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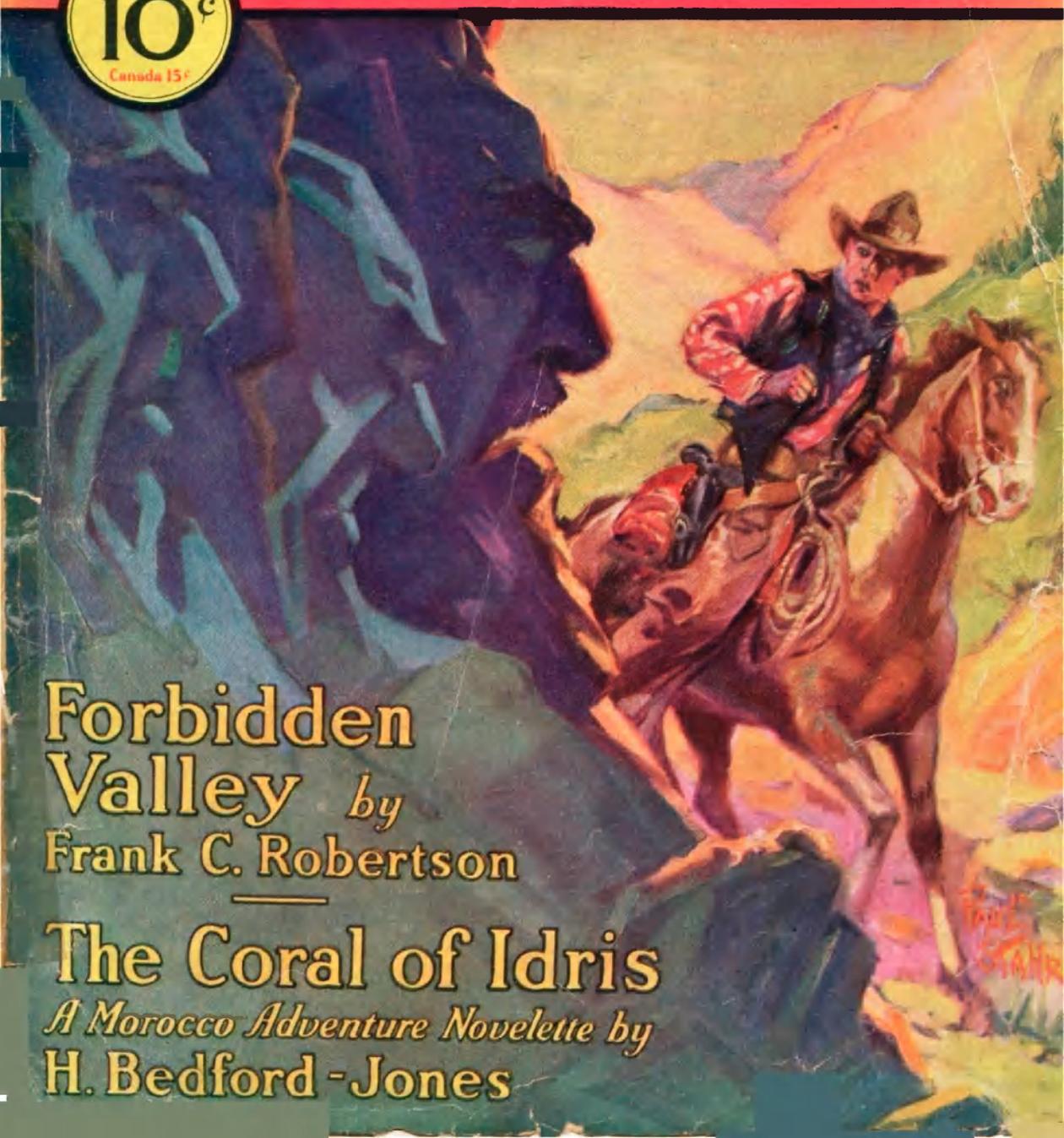


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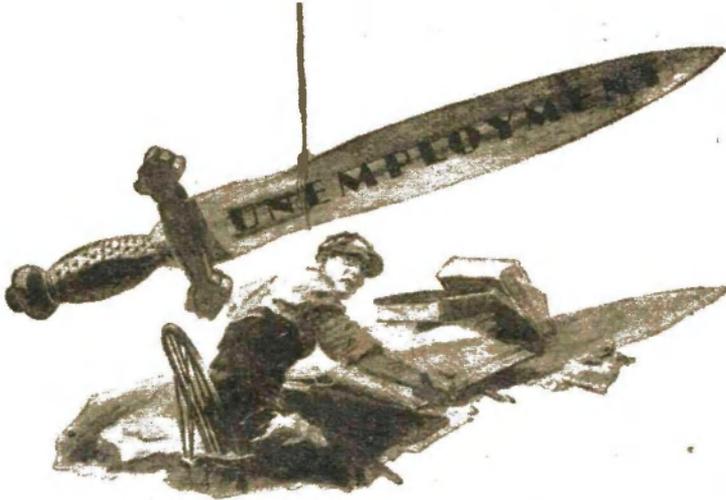
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VOLUME 220

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1931

NUMBER 6



The old man sprang at his tormentor

Forbidden Valley

All the rangeland knew the death sentence passed on any cowboy who ventured into the Valley of Old Men—but the mysterious young newcomer, Austin, would not listen

By FRANK C. ROBERTSON.

CHAPTER I.

OLD JUMBO.

“FO’ gosh sakes, heah comes ole Jumbo Alvord hisself! Fust time he’s been in town fo’ yeahs, I bet. If you wanta see some fun ask him to’ a job!”

In his astonishment at seeing the old man, Curly Lowe dropped the package he was tying on behind his saddle. Certainly the appearance of old Jumbo in Bennington was an event. But the cowboy he had addressed, though smilingly refusing to accept the invitation to ask the huge-framed old man for a

job, betrayed far more interest than amazement as he watched the progress of the old man down the street to the courthouse.

"So that's him," this second puncher breathed softly as the old man disappeared from sight.

"That's the old he-one," Curly nodded. "I reckon him an' them other old buzzards who live in Old Man Valley are jest freaks, an' their devilment is borned right into 'em."

A slight flush stole over the face of the other puncher, but Curly did not observe it. Neither did he notice how eagerly Austin had watched the grizzled face and upright body of the old man who had gone down the street.

Jumbo Alvord was over seventy and for years he had been a notorious character in the country. His great frame, that had once been filled out with near two hundred and fifty pounds of meat, was now gaunt; his bronzed cheeks were sunken and his iron-gray hair had thinned a bit, but still there was something of the majesty of an untamed old lion about him.

Austin had been on the range not more than two months, and though he had heard much of the strange "Valley of Old Men" over which Jumbo Alvord ruled with a despotic sway, this was the first time he had seen one of its denizens. His interest now was much greater than a stranger might be expected to have, but it was a deep, quiet interest which the haphazard Curly failed to notice.

"Mebbe there's been another funeral in Old Man Valley," Curly suggested. "I remember when the last old man died up there that they jist buried him an' the county officers here raised the devil with 'em fer not reportin'. I 'spect ole Jumbo has buried plenty like that in his time."

"Yuh mean men—he's killed?" Austin asked.

"Sho', why not? They been terrors up thar, them ole men. I got in thar myse'f once an' they sho' used a rifle to show me the way home," Curly said. "Good thing the ole devils are gittin' too stiff an' stove up to git around much any more."

"FUNNY thing about men livin' that way," Austin remarked.

"Whatever do yuh suppose is back of it all?"

"One man's guess is good as another's," Curly said. "Ole Jumbo he was said tuh be the first settler ever in here—him an' his brothers."

"How many brothers?" Austin asked quickly.

"Well, the only ones I know is ole Rube, an' ole Hank. Ole Bill he died off some years back, an' they may 've been others died off afore he did," Curly said. "As I was remarkin', they's lots o' stories concernin' 'em. Some say they got a rich mine thar they wanta keep everybody away from, but that yarn's about petered out, 'cause they do hire ole men occasionally, though none of 'em are ever known to quit till they die. Cattle an' ranchin' is their main business all right, but they must 'a' got their start road agentin' or somethin' like that to make 'em so scary."

"That old man didn't look scary."

"No, an' he ain't," Curly admitted. "He's tough as a pine knot. But if they ain't a ole gang o' outlaws how come 'em to keep ever'body outa their valley except a few ole men? Tell me that. Not only thar ain't been a woman in Old Man Valley that anybody kin remember, but they don't 'low a man under sixty to come thar if they kin help it."

"There was a woman once—" Austin said, and then checked himself abruptly.

"What was that?" Curly demanded suspiciously.

"Nothing; I was thinkin' of something else," Austin said hastily.

Curly might have pursued his questioning further had not his attention been distracted by two men dismounting in front of a saloon a few doors away. One was a tall, rather fine looking man with a brown beard trimmed to a Vandyke, but with ice-blue eyes that were cunning and acquisitive. The other was only about five foot two and looked even shorter because of a pair of grotesquely bowed legs. Both wore woolly chaps and flannel shirts open at the neck.

"There's Thorn Caldwell an' his eternal shadder, Banty Vogel," Curly remarked. "Can't say I think much o' them either. Caldwell bought the ole Riter outfit near two years ago an' seems to be all right in some ways, but I jist don't like him."

He would have entered into further details, but Austin was not greatly interested in Caldwell. For just then old Jumbo Alvord emerged from the courthouse, and Austin stared at him.

It was apparent that the old man was in a towering passion. Whoever he had interviewed inside the courthouse had certainly said or done something to ruffle his feathers. He was muttering angrily to himself as he strode along the board sidewalk toward the saloon. Suddenly he saw Caldwell and Vogel. The old man gave a snort that could be heard across the street. He left the sidewalk and strode directly up to the two men. Caldwell's face twisted into a sneer.

"One o' my boys says he seen you snoopin' in our valley the other day,"

the old man rasped. "Don't ever let us ketch yuh in there again."

"One of your ancient and decrepit fossils saw us in the old bums' valley? He must have mislaid his spectacles and thought a couple of trees were horsemen," Caldwell said with an insulting laugh.

"Nev' mind our age or our eyesight," the old man thundered. "We kin take care of ourselves. We been missin' a lotta stock lately, but we'll git 'em back, an' won't ask no damn sheriff tuh help us neither."

Caldwell's taunting manner changed abruptly to one of real or simulated rage—it seemed false to Austin. He advanced and shook a threatening finger in the face of the gaunt old man.

"Look here, you poisonous old spider: I've stood just enough of your insinuations," he said loudly. "You've buffaloeed this country for a good many years, but you don't look any more dangerous to me than a dyin' buzzard. One more crack out of you an' you'll be standing the other end up."

WITHOUT an instant's hesitation the old man sprang at his tormentor. In his prime he could doubtless have whipped Thorn Caldwell easily, though Caldwell was a big, well-set-up man. But now age had surely slowed up his movements as well as sapped much of his strength. Caldwell had no difficulty blocking his blow, and then the younger man, balancing himself on the balls of his feet, sent a crashing blow to the old man's jaw that dropped him in the dirt road.

Austin got to his feet protestingly. It was none of his business, but it did not look right to see an old man like this beaten up by a man in the prime of life.

"Let 'em go," Curly said, pulling

him back by the sleeve. "Serves the old critter right."

Austin subsided for a moment, but when the old man got up and was promptly knocked down again he could stand it no longer.

"Ain't that about enough o' that, stranger?" he demanded of Caldwell. "There's a limit to what an old man can stand."

"Keep out of this or you'll get some of the same medicine," the man gritted. He owned a deep, musical voice, yet one that was full of quiet menace.

"It's none o' my business—but don't hit the old man again," Austin said levelly.

"Watch him, Banty," Caldwell said curtly and turned his attention to old Alvord, who was again getting to his feet.

Austin saw a wicked grin upon the ugly face of the small, bow-legged cowboy. Banty Vogel had his hand upon his gun and was inviting trouble.

Again Jumbo Alvord rushed toward Caldwell. Again he was knocked down, and Caldwell turned to Austin with a nasty laugh. Then, as though purposely to challenge the cowboy, Caldwell kicked the old man twice in the ribs.

It was too much for Austin. Had it not been for the attitude of Banty Vogel he would have mixed with Caldwell without ceremony, but he sensed that if he did Vogel would likely shoot him before he could reach the other. He half turned away, as though nauseated by the sight, then whirled back with his six-gun in his hand. He caught them both off their guard. Banty Vogel made a belated start to draw, but desisted at a command from his boss.

"That's right," Austin approved. "I know yuh don't want him spoiled. Now git on yore horses, both o' you, an' beat it."

"You'll find out, young fellow, that you're monkeying with dynamite before you're through with this," Thorn Caldwell threatened as he backed toward his horse.

"I'm young, an' I can still learn," Austin said.

The two mounted their horses and turned back the way they had come. By that time Jumbo Alvord had got to his feet and was wiping the blood and dirt from his face with a trembly hand.

"I've seen the day I could whip a carload like him," he muttered bitterly, speaking to himself. He turned his faded but still hawk-like eyes hard upon Austin, and there was nothing of friendliness nor gratitude in them.

"Mebbe yuh think—" the old man began irately, and then paused abruptly. He peered at Austin as though he were a bit near-sighted, wiped his eyes and peered again. Austin withstood the look steadily even when the old man's gaze seemed trying to wither him.

"What's yore name?" old Jumbo asked gratingly.

"Alvord," Austin answered evenly.

A variety of expressions chased over the old man's face—surprise, conviction, disgust and anger. But not disbelief.

Jumbo Alvord stooped to pick up his hat. Then, without a backward glance he turned and strode rapidly away.

CHAPTER II.

INTO THE LION'S MOUTH.

"FELLER, I never had you picked fo' a gunfighter," Curly Lowe said with ready admiration. "Yo' sho' did han'le them two wallopers about right, but I kain't see that

it helped yore standin' in Old Man Valley by the way ole Jumbo bit at yuh. Fo' a minute it looked like the ole cuss thought he knowed yuh."

"Mebbe he did," Austin said laconically.

"Well, he sho' never pinned no medals on yuh fo' bravery, did he? I bet he don't even come to the funeral when Caldwell gits through with yuh," Curly opined.

"Yuh think Caldwell will be sore about what happened?"

"Sore? Boy, he'll be plumb festered by the time he gits home. I'm sho' glad it was you mingled with him that way 'stead o' me."

"He'll git over it," Austin said.

"'Fraid not, cowboy. Caldwell ain't that kind," Curly said seriously. "O' course yuh know I'll stay back o' yuh an' so'll the other boys o' the T. H., but I'd stay clear o' Caldwell an' his range if I was you. He's the only man that ever dared buck old Jumbo Alvord, an' their affair ain't over with. If I was you I'd let 'em kill each other off."

"It's good advice, but I got a kind of curiosity about that Valley of Old Men," Austin said. "I'd like to know that old codger better, an' I'm tempted to pay him a visit."

"It won't git yuh nothin', but I'll go with yuh," Curly offered.

"Thanks; but when I call on 'em I want to go alone," Austin refused.

"I wouldn't do it," Curly advised. "I'd ruther sleep all night in a ha'nted house with a congregation o' ghostuses than stay all night with all them ole men."

Just then the sheriff came striding down the walk.

"What's the matter o' him?" Curly demanded. "Exudin' dignity like a black washerwoman exudin' sweat."

The official stopped in front of them

and demanded pompously: "What's been the row here? Somebody just come in an' told me they seen a gun-play an' a fist fight."

"No harm done, sheriff. Both of 'em was single action," Curly spoke up. "Thorn Caldwell laid ole Jumbo Alvord down in the dust a few times with his fist, an' my pawdner checked up on him. Banty Vogel looked like he wanted to use his iron so Austin here had to draw his hardware to scatter 'em, but it was all in the cause o' peace."

"Stranger here, ain't you?" the sheriff frowned at young Austin.

"I ain't been here long," Austin admitted. "You wouldn't expect me to stand by an' see an old man like that beat up, would you?"

"It's the first time old Alvord got what was comin' to him," the sheriff growled. "Thorn Caldwell wouldn't 'a' bothered him if he'd behaved."

Curly Lowe, anxious to create a diversion, spoke up eagerly. "Say, sheriff, what brought ole Jumbo to town anyway?"

A triumphant, vindictive light came into the sheriff's eye. "He come beggin' me for help," he gloated. "Says he's losin' a lotta stock. Long as he was able to git about and steal other people's stuff he was all right. Set up there in that valley and lorded it over everybody. But when somebody gits after him he crawls down here and whines for help."

"What did yuh tell him, sheriff?" Curly queried.

"Told him to go home an' hire somebody young enough to straddle a horse to protect his stuff," Sheriff Harker replied.

"I reckon that's what done made him so hot under the collar," Curly grinned.

It struck Austin that this was a peculiar way the official had of doing his duty, but he had had enough trouble for one day and wisely held his tongue.

"I dunno but I ought to lock you up for a few days to learn you not to be so handy with that gun, but you bein' a stranger here I'll let it pass this time," the sheriff frowned at Austin.

"If arrestin' me is in yore system yuh'd just as well git it out now an' have it over with, because I'd do the same thing again," Austin retorted.

The sheriff glared at him for a moment. "I'll be watchin' you when yuh come to town again," he threatened, and walked away.

"**N**EVER thought yuh could git away with it," Curly said admiringly. "Harker is generally purty hard-boiled an' likes tuh throw punchers into jail jist fo' the fun of it."

Indeed, the curly-headed cow-puncher had a new and profound respect for the quiet, smooth-cheeked stranger who until that day had failed to impress any of the T. H. outfit for which he worked, and he was in great haste to get home and tell the other boys how Austin had run Thorn Caldwell and Banty Vogel out of town and defied the sheriff to his face.

Harker had never been popular with the cowboys, and Thorn Caldwell had quickly established himself as the big mogul of the range. In the two years that he had been in the country Caldwell had had half a dozen fights, and from each one he had emerged the victor; with the result that his was the dominant voice on the range. The foreman of the T. H. had been one of his victims.

Austin was to find his new rôle of

ranch hero a difficult one. He could see nothing heroic about what he had done. There had been no alternative. He hoped that he had heard the last of Thorn Caldwell and his bow-legged satellite. He did, however, give serious consideration to his foreman's advice that he be constantly on the alert.

"They're bad all the way through, even though Caldwell does pretend to be a respectable cowman," Mike Earnshaw told him.

"I'll be careful," Austin promised. Then he had a request to make.

"I want to git off for a few days, Mike. Will it be all right?"

"Well, the beef round-up will start next week, but I guess I can spare yuh until then," Mike answered. "Goin' any place in perticular?"

"No-o—but I figgered tuh look over this here Old Man Valley. I'm on the lookout fer a homestead."

"I wouldn't," Mike urged soberly. "I don't say there ain't some good homesteads left in there. It's a right sizable valley if it is kinda narrow, an' there might be some good places up in the hills that old Jumbo Alvord and his brothers use for range. Nobody knows just how much of it is deeded land. But the trouble them old devils would cause yuh would make it a total loss, to say nothin' o' the personal danger yuh'd be in. Better look somewhere else."

"I prob'ly will, but I'm curious to see that valley anyway," Austin said doggedly.

"Well, them ole pepper-boxes shore do resent strangers pryin' around in there, an' they been known to take a shot at people just peacefully passin' through. But to give you some sort of an excuse I'll send a note to old Jumbo which you can deliver, tellin' him when we mean to start roundin' up," Mike offered.

"Yuh know," he went on, "at the head of the valley is a saddle-like divide that we call Exchange Summit. After the round-ups we take any cattle we find belongin' to the old men an' deliver 'em there, an' generally have a bunch of other people's to turn over tuh us."

"That's leavin' a lot to other folks' honesty, ain't it?" Austin asked.

"I reckon it's about an even break. Personally, I don't figger the T. H. has ever lost a head to 'em, but some folks has done a lotta kickin'. Caldwell has been threatening to take a crew in there an' round-up anyway, but it'll spell trouble when he does," Mike said.

"I'll take the note," Austin said.

CHAPTER III.

THE RUNAWAY.

THE next day Austin started on his lay-off. It was about twelve miles from the T. H. ranch to Old Man Valley, and a mountain range had to be crossed to get there. The T. H. range extended to the divide known as Exchange Summit. Directly below the T. H. and meeting that range at a line drawn east and west from the summit was the T Bench outfit of Thorn Caldwell.

Thus far Austin's riding had been confined to his own range, but in order to explore Old Man Valley he would have to cross some of Caldwell's range if he followed the easiest route. Though recognizing the possibility of trouble if he met the man again he was not one to skulk along back trails to avoid a meeting.

He had covered a good many miles along the lower part of the range and had started to climb a devious trail that led through Caldwell's holdings to

Exchange Summit when he discerned some one in the trail ahead of him—on foot.

Austin was riding his own pet horse, Vinegar Bally, and the little bald-faced bay was feeling good from a prolonged rest. The eager, curious pricking of the horse's ears as he went around a bend was the only thing that warned Austin of the walker. A moment after he had caught a flashing glimpse of him the wayfarer darted into the bush.

Austin touched Vinegar Bally lightly with the spurs. It was extremely unusual for any one in that country to travel on foot, and the one ahead was assuredly too small to be wandering around on a mountain alone.

It took a swift but lively chase through the bush before Austin was able to overhaul the small figure he had seen.

Austin saw a small, tear-stained but defiant face. The boy, he judged, was about ten years old. He was dressed in old overalls and a checkered, faded shirt; but both garments though patched were neat and clean. Not so much could be said for the hat and shoes. The former was evidently some man's cast-off, and the hands that had mended the other garments had found the hard, coarse leather in the shoes too obstinate for repair work. His toes were upon the ground.

"Well, Bub, ain't you a long way from home?" Austin asked.

"I ain't never goin' home," the boy said stubbornly. "I'm runnin' away."

"Sho'! Whichever way yuh headin' for?" Austin asked. "My horse carries double. Mebbe I kin give you a lift."

"Yeah, I'll bet you'd take me back home," the boy said suspiciously.

He had read Austin's mind correctly. The puncher had his doubts about

the wisdom of small boys running away from home and hiding in the mountains. Austin scratched his chin with a finger of his buckskin glove.

"Where yuh from, buddie?" he asked.

"Don't yuh know me?" the boy retorted.

"Can't say I do."

"Then I reckon I don't need to tell," said the boy cunningly. "Yuh won't be able to take me back if yuh don't know where I belong."

"Mebbe I wouldn't want to," Austin said diplomatically. "Did yore folks mistreat yuh?"

"My dad treats me rotten. I wouldn't mind that so bad if he didn't let Banty Vogel beat up on me all the time," the lad said bitterly.

"Say, is yore dad's name Thorn Caldwell?" Austin demanded.

AS the boy realized that he had unwittingly betrayed himself, a flush of annoyance stole across his cheeks. "Yes, he is," he admitted sullenly.

"An' where was yuh goin'?" Austin asked kindly.

"Inta Old Man Valley, an' I don't know where from there," the boy said. "I figgered they wouldn't be so likely to look for me there."

"Listen, son, tell me just what they do to yuh down to yore place," Austin requested as he left the saddle and flung himself on the grass by the boy.

The boy dropped on his knees in the grass, and he seemed to lose some of his suspicion of the strange puncher. Reluctantly at first, and then heatedly as he called to mind his wrongs, he told a story of brutality and neglect that made Austin see red. Thorn Caldwell, it appeared, was everything that a parent should not be.

"But can't yore mother do anything?" Austin demanded.

"My mother's dead," the boy said. "Edith is good tuh me, but dad gives her more heck than he does me."

"Edith? Who's she?"

"Just — Edith," the boy said wearily.

"What's yore name, sonny?"

"Grant Caldwell."

"An' yuh was thinkin' o' askin' for shelter of the old men in Old Man Valley," Austin mused. "I reckon mebbe it wouldn't be a bad idee at that."

After listening to the boy's story and making due allowance for youthful exaggeration he could not bring himself to send the boy back to be mistreated. He had seen enough of Thorn Caldwell to believe that the boy's punishment would be dire if the man got his hands on him again. He knew, too, that he would get into trouble if he persisted in helping the boy run away. Yet he had resolved to do that very thing. Also, he wanted to try an experiment upon the old men in the secluded valley.

"Set yore foot in the stirrup, sonny, an' climb on behind me," Austin invited. "We're gonna see what Old Man Valley looks like."

An hour or so later they passed over Exchange Summit and down into what Austin had been told was the forbidden land. For some reason or other a gust of emotion swept over the cow-puncher. It was the first time he had ever beheld the valley with his own eyes, and yet everything he saw seemed familiar to him.

IT was a wonderfully beautiful little valley—the very cream of the whole country. The grass was longer and the timber taller than any he had yet seen. The cultivated part of the val-

ley was a thick, green carpet of growing hay. There was something vital about it all.

Yet there was an incongruous note somewhere; something askew about the picture — something to be felt rather than seen. It was the old men. Old men given up to decay, yet so persistent in their deterioration that they could keep out the rejuvenating influence of youth until everything in the valley withered and died as they were doing.

Was there nothing that could move them from that grim determination to keep out fresh, invigorating blood which had dominated them for years? If there was anything, Austin felt that he had it with him there on his horse. If they could resist the appeal of the timid, brown-eyed boy behind him for succor and assistance then they were hard-hearted indeed.

He stopped half a mile from the farm houses and lowered the boy to the ground.

"You go in there, Grant, an' tell yore story. Yo're dirty enough to look like yuh'd walked all the way from home, so yuh might just as well let 'em think so. Don't make any mention o' me. If they won't take yuh in just go right on down the road an' I'll pick yuh up. If they do, yuh just make yoreself at home, an' do what they want yuh to. I'll drop in to-morrow," he instructed.

"Why can't I go on with you now?" the boy asked.

"Because I ain't able to set up housekeepin'. I'll bet they take yuh in an' make yuh plumb welcome."

"I like you," Grant said. "I wish I could live with you."

It was hard for Austin to resist the boy's pleading, but he could not do otherwise. If the old men would take

him in for the night, then steps might be taken to get the boy out of his father's hands legally and give him a decent home.

Finally the boy went reluctantly along, and Austin watched his diffident approach to the door of the big old house that was the home of the old hermits. Almost immediately Austin began to have doubts as to the wisdom of his course. Suppose those old fellows were as bad as they were reputed to be and they harmed the boy? If they did—well, they would answer to him.

A more likely possibility was that old Jumbo Alvord might use the boy to get revenge upon Thorn Caldwell for his recent humiliation.

Austin waited until it grew dusk, but Grant did not reappear. He concluded that they were at least willing to entertain him for the night. He mounted Vinegar Bally and rode on toward the lower end of the valley, and here, in a quiet secluded gulch he made his meager camp for the night.

THERE had, indeed, been a lively discussion at the home of the old men when the boy made his timid appearance. Old Rube Alvord, bald-headed, but still robust, happened to be the one to meet Grant at the door. Old Rube was fat, and so he had escaped much of the hard labor of the ranch, but had been designated as housekeeper instead. Perhaps because of his occupation a few kindly traits were still left in his nature.

Still, the old man emitted a roar that made the small adventurer quake in his torn shoes.

"Where'd you come from? What d'ye want?" thundered old Rube.

"I—I'm hungry," stammered the boy. "I'm runnin' away from home."

"What home?" old Rube demanded gruffly.

"My home. My dad beats me." Grant was almost in tears.

"Well, yuh can't stay here," said the old man. The boy started to turn away, but old Rube called him back. "Here, youngster, I'll give ye a piece o' pie," he offered gruffly.

Grant was devouring the pie with the utmost zest when the third member of the Alvord trio of old men opened the door of the kitchen and came in. This was old Hank, youngest of the living brothers, but looking older than either of them. He was lank and dyspeptic, and any milk of human kindness that might once have been in his make-up had long since dried up.

"Who's that brat?" he snarled.

"Didn't ask him his name, but he's runnin' away from home an' I fed him," old Rube answered.

"Git outa here an' don't yuh dast stop runnin' till yo're outa this valley," old Hank cried, with a threatening gesture.

Grant stood his ground, with his pie in his hand, and looked at old Rube expectantly.

"Let him alone, Hank, till he gits done eatin'," Rube said placatingly. And when the pie was gone old Rube contrived other excuses to keep the boy around until dark. Then he could not be sent away.

CHAPTER IV.

WALKING PAPERS.

AUSTIN ALVORD had plenty to occupy his mind that night besides worrying over little Grant Caldwell; nevertheless he did worry, and with a guilty conscience. He should have taken the lad home, despite his

resistance, he told himself. He had thought only of the boy's own desires and of the brutality of his father. Now he was beginning to realize that boys of ten are sometimes gifted with very vivid imaginations, and in all probability Grant's story had been greatly exaggerated.

Then, too, there was another angle to the situation which had now occurred to him. Grant had spoken of his sister, and said that she was good to him, and suffered equally as much as he did from the persecutions of their father. What must be her thoughts when her little brother failed to come home? By being soft-hearted toward the boy he had probably caused this girl the most acute mental torture. She might even be blamed by Caldwell, and come in for a beating herself.

He tried to visualize this girl—Edith, Grant had said was her name. Grant was about ten, so the girl was probably somewhere between twelve and fourteen. He pictured her as dark like Grant, spindle-legged, and with long, unruly hair hanging down her back. Living alone with such men as Caldwell and Banty Vogel her existence would be a hard one. Regardless of possible trouble with Caldwell and his crew he resolved to go back there the next morning and ease her mind. First he would try to take the boy back with him, but if he could not do that he would at least tell the girl what had happened to him.

He had been in the country long enough to know that the secret of Old Man Valley was limited to its inhabitants—and probably to just three of them. The three old Alvords hired other old men to help with the work, but they were old fellows willing to serve their best and ask no questions for the assurance of a home in their

old age. It was not likely they would be taken into the confidence of the owners of the valley. Austin was reasonably sure that he himself was the only other living person who shared that secret.

It was a trivial enough thing to any average person, but not so to the Alvords with their tremendous capacity for emotion. They, or at least old Jumbo—John was his real name—could love and could hate as could no other men.

Austin had learned that from the lips of his dying mother, who had told him a year before of the strange relationship between himself and these old men. Into this section, years before, had come an unscrupulous capitalist named Caldwell, and with him was his pretty daughter. A romance sprang up between this girl and the youngest of the Alvord brothers. Both the girl's father and the man's brothers frowned upon the romance, for bad blood existed between the families.

Old man Caldwell was the aggressor in the feud, for he wanted the land owned by the Alvords. Then, when the young lovers got married, they were disowned by both families. They left the valley, and soon after a son was born to them. That son was Austin Alvord. It was not long afterward that Austin's father died, leaving them penniless.

"Your Uncle Jumbo loved your father," his mother told Austin, "and maybe you can make him like you. The brothers are getting old. Our son, I know, won't beg from them any more than we did, but you have a right to their money eventually. I want you to look them up, anyway."

As a direct result of that conversation Austin had one day appeared in the cow town of Bennington, some

twenty miles from Old Man Valley, and soon afterward had hired out to Mike Earnshaw, foreman of the T. H. outfit. He had worked on cattle ranches before, and so had no difficulty in holding down his job. He gave the simple name of A. Austin, having merely transposed his two names, and giving no hint of what the A. stood for.

He would have given much to know just what old Jumbo thought of him. Did he guess that Austin was his nephew? He had not asked when they met in Bennington; had not vouchsafed a comment. On the whole he was inclined to think that his uncle would never acknowledge him, but he could not leave until he had called upon him and the others in their stronghold.

He was aware, too, that in doing so he would be violating the rule of age that they had imposed. Would they escort him over the divide as they had other young men? Finding Grant Caldwell had added an unexpected complication.

HE was up soon after daylight, and without waiting to partake of the simple fare he had brought along he saddled Vinegar Bally and started for the valley ranch.

The Alvord ranch house stood beside a gushing, icy spring, and it was surrounded by ancient cottonwoods. There had once been a front yard and a picket fence around it. Now the fence had fallen into decay, and there was not even a trail from the front gate to the house.

The barns and corrals stood along a creek which bordered them on two sides, and ancient, mammoth cottonwoods stood grim guard over them also. The buildings were all of logs which were full of worm holes and

rotting slowly away. The impression of everything was of great age. Nothing seemed ever to have been renewed.

As Austin rode up he saw four or five old men moving slowly about the corrals. Two of them were milking cows. One, or possibly two, were tinkering at some haying machinery in an open machine shed. Another was cleaning out a stable. Still another was getting his bent old legs astride a horse.

There was something pitiful about their evident weakness; a sense of helplessness such as old Jumbo Alvord had shown against Thorn Caldwell.

Austin looked about for old Jumbo or the Caldwell boy, but saw nothing of either of them. Then one of the old men who was milking glanced up and saw him. For a moment Austin had a glimpse of a vacant, rather than startled old countenance, and then the old man put down his pail and hobbled quite rapidly toward the house.

Austin rode on up to the cow corral and looked over at the other milker, who was now aware of his presence, but continued to strip away at the cow. Little could be seen of this man's face except a pair of little blue eyes, and a mere dot of a pug nose, and a tobacco-stained mouth, on account of the mat of reddish whiskers, now turning to gray, which covered it. But Austin thought that he detected a twinkle in the bright little eyes.

"I wonder if I could git a bite of breakfast here," Austin said mildly.

"An' do ye now?" grinned the milker, the arrangement of his words rather than the bit of brogue attesting that he was a son of the old sod. "Whatever made ye think ye might git it?"

Austin's reply was cut short by the appearance of old Jumbo Alvord in the kitchen door. As he strode out toward

the corral he was followed closely by two other bareheaded old men who resembled him so much that Austin knew he was looking at two more of his uncles. A little behind them trailed Grant Caldwell.

There was a lowering frown on the face of old Jumbo as he inspected Austin. In the weak and watery eyes of the other two brothers Austin saw no spark of recognition, but there was nothing vague or uncertain in the glance of the older man.

"Good mornin'—gentlemen," Austin greeted.

The expected outburst did not materialize—just then.

Old Jumbo glared at him with cold hostility for a long moment; then he turned toward the others. "Scatter yoreselves," he said briefly. "An' take that brat back in the house with yuh."

The old man hooked his thumb in the direction of the wide open gate through which Austin had entered, and strode toward it. After a moment of hesitancy Austin turned his horse and followed. Old Jumbo stopped at the gate and rested his foot on a pole.

"I thought you'd be showin' up in here, young feller," he said sardonically. "Now there's two roads outa here. Take yore choice as to which one yuh use gittin' away."

CHAPTER V.

AN EASY HOLDUP.

AUSTIN looked down at his uncle with a pitying smile. The old man's brusqueness did not hurt him at all, since he really did not care whether they acknowledged him or not. He had come only because of his mother's request, and had not expected the outcome to be any different. If they

had driven away his father they certainly could not be expected to be any more lenient with him.

"What about the kid in there?" Austin asked, with a nod toward the house.

Old Jumbo glanced up with a look of cold suspicion. "You know anything about him?" he demanded.

"Yeah, I know who he is." Austin made mental note that Grant had apparently refrained from making any mention of him. The boy had the right stuff in him.

"Thorn Caldwell sent him in here to make trouble for us. That skunk has been tryin' every way to make us do somethin' to give him an excuse tuh break in here. I reckon yo're in with him, huh?" the old man sneered.

"If I had been in with him do yuh suppose I'd have interfered when he was beating you up the other day?" Austin asked.

An angry flush came over old Jumbo's leathery face. "I didn't ask fer none o' yore help," he ground out. "I'm capable o' fightin' my own battles."

"Another time I'll try not to interfere," Austin said coldly. The old man's pigheadedness was beginning to get on his nerves. "But I'll tell you one thing, old man: I butted in to save you any more punishment merely because you were a broken-down old man, and not because you are my uncle."

Now came the explosion. Old Jumbo's foot came off the pole and he made a leap toward Austin with the palpable intention of jerking him off his horse. But Vinegar Bally was out of the way before Austin had a chance to use the spurs.

"Broken-down!" the old man howled. "Git offen that horse, damn

yuh, an' I'll show yuh how broken down I be."

Austin kept Bally moving until the old man saw the uselessness of pursuit. "I don't care anything at all about you, old man," he said then, "but I brought that boy in here last night because I didn't have any place to take him. Now I'm goin' to take him home."

"An' I've decided that yuh won't," old Jumbo retorted. "Now I know yuh're in cahoots with Caldwell. It's a damn conspiracy to git this basin away from us, but it won't work. I know that damn mother o' yours is back o' it—"

"Stop!" Austin's voice sounded like the crack of a whip, and his hand flew to the handle of his gun. "Don't make me kill you, old man," he breathed. "If you say one word about my mother I will."

"Just as damn gallant about her as yore dad was, huh?" old Jumbo sneered.

"Just exactly," Austin said coldly.

"I've wondered why she didn't come back an' try to make us some trouble before," old Jumbo rasped. "Had to wait fer Thorn Caldwell to start it, I reckon."

"Say what you please about Caldwell, but leave my mother out of it," Austin warned again.

THINK I don't know all about this?" the old man raged. "I know who you are. No man could look as much like Jim Alvord an' not be his son—all except your eyes, an' they're the ones o' that—that—woman. Only one thing coulda brought yuh back here. She knew we were gittin' old, an' that we had no heirs. But she knew we would never will no property to any offspring o' hers, an'

so she fixed it up with that 'dopted brother o' hers tuh try tuh rob us before we died an' willed it tuh somebody else."

"Adopted brother? What are you talking about?" Austin demanded. He was about to add that his mother had no adopted brother, and then he recalled what she had said to him about her father having left his property to an adopted son. He remembered, too, that he did not even know the first name of this adopted son—but his mother's maiden name had been Caldwell!

His thoughts were chaotic, but out of them was coming an idea that Thorn Caldwell might be the man who had inherited the money that should have belonged to his mother—and to himself.

"Don't plead innocence with me," old Jumbo sneered. "That little gun-play in Bennington the other day was too thin. Caldwell or Vogel either one coulda drilled you if they'd wanted to. Thought yuh'd make me think yuh was enemies with 'em, an' then yuh'd come whinin' around in here as our poverty-stricken nephew so yuh could git to spy on us."

The unreasonableness of the old man was such that Austin was inclined to pity rather than anger. But if Thorn Caldwell was in truth his mother's adopted brother—and he was beginning to believe that he was—then there was some justification for the old man's suspicion, considering the biased condition of his mind.

"I don't know a thing about Caldwell, and neither do I care a great deal about you old men after the rotten way you treated my parents. But I am interested in that little boy that stayed with you last night an' I'm goin' to take him home."

"You brought him in here, but I'll take him out—when I git damn good an' ready," old Jumbo boomed. "He won't be harmed none, but he'll be took to the top of Exchange Summit an' Caldwell kin git him there like any other stray dogey. But Caldwell can't come in here after him, an' neither will I turn the kid over to anybody but Caldwell hisself."

Austin hesitated. He was beginning to think that all these old men were half mad. If old Jumbo carried out his purpose there was every reason to think there would be a clash when Caldwell came to claim the boy, and Grant might get hurt; might even be killed, for it was certain that Caldwell had little consideration for his son.

Austin wondered if he could take Grant away by force, but quickly gave up the idea. Every one of these old men was armed, and their eyes were not so dim that they couldn't see the sights on a gun. He knew that he would only be doing the boy harm by trying to interfere.

"Can I speak to Grant a minute?" he asked.

"You cannot. Furthermore, I want yuh to be on yore way, an' don't never enter this valley again. I don't want ever to lay eyes on yuh again, d'yuh understand?" old Jumbo rumbled.

Austin looked down at the old man with a gaze of unutterable contempt, but again pity was uppermost in his mind. Harsh and unrelenting though the old man pretended to be, his face was twisted into a grimace of pain.

Austin had a flash of deep understanding. This grim old man wanted him to stay; wanted him to take the place in his heart that had been vacant since Austin's father had departed, but an obdurate pride would not permit him to yield to his own better feel-

ings and impulses. He knew that the old man would not hesitate to shoot him if he refused to go, though it would tear his heart out by the roots to have to do it.

"**I**T'LL be no fault of mine if you ever have to see me again," Austin said quietly. "But there's one thing I want you to understand. You have no just cause for resentment against my mother. She loved my father, and they were happy together until he died. Then she fought the worst kind of poverty in order to bring me up halfway decent. Not once did she ever ask either you or her own father for a cent. Do you think I'd be cur enough to try to git your money when I've had an example like that?"

A peculiar, glazed look came over the old man's eyes for a minute or two. His great, gaunt form swayed uncertainly. Then he seemed to gather up his wandering thoughts like a six-horse skinner collecting his reins, and the implacable look spread again over his face.

"Git outa here," he ordered grimly.

"Poor, misguided old man," Austin thought as he urged Vinegar Bally through the gate and rode away. He looked back toward the house, hoping to catch a glimpse of Grant Caldwell, but all he saw was the faces of his two other uncles watching him through the windows.

He was heading back for Exchange Summit, but he was by no means certain what to do.

If he had sized Caldwell up correctly the man would come after the boy prepared for battle. More than likely if Grant was not at the divide the cowman would go down in the valley after him. Austin decided that his sole concern in the affair lay in seeing that no

harm came to the boy. He would wait on Exchange Summit until the transfer of the boy took place.

Exchange Summit was a saddle-like pass a good three thousand feet above the floor of the two valleys it divided. A rough wagon road wound up to it from both sides through quite heavy timber. On the very top, where the cattle were exchanged, it was perfectly bare save for a few scattering sage bushes. This little open space comprised about two acres, but surrounding it on all sides was thick timber.

The rider experienced little difficulty in finding a place close at hand in which to conceal his horse, and then he moved still closer to the open space to await developments.

It occurred to him that if Thorn Caldwell was his foster uncle then Grant would be his foster cousin. Of course there was no blood tie, but somehow he felt that it gave him a right to look after the lad.

Suddenly a horseman appeared in the clearing. Austin had been looking for one of the old men and had been watching their side of the summit the closest or he would have seen this rider from the other valley before. But that surprise was a mild one compared to the one he got a moment later when he saw that the new arrival was a girl.

She stopped her horse and looked around slowly. Austin had a chance to study her with no fear of detection. She was slender and quite tall, and a circle of golden curls showed beneath the brim of her high-crowned, cowboy hat. She wore a khaki shirt and blue denim overalls. Her small feet were incased in tiny riding boots that had seen much service. He could not, of course, see what color her eyes were, but he had a very strong feeling that

they were blue. The same sort of sixth sense also informed him that her complexion under the tan was creamy, and that in age she was eighteen or nineteen.

Failing to see what she was looking for, the girl got down gracefully and began to walk from one end of the clearing to the other in Z-shaped lines, crossing the road each time instead of paralleling it; all the time studying the ground intently.

Enlightenment suddenly flooded Austin's brain. She was looking for tracks in the dirt, and the ones she was looking for must be those of Grant Caldwell! Was it possible, he wondered, that this could be his sister? She was certainly different from what he had pictured her from Grant's few comments.

SUDDENLY the girl saw him and stopped, her eyes wide. Then with no indication of consternation she hurried toward him. He confirmed his guess as to her eyes, her complexion, and her age. And he added another point to his category of her qualities: she looked intelligent.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet some one," she said frankly and without the slightest trace of fear. "Have you seen anything of a small boy around here?"

"Yes, ma'am. Yuh mean Grant Caldwell?" he queried.

"Yes. I'm his sister. Where is he?" she asked eagerly.

"Down there in Old Man Valley," he told her casually. "An' he's perfectly safe."

A look of vast relief swept across the girl's strained face. "I—I've been hunting for him ever since daybreak. I wondered if he could have gone that way, but I saw no tracks."

"No; he didn't leave no tracks here

because he was ridin' behind me on my horse," Austin said.

For the first time a look of suspicion came into the girl's eyes. "Why did you do that? Why didn't you bring him home?" she demanded bluntly.

"I wish now I had, but to tell the truth, miss, the little devil talked me out of it," Austin said frankly.

A wisp of a smile crept over the girl's lips. "Is he all right? Are you sure?"

"I know he had food and a bed last night, an' he looked happy enough when I saw him this mornin'."

"But why don't they send him home?"

"I fancy they will. But they intend to make Caldwell—I beg your pardon, your father—come here to this divide an' git him. In fact they seem to entertain a suspicion that Grant was sent down there purposely so your father could have an excuse to go down there, or have the law on them or something. Anyway, I'm expecting one of those old men to come along any minute on the way to tell your—say, what's the matter? Are you ill, or something?" he broke off abruptly.

A startling change had come over the girl. Her cheeks had turned pale and she seemed to be shrinking as from an expected blow.

"Oh, if only they hadn't done that," the girl moaned. "I know father wants to have trouble with those old men, but that isn't what I'm worrying about. I did so want to find Grant and get him home before his father got back. He stayed in town last night. But now he'll know that Grant ran away—and he'll beat him."

"Yeah, Grant told me somethin' about them beatin's," Austin said dryly. "But you misunderstood me about one particular. They ain't sent word

to yore father yet—they just intend to.”

“But what difference does that make?” the girl queried.

“It may make a lot,” Austin said. “Come on, let’s git yore horse out of sight before the old fellow comes along.”

“But what do you intend to do?” the girl insisted.

—“Just stage a lil holdup,” he replied. “If it ’ll save that kid a lickin’ I’m goin’ to see that the old men don’t send no word to your dad.”

“I don’t see how—” protested the girl.

But Austin was already leading her horse into the timber. He had no more than got it out of sight when they heard a horse coming up the road from Old Man Valley. A couple of minutes later the old Irishman whom Austin had seen milking cows that morning appeared. The old range veteran was all unconscious of danger when Austin stepped from behind a bush by the side of the road, seized his bridle reins and menaced him with a gun.

“Keep your hands right there on the saddle horn, uncle, because we’re goin’ to have a talk,” Austin said.

CHAPTER VI.

FIVE GUNS TO ONE.

THE old man who had been so rudely stopped displayed a flash of temper by an angry oath and a quick grab toward his gun. Before his hand reached it, however, he comprehended the folly of resisting a man who already had him covered, and obediently brought his hand back to the saddle horn.

“Whut foolishness is this, ye young divil?” he demanded.

“No harm is goin’ to come to yuh, pop—as long as you forgit about that artillery you’re carryin’,” Austin said. “In fact I think we’d better take it away from yuh, an’ then yuh’ll be able to resist temptation. Will you step around on the other side and git it, Miss Caldwell?”

Quickly and deftly the girl did as he had bid. “Whut’s the reason fer this damnable outrage?” old Paddy demanded, but his tone fell a great deal short of anger, and Austin thought there was a bit of a twinkle in his eye.

“You were on your way to the T Bench ranch to tell Thorn Caldwell to come up here an’ git his son, wasn’t yuh?” Austin queried.

“Yis, if it’s any o’ yore business.”

“But it is,” Austin answered. “Miss Caldwell here has been out lookin’ for her brother. If she can git him home before her father knows he’s run away the kid won’t git licked. But if Caldwell finds out Grant has run away he’ll give him an awful lickin’. All we wanta do is keep Caldwell from knowin’ the boy run off.”

“An’ did yez think I had ’im hid in me vest pocket perchance?” Paddy asked sarcastically.

“No. But I do figger that old Jumbo Alvord will be bringin’ the boy up here about the time he figgers Caldwell will arrive. When he comes we intend to take Grant so Miss Caldwell can take him home,” Austin explained.

“An’ is that all?” old Paddy demanded sardonically. “Thin hivin have mercy on yer souls when yez try to hold him up like ye did me.”

Austin looked at the old Irishman curiously. “How long before they’ll be bringin’ Grant up here?” he asked.

“Oh, ’bout an hour,” Paddy replied.

“Then we’d just as well make our-

selves comfortable," Austin said. He led the way to where the horses were tethered.

"What d'ye aim ter do with me while yez are gittin' yerself killed?" Paddy asked mildly, as he settled himself on the ground.

"I did intend to tie you up to a tree until it was all over, but you're a good sport an' if you'll give your word not to interrupt an' make trouble we'll leave that part of it out."

"I'd jist as soon," Paddy said promptly. "In fact I'm not hankerin' fer old Jumbo to find out how easy I was took."

"Good. Then after we git the boy you'll be at liberty to ride on an' nobody will ever know you met with any mishap," Austin said.

"**W**E'D better till me the name o' yer folks so I can notify 'em," Paddy said grimly.

"Now, really, are those old men so bad?" Austin asked. "You yourself don't look or act so bloodthirsty."

"Young feller, I don't know much about 'em," Paddy replied. "I'm jist a newcomer, only been there six years. They're mighty queer, them old boys. Danged hard fer me to git used to 'em. Sometimes I wish I'd never gone in there, but when an' old timer like me who don't know nothin' but punchin' cows—an' not too much o' that—begins to git crippled up he'd be a plumb fool to turn down a sure provision fer his old age."

"But can't you leave?" Austin inquired.

"Leave? For why should I be leavin'? Where would I be goin'?"

"But the Alvords are gittin' old. What will happen to you other old men when they are dead?" Austin asked.

Old Paddy grinned. "The Alvords

have no kin, an' neither have we old 'uns. When they die, the last one of them, the propity is willed j'intly to all the ould min still on the ranch, but on condition that we 'low nobody but ither ould min to come in, an' when one av us dies one av the new ones takes our place. It becomes a perpetual home fer ould an' broken-down cow-punchers."

Austin was sobered and silent. He had led the old Irishman on more for amusement than anything else, but this was information that concerned him greatly. He was the lawful heir of the Alvords, but did he want to interfere with the arrangements they had made? They might be eccentric and mean, but there was surely something fine and laudable about this, even though it had had its origin in hatred. His gaze shifted to the girl.

She had not asked him his name, and he wondered if it would have any significance to her if she heard it. It was a peculiar situation. Here was he, a common cowpuncher, who, except for a twist of fate, might now have been the owner of one big cattle outfit, and the sole heir to another. And all unaware that they might be infringing upon any rights of his were these two people, the old man and the young girl, who each had expectations of inheriting some of this property.

She was obviously unhappy on account of her brother, and Grant had said that her own treatment was no better. Did Thorn Caldwell actually dare to beat her? Somehow, he resolved he must tame this man Caldwell.

It was rapidly approaching the time when Jumbo Alvord and his old men should arrive with the boy.

"You stay here with Paddy, Miss Caldwell," Austin directed. "I'll call you when it's all over."

"No," the girl flashed. "It's for my brother and I'm going with you. If there's going to be danger I'll share it."

"Yuh'd better both git some sense into yer heads an' let me go fer Caldwell," old Paddy advised paternally. "Jumbo won't hurt the kid."

"No; but Caldwell will," Austin said. "Will you promise not to butt into this if we leave you here alone?"

"I never seen nothin' I wanted to mix into less," the old man said. "But gimme my shootin' iron."

"Not till this is over," Edith declared positively.

"Then I'll jist have to wait." Paddy shrugged.

WHEN the two young people rode out of sight old Paddy was sitting on the log they had just vacated, puffing away at his pipe. It would have been possible for him to have got on his horse and sneaked away through the brush and given the old men a warning, but Austin had faith that he would keep his word.

"Miss Caldwell," Austin said earnestly, "it'll be a great favor to me if you'll stay out of sight. Those old men think I am spying upon them for your father. If they see us together that false impression will be confirmed. Please stay back and leave it to me."

"Why should they think that?" Edith demanded, but without waiting for an answer she continued. "If it might cause you trouble of course I'll stay behind. But if anything happens I'll take a hand. I—I hope nobody will get killed."

"They won't. I wouldn't harm one of those old men for anything," Austin said with real sincerity.

They both breathed a little faster as they heard horses coming up the road.

"Stay here," Austin said curtly, crowding the girl's horse behind a huge clump of brush. He rode on a few rods farther and waited for the old men to come up.

There were six old men in all, and they were riding two abreast. Grant Caldwell was on behind one of the old men in the middle rank. Old Jumbo, of course, was ahead, and by his side was his brother Hank.

Austin let them come out on the edge of the clearing, and then he rode out of the brush quietly. "Gentlemen!" he said, raising his right hand in an unconsciously graceful gesture.

Every old man sawed back on his bridle reins, and they turned to face this rude young intruder. Old Jumbo, Austin noticed, had let his hand drop to his gun.

"What're you doin' here?" old Jumbo rasped.

"This is neutral territory, isn't it?" Austin asked. "You can't accuse me of trespass here, can you?"

"No-o, but what d'ye want?" the old man snarled.

"The boy," Austin answered succinctly.

"Nobody'll git him but his own father," Jumbo gritted.

"His father ain't comin'," Austin said tersely. "I know that the old man you sent this mornin' can't find him."

"He don't git his kid till he does come, damn him," old Jumbo snarled. "He's gotta come to a show-down with us here an' now. We may be old, but that dam' outfit will find that we still kin fight."

"Nobody doubts that, but don't make the kid suffer," Austin pleaded. "It ain't his fault that he tried to run away because his dad was mean to him—"

"He's a dratted little liar. Yuh can't poke that down me," Jumbo Alvord cut in bitterly. "It was a dirty scheme to spy on us an' cause trouble."

"That's a lie," Grant Caldwell piped up shrilly.

Austin realized then the futility of trying to make the Alvords believe the truth.

"Be still, Grant," he ordered curtly. "Now, listen, uncle"—the word had slipped out unconsciously, but nobody seemed to notice it—"I mean to take this boy right here if I have to fight the whole bunch of you to do it. Do I git him or don't I?"

His hand streaked to his gun and it came out and up as though by magic.

But smooth and perfect as had been his draw it was but little faster than

that of three old men—his uncles. The inevitable stiffness of age alone had prevented them from being just as fast as he. The other old men reached for their guns, but two of them were much slower than the Alvords, and the other did not get his gun at all, for the reason that he found two small but determined hands grasping the handle of it ahead of him and he could not get the boy loose from it without knocking him off the horse.

Austin's face had gone pale, but he was conscious of intense excitement rather than fear. He had already lost the advantage his faster draw had given him, but not because he had lost his head. He deliberately held his fire, with his gun pointed at Hank Alvord—and five guns pointed at him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Novel House Moving

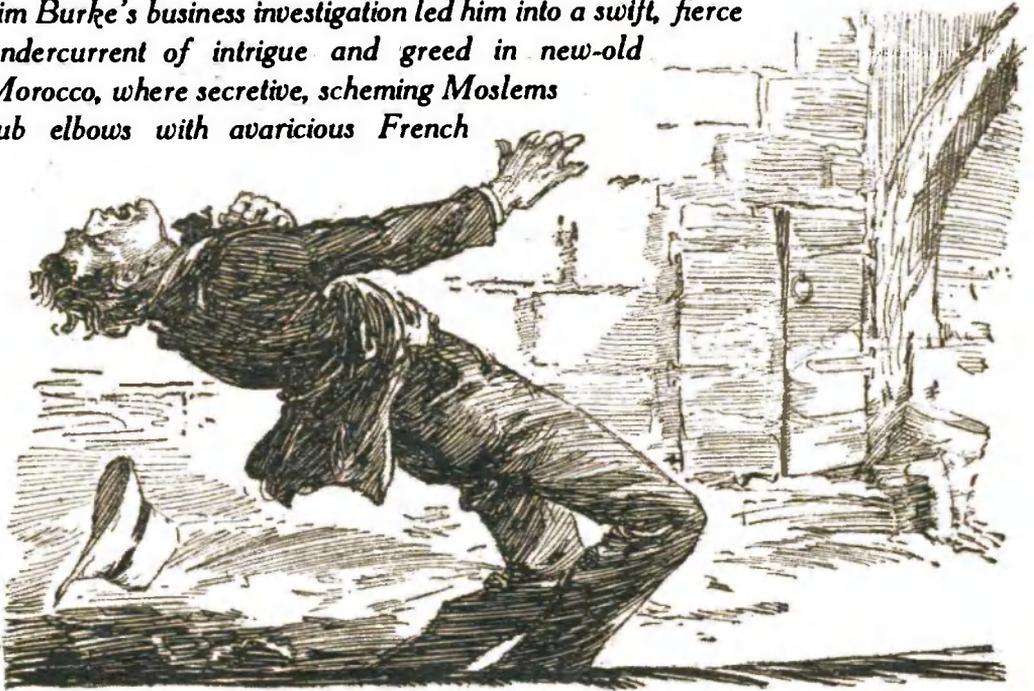
WHEN the owner of a bamboo house in the Philippines wishes to move his residence he hires a band, or at least two or three musicians, and summons his friends and neighbors. The time for moving is always set for a holiday or Sunday in order that it may not interfere with regular occupations. Bamboo houses are always built on stick-like uprights, and when the crowd has assembled long poles are thrust beneath it so as to protrude on either side. Beneath the poles stand the movers with brawny shoulders ready to receive the burden. Others work the uprights back and forth until first one side and then the other is eased down.

There is much shouting and bellowing of orders. Then the house owner or his wife runs about distributing preliminary drinks of gin from a square-faced bottle. The boss house mover gives a sharp command, "*Lakad na!*"—"Start walking!"—and the procession starts with the band tooting madly in the lead. Care is taken in maneuvering around corners, and sometimes the house rocks perilously and threatens to fall. Then flankers armed with pike poles called *tikins* jab the ridge pole and push the structure into place. More gin is issued, and the shouting grows louder. On arrival at the chosen place the house is lowered onto waiting uprights, and lashed fast with pliant strips of *bejuco* vine. The moving is over, and the movers rub their shoulders, wipe the sweat from their brows. They've done a neighbor a good turn and expect and receive—more gin.

C. A. Freeman.

The Coral of Idris

Jim Burke's business investigation led him into a swift, fierce undercurrent of intrigue and greed in new-old Morocco, where secretive, scheming Moslems rub elbows with avaricious French



By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Three Cat's-eyes," "The Lack of Nagore," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

MOROCCAN CABARET.

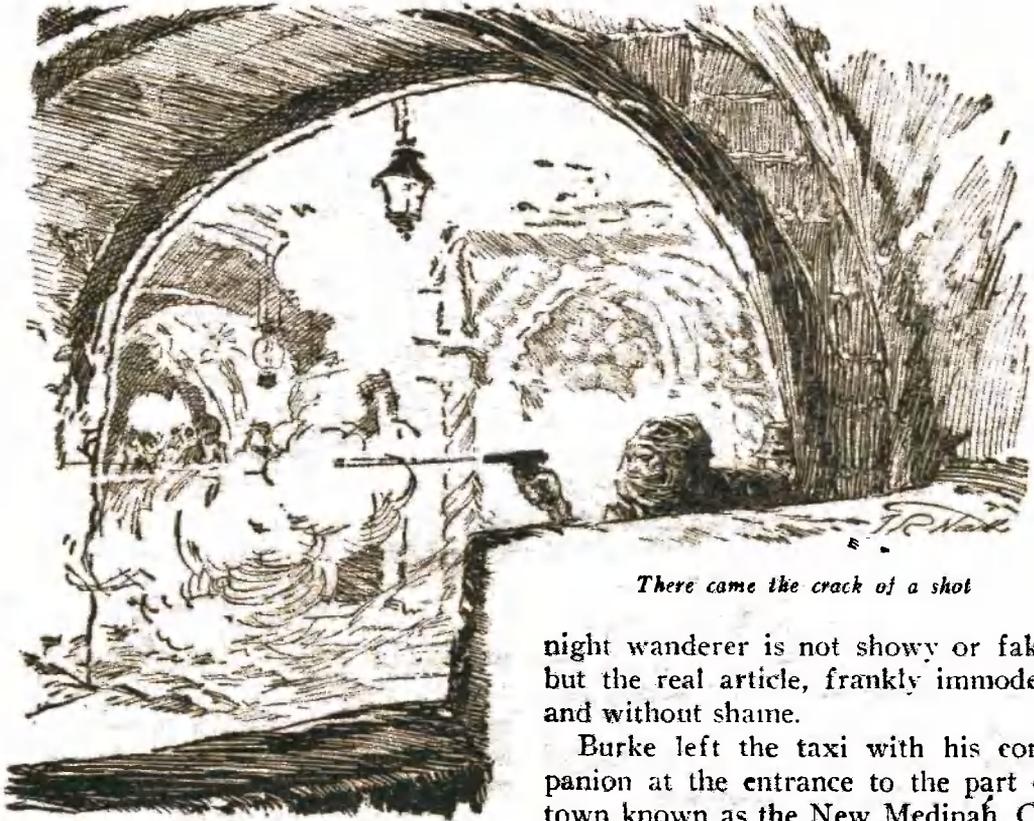
BURKE landed at Casablanca at two in the afternoon, from the Marseilles boat, and Merrit got him through the Sherifian customs and up to his apartment in the Avenue Kléber within half an hour. Merrit had the agency for the Goliath car in Morocco, and Detroit headquarters had cabled Burke in Paris to go down there and investigate.

Merrit was friendly enough. He was swarthy and looked capable. Going uptown in the taxicab, he looked

at Burke and made a straight proposition.

"I know why you're here, of course. Suppose we devote the afternoon and evening to getting settled and having a bit of fun? Then, in the morning, you can take over the office and the books, and go through everything."

"Fair enough," said Burke cheerfully. He was blond, wide-shouldered, and with warm blue eyes that could turn icy at times. He had a good idea that Merrit was crooked as a corkscrew and he would have some nasty work, but there was no need to be unpleasant. "We go to your quarters?"



There came the crack of a shot

"For to-night, if you don't mind. You'll be more comfortable there, and to-morrow you can either stay on, or get a room at the hotel. We have a brand new one here," Merrit smiled evenly. Evidently he expected trouble, and meant to meet it like a man, with a shrug and a laugh. "Thought I'd take you down to the low quarter of town to-night—the new Arab town built by the Sultan. Some Berber dancers are in from the hills, and you will see something you won't often find around the corner."

"Suits me," rejoined Burke.

Casablanca, with the exception of the native town inside its walls, is a new, up-to-date French colonial city, and possesses nothing romantic or appealing, except the costumes and uniforms. It gets little tourist business, and consequently what it offers the

night wanderer is not showy or fake, but the real article, frankly immodest and without shame.

Burke left the taxi with his companion at the entrance to the part of town known as the New Medina. Off to the left the ground fell sharply in a ravine, rising again to the palace; this hollow was a mass of roofs and adobes. The moon was high, flooding everything with silver. The signs on the high walls to which the two men turned gave clear indication that they were entering upon no Sunday school excursion. Besides affording living quarters, this section of the city was a place of amusement for soldiers and hillmen, seamen from the port, foreigners from the town, Arabs from the old town and the open country. Women were muffled and veiled, men wore voluminous garments, with *chechia* or turban, or both—all of them looking rather shopworn, and all of them wearing yellow slippers. Many wore ragged *jellabs* of old sacking.

"They distinctly lack romance," said Burke.

Merrit laughed, but his tone came with a touch of eagerness.

"You may find it ahead—who knows? We'll hit the carnival section pretty soon."

They were walking along the narrow sidewalks now. Here were vendors of fruit and candy, women without veils, plenty of electric lights, and music on every hand. Presently Burke found himself dipping into a big room, half underground, with one main entrance and several exits; a café, in effect, with a regular cabaret. Along one end, on a shoulder-high platform of solid beams, sat the Berber dancers, eight in number. Burke sidled into a place at a table beside Merrit, a long table, with a bench for seat, and met with a real surprise as two of the hillmen struck into a dance, drums and pipes making music.

This was real dancing—a sort of clog and tap, mixed with a real buck-and-wing. But there was no tap to it. Every touch of heel or toe was a rousing *wham!* It was hard to see why the platform did not come down or why they did not smash their ankles. This was a real mountain breakdown, and was kept up without a pause for full fifteen minutes, when the hat was passed.

BY this time, however, Burke's attention had been diverted to those around him. A glass of strong mint tea was placed before him, and as he sipped it he used his eyes. About him were Arabs, Berbers, French—both soldiers and civilians—and girls galore. Brown girls with wild eyes and silken garments, Berber girls with tribal tattoo marks on chin and cheeks, negroid girls with frizzled hair.

And one other girl.

Merrit had moved down to the end

of the bench, and was talking with two of the Arab girls there in his rapid, fluent French; he did not see the other at all. This one sat under an arch with two French officers. She was looking straight at Burke and smiling; a girl in a rose-pink dress, a drooping leghorn straw hat, and a white coral necklace at her throat. A French girl? He fancied not; impossible to say, however.

"Burke!" Merrit was leaning over toward him. "I'll be back in a minute; a chap outside wants to see me."

He departed, shouldering aside the girls. Burke fancied that some one had brought him a message. Looking again at the girl with the two officers, Burke caught one swift, startling look that jerked him upright. She glanced after Merrit, then looked directly at him with a most imperative gesture. The two officers were laughing with one of the Berbers and paid her no heed.

Burke frowned, half started up, then resumed his seat. He had heard about the women in Morocco—how they had flocked in from all countries to make things lively for the troops. Yet this girl was not one of the sort. He looked at her again, and met an impatient grimace. Then she was talking with her companions again, gayly, quite ignoring him.

One of the officers rose and left the place. The other, a burly man whose heavy black mustache partly concealed a purple scar at the right corner of his mouth, looked at Burke for a moment carelessly, then turned at a sharp outcry from outside. He leaped up and strode out.

Swift as a flash, the girl slipped from her seat and in three quick strides was leaning over the table before Burke, her voice low, tense, striking at him. And she spoke English.

"Get out of here quickly! Get him away!"

"Eh?" Burke was startled. "Who do you mean?"

"Merrit. Quickly! Don't you know he hasn't a chance in the world here? It may be too late even now. Get him away! Move!"

Burke read the urgent anger in her eyes, and rose.

"I don't know what it's all about, but I'll get him away," he responded. "With whom am I speaking, if you please?"

She broke out in a passion of anger and despair.

"Fool! To stand here talking that way—move! He must have been mad to come here! Quickly, tell him to call me later to-night at this address—in an hour. Off with you!"

Burke thrust into a pocket the card she handed him, and made his way out of the place. The hubbub had subsided: it had been a fight between two women, he gathered.

He stood out in the street, dimly lighted, and glanced around. At this instant, from some point not far away came the crack of a shot, then another. A burst of cries went up; in a moment the street was filled with rushing figures and wild voices.

Burke stepped back into the darkness beneath an arched entrance, waited there, listening. Presently two Frenchmen came past, stopped to light cigarettes; he caught the glint of uniforms. One of them spoke softly.

"Who was it? Why, that fool American, Merrit. They did for him. He was crazy to come here to-night—but there you are. We knew he'd get it sooner or later."

"There was another man with him," said the second voice. "Who?"

"Don't know. The Intelligence will

know, of course. It doesn't matter; he is not involved. Better get back, *mon ami*. This means we'll be ordered up to Merrit's apartment presently, to search for the yellow box. Baraud is set on having it. Come along!"

They disappeared. Burke remained motionless for a moment, stupefied by what he had just overheard; then, as a crowd surged past, he slipped in among the figures and made all haste to get out of the place.

Two minutes later he stepped into one of the waiting taxicabs, gave Merrit's address, and went whirling away at breakneck speed toward the French town.

WITH the speed of the cab, his thoughts fell into some coherence. What it all meant, what it was about, he had not the faintest idea; but if Merrit were really dead, then it was a form of suicide. He knew perfectly well that Merrit, on the morrow, had faced exposure and disgrace for embezzlement and forgery. Merrit had known it, too. And Merrit had apparently come here deliberately seeking death. Who had murdered him, and why?

"No use asking foolish questions," thought Burke, with a shrug. "The police or soldiers will be along soon enough. According to those French officers, I'm not under suspicion, and I'd better look up that yellow box myself and see what's in it. And where does the girl come in? She was a stunner!"

He paid off the taxicab and mounted to Merrit's apartment. Luckily, he knew all his papers were in order, and he had nothing to fear from any one.

Entering the apartment, he found it as they had left it, and went directly to Merrit's bedroom; here, if any-

where, would be the mysterious yellow box, and he would not be likely to have much time.

Glancing around, he went to the dresser and opened drawer after drawer, in vain. Burke paused, asked himself what he would do if he had something to hide—and went to the closet, where a number of empty grips were placed high on a shelf. With a grunt of satisfaction he felt a rattle in one, as he got it down. It was unlocked, and he opened it, to find a package wrapped in newspaper—a large, square package. He stripped it open and disclosed a square box of yellow Morocco leather, locked. It had no key.

For a moment, Burke hesitated. This was none of his business. It was very likely something illegal. The part of wisdom was to leave it alone. Yet Merrit had been murdered, and Burke meant to know why, and if possible to bring the killers to justice; curiosity, a slow anger, a sense of comradeship with the dead man, consumed him.

He replaced the grips, and took the yellow box into his own room. It fitted inside his toilet case, which he dumped out. Putting the leather box inside the toilet case, he snapped it shut again and left it on his dresser, shaving materials on top of it. As he finished, there came a long and authoritative ring at the bell, followed by a sharp knocking on the door of the apartment.

CHAPTER II.

A SINISTER FRENCHMAN.

WITH the police, whose six-pointed stars proclaimed them civil servants, were two officers, Frenchmen of a Sherifian regiment. One introduced himself to Burke as a

Captain Lamarte; he was very polite and cordial. When he had inspected Burke's papers, he nodded and returned them.

"Entirely in order, *m'sieu'*. We know you only arrived to-day. You were with *M'sieu'* Merrit when he was killed to-night?"

"I was at the *medinah* with him, yes. I heard the shots, some one rushed past saying that he had been killed. I did not know what to do, and came back here."

"Wisely. You know why he was in trouble?"

Burke explained why he had come here, and the officer nodded again.

"I am of the Intelligence, *m'sieu'*. Not only was *M'sieu'* Merrit in business trouble, but he had become involved with gamblers and worse. It is our duty to seal his rooms and inspect his belongings. May I suggest that you, being in no way involved, may find it more comfortable if you remove your own things to the hotel? We shall be glad to assist you."

This was, obviously, the thing to do, and Burke jumped at the chance.

Half an hour later he was installed at the Grand Hotel, with the comfortable knowledge that the gentlemen of the Intelligence had given his belongings a good search and had found nothing. The toilet case with its contents had been passed-up.

Once alone in his room—this spanking new hotel was well equipped with telephones—Burke went to the instrument, took the girl's card from his pocket, and looked at it. Upon the blank card was scribbled a name, Marie, and a telephone number. He called the number, and a woman's voice responded.

"I would like to speak to Mademoiselle Marie," said Burke.

"One moment, *m'sieu*—she has just returned," was the answer. Then, after a moment, he heard the crisp, English voice of the girl he had seen that evening.

"This is Miss Thornton. Well?"

"This is Mr. Burke speaking—the gentleman to whom you gave a card—"

"Oh!" Her voice leaped slightly in alarm. "Wait a minute—where are you?"

"Room four twelve, Grand Hotel."

"Mention no names," she said quickly. "However, I don't think you can do anything for me. I wanted our friend to call me up, as he has been keeping something for me—"

"Something yellow?" asked Burke.

"Oh! You know?"

"I have it here. Others have been looking for it. Is it yours?"

"I'll have to tell you—it's frightfully dangerous! You can't possibly keep it! Where can I see you now, to-night, at once? That thing must be taken to Fez immediately—"

Burke intervened quietly.

"Suppose you meet me at one of the cafés near here? It's still pretty early. Name the one, and I'll be there in ten or fifteen minutes."

"The Marmontel, then. It's on the Place de France, close by you. Get an inside table if you arrive before me—not out in front, remember!"

"Very good, miss," rejoined Burke with a laugh, and hung up.

"SO!" He turned and regarded the yellow leather box. "This thing must go to Fez to-night, must it? And dangerous. Hm! And Merit was in with gamblers and a bad crowd generally. And if it hadn't been for Jim Burke, the police or somebody would have had their paws on this long ere now. Hm! Taken all in all, looks

to me like Jimmy Burke had better know what he's getting tangled into. If I'm any judge, that girl was straight as a die. But just the same, let's play safe."

He picked up the box, perceived that the lock was some small but ingenious mechanism that probably held it fast all around by steel bars in the French fashion, and without hesitation dropped it on the floor and stamped hard.

The top of the box was crushed in.

Burke picked it up, tore aside the wood and leather, and revealed a mass of tightly packed pink cotton. When he had removed this, he brought to sight something that drew a low whistle from him as he eyed it.

It was a necklace made from large disks of red coral. Each disk was carved intricately and mounted in gold, upon which were Arabic characters graven, and between each disk was a little ball of gold, likewise engraved. The pendant, however, was what drew Burke's eyes—for it was an emerald full two inches long, with one flat surface upon which was deeply cut the word "Allah," a word so common in Arabic that even Burke recognized it.

Then he perceived that this must be no necklace, but a Moslem rosary, each bead representing one of the hundred "ineffable names" of God. It was enormously long, and was very obviously of great age and value, even apart from the huge emerald. Opening one of his long windows, Burke switched off the lights in the room, flung the fragments of the box from the window, careless where they fell, shoved the rosary into his pocket, and strode out.

"What counts, evidently, is not the container but the thing contained," he reflected cheerfully, as he sought the

street and the big Place de France just around the corner, the center of life in Casablanca, with the walls of the older Arab town just opposite. "So we'll dispense with the box, which doesn't matter, and thereby get rid of danger also."

In this eminently sensible frame of mind, he came to the Café Marmontel, one of the large cafés half bordering the square, and walking in, got a table inside, where there were few people. The outer terrace was well filled, as always, with French, officers and Arabs, but a private conversation might well be carried on here without eavesdropping.

BURKE had no more than ordered a Rossi, when Marie Thornton entered, now wearing a warm evening cloak over her shoulders, and he held a chair for her. Then she accepted a cigarette, and as the match went out they looked for an instant into each other's eyes. Burke read in the cool gray gaze that here was a girl straight as a die indeed, and unafraid.

"Come clean," he said quietly. "If we're going to do business, as I think we are, I want to be in on the whole thing. You're a friend of Merrit?"

She nodded slightly. "I knew him back home, yes. Hadn't seen him for years, until I came here a few months ago. I'm putting in a year here, painting."

"Oh! You're an artist?"

"Trying to be one. Before I do any confidential talking, however," and her cool eyes probed him, "suppose you tell me who you are and why."

Burke laughed. Laughter became him, lightening his rather harsh features and warming his blue eyes wondrously. He obeyed her behest, tell-

ing her frankly about Merrit's trouble, and she appeared little surprised.

"And you think he took you there to-night—on purpose?" she said, when Burke had told her everything.

"Yes," he rejoined. "You knew that he was in a bad crowd?"

"He admitted it," she said. "Some of the Arabs are a bad lot—the younger generation, with money, no morals, and some position. Plenty like that! I think they got him in their grip, and when he saw a chance to break clear, he took it; and failed."

The Rossis arrived. When the waiter had departed, Burke spurted water into the glasses and sipped the carmine drink.

"Come clean," he repeated laconically. "Where does Baraud come into it?"

He thought a swift pallor flashed across her face.

"Baraud? The man with me to-night? You know him?"

"Not at all. He was the chap with the scarred cheek, eh? An ugly brute. And he's after the rosary is he?"

She leaned forward, gripping the table edge, staring at him.

"Are you—have you lied to me?" she demanded. Anger flashed in her eyes. "You said you knew nothing—"

"Come clean," said Burke. "You first. Then I'll reciprocate."

With an effort, she relaxed and assented.

"All right. Baraud has been in the army here, with the Intelligence. He's made money, and has resigned. To-night was his last night in uniform. I'm not fond of him by any means, but he's a gentleman, is very agreeable, and has influence. Also, he's intimate with many of the Arab chiefs and great men. Merrit has lost heavily to him at various kinds of gambling."

She paused, sipped her drink, and then resumed.

"Well, a week ago poor Merrit bet Baraud that he could steal the rosary of Idris from the tomb of Idris at Fez. Idris founded that city a thousand years ago and is buried there in the chief mosque. No Christian can even enter a mosque here, you know; the French uphold that law very strictly. This is supposed to be the rosary used by Idris, who is a saint among the Moslems, and was lavishly mounted in gold and jewels by one of the old Sultans. No white man has ever seen it, even, unless he became a Moslem. Merrit bet Baraud a hundred thousand francs that he could get away with it."

Burke whistled. Marie Thornton leaned back in her chair and nodded.

"He did. Presumably one of his disreputable Arab friends, Hussein, helped him do it. They figured that a huge reward would be offered; perhaps Hussein stole it and Merrit took it over. I don't know. Anyway, Hussein was found dead two days later, a knife in his back. They suspected Merrit was in on the robbery, but probably were not sure. Baraud, of course, told the natives nothing about the bet—"

"Are you sure of that?" interjected Burke.

"No; but he wouldn't do it, anyway," she returned with some indignation. "However, they suspected. A huge fuss was made about it. Baraud saw the necklace to-day, and paid Merrit the amount of the bet, or at least told me he had paid him. The rosary was in a yellow box."

"It's in my pocket now. The box was too dangerous, too easily recognized," said Burke, and while her startled eyes dwelt upon him, told of smashing the box. Further, he told of

the scrap of conversation he had caught about Baraud. "Looks to me like your friend Baraud wants that necklace. You think he's straight, do you?"

He was astonished by the sudden pallor that came into her face.

"Oh!" she said in a low voice. "Oh! Then—then that explains it—"

"Explains what?" said Burke.

"A—a good deal." For some reason she seemed badly shaken. "I—I never mistook Baraud for any angel, certainly. But I didn't think—"

SHE fell silent for a moment, then looked up and met Burke's gaze.

"Something happened there to-night, and this explains it," she said in a low voice. "Would you—would you be very shocked—if I were to think that perhaps Merrit had not been killed by the natives, after all?"

Burke's brows went up. "So! No, after sizing up your friend Baraud, I'd not be surprised at anything he might do. He looks to me like a bad egg. You think he might have had some one do the trick, do you?"

"I heard some one say, back there, that a Frenchman had done the shooting," she answered. "No one saw just who it was. Of course, there's no evidence—but—"

"But we don't need any more, just now," added Burke, with a short nod. "Want to see the rosary? There's a whopping big emerald on it—the thing must be worth a small fortune."

He reached for his pocket, but she stopped him swiftly.

"No, no—are you mad? Not here, in public! If it were suspected that you had it, the natives would be after you in an hour's time! Valuable? It's worth a fortune, to the Arabs! And if it's as I think, if Baraud really wants to get hold of it—"

Burke grinned. "Then his secret service work would have him all set to get it, eh? I see. Well, I've got the thing, and what am I to do with it? Turn it over to the police?"

"Not unless you're anxious to see Baraud get away with it," she rejoined. A glow of color grew in her face, and her eyes hardened a little. "And that he shan't do! Poor Tom Merrit—I don't hold any brief for him, and I certainly don't excuse him, but I hate to think of his having been murdered. And if Baraud really had it done or was behind it—"

"Then he has something coming to him," said Burke quietly. "I tell you what I'll do, Miss Thornton. I'll put this rosary into the proper hands—Arab hands—and bargain. I'll turn it over, on condition that Merrit's murderer is brought to book. How'll that be?"

"Excellent!" she exclaimed quickly. Burke nodded.

"Right. Now, young lady, let's have a clean breast of it, and excuse me if I'm too personal. Were you and Merrit in love?"

"Not in the least," she returned, with a slight smile. "I'm not in love at all. My whole interest in him was because we were friends years ago, back home."

"Good; no entanglements, then. You know this country better than I do. You said that the thing must go back to Fez at once. What would you suggest?"

"Well, I intended to take it back there myself and turn it over to a man I know," she responded. "It would have to be very carefully done, of course. But since you have it, and since this other matter—about Baraud—has come up, perhaps you'd better do it."

"Why not do it together?" asked Burke. "There's no great rush about my business here; I can untangle Merrit's affairs later. How far is Fez from here, by car?"

"We could make it to-morrow, easily." Her gray eyes lighted up. "Good! I'll take you up on it, Mr. Burke! Have you a car?"

"Three or four, unless Merrit's burned 'em up!" Burke laughed. "I'll have a Goliath eight ready any time you say, in the morning."

"Here at your hotel, then, at eight." She rose. "We'd better not be seen together—let me leave alone, please. You've no idea how everybody in Morocco is a spy! And above all, be careful about letting a soul see that rosary. It's a safe bet that every native is on the lookout for it, and about half the French. You will?"

"Naturally," said Burke, rising. "Run along then, and all good luck! Until to-morrow."

With a wave of the hand, she departed. Burke remained a few moments longer, finished his drink, and then sauntered back to his hotel. He was rather acutely conscious of his sagging coat pocket. He was still more conscious of it when he reached his own room, and opening the door, saw Captain Baraud, still in uniform, sitting there awaiting him.

CHAPTER III.

CLASH OF WILLS.

CAPTAIN BARAUD bowed and introduced himself, cordially enough.

"I must apologize for being in your room," he said in fluent English. "I am, however, of the Intelligence, and have a few questions to ask in regard

to Mr. Merrit—a mere formality, of course. If it will not inconvenience you—”

“Of course not. Make yourself at home,” said Burke dryly. He did not need to be told that the Frenchman had made a thorough search of his room. As he dropped into a chair and met the probing dark eyes, he felt a flash of antagonism, but repressed it. Nothing had been found in Merrit’s apartment, so the man had come here direct.

“By whom was poor Merrit killed?” asked Burke abruptly.

“By a soldier, a Frenchman,” said Baraud. “I must tell you that Mr. Merrit was under suspicion of smuggling or handling narcotics. He was stopped for search, and resisted. He even drew a pistol, upon which he was shot and killed. A large amount of morphia was found upon his body, I might say.”

Burke nodded. Very prettily covered up; the murder had been well planned. He did not believe for a moment that Merrit, whatever his faults, had been a narcotic peddler, but it would be rank folly to say so now.

“I’m at your service, Captain Baraud,” he answered. “I imagine that you know all about me?”

“We are well informed, yes. I should say that you are in no way implicated in this whole affair, fortunately for you. I merely desire to ask a few questions.”

Burke relaxed and took a cigarette. “Shoot,” he said briefly.

“We are looking for a further supply of morphia, believed to have been kept in a box of yellow leather,” said Baraud. “Did Merrit mention such a box, or did you see it, while you were in his apartment?”

The American shook his head.

“Sorry I can’t help you there,” he rejoined. “I was at the apartment only for a couple of hours this afternoon; then Merrit took me for a drive, we had dinner, and went out to the *medinah*. No, he never mentioned such a box, and I don’t recall having seen the thing lying around. If he were in the dope business, he wouldn’t want me to know it, naturally.”

“Of course,” agreed the Frenchman smoothly. He was studying Burke as they talked. “Still, it is rather odd that the very box we are seeking was found half an hour ago, crushed and broken, out here in the street—almost below this window.”

“Yes, that is rather odd,” agreed Burke amiably. “By the way, did you say your name was Baraud? I believe Merrit was speaking of you this afternoon. You were friends?”

Baraud’s black eyes narrowed slightly.

“Yes, in a way. He did not know that I was handling the investigation of his case?”

“Apparently not,” rejoined the American. “He said something about having won a large bet from you—I believe he was counting upon the money to help him out when I came to look over his accounts and books tomorrow.”

The black brows shot up. “Yes? But I paid him the amount of the bet only this morning. A hundred thousand francs, quite a sum! In cash, also.”

Burke knew the other was lying. Merrit had cashed a check that evening at the restaurant where they had dined. He looked at Baraud with a slight smile, but changed the subject.

“And what other information can I give you, captain?”

“None, at the present moment. You will be here for some days, no doubt?”

"For several weeks, I imagine. I'm going to Fez in the morning, to check up matters with the local agency there, and shall be back here in a few days."

BARAUD nodded carelessly and looked at the table by the wall. Upon it was heaped the pink cotton that had come from the yellow box.

"That looks like the stuff used by jewelers," he observed significantly.

"It is," said Burke. "Pretty, isn't it? By the way, I think Merrit said that you were out of the Intelligence Service now, didn't he? Or was I mistaken?"

In these words, the Frenchman sensed the antagonist who confronted him. The two men exchanged a level look, Burke smiling, Baraud keen-eyed and angry. It was a moment of sharp awakening for Baraud, who now perceived that this American had been quietly having fun with him all the while, had pierced his lies, probably knew a good deal more than he let on.

"Let me tell you something," said Baraud slowly. "Morocco can be either a friendly or a very dangerous country, Mr. Burke. It is as you choose to make it."

In a flash, Burke took his decision. Already the fat was in the fire—that accursed pink cotton had exposed all.

"Very well," he rejoined, his eyes suddenly icy cold. "And let me tell you something, my dear captain. I know very well that you are not in the Intelligence Service; I know that you are not in charge of any case against Merrit; I know that he had nothing to do with any narcotic handling; I know that you did not pay him a hundred thousand francs to-day; and what is more, I know who was behind his murder and why he was murdered."

Baraud's dark features turned darker, and the scar half-hidden by his mustache became an angry, flaming purple. Yet he kept himself well in hand.

"It seems to me that you are a little out of your head," he observed coldly. "Am I to construe your tone as a threat?"

"As you please, and be damned to you," said Burke, and smiled a little.

"Do I make myself clear?"

"You do." The Frenchman bowed slightly, mockingly. "*Au revoir!* I shall make myself clear to you, in turn—before very long."

He departed without more words.

Burke smiled, and undressed in a bad humor. He was disappointed. He had hoped that his abrupt defiance would throw the Frenchman into a temper, get some impulsive admission out of him; but the other had been far too clever. It was that confounded pink cotton that had given the game away! Still, Baraud had undoubtedly searched everything in the room with great care, and would not be sure about the rosary. Burke got out the relic and looked it over.

"You may be sacred, and worth a pile of money, but you're blamed dangerous, all right!" he addressed the string of coral. "I expect there'll be visitors to-night, and I need my sleep—so we'll just take care of you right now."

He filled his wash-basin, scrubbed his hands thoroughly, put the rosary plump into the soapy, dirty water—and left it there. Ten minutes later he was sound asleep, without even troubling to lock his door. He was dead tired, for the day had been long and eventful; not even the ray of an electric torch, falling on his face two hours later, awakened him.

He had left an early call, and sent the native boy who summoned him with a note to the Goliath garage, to have an eight sent up for his use. Then he started dressing, and discovered immediately that he had entertained callers unawares during the night. Going to the wash bowl, he drew out the rosary, chuckled, and dried it off carefully before pocketing it.

"Outsmarted 'em for once, anyhow!" he reflected cheerfully, and went down to breakfast.

THE car arrived at seven thirty, and he arranged with the garage man to have Merrit's remaining stock taken care of until his return. He had packed a few things and had them fetched down, and was putting them in the car when a taxicab drew up and Marie Thornton alighted, bag in hand. She came directly to him, and he saw a glow of excitement in her face.

"Can we get off quickly—this very minute?" she demanded breathlessly, without so much as a "good morning."

"Hop in," said Burke, and took his place under the wheel. With the slam of her door, the car was off. "What's the rush? Trouble? Better direct me, first."

Across the square, and in five minutes they were on the Rabat Highway, which runs along the coast to the capital.

"No trouble," she explained, "but I was followed here. Something's happened. What?"

"Nothing much," said Burke amiably, "except that you and I have met. Oh, yes—Baraud paid me a visit last night. He got nasty, and so did I, and he departed. He lied like a house afire, too. There isn't a bit of doubt that he did in poor Merrit."

Once out on the highway, with no

speed laws to hold him back, he opened up the eight and an excited laugh broke from the girl.

"Splendid! And you really had it out with him? He's a bad man to have for an enemy."

"And a worse for friend," said Burke. "I'm not worrying, so cheer up. If you see any one following us, let me know."

She laughed again. "Small chance of that! They'll be ahead of us at Rabat, though."

"Nonsense!" scoffed Burke. "Look here, young lady, be sensible! This is broad daylight and the Twentieth Century. Baraud isn't going to have us pinched, believe me. That bird doesn't drag in any police—he's too wise! He might try banditry, I'll grant you. Let him! If we're going to Fez, can't we pass up Rabat?"

"We'd have to stop at the hotel in Rabat to get some lunch," she rejoined dubiously. "But it's only a two-hour drive with this car. Hm! We might stop at roadside hot-dog stands, or what passes for them here, and then skim the outskirts in Rabat and over to the Meknez and Fez road. But I'm afraid he'll be ahead of us, or will have telephoned."

"Never be afraid," said Burke. "It doesn't pay. By the way, here's the rosary, in case you'd like to look it over."

While she exclaimed in delight and wonder over the coral, the big eight purred on, past other cars, past busses loaded from running-boards to roof with Arabs, past donkeys and carts and fortified farms and ancient castles, with the Atlantic smiling to the left in the sunlight and the great Moroccan upland swelling and billowing off to the right.

The better he became acquainted

with this American girl, the better Burke liked her. He even managed to pick up a mutual friend or two, thanks to having summered in the little Michigan resort town whence she came, so that in no time at all they were on a very friendly basis. Then, abruptly, as they swung about a curve and pitched down into a deep ravine, she caught suddenly at his arm, in swift alarm.

Burke had already seen the blockade, however—a cart overturned below, a big bus drawn up waiting to pass, with a number of soldiers and Arabs from the bus helping to right the cart. Two French officers were standing to one side, watching. They looked at the approaching Goliath and exchanged a word.

As Burke brought the car to a halt behind the bus, one of the officers, very gay in his blue and scarlet and tan and gold, stepped up and saluted smartly.

"Good morning," he said, "Am I by any chance addressing Monsieur Burke?"

"Correct," said Burke. "What can I do for you? Give you a lift?"

"Thanks, but it is not necessary, *monsieur*." From his tunic pocket the officer produced an envelope, and passed it over with a flourish. "I was asked to give you this, in case I met you on the road. Thank you."

With another salute, he turned away and rejoined his companion.

Burke tore open the envelope, which bore no address, and from it removed a single sheet of paper bearing a few lines of writing. He scanned it, gave a sniff, and passed it on to the girl beside him. The cart was just being swung off the road, and the bus, taking on its load, resumed its way. Burke swung in behind, then opened up and passed it.

"Our friend Baraud thinks he's being very durned impressive, eh?" he said. "That's the French of it for you!"

Marie Thornton held up the paper and read the brief epistle:

M. BURKE:

If you stopped at the Transat Hotel in Rabat and asked for Captain d'Estrees, you would be able to turn over what you carry at a very good profit. If you neglect the opportunity, it will be most unfortunate—for you.

BARAUD.

A gasp escaped the girl. "Of all things! Delivered in this manner!"

"Bah!" Burke chuckled. "We'll just call his bluff, savvy? That's us, comrade!"

CHAPTER IV.

LAND OF SPIES.

RABAT dropped behind, with only a pause for gas and oil to fill the maw of the Goliath. On up over the hills to the east, and a pause toward noon at a roadside bus stop, with wine and sandwiches for refreshment, and luscious crimson pomegranates, dead ripe at this season, for dessert.

Then on again, until the gigantic walls of Meknez came into view, the big car purring smoothly with the throttle wide open most of the way. The afternoon was hot, sun-white, blinding. They wound along past those massive walls, into which were builded the bodies of Christian slaves by the thousand, down to the stream and on up the long slope beyond, leaving the ancient city behind, toward the new French town on the opposite hills.

"This Baraud of yours," said Burke, as they hummed along, "is a poor bluffer. If he's any good, he'll

have the description of this car, and will have telephoned ahead—he may even be ahead of us himself, for we've seen several airplanes this morning. But I think we'll stop in here, and do a little of the same work ourselves."

He drew up before the imposing structure of the P. T. T.—Postes, Telephones and Telegraphs—and met the inquiring glance of his companion with a smile.

"Who's the chap we're going to see in Fez? The one to work the deal for us?"

"Oh! Of course." She swung open the door on her side, and alighted. "Come on. I'll get him on the line—he's the manager of a branch bank there and knows me. You can speak with him. His brother is one of the big lawyers here. They're French-Algerian, and hate the military, and all the big natives are their firm friends. *Allons!*"

Burke swung in at her side. "Does he know Baraud?"

"Of course. Every one here does."

In another ten minutes Marie Thornton got her connection and broke into smiling speech with one Monsieur Souzane. She introduced Burke, and handed him the receiver.

"Hello!" he said in French. "Mademoiselle Thornton is here with me in Meknez. We have something with us which most of the natives are looking for—something in a yellow box. Do you get me? It was recently stolen—"

"For the love of heaven, *m'sieu!*" came the sharp response. "Are you in earnest?"

"Entirely. So is a certain Captain Baraud, who is either ahead of us or behind us or somewhere on the trail. We want to turn this object over to you, for restitution. I've a large car,

a Goliath, and we're heading for Fez. I have every reason to think we may have trouble before getting there. What do you suggest?"

"Does Baraud know your car?" came the instant query.

"He does."

"Where are you now?"

"At the Bureau des Postes."

"Good. Stay there." The voice was curt, energetic, vibrant. Burke liked the unseen man at once. "Within fifteen minutes a Fiat car will come to pick you up; the driver will mention my name. Trust him. Good-by!"

And M. Souzane hung up.

Out on the sunlit steps of the building, Burke turned to regard the girl whimsically.

"He's a fast worker, eh?" he observed, telling her what Souzane had said. "Evidently he'll telephone some chap here—and we'll be relieved of the Goliath. I'd better arrange to have it taken care of here, then. Hop in. We'll apparently depart, but stop at that garage down the street and walk back here."

"Where's the rosary?" she asked. "Still in your pocket?"

Burke nodded, as he swung the car about. "It bulges, too. Can't be helped."

"Let me tell you something," she said gravely. "You take all this very lightly, Mr. Burke, but you don't know Morocco. Every man you meet may be a spy. Every native, every resident, has heard about the theft of that rosary. Baraud may be out of the secret service, but he has all the connections necessary; and human life is valued at less than nothing here. You must realize—"

Burke grinned. "My dear girl," he intervened, "if we stopped to realize how serious every step of our daily

life might be, we'd go crazy! Now, forget it. Here's our garage."

They turned in at a small garage. Inside the entrance, Burke halted the car, and the girl alighted, taking her hand bag. No one was visible here, and he drove on to the far end, where a mechanic was talking with two Arabs.

"I want to store the car with you for a day or two," said Burke, as the mechanic came up.

"Gladly, *m'sieu'*," was the smiling response. "It will be quite safe here."

AS Burke got out, he was aware that the two natives had come up and were watching him with a curiously intent expression, but with the cordial, friendly smile which he had noted upon the faces of all the Arabs in Morocco. Just what that smile meant, he had not yet learned.

He glanced at the entrance, and saw that Marie Thornton had stepped outside and was waiting on the sidewalk. The mechanic saluted him.

"One moment, *m'sieu'*—I will get a receipt card from the office."

As the mechanic departed, Burke leaned into the car for the toilet case that carried his few personal belongings. Some vague prescience—certainly no sound—caused him to glance around. Not three feet away, he saw the two Arabs darting upon him, one of them with knife plunging in for his side.

Off balance as he was, unprepared, unarmed, Burke could do only one thing—but he did it like a flash. Shoving against the car, he kicked up and backward. His boot, with all the weight of his shove behind it, slammed into the knife-wielder. The blow caught the Arab somewhere amidships with terrific force. The man uttered

a startled gasp, doubled up, and dropped to the cement floor.

The second native, however, fell upon Burke, clawed him away from the car, and bore him to the floor, tearing at the bulging coat pocket. Obviously the plan had been for one man to knife him while the other secured the coral.

This scheme had already gone agley. Burke let the Arab claw, and got to one knee, then smashed in a hammer-blow to the brown face. The man snarled, and erupted in a perfect fury of passionate rage. A knife gleamed in his hand. Forgetting the rosary, he was now at Burke's throat with a lightning blow.

Somehow, Burke knocked the knife aside, and then came to his feet. His fists drove in, right and left; the Arab staggered, but recovered and leaped back at him. Burke met that leap with one smashing drive, accurately timed. It went straight to the angle of the jaw, and knocked the native off his feet. He stretched out with a spasmodic jerk of his knee, and then lay still. The first Arab was drawn up in a groaning knot, clutching his stomach.

Burke leaned forward and explored the ragged garments of the senseless man. A grunt of satisfaction broke from him as his fingers came upon a pistol. He jerked it out and thrust it into his pocket, then rose.

The mechanic was returning, gaping, staring at the scene. Burke chuckled.

"These fellows tried to rob me. Are they friends of yours?"

"But no, *m'sieu'!*" burst forth the mechanic. "They had but just come in when you arrived. They had begun to inquire after a car—yours, perhaps. I will call the police—"

"Let them go," said Burke. "I'm in a hurry."

He pocketed the car ticket, got his toilet kit, and a moment later was joining the girl outside. She looked at him and uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What's happened? Y o u — o h ! Your hand!"

Burke looked down and saw blood over his left hand. The knife had cut across the back of it, but he had not felt the hurt. With the grimace, he produced a handkerchief and wrapped it about his hand.

"Come on, no time to waste," he said. "A couple of Baraud's men were in there. I got a gun off one of them, so now I'm fixed for business. Is that a Fiat in front of the bureau?"

It was. They hurried along to the building, and were met by the driver of the Fiat, a bearded Arab in nondescript garments and a wretched *jellab* made of burlap sacking. He grinned and spoke in French.

"Good morning! M. Souzane sent me—"

"Then move quickly," said Burke. "In with you, young lady! Get going, my friend."

BY the time they were in the back seat, the Arab was under the wheel, and the Fiat went away from there with a jump.

"I have iodine here," and the girl opened her bag. "Give me your hand."

"With pleasure," said Burke cheerfully. "Both of them, if you like!"

The driver glanced around, saw the crimsoned hand, and grinned. Burke asked where he was taking them.

"To Fez, *m'sieu'*. You have had trouble?"

"No," grunted Burke. "Others had trouble."

The native laughed and sent the car

forward at breakneck speed, with imperative honks of his horn at any one in the way.

In ten minutes they were out of town, following railroad tracks across high gorges, winding through deep valleys, sweeping up again to the highlands. His hand bandaged, Burke lit a cigarette, met the anxious eyes of the girl beside him, and *l a u g h e d*. He hauled the rosary from his pocket and shoved it into her lap.

"You take it—Marie is the name, I think? No use standing on formality. You see, I'm the one they're after, now, so you'll have more chance of getting through with the thing."

She hastily put it out of sight, and with a nod leaned forward to the driver.

"Where are we going in Fez?"

"To the Dar Jamai, *mademoiselle*. M. Souzane said to take you there, as it is the closest to the gates, and he will meet you there. Thus you will not have to pass through the city. He said that he might meet us on the road, but was not certain."

Marie turned. "Good! That's the Transat Hotel—an old palace made over. I'm beginning to feel that we've pulled through, Mr. Burke!"

"Eh? Who's Mr. Burke? My name's Jim."

"Jim, then." Laughter rose in her eyes, then they sobered. "And to think that only last evening I was at that native café with Baraud, when everything began to happen!"

"It sure began then, when I saw you," observed Burke. "No use blinking the fact, Marie. And I noticed the way Baraud looked at you, too! That's why I didn't like him from the start."

She met his gaze, and nodded.

"I know; just the same, he's always been very polite. I was a little afraid of

him at times, though he's really rather fascinating."

The Arab glanced around at them. "Baraud, eh?" he said in English, to the amazement of Burke. "You friends of Baraud?"

"No, we're not," said Burke. "Where in the devil did you learn English?"

"In America," and the native laughed. "Ringling's circus two years, mister. With fine horses. Ismail my name."

"Hurrah! Glad to meet you, Mr. Ismail," responded Burke. "Step on the gas, boy! I laid out two of Baraud's friends back yonder, and we're in a hurry."

"You bet, damn' good," was the merry rejoinder, and the Fiat sputtered down a long steep hill. Marie touched Burke's arm and spoke very softly.

"You never know what you'll strike in Morocco, Jim! Be careful."

He nodded. Five minutes later, her words were exemplified, when there came a drumming roar from overhead, and Burke looked out the side of the car to see a military airplane not a hundred feet above, sweeping along beside them and then zooming up with a roar and a leap, to swerve away and vanish above the hills.

CHAPTER V.

AN ARAB STUMBLES.

THE afternoon was more than half gone when Fez came into sight, their first glimpses of it being the new French city off to the right, with sprawling brown walls on ahead. Here was Fez-Bali, or Old Fez, the so-called "new" city of Fez-Djedid having been founded a hundred years or so later.

They turned abruptly from the gates of Fez-Bali, to follow the road along the walls and animal market toward the heights of Fort Chardonner and the Merinide tombs of the twelfth century. Even the anxiety of the girl, caused by the sight of that hovering airplane, had now vanished, for the end of their road was in sight, and danger over.

The cattle market behind, with its dust and herds and throngs of Arabs, they were winding up among the trees, when a native scurried out on the road ahead, to cross before them. The driver honked at him. The Arab gave the car a startled glance, tripped, and went down in the road square in front. The driver slammed on his brakes, missed going over the man by a few feet, and leaned out to pour a flood of invective upon him. The native rose to show a negroid countenance and a forked black beard, and flew into a passion. He came up to the side of the car, shaking his fist and crying out furiously—then, unexpectedly, seized the driver by the arm and half jerked him out over the side of the car.

And at this instant a dozen men came running from the side of the road, closing about the car before Burke realized their presence. The hapless driver was hauled out into the road and hammered senseless.

Burke leaped out, the pistol in his hand. Even as he did so, he sensed that it was a trap, that this was no hazard affair. The spot was isolated, with the vast city of Fez far below, to their right, stretched out across the valley in a blue haze. As he came to the ground, an Arab leaped upon him from behind, bringing him down, and iron hands seized his arms.

He pressed the trigger blindly. A shot cracked out, and another. He

heard a cry from the girl in the car, then a harsh, imperative voice that he vaguely recognized. Something struck him heavily across the head. For the third time, he fired, weighted down by bodies, and heard a man scream in response to the shot. Then a blow on the head laid him out senseless.

A second car came up beside the first. One of the Arabs flung back the hood of his brown *jellab* and stepped up beside Marie Thornton, revealing the face of Captain Baraud.

"Into my car, if you please," he commanded curtly. "No argument, I beg of you! Talk later. Or must I have you put in the car?"

"You beast!" she returned heatedly.

"And I took you for a gentleman—"

"Put this woman into my car," he said in French, beckoning his men.

"No need," said the girl angrily.

She left the Fiat, whose bleeding driver had been lifted and flung senseless in among the brush, out of sight. Going to the other car, whose Arab driver held the door open for her, she got in. Baraud ordered in two of his men; then spoke to her again.

"Your pardon, Miss Thornton. You will not be hurt unless you call out or endeavor to attract attention. In that event, you will suffer, and I shall be forced to kill your friend here. Remember!"

Burke, fast bound, was flung into the Fiat. The group dispersed and vanished, leaving Baraud and two other men beside the Fiat. They searched this car swiftly and diligently, having already gone over Burke's body. Then Baraud nodded and climbed in.

"All right, Émile. You know where. They have hidden it, or she has it. Go ahead!"

The Fiat was turned about and

driven away rapidly, following Baraud's car.

WHEN Burke came to himself, he was lying upon a couch in a handsomely furnished room with tiled walls and floor. His head ached painfully, but he was unbound. A trickle of water came from a wall fountain at one side, and rising, he repressed a groan and bathed his head. The high windows admitted level sunset light, and he looked around in quick interest. There was one massive door to the room, and it was fast barred or locked.

Except for his lost pistol, none of his belongings had been disturbed. He sank down on the edge of the couch, wondering at it all.

"Baraud was too smart for us, eh?" he reflected savagely. "And now he's probably got what he was after. He's got me as well, blast him! But he's not through with me, that's certain."

A moment later he looked up, at a sound from the door. It was opened by a native, and into the room stepped an officer in uniform, the same Captain Lamarte who had come to search the apartment of Merrit. He gave Burke a smiling greeting.

"So we meet again, *mon ami!*" he said pleasantly. "Sorry to find you in this fix. My friend Baraud will see you in half an hour or so. Make yourself comfortable. I'll have some food and wine brought to you. Mlle. Thornton is quite safe, so be at ease."

"Very kind of you, captain," said Burke. He rose and glanced at the open door and the native there. "You didn't find what you wanted at Merrit's rooms, eh?"

"No, but it's all right now," and Captain Lamarte laughed.

"Probably. You and Baraud are in

on the game together, eh?" Burke shrugged and broke into a laugh. "Well, you've won the big stake, anyhow; and as you can't get the emerald necklace without my help, I suppose you'll be satisfied."

"Eh?" Lamarte's countenance lost its good-humored negligence. His eyes narrowed greedily, and he gave Burke an intent look. "What necklace is that?"

With an air of surprise, Burke glanced at him and then at the door.

"But I thought you knew! Well, since you don't, there's no more to be said."

Lamarte turned, went to the door, shot a few words at the native, and then slammed the door and came back to Burke.

"Now, my friend, just what is this about an emerald necklace?" he said quietly. "Baraud knows nothing of it; he need not know. I can befriend you, if you make it worth while."

"Yes?" said Burke, hesitant. "But why am I a prisoner here?"

Lamarte waved his hand. "Oh, Baraud merely wants some information from you. He has the rosary, we're in his house in Fez-Djedid, and if you play up a bit, there'll be no more trouble. About the emeralds, now! You left them in Casablanca? Trust me, and in half an hour you'll be out of here and on your way to safety."

Lamarte made the unlucky error of thinking that the American wanted to get out of here at any cost. Burke wanted no such thing.

"I suppose you're right," said Burke, lowering his voice and glancing around. "Merrit may have been wrong, of course, in saying the necklace was worth a million francs—but if you'll promise to help me—"

"Gladly, gladly!" exclaimed the of-

ficer, his dark eyes gleaming eagerly as he scented the chance to grab off something rich on his own account.

"Then," and Burke leaned forward, "I'll tell you—"

His right came up. It was a short, snappy uppercut, but he was balanced to get full weight into it. Lamarte's head rocked back, then he sagged forward as his knees loosened; Burke caught him, laughing a little, and lowered him to the couch.

"That was a mean crack, but you deserved it!" murmured the American.

He removed the Sam Browne belt, unsnapped the shoulder strap, and with the two bits of leather bound Lamarte very effectually, pocketing the pistol from its holster. Over the recumbent, senseless figure he drew two thick Shleu rugs from the floor.

"Quite as good as any gag!" he observed cheerfully. "Ta-ta, my dear Lamarte—pleasant dreams! And now, let's see your friend Baraud, a little before he's ready."

HE went to the door and flung it open. As he had expected, the native had departed. Stepping out, Burke closed and barred the door again.

He found himself at one end of a long corridor, closed on the left, with doors-opening off. On the right were arches, opening on a huge tiled court, with a fountain in the center. Opposite, across the court, were the usual native rooms, opening full upon the central square, without doors in their open arched walls. Baraud was certainly not over there, and since the doors down the corridor were closed, with no natives loafing outside, he would not be in any of those rooms either. The daylight was now rapidly failing.

To his right, Burke saw a circular staircase, and went to it. He descended halfway, and paused. Below was a glare of electric light, and two Arabs were talking idly and smoking, before a closed door. This was probably a hillside house, he reflected, and Baraud's private rooms would be on the first floor, below.

As Burke paused, a bell jangled. One of the two Arabs jerked open the door, and Baraud's voice came in Arabic. The two men responded. One of them disappeared. The other closed the door and came to the staircase, starting upward.

Burke crouched down behind the three-foot inner wall of the staircase, waiting. In the obscurity, the native did not see him until too late. One startled cry burst from the Arab, checked midway as he was hurled against the outer wall; then, before he could cry out again, Burke's boot drove into him and he lay sprawled and motionless.

A moment later, Burke was at the door below. No one was in sight. Carefully grasping the knob, Burke drew open the door a crack, and heard Baraud's voice.

"You see, my dear Miss Thornton," the man was saying in English, "it was really very foolish of you and this man to combine against me. I gave him full warning, and he ignored it. You ask me for his life—well, what can I do? I will grant your request. I will let him go free from here, on one condition."

"And what is that?" came the voice of Marie Thornton.

"It is, that you will give me your company for the evening. We shall dine with El Mokri, whose house not half a dozen Christians have ever seen. He is the wealthiest man in Morocco.

And later, you shall go to the Dar Jamaï or where you will. Come! This is a little price to ask, eh?"

"Far too little," she made answer angrily. "What is behind it?"

"You shall see there is nothing behind it," said Baraud, with a silky laugh. "I have sent for Lamarte—you remember him? He obeys me. You will hear my orders regarding this foolish American; you comprehend, I must keep the man in my power, even if I let him go free. You shall see! I will have a million francs in cash tonight from El Mokri for this little bauble on the table. A million? Two million at least! These dogs of Arabs are wealthy men, many of them, and they can afford to pay for their relics. What do you say? Do you agree?"

"I must," came the girl's voice. "You must not harm Mr. Burke. If you merely want to have my company for the evening, very well. If there's anything behind it, then look out!"

Burke smiled grimly, having a fairly good idea of what might lie behind it, for he had seen Baraud's eyes when the man looked at Marie Thornton, and he knew what thoughts bred such a look.

Then, straightening up, he knocked at the door.

"Enter," came Baraud's voice.

Pistol in hand, Burke walked into the room and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIGHTING ATTEMPT.

THE room was magnificent—the floor thick with Berber rugs, the walls half tile and half the ancient carved plaster work which is now a lost art, the ceiling of inlaid woods,

a superb fountain plashing softly down one wall, old mosque lanterns filled with the soft glow of electric bulbs.

Upon a divan against the far wall sat Marie Thornton. In an easy chair, facing her, his back to the door, was Baraud. The rosary of Mulai Idris lay on a tabouret beside him. He was just lighting a cigarette, and did not turn as the door opened.

"Enter, enter, Lamarte!" he repeated. "I want to speak with you about the American upstairs. Give him a strong dose of narcotics and take him to-night to the Dar Jamaï. Plant some morphia in his belongings, and have the police seize it, while he sleeps. Then leave the rest in my hands. You understand?"

Burke stepped forward.

He came to the side of Baraud's chair and his pistol-butt tapped down. The Frenchman never knew what hit him. He slumped in his chair and the cigarette fell from his fingers to the rug. Burke stepped on it calmly, and looked at Marie Thornton.

She had fainted.

"Oh, heck!" muttered Burke disgustedly. "If I—hello! Why, the poor kid—"

Swift revulsion of feeling seized upon him. One of the girl's arms was outthrust, and upon the exposed wrist he saw the marks of bruises, fast turning black. He seized her other hand and found more marks. He realized now how Baraud had gained that rosary beside him, and cursed the precious thing as he glanced down at it, the coral and gold and emerald gaudy in the shimmer of light.

Striding to the door, he locked it and then brought water from the fountain in an ash tray. After a moment, Marie opened her eyes, and her fingers closed on his hand.

"You—it's really you!" she murmured, and sighed as he helped her to sit up. "I thought it wasn't real!"

"Real enough," Burke said, and her eyes dilated upon the slumped figure in the chair.

"The women!" she murmured, and shivered. "Those women—they hurt me, and then they found it—those black women—"

"Forget it," said Burke. "Snap out of it, Marie. Do you know your way out of here?"

"I—I think so," she returned, with a puzzled frown. "I'm not certain. Is he hurt?"

"Not as badly as he should be," said Burke, and leaned over the Frenchman. His fingers went through the man's pockets swiftly, and he thrust a number of papers into his own pocket, then produced a second automatic, which he handed to Marie. "Can you use it?"

"Some."

"Know your way around this burg?"

She nodded. "Pretty well. I was here for a month, sketching."

"Then let's get out. Feel able?" He inspected her critically, and his blue eyes lighted up with his warm smile. "Marie, you're a peach! I don't wonder this bird wanted to take you along for the evening! It wouldn't have been a healthy visit, though. He figured on making me out a dope handler, and you'd have gone to sleep at this Arab's house, and so forth. The more I think about it, the sorrier I am I didn't hit our friend harder! Feeling fit again?"

She smiled and rose.

"Quite, thanks." Her hand came out and touched his bandaged hand. "Jim, you're wonderful! I don't know how you did it, but—well, when you

showed up I was thinking of grabbing one of those weapons on the wall and going for him."

Burke glanced at the wall above her, which was decorated with all manner of ancient weapons, most of them inlaid with ivory and silver and stones. He ran his eyes over them, and then stepped to the divan.

"That's quite an idea, young lady," he said, and caught down a heavy whip of woven thongs intermeshed with gold wire and having a handle of barbaric silver workmanship. "I'll just take this along. You'd better be prepared for a scrimmage. We'll not get out of here very easily."

Ripping the bandage from his left hand, he shifted his automatic, and swung the heavy whip. Its lash hissed and cracked sharply.

A QUICK rap sounded at the door, and Burke swung around.

"Ready for it, Marie?" he said, and lifted his voice. "Enter!"

The door swung open, to reveal an Arab who started into the room. He checked himself in amazement at sight of them. Then the long lash flicked out at him. With a shriek, he turned and fled, holding his hands to his face.

"Clumsy," said Burke, striding forward. "Come on. Start shooting if you see any one—it's noise we need now! The sooner the police show up, the better."

"You don't know Fez," she responded, and laughed shakily. "Turn right outside—I know that much—we'll get to the gardens that way."

Burke swung down the corridor in which he found himself, obeying her direction. Ahead of him flitted several figures. He flung up the automatic and fired, the shot reëchoing with a roar through the place.

His bullet missed its mark, but the figures vanished. Shrill voices, the pounding of feet, resounded on every hand. A trim figure appeared running toward them, an officer in uniform, flourishing his pistol and calling sharply at them to halt. Burke laughed and fired, and the officer pitched sidewise and was gone from sight. A moment later appeared a wide archway, with gardens beyond, dimly lighted by occasional electric bulbs.

"This way, Jim!" The girl's voice came, clear and cool, to guide him. "We came in across these gardens from the gates."

"Right," he said, and swung toward the arch. Then his whip curled up. "Look out—stay behind me! The fools are rushing us."

A burst of voices, a mass of Arab figures a head, suddenly massed to block their passage. Careless now of the outcome, Burke fired into the midst of them, and with the shot his pistol jammed. A growl, a savage animal snarl, and the Arabs leaped at him, knives agleam in the light. A shot rang out, and the bullet sang past his ear.

Burke hurled himself full at the lot of them, his eyes aflame with the lust of fight. The whip curled and cracked among them, battered at them, lashed across arms and faces like a golden snake. One native plunged forward, screaming, flinging himself at Burke's throat, but the whip butt crashed over his head and he went down. At his elbow, Burke heard the girl's gun crack out, and then the throng broke and he was through, striding along a graveled path among the trees.

"Hurt?" exclaimed Marie, panting. She was running now, to keep up with his fast stride.

"Not a bit."

Sharp while it lasted—a swift, deadly ten seconds of cruel work, but they were through, and yells leaped up behind them. They passed under a light, and rushing shapes came hurtling at them from ahead, voices yelping in shrill excitement. The whip cracked and bit out, the yelps changed to wild shrieks. An Arab rolled at their feet, blinded; the others screamed and vanished.

Burke laughed as he strode, a fierce wild note in his voice.

“There’ll be a great clean-up of this rats’ nest when the authorities get busy!” he exclaimed. “Baraud and his gang staked everything—and lost. Officers in uniform, eh? Courts-martial by wholesale on that head alone—Look out! Damnation—”

They came suddenly, leaping from the trees and bushes on either hand, three or four of them. Marie fired twice, as Burke lashed out, but it was a near thing. One Arab bore Burke backward, gripping for the throat, and was stabbing desperately when the whip butt cracked his skull. Burke straightened up, unhurt.

“Get to the gates, quickly!” he exclaimed. “We can’t keep this up.”

He could see only bushes, trees, fountains, a dark mass of high walls, the lights of the building behind. If they were in the city, it was invisible. Burke felt something dragging at his pocket, and felt for it. A chuckle came to his lips, as he felt the rosary of Idris. He must have caught it up as he left the room, stuffing it into his pocket.

Just ahead showed another light, a bulb hanging in a tree. As they came to it, two rapid shots cracked out somewhere.

Burke halted. The whip dropped from his hand. He half started to pick

it up, then checked himself, repressed a groan.

“Marie! Give me your gun. Go on ahead, reach the gates, get through—somehow—”

Startled by his voice, she caught at his arm, clung to him.

“You’re hurt, Jim—oh, where is it? Come on with me, you must! It’s not far now—”

He swung around a little, grimacing with pain. He got his back to the trees, snarled at her fiercely, almost incoherently.

“Damn it, let go of me! Go on, I tell you—yes, they’ve got me, all right. Go on, will you? Get out of here—damn it all, get out! Move! Run for it!”

The desperate urge of his voice compelled her. With a half-strangled sob she shoved the gun into his hand, pushed on past him, disappeared, running in the darkness. Burke knew that her pistol could have only a shot or two left. A groan broke from him. He put a hand to his back, felt the warm sticky blood.

Above the uproar sweeping through the gardens he caught the voice of Baraud. The weight dragged at his pocket; he jerked out the rosary, and with grim bravado flung the thing about his neck. A dark mist came over his eyes; only with an effort did he keep himself from falling. He stood there, a swaying, hurt figure, awaiting the end.

IT came swiftly enough. As the dark mist cleared away, he saw them there fronting him, a half circle of savage faces staring at him, eyes rolling wild, weapons glittering. They were pointing at him, pointing at the coral of Idris about his neck. He laughed grimly as he looked at them.

"Forward, rabble!" he taunted them. "Finish it, finish it! And the first of you will go down the road to hell ahead of me. Come along! Where is your master? Where's Baraud?"

The Arab voices broke into a furious snarl of hatred and rage. The circle started forward, then broke. Baraud came bursting through them, pistol in hand. He saw the American, and halted.

"You dog!" he cried out. "So it was you, eh? Take it, damn you!"

He fired. Burke felt the shock of the impact, then stared curiously as Baraud toppled forward on his face. A man who falls that way is done for. He realized that his own pistol had spoken. Then he saw them closing in, saw the steel flashing in the light. This was the end.

Burke laughed as they yelled at him in a surging wave of hatred. His automatic cracked, and again. They wavered—another shot would break them. But his last shot was gone now. The hammer clicked. One fierce yell of exultation, and they surged forward. Burke hurled the empty weapon in their very faces as the dark mist closed down.

About him was a furious, swaying, fighting mass of figures. His eyes cleared. A dark shape rushed at him, and Burke's hand went out, gripped a throat, clung tight. Voices were at his

ears, he heard Marie Thornton crying at him, pulling at his arm. She was there indeed, her face a blaze of excitement.

"Let him go, let him go! Jim! Wake up!"

His grip relaxed. The man before him was no Arab, but a bareheaded Frenchman, trying to uphold him. Burke tottered.

"It's all right, my friend!" came the man's voice. "I'm Souzane—thank the good God we got here in time! My driver brought us word. You're all right now. *Ma'm'selle*, get that cursed rosary out of sight! Quickly, hide the thing!"

Burke tried to realize it all, and succeeded dimly. The tide of figures had ebbed and broken and left them there alone, Baraud dead on the ground. Police whistles were shrilling. Souzane patted his arm, after a moment.

"All right, my friend, take it easy! Two bullets, but neither of them vital. We'll have you bandaged in a jiffy and taken care of—and there's a million francs waiting in Arab hands for a reward."

"Reward be damned!" said Burke, and laughed a little as his hand closed on that of Marie. "I've a better one—eh, my dear?"

Her fingers pressed his in response, and he was still laughing gayly as darkness closed over him.

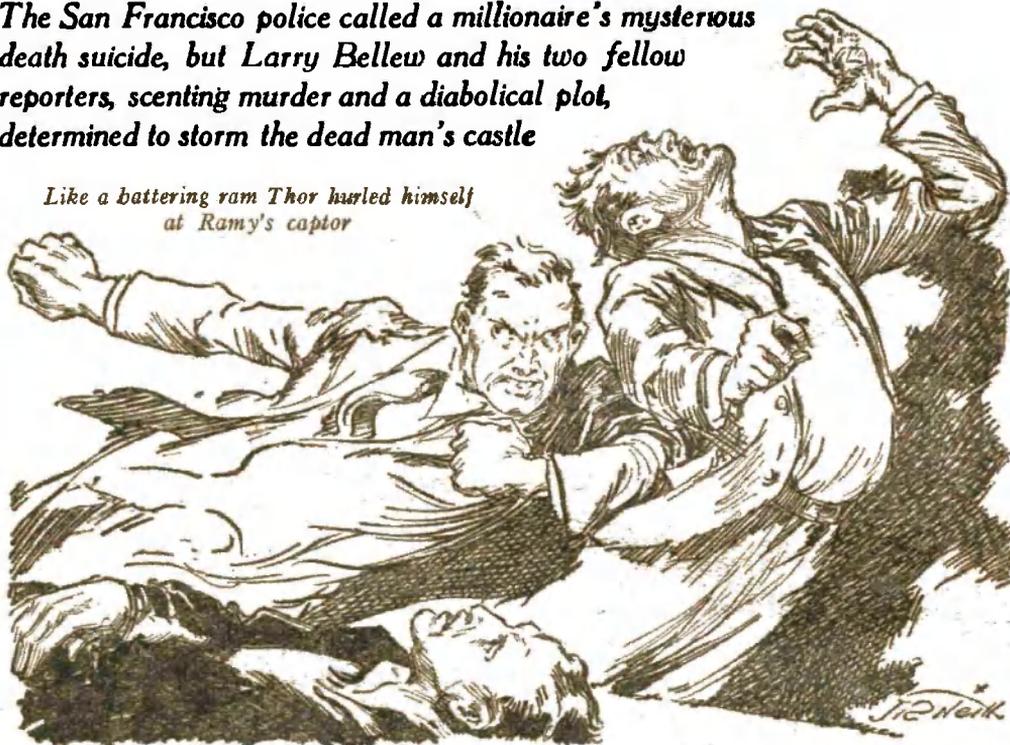
THE END.



Suicide, Inc.

The San Francisco police called a millionaire's mysterious death suicide, but Larry Bellew and his two fellow reporters, scenting murder and a diabolical plot, determined to storm the dead man's castle

Like a battering ram Thor hurled himself at Ramy's captor



By RICHARD A. MARTINSEN

Author of "The Gravy Train," "Beans for Backbone," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LARRY BELLEW, cub reporter, stopping for lunch at a tavern on the highway to San Francisco, springs into action when a drunken thug insults a girl who is trying to leave him. He disarms the man, and the girl drives off with a hurried "Thank you."

A few minutes later Larry comes upon the girl, again in trouble. Three men are trying to drag her from her machine. He routs them and insists upon driving her into San Francisco. She tells him she is Helena Hopkins just home from school in the East, and

invites him to visit her later at her Burlingame home.

Larry, entering the editorial rooms of the *Times* to ask for a job, learns that Cadwallader J. Hopkins, the rich father of the girl he had just met, has disappeared and is feared to be a suicide. Aramis Ware, *Times* reporter, hears Larry's story and takes the latter with him to inspect a disfigured body just found in the bay, believed to be that of Hopkins.

There Larry is attacked by two men, one of whom he recognizes as Helena's companion of the afternoon, Keefe

This story began in the *Argosy* for May 2.

Flaherty, a tough private detective, who had met Helena on the road with a letter from her father and had forced his company on her. Flaherty disappears after the attack. Larry and Aramis decide to go to the Hopkins home at Burlingame to interview Helena, as Aramis does not believe Hopkins was a suicide.

He tells Larry of another recent case of supposed suicide, where wealthy Jimmy Trelawney and his bride were found burned to death in a mountain cabin.

On the darkened grounds of the Hopkins estate Larry and Aramis meet Thor Larson, *Star* reporter, and find the house surrounded by gunmen. The three fight their way free, and decide to join forces, like the Three Musketeers. They see Flaherty drive up and enter the estate. Larry, worried for Helena's safety, decides to enter the house while his two companions wait outside.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY HOUSE.

LARRY strode off confidently enough, albeit conscious of a vague tenseness and an element of thrill.

His heels clicked briskly on the stone steps of the mansion, and he pulled the doorbell vigorously. It seemed to him, though, that some one was at the door, and that from somewhere hidden eyes inspected him carefully before it finally swung open.

A young maid, with a rather pale face and exceedingly bright eyes, looked questioningly out at him.

"I'd like to see Miss Hopkins," Larry said.

"I'm sorry, sir. She's—not receiv-

ing to-night. My mistress has suffered a great loss, and—"

"I know," Larry nodded sympathetically. "But she'll see me, I'm sure. In fact she asked me to call. My name is Bellew. Please tell her I'm here."

The maid hesitated, then suddenly stepped aside to let him enter. The big hallway, he noted, was illuminated by only a single globe, which scarcely dispelled the deep shadows at its farther end.

"Wait here, please," the girl told him. "I'll inform the mistress."

She started swiftly up the steps.

Now there had been nothing unusual in her brief statement or actions, yet Larry felt a sensation of uneasiness that sent him lunging impulsively after her.

"Just a minute!" he exclaimed, with a gruffness he didn't himself understand. "It's all right. I'm so sure of it, I'll just go on up with you."

"No!" The maid's exclamation was startled and shrill. "Why, Miss Hopkins is in her private apartment! I never heard of such a thing!"

"Well, there always has to be a first time." Larry grinned reassuringly but firmly. "And I'm an informal cuss. Miss Hopkins knows me well enough to forgive it. Trot right along, my child."

The maid wrenched from his grasp, as though to bolt for it, then changed her mind.

"Very well, sir," she said, with a look of queer intensity. "Since you insist—"

With no further demur she led him to the second story, and along a broad, gloomy corridor. A door showed in the semi-darkness. The maid jerked it open, slipped through, and fairly slammed it in Larry's face. But an in-

stant later the door reopened, and he saw her arm beckoning.

"Come in, sir."

THE light within the chamber was so brilliant, in contrast with the corridor, it blinded Larry for an instant. Vaguely, then, he made out the costly silks and furnishings of a luxurious boudoir. A soft but pleasing fragrance cloyed the atmosphere.

"Miss Hopkins—" began Larry hesitantly, advancing a few steps into the room.

He felt, rather than saw a blur of motion as a tall, slim figure arose from a distant chair. A voice, clear, cultured, but etched with coldness, came to him.

"Well?"

Larry blinked constrainedly at the white, oval face of the girl in the vivid, crimson dressing-gown, who stood so coldly and stiffly there.

"I—why it's Miss Hopkins I want to see—"

The girl's eyes didn't waver.

"Well, what do you want of me?"

"You?" Larry all but gasped.

"Why, nothing whatever, ma'am! There must be some mistake! You're not—"

The girl smiled. "The mistake, my poor, deluded *intruder*, is all yours, I assure you!"

Her lips closed in a thin, hard line, and she made a curious motion with her hand.

That motion, and a vague flurry of sound just behind him, were Larry's last clear impressions for some time.

Mouth opening for a startled exclamation, he half whirled around—too late to save himself. A strong hand clamped like a vise over his parted lips. Another closed viciously on his windpipe.

In a last, desperate effort to break

loose from his unseen assailant, Larry dropped to his knees, and then jerked sidewise.

He heard a hoarse and savage grunt. The weight upon his shoulders shifted an instant.

There was a whir and muffled impact as a round, heavy object descended brutally on Larry's bowed skull.

With that he slid into unfathomable blackness.

DESPITE his calm assurance, Ramy had looked after Larry dubiously as the latter's broad shoulders vanished up the drive.

"Hanged if I know whether we should have let him do it," he murmured to Thor. "That Flaherty affects my psychic nerve. An aura of poison hangs about him. And the kid—"

"Aw, he's a live wire. Don't worry about him," Thor grunted. "There goes the door—he's in, Ramy! Hot dog!"

They began their vigil patiently enough in the deep shadows beside the gate. After the thud of the door upon Ramy, a mantle of silence again fell over The Castle, so complete that it was almost oppressive. Occasionally there was a flash of headlights on the highway, and a car snorted past the watchers, but the great mansion of the dead steel king loomed before them aloof, detached, with no sign of life about it. Indeed, so dark, so still, so frigid did it stand there, it gave the impression of a deserted house.

"Ten minutes," said Ramy, glancing at his wrist watch. His voice was husky. "Gosh, it seems like an hour."

"Uhr!" mumbled Thor vaguely, and they fell silent again.

Another ten minutes dragged past. Ramy's eyes were smarting from their

fixed stare at the gloom-shrouded mansion.

"He ought to have made some sign or something, confound it!" he burst out. "He must know we're palpitating out here!"

"Ye-ah," agreed Thor. "The girl sure wouldn't chew the fat with him all night, under the circumstances . . . Hanged if I can figure it."

They had begun to step to and fro, peer about, shift their weight restlessly. As the delay lengthened, Ramy's expression grew tense. He appeared laboring more and more in the grip of an unwonted anxiety.

But at the end it was Thor, the slow, phlegmatic Thor, who blew up completely. He swung and dropped his hand on Ramy's shoulder with a grip that made the young man wince.

"My skin's crawlin', old-timer. Dunno why, but somethin' tells me we've tossed that kid into a lion's den."

"Same here."

"Then, demmit, Ramy—let's call the cops!"

"On what grounds? We haven't any, that's the rub of it. We don't know that there's anything actually wrong."

"But, gosh, he's been gone half an hour—yes, more'n that, man! We goin' to stand here like a couple of boobs all night?"

"We'd be bigger boobs if we called the cops—right now, anyway. We need something more substantial than dark suspicions."

"All right. Then how'll we go about getting it?"

"It means getting into that house—and not by the front door, either. If anybody has knocked over Larry, they would do the same for us."

"But you said that gang of strong-arm men was still in the shrubbery!"

"Yes. Very probably. We'll have to take a chance on outguessing 'em—if we go after Larry. Are you game?"

Thor snorted indignantly. "I'll tackle the whole darned troop of Cardinal's guardsmen—an' be there fighting after you're done for, friend Aramis! Lead on."

RAMY darted through the gate. Instead of going on up the drive, though, he turned sharp right and closely followed the thick, high hedge that bounded the estate.

For some moments they hurried along. At length Ramy halted, crouched low, and motioned Thor beside him.

"Hey—we've just been circling. We're no nearer the house," the giant grumbled.

"Correct. I did my scouting on this side a while back, you'll remember. We're now directly opposite the big balcony at the end of the right wing. It's twenty feet above ground level, but I spotted an oak tree that grows beside it close enough for—us. See it; that dark blur a hundred yards dead ahead, there? All right. I think we're set if we can reach it, but from here to the tree is no-man's land, so watch your step!"

He dropped flat on his stomach and wriggled out of the hedge shadow toward the objective. It was hard, slow work, that Indian crawl—even more grievous for the great-framed and ponderous Thor; but in due course they made it without attracting the attention of the mysterious watchers Ramy felt sure were roundabout.

He halted at the tree base and emitted a sigh of relief as Thor wormed safely up. Then:

"Lend me your shoulder," he whispered. "I'll see if the tree leans near

enough the balcony. If you hear me snap my fingers, shinny up after me."

It was a six-foot drop from the nearest limb to the stone balustrade, Ramy discovered, but it was negotiable. He landed lightly, and presently, albeit with a heavier thud, Thor followed him.

A row of tall French windows gave upon the balcony. One after another Ramy tried them. All were locked. But the one at the far end moved inward slightly at his pressure. A bent or partially weakened catch, Ramy decided.

After some moments of futile wrestling, Thor whispered. "A job for Porthos, my friend." He pushed Ramy aside and placed his massive shoulder against the wooden casing where the two windows joined. There was a sharp, tearing squeak, and the windows parted—violently.

"Good night!" thought Ramy. But Thor calmly pushed aside the velvet drapes which overhung the opening, and only blackness showed. The room was unlit and unoccupied.

The two comrades slipped inside it, Ramy first. Which way? The murk was far deeper and blacker than the outer gloom of night.

HE tried to visualize the probable location of the main hallway.

This, judging from the row of windows, was a chamber of princely proportions; a sun parlor, doubtless, or perhaps the library.

On his knees he moved out, straight across it. Blind going. Hair-raising. Eerie. He suddenly realized that he was a foolhardy idiot; worse yet, to all practical intents a house-breaker—a criminal. Gosh! The life was a blood-tingling, none too pleasant one!

He blundered against some massive piece of furniture, tried to work

around it, and barked his shins against another one.

A jarring thud, which set the floor trembling, sent Ramy back on his haunches, startled. He heard a hoarse, muffled exclamation, then a protesting rumble from Thor:

"S-ay! Slow up, will you? Want to get lost in this damn quagmire?"

"Shut up!" hissed Ramy.

"Aw' right. But wait for a fellow. It's black as ink in here."

Again Ramy crawled forward. Already it seemed they had been groping for an eternity in a Stygian pit, vast, ruthless, menacing. Menacing; yes, that was it. Even the faint, elusive fragrance which cloyed the heavy air was oppressive; etched with evil . . . that house. Hang it, he didn't like that atmosphere!

He bumped his head against a wall, groped awkwardly along it. Eventually his fingers felt the wooden surface of a door.

He reached up for the knob; turned it; eased the door open, inch by inch. Blackness again . . . dense, crushing blackness. Yet this must be the main hallway; it smelled like it, felt like it. And from the hallway there certainly had shone a light.

He felt Thor's body brush against him. "I'd never make a good burglar, Ramy. Boy, ain't this a mess?"

It was. No coward, Ramy, but every instinct was shrieking at him to give up this illegal adventure. Deep in his consciousness a still, small voice cried steadily: "Turn back! You fool, turn back!"

IT must have been the atmosphere of that black, cavernous mansion. He fought against it. He thought of the hapless Larry—D'Artagnan . . .

As though the name of their young

pal upon his lips had been a signal, the pall of silence was splintered. An atom of sound trickled to him vaguely from the upper reaches of the house. Yes, somewhere up there a door had opened.

Came a soft, unintelligible murmur of voices, then a distinct click as the door shut again.

"We're in the hall all right," Ramy whispered. "Hear that noise upstairs? You sit tight until I can locate the staircase. No use two of us barging around like blind mice. I'll come back after you. In the meantime, don't sound off—under any circumstances—for the love of Pete!"

He took Thor's mumble for assent, and moved off.

Thor listened to the rustle of his withdrawing body, a quizzical grin upon his own big face. Lord! He wished he could emulate the slithery Indian that way! Five feet, ten, fifteen maybe. . . already his strained ears could scarcely catch the tiniest sound of Ramy's progress.

And then, an instant later, Thor snapped amazedly erect. Gone was the noiseless stealth that he had been admiring. What the devil, he thought, staring into the wall of blackness—Ramy must have risen boldly to his feet—started off some place in a wild, idiotic dash!

From far in the dense murk boiled a wave of even clearer, of grimly convulsive sound—the spat of flesh smiting solidly on flesh, one heavy body plunging upon another! There was a reverberating thud; a biting exclamation, which cut off abruptly in a wheezy, gurgling groan. . . then silence once more, absolute, pregnant, threatening.

Thor leaped wildly to his feet, for he had reconized that voice, that groan;

it had been torn from Ramy! Great Jupiter!

CHAPTER VI.

S O S

A FLAMING second Thor poised in the doorway, lips open for a bellowing challenge, body trembling for a galvanic leap.

Ware's admonition recurred to him: "No matter what happens, don't sound off!"

His muscles bulged; blue veins stood out on his forehead from the terrific effort as he restrained himself. What, after all, could he accomplish in the pitch-blackness, save stumble into the ambush which had engulfed his friend?

As he hesitated a voice cut the murk in a husky whisper:

"All right, Dope?"

Another answered gloatingly: "Ye-ah. Got him, plenty. Let's have your light, Barney—see who the devil it is."

Thor lunged back; pressed his body against the wall behind the doorway as in the corridor a light-beam stabbed out.

"Well, I'll be damned!" grunted one of the voices. "I never seen this duck before!"

"How'd he get in?"

"Damfino!"

"You sure he was alone?"

"Yep. Heard him movin' a minute afore I jumped him. He was alone, aw'right."

"Good. I better hop up an' tell the boss, though."

"Okay, Barney. I'll haul this critter to the garbage-heap."

The light-beam danced about as the man holding it picked his way up the stairs. There was a dragging sound as

the other tugged at Ramy's inert body. An instant later, from farther down the hallway, came the slap of a closing door.

Thor didn't wait to think. He acted instinctively. Out into the hallway he lunged, and crept down it, one hand sliding along the near wall. The sound of that closing door hadn't been distant.

In a few seconds his groping fingers touched the jamb. Unhesitatingly, though slowly, he pulled the door open, then shut it again abruptly. He had glimpsed a narrow, dim-lit stairway leading downward, and near the bottom, the black form of a man stooping under a heavy burden.

Thor was on the right trail. Hot on it. He gave the quarry time to vanish, padded down the stairs, and eased open another door, at their foot. Again pale radiance, revealing a vast expanse of concrete flooring with white-plaster walls—part of The Castle cellars, since a massive oil-burning furnace loomed up at one end of it.

The man and his burden once more came briefly into view as they vanished about a distant corner. Then *click!* The lights, which the fellow apparently had switched 'on to facilitate his progress, snapped out, and a pall of blackness redescended.

Thor groaned. For a moment he blinked helplessly. But then, as his eyes adjusted, he beheld a faint glow in the direction where the man had vanished. He started for it, rounded the corner, and found himself in another expanse of granite and plaster. It was empty. But from the farther opening the light sheen still beckoned. It was stronger, too.

The cellars seemed interminable; a land of their own. But eventually the trailing giant reached what must be one

end of them, and at the same time found the source of the guiding light. It shone brightly through the open door of a small chamber—perhaps a janitor's room—built against the retaining wall. Trail's end!

THOR slid like a great shadow to the wall beside the door, then edged along inch by inch until he could peer through it.

The room was roughly furnished; a cot, a long wooden table, and a couple of unpainted chairs. A strong, unshielded light-globe dangled from the ceiling above the table. Upon the table lay sprawled the slender form of his unconscious friend.

For an instant Thor focused on Ramy's face. It was pale. The young man's cap had fallen off, and on his dark, tousled hair showed an even darker splotch—of blood, some of which was trickling down his forehead.

Thor sucked in a deep, furious breath. His body tensed as his glance roved to the second man in the room, a squat, sturdy, roughly dressed fellow. He was bending over Ramy, his back to Thor, binding Ramy's wrists securely with a length of rope. Occasionally he grunted from the force with which he jerked the cruel knots into place. Tossed carelessly on the table beside him was a stout wooden bludgeon, like a billy, blood-spotted, obviously the weapon with which he'd struck his victim down.

Ramy's head was sagging limply, face toward Thor. The eyes were closed. But as Thor moved into the doorway, they flickered open, and the blond giant could have sworn that Ramy briefly winked at him!

He almost cried out with relief as his stout legs bent, then snapped stiff once more like a released spring, and

propelled his mighty body forward in a plunging dive.

Like a battering ram the full force of Thor's body smote Ramy's captor between the shoulder-blades. He crashed forward, against the side of the table, then crumpled to the floor, with Thor's muscular legs firmly clamped about his middle.

He had been knocked cold then. But Thor, angered by the sight of Ramy's blood, was taking no chances. He caught up the wooden billy from the table, and swung in a short arc but with neat accuracy. It clicked sharply on the skull of the fallen man.

"Won't need to worry about you for quite a while," Thor rumbled, turning him over on his back. "Well, I'll be jiggered if it ain't Dope Thompson!"

"Who?" queried a voice weakly from the table.

"Dope Thompson!"

"The yegg and gunman?"

"The same!" Thor hauled a wicked-looking .45 automatic out of the gangster's pocket. "Boy, you're lucky he only used a stick on you. Look at that cannon!"

"Ow-w!" groaned Ramy. "The stick was bad enough. Turn me loose, will you? But first shut that door. We don't want any one else dropping in the way you did."

"How you makin' it?" his friend queried, after obeying both behests, and giving Ramy crude first-aid by means of a big, albeit none too clean handkerchief. "That was another close one. It's sure lucky those bozos didn't guess I was around."

Ramy nodded. "The old bean's still buzzing a trifle. Outside of that, though, I'm all okay. Let's tie the bad egg up and gag him, then go into conference. Something tells me we'd bet-

ter locate our young Larry in a hurry, after this."

"FOR Pete's sake! If you think we're going to do any more slithering around this joint on our own, you're crazy!" growled Thor as they set to work. "With birds like Dope around, packing gats and sleep-sticks, it's getting a bit thick!"

"But—"

"But nothing! I know our duty toward our fellow Musketeer, but that don't mean we can't use some discretion. There's something mighty rotten afoot upon these dear old premises to-night. We know that now. It's no longer a matter of suspicion. So us for the cops!"

"Maybe you're right, Thor. But we've got to take along our evidence."

"Who—Thompson? How in blazes we goin' to get him out of here?"

"Same way we get out ourselves—if any."

"Okay, Ramy, if you insist. But for the love of Pete let's get a wiggle on! This Barney-baby may come breezing down at any minute to see his little playmate, Dope."

He vanished from the room, but shortly thereafter reappeared on the threshold.

"Spotted a door just around the corner. Stairs behind it. And they lead somewhere outside, thank the Lord! Both doors were bolted. But they aren't now . . . Come on." He moved to switch off the light.

"Leave it going," directed Ramy. "We're not cats. It'll light us up the stairway, anyhow."

It was hard, slow going with the dead weight of their prisoner, and their route around the big garage, behind the main structure, after they got safely out of that, proved to be both

tortuous and peril-filled. Indeed, twice they had to drop flat in clumps of greenery and hold their breath, while dark shadows flitted past them, dangerously close.

But eventually they made their escape without further mishap, emerging to a deserted, dirt cross-road via a postern-gate at the extreme rear of the far-stretching Hopkins grounds.

AN hour later—well toward midnight—three automobiles swung into the main driveway of The Castle, and throbbed up to the portico. They were filled with men.

As the leading machine halted, a firm crisp voice sang out: "Every man to his assignment. Snap into it!"

Six men in uniform darted around the right wing of the big house, six others around the left. A few moments later a whistle shrilled in the distance.

"Right!" cried the brisk voice again. "The cordon's out, and I don't think anything will get through it . . . Our move. Bill, Tom, and the rest of you come with me. You news-men come too, if you care to."

He strode up to the front door and jammed his finger on the bell. Those behind him could hear its imperative jangle. But no one answered its summons, though the bell pealed like a tocsin throughout the house time after time.

"What!" cried the sturdy Burlingame police chief. A heavy brass knocker ornamented the right door panel. "They want noise, do they?" His left hand began to work the knocker, the while his right pounded away with the butt of his service pistol, until it seemed the panel must give.

But even this bedlam was unpro-

ductive. It was not until the chief had paused to deliberate harsher methods that a woman's voice fluttered tremulously from behind the heavy door:

"Wha—what's wanted?"

"Police!" the chief cried. "Open up at once!"

There was a gasp, and the rattle of bolts being drawn. The door moved slightly, and a white, frightened face appeared in the crack.

Instantly the chief thrust the door wider and pushed inside. He saw before him a patently terrified young woman in the sober dress and white apron of a maid.

"What do you want, sir?" she gasped out, round-eyed.

"We understand there are burglars in this house," the chief said.

"Oh, no, sir! I'm sure not—at least, I don't think so!"

"Where's the butler? Why did it take you so long to answer the door?"

"Why, we're alone, sir, the mistress and I. We were 'way upstairs. You see, there—there aren't any other servants here now. They all left this afternoon."

"They did, huh? That's a funny one!" exclaimed the chief. "I'll have a little talk with Miss Hopkins, I reckon."

"Oh, no, sir! Not to-night! She's just getting ready for bed! Search the house, if you want to, but—"

"I'll do that," averred the chief curtly, "and I'll have a talk with Miss Hopkins too . . . You fellows scatter and search the lower stories. Keep your eyes peeled." He grasped the maid's arm, by the elbow. "You lead the way, upstairs, my girl!"

"Oh, sir! Let me go and tell the mistress. She'll want to get dressed! She'll come down—"

"Nothing doing! I'm going up—right now!"

THE maid began to whimper, but turned on the stair lights and guided him upward and far back, to the door of Miss Hopkins's apartment. Thor, Ramy, and one of the policemen followed close at their heels.

Still holding the maid, the chief rapped loudly on the door. In a moment a cool, melodious voice called with a touch of impatience: "Well, Therese, why don't you come on in?"

"I *told* them—" the maid began to whimper.

"Chief of police, ma'am!" that individual cut in. "Come to the door, please."

"One moment."

Shortly the door opened, revealing a tall, handsome girl wrapped in a luxurious and richly embroidered crimson dressing-gown. Her face, oval and aristocratic, reflected no whit of perturbation or timidity; indignation, rather. She spoke, however, with composed hauteur:

"What does this mean, gentlemen?"

The chief flushed a little at her intense, proud gaze.

"We were informed that something was wrong here, Miss Hopkins. Burglars—"

"Who told you? Not I. Not Therese. And we are the sole occupants, at present, of the house. No, that is a weak excuse, my man. How dare you come bursting into my house, at midnight—and on this night of—sorrow?"

She bit her lip. The chief looked sheepish but stuck bravely to his guns.

"I'm sorry, Miss Hopkins. Nevertheless I must ask for a few words in private with you."

She hesitated a moment, then with

a gesture of impatience flung wide the door.

"Thank you. Come on, you fellows," he added to Thor and Ramy.

They followed into a luxurious and exquisite boudoir. Miss Hopkins seated herself and looked at them contemptuously, with flashing eyes.

"Well?"

The chief, for the first time, appeared frankly flustered. It was Ramy who spoke.

"Isn't it rather unusual, ma'am, for you to be without servants?"

"And who are you—well, never mind. It's immaterial. Let's get this unpardonable cross-examination over with . . . I dismissed the servants—the whole pack of them—as soon as I arrived this afternoon from Sacramento. The fools may well have been responsible for my—my father's death. They knew he was—missing. And for seven days they didn't notify me, the police—any one. Oh, can't you understand?"

Again her lip trembled. Ramy felt a wave of sympathy.

"**I**'M sorry, Miss Hopkins. But you have been entertaining—other visitors this evening, haven't you?"

"One only. I suppose you mean Mr. Keefe Flaherty. Yes, he was here for a few moments. I have employed him for—well, for reasons connected with my father. Surely I don't have to go into them?"

"No. But haven't you forgotten a second caller—Larry Bellew?"

"Who?" Her eyes opened wider. "Why, that's the name of the young reporter I—I met this afternoon."

"Yes, on the Sacramento highway."

"But why do you mention him? He hasn't been here to-night!"

"You're wrong there," said Ramy quietly. "Perhaps you didn't see him, but he entered the house all right. That's fact. Also that you entertained other visitors—several of 'em—albeit unawares. I know, because I was in the house myself, Miss Hopkins."

"And what were you doing here?"

"Looking for Larry. I'm a newspaper man. So's Mr. Larson, yonder. Larry is our friend. And it may interest you to know this bump on my cranium was inflicted by another of your callers, a fellow named Thompson—a notorious gunman and criminal."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Miss Hopkins. "One of us must be crazy! I—"

The strain of the interview apparently had proved too much for her. Her head drooped. Her pallor heightened. But she had won the battle for self-mastery, at least temporarily, when she looked up again.

"My mind is all a jumble. I hope you'll forgive me, but it's so," she said dully. "If you think there are burglars in The Castle—please search for them. Begin with my rooms...yes, chief, I insist. Find anything? Then please leave me—at least for to-night. Oh, God! I just can't stand any more!"

She buried her face in her hands. And it was so the three men left her, filing into the hallway crestfallen and sheepish.

There various officers were waiting to report to Chief Hale.

"Nobody hiding on this ranch, chief!" announced the sergeant who had ransacked the main level. And a corporal added:

"The cellars are clean as a hound's tooth."

"And Clancy checked in to say

there's not a darned thing moving—or hiding either—on the grounds. Not anywhere," concluded the sergeant.

"Ye-ah, I suppose so," muttered the chief. "Well, let's get out of this."

It was not until they emerged upon the portico that he spoke again. There he swung angrily on Thor and Ramy:

"Know what I think? I think you two young mutts have gone absolutely bughouse!"

"How about Dope Thompson, chief?" asked Ramy mildly.

"Aw, he's a burglar. He could just have been playing around as usual, couldn't he? If you birds hadn't brought him in, I'd toss you both into the *calabozo*—by gad, so I would! As for the rest of that cock-and-bull yarn—you've been hitting the pipe, that's what. Or else you thought because I was a hick policeman you could pull your city wisenheimer stuff on me... Oh, blank-blank-blank, and double-blank it! What a fine mess I'm in!"

CHAPTER VII.

FRAMED!

CHIEF HALE was slow to anger, but held it once he got that way.

The reporters were unable to convince him that he hadn't been made the butt of some practical joke. He even became skeptical of their claim that Larry had vanished.

"I've met all the San Francisco boys, one time or another, but I never heard of any Bellew," he said coldly. "I don't believe there is such a guy!"

"Well, at all events don't let the story leak out to the local papers, will you?" begged Ramy.

The chief glared at him. "Ahr-r! Think I want to broadcast that I was crazy enough to fall for you?"

"Okay." Ramy tried to grin pleasantly, although he didn't feel like it. "And now to send Dope Thompson to the city. Chief Ryan wants him worse than you do."

"He's sure welcome!" grunted Hale. "I'll trot him in first thing in the morning."

Ramy and Thor let it go at that, withdrawing tactfully. They were a tired and worried pair as Ramy toiled his roadster back to town.

"Deep business. But there's no use beating our brains out about it any more right now," he murmured. "Wherever Larry may be, it isn't at The Castle. That's certain. We-ell, let's sleep over it. You'd better put up with me, Thor."

The result of their deliberation next morning was that each called up his paper and requested free rein for the day.

"All right up to two o'clock," agreed Ramy's city editor. "But then you hop it to the Episcopal cathedral."

"What's doing there?"

"The Hopkins funeral. We were just notified. Want you to cover it?"

Thor met with even less success.

"I've got to beat it across the bay this noontime," he reported dolefully.

But anyway they had the morning free. And at ten sharp they were leaning on the door of District Attorney Matt Gordon at the Hall of Justice.

It opened unexpectedly to permit egress of a rotund caller, at sight of whom Ramy ducked back, then prodded Thor vigorously in the ribs.

"Did you see what I saw?"

"The Honorable Joseph Winship? Uh-huh. Up kinda early for him, ain't he?"

"Too early! Entirely too early, old pal!" was Ramy's significant comment. "I don't like it a little bit. Something

tells me we'd better handle old Matt with gloves on... after this."

Nevertheless, there was nothing unusual in their comportment as they entered and hailed the district attorney with the flippant freedom of the fourth estate.

"**W**E caught a skunk for you last night," Ramy announced. "Dope Thompson."

"Well, well! Turned sleuths, have you?" smiled the portly D. A. "Tell me all about it."

They did—except about Larry. After their experience with Chief Hale they had decided not to unburden themselves on this matter to authority, any further, until they could produce more facts. Hence their interest in Dope Thompson. The gangster knew the truth, undoubtedly, and he was now their only chance.

"He's upstairs in the prison now. We want you to get him down and sweat the blazes out of him," Ramy concluded.

"You're pretty sure that there were others at the Hopkins place?" Gordon inquired.

"Absolutely!"

"All right then. I'll go after him. You boys can stand by if you want to."

"Not me!" said Thor decisively. "He doesn't know I was the lad who clouted him, and I don't want him to."

So the two Musketeers waited in another office for an hour, while Thompson was put through the mill. They looked up hopefully when at last the district attorney came in to them.

Gordon was flushed, and mopping his wet brow. He shook his head.

"Sorry, boys. Nothing doing. Can't get a squeak out of him. He's even willing to plead guilty to felonious entry. Yep. The rat fairly asked to be

sent over the road—and what I mean, he's going to get it. If he isn't on his way to Folsom by to-morrow noon, I'll eat my hat!"

And that was that.

In due course Ramy and Thor separated gloomily, each to answer duty's call.

The atmosphere of the funeral of poor Cadwallader did nothing to chirp up the former. It was a big and impressive one, for such short notice, and most of the leaders in bay region society and business attended. But the eyes of young Mr. Ware remained dull, and his nose drooped perceptibly.

It was only at the last rites, by the grave-site at the great cemetery, that he appeared to snap a little out of his moodiness. There his glance moved not infrequently to Helena Hopkins, standing stiffly a bit aloof from all others, and dwelt on her reflectively. She wore a heavy veil of mourning, but through it he could glimpse the outline of her white, oval face.

Her long absence from San Francisco had dimmed the embers of earlier friendships. That was evident to Ramy after the ceremony. None of the younger generation approached her, at parting. Just a few of Cadwallader's older friends walked over to exchange a few low words and receive her grave nod.

Truly, the poor child was lonely, now, as well as alone!

Again Ramy felt that twinge of instinctive sympathy. But he shook it off, and moved through the crowd to intercept her deftly at the door of her machine.

"Miss Hopkins," he said gently and quickly, "Larry Bellew has disappeared."

She halted. He could feel the force of her eyes upon him.

"I'm sorry. But you must leave me to my own—sorrow, now."

"I appreciate it. Indeed I do. I knew your father. And liked him. . . . But it might prove of inestimable help if you'd answer a few brief questions. Why, in mentioning Keefe Flaherty to Larry, did you call him—James Barton? And why have you employed this man?"

The girl moved slightly. It seemed to Ramy she hesitated; was on the point of answering. But speak she did not. Instead, abruptly, she drew herself to her full height and stepped past him into the car.

It rolled away swiftly.

Ramy felt as though a whip had struck him.

"I'm a rude puppy!" he murmured apologetically. "But all the same, if Larry really had got under her skin—"

He stared after the machine ruefully.

LARRY was absent and unaccounted for. That fact remained—unless the young adventurer had seen fit, for reasons of his own, ingeniously and abruptly to ditch the whole country. Ramy eliminated that possibility—indeed, it was almost a wish now—by calling up the garage at Benicia. Yes, Mr. Bellew's car was still there. And ready for him. When would he come for it?

"Pretty soon, I hope," sighed Ramy, and meant it.

He ground out the Hopkins funeral story automatically, left the shop and walked over to the States. It was unusual for Ramy to feel baffled, and deucedly uncomfortable. He waited impatiently for Thor to help him map out a fresh line of attack. But Thor didn't show up.

When the big boy was an hour over-

due he phoned the *Star* office. Mr. Larson? Not in. Hadn't been in all day.

His assignment had stretched out, probably. Darn!

Eventually Ramy betook himself to his flat and bed, there to toss and turn fitfully.

For the next two days Jim Ingalls kept Ramy humping. After all he had to earn his salary, which was a good one, or quit his job. Each day, however, he tried to get in touch with Thor. To no avail. The blond giant seemed to be permanently "out"—a useful word in newspaperdom, since it is factual yet conveys no useful information whatsoever.

Confound Thor! One for all and all for one! Bologny! He might at least have called up, Ramy thought.

The next day, Friday, drifting into the press room at the city hall during recess of a nasty divorce case, Ramy heard a *Chronicle* man phoning in an item that brought him sharply up, all ears.

"Here's a squib on the Hopkins estate, Joe. . . . Aw, old Cadwallader J., the steel millionaire that took a swim the other day. . . . Yeah, a long one. . . . Well, his sole heir an' beauteous daughter, Helena, appeared before Judge Samuels to petition for letters of administration, this P.M. . . . Nope, wasn't any will.

"The lawyers say he never made one. Maybe he didn't expect to stay in the bay so long, ha ha! . . . Well, anyway, at her request the court's appointed an administrator. Yup. The Honorable Joseph Winship. Yup. Some more gravy for that lucky stiff! . . . How much in it? For him, or for her when he gets through with it? . . . Whaddaya think I am, you dumb ape, a mind-reader? They don't hand out definite figures. But she's over forty

millions, anyway. F-o-r-t-y! Read it an' weep!"

The Honorable Joseph Winship! The name blazoned itself in letters of fire upon Ramy's brain. He was still tingling when he reached the *Times*, tore out his copy, then grabbed a phone.

"Mr. Larson? Out. . . . Wait a minute. No, we don't know where."

That was too much. A few moments later Ramy barged into the *Star* office—and almost collided head-on with the honorable gentleman who was taking such a place in his feverish thoughts. Winship had just come out of the door of the publisher's private sanctum. He looked at Ramy unblinking a moment—the Honorable Joseph Winship's eyes never seemed to wink—nodded calmly, and continued on his way.

The wheels in Ramy's brain were clicking still more energetically as he charged up to the city desk.

"**H**OWDY, George. Say, what's happened to Thor Larson anyway?"

The bespectacled editor looked mildly up at him. "Huh? Thor? Off somewhere, I suspect."

"Don't stall me, George. It's serious."

"Yeh? Well, Ramy, are you asking officially, or is it for your private information?"

"Private. Positively."

"Um-m. All right, then. I don't know where the heck he is. I sent him over to Oakland Tuesday afternoon. He phoned in his story—and that was the last of him."

"You mean—"

"I mean that lets him out with me! He used to go off on an occasional bat. Thought he'd got over the habit,

but—" The editor waved his hand expressively. "I haven't seen hide nor hair of him since Monday. And I don't ever want to see him again—now. He doesn't work here any longer."

"Gosh, George, did it ever occur to you he might have got hurt, or something?"

The city editor grinned. "Well, he hasn't been treated at an emergency hospital. And we compile death notices every day. Nay, nay. He's whooping it up with the boys in the Malemute saloon—and you can have his job if you want it."

"No. Thanks just the same," said Ramy, and departed slowly.

One for all and all for one! Was it last Monday night they'd given the call so gallantly? Just last Monday? Yes. Four short days ago. And now, of the three sworn comrades, Ramy alone remained!

He stumbled from the *Star* office, bewildered. But underneath that emotion, and more demoralizing still was the acute presentiment of tragedy, of stalking evil, that welled up in him.

For the first time in his life, indeed, the capable and composed Aramis felt utterly heart-sick, helpless, utterly impotent.

He paced his rooms that night until the people below rapped angrily. A visit to the little hotel where Thor lived had cast no light upon the situation. Nobody there had seen the reporter that week. The clerk had concluded he was off on some extended mission for his paper.

Ramy was up against another blank wall. But this time sheer anxiety compelled some action. He felt that Thor's disappearance was tied up with Larry's somehow; tingled with the increasing conviction that both his com-

rades were in grave peril—if not worse.

He decided to break the whole story to Jim Ingalls, seek the aid of that shrewd individual.

The *Times* being an evening paper, Ingalls generally hit the shop at seven sharp. But Ramy, next morning, was there before him. The big room, in fact, was deserted, save for the cub delegated to clip the morning dailies for rewrite and follow-ups, and a shabbily dressed, pock-marked and ratty-faced individual loitering restlessly by the phone-board.

"There he is!" chirped the cub as Ramy entered.

The pock-marked individual sidled up to him. "Your name Ware?" Ramy nodded. "Front name Air-ram-miss, er somethin' like it? Uh! Then I got this fer you."

He produced a begrimed and folded bit of paper. Curiously Ramy opened it, to behold a brief, penciled scrawl:

I've been framed. For God's sake get me out of here! Don't trust Matt Gordon!
PORTHOS.

RAMY'S jaw clamped with the click of a steel trap. Body tensed, eyes boring into the shabby-looking messenger, he snapped:

"Where'd you get this?"

The other shifted uneasily.

"Up the line," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"I don't get you."

"I guess yuh ain't never done time, then. Cripes, I mean the big house, the pen—prison."

"Folsom? Great Scott! Who gave you the note?"

The fellow moved closer; peered about him furtively.

"Number forty-nine, see? Number forty-nine. I'm due to get out yesttiday,

an' the boys knows it—so some guy slips this into me mitt on the q. t., see?"

"Was it a big, light-haired man?"

"Heck, naw! A small, dark fella. But he didn't write it. He got it from a big bimbo, to pass along, see? Number forty-nine... I gets in las' night, but you've left, see, so here'm I, waitin' again this mawnin' at two g. m... An' say, guv'nor—I'm told the guy I give the paper to will slip me a ten-spot fer me trouble—see?"

Ramy produced a ten-spot, which the ex-convict seized with a grunt of satisfaction. He turned to go.

"Wait a minute!" bade Ramy. "What's No. 49 up for?"

"Ain't got a thought, boss. I told you everything I know. I'm just a messenger-boy—an' that lets me out."

"Sure of it? Sure you can forget what was in the note?"

"Say—d'you think I wanta get in Dutch with the cops some more? Huh! Inside uh two minutes I'll have forgot what you look like, or that I ever was here. So long, cocky!"

He vanished. For a moment Ramy stood motionless, striving to grasp the full significance of the message.

Deep business, he'd said once. Well, it was fathomless now!

Don't trust Matt Gordon!

If the district attorney wasn't to be trusted, neither was his office, the police—any one.

Out of the fantastic possibilities the note had created, one salient thought struck home. Thor must at once be extricated from the snare which had enmeshed him.

It was up to Ramy to stage a rescue—and do it playing a lone hand. One for all!

Young Mr. Ware returned to his surroundings with a jerk, raced for a

typewriter, and pounded out a hasty note to Ingalls:

Have just received grave news, which makes it imperative to request leave of absence—perhaps for several days. Tell you about it later. Sorry.

WARE.

This he placed on the city editor's desk, then swung to the busy cub.

"How much cash you got, kid?"

"Oh, quite a bit, Ramy. I got lucky in a poker game last night."

"Pass over fifty, will you? I'll make you out a check for it... Here y'are. Thanks. If Ingalls asks about me, tell him I've left town."

The cub stared at him wonderingly. His mouth opened, framing a question which remained unuttered, for Ramy was long-gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUTSIDE THE LAW.

AT ten o'clock on the night of Sunday, October 13, two young men leisurely descended the steps, from the direction of the warden's office, and approached the main entrance of Folsom prison. Both wore ordinary street clothes. One had a light-weight "duster" tossed over his arm.

The guard on duty at the main gate looked up at their approach. One he recognized as a San Francisco newspaper man who had entered the prison a short time before. But he had entered unaccompanied. The guard's forehead puckered slightly at sight of the second man.

"It's all right, boss," smiled the newspaper man. "Here's an okay from the warden."

The guard examined the paper he extended, and nodded.

"Right, Jim. Pass them out."

His mate swung open the heavy door, and the two young men stepped through it to the well-lighted stone steps which led from the prison stoop.

From somewhere inside the prison, suddenly, came a muffled shout. The newspaper man, who with his companion was already halfway down the steps, darted a glance over his shoulder and then increased his pace.

There was another shout. The heavy prison gate swung open again, and the two uniformed guards rushed out.

"Hey, you!" one of them bawled at the departing men.

"She's busted!" the smaller of these muttered. "Thor—cut for it!"

They broke into a run.

"Stand where you are!" the guard bawled.

Instead they plunged onward, bending low.

The guard snatched out his pistol, crying, "Let 'em have it, Jim!" and set a zealous example. Almost at the same time a machine gun began to stutter ominously from an angle of the prison wall near by.

Bullets whistled about the two young men. They had penetrated beyond the immediate radiance of the entrance lights and become elusive targets. Nevertheless, as the fusillade heightened, the larger of the pair flung out his arms and sprawled headlong.

Instantly his comrade, who had been leading, swung and darted back to him.

"Hit hard, Thor?"

"Na-aw!" came an indignant rumble. "Stubbed my toe, dog-gone it! Keep a goin', Musketeer. I'm right with you!"

The gate guards dashed after the fugitives, shooting as they ran, and the prison frothed reinforcements; but the

quarry was now under complete cover of the darkness.

"This way!" gasped Ramy, in a moment. Turning sharp left he hurdled the road ditch and led the way across an open field.

FROM the prison numerous searchlights began to stab deep into the night, but the fugitives won through the network of dancing light beams to a thick clump of bushes. Here was hidden a dilapidated but powerful touring car. Ramy jumped into the driver's seat, and, as Thor landed beside him, started the motor and swung the machine out into a dirt side-road. An instant later they were zipping along this at sixty miles an hour.

"Oh, my!" Thor's exclamation of relief topped the droning motor. "This is the life! You're a ring-tailed snorter, Ramy, boy! How in heck d'you work it?"

"Dirty pool," said Ramy shortly. "I'm not a damned bit proud—"

The wail of a dying banshee split the air; seemed to rack and sear the shivering countryside. It was the prison siren, telling the world in no uncertain tones a prisoner had escaped. Its blood-curdling din made conversation impossible, which just then suited Ramy excellently. Indeed he never offered another word of explanation—and we'll respect his reticence, save to admit he'd engineered the rescue by using his paper's influence most wantonly—by shameless lies, bribery, and finally by assaulting the good-natured warden in his office after he had induced that unsuspecting officer to send for Prisoner 49.

Every step of the daring plot, however, had been carefully planned, with particular emphasis on the get-away.

Now, careening along the dirt road like a black tornado, the fugitives piled up a good mile of lead.

But they didn't add to that rapidly. It had been imperative to switch on the headlights. And those twin beams gave the two cars which had roared out of the prison courtyard the necessary clew. These vehicles clung to the wake of the quarry like bloodhounds on a scent.

Ramy, though, hadn't played all his aces yet. He made no effort to swing into a main highway, speeding along one by-road after another with unhesitating assurance—the result of careful study. He worked in a big circle north of Sacramento, until at last he reached the Sacramento River. Near the banks of this stream he slowed up, peering over his shoulder. He fancied that he caught a glimpse of the prison-cars, but they were far behind.

He halted the car. "All ashore, Thor."

"Huh? Why?"

"Because they got a look at this bus, back yonder, and every cop in California is probably on the watch for it by now."

"But—"

"Oh, get out—and watch papa perform," smiled Ramy. "I've become a hardened criminal. Steeped in the blackest vice."

He swung the machine toward the river, set the hand-throttle forward, let in the clutch, then hopped out nimbly. The car gathered momentum, plunged over the bank and vanished in the river.

THOR stared aghast. "Well, I'll be—What do we do now, walk?"

"Not on your life. Look in that bunch of trees ten yards behind you, and you'll find an old friend."

5 A

Thor plowed heavily through the underbrush, and presently grunted with surprise. There was Mr. Ware's blue roadster, tucked away as prettily as you please.

"And just yonder," averred Ramy, "is the main stem to Sacramento and all points west. Hop in, friend Porthos."

The giant rumbled exclamations of admiration, but Ramy wasn't listening. Down the incline behind them trickled the beams of headlights, much nearer than before. The switch of cars had been made expeditiously, but none too soon. Even now it was doubtful if they could slip away unnoticed. The thing was to keep the pursuers from getting a good look at the roadster and license plates.

Ramy flipped on the ignition and slapped his foot upon the starter. There was a brisk, lively grind, but the motor didn't catch. Cold, Ramy concluded, pulling out the choke. Again the starter rasped briskly, but after one wheezing cough the motor remained obstinate.

"Who's 'at coming?" inquired Thor suddenly.

"The law."

"Then for Pete's sake get a wiggle on!"

Time after time Ramy's foot bore down upon the starter heavily. To no avail. Racking his brains for a solution, Ramy realized he'd used the choke too much—flooded the carburetor. The only remedy was to keep turning the motor over; grind away the surplus gasoline.

Such a simple little setback to nullify his shrewdly laid plans, to precipitate a grim climax upon them, with success beckoning at their very fingertips! Yet that was what it amounted to. Even Thor had become aware of

the gravity of the situation, with the prison cars drumming nearer at every precious heartbeat.

They were helpless: their fate dependent upon a mass of inert and intractable machinery.

A scant two hundred yards distant, now, the pursuing furies. A hundred . . .

"Sit tight!" Thor grunted. "Maybe they won't see us. It's our only chance!"

And at that instant the motor caught; caught with a roar and series of spluttering explosions, as though to make amends for past errors.

"Wait nothing!" Ramy cried.

He rammed the car in gear and all but flung it into the roadway. As its light beams lanced at a sharp right angle athwart the vision of the driver of the leading prison car, he abruptly applied his brakes to avoid collision. Squarely into his path plunged the roadster, skidded perilously into the main highway, and leaped along it like a frightened deer.

To Ramy and Thor drifted a flurry of confused shouts, oaths, exclamations, topped by a spray of crackling gunshots. There was a tinkle of breaking glass as a bullet whined between them, splintering the windshield. But the momentary slowing of the pursuit cars and Ramy's burst of speed had averted disaster for the present. Again they had won clear. The open road beckoned.

YOUNG Mr. Ware, always a daring driver, stayed not on the order of his going. Indeed, he held the accelerator to the floorboard, so that the wheels of the light, swift car seemed to hit paving only occasionally. There being no traffic to speak of at that late hour, the head-

lights of the heavier burdened prison cars once more dropped behind.

"Saved again!" Thor breathed thankfully.

"For the moment. But all my energy and alleged cunning's gone to pot," lamented Ramy. "They spotted us. And with this busted windshield—oh, well. No sense worrying until we have to. Say, Thor, while we've got a little leisure—"

"Call this eighty-mile-an-hour volplaning 'leisure'?" boomed the giant. "Holy mackerel!"

"Well, it's as near it as we're likely to be until the Lord knows when . . . So tell me how the dickens you got yourself all mixed up with Folsom, will you?"

"It's a short, sweet story!" growled Thor. "I was railroaded! . . . Across the bay, after I left you on Tuesday, I got a brilliant idea. Dope Thompson is our one bet to find out what happened to Larry Bellew. So, thinks I, why not occupy the prison cell beside him, get chummy, and eventually pump the guy? No sooner thought than done. I hike it back to our estimable district attorney and lay bare the plot to him. Wouldn't he like to get the dope on Thompson's gang, I query? Sure! If I'm game, so's he. Thompson has been sentenced and he's being sent off that very night. The D. A. is willin' to charge me with some nominal offense, an' pack me right off with him. Only we've got to hustle. I leave a note for you with Gordon—"

"Which I never got," Ramy injected.

"Of course not! Oh, the damned polecat!" Thor burst out. "Listen! I leave this note telling you what's happened, and to square me somehow with my sheet, an' a few hours later I'm tucked snug an' comfy in Folsom,

wearing a striped suit and number forty-nine.

"Here comes the kick. The minute I start in on Thompson he gives a horse laugh an' spits right in my face! Somebody's wised him up to me aplenty. Well, I see that angle is useless, and I may as well get out, so I holler for the warden—and zowie! I get it in the neck again! . . . An arrangement with the San Francisco district attorney? Warden Neale also gives me a nice, quiet horse laugh. He thinks I'm lying or absolutely nutty. I've been duly convicted of carrying concealed weapons, sentenced to a three year stretch, and so far as he's concerned I'm going to serve every blessed day of it . . . That Gordon is crooked as a corkscrew, Ramy! He just naturally framed me to a fare-thee-well!"

"He used pretty crude methods," Ramy murmured. "I should think he'd be afraid to take a chance on them."

"Chance? What chances was he taking?" Thor shouted. "If I stay in—all hunky-dory. If by some miracle I make a get-away, well, it was all just an unfortunate mistake. He didn't dream that I was ready to want out. Oh, no! As for the note—he's a busy man, apt to forget little things like that. There y'are! And what can I do? The whole thing was *sub rosa* anyway!"

"But why should Gordon be so anxious to get rid of you, I wonder?"

"Ho ho!" Thor trumpeted. "You should ask that—Monsieur Aramis! Well, your guess is quite as good as—"

They were whirling through the suburbs of a city. He broke off, to grunt amazedly: "Hey! You've went and gone right plumb into Sacra-

mento! Jerusalem! What's the big idea?"

RAMY glanced over his shoulder. "Those fellows have been clinging to us like leeches. We'll have a better chance to shake 'em off in town."

Thor stared. "You're crazy, an' you know it! You can't breeze through Sacramento like lightning. Slow down! Slow down! Boy, you've ruined us!"

"Maybe," said Ramy coolly. "Wait and see."

It was imperative to check their mad speed, however, and in so doing the prison cars, which never quite had lost sight of their quarry, began to catch up steadily. Indeed, it seemed that Thor was right; that Ramy for the first time had bungled sadly.

On the main streets of the city the traffic lights were still functioning. Ramy, not daring to flout them, was held up twice. The prison cars, in no fear of police complications, rocketed up within a short block of the roadster. At the last it was only by dodging through a maze of side streets that Ramy shook them off long enough to pass over the river bridge, at the far end of the city, in safety, and gain open country again. But there, almost instantly, the lights of the prison cars once more licked out, almost to the back wheels of the roadster.

Even so Ramy appeared subtly relieved. One, two, three more miles flowed beneath their throbbing cyclone. In that time it had increased its lead only to a scant half mile, but Ramy didn't seem to mind. Indeed, suddenly he chuckled. And, as Thor glanced at him in wonder, he observed quietly:

"It won't be long now. I had to get on this road, Thor. It's not the San Francisco highway. You see—"

An eye-flicker later Thor did see something, albeit not quite what Ramy had intended. For just then a rear tire burst asunder with the crashing report of a field piece, and the roadster, streaking along at high speed, went instantly out of control.

After a series of breath-taking gyrations, with Ramy wrestling futilely at the wheel, the little car hurtled mightily into the right hand road ditch. There was a muffled crash, a spit of flying glass as it rolled over. Then it plowed to a standstill, its wheels still spinning whimsically.

From under it a voice spoke:

"Thor! Thor! Are you still with me?"

"Ow-w! . . . Mamma! I reckon so."

"Then lend us your shoulder. It's kind of crowded here."

The roadster quivered; then, under the heave of Thor's massive shoulders, fell over on its side. The fugitives crawled out from under, sorely bruised but in possession of all their members.

"That's that!" rumbled the giant ruefully. "An' now we've got about fifteen seconds before our friends pile in—"

"Don't waste 'em star-gazing, then!" Ramy cut in. "Save your wind and use your legs. This way!"

He darted into the open fields. Thor panted after him, grunting: "Aw, what's the use? They've got us where they want us now, old topper!"

"Have they? I deny it." Ramy countered. "Yea, bo! We're pretty lucky, although you don't appreciate it yet. I'll show you."

THE shouts which, in a moment, welled up behind told that their pursuers had discovered the wrecked roadster, and that the game of hare-and-hounds was on, but Ramy

didn't so much as turn his head. He kept going, with a sense of confidence that somehow conveyed familiarity with the gloomy terrain.

"I—wish—you would—show me!" Thor panted presently. "Boy—I've had a hard night—an' I've gotta—lot of weight to pull!"

"Bear up, my Porthos!" bade Ramy. "See that radiance ahead there? It's a beacon—a beacon of hope for us. Mather Field!"

"What good 'll that do us?"

"It happens I know a young lieutenant there. His house isn't a mile away. Keep plugging, big boy. If we can reach it—"

"Aw, it's after midnight. He'll be asleep!"

"Gee, you're a doubting Thomas!" rebuked Ramy. "Now me, I shouldn't wonder—if he was waiting up for us."

And indeed, when by a furtive and devious route they reached a row of officers' bungalows, situated in the open country close by the army flying field, and Ramy knocked softly at the door of the farthest, it was opened promptly by a slim young man in uniform.

"Hello! So it's you, Ware!" he greeted with a calm nod. "I didn't hear your car."

"We wrecked it, Dan," said Ramy. "Meet Thor Larson—late of the *San Francisco Star*. Thor, this is Dan Widener, a Stanford buddy of mine. And now, Dan, as the hounds of law are baying at our heels—carry on swiftly, for the love of Mike!"

"Righto, Ramy. Step in, boys. Right through the house; out the back door . . . Here's the old Lizzie. We're off!"

The main entrance of the army field was scarcely a stone's throw distant.

'As the car sped for it, however, a group of black figures emerged from the field beyond the bungalows, and a hoarse shout rang out.

"Don't stop!" cried Ramy, as he and Thor dropped to the floor of the tonneau.

"Never fear. I won't!" promised the officer—and they went by the waving figures like a flash. "You fellows hold that—uh—genueflection till I'm through the gate, will you? Don't want the guard to know I've got passengers."

Presently the car halted. Ramy heard the young officer say: "All right, soldier. I'm Lieutenant Widener." Then it moved on again.

"Right!" announced their driver, presently. "Here we are boys. There's the hangar, ship, an' everything. All aboard."

Events had been transpiring a bit too fast for Thor! He was slightly dazed. It was only when a roar of cold air swept the beads of perspiration from his fevered brow that he could actually bring himself to realize that he was crouching in the cockpit of a trim airplane, with Ramy beside him—that they were soaring through the unobstructed ether, with the lights of Mather Field fading out of view rapidly.

"Well, I'll be durned!" he exploded then.

Ramy didn't hear the exclamation, but glimpsed the expression of bewilderment on Thor's face, and nodded cheerfully.

IN less than an hour the lights of the bay region were glimmering beneath them. Presently their pilot brought his ship in a long, easy glide to earth in San Francisco's municipal airport.

"Don't tarry," smiled Lieutenant Widener from the cockpit. "I crave to hop off again, before the airport boys perceive this to be an army plane, and maybe get too curious."

"You know how I feel about what you've done for us, Danny!" cried Ramy, shaking his hand.

"Same to you, and many of 'em—you old crook!" grinned Widener. "I'm here to say I wouldn't have lent myself to your nefarious schemes, though, if I wasn't pulling out this mornin' for the Philippines . . . Toddle along now—an' the best of luck to you!"

With a wave of his hand and crashing exhaust-roar he was gone.

A moment later, so were Thor and Ramy. Thor being still almost speechless from the abrupt and amazing culmination of their get-away, it was Ramy who rounded up a cruising nighthawk taxi, piled his companion into it, and murmured an address.

"Well!" gulped Thor. And "Well! Well!"

He repeated the inane yet expressive grunt at intervals until the taxi halted atop Grant Avenue hill, far within Chinatown. Mechanically he descended after Ramy, and followed that cool individual around the corner, past one of the quarter's big tourist stores, into a gloomy alley, and down this into another and even gloomier one.

At last Ramy halted before an unassuming, narrow, wooden door, and rapped softly—thrice, and again thrice.

As at the bungalow by Mather Field, the door opened with surprising promptness. This time, however, was revealed only a patch of gloom darker than the street. Into this Ramy spoke, low and gently:

"Tell Wong Tai it is Aramis Ware—and a friend."

He led Thor into the yawning blackness, and when the door closed with mysterious smoothness behind them, leaned against it with a contented sigh.

"Wong Tai, huh?" Thor rumbled. "So you know the old boy, too?"

"Quite well," smiled Ramy. "He's under obligations to me, and should give us shelter."

"Yeah . . . I suppose so. But what good will that do, in the long run? Gee, Ramy—we're up against it, proper! We've lost D'Artagnan, our jobs—and now we're fugitives from justice. Heck, yes! Outside the law!"

"My poor Porthos, you're developing a regular case of sour-apples," averred Ramy mildly. "Ah, well . . . perhaps, under the circumstances, 'tis natural. But cheer up! We've found safety, anyway, and that's something—after our vicissitudes this night."

There was a faint, indistinct sound. A pallid radiance issued from somewhere in the distance, and a calm, dry voice said:

"Yes, you have found safety, my good friends. And, I think, more than that . . . The whims of the gods are inexplicable. It may be they have led you to trail's end."

CHAPTER IX.

ACTION FRONT!

A MAN appeared at the end of the long corridor. A Chinese. He was small in stature, wore an ordinary business suit, and his iron-gray hair was close-cropped, but for all that his wrinkled, kindly face conveyed the clear, level eyes of a philosopher.

"Hello, Wong Tai!" exclaimed Ramy. "Don't you ever sleep?"

"Not to-night. I was expecting you."

"Expecting *us*?"

"Expecting something, let us say, then. I did not know just what . . . But come upstairs, young gentlemen. You look weary."

In silence they followed him up a narrow stair-flight and through several passageways to a long, brightly lighted chamber. Ramy had been there before, but Thor grunted amazedly at the contrast between its richly colorful oriental hangings and comfortable occidental furniture. Wong Tai motioned them to a deeply cushioned lounge, seated himself near by, and clapped his hands. Promptly a servant—in Chinese blouse, pantaloons and slippers, this individual—appeared from an inner door bearing a teapot, cups, and a square, black bottle.

"This will refresh you," smiled their host. "Especially if you spike your tea with *Ng Ga Py*." He extended the black bottle to Ramy. "Its taste is obnoxious to European palates, but the effect is—ah—grand . . . Now, at your leisure, I shall be pleased to learn what my friends seek of me."

"Since our visit doesn't surprise you," observed Ramy, "I suspect you know that too. Hang it, Wong Tai—why didn't I think to look you up in the first place? However . . ."

Beginning with Larry Bellew on the Sacramento highway, briefly but vividly Ramy sketched the whole strange story. The eyes of the old Chinese seemed fixed on distance, and not a muscle of his face or body moved. And yet, somehow, he gave an impression of keen interest.

"Your experiences," said he quietly, when Ramy ended, "seem incredible in this prosaic, law-abiding land . . . The method of extricating your com-

rade from the prison was unfortunate. There must have been a better way—but, ah! I suppose recklessness must ever go hand in hand with youth! . . . Well, now, what is your plan?"

"Haven't any. We're up against it," Ramy admitted. "With the police after us, all we can hope to do is find a funk-hole, at least until the storm blows over. That's why we came to you."

WONG TAI leaned over, placed his hand on Ramy's shoulder, and looked gravely into his eyes. "The house of the Hip Sing tong is yours so long as you have need of it. It is a small return upon the debt I owe him who cleared me of the murder charge, lodged falsely by the Wing Leong knife-men to cover their own slaying . . . But perhaps I can do more than furnish shelter."

"Good hearing!" cried Ramy gratefully. "I know that you've got eyes and ears everywhere, Wong Tai—that there's no whisper in San Francisco so soft but that it comes to you . . . but say! If you had helpful information, why didn't you look me up? Why did you let me fly completely off the handle?"

"Because I knew that eventually you would come to me," replied the Chinese calmly.

"How?"

"These things are ordered. The ultimate is a fixed pattern to which all stray acts must definitely conform. These acts, however in themselves con-

fusing, are but the swiftly leaping shuttles of the loom."

With grave finality Wong Tai, sage of fatalism, pronounced his ukase.

"What did you mean, down in the passage, by saying we'd reached trail's end?" pressed Ramy.

"Ah, it was not so forthright. I said maybe . . . But enough talk for the present. You are weary. Sleep is a precious remedy. And a new day may also cast new light upon your problems." Wong Tai smiled and clapped his hands. The servant reappeared. "T'a Li will show you to a resting place. And he will also cleanse and dress that wound of yours—friend Porthos."

Porthos! Ramy shot an amazed look at him. How could Wong Tai possibly know—had he talked with Larry?

Then the import of his last sentence, striking home, impelled Ramy's head to twist from the Chinese to an incredulous stare at Thor. Plainly enough, in that bright light, he saw a dark blood-stain dyeing the right shoulder of the giant's coat.

"Aw, just a scratch!" Thor muttered uncomfortably.

"So that was why you stumbled, back there in the prison yard!" exclaimed Ramy. "Stubbed your toe, huh? And afterward, with that plugged shoulder, you heaved the car off us . . . Well, you're a man, my son!"

"You are both men," remarked Wong Tai composedly. "Good night, and may you sleep well to gain strength for what is to come—very soon."

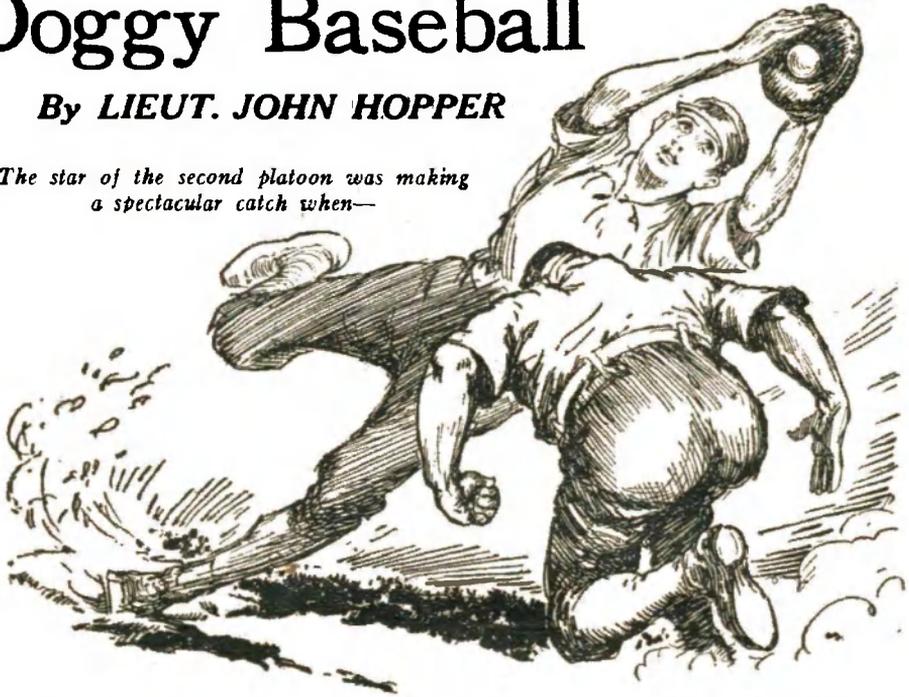
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Doggy Baseball

By *LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER*

The star of the second platoon was making a spectacular catch when—



Private Sam Jones, awkward but good-natured center fielder of the first platoon, collided with the first baseman and trouble at the same time; but trouble was Sam's specialty—he was an expert at getting into it

FOR seven and a half innings the second game of the annual three-game series to determine the baseball champions of Company B, United States Regular Infantry, had been bitterly contested. The score stood three to two, in favor of the first platoon.

In the field, the members of the second platoon team directed a steady stream of encouraging words at their pitcher. There was one man on third base, and two out. The game was far from lost. If the next man up to bat for the first platoon could be put out before the runner on third scored, there was still a good chance for the second platoon to overcome the one run lead, and win the game. And in winning this game they would win the series, for they had captured the first game to the tune of nine to five.

From the players' bench a short and stocky young soldier advanced timidly upon home plate, carrying his bat with the technique of a coal heaver carrying a shovel.

The voice of First Sergeant-Topping, coach and leader of the first platoon team, followed the batter from the bench.

"Make it good, now, Jones! Stand up to the plate, and hit the old pill like a man."

"Yes, sir," mumbled Private Samuel Jones from force of habit. The thought of the ordeal before him caused him to quake in his baseball shoes, caused his heart to thump in terror, and large beads of perspiration to break out on his broad, good-humored face. He had never done anything to the pitcher, yet according to Private

Jones's worried eyes, that normally peaceable and harmless soldier seemed transformed into a fiend on the pitcher's mound, and seemed to take unholy delight in hurling balls burning with speed in the direction of Private Sam's generous and tender middle.

The crowd of soldiers in the ancient, wooden grand stand behind home plate sensed Private Jones's distaste for baseball and accordingly greeted his appearance with sarcastic comments which ranged from his resemblance to a grandmother down to comparing his playing ability with that of a new-born babe.

Even on the players' bench he had just quitted, dissatisfaction was audible and bitter.

"Aw," said Corporal Hogan, the catcher, disgustedly, "what chance have we got to win the championship with that guy playing on our team?"

"Shut up!" commanded First Sergeant Topping tersely. "It ain't my fault that he's playing. The captain thought some athletic exercise would do him good—take some of that fat off of him—so he orders me to put him on my team. I don't even dare to bench him.

"Anyway," Topping concluded, for he was a just man, otherwise he would not have risen to his exalted position as first sergeant of Company B, "you can't blame Jones so much. He's from the backwoods, way back, and he ain't never seen a baseball game before, much less played in one."

"I don't see, just the same," insisted Corporal Hogan, "why we're the ones who have to play him. Why didn't the captain make the second platoon take him? They had the best of it anyhow with that bird Bottomly on their side. He's one of the best baseball players we've ever had in the company."

"Aw, stop your yelling!" said First Sergeant Topping exasperatedly. "If we lose this series, the supply sergeant 'll take more money away from me than the rest of you earn in six months!"

THE second platoon hailed Private Jones's arrival at the plate with visible and audible manifestations of joy. Easy meat! Wide-open way out of a tight place. Two outs, and the third one as good as chalked up on the board.

The pitcher grinned ferociously at Private Jones who, in return, waved his bat in uncertain friendliness at him. The southpaw proceeded to give himself a terrific fear-inspiring wind-up, out of which the horsehide suddenly emerged with all the speed of a bullet.

The pellet sliced across the inside of the plate, causing Jones to dodge whole-heartedly, and plunked into the catcher's mitt.

"Stri-i-ike one!" announced the umpire solemnly.

The first platoon player marooned on third base squatted on his heels hopelessly.

"Stri-i-ike two-ah!" said the umpire, as the second ball, thrown intentionally and preposterously wide, managed to entice Private Sam to swing like the old barn door.

Broad grins decorated the faces of the second platoon players.

Again the pitcher wound up into an exaggerated pose for the third strike.

Private Jones saw the ball hurtling directly at him. His frantic brain futilely telegraphed his muscles to get his bulky body away from the danger zone. But the muscles suddenly seemed paralyzed. They refused to respond. He could not move.

The ball was almost upon him when

at last, by a supreme effort of will, he broke the bonds of fear that chained him.

He was successful in getting his body out of the way, but his bat, in following his awkward movements, collided with the ball.

"Run! Run! You darn fool!" yelled First Sergeant Topping.

The ball struck the ground in front of home plate and started to roll slowly toward the surprised pitcher.

Private Sam Jones recovered his balance, shot a bewildered look at the shouting, gesticulating first sergeant, another at the rolling ball and at last dropped his bat and started galloping along the line to first base like an old and fat fire horse.

"Here! Here!" yelled the first baseman, Private Bottomly, to the flustered pitcher, who had scooped up the ball and was about to hurl it to the catcher despite the fact that the runner from third had already crossed the rubber.

The pitcher whirled, and let fly at Bottomly, who was waiting anxiously at the bag.

The ball and Private Sam seemed to arrive at about the same instant. Bottomly made a spectacular catch, but the next thing he knew something with the non-stoppable momentum of an express train struck him squarely on the chest, and then the ground rose up to slap him forcibly on the back of the head. The ball spilled out of his mitt.

The umpire calmly spread his hands and said, "Safe!"

PPRIVATE BOTTOMLY brought his tall and slender form erect.

His face which, normally, was exceptionally good-looking for a man, was now contorted by fury. His blue eyes blazed angrily.

"You big hog!" he cried, charging on the puffing Jones, who stood on first base as solidly as the Rock of Gibraltar stands on the toe of Spain. "Knock me down, will you? Take that!"

His fist shot out and rang the bell against Private Jones's generous but tender olfactory organ.

Baseball was one thing, but this was something else again; something which Private Jones knew a little more about. He recovered his breath and his startled wits about the same time. Then his avoirdupois followed his punch, and the earth slapped the back of Private Bottomly's classical head again.

The members of both teams rushed to the spot to interfere, but by the time they arrived Private Jones had recovered his usual good humor and was gazing mildly down at Private Bottomly, who was lurching groggily to his feet.

"I'll get you for this!" Bottomly ground out.

"Pipe down, Bott!" said Supply Sergeant Eskridge of the second platoon, who had come up running. "You had no business to take a poke at him. He didn't knock you down purposely."

It took a great deal of persuasion and not a few threats and warnings from the sergeant to induce Bottomly to take up his position again. When he finally yielded, after casting vicious looks at the phlegmatic Jones, both teams returned to their places and the game proceeded.

The next man up for the first platoon struck out, which retired the side without Jones advancing from first base.

The next two innings proved fruitless ones for the valiantly striving second platoon, and the game finally ended with the score four to two in favor of the first platoon.

The great yearly series was tied, and it was decided there and then that the crucial game would be played on Saturday, immediately following the weekly inspection.

"Better tell Captain Davidson to buy some more baseballs," said First Sergeant Topping to the supply sergeant. "What we got are pretty well battered up, and besides we're liable to run out of them."

Then the first sergeant turned away and called:

"Bottomly! Jones!"

When the tall and the short soldier were standing side by side in front of him Sergeant Topping bent a stern gaze on them.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourselves?" he said. "Fighting like that, and nearly breaking up the game! For that, you two guys beat it over to barracks right away and get dressed and cleaned up. The captain wants a detail of two men for some special job. Now shut up and beat it!"

"Aw, sarge—" began Private Bottomly, casting a bitter look at the phlegmatic Jones.

"Shut up, I said!" ordered the first sergeant ominously. "I hope it's a dirty job. You two guys deserve it. Now beat it!"

Private Sam Jones was accustomed to obeying orders without complaining, so he immediately made an about face and lumbered obediently away, unaware of Bottomly's hate-filled glance following his broad and sturdy back.

CAPTAIN DAVIDSON, commander of "B" Company, was at his desk in the barracks orderly room when Privates Bottomly and Jones entered after the customary rap on the door.

They saluted and stood stiffly at at-

tention, awaiting the captain's pleasure. All traces of the baseball game had been removed from their faces and hands. Their skins gleamed from vigorous application of soap and water. Private Bottomly's silky, yellow hair was plastered close to his well-shaped head. With his dark hair, Private Sam Jones had done his best, but it still looked like a lawn cut by a dull lawn mower.

The captain looked up and ran an appraising eye over their neatly pressed uniforms. His glance registered approval when it rested upon Private Bottomly, who was, indeed, a living fashion plate of a smart, well-dressed soldier. The officer's eyebrows, however, lifted a little when he turned to Private Jones.

"Who told you to join this detail?"

"The f-first sergeant, sir," stammered Private Jones, shifting his weight uneasily on his ponderous feet.

The captain grunted. "Well, it's too late now to make a change," he said, eying Private Jones distastefully. "Sergeant Topping should have known better. I told him distinctly that I wanted two good-looking and alert soldiers for this job."

Sam Jones blushed behind his wide ears. It did not take any feat of superhuman intelligence to comprehend the captain's meaning. Private Jones was the odd stick of the pair. His ample build, his plain face, made him anything but a good-looking soldier. As for alertness, it was axiomatic in the company that Private Jones was the best man for doing the right thing wrongly, and the wrong thing rightly.

"However," continued the captain, "you will have to do, I suppose." He leaned forward and stabbed a pencil at them. "What do you know about etiquette?"

"Etiquette!" They stared at him.

"Yes, etiquette! Table serving. Tonight I am going to have guests in the mess hall for supper. Very particular guests. And you two men are going to wait on the table occupied by these guests and myself. I want you to be very, very careful."

He paused to allow the full meaning of his last sentence to sink in.

"If anything goes wrong," he added significantly, his eye on Private Jones, "it 'll be just too bad—for you. Get it? Now here is what I want you to do."

Whereupon Captain Davidson proceeded for a full fifteen minutes to instruct his soldiers how to be waiters according to the best rules of etiquette.

Private Jones faithfully endeavored to follow his captain, but all these manners were new and strange to him. His brain was whirling with the numerous things he was told. He had never known before that such ceremony could be attached to the simple and natural act of eating.

Private Bottomly, on the other hand, seemed to take to the idea of things as a duck takes to water.

When the captain had finished his discourse, had given his last warning, had uttered his last threat, he rewarded Bottomly with an approving glance. The look which he turned on Jones, however, was dark and doubting.

SUDDENLY there came to the ears of the three in the orderly room the musical notes of a deep-toned automobile horn. The captain's guests were arriving. A look of rapturous anticipation mingled with nervous apprehension spread over his face. He reached for his cap on the desk, and started for the door.

At the same moment a tenant that

had been occupying the space beneath the captain's desk unknown to that officer, startled by the commotion, also decided to move. The captain and this creature, in moving toward the door, arrived on the same spot at the same time. The officer's polished boots and clinking spurs struck forcibly and became entangled with a small, lively body. A yelp of surprise and pain fractured the peace of the orderly room. It was followed by a series of lesser yelps, which finally tapered off to a plaintive whimper or two. Four paws scratched the floor desperately, and the dog scooted for Private Jones, who had been watching the scene with horrified gaze.

Meanwhile Captain Davidson, suddenly, unexpectedly, and very undignifiedly—not to say painfully—arrived on the floor in a sitting position. The officer had spent some time in the Army, and accordingly knew the best oaths for use on such occasions as this. When he had vigorously proceeded through about half his repertory he remembered, with a gulp, his arriving guests who, by now, had doubtless descended from their limousine and were approaching the barracks steps.

He cast a murderous glance at the dog, which had gratefully accepted the haven of Private Jones's broad arms, and was frantically engaged in washing with his tongue the private's sober features.

"Your dog?" roared the captain, getting to his feet and futilely brushing at the dirt which desecrated the seat of his once immaculate "pink tea" breeches.

Private Jones nodded his head dumbly, admitting his guilt. His tongue had become too thick to form words.

"All right!" snapped the captain.

"Get rid of him immediately! Do you hear? If I catch that mutt around here again, I'll have him shot. And," added the officer for good measure, "I'll put you in the guardhouse. Understand?"

The captain went out to greet his guests. Private Bottomly lingered long enough to give vent to a long, sarcastic laugh. Then Sam Jones was alone with his dog.

His sorrowful and perturbed gaze looked down into the eager, worshipful, brown eyes of the small animal, whose fur of irregular and misplaced black and white markings, long, edge-chewed ears and stubby tail proclaimed him a dog in whose presence the word pedigree had never even been thought of, much less mentioned.

Private Jones's heart was lead within his breast, and it hurt. The one bright spot in his military life, his truest friend, was his dog. Ever since the day the stout, ungainly, good-humored soldier had rescued the shivering mongrel from the baiting of a gang of street urchins they had been bosom companions and loyal friends. Now the animal must be banished, or suffer death.

Private Jones sighed heartbrokenly and left the orderly room still carrying the dog in his arms.

THE captain's guests proved to be two ladies, apparently mother and daughter. Such astonishing and unusual company in the mess hall was enough to keep the men subdued in actions and practically silent. Their eyes, however, did double duty. There was not a soldier in the company who did not steal all the looks he felt he could get away with at the young lady sitting beside the captain.

Indeed, Miss Gladys Bradley was certainly well worth looking at. De-

mure, of blond perfection, she sat beside Captain Davidson, conversing politely with him.

Across from her was her mother at whom, by the way, no one cast a second glance. Mrs. Bradley, when she was not surveying the two young people opposite her with a hawklike gaze, spent her time in raising her lorgnette from her ample bosom and training it curiously on the soldiers who sat at the long tables around her.

Once, while the good lady was engaged in doing so, she was suddenly startled by a huge arm sneaking past her ear and depositing a meat platter on the table. In retrieving the arm, a massive shoulder gently jostled her bare and powdered one, knocking the lorgnette a good foot or two from its proper position.

Captain Davidson drew in his breath sharply and shot a vicious glance at the trembling Private Sam Jones, whose mind was more on his dog than on the niceties of proper serving as illustrated in the book of etiquette. The daughter glanced apprehensively at her formidable parent.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Captain Davidson with false good-humor, looking at Mrs. Bradley. "These men are really soldiers, you know. They are apt to be a little clumsy when waiting on such unusual and charming company," he concluded bravely, stealing an instant to throw another murderous glance at Private Jones who was now stolidly lumbering off to the kitchen.

"Oh, that's quite all right, captain!" gushed Mrs. Bradley in a thin, affected voice. She favored him with a vinegary smile. "I understand, really. It was so nice of you to invite us here," she continued. "It is so—interesting. Don't you think so, Gladys?"

"Yes, mother," replied the charm-

ing daughter obediently. She pressed Captain Davidson's hand under the cover of the table.

"Yes, indeed," the dowager went on. "So interesting. They all look so quiet and peaceable—almost like ordinary human beings. I hadn't imagined!"

"What, Mrs. Bradley?" asked Captain Davidson, puzzled.

The dowager mother waved her lorgnette serenely. It seemed to indicate that Mrs. Bradley's opinions on any subject were as right as that two and two equal four.

"It surprises me, captain, to see so many bright, young, and quite honest looking faces among these men of yours. I am further surprised that so many of them can dine quietly together in peace. I had been given to understand that a hired soldier is always a crude, boisterous, rough creature, who is quite ready at any time to kill and rob poor, helpless people."

"Oh, Mrs. Bradley!" smiled Captain Davidson. "I'm afraid you do our soldiers an injustice!"

"Perhaps so," she admitted. Then she expanded visibly like a pouter pigeon. "As you know, my dear captain, I am the chairwoman of the W. P. C. A. W.—Women's Preventive Crusade Against War—our little home organization that is doing its bit," she said with modesty as false as store teeth, "to put an end to all war. I have always been a most ardent pacifist, and that is why, of course, I hesitated so much in giving Gladys to one whose profession is avowedly that of war.

"However," she sighed like a horse, "love cannot be denied. And I must confess, captain, that I am a little more reconciled to the idea after seeing these men here this evening."

Meanwhile, Private Jones was returning from the kitchen. He bore with both hands a platter containing a large strawberry shortcake which, with true Army hospitality, was running over with rich whipped cream and red, ripe, juicy strawberries.

The captain was too good a soldier to argue with his superiors, so he submitted to Mrs. Bradley's spoutings without comment.

"And further," continued that solid lady, who knew what was right, "I know that if all these young gentlemen here knew the truth of things, the horrible devastation caused by war, the cheap glory and tinsel of bands and uniforms, they would . . ."

Her enthusiasm was carrying her away. The silver lorgnette was slashing the air decisively, emphasizing the inexorable truth of her words. It slashed into Private Jones's arms as he was straining himself to place the gorgeous piece of pastry on the table.

The platter tipped and, greased by the cream beneath it, the white and red mass slid off swiftly, suddenly, and unexpectedly.

Plop!

IT would be putting it mildly to say that the ensuing scene was horrible.

The mushy cake disintegrated immediately and sprayed Mrs. Bradley's broad bosom lavishly with whipped cream and strawberries. Indeed, with the red streams staining the fluffy white, Mrs. Bradley looked as if she herself had just returned from the battle-front.

For an awful moment there was not a sound in the mess hall. But soldiers, no matter how nice they may look, are only human underneath, and no discipline has ever been devised that can curb sudden laughter.

For an instant the men stifled it for their captain's sake. But the sight of the dowager rising out of the wreck of the strawberry shortcake, filled with rage like a toy balloon is filled with air, was too much even for trained soldiers. A tremendous gale of uncontrollable laughter swept through the mess hall.

Captain Davidson was beside himself. He rushed to Mrs. Bradley's aid, and in his distraction attempted to wipe away the cream and the strawberries with his napkin. The irate lady, however, snatched the cloth viciously from his hands and began to dab futilely at her dress, assisted by her fluttering, anxious daughter.

The captain backed away, and looked about him with blood in his eye.

As broad as Private Sam Jones was, not a pound of him was in sight. He had not lingered after the fateful crash. His sole desire had been to put distance between himself and the disastrous spot. In the confusion immediately following the catastrophe he had made good his escape, his big, flat feet carrying him along with a speed that was nothing short of remarkable. Where he was now was a matter of conjecture, but it was a good thing he was missing, for certainly if the captain could have put hands on him at that moment, Private Sam Jones's dog would have been without a stepfather.

"Where did he go?" Captain Davidson hissed at Private Bottomly, who had stood his ground and was busily engaged in feeding the mess hall's scanty supply of napkins to Mrs. Bradley.

"I don't know, sir. But he'll show up some time," said Bottomly, who was having difficulty in keeping his joy from sparkling in his eyes.

A shriek, high and hair-raising, split the confusion. Captain Davidson's

heart turned colder than forty below zero, and he hastened to Mrs. Bradley's side.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, my diamond pendant! It's gone! Some one has taken it!"

"My dear Mrs. Bradley!" said Captain Davidson, trying to be calm. "What damned—I mean, diamond—pendant? What happened to it?"

"What happened to it?" she shrieked at him. "You fool! What do you suppose happened to it? It has been stolen—right from my very neck—as I sat at this table. Oh!" she moaned. "The very last thing my dear, dead Horace gave me!"

"Mother! Mother!" appealed Gladys frantically.

Mrs. Bradley collected herself. She pursed her lips, and transfixed the perspiring captain with a grim and baleful glare.

"That settles it!" she said, biting short her words. "Gladys, you will marry this man, this leader of hoodlums, thieves, and murderers, only over my dead body. Come!"

With that, she seized her daughter's hand, jerked her from the mess hall, from the barracks, and into the shiny limousine, which presently moved off with a sarcastic roar, casting exhaust backward into the face of the bare-headed Captain Davidson standing wretchedly in the middle of the road.

Finally the captain pulled himself together. A terrible look crossed his face as he thought of Private Samuel Jones.

FROM that day on, Private Jones became a fixture in the company kitchen. The hardest and dirtiest tasks were his. The cooks, acting upon the captain's orders, kept the mountainous soldier on the jump from day-break until dark.

One would have thought that such long and arduous labor would have wasted Sam to a scarecrow. Far from it. He waxed stronger and fatter than ever.

His mien, however, was sad. He pined for the joyous and ever loving companionship of Spotty, his dog, whose bounding, wriggling, playful presence had vanished from the barracks as completely as a recruit's first pay in the company poker game.

Private Jones suffered the most, yet he was not alone in his suffering. The entire company sweated and swore under the harsh discipline of a captain suddenly gone moody and irritable. Despite all the investigations, company punishment, third degrees and searches, the diamond pendant still remained among the missing. Coincident with the bursting of the shortcake bomb, it had vanished. No leaves were granted, and the camp was combed—in vain. That was queer, too, for there were few places in which the closely-guarded soldiers could have hid it.

The longer it remained missing the worse grew the captain's temper. Life for his men, was made bearable only by the thought of the approaching baseball game, which would decide the much-argued championship of the company.

The day of the big game finally came, and it was inspection day as well. In the morning Captain Davidson, followed respectfully by First Sergeant Topping and Supply Sergeant Eskridge, entered the huge squad-room of the company. An immediate silence fell over the place.

Soldiers, with uniforms freshly pressed and hair wetly combed, stood beside their bunks and shivered in anticipation. The captain had been hard-boiled all week. If his mood had not

changed this was going to be a whiz of an inspection, and woe betide the man who had a single article in his trunk locker misplaced, or who had the slightest speck of dust beneath his bed.

The captain had not gone far when he paused.

"Get me a man with a paper and a pencil!" he barked at First Sergeant Topping. "These trunk lockers are in filthy condition! I'll have the name of every man who owns one, and there'll be a lot of extra fatigue duty done around here next week."

The first man upon whom the eyes of Sergeant Topping fell was Private Samuel Jones.

"Get a piece of paper and a pencil, Jones," he ordered, "and go with the captain. Take down all the names he gives you."

In his eagerness to be of service, Private Jones stumbled against his trunk locker with his big feet, and sent its cover down with a magnificent crash. The captain looked up and frowned, but as his mind was busy with his inspecting, he saw only some clumsy individual, and not Private Jones.

The inspecting party arrived before the trunk locker of Private Bottomly.

"Ah," said the captain to the soldier who had become his favorite, "very neat, Bottomly!"

The trunk, in fact, was no neater than others which the captain had described as "filthy," "disgusting," and "degrading." A superior smile spread across the handsome features of Private Bottomly.

"Thank you, sir!" he dared to say.

At that moment the supply sergeant noticed a battered baseball reposing in the tray of the trunk. It joggled his memory.

"Captain, sir," he asked, "did you get the new baseballs for the game this afternoon?"

"I did not!" snorted the captain, who had forgotten to do so. "What do you men think the company fund is—a bank? Use the baseballs you have."

"But," murmured the supply sergeant, "there ain't enough for the game."

Captain Davidson did not choose to hear him, and the inspecting party moved along to the next bunk.

WITH excitement running high the entire regiment turned out to witness the great championship game that afternoon. The soldiers quickly separated into rival factions, and each supported its team generously with sarcastic remarks concerning the playing ability of the opposition. Partisanship was as bitter as in a World Series.

Despite the fact that the first platoon was playing with only eight men—nobody counted Private Jones at center field—it managed to hold the second platoon to a tie score, four and four, until the unlucky seventh inning, when Bottomly hit a home run.

The first half of the ninth began with the second platoon still one run in the lead, and Supply Sergeant Eskridge's smile grew broader as he thought of the money he would win from the first sergeant.

However, his smile faded to a worried frown as the first three men up to bat for the first platoon followed one another to first base—that terrifying predicament of three men on and no outs.

When the next two men walked up to home plate, and walked right back disgustedly to the bench again, Ser-

geant Eskridge's face began to relax a little. His pitcher was fighting hard and nobly lifting himself out of the hole by his own bootstraps.

The supply sergeant's frown became a grin at the sight of the player now timidly approaching the home plate, holding his bat as if it were a strange woman's baby.

Cold sweat oozed from every pore of Private Jones's chunky body as he took his stance beside the base. His left foot was awkwardly placed to enable him to beat a hasty retreat if the ball came too fast or too close.

The first one whizzed by him like a streak of lightning.

"Stri-i-ike one!" boomed the umpire.

Spectators groaned loudly.

"Stri-i-ike two-uh!" said the umpire, as Sam recoiled from one that perilously grazed his generous middle.

Jeers, hisses, and razzberries compelled him to stand up to the plate again. He waved his bat unconvincingly.

Plunk!

"Ugh!" grunted Private Jones, dropping his bat and doubling over agonizedly to clutch his midriff, which the pitched ball had tried unsuccessfully to penetrate.

"I knew," muttered First Sergeant Topping grimly, albeit with satisfaction, "that that was bound to happen sooner or later. And I had a hunch that this would be the time."

According to the rules of baseball, all players moved around a base. One came home, making the score five to five, and Private Jones went to first still tenderly rubbing his bruised stomach.

The next man up smacked a single. Unfortunately it was so placed that only one man was able to get home on

it. And, for a miracle, Jones knew enough to scramble to second base and stay there.

The next play was a vicious line drive, which came straight at the pitcher's head, and that surprised individual, in putting up his hands to protect himself, caught the ball, thus ending the disastrous first half of the ninth inning.

The team of the first platoon now went into the field and picked up their gloves with grim, do-or-die expressions on their faces. The score stood six to five in their favor, and they intended that it should remain that way. It would—if Supply Sergeant Eskridge's team could be held scoreless for the last half inning.

The outfield situation, made precarious by the awkward and hefty Private Sam Jones playing center field, had been adjusted nicely, and had worked successfully so far. All through the game Sam had not put his hand on a ball. The right fielder and the left fielder, acting under instructions of Sergeant Topping, played closer to center field than was usual, and thus managed to cover between them that territory in addition to their own.

With grim expressions not unlike those worn by the team in the field, the second platoon went to bat.

THE first man up smacked a bouncing grounder to third, which was juggled sufficiently to allow him time to reach first base safely. The second man died hard, going out on the third strike after three balls in succession had been called on him.

The next player hit a long, high fly to the outfield, purposely directed at the territory guarded by Private Jones. The direction, however, was a

little off, and the ball veered sufficiently to the left to enable the left fielder to make a magnificent running catch. The runner on first started for second, but suddenly changed his mind and returned to first.

There was a man on first base, and two outs, when Private Bottomly rose from the bench. The cheers of the crowd followed him as he confidently advanced to home plate, his slender arms swinging three bats.

"Make it good, Bott!" pleaded Supply Sergeant Eskridge. "Two outs, you know."

"Don't worry!" replied Bottomly, tossing the extra bats away. "I'm due for another home run—and I'm going to collect it now!"

Sergeant Topping motioned his outfielders farther back. Private Jones, always anxious to please, went so far back that if one did not know it, he would have been surprised to learn that he was in the game at all.

Bottomly took a firm grip on his club, smacked the rubber plate once with it, and dared the pitcher to put one over to him.

There was no doubt that the pitcher was worried. The first ball he threw went wild, and it was only by a desperate leap that the catcher snared it.

Bottomly grinned like a cat that has a mouse cornered, and waved his bat forward and back a couple of times.

The pitcher took a chance, and with all his speed hurled the ball squarely across the plate.

"Stri-i-ike one!" said the umpire.

Bottomly only grinned and took a tighter grip on his bat.

The next ball also was going to cut the plate, straight as a bullet, no curve, no drop.

Bottomly swung viciously, but succeeded only in nicking the ball, which

rose over the grand stand and, soaring still higher, disappeared from sight over the top of Headquarters Building across the road.

"No more balls," said the umpire in answer to the pitcher's questioning look. "We'll have to wait while somebody chases after that one."

"I knew it!" fumed Supply Sergeant Eskridge. "And this the championship game, too!"

While all were waiting impatiently for the lost ball to be recovered, Private Jones came galloping in breathlessly from his lonely center field position.

"I got a ball!" he announced, tugging at his hip pocket and finally producing a battered but usable baseball.

"Okay," said the umpire, taking it. "We'll use this. It's better than none, and maybe they'll never find the other."

"Hey! Just a minute!" Private Bottomly hastened to the pitcher's mound.

He snatched the baseball from the umpire's hand and then turned furiously upon Jones.

"Where did you get this ball?" he demanded.

"Out of your locker," said Private Sam unconcernedly. "I saw it there this morning when the captain was inspecting. I heard the supply sergeant say that we were likely to be short of balls, so I thought I'd pick it up and bring it along."

"Oh, you did!" snarled Bottomly. He swung his bat as though he would have liked to annihilate the soldier before him. But a glint in Sam's eye stopped him in time.

"What's wrong with the ball?" demanded the umpire. "It isn't quite as good as what we've been using, but as far as I can see it's all right."

He retrieved the ball from Bottomly's unwilling fingers and tossed it to the pitcher.

"Play ball!" he commanded.

WHICH left nothing for Bottomly to do but return to home plate, where he waited for the next ball to be served to him.

It was not long in coming. There was a resounding crack as the speedy horsehide met wood. For an instant Bottomly stood beside the plate, surprise mingled with apprehension on his face. It was as if hitting the ball had astonished him—as if he had meant to miss it. The next instant, however, he was tearing toward first base.

The white sphere mounted higher into the blue sky, until it became a speck over center field.

The right fielder and the left fielder, having judged the probable course of it, now turned about and began racing madly to the rear. However, it was plain to all on the field that their efforts were hopeless.

There was one man who was back far enough to get under that ball—Private Sam Jones—but his teammates knew that even if he were equipped with a bushel basket he would not catch it.

Down, down dropped the ball. Bottomly had rounded first and was kicking up the dust on his way to second. His comrade on bases was almost to third.

Manfully Private Jones stood his ground. Like one who knows fully that he is about to touch a high tension wire, he raised his big hands toward the ball, which was looming bigger than a balloon and rushing earthward with terrifying speed.

He muffed it. The baseball went

through his hands like water through a sieve.

The ball struck the ground, bounced high, came down again, and then went bounding vigorously along.

Private Jones valiantly gathered his pounds together to give chase. Suddenly he heard a sound that chilled his blood. Barking joyously, a black and white dog, stubby tail erect, long ears flapping like flags, streaked past the center fielder, almost upsetting him. A frayed rope, streaming behind his canine friend like a triumphant banner, told Private Sam the sad story.

Ecstatic at his new-found freedom and doubtless thinking that the ball bounding along through the green grass was doing it for his especial benefit, the mutt seized it in his mouth.

"Spotty! Go home!" shouted Private Jones.

For him, the game was forgotten. He thought only of his dog, his one true friend, appearing before the eyes of the world again—an appearance that meant death, according to the captain's orders.

The dog sensed from the tone of his master's voice that something was amiss. But what it was he did not dally to discover. As fast as his four short legs could carry him he lit out across the field and disappeared from sight. He neglected, however, to leave the ball behind him.

Meanwhile, back in the infield, the umpire was motioning a cloudy-visaged Bottomly back to second base, and a volubly objecting player from home to third.

"Interfered-with ball," said the umpire. "I rule only two bases on the hit."

After much vociferous argument on both sides, the game at last proceeded with the ball that had been recovered

by that time from behind Headquarters Building.

And the next man up to bat for the second platoon struck out.

"Gosh!" said First Sergeant Topping shakily, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "We'd have lost the game for sure if it hadn't been for that darned dog! If I ever saw a homer, that clout of Bottomly's was one!"

AFTER the game Private Bottomly ended his vigorous, curse-filled search for Private Jones when he found that large individual, the unsung hero of the baseball series, sitting sadly and apprehensively on the steps of the tool shed behind the company barracks.

"Where," began Bottomly, suggestively shaking the baseball bat he held in his hand, "is my ball?"

Private Jones was too miserable to fight. But before he could make an answer the screen door of barracks opened to let out Captain Davidson and First Sergeant Topping.

"Ha!" said the captain as he approached. He had caught a glimpse of Bottomly's threatening attitude, and the baseball bat. "What is the trouble here?"

"I'm looking for a baseball I lost," said Bottomly, with obvious reluctance.

"Aw, forget it!" said the first sergeant. "You'll never find it again. And by the time that dog gets through with it, it won't be no good no more anyhow."

"Dog? Dog?" said Captain Davidson, pricking up his ears. "What dog? Whose dog?"

No one answered him right away. The officer finally snapped out testily, "What about the dog, I say?"

"Private Jones's dog, sir," said the first sergeant dutifully.

The captain eyed Jones ominously.

"I thought I told you to get rid of that animal!"

"Y-yes, sir. I did, sir," replied Sam Jones, but his eyes failed to meet the captain's.

Suddenly, from beneath the tool shed came a series of short, eager barks.

Private Jones's face paled. His own dog was calling him a liar!

"Ha!" exclaimed the captain, bending a black look upon Jones. "Release the animal, sergeant."

After much untying of weird knots and much pulling on the intricate system of ropes Private Jones had used to secure Spotty once more, the first sergeant was at last able to seize the impatient animal by the scruff of the neck and drag him out.

When Spotty came into light he was nonchalantly holding between his jaws a baseball, from which the cover had already been partially ripped.

"Ha!" said Captain Davidson. "Here is your ball, Bottomly!" He bent forward to take the damaged article from the dog's mouth.

Bottomly extended an eager hand. Suddenly Captain Davidson exclaimed aloud and jerked the ball back.

He pulled back the chewed and ripped horsehide cover. In a small cavity, which had been gouged out of the tightly wound twine, sparkled a diamond and a thin chain of platinum.

The officer extracted the pendant and shook from it some pieces of putty-like substance, which had evidently been used to wad the jewelry tightly into the baseball.

"Your ball?" he snapped at the sulen Bottomly.

First Sergeant Topping was quick to nod his head. "His ball, captain," he answered for the scowling soldier.

Meanwhile Spotty, not knowing that by revealing his hiding place he had sentenced himself to death, forgave the captain for stumbling over him that day in the orderly room and was jumping up on the captain's breeches in appealing overtures of friendship.

The officer looked down silently at the animal and made no effort to prevent the mutt from pawing his breeches, although the paws left definite and ineffaceable marks. Then the captain looked at Private Jones.

The recovery of the diamond pendant meant little to Sam. His thoughts were of Spotty, at whom he stared with sad eyes.

"Private Jones," said the captain, "there is a corporal's vacancy in the company—which I think you'll just about fit."

The officer turned to the first sergeant.

"Topping, put this valuable pup on Company B's roster. Hereafter he will be known as Private Mutt—and respected as such. Give him a permanent assignment to Corporal Jones's squad."

"Yes, sir!" grinned the first sergeant.

Captain Davidson glanced briefly at Private Bottomly.

"Guardhouse," he said laconically.

Then the captain strode into barracks to prepare himself for a call at the Bradley home.

The first sergeant marched his muttering prisoner away, leaving behind the newly created corporal happily hugging the only four-footed private in his squad.

THE END.

Jan of the Jungle

In a time-lost valley of prehistoric beasts and strange humans in the unexplored heart of South America, the jungle-trained young red-head Jan and his fellow-captive Koh Kan are marked for a ghastly sacrifice

By

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

*Author of "Maza of the Moon,"
"The Prince of Peril," etc.*



Jan swung himself up on the ichthyosaur's scaly neck



LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TALL, strong, and auburn-haired, the sixteen-year-old youth Jan had never seen a human being other than his kidnaper and evil genius, Dr. Bracken. That half-mad fiend, having been jilted by Jan's titian-haired mother, Georgia Trevor, had stolen the boy shortly after birth. By sewing him in the skin of a baby chimpanzee, Dr. Bracken had succeeded in getting a captive chimpanzee-mother, Chicma, to adopt the child as her own. A human being with an ape's mind—that was the revenge Dr. Bracken planned.

But Jan and Chicma escaped from the menagerie in the Florida Everglades and were picked up by a Vene-

zuelan trading schooner just before the enraged and disappointed Dr. Bracken caught up with them. During a hurricane Jan, his chimpanzee foster-mother, and a kindly Negro named Borno were washed ashore on the South American coast. Separated from Borno, Jan and Chicma struck into the jungle, where they lived for two years in a tree hut which Jan built near a waterfall. One day Jan wandered near a rubber plantation just in time to rescue beautiful Ramona Suarez—the first girl he had ever seen—from a gigantic puma. They became good friends, and Ramona taught Jan the rudiments of English and natural history. Jan was especially fond of

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pictures of animals, modern and prehistoric, and liked to copy them. One day while using a pen and blue India ink, he discovered a way to tattoo on the palm of his hand an exact duplicate of a flower tattooed on Ramona's.

Ramona was sent away to school in the United States. The disconsolate Jan spent his time exploring a great closed valley, a secret entrance to which he had found behind the waterfall near his hut. One day he and Chicma were captured there by a strange band of white men in golden armor, men of the Sect of Re. Jan escaped, but he was soon taken again, this time by a black-robed fisherman, member of the Saturn-worshiping Sect of Set, and was thrown into a black-walled enclosure with several hundred other prisoners.

As weeks passed Jan struck up a warm friendship with a captive youth named Koh Kan, prince of a tribe of yellow-skinned worshippers of the Feathered Serpent, who told him that they were being held as a sacrifice to Sebek, a huge water-monster revered by their captors. A few days later a guard notified them that their time had come.

Meanwhile the vengeful Dr. Bracken had picked up the trail of Jan and Chicma, and with Jan's parents had organized a party to comb the jungles for the missing pair—hoping in that way to hasten his revenge on the mother of Jan.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WARM TRAIL.

ON one of the long wooden docks that projected over the river in front of the Suarez hacienda, Don Fernando and Doña Isabella, as well as a score of their Indian servants,

stood gazing intently downstream. Today Ramona was expected home from her first year of school in the United States. A servant had just come dashing up to the house to announce that the boats were coming.

After gazing for a brief interval, Don Fernando removed his slim cigar from between his lips and said to his wife:

"The *mozo* was wrong. Those are not our canoes."

"But they must be," insisted Doña Isabella. "Who else could be coming this way with so many boats?"

The don shrugged.

"Explorers, perhaps, or a party of hunters. We'll soon see."

There were six canoes in all, most of them smaller than the six sent out by Don Fernando in charge of Felipe Fuez, his foreman, with orders to meet and bring Ramona and her governess.

As the first canoe drew near to the dock, the don carefully scanned the faces of its occupants. Besides the four Indian paddlers it contained two white men—one a swarthy Venezuelan with a small, pointed mustache, the other a lean, bearded man wearing a pith helmet and khaki, who might be an American or an Englishman. In the second boat rode two more people with pith helmets and khaki clothing. One was a broad-shouldered, clean-shaven, athletic-looking fellow who appeared to be in his middle thirties; the other was a woman, somewhat younger and quite comely, whose curls glinted auburn in the reflected sunbeams that danced up from the river. The other four boats contained Indian paddlers and luggage.

The first canoe came up beside the dock. Its gunwale was seized by willing hands, steadied.

The don and doña were smiling and

gracious now, masking their disappointment at not seeing Ramona, that they might welcome the strangers with fitting cordiality.

When the first two stood on the dock the bearded man took the initiative.

"I am Dr. Bracken, Don Fernando," he said in Spanish.

"I am honored, *señor*," replied the don. "Doña Isabella, may I present Dr. Bracken?"

"An honor and a pleasure," murmured the doctor, when the doña had acknowledged the introduction. "May I present Captain Santos?"

"My other companions speak very little Spanish," he added then. "Permit me to translate for you."

"Hardly necessary," smiled the don. "I'm a Harvard man, and the doña attended Lake Forest University. We first met in the States at a football game."

"Splendid!" replied the doctor. "Then the introductions will be in English."

And so they were. Doña Isabella and Mrs. Trevor soon found much in common, due to the former's residence in the States.

SUDDENLY there came a cry from an Indian at the end of the dock.

"More canoes coming!"

Don Fernando looked down the river. Two had rounded the bend. A third was just nosing into sight.

"*Viva!*" he cried. "Our boats!"

"It's our daughter, Ramona," explained Doña Isabella.

The first canoe came on swiftly, outdistancing the others. It glided toward the pier, propelled by the don's best paddlers, and steered by Ruiz himself, a big fellow with a snow-white mustache and goatee. He deftly guided it to the dock amid shouts of welcome.

As many willing hands steadied the boat, Ramona stood up, leaped lightly out, ran into the arms of Doña Isabella, kissed and hugged Don Fernando. There were tears of joy in the eyes of all three. The don held her away from him, admiring her proudly.

"How you have grown, my little one! And how stunning you look in those 'flapper' clothes!"

Many other pairs of eyes also admired the trim little figure, the lustrous dark eyes and hair, and the skin of milk and roses. The usually half-closed orbs of Captain Santos opened wide and he gasped involuntarily. As his eyes drank in Ramona's youthful loveliness, passion flamed suddenly in his breast, was reflected in the flush that mounted to his throbbing temples. Suddenly self-conscious and fearful lest he had been noticed, he tore his eyes away and fumbled for a cigarette. Not until he had lighted it did he cast a furtive glance around him. No one, it seemed, had observed him. With a sigh of relief, he exhaled a cloud of blue smoke.

But there was one who had seen, and understood fully. Dr. Bracken, outwardly unmoved, was inwardly gloating. For many days he had been looking for a rope with which to bind Santos to his cause. Now it was revealed to him as plainly as if the captain had spoken his thoughts aloud.

Fussing like a brooding hen, the short and rotund duenna, Señora Soledade, was on the dock now.

Doña Isabella was introducing Ramona and Georgia Trevor. The girl started perceptibly as she clasped the hand of the auburn-haired woman and for the first time had a good look at her features.

"What is wrong?" asked the older woman.

"It's—it's nothing at all. You look

wonderful. You remind me strangely of some one else."

Don Fernando gave some crisp orders about the luggage. The Indians scrambled to obey, and the party moved toward the house.

According to Don Fernando's code, it would have been very bad taste to ask the purpose of his guests' expedition. The subject did not come up until all had gathered for dinner.

"I'm curious to know," said Georgia Trevor to Ramona, "about this person who so greatly resembles me."

"His name is Jan," replied Ramona, "and he is only a little older than I. He once rescued me from a puma."

The effect of this statement on the four guests was electric. The eyes of Santos narrowed slightly. Dr. Bracken retained perfect control of his features, but he could not prevent the sudden pallor that spread over them at the mention of Jan's name. Harry Trevor's face showed his intense interest; that of his wife, sudden hope.

"Slightly older than you—resembling me!" she cried. "Harry, it must be our boy! He would be nineteen now. Tell me more about him, my dear—tell me all about him!"

With flashing eyes, Ramona related the story of her rescue. Her description of Jan was so favorable that her hero worship was obvious to all. She said nothing about her frequent meetings with him, although she hoped to resume them. Don Fernando had given his opinion of Jan quite plainly.

"*Por Dios!*" exclaimed the captain. "That ees him, all right! Ees wan dangerous hombre, too, I tal' you. Me, I rather meet the hongry puma, any time."

"He's dangerous only to those who would harm him," flashed Ramona. "I am not afraid to meet him."

"I feel," interposed Harry Trevor, "that we owe our host and hostess an explanation. If you don't mind, my dear"—with a look at his wife—"I'll begin at the beginning and tell them why we have come into the South American jungles."

She nodded assent, and while all listened in rapt attention, and with varying emotions, he related the entire tale. The don and doña were sympathetic, eager to help. Ramona hoped that these people, whom she had begun to like very much, would really prove to be Jan's parents.

After dinner coffee, liqueurs and cigars were served on the terrace that overlooked the patio, and quite early every one retired.

THE rooms of Dr. Bracken and the captain were opposite each other.

As they walked down the hall together, the doctor invited Santos in for a chat. Santos sat down and lit a cigarette while the doctor softly closed the door. After listening for a moment, he returned and flung himself into a chair.

"It's about time, captain," the doctor said evenly, "that you and I came to a complete understanding. I'm not going to beat around the bush. You want to make money. don't you?"

"Sí."

"And to-day you saw something which you want even more than money."

"I don't gat, you."

"Yes you do. I wasn't blind to-day, Santos, when we stood on the pier as a certain party arrived. Now, suppose I am willing to help you realize your desire. Would you be willing to help me realize a certain wish of my own? To work with me and keep your mouth shut?"

"*Sí, señor.* I work to beat hal' and keep the mouth shut tight."

"Fine! Now what do you suppose would happen if you were to go to Don Fernando and propose marriage with his young daughter?"

"Planty!"

"Yes. He'd kick you out of the house. Now suppose you were to approach the daughter and suggest that she elope with you?"

The captain shrugged.

"Who knows what a woman will do, *señor?*"

"You know and I know that she is not likely to consider the plea of a stranger twice her age when she is in love with a handsome youth."

"So I thenk you right. She's craz' about that keed, for sure."

"Now where do you come in? What are your plans? You probably intend to steal that child, run away with her at the first opportunity. You will try to force marriage upon her—break down her will. If you succeed you will be the husband of the heiress to the Suarez millions. Sooner or later her people would take her back, and you with her. Suppose, on the other hand, that she would not marry you under any consideration. You could demand, and probably get a princely ransom. Failing in this, you would still have the girl—and to you, she herself would be worth the ransom of a grandee. Am I right?"

"If so, what then?"

"Simply this: I want to find Jan at once and keep him away from this house, until it fits certain plans that I have to bring him here. I don't want his parents or their friends to hear of his capture. If you are willing to help me and say nothing, I'll be glad to do the same for you. Well, what do you say?"

"I say, 'O. K.,' *amigo.* I'm weeth you till the cow goes home."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DEATH HOLIDAY.

A GREAT crowd filled the open-air Temple of Sebek, a circular amphitheater near the great black Temple of Set. Word had gone forth that two unusual sacrifices would go into the capacious maw of the great fish-reptile Sebek this day—a prince of the House of Kan, and a strange white savage.

Not only were many black-robed priests present, and black-armored warriors, but there were also nobles of the order of Set, with their black cloaks, in special seats reserved for them. In other sections were tradesmen, artisans, artists, scribes, musicians and laborers. Although their costumes varied greatly in pattern and richness, all wore black, which identified them as the followers of Set. No women or children were present.

On a raised platform of black marble stood Samsu, High Priest of Set and cousin of the Emperor Mena, in his sacrificial robes and ornaments. His pasty, skull-like countenance turned slowly from side to side, and his small snaky eyes sparkled with satisfaction as he noted how vast an audience had gathered to view this special sacrifice.

The feeding of Sebek was a daily rite at the sun's zenith, and was therefore so common that when ordinary prisoners were sacrificed no one attended except those priests and warriors whose presence was commanded. But it was not often that Sebek feasted on royalty, and the white savage was a distinct novelty.

The High Priest looked down at the monster, a gigantic ichthyosaur, swimming back and forth in the deep pool, the surface of which was about ten feet below the bottom tier of seats. Sebek was always hungry, and unusually active whenever his feeding time drew near. The jewel-studded gold rings in his ears and nostrils clattered as he reared his monstrous head from the water, snorting and snapping his jaws, which bristled with sharp teeth and were large enough to take in a grown man at a single gulp.

Then Samsu looked over at the two youths who stood on a slab of black stone opposite him, that hung out over the pool. The white man, whose sole garment was a ragged piece of jaguar skin, was gazing down into the pool, watching the movements of the monster with apparent interest, but with no signs of fear. The yellow prince, who wore the royal red of the House of Kan, stood stiffly erect, his gaze haughty, fearless. Behind them was a closed door, fitted snugly flush with the edges of the smooth wall. At a signal from the High Priest, the polished slab on which they stood would tilt straight downward.

Jan looked up from his examination of the creature in the pool.

"A mighty monster, this Sebek," he said to Koh.

"And terrible," replied Koh, speaking softly so he would not be overheard. "Think of the number of people that slimy monster has eaten in its long lifetime! And we, too, now go to our destiny by way of that filthy maw. See how the Black Ones have gathered, like buzzards around the dead! It will soon be over, friend Jan. Samsu has taken the mallet, and is squinting at the sun. At the third stroke of the gong, we drop."

"Then listen to me, and act quickly," replied Jan. "The pool has an inlet and an outlet. The inlet is at our right, the outlet at our left. Look down at the outlet now. Fix its position in your mind. Don't wait for the third stroke of the gong. Dive as soon as you hear the first, straight toward that outlet. Remain under water and swim into it. The monster has made the pool turbid with its movements, so you will not be seen. When you are deep in the outlet so no one can see you, rise and turn on your back. Thus you may breathe in the narrow air space at the top and swim out to freedom. The monster is too large to follow you through the opening."

"But what of you?" questioned Koh. "Will you come with me?"

"Later," replied Jan.

"I refuse to go if you intend to sacrifice yourself to save me," said Koh.

"Do as I say!" insisted Jan. "It is the only hope for both of us. Get ready. The High Priest is about to strike."

SAMSU struck the great gong that hung behind him. It responded with a booming, metallic note. To the surprise of all present, the bodies of the two youths flashed outward from the slab in a simultaneous, graceful dive. Before the second note had boomed forth, both were under water.

As Jan and Koh had dived in opposite directions, the monster was confused for a moment, not knowing which way to turn. Koh, in accordance with his instructions, swam straight for the outlet, remaining beneath the surface. But Jan, who had dived beneath the monster's belly, came up beside it, and to the intense amazement of the spectators, grasped one of the bejeweled rings that hung from the

rim of Sebek's short ear. Then he swung himself up on its scaly back, just behind the head.

This unexpected trick was greeted with cries of astonishment from the spectators, and with frantic efforts on the part of the ichthyosaur to unseat its rider. But as it threshed about, Jan gripped the immense neck with his thighs and clung to an earring with each hand.

The spectators were getting far more entertainment than they had expected.

Presently the monster dived. In a few moments it emerged, riderless, with blood streaming from its eye sockets, dyeing the water a pale crimson. As the multitude cried out in horror at this sacrilege, it began swimming blindly in a circle. Of the two intended victims they could see no trace.

As soon as the great fish-lizard had plunged beneath the water with Jan, he had put into effect the plan which had come to him when he saw its great resemblance to an alligator. He had plunged his fingers into its eyes.

Then he kicked himself away from the great bulk and swam toward the south wall. Following this, he explored with his hands until he came to the mouth of the outlet. Into this he plunged. After a few swift strokes, he rose to the surface, turned on his back, and drew great sobbing breaths of air into his aching lungs.

He swam in total darkness for a long time, despite the fact that the swift current and his own efforts were carrying him rapidly forward. It was with great relief that he finally saw a faint light ahead. Increasing his efforts, Jan shot out of the culvert into the sluggish current of a broad river. Quickly turning over, he gained the

bank with half a dozen stout strokes and, seizing an overhanging root, drew himself up, dripping and triumphant.

IN front of him the bushes parted and Koh emerged, his finger to his lips.

Faintly Jan heard the sound of voices, the clank of armor and weapons, and the thunderous tread of great beasts, mingled with their occasional hoarse bellowings. Together, the two fugitives crouched in the shelter of the bushes.

"A hunting party of the Golden Ones," whispered Koh. "They will soon pass."

They crouched there breathlessly while the sounds grew alarmingly louder. Presently, however, they began to recede, and were lost in the distance.

"They've gone," said Jan. "And now, friend Koh, our paths lie in different directions. You will want to get back to Temukan as soon as possible. I go to Satmu to rescue Chicma."

"Come to Temukan with me, my friend," pleaded Koh. "You can't hope to rescue Chicma from the very palace of the Emperor. First there is the river to cross. The bridges are guarded night and day. You have no boat, and if you swim there are man-eating monsters in the stream which can't be eluded so easily as the clumsy Sebek.

"Even if you succeed in reaching the island, so well guarded are the city walls and the palace itself that you can't hope to penetrate both without being either killed or captured. And you might as well be killed outright as captured, because if they take you alive, your death will only be a matter of a few days. Besides, if Samsu learns of your capture, he is sure to demand you from his imperial cousin,

Mena, so he may torture and slay you as a punishment for what you have done to-day. He would probably give half his wealth to have you in his power right now.

"But even if you are captured and Samsu does not hear of it, you can't expect a much kinder fate from the Emperor. He will have you entered in the games, where human prisoners are forced to fight each other or huge and terrible beasts, some of which have been brought in from that place of horrors, the pit of mud. Not one prisoner in a hundred escapes the games alive. Come with me to the city of my father, the city which I will some day rule. Wealth, power, lands, slaves—everything you could wish shall be yours."

"I would like to go with you, my comrade," replied Jan. "But my duty calls me to Satmu, and that is where I am going."

"Well, then," said Koh. "I'll go with you."

"To meet all those dangers for a cause that does not concern you? I can't permit it!"

"I owe you my life," replied Koh. "Surely you will allow me to pay part of the debt! Besides, I will enjoy the adventure. With my knowledge of the country and people you will have a much better chance for success, too."

"As you will," said Jan, reluctantly.

"Now," said Koh, "if we swim the river the chances are ten to one that we will not get across alive. If we should elude the monsters that live in it, we would be seen and captured by boatmen. But if we search along the bank we are very likely to find a boat which we can steal under cover of darkness, and which will take us across in safety. While we are looking for the boat we may find something to eat."

"There is wisdom in your words," said Jan. "Let us search for food and a boat."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RIVER OF MONSTERS.

AT first they were undecided whether to go up the river to the west, or down the river to the east. Behind them to the north was the Temple of Set, with its cluster of buildings and its background of pyramid-shaped mausoleums. The main temple housed the High Priest, his black-robed assistants and attendants, and his black-armored warriors.

In a group of smaller buildings lived the tradesmen, artisans and laborers, comprising a small village with its market place. And in a tiny cluster of hovels near the Temple of Sebek were the despised handlers of the dead—the embalmers, who spent their lives segregated from other men. They had no intercourse with others except to receive the bodies intended for the burial grounds of Set, and to return the embalmed mummies to the temple attendants, who placed them in the caskets.

The nobles of Set lived in baronial castles scattered about the country north of the temple, where peasants toiled in fields and tended flocks. Koh had explained these things to Jan, so both knew that it would be extremely dangerous for them to venture north, away from the river.

Across the river to the south was the magnificent City of Satmu, capital of the empire. It was in the center of an island about five miles by ten, rimmed by marshes and a circle of rolling, partly wooded areas. Four immense arch bridges connected the island with

the mainland to the north, south, east and west, each bridge guarded by a small fortress. The city itself was circular, and about three miles in diameter. From where they stood on the river bank the two fugitives could see its north wall, and beyond that its gayly colored roof tops, its towers, domes and minarets.

Standing in the center of the city, and dominating the scene with its great size and magnificence was the Imperial Palace, its central dome of polished gold reflecting the rays of the afternoon sun with dazzling brilliance.

SINCE the north bridge lay only a mile to the east of them, Koh and Jan decided to go toward the west. They had not gone far when the jungle-trained Jan suddenly caught his companion by the arm and cautioned silence. Koh could hear or see nothing at first, but presently he heard the rustle of small animals through the undergrowth and the patter of their little feet. Jan had not heard them much sooner than his friend, but his delicately attuned nostrils had caught their scent long before the sound was audible.

Motioning to Koh to remain where he was, Jan swiftly and noiselessly swung himself up into the tangle of branches and lianas above. In less than a minute he was directly above a herd of small, spotted animals, none of them much bigger than a full-grown fox, and bearing a singular resemblance to the horses which he had seen on some of the plantations that fringed his jungle. Their scent, too, was singularly like that of horses. He remembered having seen a picture of one of these creatures in Ramona's book of extinct animals. It was called an eohippus, and she had told him it was

the earliest known ancestor of the horse.

Jan knew at a glance that the little beasts were not so dangerous as carnivorous beasts their size might have been, but still they might attack in mass if he should drop among them. Pccaries had done that several times, wounding him severely with their sharp teeth and hoofs and forcing him to take refuge in the trees, despite the fact that he was armed. And now he had no weapons whatever. But they must have meat.

Singling out his intended victim, Jan suddenly launched himself through the air with a throaty roar like that of an attacking puma, a sound which usually paralyzes the prey for an instant. As he alighted beside the little beast, Jan clutched it around the neck, while the rest of the herd, squealing with fright, splashed up the bank and plunged into the undergrowth.

With a deft twist, Jan broke the neck of the prize. Then he swung it over his shoulder and walked back to where Koh waited for him.

"Here's our meat," he said, and proudly displayed his kill.

"But we have no knife to cut it with, and no fire," objected Koh.

"What of that?" asked Jan. "We have our teeth and hands. The meat is fresh and good. Cooking would only spoil it."

He tore off a foreleg and handed it, still dripping with warm blood, to his companion. Then he tore off another, and peeling back the hide as an ape peels a banana, began devouring the tender flesh with gusto. Koh, the delicately nurtured prince of an ancient civilization, held the gory portion handed him as if it had been a burning brand, and watched Jan with wonder and a tinge of horror.

"By the long red feathers of Kan!" he exclaimed. "I have heard that the hairy ones, the man-apes who live in the caves, so devour their meat, but never have I seen nor heard of a man eating it thus."

"And never," said Jan, "have I tasted such sweet and delicious meat. Try it."

"I'll starve first," said Koh, and flung his portion to the ground.

JAN made no reply, but continued eating, squatting on his haunches and gazing out over the river toward the distant golden dome where he hoped to find and rescue Chicma. Presently a small sailing vessel hove into view. It had a single, lateen sail of golden yellow hue, in the center of which was painted a coat of arms. There were three men in the boat, and a pile of recently slain water birds.

"The emperor's fowlers," whispered Koh. "That is one of the boats that supplies the imperial table with the birds that inhabit the marshes."

"How do they kill them?" asked Jan, seeing no weapons in evidence.

"With throwing sticks," replied Koh. "See, each man has a small pile of curved sticks beside him. I have heard that the emperor himself sometimes hunts thus, for the sport of the thing."

As Koh watched Jan, eating with apparent relish, his hunger increased. Finally it overcame his scruples, and he picked up the leg which he had cast away so disdainfully. Following Jan's example, he first peeled back a portion of the skin. Then he shut his eyes, and tearing off a bite, quickly chewed and swallowed it. Much to his surprise, he really liked it.

By this time Jan had devoured most of the meat on his portion, and was

gnawing the gristly parts of the joints, which he swallowed with relish. Then he cracked the bones between his strong teeth and ate the marrow for dessert. These things he had learned to do by watching the carnivores of the jungle, and having once tried them, had found them to his liking.

Having satisfied his hunger, Jan went down to the river to wash his face and hands, and to drink. Then he returned, and with that feeling of contentment which follows a satisfying and tasty meal, lay down to doze in the speckled shade and to wait for Koh to finish. For the first time since his capture by the black-ropes, life was once more worth living.

Koh was not long about finishing his meal. When he had washed and drunk at the river, Jan sprang to his feet and slung the remains of his kill over his shoulder. They started off along the river bank to the west.

The sloping, jungle-draped shore gradually gave way to a steeper and more rocky formation, where the vegetation, except for a narrow fringe of willows and oleanders at the water's edge, was quite sparse. Soon they were picking their way among fallen boulders and rock fragments at the base of a steep bluff.

Suddenly Jan, who was in the lead, stopped and sniffed the air apprehensively. Koh came to a halt behind him, peering around his shoulder in an attempt to learn the cause for his uneasiness.

But the cause announced itself with unexpected and terrifying suddenness. For, with a terrific roar that rolled across the river valley, a great shaggy creature crept from a cave mouth about ten feet above Jan's head, and with its claws a-spread and white teeth gleaming, tensed to launch its mighty

bulk through the air straight for the startled youths.

CHAPTER XX.

MAN-HUNT.

THE morning after his arrival at the hacienda, Dr. Bracken was astir bright and early. After drinking a cup of coffee and declining all items of breakfast which the obsequious butler suggested, he lighted a black stogie and strolled outdoors. The sun was rising with a blaze of glory, swiftly dissipating the mists that hung over the river, and promising an exceptionally warm day.

As the doctor made his way toward the huts where his Indians were quartered, he caught sight of a familiar figure standing on the dock and gazing out over the river—Captain Santos. He immediately turned his steps in that direction.

Santos looked around as a board creaked beneath the doctor's tread.

"Ah, good morning, captain!" greeting the doctor. "Up early, I see."

"Sí. Eet was no use to stay in bed. I could not sleep wan weenk all night. I 'ave fall' een love to beat hal'. I can't sleep, I can't eat, for theenk about that keed."

"The best thing you can do," said the doctor, "is to snap out of it *muy pronto*, and work with me. Now—how many of our Indians can we trust with this work, provided they are well paid?"

Santos grinned. "We can trust any of them—eef well paid."

"Then here's the plan: We have thirty Indians, all told. I gather that this wild boy is somewhere in the jungles to the south of here. I think I know where to find him and how to

capture him. After he is caught, I must have a place to keep him until I am ready to bring him here.

"So we'll split into three searching parties. We'll allot ten men to Trevor, and let him go to the north, where he'll be quite sure not to find Jan. You will take ten men and head east, while I go south with the other ten. Instead of continuing east, however, you will circle southward until you strike my trail. I'll wait for you at my first camp. Then I'll show you where I want you to build my little prison. We'll make a secret base camp on the spot, and we'll take Jan there."

"Your plans, *señor*, are good for your own ends. What about mine?"

"I was coming to that. Once we get Jan we'll see that a message from him reaches the girl, asking her to meet him at a certain place. She'll go. We'll have two Indians there to persuade her to go the rest of the way—to our camp. If something goes wrong with our plans, we'll kill the Indians for attempted abduction. Their comrades will not know they have been paid to do this work, and dead men tell no tales."

"*Señor*," said Santos, admiringly, "you 'ave wan damn' good head. What you say, I do."

"Good! Get your three parties organized, and I'll go and fix things with Trevor."

DR. BRACKEN found the Trevors breakfasting with the don and doña. He outlined his plan to them, and all were in hearty accord with it. Don Fernando offered to take ten of his own men and search the country to the west, across the river, though Jan had never been known to hunt in that part of the jungle, and that was agreed upon.

By ten o'clock the four bands were ready to march. Farewells were being said. The two women were saying good-by to their husbands, while the doctor and Ramona stood a little way off.

Suddenly, to Dr. Bracken's surprise, she turned to him and said in a low voice:

"I'll tell you something, doctor, if you will promise not to tell any one."

"Eh? Of course I'll promise, *senorita*."

She came closer. "It's about Jan. I believe I can tell you where to find him. You see, my father and mother don't know that he came to see me many times after he saved me from the puma. But I do so want you to find him and bring him back!"

"I'll find him, never fear," replied the doctor, "even if I have to devote my whole life to it. What was it you were going to say?"

"He told me," said Ramona, "that he lived in a tree hut, four days' journey to the south. It is beside a deep pool that is beneath a waterfall. Your chimpanzee is there, also. That is all I know, but it may help."

"It will help a lot," the doctor assured her, "and I am deeply grateful to you for confiding in me. You may rest assured that your confidence has not been misplaced. And now the others are ready, so I will say good-by."

The doctor smiled grimly to himself as he led his band of Indians away. This was going to be easier than he had anticipated. In one of his packs was a case of hypodermic needle cartridges, such as he had used for capturing wild animals in Africa. After finding Jan's tree, all he would need to do would be to camp near it, out of sight, and wait for the young man to

appear. A "hypo" bullet in the arm or leg would put him to sleep for several hours. When he awakened he would be in the doctor's power.

As for abducting Ramona, Dr. Bracken had no intention of carrying out this part of the bargain with his confederates. He could easily dispose of Santos in the jungle, and return to the hacienda with the report that the captain had been killed by a native's blow-gun dart.

The doctor was in an excellent humor when, about an hour before sunset, he bade his Indians halt and make camp. He had finished his evening meal and lighted a stogie when Santos and his Indians marched into camp.

The two bands camped together that night, and together went forward on the following day, and for two days thereafter. Then, as night was drawing near, Dr. Bracken heard the roar of a waterfall. Bidding the Indians stop where they were and make camp, he took Santos forward with him. Before he left, he loaded his rifle with a hypo cartridge and ordered the captain to do the same.

THEY located the waterfall about a half mile away. Looking upward, the doctor, with a grin of triumph, saw Jan's tree house.

"Wait here and keep out of sight," ordered the doctor, "while I go forward to investigate. If the man or the ape shows up, shoot for an arm or leg."

He handed the captain several extra hypo cartridges and walked over beneath Jan's tree. Beneath it he found many nutshells, the dried remains of orange, pineapple and banana skins, and a number of gnawed bones. The appearance of these remains convinced him that neither Jan nor the ape had been in the tree for several months.

He accordingly laid his rifle on the grass, and climbed the tree. Perspiring in every pore and breathing heavily, he presently reached the lowest limb and drew himself up on it.

A single glance into the interior of the hut convinced him that it had not been used for some time. With great curiosity, he examined Jan's collection of native weapons, ornaments, clothing and hides. Careful woodsman that he was, he looked also for evidence that would convince him beyond any doubt that this was Jan's hut. With the aid of his flash light he found it, clinging to the bark of the tree trunk—chimpanzee hair, auburn human hair, and the hair rubbed from the jaguar skin garments with which Borno had clothed both of them.

He was about to leave when he noticed something else—a piece of notebook paper projecting from beneath a badly cured jaguar skin. Quickly lifting the pelt, he saw many more pieces of paper and a stubby, much-chewed pencil. The papers were covered with pencil drawings, crude but showing marks of talent, and with much childish printing, all in capital letters. In it he found many names and descriptions of animals, both prehistoric and existing, evidently copied from natural histories. He also found the sentence written over and over: "Jan likes Ramona."

Pocketing one of the papers and replacing the skin over the others, the doctor, quite satisfied with his discoveries, climbed down the tree once more. Picking up his rifle, he walked over to where Santos awaited him.

"I've found his lair," he said. "Some day, if he is alive, he is sure to return to it. We'll build a blind, here at the edge of the jungle, and post a good marksman in it night and day,

with a rifle and plenty of hypo cartridges. While we're waiting for the lad to return we can be building our cell and our permanent camp."

"You are sure this ees the right place?"

"Positive. Look here." The doctor extracted the folded note paper from his pocket and handed it to Santos.

"So! What ees this? A beeg homp-backed lizard weeth teeth on his back and horns on his tail. 'Stegosaurus,' eet say onderneath."

"A prehistoric reptile," said the doctor. "Jan must have copied it from one of Ramona's books."

"*Mil demonios!* You theenk he steal her book? Eet say here, too, 'Jan likes Rañona.' *Carramba!* I geeve him a real bullet if I catch him fool around her!"

"If you give him anything but a hypo bullet before I'm through with him, it will be just too bad for you," warned the doctor, snatching the paper from his hand. "When I have finished with him you can chop him in little pieces, for all I care, but not before. *Sabe?*"

"*Sí, señor,* I onderstand. But after that he better look out, I tal' you."

Darkness came on with the suddenness common to the tropics just as they got to camp, so nothing more could be done that day.

EARLY the next morning the doctor left minute instructions with Santos for the construction of the jail cell and permanent camp, and took two Indians with him to build the blind near the tree hut.

Having finished the blind, the doctor left the two Indians on guard there, promising to send two more that night to relieve them. Each was armed with a rifle containing a hypo car-

tridge, and ordered to shoot only for the arm or leg.

A week later the permanent camp was completed. There was a cabin for the doctor and Santos, in one end of which a small room was partitioned off by means of stout wooden bars. This the doctor called his *carcel*, or jail, and it was here that he intended to imprison Jan until he should be ready to take part in the terrible climax to his revenge which he had planned and toward which end his life, since the birth of the boy, had been devoted with a fervor worthy of a better cause.

There was also a bunk house and cook shack for the Indians.

But while all this was taking place, Santos was doing a certain amount of planning in the furtherance of his own ends. It was not necessary, he thought, to capture Jan in order to entice Ramona away from the hacienda. This could easily be done by sending her a short note imitating Jan's writing.

Without broaching his plan to the doctor, whom he knew would frown on it because it might interfere with his own scheme, Santos took two of his Indians into his confidence, offering each an immense sum of money for his part in the crime. Soon it would be necessary to send some one back to the hacienda for supplies, and when this time came he meant to detail his two accomplices for the work.

CHAPTER XXI.

FORBIDDEN GROUND.

AT the thunderous roar of the beast just above their heads, about to spring, Jan and Koh both leaped forward as if propelled by a powerful springboard, and ran as fast as they

could. There was the thud of an immense body on the spot they had just vacated, followed by the gallop of huge pads and the rattle of long claws on the stones.

They had not gone far when Jan knew, by the increasing proximity of the sounds from behind, that the great beast was rapidly gaining on them. He threw a quick glance over his shoulder, and recognized it instantly from a picture he had seen in Ramona's book—a giant cave bear.

Knowing that further flight was useless, and that unarmed as he was he would be quickly pulled down and devoured, he decided to stake everything on the chance that he might be able to outwit this terrible enemy. Suddenly halting in his tracks, he turned and faced his pursuer.

The bear instantly came to a sliding halt, alert for a trap or ambush. When it appeared to have satisfied itself that no hunters lurked near by, and that it was confronted only by a single unarmed man—for Koh had continued his running, not knowing that Jan had stopped—it reared up on its hind legs, head and shoulders taller than a tall man, and advanced, roaring thunderously.

Jan raised the carcass of the little eohippus over his head, then hurled it straight at the oncoming beast. It just grazed one furry ear and alighted some ten feet behind the bear. But in the instant of its passing the monster had got a whiff of its favorite food, the elusive but toothsome little dawn horse.

Suddenly dropping to all fours, the bear turned and started toward the carcass. Jan took advantage of this by adding to the distance between himself and the monster. The beast heard him and swung about again, undecided

whether to take the game already killed or pursue that which was still alive.

But the bear was not the only carnivore in the vicinity that had scented freshly killed eohippus. A slinking, dog-like beast came trotting down the trail, sniffing hungrily, and keeping a wary eye on the bear. The latter did not hear it until it loosened a small stone. Then it swung about with a snarl.

The presence of the new brute, which Jan recognized as a hyænodon, decided the issue. With a fierce roar of rage, the bear sprang for the intruder just as it was about to seize the prize. The hyænodon leaped back out of reach of the great, flailing claws, and squatted on its haunches. It could not hope to get a full meal now, but it would wait with dog-like patience until the bear had finished, hoping that the lordly beast might leave a few edible scraps.

Jan did not wait to see more, but hurried on after his companion. He found Koh coming toward him a few hundred feet down the trail.

"I missed you," said the prince, "and so came back, fearing the bear had caught you."

"There is still danger," said Jan. "I gave it the eohippus, but that will only be a mouthful for such a big brute. Come on."

THEY set off at a stiff trot, which either of the youths was capable of keeping up for hours. Presently Koh stopped and caught his companion's arm.

"Look!" he cried, excitedly. "A boat!"

The sun was dropping behind the tree-clothed river bluffs, as they hurried down the bank to examine their

prize. It was only a crude dugout canoe with one paddle and a barbed, three-pronged fishing spear lying in the bottom. But to these two it was as welcome as the most luxurious and palatial yacht.

"Get in the other end," said Koh. "I'll push off."

Jan did as he was bidden. He had had no experience with canoes except as a passenger, and bowed to his friend's superior knowledge and skill.

Koh lifted the anchor, a stone with a rope around it, into the boat. Then he pushed off, scrambled aboard, and seized the paddle.

He had not taken two strokes when there came an angry shout from the river bank. A bearded, sun-bronzed white man, naked save for breech-clout and sandals, ran down to the water's edge and launched a long spear at them. It flew high, but Jan stood up and caught it.

"Come back, thieves!" shouted the man on the bank. "Come back, cowards, and I will kill you with my bare hands!"

Koh was using the paddle with considerable dexterity.

"Too bad to take his boat," he said. "Evidently he is a fisherman, and this is his means of livelihood." He shouted over his shoulder to the raging man on the bank. "We'll leave your boat on the island for you—straight across. Come over the bridge and get it."

In reply, the man hurled after them a choice collection of Satmuan curses. Then the darkness descended suddenly, and he faded from view.

Koh was an expert with the paddle, and it did not take him long to reach the opposite shore. The prow grounded among some rushes, and Jan, leaping out, dragged it up until more than half

of the boat was out of the water. He retained the spear which the bearded man had cast at him, and Koh followed with the fishing spear.

For some time they splashed through a grassy marsh. Presently they struck higher ground, and entered a thick, dark wood. Here were many strange smells and sounds. Great beasts crashed through, the scents of which were totally unfamiliar to Jan. Weird cries, shrieks, bellows and roars resounded in the darkness, unlike anything he had ever heard in his own jungle. These made him cautious, so he progressed but slowly.

Koh had never been in the jungle at night before, and though he was a brave youth his nerves were constantly on edge at each new noise. He was following Jan, holding onto the butt of his spear, so they would not become separated in the inky darkness.

There were mighty, flesh-eating killers abroad in the jungle. No mistake about that. From time to time they heard the plaintive death cries of helpless creatures dragged down by carnivores, and the struggles of others.

WITH immense relief they emerged from the jungle about midnight. The moon had risen, and they saw through a ten-foot barricade of heavy posts, set about four inches apart, a rolling plain covered with short grass. Busily cropping this grass with their parrot-like beaks, singly and in scattered groups, were several hundred of the terrible, three-horned mounts of the Satmuans.

One triceratops grazing near them evidently heard them or caught their scent, for it lowered its immense head and charged belligerently, clear up to the paling. There it stopped, snorting and pawing the earth.

"It looks as if we will have to go around this pasture," said Koh. "I'd rather go back into that dark jungle than climb in there with those brutes."

"If they are so fierce, how is it that the soldiers and hunters can ride them?" asked Jan.

"They learn to know their masters and their masters' people," replied Koh. "They are fighting beasts, you know, ridden by fighting men, and to them all strangers are enemies. Unless restrained by their riders, they will attack any strangers they meet. These beasts are quite docile among Satmuans, but they attack strangers, and will even attack other beasts of their own kind belonging to strangers."

As they circled the pasture near the paling, the immense brute inside kept pace with their progress. But presently tiring of this, or perhaps convinced that they were not going to enter, it left them with a contemptuous snort, to return to its feeding.

At last Jan and Koh drew near to a long row of low sheds, near which were a number of small, round buildings with lights shining from their windows.

"The stables," said Koh, "and the houses of the keepers."

They circled once more, this time through a grove of orange trees planted in straight rows. This brought them up against the northwest wall of the city—a wall fifty feet high, smooth and unscalable. At intervals of five hundred feet along this wall were guard towers, in each of which was a sentinel.

"Well, here we are," whispered Koh. "This is as far as I can guide you. I don't know of any way we can get into the city except as prisoners."

"There must be some way," said Jan. "Let us look."

They circled to the left, keeping to the shadow of the wall so they would not be seen from above, until they were scarcely a quarter of a mile from the great, arched north gate. This, Koh assured Jan, had been closed for the night, and would be guarded by not less than fifty men.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PERILOUS VISIT.

AS they stood there talking, Jan took hold of a thick creeper which had grown up the side of the wall, and pulled it to throw it out of his way. To his surprise, it clung to the wall. He pulled harder, but it would not budge. Then he stepped away from the wall and looked upward. Half a dozen creepers like this one had climbed side by side, almost to the summit.

"Come!" he whispered to Koh. "Here is a way into the city."

Tearing off a branch of the vine, he made both ends fast to the hunting spear and slung it over his back that he might have the use of both hands. Koh did likewise with the fishing spear. Then Jan sprang up the vine with ape-like agility, and the prince, after waiting until they were about twenty feet apart in order that their combined weight would not be on the same tendrils at the same time, followed.

When he reached the top of the wall, Jan moved with extreme caution. His position was about halfway between two sentry towers. The sentry on his left was standing in front of the tower, leaning on his longbow and looking out toward the bridge. At first he could not see the one on his right, but he presently made out his huddled form leaning against the tower, asleep.

Very carefully, Jan drew himself up, and flattening, wormed across the edge of the wall. It was about three feet thick at the upper edge. Just behind it was a row of terraces, each three feet wide, and with a drop of the same distance to the next, reaching clear to the ground. He crawled down onto the first terrace, and unslinging his spear, waited. In a moment he was joined by Koh, and the two noiselessly descended the terraces until they reached the ground.

The part of the city in which they found themselves was a residence section of flat-roofed buildings set closely together, their fronts level with the paved street. Lights showed in a few of the houses, but most of them were dark, showing that their occupants had retired.

After following the wall for some distance, they came to a narrow street, lighted only by the rays of the moon, and now nearly deserted.

"This street must lead to the palace," said Koh, "for I have heard that the city is laid out like the web of a spider, with streets branching out in all directions, but all centered at the Imperial Palace. The palace, with its gold dome, represents the sun, and the streets branching out from it, the rays. There are concentric circles of narrower streets connecting the ray streets."

"Then let us follow this street," said Jan.

"Dressed as we are," replied Koh, "that would be an impossibility. The streets are constantly patrolled, and we would be seen and captured."

"And where would we be taken?"

"Probably to the palace for judgment. Ordinary prisoners would be taken before a magistrate, but because I am of royal blood and you are a

stranger in the valley we would probably be taken before the emperor, himself."

"After all," mused Jan, "it would be the easiest way to get there."

"What do you mean?"

"Leave your spear here and follow me."

JAN discarded his hunting spear and started down the street. Koh dropped the fishing spear and followed. The first person they passed wore the garb of a merchant. He stared at them as if he could not believe his eyes, but they walked on, ignoring him.

They saw two more men approaching. Moonlight glinted from their polished armor and the tips of their spears.

"The patrol!" whispered Koh.

"Good!" replied Jan.

He swaggered straight toward the oncoming figures. Koh followed his example. Soon the clank of armor and weapons was audible. It grew louder. Jan thought the two would pass them by, unnoticed, but suddenly as they were abreast, one turned.

"Halt!" he commanded.

Jan and Koh stopped in their tracks. The two in armor sauntered over, peering at them.

"A strange pair," said the first, staring beneath his raised visor.

"By the long slim beak of Tehuti!" exclaimed the other. "A savage dressed in the skin of an animal!"

"And this other!" said the first. "Pierce me through, if he wears not the scarlet of the royal house of Kan! Who are you two?" he demanded.

"I am Koh of Temukan," said the prince.

"And I am Jan."

"Jan of where? Of what?"

The youth hesitated for a moment.

"Jan of the jungle," he replied.

"Of the jungle? You look the part. Where are you going?"

"We were on our way to the palace."

"To the palace! You hear him, Batau? They were going to the palace—a jungle savage and a yellow prince! No doubt they intended calling on his imperial majesty, the emperor."

"No doubt, Pebek. They are visiting royalty—a prince of Temukan and a prince of the jungle. It would be discourteous to let them go unattended."

"They should have a guard of honor. We will go with them to the palace." Pebek bowed ironically to the two youths. "You will permit us to escort you. Proceed."

The two youths moved forward, each with a spear point at his back.

On their way to the palace they met a few straggling townsmen. These stared, but made no comment. Soon they stood before the great arched gate of the palace grounds. Here were fully fifty golden-armored warriors on guard. Jan began to realize the magnitude of the task he had undertaken.

At a word from their captors the gates swung open, and they were allowed to pass.

"This place is easier gotten into than out of," muttered Koh.

"So it seems," replied Jan, "but we are not ready to leave, yet."

"Silence, you two," growled Batau, and prodded Jan with his spear point.

WITH the pain of that wound, Jan's carefully thought out plan was forgotten. It transformed him, in an instant, to a raging jungle creature.

He whirled with a snarl of rage and

seizing the shaft of the spear, snapped it off. Balancing it for a moment, he hurled the resulting three-foot javelin with all his might. It struck Batau in the left eye and entered his brain, killing him instantly.

Pebek had attempted to come to the rescue of his comrade, but he had immediately been set upon by Koh. His movements impeded by the weight of his armor, the warrior was far too slow for his agile adversary. He had dropped his long spear, useless at such close quarters, and was drawing his sword, when Koh snatched his dagger from his belt and struck for his neck, just above the rim of his breast plate. The slim blade went home to the jugular, and Pebek, after staggering blindly for a moment, slumped to the ground, blood oozing from between the joints of his armor.

"Quick!" panted Koh. "Let us get them out of sight. If they are discovered the whole palace guard will be after us."

They swiftly dragged the two fallen warriors into the shrubbery that bordered the path. Then they returned and picked up the weapons that had been dropped, returning into the shrubbery with these.

Scarcely had they reached their place of concealment when they heard the march of approaching warriors.

"They heard, and are after us," said Jan.

"I think not," replied Koh. "It is probably a squad from the palace to relieve the watch at the gate. They keep step, and are not hurrying. But when they reach the gate, look out."

Koh's surmise was proved correct, when a few moments later fifty spearmen filed past, looking neither to the right nor left. As soon as they had passed, each youth armed himself with

the sword and dagger of his fallen foe-man. Then they hurried away toward the palace.

"How do you expect to find Chicma in that great building?" asked Koh, as they stood in a little clump of tall trees, looking up at the massive structure with its towers, turrets and balconies.

"By her scent, if she is there," replied Jan. He was looking up at the tall tree beneath which they were standing. Its branches brushed the railing of an upper balcony.

AT this moment there came a shout from the gate—the sound of armed men running through the shrubbery.

"Follow me," said Jan. "I see a way into the palace, where they will least expect to find us."

He sprang up into the tree, and climbed rapidly. The prince followed more slowly, unable to compete with the ape-like agility of his companion. When he reached the limb that brushed the balcony, Jan swung out on it, caught the railing, and drew himself up. At the rear of the balcony a hinged window stood open. The room behind it was in darkness.

Creeping over to the opening, Jan investigated the room with twitching, sensitive nostrils. His nose told him that people had been there recently, but that it was unoccupied now. Koh came silently over the railing.

Excited shouts came up to them from the ground, cries of rage. The two bodies had been discovered.

Jan led the way into the darkened room. At the far end, he saw a faint blur of light, and went directly toward this. It came from behind a heavy curtain which draped a doorway. Cautiously he moved the curtain a little way. Outside was a narrow hall,

lighted at intervals by lamps hung on wall brackets. The oil burning in them gave off a mild, sweet aroma that reminded Jan of flowers.

A quick survey showed him that there was no one in the hall. He stepped out, followed by Koh, his nostrils twitching as he endeavored to catch Chicma's scent. The perfume from the lamps confused him.

Presently he turned to the left and like a hound on a trail, went straight to a door about fifty feet away. Here he halted, sniffing for a moment, then lifted the curtain and peered in.

He saw Chicma, but she was not in a cage, and she was not alone. She was lolling on a cushioned divan, daintily nibbling a sweetmeat from a dish piled high on a taboret beside her. Her ragged jaguar-skin garment was gone. In its place was a gaudily colored jacket of the softest silk. There was a jewel-studded gold collar around her neck, and jewels blazed from golden settings on her finger and toe rings. Beside her stood a slender yellow slave girl, who was brushing her fur.

Jan turned to Koh.

"Seize the slave," he whispered. "We'll bind and gag her. Then Chicma can come away with us."

Together they rushed in. Koh clapped his hand over the girl's mouth before she could cry out. Startled by their abrupt entrance, Chicma leaped down from the divan and started to run. Then she recognized Jan, and stopped.

"What do you want?" she clucked, in her guttural chimpanzee tongue.

"I've come to take you away," he said.

"I like it here," she replied. "I won't go away. You do not need me.

You are grown, and can care for yourself. Go away and don't bother me."

JAN was dumfounded. To think that he had risked his life needlessly, passed through countless perils to save Chicma from her captors, only to find that she actually liked her captivity! All this he could not tell to Chicma. There was no chimpanzee way of expressing it.

"I will go," he clucked to her. To Koh: "She won't go. We must go without her. First I'll help you bind the girl."

He tore a strip of cloth from the curtain. But before he could use it, the girl suddenly wrenched her mouth free from Koh's hand, and shrieked loudly.

There was an answering shout from the hallway, the clank of armored men running.

"No use to bind her now," said Jan. "Come."

He dashed out the window, onto the balcony. Koh flung the girl from him and followed, just as a host of warriors rushed into the room. One of the guards, searching the shrubbery beneath, spied the two figures on the balcony and shouting to his fellows, pointed upward.

The nearest tree stood about twenty feet from the balcony. Jan stepped up on the rail, and shouting, "Follow me!" plunged across the dizzy height. For him it was not much of a jump. Many times he had leaped this far, from tree to tree, in the jungle. His sure hands gripped the lowest branch, clung there. But the branch cracked, sagged, then tore loose from the trunk. Jan's body, under the impetus of his leap, swung out to the horizontal and dropped. He struck on his back with terrific force. Then came oblivion.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



"Gus, you're a made man," Bill beamed at the dubious officer

Second-Hand Glory

Drifters Bill and Jim were more likely to attempt to keep one jump ahead of the law than to help enforce it—but they were willing to try most anything once if it would help a pal

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

YOU can't judge by the glitter of gold buttons," remarked Gus sadly, as he scraped at a speck on the sleeve of his uniform. "You . . ."

He paused to nod absently to a classy-looking little dame, who in passing had given him a sweet and confiding smile. Bill and I nodded, too, but all we got in return was a cold stare.

"Pretty soft," ventured Bill enviously.

"If you say 'pretty soft' to me again I'll run the two of you in as vagrants, or for interfering with an officer," snapped Gus impatiently.

"You wouldn't do that to two old carnival pals," grinned Bill reprovingly.

"Just the same, it gets my goat to

have you giving me that patter about my soft job," growled Gus. "I've been a tent man, a ballyhoo artist, a wild man and a bearded lady, and I know jobs, so you can take it as expert testimony when I tell you that **this isn't** no soft job. If a guy could get to be sergeant it might be all right, but from the way I've been getting the breaks, I have as much chance of ever being promoted to sergeant on this police force as an ambitious cornet soloist has of receiving a silver loving cup from the nervous wrecks in his neighborhood.

"Every time I try to pull off something big I get tangled up in the wrong ropes, and instead of earning a credit mark toward promotion I receive another warning from the chief that there's a long string of intelligent men

waiting to grab my job. Just now I am on probation for handing a ticket and some stern remarks to a speeding dame who happened to be the police commissioner's wife. I didn't even know the police commissioner was married. It's up to me to do something in a big way to square myself or else one of those brainy applicants is going to be covering my beat."

"I see that Beary's carnival is playing over at Cornwall this week," remarked Bill in an effort to steer the conversation into more cheerful channels. This was the first time we had seen Gus in several years, and we did not want the chance reunion to degenerate into a lodge of sorrow.

"Beary's? Over at Cornwall?" There was a hungry look in Gus's eyes. "The same old bunch of roughnecks still in the company, I suppose?"

His tone was wistful. In spite of the uniform and the brass buttons and other regalia, poor old Gus, after all, was still a carnival man. A burglar may become a philanthropist, and a philanthropist may become a burglar and still be happy, but a leopard can't change its spots. If Gus ever got to be a sergeant he probably would make more money and have a far better job than he could land on a carnival lot, but he would be happier driving tent stakes or ballyhooping for a third-rate sideshow in a one-horse town. Bill and I had been in the carnival business ourselves and had been drifting aimlessly about the country long enough to know this.

YET in spite of what we knew about Gus, we were hustling back into town in a car half an hour later, when we had expected to be shaking the dust of Goshen from our feet. We were going to give him a

boost toward the sergeantcy which might forever wean him definitely from the old life that he loved.

We had been ambling along the road when Bill happened to spot a car parked well up on a side road. It was such an unusual place for a car that we stopped to investigate. The car was not locked. It apparently had been run up the side road and abandoned in a hurry. On the back seat was a kit of tools, and one glance was sufficient to identify them. They were burglar tools—the complete kit from skeleton keys and a jimmy to a revolver and a sawed-off shotgun. Bill and I have been on the road long enough to know burglar tools when we see them, so there was no question about it.

"A stolen car, a burglar's kit and a portable arsenal—if Gus turns up at Police Headquarters with a capture like this, the sergeant's badge will be pinned on him at public exercises in City Hall," declared Bill as soon as we realized the nature of our unexpected find. "It's easy to figure out the dope—the gunmen either feared detection and abandoned the outfit, or else they hid it up here in this side road and will come back after dark to get it. Probably they are planning to pull off some big job in Goshen to-night. Gol-ding it, Jim, I ought to be a detective!"

"You don't have to be a detective to figure that out," I retorted. "It would be clear to a child."

"Oh, well, we won't argue about that," said Bill airily. "Here's the idea: We've made a big haul here. If we tell the police ourselves we won't get nothing out of it except perhaps a pair of subpoenas to appear as witnesses. But if we tip off Gus, our old side-kick is going to get the big break of his career as a policeman."

We debated as to what would be the best course to pursue. If we left the car there and walked back to town, the burglars might return and drive it away before Gus could get back.

"The only thing to do is to take the car with its contents, drive it into town, and turn it over to Gus," declared Bill. "He'd have exhibits A, B, C, and right down to Z, and in them he probably would find enough clues to pick up the trail of the burglars."

I agreed with him; and without further ado we hopped into the car and, with Bill at the wheel, sped back to Goshen. Arriving there, however, we were unable to find any trace of Gus. We drove back and forth on Main Street several times, but he had disappeared. Nor was any other cop in sight.

We began to be a bit nervous. If it were a stolen car, the alarm might be given any minute, and if we were stopped we might find ourselves in an embarrassing position. It would be just as embarrassing, of course, if we were stopped for any other reason, and the burglar's kit and portable arsenal were discovered, along with the minor detail that Bill had no driver's license.

"We've got to find Gus and find him quick," said Bill in desperation. "If we don't we're going to be in the devil of a mess."

WE finally parked the car on a side street off the main stem and hiked around the corner to the police station. The desk sergeant eyed us suspiciously as we approached the railing.

"Is Officer Gus Gisselbrecht on duty now?" asked Bill.

The sergeant glanced at a card on his desk.

"Officer Gisselbrecht went off a

quarter of an hour ago," he said. "He— Just a minute."

The ringing of the telephone had interrupted him.

"Hello! Sergeant Booth speaking." A pause. The person on the other end of the wire was talking. Then: "Stolen, eh? I'll give the alarm immediately and notify Winsted, Waterbury and other towns around here. We'll get it. Sure thing. Good-by." He banged up the receiver, pressed a button at his elbow, and hurriedly thumbed the pages of a telephone book.

"Holy mackerel, Bill, we've got to work quick or somebody else besides Gus will be grabbing all the glory!" I whispered.

"Where can we find Officer Gisselbrecht, sergeant?" asked Bill.

"He's probably at Bill's Lunch Room on Water Street," snapped the sergeant. "Don't bother me. I'm busy now. This is important."

Bill and I didn't wait for any further information. We hastened from Headquarters, inquired the direction to Water Street, located Bill's Lunch Room, and within the brief space of a few minutes had dragged Gus away from a steaming mug of coffee.

"Gus, old man, before we get down to business Jim and I want to congratulate you—you're going to be the next sergeant of police in this burg," said Bill as we escorted him outside.

"You saw the mayor?" queried Gus in pleased astonishment.

"We haven't seen anybody—yet," said Bill.

Gus looked disappointed. "I thought that for once I was going to get a lucky break," he said. "Not that I give a hoot. I've about made up my mind to chuck up this pavement pounding business and go over and see Beary. He'll—"

"Forget about Beary," snapped Bill. "You're going to get a sip of glory. Your two old carnival pals are going to put you on the track of the biggest break you ever got."

"My coffee is in there getting cold," grumbled Gus.

"He's just like you, Bill, always thinking of his stomach," I interposed.

Bill gave me a dirty look.

"Here's the dope, Gus," he said impatiently. "Suppose you were to report at police station that you have recovered a stolen car, picked up a kit of burglar's tools, including guns and so forth, and that you have hot clews leading to the trail of the fugitives—what would it mean?"

"It would mean probably that I would be dismissed for lying."

"But supposing it were true, and you had the car, the kit and the guns outside, what would it mean?" persisted Bill.

"It would mean that your old pal, Gus Gisselbrecht, would be in so solid with the department that the mayor would personally pin the sergeant's badge on him. The only fly in the molasses would be that the chief might get jealous—he's been on the trail of the Costa gang for forty-eight hours and hasn't reported back with a single thing," chuckled Gus.

"Come on, old man," directed Bill, and without further ado he grabbed Gus by the arm and led him toward the side street where we had parked the car.

AT the foot of the street Bill paused dramatically and pointed toward the car.

"See that, Gus?" he demanded.

"Yeh, what about it?"

"In that car is a kit of burglar's tools, a revolver, and a sawed-off shotgun," said Bill. "The car probably was stolen—in fact the sergeant at Headquarters has just been all stirred up by word of a stolen car, and this probably is the one. Jim and I found it parked on an old wood road about two miles from town."

"Where are the prisoners?" queried Gus.

"Listen to that, Jim, will you? Here we've turned over the car and kit and everything to Gus, and he's asking us why we haven't got the prisoners, too. He— Hey, what you doing?"

Bill and I gazed in astonishment as Gus unpinned the badges from his coat and hat.

"I'm through as a cop," said Gus emphatically. "I'm going over to Beary's and get a job."

"What—what—" sputtered Bill.

"The boys in the restaurant and a lot of people on the street have seen me going along with you two, and a lot of people probably saw you in the car," said Gus. "And I figure I'll have a better chance getting back into the carnival game with Matt Beary than I would have trying to explain things to a lot of superior officers who are already convinced that as a policeman I'm not so hot."

Gus calmly tossed his badges into the car.

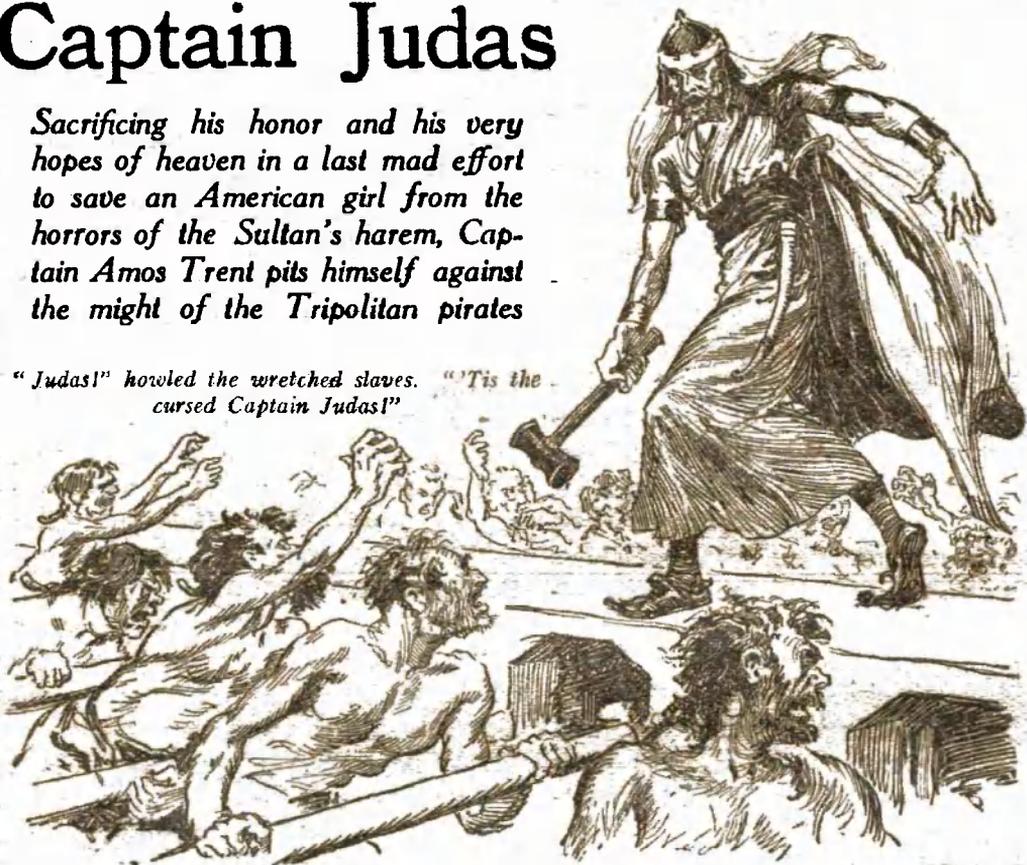
"The chief himself has been working on this burglary case," he continued. "He has been watching an old shack down near that wood road. Apparently he found the kit and guns. Probably by this time he has his men, and is burning the wires to Headquarters."

"You see," he added, "this happens to be the chief's car."

Captain Judas

Sacrificing his honor and his very hopes of heaven in a last mad effort to save an American girl from the horrors of the Sultan's harem, Captain Amos Trent pits himself against the might of the Tripolitan pirates

"Judas!" howled the wretched slaves. "Tis the cursed Captain Judas!"



By F. V. W. MASON.

Author of "Captain Nemesis," "The Tiger of Pnom Kha," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CAPTAIN AMOS TRENT, young master of the fleet brig *Medea*, sets sail from New York in the days when Mediterranean traders were in constant danger from marauding Barbary Coast pirates. A passenger on his ship is his sweetheart, the lovely, patrician heiress, Dorothea Sayles.

The *Medea* is taken by corsairs out of Tripoli under a Scottish renegade, Gregory Lisle, who is admiral of the bashaw's fleet. In the Tripolitan slave market, Dorothea is sold to Lisle for a fabulous sum to be held for a million

dollars ransom from her wealthy father in New York. Amos suggested this to Lisle to save her from a far worse fate at the hands of other purchasers. He, himself, is sold to a Moorish boat builder, and for many terrible weeks leads the life of a Christian slave among Moslems. But always he plans to escape and to rescue Dorothea.

At last the time comes. Amos leads a party of slaves in a raid on the admiral's palace where Dorothea is imprisoned. Some of the fugitives make good their escape in a stolen galley, but the affair is disastrous for Amos

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who, after a terrific battle against overwhelming odds, is cast into a dungeon that is in reality a fiendish instrument of torture. This is the punishment meted out by Admiral Lisle, whom Amos called a "perjured renegade" for adopting the Moslem faith. The Scotsman is determined to tempt the Yankee skipper into doing likewise, for the bashaw offers a commission in his navy for able sea captains from America who will renounce Christ. Driven half mad by torture and informed by Lisle that Dorothea is to be sent to the Sultan's harem, regardless of her ransom, Amos accepts Lisle's offer with a certain secret purpose in mind. The bashaw presents Amos with three lovely handmaidens, in whom Amos has no interest, and a modest palace. Soon after, clad in the Moslem robes and captain's uniform, he meets Dorothea on a battlement and she renounces her love for the "perjured traitor" and christens him Captain Judas.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FLEET SAILS.

FOR a long while after the departure of Dorothea Sayles, Amos Trent, the newly christened Mohammed el Kebir of the bashaw's navy, stood on the edge of the worn stone battlements staring seaward, while the scathing epithet hurled at him by the girl he loved continued to ring in his ears.

"Captain Judas! Captain Judas! A cowardly renegade!" In an agony of despair he repeated the words again and again.

His miserable reverie was finally terminated by the swift patter of bare feet coming toward him. Drawing a

deep breath, he turned to face a beetle-browed, black-haired janizary who saluted and stood in silence, waiting permission to speak.

"A message, O mighty captain. Even now the final orders for thy excellency's galley are being sent to thy palace. Mirant Lisle bids me say that the fleet which is to escort the Meshouda will sail for Istambul on the morrow. Our gracious bashaw—whom Allah protect—has so decreed."

Amos dismissed the swarthy soldier with a nod, and strode off in deep silence from that embittering spot where his last hope of happiness had perished.

"So the fleet's to sail to-morrow? 'Tis the devil's own irony," he muttered with a wry smile, "that I should guard the ship that will bear my Dorothea to the infamous sultan's harem. Dear God, was there ever such an evil jest? What can I do—alone among Moslems and traitors?"

Arriving before his modest palace he paused, listening to a series of soft heartbroken wails arising from within the walls.

"Now, what the devil are those wenchies crying about?" Amos halted in the doorway, a sorely puzzled man. "They can't have been mistreated."

The cries were instantly stilled when his voice bade the door slave unbar, and when he caught a glimpse of the girls they were smiling shyly from a corner of the porch. But the somber gleam in their indifferent master's eye caused the little seraglio to lower dark-haired heads and draw back in affright.

Amos, wholly unaware that the wails of the full-bosomed, olive-skinned beauties were a tribute occasioned by his imminent departure, continued his interrupted march toward his own quarters. Once in the cool dusk, he unbound the white turban from his

aching head, heaved a weary sigh, and fell to absently rumpling the hot, damp hair he had managed to keep for all that, as a good Moslem, he should have had it shaved off.

After a moment's thought he clapped his hands sharply and when a slave appeared, he directed in halting Arabic that an ink horn and pen be brought. Then, writing steadily, he covered sheet after sheet of ivory white vellum with his strong flowing script until at last the light faded completely.

Then only did he pause long enough to devour a few mouthfuls of succulent *cous-cous*—lamb stew, prepared and brought in by one whom Dorérame described as his "first and most beautiful concubine." Clad in a pair of chiffon pantaloons designed to reveal the symmetry of her limbs and a tight little bodice that glittered with many golden buttons, she drew near to bow low and set the dish before her master.

Purely out of human kindness the impassive El Kebir murmured some words of praise, which though few in number and utterly perfunctory, nevertheless brought tremulous smiles to the trembling creature's countenance.

"Is—is my lord pleased?" she asked, as amid an aura of delicate perfume she sank to the floor at his knee to gaze wistfully upward from huge black eyes.

"Aye, Miriam," he replied in his clumsy Arabic, "the stew is savory—and—and very well cooked indeed. When I return from this voyage, I'll bring thee a bracelet worthy to grace even thy slender wrist."

HE lay back smiling at her, for the first time wondering if . . .

Perhaps Lisle wasn't such a fool after all. This new life was not altogether bad—far from it, in fact.

Here he had good food, a palatial house, efficient servants, and three lovely maidens to heed with loving care his least whim.

To his amazement the child, for she could be scarcely more than fifteen, suddenly burst into tears and, murmuring breathless, heart-broken pleas and endearments, timidly kissed the pointed red slipper covering the stalwart captain's foot. Confused, startled at the trend his thoughts had been taking and uncertain what to do, Amos awkwardly bent to pat the sleek black hair in much the same manner as he would to calm a frightened puppy. Then, after a few labored reassurances, he gently raised the quivering girl to her feet and sent her off to the women's quarters.

By the orange-red light of several sputtering mutton-fat lamps he resumed his writing and so labored late into the night.

At last he straightened, cast sand over the final page of the manuscript, then sought a small brass-bound chest set against the opposite wall. From this he drew forth a small cylinder of curiously carved ivory perhaps six inches long.

"Ah, here it is—" He seized one end and, with a strong, twisting motion, unscrewed a skillfully concealed joint. With great care he rolled his manuscript into a tight little scroll and inserted it into the hollow interior, screwing the cap back in place with supple brown fingers.

"And so 'tis done," he sighed. One by one he extinguished the smoldering lamps, then wandered to the elaborate grille of wrought iron that guarded his window against intrusion, and stood looking out into the African night.

"Ah, Dorothea, my lovely Dorothea, only you could rack my heart

so!" Spasmodically the convert's powerful fingers laced themselves around the cold, rusted ironwork. "'Twas folly to expect you to have such faith, but—but I had hoped."

His eyes, burning in their sockets, wandered from the moonlit garden outside to the indistinct whitish outline of the ivory scroll lying on his desk. "Perhaps some kindly fate will guide it to her hands; then she'll know and perhaps hold my memory more kindly."

Wearied to the point of exhaustion, he crossed to the couch and, flinging himself upon it, sank into the dreamless sleep of one who has been condemned beyond hope of reprieve.

THE respectful knocking of one of his house slaves was the first sound to arouse Captain el Kebir. For all his sleep, Amos arose but leadenly, freshened his face with cold rose water, then donned his shirt of fine chain mail, a present from the fierce old Scot who was his superior.

He was surprised at the strange new power which was in his arms, and at the indescribable steel-like hardness that had crept into his nature. Nothing, no matter what, could hurt or pain him now, he felt.

"Well?" A thin, joyless smile was on his lips when he beckoned in an officer who waited on the threshold.

"*Salaam Aleikoum*, O captain!" the lieutenant murmured, his steel casque glittering as he bowed. "May the lucky hand of the holy Fatima guide thy galley. His excellency, the *nirant*—whom Allah protect—awaits you."

The dark, falcon-featured officer then spoke of further news while Amos partook of the thick Turkish coffee and delicately brown rice cakes which composed his breakfast.

"We set sail early then?" remarked the captain, setting down his tiny porcelain cup. "See, the mists have not yet raised from the harbor."

The other nodded enthusiastically. "Ya, the admiral is impatient to be off. Was there ever such a favorite child of the Prophet?"

"No," grimly smiled Amos, as he buckled to his waist a heavy scimitar with a worn black leather scabbard. "He is favored with an uncommon lack of fear. Come now, we'll be on our way."

Amid the high-pitched, heart-rending wails of the household he was about to desert, El Kebir directed that the coffer containing his effects be immediately sent aboard the *Nsoura* now lying at the naval mole.

Well out into the street the lamentations of El Kebir's dusky handmaidens followed him, together with their sobbing pleas that Mohammed and all of his guardian angels should watch well over El Kebir, the Lion, the mighty in battle and the smiter of the unbelievers.

Hardly had he quitted the threshold when a fiercely resonant cry hailed him like the voice of an angry nemesis. "Hail! Captain Judas! May God blast yer traitor's soul!"

As though an asp had stung him, El Kebir half drew his scimitar and whirled about to behold the speaker, an old man, who tottered along chained to a native donkey cart.

"Aye, Captain Judas, ye look very fine, I warrant—I suppose ye'll murder a good number o' Christians this voyage?"

Under the sting of the old slave's vitriolic attack, El Kebir paused glowering, watching the unhappy creature's wrinkled features writhe into an expression of unspeakable contempt.

Encouraged by the convert's silence, the old man straightened and actually shook a shriveled fist.

"Bad luck to ye and yer cruise, Captain Judas!" he snarled. "I hope ye cook in Hades a thousand years!"

COMPLETELY outraged at the audacity of a slave berating a captain of the bashaw's navy, the lieutenant stood paralyzed in mingled astonishment and indignation. But the slave's owner, a brutal-looking teamster, twice lashed the shrill old man across the face, then groveled before El Kebir, imploring forgiveness for his slave's offense.

Amos, however, took no notice, only strode by with a face of death, pausing just long enough to command the teamster to spare the slave a further punishment.

"Bid him beat me," quavered the old man. "I want none of yer pity, Captain Judas. I'll gladly take my punishment now, but you'll endure yours for eternity!"

El Kebir was still quivering mentally from this first shock when he received another.

"Captain Judas!" A slave tottering under a huge square of sail cloth panted the accusation. "May ye rot in Hades with yer brother Iscariot!"

"Captain Judas!" The name rose in chorus from a group of sweat-bathed slaves laboring on the breakwater. In some mysterious way evidently all Tripoli had learned Dorothea's epithet.

Bitterly El Kebir realized that his shrift would indeed be a short one if chance should ever throw him into the power of those savage scarecrows.

When he appeared aboard the *Nsoura* the mass of slaves on the rowing benches raised the cry of

"Captain Judas! Captain Judas!" and kept it up, until the cursing janizaries silenced them with cracking whip blows.

Dazed and crushed at the completeness of his damnation, El Kebir made his way directly to the spacious captain's cabin and, curtly bidding the officers to wait, closed the door.

For some moments he fiercely resisted an almost uncontrollable impulse to seize a pistol from his belt and put a finish to an existence become too miserable to be endured. In the end, however, that indomitable strain in his nature came to his rescue.

"I deliberately chose this course, and, by God, I'll go through with it," he told himself dully. "No use playing the conscience-stricken rogue." So saying, he got up, strode across the cabin and, forcing a welcoming smile on his lightly bearded lips, beckoned in the three officers waiting there.

"*Allahu Akbar!*" he cried, his right hand fluttering in the Mohammedan salute from brow to heart. "I see ye are as eager as I to be off."

AS the bowing, respectful officers stepped into the low-ceilinged cabin, the captain summed them up narrowly, mentally fitting each one into his proper niche.

For second in command he had one Ibn Madhkur, a stalwart, muscular Berber from Morocco whose finely modeled features were almost noble in expression and always alert. He stood easily, small hands resting without motion on the jeweled hilt of a powerful yataghan and dark eyes intently trained on the speaker.

Shorter in stature was Abul al Har, a burly Turkish adventurer with a huge hooked nose jutting above a magnificent black beard. A long, irregular

red scar traversed one side of this veteran's warlike visage, and the other was pitted with powder burns acquired in some ancient fray.

"Capable, resourceful fighters, both of them," decided El Kebir. "It would be hard to fool them—"

His gaze moved to the third and last of his subordinates. This was Jahalul Pasha, head of the janizary force aboard the *Nsoura* and direct emissary of the Sublime Porte. Though nominally under El Kebir's orders, this Pasha received authority from the Sultan himself. Shrewdest of all and somewhat younger, he reminded the captain of a restless jaguar, seemingly sleepy, but in reality ready to strike out at any moment.

Jahalul Pasha, it appeared, corresponded to the officer in command of marines in Christian navies, for his janizaries were a separate entity of fighters, obeying only the commands of their leader. This copper-hued fighter, in distinction to the other officers, wore a green cape and a red, tasseled fez.

His mental summary completed, Captain el Kebir commenced a final check up. "Are all the supplies aboard?" he inquired of the Berber.

Ibn Madhkur nodded, and his strong white teeth flashed in the morning sunlight. "*Ya*, all is in readiness."

"And the water, too?"

"*Ya*, that also."

The brooding eyes of the renegade then shifted to the Turkish veteran. "How many number the sailors?"

"Twenty sailors from Tripoli," replied that worthy without hesitation. "All sound men. Then there are thirty galley slaves, all stubborn, unbelieving dogs from the new nation across the seas."

Abul al Har announced this last unblinkingly, although fully conscious

that El Kebir himself came from that same new nation. If he had expected a change in the captain's expression, he was sorely disappointed, for El Kebir remained immobile.

"And for fighters?" Amos demanded of Jahalul Pasha. Much depended on the number of the janizary detachment. Their force, he confidently estimated, did not exceed thirty. If there were more of these incorruptible, reckless marines—

"Forty fighters, captain," grunted the Sultan's officer, "forty of the best. Tried men who know how to handle the perjured Nazarenes."

Had Pasha put an unnecessary emphasis on the last few words of his reply? El Kebir wondered, but held his peace.

Meanwhile he was mentally calculating. "Twenty sailors and forty janizaries make sixty in all, and that's not counting the officers. Add to that thirty galley slaves and the total is ninety or thereabouts. A full crew and a few over."

AT that moment the distant boom of a signal gun interrupted the council.

"Ha!" exulted Ibn Madhkur, "It is the warning signal—"

"*Allahu Akbar!*" cried Abul al Har, grinning crookedly. "May we return home deep in the water with spoils and slaves."

"Fear not, we shall take a ship before all others of the fleet," El Kebir assured him as he turned to go. "I feel we shall gain that honor. Are ye ready?"

Donning a glittering steel helmet and winding his turban about its base, El Kebir smiled thinly at his lieutenant's impatience to be off. "Let each man perform his duties carefully and

thus show the *mirant* we know how to smite hard for the glory of Allah and his true prophet, Mohammed!"

So saying Amos caught up his heavy scimitar and, followed at a respectful distance by his subordinates, made his way on deck into the splendor of a golden sunrise that lit the sails of the rakish warships clustered at the base of the castle.

Forward, he beheld lean, half-naked sailors hauling up the anchor.

Already the yellow-shafted oars were thrust out, held dripping and horizontal to the breathless water of the Tripoli harbor. At the sight a surge of hot blood flowed into El Kebir's face; gripping the handles of those same oars below decks sat his countrymen, thirty of them—gaunt, chained and hungry. Here was he, commander of the ship, with a soft couch in the cabin, slaves to obey his every wish, rich, nourishing food to eat, yet deep in his being he would gladly have changed places with the most ragged, starving wretch on the rowing benches.

Then, through an open hatchway, one of the slaves spied that stalwart figure in flowing white robes, standing immobile on the quarter-deck.

Instantly a hideous clamor rose once more. "'Tis Captain Judas! There he is! Traitor! Faint heart!"

Amid the whistle and snap of whip lashes, the outcries died to hollow groans and anguished curses. But Abul al Har looked serious.

"A bad omen," he muttered, jerking at his beard. "These American dogs are forever insolent!"

El Kebir laughed, however, turning aside with a shrug and a light remark to Ibn Madhkur.

"Thou seest how my late brethren love me?" He waved a broad hand at the open hatchway. "The unbeliev-

ing dogs would tear me to shreds had they the opportunity."

The Berber grinned wolfishly. "Ah, captain, have no fear of further insults; the sharp tongues of the whips will soon teach them respect." He paused as though struck by an idea. "But it is ill fortune that thou shouldst find so many Americans among thy slaves—one might almost call it strange."

Amos nodded as he turned away from the stern. "Aye, but their backs are stronger than most; I have found that an Englishman or an American takes near twice as much killing as any other nationality. But, look! Is not the *mirant's* barque getting under way?"

SURE enough, amid the intermittent thunder of saluting cannon, the barque Kaaba, shaking out sail after sail, moved grandly across the harbor. Then, one after another, the various ships of the fleet thrust out their oars or raised sail according to their type.

"One barque," murmured Amos, standing by his helmsman, "two brigs and six of the polaccas, galleys and xebecs—not counting ourselves." Deeply impressed, his eyes wandered over that martial array, for until that moment he had not realized the genuine power of the Tripolitan navy. Suddenly his heart stopped and he stiffened involuntarily as around the end of the mole appeared a brig—a ship familiar in every line and spar.

"By God! It's the Medea!" With the sight of her, a host of torturing memories flooded his brain. Could it be that he had once been her master? He, "El Kebir"?

"That is the Meshouda," chuckled Jahalul Pasha with a lingering side-

wise glance. "A beautiful gift from America to God's caliph on earth. In her are all those treasures sent by Yussuf Karamanti—whom Allah make prosperous — to please his magnificence, Selim III, at Istambul." The janizary officer's glittering eyes searched his commander's lean features.

"Ya, she bears chests groaning with two hundred thousand British pounds in heavy red gold, as well as emeralds, rubies, and other rich stones, not to mention twenty beautiful female slaves. A sultan's ransom, eh, captain? Is it not—er—well, tempting?"

A long moment El Kebir permitted his gaze to rest on the Turk's brutal features. An untrustworthy adventurer, he decided.

Through discreet questions carelessly asked, El Kebir discovered that the unhappy creatures occupied a luxurious cabin aboard the refitted *Medea* and that their every wish, saving the right to liberty, was granted. But he had scant time to meditate on these things, for the deep voice of Ibn Madhkur addressed him.

"Look, O captain! Our signal flutters from the *mirant's* yardarm."

A new animation suddenly gripped the man known as El Kebir. At his orders the long oars began to flash smoothly over the sunlit water, and the corsair galley set off on her cruise of rapine and murder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EL KEBIR TAKES A PRIZE.

DAWN found the *Meshouda* cruising along under easy canvas, for a full spread of the brig's sail would have left her slower guardians far behind. Three vessels had been de-

tailed to escort the treasure ship—the beautiful Kaaba and one other galley besides the American renegade's *Nsoura*. The balance of the corsair squadron had separated to their various cruising stations during the night.

In the morning El Kebir, coming on deck, became increasingly aware that his officers, particularly Jahalul Pasha, were wary to the point of mistrust. Over every important part of the galley the thin-lipped Pasha had posted an impassive janizary who moved not an inch from his appointed station, and, singularly enough, all-access to the slave hold was especially well guarded.

Though the commander of the janizaries was invariably respectful and subservient, it was not until the third day out of Tripoli that El Kebir was able to shake that copper-visaged officer's suspicions.

It was about noon when the lookout reported the glimmer of a sail just rising above the horizon off the starboard bow. Instantly El Kebir, with every manifestation of eagerness, climbed to the rail and eagerly scanned the strange speck of canvas with a spy-glass. About him, grimly impatient, clustered his officers.

"Now Allah be praised," exulted the convert. "'Tis a fat brigantine! Fatima send she's not an English ship. Look thou well, Jahalul Pasha!"

There was no trace of false eagerness in El Kebir's deep voice and his face was lit with a strange excitement. "Make haste!" he shouted to the second in command. "Out oars! See to it, Ibn Madhkur! Haste, ye lazy dogs! Would ye have the *mirant* or Captain Sadiqua snatch the prize from under our very noses? Ibrahim! Swing the yard about, ye hamstrung, camel-sired rascals!"

Moving with an energy that as-

tounded his dark-skinned subordinates, El Kebir changed course and swiftly headed his galley for that distant sail, while Kaaba and the other galley were yet hesitating.

"By Allah," chuckled Abul al Har to the Berber. "What said I? Our captain is of a truth famished for battle and spoil!"

Animated with a fierce, deep earnestness, El Kebir cried for speed and more speed when the two other corsair cruisers swung about post haste and joined in the race for that distant sail which might prove to be a deep-laden Frenchman or an American full of cargo.

SLOWLY and surely the Nsoura was gaining ground, but El Kebir ground his teeth in a frenzy of impatience. At last he himself strode below to the slave deck.

"Pull, ye dogs!" he ordered coldly. "Boatswain! Lay on harder!"

As the order was carried out a gale of panting curses arose from the slaves. "Damn you, Judas; We'll tear you apart some day—Oh! God! Stop the whips!"

But the renegade captain was relentless. With naked scimitar in hand, he strode back and forth along the gangway running between the crowded rowing benches, heartlessly pointing out the laggards for a taste of the slave driver's lead-tipped lash of discipline.

Groaning and gasping, the brawny American galley slaves heaved until the stout oars cracked and buckled. It seemed as though El Kebir's very life depended on reaching that distant vessel first, and though the other corsair galley was larger and her crew strove their best, yet the gap between the two grew wider and wider.

"Be my tongue split in two," growled Abul al Har to the leader of the janizaries, as they once more stood upon the quarter-deck. "This convert proves himself a lion indeed. See how he grips his sword handle! Mark how he peers at the cursed Nazarene ship. *Shabat!* He looks as does a lion on a strayed camel colt."

Relentless, the Nsoura bore down on the now terrified and fast fleeing brigantine. When but half a mile of blue water separated the galley from her intended victim, El Kebir ordered every free man on deck, and with no little eloquence exhorted them to shout and make a great display of their arms; not that the injunction needed much encouragement.

In a terrifying chorus the dark-skinned corsairs raised a deep cry that must have stricken fear into the hearts aboard the brigantine.

"Her name, El Kebir—is she American?" cried Ibn Madhkur.

The renegade nodded in what seemed like grim joy. "Aye, a Yankee ship. 'Tis the Swan of New Bedford!"

"Fire a gun," he suddenly commanded Jahalul Pasha.

"But, captain, the range is too long," protested the other in amazement. "No gun aboard can carry half the distance."

When El Kebir bent a furious look on him, he carried out the instructions.

With a curious, detached sense of excitement, the Nsoura's commander watched the spurt of flame, and the lazy, gray cloud of smoke that appeared under the galley's counter. A fleeting smile twisted his lips when the shot, as Jahalul Pasha had predicted, fell short a good two hundred yards.

Nevertheless, it had effect, for alongside the Swan appeared small splashes as, from the waist of the ship,

her crew began throwing overboard ballast, cargo, anything that would lighten the brigantine and so increase her speed a fraction of a knot.

From his heaving poop deck, El Kebir witnessed, with growing trepidation the dogged approach of the Kaaba, Lisle's ship, as, propelled by a favoring slant of wind, she spread all her canvas, eager to outstrip her smaller consort and thus gain the glory and profit of taking the prize.

"Faster, oars!" roared El Kebir, his face drawn and tense beneath the orthodox turban. "The Kaaba gains. Oars! Make those lazy slaves put their backs to it!"

Below decks the chained wretches tugged and heaved like madmen, gasping fearful imprecations on the merciless renegade whose demands exacted every ounce of their strength.

AS the American ship beheld her doom in the shape of that fleet galley coming ever nearer, her captain, in a brave, if futile gesture, opened fire with four of his guns, but unfortunately for him, the Swan carried only short carronades of so limited a range that they could not hurt the pirate vessel until she drew very close.

"Open fire" snapped El Kebir to Abul al Har. "Shoot and cripple the rigging of these unbelieving dogs, for once their ship loses speed they are ours. Hurry now, ye misbegotten dogs! Five golden pounds to the gun crew that brings me down the brigantine's mainmast."

While the brown corsairs, grimly picturesque in their miscellaneous array of side arms, tugged and sweated at the gun tackles, Amos strode among them, shouting encouragement.

When the galley was but a hundred

yards from the fugitive vessel, Ibn Madhkur prepared for battle by stripping to the waist and strapping on a light cuirass of glittering steel.

"These will do for at least two of the Christian swine!" he gloated fiercely, adding a brace of long-barreled pistols to his arsenal.

As El Kebir passed on his return to the poop, the Berber's eyes narrowed. "Why dost thou carry that ivory stick in thy belt, O captain? Would not a pistol be more useful?"

"It contains a certain precious writing," replied El Kebir shortly. "If I should chance to fall in the battle—see that it reaches the *mirant*."

Jahalul Pasha, meanwhile, had mustered his veteran janizaries on the galley's prow, where they now waited in restless, serried ranks, impatiently eying the doomed brigantine.

During this last phase of the chase the galley's nine starboard guns spoke, one after the other, while El Kebir stamped and cursed in furious anger at the poor shooting. Only two of the shots hulled the fleeing merchantman, and the others either fell short or passed harmlessly through her rigging.

While the guns were being reloaded the Nsoura's captain anxiously glanced over his shoulder to perceive that the powerful Kaaba had gained incredibly and was rapidly drawing in range. He could almost read the triumphant smile on the Scot's face at the prospect of carrying off the prize after all. There was no doubt now that the Swan would fall to the Kaaba if her flight was not immediately halted.

"Stand away, ye blind, fumbling dogs," El Kebir roared at the crew of a freshly loaded gun. "Ye awkward clowns, ye could not hit an ox with an oar!"

Roughly he drove away the shamed and apologetic gunners, then snatched up the aiming mallet and a couple of quoins. At once a deep silence reigned amid the near-by corsairs, while El Kebir, with a rare skill, fell to sighting the heavy cannon.

"What madness is this? El Kebir can never hit the mast," gasped Abul al Har. "'Twould be the work of a *jinni* if he does."

Jahalul Pasha grinned sourly and tested his sword point on a broad, powerful thumb. "Aye, surely this time our captain has overreached himself. He is an empty braggart."

Nevertheless, the mail-clad commander calmly pursued his preparations; then, rising to his feet, he seized the firing lanyard and braced his bare feet on the deck.

Though the sea was fairly calm, the lightly ballasted galley rolled heavily, forcing Amos to judge the motion to a nicety. At that precise instant, while the Nsoura hovered on an even keel, his hand darted back and a tiny, vertical puff of white smoke shot up, presaging the thunderous explosion. Like a wounded beast the gun carriage leaped back on its ponderous wooden wheels, rumbling and straining viciously at the tackle ropes under force of the recoil.

MOMENTARILY blinded by the bitter fumes of burnt powder, the tensed, sweat-bathed El Kebir heard a ringing, triumphant shout from the prow of the galley.

"*Allahu Akbar!*" 'Tis a miracle! See, the American's mast sways! It totters! It falls!"

Ibn Madhkur was shouting incredulous, delighted oaths, and Jahalul Pasha, impassive veteran of twoscore engagements, flung both arms about

the grinning, powder-grimed El Kebir.

"By the stone of the Kaaba," he shouted, "thou art well fitted to follow the victorious crescent of Mohammed! Surely, the hand of Fatima guided that shot."

When the heavy white billow of smoke cleared away, the Nsoura's master beheld, with sadly conflicting emotions, the results of his uncanny gunnery. The Swan now lay helpless, not over fifty yards away, with the wreck of her mainmast depressing her left rail in such a manner that her frantic crew could not bring their guns to bear. She had, moreover, lost all steerageway, and now wallowed completely, defenseless, waiting the onslaught of her three pursuers.

As hounds on the trail of a faltering buck, the Kaaba and her running mate came storming up, but they were too late to share in the victory, for the Nsoura's boarders were already swarming in a dark cloud over the brigantine's green-painted stern, and at their head the watchers recognized the stalwart, white-clad figure of Captain el Kebir.

"Surrender!" shouted El Kebir in English. "Surrender at once, ye Christian dogs, and mayhap your lives will be spared."

The brigantine's captain, a tall bony man in a ragged pea-jacket, turned aside in evident despair to confer with his mates. El Kebir saw the others urge surrender, saw the captain's thin, anguished face lifted to glance at the red, white and blue flag that yet fluttered from the brigantine's foretop.

"Quick!" growled Jahalul Pasha, starting forward. "See, they defy us! Slay them, slay them all!"

But El Kebir sprang before the janizary officer, with hand raised.

"Peace!" he cried. "Thou dost forget thyself. I give orders here. Fool! Why murder the Christian dogs? Every one left alive means more gold for us in the slave mart. Have patience, comrade, they'll surrender immediately."

But the brigantine's lanky master still demurred. Suddenly he snatched a long musket from a near-by sailor and, taking quick aim, fired full at the calm white-clad figure on the brigantine's stern.

"Take that, you murdering infidel!" he roared hoarsely.

The bullet sang by a scant inch or so from the golden ring in El Kebir's ear to stretch a stalwart janizary writhing on the deck.

In an instant a dozen corsair muskets had cracked, and when the smoke drifted away the foolhardy skipper, one of his mates and two seamen lay dead on the deck.

"Stop! For God's sake! We surrender!"

The plea for quarter rose from all sides as the remaining officers raised empty, imploring hands.

"Then drop your arms, all of you!" rasped El Kebir. "And haul down that rag of a flag!"

FEARFULLY obedient, the Swan's crew cast their weapons clattering to the deck and sullenly lowered the Stars and Stripes.

When the Nsoura, after shipping her oars, was run alongside, it was El Kebir himself who superintended the chaining of twenty-two sullen and uncowed American seamen.

"Lusty rogues," he commented carelessly to his second in command. "They'll do well at the oars."

"Ya, sidi, it is a goodly haul," chuckled Abul al Har. "And the

Christian dogs are loaded with spices and wine."

Unconsciously repeating Lisle's first words aboard the Medea, El Kebir addressed the surviving mate, a tall, black-haired fellow.

"Where's your manifest?"

At the familiar accents the American's jaw dropped almost to his chest. He stared, then grated harshly: "A renegade, by God!" Turning to another prisoner he contemptuously jerked his head in El Kebir's direction.

"Damn my eyes, Harry, look at that thing in infidel clothes. Who'd think a Yankee skipper could fall so low?"

El Kebir, his soul for once tortured beyond endurance, vented a growl of rage and struck the offending mate senseless to the deck with a crashing blow that won a murmur of approval from the onlookers and a thin smile from Ibn Madhkur.

"So much for that insolent dog," remarked El Kebir, calmly spurning the fallen mate. "Jahalul Pasha, station thy janizaries aboard the prize at once. I'll then make report to the *mirant*." He grinned. "By Allah, the old Scot 'll be in a fine fury, too."

Jahalul Pasha inclined his head, but spread eloquent hands in protest. "I regret, illustrious captain, I can spare but ten men. Do thou make up the greater part of the prize crew from among thy sailors."

But Amos firmly shook his head. Fixing the other with a stony eye, he insisted. "See how large and helpless is this vessel. Ibn Madhkur has but twenty sailors, while thou hast twice as many janizaries."

Grumbling and very reluctantly, Jahalul Pasha finally assented to the placing of fifteen of his savage followers aboard the Swan. To these El

Kebir soon added ten sailors under the able command of Abul al Har.

SHORTLY afterward the victorious captain caused himself to be rowed over the sparkling blue rollers to the Kaaba where, after an exchange of civilities, he made due report to the half-admiring, half-disgruntled *mirant*.

"Ye're a plaguey keen commander," commented the Scot sourly. "Ye did me oot o' a fat prize; but 'twas weel done, laddie." Losing his spite he clasped El Kebir's hand warmly. "It's gr-r-rand tae have anither white mon by me. It's fair lonely wi' all these black rogues for mates. Amos, boy—ye'll make a great name yet. I'll admit ye fair surprised me wi' your eagerness to-day. I'd feared ye'd be none sae keen tae prey on yer late countrymen."

The ring in Amos's ear flashed brightly as he chuckled convincingly.

"Nonsense, Lisle! 'Twas you taught me sense. I've had small cause to love certain of my ex-countrymen—the late Mr. Estes, for instance. Besides, having made my bed, it's only reasonable to wish to lie as comfortably in it as may be."

The Scot's leathery features relaxed in a smile.

"Ah'm thinking ye're no mean philosopher, Trent. I have always found it wiser tae risk my neck for a sovereign than for a goat. I am well pleased wi' ye. What have ye done wi' the prisoners of warr-r-r?"

"Taken them to my own ship," replied El Kebir easily. "I've still some vacant benches, and the other galley has none. What are your orders now, sir?"

Solemnly, Gregory Lisle, *mirant* of all the bashaw's navy, winked his blue right eye and laid an affectionate hand on his subordinate's arm.

"My immediate orders, Captain el Kebir, are tae come below whaur I've a wee drappie o' something our dear Prophet ne'er properly appreciated. Come doon and we wull drink tae your successful cruise."

Smothering a weary sigh, El Kebir nodded, then followed the wiry, white-robed figure down the companionway.

CHAPTER XXV.

NIGHT OF STORM.

IT was the third day following the capture of the Swan that the first warnings of an impending storm appeared. From the Nsoura's poop, El Kebir watched ragged, low-flying clouds come scudding up over the horizon, paling the bright blue water to a dirty gray.

All day the weather grew worse, forcing the Kaaba and the Meshouda to reduce sail and causing the galleys to draw their wildly threshing oars inboard.

Steadily the gale increased to a howling blast, and by nightfall the sea was white and all four ships plunged madly, content merely to hold their own against the storm.

Only El Kebir seemed at ease aboard his rolling galley. The janizaries off duty crouched shivering and cursing in their quarters, mumbling prayers that the storm might not increase, while the thirteen remaining sailors traveled the wave-washed deck in peril of their lives and ventured forth only on command.

In the fetid slave hold there was no sound save the groaning of timbers and the dull thunder of waves beating outside, for all save a single slave driver on duty had sunk into a weary slumber.

Darker and darker grew the night,

until it was only with difficulty that El Kebir, drenched and shivering, could distinguish the lights on the Kaaba and the Meshouda as he stood beside the great oaken tiller. 'Already the other galley was lost to view.

"I shouldn't wonder if they've come into the wind," he conjectured. "Would to God we could—it's a cruel buffeting the Nsoura is taking."

Dodging a cloud of spray, he turned to the quartermaster, who, with feet braced wide on the cleated deck, shouted directions to two assistants struggling with the ponderous tiller handle.

"Ali, I am going forward to test the cordage; do thou keep the Nsoura's prow in line with the red lantern on the Meshouda's stern. Lose it and I promise thee thy head will pay for the error."

The steersman's eyes, wide with alarm, shone dully in the darkness.

"*Ya, sidi*. It is difficult, but I will do my best. What if the others—"

"Peace," growled El Kebir, tightening the broad belt which restrained his robe against the fierce blasts of the gale. "I have spoken. Remember thy life depends upon keeping the Meshouda in sight."

So saying he bent against the wind and staggered off, clutching the rail for support and instinctively shielding his eyes against the torrents of stinging spray with his free hand.

HAD some watcher been abroad that stormy night he might have noticed a curious, set expression on El Kebir's gleaming features as he fought his way forward—inch by inch and foot by foot—toward a certain solidly-built companionway that led below.

Minutes later, drenched and panting, the venturesome captain found himself

on a staircase illuminated by a single smoking lantern. He paused to examine with critical eye an object seized during his progress along the deck. It was one of those leaded mallets employed to regulate the quoin guns.

"God knows," he muttered, "it should do the trick." His fingers gripped the handle with almost spasmodic tightness as the mallet vanished once more beneath his dripping robes.

Outside the crew's quarters he hesitated just long enough to glance inside and to make sure of the number of huddled outlines present. Then, walking on the balls of his bare feet, the renegade silently turned toward the slave hold, instinctively wrinkling his nostrils against the stench that assailed him from the narrow black passage ahead.

True to the rigid discipline that had built the empire of the Sublime Porte, the two janizaries on guard were not only awake, but alert as well. They stood talking in low tones, their calloused feet braced on the swaying floor of the passage. Upon catching sight of the commander, their yellow-clad bodies stiffened awkwardly and in unison they presented naked scimitars in salute.

El Kebir inclined his head as he advanced and smiled. "Ye are good watchmen," he commended them. "It is an ill night to stand guard."

The two scarred faces relaxed, hugely pleased by the praise of a master known to be exacting. How gigantic seemed the two in that half light; why, they nearly filled the narrow passage.

"*Ya*, captain, as thou sayest, it is—" Suddenly one of the silver-mounted pistols from El Kebir's wide girdle clattered at his feet. Immediately the nearest janizary uttered an exclaima-

tion and stooped swiftly to recover the weapon, thus presenting for an instant the back of his shaven skull.

He never straightened, for with the speed of a leopard's blow, the heavy quoin mallet flashed out from beneath El Kebir's sodden robes and descended with all the force of the captain's powerful frame. The stricken soldier collapsed without a sound to lie quivering like a stunned ox.

During a fraction of a moment the other guard gaped incredulous, paralyzed with surprise, but recovering as swiftly, leaped forward in a tigerish assault.

El Kebir sprang back and jabbed hard with his left fist to gain time to raise the mallet once again. But though his hard, bony fist landed squarely on the point of the Turkish soldier's jaw, it bothered that tough veteran not at all. He merely grunted, shook his head and whipped up his scimitar with a lightning speed that seemed to spell El Kebir's doom. But at the apex of its arc the scimitar's point inadvertently crashed into the single lantern illuminating the disputed passage. Came the high tinkle of shattered glass, a spray of hot, rancid smelling oil, and a turmoil filled the blackness, for the door to the slave hold was swung shut.

It was fantastic, unreal, the duel that followed there in the swaying passage, with Death waiting to strike the incautious. El Kebir, quicker in his reactions than the janizary, twisted sinuously sidewise and instantly flattened himself against the wall. He heard the grunt of the invisible swordsman as he struck and found nothing.

Then, calculating the probable position of his opponent, the captain once more brought down the mallet, putting all of his strength into the blow. Luck

avored him this time, for a dull crunch sounded hollowly in the blackness and something warm and yielding slithered against his knees.

PERHAPS ten minutes later a sleepy slave driver on duty in the hold started up at hearing a soft step behind him, turned to see the cause and sprang to attention, for El Kebir, himself, was quietly making his way down the long, narrow gangway separating the rowing benches.

"Judas!" cried a wakeful slave with a sudden jangle of fetters. "By God, boys, 'tis the bloody Captain Judas himself!"

In one brief instant the slave hold became an indescribable bedlam as some forty-five frenzied slaves awoke and, spying the object of their almost fanatic hatred, strained desperately at their chains and fought with writhing fingers to catch hold of the unmoved renegade.

"Judas!" a voice howled madly. "Judas! He's the damned traitor whose hand brought down our mainmast. He's the one to thank we're here!"

Knowing from past experience that the roar of wind and wave would drown out the outcry, El Kebir stood impassive while the Negro slave driver, growling angry oaths, caught up his lead-tipped lash and commenced to beat back the yammering slaves.

Progressing steadily down the gangway the huge black plied his whistling whip, moving straight toward El Kebir. The driver left in his wake a dozen moaning, writhing figures, then prepared to pass the motionless commander who stood clutching a deck beam for support and watching the slave driver's efforts with smoldering eyes.

At that precise moment, when the bandy-legged driver was directly beside him, El Kebir's foot shot out with the speed of a cat's paw, dexterously throwing the Moor off balance. In a twinkling the slave driver reeled, clawed wildly at the air, then plunged among the benches to vanish under a pack of screaming, raging slaves who quickly and horribly put an end to the black's career of brutality.

"And now, we'll have you, Captain Judas!" they shrieked. But, calm and commanding, El Kebir raised a hand for attention. A few who had noted the reason for the slave driver's fatal fall silenced the others. They seemed struck by an idea, those gaunt, filthy wretches, and waited breathless.

"Hearken," cried the renegade known as Captain Judas. "D'ye see these keys? They fit your fetters. Would ye be free?"

In dull incomprehension the red-eyed slaves gaped at that tall, masterful figure beneath the lantern.

"Bah!" snarled a black-haired seaman down whose chest ran a trickle of blood. "We'll have none of you, Judas. Once a traitor, always a traitor! What new game is this?"

"The game of Life and Death, fool!" replied El Kebir in loud, bitter tones. "A costly game. Ye all know that everything in this world must be bought at a price. I've tried to buy your liberty and that of another—at a price." There was something infinitely tragic in the ruddy bearded face, and the gray eyes sweeping the slave benches were veiled with an indescribable sadness. "That price is the name of 'Captain Judas.' D'ye understand? To get you free—I perjured myself. I'm branded as Judas now—and will be till I die." He waited for an outcry, but none came, so he went on, rais-

ing his voice above the groaning of the storm-tossed galley. "But I've only bought half your freedom—the other half must be bought by you!"

"What's the price?" A dozen strained and breathless voices chorused the query.

EL KEBIR held the great key ring up to the light. "Here are the keys. Now, mark my words. In ten minutes you can all be free—in ten minutes you can slay these pirate devils who have imprisoned you—if, mind you, you will but promise to obey me in all things!"

"You ask us to trust and obey you," cried an old man, "and 'twas your own hand that crippled the Swan."

Deliberately, almost contemptuously, the captain's turbaned head turned to the speaker.

"Yes," he answered in fierce impatience. "'Twas my hand! Thank God for it, too! Don't you see, witless fool, that had I not captured you, one of the other vessels would have? I strove to be first—deliberately lashed the backs off some of you, didn't I? Why? Because I wanted every American I could get, aboard this vessel. Now, will you believe me?"

Something in El Kebir's poignant appeal must have brought conviction. The nearest slaves hesitated, turned aside and communed hastily in undertones while the captain waited on the gangway, his heart drumming violently. Everything hinged on this critical moment. The other slaves were wavering—some pro and some con.

Master of diplomacy that he was, he instantly gave them one final word. "Decide," he rasped, and his jaw shut with an ominous click. "Decide, you wavering fools, or I'll go aloft and send down the janizaries!"

It was the needed impetus—they knew his threat was genuine. As one man they arose. "Captain Judas!" they shouted—quite forgetful of the implication—"we'll follow! That we will! Show us the way and we'll follow."

Instantly El Kebir sprang down from the gangway to the benches and distributed a key ring to either side. A period of feverish activity followed, at the end of which some forty-five desperate, shivering wretches, bearing iron balls on wrist and ankle, lined up on the gangway.

"Lead on, captain," cried the foremost, and the gleam in his sunken eyes boded ill for the corsairs sleeping in fancied security aboard the Nsoura. In a long, shaggy column the freed slaves commenced to move forward, bending low to miss the deck beams.

"Quietly now," cautioned El Kebir. "You, mister red-head, take charge of the distribution of arms—I've opened a chest of pikes at the far end of this passage. There are a brace of dead janizaries out there," he added grimly. "Don't trip on them or cry out. When you're armed, follow me, and for God's sake strike hard and true."

A grisly, ominous laugh echoing through the semi-darkness was his reply.

LATER, El Kebir recalled the vision of twenty grimly eager men poised outside the Tripolitan crew's quarters—of a hand trying the latch, a sudden influx, squeals, shrieks, thudding blows, groans, then silence.

For over half an hour terror, murder and sudden death reigned on the storm-assailed Nsoura. A good half of the janizaries were stricken down before they could rub sleep from their

eyes; the others fought gamely, but died just as surely.

Jahalul Pasha awoke to find his quarters full of naked, apelike figures. He went down after a terrific struggle, cursing El Kebir until a boarding ax sank deep into his brain.

Of all the crew, only Ibn Madhkur, the quartermaster and his two assistants were spared. Very efficiently they were seized, bound and imprisoned below.

And while Death raged in a carnival of revenge, the wave-lashed galley continued to follow the dim red beacon on the Meshouda's stern as though nothing had happened. About that El Kebir was very careful.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIGHT ON THE MESHOU DA.

WHEN the discouraged gray light of early morning finally penetrated the storm clouds, there remained of the original convoy only two vessels cruising in company. They were the brig Meshouda and a single, grimly tenacious galley which, with a few of her oars thrust out, crept suddenly over the surging seas.

"By Allah! What a sea eagle is this El Kebir! He alone lost us not during the night." On the treasure ship's quarter-deck Captain Albu Mohammed clutched the taffrail and peered anxiously out over the tumultuous gray waves. "Mark thou, Fahkri," he observed to his mate, "how badly the galley has suffered!"

"Aye," answered the other. "See how low she sits in the water. Ibn Madhkur's rogues must be breaking their backs at the pumps. By the beard of the Prophet, I think I see her distress signal even now."

"Fetch my glasses," commanded Albu Mohammed, "and send the officer of the watch to me at once. We may have to stand by for a rescue. 'Tis Shaitan's own luck that the Kaaba was blown away or she'd do it."

Through the glass the master of the Meshouda studied the laboring galley and noticed with apprehension how wave after wave raced foaming and unchecked across her decks. A frown appeared on his dark brow when he discovered how badly the Nsoura's bulwarks were shattered and broken, and how the triple-reefed sail tugged and threshed, momentarily threatening to break loose.

At that moment the officer of the watch came up.

"Here," commanded Albu Mohammed, "take this glass and tell me what thou seest."

Steadying the glass against the brig's violent lurching, the officer obeyed.

"I see the water pouring into a broken hatch. I see several of the slaves pumping like mad. On the deck stands El Kebir, and close by him Ibn Madhkur." Suddenly the watcher stiffened. "Quick, captain!" he cried. "There flies the red flag of distress."

He turned questioning eyes on his superior—would he turn back?

"We must," reluctantly growled Albu Mohammed in reply to the unspoken query. "'Tis the bashaw's own order. Prepare to wear the ship. Ten thousand curses on our fate to have to creep along at a galley's speed!"

RUMBLING angry oaths in his beard, the lieutenant strode off; and before long the Meshouda commenced to swing in a wide arc back toward the apparently sinking hulk of the Nsoura.

In another ten minutes two of the brig's whaleboats, each capable of carrying forty souls, set out from the Meshouda's lee and, by dint of hard pulling, were rowed over to the far side of the sinking galley.

Agile as cats, two of the seamen from each of the whaleboats sprang to the wave-lashed deck. Then one of them, more astute than his mate, started back with a sharp cry of astonishment, for the hatch which was admitting water had been unmistakably chopped, not broken open. In increasing trepidation he noticed several ropes which also had been cut, not broken. He whirled to give an alarm, but a powerful brown-faced man in a janizary's uniform neatly knocked the breath from the corsair's lungs.

Watchers crowding the rail of the Meshouda then witnessed a perfect example of marine discipline. In orderly files the doomed galley's whole force of janizaries lined up across the wave-lashed deck, while from the slave hatch appeared some twenty-five slaves, momentarily freed of their shackles. These were handed or thrown bodily over the side into the waiting boats which, being on the far side of the Nsoura, were invisible from the brig.

"El Kebir must be leaving some of his slaves to drown," observed Albu Mohammed, with a sour laugh. "Evidently the galley sinks too fast. See, there is El Kebir himself, going over the side."

Even as he spoke, the first of the returning whaleboats appeared, riding heavily over the waves, her rowers reënforced by slaves from the foundering galley. They rowed eagerly enough, for about them squatted numbers of janizaries in whose hands gleamed ready blades.

"Aye," nodded the officer of the watch, "El Kebir may have left some slaves, but he has saved all of his arms. Seest thou the heap of pikes, pistols and cutlasses in the stern of each boat?"

"A good leader is El Kebir," agreed 'Albu. "He thinks of everything."

A shout of excitement rose from the handful of sailors on watch on the Meshouda's deck.

"Look, by the Rock of the Kaaba! The galley sinks!"

It was so. That long, sinister hull was settling lower and lower into the water, until suddenly the Nsoura gave a final heave and completely vanished, her passing marked only by a litter of scattered wreckage.

STEADILY, the returning whaleboats pulled for the patch of quieter water in the brig's lee. Apparently sick and cowed, the rescued janizaries crouched in the boat bottoms, not one of them so much as turning his head in the direction of the Meshouda.

El Kebir, however, stood with Ibn Madhkur in the stern of the foremost whaleboat and shouted in a voice of thunder that lines should be cast over the side, a command which was promptly carried out.

Then, as the whaleboat plunged alongside, the janizaries awoke to a strange and sudden activity. Their belts bulging with pistols and holding bright bladed scimitars between their teeth, they caught the trailing rope ends and came swarming up the side like so many yellow-clad apes.

"Captain!" There was a note of poignant alarm in the voice of an officer who stood beside 'Albu Mohammed. "See those janizaries! Treachery! They are not the same which shipped aboard the Nsoura!"

He darted across the quarter-deck bellowing for the guards, while the Meshouda's captain, in belated alarm, jerked the lanyard of a signal gun that was always charged and ready to fire. He had scarce time to discharge the warning shot before a raving, howling mob of ex-galley slaves, grotesquely attired in janizary uniforms, came bounding up to the quarter-deck, brandishing their weapons.

At their head rushed El Kebir, scimitar in hand. With admirable presence of mind, he flung himself upon the dismayed captain of the Meshouda and disarmed him, then shielded the captive against the freed Americans.

"Back!" he roared when the attackers sought to kill 'Albu. "Back, leave him alone, he'll be useful soon." Crisply he issued orders. "You, Jones, take ten men and clean out the forecabin; Henniger, take charge of the wheel, and the rest of you bully boys, follow me!"

"Aye, that we will! Lead on, Cap'n Judas!"

All over the Meshouda they swarmed, a fierce, resistless, all-conquering tide. Neither side asked nor gave quarter, and the avenging boarders slaughtered the Tripolitan crew and guard of janizaries to a man. The negro slaves and eunuchs who made no resistance were spared and herded, squealing with fear, into the lazarette.

IT was only when the despairing shrieks of the last doomed corsairs had faded away that El Kebir allowed himself to think on that subject which had burned steadily in the back of his brain since that fateful, soul-crushing interview on the battlements—that interview when she whom he adored had christened him "Captain Judas!"

"I allow they're all dead now, sir." Eben Jones, a stocky little Rhode Islander, saluted wearily. "Lawks, but you should ha' heard the pretty girl slaves a squealing with fright when we broke open the door. Thought their last hour'd come, I allow."

Slaves? El Kebir struggled to suppress a quiver in his beard. Among those slaves must be Dorothea! Dorothea! The name beat like a tiny tocsin in his brain.

In a brief, precise gesture he sheathed his clouded scimitar and looked at the speaker. "I would view these slaves," he directed in a voice devoid of inflection. "Lead me—show me where they are."

But before he could move, Henniger, black-haired mate of the Swan and one whom El Kebir had selected as second in command, rushed up, eyes starting from his head.

"Look, sir! We—we're rich—rich as Croesus! I just came from the captain's cabin. Why—why—" he stammered and held out a handful of coins, "there's chest on chest o' gold, kegs of fancy perfumes and all manner o' outlandish trinkets. They'll fetch a pretty penny in Marseilles or Naples. That they will, sir."

To the exultant speaker's surprise, the tall captain's sole reaction was a brief, disinterested nod. "Good enough," he commented, "good enough. See that a guard's posted at once."

Henniger's blue eyes widened ludicrously. "Good enough, say ye? Is that all ye say to nigh onto a—a"—at mentioning the sum he choked—"a million dollars worth o' loot?"

But the tall man in blood-splotched Moorish robes thrust a curious ivory baton more firmly into his belt and acted as though the mate's awed state-

ment had been a remark upon the weather.

"Yes, yes. Step aside, man. You, Jones, lead me to the quarters of these women slaves." Yet taken aback at El Kebir's indifference, Henniger grinned in sudden, though mistaken, comprehension.

"To the women, eh? Well, I don't blame him. One gets damned hungry for the sight o' one in the years of slavery."

EL KEBIR followed Jones in silence down a passage leading to the cabin where were housed the fairest of those damsels intended for the harem of Selim III, God's Caliph on Earth and Defender of the True Faith.

With each stride he took down the low, gloomy passage, the hammering of El Kebir's heart increased. In another few moments he would again stand face to face with her whom he still loved beyond power of expression. In another few seconds he and Dorothea Sayles would meet—free and equal for the first time in many weary months—and very possibly encounter each other for the last time.

At last Jones halted before a low door secured with a snap lock. "There ye be, sir. In this room is the prettiest slave wenches ye ever set yer eye on!"

Strangely taut, El Kebir stepped forward over a limply sprawled janizary. "All right," he replied in brief, metallic accents. "Wait for me here."

The touch of the cold knob on his fingers steadied him; it brought reality home. Drawing a deep breath, he snapped back the lock and, gripping the ivory cylinder, slowly opened the portal.

A series of piercing, throbbing screams of animal terror assailed his

ears, as the unfortunate maidens cried out—expecting an instant death. Strangely incongruous, a scent of jasmine perfume rushed out into the death-littered passage.

For a moment he could see nothing. The cabin was dark and the light of the clouded sky was further restrained from entering by a brace of heavy silken curtains drawn across the port-hole. Then his staring eyes gradually distinguished a number of slender figures pressed in terror to the far wall. —“Dorothea!” The man called Captain Judas choked out the name. “Dorothea, where are you?”

In the uncertain half light he could tell nothing, could see naught save several crouching figures sobbing upon gaudy pillows. There was no reply.

Perhaps she was below? He half turned, but checked himself as he descried a solitary upright form that looked fixedly at the doorway.

“Dorothea! Dorothea!” A great gladness for her safety welled up like a cool spring in an arid plain. Some of the women slaves checked their lamentations to peer curiously at the tall, military figure in the doorway.

“Dorothea!” Hoarsely he called her name a third time, but still she neither moved nor shifted her accusing eyes.

“Get thee gone, Captain Judas.” Her voice came to him at last, toneless, deadly calm. “Even now your hands are red with slaughter. Has it suited you to turn your coat yet again?”

IT was as though a corsair pike had pierced his heart. He felt sick—deathly sick—as he clutched the door frame for support. “Captain Judas!” She had called him that again! Her love, then, was quite dead. No woman could have said that to the man she loved.

Suddenly become savage at her injustice, he was about to burst inside, to take her in his arms, to tell her, by force to make her see the truth, when there sounded the pounding of hurried feet and a voice calling his name.

“Captain! Captain!” There was an unmistakable note of alarm in the shouts of the unseen speaker. Amos paused as though turned to stone. Every nerve alert, he wondered what fresh calamity had befallen.

Dimly, he heard Eben Jones on guard outside of the door hail the newcomer. “What’s up?”

“Man, don’t delay me!” gasped the other angrily. “Where’s Judas? God help us, the Kaaba’s come back! She’s bearing down like mad.”

Instantly Amos was El Kebir once again—the lonely, granite-browed El Kebir. “What of it?” he rasped from the doorway. “Don’t yell so—there’s no need for Lisle to suspect aught amiss for a long while.”

“But there is,” gasped the seaman. “Some fool, with a misbegotten sense of victory, hoisted some American colors that he found nailed up as a trophy in the captain’s cabin. Hurry, sir, the Kaaba’s coming up hand over fist, with her guns out and her crew at quarters.”

One long moment El Kebir struggled to readjust himself to this final blow.

“Get on deck,” he ordered. “Break out the ammunition, cast the tarpaulins off the guns and open the magazine. We will make such a fight as they’ll talk of in Tripoli for years. Ha! ha! ha!” He felt his overstrained nerves snapping. “Yes, we’ll fight—get out, you two! I’ll be on deck directly.”

The two men stared, but turned and obediently dashed off to summon the dismayed crew, while El Kebir spun

about once more to fix terrible eyes upon the motionless girl across the cabin.

"I regret," he began unsteadily, and his voice told of infinite weariness, "that you hold so little faith in me. This I promise—I will not survive the engagement we are about to begin. I have striven greatly and 'tis time for a long rest. Should the Medea"—he unconsciously employed the brig's true name—"win free, you will be at liberty to go where you will."

His hand gripped the ivory cylinder and pulled it from his belt. With a stiff, jerky gesture he cast the case at her feet, where it fell with a dull thump.

"There's a scroll in there—my farewell to—to one I loved. I pray you read it sometime." His eyes, infinitely yearning, sought hers, and a fleeting smile parted his lips. "Farewell—Dorothea!"

He bowed gravely, then, with a swirl of robes, turned and stalked out, shutting the door a fraction of an instant before Dorothea Sayles sprang forward to dash sobbing toward the spot where he had stood.

"Amos! Amos! Come back, beloved! Oh, I do believe!"

But the heavy door was shut and was secured by a spring lock that could not be opened from the inside. Wildly, she stared about the cabin—lips a-quiver and bosom heaving.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EL KEBIR'S LAST BATTLE.

THE enormous difficulties confronting the defenders of the Medea struck Amos with full force when he gained the brig's deck.

The Kaaba, under reduced canvas,

was rushing down on her late consort, ominously prepared, her starboard battery of seventeen guns ready, though not run out, for the wild rolling of the barque dashed quantities of water into the open gun ports. Quite clearly, the harassed commander of the Medea could distinguish the grim, relentless figure of Lisle, standing like a white statue on the quarter-deck, coolly directing the preparations for taking the recaptured brig. What were the dour old Scot's thoughts at that moment?

The American captain's momentary paralysis of despair vanished and in an instant he was among the cannon. "Jones! Henniger! Manning! Drop what you're doing—come here!"

There was no denying the authority in that leonine voice. They came. Panting from their efforts at clearing the guns and wild-eyed with fear at being recaptured, the three lieutenants crowded close about the calm, steely-eyed captain.

"Now, listen." Amos spoke in decisive, clipped fashion. "One mistake on your parts and by nightfall we'll be hanging at yonder yardarm." He jerked an eloquent thumb toward the onrushing Kaaba. "Each of you select six men that have served guns before. You, Manning," he snapped to a tall Maine seaman, "run below and drive on deck all the eunuchs and slaves that served the women prisoners—they can act as powder monkeys and swabbers. You, Henniger, set two reliable men in the magazine to deal out powder and shot. Hurry now, damn your eyes!"

From that moment Amos was everywhere, superintending the opening of the familiar magazine, reappportioning the crew, and driving the black servants and the eunuchs to a swift completion of their simple tasks. Grad-

ually, miraculously, a semblance of order arose from the chaos. Hoarse, all-seeing, Trent raged back and forth, until six "long eighteens" of the Medea's starboard battery were manned by a crew of rag-clad men, desperately clutching at bulwarks, ropes and tackle lines, in an effort to keep their positions.

"Awful — hopeless — but order at least," thought the Medea's master. What a ghastly jest! What pitiful folly to dream of beating off the attack of Lisle's well-trained crew with such a miserable handful of men. Subconsciously he realized that he did not care greatly as to the outcome; life held little interest for him now that Dorothea had for the last time refused to hear or to believe.

"Sheer, rank lunacy," he muttered. "Here's hoping a roundshot cuts this damn' business short."

For all his personal despair, the naval officer in him urged as persistent and skillful a defense as he was capable of making. A moment more he waited, glanced aloft to catch a glimpse of the American colors and felt a sudden wave of relief to be fighting once more beneath the flag of his country.

He felt cleansed and free once more, if only for a few hours.

THE Kaaba, meanwhile, came charging down like some great monster, outraged on seeing its authority challenged by a lesser rival. The barque's black hull reared high on a roller, revealing a coppered bottom, then the prow dipped and the hull was lost to sight in a smother of lacy foam.

"This sea will tax their shooting powers," reflected Amos, at the same time wondering how astute the Tripolitans would be in gauging the mad plunges of their vessel. "Only two

hundred yards away—it 'll begin in a minute now."

At that moment he beheld half a dozen ports aboard the barque swing up and simultaneously a row of menacing, black muzzles appeared — muzzles which almost dipped into the water on the Kaaba's next dizzying plunge. Then, as the barque's side commenced to rise she fired, the roar of the reports half lost in the thunder of the waves.

From the Tripolitan's first broadside Amos's ship suffered not at all, because the upward roll suddenly elevated the muzzles of the enemy guns and all the shots passed high over the Medea's swaying topmasts.

"Hope those gun captains I chose will keep their blessed heads." Glancing down at the main deck, Amos was conscious of many drawn faces peering up at him in eager expectancy. He shook his head, and caught up his speaking trumpet. "No, we'll wait until they get in pistol shot. With this sea running, 'tis folly to attempt fine shooting!"

Again the Kaaba's guns spouted flame and smoke. This time the aim was better, for some of the shot struck among the Medea's rigging, one tearing a clean round hole through the lower fore topsail.

A cry of mingled impatience and apprehension arose from the inexperienced gun-crews. After an instant's hesitation Amos deemed it wise to yield in allowing a single broadside to be fired.

But the result was worse than he feared; the untrained men were woefully ignorant of more than the rudiments of gunnery. Quite distinctly he could see the shot slash into the angry waters, some short and some over their objective. Abandoning the wheel to

the Swan's quartermaster he hurried to the lower deck.

"Here!" he shouted to the nearest gun captain. "Stand aside! Watch close, now—see—you must fire on the downward roll of our ship!"

DODGING a shower of spindrift, he went on to the next piece; there he halted to glance through its gun port and catch a brief vision of the Kaaba's copper under side, momentarily exposed as she wallowed free. The sight engendered a sudden inspiration.

"Look, ye," he cried to the drenched and shivering gun crews, "mark the barque's water line! It needs but two or three good shots there to send more water into her hull than she can well handle. If you value your lives remember to shoot only on the *downward* roll. Try to gauge that moment when the barque's water line is exposed."

Snatching at the suggestion, the men did their best; but unfamiliarity with the guns they handled, added to the frantic plunging of the smaller ship, made the shooting terribly erratic.

Amos groaned aloud, for now the Kaaba had ranged closer, her green and yellow battle flags snapping in the wind. In steady, damaging broadsides that bespoke Lisle's masterful control, the Tripolitan shot commenced to take effect. One roundshot hulled the Medea just aft of the foremast, completely wiping out the crew of Number Three gun. Another ball tore through a number of the weather shrouds of the foremast, and a third, hissing over the bulwarks, neatly decapitated one of the Nubian eunuchs engaged in bringing leather budes of powder from the magazine and thereby threw his fellows into a maddened panic.

Above the unceasing hum of wind

in the rigging came the hoarse, panting shouts of the remaining gun crews, their hair hung in wild strands over their shoulders as they tugged and strained at the whining gun tackles. Ever and anon a whole gun crew would lose its footing in some unexpected lurch and roll in a struggling heap to the scuppers.

"God help us!" sobbed a frantic gun captain. "We're missing them nigh every shot, and they're finding us."

The situation was unmistakably becoming critical. The Kaaba poured in her broadsides with cool deliberation, riddling the Medea at will from stem to stern, though she herself remained scarcely touched.

Henniger was crouching like a huge hairy ape behind his gun and sighting with savage deliberation while blood from a splinter wound dripped over his bearded cheeks.

"Steady, man," shouted Amos, who was watching him. "Hold—not yet! Wait till we commence the down roll."

Tense and with the lanyard clutched in his talonlike hand, the Rhode Islander waited until the Medea, quivering in every timber, changed the motion of her roll. Across an expanse of gray water, some fifty yards away, the Kaaba, too, was rolling. Magically, her reddish water line came clear of the hissing, bubbling foam, to expose for a brief instant a wet, gleaming section of her bilge.

"Now!" roared Amos.

Henniger's hand shot back, there was a deafening explosion, and the long eighteen hurled its projectile squarely into the bottom of the towering barque. The desperate men aboard the Medea yelled like mad. They had had just time to catch a glimpse of the round, black hole that sprang into being full in the reddish section of the bottom.

"One in the bilge! Bully boy!"

Then the Kaaba rolled back, firing her broadside and hiding the shot hole. Coincidentally came a resounding *crack!* directly overhead: the gun crews cowered, as the Medea's main yard, cut squarely in two by a passing roundshot from the Tripolitan's broadside, parted at the standard to come crashing down to the deck, smothering another of the brig's pitiful battery beneath a wildly threshing pall of canvas and serpentlike rope ends.

DOGGEDLY, the gunners aboard the Medea reopened fire, for they seemed to be finding the range after a fashion at last. Presently another shot, fired a fraction of a second too soon, penetrated the barque's side squarely on the water line, opening a new gap into which swirling water eagerly poured.

"That's better, lads," roared Amos, taking charge of a gun whose captain had been disabled by a broken leg. As he worked at the priming, he kept an eye on the others.

"Come, Manning," he called suddenly. "Fire, man! Now's your chance! See? There's that hole again!"

But Manning was incapable of reply. Another vicious broadside from the Kaaba had struck with devastating effect at that section of bulwark which shielded Manning's piece, and hurled a cloud of jagged splinters among the gun crew to stretch a good half their number in helpless agony upon the deck.

In the moment of victory a stampede seized the undisciplined crews, and all save those at Amos's own gun fled precipitately to shelter below decks.

Cursing and appalled at the panic, Amos struggled with the strength of

two men to train his piece. Abandoning his recently found hope, he grimly judged the sway of the two vessels and finally succeeded in sending a double charge of roundshot crashing straight into the Kaaba's coppered bottom.

"Take charge of this gun," he raved to Henniger. "Keep firing as long as you can and aim at their bottom!"

Then began a heartbreaking attempt on Amos's part to rebuild the morale of the shaken ex-galley slaves.

"Back to your stations! 'Tis your only chance," he told them. "If you don't fight, you'll be skinned alive and rubbed with salt when Lisle gets you. Throw it into them! See, the barque's a bit down by the head already."

"Aye," growled one, "but look at us." He waved a grimy paw from the reddened deck to the litter of fallen spars, ropes and canvas.

Amos ignored the obvious truth that the Medea had become a badly stricken ship. "I know," he shouted, "but go back! Serve your guns! Serve them until the end."

As though to thwart his purpose, the Kaaba from short range fired an especially effective broadside. Every man on the Medea felt the shots strike. Two of the long boats vanished in clouds of splinters. One shot severed the signal gaff *h a l y a r d s.*, and the heavy spar fell with crushing force, glanced and hit Amos like a giant fist, hurling him sidewise. There was a searing, exquisite pain in his chest, and for an instant he tottered on the brink of oblivion. Then, a trifle recovered, he somehow staggered to the uncontrolled wheel in a heroic effort to hold his ship steady.

Twice more the Medea's depleted battery fired. Then Amos dizzily realized a great silence had fallen. Mustering his strength, he raised his head,

looked to the gun deck and saw the crews standing idle about their pieces.

"Fight on, you cowardly dogs!" he gasped while the red spray flew from his ashen lips. "Fight on!"

But the begrimed Americans were standing at the bulwarks, gesticulating and pointing out over the sea.

To the stricken man at the wheel it seemed that the *Medea* was leaping to and fro like a tree shaken in a storm. In failing consciousness he tightened his grasp on the spokes and looked across the water to discover with dull amazement that the *Kaaba* had fallen well astern, her batteries silent and her bowsprit curiously close to the waves.

"Full o' water," he gasped. "Lisle's—got to—come into—the wind or sink. Can't keep up—we've—we've—" The word "won" simply would not be articulated. The others had won, but had he? As though mesmerized, Amos watched the *Kaaba* recede, conscious that each breath he drew was like a searing iron in his lungs.

Lower and lower settled the barque into the water, while her crew pumped and struggled furiously to pull canvas shields over the gaping holes in her bilges. There was no doubt she had abandoned the struggle and was now battling to remain afloat. Soon she was but a dim black hulk on the horizon.

Faintness, all conquering, swept over Amos. He snatched at a stay, missed, reeled, then tumbled headlong to the shot-scarred planking.

"Better finish the job," some inner voice suggested. "She hates you—there's a pistol in your belt. Use that—before you faint." Feebly his blood-stained fingers fumbled for the butts of his silver-mounted pistols—found one—closed over the smooth cold surface—he tugged—tried again—the

pistol was loose. With the last of his waning consciousness he raised the barrel to his head and his finger crept over the trigger.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VICTORY!

IN the flush of their wholly unforeseen and astonishing victory, the decimated crew of the *Medea* were aware of nothing save that at last they were unmistakably free from the loathsome shadow of slavery. On the battered deck they danced a wild, exultant carmagnole. That bearded lot of scarecrows tossed their rag-covered arms to the stormy sky and capered like schoolboys released for the summer vacation. Some wept, others laughed, and a few offered fervent thanks to God.

Not one of them had noticed what had happened on the quarter-deck. For some moments they also failed to see a slender, breathless girl in azure blue robes whose frantic poundings on a certain cabin door had at last brought one of the cowering eunuchs out of hiding to release her. As she sprang from a companionway, one small white hand flew to her mouth to smother an anguished cry at the ghastly scene of carnage and destruction.

Like darting birds her horrified eyes sought one fallen figure after another, then she stumbled forward to catch one of the ecstatically cavorting seamen by the arm.

"Stop!" she commanded. "Stop! Where is Captain Trent?"

Checked in mid-career, the fellow stared at her as at a vision, blinked, and seemed not to comprehend. "Trent, mistress? Why, there's no Captain Trent here."

A steely icicle seemed to have transfixed her heart, and the whole scene suddenly wavered before her eyes.

"Hey, you!" The man at her side beckoned one of the calmer spirits. "Know ye aught of any Trent?"

"Trent?" The giant eyed Dorothea's warm beauty, frankly, inquiringly, while scratching at a tangled mop of straw-colored hair. "Why, mistress, there's no man called Trent among us. If there was, he's dead."

Suddenly illumination broke in upon Dorothea's tortured consciousness and with a hot flush she conjectured he was only known by his Arab name and by that title of infamy she herself had created.

"But—but—" she stammered, and her eyes, suddenly moist, sought the bespattered deck, "I look for El Kebir—otherwise called Judas—Captain Judas."

"Ah, so that's it?" cried the blond giant. "That's who you mean, mistress—Captain Judas, eh? Well, here's an end to that name for him. A soul with the brains of a booby would know that to call such a man by so foul a name is a damned misnomer."

"Yes, yes," gasped Dorothea impatiently, all the devils of uncertainty racking her nerves. "But where is he? I must find him."

In their faces she could read sudden alarm. For the first time they realized that he who had brought them victory was nowhere to be seen.

"Here! Stop this nonsense!" The big man strode among the breathless dancers. "Any of you seen the captain?" Purposely he omitted the shameful name.

"Why, yes," a shrill voice answered from the far side of a group. "But you've come too late." He thrust a powder-blackened hand toward the

quarter-deck. "Captain Judas is up there, dead. I seen him all covered wi' blood and lying in the quarter-deck scuppers a piece back. He's dead all right—and a mighty shame it is he couldn't have seen—"

But like a ray of light thrown across a dark room, Dorothea was already hurrying across the littered deck, an indescribable, lead-heavy oppression crushing her soul, while infernal voices yelled, "Too late! You're too late—it's all your fault that he's dead!"

Trembling but tearless, she started up the ladder. On her face, as she climbed step by step, was an expression such as might have shown on the countenance of a doomed aristocrat climbing to meet the knife of the guillotine. Her breath seemed halted in her lungs, and from below an array of faces tensely watched her progress.

Her robes whipping about her, she gained the quarter-deck at last and saw what she feared most, while Amos's words came back to her with terrible force: "—that you hold so little faith in me—I promise you I will not survive this engagement!"

Shaken to the depths of her soul, the realization came home that he had kept his word. The body of Amos Trent lay face down a few feet away in the port scuppers, his bloodied Moorish robes looking very strange on his broad frame. In his nerveless hand was yet clutched a silver-mounted pistol.

ACRY that must have been torn from her soul pierced the air, whereat the fierce men below gazed uneasily at one another and advanced hesitantly. In an instant she was at his side.

"Amos," she sobbed, "Amos, before God, I believe in you! I—I never

even looked at your scroll—I knew—ah, beloved, don't punish my lack of faith so terribly!"

With a gesture of despair she tore the heavy mail coat aside, easing his motionless chest of the weight. Gauntly handsome, he lay with his short golden beard gleaming in the subdued light and his pain-refined features composed, like a splendid leaden image.

Then, while the universe reeled about, Dorothea was aware of a soft-spoken man beside her. "One moment, mistress. I have some skill in medicine. Perhaps I can find the wounds."

Lifting eyes glittering with unshed tears, she whispered: "Do not dare to give me hope—I think such happiness would kill me."

Gently the ministering seaman removed the undischarged pistol from the senseless captain's hand and drew aside the smoke-grimed robes. Presently he raised a grave, impassive face.

"He'll live. Something struck his side with terrible force. Offhand I'd venture he's broken a minor blood vessel as well as two or three ribs. But he's strong as an ox. Barring accidents, he'll pull through. Come, we'd best get him below. Now if you—"

He paused, thrust out a quick hand, but it was too late. "Send Mr. Henniger here," he said to a ragged fellow who stood gaping. "Don't stand there staring like a damn' fool; haven't you ever seen a lady faint?"

STRONG, golden sunlight streaming in the stern port was the first thing Amos Trent became conscious of. The second was a vision of one who, supremely beautiful, stood motionless in the path of the sunlight, her features soft in an expression of infinite longing and tenderness.

Amos blinked. "Surely I am dead," he told himself, "and must be in heaven." He broke off his musing while his sunken eye took in the familiar cabin. "Surely," he thought, "I never knew they had ships in heaven."

While the vision looked silently on, he raised his hand, wasted and thin from the long delirium and consequent fever. Slowly the hand crept upward in the old gesture toward the ring of red gold in his left ear. As his fingers closed upon the cold, hard surface, he realized the scene was not a figment of imagination and his pale lips parted to form the word "Dorothea."

In an instant she was by his side, murmuring a torrent of foolish endearments, showering warm, light kisses on his eager lips. He had no need to seek complete understanding.

"You loved me, then, all the time," he whispered as she nestled in his arms. She nodded; the dark fringe of her lashes swayed toward her cheek like a Spanish fan of black lace.

"Always, Amos, always," she sighed, and let her small, bright head sink on his shoulder. "I loved you even when I doubted most; I think that's what made me so bitter."

A few moments later the cabin door was swung silently open, and Henniger's brown, cragged face peered in. From the passage behind him came Jones's eager whisper. "How is he?"

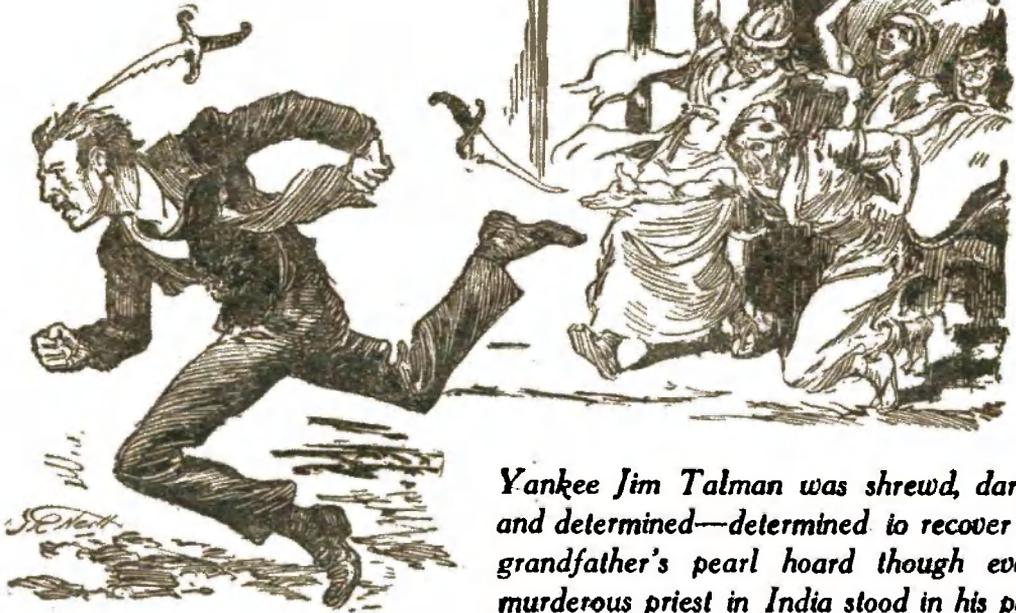
As silently as it had appeared Henniger's head was withdrawn, and when the door was softly shut he turned, smiling, to eye the other, a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Jones," he replied, "I allow it's safe to say Capt'n Trent has recovered. Recovered everything, that he has!"

At the Feet of Inam

By
BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

The howling priests were at his heels



Yankee Jim Talman was shrewd, daring and determined—determined to recover his grandfather's pearl hoard though every murderous priest in India stood in his path

JIM TALMAN tried three times to enter the temple of Inam to remove the pearls that legend placed beneath the left foot of the idol—a legend which Jim had a special reason for believing true. The first time he bribed a brown-skinned maiden, who mistook his jewel-hunger for sincere admiration. He managed to get as far as the second door before they spotted him.

It was a long sprint to safety, with the howling priests at his heels, and Jim bore away two long scars from the knives that had been thrown after him as he disappeared into the night.

The second effort came after long planning, for Jim was as resourceful as he was determined. Greed, he rea-

soned, was as universal as any other motivating influence, so he prepared a gift for the priests.

The sedan chair that he chose was a costly creation, heavily ornamented and gayly decorated. It cost a pretty penny, but Jim was after those gems, well aware that one of them would repay him for all of his expenditures and more.

The chair was heavy on the shoulders of the bearers, which convinced the priests that the yellow metal that had been used so profusely was solid gold instead of the gilded metal or wood so frequently used in cheap imitations of the true thing. They could not know that a full one hundred and eighty pounds of that weight was the

body of one James Talman, stowed cunningly away in the canopy. At least they did not know it until the chair was within the inner holy of holies, where the sharp eyes of the high priest detected a too eager Jim in the act of peering forth between two folds of the purple draperies.

This time he was too hampered to run. It was a case of stand up and account for his presence the best way he could.

Jim Talman was capable of making a good showing with his tongue as well as his heels. He faced the scowling high priest without a tremor and told the whole story. He was a grandson of Captain Israel Talman out of New Bedford who had amassed those jewels in all far corners of the Orient forty years before, only to be despoiled of them here by the priests of Inam. Accepting the story of their confiscation and burial from his father, who had it in turn from old Captain Israel, he had set his mind upon recovering the family treasure.

His speech availed him little. The priests were determined that he should not leave the temple alive. Furthermore, for his audacity in thus attempting to gain entrance, he was to be introduced to some of the refined methods of extermination that the East had developed through the ages.

All of this he heard without flinching, for he had known the price of failure only too well before venturing on such a mission. But, knowing the price, he had not come as unprepared as his easy capture would indicate. As they closed in upon him menacingly, after sneering openly at his story, Jim turned and yanked at one of the silken cords that hung down from the canopy. At the same instant he clapped something from his breast over his nose and

ducked in the direction of the stolid figure of Inam.

The released tear gas filled the chamber and incapacitated the priests. Jim dug frantically at the flagstone that hid the jewels, his labors aided none at all by the stifling influence of his mask.

Seconds ticked away as he pried. The gasping, choking victims of his gas attack milled about in their pain. He heard a sharp cry of anger above his head and felt a strong wind whistle past him.

Instinctively he knew what it meant. Other priests were in hiding, had opened some secret means of ventilation in order to remove the gas.

The stone which lay over the jewel compartment came loose, and he caught a glimpse of the teakwood box his father had described. Then something descended upon him from above and the stone fell into place again.

He fought and rolled about on the stone floor. A knife dug into his thigh, sending a moist rivulet down his leg. Another pricked his shoulder. A third bit at his neck, near the jugular.

Somehow he tore away and fled. The mazes of the inner halls confused him and his loss of blood weakened him. He could hear those padding feet going up and down the many corridors, could sense the creeping advance of his stealthy pursuers. Then fortune favored him again and a narrow door let him into the street with just enough strength left to reach the second and more humble sedan chair that he had ordered to wait for him.

“YOU’D better leave these parts,” said the doctor who sewed up the wounds. “I’m not punning at all when I say that you appear to be a marked man. I’ve been here three

years and never had a knife wound, yet you collect half a dozen within a fortnight of arrival. I'm afraid they don't care for you here, Talman."

"They'll care a lot less before they're through with me," Jim declared in his quiet way.

"You don't mean to say—?"

"I do mean to say that I'm not through yet. I came out here to do a specific thing. It isn't done yet. I've tried twice. The next time will be the third and last."

But the third attempt was long delayed. The loss of blood had weakened him more than he realized, and fever took a whack at him before he was back on his feet. For weeks Jim lolled about the little infirmary, scowling, planning, scheming.

"Dirty bunch of superstitious beggars!" he ejaculated frequently. "Think all the pearls in the world are the tears of that dratted idol of theirs. Think a full peck of them, buried at his feet, will bring life back into his stony figure. That's why they stole grandfather's buy and tucked it away there. Hope to get enough to work the miracle before the 'Fire-Monster' returns."

"If you keep on boiling you'll be able to impersonate that fire-monster yourself, Talman," chuckled the doctor.

"How in heck can a man impersonate a fire-monster?" Jim retorted.

"Keep calm," the doctor pleaded. "You're too weak to excite yourself this way." But after the doctor left, Jim remained there, tensely staring off through the heat haze. A slow grin spread across his face at last. He got up weakly and made his way to the cable office.

It took considerable pencil chewing before he finally decided on the word-

ing. The operator gulped, stared at him in puzzled wonderment, and finally sent off the odd message.

He tried to appear nonchalant during the period of waiting, tried to console himself with the knowledge that it would take time to find the things he had requested of that friend in the States.

The answer came at last. He read it and chuckled with glee. By the time his goods arrived he would have his strength back again. This would be his third and, he hoped, last invasion of the temple of Inam.

The packing cases were huge and weighty when they were at last lowered to the sampans and brought ashore. Refusing to accept any aid in opening them, he retired into the vast building he had hired for the purpose and set about his task.

It was well that the strength had come back into his body, for the job was not an easy one. He toiled in the heat, glad to be doing something, exulting in his idea, thankful for the inventive genius of certain Yankees.

At last he was done and his handiwork pleased him. He looked out of the door and down the short stretch of street that separated him from the temple of Inam. Fervently he shook his fist at the walls that had so nearly seen the end of him.

"At midnight I'm coming," he breathed softly. "This time is the third and last."

AT fifteen minutes before twelve the short street was deserted. In the darkness the great door opened softly. Something huge and ungainly moved awkwardly forth and down the uneven paving.

The nameless thing heaved and rolled and waddled along in a manner

unknown to any living creature of the modern age. Three times the bulk of an elephant, elongated of neck and heavy of tail, it resembled nothing more than the prehistoric exhibition at a museum, or the dream of some hunter after buried fossils.

The thing hummed and clicked in a strangely mechanical way as two red eyes started to roll about in the tiny head as though in quest of the doorway of the temple of Inam.

A guard shrieked in terror as it approached. His cry brought forth a group of angry priests who sought to chastise him for disturbing their slumbers. Then they, too, caught sight of the thing and added their cries to the wails of the guard.

At that precise instant the nostrils of the advancing beast shot forth twin jets of bluish flame that roared and hissed like a mighty blow-torch.

The wailing increased about the door. There was distinct terror in the cry as the priests fell back.

The thing came on irresistibly. It mounted the steps slowly, rocking and rolling, long neck thrust forward. The flames darted forth again as the head priest stood defiantly in the doorway. The blast scorched his robes, sending him precipitously back upon his henchmen. Slowly he gave ground.

At the last door the head priest tried to rally his men for a fervent prayer, but his followers were gone. With a cry of despair he too turned and fled, scampering past the stone image that had failed him and on into the night.

From under the body of the teetering monster Jim Talman darted forth. The stone lifted easier this time. The teakwood box came away without effort. Clutching it to his chest, he disappeared again under the belly of

the thing that had protected him, seemed to become a part of it as the cumbersome body slowly wheeled and retreated.

"Yes, doctor, I'm going," he smiled the next morning. "Time to be heading home."

"Then you're giving up that foolish idea of trying to get into the temple again?"

"Gave it up last night—upon completion of my little plan."

"You don't mean that you got in?"

Jim rolled half a dozen pearls across the smooth surface of the table. They wobbled about like so many marbles, pink glories on the black wood.

"Keep 'em for your trouble and inspiration," he grinned, as the doctor picked them up with trembling fingers. "I've got a quart or so like 'em."

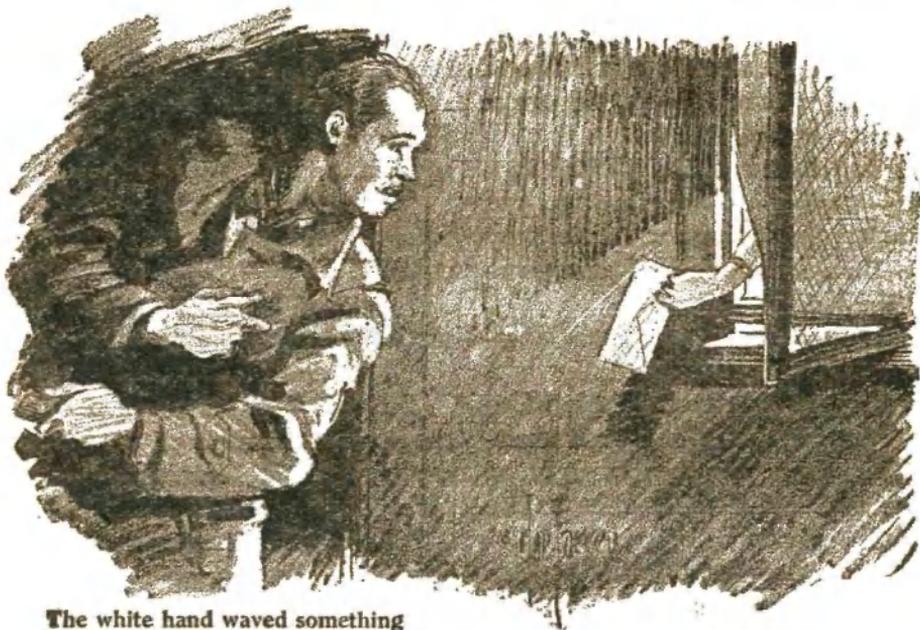
"But—how? What do you mean by inspiration? I don't see what I did."

"You suggested that I impersonate their fire monster, which I did. Wired a friend in the States to have those boys who build the prehistoric monsters for the movies create one for me. Cost just about all the money I had left, but it was worth it. I'd give you a glimpse at it but I didn't dare leave the thing around. Ran it off the dock last night, as soon as I was through with it. A real humdinger, with a motor to manipulate it and gas blowers to shoot fire from the nose. They'll be careful how they rob Yankees after this, the brown heathens!"

The doctor nodded solemnly after him as he swayed away toward the ship that would bear him home.

"I'll hand it to him," he declared. "Courage and determination and Yankee ingenuity. No wonder they couldn't stop him."

DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION ?



The white hand waved something

The Hidden Hand

Cloudy Melhorne Has a Battle on His Hands When He Enlists to Protect a Millionaire from the Sinister Man Called Morte

By Richard Howells Watkins

CHAPTER I

The First Murder

IN the shadow of a big rock near the shelving bottom of the cliff a man was lying sprawled out on his back in a grotesque posture of sleep. But he was not sleeping. He was dead.

Cloudy Melhorne dropped to his knees beside the still figure.

"Waterbury—Dale's secretary," he said tersely, after an instant of inspection. "The back of his skull is crushed in. The body is still warm."

Cloudy gave the cliff no more than a glance. Then he returned to the body and lifted one of the dead man's hands, and then the other. The fingers and palms were white and unmarred. He stared curiously at those unscarred hands.

Those hands told Cloudy a story—a story of murder, the first in a series of ferocious and mysterious crimes that keep you on edge reading this thrilling serial. Don't miss it in **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**, formerly **FLYNN'S**—May 16 issue.

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



WE'RE almost afraid to print "kicks"; it boosts our daily mail so much. For instance, to pick one reply:

Philadelphia, Pa.

I've never written before, but I'm mad, rip-roaring mad and I simply have to write. In reference to the March 14 number A. J. B. from Pittsburgh certainly is a pessimist. If he doesn't like ARGOSY tell him for me that there are thousands who do and will be please stop knocking a magazine that brings joy to so many people. I've read ARGOSY for six years and although at times there are stories that I don't care much about I know that there are some people who do like them, so why should I kick. There probably are stories I like that other folks don't like. In the end everything is even and I'm not kicking.

More *Jimmie Cordie* and *Gillian Hazeltine* and *Bill* and *Jim*.

Best wishes from an ardent fan.

R. J. H.

A WHEELBARROW full of bricks:

Los Angeles, Cal.

I have been reading ARGOSY for years, off and on. Read it more now than ever, in fact, every night. Now and then perhaps once in six months I cast a glance over remarks of your readers. I note that they are mostly, if not all, bouquets and no brickbats.

Well, here is a wheelbarrow full of bricks.

I note one reader says—and maybe more than one—they read every story and article in the book and enjoyed it. He certainly must be living on the desert alone and no other reading matter to be had, or easy to please, for the magazine is full of bum stuff. I read perhaps one continued story in a book, one or two novelettes and perhaps two short stories. That's all. I never read stories where the location is in foreign countries except England, the desert, or Alaska. You have one writer who is in a class by himself, and that is Fred MacIsaac. He doesn't write a column to show off his knowledge of English, or have his characters light cigarettes every ten seconds or pipe or whatever it may be just to stretch

his copy. Oh, sometimes he prolongs his descriptive remarks. Most of the time he confines himself to the narrative and it's interesting most of the time from start to finish. And unlike most stories in which there is only one dry climax, his have three and four climaxes. For instance, there is his "Run, Dan, Run!"

C. E. CARTER.

ROSCOE'S recent novelettes made a hit with this reader from a famous Illinois town. (Watch for his East-of-Suez mystery serial this month!)

Cicero, Ill.

"Nightmare Island" and "The Blade of Don Beltram," by Theodore Roscoe, sure hit the spot. My favorite author is Theodore Roscoe, with Fred MacIsaac running a close second. After them come all your other authors; there are too many to name them all.

The stories I liked best were "Balata," "A Great Man's Shoes," "The Phantom in the Rainbow," "Gone North," "Maza of the Moon," "Looters' Luck," "The Hawk of Hazard," etc. I liked all of the *Bellow Bill* stories by Ralph Perry, all the *Bill* and *Jim* stories by John H. Thompson, and a countless number of other stories.

Here's hoping you keep the ARGOSY the way it is and pay no attention to the "knockers."

CHESTER LECKI.

IT won't be so long till *John Solomon's* newest intrigue is told you:

Dallas, Texas.

I am sending ten coupons for my drawing, and am hoping it will be an illustration from some story by one of my favorite authors, who are W. Wirt, Theodore Roscoe, H. Bedford-Jones, Hulbert Footner, William Corcoran, Talbot Mundy and F. V. W. Mason.

I do not care for Fred MacIsaac much, though his stories make interesting reading to pass the time; but they are too reminiscent of Horatio Alger grown up to really intrigue me. However, nearly all your readers do like him, and ARGOSY suits me fine just "as is," except for my one pet "peeve." That is, Kenneth Perkins

with his southwestern Indians using northwestern Indian words and phrases, and his impossibly overdrawn characters. If he knows the West, then I've never been in it, and I was born and raised in this part of the country and farther west.

ARGOSY is, to me, the best magazine I have ever read, and I read a great many of them. Hard times come, and other magazines more expensive, and a few less so, go, but somehow I always managed to get ARGOSY even when sick and out of work.

I have been reading it ever since 1905 and hope to continue for as many more years. But, oh! Do, please, somebody, resurrect H. Bedford-Jones and the incomparable *John Solomon*.

Wishing a long life and prosperous voyage to our ARGOSY.

MRS. IDA W. JAMES.

THREE fantastic novels are outstanding to this fan:

Fairview, N. J.

I think ARGOSY is the greatest little magazine I have ever read, bar none. The serials are usually the best stories in the whole book. Say, how about more fantastic stories like "The Snake Mother," "Tama of the Light Country" and "Caves of Ocean"? These are my favorites.

DANIEL PUGLIS.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get an ARGOSY drawing (not the cover painting) for framing.

This coupon not good after August 1.

5-9



Looking Ahead!

Pirate of Wall Street

YOUNG Reggie Blake is robbed and orphaned by the "Black Devil of Wall Street"—but his crusade to smash his father's murderer enlists a strange ally in Aristides the Pitch Man, uncrowned king of the street hawkers

By FRED MACISAAC

The Dagger of El Haran

A "different" Foreign Legion novelette, where the finest warriors of two civilizations, Western and Arab, battle gallantly for mastery

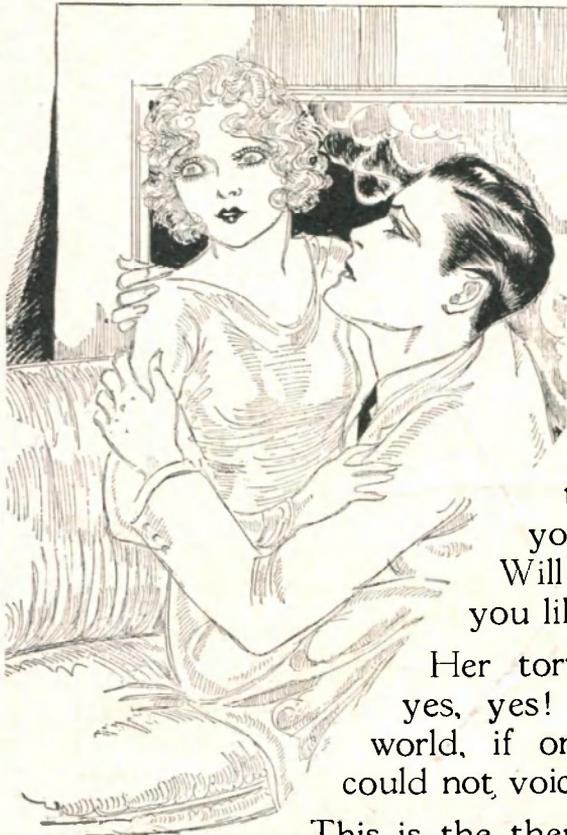
By ROBERT CARSE

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF MAY 16th

RUBY M. AYRES

Presents

Ex-Fiancée



"I love you, love you," he said unsteadily. "And you must care for me, when I love you so! Priscilla, let the dream come true! I've got a wonderful job out there in the tropics, and I want to take you with me and begin life anew. Will you come, my darling? Would you like to go?"

Her tortured heart was crying: "Oh, yes, yes! Anywhere, any part of the world, if only you are there!" But she could not voice the words.

This is the theme of Ruby M. Ayres' appealing serial, "Ex-Fiancée," the story of a broken engagement and three broken hearts. The story of the greatest tragedy that can come into a woman's life—a forced marriage with one man while with her whole heart and soul she loves another.

"Ex-Fiancée" has only just started; if you missed the first installment, there is a complete synopsis to enable you to pick up the threads. Now running in the May 2nd ALL-STORY, on sale at all newsstands until May 13th.

ALL-STORY

COMBINED WITH MUNSEY

Love Stories *of the* Modern Girl

If your newsdealer cannot supply you, send 20c to Frank A. Munsey Co., 280 Broadway, New York

Win a Studebaker or \$3,000.00 in Cash

COMEONE who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a latest model 8 cylinder Studebaker President Sedan or its full value in cash (\$2,000.00). In addition to the Studebaker Sedan we are also giving away six Ford Sedans, a General Electric Refrigerator, a Shetland Pony, an Eastman Moving Picture Outfit, Leather Goods, Silverware, Jewelry and many other valuable gifts—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. Already we have given away more than \$150,000.00 in cash and valuable merchandise to advertise our business. A. H. Jones received \$3,050.00, John Burroughs \$3,795.00, Mrs. M. Iverson \$2,320.00, W. R. Eddington \$3,050.00, Mrs. Kate L. Needham \$3,150.00 and E. J. Cullen \$2,220.00. This offer is open to anyone living in the United States, outside of Chicago, and is guaranteed by an old reliable company of many years standing.



Draw 3 Straight Lines

There are seven cars in the circle above. By drawing 3 straight lines you can put each car in a space by itself. See if you can do this. As soon as you are able to put each car in a space by itself by drawing 3 straight lines, tear out the puzzle, fill in your name and address on the coupon below and send both puzzle and coupon to me right away.

\$1,000.00 Cash Given for Promptness

If you act quickly and win the Studebaker Sedan I will also give you \$1,000.00 in cash just for being prompt—making a total of \$3,000.00 you may win. Altogether there are a total of \$7,500.00 worth of prizes to be given and the money to pay the prizes is now on deposit at one of Chicago's largest banks ready to be paid to the prize winners. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be paid each one tying, and any winner may have cash instead of the prize won, if so preferred. Get busy right away. Solve the puzzle, fill in the coupon below and send it to me just as soon as possible to qualify for an opportunity to share in the \$7,500.00 worth of prizes. EVERYBODY PROFITS. Who knows but that you may be the Lucky First Prize Winner? It pays to act promptly.



Mail Today 

James Armstrong, Mgr., Dept. H-574
323 S. Peoria St., Chicago, Ill.

I have solved the puzzle and am anxious to receive a prize.

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Address.....

City..... State.....