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John Solomon—

Supercargo - - - -

By ALLAN HAWKWOOD - *Author of*
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John Solomon—Supercargo

CHAPTER I

THE CATTLE-WHARF AT DEPTFORD

Frederick L. C. Harcourt, Viscount Ratcliff, was extremely natty in his flannels, buckskins, and yachting cap, and consequently he aroused tremendous excitement, plainly being nothing more or less than a "toff" of the first water.

As he strode along the cattle-wharf at Deptford, he looked as much out of place as would a royal highness if suddenly dropped among the habitués of Sally Tucker's pub.

Nevertheless, because of the Royal Yacht Club insignia on his cap, and also because his face was very brown and square-chinned and his shoulders rather broader than most, his "sunfish" prodding the long-horns down the gangs kept their comments strictly to themselves.

Harcourt, who was strolling along in a rather aimless fashion, nodded quietly to the astonished S.P.C.A. inspector, replied to the latter's flurried greeting that it certainly *was* a fine day, and passed

on. His dark-blue eyes settled on an ancient and dishonorable well-deck cargo tank of some three thousand tons, from which the last batch of cattle were being driven into the wharf pens.

As he passed down beneath her counter, on the edge of the wharf, his sauntering ceased rather abruptly. From somewhere came a well-directed stream of blue, evil-smelling, pipe smoke, which shot down with the wind squarely athwart his face.

Harcourt looked up to see a man, obviously a "sunfish" or cattle-boat hand, leaning lazily upon the rail above him and grinning amiably at the intruder.

Foul beyond the ordinary foulness of the bullock waiter was the man, his clothes a mere mass of tattered rags, and dirt; but there was a twinkle in his grey eyes, and his face and neck were brown and rough and muscled. His tousle of black hair was crowned by a battered felt hat, whose brim flapped at weird angles about his ears; but from brow to chin his face was aquiline, sharp, while, as he addressed the other, white teeth flashed on his pipe-stem.

"Slumming, pardner?"

Harcourt smiled, his cheeks rosy through their bronze, and something of the cool insolence that had rested in the grey eyes above him died away before his look.

"Perhaps. Come down here, my man. I'd like

a word with you, don't you know."

The sunfish did not move, but sent a slow stream of smoke down the wind, his eyes narrowing slightly.

"I'm not your man," came the calm retort. "Also, I'm quite satisfied where I am. If you want a word with me you are at liberty to trot up here; but I'd advise you to take that white coat off first. I'm liable to muss it up if you get me too excited."

The Englishman stared for a moment, evidently surprised at the voice and accent of the sunfish, which held quite as much authority as did his own and which betrayed culture despite the challenging veneer of insolence.

Meanwhile, the scattered sunfish and cow-punchers took note of their visitor's stoppage and, as the last of the cattle were shoved into their pen, a little crowd collected about the gang, scenting trouble with unmingled joy. Seeing that one of their comrades had taken the burden upon his own shoulders, they encouraged him distantly.

"Don't youse take any lip off'n him, pal!"

"Tell the bleedin', bloody toff 'is pants is tore, 'Ammer!"

"Ain't his little feet pretty——"

The murmuring died away with startling abruptness, for one of the cow-punchers shouted over from the pen, with callous indifference to the feelings of the visitor;

"Shut up, you stiffs! That's his lordship what

laid out the Brighton Blighter last night. I seen him do it!"

Amid the ensuing silence Harcourt flushed darkly and walked to the gangway, the men drawing back suddenly from his mild look.

Up above watched the sunfish, his grey eyes wide, for all the docks had heard the story—how the famous Brighton Blighter had encountered some toff or other in Oxford Street the previous night, and how, after some passing reference to lords and ladies, the heavy-weight champion had been knocked out cold within a minute.

So this mild-eyed, wide-shouldered yachtsman was the man, then! The sunfish quietly laid aside his pipe and stood waiting; if his invitation had been accepted in the spirit in which it had been issued, he was like to have his work cut out for him. Harcourt, however, displayed no bellicose intention, but halted a few feet away.

"Well, now that I am here, I presume you'll grant me a few moments?"

The sunfish grinned as the blue eyes twinkled into his.

"I can spare you five minutes, my lord. I thought that perhaps you desired a sparring partner!"

"Oh, I say now!" Harcourt flushed again and was plainly ill at ease. "Just forget all that bally rot, can't you? It's too beastly——"

"Listen!"

The sunfish held up a hand, and from the wharf below a confused murmur drifted up from the gathering crowd.

"That's 'im, a talkin' to 'Ammer!"

"Aw, what youse givin' us? He didn't knock out your blamed white hope!"

"Stow that, ye flatfoot! Billy here seen it, an' that's the guy, all right!"

The sunfish grinned again at the uneasy yachtsman. "Don't be bashful, your lordship—true greatness cannot be hidden under flannels, even at Deptford, you see. Sorry to receive you in these duds, but my valet hasn't come down to the dock as yet."

A flicker of something that was not amusement flared out in the blue eyes, but it passed quickly with a chuckle.

"All right, my friend—you're the man I'm looking for! But, upon my word, I hardly expected such good luck. "

"It's all yours so far," came the dry retort. "Only, if you're looking for a thug, you'll find plenty down there in the crowd." His grey eyes rested shrewdly, but laughingly, on the other.

"No, thanks very much." An appraising glance and a nod accompanied the words. "You'll do. Your name is Hammer I take it. American?"

"Stars and stripes, you bet. As to Hammer, that's not my name, but it's handle enough for this craft. 'Ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard

'ighway, you know—only my cognomen is a title of distinction gained by the honest use of fists. Yours, if you have one, was probably gained through the chance of birth. I will say, though, that you're very decent-looking, for a Britisher."

"Oh, thanks very much!" The visitor seemed anything but angry, to the visible disappointment of the watching gangway; still, he very plainly was bewildered by the cultured tones of the sunfish. "Are you—er—looking for work?"

"Well, that depends on the work," returned Hammer easily, paying no heed to the outraged ship's officers, who were looking on aghast. "No yachting, thanks. Too hard to look pleasant all the time. Besides, I can't keep straight."

The other's eyes met his, unsurprised, questioning, and beneath that level gaze Hammer only kept up his truculent air with an effort. This Englishman was very likeable.

"How so, Mr. Hammer?"

"Oh, general cussedness and particular booze. Better browse along and hunt up another victim, your lordship! I like your looks, but I don't like my own—in comparison."

This rather impulsive admission had no effect on Harcourt beyond sending a stubborn glint into his blue eyes. Deliberately pausing to light a cigarette, he extended his case to the other; Hammer refused, replacing his pipe in his mouth, but this time he carefully sent the smoke downward.

“No, I’m rather keen on you, Hammer. I’ve been—er—browsing along, as you say, all of the morning without any success, and it’s getting tiresome. As matter of fact, I came out to look for a man with a second officer’s ticket, a man who could use his fists and who was willing to take a chance with me.

“Now, however, I’ve changed my mind. I’m not quite sure yet as to what offer I’ll make you, but come up to my address in the city when you’re through here—to-night, if you can. Here’s my card and a tenner to act as retainer.”

The astonished Hammer mechanically shoved the Bank of England note into some recess of his ragged shirt, then perused the card. He looked up with hesitation in his eyes.

“Mind, Harcourt, I’ve warned you that I’m no good——”

“Nonsense! If I was after a sober, respectable seaman, do you think I’d have come here looking for one? When can I expect to see you?”

“Oh, have it your own way, then!” Hammer shrugged his shoulders, resignedly. “I’ll meet you say, at Prince’s for dinner. Centre table, far end.”

“Eh?” Harcourt’s eyes opened. “You—er—but Prince’s, don’t you know——”

“——Doesn’t go with these duds, you mean?” Hammer chuckled as he finished the other’s hesitating sentence. “Never mind—you should worry Harcourt! Much obliged for the tenner, just the

same; all you have to do is to show up and see what you find. Seven-thirty suit you?"

"Very well, thanks," murmured Harcourt, and so the colloquy ended—in amused and rather interested toleration on the part of the sunfish, and in bewildered doubt on that of the Englishman.

At seven-thirty that evening Harcourt received another shock, and this time a greater one. For after he stepped into the big dining-room at Prince's and beckoned the stately head-waiter, that individual arrived with the calm information that Mr. Hammer was waiting.

"Er—you know Mr. Hammer, Bucks?"

"Quite well, sir," responded Bucks, and Harcourt followed in subdued amazement.

He was led to a table, from which a man in evening dress sprang to meet him, hand extended. For a moment the sorely-doubting Englishman did not recognize the sunfish, until he took in the hard grey eyes, the tanned features, the keen incisive lines of the face.

Then he recovered himself and went through the form of greeting stiffly; but Hammer had no intention of letting him off so easily.

"It *was* rather a low-down trick, wasn't it?" grinned the American cheerfully. "However, we'll have an explanation all around. Poor chap, your face was a picture this morning when I announced that we'd dine here!"

"I must apologize, of course, my dear chap,"

returned Harcourt ruefully; then, unable to resist the infectious humour of the other, he broke into a laugh and the incident was closed.

In truth, Cyrus Hammer was well calculated to draw a second glance, for not only did his evening clothes fit him impeccably, but he wore them with ease and grace which made him to the full as *distingué* as his aristocratic companion.

His mouth was hard, and there were lines in his face which has no place in the face of a man of twenty-eight who had lived his life well; but these were in great part redeemed by an abundance of unfailing good humour, which hid, mask-like, the hard-fisted quality of the man underneath.

Harcourt wasted no time, and no sooner was the dinner fairly begun than he plunged headlong into the subject under discussion.

"Hammer, I have a little surprise for you myself, perhaps. I told you this morning that I had changed my plans pending your acceptance of my offer to you, so there is no use in beating about the bush.

"Until a month ago I had considered myself fairly well fixed for life; then came that flurry in Wall Street which wrecked two of your big institutions.

"I woke up one morning to find myself almost a beggar, as all my funds were invested in American securities and they had slipped down and out with a crash. My word, it was a blow! I had a few

hundreds left; no more."

Hammer displayed none of the surprise he felt at this astounding revelation, but merely nodded; and after a moment, the other continued:

"Practically all that I saved out of the crash was my yacht, the *Daphne*. All my family have been sailors, don't you know, and if I hadn't been, sent down from the 'Mill'—Woolwich—years ago, I'd have been in the navy to-day. In fact, one of my proudest possessions is a Board of Trade certificate as Master.

"Well, I'd about made up my mind to sell the craft and try my luck in your bally country, when along comes an offer to charter the yacht. That gave me the idea. I say, Hammer, why couldn't I take this party out to East Africa, where they wish to go, then—er—browse around the ocean, acting as my own captain? Couldn't a chap make a decent living at that, eh?"

"Ought to," chuckled Hammer, making no secret of his interest by this time. "If you're willing to take a bit of risk once in a while, I fancy you could pick up some easy coin, and have a good time as well. But why should this party want to charter a yacht to reach East Africa with?"

"Oh, it's that big Dresden archaeological chap, Dr. Sigurd Krausz—he's sending out an expedition to dig up some beastly thing or other, and wants the *Daphne* for his own use, the field force going separately. I've not the slightest idea what he's

after, but he's willing to pay well, and seems to be doing the thing on his own hook instead of working for any museum.

"But let's get down to business, Hammer. I've been thinking this over, and since I'm frankly down and out, as you Americans would say, I've no notion of depending on myself alone. I'm a pretty good character-reader, Hammer, and I liked you at first sight or I wouldn't make this offer. Other things being equal, how would you like to take a junior partnership in the *Daphne*?"

Hammer looked at him silently, wondering if the man meant what he said. But the other was plainly in earnest, and, moreover, Hammer thought that he had seldom met a man to whom he was so attracted. That the liking was mutual there seemed to be no doubt; but would it last?

"I don't know," he returned slowly. "I'm no sailor, for one thing—I'm a cattle-boat hand, and nothing else. I can't see where I'd be any good."

"No matter," declared Harcourt impatiently. "You could soon pick up navigation; for that matter, there are plenty of men in command of craft without proper license. However, I'm not figuring on you as a sailor. I can do that, but I don't know a bally thing about business. You could handle the business end of everything and gradually work into handling the ship; she'd be my property, of course, but we'd share even on what we made."

“Go slow now,” and Hammer laughed quietly while the waiter hovered about them. Then, when they were once more alone, he went on: “Better let me spin you my yarn first, then see how far you’d be willing to trust me.”

Hammer’s real name was Cyrus Murray, and until three years before this time he had been engaged in a profitable brokerage business in New York City. Alone in the world, he had made his own way, and in the course of its making he had contracted a hasty and ill-advised marriage with a girl who was in no way fitted to be his wife.

It was a sordid little tragedy, by no means uncommon in American life of to-day; but, unfortunately for Murray, his wife had been the first to discover that it was a tragedy.

He glossed over this portion of the tale in its telling, merely stating that he had allowed her to obtain a divorce, and had turned over to her the greater part of his worldly goods; but he had been hard hit by the entire affair.

Impulsively, he had thrown his business overboard, and one night, in reckless desperation, he sought shelter from his thoughts by shipping aboard a cattle-boat. Curiously enough, before he reached Liverpool he had found that in spite of the terribly rough life, in spite of the almost daily battles for existence into which his very appearance and manner flung him, the hard physical labour and the tortured weariness of his body was a relief

to his mind. Then the liquor.

So for three years he had been traversing the Atlantic, working hard, fighting hard, drinking hard; his ambition was destroying; he took savage zest in bullying the thugs and degenerates who were his companions in misfortune, and he had thought himself fairly content at the level to which he had sunk.

Upon each arrival in England he made a practise of going to London and living like a gentleman for a week or two—for he had still some money left—until the life became unbearable to him, and back he would go to his cattle-boats and human cattle.

“There’s the whole thing,” he concluded with a bitter smile. “A fool paying for his folly, that’s all. Still want me?”

“Yes,” came the quiet answer. “I think we’re well mated, Hammer; but, to make sure, suppose we make this a trial cruise together. You’ll never find any ambition aboard a bally cattle-boat, that’s sure, and you might better go to hell decently, if you’re bound to go.

“However, you’re a real man, and I like you. My offer stands; only, don’t you know, I want your word that you won’t drink while you’re with me. I mean—er—well, drinking in a beastly fashion——”

“I get you, old man,” chuckled Hammer quickly. “Suppose we put it that I can drink as much as you do, but no more, eh? All right, then—but I’ve

really no great inclination for drink in itself. You have my word of honour, such as it is—and here's a toast in coffee to the *Daphne* and the daffy Dutchman!"

"Done!" cried Harcourt in undisguised delight, but as he raised his cup Bucks approached with a whispered word and a card. Harcourt frowned, glancing at the latter.

"'John Solomon'—who the devil is John Solomon? Who is he, Bucks?"

"A rather queer *person*, sir," replied the headwaiter sagely. "I might let him wait in a private room, sir!"

"All right, do so. We'll be out in a moment—confounded nuisance! How did the fellow come to look me up here? By Jove, Hammer, the unmitigated insolence of some——"

"Cool off," laughed the American. "Here, have another cigarette before we go, and we can investigate your friend after we finish. Funny name, John Solomon!"

CHAPTER II

JOHN SOLOMON

Since Hammer had an inveterate dislike of fat men in general, and blue-eyed fat men in particular—born out of his experience with a fat and demented Swede cook on his first cattle-boat trip—it was not to be wondered at that he eyed John Solomon with no great favour in his heart. For John Solomon was fat and blue-eyed.

“Pudgy” would be a better word than the flat and misleading “fat”. Pudgy embraces the face that a man is not merely fat, but that he is filled to a comfortable completeness, as it were; that he is not too fat to move about, but just enough so to be dignified on occasion; and that his expression is cheerful above all else.

Save for this last item, the description fitted John Solomon to a dot, for while his face was cheerful enough, it was as totally devoid of expression as a face can be—and still remain a face.

He was a short, little man, not more than five feet six, very decently dressed in blue serge, and he sat quite contentedly filling a short clay pipe from a whittled plug as Hammer and Harcourt entered the private room.

When he glanced up and rose to meet them, the first thing Hammer noticed was that healthy-looking yet expressionless face, from which gazed out two eyes of pale blue and of great size.

As he came to learn later, Nature had endowed John Solomon with absolutely stolid features, but in compensation had given him eyes which could be rendered unusually intelligent at times.

“You are John Solomon?” questioned Harcourt curtly. “What is your business with me, and how did you know I was here?”

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir,” and the pale-blue eyes met the darker ones of Harcourt without shrinking. “I ’ave a pal down at Deptford who ’appens to ’ear what you and Mr. ’Ammer said this morning. ’E knowed I was werry anxious for a ship, and ’e comes to me with it.”

“Oh, you want a ship, then?” returned Harcourt. “And therefore you interrupt a gentleman at dinner in a fashionable restaurant——”

“I didn’t mean no ’arm, sir,” broke in Solomon, without cringing, however. “You see, sir, I ’adn’t no means o’ knowing where to find you otherwise. I say that if so be as a man wants work, it don’t matter ’ow ’e gets it, so ’e gets it, and I trust as ’ow you’d look at it the same way, Mr. Harcourt, sir.”

“And quite right you are, John Solomon,” exclaimed Hammer, amused despite himself, and beginning to think that this pudgy little man had

some brains. Since Harcourt was not quite sure whether to be angry or not, the American's laugh saved the situation for the moment. "You're got plenty of nerve, my friend, but you must want work pretty badly to go after it so strong. What's your line—seaman?"

"No, sir," and the wide blue eyes rested in child-like faith on Hammer's face. "I'm a bit 'eavy for that there, sir, though I've A.B. papers. No sir, though I can do a bit o' navigation at a pinch, I'd feel more at 'ome like wi' figures. I writes a good 'and, sir, and I knows 'ow to 'andle port off'cers and such. If so be as you could use a supercargo, sir?"

Hammer turned to the Englishman, who was still eyeing Solomon doubtfully.

"How are we fixed for officers, anyway, Harcourt? I've got a grudge against fat men as a rule, but hanged if I don't admire this chap's nerve! A man who'll butt into a place like this to get a job must have something in him."

Harcourt rubbed his chin reflectively. "Well, the yacht has been laid up for six months and didn't have any crew, so Krausz agreed to place a dozen of his own men aboard her under a mate, if I'd find a chief officer and an engine-room crew.

"So far as standing watches is concerned, you can rank as first mate, unofficially, and I've already arranged for my old chief engineer to pick up his own men.

“A supercargo isn’t absolutely essential, but Krausz is going to take a lot of stuff out to do his excavating with, as well as packing cases and all that bally impedimenta—my word, Hammer, I don’t just know what to say!”

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir,” put in Solomon, as the other paused, “but I can take care o’ port papers and such werry well, and ’ave AI references. A supercargo ain’t no use unless ’e’s a lot o’ use, I says, sir, and I goes on that princ’ple. What’s more, Mr. ’Ammer, I knows a man as can fix you up wi’ first off’cer’s papers for a matter o’ two pun and no questions asked.”

The twinkle in the blue eyes drew an answering chuckle from the American, even Harcourt relaxing sufficiently to smile slightly.

“You seem to have your uses, certainly,” said the Englishman dryly. “By the way, Hammer, where are you stopping?”

“I’ve stopped,” grinned the American cheerfully. “My war-bag’s aboard the ship still, but there’s nothing in it worth carrying off. I have my pipe here, and no other clothes worthy the name.”

“Then you’d better go home with me to-night,” returned the other. “We’ll do the opera first, if you like. To-morrow, you can take up your quarters aboard the *Daphne*, and we can talk over money matters at leisure.

“Now, John Solomon, you seem to have a

fairly good idea of my business already, so I'll simply say that my yacht, the *Daphne*, is anchored at the Royal Thames docks and that you can go aboard whenever you please. As supercargo, you will join the officers' mess, of course, but I'll be aboard to-morrow and will fix things up with you, and you can sign articles then. And—er—about those bally papers—er—you had better get them.”

“Yes, sir, I'll 'ave them to-morrow, sir,” and John Solomon touched his forehead respectfully; but Hammer imagined that he caught something very like a wink from one of those wide blue eyes.

“Thank you werry much, Mr. Harcourt, and you, Mr. 'Ammer, and I'll be aboard bright and early, since it's the early worm what sees the bird first, as the Good Book says.”

“Very good,” rejoined Harcourt briefly, and so John Solomon passed forth from all the glory of Prince's, with his little black clay pipe wagging defiantly at the liveried doormen, and the place thereof knew him no more.

Although he had accepted the proffered partnership glibly enough, Hammer was by no means sure that he would stick to it, for various reasons. Chief among these was the fact that he had a profound distrust of himself; since he had deliberately thrown himself to the dogs, in a way, he had come to have a deep-rooted conviction that

he was no good, that his better qualities were mere surface outcroppings, and that a man such as Harcourt would like him less the better he knew him.

Still, he frankly liked Harcourt, and the idea of free-lancing about the ocean appealed strongly to him. But he had so long been battering down the better side of his own nature, the shock of his past trouble had so deeply bitten into his soul, that he could not look forward to the future with anything approaching hope.

His very promise to abstain from drink had been made solely because that was the only way in which he could accept Harcourt's offer, and not from any desire to regain his lost state.

"No," he told himself that night, alone in his room at Harcourt's apartments, "I guess I'm a wastrel, pure and simple. I've nothing to go ahead for, and I've got a devil of a lot to forget; if I can only get up enough interest in the yacht and in the places we visit and the work we do, then there's a chance that I can break even and stay decent for a while. And, Lord knows, it's about time!"

In which conclusion he was undeniably correct, much more so than in his foregoing premises. For Hammer was not nearly so unlikeable as he imagined; in the effort to cast his old life and his youthful mistakes far behind him he had plunged into the swiftest maelstrom he could find,

is better men than he have done and will do, but he had managed to keep his head above water—much to his own surprise.

The good-humoured manner, which was at first an assumption to hide the hurts beneath, had finally become reality, and perhaps Harcourt had shrewdly reckoned on the fact that mental trouble is very likely to lessen and vanish beneath the light of friendship.

Harcourt himself was little bothered over his own financial crash. Accustomed to thinking little of money or its value, he did not trouble greatly about making his living now that his plans for the immediate future were settled. He was twenty-nine, two years younger than the American, but he had taken the *Daphne* far around the seven seas, and in some ways was a good deal older than Hammer.

The following day, having procured other clothes than his dress-suit, Hammer went aboard the *Daphne*. She was a small but luxuriously furnished steam-yacht of a thousand tons burden, and having been already overhauled for the benefit of Dr. Krausz, was ready for sea, save for stores and crew; also, the archaeologist's "impedimenta", as Harcourt had termed it, had not yet come aboard. Hammer was delighted with her, and with Harcourt and John Solomon, put in a busy day.

Harcourt was well satisfied with his supercargo, for Solomon took charge of the purchasing

of the stores, and not only procured them of excellent quality, but at an astonishingly low price.

He proved to have a thorough acquaintance with his duties, and also with the duties of the other officers, and promised to be on the whole an exceedingly useful man.

Nothing was seen of Dr. Sigurd Krausz during the next two days, but Hammer learned that the point of the expedition was a small bay near Melindi, on the East African coast, and that another part of the expedition was being sent ahead to make the preliminary excavations.

On the third morning Harcourt sent the American to Krausz's hotel to inform the professor that the yacht was ready for her lading and passengers, and now, for the first time, as a result of that sending, Cyrus Hammer found himself awakening to the fact that he had been suddenly transplanted into a group of peculiar individuals, from the aristocratic but "busted" viscount and the pudgy John Solomon to the unscientific-appearing scientist, and that there was a screw loose somewhere.

This was the manner of it. Being now in possession of his first mate's certificate—"and no questions asked"—Hammer sent in his name and was admitted to the presence of the already-famous archaeologist. For Sigurd Krausz was not after the pattern Hammer had anticipated.

He was a rather thick-set man, clad only in

pyjamas, and was at work over a desk full of papers. These he abandoned to greet Hammer, pulling the latter aside to the window as if to keep him away from the desk.

Then, through his host's *négligé* attire, Hammer saw that Krausz was a mass of muscles; his hand-grip was like iron, and his large head was set well back between his shoulders in a fashion which made him greet the world with out-flung jaw.

There was nothing very remarkable about the man's face, which was Saxon rather than Teutonic, save for the heavy-lidded eyes. The features were regular, of massive mould, and the ridge denoting the thinker overhung the eyes; but—and this Hammer did not observe at once—the right temple was crossed by a nervous muscle, which throbbed like a ribbon underneath the skin.

On the whole, Hammer liked the scientist, deciding that while his face could be cruel upon occasion, it was the face of a strong man.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Hammer," exclaimed Krausz cordially, on learning the American's errand. He seemed in no hurry to return to his papers, but pressed Hammer into a chair and questioned him closely about the yacht, puffing the while at a long black panetela.

Thanks to his recent labours, Hammer survived the examination in good shape, and his personality seemed to make some impression on the German.

“I like you, yess, friend Hammer,” remarked the latter, handing him one of the thin panetelas. “Also, I like Mr. Harcourt, and trust we will get on well together. You are American, yess? I like Americans, but not the British, for sailors. That iss why I am putting some of my own men aboard, for they will also serve as helpers in the work. You are interested in archaeology, yess?”

“Not in general,” returned Hammer frankly. “However, I didn’t know there was anything to be dug up on the east coast of Africa.”

“Oh, plenty, plenty!” puffed the other, and after a long puff continued: “It iss some relics of Portuguese rule in Mombasa which I hope to find—relics more important ass ethnological and historic things than for their intrinsic value.”

“By the way, I’d like to know just how many are in your party, doctor. Our steward wants to get the cabins in shape.”

“My party? *Nein*, there will be but myself and my secretary going out. Professor Helmuth my assistant, leaves to-day for Mombasa to get things started, and coming back we will perhaps crowd the ship, yess.

“My second mate, Hans Schlak, will bring the men aboard to-morrow; if our necessary permits, and so on, arrive from the British Colonial Office, we will leave the day after. They should be here already. That iss satisfactory?”

“Perfectly—” began Hammer, when a third

voice interrupted apologetically.

“In half an hour the Mombasa sails, Herr Doctor!”

Krausz turned with an exclamation. Shuffling out from a shadowed corner of the room, Hammer saw a black-clad, small, flat-chested man, with deep-set, furtive eyes, high brow, and retreating chin; the chin did not express weakness altogether, for it was rather the fox chin, which denotes cunning and ability. The doctor waved a hand.

“Mr. Hammer, my secretary, Adolf Jenson. Very good, Adolf; better take a taxi and deliver the papers in person. Remember, Professor Sara L. Helmuth, stateroom 12 B.”

With this he turned to the desk and picked up a small black rubber wallet, which Jenson took with something very like a cringe, departing with an inaudible murmur of words.

Somewhat disgusted with the man, Hammer followed him, once more gripping the firm hand of Krausz and taking with him the remembrance of cordial words and an effusive smile from the big scientist.

The American stopped in the hotel entrance to light the doctor's cigar, and, as he glanced over his cupped hands, he saw something that astonished him. For there, just at the curb, and beckoning frantically to the nearest taxi, was no less a person than his supercargo, honest John Solomon!

Hammer stared in disbelief of his own eyes, since Solomon was at that moment supposed to be laying in a supply of extra cabin stores on the other side of the city.

But there was no mistake; even as the taxi drew up Solomon turned and waved his cap at some unseen individual farther up the street, then scrambled headfirst into the machine, his hurried words floating back to Hammer:

“P. and O. docks—the *Mombasa*! And ’urry or no tip!”

The taxi darted away, Hammer staring after it dazedly. What on earth could this mean? Why was this fat little Cockney supercargo of his chasing in a taxi-cab after a P. and O. liner due to sail in half an hour? Could it have any connection with the errand of the secretary, Adolf Jenson?

A flood of questions darted through Hammer’s brain on the instant, and, giving way to the impulse, he sprang to the taxi which had drawn up to the curb in place of that taken by Solomon. Whatever the supercargo’s purpose might be, Hammer determined to get down to the dock before the liner sailed and see what was going on, if possible. It might be a wild-goose chase, but on the other hand——

“P. and O. docks—I want to see the *Mombasa* go out, and she leaves in twenty minutes. Do it on the jump!”

The chauffeur grinned, and slammed the door. A moment later they were driving through the streets at a good speed, the American still pondering this surprising action of his harmless-looking little supercargo.

And Solomon had actually been talking of tips, when only a couple of days before he had dared much in order to capture a job! The whole affair was perplexing in the extreme.

"I never did like fat men, anyhow," reflected Hammer grimly. "That chap seemed to know a whole lot the first night we met, and I'll bet that he isn't the fool he looks by a long shot. But whatever got him mixed up with this Krausz business--if he is mixed up in it? I may be barking up the wrong tree, of course, and everything may be all right, so I'd better go slow if I catch him."

The conviction grew upon him during the remainder of his ride that he would have done much better to have waited, and to have questioned Solomon upon returning to the yacht.

The man might have friends leaving on the liner--but Hammer forgot his vague reasonings when the taxi drew up suddenly and he found the entrance to the docks of the Peninsula and Oriental just ahead.

The chauffeur had done his work well, for the journey had taken just fifteen minutes. Hammer found the dock gates open and pushed his way through the crowd; as he did so he passed the

black-clad figure of Adolf Jenson.

But the meek little secretary did not look up, vanishing toward the gates; and the American glanced around for John Solomon in vain.

There was no trace of him in the crowd, and the ship had already been cleared of visitors. The waiting tenders had their lines out, and as Hammer gazed up the gang-plank was just being taken in.

The whistle crashed out, drowning the tinkle of bells, and at the same instant Hammer saw an officer walk hastily to the open gangway, accompanied by a small pudgy man, dressed in blue.

They stood talking together for an instant, then shook hands; the siren shrilled forth, and wharf-lines were cast off, and John Solomon leaped ashore with amazing agility, and was lost in the crowd.

Standing watching in sore perplexity, Hammer recalled the name of the scientist's assistant—"Professor Sara L. Helmuth". He turned and pushed back to his waiting taxicab, execrating his useless trip, for he was now convinced that it had been useless.

"I seem fated to get mixed up with people I don't like," he smiled to himself, as he was being driven back to the city, the Royal Thames docks being up-river. "First it's a blue-eyed fat man, and then it's a woman relic-hunter, to say nothing of that swine of a secretary. Sara L. Helmuth—"

gosh, what a name! I never did know a woman named Sara that was worth a darn for looks."

With which conclusion he paid off his chauffeur and walked the remainder of the distance in an irritable humour enough. This humour was by no means lessened when he saw John Solomon standing at the gangway, checking off some stores that were coming aboard, while a number of heavily-loaded wagons stood waiting by the foredeck, where a steam winch was getting into action and stevedores were bustling about.

"What's all this?" he demanded bluntly. "I thought you were in the city."

"No, sir," returned Solomon, not looking up. "I did take a bit of a run up, sir; but them 'ere wagons were a bringing of our lading, so I 'urried back. Werry fine day, sir."

Hammer grunted. "Tell the steward that there will only be two passengers. Dr. Krausz and his secretary. The crew will be aboard to-night or in the morning."

"Werry good, sir."

Solomon went calmly on with his lists while the extra cabin stores were brought up the gangway. Suddenly, as one of the trucks stopped for checking off, a case of tinned goods joggled over, and Solomon leaned forward, catching it before it fell.

The action flung his short blue coat up around his waist, and Hammer caught a glimpse of a

black rubber wallet protruding from the man's hip-pocket. He recognized it instantly; it was the same wallet which Krausz had sent aboard the *Mombasa* an hour previously!

The American leaned quickly forward and snatched the wallet away. Solomon, having replaced the case, straightened up and whirled, and Hammer met his wide blue stare with a smile.

"You nearly lost this," he said coolly. "Nothing very valuable, I hope?"

Solomon's eyes widened a trifle.

"Lud, no, sir! Nothing more wallyble than my 'baccy, sir. If so be as a man likes 'baccy I says, then it's place ain't in a dirty pocket, but in a neat like pouch, says I. Werry kind o' you to save it for me, sir."

Ignoring the outstretched hand, Hammer opened the wallet, determined to test the truth of Solomon's explanation. He was convinced that this same black rubber pouch had contained the papers sent by Krausz to Professor Sara L. Helmuth, and that Solomon had, in some way, obtained them from the latter, or else from the meek secretary.

But his growing anger evaporated suddenly when the opened wallet showed nothing more than a vile-smelling flat plug of very black, molasses-impregnated tobacco.

"Yes, a good pouch, that," he said quietly,

closing it up and handing it back to its owner, his face inscrutable. "Is Mr. Harcourt about?"

"In the saloon cabin, sir," and, nodding, the American went on board.

He looked back once and saw Solomon mopping his brow; for some reason the action seemed significant of relief on the part of the supercargo, and Hammer frowned.

"Confound it, I'd like to know a few things!" he muttered savagely. "I'll have a run-in with that fellow yet! Wish I hadn't stood up for him the other night at Prince's; I should have let Harcourt kick him out, and a good job."

And the events which were to follow kept the regret keen in his mind.

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD TO MELINDI

“Well, the beggar was jabbering Arabic with those three men behind the ventilator this morning, and his actions don't look good to me, Harcourt. Oh, you can laugh, and be hanged to you! I tell you that John Solomon has more brains than his position warrants, and that——”

“Oh, nonsense, old chap! Don't be so beastly suspicious; Solomon told me at Port Said that he knew a smattering of Arabic, and he's been tremendously handy. I say, look at those hills, eh?”

Hammer relapsed into sulky silence, and presently Harcourt left the bridge to him and sought his cabin, while the American remained staring moodily at the purplish-blue Jeb el Geneffeh hills to the south-west, for the *Daphne* was passing through the Bitter Lakes, midway of the Suez Canal.

Until reaching Port Said, the cruise had been perfect in every way, and his half-realized suspicions of John Solomon had completely fallen into abeyance.

As Harcourt said, the man had proved to be very useful, indeed; he seemed to have a perfect

knowledge of port regulations everywhere; he attended to customs and *pratique* expeditiously, and almost made himself indispensable at mess, with his unfailing good humour and occasional fragments of home-made philosophy.

In fact, he seemed to have taken a liking to Hammer, and the American had begun to reciprocate it—until Port Said.

Here, barely an hour before they left for Suez, word was brought aboard that three of the German crew were in the hands of the Sudanese police. Dr. Krausz, who, with his secretary, had not left his cabin a dozen times during the cruise, went ashore with Harcourt in furious excitement, but returned considerably subdued.

It seemed that the three men had fallen foul of some French and Arabs in the native quarter, that a row had arisen, and one of the French had been stabbed.

Consequently, there was nothing to be done save to place the matter in the hands of the German Consul and go on, since Krausz did not wish to be detained pending the case.

As another of the crew was down with eye-trouble and ought to be left behind in hospital John Solomon had offered to pick up three or four natives who could make themselves generally useful, and after some hesitation, Krausz accepted, and the supercargo had promptly got his four Arabs aboard.

When, the next morning, Hammer had found Solomon talking Arabic with three of them in shelter of a ventilator, he had at once laid the affair of the black wallet before Harcourt, all his suspicions aroused.

But the Englishman laughed him down, and even Hammer had to admit that there was nothing very terrible about the pudgy little man. So while the *Daphne* pursued her course through the sandy wastes to Port Ibrahim and Suez, Cyrus Hammer gradually threw off his almost groundless suspicions and took on his usual good-humoured manner once more.

Hans Schlak, the second mate, was a big blond German—a Viking in appearance, slow and stolid, but thoroughly efficient in every way.

The men, too, were smart and well-behaved, responding so well to Harcourt's discipline that Hammer was not surprised to find that most of them had served in the German navy.

Beyond discharging her pilot and sending some letters ashore for the doctor, the *Daphne* made no stop at Port Ibrahim, and by next morning she was well on her way out of the gulf and down the Red Sea.

They were holding in somewhat to the Arabian coast, and Hammer, in charge of the bridge, was seated in the chart-house going over a lesson in navigation, when a figure darkened the doorway and John Solomon entered.

“Beggin’ your pardon, Mr. ’Ammer, sir, but would you ’ave the kindness to let me take a bit of a look through the glass?”

“Well, I don’t know that it would do any great harm,” replied Hammer cheerfully. “Help yourself, Solomon. Want to get a last look at Asia, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” came the sober answer, as Solomon procured a pair of binoculars. “You see, sir, I was down this ’ere way a few months ago. Werry interesting place, Mr. ’Ammer, and when so be as you finds an interesting place, I says——”

The rest was lost as Solomon directed a fixed gaze from the port doorway toward the distant coast, and he did not change his attitude for five minutes. Hammer watched him with some interest, until at length the other lowered the glasses with a sigh.

“Lud, what a bare coast she is, sir! If I might make so bold, sir, what be we a going to do after we reach Mombasa?”

“Why,” smiled Hammer, “we’re bound for a little harbour up the coast called Melindi. We’ll have to leave the yacht at Kilindini harbour, after the trip up, and go to and from Melindi by launch, I suppose.”

“Aye, sir; it’s a werry bad place indeed, Melindi. And may I ask, sir, if so be as we’re a-going to stay with the yacht or go with Dr. Krausz?”

“Not decided yet, Solomon, to my knowledge.

Why, do you want to go along with the relic-hunters?"

"No, sir, though I'm werry interested in strange things. Beggin' your pardon, sir, Dr. Krausz is all werry well in his way, but 'is way ain't to me notion."

"So you don't like him? That's queer!" Hammer pulled out his pipe, and, accepting this as tacit permission, Solomon began to whittle at a plug which he had been holding ready.

The wide blue eyes came up and met his squarely, with just the suspicion of a frown hovering at their edges. Hammer decided that his supercargo might yet inveigle some expression into his face if he kept on in this way.

"No, sir; me 'umble opinion is that Dutchmen ain't to be trusted, not so far away from 'ome; and I've 'ad some experience. Do you think, sir, as 'ow Mr. Harcourt would give me a discharge at Mombasa? O' course, I signed on for the voyage, sir, but I 'ave me reasons for wantin' to be stopping off at Mombasa, so I comes to you all square and above-board. If you want a thing, why, ask for it ship-shape, as the Good Book says, sir. That's what I 'old to."

"Right," nodded Hammer. He was no little surprised at the request; but as it would have been easy enough to slip the yacht at Mombasa, the fact that Solomon asked for his discharge so long beforehand showed a desire on his part

to play fair—and also to draw his pay on being discharged.

“I’ll speak to the captain about it, Solomon, and I think it’ll be all right. But we’ll be sorry to lose you, for you’ve certainly been a great help to us.”

“I’m sorry to be leaving you, sir,” and the blue eyes opened a trifle wider. “Thank you werry much, Mr. ’Ammer.”

This was to be a day of surprises for Cyrus Hammer, however. The day was cruelly hot, even the breeze created by the yacht’s motion being stifling, and by noon Hammer, as well as Schlak and the others aboard, had stripped to pyjamas.

Very little had been seen of Dr. Krausz and Adolf Jenson; most of their meals had been served in their large cabin; and from the quantities of mail sent out at each port of call, it had been evident that the scientist was hard at work.

That afternoon, however, while Hammer was splitting a bottle of beer with Harcourt in the comparative coolness of the latter’s cabin, the steward appeared. He was a quiet little Englishman, who had formerly acted as Harcourt’s valet in more prosperous days, and had chosen to remain with his master.

“Mr. Harcourt,” he said, hesitantly, “I’d like to ask you about something, sir.”

“Very well, Roberts. What’s on your mind, my man?”

“Why, sir”—and the steward twisted his cap nervously—“it’s Dr. Krausz, sir. I’m—I’m afraid as he’s going it a bit strong, Mr. Harcourt.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Why, him and that—that yeller-faced swine Jenson”—and Roberts spat out the words with a sudden viciousness that was astounding—“I’ve been a-taking them champagne, sir, all morning, and a half-hour ago Dr. Krausz he sent for a bottle o’ brandy, sir. I thought, maybe, as how you might drop a word to him, sir. It’s a mortal bad climate, you know, sir, for such goings-on.”

Harcourt stared at the American, surprise plain in his eyes.

“My word!” he ejaculated. “I’d positively no idea that he was a tippler, ’pon my word! Has this been going on long, Roberts?”

“Off and on, sir, since we left Gibraltar. But not so heavy as this, Mr. Harcourt.”

“Very good. You did quite right in telling me, but mention it to no one else, understand. You may go.”

Left alone, the two looked at each other for a moment until Hammer chuckled.

“So our worthy doctor has fallen off the wagon, eh? Well, it’s his funeral, cap’n, not ours. Better drop him a hint?”

“Eh? By Jove, no! I want no bally German telling me to keep my place! He knows what he’s doing, Hammer, and I’m no nursemaid, so

we'll let him drink himself to death if he likes. I'd much sooner see that fellow Jenson go overboard in a sack, for the doctor's quite a decent sort, don't you know."

"He might be worse," nodded Hammer. "Well, I'll be off and get a bit of sleep under the after-awning by the electric fan."

Here he managed to obtain a modicum of relief from the heat, and dropped off to sleep without troubling himself over the alcoholism of Dr. Sigurd Krausz.

How long he was asleep he had no idea, until he was aroused by an excited voice, which resolved itself into that of the doctor in question. Half-clad, dishevelled, and with furiously-flushed features, the archaeologist was disclaiming wildly in German to Hans Schlak, whose watch it was.

The two were standing by the starboard rail, and as Hammer raised himself on his hands the second mate cast a helpless glance at him. The American caught the look, and did not hesitate to break into the scientist's flow of words.

"Who's up on the bridge, Schlak?" he asked curtly. "You'd better get back before the captain——"

"*Was ist?*" Krausz lurched about with a black frown, and Schlak seized the chance to get away. At the same instant Roberts appeared, bearing a whisky and soda. He hesitated at sight of Hammer.

“Throw that stuff overboard, Roberts,” commanded the later, rising. With a look of vast relief the steward obeyed. Krausz glared at them, and the American saw the peculiar ribbon of muscle beating furiously under the skin of his brow.

“How dare you!” burst forth the scientist. “Pig of an American, you do not your place know——”

He was swinging his fists wildly in the air, and by sheer accident managed to catch the tray of Roberts with a blow that sent it clattering to the deck. Hammer, angry, took a step forward and caught the German’s wrists in a hard grip.

“Get command of yourself, doctor,” he said quietly. “You’re making a disgraceful scene here.”

For an instant the other glared at him with bloodshot, maddened eyes which, despite his light-brown hair, were of the deepest black. Then Hammer caught a ripple of the man’s huge muscles, and he was flung violently back with a curse.

“Iss it not mine ship?” stormed the angry German. “Pig! Dog! I will show you——”

He rushed forward. Hammer, seeing that he had to deal with a sheer madman, wasted no more words but struck with all his weight behind the blow. His fist took Krausz full in the stomach, and with a single groan the big man shivered and collapsed in a heap.

“Roberts,” and Hammer turned to the wild-eyed steward, “send two of the Germans here to carry the doctor to his cabin. Then see to it that I am called at four bells and not disturbed before then.”

Poor Roberts fled hastily, and Hammer composed himself to sleep again. He would have thought little of the incident, nor did he expect that Krausz would remember it; but that evening the doctor appeared at mess—a very rare thing. His first act was to go up to the American with hand outstretched.

“My dear Mr. Hammer,” he said, sincerity in his tone. “I deeply regret what took place this afternoon, and apologize to you for it. I——”

“Don’t say any more, doctor,” laughed Hammer, with an amused glance at the wondering Harcourt, who knew nothing of the occurrence. “It’s really not worth bothering about, I assure you, and if anyone needs to be forgiven it is I.”

“Not at all,” beamed the other, but the muscle over his temple was beating hard. “By the way, you found no papers on the deck, yess?”

“I didn’t notice any,” returned the surprised American. “Why, did you lose something?”

“A paper, yess. Adolf believed me to have had it when I left the cabin. But no matter, my friend. We——”

“Hold on there!” cried Hammer quickly. “If you lost something, we’ll look into it. Roberts!

Was anyone else on the after-deck?"

"I saw no one, Mr. Hammer," returned the steward. "I called the two men, as you ordered."

Hammer frowned, but Krausz waved a hand and insisted that nothing mattered; and so the dinner proceeded, with a brief but frank explanation on the part of the scientist to Harcourt and John Solomon, Schlak still being on the bridge.

Hammer was about to relieve him when Krausz asked him to wait, as he wished to explain the purpose of his expedition.

This proved to be of little interest to the American, however. The doctor had discovered, some time before, a number of old manuscripts dealing with the Portuguese occupation of the Mombasa coast.

According to these, there was a place not far from Melindi where a fort had been established, and where, afterward, a number of vessels had been wrecked on their way from Goa to Lisbon.

The cargoes had been saved, but before they could be transferred to Mombasa an irruption of natives had destroyed the fort. It was believed that a great portion of valuable relics, with gifts from the Indian viceroy to the king of Portugal, and other such things, had been buried somewhere within the fort and had never been located.

These formed the object of the party's work; for if found they would be of great value to historians, more especially as there were many papers

of interest supposed to be buried with the more intrinsically valuable articles.

The subject did not appeal particularly to Hammer; but Harcourt displayed keen interest, while John Solomon stared at Krausz with his blue eyes growing wider and wider.

“And you mean as ’ow to say that there ’ere loot is still there, doctor?” he broke forth at last. Krausz smiled blandly.

“Such is my hope, Mr. Solomon.”

“Lud! The ways o’ Prowidence are mysterious, as the Good Book says. To think o’ loot a-laying buried for all this time waiting for you to dig it up! Once upon a time I worked for a relic-’unter, like you, sir. A fine, upstanding man ’e was, too. But I says, when there’s summat dead, let it lie. It ain’t proper to dig up the past, as the old gent said when ’e led ’is third to the altar.”

“So you used to work for an archaeologist, yess?” and for the first time the doctor seemed to find John Solomon worthy of attention. “Where wass that?”

“A main long time back, sir—up in Palestine it was,” and Solomon sighed reflectively.

Hammer, who was studying Krausz, suddenly saw the muscle in his brow begin to throb. He felt himself beginning to dislike that muscle vaguely.

“’Is name was—dang it! I’ve been and forgot—no, I ’aven’t neither! ’Is name was ’Elmuth!” he concluded triumphantly.

“Helmuth!” The word broke from Krausz and found echo in Hammer’s mind. The heavy-lidded black eyes of the German were bent suddenly on Solomon. “The Herr Professor George Helmuth, yess, of the University of California?”

“That’s ’im, sir!” Solomon’s eyes sparkled. “American ’e was.”

“H-m!” For some reason the doctor’s face darkened. “Hiss daughter she iss my assistant, Mr. Solomon. She wass assistant curator at the Dresden Library. Well, my friends, I bid you good evening.”

Hammer also departed to the bridge, pondering over the coincidence brought out by Solomon’s words; and when Harcourt joined him for a smoke they chuckled over it together. The captain had already decided to let Solomon go at Mombasa, as there would be little need of his services for a time.

“Funny thing, that,” remarked the Englishman. “Fancy a woman doing such work out here in Africa!”

“Oh, shucks!” laughed Hammer carelessly. “The kind of woman who goes in for that work—well, you know. Spectacles and Bibles and a blue *pagari** on her sun-helmet.”

* This is the correct spelling of the word, which is bastardized into puggaree or pugree, and other forms. The “Standard” will probably give pugaree, or some such spelling—*Author*.

So the matter passed, and for the time he forgot it. Indeed, Hammer was busier than he had been for many a day. Besides lessons in navigation from Harcourt, he was learning a smattering of Arabic from Solomon, and already could swear fluently at the four Arab sailors, who took a cheerful delight in adding to his vocabulary.

Also, he was rather surprised to find that he and Harcourt were drawing closer together with every day; that he was keenly interested in his new environment, and was looking forward to newer seas and lands with unalloyed anticipation.

In fact, he was beginning to see the falsity of his old attitude toward life, while the taste of authority was sweet to him. Already the past had faded out in his mind, save for occasional twinges of bitterness, at which times he plunged into his work and was astonished at the easy with which the mood passed.

So the days flew by until the *Daphne* had rounded Cape Guardafui and the last leg of the journey was begun, down the east coast of Africa. They were still three days out from Mombasa when Hammer, who had the second dog watch, went to Schlak's cabin on being relieved by Harcourt.

He wanted to ask the second officer about some detail of the chart; and since it was nearly dark, and he made no noise in his pumps, his approach must have been unheard.

As the door was slightly ajar, Hammer merely

pushed it open with a word and stepped in. He heard one sharply-drawn breath, and in the gloom found himself facing Adolf Jenson, whose face was absolutely livid.

An instant, as he switched on the light, the American saw the body of Hans Schlak lying on the floor at his feet, a knife-shaft between the shoulders.

CHAPTER IV

WHO MURDERED HANS SCHLAK?

“My God! Don’t look at me like that, sir—I didn’t do it!”

Trembling in every limb, the secretary shrank back against the berth, staring up at Hammer with horrified eyes.

The American, to whom Jenson was repulsive, made no attempt to lay a finger on the man, but stood looking at him with sternly questioning eyes; palsied with fear, the fellow babbled out protestations of his innocence until suddenly Hammer waved him silent.

“That’s enough from you. How long have you been here?”

“I just came in, Mr. Hammer. I can prove it by Dr. Krausz; I’ve been with him until just now——”

Hammer leaned over and touched Schlak. The second mate was dead, and had been dead for some time, since the body was set fast in the rigor mortis. For a moment he looked down, frowning, then swept the cabin with his gaze.

Evidently here had been a struggle, and a desperate one. A chair was broken and overturned, clothes and papers were strewn about the

floor, and the clenched fists of the body showed that death had not found Hans Schlak unawares.

In one hand Hammer saw a fragment of paper, and after a moment's work got it away intact; it was a torn corner of a letter, probably, for a few words in German could be made out written in pencil.

Contrary to his own will and even against his first supposition, the American was forced to the conclusion that the cringing secretary was innocent. True, he had the man standing over the body, but Schlak had been dead for an hour at least—in all probability he had returned from the dining-saloon to find his fate awaiting him.

Therefore, someone must have been in his room during his absence at mess. Who? Not Jenson, for Jenson had been at the table with them; and Hammer mentally accounted for every member of the officers' mess that evening, except John Solomon.

An instant later he remembered that he himself had sent the supercargo off to make up some accounts which Harcourt desired to see, and that Solomon had returned a few moments after Schlak had left the table.

Therefore, it would seem that the pudgy supercargo was cleared; and at the thought of the little man killing the viking Hans Schlak, Hammer smiled grimly.

“So you didn't do it, eh?” he said sternly,

thinking to make the secretary cringe for a moment. Hammer had a thorough dislike and contempt for the man, and made no secret of it. "I find you standing over this body, and you claim innocence! Do you think that will stand when you get up before the German Consul at Mombasa?"

For a moment Jenson broke out anew with his frenzied babbling, weaving his hands in and out, his face ghastly with terror; then he caught the American's contemptuous smile and shivered into silence. Hammer was satisfied, but he was to pay dearly for that short moment of play with Adolf Jenson's nerves.

"Oh, you're cleared all right, Jenson! Now go down and send Captain Harcourt here, and Dr. Krausz with him. Tell no one else what has happened."

With which Hammer went forward and investigated among the crew. But one and all could account for themselves and proved good alibis, even to the Arabs; so he returned in disgust to the bridge and relieved Harcourt temporarily.

In ten minutes the captain returned with Krausz, all three men entering the chart-house gravely enough.

Hammer told his story, exculpating Jenson fully, and produced the torn scrap of paper taken from Schlak's hand. Dr. Krausz, who had taken the news with astonishing equanimity, examined the paper and uttered a cry of surprise.

“It iss the paper I lost that day when I was drunk! Mein Gott, gentlemen, but thiss iss queer! It iss a copy of one of those Portuguese ‘relations’, concerning the place to which we going are.”

“So?” Harcourt inspected the end of his cigar. “Then whoever took it from you that day must have been in the cabin with Schlak, and the row probably started over that paper, by Jove!” He looked up with sudden excitement. “Is anyone else after this treasure, Dr. Krausz?”

The big German blinked in surprise.

“*Hein!* It would be of no interest to others, but to archaeologists, yess. No one knows but myself. There iss not any chance of sich a thing, I am sure.”

“Well, here’s the knife. It ought to be recognized.”

Harcourt laid the weapon on the table—a plain, horn-hafted sheath-knife, with no scratch on the haft to proclaim ownership.

As Hammer had not revealed the cause of his visit to the forecastle, it was decided to call in each man on board the ship, from stewards to stokers, and see if the weapon would be recognized.

“It’s a cinch that the murderer is on the ship,” declared Hammer confidently. “If that knife belongs to any of the men it’ll probably be recognized.”

“By the way,” exclaimed Harcourt, “we ought

to have Solomon up here. I believe that chap has some brains, and he can help us out with the Arabs. Can you handle their bally talk at all, Hammer?"

"Fairly well, but not for rapid-fire work. Yes, better have John come up, and then start in with the men. I'd better get the articles and see that we get hold of every man aboard, hadn't I?"

The captain nodded, and Hammer went below. He went first to his own cabin, where he dug to the bottom of a ditty-bag full of soiled linen and fished out an old-style revolver of small size but heavy calibre.

"Not that I want to shoot her any," he grinned to himself, "but she feels comforting with murderers aboard! Guess I'd have to have a man within a yard of me to hit him with this mule of a gun, anyhow."

Visiting Harcourt's cabin, he procured the ship's papers, sent Roberts to ask John Solomon to step to the chart-house and to follow himself, and returned. At anyrate, he thought grimly, this cruise bade fair to beat cattle-boats as far as excitement was concerned.

He found the others as he had left them, Harcourt smoking and Krausz staring glumly at the knife, which lay on the table before them. A moment later the supercargo arrived, puffing after his climb, and at Harcourt's invitation dropped into the fourth deck-chair.

“Do you know that knife, Mr. Solomon?”

“Why, cap’n, I can’t say that I do—no, sir; I never laid eyes on it afore, not as I knows of. I—why, dang it! There’s blood——”

“Yes,” cut in Harcourt grimly. “Mr. Schlak was murdered this evening. Oh, hello, Roberts! Tell the men to come up here one by one—come in here first. Ever see this knife before?”

Roberts approached the table and replied in the negative, after which Harcourt waved him away. John Solomon said no more, but stared from one to the other of the three, silent with the horror of the thing.

Taking pity on him, Hammer explained the affair, and had barely finished when the men began to come in, wondering greatly at the time and place of the summons.

One by one they passed through, each denying any knowledge of the knife, and Hammer pricked off the names. The four Arabs had not yet appeared when Adolf Jenson came to seek his master on some trivial errand and stopped, pale-faced and with a virulent glance at the American, as he noted what was going on.

Solomon’s eyes turned to him, remaining in a fixed stare; and after a moment the secretary evidently became uneasy, for he passed out into the night again after returning a brief negative to Harcourt’s formal question.

There were only five men left—the four Arabs and

the German boatswain, Hugo Baumgardner. Two of the Arabs, the only ones who knew English, came through, and after them the boatswain. Then for the first time things began to look interesting.

“Yes, sir,” replied Baumgardner slowly, scratching his mop of black hair reflectively and speaking excellent English, “it seems to me I’ve seen that knife before; there’s a funny twist to the handle if you notice, sir.”

An electric-charged silence settled down, while Baumgardner scratched his head and stared at the table. From outside came a murmur of voices from the waiting men; then very quietly John Solomon rose and stepped to the door.

No one except Hammer paid any attention to the movement, and the American, after noting that Solomon was saying something to some person out of sight, centred his thoughts on the stalwart boatswain.

“Well, tell us where you saw it,” spoke up Krausz encouragingly, as Solomon resumed his chair. Baumgardner frowned heavily, then his face cleared.

“Why, sir, it was the day after we left Malta—I remember that Mr. Solomon was breaking out a case of champagne and I was helping him with it. Yes, that’s it. I asked him for a knife—I’d left mine in my bunk—and he passed me that one to cut away the straw around the case. Just

let me hold it a minute.” Harcourt passed over the knife and the German folded his great hand around it, nodding. “Yes, I could swear to it, Mr. Harcourt. I hope there’s nothing wrong, sir?”

“Nothing, Baumgardner. You have seen the knife at no other time, I suppose?”

“No, sir. I only remembered it because it had that little hitch at the end of the handle, but it’s the same one.”

“Very well. That will do.”

No one said anything for a moment. Hammer’s eyes went to Solomon, and he surprised a peculiar look in the other’s face—a peculiar look which he could not fathom. It was as if John Solomon’s faith in human nature had suddenly received a shock, and if it was acting, then it was cleverly done.

A second later the third Arab entered, replied to Harcourt’s question, which Solomon translated with a curt negative, and passed on. The fourth Arab, however, glanced at the knife, and before a word had been uttered his eyes lit up. Harcourt caught the gleam and checked Solomon.

“Wait a moment, Mr. Solomon. Hammer, I think you’d better ask him, to avoid any suspicion against Solomon’s question; not that we suspect you, Solomon, but under the circumstances it might be better.”

“Quite so, sir,” rejoined the supercargo humbly.

"I'm werry sorry, o' course, sir."

Hammer put the question in faltering Arabic, and the man nodded at once.

"Yes, *effendi*, I have seen the knife. Has it a small nick near the end of the blade?"

The American translated and Harcourt picked up the weapon.

"Correct. Ask him where he saw it."

Then Hammer received a surprise.

"I saw it two days ago, *effendi*—no, it was four days ago, two days after *effendi* was drunk and you hit him very hard. I was cleaning the brasswork. I saw the little black man come near me, and there was a bad place in the brass. I asked him if he had a knife, for I had none, and he lent me this one. I remember the nick in the blade, for Allah willed that it scratch my thumb."

Startled, Hammer made the man repeat his statement to make sure there was no mistake and that he had understood correctly; then he translated for the others. He saw Krausz dart a single flaming glance at Solomon, which the latter seemed not to note, and then Harcourt spoke up:

"Ask him who he means by the little black man."

The Arab could not say, except that he would know the man again; but Hammer felt no doubt in his own mind that Jenson was indicated, and summoned the latter. Upon his arrival the Arab identified him at once.

“That is the man, *effendi*. If he says that the knife is not his, then he is a——”

The Arab’s opinion of Jenson coincided more or less with that of Hammer, but the American cut short the flood of expletives and ordered the man to stand aside.

“Gentlemen,” said Harcourt gravely, “this situation would be laughable were it not so deuced serious. One man states that Mr. Solomon had the knife when he left Malta; Solomon denies having ever seen it before; another man states that Mr. Jenson had it since that time. You will have noted that the Arab recognized the blade by its slight nick, of which he could have had no previous knowledge. In my opinion neither witness is to be doubted.”

Not until then did the unhappy secretary realize what had transpired, or why he had been sent for. Comprehending the drift of things at Harcourt’s words, transfixed by his master’s gloomy eye, poor Jenson shrank back, trembling, an agony of fear in his livid features.

“I—I never had it!” he cried in a strangled voice. “Herr Doctor—gentlemen—I swear before God and the Virgin—I never had the thing, never saw it——”

“Don’t cry before you’re hurt, Jenson,” said Harcourt coldly. “Then you deny having had the knife in your possession, eh?”

“Yes! My God, yes!” With a sudden snarl

that brought out his rat-like teeth he whirled on Hammer, "It's you who framed this thing up—you always hated me; you accused me of doing it in the first place——"

"Shut up!" The heavy voice of Krausz silenced his frenzied words. "Captain Harcourt, you are in command here; but if you please I would like a word to say, yess?"

"Certainly, doctor."

"Then I can witness that thiss man, Adolf Jenson, wass with me from the time I went to my cabin after mess until five minutes before I wass called up here. Also, I left the dining-saloon before Schlak did. If poor Schlak wass killed after then thiss must surely absolve Jenson."

"It would certainly seem to, by Jove!" exclaimed Harcourt, frankly puzzled. "Mr. Solomon, kindly explain to us why you denied all knowledge of the knife when we first asked you about it. Do you stick to that denial?"

"No, sir," and the wide blue eyes, which had rested on Jenson with a wondering look, shifted to Harcourt. "You see, sir, I don't carry weapons, not as a rule. Everything in its place, I says, and a supercargo 'e don't rightly 'ave no use for knives. When so be as I wants a knife I gets one from the steward, or borries one anywhere. It may be werry well be as the bos'n says——"

"Then why did you deny it in the first place?" shot out Harcourt sternly.

Solomon hesitated, his eyes shifting from face to face appealingly.

“Well, sir, I suspicioned as summat was wrong. I don’t ’old to gettin’ shipmates into ’ot water, sir, beggin’ your pardon, and I says to myself, ‘John Solomon, tell a lie,’ just like that, sir. ‘Tell a lie,’ I says, ‘and don’t be a-gettin’ of a poor shipmate into ’ot water. Do as you would be done by,’ I says——”

“Confound it,” exclaimed Harcourt, “tell me who you borrowed that knife from or I’ll put you in irons!”

“Well, sir,” sighed the supercargo, “I must say as I remembers it werry well, and werry sorry I am to ’ave to say it, Mr. Jenson; but you——”

“You lie!” screamed Jenson terribly, flinging himself forward. With unexpected agility Dr. Krausz leaped up and gripped him. “You lie! You lie! You lie!” Over and over the words were shrieked out until a torrent of German from the scientist quieted the livid-faced secretary.

It was a scene that lingered long in the mind of Hammer—stolid, pudgy Solomon sitting quietly with something like sadness in his eyes, while Jenson, an agony of dumb horror in his face, panted in the grip of the Teuton, Harcourt watching with a troubled frown, and the Arab standing back in silence.

“Ordinarily that would be good evidence enough,” stated Harcourt finally. “However, it

is only your word against Jenson's, Solomon, with the preponderance of evidence in your favour.

"Still, Jenson has an excellent alibi. Where were you while you were absent from the dining-saloon?"

"In me own cabin, sir," came the prompt answer. "Fixing up them accounts, sir."

"Anyone see you there?"

"Not as I knows on sir."

"Then your bally alibi's smashed and we're worse tangled up than ever!"

Silence once more settled over the chart-house. For the life of him Hammer could not solve the puzzle, and in desperation he suggested that the remainder of the crew be sent for.

Since two of the fore-castle mess had recognized the weapon there was a chance that some of the engine-room crew might have seen it and so might corroborate either the Arab or Baumgardner.

Harcourt accordingly summoned every man on board but with no result. Each and all positively denied ever having seen the knife, and finally the Arab was dismissed with the rest, Baumgardner being advanced to acting second mate with orders to prepare the body of Schlak for burial the next morning.

"I'm bally well stumped, gentlemen," announced Harcourt wearily. Jenson was now standing beside his master, one of Krausz's big hands resting

on his arm. "What's your opinion, Hammer?"

The American hesitated. Plainly the secretary believed him to have framed up the charge, and it was next to impossible to believe that the fellow had really murdered the giant mate. Besides, the alibi was heavily in the man's favour.

"From the evidence of the Arab and John Solomon," he said slowly, "it would seem that Jenson is guilty. But the body was stiff, remember, and there had been a struggle, to say nothing of the alibi. On the other hand, Solomon cannot prove where he was at the time. I would suggest entering on the log that Schlak was murdered by persons unknown, and then put the matter up to the German Consul who would probably have jurisdiction at Mombasa."

"No," corrected Harcourt. "Extra territorial rights have been withdrawn in British East Africa. The government would have jurisdiction. What is your opinion, doctor?"

"I would leave it to you, captain. I say it iss for you to settle."

"And *I* say," exclaimed Harcourt with sudden harshness, "that no man is to be murdered in my ship without someone swinging for it, by the Lord Harry! We'll get into Kilindini, and never a man goes ashore until this has been ferreted out. John Solomon, and you, Adolf Jenson, mind that!"

So the matter ended for the present, after

affidavits and statements had been drawn up and signed by all concerned. But, as he paced the bridge that night, Cyrus Hammer thrashed the matter over and over in his mind. The strands were twisted a little bit too much to his manner of thinking.

Solomon's absence in his own cabin was bad, for there was nothing to prove that he had been there, save his own word. This, however, was balanced by the fact that the knife seemed to belong to Jenson, whose flat denial of this evidence looked very bad also. Yet his alibi was unimpeachable.

What with Baumgardner testifying against Solomon, and the latter against Jenson, the thing was badly tangled. Yet the evidence was in favour of the secretary clearly. He would hardly have stolen the paper from Krausz, over which the struggle would seem to have been waged, and he could account for his movements.

Despite the ownership of the knife, there would seem to be a much better case against John Solomon, except for the testimony of the Arab—and at this the American paused. *What had the super-cargo said there at the door of the chart-house?*

For a long moment Hammer stood staring out at the sea, startled by this thought which had winged its way into his brain. Was it possible that in that moment Solomon had given the Arab his cue?

But why? He had not desired to testify against Jenson at first, beyond doubt. Hammer's mind flashed back again—Jenson also had left the chart-house shortly before Baumgardner's recognition of the blade.

Was it possible that Jenson had instructed the boatswain what to say, that Solomon had read his purpose and blocked the move by the counter testimony of his Arab?

"By Godfrey," thought the American, "that's expecting too much altogether of Solomon's wits. Besides, Baumgardner doesn't look as if he'd lie in order to save that little shrimp of a secretary. Well, I guess it's up to the authorities at Mombasa, and here's hoping they can find more sense in the whole affair than I can."

With which he patted the side-pocket of his coat reassuringly and devoted himself to keeping a sharper lookout than usual.

The next morning Schlak was buried, and the *Daphne* went once more upon her way with the mystery still unsettled, until in due time she rounded into Kilindini, the southern harbour of Mombasa, and her anchors crashed down into the waters of the port.

CHAPTER V

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Now, it is not to be expected that when a man has been living for three years among "stiffs" and "sunfish", with only occasional lapses into decency, he can suddenly turn around and rank as a gentleman and a scholar for ever after, with never a fall from grace.

It would be very nice to chronicle such a miracle in the life of Cyrus Hammer, and would, no doubt, afford great pleasure to the average reader; but it would afford great disgust to the average student of human nature, such as John Solomon.

"Regeneration is all werry well," as that peculiar individual said, "but it ain't to be 'ad with a 'op, skip, and jump, I says. 'Umans is 'umans, and nature ain't to be denied, as the parson remarked when 'e smashed the constable in the eye. If so be as a man's a saint, why, 'is place ain't 'ere on earth, says I."

Accordingly, in the due course of events, Hammer and the rest were entertained at the Mombasa Club, where Harcourt found numerous old friends now "in the service".

These, with the American Consul, were so cordial to Hammer that he and Harcourt spent one glorious

evening around a punch-bowl at the club, and about midnight Hammer was lost in the shuffle. At 3 A.M. he was located by a native policeman, who patiently extricated him from the embraces of a half-caste Portuguese and two sailors from an oiler in port.

The extrication was a matter of time and trouble, Hammer vowing that he was not being shanghaied and had no intention of being so; and before the question was settled the half-caste had a broken head, two constables were *hors de combat*, and half Mombasa was watching the riot in unholy glee—for Hammer managed to hold the cathedral steps against all comers until taken from behind.

Undoubtedly, it was a highly disgraceful scene, and Hammer was duly contrite when his fine had been paid and he was returned to the yacht. Harcourt made no mention of the occurrence thereafter, and the American savagely determined not only to stay away from the club but to get out of Mombasa altogether.

Wherefore it was not long until he was given charge of the "impedimenta" belonging to Dr. Krausz, and found himself steaming up the coast aboard the government packet *Juba* with half a dozen of the crew.

Krausz himself had gone on to Melindi as soon as the investigation into the death of Schlak was finished. And it was quickly finished, for the authorities, after hearing the evidence, directed

that the finding of the *Daphne's* log be confirmed, there being no direct evidence against either Solomon or Jenson.

Whereupon the former had at once drawn his pay and disappeared, and the latter had gone to Melindi with his master in the yacht's launch. Harcourt remained in charge of the yacht for the present.

The trip up-coast was fairly uneventful, and at Melindi he found Jenson waiting with the launch in which to take the men on. He himself was given a native guide, and was forced to get the boxes unshipped two miles from shore, swung into surf boats, landed, and then loaded onto a gang of Kiswahili porters to be taken overland. From the Kiswahili guide Hammer extracted the information that their destination was two days' march north from Melindi, and, perforce, he resigned himself to the situation, roundly cursing Jenson for leaving him in the lurch,

An English cotton-planter whom he met on the wharfs came to the rescue, however, took charge of his boxes and porters, and set off with him for the first few miles—for all of which Hammer was intensely grateful.

He was like a child in a strange house, at first; but by the time the planter stopped off at his own place the American had got into the swing of things. The planter sent him down a couple of boys for personal attendants, and after Hammer

had attended to one insolent porter he had no further trouble whatever.

They were headed for a small ruined fort, dating from the Portuguese occupation, which lay sixteen miles up the coast from Melindi. Owing to the difficulties of the march and the roundabout track they were compelled to follow, it was not until the evening of the second day that the guide declared the fort to be near at hand.

It had formerly been built at the head of a small bay, but, owing to changes in the conformation of the coast, the sea had left it a half-mile away and the bay had vanished.

As the little safari broke from a thicket of brush and trees Hammer saw the ruins on a small eminence from which the trees had been cleared.

At one side were two large tents, with the smaller tents and brush huts of the native workmen scattered down the hillside. There seemed to be no one in sight, however, and Hammer sent the guide on to stir up Dr. Krausz or his assistants.

He was in an ill-humour, and made no secret of it. On that two days' march he had been tortured by insects, irritated by his porters, and plagued by the remembrance of what had occurred at Mombasa; he decided that he thoroughly hated East Africa, and longed to be once more out at sea on the bridge of the *Daphne*.

"By Godfrey," he ejaculated, staring at the silent camp ahead, "when I get out of this devilish

country I'll stay out! The ocean is good enough for me, and no mistake. I wonder what's happened to this place, anyhow? Where are all those Dutchmen?"

The guide had run ahead to the two large tents, where a few other natives appeared, talking to him. Above, the cleared hilltop showed long lines of ruined stone-walls three or four feet in height, crowned by one or two spreading mimosa-trees which had evidently been too large for removal.

It was a naked-looking place, with the deep jungle behind and around and running down toward the shore where the sunset gleam was striking the ocean and the eastern skies to flame, and Hammer wondered where water came from for camp use—a thought born of his late experiences.

This was answered by the sight of two or three Kiswahili coming from the ruins with kettles, and the American realized that the fort must have been built around a spring or well.

The porters slowly wound up the hill, singing happily enough, and half a dozen natives crowded around the guide as he returned to meet them. All were capering and dancing like children, but Hammer was in no mood to handle them gently.

"Well," he snapped, "where are the *sahibs*?"

"They are not here, sar," returned the guide. "Here is one man from them," and he pointed to a grinning fellow who stepped out boldly.

“I am Potbelly, sar; very good mission-boy,” he announced complacently. “Missy Professor she say she not see you, not well in the stomach. The Herr Doctor, he went off this morning, sar, with all men hereabouts, in order to engage native help from nigger village inside of the coast. He will be back very immediately, sar, and Missy Professor say you take tent——”

“You’re blamed right, I’ll take his tent,” ejaculated Hammer angrily, “and you see that these boys are attended to after the stuff is piled—savvy?”

Potbelly savvied and guided Hammer to one of the two large tents. Here he found comparative comfort; his two personal boys making a bath ready; but his reception was vexing in the extreme.

The Missy Professor, of course, was Professor Sara L. Helmuth. She probably had the other tent, with her own attendants, and of course Krausz would never have gone off and left her alone unless she was perfectly safe here. The doctor was losing no time, evidently, since he was already off engaging workmen and getting things under way.

The chop-box which the planter had sent with his boys had been used up, and as there was no sign of eatables about the doctor’s tent, Hammer changed into some of the German’s clothes and went forth to investigate in a vile temper.

His proficiency in Arabic, of a sort, had vastly increased since leaving Melindi, and, finding that the natives were gathered about the boxes which he had brought outside Professor Helmuth's tent, he strode into the midst and demanded dinner.

Now, whether it was that the American overestimated the intelligence of the Kiswahili and Arab half-castes, or whether the absence of Potbelly in his mistress's tent left the other boys helpless, nothing ensued save a violent jabbering, in which every native tried to talk at once, the whole gradually rising to a shrill outburst of angry shouts, and Hammer's temper gave way.

Relying on the safety of his Arabic the American made himself heard above the uproar, lashing about with a convenient bullock-whip hide and pouring out a raging flood of invective and expletive.

Before the face of his anger the Kiswahili melted away in terror, and long ere his rage was exhausted he found himself standing alone, glaring around vainly for someone on whom to finish his vocabulary.

A moment later Potbelly appeared jauntily from Professor Helmuth's tent, bearing a slip of paper. With a watchful eye on the whip he handed it to Hammer and skipped out of reach, vanishing with a final grin. The American opened the paper, and was dumbfounded. He read:

DEAR SIR:

I would thank you to remember that there is a lady within hearing. If common decency will not restrain your language, I shall be compelled to take other measures which will have that effect. SARA L. HELMUTH.

“Good Lord!” gasped Hammer in dismay. “I never had any idea—why, she must know Arabic! Oh, darn it all, anyway—I wish I was out of this confounded place! Mixed up with blue-eyed fat men and short-haired women and Dutchmen—good *night!*”

The Kiswahili had vanished. Potbelly had vanished. Even the daylight had almost vanished, and without a word Hammer flung down the whip, tore the note into pieces and threw it to the breeze, then turned to the tent of the “lady professor”, as he mentally termed her.

“Very sorry, Professor Helmuth.” He raised his voice, but without especial civility in his tone. “I apologize, of course. I didn’t know you understood Arabic. I’ll trouble you no more.”

As no answer came he returned to the other tent, and in desperation seated himself on a camp-stool. With his pipe alight, he faced the fast-gathering shadows outside, and a few moments later was startled by a wild outburst of yells.

Knowing nothing of the country, when the yells grew closer and more threatening the American

leaped to the conclusion that the natives were on the war-path, and he leaped up.

Almost at his side stood a heavy, double-barrelled shotgun, and, making sure that this was loaded, he stepped to the front of the tent to investigate. No one seemed to be in sight, for darkness was almost on the camp; but, seeing a light in the other tent, he walked toward it with the idea of defending the lady professor.

The place was an inferno, what with the shrill yells and occasional shots; and from the noise, Hammer concluded that the camp must be surrounded by hundreds of men.

Suddenly a dark figure loomed up in the dusk a few feet away, and instantly he brought up his weapon.

“Hold on!” he shouted angrily. “Who the devil are you?”

For answer he felt the barrel of the gun gripped and flung up, and found himself looking into the wrong end of a revolver. Then——

“*Mein Gott!* It iss Mr. Hammer!”

“Krausz—good Lord, I nearly plugged you. man! What’s going on here, an attack?”

The other stared at him a moment, their faces close. Hammer was quick to observe a startled suspicion in the Teuton’s heavy features, and the revolver did not go down.

“What are you doing with that gun?” demanded Krausz threateningly.

“Holding it,” was the American’s laconic response. Then, at a fresh outburst of yells: “You aren’t going to stand here and be murdered, I hope?”

“Murdered? *Hein?*” For an instant the other was puzzled, then his teeth flashed in a sudden laugh as he understood.

“Oh, you thought it was an attack, yess? And so you got out the gun—ho-ho! Come to my tent—— Pardon, me, but I must laugh, for it iss but my home-coming, Mr. Hammer. Have you dined?”

“I haven’t anything. I’m stiff and sore and grouchy, and all I want is to get out of this blasted country as quick as I can.”

The doctor laughed again, and they returned to the tent together. Before Krausz had finished his bath the camp had undergone a transformation in Hammer’s eyes. Fires had been built, around which masses of natives were grouped; there was a smell of roasting meat in the air, and brush huts were being quickly put up by the dozen.

Jenson received a sound berating for not having attended to Hammer’s wants in better fashion at Melindi, and by the time they sat down to mess with the secretary and Baumgardner, the American was feeling more like himself.

Still, he reflected, if the country was as peaceable and quiet as the scientist declared it to be, that revolver had flashed out with marvellous promptitude.

Professor Helmuth had been on the ground nearly two weeks, and had made things ready generally against the doctor's arrival, with the assistance of a few mission-boys.

The Kiswahili, it seemed, had refused to leave their fields to work for a woman, even at the urging of the district commissioner; but Krausz had easily procured two hundred of them, who would dig trenches and bring in food supplies for the whole camp.

Now that he was here, he confidently predicted that things would go forward with a rush; but whether it was the champagne, served abundantly with dinner, or whether the remembrance of that flourished revolver still stuck in Hammer's crop, he did not exactly like the way in which the archaeologist referred to his assistant.

He learned that the lady professor kept strictly to herself after working hours, even to taking her meals apart; and this did not raise her in the American's estimation.

In her position, he considered, she should frankly accept such things and not be so stuck on conventions. None the less, when he expressed himself in such wise, Dr. Krausz took it as a huge joke and poked Jenson familiarly in the ribs, upon which another bottle of champagne was opened.

Hammer, who had absorbed his full share in his bitterness of spirit, suddenly felt out of humour

with the Teutonic attitude of mind toward women in general. Spectacles or no spectacles, if the lady hailed from California then she ought to have more sense, and probably these Germans had handled her coarsely. So he leaned over the table and said as much with the innate earnestness of his convictions.

“*Nein*,” returned the doctor good-humouredly; “I am not German, but Saxon, yess! So you think she wass not asked rightly, Mr. Hammer? Perhaps if you asked her then she might come, no?”

“By Godfrey, if she’s American I’d take a gamble on it!” blurted out Hammer, and wagged a long forefinger under the nose of Krausz. “I’ll bet you that *I* could get her over quick enough! I’ll bet a million dollars I could do it!”

“So?” The archaeologist turned and leered heavily at the others. “You hear, gentlemen? Then it iss a bet—a bet of one million dollars, yess! The *fräulein*, she does not like to eat with you, Jenson, *hein*?”

Jenson babbled something, Baumgardner boomed out a stolid assent, and Hammer had a sudden conviction that if he took another glass of champagne he was going to be very very drunk indeed, whereupon he removed his shoes and climbed inside the doctor’s mosquito shelter.

In the morning he realized that that extra glass would have been entirely superfluous, to judge from his head. It was after nine, but he had a tub

and a cup of coffee and felt considerably improved, and, finding from the boys that everyone was at work on the hill, he donned his new sun-helmet and started for the ruins above.

Each of the German sailors had charge of a gang of fifteen or twenty natives, and trenches were being laid out between the lines of the old walls, under the supervision of Krausz, who sat beneath a grass-thatched shelter at a table with Jenson. The doctor greeted him with a cordial grin, though for some reason—probably the heat—the ribbon of muscle in his temple was throbbing noticeably.

“And the *fräulein*—she will dine with us this evening?”

“Huh?”

Hammer stared, astonished, until the wager was brought slowly to his recollection. Then he looked around in some dismay, but the lady professor had not left her tent and the doctor failed to assign any reason thereto.

“Then I guess she won’t leave for me,” and Hammer ruefully related the incident of the note he had received the evening before, at which the doctor laughed uproariously, and even Jenson cracked a sly smile. Krausz explained that Professor Helmuth was an expert in Semitic languages, and also that the bet was off.

“Your beastly champagne did it,” said Hammer irritably.

“But listen!” Earnestness swept into the

doctor's heavy black eyes and his hand went to the American's arm. "If you will do it, yess, I will pay one hundred dollars——"

"You'll—*what?*" Hammer stared at him a moment, then flung off the hand as he turned away. "Been hitting up the booze again this morning, have you? I'll thank you to get that launch ready for me to get back to Melindi in. As for your she-professor, I'll have her over to dine this evening just to show you what a blooming fool you are, doctor. Then I'll start back in the launch after dark. I've had enough of this place."

How his remarks were received he did not see, for he strode downhill without once looking back. But the scientist's offer to pay him for getting Professor Helmuth to dine with them was both disgusting and illuminating.

It filled him with distaste for everything German—or Saxon—with particular emphasis upon Krausz' ribbon of muscle; and it also made him wonder why the she-professor was refusing to honour the general mess with her company. Did she carry primness to such a limit?

"I'll fix her," he said, and upon reaching his tent sent a boy for Potbelly. When that individual appeared, Hammer gave him his name, stated that he was an American, and said to tell Professor Helmuth that he intended to call on her in ten minutes.

Potbelly's grin vanished and he looked ugly

instantly, whereat Hammer took him by the shoulder and assisted him from the tent with a kick.

He watched Potbelly disappear inside the other large tent, then sat down and smoked his pipe.

When the ten minutes were up he promptly knocked the ashes out of his pipe, began to whistle and started for the other tent.

Potbelly looked out, vanished again, and the next minute the tent-flap was pushed aside and Hammer obtained his first view of Professor Sara L. Helmuth—and he was undoubtedly the most astonished man in the whole of British East Africa at that instant.

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY PROFESSOR

The American's dreams of spectacles and blue *pagaris* was swept away, for standing facing him with expectant eyes was—a girl or a woman, Hammer could not tell which.

There was some mistake, of course; self-possessed, cool, deliberate in word and look as she was, this slender, brown-haired, brown-eyed girl could not be the austere mistress of Semitic tongues——

“I beg your pardon,” he found himself stammering weakly. “I didn't mean that message for you; I wanted to see Miss Helmuth, the scientific person who doesn't like my Arabic cuss-words.”

A trace of red crept through her cheeks, but her eyes held his with no response to the whimsical laugh of him.

“I am Miss Helmuth,” she said coldly enough, not moving that he might enter the tent, and appraising him keenly as she spoke.

Hammer stared at her in open disbelief, but not for long. Something in the curve of the dark eyebrows and the set of the girlish mouth, something in the poise of the small head, gave a hint

of resolution and firmness—and Hammer took the hint.

“Ah,” and he bowed with his fine smile, “I trust you will pardon my surprise. I was looking for a spectacled, gaunt lady of uncertain age, and never expected to find——”

“I am not interested in your expectations, Mr. Hammer,” her reply came coldly. “What is your business with me?”

Again Hammer was taken all aback and could not quite readjust himself.

“Why—er——” It struck him that she would think that he was attempting to flirt with her, and the thought sent him floundering deeper. “You see, Miss—Professor, I mean—Professor Helmuth, I’m first officer of the *Daphne*, and—— Oh, blame it all! Honest, Miss Helmuth, get that look off your face or I’ll run!”

A flicker of amusement came into her brown eyes, then it passed, and her look hardened strangely. Hammer could almost have imagined that she had been crying not so very long ago.

“Really, Mr. Hammer, I think that would be the best thing you could do. I have no desire to have any dealings with you whatever. Kindly state your business and go.”

“Well, that’s flat enough, anyhow.” Hammer’s eyes flashed for a second. “But I must say that such downright discourtesy doesn’t go with your

looks, professor, though anything might be expected of this outfit.

“Still, as an American, you ought logically to be a little more human and a little less priggish. If we were on Fifth Avenue I wouldn’t blame you, but here in Africa I should think you’d have more sense.”

She gazed at him, her eyes widening, as if this direct attack startled and surprised her. Hammer was instantly contrite.

“Well, I apologize again, professor. You certainly riled me up for a minute, and I’m sorry I expressed myself so bluntly. I guess Krausz wasn’t to blame so much as I thought he was, if you handled him like that. You see, I came over to ask you if you wouldn’t show up at——”

“So you dare to carry out that bet made in a drinking bout with that man Krausz and his associates?” Poor Hammer’s jaw dropped as she straightened up, anger in every feature, and fairly flung the words at him.

“Haven’t I been put to enough shame without having my name bandied about over the wine and cigars? For a moment you nearly deluded me into thinking you a man of another kind, Mr. Hammer.”

“Eh? Say, professor, I don’t think I’m wise to all this business by a long shot! Look here—— No, don’t fire up yet for a minute—— Tell me

how you knew about that affair? It's true, of course——”

There was scorn in her eyes as the American stopped, embarrassed.

“If you want to know, I heard of it through one of my boys, who got it from your own boys. Now, Mr. Hammer, you know the penalty attached to entering this tent. If you dare to attempt it, either you or your associates, I shall carry out my threat to the letter. You may carry back that report. Good day.”

With that she turned inside, but before she could lower the flap Hammer sprang forward. His mind was in a swirl, and he only realized the one great fact that this woman had a very wrong idea of him and of his intentions. Catching the flap from the outside, he paused as she whirled on him indignantly.

“Just a minute, Miss Helmuth! Look here! I'm not an associate of Dr. Krausz, in the first place, and in the next I don't intend to carry back any report. But I do want to square myself with you, honest, and I think you might give me a chance.”

He found himself, for the second time within twenty-four hours, looking squarely into the muzzle of a revolver which she had plucked from the table behind her.

“You step inside this tent, Mr. Hammer, and I fire.”

“But, confound it!” he cried, astounded, “I haven’t done——”

“Let go that flap and get out of here!”

Helplessly, Hammer stared into her brown eyes and read determination there. He made one more attempt, however.

“Please listen to reason, professor! I’m not trying to put anything over on you; all I want is to get out of this accursed place and to make you look at the thing straight before I go. I didn’t know I’d got in so bad——”

“Let go that flap or I’ll have my boys force you out of here bodily!”

The brown eyes were blazing with fury, but Hammer thought that never had he seen a woman look so beautiful, so capable of taking care of herself, so thoroughly efficient.

Realizing that she was in no mood to be argued with, however, he obeyed her command; and as he turned on his heel a single word broke from him with uncontrolled emphasis:

“Damn!”

The grinning face of Potbelly peered at him from a corner of the tent, and he strode back to the other canvas with his ears burning. It would have been a bad moment for any who had interfered with him just then, and perhaps the cunning Kiswahili recognized the fact, for they kept well out of his way.

The humiliation of the interview was maddening

to him; and when he called the boys who had been loaned him by the planter and found that they had slipped home early that morning, he was in savage humour.

For a moment he determined to return to the tent of Professor Helmuth and dare her to carry out her threat, but second thought decided him against it.

She had been in earnest beyond any doubt—but why? From the very face of her, she had too much good hard sense to be the prig Krausz had painted her; and why should she be willing to carry out so desperate a threat?

At this he recalled her words: “You know the penalty attached to entering this tent.” Why had this girl set such a penalty? That she had done so, publicly, was evident from her words, nor did she bear Dr. Sigurd Krausz any great love; yet she was his assistant; she had come out from Dresden in charge of the preliminary work; she must have known him well before she started; and, above all, Krausz was an eminent man in his line of work.

Yet Hammer knew only too well how a man, once away from his natural environment, may do things he never would have dreamed of doing otherwise. Could it be that Dr. Krausz, or others of the party, had insulted the girl?

“By Godfrey! That name Sara isn’t so bad after all, come to think of it,” and Hammer rose,

frowning. "I guess I'll go up and see that chap. If he's been cutting any didoes around here I'll show him a few things. I wish Harcourt was here; I'm blessed if I know what to make of it all!"

He passed the she-professor's tent and strode up the hill; for if there was to be trouble with the doctor, he wanted to have it over with at once.

And as he went he patted the side-pocket of his coat, where his old-style revolver still reposed; he remembered the way Krausz had whipped out his weapon the evening before, and the thought was hardly reassuring.

He found the doctor as he had left him, and under the direction of the Germans the natives were beginning to make the dirt fly. Krausz looked up, his heavy eyes narrowing slightly at sight of the American's face; then he smiled cordially.

"Well, Mr. Hammer? And how did you find the *fräulein*?"

"A darned sight worse than I expected," returned Hammer frankly. "See here, doctor: I'd like to know why she won't let a man enter her tent under pain of firing at him, and why she's holding a grudge against you?"

The ribbon of muscle began to beat under the skin of the other's brow, though Krausz's expression never changed. Jenson apparently, paid no attention.

"Pouf!" The big Saxon spread his hands with a Continental shrug. "My dear fellow, it iss her

fancy. What can you expect? She hass never been here in Africa before, and she iss nervous. Ass to dissliking me, why should she? Wass I not her father's friend before he died?"

"How the devil do I know? It's a cinch she hasn't any love for you, doctor; and I'd like to know why that girl has to barricade herself in her tent, that's all. What's more, she isn't the sort to be nervous.

Hammer looked down at the other, hands on his hips, his brown face determined. He realized that he was beginning to dislike the sight hissing accent of his employer, no less than that curious muscle in the forehead, and the aggressive note in his voice was thinly veiled.

Krausz seemed surprised at the change in his first officer, and once more his eyes narrowed; but this time they were menacing—so menacing that Hammer felt uneasy.

"Are you her guardian, Mr. Hammer?"

"No; but I'm an American, and I used to be a gentleman."

"Then you will please not interfere in a family affair, my friend. I am her guardian, the executor of her father's estate——"

"Now, see here, doctor. I'm not hunting trouble, understand; but I'm fairly competent to handle any that comes my way. To know Semitic languages and be curator in a big Dresden library takes time and work; besides, I can tell from that girl's face

that she's of age. You're not her guardian any more than I am, if you want it straight."

"My dear sir, you misunderstand! Yess, she iss twenty-three years of age, but I *wass* her guardian, ass she will tell you. I *wass* her father's best friend, and in my arms he died, yess. It *wass* I who got her that library position. Ah, come!" Krausz rose quickly and patted Hammer on the shoulder, smilingly. "You and I, we are too big men, yess, to be losing good humour over a little girl! *Lieber Gott!* Iss she not to me like a daughter, no? Come down to luncheon, my friend, and over a bottle will we forget all this——"

"No more bottles, I guess," said Hammer decidedly. None the less, the scientist's words had their effect. "However, I don't want to butt in, doctor, and I'm sorry I made a mistake. I go back to-night, I suppose?"

"Yess; Baumgardner shall take you in the launch."

So the matter was closed. The American still felt a trifle uneasy; but Dr. Krausz' words had placed the affair in a new light before him, and he forced himself to the belief that he had interfered in some petty quarrel where he had no concern. Krausz had succeeded in spiking his guns.

With Jenson and Baumgardner, they sat down to a very enjoyable lunch in the doctor's tent; for Krausz seemed to have brought no end of chop-boxes from Mombasa, and the natives had fetched

in plenty of fruit, vegetables, and fresh meat.

Even Jenson seemed to attain some semblance of life, almost growing enthusiastic over the work that had been begun; and the American found Krausz cordial and entertaining as he had rarely been before. He had an unfailing supply of his long black panatelas; and while all four of them were sitting smoking and chatting over their coffee, there came a sudden interruption.

“*Hodi!*”

All turned. There, standing unconcernedly in the doorway, was a native streaked with sweat, his eyes roving from face to face, a heavy fold of skin hanging in the slit lobe of one ear. Several of the camp-boys stood behind him uncertainly. Once more he repeated the Kiswahili greeting.

“*Hodi!*”

“*Karibu,*” grunted Krausz; and then in English: “Who are you? What is it?”

“*Bwana* Hammer?” came the laconic query.

“That’s me!” exclaimed the American. “What do you want?”

The Kiswahili looked him over for a second, then nodded as if to himself and drew the skin from his ear-lobe. From it he took a small packet and handed it to the American, after which, not deigning to say another word, he turned and stalked away.

“Well, that’s a funny proposition!” exclaimed Hammer, staring at the heavy little object in his

hand. The others said nothing, but Krausz smoked furiously as he watched. Out of sheer decency Hammer felt that he must open the thing before them, and proceeded to do so, wondering greatly what it was and why the bearer had not been more loquacious.

Unwrapping a heavy fold of tissue-paper, he caught a little silver ring that leaped out into his hand. It was a cheap thing enough, and he remembered having seen just such things sold to tourists at Port Said, with "Arabic initials engraved while you wait."

Sure enough, looking closer at it, he perceived a thin tracery on the signet side; but his slight knowledge of Arabic did not extend to reading the language, and he passed it over to the doctor with a surprised laugh.

"Can you read Arabic, doctor?"

"*Nein*. Wass there no writing?"

"Not a scrap," said Hammer. "Let's get that boy back here."

The messenger was sent for, but he proved to have left camp without waiting to so much as be fed—a thing unusual, to provoke comment from the other natives.

"Well"—and Dr. Krausz shrugged his shoulders as he rose—"there iss some mistake, or the letter hass been lost. It iss but a trifle. We must get back to work, my friends, for the afternoon iss getting on."

The others rose with a sigh, and they went off together, Hammer stretching out luxuriously on a cot and wondering afresh where this mysterious little ring could have come from, and what the engraving meant. It was irritating, from its very littleness, while the strange conduct of the messenger refused to be explained away.

If the thing had come from Harcourt it would have had some word with it. In any case, what reason would Harcourt have for sending such a thing?

It had probably come from Melindi, however, and Hammer had not the faintest idea of who could have sent it from there.

The odd part of it was that the worth of the ring itself must be far below the cost of the messenger's services, nor was there any apparent reason for the ending of it.

"By Godfrey," thought Hammer suddenly, "I'll send it over to Miss Helmuth!"

Clapping his hands, he sent a boy for Potbelly. Since the Lady Professor was an adept at Arabic to the extent of understanding certain expressions which would hardly bear adequate translation, Hammer saw no reason why she could not decipher the engraving for him.

After he had sent the boy he hesitated, remembering the humiliation he had already passed through; but a moment later Potbelly appeared at the entrance of the tent.

“Come here,” said Hammer curtly, holding out the ring. “You see this? Take it to Professor Helmuth. Ask her to tell what this means—— Why, what the devil’s the matter with you?”

Potbelly’s grin had faded suddenly; rather, it had been frozen into a ghastly semblance of mirth, and he looked from the ring to Hammer with absolute terror.

“You savvy him, *Bwana*?” he whimpered. “You savvy *Bwana* John?”

“What Master John?” repeated the American suspiciously, then grinned. “John Jones or John Solomon?”

To his intense amazement, Potbelly merely whimpered again, then turned, speaking over his shoulder as he went through the door.

“You come, *Bwana*. I think mebbeso Missy Professor she see you.”

“Well, I’ll be darned!” murmured Hammer, and followed like a man in a dream.

CHAPTER VII

HAMMER STARTS SOMETHING

The American was at a loss to make out what had happened to Potbelly. The mission-boy had arrived grinningly, almost insolently, and after a look at the ring he had seemed to be transfixed by terror. What was there about that ring to create such an impression? Certainly it looked harmless enough, and Herr Krausz would have observed anything unduly curious about it.

From inside the tent of Professor Helmuth he could hear, as he waited, Potbelly's voice rising shrilly, though the words were lost. Then came a softer, deeper voice, which he recognized as that of the lady in question. He grinned to himself as he remembered her cool determination of that morning.

"I guess Potbelly's having his troubles about now," he thought. "By Godfrey, I'll have to get to the bottom of this mystery some way! And the only way to do it, I guess, is to have a frank explanation with Professor Sara L. Helmuth—bless her brown eyes! I wonder why I never liked that name Sara before now!"

Hammer was still cogitating this all-important

point when he saw Potbelly's black visage appear from the tent-flap, and the boy beckoned hastily. The American, holding the ring in his hand, stepped to the tent door.

Sara L. Helmuth, professor and mistress of Semitic languages, was sitting at the table inside, a revolver ready to her hand.

Simply and coolly dressed in white, with her rippling brown hair coiled loosely on her head, she offered an extremely attractive picture to Cyrus Hammer, in spite of the circles of weariness and trouble about her eyes.

He had always felt a weakness for women who were self-reliant without becoming, as he had phrased it, "short-haired", and that she was such a woman had been evident from the first. Moreover, the doctor had said that she was just twenty-three.

She did not rise, but stood looking at him for a moment, and Hammer felt that to her the situation was, for some reason, very grave. Instinctively he sympathized with her, and under the thought his face lost its harder outlines, though it retained to the full all its rugged, healthy strength. Then she waved her hand toward a camp-stool just inside the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Hammer. Make sure the boys are watching, Potbelly."

The mission-boy disappeared. Hammer felt unaccountably at a loss, as though all his assurance

were ebbing away beneath her steady gaze, and waited for her to speak.

"Potbelly tells me, Mr. Hammer, that you have come from Mr. Solomon. If that was true, why did you not speak of it this morning?"

"Eh?" he stammered, utterly bewildered. "Mr. Solomon? You mean John Solomon?"

"Who else would I mean?"

"Why—Miss Helmuth, I—you can search me! I haven't come from John Solomon, not that I know of. What's got into that fellow of yours, anyway? Now please don't look like that"—for she had suddenly stiffened in her chair, her eyes cold—"but I can't make head or tale of this thing, professor. That's straight!"

"I didn't tell Potbelly that I wanted to see you, and I didn't send him to you with that message. I wanted him to ask you if you could read the seal engraving on this ring, for it looks like Arabic. He jumped off on his own hook and told me to come along."

There was unbelief in the brown eyes that gazed archingly into his, but the American's whole attitude betrayed the sincerity behind his words. Slowly the girl relaxed in her chair, and held out her hand.

"Let me see the ring."

He gave it to her in silence. She bent over it a moment, then rose with lithe grace and took an enlarging glass from an open suitcase near by.

She stood by the light of the open flap, scrutinising it closely, while Hammer's eyes wandered over her slender figure and jerked back quickly to her face, almost guiltily: for Cyrus Hammer was like most highly-strung, clean, hard-living men in that he idealized women in general, and his own women friends in particular.

That, indeed, had contributed largely to his utter demoralization after the disillusion that had come upon him three years before.

"Where did you get this ring, Mr. Hammer?"

He started, for his thoughts had been far away. She returned to her seat, having seemingly lost her fear for a moment, and he told her how the ring had been brought to him an hour before, and how the messenger had straightway departed without a word of explanation. While he spoke her eyes searched his face keenly, and at the end she nodded.

"I suppose your story is true, Mr. Hammer; though it sounds rather odd, I must admit that there is truth in your face. That is exactly what I cannot understand."

"You can't? Why not, please? You must have a pretty bad opinion of people!"

"Well, perhaps I have some reason for it, Mr. Hammer. But—well, no matter. Where is Mr. Solomon? Have you seen him?"

"Not since he left the yacht," and Hammer told what he knew of John Solomon. It occurred

to him that this was a chance to heal the breach, and accordingly he dilated upon Dr. Sigurd Krausz as a side-issue, putting in as good a word for the scientist as he could. He did not see that suspicion was darkening in the girl's brown eyes as he proceeded, nor did he note that her hand had closed once more upon the revolver, until she held out the ring and interrupted bluntly.

"That is enough, thank you. This ring, as you probably know, bears the Arabic name of Suleiman, or Solomon. There is no use saying any more in favour of Dr. Krausz, Mr. Hammer. Your story is rather improbable, to say the least."

"Why, what do you mean?" He was once more startled by her sudden change of front, comprehending that she had resumed her hostile attitude. "I wish you would tell me if I can be of any help to you, Miss Helmuth! I put it up to the doctor flat, and he told me to keep out of a family row, but——"

"Now, listen, please," she broke in again, her voice cold—almost desperate, he thought vaguely.

"Your story is not convincing, Mr. Hammer, and I am frankly afraid that you think me a good deal of a simpleton. That ring may have come from John Solomon and it may not, but under the circumstances I prefer to take no chances.

"I never met Mr. Solomon, and I never met you; I am practically helpless here, except for my four mission boys, and while you and the doctor may

pull the wool over their eyes, I intend to take care of myself.

“When you can produce Mr. Solomon to vouch for you, then things will be different. Until then, I must decline to have any further communication with you.”

Poor Hammer stared at her, wondering which of them was crazy. A moment before she had seemed perfectly amenable to reason, but his references to Krausz seemed to have flicked her on the raw and turned her against him again.

“But, Miss Helmuth, can’t you see that I am trying to help you? Good Heavens, girl, I’m not any great friend of the doctor! Things here look pretty badly for me, and I’m only anxious to help you if I can. Why are you helpless here? I can’t very well go after Krausz with a shotgun without knowing why!”

“I think you know why, Mr. Hammer, and I don’t believe there is any use in discussing the matter further. There is only one man I can trust, and if you have been telling the truth I will be glad to apologize.

“But you are either a great fool or you are very ignorant of conditions, and if you came from Mr. Solomon I do not think you would be in either category.

“I can only conclude that you are, as you yourself admitted, in the pay of Dr. Krausz. If Mr. Solomon comes, as I have prayed he will come

then he may be able to vouch for you. If not—well, I shall not give up without a fight, that's all."

She rose in dismissal, but Hammer refused to budge.

"Give up what, Miss Helmuth? I'm sorry you don't believe me, but I don't know what the row is about."

The brown eyes gazed at him steadily, almost contemptuously.

"How did Dr. Krausz know that I had appealed to Mr. Solomon for aid?"

"He didn't, that I know of," retorted the American, losing patience. "What on earth is all this talk about that little fat man, anyway? You say you've never met him, then you say that he's the only man you can trust and to bring him along to vouch for me. If I do, who's going to vouch for *him*, I'd like to know?"

Her eyes dilated slowly, and Hammer was under the impression that his words had had some effect. He was soon undeceived, however.

"Oh, is he a little fat man with big blue eyes?" and there was amazement in her voice.

"He is," returned Hammer ungraciously. "Also, he's in the employ of Dr. Krausz as supercargo—same as me, if you please. Also, I think he's the biggest liar unhung. I can't quite see the connection between you and him, professor."

“Then—he was the man who came on the *Mombasa*——” she began as if speaking to herself, stopping abruptly and gazing at Hammer as if he had surprised her into revealing some secret. He paid slight attention to her words, for he was trying to find the clue which so persistently eluded his efforts.

Certainly his own statements were a good deal more lucid than hers, and were not so conflicting by half. Yet she seemed to think that he and Krausz were leagued against her in some way and that the ring was some kind of a trick.

She claimed never to have met Solomon, yet described him and seemed to trust him implicitly! Small wonder that the American groaned to himself in despair.

Sara Helmuth was still standing, however, and now she looked down at him with angry eyes; but Hammer thought that seldom had he seen so magnificent a girl even though her mind might be a trifle unbalanced.

“You seem to be insensible to my invitation to depart, Mr. Hammer,” and there was cold rage in her voice; “and since you have been clever enough to worm most of the secret out of me, I’ll tell you the rest in order to get rid of you.

“Mr. Solomon came aboard the *Mombasa* at London, stating that he was a messenger from John Solomon and proving it quite efficiently. Naturally I did not recognize him, but I turned

over to him the papers, and received them in duplicate when I reached Mombasa from the hands of Potbelly.

“They must have been cabled out, but in any case Potbelly has shown himself worthy of trust, except in this one instance of your fraudulent ring. That is all I know, and you can take it back to your master and share the knowledge with him. Now will you go?”

Hammer began to see light for the first time since the conversation began. John Solomon’s hurried trip aboard the *Mombasa* was explained, it seemed; also the conflicting statements of Miss Helmuth began to straighten themselves out.

And yet the thing sounded so incredible! John Solomon, a fat little cockney supercargo, in league with this girl he had only seen once——

“I’ll go,” he said helplessly, “but I’m going to have this thing out with Krausz and see what screw is loose, Miss Helmuth. I still can’t understand your connection with that little rat Solomon—but I’ll go.”

So he went, without a word more from her, back to the other tent, where he filled his pipe and tried to get the affair into more lucid shape within his own mind. The effort was vain, however.

The one thing that stood out above all others was that Potbelly’s recognition of the ring had been in vain, that Sara Helmuth had absolutely no confidence in it, and had a very lively suspicion

that he and Krausz were attempting to trick her.

But what about? It was no longer a question of this woman being a prig—Hammer saw deeper than that, at least. There was something underlying it all that vitally affected her.

This much he knew: Krausz had sent her certain papers in a black wallet from the hotel in London, and she had given those papers to Solomon five minutes later, doubtless without reading them. Then Solomon had lied to him about the black wallet, and he had done it artistically, too. The American began to consider Solomon seriously.

“I’ll bet a dollar I was right about Schlak’s murder,” he thought suddenly. “John Solomon put that Arab up to testifying as he did, and whether Jenson worked the same game with Baumgardner—say, I’ll run a bluff on that big Dutchman!”

As the idea occurred to him he looked up and saw Baumgardner himself approaching the tent, evidently having been sent for something by the scientist.

Hammer laid down his pipe and waited until the other came up to the entrance, when he quickly brought out his revolver and covered the surprised German.

“Sit down, Baumgardner,” and he made his voice as cold and menacing as possible. “I’ve a word to say to you, my man.”

Anger flitted over the other’s heavy countenance,

but Hammer was in no mood to be trifled with and showed it plainly. The boatswain sat down.

“Now bear in mind that you’re under my authority, bos’n, and not under that of the doctor. No, shut your head! I’ve got you to rights, Baumgardner. Thought you were pretty smooth, didn’t you, when you pulled off that play aboard the yacht? But I’m on to you, and you go back before the German Consul, you and Jenson, and before the British authorities.

“I’m going to open up the case of Schlak’s death with a vengeance, and you’ll get about two years breaking stone on the Mombasa roads for perjury, you and Jenson. How does that strike you, my man?”

It struck, plain enough, and struck heavily. Baumgardner, who was a big, black-haired type like the doctor, stared at first in blank amazement, but when Hammer finished, his jaw had dropped and dismay sat in his eyes. The American, at heart terribly doubtful as to the outcome of his bluff, pressed the advantage instantly.

“Now, look here, Baumgardner. You’re a good seaman, and I’d sooner put Jenson over the road than you. Besides, Mr. Solomon and his Arab friend are going the same way, so there’ll be company, and to spare. Now tell me exactly what Jenson said to you outside the chart-house that night.”

Baumgardner, whose heavy wits failed to come up to the scratch, blinked.

"Why, Mr. Hammer," he responded humbly, "he just fixed up the story with me, that was all, and said he'd stand by me. How did you know about it, sir?"

"None of your business," snapped Hammer, unutterably relieved. "So it was a frame-up, eh? And Solomon never had the knife to your knowledge?"

"No, sir. It belonged to Mr. Schlak."

"Good Lord! Is that so?"

"Yes, sir. The sheath was hanging on his wall, but Mr. Jenson said to say nothing about it. The hands didn't know because they'd never been in his cabin and he generally carried another."

"Then we'll land Solomon—but why did he admit having had it?"

The other only stared dully at him, his face pale. The American had almost forgotten about Sara Helmuth in the light of this amazing revelation which his bluff had forced out of a clear sky.

He thought swiftly. Solomon must have admitted having had the knife in order to give better colour to the Arab's testimony, and the cleverness of it appalled Hammer, who had scarcely expected such astuteness from the fat supercargo.

Now, however, he determined to carry out the affair to the limit. He would take Baumgardner and Jenson back to Mombasa, get hold of Solomon

and the Arab, which could easily be done, and set the whole group breaking stone with the possible exception of the boatswain, who had been a mere tool in Jenson's hands.

Moreover, the pallid-faced secretary was turning out to be a dangerous character. The American's dislike of him was being well verified, and he would have to keep a good watch on the viperish little black-clad man on the trip to Melindi, where the district commissioner could take him in charge.

But while he was turning the matter over in his mind, Baumgardner, perhaps suspecting that the American had bluffed the truth out of him, was regaining his lost self-control, and now spoke out with startling boldness.

"You'll have to see Dr. Krausz, Mr. Hammer, before taking us back. I'm working for him——"

"You shut your head!" Hammer shoved the revolver back into his pocket, for he much preferred to use his fists, and his face, dangerously alight, shot forward almost into the German's.

"Don't give me any of your lip or I'll show you who you're working for, you pie-faced Dutchman! Now stay where you are while I fetch Jenson, and we'll be off for Melindi in ten minutes. You leave this affair to me and I'll pull you out of it; but start any monkey-work and I'll make it hot for you. Don't forget that."

Baumgardner was thoroughly subdued and showed no sign of giving further trouble. So Hammer,

determining to get off in the launch before the afternoon grew old, called one of the boys who was in sight.

“You talk English? Good. Break out two chop-boxes and put them aboard the launch—where is she, Baumgardner?”

“Anchored a quarter-mile off shore, sir. The boat’s on the beach. It’s too shallow to run her in closer, sir.”

“Very good. Boy, what’s your name?”

“Mohammed Bari, sar.”

“Then get a couple of boys down to the boat with the boxes and stay here. Be ready to lead me down there. That’s all. How far is the shore from here, bos’n?”

“Straight down, sir, about three hundred yards. But we come by a path, sir, which goes down to the boat. It’s a matter of a half-mile.”

“All right. You stay where you are.”

So, having no more fears that the boatswain would prove insubordinate, Hammer rummaged around in the effects of Dr. Krausz until he found a length of very serviceable wire-twisted cord which would make a good substitute for handcuffs. He was going to take no chances with Adolf Jenson. A moment later he started for the hill. With one of the sailors to accompany them and fetch back the launch from Melindi, he could take care of Jenson. He found Krausz and the secretary at their

table beneath the sun-shelter, and perhaps something in his eye warned the latter, for Jenson started to his feet as Hammer came up.

“You’re coming back to Mombasa with me, Jenson,” said the American, reaching forward and dragging the fellow out bodily by the collar. “Stick out your hands, you little beast!”

“*Was ist?*” The doctor’s voice was very gentle, but Hammer felt a little rim of steel touching his neck. “Let that man go please, yess?”

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE OPEN

Cyrus Hammer had never felt a revolver-muzzle against the back of his neck before, and the touch was decidedly unpleasant. It sent a peculiar cold chill quivering down the length of his spine, and there was an odd note in the doctor's voice which sent the same kind of a chill through his brain.

In no sense was the American a coward, but he had seen enough of life to have grasped an extremely difficult accomplishment—that of knowing when a man is in cold earnest, from the mere tone of his voice.

Dr. Krausz was just at present in earnest, and therefore Hammer loosened his grip on Jenson and tossed his length of cord on the table; there had swiftly leaped into his mind a premonition that he had overlooked the most difficult part of the proposition—by name, Dr. Sigurd Krausz.

“Now will you please explain, Mr. Hammer.”

So Hammer explained, and the manner of his explanation was not calculated to soothe the doctor's feelings or those of Jenson, who had shrunk back beside his protector. The American was angry, and three years on cattle-boats give an

angry man a vocabulary which is little short of being extraordinary.

When he made an end, Jenson, with his rat-like snarl, was clinging to the scientist like a frightened child, while Krausz, his revolver put aside, was looking at Hammer with an ominous glint in his black eyes. Over his temple that peculiar strip of muscle was pounding furiously with every throb of blood.

“So, Baumgardner has confessed, no?” The doctor’s voice was fairly athrill with hostility, though the words came calmly enough. “And on the word of a drunken sailor you would deprive me of my helper when I need him most?”

Hammer flushed. “Your assistant is in her tent down there, doctor,” he said significantly. “And, by the way, I had a talk with her this afternoon. No, I’m not doing this on the word of any drunken sailor, doctor, but that fellow Jenson is going over the road, and you may as well make up your mind to it. Either he or John Solomon knows who killed Hans Schlak, and I’m going to find out.”

There was no mistaking the rage that flashed out into the heavy eyes, but it was directed against Jenson, as if the name of the murdered mate had aroused a slumbering ferocity within the big Saxon.

“So!” he spoke slowly, looking down at Jenson with terrible quiet, only that ribbon of muscle

betraying his emotion. "So? And whoever killed Hans Schlak, it was he who took that paper from me when I was drunk, yess. I do know Adolf Jenson. I did not suspect that it was you or that it was Mr. Solomon, but if it was you, Adolf, you shall be very sorry, yess!"

Until now poor Jenson had trembled in silence, but he looked up and caught the full gaze of Krausz, and it was as if something in the heavy powerful face had blasted the last remnants of courage within him. He buried his face with a muffled scream.

"I didn't! I lied because Mr. Hammer and Solomon were friends—they both hated me—don't look at me like that, Herr Doctor! Before God, I didn't take the paper!"

It struck Hammer as odd that the taking of that paper seemed more important to Jenson than the murder of Schlak. However, he had to ascertain what the attitude of the archaeologist was to be.

"See here, doctor, I want to do the square thing, but you can't stand up for this man. He's perjured himself in court and he's got to explain it. Of course, I can't scrap you and your men—for these Germans will stand by you—but what I can and will do is to go back to Melindi and send the district commissioner up here for Jenson. If you persist in sticking up for him you'll get into hot water, that's all."

Krausz looked at him calmly.

“Do not get excited, Mr. Hammer? I am not sticking up for anyone; but Adolf cannot go back to Mombasa, just yet. Later, perhaps——”

Jenson pulled away from him suddenly, looking up with his viperish snarl.

“If you let them take me, Herr Doctor, I’ll tell——”

With brutal force the Saxon’s hand struck down, caught Jenson square in the mouth, and knocked him under the table, where he lay whimpering. Hammer was startled at the change in the face of the man; its glossed-over brutality was standing out in full relief, its heavy eyes were filled with rage, its finely-chiselled mouth was convulsed with untrammelled passion.

“Pig! Dog! Be quiet!” bellowed the doctor threateningly, then turned to the American. “As for you, Mr. Hammer, of what did you talk with the *fräulein*?”

“Eh? The professor? Why, we—say, I can’t see where that’s any of your business, doctor. You’d better attend to the matter in hand and quit using your fists on that poor devil. Now, speak up, for I don’t intend to hang around these diggings all afternoon. Are you going to hand Jenson over to me, or not?”

“My friend, I do not like your tone. Remember that I am your employer, yess. When I ask you a question I expect it to answered be.”

The two men glared at each other across the table, beneath which lay the prostrate figure of Jenson. From behind them came an occasional guttural exclamation from one of the seamen-overseers, and the ring of pick or shovel on stone; if the scene beneath the grass-thatch was observed, it passed unnoticed.

And beyond was the jungle and forest, deep, silent, tropical; behind, the tents and brush huts, the jungle again, and then the blue sea.

It may have been that a breath of bracing salt air drifted in from the sea at his back, but Hammer felt unaccountably stubborn on a sudden. He closed his fists, and was aware of the silver ring setting a bit tightly around his little finger.

"I feel the same way about it, exactly," was his dry response, and there was danger in his level grey eyes. "I asked you what you were going to do about Jenson, doctor, and I'm waiting for my answer."

He saw the burly hand tighten on the revolver, and the ribbon of muscle deepened with the flush that swept across the face of Krausz at his words; he saw the figure under the table change its position slightly; he saw one of the German seamen painstakingly explain to a group of natives how to handle their picks properly; but all the while he was gazing steadily into the black eyes of the scientist, waiting for the latter's decision.

Then the affair was taken out of his hands.

For, being trained thus to see many things while looking only at one thing, the American caught a glint of something bright beneath the table.

With his nerves on edge as they were, he shied at the thing as a horse shies at a newspaper, and well it was for him that he did so.

Barely had he shifted his position when a splash of red ripped out in the shadow of the table, something sang viciously an inch from his ear and whined up through the grass thatch, and he realized that Adolf Jenson had made answer for himself.

Hammer never attempted to excuse what happened next, though he was never very sorry over it. Comprehending in a flash that Jenson had fired at him, and that Dr. Krausz stood waiting, revolver in hand, he tackled the more dangerous opponent first, even without provocation.

The scientist's face was dawning with surprise, for he had evidently not been expecting Jenson's move, when Hammer's fist caught him squarely in the chin.

Hammer had no time to waste blows, and Krausz went down without a word. Almost in the same movement the American jerked up the table with his knee, exposing Jenson, and stamped hard on the wrist which was pulling up the revolver once more.

Jenson screamed once, and then again as Hammer's kick took him in the stomach and doubled him up gasping. Already, however, Krausz was

struggling to his feet, and the American jumped for him, raging.

Even in his anger he could not strike a man who was down, though he had not hesitated to put the treacherous Jenson out of commission. He caught the doctor's revolver hand in both his own, wrestled away the weapon with a savage twist that brought a grunt from the Saxon, then picked up the automatic dropped by Jenson and sprang back.

The six seamen were coming on the double-quick, drawn by the shots and Jenson's screams, and the American knew that he had his work cut out for him.

"Down with you, Krausz," he cried, his voice high. The doctor, raising himself on one elbow, cursed, but obeyed, while Jenson writhed in the dust and whimpered. Across their bodies Hammer levelled the two revolvers and waited.

"Well?" he said more calmly as three of the seamen came up together. "You, Schmidt, and Klaus, pick up that rope there and tie Mr. Jenson's hands behind his back. Behind his back, remember, and do it so that I can see the knots. The rest of you stay where you are."

Krausz raised his voice in a storm of furious curses, but the six seamen were used to taking orders from Hammer, and after a look into the two revolvers they obeyed him promptly if sullenly.

"Stop that silly cursing, doctor," commanded the American, now sure of himself. The cursing

stopped, though the doctor's face was not a pleasant sight, what with his fury and a trickle of blood from a cut lip.

By this time the two sailors had jerked Jenson to his feet and were trying his hands as Hammer had directed, the other four men standing back and staring from the doctor to the American in stupefied wonder. Already, however, Hammer was making his plans as how to get away.

If he took Jenson and Baumgardner and started for the beach the doctor and his six men would be after him instantly. The natives did not count; Hammer had learned enough from the doctor to know that there was nothing to fear from these Kiswahili. Then there was Baumgardner to be considered——

“You want help, sar?”

Hammer glanced hurriedly over his shoulder at the gentle voice. There, to his infinite amazement, he beheld the grinning features of Potbelly; also the submission of Dr. Krausz was explained, since Potbelly held him under the muzzle of his own shotgun, and appeared to be enjoying himself immensely.

The American remembered suddenly that he could not take to his heels and leave Sara Helmuth in the lurch, though he had forgotten all about her. And that he would be leaving her in the lurch he had no doubt whatever.

“Did Professor Helmuth send you up here?”

he asked crisply. Potbelly grinned.

“No, sar. I hear *bang-bang*, take gun belonging to *Bwana* Doctor, come quick.”

There seemed to be no doubt of his antagonism to the Saxon, so Hammer accepted the fact without trying to explain it.

“All right. You stay here. If the *Bwana* Doctor or his men try to follow me, shoot. Get that?”

“*Jambo, Bwana,*” came the assured answer.

“Come over here, Jenson—move lively, you hound, or I’ll come and kick you over!”

Hammer’s grim voice fetched the cowering secretary, whose arms were fast bound behind him. Throwing away the automatic, which he did not understand, the American put the doctor’s revolver into his vacant coat-pocket and grabbed Jenson by the shoulder, accelerating his progress as he turned.

Beneath, he could see Mohammed Bari and Baumgardner standing, watching, beside the tent. He was not ready for them, however, but paused outside Professor Helmuth’s canvas, drawing out one of his revolvers in order to keep the boatswain safely lined up.

“Miss Helmuth!” he called. “Get out here, quick!”

A second later the tent-flap was pulled aside and he saw the girl standing, her revolver in her hand. Her eyes widened in amazement at sight of him standing over the figure of Jenson.

“Get what necessities you must take, and do it in a hurry, please. Potbelly’s holding the doctor up there with the shotgun, and we’ll have to make tracks for the launch. Don’t stop to argue, but for Heaven’s sake get a move on if you want to skip out of here!”

He caught one muttered exclamation of something that sounded very much like “Thank God!” and she vanished. It was curious, thought Hammer, that while she had twice repulsed him that same day, with varied degrees of suspicion, she now did as he commanded without a word of protest.

Perhaps Potbelly had something to do with it, or else the sight of Jenson in bonds had influenced her to believe him sincere at last.

He eyed Baumgardner grimly, and, deciding to make the big boatswain of some use, ordered him to take charge of Jenson.

“If he gets away, one of you will stop a bullet,” he concluded. “You go first and lead the way, Mohammed Bari.”

The Kiswahili grinned, nodding cheerfully and seeming in no wise affected by the display of revolvers by these white men, to whose vagaries he was accustomed. Looking up at the hill, the American could see the tableau beneath the grass-thatch very clearly.

Potbelly stood with the shotgun at his shoulder, covering Krausz, who still lay on the ground, his heavy curses carrying down to the tents, and behind

him stood the six seamen in a bunch.

“I guess that nigger’s competent,” chuckled Hammer to himself. “Wonder what he knows about my friend John Solomon?”

His wonder vanished before the necessity for action, as Professor Helmuth appeared at the entrance to her tent, a small wicker suitcase in her hand. Hammer took it as she reached his side, and motioned her to fall in ahead of him.

“Go ahead, Mohammed,” he said. “You next, bos’n, with Jenson—no, you go with Mohammed, professor; I want to keep an eye on these two beauties. I guess Potbelly can take care of his own getaway.”

The girl made no protest, but joined the native, and all five left the camp and the staring Kiswahili behind. A last backward glance showed Hammer that Potbelly was slowly retreating down the hill, and then the jungle had closed in about him and all behind was lost to sight, with only the green tangle on every hand and the backs of Baumgardner and Jenson in front, while through the shadow-haunted, sun-creeping mass of foliage came to him occasional glints of the white dress of Professor Helmuth.

Cyrus Hammer felt quite pleased with himself for once. He had bearded the lion in his den and had got clean off with the bone—meaning Jenson. As to Sara Helmuth, that was another matter and not one with which Hammer was not now greatly concerned. If she had been in trouble, she was out

of it, and enough said.

But Jenson was going over the road, the American told himself grimly. To tell the truth, he was angry, more because the pallid little secretary had played with him than because he had committed perjury, and he was now intent on reopening the case of Schlak. Either Jenson or Solomon could tell who had killed the second mate, and why there had been a double perjury afterward.

As they tramped along, stumbling over vines and creepers, with the jungle wall dark and impenetrable on either hand, Hammer caught the two men ahead talking, and warned them against it with such savage intensity in his voice that they obeyed.

The American was perfectly well aware of the dangerous quality of the secretary by this time, and was surprised that Dr. Krausz had stood up for the man so boldly, even to defying the law.

For that matter, Krausz was apt to prove extremely dangerous himself, now that his open antagonism must have been aroused.

Hammer chuckled at the delight which had been so evident in the face of Potbelly.

The fellow had the quality, rare in natives, of acting on his own initiative, and the American hoped that he would get away in safety from the German party.

Undoubtedly he owed Potbelly's help to the

little silver ring, however—and that was a mark in John Solomon's favour.

But had Solomon really sent him the ring, and why? It seemed a senseless thing for a supercargo—ah! If Potbelly had recognized it, what connection had he with John Solomon, and where was the link between Solomon and Sara Helmuth?

"It's too blamed deep for me," concluded Hammer, eyeing Baumgardner's broad back and the narrow cringing shoulders of the secretary. "Best thing I can do is to see Harcourt and soak this devil Jenson before the doctor gets back to fire me—which same he won't get a chance to do if I know it!"

It had been his original plan to bring one of the German sailors who could take back the launch from Melindi, for the convenience of Dr. Krausz. This did not matter greatly to Hammer now, however, so he concluded that when they reached Melindi they could find out about the Protectorate despatch-boat *Juba*, the only ship which made the place.

If she was about due they could wait for her, and if not they could easily run the sixty-five miles down to Mombasa—which, however, would be longer by coast, for the launch was a small one, and Hammer would not chance a squall very far from shore.

After an excessively long fifteen minutes the American, who was half-fearful of treachery on the part of Mohammed Bari, the guide, saw the welcome gleam of water ahead, and they stepped

out from the trees to the sand, almost without warning, for the jungle ended as suddenly as it began.

Below them lay the surf-boat, with the two boys indolently lying under the thwarts, and Mohammed Bari was already stirring them to action with his foot and tongue. A white speck out beyond the lines of heavy ground-swell surf showed the launch at anchor.

Hammer marched his captive Jenson and his semicaptive Baumgardner down to the boat without heeding Sara Helmuth, who was watching anxiously. Dropping the suitcase to the sand, which was alive with sand-fleas, he addressed the boatswain sternly.

“Now, Baumgardner, if Jenson has been putting any treachery into your head you forget it quick. Get up in the bow of that boat when she goes out, and then get into the bow of the launch and take care of Jenson. If his bonds are loosened or if you try any tricks, I’ll give you a bullet first, so mind that. All ready, Miss Helmuth?”

She assented silently, and he helped her into the stern-sheets of the boat, the boys waiting to run it out. Ordering the two to return after they made the launch and Mohammed Bari to remain with him, he sent the two Germans into the bow, then lent a hand at running out the boat.

A moment later he flung himself in over the stern, the dripping boys took an oar each, and they headed through the slow swells of breaking surf for the launch.

CHAPTER IX

HAMMER BEGINS TO SEE

Not until reaching the launch did Jenson, who was almost beside himself with terror, seem to realize that Dr. Krausz had been powerless to save him from Hammer.

As Baumgardner tried to put him over the side he broke away, and flung himself face downward across the fore thwarts of the boat with whimpering, inarticulate cries.

The American caught Baumgardner's helpless gaze and ordered Mohammed to hold the two craft together while he attended to Jenson.

At this juncture, however, Sara Helmuth developed resources of her own. Motioning to Hammer to hold on, she calmly took a revolver from his coat-pocket, rose, and went forward.

"Get into the launch, Baumgardner," she said coldly, and the man obeyed. Jenson looked up at her, then fell to grovelling at her feet.

"Don't shoot!" he shrieked, a mad agony of fear in his voice. "I'll tell it all, *fräulein*—it was I who told the Herr Doctor about the——"

"Be silent!" she said scornfully, and his whimperings died away. "Get into that launch unless you want to be thrown in."

To the surprise of Hammer, the secretary clambered into the launch without a word more, and she followed him. When the chop-boxes had been put aboard and Mohammed Bari had followed them, Hammer went over the side also and curtly ordered the two boys to row back to the shore.

“Do you understand this engine, Miss Helmuth?” he asked meekly. Since this girl from California had shown herself adept at so many other things, it was more than possible that she could take care of the launch engine, so that he was not surprised when she nodded, handed back the revolver, and stooped over the fly-wheel.

An adjustment of oil and gasoline pins, and with the first crank the engine went off into a steady splutter that rose to a roar beneath her hand.

Hammer made room for her in the stern-sheets and took the tiller-ropes himself, for the launch steered from a wheel at the bow, with another amidships, but he could easily steer by the ropes from the stern.

“Baumgardner, get up that anchor. Help him, Mohammed.”

The boat rocked as the little anchor was torn loose and then swung away. By the time the boat-swain had got the anchor in-board the launch was standing down the coast: looking back, Hammer could see nothing save jungle, over which the sun was lowering redly, for the afternoon was hard upon its close.

“Well, it’s good-bye to the doctor and his ruins,” he said cheerfully to the girl at his side. To his amazement, he saw a mist in her eyes; then she turned and looked at him, her hand extended.

“I ask your pardon, Mr. Hammer.”

The touch of her cool hand thrilled him, but before he could speak she went on, her voice low.

“I am sorry that I misjudged you so terribly, but under the circumstances I was unable to trust anyone. Then, when I heard the shots and came out to see you with Adolf tied up, I knew that Potbelly had been right after all, and——”

“And so you came,” he finished gravely as she paused. “I do not understand, Miss Helmuth, as I told you before, but I am just as glad as you are to leave that place behind.”

“I’m—I’m not glad,” she faltered, looking away from him, and he could see that her eyelids were closing and unclosing rapidly, as if to quench tears that welled forth. “It was my father’s dream—I——”

He leaned forward to throw off the motor, but she recognized his intention and checked his hand swiftly.

“No, no—you misunderstand, Mr. Hammer! Please, let me think a moment! I’ll try to tell you——”

“No, please don’t tell me anything that distresses you, Miss Helmuth. I am very sorry that circumstances brought us together in the way they

did, but everything's coming all right now, so don't worry. This boat isn't very fast, but we ought to pick up the Melindi light an hour after dark at furthest."

"What do you intend to do with Adolf Jenson, Mr. Hammer?" She turned and faced him, and now her brown eyes seemed very determined once more with the passing of her momentary weakness.

So Hammer told her the story of how Hans Schlak had died unavenged, and of necessity began at the beginning with John Solomon's arrival at "Prince's" in search of a job.

She listened with grave intentness, only smiling once, when he told about that hurried trip to the departing *Mombasa* at London, then sitting and watching his face. Hammer himself could give but a divided interest to the story, since he had to tell it and watch the coast at the same time, until it occurred to him to order Baumgardner to handle the yacht from the wheel forward.

He also ordered Mohammed to break out the chop-boxes and dish up as good a meal for all as their contents would afford. Then, leaning back, he filled his pipe and finished his story.

"Certainly, smoke all you want to," she smiled at his inquiring look. "Have you always been a sailor, Mr. Hammer?"

"Eh? Well, not exactly," he returned, flushing,

and hesitated for a bare second. "I've been working on cattle-boats for three years past."

"Well, isn't that being a sailor?" she laughed back. Hammer looked sharply at her, and found that she meant the words. Evidently she knew nothing of cattle-boats.

"Not exactly, Miss Helmuth. It means that one associates with thugs and the lowest sort of men, and in general stands for ostracism among decent people."

"Then why did you tell me that?"

"Because you asked me."

Hammer felt, indeed, as though she had drawn the truth from him bodily, and the earnestness of his tone perhaps startled her, for she looked out toward the east, where the after-glow was striking the skies to crimson; and when finally she spoke it was with entire abandonment of the subject, much to the American's relief.

"Mr. Hammer, I wish I had trusted you in the first place. Do you know, I do think that Mr. Solomon sent you that ring for the very purpose of making me trust you? No, wait a minute, please! I haven't anyone else to depend on, and if I told you my story I think it would help me a great deal. You see, I've been rather wrought up for the past few days—in fact, ever since Dr. Krausz arrived."

Hammer nodded quietly. "I'll respect the confidence, of course, Miss Helmuth. And if I

can be of any assistance, you may command me.”

She seemed not to have heard the words, for she was gazing off toward the darkening coastline, lost in thought. He watched her firm, well-poised features for a moment while he lit his pipe, and as the match hissed in the water alongside, she turned decisively to him.

Hammer stopped her, telling Mohammed to get out the launch's lights and set them in their sockets, then settled back and listened without comment.

“You'll pardon me for going into my own history, Mr. Hammer, but it's necessary here. My father was an archaeologist connected with the University of California, though he was usually afield, and as I accompanied him ever since my mother's death, ten years ago, you can see how I come to recognize your Arabic expressions yesterday.”

Hammer grinned to himself, for there was a suspicion of dry humour in the girl's voice, and he knew that he was forgiven.

“Last year my father and Dr. Krausz were together in Greece, while I was preparing to take up work at Dresden Library. Mr. Hammer, what happened on that trip has never been discovered. I received a very hasty letter from my father, dated at Lisbon on his return to Germany, and this was followed by the news of his death. Dr. Krausz brought his body home, for we were living

in Dresden, temporarily.

“In his letter my father had merely said that he was not well but had made a great discovery, and if anything happened to him I should write to Mr. John Solomon, a friend of his at Port Said, to whom he had already written in full. At the time I thought nothing of it, though I believe that he had some presentiment of his death; nor did I distrust Dr. Krausz when——”

“Good gracious, girl!” snapped out Hammer, startled. “You don’t mean to say that Krausz was responsible for your——”

“No, no!” Wait, please!” She laid a hand on his arm, withdrawing it instantly. “You see, father’s death was a dreadful shock to me, and then I had to straighten up all his affairs besides going on with my work at the library. So I forgot all about father’s discovery and writing this Mr. Solomon. There was no mention of such a man in his papers which Dr. Krausz turned over to me—after keeping some of them, as I now know.”

“Then Krausz is not your guardian, as he told me?” broke in the American. In response to the girl’s surprised glance he told her of the doctor’s words.

“No, that was all a lie, Mr. Hammer. Of course, I never suspected that anything was wrong, for I used to see a good deal of him in Dresden, where he stayed to work on a book. Well, about three

months ago he came to me offering me this position of assistant to him. I was naturally quite flattered, for he is really a big man in the world of science, Mr. Hammer, and of course I accepted. He told me only that he had found out about this place, and, as usual, I waited to be taken into his confidence when the time came.

“Well, while I was clearing things up at home I found father’s letter, and it occurred to me that since I had to pass through Port Said I might as well write to this Mr. Solomon and ask him about father’s discovery. I did so, and in return received a long cable telling me to say nothing to Dr. Krausz, but to trust implicitly in whoever showed me the letter I had written Mr. Solomon.

“I waited for the messenger, but none came until that day in London when the steamer was leaving. Then a fat little man with queer blue eyes rushed up, showed me the letter, and demanded the papers which the doctor had just sent me. Since the purser had directed him to me and there was no time to waste, I obeyed, although the papers contained directions as to what I was to do in the preliminary work. Fortunately, he cabled me their contents at Mombasa.”

“The thing sounds incredible, Miss Helmuth,” said Hammer, as she paused, “but I rather think that there is more in it than we know. Solomon certainly must be more than a mere supercargo—and say, he sure handed Krausz a hot one!”

Whereupon he told her about Solomon's mention of having worked for a Professor Helmuth in Palestine. She smiled sadly.

"I haven't finished yet, Mr. Hammer. It—oh! What's that? It's just like a lighthouse!"

Hammer turned to see a tiny dot of light against the coast to the south-west, and nodded.

"The Melindi light—stationary white light, Miss Helmuth. We're miles away yet."

"Well, I got here and got the work started after a fashion. I thought it was awfully queer that Mr. Solomon had acted the way he did, but father spoke very warmly of him in his last letter, and father had some queer friends all over the world. Things went on very well until Dr. Krausz and Jenson came the other day. The first evening the doctor drank a good deal of champagne, and he said some things that startled me, in connection with the expedition.

"Then, the second day, I went to his tent while he was on the hill, in order to get some quinine. As I passed his table I saw a sheet of paper on the floor and stooped to pick it up; you can imagine the shock it gave me to see my father's handwriting! Then I saw that it was something about this place—Fort St. Thomas, it was called—and the paper proved to be part of a transcription father had made from some old document, telling about the things buried here.

"That made me suspect Dr. Krausz of having

stolen the papers from my father. Perhaps you can guess, Mr. Hammer, that with archaeologists especially, a 'find' such as this would be a terribly big thing; it would mean not only money, but a great deal more. And with certain scientists, just as with actors, it is almost a monomania to 'have a big name'; besides, the passion for discovering such things gets a tremendous hold on one, all by itself.

"I was so angry that I went right up to the ruins and asked the doctor about it. He had been drinking again, and instead of getting angry he only laughed at me, telling me to prove it if I could—and he frightened me, Mr. Hammer. I'm not very timid, but I think any woman is afraid of a drunken man."

Hammer winced imperceptibly.

"I tried to get away with my boys, but he prevented me—not openly, but so I understood that I could not go. Therefore I managed to get one of my mission boys off with a note, but he was found and brought back by a party of Kiswahili, and the only thing I could do was to barricade myself in my tent."

"Which you did very effectually," laughed Hammer. Inwardly, he was cursing Dr. Krausz with all his soul. "Tell me, where did you get that boy Potbelly? He seems to know a lot about Solomon."

Potbelly, it appeared, had met her when she

first landed, displaying letters of recommendation from John Solomon and others, upon which she had promptly engaged him. Since then he had proven invaluable to her, though he had said nothing of Solomon until he rushed into her tent that afternoon, saying that Hammer had come from that individual.

In the American's mind there was no doubt that Krausz had been carried away by the craze of his science, and he expressed himself forcibly on the subject. It occurred to him, however, that possession was nine points of the law, and they had no evidence on which to prosecute Krausz for anything. On the other hand, if he set to work to gather in John Solomon for the perjury committed on the yacht and in court, he would be removing the girl's only mainstay.

Solomon had clearly been playing a smooth game, for some undefined purpose. Supposing that Professor Helmuth had really written him from Lisbon, upon receiving the letter from Sara Helmuth telling of Dr. Krausz's expedition and asking details of her father's discovery, he might have leaped to the conclusion that Krausz was crooked.

Then he had come to England for the purpose of finding this out? That was the question troubling Hammer. If Solomon had joined the yacht merely to play Sara Helmuth's hand for her, which seemed like incredible chivalry in

such a man, there would be a bad complication if Solomon were arrested for perjury.

In fact, that would be the best thing in the world for Dr. Krausz, for whoever and whatever this Solomon was, he was certainly taking care of everything in a remarkably shrewd manner.

Potbelly had plainly been stationed at Mombasa to attach himself to the girl and protect her. The mere use by Solomon of the cables in so reckless a manner showed that the man must have money behind him.

Sara Helmuth went on to say that all of Dr. Krausz's men had been with him for years, from the giant Hans Schlak to Adolf Jenson. It was clear to Hammer that Krausz had received as much of a shock as had anyone upon Schlak's death, and he had afterward threatened Jenson darkly, there and up on the hill.

But if the fellow knew who had killed Schlak, why did he not tell—or had he told the truth when he said that he had tried to fasten the crime on Solomon because he was Hammer's friend?

Suddenly the American remembered Jenson's cry, stopped by a brutal blow from the doctor. "If you let them take me, Herr Doctor, I'll tell—" what? The secretary had started to say the same thing as he grovelled at Sara Helmuth's feet, and as he recalled this Hammer sprang up.

"Jenson! Come aft here, and move spry unless you want me to come after you."

The secretary, his hands still bound, had been stretched out on one of the side-cushions near Baumgardner, and at Hammer's words he got up and shambled aft.

The American was growing less anxious with every moment to push the investigation into Schlak's death; at any rate before he and Miss Helmuth had had some kind of an explanation with John Solomon. Once Jenson was turned over for perjury, Solomon, the Arab, and Baumgardner would of necessity be gathered into the same net, while the legal complications might be unending. And Cyrus Hammer had both the sailor's and the broker's fear of lawyers.

"Look here, my man," he addressed Jenson with curt asperity, the pallid, almost corpse-like features of the man standing out in the starlight clearly. Hammer noted absently that over the shoulder of Jenson the Southern Cross hung low above the horizon's rim.

"Miss Helmuth and I know some things, and we want to know more, especially about your master's dealings with Professor Helmuth in Lisbon. You know, and you can tell us. If you do, I promise you that you'll not go up before the court for perjury, though we may hold you for a few days aboard the yacht. If you refuse, then you'll take your medicine for perjury and for your murderous attack on me. Chose."

Jenson chose, and quickly. He sank down in

the bottom of the boat awkwardly, because of his bound arms, and the terror in his face was so great that the girl turned away from him, unable to watch longer.

"I'll tell, Mr. Hammer, if—if you'll let me go."

"I promise, Jenson," said Hammer quietly. "But mind you don't lie, for we know enough to test the truth of your story."

"I'll tell the truth, Mr. Hammer, so help me! Professor Helmuth was sick, and we knew that he had found something big in one of the libraries. I was nursing him, and when he got worse I went through his papers one night, then took them to the Herr Doctor who kept them.

"Professor Helmuth died, and we tried to get hold of the original papers at the library, but there had been an outbreak of Royalists and everything was closed or in disorder. So we came to Dresden and, later, made up the expedition. That's all, sir!"

"And enough." Hammer turned to Sara Helmuth. "Anything you would like to ask him, Miss Helmuth?"

"No," she shuddered, looking away. "Get him out of my sight."

Jenson needed no urging to remove himself, and for a space the two in the stern remained silent, while the motor sent its staccato exhaust humming over the sea. The Melindi light was

very close now, and Hammer headed for the river, since the launch was small enough to get into the mouth of the Sabaki and make the dock.

“Thank you, Mr. Hammer,” the girl spoke in a low voice as she turned to him. “So it was that man who brought about father’s betrayal! I think that he will suffer punishment for that, one day.”

The American gave little heed to her words at the time, but he was to remember them later, when he and Sara Helmuth and Adolf Jenson were facing the end of things together.

Jenson’s soul seemed to Hammer as colourless as his face. He lay amidships, over a thwart beyond the motor, in silence: odd, thought the American, that while the man was a creature of lies and theft and treachery yet he was the veriest coward withal.

Baumgardner, who was smoking a pipe, had also come amidships to the wheel there, while Mohammed Bari was sitting forward, just beyond Jenson, chewing betel and humming some monotonous native air to himself.

The American overlooked one significant fact, namely, that Baumgardner, as well as the other Germans of the crew, had been with Krausz for several years, and since the Melindi fight was now so close he apprehended no further trouble.

He was joying in the fact that the girl’s confidence had drawn them a bit closer together,

mentally; and by that curious sixth sense which comes to men at such moments he felt that she also realized this, and that it was not unwelcome to her.

He frankly was drawn by Sara Helmuth. The way in which she had faced the problem presented by Dr. Krausz, her absolute independence of thought and action, and the very manner in which she bore herself—all these attracted the American greatly, and he smiled as he recollected his mental picture of this Professor Sara L. Helmuth.

Sara wasn't such a bad name after all, he reflected, then remembered how the doctor had spoken of his assistant and frowned. Dr. Krausz certainly had something coming to him, and if he only got the chance he was going to see that it came.

However, that could wait. First was the problem of John Solomon, while he and Harcourt would have to look into Schlak's death between them.

Mohammed Bari shifted his position and hung over the side, lazily squirting betel juice outboard, and as they were now opposite the Melindi light, and a half-mile out, Hammer directed Baumgardner to head straight in for the river mouth.

The launch swung about, ceased her rolling as she rose on the first surf-crest, and on a sudden the engine gave one deep-throated, convulsive gasp and died into silence.

“The oil—turn the oil-cocks off!” exclaimed Sara Helmuth sharply, as Hammer rose. “I thought I had turned them off, but——”

“All right, I’ll fix it in a minute.”

Hammer went to the engine, beside Baumgardner, and leaned over; with the action he received a heavy shove that sent him head first against the second cylinder. His head striking the oil-cup, he felt the thing snap off, the jagged glass and metal ripping the skin of his brow above his left eye: for a second he was half-stunned, but fought blindly to regain his balance, thinking that the launch had struck a reef. Then he was caught from behind and half-lifted back toward the rail, a hand closing on his throat.

As he came erect, gripping desperately at the air, he saw the form of Jenson at one side, hands unbound. A flash of red split the starlight into blackness, and Jenson, with a strange clucking noise, dove head first over the side.

Baumgardner, who was trying to fling the American over the rail, stumbled on a thwart, and they both came down in a heap.

Over the port bow lay Mohammed Bari, very still and silent, a black thread of betel juice trickling from his mouth and something blacker running from between his shoulder-blades where a knife-haft gleamed. Jenson had acted swiftly.

Thrashing about in the launch’s bottom, Hammer wrenched around and clutched the boatswain with

his left hand, forcing him back against the rail. But his throat was dry, his breath was shut off, and the figure of Sara Helmuth standing in the stern, revolver in hand, was lost in a swirl of blackness.

Vaguely, Hammer felt the fingers of his right hand close on something hard beneath him, and with a last effort he brought the object up and struck the German with all his strength.

Hit squarely on the temple by the heavy wrench, Baumgardner groaned softly and fell back with loosened fingers, toppling slowly over the rail until a surf-crest picked him up gently and smothered him from sight.

Hammer lay motionless at the girl's feet, a black-red smear over brow and eyes, while she stood as if paralysed; and over the bow one of Mohammed Bari's hands flopped crazily to the lift of the surf.

And so the launch drifted slowly toward the river-mouth and beach, with no man to guide her.

CHAPTER X

AT MELINDI

“Dang it, I’ve a ’ole bloomin’ ’ospital on me ’ands, what with Mr. ’Ammer as ’e is and Mr. Harcourt on ’is beam ends! And worse luck, it comes just when—ah, all ready, miss? And what’ll it be this time?”

“Whatever you say,” rejoined the voice of Sara Helmuth, grave and self-contained. “Is there any change in Mr. Harcourt?”

“No, miss. ’E’s crying fretful like—or at least ’e was. Seems like a woman’s step and tongue quiets ’im a bit, miss: werry unusual, o’ course, but when so be as a man’s off ’is ’ead, I says——”

“Darn you, Jenson! Stop your bally grinning! He stabbed me, I tell you——”

Harcourt’s shrill cry pierced through the low-toned voices and sent cold sweat starting on Cyrus Hammer’s brow as he stared up into darkness.

Where was he? What was this terror that had seized on Harcourt? For answer the soft murmur of Sara Helmuth’s soothing voice came to him, followed by the wheeze of a harmonica.

“All right, miss, I’ve got me instrument in ship-shape order, so to speak. Let’s give ’em

that 'ere lullaby you was a-singing of last night, miss—them Irish things fair brings the music out o' me, though bein' born and bred in Wapping I ain't got much use for the Irish in general. But let 'er go, miss; I'll come in somewheres."

Silence for a moment; then the girl's voice rose—a soft, deep-toned contralto, with Solomon "coming in somewheres" with his harmonica in a monotone accompaniment which did well enough, however, and must have satisfied him amazingly. Hammer's eyes glistened as the words came sweetly to him, for the words and air brought many things back to him, things that he thought long forgotten—

"Out on the sea where the sad winds wail
(Sad and low, sad and low!)
Watch for the flash of thy father's sail
Dipping from sight in the sunset glow!
He comes no more till the dim stars die
And the day gleams red in the eastern sky;
Baby of mine—
Oh, baby of mine, hush, hush thy cry,
For the deep sea-moan holds grief of its own—
Grieve not my heart with thine!

"Out on the sea where the slow gulls wheel
(Sad and slow, sad and slow!)
Watch how the writhing night-mists steal,
Veiling the infinite ocean's wo!
Father will come when the nets are drawn
With a kiss for thee, as the night is gone;
Baby of mine—
Oh, baby of mine, in the rosy dawn
He will come to me, with a kiss for thee,
On the crest of the tossing brine!

“Dang it—’e’s asleep—excuse me, miss, while I see to Mr. ’Ammer.”

Solomon’s voice was husky and jerky, and the American, who felt much the same way himself, saw a flood of light spread through his darkness for a moment. A step sounded, and Solomon dropped into a creaking chair beside Hammer.

“Dang it,” came a mutter, “I didn’t ’ave the ’eart to tell ’er, bless ’er sweet face! ’E’s done for, ’e is, and ’ere I be, tied up wi’ the missus and the two on ’em while that danged pasty-faced scoundrel’s been and got clean off. But wait, me friend! Them as stabs in the dark shall perish in the dark, as the Good Book says; but when I gets me ’ands on ’im—Lud! So you’ve been and woke up, Mr. ’Ammer?”

The American, wondering what sort of nightmare he was passing through, had raised his hand and felt a thick bandage around his head, and the movement had startled Solomon from his soliloquy.

Despite the bandage and his bewilderment, Hammer felt very well, and announced that fact as he tried to sit up. Solomon’s hand repressed him.

“Down wi’ you, if you please, sir! It’s still a-workin’ in you, but to-morrow morning you’ll be fit to—Lud help us all! If ’e don’t last——”

“If who doesn’t last?” queried Hammer, lying back among his pillows. “Who is it that’s done for?”

“You’ve ’ad a sleeping potion, Mr. ’Ammer,” came Solomon’s reply, a curious note in the man’s voice. “It’s been and give you bad dreams, sir, so just drink this, and in the morning——”

Obediently, Hammer swallowed a few drops from the spoon that Solomon held to his mouth, and still wondering what the conversation had been all about, slipped off into slumber before he could speak his thoughts.

He woke to find it broad daylight. He was lying on a mosquito-curtained cot beside an open window, and gained a glimpse of green trees and white-bolled cotton-fields before he turned his head to inspect his quarters. For a space the wonder of the thing gripped him, keeping him from recalling what had last taken place.

He had gone to sleep in an open launch off the Sabaki River, and he had wakened in a room that might have housed a prince. Save for his cot and a small stand of plain ebony beside it that held medicines, there was no furniture in the room but rugs—rugs on walls and floor, and ceiling, even. Though knowing nothing of such things, the American sensed the fact that they were such rugs as he had never seen before.

Opposite him was a royal Ispahan prayer-rug of solid fawn and blue silk, with unbroken lines of Arabic worked in solid gold thread, and the cypress, the tree of life, rising over all in white.

On another wall beside the one door hung a

rug of pale-blues and yellows, bearing the five-clawed dragon of the imperial family of China; it could have come from no place save the imperial palace, so much Hammer knew.

These were but two of the many which struck his eye in that first moment, and utterly bewildered, he sat up, feeling slightly dizzy but perfectly sound, save for a slight pain in his head. As he sat, a voice came to him; at first he took it for Harcourt's, then recognized his error.

"I have notified the authorities, Mr. Solomon, as you wished, and have no doubt that all will be right as far as you are concerned. No, I am sorry that there is no hope whatever; this bally fever has complicated the thing, don't you know, and I am frank to say that I can do nothing. He'll be conscious for an hour or so before——"

The voice died away, and Hammer sat staring dumbly at the Ming dragon, for now he recalled that wild dream he had had. What was going on here, anyway? Where was he?

Suddenly conscious of hunger and a feverish thirst, he seized a glass of water from the ebony stand and drained it. As he set it down the door opened, and into the room came John Solomon, holding open the door for Sara Helmuth, pale-faced but steady-eyed as ever.

He could do nothing but stare at them blankly, Solomon, his pudgy face very pale, heaped up

a large rug for the girl at the head of the bed; and as she sat down she looked up at Hammer with a smile, but it was a smile that struck a cold fear to his heart.

"What's the matter?" he asked hoarsely. "For Heaven's sake talk!"

"You tell him, Mr. Solomon," and there was a catch in the girl's voice. Solomon nodded and sank down on a rug with his legs crossed: Hammer noted absent-mindedly that he wore dingy carpet-slippers and held his empty clay-pipe in one hand.

"Mr. 'Ammer, sir," the supercargo cleared his throat, "let me say first as 'ow you're all right, or will be after a bit, though you've been off your 'ead for a matter o' three days. You're in my own 'ouse, sir, and werry safe you are, if I do say it as shouldn't. It's a werry crooked story, sir—dang it, Mr. 'Ammer, don't interrupt!"

For a wonder the last words were so irritably shot out that Hammer sank back, listening, his questions stilled. So he heard what had chanced, with a slowly-gathering horror in his heart, and a great grief filling his soul, for the words of John Solomon bit into him ineffaceably.

When the launch had drifted in toward the shore, Harcourt had just been bringing up the *Daphne* to Melindi, and had picked up the launch with her searchlight. Harcourt himself had contracted a slight touch of fever, but had insisted

on bringing the senseless Hammer and Miss Helmuth aboard personally, and the off-shore breeze had not aided his fever to any extent.

Alarmed at the story told by the girl, and the condition of Hammer, who had remained unconscious that night, Harcourt had gone ashore early the next morning intent on getting a doctor.

He had barely left his boat when a figure had started out from the crowd of natives about him with a shriek, and the next thing anyone knew was that Harcourt was lying in a pool of blood, stabbed in the side.

Solomon had appeared on the spot, and being known, it seemed, to the native constabulary, had assumed charge of Harcourt. Getting the story of Hammer and Miss Helmuth from the four German sailors who had rowed the captain ashore, he had sent for them as well, installing all three at his cotton plantation a mile outside the town.

Here an English physician had come to attend them from the *Juba*, then in port, and had remained until a few moments before. Hammer had been given a sleeping-draught the day previous, his own slight fever had vanished altogether, and he was perfectly well: but Harcourt was dying.

From his delirium Solomon and the girl had gathered that his attacker had been Jenson—probably rendered insane by fear at sight of

Harcourt. At this juncture the American disregarded Solomon and broke in with a single curt question, his face grim.

"Where is Jenson?"

"No one knows, Mr. Hammer," answered the girl gently, placing her hand on his wrist for a moment. "Wait, please! It was not found out who had stabbed Captain Harcourt until we found it out from his ravings. Then Mr. Solomon said not to tell the authorities anything about it."

Hammer looked at the supercargo, a flame of grief and fury in his hard, grey eyes, his face tense.

"Explain this, Solomon, or by Godfrey——"

"Mr. 'Ammer," and for a brief instant the American was all but awed by the look in the wide blue eyes, "I liked you, and I liked Mr. Harcourt, more than I like most men. If so be as you're bound to do it, then report the thing; but I says, wait. Just like that, Mr. 'Ammer—wait. I 'as me own ways of doing a thing up ship-shape, and I'm older than you be, Mr. 'Ammer, havin' learned a mortal lot in me day. I knows the authorities, Mr. 'Ammer, and I knows John Solomon, and I gives you me Bible oath that this 'ere Jenson answers to us for what 'e's been and done."

The eyes of the two men gripped and held for a long moment. Hammer, struck to the heart by the news of Harcourt as he was, a furious

madness for revenge tearing at his brain, yet felt a curious impulse to obey this John Solomon.

All the obsequiousness of the latter had vanished, and in its place had come a quiet assurance, a steadiness, that could not but impress the American. More than this, even, did the next words of Sara Helmuth restrain him.

“Please, Mr. Hammer, don’t be hasty in this affair. Believe me, I know a good deal more than I did that night in the launch, and when you know it, too, I think that you will agree fully with me. Beside, Mr. Harcourt is—is—the doctor said that he would not live more than a few hours longer.”

Not until that moment did Hammer fully realize how dear his friend had become to him. It was to him an incredibly dreadful thing that after all he had passed through, after finding Harcourt, after coming to like and to be liked—that the gods had now snatched this gift from him, just when he was coming to most depend on the other man.

“My God!” he said under his breath, and dropped his head into his hands. “Harcourt dying!”

It was horrible; a thing almost beyond his comprehension. But, so deep down in his soul that even he did not realize it, was fear—fear that he would go back to what Harcourt had dragged him from—fear that the old terrible bitterness would sweep back over him and smother him. Suddenly he looked up, his face drawn and grey.

"You—last night you were singing!" he cried hoarsely, and his eyes shot accusation into the brown pitying gaze of Sara Helmuth. "What do you mean? Are you playing with me——"

"Be quiet!" Solomon's voice rang harsh and stern. "'Ow dare you, Mr. 'Ammer! I says this 'ere lady is an angel—why, dang it, sir, she 'asn't slept for two blessed nights, what o' watching wi' you and 'im! Yes, she was a singing, Mr. 'Ammer, 'cause Mr. Harcourt 'e thought she was 'is mother, 'e did, and wouldn't go——"

"Oh, stop it, stop it!" Hammer groaned, waving his hand in desperation. "I'm sorry, Miss Helmuth—I understand now. Take me to Harcourt, please."

He gained his feet, careless of the fact that he was dressed only in a suit of pyjamas. Sara Helmuth looked after him, her eyes brimming, but did not move; Solomon led him out into a wide hallway and across into another room.

Harcourt was lying in a cot, wasted, pale to ghastliness, dark circles under his eyes, but none the less with his mouth wearing its same good-humoured lines. By his side was a chair, and into this Hammer dropped, gazing down at the sleeping face of the man who had been his friend.

How long he sat there he did not know. He was vaguely aware that Solomon had gone away on tiptoe, but before his mind's eye were passing scenes, pictures of Harcourt as he had known him

from day to day, now sharp and clear-cut, now dim and ill-remembered.

And three days had wrought this change! Three days, death in their wake, had transformed the broad-shouldered, clean-minded Englishman into this wasted semblance of himself.

“Good God,” muttered Hammer, licking his dry lips. “It’s horrible!”

As he breathed the words to himself, leaning over the bed, the dark eyelids flickered and opened, and Harcourt’s blue eyes met his—at first with blank unrecognition, then with surprised delight. Harcourt smiled faintly, and his voice came clear but weak.

“Hello, old chap! You’re—by Jove, where’s that Jenson?”

The blue eyes had suddenly flashed out with anger as Harcourt remembered. The American, with more tenderness than he had ever thought to show any man, put out a hand to the cold brow of his friend.

“Quiet, old man; we’ll take care of all that.”

For the life of him he could not repress the message that leaped from his own eyes to those of the other. Harcourt looked up steadily; he had read the message aright, but the clear blue eyes never faltered.

“So bad as all that, old chap?”

Hammer nodded, his mouth quivering as he bit at his lips; then the words burst forth brokenly.

"God knows I wish—he'd taken—me instead, Harcourt!"

The other put out a weak hand to his, still smiling.

"I say, old chap, don't be so bally broken up! How long?"

Before Hammer replied a step sounded, and he looked up to see Solomon.

"What-o!" exclaimed that individual cheerily. "Inwalid woke up? We'll——"

Solomon's voice died away, and into his wide blue eyes crept a look of utmost sympathy and kindness as he saw that Harcourt knew.

"How long can I count on, Solomon?"

"It's 'ard to say, sir. An hour, the doctor said——"

"All right. I want to make a will, don't you know. I say, Hammer, brace up! 'Pon my word, I'm having a splendid time, old chap; I've always wanted to have a look in on the stage and see how things were run."

"I'm a notary public, sir, if so be as you wants to——" suggested Solomon.

"Very well. Hammer, you don't mind leaving us alone for a bit?"

The American, choking, rose and left the room, returning to his own. Miss Helmuth had vanished, and he stood over his cot, looking out the window, and fighting back his emotion with grim intensity. It seemed untold ages before his door opened and

he turned to face the master of the house.

“’E’s all through, Mr. ’Ammer, and wants you. Werry weak ’e is, sir.”

Hammer strode back hurriedly and dropped beside Harcourt.

“Hammer, old chap,” and Harcourt’s voice was faint. “I’m not afraid to meet the Stage Manager; but, Christian or not, I do wish that you’d get Jenson for me, will you? Not that I object particularly, don’t you know, but I do object to being hurried in such a bally indecent way.”

“I’ll get him,” muttered Harcourt, meeting the clear blue eyes.

“I’ll get him, Harcourt, and I’ll get his master with him, by Godfrey!”

“Werry good, sir!” echoed the voice of Solomon behind.

Harcourt’s gaze shifted and the trace of a smile crept into his colourless cheeks.

“Tell me, Solomon, do you know who killed that bally second mate?”

“I did, sir.”

Hammer heard the words dully, but they did not pierce to his brain, nor would he have heeded them if they had done so. Harcourt’s vitality was ebbing fast, and their hands came together for the last time.

“Well, old chap,” and his voice was little more than a whisper, “no bally preaching, you know—

but take care of yourself. And I wish you'd take me out to sea for the last scene, if you don't mind. Beastly country to rot in, this. What's the time, John?"

"Four bells, sir, afternoon watch."

"Thanks very much."

Silence ensued, while Hammer's grey eyes fastened hungrily on the face of his friend, and Harcourt gazed up, still smiling faintly.

Then the blue eyes closed, but the hand that the American held still pressed his feebly. After a moment Harcourt looked up again, a tinge of colour in his cheeks, and spoke in his old voice.

"Don't forget—Jenson. Good luck, old chap!"
And there were but two men in the room.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN SOLOMON PREPARES FOR ACTION

“Solomon, I wish you'd tell me about that Schlak business, just to get it off my mind.”

“Yes, sir; just a moment. Miss 'Elmuth, can you bring to mind the date o' that 'ere scrimmage up at the camp?”

Hammer stared, for the supercargo—supercargo no longer—seemed to think more about getting his notes down in that little red morocco notebook than he did about the death of Schlak. Presently, however, Solomon closed and carefully placed a rubber band about the notebook, shoving it into his pocket.

“I likes to keep my accounts all ship-shape, sir and missus, and I must say as 'ow I'm getting a mortal big account over against the name o' Krausz. Why, Mr. 'Ammer, 'ere's the facts o' the case.

“You may remember as 'ow, that night, I was gone from mess for a bit? Well, I'd slipped up to Mr. Schlak's cabin to see if I could find something I was after—papers connected wi' the expedition, they was.

“I 'ad the paper I'd taken from the doctor's pocket, and was comparing of it with some others I found when, lo and behold, in pops Mr. Schlak!

“'E never says a word, 'e don't, but just goes for

me. Lud, but it did give me a turn for a moment, sir! Forchnit it was me 'and fell on 'is knife, where it 'ung on the wall, after 'e'd knocked me back and took me by the throat. No, I 'ad to do it, miss; it was 'is life or mine, and no mistake."

It was four days after the sea funeral of Harcourt. The latter, by the terms of his hasty but authentic will, had left to Hammer all his property, consisting of the *Daphne*.

At first the American had flatly refused to accept the yacht, until the practical, hard-headed common sense of John Solomon won him around; and when he put the case up to Sara Helmuth she had promptly decided that he should accept.

He did so, was duly constituted as lawful owner, and there being no objections to the first mate's papers, obtained for him by Solomon, took command of the yacht until her arrival in England once again. She was at anchor off the river. Hammer and Sara Helmuth remaining with Solomon until they had agreed upon some plan.

Hammer began to feel that it was time for action. No word had drifted in from the ruins of Fort St. Thomas during the week that had intervened, and Hammer's grief had settled into a determined thirst for vengeance.

Solomon was at one with him in this, but had exercised a restraining influence to which Hammer had yielded with good grace. He had begun to find out things about John Solomon.

The man seemed to have no lack of money, and it was apparent that he was neither supercargo nor cotton-planter. The very character of his visitors precluded that, while it but vexed Hammer the more.

On one occasion it was a Kiswahili chieftain from up-coast; on another a party of dirty but stately Arabs from a dhow in port; on another a bearded, khaki-clad officer of police from somewhere up-country. These visitors were received in private and departed as they came, without meeting Hammer or Miss Helmuth.

On this, the fourth day after the sea-burial, all three were sitting in a large living-room on the ground floor of the house. Like the other rooms it held many rugs, together with native weapons and two of the ancient Shishkhana rifles from Damascus, of which Solomon was inordinately proud.

He had been seated over a little desk in the corner, busily writing in his red notebook, and when at last the impatient American had got the story of Schlak's death out of him he squatted down on some cushions beside Sara Helmuth, who, with her quiet common sense which embarrassed Hammer at times, was darning socks for the two men.

"About Jenson now," he continued, whittling at his tobacco plug—"it don't pay to be in a

'urry, Mr. 'Ammer. I 'ave men out 'unting for Potbelly——”

“But, confound it, Solomon, why can't I go up there and——”

“Now, Mr. 'Ammer, don't take on so! First off, we 'as t' get this 'ere business straightened out all ship-shape and proper, so to speak; and the East ain't the West, Mr. 'Ammer.

“If so be as you wanted a certain book, you'd say, 'Get the book I gave you last night,' which is all werry well in its place, I says; but if you was talking Hindi you'd say, 'What book was by me given to you yesterday at night, that book fetchin' to me, come.'

“Now, Mr. 'Ammer, that's just a sample, like. The East ain't the West, I says, and a werry good job that it ain't. Besides, there's the missus to think on, sir.”

Hammer glanced at Sara Helmuth, who smiled at him, noticing that his face was older than it had been a week before—that it was graver, finer drawn.

“Perhaps it's time for an understanding, Mr. Hammer. I haven't seen much of you the last two or three days, you know, but Mr. Solomon and——”

“Make it John, miss, if you don't mind,” broke in Solomon pleadingly. “It's John with me friends, if I may make so bold as to place you in that 'ere category.”

“All right, then,” laughed the girl. “John and I have had an understanding, Mr. Hammer——”

“Make it Cyrus, miss,” interrupted the American, his eyes narrowing in a slight smile as he met her gaze. “Or cut off the mister and make it plain Hammer, both of you.”

“Hammer it is!” exclaimed the girl, though John shook his head solemnly. “So, of course, I’ll reciprocate with plain Sara. And now let me finish. The whole story that Dr. Krausz told you, Hammer, was untrue.”

“What? You don’t mean about the treasure stuff——”

“Yes, for he changed that to suit himself. Now, here’s the real story. My father found a number of old papers in Lisbon giving the whole thing, and wrote it to Solomon, intending to join him later and go shares on it. In 1696 Fort Jesus, or Mombasa, was besieged by the Arabs.

“That siege lasted for thirty-three months, for the Portuguese sent over help from Goa, but in the meantime all the other Portuguese settlements were being destroyed.

“Our own Fort St. Thomas was able to hold out until Fort Jesus had fallen, when the Arab fleet came up and put everyone in the fort to the sword. We don’t know who escaped, but, at anyrate, father found the papers telling about the treasure. It seems that the Viceroy of Goa had sent some alleged relics of St. Thomas, who was supposed

to have died in India, you know, back to the King of Portugal; and with them he had sent a lot of valuable papers and documents, as well as such things as gold and jewels—there has to be a treasure, of course.

“Well, that ship put into the bay which used to be at St. Thomas; she was driven ashore, and the garrison only had time to transfer her cargo to the fort before they were attacked. So far as anyone knows to the contrary, Hammer, it’s there yet.”

“I guess not.” The American shook his head. “Krausz has it by now; you can lay on that—Sara.”

His brief hesitation before her name was answered by a slight flush as she laughed quickly up at him.

“No, he hasn’t! At least, not the papers, the best part of all. They were hidden away separately, and not even father knew it. There was one paper he could not translate, for it was written in cipher, so he sent it direct to John. That paper told about the hiding-place of the papers and the relics, and Krausz never heard of it.”

Hammer glanced at Solomon, beginning to grow interested in this treasure-hunt in spite of himself.

“What kind of a chap are you, John? By Godfrey, I’m thinking that you must be some kind of wizard!”

“Well, Mr. 'Ammer, so the Arabs do say. You see, sir, I've 'ad a bit o' luck wi' the rosary predictions—'El Ramel', the Arabs call it—and I'm free to admit, sir and miss, that it ain't far removed from rank sorcery to a Christian's way o' thinking. But I've learned a mortal lot in me time, Mr. 'Ammer, and 'ave 'andled some main ticklish jobs.

“You might not think it, sir, but I've a fondness for these 'ere rugs, and I've got some as couldn't be bought, sir—sent to me by different 'ands. But put not your trust in Hajjis and Sayyids as the Good Book says: no, sir, I 'olds to me own game and plays it me own way. Just so with this 'ere Jenson; and when Potbelly gets back, why, we go after 'im and 'is master and the loot, all in one pile.”

“Potbelly?” queried Hammer. “Is he a man of yours?”

“One of a few, sir, and not so black as 'e's painted. A Hazrami, 'e is; them Hazramaut men wanders all over, sir—reg'lar soldiers o' fortune, like. The Hindus say: 'If you meet a viper and a Hazrami, spare the viper'. But this 'ere man Potbelly, which ain't 'is proper name, is main useful. Lud, what I've seen that man do! A actor, 'e is, sir.”

Hammer learned that nothing had been heard of Potbelly, but men were looking for him. He also learned that Solomon had, in reality, been

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the *deus ex machina* during the entire cruise of the yacht, and that he had managed the affair at Port Said, thus detaining three of the Germans and replacing them with his own men in case of trouble. As he had advised dismissing the remaining Germans at once, they had been summarily discharged and sent to Mombasa.

Thither, Hammer decided to follow them. Roberts, the steward, had already been sent home with his master's personal effects, and the sooner the yacht was in the shelter of Kilindini harbour the better.

As Solomon wished to get two Afghan friends of his up from Mombasa, Hammer concluded to take down the yacht in the morning; for it was beginning of November, and the south-west monsoon was threatening the insecure anchorage of Melindi.

"What day is this?" he asked suddenly.

"The 14th day o' the month Zil Ka'adah," rejoined Solomon, with a twinkle in his eye. "Year o' the Hegira, 1331. In other words, sir, it's Thursday."

"Then I'll be back on the *Juba* Sunday night," reflected Hammer. "What are your plans?"

Solomon's plans were quite well-defined, once he stated them. He intended to go up-coast to old Fort St. Thomas by launch, sending a party of Arabs around by land; the natives would be

easily sent away, leaving Krausz with six Germans and Jenson.

The last-named would be either given up or taken by force, and Krausz could get back to Melindi and Mombasa as best he might, while with their men Solomon and Hammer dug up the ruins.

Sara Helmuth insisted that she be of the party also, and since there was no great danger to be apprehended, Solomon consented.

He bade Hammer keep the little silver ring, saying that most of the natives knew the emblem and that it might prove of help to him at some future time.

Frankly mystified, Hammer questioned the man directly as to who and what he was; but Solomon merely laughed and waved a hand complacently.

“Easy, sir—easy! A man as asks too much gets less’n ’e asks, I says; it ain’t in ’uman nature to be answerin’ of questions, I says, but Lud, there’s few men as understands ’uman nature, Mr. ’Ammer! Ship’s stores, me line is, Mr. ’Ammer, and I ’as me little shop in Port Said all neat and ship-shape like, where I’ll be mortal glad to receive ye on ’appier occasions, sir and miss.”

Hammer gave up questioning his ex-supercargo. Sara Helmuth proved to know no more than did he himself, but he had talked much with her of other things, striving to gain something of her poise

and perfect self-confidence. For the American was in deadly fear of himself.

With each day the old bitterness had been surging back into his heart, driving him to action no matter what it might be. Harcourt's death had been a sore stroke to him, and yet—even more than he could comprehend—the presence and friendship of Sara Helmuth had upborne him and kept him from the brooding which had proven his undoing in time past.

He listened without interest as Solomon questioned the girl about the old fort and her preliminary work in getting it cleared of brush and trees. As she replied to his queries, Hammer saw a frown slowly gathering on Solomon's pudgy face; then the little man pulled out his clay pipe and tobacco and began to whittle thoughtfully.

"All werry good, miss," he declared finally, "but I'm mortal sorry as 'ow you 'ad all that work for nothing."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"Well, I thought as 'ow I'd say nothing about it till the proper time, miss; but this 'ere's the proper time, I says. You see, that there place you was a-workin' on wasn't the fort at all, miss; it was just the ruins of the old store-house and slave barracoon, at what used to be the water's edge. The fort itself is a matter o' two hundred yards back in the jungle, miss."

While Hammer and the girl stared at him,

almost in incredulity, he went on to explain, with one of his quiet chuckles. He had visited the ruins four years previously on an inspection with the district commissioner from Melindi, and so was aware of there being two sets of ruins.

Those of the fort proper were well overgrown by the jungle, but were in much better preservation than those on the hill, which had been levelled long since by the elements.

Bearing this in mind, he had instructed Potbelly to meet the party of Miss Helmuth and to lead her to the lesser ruins, saying nothing about those of the fort proper.

This Potbelly had done, and in consequence Dr. Krausz was spending time and money in digging up ancient slave barracoons, knowing nothing of the real fort so close to him.

Hammer could not understand this until Solomon explained the density of the jungle near the place, which was uncrossed by any native tracks.

"But if he got the location from the papers left by your father," argued the American, "surely he would know better, Sara. He's a man of experience——"

"Not in Africa," broke in Solomon, chuckling. "Not in Africa 'e ain't! Them places was all alike, sir—just a square with a roof over it, like. The fort's just three o' them there squares with a wall around and other buildin's in between.

"No, sir; in them papers you mentions, 'e found

where to dig, providing 'e got the right place. So 'e's a-digging of his bloomin' 'ead off, and much good may it do 'im, I says. When so be as we gets ready to dig, why, them Arabs o' mine will 'ave it all ready cleared for us. It's so mortal thick in there, sir, that two parties could live for a year on end, ten yards apart, and never know it—just like that, sir."

In the end Hammer was forced to admit the logic of Solomon's reasoning, though when he learned that the Arabs were probably on the spot by this time he refused to believe that they would not be discovered at work.

The Afghans he was to pick up at Mombasa had been despatched to Goa by Solomon in the endeavour to learn something definite about the old fort; but whether they had done so or not Solomon did not know.

Nor could the American understand the other's choice of men. Why he should send Afghans on such an errand, why he should trust Potbelly and make use of him as he did, why he should seemingly put so much trust in natives and so little trust in white men, drew a series of questions from Hammer which forced Solomon to explain.

"White men is all werry well in their place, sir, but Africa ain't their place. Me men know me, Mr. 'Ammer, and 'as faith in me. White men can't 'elp from talking too much, sir; but it ain't in the nature of brown men to talk.

“Work a brown man all square and above-board, I says, and ’e’ll curse ye for a bloody fool; but work ’im underhand, like what e’s been used to for the last thousand years, and ’e’ll fair go through fire and water for ye. What ’e loves is the game, sir—same as me. It ain’t the money as I’m after, though I do say as money ’as its uses.”

Which was all Hammer ever extracted from John Solomon on the matter of colour.

That night, after a long talk with Sara Helmuth, the American went out to the *Daphne*. He had not been able to nerve himself to the deed before this, but now installed himself in Harcourt’s cabin and arranged with the chief engineer to sign on a crew at Mombasa as fast as the men could be picked up.

He was without money, practically, and doubted very much whether he would be able to make the yacht pay in future—for this, however, he made no plans; his first duty was to get hold of Jenson, and what came after that did not trouble him greatly.

At Mombasa he found the two Afghans without trouble. Both were heavily-bearded, stalwart men, of keen intelligence, and cousins; Akhbar Khan and Yar Hussein were alike, grave-eyed, dignified, green-turbaned, and dependable. Hammer concluded that John Solomon knew what he was about, after all.

His only business ashore was to get the two Afghans, and with them he returned to the waiting launch, provisioned and manned by Solomon's four Arabs, for the run up-coast.

He did not go near the club, and saw no one he knew until reaching the wharf. Here, however, he ran into a little Cockney, a waiter at the club the evening he had so gloriously awakened Mom-basa.

Finding the man staring at him, he nodded and would have passed on, but the fellow plucked his sleeve.

"Beg pardon, guv'nor, but you'd best cut and run for it. I heard two o' them nigger bobbies sayin' as 'ow they was lookin' for you up-town."

"Eh? I guess you've made a mistake, my man!" exclaimed the American. The other winked and sidled away hastily.

"Just a tip, guv'nor. Don't wyste no time——" and he was gone.

Laughing over the occurrence, and thinking that the man was drunk, Hammer dropped into the launch and the wharf was soon left behind.

He had decided not to go up on the *Juba*, as the launch would be of use to them and he could make a quicker run up in her. Solomon had a launch hired at Melindi, but another would not come amiss, he thought. Nor did it, as events proved.

The run to Melindi was uneventful in the extreme,

and they made the river-mouth shortly after nine in the evening. Bidding the Arabs and Afghans come to the plantation with him, where there were a number of buildings in which they could find shelter, Hammer led the way at once.

To his surprise, the plantation-house was dark save for the servants' quarters, nor was there anyone to greet him.

Mystified and no little startled by the empty rooms, the American lit some of the lamps and soon had the house-boys on the jump.

The only information that he could elicit from them was that Potbelly had come that morning, and Solomon and Sara Helmuth had gone shortly after luncheon—where, no one knew or would say.

CHAPTER XII

UNDER SUSPICION

Irritated almost beyond control by Solomon's exasperating method of playing his hand in the dark, Hammer passed a very bad night.

More than once he was on the point of sending a boy to Melindi for the district commissioner and of putting the whole case into the hands of the authorities, and only his promise to Harcourt restrained him, for he had come to look upon that promise as a personal pledge, to be carried out by himself alone.

Why had Solomon gone off without leaving him any word, and why had he taken Sara Helmuth with him? Perhaps the latter query worried the American more than the former.

He overlooked the facts that Sara Helmuth was quite competent so far as taking care of herself was concerned; that she had as much or more interest in the entire affair than he had, and that she was not the kind of person to sit idly by while Solomon worked in her behalf.

Evidently Potbelly's tidings had in some way drawn them off the original plan, though Hammer could not see how.

The Hazrami, who was masquerading as a

Kiswahili, must have brought back important news to bestir Solomon to such rapid action, for at dawn no move had been contemplated till Hammer's return. Besides, Solomon had no taste for hurry, as the American knew.

The two Afghans and the four Arabs had received the news of Solomon's absence with grave acquiescence, departing to the rooms assigned them by the house servants, who were all Kiswahili. Akhbar Khan had carried a small roll of sheepskin, the only baggage of the two, and this he had taken with him.

But when Hammer descended to breakfast both Akhbar Khan and Yar Hussein had vanished bodily, sheepskin and all. The four Arabs could tell nothing of them, and, although Hammer expended all his store of Arabic upon the house servants, he elicited nothing but the surprising information that the two visitors must have been djinns, since they had flown away in the night, even as they had come.

So the American cursed them all impartially in the name of Allah and bade them leave him alone, which they did willingly. There being nothing better to do, he gave himself up to waiting; but an hour later he was pleurably surprised by the arrival of no less a person than Potbelly himself.

Now, however, he came in his own guise. No

longer a Kiswahili, he had doffed his pseudo-mission clothes and came in all the stately pride of a Hazrami, an Arab of the Arabs, masterless, and bowing to no man.

Yet, in spite of his white burnoose and green turban of the pilgrimage, he was weary and in much need of repair, having plainly come through the bush. He insisted on speaking French, also, to the further annoyance of Hammer, though the American could understand him well enough.

"It's about time you came, Potbelly," grunted Hammer ungraciously. "What's your news? Where's Solomon?"

For answer the Arab settled himself on a rug, clapped his hands, and demanded coffee from the boy who came, and then saw to it that his proper self made a proper impression on Hammer.

"I am no longer Potbelly, *m'sieu*, but the Hajj Omar ibn Kasim el Hamumi——"

"I don't care a whoop who you are!" exclaimed Hammer angrily. "Give me your message or get out of here!"

A wounded look from Omar ibn Kasim was followed promptly by his news, as he met the eye of Hammer, and saw fury smouldering there.

But, mindful of the words of John Solomon, the American forced himself to restraint and let Omar tell the tale in his own fashion, which consisted largely in dwelling on every little circumstance to the full, and lauding his own efforts with

great self-satisfaction.

The gist of the tale, as Hammer finally extracted it, was that Omar had held Dr. Krausz and his men helpless until Hammer and Sara Helmuth had obtained a good start on any possible pursuit.

Then, knowing that he had no retreat by sea, he had shouted to Miss Helmuth's mission-boys to join him in the jungle, and had plunged into the midst of it, chancing upon the real ruins of the fort.

At this point his story was full of fanciful interpolations, as Hammer termed them, concerning monkeys who threw skulls at him, and pits full of snakes. After weird and wholly impossible adventures he had met Solomon's party of Arabs, who were later joined by Sara Helmuth's mission-boys.

Since the Arabs, whom he wrathfully described as "men without shame", were determined to carry out Solomon's orders, and laughed at his stories of the ruins, he had come on to Melindi with the mission-boys.

Midway, however, he had come down with fever, which explained his delay. The mission-boys had cared for him, and Hammer shrewdly judged that he had made the most of his illness, for at present he displayed no great signs of emaciation.

On the day before, as he was coming into town, he had seen a party of nine men leaving; of these

stalwart Masai *askaris*, bearing the eagle of the German Consulate on the collars of their tunics. Here the American interrupted wrathfully:

“What manner of lie is this, Omar ibn Kasim? How should these men get here from Mombasa?”

“Did not the *Juba* arrive the day before yesterday, and does it not arrive again to-morrow, Yaum el Ahad?”

“Yes, to-morrow is Sunday,” retorted the American, “but that doesn’t explain how Jenson could have fetched those *askaris* from Mombasa.”

“A week has passed, *effendi*,” and the other struck into Arabic. “Am I a liar, then? *Al Nar wa la al Ar!* May fire seize on me, but not shame! If I lie, *effendi*, may I be childless, may my——”

“Oh, cut it out and go on!” groaned Hammer wearily, recognizing his want of tact in dealing with the man. “You are more truthful than the Koran, Omar Ibn Kasim, so finish the story and I will doubt no more.”

Mollified, the Arab told how he had brought the news to Solomon, and how that individual had at once set out after Jenson, taking him for guide.

Miss Helmuth had gone with them, with enough boys from the plantation to make a respectable safari. As they had failed to come up with Jenson by nightfall, in the morning Solomon had despatched the Arab to bring up Hammer.

“Then it’s time we started,” growled the latter, angry at Solomon, Omar, himself, and everyone

else. "If we had only got the authorities after the fellow," he thought, "it would have been all over by this time. Confound Solomon! It's too late now."

He questioned Omar about the two Afghans, but the latter knew nothing of them. Neither did he have any inclination to hurry forth into the jungle again, and said so plainly as he sipped his coffee.

Hammer, exasperated by the coolness and almost contempt of the man, could restrain himself no longer. Starting from his seat, he grasped the arm of Omar with a wrench that sent the man to his back on the rug.

"Now," and he glared at the angry Arab with his grey eyes hard and cold, "I've had enough of your insolence, my friend, and I don't give a hang whether you're a Hajj or a Hazrami or Mohammed himself. You're going to lead me to John Solomon, and do it on the jump—understand?"

This was exactly the action required. Omar looked up at him for a moment, then his dark face cleared, and he stated that he understood and would do exactly as the *effendi* ordered, though he was dying for lack of food.

"That's all right," and Hammer released him. "Do all the dying you want to but not until you have led me to Solomon *Effendi*. Now, get out and see that you have some boys ready to start within

an hour, else I go alone and spread the story of your shame through all the coast. Jump!"

Omar jumped, and, with the four Arab soldiers to help him, he speedily raised a force of twenty boys from the plantation quarters.

As Hammer knew where Solomon's stores of chop-boxes and supplies were located, he broke into the storehouse without scruple and left Omar getting the loads ready.

Though he searched every room in the main house, he could find no arms save the weapons adorning the walls, and these were handsome but useless to him.

Evidently Solomon had small use for weapons, so he was forced to bide content with his own two revolvers. Meanwhile, the problem of Jenson and the consulate *askaris* was worrying him.

There was no doubt that the secretary had swum ashore, either frightened or wounded by Sara Helmuth's bullet, the night he had stabbed Mohammed Bari in the launch. He had met Harcourt the next morning, probably after hiding on the wharf all night; and where had he been during the intervening week?"

Remembering the *askaris*, Hammer whistled softly and consulted Omar ibn Kasim, who replied to his questions with the information that the German Consul in Mombasa did not have *askaris*, requiring no protection; but that all the Consulates in Zanzibar did, and, further, that if a man was

fool enough to be in a hurry he could get to Zanzibar from Mombasa and back in a couple of days, more or less.

This, then, explained the actions of Jenson fairly well. Immediately after his stabbing Harcourt he must have gone aboard the *Juba* to Mombasa—but would he have the influence and authority to command *askaris*? Also, he was taking them to Fort St. Thomas, a thing he would never dare do on his own initiative. This compelled a readjustment.

Evidently, then, Jenson had gone to Dr. Krausz, either overland or by launch. This could be verified by ascertaining in Melindi if he had hired a launch at the time in question; yet he must have done so to account for his other movements.

Armed with letters from Krausz, the American reflected, he had caught the *Juba* on her next trip, connected at Mombasa for Zanzibar, and hurried back with the *askaris*. Krausz evidently wanted men who could shoot, as these Masai could.

Hammer strongly doubted whether it was legal or not to bring the Consulate guards from Zanzibar up here into British East Africa. Certainly, the German Consul would take no such risk, for the thing would be sure to demand investigation if illegal, as Hammer thought it was.

How, then, had Jenson secured the men? Probably by misrepresentations, or else by actual lies; and if this was the case Hammer felt that he had

Krausz cornered at last.

Omar had met the party leaving Melindi, however, and if Jenson acted thus openly the presence of the *askaris* must be unquestioned.

The best thing to do was to see the district commissioner about it, thought the American, and with this thought he issued from the house and sought out Omar.

The latter was ready to start, as was his safari, and from somewhere the Arab had dug up an ancient Snider rifle and bandolier, which Hammer eyed with some disfavour. As he gave the order to march, however, a Kiswahili boy ran up with word that Bwana Somebody was coming, whereat all save Omar seemed to be affected with sudden fright.

The American got them into shape with much expenditure of Arabic, and as he did so became aware of a little party coming down the track—for the plantation of Solomon, being away from those of the East African Corporation, did not have the benefit of any road.

The party, as he saw at a glance, consisted of a very trim and spruce officer of police, a sergeant, and four men, and that they were coming here he had no doubt. So, bidding the natives wait, he advanced to meet them.

“Good afternoon,” the officer responded curtly to his greeting. “Is there a Mr. Hammer anywhere about?”

“I am Mr. Hammer,” replied the American,

surprised. "Sure you want me!"

"Well, rather!" snapped out the other, curtly. "Sergeant, arrest this man."

Before the amazed Hammer knew what was happening there was a policeman on each side of him, and the officer's eye had lighted on Omar.

"Here, you! Have you a permit to carry that *bunduki*?"

The officer was somewhat taken aback when Omar, grinning, held out a folded paper and replied in English:

"Yes, sar. Licensed to carry one gun, sar."

"Humph!" By the time the officer had glanced over the permit and returned it with a bad grace, Hammer had recovered his power of speech. He knew that something was radically wrong, but that if he resisted it would be more wrong still, so he restrained his anger and spoke with what seemed to him remarkable coolness.

"I'd like to know what this means, lieutenant! How dare you arrest me, and on what charge? What——"

"Whatever you say will be used against you," replied the officer. "You are under arrest for murder sir, and I warn you not to resist. I just got here in time evidently; you slipped out of Mombasa pretty neatly, 'pon my word!"

"Slipped your grandmother!" retorted Hammer with some heat. "I'm not in the habit of

slipping out of anywhere, you impertinent young puppy! I want to know——”

“See here, Hammer,” and the officer, for all his youth, showed determination, “I’d advise you to keep your mouth closed unless you want it closed for you. If you can’t help talking, wait till you get closeted with the district commissioner. I’ll warrant you’ll get a mouthful from him, my man, and no mistake, but in the meantime I’ll thank you not to discuss this affair with me. I’ve no bally use for a man of your stamp, and the less you say the better for you. All ready, sergeant?”

The sergeant was, and so was Hammer. Furious but helpless, he clearly perceived that there was no use resisting, and that argument with this business-like young officer was worse than futile.

He was but obeying orders, after all, and the only thing to do was to have it out with the district commissioner.

So, angry at the mere senselessness of the arrest, the American fell in between the two men and followed the sergeant, his face pale and hard.

As he went he saw that Omar ibn Kasim, after a quick order in Arabic which he did not catch, was starting after him. Struck by a sudden thought, Hammer held up the hand on which glittered Solomon’s ring.

Omar stopped, waved a hand, and departed by another path in all haste, while Hammer proceeded with more calmness. He was suddenly aware that

he had great confidence in John Solomon, and, whatever this situation was into which he had stumbled, the pudgy little man would find some loophole.

Then he remembered the Cockney whom he had met on the Mombasa wharf, and realized that the thing must be serious indeed if the Mombasa police were after him. They had notified Melindi by wire of course; but of what had they notified? What was the cause of the whole business?

Hammer racked his brains vainly. He might have been arrested for the death of Baumgardner, although no hue and cry had been raised over finding any such body along the beach. Besides, the testimony of Sara Helmuth would have cleared him of that, and Solomon had accounted to the authorities for the death of Mohammed Bari in some manner or other.

It must be some trumped-up charge brought against him by Krausz, he considered. The scientist had no knowledge or fear of John Solomon's activities, and he was probably trying to get Hammer out of his way, believing him the only champion of Sara Helmuth.

The reason was plain, for with the persistent American safely disposed of, pending trial, the doctor and his aides could get hold of the treasure and get it stowed away where Sara Helmuth would never find it.

At this reasoning, which proved correct enough

in its way, Hammer chuckled and began to feel relieved. Krausz would have a hard job finding any treasure in the place he was looking for it, that was sure.

As for himself, he would be freed just as soon as he had had a talk with this asinine district commissioner, or as soon as Solomon came to the rescue. And with that Jenson would be tracked down in short order.

"By Godfrey, he's going to swing for that murder!" Hammer swore savagely to himself, almost forgetting his own plight. The party had swung into the road by this time, passing old and new cotton plantations on every hand, for Melindi threatened to become a big cotton-producing centre in no long while.

On whatever evidence Krausz had trumped up this charge against him, thought the American, he was reasonably sure of getting off in a day or two, and it would be more than a day or two ere Jenson got out of the country. He was not greatly concerned whether he brought the man to justice or killed him himself, and rather preferred the latter, for feud was strong in his heart.

"I suppose I'll have a preliminary hearing?" he asked the officer.

The latter nodded curtly. "I suppose so. You must be formally identified."

Hammer asked no more questions. Ahead of him were the two small corrugated iron bungalows,

with the flag fluttering gaily before them and the police huts at one side, while the natives stared in high glee at a white man being brought to justice.

The American grinned cheerfully as he caught sight of the planter who had assisted him on his first arrival at Melindi standing in the doorway of a store; but to his surprise his grin was not answered in kind. Instead, the planter darted him a black look, and Hammer could almost hear the curse that left his lips as he turned on his heel and vanished.

He had small time to wonder at this, however, for he was led into one of the iron bungalows which mark the limitations of British rule in all torrid lands, and found himself in the presence of the district commissioner. The latter was a red-faced young man who sat at a table writing, with a whisky bottle on the shelf behind him; two more of the police were sitting on a bench inside the door, and these rose in salute as the squad marched Hammer inside.

“This is our man, Mr. Smith!” exclaimed the police lieutenant, saluting.

Commissioner Smith looked at Hammer from a pair of narrow set eyes and pulled a paper in front of him with a weary air.

“You are Cyrus Hammer, first mate of the yacht *Daphne*?”

“You bet I am!” shot back Hammer, irritated

by the man's air. "And I demand to know why I am under arrest?"

"For murder," came the laconic answer, accompanied by a stare of mild surprise. "Don't come that, my man! Can't get away with it, really, don't you know!"

"Confound it, who have I murdered, you blithering ass?"

"Why—er—oh, yes—Frederick R. C. Harcourt, your owner and captain. And no more insolence, you cur, or I'll put you in irons, you know."

CHAPTER XIII

ACCUSED AND ACCUSER

It was perhaps unfortunate that District Commissioner Smith had very recently been transferred from Nairobi for his sins, inasmuch as he knew not the gods of Melindi and cared not to know them.

He was utterly bored by the place, and showed it plainly: he disliked Americans by instinct and training and Hammer saw that the question of his guilt or innocence was of the utmost indifference to his inquisitor.

“Do you plead innocent or guilty to this charge Mr.—er—Hammer?”

The American tried to collect himself, for the charge had struck him like a bolt from the blue. Preposterous as it was, the very absurdity of it shocked him into quiet coolness.

If it was the work of Krausz, as he had conjectured, then he would eventually hold the whip-hand, through the testimony of Solomon and Sara Helmuth; but in the meantime it would do no good to try and bluster out his innocence.

“Not guilty, of course. I trust that you’ll note that I gave myself up without making a fight? Does that look as if I was a murderer, Mr. District Commissioner?”

Smith made an entry on the sheet before him, then looked up.

“You’ll please bear in mind, Hammer, that you’re not here to ask questions, but to answer them. Where were you on the morning of the 14th instant?”

“The 14th?” Hammer thought back desperately—ah, that was the morning of Harcourt’s murder!

“I was aboard the *Daphne*, ill with fever.”

“You deny the fact, then, that you were on the wharf that morning?”

“Of course I do! I was brought ashore that day unconscious, and can bring witnesses to prove it.”

“Ah!” For the first time Smith began to show a trace of interest. “Their names?”

“John Solomon for one. Miss Sara Helmuth for another, the doctor who attended me, natives _____”

“Testimony of natives not allowed.” The commissioner glanced at his police officer. “Who is this—er—this John Solomon, lieutenant?”

The officer hesitated, for he knew Solomon of old.

“He is a planter, Mr. Smith. His place is about a mile outside town. I would suggest, sir, that he be——”

“Kindly bear in mind that I am conducting this examination, lieutenant.”

The latter bit his lip and flushed. It was plain that he had no great love for his superior. The

commissioner turned languidly to Hammer.

“Where is this Mr. Solomon?”

“Out in the jungle somewhere—search me. But he’ll be in soon.”

“Oh, very good! Lieutenant, you will see that he appears. Now, Hammer, what physician—er—attended you?”

“I don’t know, but he was the same who signed Harcourt’s death-certificate.”

“Ah, Dr. Fargo—at present with the *Juba* at Mombasa. Very good. Well, Hammer, I can’t see that you have any case whatever. Cheek, I call it. However, they can settle it at Nairobi, and be blessed. Lieutenant, put the prisoner in the——”

“Look here,” Hammer broke out furiously, “I’ve had about enough of this farce, Mr. Smith! Now you bear in mind that I’m an American citizen. Also that I plead not guilty. You hand out what testimony you have against me or I’ll make it hot for you in darned short order; and if I can’t I’ll bet a dollar John Solomon can!”

The commissioner gazed at him mildly, then shifted his look to his lieutenant. What he saw in the latter’s face may have decided him, for with an air of boredom he shuffled the papers before him, fixed on the right one, and nodded.

“Very good. You are probably aware of the fact that according to the death certificate of Mr. Harcourt he died from a stab at the hands of persons unknown, complicated by fever.

“Since that time it has been reported to the authorities at Mombasa that you inflicted the wound, later getting away in the crowd. It is also known that you benefited largely by his death, since by his will you were given ownership of the yacht *Daphne*. Yesterday, you visited Mombasa, getting away—er—secretly before you could be apprehended.”

“See here, Mr. Smith,” exclaimed Hammer earnestly, “this charge is absolutely absurd. Not only was Mr. Harcourt my best friend, but I was ill and unconscious at the time——”

“Just a moment—I overlooked that scar on your forehead,” broke in the commissioner, looking up from his papers. Hammer put up a hand to the scar which had resulted from the fight aboard the launch, “Yes, that is it. These papers state that—er—it is the result of a blow struck you by Mr. Harcourt as you stabbed him.”

“Confound it all,” exclaimed the enraged American, “who’s bringing all these charges, anyway? Dr. Krausz?”

For answer the commissioner glanced at his police officer.

“You detained those fellows, lieutenant?”

“I did, sir, against their protest.”

“Damn their protest, my dear chap! Bring ’em in. Since you persist in going through with this ruddy mess, Hammer, I’ll give you all you want of it.”

The American asked nothing better, and began to think that the commissioner was not so bad after all, having probably been prejudiced against him from the start. The police officer, with his sergeant and two men, left the room, Hammer watching the door eagerly for their return.

Who were these unknown persons? Whoever they were, he reflected, they had done their work well. The devilish ingenuity of it all was amazing, and as Hammer never doubted that Krausz was behind the thing, he began to score up an ugly debt against the scientist.

Except for the evidence which could be brought by Solomon, Sara Helmuth, and the doctor of the *Juba*, all of whom would not be suspected by Krausz, the identity of Harcourt's murderer was unknown.

Counting on this fact, Krausz must have worked out the case against Hammer to the last detail—even to that scar on his forehead.

There was no ultimate danger, of course, but that was not the fault of Krausz; he must have reasoned that if Harcourt had disclosed the name of his attacker before he died, it would have set the commissioner after Jenson.

Therefore he had not disclosed it, and therefore it was perfectly safe to make out the case against the American—and with a plausibility which was startling to Hammer himself, certain as he was

of disproving the charge absolutely, on the return of Solomon.

Yet, was Krausz so wholly to blame after all? Could he have known those little things, such as the scar, and Hammer's ownership of the yacht? He had been miles away all this time, and while he must have furnished Jenson with letters to the German Consul, in order to get the *askaris*, the little secretary must have acted on his own initiative in regard to this charge.

Krausz was no saint, but he was a sinner only because of his life-work, his science; he was no plotter in the dark, and the very theft which had brought him here, which had made him bring Sara Helmuth with him as a sop to a guilty conscience, was attributable to the secretary, who was his evil genius. And that Jenson could act on his own initiative had been shown after Schlak's murder.

Yes, concluded Hammer grimly, he had a godly score to settle with Jenson. Solomon could handle Krausz, for he had long since constituted himself the companion of Miss Helmuth, but Jenson was his own peculiar affair. And, *askaris* or no, he was going to the ruins and get Jenson——

At this juncture the door opened. Behind the policeman entered two of the German sailors from the *Daphne*, and behind him Adolf Jenson.

Hammer said nothing. Thoroughly master of himself by now, he knew the futility of threats,

nor did he want to show Jenson his hand unless it was necessary. But he soon found that it was highly necessary for his own safety.

"You are Adolf Jenson?" demanded the commissioner brusquely.

"Yes, sir," and the secretary, more pallid-faced than ever, let his eyes rest on Hammer's grim face, caught the flame in the American's eyes, and shifted his gaze abruptly.

Hammer remembered that the lieutenant had stated that Jenson had remained only under protest. This, then, was why Solomon had not found him with the *askaris* in the bush. The two seamen gazed stolidly at the commissioner.

"You came ashore with Mr. Harcourt from the *Daphne* the morning of the 14th instant, according to your evidence sworn to at Mombasa?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who else was with you in the boat?"

"These two men, sir, as well as two more, who are now in camp with Dr. Krausz, my master."

"State what happened on the wharf."

Jenson licked his lips nervously, but the sight of Hammer under arrest seemed to give him courage. He had a red weal across one cheek, which the American took to be the mark of Sara Helmuth's bullet, fired during the struggle aboard the launch.

"Why, sir, Captain Harcourt had just stepped ashore. I was right behind him, sir, and there was a crowd of Arabs and natives all about for,

the *Juba* had just come in, and a number of surf-boats had come ashore from her."

He paused, the telling of the story being plainly distasteful to him. Commissioner Smith nodded his head, reading one of the papers before him.

"The captain was a little ahead of me, for I had turned to see that a man was left in the boat. I saw a man wearing a white burnoose step close to Mr. Harcourt, and the next minute he had drawn a knife, sir.

"Before any of us knew what was happening, he had stabbed Mr. Harcourt. The hood of his burnoose fell off, and I recognized Mr. Hammer there; then the captain grappled with him and struck him. That's the mark over his eye, sir. It was made by a heavy ring that the captain always wore."

Jenson was an accomplished liar, thought Hammer grimly. Harcourt had indeed worn a heavy seal ring. Again the man paused, licking his lips, his face ghastly, and again the commissioner encouraged him with a nod.

"Go on."

"He had the hood on again in a minute, sir, but not before we knew who he was. As Mr. Harcourt fell I tried to reach him, but Mr. Hammer's knife touched my cheek, just here, sir"—and Jenson indicated the red weal under his eye. "Then, before we could do anything more,

he had slipped away into the crowd. That's all, I think, sir."

Jenson stepped back toward the door, in evident relief that his story was done with. Except for the two native policemen on the bench, he had the open doorway to himself, since the lieutenant had taken his stand behind Hammer, one hand on his holstered revolver.

The American eyed Jenson grimly enough, but still in silence. The thought that was in his mind occurred to the commissioner at the same instant.

"Look here, Jenson," said Smith, looking up for the first time, "your story agrees with the facts as brought out by the inquiry at the time, except that no such evidence was then given my assistant, who made the inquiry. I'd like to know why you and these two men, who I see gave their testimony in German, went down to the German Consulate at Mombasa after a week had passed, instead of coming to me on the spot and accusing the murderer?"

"We were frightened, sir," returned Jenson promptly. "Mr. Hammer threatened us a little later on, when he found that we had recognized him. It wouldn't have mattered so much to me, sir, but the two men here are members of the crew, and without their testimony mine would not have been believed, I thought.

"Mr. Hammer threatened to kill them if they

said a word, sir. I went to the camp of Dr. Krausz, who sent us at once to Mombasa, and then to Zanzibar, where we produced a number of *askaris* to guard the camp, as you know, sir."

"Yes, and I've taken that up with Nairobi, by Jove!" Smith seemed to wake into life suddenly. "It's a deucedly funny affair that I have to see German soldiers walk into my district to protect a man! If Mombasa people hadn't agreed to it not one of 'em would have set foot in Melindi, and if they aren't kicked out of here inside of two days I'll hand in my resignation. Confound the insolence of you Germans!"

He glared at Jenson, who cringed abjectly. Hammer, who had only been forestalled by the commissioner's questions in regard to the delay in giving evidence, smiled grimly across the stuffy little room at Jenson, and the smile seemed to discourage the secretary entirely. Shrinking back, he pointed at the American, his voice shrill.

"I want you to protect me, sir! He's threatened to kill me before now, and he carries revolvers——"

"Did you search that man, lieutenant?" asked Smith sharply.

Before the officer could reply Hammer drew the two revolvers from his pocket and laid them on the table, still smiling.

"Kindly observe that they are loaded," he said contemptuously; "also that if I had desired to make any resistance it could have been done very easily."

Smith cast a single glance at his officer, who bit his lip again, for he had evidently forgotten about searching his prisoner for weapons.

The Commissioner forbore to make any observation, however, being plainly highly incensed over Jenson's action in bringing the *askaris* into his district.

“Look here, my man, I've a deuced good notion to send you after those *askaris* and ship the lot of you out of here to Mombasa! Confound it, this isn't your bally German East Africa by a long shot, and if you think you can carry things with a high hand in my district, either you or I go, by Jove!”

Jenson did not reply, save by an inarticulate mutter, and shifted his gaze out of the open doorway, the two seamen consistently inspecting the boards of the floor. Smith turned to Hammer, gathering up the papers before him as if his task were done.

“Well, Hammer, I trust you are satisfied that you will get justice done you? And let us hear no more ‘American citizen’ talk——”

“Is it customary here to allow an accused man to be heard in his own defence?” broke in Hammer quietly. He saw that he had started off badly, and that while Smith did not care a snap about the outcome of the case, he did care about the dignity of his position and the brand of justice which he was there to dispense.

“I'm sorry if I offended you at first, Mr. Smith,

but I didn't quite understand the situation and was naturally indignant."

"Why—er—of course, Hammer," assented the other, still with his air of boredom, as he prepared to write. "Anything you may say, of course. No deuced use, though, I'll say frankly: you're bound to go to Nairobi for this thing——"

"Oh, then my accusers will go, too, of course?"

"Naturally," came the dry response. "And under the circumstances I'd advise you to change your plea there, Hammer."

"Thanks," smiled the American. Jenson, uneasy, was darting swift little glances at him, but he paid no heed to the secretary. "But I'd like to go on record as denying the whole affair, Mr. Smith. When does the *Juba* come in, may I ask?"

"She's due to-morrow night, and you'll go back on her the next morning."

Much as he disliked to show Jenson his cards, Hammer saw that he had no other choice. He did not want to leave on the *Juba*, and he hoped to delay matters until the arrival of Solomon, with Sara Helmuth.

If only Potbelly, or Omar ibn Kasim, rather, had understood that last signal of his! Surely Solomon could not be so very far away by now.

"You still deny the accusation, then?" the commissioner was asking, with some surprise in his tone.

"Most certainly, sir. Not only do I deny the

charge, but through the evidence of Mr. Solomon, Miss Helmuth, and Dr. Fargo of the *Juba*, who stayed over here, as you are aware, to attend Mr. Harcourt, I am prepared to prove that not only was I unconscious at the time of the attack on Mr. Harcourt, but that I was on board the *Daphne*.

“If necessary, Roberts, the yacht’s steward, can be brought out from England to testify to that fact, since he caught the first steamer home with certain of Mr. Harcourt’s personal possessions. Furthermore, through the same evidence——”

Hammer paused, unwilling to lay out his whole hand as yet. The commissioner was staring at him in blank amazement, while Jenson, more pallid-faced than ever, was still looking nervously out the doorway. Smith laughed as the American stopped speaking.

“That’s a poor game, don’t you know, Hammer!” he said incredulously. “You can’t produce your witnesses, it seems, and you’re making a play for time that’ll do you no good in the end. Now——”

Suddenly Jenson interrupted, coming a pace forward.

“Beg pardon, sir, but if you think it would be a good plan I can get a launch at the wharfs and fetch these other two witnesses of mine, sir, in time to catch the *Juba*. Their tesimony would clinch matters, sir.”

“Yes,” and Smith nodded, pursing up his lips.

“That’s a good plan. Go ahead——”

“Stop him!” cried Hammer sharply, as Jenson sidled toward the door. He could not make out the secretary’s purpose, but it was clear that Jenson was anxious to get away. “I charge that man with being Mr. Harcourt’s murderer——”

“Enough, Hammer,” ordered the commissioner coldly. “Another word and you go in handcuffs. Get your witnesses, Jenson, and be back here by to-morrow night at latest.”

Furious, barely able to restrain himself, the American saw Jenson flit hastily from the door, leaving his two Germans still on the spot.

From his position he was unable to see the street, and five minutes had elapsed during which time Smith was giving instructions as to the care of the two seamen and preparing his papers, until he ordered Hammer taken to the little corrugated iron prison.

He stopped the officer to order him to get John Solomon as a witness when Hammer heard the sentry outside halt some person.

“See who it is, sergeant,” commanded Smith impatiently.

The sergeant went out, but came back hurriedly.

“Mr. John Solomon, sar.”

And a moment later the overjoyed American saw the pudgy form of Solomon enter, with the grinning Omar Ibn Kasim at his heels like a faithful watchdog.

CHAPTER XIV

OFF AT LAST

“Dang it, but it be a mortal 'ot day!”

Solomon, with his mild observation, paused to mop his brow with a flaming red handkerchief. Instantly offended, Smith snapped out a curt question.

“Your business with me, sir?”

Solomon looked up, his blue eyes widening in surprise.

“Why, dang it, if it ain't the new commissioner as I 'aven't met yet! Werry pleased I am to meet you, sir, and 'ere's 'oping as 'ow we'll get on well in future, as the old gent said to the new 'ousemaid. Me name's Solomon, sir, John Solomon.”

“So I understand. Your business?”

Solomon once more seemed surprised, then looked around and nodded to Hammer.

“Why, sir, I 'eard as 'ow me friend, Mr. 'Ammer, was 'ere, so I says to meself: ‘John,’ says I, ‘don't refuse a 'elping 'and to a friend! 'Elping 'ands is cheap,’ I says; ‘but friends is werry 'ard to find.’ So 'ere I be, sir, 'oping as 'ow you'll see fit to let Mr. 'Ammer go with me.”

“You're a very innocent person,” came the brusque reply. “Mr. Hammer is accused of murder, and does not go *with* you.”

“Lud! Murder! And who’s ’e been and murdered, if I may make so bold, sir?”

Hammer grinned to himself, though inwardly worried over Jenson. Had the man seen Solomon coming?

“He’s accused of murdering Mr. Harcourt, who died at your house not long ago.”

“Lud! To think o’ that!” Solomon fixed the commissioner with his wide blue stare, seemingly as harmless as a baby’s, then shifted it to the officer. “Your servant, lieutenant, sir! Mr. Smith, might I a’ve bit o’ speech with you in the other room, sir?”

“You may not. By the way, lieutenant, better make sure of getting Mr. Solomon as witness in this case I——”

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir; but if so be as you ’as the time, I’d like a bit o’ speech with you in the other room.”

Smith looked up, raging at Solomon’s calm persistency.

“Confound your deuced insolence, sir!” he began. “Do you think——”

“Did you ever ’appen to ’ear, sir,” and the wide blue eyes narrowed a trifle, “as ’ow this station come wacant? Werry unforchnit it was, sir, for the gentleman as was ’ere before you. Lieutenant, your servant; if so be as you’d say a word to Mr. Smith——”

“I really think, sir,” said the police officer

dryly, "that it would be wise to grant Mr. Solomon's request."

Smith glared from one to the other, while Hammer chuckled. Then, as Solomon very calmly drew out clay pipe and plug, the commissioner sprang to his feet and whirled into the other room.

"Very well, Solomon."

"Thank you, sir," and as Solomon passed the lieutenant of police, Hammer caught an almost imperceptible wink.

What transpired in the other room Hammer never knew. For a long ten minutes those in the outer room listened to the hum of voices; then the commissioner reappeared, his face very red indeed.

"Lieutenant, put those two Dutchmen in cells and keep them there," he ordered succinctly, and sat down at his table while Solomon came out. For another few moments he wrote rapidly, then passed the paper to Solomon, who scrutinized it carefully and signed.

"I'm sorry this mistake occurred, Mr. Hammer," and the commissioner turned to him with extended hand, which the American grasped. "You'll have to go to Nairobi, of course; but I've accepted Mr. Solomon's bond for your appearance there. By Jove! Sergeant, take two men and get down to the wharfs; stop that fellow Jenson and bring him up here. We'll land him for perjury, Solomon!"

“Werry good, sir; and if so be as all’s well, Mr. ’Ammer and I will bid you good day. We’ll be back werry shortly, I ’opes, sir.”

Once more in the free air, Hammer’s first thought was for Jenson. As he started after the sergeant Solomon stopped him with a quiet chuckle and pointed out to a dot at the river-mouth.

“Too late, sir. But there ain’t no ’urry, Mr. ’Ammer. There’s a mortal lot in what the Arabs say about fate, sir; and if so be as a man’s turned to evil ways, sir, then ’e’s got to run ’is course, I says. Don’t you fret, Mr. ’Ammer, we’re a-going to send that ’ound to ’ell, sir.”

To his surprise, the pudgy man led the way to the river, with Omar trailing after them, and, as they went, Solomon explained matters somewhat.

When he had left with Omar, the day before, he had missed the trail of Jenson and the *askaris*, owing to the fact that Jenson had been fetched back to Melindi by the police.

The *askaris* had perforce come with him, but had been sent on to the camp by launch, with a native for guide. Solomon had left no word of his whereabouts because he wanted Hammer at the plantation house where he could find him at a moment’s notice.

No such restrictions had been placed on the two Afghans, however, since he was anxious to see them. Accordingly, having found out from

the servants the direction in which Solomon had started, they had slipped out during the night and come to meet him.

Not until after sending Omar to bring Hammer did Solomon find out from a party of natives that he was on the wrong scent, so he had promptly turned back, to be joined by Omar and brought to the commissioner's office in the nick of time.

"No such thing," returned Solomon to a remark by Hammer—"no such thing as coincidence, Mr. 'Ammer. Just the way things work out, I say. When the time comes to get that 'ound Jenson, why, we'll get 'im, sir, and not till then."

"Where's Sara Helmuth?" asked the American.

"Right 'ere, sir," and Solomon pointed to the wharf ahead. Then Hammer saw that his own *Daphne* launch and another were lying ready, filled with Arabs; in the first was seated Sara Helmuth, who left the shade of the awning to meet them as they came down the wharf.

"A fair jewel, the missus is," but Solomon lowered his tone as he went on. "I came to get you off, sir, while she took charge o' this 'ere. And werry well done it is, sir! Off we goes after Jenson."

Few words passed between Hammer and the girl, to whom the story was told as they chugged out into the lines of surf and headed to the north. Quiet and self-contained as always, she had brought down the men and provisioned the launches while

Solomon had gone on to the commissioner's.

With the three of them beneath the awning sat the two Afghans, who greeted Hammer with grave dignity, while Omar had taken command of the other launch.

In all, there were some fifteen Arabs in both craft—and after leaving Melindi behind, fifteen very excellent Winchester rifles mysteriously appeared, with all the appurtenances belonging thereto.

Hammer suddenly appreciated the fact that these men were very different from the chattering natives, and were apt to be dangerous. When Solomon explained that his plan was to land Sara Helmuth and five men a mile this side of the ruins that they might join the Arabs behind the doctor's party, while he and Hammer would go straight for the camp with the other ten, the American voiced his thoughts.

"All very well, John; but wait a minute. Those two Germans back there at Melindi were the same two I kicked off the yacht. Jenson found them and didn't have much trouble persuading them to swear to his lies, evidently. But that only goes to show what a hold he and Krausz have on their men. There are eight *askaris* and six seamen up at the ruins now—fourteen in all, with Krausz and Jenson.

"I'm not afraid of being outnumbered, since we've got it all over them there; but I am afraid

of a general row, and no mistake. If we get into a shooting scrape and half a dozen men get laid out, these Britishers will give it to us hot and heavy for going after Jenson on our own hook, to say nothing of the danger to Sara——”

“One minute, Mr. 'Ammer, sir. I'm werry strong wi' the governor, sir, and the government gen'rally, so to speak, so I wouldn't worry none about a-shooting of all fourteen o' them 'ere men, wi' the doctor into the bargain, sir.”

“Mind, I don't say to 'unt any such mess, Mr. 'Ammer; but if it comes—why, I says to meet it half-way. This 'ere's a partnership deal, sir—you for Jenson and me for the doctor; but so be as 'e gets out peaceable, why, let 'im go. What be you a-going to do wi' this Jenson?”

“Take him back to the *Daphne* and string him up, and explain to the authorities afterward,” announced Hammer. “I'd have brought the engine-room crew if I'd known we were to go after Krausz hammer and tongs, like this. If Jenson resists, I'll shoot him.”

To which intention Sara Helmuth made no objection whatsoever.

Now for the first time Solomon had a chance to interview his Afghans, for they had all been too worn out the night before to have any talk. The result of their mission, which Yar Hussein announced with no little pride, was embodied in the little sheepskin packet he had carried.

This, being opened, proved to contain some very well-copied plans which Akhbar Khan had located among the archives—though he did not say where or how. He was the locater and Yar Hussein the draftsman, it seemed, and the work had been copied line for line and word for word, even to the early seventeenth-century Portuguese text.

Solomon held them in his lap, Sara Helmuth and Hammer leaning over his shoulders as they inspected the plans and he explained them. The first was a rude map of the coast, which clearly showed the location of the fort and storehouses and barracoons; when erected, the latter buildings had been well defended by the position of the fort itself, though the coast seemed to have changed greatly.

There were three others showing the Melindi—spelled “Maleenda”—buildings, which Solomon tossed aside, but at the fifth and last he uttered a grunt of satisfaction. This, to Hammer’s surprise, was labelled Fort San Joao.

“That ’ere was its first name,” explained Solomon knowingly. “Accordin’ to them papers o’ Professor ’Elmuth’s, it was changed to Fort St. Thomas after its destruction. You see, sir and miss, some o’ them ’ere relics belonged to Saint Thomas—Didymus, I doubt it was—and as they was never dug up again the name just stuck to the place, so to speak. This ’ere’d be the place for Jenson, Mr. ’Ammer,” and he chuckled

again as he laid his finger on one of the squares in the corner of the plan.

As Solomon had told them before, the fort was merely a group of buildings with a wall around, much as were the barracoons and warehouses for less valuable goods. The corner to which he pointed was that farthest away from shore, and seemed to be separated from the fort proper by the angle of the corner bastion.

“Why?” asked the girl. “What was that, John?”

“This ’ere, miss, was a little room set above the ground, according to the plan. It was a prison—them Portuguese were main cruel, which was why they didn’t last—and under this ’ere room was a stone pit full o’ puff-adders.”

Solomon went on to say that he had not seen this room when there before, as there was too much jungle to inspect the place closely; but the text, with the plans, explained its purpose fully.

In fact, it was not until a native king had perished in this snake-pit that the place was finally attacked and razed, with the help of the fleet from Muscat which had already taken Port Jesus, or Mombasa.

Suddenly, Hammer recollected Omar’s wild tales about monkeys throwing skulls at him and pits full of snakes, and related what he could of the man’s story.

Solomon nodded gravely, saying that there might still be snakes there, though the monkeys were probably imagination, and fully reassured Sara Helmuth that she would be in no danger through joining his Arabs and making camp in the ruins; and, in any case, puff-adders would hardly be encountered outside the pit.

Upon which, with the air of a man who has played his part exceeding well, Solomon stated that he was in need of rest and would take a nap until the run was finished.

Hammer had seen no sign of Jenson's launch ahead, for he had no glasses, and the secretary had obtained a good start. When Solomon had curled up on the bottom beneath the thwarts the American sat beside Sara Helmuth in the stern, as they had sat on that eventful night that seemed ages ago, when Baumgardner had paid for treachery with his life.

"Talk about Arabian Nights," laughed Hammer grimly, glancing back at Omar's launch in their wake, "I guess this is the limit, Sara! I've half a notion to use that snake-pit on Jenson after——"

"Don't, please!" She shivered despite the heat, then met his gaze and smiled. "I know you didn't mean it, Hammer, but it sounded anything but nice. Now tell me—I have been thinking about something during the past few days, and I wonder if—if this man Jenson could have had anything to do with my father's death?"

Hammer stared at her, trouble in his eyes.

“I don’t know. The man is a regular viper; but though it has occurred to me, also, I rather fancy that he’s not guilty of that, Sara. You see, he’s hardly the sort of man who commits murder except when he’s panic-stricken—a cornered rat, exactly, even to his face. He murdered Mohammed Bari in the hope of getting away from me, and he murdered Harcourt in blind panic, thinking he was discovered.”

The girl looked pensive, and said:

“I’m glad you think that, Hammer; because, while I’m afraid I hate the man as much as you do, if I thought he had injured father in any way, I don’t know just what I would do. No, I think you’re right. He started out by lying about that horrible murder on board your yacht, didn’t he? And he just got in deeper and deeper through his desperate efforts to get out until——”

“Until he’s in too deep to ever get out now,” concluded Hammer. “Shouldn’t wonder if John’s right in his doctrine of Kismet. Jenson’s whole life, little and mean and full of lies, has been leading him up to this very point, it would seem. He hasn’t met his punishment yet, but it’s mighty close, seems to me.”

“Yes. But isn’t that always the way, Hammer? Isn’t a man’s life, and a woman’s, always slowly leading up to some great moment? It has always seemed to me like a mosaic, in which every little

action fits like a stone—insignificant in itself, and yet giving its tiny detail to the making of the whole, until the great moment of highest power or highest failure comes.

“It may not be very high, but I think it comes to everyone, banker or grocer’s clerk, and whether it is power or failure depends largely on the structure of the mosaic. How do you like my philosophy?”

“I’m afraid it’s very true,” returned Hammer slowly, his voice low, his eyes gazing straight over the bow of the launch. Something in his tone struck the girl, for the underlying earnestness in her own voice crept into her eyes as she watched him.

The American’s thoughts were not pleasant. It came to him that this argument of hers was indeed very sound, and he quailed before it. Jenson’s whole life had been leading up to his greatest villainy; his own entire life had been leading up to—what? So with other men he knew, and women.

So with his own wife—her life a tissue of trifles, of petty vanities and unworthy ambitions, until it had culminated in finding a man after her own stamp, and her preferment of him to her husband.

Little things, all of them, yet when united all led irrevocably to some great valley of decision. Why, this serious-eyed girl had hit to the very heart of things!

So, never looking at her, he told her his story.

She listened, half-fascinated by the virility of him, half-awed by the fact that she had pierced to his soul unthinkingly. She watched the fine-lined face, whose rare smiles swept away its harshness; the clear eyes that frowned into the blaze of afternoon sun; the firm, almost too firm, mouth and chin and nose.

And as she watched, harkening to his low words, the faintest trace of a smile touched her lips, though in her eyes there was only a great compassion.

“So, you see, you hit near home, Sara,” he concluded. “What my great moment will be there is no telling; but if it were to come soon I would be afraid—yes, afraid to meet it, I think. Harcourt met his great moment with a clean heart, like the splendid man he was; but my little moments have not been so good, so open to all the world, so fearless and honest as his.”

She was silent an instant; then, “But they have been strong, Hammer! And better a devil than a fool! No; when that great moment of yours arrives I think it will be one of power, not of failure; I would like to see what happens when it does come.”

A sudden blaze outbroke in the man, and he turned; but the words on his lips were interrupted.

“‘Ere! ‘Ere! Dang it, you’ve been and passed the place!”

Startled, he looked around to see Solomon

awakened and hastily gaining his feet. It seemed that Hammer had passed the intended landing-place of Sara Helmuth by a good half-mile, very nearly reaching that of himself and Solomon, in fact; for, looking ahead, he could see a launch anchored and rocking lazily to the swells, while on the shore was the deserted boat.

He swept his launch around, bidding Omar shut off power and wait where he was. As they had no boat, Solomon went into the bow and conned the shoal-water until, at his cry, Hammer shut off the engine.

A swift order sent five of the men over the side, up to their knees in water; and these took up Sara Helmuth and carried her to shore, where all vanished amid the trees a moment later, after a last wave of the hand.

"All right, Mr. 'Ammer!" cried Solomon, relaxing. "They'll be in camp in an hour, God willing."

"And in less than that time we'll either have our friend Jenson ready for the rope, or else we'll have a sweet scrap on our hands," added the American. But he was now thankful to John Solomon, for that sudden awakening had saved him from words which he might have sorely regretted.

Five minutes later the launch was at anchor, and Hammer, lowering himself from the arms of his bearers, saw the path to the ruins directly ahead of him.

CHAPTER XV

DR. KRAUSZ PROVES OBSTINATE

Hammer was by no means certain as to the attitude of Dr. Sigurd Krausz, and he was very certain indeed as to the attitude of the British East African officials. He knew that if he played a waiting game for a day or so, District Commissioner Smith would see to it that the scientist's force was disrupted and the *askaris* transported home, and his recent elbow-brush with the law had shown him very vividly that men do not die in East Africa without investigations, and reasonably thorough ones at that.

Wherefore, with the flame of vengeance no whit undimmed, but burning in the lamp of caution, he waited for Solomon to land the rest of the Arabs and the two Afghans, who had also been given rifles.

"Going to take the men up with us, John? It might be wiser not to make any display of arms until we see what Krausz intends to do."

Solomon nodded, and spoke in Arabic:

"Keep the men here, Omar. We'll be back before sunset."

"And if you do not come, *effendi*?"

“Then see that no one from the other party reaches their boats, but do not fire the first shot. If there is a fight, your task will be to cut them off from escape.”

Mopping his streaming brow—for there was not a breath of wind—Solomon turned to the American.

“If so be as you’re ready, sir? It don’t seem as ’ow there’d be any trouble, Mr. ’Ammer; so we’ll not take any arms, if it’s the same to you, sir. Guns is all werry well in their place, I says; but if men wasn’t so danged anxious to be carryin’ of ’em there wouldn’t be so many cartridges wasted, says I. So we’ll go gentle like and meet the doctor ’alf-way, so to speak.”

Hammer handed back the rifle he had taken from Yar Hussein, and nodded. Knowing the path up to the ruins, he plunged into the opening; but Solomon insisted on going ahead, fearing that Jenson might be lying in wait and might go crazed with fear again at sight of the American.

The latter laughed, and gave way, and he was surprised at the agility with which Solomon clambered along, for the pudgy little man gave no great evidence of bodily activity to a casual eye. Remembering the episode of Hans Schlak, however, Hammer decided to suspend judgement. He had already found John Solomon highly surprising in more ways than one.

Though he watched the jungle keenly as they

proceeded, he could detect no sign of danger. But surely Jenson must have known that he would be followed, and Krausz would not be fool enough to put out no sentries!

Nor was he, as the American found out soon enough. They had covered perhaps half the trail, and had just crossed an open space amid the bamboo thickets, when Solomon, four yards ahead of Hammer, vanished around an abrupt turn in the trail.

The American pushed hastily after him, and upon rounding the same bend was brought up in startling fashion.

Solomon had halted, and directly in front of him Hammer saw Dr. Krausz calmly seated on a camp-stool, with that murderous, double-barrelled shot-gun of his covering the approach. So, then, their launch had been seen! Behind the doctor stood two gigantic Masai *askaris*, their black faces stolid.

For a moment, Krausz looked at the two men before him, his heavy face impassive, but that ribbon of muscle beating, beating, beating endlessly on his brow. He was perfectly sober, the American was glad to note, though none the less dangerous on that account; and when at last he broke the silence his voice was impassive as his face, as though he were exercising a great restraint upon himself.

“So you have come back, Mr. Hammer! And

what are you doing in this man's company, Mr. Solomon—you who used to work for Professor Helmuth, yess?"

In his last words contempt flashed out, but Solomon's eyes only opened a trifle wider as he met the sullen, menacing gaze of Krausz. By tacit consent Hammer allowed his companion to do the talking.

Solomon's answer was characteristic, however. Before replying, he put a hand inside his coat, paying no heed to the swift movement of the doctor's shot-gun, and drew out his red, morocco-bound notebook. Then, wetting his thumb, he opened it and shuffled over the leaves until he found the place desired.

"Ah, 'ere it be, all ship-shape and proper!" He held it out, and Krausz took it, but without relaxing his vigilance. At a word from him the two Masai brought up their rifles while he glanced down at the notebook.

"Werry sorry I am, Dr. Krausz, sir," went on the little man apologetically, "for to bring this 'ere account to your notice, but you asked a question, sir, and so I answers according. If a man can't tell 'is business honest like, I says, why, 'e ain't no business 'aving any business, says I. If you'll just turn over the page, sir, I made so bold as to set down Mr. 'Ammer's account wi' Jenson, keepin' same separate *and* distinct from the account o' Solomon and 'Elmuth."

But Krausz was paying no heed to the words. As he read, his heavy jaw snapped shut, and a dark flush rose slowly to his brow, where the muscle was pulsating terribly.

Deeper and deeper grew the flush, though he forced himself to turn over the page and read to the end; then, with a swift movement, he dashed the notebook down and sprang up with fists extending and shaking, the shot-gun slipping unheeded to the ground.

“Swine!” he roared, furious almost beyond control. “Swine!”

Hammer prepared for anything as Krausz advanced, for one blow from the big man would put him or Solomon in hospital. The latter, however, only gave Krausz a reproachful glance and bent over to pick up the notebook, without heeding the great fists which waved about his head. The action seemed to both puzzle and calm the infuriated archaeologist.

“It iss foolishness!” he foamed, yet looked curiously at Solomon. “Thiss Professor Helmuth, she iss crazy, no?”

“No, sir,” retorted Solomon simply; “no more’n I be, sir. You see, doctor, I was in partnership with ’er father, in a manner o’ speakin’, and ’e wrote me a letter before ’e went and died, ’e did.”

“What?” Krausz controlled himself, swept the brutishness out of his face, and contentrated his

keen energies on John Solomon's personality. "You were my supercargo, yess? Then you were a spy, also!"

"Yes, sir, so to speak. I——"

Krausz interrupted with a brusque gesture as he turned his broad back.

"Come."

Solomon and Hammer followed him, the two *askaris* falling in behind. Hammer was not at all convinced that Krausz did not intend treachery, but there was no help for it, and he followed, wondering if Sara Helmuth had by this time joined forces with Solomon's Arabs behind the camp.

He could not know what was in Krausz's mind, or if the scientist had by this time heard of Harcourt's death. It was possible, indeed, that Jenson had carried his trickery through to the extent of deceiving his master, though Krausz was not a man to be easily deceived.

Now the camp hove in sight ahead, and to his surprise Hammer saw that work on the ruins had been abandoned. More, the hastily-constructed huts of the natives seemed deserted, while the sailor-overseers were sitting idly beneath a large tree.

But, on the hill-top above, he could see an *askari* standing sentinel, while five more were scattered about the camp. Of Jenson there was no sign, and Hammer guessed rightly enough that the secretary was inside the doctor's tent.

“This is great state in which to receive poor wayfarers,” said Hammer dryly. “Ready for our ultimatum, doctor?”

The other strode on without answering, curtly bade them wait, disappeared within his own tent, and emerged a moment later with one of his black panatelas smoking mightily.

Already irritated by the manner of their reception, the American suddenly found himself furiously angry, and flung off the hand of the ever-watchful Solomon without ceremony.

“No, you’ve said your say, John, and got nothing for it. I’ll talk to this brute and show him that we mean business.”

With which he strode up to Krausz grimly and delivered his “ultimatum” without any preliminaries.

“You mind your eye, Krausz! You’re here after stealing a girl’s property and trying to bluff her with threats, but I’m not calling you to account for that. You’re shielding a murderer here, and I want him. You tried to shelter him once before and got what was coming to you, but you hand over Jenson now or you’ll learn what’s what in a very different way.”

“Who hass he murdered?” The other eyed him, puffing calmly.

“Captain Harcourt, and I guess you know it!”

“And,” Solomon came forward with something in his manner that was almost boldness, surprising

Hammer greatly, "I'd like to say, doctor, as 'ow you'd better move out of 'ere werry quick, like. A man as'll steal from a lady, I says, ain't to be trusted nohow. It's 'uman nature to steal, I says, but——"

"Be quiet!" broke out Krausz, losing his calm. "How iss thiss? You say that Jenson killed Mr. Harcourt? That iss a lie! A damnable lie!" He glared at them, overlooking entirely the charges of Solomon.

"Well, do something," suggested the American challengingly. "Hand him over or refuse, one of the two."

"Wait," and Krausz pointed to the tent of Sara Helmuth. "Go in there, both of you, and in the morning——"

"Not on your life," and Hammer took a step forward threateningly. "You make up your mind right here and now, Krausz. I don't give a whoop which you do—all I want to know is——"

"Go," repeated the other, displaying no other emotion than the pulsating ribbon of muscle. "Go, or my *askaris* take their whips to you, and shoot if you refuse, yess! Now go."

Hammer, breathing hard, saw an *askari* approach, trailing the long lash of a rhinoceros-hide whip behind him, two others standing with rifles ready.

"Then you will give us your decision in the morning, doctor?" asked Solomon rather humbly. Krausz flung him a swift look of contempt.

"Yess, to you and Mr. Hammer both. Go!"

Solomon turned and went. Hammer hesitated, but seeing that they were practically prisoners, turned and followed.

At anyrate, thought the angry American, the enemy had taken the offensive and had only himself to blame for what followed.

An escape that night, or a signal to the Arabs, who were, no doubt, aware of what was forward, and Krausz would find himself up against something solid.

But Solomon had no intention of either escaping or signalling, as he flatly stated when Hammer had exhausted his arguments. The other, sucking his clay pipe, accepted the situation very complacently.

“What better could we ’ave asked, Mr. ’Ammer? ‘Ere,’ says ’e, ‘I’ll give you me answer in the morning.’ ‘Werry good,’ says I. ‘E can’t get away, nor can Jenson. Nor, for the matter o’ that, can we; but ’e thinks as ’ow our men are down by the shore and ’e don’t know about them as Miss ’Elmuth ’as. It wasn’t worry as made Methusalum live longer’n most men, sir, as the Good Book says.”

Hammer grunted, but knowing the hopelessness of trying to shake Solomon’s conviction, said no more. His eagerness to get hold of the man was accentuated a thousandfold by Jenson’s nearness, yet he could see that there was some reason in Solomon’s argument.

Also, two *askaris* brought in their supper before long, and since they were to eat alone, Hammer pitched in and made a good meal, feeling more comfortable over a pipe afterward.

In any case, they had Krausz on the hip, what with the men watching the boats and the second party in the ruins of the real fort.

For that matter, he need not be made to move; they could settle down and dig up the treasure, as Solomon had hinted, without the Germans knowing anything at all about it.

What Hammer did not know was that the reading of that notebook and Solomon's words about stealing from a lady had sent a desperate and terrible fear through the big Saxon.

It was not the fear of bodily ill, but it was the fear of the scientist who sees that thing for which he has worked and planned and bartered his soul suddenly about to be snatched from him.

It is a bad fear to have place in a man's heart, but worse when that man is able and determined and when he has staked much upon the issue.

"What's become of the natives?" asked Hammer when they were about to turn in. "Krausz had about two hundred of 'em the last time I was here."

Solomon chuckled. "I sent 'em word to be gone 'ome, sir. They worship some kind o' snake god 'ereabouts, Mr. 'Ammer, so I sent 'em a quiet 'int that the doctor 'e was a-goin' to sacrifice

some of 'em. That settled it."

"Snake god?" repeated the American thoughtfully. "Anything to do with that den of snakes we were talking about?"

"Not as I knows on, sir. To be downright frank, it's some years since I've been and lived 'ere, sir, and I ain't kept in touch rightly wi' things. 'Owsoever, it may be, though I 'as me doubts."

"Snakes don't live without food," retorted Hammer. "They might have a sort of voodoo business along here, which would explain their snake god and also why the snakes had kept alive—for I guess Omar ibn Kasim was telling the truth after all, in part."

Leaving to the morning the question whether they were to be hostages or captives or free men, Hammer slept the sleep of the just that night. They were wakened to receive an early breakfast, which was soon followed by the intimation that "Bwana Krausz" wished to see them in the other tent. Solomon nodded, but stopped Hammer as the latter was preparing to follow the Masai.

"Just a minute, sir. It strikes me that you 'ave a way to make 'im give up Jenson, if so be as 'e refuses, Mr. 'Ammer."

"Eh? How's that?"

"Why, 'e don't know about the real fort, and no more 'e don't know as Jenson 'as 'fessed up to Miss 'Elmuth about them there papers 'e stole

from 'er father. Jenson 'asn't been and told 'im, you can lay to that, sir! 'E'll be fair mad when 'e finds it out."

"Oh, if it comes to that, we'll make him give in," returned the American slowly. "But I don't fancy the method, John, and that's a fact. I'm sore at that big Dutchman for his general conduct, and I'd like to make him crawl without using any such side-issues. But we'll see what turns up; it's certainly a good card to hold."

They found Krausz seated at the table in his own tent, two *askaris* at the door, and two more of the seamen within call. At one side sat Jenson, who was very plainly possessed by one of his cowardly fits, and who contented himself with darting a venomous glance at the two as they entered.

Krausz motioned Solomon to one side and transfixed Hammer with a baleful stare, at which the American grew angry instantly.

"Well?" he rasped out, "what have you to say?"

"Thiss, my friend. I have found out who killed Mr. Harcourt. He wass a good man, and a good captain, and I am sorry. Adolf did not kill him, but you did, and for that you shall hang by the neck, yess. Ass for taking Adolf away, that iss foolishness. Adolf shall take you, yess."

Hammer collected himself, for he had half-expected such a counter accusation from the

secretary, who was desperately endeavouring to weave such a network of lies about the death of Harcourt that he might be able ultimately to wriggle out through some loophole. Angry as the American was, he laughed shortly.

“Suit yourself, Krausz. Adolf never goes away from here except in irons, though. So, now that you’ve settled me so neatly, what about Mr. Solomon?”

Krausz turned to Solomon, who looked very wide-eyed at him.

“As for you, Mr. Solomon, I do not like people with notebooks, no. You also are a very big liar, and to a bad end you will come. I might prosecute you for blackmail, but no. Out you shall go, but do not think you can——”

“*Bwana!*”

A sudden disturbance arose outside, followed by a shout in German. One of the seamen entered and made a hurried speech in that language, to which the doctor nodded, looking slightly surprised. The man hurried out again.

“Ah! I thought we saw you land Miss Helmuth yesterday, yess!” He beamed on the American, caressing the thin cigar in his mouth, and his face was cruel. “Also I thought she would not stay out in the jungle long, for here she iss!”

Hammer started. Was Sara really coming, then? She or Omar must have seen that he and Solomon were prisoners, of course, but it was a mad

thing to come in and throw away their best chance of rescue!

He flung a despairing glance at Solomon, which fetched a chuckle from Krausz, but Solomon merely stared like a surprised baby and kept silence.

Of course the girl would lead out her men and make what show of force she could, thought Hammer, edging around to get a view of the ground immediately outside the tent.

With fifteen men here, and ten more under Omar against his fourteen, even the stubborn Saxon must see that he was outnumbered. An instant later the American felt dismay tugging at his heart.

For Sara Helmuth came in alone, with neither Afghan nor Arab behind her, but with an *askaris* and a seaman conducting her. With a glance at Hammer and Solomon she walked up to Krausz, who doffed his sun-helmet for a wonder, and opened fire.

“What does this mean, doctor? Are my friends your prisoners?”

“Not at all, dear lady,” he beamed, putting forward a camp-chair, which she ignored. “Thiss Mr. Hammer iss a murderer, and later on Adolf takes him back to justice, yess! Thiss Mr. Solomon is an impudent little fat man, who gets turned out in the jungle to starve—but away from hiss men, yess, away from hiss men. Not on the seaward side, you understand!”

He smirked knowingly, and the anger in the girl flashed out.

“You scoundrel! For a man of your position to stoop so low as to steal and lie! Oh, I know the whole story now! You stole those papers from my father, your friend, as he was dying; but you didn’t steal them all, Dr. Sigurd Krausz! Poor fool of a thief that you are, not even to know a fort from a slave barracoon—and yet you call yourself an archaeologist! Why, you don’t even know what the treasure is yet, the best part of it, nor where it is, nor where the real fort is! And you never will know. Now, either send Mr. Hammer and Mr. Solomon safely out with me, or I’ll——”

“Begin’ your pardon, miss, but if so be as I could smoke it’d be a mortal help!”

The words were a desperate effort on the part of Solomon to save the situation. So rapidly had the furious girl poured out her denunciation that before Hammer realized what she was saying, before any one could intervene, she had given away the secret.

Solomon’s words, however, and the look that he flashed her, saved her from letting Krausz know any more. It was all-important that he should not know that they had men in the jungle ready to spring at his throat.

As she realized what she had said she went deadly pale; but there was no wavering in her eyes, and Hammer, dismayed though he was, could not but

approve her for it. Krausz, too, caught the meaning of her words, but more slowly.

As he grasped their import his face changed from red to white, and a snarl came into his eyes; then he sank into his camp-chair, gazing steadily at her as he forced himself into control and tried to read meaning into her words.

"You know the whole story now—so! And they were not all stolen, yess? But what iss thiss—that I do not know a fort from a slave barracoon—*Himmel!* That iss why we found nothing! And, *fräulien*, you know all these things, yess?"

"I do, and you shall not know them."

"Listen, *frälein!*" He leaned forward, sweat dripping from his face, and earnestness in every feature, while the ribbon of muscle on his brow pounded furiously.

"You know thiss, and I do not, *hein?* What will you take that you shall tell me? It iss nothing to you, it iss everything to me!"

"Tell you?" And the scorn in her voice lashed him like a whip. "Thief and liar that you are! Tell you? I would sooner tell that man Jenson there than you!"

"Ah, yess! Jenson!" Still he gazed at her, fighting himself hard. "I have made a mistake, then? Thiss iss not the fort, but I knew that much already, *fräulein!* And this Mr. Hammer iss your friend—*Ach, mein Gott!* It wass you who told about the papers, Jenson!"

The big Saxon whirled in his chair, his hand shot out, and Jenson, clutched by the shoulder, was dragged bodily over the table into the group. The fellow was too frightened even to whimper, and the blaze in the eyes of Krausz seemed to paralyse him.

“So, it wass you who told, while you were away! You told, swine! Listen, *fräulein*! Tell me what you know, and we shall be partners, yess! Tell me, and this Mr. Hammer he shall take Adolf with him! Perhaps it wass Adolf who killed Captain Harcourt, after——”

Quick as Jenson was, the scientist was quicker, his foot shooting out with the swiftness of light. Hammer fancied that Jenson’s wrist was broken by the kick, for he screamed once, horribly, even before the knife fell to the ground. Krausz flung him to the seamen with an order in German, and a moment later Hammer was seized and his hands bound before he could resist.

The incident aroused all the brute in Krausz and he stood glaring around for a moment, Sara Helmuth instinctively shrinking before him.

“You, *fräulein*, you know me! Yess, the papers were stolen, but I did not come to the right place? Then you shall tell me where that place it iss.”

“I will not,” came her firm answer.

Krausz turned and snapped out an order in German, pointing to Hammer. The American

saw one of the sailors snatch the rhinoceros-hide whip from the *askari*, but the girl's face had gone white.

"Stop!" she almost screamed. "I'll tell—I'll take you there; but not that!"

"Good," grunted the Saxon, watching her malevolently. Jenson, bound and writhing impotently, was laid on the ground, and he took the whip from the seaman.

"Get up, Jenson." A stroke of the whip and Jenson rose; what with the whip and his arm, the man was in agony, and Hammer almost pitied him.

A few orders from Krausz, and Solomon was bidden go where he willed—on the landward side of camp; two *askaris* forced Jenson and Hammer along, two more followed, and with Krausz and Sara Helmuth walking side by side the party proceeded up the hill toward the jungle and the ruins beyond, while John Solomon looked after them for an instant and then incontinently took to his heels.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLACE OF SKULLS

Cyrus Hammer, as he was forced along beside Jenson, was aware that the crisis had come in the twinkling of an eye and that he had proven wanting. Sara Helmuth had met it in his place—and Krausz had proven victor.

On the surface, at least. But, as he heard Sara Helmuth telling the scientist the tale of the real fort, Hammer smiled to himself. She might reveal the secret of the fort and treasure and all else—for Krausz had done the very thing which Hammer had never for an instant dreamed that he would do in releasing John Solomon.

The American recollected that, to Krausz, Solomon was no more than a mere pudgy little man who had shoved himself into the affairs of others, and for whom a day of wandering in the jungle would be veritable torture.

Krausz had woven his own net, for the only man there able to warn him against Solomon was Jenson, and from Jenson he would receive no warning. Moreover, Hammer saw that vengeance was like to be taken from his hands, since Jenson's punishment was slowly but surely drawing in upon him.

His exultation did not last long, however. He soon saw that, short of a murderous volley which would cut down all four *askaris* and Krausz with them, Solomon could not do much to help them just at present.

The girl was telling Krausz of the treasure now as they stood among the trenches on the hill, where tools lay flung about as the natives had deserted them.

Krausz had done a good deal, thought Hammer; in that week he had found out for himself that he was on a false scent—and that despite Solomon's prediction to the contrary.

Behind them the camp lay quiet, smoke curling up from the fires, the seamen and the four remaining *askaris* looking after the party. In front stretched the jungle, deep green and yellow tangles of vines and trees and bamboos. The girl turned to Hammer.

"Do you know just how to get in there, Hammer?" she said wearily. "I've promised to guide the doctor there, and——"

He saw that she was trying not to betray the secret of the camp from which she had come, but with Solomon gone to his men, as he plainly was, there was naught to be feared.

"Lead us by the path you came," he reassured her, Krausz paying no heed, but searching the jungle with eager eyes. "The ruins ought to be straight back from these, about two hundred yards or so."

She caught the meaning of his words and his quick smile and, with an answering flash in her eyes, turned back to Krausz, who still bore the whip taken from the *askari*. Though he carried no gun, Hammer caught a bulge in the coat-pocket of the big Saxon and knew that he was not unarmed.

Now, without further hesitation, Sara Helmuth led the way across the half-trenched lines of ruins. The American saw that when she had come to the camp that morning out of the jungle-hid fort it had been with little fear of such a result as this.

Perhaps trusting in John Solomon or himself, perhaps determined, if necessary, to force the doctor's hand by threat of exposure—any one of a hundred reasons flashed through Hammer's mind; but the central thought was that she had borne herself far better than had he.

Bound, helpless, marched at the side of the staggering, moaning Jenson, he found himself forced into a narrow path, and the jungle closed around them.

Krausz was not careless, however. Finding that the path was actually walled in by trees, bamboos, and creepers, and doubtless suspicious at seeing it recently cleared, he sent an *askari* ahead, then Sara Helmuth, and followed himself, with another *askari* behind, his long whip ready for action, and ordered Hammer and his guard

immediately behind, while Jenson and the fourth Masai brought up the rear.

Barely had they got well in shelter of the jungle than Hammer, with Jenson's moans coming from behind like the inarticulate cries of a trapped beast, felt the hand of his guard fumbling with the cords that bound his wrists.

He half-turned in surprise, when a hand on his shoulder pressed him about again; with the fingers of his other hand the Masai tapped gently on the little silver ring Hammer still wore, and the latter understood.

This Masai fighting man, brought by Jenson from Zanzibar to defend Krausz, with the German eagle on tunic and fez, had recognized the sign of John Solomon, and had made answer to it!

Almost as the unbelievable thought found its way into his brain he felt that his bonds were loosened; a warning hand pressed his wrist again, and was gone. He comprehended that for the present he was not to free himself, and though the impulse was in him to leap on Krausz from behind, he held it in check and followed blindly.

In one respect at least the scientist seemed sincere, and that was in his belief, inspired by Jenson, that Hammer had stabbed Harcourt. Indeed, in matters foreign to his calling Krausz was probably all that could be wished.

But he, too, beginning at the comparatively innocuous point of taking the papers belonging

to the dying Helmuth, had been wound in the skein of cumulative wrong-doing, reflected Hammer. He was not weak like Jenson, however; his wrong-doing was aggressive, determined, positive, while that of Jenson was decidedly negative.

Where the hiding-place of the relics and papers was the American himself did not know, though Solomon and the girl did. Now Krausz knew as well, or soon would, for Hammer divined Sara's intention perfectly.

She would give up all in order to appease the Saxon, depending on Solomon to eventually overpower the latter, if he did not first prevent the disclosure of the secret.

Hammer spared no thought on himself. That he was in any present danger did not occur to him, since he could not suspect the thoughts behind the doctor's heavy-lidded eyes and throbbing band of muscle.

For the jungle smell had entered into the nostrils of the scientist—and whether it be in jungle or forest or sand reaches, no man can taste the loneliness of Nature and hold to his veneer of man-learning.

It is the same whether he be beside the Mackenzie or the Mahakkam, under Kilimanjaro or Tacoma. Once away from his kind, man forgets his kind, for the despotism of the wild overbears all else.

It was so with Krausz and, to a certain sense, with Sara Helmuth; it was so with Hammer,

though he did not comprehend it; but if it was so with John Solomon no man could say.

"We are here," exclaimed the girl dully.

The party halted. Without perceiving it in the half-gloom of the overhanging masses of vegetation, they had suddenly come among half-fallen walls, ruined stone structures that loomed far up and were held in place by thigh-thick vines.

Through some had pierced old trees and limbs of trees, yet the walls still held in grotesque mimicry; no roofs were there, but only walls and ruins of walls. And over the place brooded silence, with never a chattering of monkey or parrot's screech to quiver hollowly up.

Hammer felt a twitch at his arm, but shook off the hand of the *askari*. If the man thought he was going to run for it and leave Sara Helmuth in the lurch, he was much mistaken. Slowly, very slowly, the American saw that men had been here not long before, since in amid the ruins were evidences of clearing—lopped branches piled up in places, flickering shadow-gleams of sunlight that filtered down from somewhere above, and queer white fragments that strewed the ground in spots.

If Krausz saw this, however, he paid small heed, but clambered over a smoothed-out pile of stones, the others following.

"*Gott!* Truly thiss iss the real place!"

He stood looking around, caressing the handle

of the whip with his fingers. On three sides towered walls and trees and vines, inextricable and undefined; where walls ended and trees began it was impossible to say, for the growth of two hundred jungle years is not to be lightly set aside by a few Arabs in a week's time. Jenson sank down where he stood, cowed into silence by the silence around.

Suddenly, as if the echoes of the doctor's words had worked through the interstices of the leafy roof, a great burst of shrill chattering arose somewhere overhead.

Hammer jumped, startled; at the same instant two or three white objects shot down from nowhere, apparently. Two burst into shreds, the other struck a mossy wall and rebounded to the feet of Krausz, who leaped back in alarm.

One half-stifled shriek burst from the first *askari* and stilled the clamour above. Sara Helmuth stared at the thing, as did everyone else, her face very pale; and Hammer knew, at last, that Omar ibn Kasim had spoken truth indeed—for the object was a skull.

An oath from Krausz recalled the frightened *askaris* to their vigilance. He stood mopping his brow and staring from the unbroken skull to the trees above, and, as Hammer glanced up, he saw one or two dark forms flitting about the top of the nearest wall and vanishing in the trees.

“Monkeys!” exclaimed Sara Helmuth, her eyes

unnaturally large, but her voice firm. "Are you afraid of monkeys and skulls, Herr Doctor?"

For answer Krausz snorted and picked up the skull. He flung it away instantly.

"Pah! It iss mouldy—it hass been the ground in. Monkeys—pigs of scavengers! Yess, thiss iss the place."

For a moment he stood silent. Then, for the gruesome thing must have wakened the depths of him, he swiftly changed the whip to his left hand, drew a revolver with the other, and turned on the group behind him.

Hammer started at the change in the man. His great brow was mottled, as were his cheeks, save for the panting band of muscle that stood out deep red, and his black eyes gleamed with something that was near akin to ferocity. Never had Hammer seen such a face on a man, and now, for the first time, a strange alarm stirred within him.

Krausz tried to speak, but could not for a moment; lips and tongue were dry, and his voice came in a hoarse growl that betrayed how that monkey-flung skull had got on his nerves.

"You tricked me, yess!" he cried at length. "You tricked *me*, Sigurd Krausz! You, *fräulein*, you, and Adolf here! But no more shall you trick me, no. I——"

He paused quickly, plainly fighting for his lost self-control, meeting the firm eyes of Sara Helmuth.

Hammer, fearing that the man would break out into violence, tensed his muscles and measured the distance between them, but Krausz lowered his revolver as slow sanity crept back into his eyes.

The girl still faced him, though she had shrunk back before that mad outburst, and in reply her voice came low, but with a note that seemed to calm his rage, so cold and self-contained was it. Hammer noted that she made no gesture as for a weapon; she must have come unarmed, probably on the impulse of the moment.

“Yes, you were tricked, Her Doctor—tricked by a girl. And you are called the greatest archaeologist in Europe! Dresden will laugh when it hears the story, doctor—the story of how you dug for a week in the ruins of a storehouse, while the fort you were in search of lay under your nose here. And then the treasure!

“Now free me and Mr. Hammer there, and I promise you that this shall never be known in Europe, Dr. Krausz. If the story came out it would blast your reputation, and you know it well.”

Krausz looked at her, frowning as if in hard thought. Hammer saw that the strain was telling heavily upon her, and breathed a sigh of relief when the scientist replied:

“Yess, it would my reputation blast, *fräulein*. That iss very right—very. But listen. You have

told me that the treasure was in two parts, yess, and the relics and papers, I do not know where they are. But you know, *fräulein*. Now tell me, take me to thiss place also, then will I free you and Mr. Hammer and Adolf—yess, you shall go free with Adolf, both of you!”

As he made this offer, there was something about the narrowed eyes of the man that Hammer did not like. Sara Helmuth studied him for a moment, but she was plainly weakening fast.

Something of the fetid aspect of the place seemed to be in the face of Krausz, and she palpably distrusted him; but he forced quietude into his features and stared stolidly at her, waiting.

Another white object fluttered down from above with a chattering that floated away amid the tree-tops, and the girl shuddered as the skull struck the wall behind her and shivered rottenly.

“How—how if I refuse?”

“If you refuse, *fräulein*, the whip—and no promise.”

He gestured with his hand toward Hammer. The girl flung the latter one helpless glance, and bowed her head as she turned.

“Come.”

Krausz, with triumph beaming from his massive features, motioned the others to fall in line, and they went as at first, out across the fallen wall. To the American the place was shapeless, formless, but Krausz cast quick nodding glances about him,

and Sara Helmuth did not hesitate.

Hammer felt his heart throbbing—the atmosphere of the jungle-hid ruins was oppressive, stultifying. The girl led them across fallen walls and past cleared spaces to a great heap of ruins overgrown thickly.

Through it led a hard-beaten path, and with half-darkness about them she paused at what seemed to be a square hole in the ground, perhaps a dozen feet across, with trees roofing all in overhead. Here the path ended.

“It is there,” she said simply.

Krausz growled something at the *askaris*, and went forward. Hammer, watching, saw him stop suddenly as though listening. Then, at the edge of the hole, he laid down revolver and whip and went to his knees, and so flat on his belly, his hands gripping roots on either side of him.

Here he stayed motionless for what seemed ages to the overwrought American. When, at last, he crawled upright, his hands were shaking tremulously, his face was ghastly white, and he clutched at a near-by tree for support.

“*Mein Gott!*” he said thickly, staring at the girl. “*Mein Gott! Mein Gott!*”

CHAPTER XVII

THE PIT OF ADDERS

Hammer could not understand himself. He was practically free, he realized fully that this was the time to act, when Krausz was unarmed, and yet his brain was dulled and refused to impart movement to his limbs. He stared at Krausz, fascinated by the least movement of the man, utterly unable to do a thing.

Whether it was auto-hypnotism, or whether the terrible deadening influence that had come upon him was caused by the noxious jungle bringing back his fever, the American never knew.

Jenson had ceased to moan, and crouched at one side by his guard, cowed. The Masai cast uneasy glances about and at each other, but still Krausz stared at Sara Helmuth, who seemed to droop under his gaze.

“You knew, yess?” he muttered finally.

She nodded listlessly.

“Yes. I stayed near here last night. I was here.”

The colour flowed back into the face of the scientist little by little. Turning his back on the party, he stooped and picked up revolver and

whip, then stood looking down at that which lay in the blackness of the hole.

Hammer wanted to scream, but he could not, for some unseen power had paralysed his muscles. He wondered, idly, what lay in that hole, but he was more interested in watching the big Saxon. He had never seen Krausz so completely overcome before, he thought, and it made him want to laugh.

“By Godfrey!” He shook himself, conquering that terrible apathy. “You’ve got to quit this, old man, or God knows what’ll happen. That chap is breeding trouble and first thing you know he’ll spring something bad.”

Why the thought came to him he could not tell, but come it did. Krausz turned, with a nervous glance around at the silent trees, but there was no danger in his face, save that the tell-tale ribbon of muscle was pounding madly.

Then once more the scientist went to the brink of the hole and looked down. It was as if he were reflecting on something, weighing something over in his mind before coming to a decision.

A half-sound caught Hammer’s attention and he looked at Sara Helmuth. She had turned partly aside, her head was down in her two hands, and her shoulders were shaking softly as she stood. Overcome by the horror of the place, she had given way at last, and the sight was too much for Hammer.

As if by magic he felt himself once more, with

all his old quickness of thought and vigour of action returned to him. Solomon had failed them and they were alone, and the thought brought responsibility back to him.

Quietly slipping his hands free of the loosened cords, he strode over to the girl's side, none hindering him, and in the face of the jungle horror about them he put an arm about her shoulders, drawing her head to his breast.

"Quiet, Sara," and he patted her back in a clumsy effort to soothe her. "It's all right, girl—don't cry. We'll get out of this place and forget about it——"

For several weeks now Sara Helmuth had forced herself into the position of a man among men, playing a lone hand in the dark, and while friendship had come to her in the guise of Solomon and Hammer, her woman's soul had craved sympathy as a child craves its mother's arms.

Furthermore, the place in which they stood mirrored dread into her soul, for only the evening before she had stood at the edge of that hole and gazed down while the Arabs held torches aloft and looked grimly at each other. So, but chiefly because of Hammer's actions and words, she smiled once and fainted.

The American felt frightened for a moment, then relief came to him. The burden had been put on his shoulders, and, allowing the girl to slip to the ground, he turned to find Krausz looking

at them and frowning, blackness brooding in his eyes and an evil twist to his heavy jaw.

"She hass fainted? That iss good."

"Yes, she's fainted; but you'll notice that she kept her word first." Hammer's anger turned cold within him, for as he wondered what frightful thing lay in that hole he remembered the story of the pit of snakes—and he dreaded snakes as he dreaded no other thing on earth.

"She's kept her word, Krausz, so I guess it's up to you to keep yours. You lend me a couple of these *askaris* to carry Miss Helmuth and we'll be going."

"Wait."

The scientist seemed oddly apprehensive, seemed as if he were trying to say something which could not find utterance. He looked at Hammer, then at the *askaris*, then at the jungle above and around, and finally beckoned.

"Come—look at thiss thing."

Hammer did not want to look, yet it seemed as though some force drew him to follow the other to the edge of that black hole. Now he knew why the horror had come upon him, the snake-fear which lies at the bottom of many men's souls and which is not to be explained or reasoned away.

"*Mein Gott*—look at them!"

The American obeyed with cold chills gripping his spine. Yet he could see little. The pit was

deep, very deep. As his eyes searched the darkness of it he guessed that the bottom was twenty feet away.

Then a soft, slithering sound broke the dead stillness, and a low "his-s-s" which there was no mistaking.

"Adders," stated the doctor decidedly. "Puff-adders, my friend, and a bite it iss death, yess!"

Hammer did not know a puff-adder from a black snake, but he did know why the other had gazed so long into that pit of darkness, for there was a deadly fascination about it that compelled his eyes despite his loathing.

"If the treasure iss there, it can wait, yess!" exclaimed the scientist.

The American mentally added that it could wait until what Sherman said war was froze over, for all of him; but he still looked down until gradually the thing took shape before him.

The sides of the pit were straight and well paved, slimy, mossy, with never a break in the stones. Far down something scintillated for an instant, then again, and the slithering noise went rustling faintly without cessation. Hammer was aware that Krausz had come to his side and was pointing down.

"There—look at that. It iss a platform, no?"

With the words the scientist scraped a match and flung it down. The American got a glimpse of a small jutting-out stone, some two feet square,

half-way down the pit, and below that a twining, shuddering mass of something that drove him reeling back with sickness strong upon him.

“That’s enough,” he gasped, wiping the cold sweat from his face. “I’ll get out of here and stay gone, don’t worry——”

“Stop!”

There was a new note in the voice of Krausz, and it brought Hammer around instantly. The other had followed him back from the hole, and was glaring at him with such mad eyes that instinctively the American took a step backward.

“You are not going away,” said the big Saxon slowly, his eyes burning into those of Hammer. The band of muscle was deep crimson, and it was pulsating like a wild thing against the man’s white brow. Hammer’s foot struck against the limp form of Sara Helmuth, and the touch restored him from his panic.

“Eh? What’s that?” he exclaimed, unbelieving.

“I say you are not going away—you and Adolf and Professor Helmuth, yess!”

“What’s the matter with you?” demanded Hammer, thoroughly angry. “You promised that when——”

“Yess, and my promise I shall keep—but thiss way.” Krausz gestured with his whip toward the hole. “I promised to set you free, *nein?*”

Between anger at the man and fear of what lay

behind him, Hammer stared at him astounded. It had not occurred to him that Krausz would not perform his part of the agreement—but what did he mean by “thiss way”?

The big Saxon went on, his jaw pushed forward aggressively, his eyes fastened banefully on Hammer:

“Fools! Did you think that I would let you go, yess, to make of me a joke before all Europe? *Ach*, no! Am I, Sigurd Krausz, to be tricked and made a fool?”

He turned swiftly to the nearest *askari*—the same who had freed Hammer.

“Go back to the camp and bring a rope—quick, you black swine!”

The man saluted, flung Hammer a helpless look, and disappeared. The other three watched, leaning on their rifles.

“What do you mean?” began the American, aghast before the terrible thought that had leaped into his brain. Krausz flung about on him, raging.

“Mean? What do I mean? American pig! Iss my work to be spoiled by thiss *fräulein*? No! *Ach*, but Adolf iss a devil! He betrays everyone, but he shall not betray Sigurd Krausz. No, nor you, American. I meant to kill you all, but now I have a better way, yess, and I shall my promise keep. Later I will come back, yess, and get the treasure and give it to the world—my treasure,

my papers, my relics!

“Never has so great a chance come—and it is not to be perilled by you. So I tell you plainly, American, you shall not play with Sigurd Krausz.”

Then, too late, Hammer realized that the look in the other's eyes was little short of madness. He cast a look around, but the jungle hedged them in, silent and merciless, with no sign of Solomon or aid.

But—what did the madman mean to do? He was crazed on the subject of his work, that was plain, and whether the jungle mania had unbalanced him or not, there was a fury in his eyes.

“What do you mean?” asked Hammer again. “Don't think you can get away with any dirty work, Krausz, or Solomon——”

“Bah! Do not joke with me. Listen—you saw that platform, American? Then I tell you that you and Adolf Jenson and Professor Helmuth, you shall stand there until you get tired. You shall be free, yess—but you cannot get up, and when you go down you will not play with Sigurd Krausz any——”

Hammer saw red and struck. The whole insane scheme darted clear to his mind, and he drove his fist home into that mocking face with a furious curse. Krausz flung up his revolver-hand, but Hammer dashed it aside and the weapon fell; he saw Krausz reel back and knew he had crushed the man's nose with his first blow, but he followed

with relentless fury in his heart.

Krausz tried to fight him off, and he saw the three *askaris* closing in on him; then he felt the whip curl about him, sending a terrible red wale over his cheek and biting into his body; but time and again those fists which had won him his name stabbed into the face of the big Saxon—until the *askaris* ground him to the earth by main weight and tied him.

The American glared up, still raging in his helplessness. Krausz had dropped his whip and was clinging to a long vine that trailed down across the body of Jenson, who had not moved.

The fight had hardly lasted a minute, but Hammer had learned his trade in a hard school. The heavy features of Krausz were crushed into a red mass, for the first blow of Hammer's had splintered his nose; yet, for all the pain he must have been suffering, Krausz said no word.

Groping for his handkerchief, he slowly wiped the blood from his eyes, then stooped and picked up his pith helmet and put it on, carefully letting down the mosquito-gauze about his features.

There was something in the action, something of iron tenacity, that made Hammer hold his breath, waiting for he knew not what. With that crimsoned visage masked from sight, Sigurd Krausz appeared even more formidable. Hammer knew that his outburst had effected nothing.

Yet it had been half panic. The scientist's

fiendish plan had sent a shudder of abhorrence through him; the very odour of that pit nauseated him, and he had lashed out in a frenzy of mingled fear and rage. Then the memory of that narrow shelf of rock——

“By Godfrey!” thought the American desperately, “if Solomon doesn’t show up in a hurry it’s all off! That ledge won’t hold more than one person, that’s sure.”

Panic-stricken, he watched the Saxon. Krausz took a step, and stumbled across Jenson, all but falling. At the same moment the *askari* who had been sent to camp returned, panting, carrying a length of rope.

Krausz seized it from him and bent the end around under Jenson’s arms. From where he stood Hammer could see how the secretary trembled, and a moment later he shrank away from Krausz, scrambling desperately to regain his feet, screaming.

“Don’t!” The wail shrilled up. “Don’t! Oh—God——”

Krausz had signalled to the *askaris*, who shut off Jenson’s screams with grins of delight. It was not the sort of work they usually did for white people, but to Masai hearts it was glorious. Hammer realized that the one friendly man could do nothing for him, and his cheeks blanched.

He watched Jenson carried to the edge of the pit and carefully lowered. A jerk or two freed

the rope, and since no sound came forth, Hammer supposed that the man had reached the ledge in safety. Krausz turned to where Sara Helmuth lay, still senseless.

Then the American knew that there was no hope, that this fiend would actually carry out his threat, and he felt his flesh creep at the thought.

He pictured to himself that narrow ledge, with Jenson already there—ready to fight off whomever came next.

If the girl was sent down alone, unconscious as she was, what little chance she had would be gone, while he, Hammer, was whimpering up here!

He slowly got to his feet, the *askari* who stood over him pulling him up, and, as Krausz leaned over the girl with the rope ready, Hammer knew that he had become himself once more. He might die, but he would die like a man.

“Put that rope around me, Krausz,” he said calmly. “I’ll take her in my arms, if you’ll untie my wrists.”

The other straightened up, turning toward him, and Hammer saw the little dribble of blood that trickled down the front of his khaki coat from beneath the helmet-gauze. He noted, too, that Krausz feared to trust him, and added desperately:

“I’ll give you my word, doctor, to make no trouble. Let’s have it over with decency.”

“Good!” came the rumbling response, with a gesture to one of the Masai. The latter cut

Hammer's bonds, and the American strode to the side of Sara, lifting her in his arms. Then, with firm step but ghastly face, for the feeling of revulsion was almost too strong to be endured, he walked to the brink of the pit, and waited.

"Hurry, for God's sake!" he gasped.

The rope was put around him, under his shoulders; he did not feel how it cut into him as his weight came upon it. He knew only that terrible darkness was rising up at him, that the nightmare had begun, that slimy mossy stones were all about him.

He strove for a footing with his hanging feet, but to no avail. The walls were smooth, fissureless; he could not look down because of the body of the girl who lay in his arms. And it was as well that he could not, for an instant later his foot struck something soft.

He almost screamed at the touch, having forgotten Jenson for a moment; then he remembered. What next happened he could not tell; he felt himself swinging on the rope, and a great fear surged into him that the Masai had dropped him.

Then he knew that Jenson was beating against his legs, trying to drive him off with his beast-like, wordless whimpers.

He felt that he was kicking out in desperation, and his foot landed once; then from below came a single strangled cry, followed by a soft thud, and an instant later he was afoot on the rock ledge.

How long he stood there holding Sara Helmuth he never knew, for he was battling with all his will-power to get control of the awful horror that was over him. The snake-fear had gripped him, and the very rock at his back seemed to be a living thing that was pressing him forward, trying to fling him to the things below. This must have been the rope loosening from him, however, for presently he had conquered himself and the rope was gone from about him.

For a little space he did not realize that he was in any great danger. He was a good ten feet above the things that crawled down there and as much below the surface; he thought of Jenson, but spared no pity on the man; and the remembrance of his own words regarding the snake-pit and Jenson even brought the faintest flicker of a smile to his tense lips. Yet in his bitterest moments he could not have wished the man such agony as was now his own.

He listened for some sound from above, but none came. Had Krausz departed to cure his own hurts or was he waiting for some word from his victims? Hammer compressed his lips tighter; at least, the Saxon would not have the satisfaction of hearing him whimper, he thought. He was thankful that the girl showed no signs of waking from her swoon.

But how was Solomon to know where they were? He could not have been watching, or he would

have prevented the terrible deed at all costs; of that Hammer was assured.

If he did not shout for aid—but what good would shouting do him? The sound would be lost in the pit or in the leafy roof above; he could not have pierced that mass of vegetation if he had had the lungs of Stentor.

It occurred to him that if he set the girl down on the ledge at his feet he might be able to get out in some way. There was only a ten-foot wall above him, and even the mosses would give him foothold.

Besides, her weight was beginning to tell on his arms, and he could not hold her for ever. He felt gingerly forward with one foot—and cold fear struck him to the heart.

Now he knew why Jenson had slipped away, and how. In the darkness of the pit, looking down from above, the ledge had seemed fairly wide; as a matter of fact, it jutted straight out from the wall for a scant foot; then the upper part of the stone broke and shelved down on all sides to the under part.

On that foot square of rock it was possible for one person to stand; it was possible for him to stand so long as he could hold the girl's weight in his arms, but there was not foothold for two persons—and he could not hold Sara Helmuth much longer. As it was, his arms were tiring rapidly.

Hammer's face clenched into a grimace of pure agony as the tremendous temptation swept over him—all the more powerful because of his inborn dread of what lay below. The girl was unconscious; she would never know! Was it not more merciful, after all, to give her to death now than to leave her precariously hanging on that foot-square ledge until she wakened, moved, and—dropped?

“Oh, God!” he muttered, Jenson's cry on his lips, and repeated it over and over. How could he save his own worthless life at the expense of hers? A terrible convulsion seized him; he tottered, and only recovered his balance by a miracle. The danger sickened him, but it also woke latent words in his brain.

“—I think it will be one of power, not of failure. I would like to be there——”

He groaned, and it was as if the groan had been wrenched out of his soul, for he knew that his great moment had arrived. And he knew that, despite himself, it would be one of power—nay it *was* one of power!

Though half of his soul fought against the other half, trying to loose his arms, it was in vain; sophistry was swept aside, and he felt that he must do his utmost, even though it might be useless. He would go to join Jenson, and he must go soon, lest his strength fail.

Feeling about with his feet, he found the last

inch of rock that would hold him up, and slowly bent downward. Twice he had to shift his position laboriously because of the wall behind him; once again he tottered, his foot slipped, and only a desperate effort recovered him.

After he had laid the girl across that ledge he could never get upright again without standing on her body—and, harmless though that might have been to her, it never came into his head.

He lowered her to his knees, twisting about, and inch by inch bent downward until she lay across his feet and ankles in safety. Only his grip on her body held him on the ledge now, and the physical torture of his position sent the sweat running down his face in streams.

His will-power all but failed him in that last instant. With infinite pains he drew one foot free, then the other, and went to his knees. But they slipped on the slant of broken rock-face—and, bending swiftly, he touched his lips to hers as he went down.

He seemed to fall for miles and miles through space. From somewhere above came a dull report, and a second; then a shock, and he landed feet first on something soft, and felt great shapes twining around him. He screamed—and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

“THAHABU!”

“I did, miss.”

Who did what? Dull mutters and echoings pierced into Hammer's brain, as if voices that he used to know were whispering in the distance. They swelled and died away and swelled again, reminding him vaguely of the bells he had heard one evening in Venice.

There it was again—there—that was the clear silver of San Giorgio's Campanile, with the deeper tones of Giovanni e Paolo dipping down through the silver, then Santa Maria Formosa dropped in her liquid notes, with, over all, far-flung cadences drifting faintly down on the sea-wind from the Frari until the great dome of the Salute spoke to the sunset, and all the myriad others——

No, it was nothing but Harcourt talking, talking to his mother! That was odd: Harcourt was five miles out at sea, and his mother had been dead for twenty years, he was quite sure.

Ah, he was wrong after all! It was only John Solomon and Sara Helmuth talking together. At that he opened his eyes, caught a faint flicker of light—and remembered.

A violent nausea swept over him, but he conquered it, lying with clenched fists. He recalled what a dying man had once whispered to him aboard the cattle boat—"I wonder what the other place is like?"—and he repeated it over and over in his mind, for it was a good joke.

"I wonder what the other place is like!"

It was his own voice speaking, and he laughed, a dry cackle of a laugh that struck the other voices dead. Where was he?

"I'll lay odds that it's hell——"

Something cool touched his brow and he jerked away sharply, every nerve in his body twinging. Then he realized that the thing was a hand, and heard that queer laughter of his ring out again, though he had not meant to laugh at all.

"Best let 'im be, miss. 'E ought to be waked by now, but 'e'll come up all right-o. Dang it, I don't know as I blames 'im much. It was a mortal bad place."

"Hello, John!" Hammer made a great effort and forced himself to speak. "What are you doing on the other side, as the spiritualists say! Who's that devil got his hand on me? Take him off, darn it!"

The hand was withdrawn, and he heard Solomon chuckle.

"'E's come through, miss, but 'e don't know it. 'Ey, you, Mr. 'Ammer! Sit up and take a werry

good look at this 'ere devil 'o yours—beggin' your pardon, miss.”

The startled American felt himself pulled to a sitting position, and blinked. The flickering light was from a fire, and he seemed to be sitting on a cot in a tent; also, the tent looked oddly like that of Dr. Krausz's.

That was hardly possible, of course, but John Solomon was standing in front of him and smoking his vile black tobacco, while it was indubitably Sara Helmuth at his side.

“Why—why, what's—where—” he stammered confusedly. Then a cry of mortal agony broke from him. “Good God, don't play with me like this!”

He tried to shut out the vision, his hands over his eyes; as he sank back on the cot he felt other hands on his, pulling them away, and something warm and wet splashed on his face.

“Hammer! Don't, please! It's all right, really! Hammer, dear—oh, John, can't you do something?”

“Ay, miss, if you'll stand aside.”

Something struck him, and he heard a cry, then came more blows that knocked him back; furious, he struggled up to see the girl forcing the laughing Solomon back.

“Stop that, John! Don't be cruel——”

“Say, what do you think I am—a punching-bag?”

The angry American leaped up, and instantly Sara Helmuth was holding to his arms, half-laughing, half-crying as she looked up at him. Solomon chuckled.

"I thought as 'ow that'd fetch 'im about, miss! Sit down, sit down, Mr. 'Ammer. It's only John Solomon, a-'itting of you flat-'anded. Sit down, sir."

Hammer obeyed, utterly bewildered, still holding the girl's hands. The hysterical seizure passed and left him very weak.

"Then I'm not dead, Sara?"

"Not as anybody knows on, sir," returned Solomon cheerfully, and his voice changed suddenly. "Miss, leave us alone for a minute, if you please."

Obediently, the girl rose, and stepped outside the tent, Hammer looking after in terror lest it was all a dream. Solomon came and sat beside him, gripping his hand.

"'Ere, buck up, sir! I'm sorry there ain't a drop o' liquor, but there ain't. Now you brace up ship-shape and proper, Mr. 'Ammer—you 'ear me? Buck up, I say! You ain't 'urt and you ain't dead, and if I punches you one in the eye you'll know it. Beggin' your pardon, sir, but don't be a——"

And there came a flood of low-pitched but biting words that effected their purpose. Hammer forced control over himself with a shudder and gripped back at Solomon's hand.

“I’m all right, John,” he said shakily. “But—but it’s hard—to realize. Call Sara, will you?”

She must have been listening, for she was at his side immediately, and when he had her hands in his again it seemed to Hammer that all was right with the world.

“Now tell me about it,” he said, his flagging interest reviving before the wonder of it all. “Didn’t the—the adders—puff-adders, Krausz said they were——”

“No, sir, they didn’t,” broke in John. “They didn’t, ’cause why, they wasn’t nothing of the sort, sir. I dessay the doctor thought as ’ow they *was* puff-adders, and for the matter o’ that so did I till I got down and ’ad a good look at ’em as I was a-slipping of the rope on you——”

“Great Scott!” exclaimed Hammer sharply. “Do you mean to say you went down in there after me? And you thought they were adders——”

“Lud!” And for the first and last time in his life Hammer saw John Solomon blush in the fire-light. “Don’t take on so, Mr. ’Ammer—you see, the Arabs wouldn’t do it, so it was werry plain it ’ad to be done, and——”

The American put out a hand, his voice husky.

“Thank you, John,” he said simply. “I—I think you understand.”

“Yes, sir. And now if you’ll be letting me tell my story, sir—well, it was like this. I got there too late, what wi’ losing some o’ me men

and one thing and another, and the doctor 'e was a-looking down the 'ole, so I knowed where you was. It fair druv me mad for a bit, sir, and I ups and lets drive. Werry sorry I am to say it, but I missed, not 'aving used a gun for a long time.

"'Owsoever, we potted three o' them danged *askaris*, the fourth bein' me own man, but the doctor's got clean off. It give me quite a turn Mr. 'Ammer, it did that, when I come to the edge o' that there 'ole and looked down. The two Afghans was after the doctor, and the Arabs wouldn't go down, so I 'ad to.

"We got the missus up first-off, but when I went down again for you, sir, it near give me the jumps to see you a laying across Jenson's body——"

"What!" broke in Hammer. "Jenson dead? I thought you said they weren't——"

"So I did, sir; so I did; and quite right they weren't. Near as we could figure it out, sir, Jenson died o' fright, and a good job, I says. So we got you up, and wi' that I went for the doctor and druv him clean into the jungle, I was that worked up. Werry sorry I am to say it, but where 'e is I don't know, and what's more, I don't care. We made a good job o' them *askaris*, though, and took two o' them Dutchmen alive. So there you be, Mr. 'Ammer, all ship-shape and proper." Silence settled inside the tent, broken only by the choking bubble of Solomon's ancient pipe.

Hammer realized that it had all taken place that afternoon, and this was evening; but the snakes were not deadly after all——

“I made a blessed fool of myself, then!” He looked up and caught his words, wondering if they knew, by any chance. Well, since the girl had been unconscious and Jenson dead, they didn’t. “However, no matter about——”

“Yes, Hammer, it does matter.” Sara spoke gravely, her eyes glistening. “You see, after we brought you here you were out of your head, like you were back there at the plantation, and you went over and over that horrible scene—oh, Hammer dear!” There was a catch in her voice. “Didn’t—didn’t I tell you once upon a time that when the great moment came——”

“Don’t, Sara!” begged Hammer earnestly, trying to smile and failing dismally. “Yes, you were right, and it doesn’t matter whether I made a fool of myself or not. I——”

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir and miss,” broke in Solomon hastily, as he rose, “I’d better see as them Arabs put out a guard in case——”

But neither of them heard him, for they were looking into each other’s eyes, and Hammer suddenly found that words would not come to him.

“Sara, I—I’m afraid—I love you.”

He dared not move, for he had blurted the words out before he thought, and now fear nestled in

his heart. Then a soft hand touched the red whip-wale on his cheek, and——

“Hammer, dear, I—I’m glad, I love you!”

But, as John Solomon remarked to the Southern Cross—having forgotten what he went out to do—“Dang it! ’Uman nature is ’uman nature, I says. If so be as a man ’as a ’eart like gold there ain’t no woman too good for ’im, as the old gent said to the actress lady.”

Which, taking it by and large, may be accepted as a true statement of fact.

Now, it is commonly said of novelists and magazines that a man in the first transports of requited love feels forgiveness for all his enemies; nay, the hero, in the magnanimity caused by owning the earth and the seven heavens, all too frequently sends his deadliest foe packing with the confident trust that he, the foe, will go and sin no more.

That makes good Sabbath-day reading, but it makes nothing else. A man strong enough to have a great enemy may be strong enough to forgive that enemy, but it is much more likely that he is not, has no desire to be, and would not if he could.

Cyrus Hammer expressed himself to this effect at breakfast the next morning. Sara Helmuth was still sleeping, and he and Solomon, with Omar and the two Afghans, discussed the probable future of Dr. Sigurd Krausz, archaeologist.

“He’s dangerous,” declared Hammer with decision. “I’d say, send out all the men after him, John, and if he comes willingly, then all right. If not, fetch him, anyway. The poor devil must be in bad shape, what with that nose of his; but after yesterday I’ll be blessed if I’m not set on giving him the limit!”

Solomon looked at the Afghans. Akhbar Khan exchanged glances with his cousin, and the two men rose, bowed in a silent salaam, and stalked off with their rifles under their arms.

Solomon looked at Omar, and the Arab’s teeth flashed out as he followed. And so, for the present, Hammer forgot his enemy, for Sara Helmuth had emerged from the other tent and now joined them.

“There’s summat as Mr. ’Ammer don’t know about yet,” remarked Solomon complacently as the girl sipped her coffee, and she flashed a smile at him. Save for the circles about her eyes, sleep had removed all traces of her weariness. “When so be as you’re ready, miss, we might ’ave a look at it.”

“Very well,” she nodded, then her eyes steadied. “But first, John, I want it thoroughly understood that I waive all claim to it. By right it belongs to you and to Hammer—by right of suffering and toil and——”

“What is it you’re talking about?” demanded the American, frowning.

“The treasure,” she said, and explained. As

she had rightly told Krausz, that part of the treasure which contained the papers, relics, and gifts from the Viceroy to the King of Portugal, had been placed in the pit of snakes, and in all likelihood would have remained there had not Solomon been forced to descend, and so discovered that the snakes were harmless.

It had been hauled out and left amid the ruins. The more intrinsically valuable portions of the treasure were buried underground in another place, but the girl had by now given up all hopes of ever getting it.

“We know where it is,” she concluded with a shiver, “but it would take time, and I wouldn’t stay here a minute longer than necessary, money or no money. You and John, Hammer, can divide —”

“Hold on there!” exclaimed the American. “I’m not in on this treasure stunt. It belongs to you, Sara——”

“Just a minute sir and miss,” and Solomon leaned forward earnestly, waving his empty pipe as he spoke. “O’ course, I ’as to go back wi’ you to Mombasa and straighten up this ’ere mess wi’ the governor; but if so as you don’t want to wait, I’ll come back and dig up the stuff on me own. I’ll chance it if you will, miss; and you Mr. ’Ammer to take what there is ’ere, me to take what’s left.”

“That’s fair enough, Sara,” put in Hammer quickly. “Only, I’ve no right to——”

“You have!” cried the girl indignantly. “The idea—after all you’ve gone through for me! Well, let’s have it as John proposes, then; you and I, Hammer, take the papers and relics, and John can take the gold for his share. If you don’t say yes, I’ll—I’ll give the whole business to Potbelly!”

“All right,” laughed the American, who, to tell the truth, had no great faith in the entire treasure story. “All ready?”

As only two of the Arabs had remained in camp, Solomon summoned them with axes, and the five started for the ruins. Hammer could not enter the tangle of jungle without a shudder, and would greatly have preferred staying away altogether; but once in for it he patted the revolver given him by Solomon and determined to see the thing through.

Fortunately for his peace of mind it appeared that Solomon had left the treasure in one of the clear spaces of the fort itself, for which Hammer was devoutly thankful; he sorely doubted his ability to visit that pit again, for his nerves were still badly shaken.

They reached the clearing, and in spite of his scepticism, Hammer felt a thrill at sight of the two coffin-like lead cases that lay beside the bush-strewn ruins of a wall. Without delay the two Arabs fell to work with their axes, ripping open one of the cases; and after half an hour’s labour a second case, of heavy wood, was laid out.

“Teak,” grunted Solomon. “Give that ax ’ere.”

With some care he attacked the locks that rimmed the iron-bound case, smashing them one after another. When the last had gone he paused, and beckoned Sara forward.

“Open it, miss.”

The girl obeyed eagerly. Stooping over, she managed to raise and tip back the heavy top, and with it a mass of camphor-smelling cloth that had lain beneath. A gleam of yellow shot up, and Hammer found himself staring down at a magnificent gold-wrought reliquary. One of the Arabs gave an exclamation in Kiswahili.

“*Thahabu!* Gold!”

At the same instant Hammer’s eyes darted up to the bush-strewn wall. The others had heard nothing, absorbed in the sight of the treasure, but Hammer caught a dull tan-hued form amid the bushes, and snatched at his revolver. He perceived a glint of steel, and fired through his coat pocket.

“Yess, it iss gold,” came a mumble, piercing through the startled cry of Sara, and the misshapen face of Sigurd Krausz rose amid the bushes.

A tongue of flame spat back at Hammer, who tried to fire again but could not. Slowly, yet before the echoes of Krausz’s shot had flung back from the jungle around, the American slipped and went to his knees.

He looked up in surprise at Sara Helmuth; then, as her fingers went out to his, he choked and fell sideways, both hands clutching at his throat.

CHAPTER XIX

THE "DAPHNE" AGAIN

"Er—'pon my word, Mr. Hammer, I'm—er—glad to be able to apologize!"

"Nonsense, commissioner! Then it's all right with Nairobi?"

"Perfectly, my dear chap, perfectly! Had a bit of a ragging from the Germans, but Krausz had misrepresented things fearfully, you know, and that *askari* business—er—put the governor in a perfectly beastly rage, I'm told. He gave 'em the man's body with his compliments. Ripping morning, isn't it?"

"Couldn't be better," grinned Hammer cheerfully. He was sitting in a deck-chair beneath the *Daphne's* awning, Sara Helmuth on one side and Commissioner Smith on the other. His throat was swathed in bandages, and he had lost his healthy tan, but he was undeniably happy, and showed it.

"That yarn—er—reminded me of your American tales," went on Smith rather heavily, as the figure of Solomon appeared coming to join the group. "Two bad men, don't you know—er—shooting across a bar, and all that kind of thing. Each one plugs the other—er—double funeral.

Rather exciting thing out here, though, 'pon my word! Very usual in America, I understand."

"Oh, yes, very," returned Hammer gravely. "Hello, John! Can I smoke yet?"

"Werry sorry, sir, but against orders. Your servant, Mr. Smith and I 'opes as you're quite well?"

The Commissioner flushed slightly as he shook hands.

"Quite, thanks, very much. Er—narrow escape Mr. Hammer had, by Jove!"

"Quite so, sir. Missed the jugular by a matter of 'airbreadths, the doctor said. Prowidence is a werry mysterious thing, sir, as the old gent said when the 'ousemaid saw a mouse."

"We might show Mr. Smith that reliquary, John," smiled Sara Helmuth, and her hand stole quite shamelessly over the arm of the deck-chair to Hammer's.

The *Daphne* lay anchored off Melindi. The commissioner's launch lay at the ladder, its crew of two spruce policemen chatting in Kiswahili with the Arabs above, while the oily groundswell lifted the yacht at her anchor.

It was two weeks since Hammer had left the jungle behind for ever, as he devoutly hoped, and with the commissioner's visit the last weight had been lifted from his mind.

Not only had he been entirely absolved from any complicity in Harcourt's death, but Nairobi

had been graciously pleased to overlook entirely the death of Dr. Krausz, and to waive all claims to the treasure in hand—after the cathedral at Mombasa had been presented with the relics.

Hammer had little use for relics, but he had been very careful to say nothing about the reliquaries. Of these, the finest was that containing the reputed hand of St. Thomas—indeed, Commissioner Smith declared it, rather vaguely, to be "perfectly ripping—top hole, don't you know, in such things!"

His judgement proved ultimately to be entirely correct, while the records, historical and otherwise, contained in the cases, were declared by Sara Helmuth to be worth a good round sum to any library in Europe.

As Hammer was not particularly imbued with a love for art, he sold the three smaller reliquaries to Solomon; and also agreed to carry that individual back to Port Said on the yacht.

As Solomon said, the gold had waited two hundred years, and it could wait another few months very well, while he had important business at Port Said. A crew of sorts had been shipped at Mombasa, and with Hammer's recovery the voyage home would begin.

"You'd better stick around, commissioner," smiled the American as his visitor rose. "About a week from now the American Consul is coming up from Mombasa, and there's going to be some

doings, as we say in America.”

“Eh?” Mr. Smith looked blank for a moment, until Sara Helmuth’s blushes proclaimed themselves. Whereupon, being a very observant young man, his face brightened up, and he seized the American’s hand.

“Er—by Jove, old chap—I congratulate you both, ’pon my word I do! I say, do let me bring my assistant and the lieutenant, eh what?”

“Bring your whole constabulary force,” grinned Hammer, “and we’ll do the thing up in style! And come out for dinner Sunday night, Smith.”

Quite excited, the commissioner departed. Hand in hand, Hammer and Sara Helmuth watched his launch puff away toward the green-hilled shore, until Solomon cleared his throat nosily, and they saw two Arabs approaching bearing a bulky package.

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir and miss,” announced Solomon, “but this ’ere’s a bit o’ summat as aren’t to be shown at the weddin’, so to speak. If I may make so bold, miss, as to be a giving of a weddin’ present before the ’appy moment——”

A cry of delight broke from the girl, for as the package fell apart there was displayed that same fawn-coloured rug, with the blue, white, and gold dragon of five claws, which Hammer had seen when first he wakened in Solomon’s house.

“It’s a rug as you might not care for, first-off,” explained Solomon apologetically, “but it ain’t

to be bought for money, miss. Where I got it I 'adn't ought to say, but it 'ad best be kept under cover till you get out o' these 'ere waters. That's the imperial dragon o' China, Mr. 'Ammer, and rugs like them ain't made for sale——”

“Oh, it's beautiful!” cried the delighted Sara, Hammer nodding with appreciative eyes, for he knew that John Solomon's words were strictly true.

As he looked about, however, he saw the pudgy little man bending over his little red notebook, writing very carefully with his fountain pen, and forbore to interrupt.

“Are you glad, girl?” he turned to Sara very soberly, motioning the Arabs to take away the rug as he did so.

“Hammer, dear,” she whispered, “I'm happy!”

His face had lost the old lines of hardness and bitterness, and as he met her eyes and smiled into them with perfect understanding, he remembered something.

“But—my name isn't Hammer, dear! You'll have to be Mrs. Cyrus Murray——”

“Yes, but you'll be just Hammer, to me!”

“There!” and Solomon clapped his notebook shut with a very complacent air. “I'd been and overlooked that 'ere account wi' Dr. Krausz; but it's all ship-shape and proper now to file away and 'ave done with.”

“Oh, your account!” laughed the American.

“That’s the one you presented to him, eh? Do you always keep your accounts, John?”

“Werry good plan, sir. They come in ’andy, like, mortal often, even if they’re filed away. Howsoever, sir and miss, business is all werry well in its place, but its place ain’t between two young ’earts, I says—and since this ’ere account is closed, I’ll just file it away.”

And as he shuffled off in his carpet-slippers toward his own cabin, the two who sat side by side gazed after him for a moment, smiling, and then turned to each other.

THE END

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