on his confessed evasion of British regulations, and he continued in a softer voice.

"One who has suffered learns how to forgive. Last night I sought out the Pearl of my dreams. I came to claim my own, and she received me with a glad cry, nestling in my arms. She was overjoyed when I showed her the cherished phial. There was a special chalice of gold from the tomb of an ancient Egyptian king, which she had saved from which to drink the elixir."

"And did she?" I inquired. I had often heard of the superstitious regard in which the zem-zem water was held by all Moslems, but of its everyday attributes I was skeptical. Probably nothing more than the equivalent of one of our mineral waters.

Said stared somberly at the moon. Strange what comfort men, whatever their race or creed, absorb from that luminous lamp of heaven.

"She drank—and died. . . ."

"Died?" I repeated the word slowly, uncertainly, my mind suddenly dragged back from its ruminations. "Lola dead!"

Said laughed bitterly, grasping the simitar's hilt.

"Could you not guess? There was poison in the water, taint of a most potent and foreign nature. The brother of the Syrian thief I slew introduced a subtle stain into the holy clearness of the sacred fluid, and left it on the breast of the dead man so that I would be sure to find it."

For some moments I stared out across the silvered sands stretching in illimitable seas below. To say I was deeply shocked is to minimize to the point of ridiculousness. Yet tragedy like this is an almost daily occurrence in the East. I comforted the stricken youth as best I could. Nevertheless I found myself bitterly pondering the strangeness of things—and the ways of life which lead by all paths to death. In four short months this young Bedawi had lost all that he held dear on earth: his father, his camel, and his love. What was there left to him?

He answered this last thought himself, suddenly springing to life as if he had been standing on a wire unexpectedly electrified.

"I have lost my Pearl for ever," he cried, drawing the naked simitar, and the pathetic poetry of his utterance went to my heart. "But there remains vengeance! It is the birthright of Man. And it shall be claimed. Almost was it accomplished today. The thief who poisoned the water met with me face to face in the street before the bazar, but though I managed to slash his face, cutting off his hooked beak, he escaped me again. When next we cross, one of us flees no more for ever!"

Said saluted me, gracefully touching his forehead.

"Farewell, my friend," he said earnestly. "Your sympathy has caused me to repeat this tale to you, and it has eased my pain in the telling. I go now to wreak that vengeance that has been too long delayed. Your well-meant coin in the bazar has purchased an evil fruit."

Vaulting agilely over the parapet, he vanished into the shadows, and I was left with my thoughts and the sultry night.

NEXT morning, simultaneous with my rising, my servant informed me that a visitor had presented himself. I did not have him enter, but met him at the door. Catching sight of him, I stopped short in surprize, almost convinced that what confronted me was the weird remnant of a dream. The man was a Syrian, oldish and crafty in appearance. But that is not what occasioned my astonishment.

Across his face was a dirty plaster, evidently concealing a long and fresh wound, for the bandage was tinged a deep red. The plaster ran over the surface of what had formerly been a nasal protuberance, and as I questioned him as to his errand, the Bedawi's words came back to mind. For several minutes the Syrian conversed with me in an excited manner, but suffice it to say that he was inquiring the whereabouts of his daughter whom he had not seen for years. Some one had sent him to me, probably because I was supposed to be in closer touch with the native element than any of the other white officers in Quena.

"What is your daughter's name?" I asked, my eyes persisting to stare impolitely at the bloody bandage.

His lean hand lifted the plaster aside, while he contorted his mouth in order to speak distinctly. I should have known what to expect, should have realized what was coming. But I didn't. When it came it struck me squarely between the eyes.

"Lola!" he said, gazing at me hopefully.

Each man believes his ticks to be gazelles.—*Arab saying.*

The Tale of Annaya*

WHEN thy back shall be turned upon this city, and thine eyes shall look upon the shore of the sea, wend thy steps, oh *numen,* to the Cape of Matifu. There a place thou shalt find, which the men of years call Hamza. Sodden with blood is its earth; the djinns of revenge are born there. Arbal towers above it, once a powerful castle with a mosque within its walls; now a heap of ruins, of crumbling ramparts overgrown with aloe-trees and figs. Yet, on the site of the mosque that was, a red stone pillar still stands today.

Husein Talem, the intrepid, noble pirate leader, built the castle and the mosque. The infidel dreaded the name of Husein, and, when his ensign of the ax floated over the sea, no galley of Spain or Italy dared to venture from her harbor.

It came to pass that Husein, when once sailing from Algiers to Gibraltar, came upon a ship of the French, captured the infidel galley and took her crew into slavery. On the ship was also a woman, whose youth and beauty caused the brave captain to take her unto himself as a wife. He gave her the name of Annaya and he loved her more than life and more than glory. Her every wish spelled a command to him and for her he gave up his ships. Like a faithful dog he looked into her eyes and did her bidding.

Full was his cup of happiness, when suddenly an illness came upon Annaya. Though the most famous wizards and doctors took counsel together and shook their heads wisely, naught could be done, no remedy availed. While his beautiful wife drooped and withered like an autumn leaf, there came one day to Husein a wise *kahin,* who said unto him:

"Build a mosque to the glory of Allah. Go to Mecca and pray for thy wife." Obeying the command, the mighty *ras* caused a mosque to be erected, supporting its arches on pillars of marble, white as the snow of the hills. Then he started for Mecca.

When on his way the servant brought him the ill tidings that his wife had gone out from his house, had left him. Like a flash of angry lightning Husein turned and sped back to his vacant house. There he commanded before him thirty hundred of his faithful pirates, and dispatched them to every corner of the land and sea to search for and find his Annaya.

One of his troops came upon her disguised as a man near Tenes and dragged her back to her lord. Pronouncing neither word of greeting nor reproach, Husein motioned his servants to lead her into the mosque, where they tied her to the central pillar and locked the doors of the house of worship. At night, Husein himself opened a vault and let a hungry lion into the mosque. At dawn, the white bones of Annaya alone were found.

The temple was burned and everything perished. Only the central pillar, stained with a woman's blood, stood in the midst of the ruins. Its dull, purple color persists unto this day. To this pillar came Husein every morning to pray, to weep and to think. When the days of death drew near unto him, he placed in the pillar a vessel of stone, filled with gold, as a sacrifice to the djinns of hatred and revenge that dwelt there.

Thus it often happens, *mumen!* A wife may be the sun of your life, or the venom that poisons even the last days of your existence.

* This is a translation of a Berber song of Algiers.

HARDLY a day goes by without bringing letters from you, the readers of ORIENTAL STORIES, asking us to publish the magazine every month, as three months is too long a time to wait between issues. We can only answer that more frequent publication of the magazine depends on your support. Although ORIENTAL STORIES is making new friends with each issue, the sale of the magazine does not yet warrant changing its present status as a quarterly to a monthly basis. We will be as glad as you when the time comes that we can offer the magazine to you more frequently; but at present it is not feasible to do so. If each of you who enjoy this magazine will get one friend to buy it, then it will be possible to offer the magazine to you each month.

L. Lary Edwards, of Clay Center, Kansas, offers a suggestion for an Orientalist club. "I have just finished reading the Winter Issue of ORIENTAL STORIES," he writes, "and I enjoyed it more than I can say. I have looked forward to getting it since running across your first number. I trust your circulation will soon increase to the point where you can make it a monthly. Give us plenty of S. B. H. Hurst and James W. Bennett—they know their Orient. I would like to see some of Talbot Mundy's, too. I have spent considerable time in the Far East and have sometimes wished for some sort of an organization that would bring together the 'Sundowners' and chaps who have 'missed too many boats back home', in other words a club which would be of interest to the real Orientalist. Perhaps your magazine would sponsor something of the sort. I have no exact plan, but thought I might suggest it and would be willing to give my time to something of the sort. Perhaps the Souk could feel out some of the real 'Sundowners' regarding something like this."

George Haig, of New Haven, Connecticut, in casting a vote for *The Dragoman's Jest* as his favorite story in the Winter Issue, writes to the Souk: "I see more adventure in Arabian stories. I believe they appeal more to the public, since *The Thousand and One Nights* is very popular with us. Please have more stories dealing with Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia."

A letter from N. Yvonne Saluby, of Walsenburg, Colorado, says: "I read every one of the Oriental stories in the Winter Issue. They are different from the general run of modern fiction; especially so is Kline's and E. Hoffmann Price's story. This truthful presentation of the dragoman, and the flow of Arabic, is very good indeed. Being a native of Lebanon in Syria, I am able to appreciate this. Robert E. Howard's story of the Crusades is thrilling—but the stories are all good."

"*The Sowers of the Thunder,* by Robert E. Howard, is the very best story that has yet appeared in your magazine," writes H. J. Ervine, of Coleman, Texas.

Helen Dale, of Chicago, writes to the Souk: "There is real meat in all of Howard's stuff, and fine psychology in Miller's *The Dancer of Djogyakarta.* I always know I can count on something good in any Mahbub Ali (Gardiner), Tsang (Bennett), or dragoman (Kline) stories. They are uniformly good."

"I have just finished the winter ORIENTAL STORIES and think it magnificent," writes Bruce Bryan, of Los Angeles. "Howard wins in a walk with his *Sowers of the Thunder,* as far as I am concerned, with Pendarves' *El Hamel, the Lost One* second, and the Kline-Price *Dragoman's Jest* third. I liked *The Dancer of Djogyakarta,* though I think the story failed to show just how the girl invoked the Hindoo gods to her aid, inasmuch as it was her lover who gave the white lad the works. Hurst, as usual, is very good."

An enthusiastic letter from Miss Frances Manno, of New Orleans, votes for *The Death-Heads' March,* by Geoffrey Vace, as her favorite in the Autumn Issue. "The locale and the cleverness of the characters interest me," she writes. "An example, in the colloquy between Chowkander King and Juggut Hai: 'One man against an army, I think you said, Juggut Hai. One man, and a machine-gun.' This unusual story and the smart action of the leading character makes me enjoy reading ORIENTAL STORIES."

Writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago: "The honor of first place in the Winter Issue of ORIENTAL STORIES goes to two stories: *The Dragoman's Jest,* by E. Hoffmann Price and Otis A. Kline, and *The Sowers of the Thunder* by Robert E. Howard. Tell Mr. Kline to write more stories of Hamed the Attar and Mr. Howard to write another story about Genghis Khan. Let's have more fast action stories of the Robert E. Howard type. The cover by J. Allen St. John is the best one you have had so far."

"I am a regular reader of ORIENTAL STORIES," writes Walter Grapen, of St. Louis, "and have re-read many of the stories, especially *Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan,* by Frank Owen. It would give me great pleasure to know if the slave Ta' Ki whom he mentions as being the one who caused the downfall of the Chow dynasty is none other than Mo Hsi, concubine of Chieh, seventeenth and last ruler of the dynasty. This woman Mo Hsi is regarded as one of the most infamous women in Chinese history. The emperor Chieh was completely under the influence of Mo Hsi and most of his time was given up to dissipation. T'ang the prince of Shang (a little principality in the eastern part of Honan) gathered an army and soon put a stop to all this, causing the abdication of Chieh, who was then confined to a sort of prison at Nan Ch'ao." [We are passing this letter on to Frank Owen, author of *Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan,* for him to answer.—THE EDITORS.]

What is your favorite story in this issue? It will help us to give you better stories if you let us know which stories please you most, and which stories (if any) you dislike. *The Sowers of the Thunder,* Robert E. Howard's vivid action-story of Baibars the Panther, easily led the field in popularity in our Winter Issue, receiving exactly twice as many votes as the next most popular story.

(Please turn to page 284)

Coming Next Issue

THEN Lo Foo danced.

Never before had I seen her so beautiful, so radiant, or so madly alluring. The key color of the ensemble she had chosen for that dance was red, the color of love. Her shirt was a tenuous, diaphanous material of a shade that matched the red of her lips, and was suspended on a girdle of cloth of gold, studded with rubies. Her breast shields were blood-red coral beads, woven on golden threads, and her anklets and armlets were gold, decked with figures of red lacquer.

The dance was one of passionate love—of wooing and of mating. Never had she danced thus before me, and never had I been so powerfully affected. The throbbing music, the rhythmic swaying of her slim, young body, and the matchless perfection of her face and figure, held me enthralled.

Suddenly I realized that the dance was over. The music had ceased, and the little dancer had flung herself down before me. I caught her up, and she nestled in my arms like a tired child. But her eyes were the eyes of a woman, and they were starry with a light which a man, though he see it but once, may never mistake. The fragrance of her breath intoxicated me like heady wine. Unmindful of the slave-girls and the eunuch, I claimed the sweetness of her lips. Her arms stole about my neck, and clung. Still holding her in my arms, I stood up, and carrying her into our room, gently lowered her to the *diwan*.

Behind me, Musa, the eunuch, closed the door. . . .

Here is a fascinating story that takes you into the harem of an oriental potentate. You can always be sure of thrilling and glamorous entertainment from the inspired pen of Mr. Kline. This action-adventure novelette of Hamed the Dragoman and his love for a beautiful Chinese princess will be printed complete in the Summer Issue of ORIENTAL STORIES. You can not afford to miss this remarkable tale:

The Dragoman's Confession

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

—ALSO—

THE TWISTED THREE
By S. B. H. Hurst

A novelette of Burma, two mysterious murders, and the theft of the sacred Tooth of Buddha—a tale of Bugs Sinnat of the Secret Service.

THE BEND IN THE ROAD
By James W. Bennett

The Taoist monk put the fear of the Ten Courts of Hell in Waung, the coolie—a Chinese tale of rickshaw racing.

PIRATE WHELP
By Warren Hastings Miller

A complete book-length novel of Malaya, of a great sea battle, and of Siti Ishtar, the capricious Queen of Kota Sembilan. This gripping story offers you real entertainment.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF ALI BABA
By Allan Govan

What happened after the death of the forty thieves is entertainingly told in this story.

THE BLACK ADDER
By Dorothy Quick

A tale of India—Talfa, the dancing-girl, tries to thwart the burning passion of the Rajah.

Summer Issue ORIENTAL STORIES Out July 15

The Souk

(Continued from page 282)

"How can I get a good knowledge of the Orient, so that I may write stories for your magazine?" asks Morris Rosen, of New York City, in a letter to the Souk. "What books would you advise me to read to get this information?" To this we reply that the only satisfactory way to get adequate information about the Orient, and the accurate touches of local color that make the stories seem real, is to study the Orient at first hand. And mere tourist travel through the Orient, though it may acquaint a writer with the atmosphere of the East, is not enough. At best a Cook's Tour traveler sees only the things that are on the surface, and does not penetrate into the motives and secret life and thoughts of the Orient.

Glance for a moment at some of the authors whose work is making ORIENTAL STORIES the fine magazine that it undoubtedly is. Where did they get their knowledge of the East? S. B. H. Hurst, for instance, knows his India and adjoining countries, such as Burma and Afghanistan, by actual sojourn in those lands. As a young man he was a seaman in Burma and the Andaman Islands, and his acquaintance with native life is such as can only be obtained from actually living in the countries about which he writes, and speaking the languages of those countries. Geoffrey Vace also knows his India from long residence there. His grandfather pioneered the first railway in India: the Great India Peninsular Railway. James W. Bennett, whose stories of Tsang, the Chinese detective, you have so much enjoyed, was vice-consul in Shanghai and is the author of several novels of Chinese life. Solon K. Stewart was with the British army in the Mesopotamia campaign against the Turks. Paul Ernst gets his knowledge of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco from actually being on the ground. Warren Hastings Miller spends about half of each year in the Orient.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE SPRING ORIENTAL STORIES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why?----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Oriental Stories if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Souk, Oriental Stories, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Devil Drums

By LIEUTENANT E. W. CHAMBERLAIN

Morrison's impressive beard made his head an object to be coveted—a tale of the Malay archipelago

THE fever madness plucked at Morrison's brain with long, yellow fingers as he tossed and screamed in the hut beneath the Balang tree, and always Nuan, the little brown man who had carried him through the jungle, sat beside him and poulticed the burning wound in his shoulder and dribbled water through his parched lips and smoothed his forehead as tenderly as a mother could have done.

That is a bad land, that dark, unhealthful country which lies to the westward of Port Moresby beneath the equator. There is the fever and the madness and always the sound of the drums drifting down the wind which tells of little brown men who squat in front of the devil-doctor's hut and watch the heads turning, always turning in the pungent, blue smoke of the drying fires; little brown men with the oldness of centuries as they squat and dream while the heads turn slowly.

When the fever devils were bad Morrison would be back at St. Julien—in the great barrack room where they had brought him from the prison ship, four years ago it was now—chained to Gourand, the murderer, on one side, and Woo Lee, the opium pirate, on the other. Four years of worse than hell with brutal, white-faced guards who carried bone-crushing clubs and chained animals who screamed and rattled their chains in their uneasy sleep. Four years of hell in the sand pits where men went mad in the pitiless glare of the sun and ran gibbering at the white-faced men with clubs. There had been never a friend until Nuan had come, Nuan, the little brown man with his wrinkled, ageless face and his inscrutable, age-old eyes. Nuan had been good—he had been like a white man. He had stolen for Morrison food from the officers' kitchen, liquor now and then—the fiery liquor which warmed one's heart and dimmed the dreary future which stretched ahead; for death alone delivers one from St. Julien. More than once Nuan had taken punishment for Morrison.

It had been Nuan who had struck with the long heavy knife at the guard so that his bullet found a lodging-place in Morrison's shoulder instead of his heart on that blazing day when he too had seen that red shade drop across his eyes in the sand pit. Nuan had struck swiftly, silently, and the guard had dropped without a word, his head flopping loosely from a severed spine; and then Nuan had seized Morrison and pointed to the jungle where a white man might not follow, and Morrison had gone.

Other times there were softer, sweeter dreams and there would be Jeanne coming toward him in the cool dusk; Jeanne with her black eyes and her face like a white flower and the soft pressure of her hand in his as they strolled up the driveway to where the long windows were cheerful eyes of light in the big house. There had been lilacs underneath the windows—but it was a long time ago. He had just found Jeanne and then the trial and the prison ship and Jeanne married to the man who had sent him there,

It always ended that way and then the imps would be at his brain pounding with their brazen hammers and tearing with their white-hot hooks until Nuan, the little brown man, bathed them away with his tender touch.

It had been a nightmare, that trip, with Nuan hacking a passage through the tangle of creepers, hacking, always hacking with that razor-edged knife. Nuan was an expert with that knife, and after him stumbled Morrison, blinded with the fever and racked with madness born of the wound which throbbed in his shoulder and the memory of the sun in the sand pits. He lost all count of time. The days were endless torments and the nights were oblivion, with Nuan squatting before him brushing away the clouds of insects and gazing with dog-like devotion at the white man. A stout fellow, Nuan. The last two days he had carried Morrison and had brought him at last to the grass house at the edge of the Java Sea which was home to Nuan.

And now the fever raged and Nuan watched with bright eyes as he dribbled cool, healing juices into Morrison's mouth which brought the tiny spark of life back from the far places where it had wandered. All day long Nuan would sit cross-legged beside the white man and as he smoothed Morrison's brow he would touch the tangled beard beneath and smile contentedly.

Then at last the fever passed and Morrison could sit in the doorway and watch the sun sink into the Java Sea and the birds of paradise flash into the jungle, and finally the day came when he could stroll alone down to where the blue water lapped the sand. He was a new man as he sat in the sun and dreamed. The world was good after alll. St. Julien was behind, a bad memory to be forgotten as quickly as possible. When he was a little stronger he would go to where he could

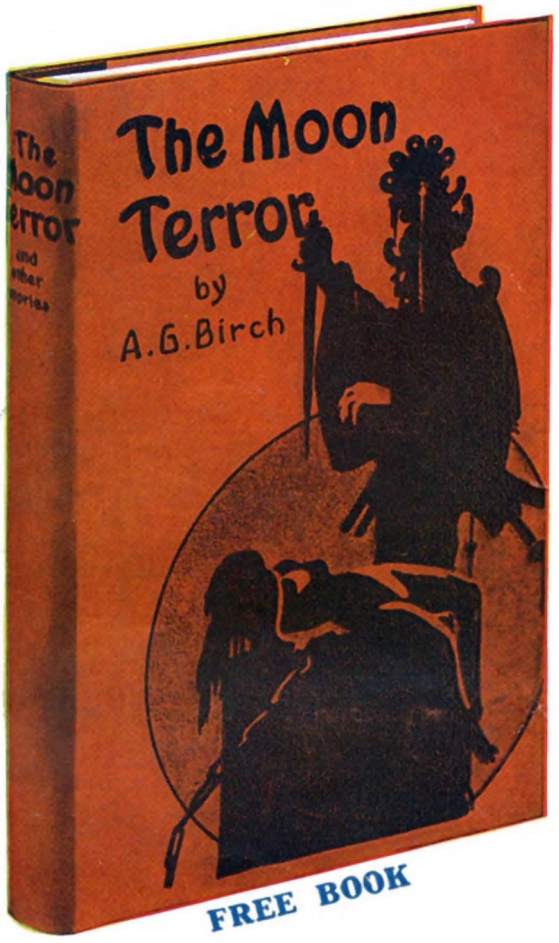
make a new start—to Sidney or Capetown—why, the whole world had been given back to him. He was young, only twenty-nine, and his whole life was before him. Nuan had given it to him and Nuan would go with him, of course. Decent little beggar, Nuan. He had saved Morrison's life more times than one. He would have to make it up to Nuan. He smiled as he pictured the little brown man in the attire of civilization. The world was good as he strolled back up the beach.

Before the hut a fire was burning, a fire of green, pungent wood, and the smoke curled lazily up in the still air. In front of the fire sat Nuan whetting the edge of that heavy knife which he knew how to use so well. Morrison smiled and Nuan grinned back at him, a happy, friendly grin. It was the grin of a man who has performed a difficult task and knows that he has done it well. He gave a final rub to the shining blade and slowly rose to his feet. Morrison started and then felt an icy current run through his veins as he read what was written in the passionless, age-old eyes of the little brown man.

That evening Nuan crooned happily to himself as he sat in front of the drying fire turning the head in the pungent smoke. Now and again he would stroke the silky beard with his fingers. Surely no one else had so fine a head, not even the fat old devil-doctor who lived by the spring under the Luangi tree.

missing page

A Ghostly Voice from the Ether Threatened the Lives of all Mankind



THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

Who Was This Dictator of Destiny?

YOU will want to know the answer to this question. Read "The Moon Terror," the most enthralling fantastic-mystery story of the age. And you can get this splendid book FREE.

Special Offer

For a limited time only, we offer this book to you without cost, with each subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months. Simply send $1.50, the regular six months' subscription price for WEIRD TALES, and this book is yours without further cost. You receive the magazine for six months and this book is sent to you free of charge.

Limited Supply

This offer may be withdrawn at any time, so we advise you to order now. *Remember, the supply of books is limited.* Send today!

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. S-21. Chicago, Ill.

WEIRD TALES, Dept. S-21,
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1.50. Send at once, postage prepaid, the book "The Moon Terror," and enter my subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months to begin with the October issue. It is understood this $1.50 is payment in full.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____