
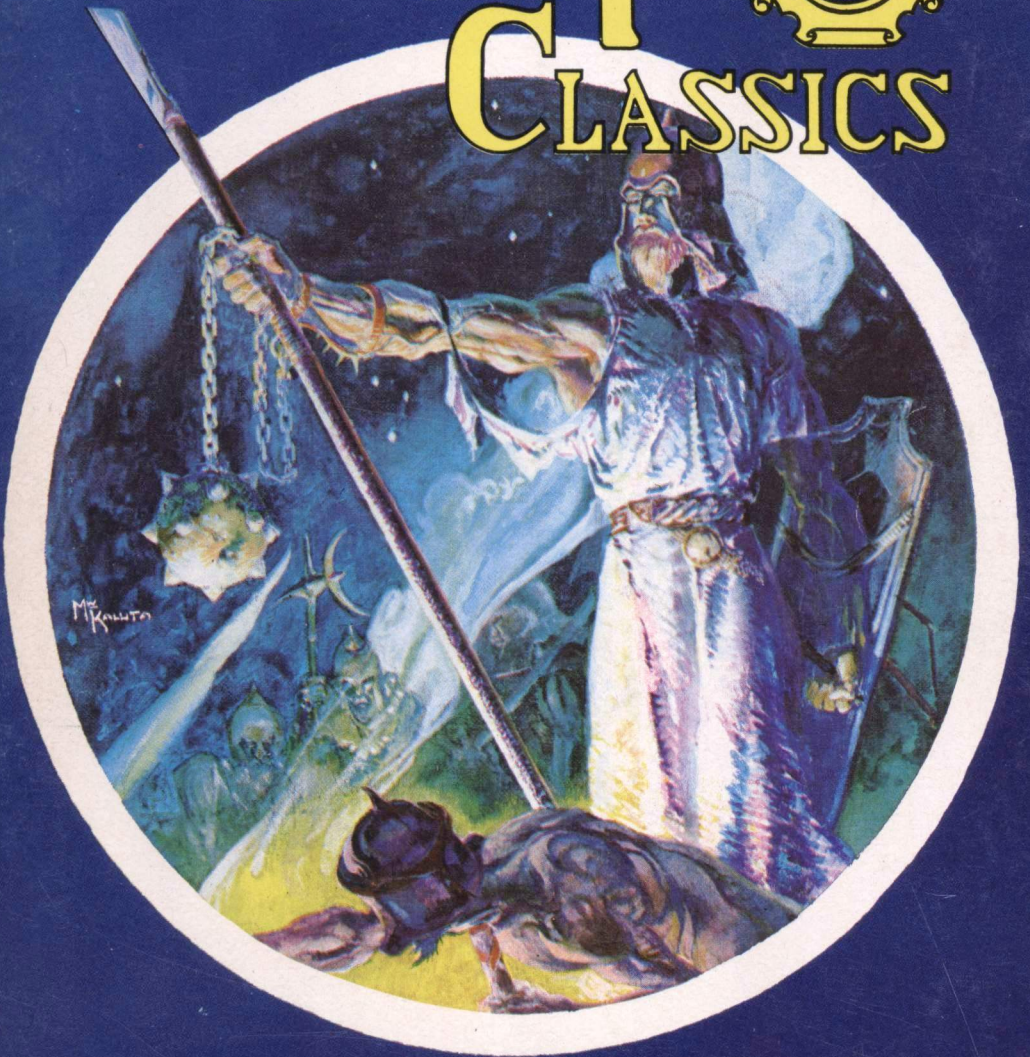



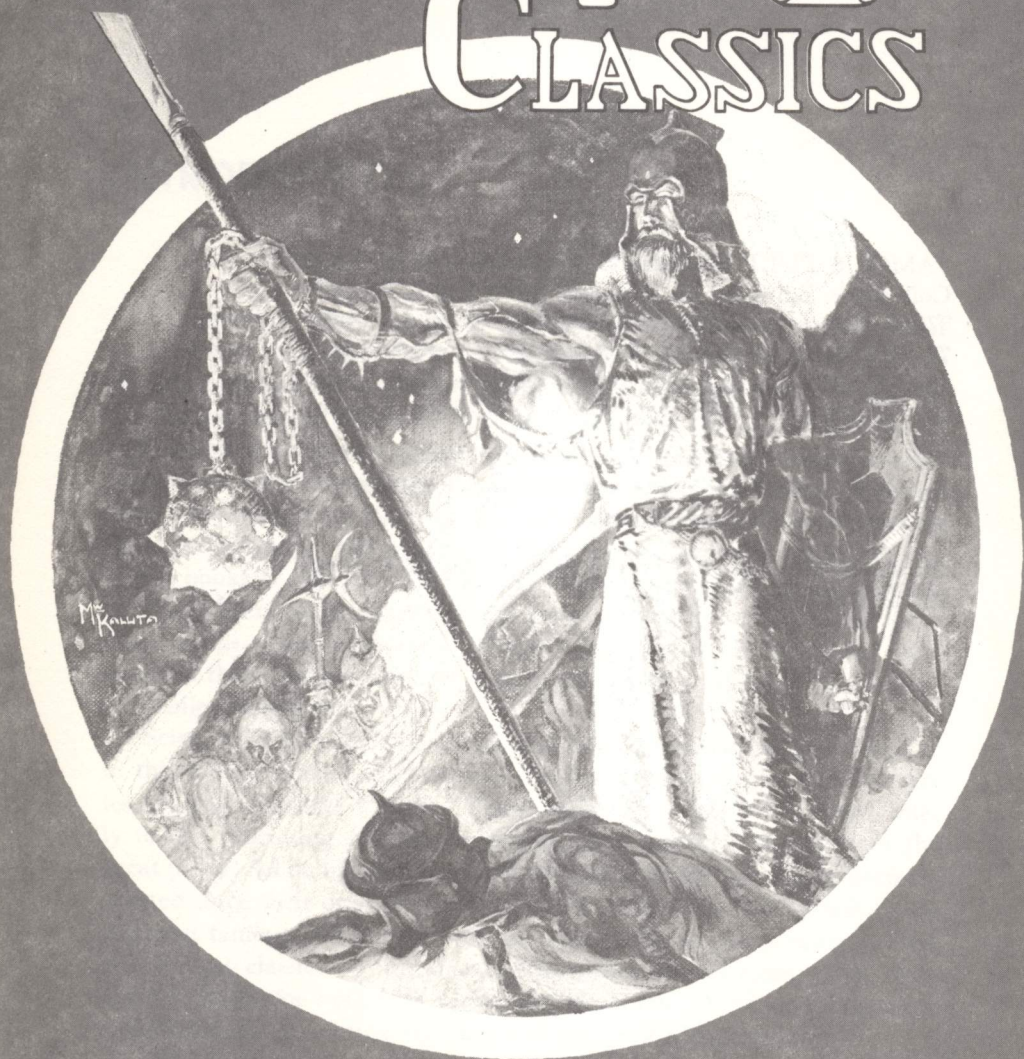
Famous
Pulp 
CLASSICS



Over 70,000 words of dynamic adventure fiction
from the Golden Age of the Pulps!

Talbot Mundy * Malcom Wheeler-Nicholson
Loring Brent * H. Bedford-Jones
Theodore Roscoe * Johnston McCulley

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CLASSICS



FAX COLLECTOR'S EDITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The greatest adventure writers of all time appeared in the action pulps of fifty years ago. Literally hundreds of different magazines were printed in the period from 1910 through 1950, all featuring heroic adventure fiction. Many thousands of issues spotlighted the best action stories ever to see print in this country. Unfortunately, a vast majority of this output has been completely ignored and forgotten since its original appearance. Numerous classics have been left buried in the crumbling issues of old pulps. While some of these magazines have been used for source books of detective and science fiction anthologies, little attempt has ever been made to revive the great adventure stories from these same pulps. Our purpose in *Famous Pulp Classics* is to bring back many of these lost classics and make them readily available to the general collector and fan.

Science fiction and fantasy material from this period will not appear in this series. Instead, such stories will be found in our companion series, *Famous Fantastic Classics*. These collections will be devoted solely to the reprinting of straight action and adventure stories from the great pulps. All of our selections will be stories which have never been reprinted since their original appearances in rare pulps. Many will be by the most famous writers of adventure fiction ever to pen a story. Others will be lost classics by authors long forgotten. In all cases, each story will be chosen for both its scarcity and its worth. Our first collection is a showcase for our future volumes and our policy in general.

This first selection of tales contains six adventures, all by authors who were reader favorites with the audiences of the 1920's and 1930's. They span all types of adventure fiction, and range from short story to complete short novel. All are published here complete and uncut.

Our lead story is by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a pulp author long

forgotten by all but the most ardent fan. His adventure, "Lances of Tartary," is the first of a series of stories about Alan de Beaufort, a lone Crusader who rode with the hordes of Genghis Khan. It is a fast-paced tale and one has to guess that it was a strong influence on later Crusader stories in a similar vein written by Robert E. Howard.

One of the kings of the pulps was Talbot Mundy, who died in 1940. While many of Mundy's novels have been published in hardcover and paperback, many other stories still remain uncollected and buried in rare pulps. In *Famous Pulp Classics* we plan to revive these lost Mundy adventures. Our first discovery is "Black Flag," a rousing short story of the Spanish Main.

In 1918, *All-Story Magazine* published a series of novelets by George F. Worts, using the pen-name Loring Brent. The stories were wild adventures set in modern China and featured a young American hero, Peter Moore, dubbed Peter the Brazen by the Chinese. Four of these stories were later collected in hardcover.

In 1930, Peter the Brazen returned in a new series of adventures. This second series was among the most popular fiction ever published in *Argosy*. Best of the group were Peter's three battles with the mysterious Mr. Lu, the omnipotent Blue Scorpion. If Fu Manchu was the supreme Oriental villain of pulp fiction, then the Blue Scorpion has to be considered his right-hand man. From the pages of *Argosy* comes the first encounter between Peter Moore and Mr. Lu. This short novel is published complete in this book.

Probably the most consistently good writer of adventure fiction for the pulps was Theodore Roscoe. Mr. Roscoe could always be counted on to turn out an entertaining tale of high adventure with one or more twists at the end. By special arrangement with Mr. Roscoe, we are reprinting several of his best stories. Our first choice is one of his most famous and most unusual tales. "Uneasy Lies the Head" derives its title from Shakespeare, but the story is pure Theodore Roscoe. For anyone familiar with the pulps, that is recommendation enough.

Johnston McCulley was primarily known as a western writer for the pulps, his most famous stories being about that Robin Hood of the old West, Zorro. However, McCulley was a typical pulpster, and his range was not limited to mere westerns, as demonstrated by "Four Lashes an Hour."

Possibly the only challenger to the legendary Max Brand for the title of most prolific of all pulp writers is the equally prolific H. Bedford-Jones. A master of all types of pulp fiction, Bedford-Jones had one of his best stories in the novelet, "Berber Loot," reprinted here from the legendary *Magic Carpet Magazine*.

The contents of this issue are just a preview of what is to come in the months ahead. More details on future books are given on the last page of this book.

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LANCES OF TARTARY

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON



"Climb, Crusader, climb!" said a soft voice. Hungry blades reached for him as he slashed down at them.

An Action Saga of a Crusader who Rode with the Hordes of Genghis Khan

EDITOR'S NOTE—With this story ALL-FICTION presents the first of a series of action sagas of the warriors who rode on horseback down through the ages. The next story follows the mighty Genghis Khan as he drove the Persians before him in his dream of world rulership.

HORSES' hoofs had trampled empires into the dust ere now. No man knows what unseen forces continually stirred the vast tribes of Asiatic nomads into overflowing from High

Tartary and inundating civilization. Even now the thunder of the hoofs of the hordes of Attila still echoed down the centuries. Imperial Rome had crashed to the sound of the screams of nomad horsemen and to the

savage neighing of Tartar ponies.

Since then new nations had waxed and waned. Since then a fanatic muleteer had come out of the desert and had talked with burning phrases at Mecca and his words had lighted the flame of Islam. Stern Moslems galloped out of the desert wastes smiting the infidel with fire and sword. Slender-legged Arab horses carried Mohammed's followers and the scimitar of Islam. But long ere this, the luxury and wealth won by the conquerors had bred indolence and sloth. The silken-skinned Arab horses lost their vigor.

But in the high uplands of Asia the Tartar ponies still wrestled with the stern winds of the Gobi and fought for every blade of grass on the high plateau.

Lately, a rumor had begun to coil and eddy through Islam. Men cast worried glances at the Sungarian Gate, the pass whence all the nomad hordes have come out of High Asia. The Shah of the mighty Persian Empire scoffed when his advisers reminded him of Attila the Hun and spoke of a new Scourge of God, a certain Genghis Khan whose warriors could only be numbered as the blades of grass or as the sands of the sea shore, and whose herds of horses blackened the plains to the far horizon.

And still the Shah scoffed, forgetting the great empires which had dissolved into dust under the hoofs of hordes of nomad horses.

A cold wind blew out of High Tartary. There was a shower of meteors that night and the inhabitants of the Moslem city gazed frightened at a ball of fire which hung for nearly a minute above the tip of the highest minaret of the great mosque.

"Surely these portents warn of evil to come!" they whispered to themselves.

Unaware of the whispering, unnoticed by the inhabitants and unperturbed by the portents, a lone horseman rode up to the west gate of Otrar. It being after sundown, the Captain

of the Gate had closed the entrance to the city and there seemed little prospect of entering that night unless, as the lone wayfarer hoped, some large party of travelers or some personage of note should demand admission. In this case the solitary traveler hoped to slip in unobserved amongst the press of people, a none too easy matter. For he was taller than the majority of the inhabitants of this mighty Persian Empire, taller and fairer of skin, which was not to be wondered at seeing that he came from lands far to the westward. A worn surtout upon which was emblazoned a cross, his long, slender sword and the chain mail protecting mighty chest and shoulders, lean flank and thigh, showed him to be one of those Crusaders who still held a precarious foothold on the edge of the coast of the Holy Land. Alan de Beaufort had all the lean strength of a wolf and like a wolf he had seen more than his meed of fighting since he had left Normandy. Bitter had been his portion, even in the Holy Land itself. His liege lord had turned upon him in treachery and forced him to seek sanctuary amongst the enemies of the True Cross. Impelled ever eastward, harried and in danger from the Moslems, he found himself at last before the gates of Otrar, that outpost of the mighty Kharesmian Empire which extended from India to Bagdad and from the Sea of Aral to the Persian Gulf. Men told strange tales concerning one Prester John who was reported to be the king of a mysterious Christian race high in the uplands of Tartary. It was toward this nebulous sanctuary that the Christian knight, Alan de Beaufort, was making his precarious way.

Dismounting, he stood in the shadows of a tree hard by the gate and watched the two cressets burn and splutter on the walls, their flames gleaming crimson on the helmet of the sentry who paced back and forth above the gates. Behind that wall lay a populous city in which he could hide himself and find food and shel-

ter. Outside the walls was the bleak countryside infested with marauding bands.

BOTH horse and man were weary but both horse and man raised their heads at a faint stir in the darkness behind them, a stir which grew louder in volume and resolved itself into the shuffling of many feet of men and animals. Some one else was seeking admittance to the city and Alan placed foot in stirrup and mounted, reining his horse back into the shadows as the shapes of many mounted men loomed out of the darkness and approached the gate.

In the faint light of the cressets they proved to be a caravan of merchants, short, squat men, slant-eyed and heavily clad, riding shaggy ponies and leading many heavily laden pack animals. Merchants out of Tartary they were most evidently, bringing furs and silver to trade for damascened weapons and armour, rugs and silks. Their leader was a man taller than his companions with something eagle-eyed and keen about him, unusual in a merchant. He demanded admission in a guttural voice which held withal a ring of authority. The Captain of the Gate, gleaming in scarlet and silver armour, leaned haughtily upon his scimitar above the wall and questioned him.

It was too far away for Alan to hear the queries and replies, but evidently the answers were satisfactory for there was a stir in the gate towers and the two huge portals rolled slowly back, disclosing a clump of spearmen just inside.

The caravan of some twenty merchants and twice as many pack animals set itself into motion. Alan wasted no time but quietly rode in amongst the five or six riders who brought up the rear. With them he entered the gates. Scarcely had his horse set foot on the stone slabs of the street pavement when the gates creaked slowly shut behind him. For the moment he had the sensation of being trapped and cursed himself for

entering this dangerous vicinity. His right hand dropped to the hilt of his sword in its worn leather scabbard and he received therefrom a fresh access of confidence. Meanwhile his eyes probed here and there, taking in the clump of steel-clad spearmen who fell in behind and noting another clump who marched out from a side street and took position at the head of the caravan. This was disquieting enough in all truth and he wished heartily that he were well out of the place and sought for some side street down which he might move inconspicuously. But this desire was doomed to non-fulfillment for suddenly a spearman had ranged himself alongside and a cordon of armed men was stretched from front to rear of the caravan enclosing it as in a wall of steel.

There was something ominous about this. Alan, too familiar with danger not to recognize it, knew instinctively that this unusual reception of a caravan of merchants portended evil. In the glare of the torches carried by the spearmen he studied the faces of his companions, but the squat-bodied, slant-eyed merchants rode forward impassively, betraying by no outward sign any fears they might have felt.

The leader of that body of spearmen which surrounded the caravan rode back from the head of the column, bending his head to avoid the overhanging balconies. His horse, a coal-black Arab stallion, snorted and whinnied as he stepped daintily over the paving stones. The man was an insolent-eyed Seljukian Turk, high chested and arrogant, wearing a jewel in his turban, his damascene blade in his hand. Alan drew the folds of his cloak more closely about him for the Seljukian Turks were no friends of the Crusaders. Nearer and nearer came the captain of this guard, studying the faces of each traveler intently. He was now abreast of Alan, his keen eyes looking him up and down while the disguised Crusader sat hunched in his saddle. For a fleeting second

Alan had hoped that the man would ride on but that hope went glimmering as the Turkish officer swung his horse about and, leaning from the saddle, whispered some order to the nearest guards, pointing at the tall knight.

The guards closed in, staring with renewed interest at the stranger in their midst. More guards came up and reinforced the cordon at this point. The Turkish captain, after another glance at the Crusader, rode toward the front of the column. The long caravan with its guards was passing through a narrow street whose overhanging balconies nearly touched. Between them Alan could see the stars gleaming down coldly from a clear sky. That special orders to watch him had been given the guards he well knew, and without seeming to do so, he studied each cross street and side alley as he rode along.

SEVERAL hundred yards ahead of Alan, he saw the large vast bulk of the citadel and knew that it was toward this stronghold that the captives were being led. This boded nothing but evil as he well knew, an evil which was impressed upon him as the street widened and they passed by a blank wall. A groan came from somewhere above. Looking upward, Alan saw several strong sharp hooks set in the walls, hooks like those upon which the butchers hang their carcasses. And, like one of these carcasses, there hung the naked body of a man, suspended cruelly in mid-air, his eyes half-closed and blood dripping from the steel points which pierced his body.

The sight of this strengthened Alan in his resolution. Why the authorities of this frontier city should seize a caravan of merchants he did not know; but Mohammedan justice being what it was and the cruelty and rapacity of the Shah's governors being notorious, he decided to risk quick death rather than follow dumbly along like a sheep to the slaughter.

They had now passed the large

blank wall and were again in the narrower passage of houses. On Alan's right were two or three of the squat-bodied, slant-eyed merchants. Very quietly he edged his horse ahead of them and began slowly to force him toward the line of spearmen on the flank. So unobtrusively did he effect his change of position that they scarcely gave glance to him. Ahead of him loomed the black gate of the citadel, scarcely a hundred paces. Between him and that dark entrance a street led off somewhere to the right. It was down that street that he meant to make his escape. Under his coat he began to slip his sword from its scabbard, lifting it up inch by inch, pushing it higher and ever higher with his hands on the cold, steel blade. He was now within a few yards of the street corner. He had worked his sword up until it was three-quarters out of the scabbard, its pommel resting against his shoulder under the coat. Just at that moment the Captain of the Guard rode back from the head of the column. Alan gripped the sword in his right hand, crouched low in the saddle and poised, tense as a hawk about to swoop.

The keen eyes of the Turkish captain took in the situation at a glance. He shouted to the guards who marched along on foot but in that second Alan had plucked forth his blade with a dry, steely whirr, set spurs to his horse and drove at the nearest of the spearmen. His blade bit through the man's coat and shoulder joint. The onset of the horse made the other spearmen recoil, but forced on by the shouts of the captain, they quickly recovered and began to lunge at the intrepid horseman above them. Hungry spear points thrust at the Crusader. The first he parried; at the second he slashed, severing the wrist of its wielder with a single sweeping stroke. He was now at the entrance of the side street, fighting like a stag beset by a pack of hounds. Other guards hurried to the attack until there was a solid press and surge of men about him. The Turkish cap-

tain was forcing his horse into the mob until now he was upon the Crusader, his scimitar gleaming red in the light of the torches as he sought for an opening. Alan rose in his stirrups. His sword swung about him like a circle of steel. He shouted and thrust. The Turkish captain edged his horse nearer. Suddenly Alan leaned far out to the left, driving straight at the fellow's throat. The Turk flung himself backward in the saddle, barely escaping the vicious thrust which, at that, thudded into his shoulder, forcing him to drop his blade.

Within incredible quickness Alan recovered, smashing and cutting at the ring of spearmen about him until at last he was on the outskirts of the throng. With a final thrust at a tall spearman who was endeavoring to cripple his horse, he leaped his animal clear of the fray and galloped down the narrow side street.

The shouting and confusion, the ring of steel on steel and the clatter of his horse's hoofs awakened the street into sudden life. Casement windows were flung wide; doors were flung open. People thronged out on the balconies and into the street. In a second the quarter was in an uproar.

WITH a sudden sinking of his heart Alan saw a bulky shadow blocking the way in front of him and realized too late that he had run into a blind alley. Behind him the guards were pursuing, rapidly advancing through the throngs which had filled the small street. Across the street women screamed on a balcony, pointing him out. Lights were being brought and the torches of his pursuers came ever nearer, flashing from their spear points. An arrow sang through the air and buried itself in the wooden frame of the balcony not six inches from him. He turned his horse to face his pursuers, determined to die as bravely as might be. They came on like a pack of wolves keen on the scent and were now within twenty

paces, a solid crowd of armed men filling the street from wall to wall. Before him was a wall of steel and behind him a wall of stone! Alan threw back his head and laughed, tossing his blade in the air and catching it lightly by the hilt as he settled more firmly into the saddle. Above him loomed the darkness of a balcony, its supporting beams not five feet above his head. Upon it, gleaming white in the dusk there leaned a figure which he took to be that of a woman. Her voice came down to him.

"Climb, Crusader, climb!" said the voice in Latin, a tongue that was like his own language so that he gazed up, startled. The hungry spear points were but four or five paces away. A steel-clad figure leaped for his horse's head. He cut down at it swiftly and laughed again as he parried the thrust of a steel point.

Suddenly he kicked his feet from the stirrups and, placing hand on pommel, stood upright in the saddle. From this vantage point he leaped at the balcony support just as his horse went down with a scream from under him. An arrow thudded between his outstretched arms. With a mighty heave he drew himself up and in a second had vaulted over the balcony rail.

A great shout went up from below. Men began to hammer with their spear shafts on the door. Sword under arm, Alan stood for a second, gazing at the dim figure before him. The woman beckoned and he followed her through the long, narrow doorway, finding himself in a low ceiled room bathed in a soft, rosy light, gleaming from a silver lamp, hung in chains from the ceiling. By its light he glanced swiftly about him, marveling at the richness of rugs and divans, at the silk hangings and at the jade and ivory displayed. From this he glanced at the woman and found that she was but a slip of a girl of some eighteen summers with a beautiful imperious head bearing itself proudly on a slender neck.

"I have to thank thee for thine aid,"

he said gravely, "but 'tis not meet that I should remain here and endanger thee. Who art thou?" he asked curiously.

"No matter who I am, but come," she whispered, and led him across the room to a narrow door set behind a silken hanging. As she opened this, Alan had time to remark on the freshness and whiteness of her skin and the beauty of her carriage and decided swiftly that this was no Mohammedan woman, but undoubtedly some high-born woman of a race more nearly his own. A tiny golden Greek cross swinging from about her neck convinced him that he was right, but there was little time to question, for the shouting and the hammering at the lower door had grown louder and there were imperative commands to open in the name of the law.

The girl swung open the small door, disclosing a flight of steps mounting upward into the darkness. Without a word she seized his hand and led him upward. He followed after her, stumbling on the narrow steps, strangely thrilled by the contact of that small slender hand on his own hairy wrist. In a few seconds they had mounted to the top and the girl pushed open a door which gave out upon the roof.

She pointed off over the flat, expansive roofs.

"Go!" she said, "hide thyself."

He straightened out and shook his head stubbornly.

"I cannot leave thee to face that pack of wolves alone," he said quietly.

Her head was half turned, listening to the mounting clamour below. The clamour suddenly stilled itself as the street door grated open and a tramp of feet could be heard ascending a stairway below.

"No, no," she whispered anxiously, "they dare not harm me. Go, I beg of you!"

"'Tis well, then," he said. "Do thou, then swear upon the True Cross that no harm will befall thee."

"I swear it, upon the True Cross, go, ere it be too late!" she whispered

frantically as the house below them became filled with the shouts of the searchers.

But still he tarried.

"I know not thy name nor how I am again to see thee," he objected.

"I am called Helene, the daughter of the Strategos and—and if haply thou shouldst escape this night, come at dawn to this door and rap thrice," she said breathlessly, and drawing her white robe about her, she was gone.

CHAPTER II

CITADEL OF THE WAZIR

THE street below was filled with a mob of curious on-lookers who gaped and craned their necks. The murmur of many voices came up to him. The flat roofs cut here and there by low walls, stretched out before him. Returning his sword to its scabbard, he looked about to fix the exact location of that doorway in his memory, thereafter setting forth across the roof to a wall which confined it.

Scaling this, he dropped on to a slightly higher roof and hurried across this and two more until he came at last to a street again. Peering over the wall, he looked down upon a smaller and narrower thoroughfare. People were hurrying through it, toward the excitement in the street he had just left. Baffled, he turned and made his way along the roofs until he came to a wall higher than those which he had previously scaled. Seeking along this he found a bale of some heavy material bound in rough wool and heaved it against the wall. Using this as a step he swung himself to the top of the barrier and gazed below him. This roof was larger than the ones he had left behind. As he looked back to that distant doorway through which the girl had disappeared, a shout went up from her roof and he saw the faint gleam of steel as men began to hurry toward him.

Dropping lightly on to the larger roof below him, he gazed about for sign of life but could see no person

stirring. Ahead of him rose a covered doorway. It was high time that he sought asylum. Hurrying toward this door he glanced behind him as the shouts of his pursuers grew ever louder in his ears. In another moment they would top the wall behind him and he would be cornered like a rat. The doorway gave to his touch. He closed it behind him as he went down some broad flat steps in the darkness. Ahead of him he heard the murmur of voices.

As he neared the bottom of the stairway the murmur of voices grew louder and he could pick out a heavy masculine tone and the lighter notes of women's voices. It struck him suddenly that it might be a good idea to lock the door by which he had entered and he slipped back up the steps and dropped the bolt in place, hearing as he did so the noise made by his pursuers in climbing over the wall of the roof. Returning again to the bottom of the stairs he found himself before the heavy folds of a damask curtain. The voices continued and he opened the curtain slightly and looked through.

Directly beyond the curtain was a small hallway some ten paces long from which doors opened out to right and left. At its farther end it opened into what seemed to be a large room. What caused him to draw in his breath sharply was the sight of a huge Nubian slave armed with an enormous broad-bladed sword, who stood on guard half way down the passage. Undoubtedly it was the Keeper of the Harem, for beyond him he caught a glimpse of silk hangings and soft-colored lights and saw women passing back and forth. A brown-skinned slave girl, clad only in a single garment which was draped about her hips came out of the lighted room, carrying a silver ewer filled with water or wine. She said something to the huge, gross Nubian who grunted disdainfully and made no reply while the slave girl disappeared into one of the doors at the side of the passage. Alan reasoned that these doors must

lead to the servants' quarters. The huge Nubian stood half facing the harem, his back partly turned to the man behind the curtains. For some two minutes he stood there, then the slave girl returned and said something to him, whereat he turned and followed her through the doorway that led to the servants' quarters.

Alan kept his ears strained, fearing that at any second there might come a peremptory knocking on the roof door behind him. The passage was now clear and he decided to move forward. Sword in hand, he advanced quietly toward the harem, coming at last to the end of the passage which was draped on either side with heavy brocade curtains.

SLIPPING behind one of these curtains, he gazed into the room before him. It was a large room, its floor covered with beautiful mosaic and a fountain whispering and lispng in the center. The air was perfumed that came from that room and a strong scent of myrrh, spike-nard and musk assailed him, a heavy, cloying, Eastern odor that wrinkled his nostrils in masculine disgust. The softly shaded lights gleamed on the smooth shoulders and unveiled faces of the women of the harem, of whom there were five or six. They were clustered about a divan on which a man reclined. From amidst the crowd of women his voice rose in grumbling accents. Two or three slave girls, as lightly clad as had been the first one, stood around with basins and ewers. As Alan began to study the scene more closely he reasoned that the man who lay there must be wounded, for one of the basins was filled with water discolored with blood. A tall and stately woman well past the first flush of youth but beautifully clad in pearl embroidered jacket and voluminous silken trousers, administered to the wounded man, washing his wound and rubbing ointments upon it, while he alternately grumbled and scolded. The women who clustered about the divan opened out for a fleeting mo-

ment and in that short space of time Alan gazed full upon the man who lay there.

Staring at the wounded man in surprise he recognized him as the arrogant, cruel-eyed, Seljukian Turk, the Captain of the Guard whom he had wounded when he made his escape. But the man was talking and Alan made shift to listen to the words.

"And it was thus that the Nazarene swine escaped me," grumbled the wounded man, "but my men will make short work of him. Even now they have probably captured him. I have ordered that he be not harmed until I can oversee the infliction of the harm. I will teach that dog what it means to wound the Wazir of Police, the second most powerful man in Otrar!"

Here was food for thought! Alan grinned slightly to himself as he realized the predicament in which he was placed. For it was the Wazir of Police, no less, that exceedingly powerful individual in a Mohammedan city, whom he had wounded. And here he was seeking sanctuary in the very household of that said Wazir. Not only was he in the house of his chief enemy but he was within the harem itself, committing the most heinous crime in the Mohammedan decalogue by intruding within those sacred precincts. Truly he had placed himself in an unenviable position.

Keeping one ear toward the passageway behind him to listen for the return of the guardian of the harem, he paid heed to the conversation that was going on in the room in front of him. One of the women was speaking, a willowy, graceful creature, slim as a birch tree and with a skin like alabaster.

"And what of these infidels, my lord?" she asked. "The merchants whom thou hast imprisoned in the citadel?"

"It is not yet known," rumbled the man's heavy voice, "whether or not they countenanced the escape of this Nazarene. They deny all knowledge of him. But, in any case they cannot

be harmed without permission from our lord, the Shah. My master Inaljuk is sending word that they are the spies of the Mongol emperor who calls himself the Kha Khan. When permission is received from the Shah they will be killed in due course."

"But will not that anger this Kha Khan, this Emperor of the Mongols?" asked the soft voice again. "From what little we hear here in the harem it seems that he is a very powerful emperor, ruling over many men. Is it true that he has conquered the Golden Emperor of Cathay and humbled the nomad Turks of High Tary?"

"What of it?" grunted the man. "He has never fought true believers. He has never encountered the might of Islam. He is a petty, barbarian chieftain inflated with a few victories. This Genghis Khan will have his throat slit like a dog's if he crosses the path of our mighty Shah!"

Alan's brows drew into a puzzled frown as he listened. So the merchants with whom he had entered the city had come from Karakoram, that mysterious capital city of a mysterious Mongol leader, word of whose exploits had penetrated even into the Holy Land? There was something vast and inscrutable about that sullen, brooding force of nomads on the inner highlands of Asia. Men said that a leader had risen amongst them, this Genghis Khan, so called, who had welded millions of men under his sway and had conquered not only the Golden Emperor but the Kingdom of Black Cathay as well.

It was even said that his scouting parties had ventured over the mighty rampart of the Tian-Shan, where they had been seen by incredulous peasants who marvelled at the squat men dressed in black lacquer armour and carrying slender lances, mounted upon shaggy ponies. Some vague disquiet had seeped through the rich and prosperous empire of Islam; men shook their heads and muttered of a storm to come.

AS THOUGH sharing in his thoughts, the voice of the woman fell on his ears again. "Is it true, oh my lord," she asked, "that signs and portents have been seen, that the stars have fallen from their places in the heavens and that a ball of fire hung above the tall minaret of the mosque this night? If it is true, my lord, does it not mean danger and would it not be wiser to let these Mongol merchants go their way in peace?"

"Signs and portents! Bah!" grunted the Turk as he rose from the divan. "Bazaar gossip and the chatter of women. The mighty empire of the Shah has nothing to fear from a few wandering herdsmen," he patted the bandage over his shoulder and moved his arm, grimacing in pain as the wound irked him. Nevertheless, he strode through the group of women out toward some entrance on the far side. "I go now to see the punishment of this Christian dog," and with that he disappeared from view.

The women murmured together, something of worry and anxiety evident in their voices and gestures. But one by one the group broke up until there were none left but the slim and beautiful woman with the alabaster skin who sat pensively on the divan, her dainty feet crossed and her chin resting on the palm of her soft hand. As she sat there she was directly facing Alan, concealed behind the curtain and he had time to marvel at her beauty. But other matters drove her from his mind for the sound he had been dreading broke suddenly upon his ears.

Fists were determinedly hammering upon that upper door which gave upon the roof and he blessed himself for having locked it. But the knocking continued. The woman seated on the divan raised her head in startled alarm. Footsteps began to sound in the passageway behind him. The clamor at the door redoubled.

The imperative knocking on the door quickly brought the huge Nubian slave, his broad-bladed sword carried

across his arm. Behind him came another guard so nearly like him in grossness of body and hugeness of frame that they might have been brothers. These two advanced up the stairway to the roof and unlocked the door. There followed the sound of many excited voices and protests from the Nubians.

These guardians finding the door locked from the inside were certain that no one had entered and their assured manner, combined with the fact that this was the dwelling of the Wazir of Police quickly sent the men outside on their way. The door was locked. The two huge slaves marched in stately fashion down the staircase. The press of servants who had appeared drifted back to their quarters and again the small hallway was deserted.

The slim and beautiful wife of the Wazir continued to stare through that doorway behind the right hand drape of which Alan stood concealed, not daring to move for fear that her keen eyes would see him.

For a full moment he stood thus, scarce daring to breathe. Whether some movement on his part betrayed him or whether the woman saw his shape outlined behind the portiere he never knew, but he started and grew tense as she rose from her seat and peered more closely at the curtain behind which he stood.

Advancing with one dragging step after another she came halfway across the room. Alan was certain now that he was discovered. He was not long in doubt for at that second she stopped and gave voice to a piercing scream. Her voice rang through the house like a clarion. There was an answering shout from the servants' quarters. The remaining women of the harem appeared as if by magic.

Alan wasted no time but strode boldly back in the direction whence he had come. As he reached the low door which gave on to the servants' quarters the huge black bulk of the Nubian slave appeared before him. The Nubian, his eyes popping with

astonishment, stared at him open mouthed, forgetting to use the great sword. Allan, who had drawn his own weapon, suddenly flashed it viciously at the man's throat. The eunuch went down, bawling like a stabbed ox. Behind him the shadowy corridor was filled with figures. Alan in three more strides was at the foot of the staircase. He hurried up to the outer door as frightened faces began to appear at the bottom. Unlocking the portal he flung it wide and stepped out on to the roof, closing the door behind him.

IT WAS not until he had turned around from closing the door that he sensed a shadowy figure crouched with upraised weapon at his right hand. Some instinctive reaction drove him to leap to one side as a glittering scimitar whistled through the air at the spot where he had been. Before his unknown antagonist could raise his weapon for another blow, Alan drove at him savagely, his long blade snaking out like a serpent's tongue, driving through the man's body with the whole force of his strength. The guard went down with a groan and Alan withdrew his sword. There seemed no one else in the immediate vicinity and, wiping his blade he went back in the general direction of the house of that girl calling herself Helene, she who had given him shelter.

A pale moon hung like a silver sickle in the sky and by its light he could see over the housetops. The hue and cry for him had evidently passed on. Reasoning that it would be better to return to that house, on the principle that the greatest darkness is just under the lamp, he stole cautiously across the roofs, carefully spying out the ground ahead before each move. The crowds which had now filled the streets were now dissipating and there were only knots of people here and there discussing the escape of the Christian. Farther down the street the police were still

searching the last few houses but Alan kept on his way.

It was not long until he was back once more at that roof where he had last seen the girl. There was no one about. Very quietly he tried the handle of the door and found that it gave to his touch. Below him some faint light from her room shone through the damask curtains. Evidently she had left the door open for him. Taking the same precaution which had stood him in such good stead before, he locked the door from the inside and went quietly down the staircase. Anxious not to frighten her, he called her; he called her name softly once, and once again. There was no response but the light continued its rosy glow from beyond the curtains. Thinking that she must be in some other part of the house he pushed aside the curtains and gazed into the room.

The place was in disorder as though many men had overturned cushions and moved cabinets in their search. Holding the curtain in his left hand he stepped within the room.

Something heavy and soft dropped over his head, blotting out all light. Arms like steel bands encompassed him from all sides. His feet were kicked out from under him and he was rolled helpless on the floor, while ropes were swiftly knotted about him. His kicks and struggles were unavailing. Whoever his captors were they went about their work silently for he heard never a word as he was picked up and carried head foremost, feeling like some trussed fowl, out of the room and down the stairs.

It was not until he reached the street that he heard the murmur of voices and the excited cries of on-lookers but had little time to listen to this as he was lifted up and thrown face downward over the back of a horse. Supported on either side with strong hands he felt the horse being led out.

In his mind's eye he could almost picture the route he followed, back along that street where he had fled

for shelter into the main thoroughfare and to the right toward the grim citadel.

His captors halted at last and pulled him from the saddle. Again he was lifted and carried into some musty, dank entrance along a corridor of stone, against which the steel mail of his captors jangled as they hurried through. In another minute he felt himself being carried down the steps, heard the clang of a great door and found himself thrust in amongst many people.

CHAPTER III

CAGE OF CAPTURE

THE cloth which had been fastened tightly around Alan's head and arms prevented him from seeing where he was or who might be around him, but as he was placed upright on his feet he felt his bonds being untied. In another minute the heavy cloth was removed from him, at the same time that his belt and sword were taken from his side. The removal of the heavy cloth left his eyes nearly blinded by the light of many torches and at first he could see nothing except vague faces and the gleam of steel. His captors turned from him abruptly and went away, clanging a steel gate behind them and locking it. Their footsteps lessened as they left his prison and their torch lights cast grotesque shadows on the walls and ceiling.

So dim was the light that he could scarcely see where he was or in what manner of place he was imprisoned. As his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, he made out the walls of his prison. As far as he could determine, he was in a large steel cage, the bars of which extended to the roof, leaving a passage around it and next the wall where an armed sentry paced his post like some keeper guarding wild animals. Underfoot the floor was covered with musty straw. There were many men about him in the cage, some seated and some reclining and he had the sensa-

tion of being watched by countless curious eyes as he stood there inside the door. As his eyes grew more accustomed to the semi-obscurity he gradually began to recognize the men about him and saw that they were those same merchants with whose caravan he had entered the gates of this unlucky city. They continued to regard him steadfastly, no man saying a word. The night was well along and Alan found himself suddenly weary. Finding himself a vacant place he composed himself to slumber, wondering what might be in store for him on the morrow.

It was the stir and movement about him that woke him up in the morning. A few rays of sunlight entered the place from high overhead and he sat up rubbing his eyes and gazing curiously at his companions. These sat impassive and resigned, their slant eyes containing no trace of emotion, their squat bodies as immovable as though they were carved from rock. It was the noise of the guards coming with food and water which had awakened him. Looking over his silent fellow captors he saw one figure that seemed vaguely familiar. It was one of the merchants, taller and of more commanding aspect than the rest. He sat a little apart.

Suddenly he remembered. This was the leader of the caravan, the man who had parleyed at the gate for its entrance. As he studied the leader that individual turned toward him and beckoned, inviting him to seat himself beside him.

Curious as to what the gesture of the merchant leader might portend, Alan rose and stretched, then strolled over beside him. The man looked up at him, his keen eyes staring out of a sharp, thin face which was alive with intelligence and force.

"Art thou he who entered with our caravan and escaped?" asked the merchant leader, speaking in Persian. Alan nodded.

"And who art thou?" he asked of the merchant leader.

"I am one who hates the Shah and

his people!" returned that individual and he bared his teeth in a snarl which gave his face a wolfish expression for a second. Then his features composed themselves again to their usual passive stolidity.

"I have heard," said Alan, "that the governor here awaits word from the Shah to put thee and thy men to death. In what manner have you offended?"

"In no manner except that the governor Inaljuk and Timur, his Wazir of Police, covet our wealth. In order to seize it they accuse us of harboring spies in our midst," returned the caravan leader.

"And thou hast no friends in thy country who would ransom thee?" asked Alan.

"Aye, many and powerful, but the time is short. But thou, thou also art doomed. Dost know that thou art to be put to the torture at sundown?"

"Doubtless," nodded Alan, composedly. The caravan leader shot a sudden side glance at him, a glance in which there was a trace of respect for this powerful white man who recked so little of torture and death.

"**A**RT alone?" the Mongol asked. "Hast thou no friends who will aid thee to avoid the torture?"

"Nay, not one," answered Alan, thoughtfully, "not a soul who will take vengeance for my death."

"That is to be regretted," returned the other, and then with some trace of satisfaction, "Great and terrible will be the vengeance of the Kha Khan when he is apprised of our death. He will stable his horses in the mosques of these intolerant Mohammedans. He will overrun the land with fire and sword. He will leave not even a jackal to mourn the ruins of once populous cities!" The man spoke calmly as though announcing a fact. Alan gazed at him in surprise.

"Thou servest Genghis Khan, then?" he asked, and then at the man's nod, "Is he then so powerful?"

"Aye," nodded the Mongol. The complete finality of that answer, said more than a score of words could have done.

"Thou hast high rank in thine own country?" asked Alan, shrewdly.

"Aye," came the simple rejoinder.

Alan sank his head in thought only to raise it again as he noticed the jailer with several guards behind him, unlocking the great door. The man came in carrying something under his arm. He came to where the two men were sitting and tossed something into Alan's lap. Looking down at the object the Crusader saw a loaf of greasy Mussulman bread.

"There is one who hath paid much gold that this be given to thee, Christian dog," whispered the jailer as he passed on his way.

"Where there are Turks there will gold buy a way," quoted Alan as he looked at the bread. Waiting until the jailer and the guard had disappeared from view he tore the loaf apart carefully, finding a short, jewel-handled dagger in its interior. This he started to slip into his cloak but found a square of parchment bound about its blade. He unrolled this in considerable puzzlement over the lines of the unfamiliar Latin script, inscribed thereon in purple ink.

"Greetings," read the note, "and sorrow at thy capture. He who has borne this message to thee has received much gold to come to thine aid." It was signed, "Helene."

Alan looked up a little puzzled and thoughtful to find the eyes of the Mongol leader upon him.

"It seems after all that thou hast a friend," said the Mongol, drily.

"Aye," returned Alan, still thoughtful. He was recalling in his mind's eye the beauty of face and figure of that girl who had helped him so generously, the first and last time he had seen her. And now she had come to his aid again. Truly she was of kindly and compassionate nature, he reflected, and then his practical mind began to reason ways and means. The jailer had been bought by gold,

but then one could not trust a Turk and his aid would probably be of little value. It was worth trying in any event and he waited the man's return, anxiously.

It was noon before the man came back and the slow hours of the morning had passed in interminable weariness of spirit. The jailer, a stout, full-lipped, huge-shouldered Turk, cast an oblique glance upon him as he entered the door, but came closer as Alan beckoned.

"Canst aid as thou hast promised?" whispered Alan tensely.

"Of what avail will be my aid?" returned the Turk. "They will lead thee forth at sundown to be thrown upon the hooks. In the morning they will drag thee to the torture. The place is strongly guarded. I think it is fated that thou shouldst die."

"Nay," returned Alan levelly, "it is not so fated. Canst get me mine own sword?"

"'Tis impossible!" the Turk shook his head. "I could not bring it to thee without being discovered."

Alan plucked idly at the musty straw which littered the floor.

"It would seem, Sir Jailer, that your floor covering is ancient and hath need of renewal. Couldst not bring a bundle of fresh straw? A long bundle?" and reaching into his leather pouch in the inner pocket of his cloak he brought forth a single gold coin. The eyes of the Turk brightened.

"Aye, perhaps," he mumbled as he turned away and went out amongst the guards.

ANOTHER weary hour dragged by but at last echoing footsteps of the jailer sounded in the long corridor and shortly he appeared, carrying a great bundle of straw under his arms, accompanied by two or three men who carried more bundles. Again the steel-barred door was unlocked and he entered. Looking neither to the right nor to the left he dropped the bundle at Alan's feet, and departed without a word.

"It is well," said Alan as he parted the bundle with his foot and felt something hard in its interior. "Given a sword a man can accomplish wonders."

But another interminable hour dragged by. No sword could cut through the thickness of those iron bars. Some one must come. Briefly he outlined a plan to the Mongol leader beside him and that man nodded sagely.

"It is better that thou and I alone should escape," said the Mongol, "and that these others should remain behind."

"They may prove unwilling," grunted Alan, a little disdainfully.

The Mongol looked up at him for a second before replying. Evidently he had caught the tone and the implication behind it.

"They understand if thou dost not, that they will be serving the Kha Khan most gloriously by aiding in my escape. Come, I will ask them." He turned and called out to the twenty or thirty men behind him, saying a few words in guttural Mongol. The men nodded eagerly, their eyes showing devotion and implacable resolve. Alan saw this and marvelled, wondering what manner of man this might be for whom a score of followers would lay down their lives so willingly.

And thus it was agreed. Alan slipped the dagger from within his cloak and handed it to the Mongol leader. The two of them waited, while behind them the followers edged nearer the door and sat, each man in passive silence as the slow minutes dragged by.

They had not long to wait. The tramp of many men and the clank of steel heralded the approach of several guards. In another minute there issued from the corridor a group of men, some eight or nine all told, headed by a figure in resplendent helmet and silvered mail, wearing a jeweled scimitar and gold-embroidered vestments.

It was Timur, the Wazir of Police,

who still carried his left arm in a sling from the wound inflicted by Alan.

The Turkish officer swaggered into the cage as the steel gate was thrown open, followed at several feet by the guards. Timur halted as he came to where Alan sat.

"Ho, thou Nazarene dog," he said, "thy time is nearly come. Great sport will I have watching thee groan and bleed on the steel hooks. Great sport will I have watching thee undergoing the slow death to follow on the morrow." And the full-lipped, cruel-faced Seljukian Turk went on, heaping scorn and abuse upon the prisoner. Alan watched, seeing out of the tail of his eye, one Mongol after another rise to his feet in careless fashion.

"Now is the time," he whispered to the Mongol leader at his side.

The arrogant Wazir of Police continued his insults. Alan thrust aside the straw and with one sweeping motion leaped to his feet, sword in hand. His movement was a signal to the Mongols. Those squat-bodied, powerful men leaped bare handed at the guards, tearing and screaming like a pack of demons. The Wazir's scimitar was half out when Alan cut down at him. The blade struck a glancing blow on the Turk's chain mail and turned inwards, making a nasty wound. The Wazir stumbled backwards. From Alan's side the leader of the Mongols had leaped, dagger in hand, at the nearest of the guards and plunged the weapon into the man's throat. As the guard went down groaning, the powerful Mongol seized his scimitar.

SO SUDDEN and so unexpected had been the mass attack of the prisoners that the guards were caught unprepared. The struggling group of men swayed back and forth but the Mongols pressed them away from the open door of the cage and Alan and the Mongol leader leaped for the entrance. Three guards barred their way, men who had been left outside. As the first of these raised his

scimitar to strike, Alan's blade darted in with the quickness of forked lightning. He pulled it clear as the man stumbled and fell. The second guard wavered uncertainly and him the Mongol cut down as one cuts down a weed. The third guard fled down along the outside of the cage and the way was clear. Swords in hand, the two hurried down the corridor. Behind them the prison room resounded with screams and shouts and the clash of weapons, a noise which re-echoed in the low ceiled corridor. Half way down its length the two fugitives heard men running toward them, hurrying to the sound of combat and in a second they saw the light of a torch wavering toward them. An angle of the wall cast a heavy shadow and the two crowded close against this, standing motionless as a hurrying group of eight or ten men streamed past them intent on the disturbance ahead. Again they set forth, coming to the end of the corridor which opened out into a sort of rectangular guardroom. Spears and shields were hung along the walls and the long cloaks of the guards were scattered about. The place was empty of men but there were sounds of more guards approaching from the opposite direction. Sheathing his sword, Alan seized a cloak and draped it around him, then placing his own helmet underneath it, he seized one of the helmets of the guards. The Mongol quickly followed his example. They each took a Damascene shield and spear and thus accoutered had all the appearance of two guardsmen, to one who did not examine too closely.

They wasted no time in setting forth, but scarcely had they left the guardroom than they met a hurrying group of men coming down a gallery which led toward the courtyard.

"Hurry, hurry, the prisoners are fighting!" called the Mongol to these, speaking Turkish. This group of men hurried past them, weapons in hand, and the two kept on their way, coming at last to the courtyard.

There were few men in the court-

yard, most of them grooms, but there were many horses. The two fugitives glanced at each other and without a word made for the nearest mounts. A sleepy groom rose as they untied the reins and voiced some protest.

"Silence, dog!" growled the Mongol. "It is upon order of the governor that we go!" The man subsided grumbling as the two flung themselves into the saddle and trotted their horses toward the main gate of the citadel. The guards at the gate, aroused by the excitement inside were crowding out of their guard-room when the two rode up. They glanced up at the two horsemen with half an eye, seeing naught of strangeness in two mounted guardsmen riding forth. Even the sentry standing in the center of the gate only questioned them mechanically, asking whither they were bound.

"To carry a message from the governor to the Captain of the Western Gate!" barked the Mongol impatiently, and the sentinel stood aside.

They were in the street, that long street that led to the Western Gate. Behind them the citadel hummed like an angry beehive. The Mongol was for riding immediately to the Western Gate and the open country.

"Not so. Not so," said the Crusader. "There is a lady to whom I owe thanks," and he turned in at the side street leading to the house of Helene, the daughter of the Strategos.

"Fool, we are lost if we delay!" growled the Mongol to Alan's uncompromising back, but followed perforce as he saw his argument was of no avail. The two of them cantered down that blind street until at last they were before the house. Here Alan drew his horse up sharply and bent a piercing gaze on the two guards who lounged before the door.

"Thou speakest better Turki than I," he said to the Mongol. "Demand of them the whereabouts of the lady, Helene." The Mongol nodded and trotted his horse forward, posing his question sharply.

"Ho," laughed one of the guards,

"she hath been seized by the governor and imprisoned in the citadel for aiding a Nazarene dog to escape. She hath left these twenty minutes."

CHAPTER IV

GOLD AND STEEL

ALAN'S face grew grim. He sat like a graven image, thinking of the guard's words, reflecting upon the lady Helene and her beauty and the manner in which she had aided him and of her capture. It was the voice of the Mongol which warned him to hurry, for even now the guards at the door were gazing upon the two suspiciously and the usual bazaar rabble was beginning to collect. It needed no second warning to tell Alan that this spot was rapidly becoming unhealthy. With some dim idea of returning to the citadel and attempting a rescue of the lady Helene, he wheeled his horse, and, followed by the Mongol, cantered up the street.

As they debouched into the main street he checked his horse and gazed toward the citadel. A great clamour and excitement was taking place.

"Hurry!" said the Mongol. "Thou canst do no good there and every second is precious."

Even as he spoke the sentinel at the citadel gate spied them and, pointing to some one within, shouted a warning. Spearmen began to appear. Over their heads Alan could see other guards hastily running for the horses. With bitterness in his heart he wheeled his horse and with the Mongol at his side headed for the Western Gate.

The rattle of their horses' hoofs reverberated against the broad wall upon which were placed those cruel hooks whereon he was to have been thrown to spend the night in agony. He glanced up at them in the dusk and his jaw set into stern lines. Horsemen were now beginning to stream out of the citadel gate behind them. The two urged their own mounts into greater speed and gal-

loped through the crowd, scattering people to right and left. The warning shouts and yells of their pursuers were in their ears but so far away were they that the street rabble could not understand them and suffered the two fugitives to pass, certain that they were guardsmen hurrying on important business.

Their great point of danger now would be that Western Gate and the guards who tended it. Alan prayed that it might not yet be closed and watched anxiously over his horse's head as the two mounts strained at the bits. They swept past the open market place, with the shouts of their pursuers ringing in their ears. Could they but win through that Western Gate the day might yet be saved, but should the gate be closed it would mean that their pursuers would catch up with them. As they galloped Alan harked back to the lady, Helene, and felt the bitterness rise within him that he had failed her in her hour of need. Reason told him that he could better aid her by being free than were he to be captured and thrown on the hooks, but reason could not comfort him.

They could now see the bulk of the outer wall of the city before them, against the sky, but were unable as yet to see the gate by reason of the turns and twists of the thoroughfare. They had to check once as a great two wheeled cart lumbered out of a side alley, nearly blocking their way. But they shoved through between wall and metal-tipped shaft of the wagon with barely an inch to spare. Seized with a sudden idea, Alan jerked his horse to its haunches, wheeled and grasped the reins of the two wagon animals, swinging them so that the wagon blocked the narrow street. Then with the speed of thought he ran his sword into the throat of each of the animals and galloped on with the Mongol, just as their pursuers appeared in plain view on the far side.

That this ruse would only gain them delay of a minute or two, he

well knew, but seconds were precious. They galloped on, rounding an angle of the street and hearing the yells of their pursuers to the rear. As they turned still another twist in the thoroughfare they saw the gate before them.

It was closed.

The Mongol, seeing the gates closed before them, checked his horse, but not so Alan. He kept on his way unflinching.

"Speak thou to the gate guards," he said to the Mongol as he drew up beside him. "Tell them——" and he gave his instructions. The Mongol nodded, his eyes gleaming.

The two drew up with a clatter before the gate. Behind them they could hear the shouts of their pursuers, ever nearing.

"Open in the name of the governor!" shouted the Mongol to the men who came tumbling out from the gate towers. "Open quickly, dogs! Ye have let a prisoner escape through the gates and we seek him. Open or thy heads will pay the penalty!"

THE STARTLED guards, infected by the excitement of the two, hurried to swing the great iron gates aside. They creaked slowly, an inch showed between their mighty leaves and then two inches, which slowly broadened to a foot and then to a yard. Alan leaped his horse through the opening as quickly as the space was wide enough and the Mongol followed after. Jerking his horse on his haunches the Crusader whispered to the Mongol. That one grinned and raised his voice again.

"Close the gates immediately by order of the governor! There are prisoners loose within the city. Allow no man to leave without written order from the Wazir of Police!"

Through the space between the half open gates they could see their pursuers, not a hundred paces behind them, surging rapidly down the narrow street toward the gate. But in obedience to the Mongol's command the great portals closed again just as

the foremost of the pursuing horsemen came within hailing distance of the guards.

"That will give us a little time, O Mongol, but we must make speed!" said Alan, and they lay low on their horses' necks and gave them rein as they swept down the road with the black walls of the city lessening in the distance behind them. Darkness had come on apace. The moon had not yet arisen but their nimble footed horses carried them unswervingly forward, taking them farther from their enemies with every second.

"They will seek for us to the eastward," the Mongol's voice fell on Alan's ears. "We must continue to the west for a time."

"True, O Mongol. I ride with you," returned Alan's voice above the pounding of the horses' hoofs. "But tell me, O Mongol, what is the name by which you are known amongst your people?"

"Chatagai," returned the Mongol briefly as they forged ahead.

After some fifteen minutes' progress they drew up their horses and listened for sounds of pursuit in the darkness. But all seemed silent behind them. It was Alan's keen ear however, which heard the thud of horses' hoofs on the road ahead, advancing toward them. The sound was so near that it seemed almost upon them and in a second a voice bellowed at them not three paces away, and dark figures loomed out of the gloom.

"Halt!" it shouted in authoritative Turkish. "Who are ye and whither are ye bound?" A tall, turbaned rider, evidently an officer judging from the jeweled egret in his turban, blocked their way. Other horsemen rode out of the darkness on all sides. Chatagai, the Mongol, reached instinctively for his sword, but Alan's hand fell compellingly on his wrist.

"We be messengers from the Governor Inaljuk of Otrar to our lord, the Shah," returned the Mongol boldly. "And who art thou?" he demanded.

"I also am a messenger," said the tall man, "carrying word to Inaljuk, the governor, and bearing the commands of our lord, the Shah, that he shall put to death the Mongol merchants whom he has seized."

Alan heard Chatagai draw his breath in sharply and before the Crusader could arrest the motion the scimitar of the Mongol leaped forth like a living thing and thudded into the neck of the turbaned stranger. The man's head twisted sideways in a peculiar fashion and he slumped forward on his horse's neck from whence he rolled to the ground.

So sudden and so unexpected had been this blow that everyone was paralyzed with astonishment for the nonce, but Chatagai rose in his stirrups and slashed down the next man. Alan was the first to recover; he drew his blade in time to thrust home as the nearest horseman rode into him. How many there were there in the darkness the Crusader could not tell, but they were all of five men around and about them.

"Ride through, O fool!" he yelled at Chatagai, and, cutting and slashing like fiends the two overbore the little group of startled men about them and galloped on into the night, swinging sharply off the road as they overpassed the strangers.

BEHIND in the darkness they heard a babble of voices which died away into the distance. They rode across a field and through an orchard, slowing down their horses as they came to the grassy banks of the small brook. A dog barked from somewhere near at hand but they paid no heed as they dismounted and watered their horses, tightened girths, and adjusted stirrups and clothing.

"We cannot long tarry here so near the city," said Alan, "for the hue and cry will be on at daylight. Whither art thou bound, O Chatagai?"

"For the yurts of my father's tribe," answered the Mongol. "Come thou with me."

"Nay, but that cannot be," returned

Alan, adjusting his sword belt. "I cannot leave the lady Helene a prisoner."

"O man of little judgment," returned Chatagai, "ye can do naught else but leave her a prisoner. How canst thou, single-handed, overcome a walled city and a mighty citadel filled with armed men? Leave her prisoner. Little harm can befall her, for she of whom you speak is a hostage whose safe-keeping is entrusted to the governor of Otrar."

"Say ye so?" Alan looked up sharply. "How know ye then these things?"

"A man who has ears can listen," returned the Mongol. "But do thou come with me and together we will return with a horde of warriors which shall blacken the plains and leave not one stone upon another in Otrar."

"How dost thou know that these warriors will come?" asked Alan.

"By the White Horse Hide upon which the throne of the Kha Khan is placed do I swear that these things shall come to pass," said Chatagai solemnly. "Thinkest thou that the Genghis Kahn, the Ruler of All Men, will brook that his merchants, coming in peace and amity shall be set upon and murdered by a petty governor of the Shah? Nay, ye know not the Power which broods behind the mountains. Come with me and ye will have high honor and worthy employment and shall return at last to find thy woman with ten thousand lances to aid thee in the seeking."

Alan considered this for a moment.

"So be it," he said at last and without other word the two men put foot in stirrup and set forth veering off to the eastward, setting their course upon a star.

They rode silent through the night, passing through farm land and orchard, village and wooded copse until they came to the edge of the fertile ground and felt the heat of the barren lands rising up. They were moving eastward from the river Syr, that river known by the ancients as the Jaxartes. Chatagai told him whither

he was heading, being set upon crossing the mountains to strike the *Pe lu*, the Great North Road above the Tianshan, where existed one of the oldest trade routes of Asia. Could they but elude the pursuers which would be sent out to capture them, the way lay clear before them. The first rays of dawn found them plodding steadily westward toward those mountains which could dimly be seen piled up mass on mass and reaching to the sky. They reasoned that it would be better to hide by day, resting man and beast and moving only by night. The horsemen of the Shah were many in number and roamed far and wide over these plains and barrens. An hour later the countryside was bathed with early morning sunlight and they found themselves following a narrow track through a valley. They glanced about them, anxiously seeking for some place where they might find food and shelter and hiding for the day so soon upon them. It was Alan's keen eye which first spied the glint of sun on steel, following on their trail not half a mile in rear.

"The hounds are early on the scent," he remarked to Chatagai as he pointed out their pursuers, a clump of thirty or more horsemen. Chatagai looked long and gravely at them and then both men turned as they rounded the twisting path and saw before them a squat tower guarding the trail at the head of the valley.

A single swift glance showed them that the tower was occupied, for smoke arose from its interior and Turkish warriors could be seen moving about its base.

HAPLY the men in the tower above had not observed them, or if they had, they paid little heed to these two lone travelers. There was only one thing to do, which was to scale the side of this steep valley and pass around and above the tower; this they did, leading their horses until after twenty minutes they were safe in the woods at the top of the divide and headed toward

the mountains. They kept on going until late in the morning when they found a hunter's cabin and were fed and their horses cared for by this man. One slept while the other watched but none came to disturb them in this lonely spot and they fared forth at nightfall once more. By the end of the third day they had overpassed danger of pursuit and began traveling in the daytime. Steeper and ever steeper grew the road and colder and ever colder grew the air as they climbed into the Great North Road above the Tian-shan. Upon the trail they found long lines of hairy camels, plodding along in single file to the chime of tinkling bells, laden with cloth and grain and all manner of merchandise, coming and going from High Tartary and the lowlands.

The days became like some nightmare of effort and of steady plodding progress, up into seven thousand foot passes and over rivers. Here Chatagai taught Alan the Mongol manner of crossing rivers and swimming horses. After incredible hardships they came at last to the small ranges on the far side. One morning Chatagai shaded his eyes and pointed ahead to a collection of three or four yurts, black felt-covered tents looking like great domed beehives. They rode up to this and a Mongol officer, a bony-faced man in black lacquered armour came forth and called upon them to halt.

Chatagai drew forth from his breast a tablet of jade on which was inscribed some wording in the flowing Mongol script. To Alan's surprise the officer dropped to his knees and bowed his head, palms to the ground, thereafter arising swiftly and shouting in a loud and terrible voice so that men came running and took the horses of the travelers and hurried fresh horses up while other men brought kumiss, fermented and beaten milk to drink and boiled millet and mutton for them to eat. They had hit the farthest outpost of the great Yam, the far reaching messenger re-

lay system of Genghis Khan. They were sent upon their way with a mounted messenger to guide them and galloped at full speed to the next station. Their escort wore a broad belt upon which were many small bells. The tinkling of these bells warned the station ahead and as they arrived, fresh horses were waiting saddled and bridled. Each time they changed horses the jade tablet was flashed and each time men went to their knees and bowed before it.

"What is it that thou carriest before which all men tremble?" asked Alan.

"It is the Tiger Tablet," answered Chatagai and gave no further explanation. Later Alan was to learn of another tablet, the Falcon Tablet, which insured a messenger fresh relays of horses, and he was also to learn of the Tiger Tablet which did all this and, in addition, gave its bearer the power of life and death over the Mongol guardians. Along the route passed the endless lines of camel caravans carrying silks and woven stuffs from Islam into the desert. Sallow-faced Jewish traders led carts and heavily laden donkeys, loaded with goods for trading at the court of Genghis Khan. Armenians rode by, and merchants and savants of every nation converged upon Karakoram, the capital city of the great Mongol conqueror. They pressed on, the two riders, pausing only to snatch a few hours' sleep, resting in the station or the house of the *daroga*, the road governor, where great honor was shown Chatagai. These stations were twenty-five miles apart, more or less, and the shaggy Mongolian ponies covered the distance at full speed so that on many days they put over a hundred miles behind them from sunup to sundown. As they neared the great city in the desert the trade routes became more populous. They passed by all manner of craftsmen, carpenters, brick makers, sword welders and priests of all beliefs; Nestorian Christians, gray garbed and ascetic looking; yellow-hatted Tibetan Lamas, twisting their prayer wheels

as they marched; Hindu fakirs, bare-footed and fanatic; all manner of men of all manner of races hurried toward that point where Genghis Khan sat enthroned representing all the power of High Asia.

CHAPTER V

COURT OF GENGHIS KHAN

THE day came at last when they arrived at the outskirts of Karakoram in the desert sands, a huge nondescript city of hovels and palaces, felt yurts and wattle-thatched huts. They were met at the gate by a silken-garbed Mongol, wearing a great ruby in his cap, who bowed and made obeisance to Chatagai. It was the Master of Law and Punishment who received them and escorted them, as was the custom, between the two great fires.

Chatagai led Alan to a richly ornamented yurt of white felt and here they cleansed themselves and washed the dust of travel before entering into the Ordu, the center of the clan, the dwelling place of Genghis Khan himself. As they passed on their way, Alan saw vast stables housing mighty herds of horses; and he saw great granaries containing millet and rice for men, and fodder for the horses. Of religious tolerance there seemed to be plenty, for Buddhist temples stood side by side with the stone mosques of Mohammedans, with the wooden churches of Nestorian Christians edging in beside them. The two of them, escorted by several high Mongol officers, came to a great high pavilion of white felt lined with silk. Next its entrance was a long table made of solid silver upon which were set out meat and fruits and honey and the milk of mares, so that all might eat.

At the far end of the great pavilion was a long, low bench set upon a dais. Enthroned upon it sat a keen-eyed man of middle age, dressed in white wadded coat with a hanging girdle and up-tilted felt hat, with long streamers. A broad belt of gold

encircled his waist and a sword lay at his feet. His expression was one of vast calm, the face of a wise and just man; but Alan saw also in the intensity of his eyes a power that boded ill for any who aroused his ire.

On the bench with him, but slightly below it on the left side, sat a squat Mongol woman dressed in rich silken robes. Alan realized that he was gazing upon the mighty conqueror himself, Genghis Khan, who had established his power over all the nomads of High Asia, and the woman with him was the great ruler's first wife.

He had little time to reflect upon this, for Chatagai suddenly marched briskly away from him and threw himself prone at the foot of the dais. Genghis Khan and his wife rose and descended, lifting up the prone Chatagai and embracing him.

It suddenly came over Alan that this Chatagai was no less a person than the son of the Kha Khan, for the greeting could have been nothing else than that between father and mother and son. In another moment Chatagai beckoned to him and he came forward, dropping on one knee and bowing.

Genghis Khan spoke naught but Mongol; so a silken-robed figure at his right, his prime minister Chutsai, the Chinese, translated in a deep melodious voice as the Kha Khan spoke.

"The Kha Khan welcomes you to his court and gives you thanks for your aid to his son," said the Chinese in precise Persian. Alan bowed and made some fitting reply. Father and son were talking together, Chatagai now standing. As the younger man spoke, the Kha Khan rose in excitement and anger, hurling question after question, and then sank back, brooding like some great eagle. While this was going on, Alan's eyes took in the walls of the pavilion around which many richly clad nobles sat in silence. A fire of desert thorn and camel dung glowed and crackled in the center of the pavilion. High officers, the Tar-Khans, those chosen leaders, the highest of all next the princes of the Im-

perial blood, entered and departed, while the Orkhons, the commanders of armies, each of them carrying a mace, took seats around the wall. The conversation between father and son came to an end at last and Genghis Khan issued a sharp order to one of his ministers. Chatagai beckoned to Alan and they retired to the yurt of the Mongol prince where Chatagai's brothers came to embrace him. For the first time Alan gazed upon these men, called the *Orluk*, the Eagle's Imperial Princes. Amongst them was Juchi, whose son, Batu, afterward commanded the Golden Horde that overcame Russia, and Tuli, who had a son, the great Kubla Khan, who reigned over a great empire extending from China to the middle of Europe. And Chatagai himself, though no one knew it at the time, was to inherit the whole of Central Asia and was to be the ancestor of Babar, the first great Mogul of India.

WEEKS passed in feasting and in hunting, weeks in which Alan strove to learn the Mongol tongue. Chatagai kept him informed of developments and stilled his impatience to return to Otrar and rescue Helene, by telling him that an embassy had gone forth to remonstrate with the Shah for his treatment of the Mongol merchants.

More weeks passed, one morning Chatagai came into the yurt, stating that the Shah had killed the leader of the embassy and burned the beards of the remaining members.

"It means war," said the Mongol prince exultantly.

It was even as Chatagai had said, for an ominous message was swiftly despatched to the Shah.

Thou hast chosen war. That will happen which will happen, and what it is to be, we know not. God alone knows.

The might of High Asia was to be hurled against the whole of proud Islam.

Spies were quickly despatched to

study out the mountain passes and swift messengers carried the red arrow of war to the outlying standards of the horde. A river in the southwest was chosen as the mobilization center and the pastures were soon filled with great herds of horses and cattle. The nomads began to arrive, whole nations of them, each man bringing spare horses.

It did not take long for Alan to realize that here was no undisciplined mob but organized and trained soldiers. They were gathered in *tumens* of ten thousand men each, under an *orkhun* and sub-divided into regiments of a thousand each, squadrons of five hundred and squads of ten, each under its leader. There were shock divisions, their horses encased in lacquered leather, some in red and some in black. Each man of the horde was equipped with two bows and a damp-proof arrow case.

They wore lacquered armour over which were coats of fox and wolf skin. Their helmets were light and strong. The thousand men of the Khan's bodyguard carried shields and rode black horses. Every man carried a slender lance, an axe and lariats, with serviceable kits of equipment for each soldier and emergency rations of smoked dried meat and dried milk curds. Artillery they had under Chinese officers who understood the building and handling of heavy siege engines, fire throwers, ballista and mangonels and *ho-pao*, the fire gun, using Chinese gun powder.

Nearly a quarter of a million men, trained, disciplined and seasoned fighters, assembled for that great march against the empire of Islam. Alan, despite his impatience at delay and his anxiety to return to that city which harbored the girl who had his heart in her keeping, yet felt himself joyous at the sight of this vast horde.

The scouts reported the first sign of the enemy. Alan, riding beside Chatagai, at the head of two *tumens* of twenty thousand men each, had accompanied the army through its in-

credible march across Asia and down through the mountain passes on to the plains of Persia. Before them lay the head waters of the Styr. To their north the main body of the horde moved down through the Sungarian gate, that pass from which all nomad hordes have descended into the plains from High Asia. It was Chatagai's wish that he should be allowed to punish Otrar and the wish had been granted him.

The scouts reported a huge force of Persians advancing upon them down the length of the broad valley. Chatagai closed his eyes and sank his head on his chest in thought for a moment, sitting his horse like a brooding eagle. Behind them as far as the eye could see stretched a river of mounted men, twenty thousand horsemen, their lances rising in a veritable forest of slender steel points.

Chatagai raised his head again and barked some guttural orders. A regiment of a thousand warriors in black lacquer armour moved forward at the gallop, sweeping by in silent unison. Alan begged leave to accompany them and posted himself with their leader. The drumming of the hoofs of a thousand horses sounded like the roar of a cataract and this force was named with some such name, being in truth the Kiyat, "the Raging Torrents," the Paladins of the Kha Khan.

AND IN truth they looked the part of the "Raging Torrents." Their leaders said something to the bearer of the horned standard, with its nine streaming yak tails. The horned standard rose and dipped, once to the right and once to the left. Gazing backward Alan saw the sub-chiefs motioning. Suddenly the drumming of the hoofs rose in volume and the thousand horsemen galloped up into line, smoothly and quietly, forming two squadrons of five hundred men each, five ranks deep. The first two lines wore armour made of heavy iron plates, pierced and held together with leather thongs, with

helmets of iron protecting their heads and their horses protected with lacquered leather; the riders carried small round shields and slender lances with tufts of horse hair streaming from beneath the points.

But Alan's attention was attracted to the front; far down the valley he saw what seemed to be flames leaping in the air, but was indeed the reflection of the sun from the mailed host of Persian warriors. His heart sank a little as he saw the number of that host which extended as far as the eye could reach, richly clad, heavily armoured warriors, the flower of the Persian Empire.

As the two hosts drew nearer and nearer, great bronze trumpets up-reared themselves from the Persian masses and pealed forth blast after blast of deep-throated defiance. It seemed like suicide, no less, to Alan, that this force of a thousand Mongols should continue moving forward so smoothly and so silently against a force forty times their strength.

They were now almost within bow shot and a wild exultant yell shook the hills as the Persian host began its advance.

Suddenly the horned standard of the Mongols dipped again, this time to the front. The first two lines of Mongol warriors came to a sudden halt and opened out. Galloping out from behind them, the rear ranks went forward in a great loose line. Swiftly they shortened the distance until they were within twenty or thirty paces of the Persian ranks. Then as though moved by a single impulse, they turned their horses to the right and bow strings began to twang. The vicious Mongol arrows filled the air, whistling and thudding into the packed masses of the enemy. The mounted bowmen guiding their horses with their knees, loosed clouds of death-dealing missiles into the foe, seeking out every crevice and joint in the armour of horse and man until flesh and blood could not stand the deadly assault. The front ranks of the Persians recoiled and slowed up

the advance while men and horses dropped under the hail of feathered death. Pitilessly and relentlessly the arrows winged their way.

Again the horned standard dipped, this time twice to the rear. The bowmen cleared the field as if by magic, galloping off the flanks and through the ranks of the lancers and suddenly these last closed into a solid mass and bore down upon the demoralized foe.

A wild yell went up from the Mongols as they struck the Persian front. Screaming and stabbing, cutting and thrusting, they hacked and harried the enemy host.

And wherever the fight was most fierce, there was the great Genghis Khan himself, surrounded by the black horses of his Paladins. Urging his Mongols on by the mighty example of his own lance, he charged unafraid into the Persian host. The horned standard of the nine streaming yak tails marked the course of his battle as his faithful bodyguard followed their leader.

Alan marvelled as he caught a glimpse of the warrior emperor—now transformed. No longer was he the fond father of Chatagai or the calm ruler of his yurts, that Alan had known heretofore—but the avenger of his people, overpowering all in his wrath, truly the leader of the "Raging Torrents."

They fought like fiends, those Mongols, stabbing with their lances, pulling their enemies out of the saddle with hooks, their savage horses biting and screaming with them.

Alan leaped to the thick of the fray, his tall figure, gleaming in chain mail, making him conspicuous in the horde of smaller, more lightly armed Mongols. Filled with the lust of slaughter he drove straight at a group on his front, a group of Persians headed by some *atabeg*, or prince, whose silvered armour was surmounted with a damascened helmet above which rose an egret fastened by a single great ruby. The *atabeg*, a dark-bearded, stormy-eyed Persian, freed his scimitar and

leaped forward to meet the onslaught.

Around them the savage turmoil of battle rose in deafening clamour. The two blades met and rang. The more heavily armed Crusaders bore down on his antagonist with a mighty sweep of his blade which sheared the egret and the Ruby from the *atabeg's* helmet. A cry of dismay went up from the followers of the Persian chieftain; they crowded in with lance and scimitar until suddenly Alan was fighting alone, surrounded by a press of Persians.

ALAN'S great sword rose and fell like a flail, he stabbed and hacked, twisting and turning to avoid the questing spear points. His blade found its target again and again; one intrepid Persian after another sagged from the saddle or drew back wounded and helpless. But fresh men replaced them and the ring of steel grew ever tighter.

The clamour rose to a crescendo. The sheer weight and momentum of the Persians bore steadily forward along the whole line. Over the bodies of slain men and horses, they continued to advance, pushed by the weight of the mass behind them.

A sudden exultant shout went up from the Persian host and Alan glanced behind him, seeing the horned standard of the Mongols dipping again, this time with a circular motion. Every Mongol lancer detached himself swiftly from the foe. Like swallows they turned and fled to the rear.

Exultant, the Persians came on, stringing out and breaking ranks in the flush of victory. Alan was borne backward as though by a mighty wave but so close packed were his enemies that there was no room for weapon play. On his right side he found the *atabeg* who glared at him and strove to unloose a dagger at his waist. A horse's foaming mouth thrust itself at Alan's knee, his left elbow was caught against a Persian warrior on his flank. The *atabeg* loosed his dagger at last and struck viciously at the

Crusader's chest. The blow glanced harmlessly against the sturdy chain mail. The rush of horses eased slightly the pressure around the lone knight. He was enabled to draw back his sword arm and with the heavy hilt of his weapon he smashed full into the face of the *atabeg* so that the man shrieked and cowered in his saddle, blinded.

The Crusader, alone in that great battlefield, was like a piece of driftwood, rolled forward by the waves. But he abated no whit the sweep and thrust of that great sword, so that a little space was cleared about him and he had time to glance back toward his friends.

There was no need to glance back, for suddenly a storm of arrows broke from the Mongols, rattling and thudding into Persian warriors and horses. The shifting elusive lines of Mongol bowmen had again taken up their pitiless hail of arrows.

Some understanding of these tactics of the Mongols came to Alan; he freed himself from the encumbering Persians about him with a last mighty sweep of his blade that lopped off the arm of the nearest foeman. So demoralized were the front ranks of the Persians by the clouds of arrows that Alan was enabled to gallop back through the bowmen of Chatagai's force and place himself again with the lancers.

Again and again this maneuver was repeated, bowmen alternating with lancers so that the Persian host, carried forward by its sheer momentum was constantly assailed and its front ranks constantly cut down by this mobile and elusive foe.

But the immense Persian host rolled ever forward like some vast wave, riding over its dead, only to meet constantly reinforced walls of mounted men. The Persians were fed on and ever on up the valley, straggling out until all traces of solid ranks were lost and the Persian force streamed forward like a mob.

Alan, riding with each rank in turn, dropped his weary arm and his

red sword blade as a sudden terrified scream came from the Persian mass. Looking up to see what it might portend, he gasped in sudden amazement as the whole mountain side above him quickened into sudden life. There, in ambush, had waited the main body of the Mongols, a huge, steel-tipped, quintuple rank of nearly twenty thousand men. The earth shook as the great waves of horsemen surged down on the Persian flank. The air quivered with the savage screams of the Mongols. The sun glittered from ten thousand lance tips and then the lance tips no longer glittered as their thirsty points buried themselves in living flesh.

The Persian host, demoralized and panic stricken, broke as a castle of sand breaks before the first wave of the incoming tide. The following waves rode over it and smashed it utterly until in all that great valley there was naught left of the foe but wounded and dying Persians, and riderless, screaming horses. Nightfall saw the carnage continued and the fugitive Persians ridden down and butchered.

The way was clear to Otrar.

CHAPTER VI

CHAMBER OF HOT IRON

THE next morning at dawn the sentinels on the walls of Otrar sounded the alarm gongs, which boomed and reverberated over the city, rousing the inhabitants who crowded to the walls and gazed in horror as the smoke of burning farm houses and villages rose in the air, and a vast sea of mounted warriors flowed toward the city.

In the harem of Timur, the Wazir of Police, a slender woman, with a skin like alabaster, sat on a divan with chin cupped in soft hand, and talked to her lord who gazed moodily on the floor.

"Said I not, my lord, that those merchants should have been freed and sent upon their way? Even the heavens cried aloud and the stars

dropped from their places in the firmament. And rememberest thou the ball of fire which hung above the minaret? Yea, my lord, verily 'tis the anger of Allah which has descended upon us! It is the scourge of God which is visited upon us for our sins."

The Wazir of Police, having been long and muchly married, said naught.

At the northeast corner of the inner citadel in a small room whose prison severity had been a little mitigated by a few hangings of silk and a few worn cushions and a battered rug, Helene, the daughter of the Strategos, gazed out over the city and to the plains beyond, something like wild hope fluttering like a dove in her bosom. By devious routes, word had come to her that the tall and handsome Crusader, whose life she had saved, and whose memory she had treasured sleeping and waking for all these weary months, had not forgotten his debt of gratitude. Now the proof of it lay before her.

The city was powerfully fortified and the Mongols sat down before it like a pack of hungry wolves. Weeks passed while ballista were brought up and concentrated upon a weak portion of the wall. The last resort of the Mongols had not yet been put in force, that terrible Mongol storm where the dead were replaced by the living day and night and night and day. It was Alan, growing impatient at the delay, who first suggested the thing. And Chatagai, after five minutes' thought bade him Godspeed, and said farewell to him.

For it did not seem possible for a man to go alone into that city and come forth alive.

To say that he went forth alone to the city would perhaps be putting it too broadly. For there was a spy in that city, a certain Khankali Turk, a notoriously treacherous breed, who for a price would accomplish certain things. The price having been paid, enlisting the aid of this man and mayhaps some of his friends, Alan set forth on a particularly dark and starless night. On the eastern flank of

the city he found a knotted rope at the recessed angle of an inconspicuous tower, and was drawn up, hugging the shadows of the wall, and not knowing what he should find at the top. But the Khankali Turk was there. And with him was a certain Mustapha Ali, whom Alan recognized from aforetime as a jailer who had once sold a bundle of straw for a gold piece. For, be it known, Mustapha Ali reasoned that it were far better to be a live Turk than a dead hero; seeing the mass of nomads before the city and hearing what was happening to the rest of the Empire, he had decided to gain favor with the conqueror.

This, as Alan remarked to himself after hitching his sword belt tighter under his cloak, was a rare piece of luck. But between recognizing a rare piece of luck and exploiting it to its fullness there can be a lot of difficulties, as Alan well knew.

Therefore he took certain precautions and tarried for some time in that neglected corner of the wall before setting forth.

WHEN Alan set forth it was not toward the citadel that he went, but to a certain house in a certain street that came to an end against a blank wall. With the aid of Mustapha Ali, he was turbaned and cloaked like any devout follower of Mohammed, and thereby succeeded in attracting little attention as he went boldly to the door of that house which had once sheltered Helene.

The quarter wore a different aspect than when he had last been there, for weeks and months of siege had left their mark upon the once fat and prosperous citizens. The siege had left one mark especially, namely in a remarkable scarcity of vagrant cats which had long since passed into the hereafter in the form of stews and roast meats. The siege also had rendered more lax the guard which had been maintained over the vacant house where Helene had maintained her residence. For this reason it was

a comparatively simple matter to pass into the tenantless place and up through her now barren room and on to the roof. Once more where he had sulked and hid in escaping from the soldiery of the Wazir, he made his way unflinching across the roofs until he came at last to that doorway which marked the entrance to the harem of the Wazir of Police.

It was evident that the ladies of the harem had been lounging upon the roof for there were still the cushions left about by careless servants. The door was open and again he went down those steps where he had taken such hasty farewell of one Chief Eunuch. The siege had also had its effect on this worthy, for such luxuries as Chief Eunuchs could not be maintained in this time of stress; he had been drafted with his fellows to help prepare boiling oil and other things that were used to repel the besiegers.

So it was that the slim wife of the Wazir again gazed upon the tall Crusader, a fleeting glimpse of whom she had caught as he fled on his first visit. Perhaps that fleeting glimpse had made her a little sorry that she had screamed so soon, or perhaps, being a sensible woman, she felt that it was a case of any port in a storm.

In any event whatever the reason, some fifteen minutes later a veiled figure accompanied Alan across the roofs and down into the street again where the two separated, the veiled figure accompanying the Khankali Turk in the direction of that deserted section of the wall, while Alan turned right, glancing as he did so, down the street where hung those cruel steel hooks, and kept on his way to the citadel.

"The peace of Allah be upon thee," he said to the guard of the citadel gate. "I come to visit my brother, Mustapha Ali, the jailer." And Mustapha Ali appeared from somewhere and embraced his brother and the two of them lost themselves in the shadows of the citadel, only to reappear again at the base of a certain tower. From here Alan went on alone,

climbing many winding steps until at last he came to a door which he unbolted from the outside and softly entered, closing it behind him.

"Who art thou?" quavered a frightened voice from the low divan. And he explained who he was and a note of joy replaced the fear that was so evident in that sweet voice.

For a while they conferred there together whispering in the darkness, while the lady put on cloak and slippers. She told haltingly of the long, weary months she had hoped for his return.

It seemed very natural somehow that their lips should meet and cling for a precious second, there in the darkness, before they fared forth.

What was not natural was that Timur, the Wazir of Police, who was also military commander of the citadel, should have been making his nightly rounds at the particular hour and the particular minute that these two stepped forth from the tower.

There they were, Helene and the tall Crusader, whom no disguise could conceal from the man whom he had wounded twice and shamed before all the world. The Wazir, a prudent man, was accompanied on his rounds by spearmen and bowmen of the guard; these gentry promptly fitted arrows to bow strings and placed spear points against the Crusader.

HELENE shrank against Alan and moaned as though in pain. There was that in Timur's eyes that betokened little mercy for her lover and the final result was nearly a foregone conclusion as the Wazir of Police led the two of them into his council chamber, hard by the gate.

"And so thou comest again to plague me, dog of a Crusader!" said the Wazir, seated on his divan, to the prisoner who stood before him. Alan glanced toward Helene who stood to one side with two spearmen guarding her.

"And so thou hast come again to plague me," repeated Timur. "I am

wondering what worthy form of mental or physical pain I can inflict upon thee," he said thoughtfully. Unconsciously Alan's eyes strayed toward the girl with some idea of attempting to comfort her. The Wazir caught the look and a gleam came into his eyes.

"So this is the bait that has brought thee back," he said. "How now, Sir Crusader, if I spoil that bait before thine eyes, thereafter allowing thee to die, slowly, with that memory to comfort thee?" and the Wazir rubbed his hands together at the simple effectiveness of his idea, and rubbed them still more heartily as he saw Alan, flinch.

Alan started to speak but before he could say aught the Wazir hurled forth a command.

"Ho, guards, bear me this woman to the torture chamber and drag this carrion along." He jerked a finger at the tall Crusader as he passed out behind the two spearmen, who bore the white-faced and staring girl between them. They crossed the courtyard and entered a staircase, ascending to a second floor where a round room opened out before them. Two gross Turks, naked to the waist, presided over this chamber. They hastened to where a charcoal brazier gave out a rosy glow and began to instill more life into it with a great bellows, which one of them worked while the other placed various metal instruments into the bed of coals.

By the time Alan was shoved into the room the girl had been stretched out on a sort of table. She lay there, bound hand and foot, with something very pitiful in her eyes as she sought to gaze upon the man she loved. He stood there like a statue, white faced and stern, the bright steel spear points of the guards pricking him from time to time.

The two familiars of this unwholesome place worked busily at their bellows and their metal instruments began to change slowly from dull red to bright scarlet.

One of them tested his tools and placed it back again in the coals.

"Shall it be the branding of the forehead and the cheeks followed by the cutting off of the nose or shall we first cut off the nose and ears and then to the branding?" Timur the Wazir was thinking aloud, casting many a side glance at the white face of Alan as he mouthed the words. "Ho, Malik, first bring the knives," he ordered. The girl stretched out helpless, shivered slightly but gave no other sign. The half-naked Turk brought over a black tray with several glittering knives laid out upon it. He picked up one of these and tested it upon his thumb, nodding with satisfaction. Obedient to the orders of the Wazir, he approached the girl and pulled the long braids of her hair well back so that they hung over the edge of the table.

It was then that Alan spoke, addressing Helene.

"Fear not, they will not dare to harm thee," he said, and his voice boomed forth in that hollow place, with such force that all gazed upon him strangely. "And as for thee, dog and son of a dog," Alan turned to the Wazir, "look to thine own women before harming mine! Look, I say, to thine own women! Seek Zobeida, thy favorite wife and find her if Allah be willing!"

The Wazir looked up, startled.

"Zobeida? What know you of Zobeida?" he faltered uncertainly. There was too much of a ring of sincerity and truth in the stern face of the Crusader to permit doubt.

"Send, I say and seek Zobeida! Fool! Thinkest thou that I came here like a sheep to the slaughter without guarding myself! Fool, and thrice a fool, bethink thyself! Would I put myself under thy power without exacting a hostage? Send a messenger to find thy Zobeida before thou goest further. When thy messenger returns with startling news, I will tell thee that thy favorite wife is now in the hands of the Mongols and that she will be the hostage and the victim of every act thou shalt commit!"

BUT there was no need of sending a messenger, for even then a slave from the household of Timur was clamoring for a word with his lord. He broke the news in fear and dread, telling of the strange disappearance of the Wazir's favorite wife from the harem. The spearmen ringed about Alan, recoiled a pace or two at the fury and anguish in the face of the Wazir. For the moment they forgot their prisoner. And in a moment many things can happen.

For before they could recover from their astonishment Alan had leaped to the glowing brazier, and snatched therefrom a thin bar of iron by its wooden handle, a bar of iron which gleamed cherry red and cast off tiny sparks as he held it in his left hand. In one swift stride he was before Timur and with lightning quickness had seized the hand of the Wazir in a steel grip and bent it cruelly backward, nearly jerking the arm from its socket as he forced the Wazir to his knees.

"Move a single step!" growled Alan to the spearmen, "and I plunge this iron into the Wazir's eyes." He held the glowing metal bar so that its heat scorched Timur's face.

"For the love of Allah," begged the Wazir, "move not a step, O spearmen! On pain of death I command ye stand in place, else I am blinded!"

"It is well, O Wazir," agreed Alan. "Now command that the girl be unbound."

And in a voice half hysterical with rage and fear the Wazir did as he was bade and Helene was helped from her harsh couch to the floor.

It was Alan who swiftly bade her bring him cords wherewith to bind the hands of the Wazir, but Helene herself performed the office, binding Timur's wrists behind him as Alan continued to hold the glowing metal.

"Now," commanded the Crusader, "bid all thy men lay down their weapons and file into the next chamber, closing the door after them!"

Again the quavering voice of the Wazir demanded obedience. Slowly

and sullenly his men laid down their spears and all of them filed into the next chamber. The last to go were the two half naked torturers. Helene slammed the door upon them and dropped the lock into place.

"Now, O Wazir, thou wilt lead us forth out of the citadel, thy cloak around thee, and I will follow at thy side with the point of my sword pressed close against thy heart. Take heed, O Wazir, and let thy steps be careful, else thy blood will be spilled!"

And thus it was that the guard at the gate saw the Wazir of Police shuffling, in rather dejected fashion, it is true, moving out toward the town, accompanied on one side by a veiled woman and upon the other by some one who must be a boon companion, for he walked arm in arm with the Wazir, their two cloaks almost merging as one.

There was a strange silence in the city as they entered the main street, a silence which lasted until they moved into a side street. It was not until the three had mounted the wall and approached the dark angle that the Wazir, startled, saw the shadows fill with the forms of creeping Mongols.

As they lowered the Wazir foot by foot to the outer side of the wall, the terrible relentless Mongol storm commenced from within and without the city. The Wazir disappeared beneath the first wave, torn to pieces as if by wild beasts.

Alan, drawing Helene into the shelter of a small tower room, waited for the fury of the storm to pass them.

And thus it was that the city of Otrar, for its sins, was laid waste as Chatagai had promised. There remained of it not one stone upon another. Even the Mongols spoke of it thereafter as *Mou-baligh*, the City of Sorrow. For its treachery had unloosed the hoofs of the horses of the Scourge of God, and already the dust of their trampling was beginning to herald the downfall of another great empire.

BLACK FLAG

By

TALBOT MUNDY



MENDOZA lolled against the taff-rail. His felucca, with the sails all brailed up, lay like a killer whale with her nose to the flank of the fine bark *Grace of God*. He was watching his men carry the loot over the bow, but there was some of it coming in the bark's boats. He watched the boats, too; even pirates have a way of cheating one another; the rule of one share all and two for the captain, led to a lot of wasteful fighting unless the captain kept his eyes skinned.

Mendoza had eyes like a shark's—unemotional, almost sleepless, cruel. His craving to be cruel was increased by the pain of an abscessed tooth that had swollen the jaw under his curled black beard. His hand went to his face now and then as he spat and glanced at human bodies on the calm sea being torn by the sharks that

had come swarming when the first went overboard.

"No prisoners!"

Each man, under pirate law, had the right to do with his own captive exactly as he pleased, and except in the case of women, who were rare but valuable loot, that frequently led to disaster. At the time of "taking" a ship it was easy to make men kill and get it over with; afterward, in cold blood, not so easy. Spared men usually were recruited after a period of bullying and horseplay, and such recruits seldom had a genuine taste for the business. Piracy seldom became their religion; they remained amateurs. Many a pirate captain's corpse had hung in chains because he let his crew become diluted with men who were sailors at heart and not pirates at all except by force of necessity.

of the Spanish Main



Nevertheless, two prisoners had been taken from the *Grace of God*—her captain and his sixty year old cabin boy. The latter, as devoted as a dog, had got in his master's way attempting to protect him as he fought with his back to the bark's wheel. Both were stunned from behind and had been thrown on board the pirate vessel, where they recovered consciousness.

Because his tooth ached, and he had been disobeyed, Mendoza was in an even more savage mood than usual. He had ordered the bark's captain blown from the midship swivel gun, and the cabin boy hanged to the masthead feet first, to be swung there until he died. But there was no hurry—lots of loot yet to be brought aboard. It amused Mendoza that the prisoners should stand there with the sun

in their faces, one lashed to the cannon mouth, one to the mainmast, and await their end. The captured bark was much too unhandy and big for a pirate's purposes; it might add to her captain's anguish to be forced to watch her being burned.

Besides, he was not sure that he would not first flog the man for keeping such a stiff chin. Mild faced, portly—almost corpulent—Captain Alexander, with his reddish hair and straight lipped smile, was the sort that Mendoza despised and hated. Obviously a moralist. Morals and Mendoza did not mix. But with that ache in his jaw he hated every one, and above all, laughter angered him. His boatswain climbed out of a boat and dropped a heap of plunder on the deck, then stood shaking with laughter at the

cabin boy lashed to the mast. Mendoza drew one of his pistols with the genial intention of blowing the prisoner's brains out so as to spoil the boatswain's entertainment.

"Like a toad!" roared the boatswain in Spanish. "No teeth!" He set his thumbs in Willie Tim's mouth and forced the toothless gums apart. "Can't bite!"

"Fetch him aft," said Mendoza, whose macabre moods were now and then cross-lit by curiosity.

So Willie walked aft at the point of a cutlass and was cross-examined. Yes, he once had teeth. The captain had pulled them a few at a time. No, not for punishment. Because they ached. If a man's tooth ached the captain always pulled it; he was a good surgeon; he could bleed or drench a man and make him fit for work. Because of that men called him Tooth behind his back, although his name was Alexander.

"Tooth, tooth!" he would say. "Who can bite on biscuit with a tooth in his head like a hot nail?"

Yes, it did take half the watch to hold a man sometimes; but it was all right afterward; a pulled tooth soon quits aching.

"Tooth, eh? Fetch him," said Mendoza, and he sat down on the trunnion of the starboard poop gun. No one would have dared to hold Mendoza, any more than he would have dared to let men try to. He had his reputation to consider. He gave orders to the boatswain and there was a pause while Captain Alexander's chest of medicines and instruments was brought, and the two men eyed each other. Then:

"I ache me," said Mendoza. "Out! *Car-r-amba de diabolol* Pull it out!"

Captain Alexander answered quietly because he could not trust himself if he gave emotion rein. He was used to day-long silences and sudden anger that he afterward regretted.

"I am pleased that it aches. I know how such teeth rot the very guts of you at last."

A promise being small coin, Mendoza bargained, as his way was, gracelessly—

"You may live till you rot, if you pull it."

"You and your swine," said Alexander, "have butchered my mate, two 'prentices, and three and thirty men. I have only this boy left to me. I want him."

Mendoza grinned sourly at that speech and his boatswain made ready to kill the sixty year old Willie as a cook splits fish. But there was creeping fire in Mendoza's upper jaw, and talk about it had increased the agony, besides suggesting how agreeable relief would be.

"Have him," he answered. "Pull it!"



MEN PAUSED even from the looting. It was no news that Mendoza had the heart of a shark, but it was breathtaking to watch him, with the blood running down on his black beard and his long fingers gripping his pistols. The tooth broke. But the fragments came out at last.

"Amen," said Willie Tims. He always said that when the captain finished something, whether it was sights or Sunday sermon.

"Bum!" Mendoza ordered; and he studied his crew while he drank it and spat.

There were some of them hurt. A pirate's men are just as valuable to him as the choir is to the parson; but good pirates are harder to find than choir boys, and the trade is much more difficult to learn.

"Chirurgion them!" he ordered, being not pedantic in his use of English.

Captain Alexander, master-mariner of Boston, Lincolnshire, thus became pirate-surgeon in the lawless port of Panama. From that day forward no one called him anything but Amen Tooth, because Willie Tims always said amen to whatever his master said or did. Willie Tims, being willing to please, was not ill treated beyond endurance even when the pirates were in a mood for entertainment; there was a suspicion in the back of their minds that Mendoza might, perhaps, have been in earnest when he granted Willie leave to live, and it was deadly dangerous to break Mendoza's

word for him. He could do that himself, and in that respect he tolerated no officious interference.

Amen Tooth discovered there were only two things that Mendoza feared. One of those was not Charlotta, his mulatto woman. It was her black arts. Charlotta herself could be disciplined, but yellow fever was nothing tangible that a gentleman could cajole, bribe or thrash. Yellow fever had wiped out scores of estimable pirates. It might carry off Charlotta. There was no way of protecting her against it as one could, for instance, from the rival pirate captains who desired her; or as one protected her against her own peculiarly Cuban disposition by the use of fists or whip. So he dreaded yellow fever, too.

Charlotta's hold on Mendoza was even stronger than his own hold on his crew. They had to protect and obey him because he knew how to navigate and they did not. Besides, Mendoza was a genius who seemed to know by instinct when to put to sea in order to waylay merchantmen. But he was superstitious. He could not get along without Charlotta's witchcraft. She had a way of foretelling the future in trances, and with packs of playing cards, and with dust and the smoke of burning feathers.

So he warned Amen Tooth he would flay him alive if the least harm happened to Charlotta. Tooth, to all intents and purposes, became Charlotta's slave. He had to follow her through the fly ridden lanes of Panama that stank of the endemic pestilence. She craved the admiration of Mendoza's rivals, loved to display the plundered jewelry she wore and, above all, enjoyed the dignity of being slaved for by an ex-sea captain, on whom she heaped indignities.

When he remonstrated, she struck him.

"I go where I please! And you come when I say!"

"The yellow jack will get you," Amen Tooth warned.

"Ants shall get you!" she retorted. "I will have you pegged out on an anthill to be eaten alive if you show me impudence!"

She was known to have persuaded Mendoza to do that to several people. Between the devil and the deep sea of Mendoza's and Charlotta's threats, Tooth resorted to strategy.

"If I should lie," he said to Willie Tims one night in the gloom of the thatched shed they were allowed to occupy, "the Lord forgive it. I believe we two should not have been allowed to live unless it were to wreak vengeance."

"Amen, master. Take a knife and kill him. I can kill her."

"Kill two hornets? There is a swarm needs smoking! Bide the right time."

"Amen."

So he lied to Mendoza. He invented a plot by rival pirate captains to decoy Charlotta and throw dice for her. Mendoza had never courted popularity, so he believed the story and pulled out of Panama, after setting fire to half the waterfront; and the shotted salute, with which he signaled "fare ye well", cut down the mainmast of the sloop belonging to Charles Dupont, the halfbreed from Mauritius. Vasco Gomez came out with his felucca in pursuit, but one at a time was not the profitable way to fight Mendoza. The other pirate ships were careening or being repaired. Gomez fired a shot or two and turned back.



MENDOZA chose himself an island protected by reefs with tortuous channels between, that afforded safe sanctuary. It was a clean, green island like a jewel in a foam-white setting. There he set his men and their women and some slaves to building a stockaded village. And since he had a professional navigator on his hands, whom conscience, etiquette and ordinary prudence made it almost sinful not to kill, he suppressed his premonitions by putting Amen Tooth and Willie Tims to work in a longboat, sounding and secretly marking the dangerous channels. Even a halfwit learns a trade or two at sea. Between spells of rowing Willie Tims made a lug sail out of stolen scraps of canvas. But they were watched and

escape was impossible. Charlotta watched incessantly. She had learned to value Amen Tooth's services, and she enjoyed more than ever inflicting gross indignities on a man who had once been despot on his own poop.

But there was rum. The pirate law forbidding any man to get too drunk for duty did not bind Charlotta, who could do as she pleased in that respect. She got so drunk that she forgot her manners. Mendoza smote her one night on her impudent, sensuous mouth with a fist that had hell in its knuckles. Next night, by the light of the whale oil lanterns in the long, low bunkhouse she was held, kicking and screaming, while surgeon Amen Tooth removed the broken stumps of all her front teeth.

"And I think I see the way home, Willie."

"Amen."

"And then vengeance."

"Amen."

Charlotta, desperate about her beauty, first made magic. She was mocked by jealous women when the magic failed her. Mendoza, shark eyed sober in his cups, sneered at the gap where her milk-white teeth had been. She could see her authority dwindling. She began to make friends with the man she despised. He told her tales of false teeth that renew youth. They seemed incredible until he produced two from his own mouth.

"If you had teeth like those, Charlotta, you could grin and bite, and nobody would know the difference. You'd look pretty again for Mendoza."

"You make them?"

"I can't. But I know who can. If you help me escape, I could bring them."

But she was used to pirates' promises, and she knew what value Tooth set on his servant, so she demanded Willie Tims as hostage:

"You leave him here and bring him teeth too. Then I know you come back."

Tooth refused.

"Both or neither. If you want new teeth, help both of us escape."

There were days of heart sickening ar-

gument and delay after that, but at last she compromised.

"I will make you so you dare not lie to me."

"Witchcraft?"

"Magic."

Amen Tooth remembered he was Captain Alexander. He had always preached a Sunday sermon from the poop when wind and sea permitted. Witchcraft, magic and the devil were the same thing. However, he had to submit to a dark ordeal devised to bind his will and make him faithful. There was the blood of a goat, and the skull of a man who had died of torture. There was a torn page from a prayer book taken from the bedroom of a virgin on her bridal night. And there were exactly thirteen drops of red blood taken from his own left wrist and mixed, with incantations, with exactly thirteen drops of hers. There was also a voice that seemed to come from nowhere, emitting strange words in an unknown tongue. It was genuine *juju* magic, she said, and he prayed about it afterward, with half-wit Willie adding amen.

Next evening he made a clay cast of Charlotta's gums, which he copied afterward in lead from melted bullets, to make permanent and convincing. She had preserved her broken teeth for superstitious reasons; those were pieced together and also copied carefully in lead.

"I know a man in Lincoln. It was he who taught me how to pull teeth. He will copy these and your new ones shall come to you in a merchant ship. Its captain shall be told of buried treasure. He shall be given the bearings of this island. He shall be told that if he flies three red flags at the fore, one above the other, a ship will put forth with the woman on board to whom the teeth belong. He shall be told that the woman will stay on his ship. She will pay for her teeth by pilotage to where the buried treasure lies."

Charlotta nodded.

"That will please Mendoza twice. I shall be beautiful again. And the ship will be easy pillage. Send a rich ship. I will prophesy its coming and Mendoza

will know that my magic is good."

"Depend on me."

But hope almost died stillborn. Mendoza became suspicious. He declared that his soul would sicken in him if he kept stale promises too long.

"*Carr-r-ramba!* It is time to send you two to hell!"

Charlotta saved that hour by inspiring a fight between boatswain and cook, good cutthroats whom Mendoza valued. He had to spare Tooth and Willie to attend to knife wounds. When the wounds were nearly healed Charlotta devised a new expedient. She went into a trance and swore she saw a fat, slow merchant ship becalmed about a hundred miles away. She also intimated that Mendoza's rivals, Gomez and Dupont, were weighing anchor to give chase on the strength of a rumor. And it was Mendoza's most exquisite passion to gloat over the disgust of rivals who were too late to share a ship's pillage.

"Man ship and warp her out! The last man aboard gets no share of the loot!"

Mendoza was always a man of his word in such particulars, so there was hurry and confusion. It was midnight, and the marks invisible. Instead of being taken along as surgeon, Amen Tooth was sent in the longboat with Willie Tims to show a flare at the turn of the channel; and because of darkness it was not noticed that they set the lug sail. They were only missed when there was no flare at the corner of the reef and Mendoza saved his ship by letting go anchors and sweeping her clear. Then it was too late to pursue.



SO AMEN TOOTH reached Rio, where a homeward bound captain of a barkentine took pity on him and provided passage, entering his story briefly in the log, but adding:

"So said he, and so said Tims his servant, whether credibly or not. He appears to believe that Lord Ambleby will provide him a new ship, but that is his Lordship's business and remains to be seen. So ends this day."

He was a pious Scotsman out of Aberdeen, who might have refused the passage home if he knew about the false teeth and a bargain with a pirate's mulatto witch. Captain Alexander was probably silent on that score; there was no mention of it in the Scotsman's log.

Captains who have lost their ships are irritable people, often at their wits' end for a livelihood. It comes expensive to be sympathetic or too inquisitive. Gossip is safer. So in his home port, Boston, Lincolnshire, Captain Alexander was left very much on his own resources. Willie Tims got drunk at the Green Man, but nobody believed what Willie Tims mumbled through his toothless gums. However, gossip leaked out through the servants' hall at Grey Grange, where Lord Ambleby's butler often overheard talk while he drew the corks of claret bottles and judiciously warmed the wine behind a screen that concealed the pantry passage. It was common knowledge that Lord Ambleby had made a fortune out of the good bark *Grace of God*. The butler quoted him:

"It is true you have made money for me from time to time. But now you have lost the ship and that costs a fortune. It is an unheard of thing to give a captain who has lost a good ship the command of another one. People would laugh."

"Who would laugh—" or so the butler said that Alexander answered—"if it were known that the *Grace of God*, on many an occasion, delivered cannons to the French, that had been cast and finished in your Lordship's foundry, of iron from your Lordship's mines?"

Lord Ambleby blustered, in the way of weak willed men who must choose between bad alternatives.

"God's vengeance! I must keep my men employed. The king's ships rot at moorings, and the Admiralty buys no cannon."

"It is of vengeance that I speak, and you have also a duty to me. Am I to hold my tongue about your Lordship's dealings? The king's enemies have money; but your Lordship's enemies have

tongues, and is there not a law against high treason?"

There began to be rumors of buried treasure when Lord Ambleby purchased a French prize of war, a neat, swift bark of seven hundred tons, and recommissioned her with Captain Alexander in command. But there was amazement when it was learned that King George, acting on his minister's advice at the request of Lord Ambleby, had granted letters of marque to Captain Alexander, authorizing him to commit such acts of war against the king's enemies as might be necessary. There was nothing new about letters of marque, but it was a new idea to grant them to a mild man addicted to mothering crews and preaching to them from his poop on Sunday afternoons. Send out a sheep to prey on wolves? Lord Ambleby had prophesied rightly; there was laughter.

And then mystery. Powder was put aboard and guns were mounted. Shot of all three sizes almost took the place of ballast; there was no cargo other than provisions, and that, of course, revived the rumors about buried treasure, to be dug and perhaps fought for. The bark was re-rigged to make her handier; stout oak bulwarks were erected, and almost everything was altered except the bark's name and the female figurehead. It was considered an almost awe inspiring coincidence that the name was *Grâce de Dieu*; but that was presently forgotten.

It was reckoned proof of Captain Alexander's madness that he caused the artist, who was painting Lord Ambleby's portrait, to insert very large teeth in the mouth of the figurehead, and so to darken the face that it resembled that of a grinning negress rather than the patron saint of the French port whence the ship originally came.



BUT THAT, too, was forgotten when the crew was signed on. Such a godless gang of rogues was a disgrace to the port of Boston. There was no one who could navigate in the event that Alexander should fall sick or be disabled. In place of

mate there was a boatswain who had been flogged out of the king's navy for easing sheets without orders. For boatswain, there was a man who had served two terms in prison for smuggling. The carpenter was also a jailbird. Half of the crew were deserters from the king's ships, who had changed their names for the sake of less exasperating misery ashore; of the remainder, two or three were soldiers and the rest such unsavory rogues that not even a press gang would have seized them for enlistment in the navy.

"Will he preach them to obedience? How long before they mutiny? Will he draw their teeth and turn them into toads like Willie Tims?"

But that was his affair. In a calm, in a fog, about a hundred leagues to the westward of Finisterre, the crew did mutiny and ordered him to turn back homeward. But he took out the letters of marque from the box in his cabin and burned them in their presence.

"Now you are pirates. If you return home they will hang you. And unless you obey me, who will navigate you?"

"Amen," chanted Willie Tims.

That was not good sea law, but it was good psychology. They were ignorant men. They had tasted jail and cat-o'-nine-tails, poverty, hunger, ignominy. Piracy could hardly be worse. Hope of sudden fortune smiled on them as the sun did through the melting mist. They discovered a man who could write and after long debate brought back a scrawled agreement laying down conditions. Alexander tossed that overboard.

"This is my ship. It is I who make conditions."

"Amen," agreed Willie Tims.

"Pirates are not coins that have their value on their faces. Prove your worth," said Alexander. "He who stands to his gun without flinching shall have his deserts. I will sign what is proper, after I have laid you alongside such a ship as will test your mettle."

"Amen."

"And I will pistol the man who disobeys me."

"Amen," chanted toothless Willie Tims. "Whoever calls me Alexander in my hearing, him will I also pistol. I am Amen Tooth from this day forward."

Nobody knows why one man can impose his will on many, although how it is done is the whole lesson of history. The crew went forward. Mutiny had vanished like the mist on the track of the wind. Hope of plunder, gun drill and the weather kept them too busy to do much thinking. The grub was good, and Alexander remembered to add the last, convincing touch.

"Cut a black flag out of that tarpaulin, Willie. Bend and hoist it at the maintop. It will stiffen their fear of hanging and their hope of fortune."

"Amen."

But there was no black flag aloft when the *Grâce de Dieu* hove to in sight of Panama, where French Dupont and Dago Gomez lay at anchor, famished for lack of mischief and afraid to send their crews ashore because of yellow fever raging. They gave chase. Amen Tooth fled, towing a sail behind him because the pirates' hulls were foul with weed and the *Grâce de Dieu* was faster. He desired those rivals of Mendoza both in full view, but out of cannon range, when he sighted Mendoza's island. And so it happened. From the fore he broke out three red signal flags. Mendoza, no doubt thoughtful of Charlotta's prophecy, weighed anchor in a hurry to forestall his rivals.



FROM his poop, where he carefully conned bearings and recalled to mind the secret channel marks that he and Willie had so tediously placed, Amen Tooth spoke to his crew.

"I have stove all water butts save one. So if you wish to drink tomorrow, you will stand to your guns this day and serve them smartly. Two ships are to windward and can bear down, so we can't run. It is better to fight one than two, so I will put the reefs to windward of us. Stand by sheets and braces."

But he continued to tow the sail. Du-

pont and Gomez crowded after him, to pounce if he should hit the reef, or follow through if he should chance to know the channel. So he kept all canvas set, to seem in great haste; but he towed that sail so that the pirates might gain on him little by little, racing to lay alongside before Mendoza could claim the pickings. Pirate law was first come, first served.

"Bosun, you are to cut down any man who flinches."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Yon ship is Mendoza's. It is his habit to flay prisoners alive. So you shall fight this day or die like skinned eels! Serve rum for all hands!"

The *Grâce de Dieu*, her toothed figure-head grinning lewdly, boiled through surf between the reefs into the crescent shaped bay; and Mendoza came beating to windward on a course that should bring him astern of his intended victim and cut her out under his rivals' guns. That was a daring maneuver; Gomez and Dupont were already inside the reef and they had the advantage of the wind. Perhaps Mendoza counted on their fear of him to make them turn tail. But Amen Tooth upset all calculations:

"Stand to your guns! Make ready!"

Great square gun ports opened suddenly along each bulwark and the muzzles of the guns protruded as the *Grâce de Dieu* changed helm and headed straight toward Mendoza's ship. They were so close that the wind was stolen from Mendoza's sails. The *Grâce de Dieu's* commander bellowed through a trumpet at the pirate:

"Can you see your woman's new teeth? Come and take them! Fire a broadside, Bosun!"

Five black cannon belched their shot into the pirate's bulwarks and were drawn in to be reloaded. Mendoza's mainmast crashed in the billowing smoke as his ship fell away on the wind, and in another moment Gomez and Dupont were crowding down at less than pistol range. They and Mendoza were hull to hull until they passed him, one on either side, exchanging threats but saving can-

non shot for Amen Tooth. Mendoza shot two men for unhandiness as he got his ship before the wind, manned sweeps and gave chase.

"Ready about! Stand by!" roared Tooth.

No elegant maneuver—not done handily, with two-thirds of the crew either sponging and loading the starboard guns or at their stations ready to serve the portside battery. Amen Tooth lost a topmast just as all three pirates came abreast of him, two to port and one to starboard; but he was in time to send his second broadside into the three pirate ships. They were huddled together, the two on the port side rubbing hulls, their captains cursing one another. Then Tooth fell away again before the wind—landlocked—no room now to work around to windward, all three pirates after him, Mendoza lagging in the rear. Emerald-green, sunlit shoals ahead. The beach to starboard. On the port coamers bursting on the coral. It was stark luck that a shot from Gomez' bow gun split the mainmast of the *Grâce de Dieu*; nothing less than that disaster could have possibly saved the bark from going aground or striking on the reef.

With every sheet let go the *Grâce* swung to her tangled mainmast and came head to wind again. Gomez and Dupont were closing in on either side, intent on grappling, their crews too busy with the downhauls to fire more than a shot or two. They were much too eager to outrace Mendoza. As they closed in they exposed their flanks at point blank range.

"Both broadsides!"

The ships reeled as if a hurricane had struck them. Round shot tore into their hulls. They split and splintered. Gaps yawned above the waterline. One grapple came aboard, but the boatswain's cutlass severed the line made fast to it. And then Mendoza, downwind, head on, even angrier with Gomez and Dupont than with the grin of the white toothed figurehead that mocked him and his woman.

"I see you, Amen Tooth! By God and all his devils, I will make you die a new way!"

But Tooth, with his mainmast overside, looked like an easy victim. Mendoza was minded first to deal with Gomez and Dupont. Their crews had manned their long sweeps; they were struggling back upwind to grapple the stern of the *Grâce de Dieu*. Mendoza changed his helm to bring bow guns to bear on both of them, raking them fore and aft with round shot and a hail of bullets. Charlotta was on the poop beside him—toothless—furious. She screamed obscenities at Amen Tooth. Hope of beauty gone, and savagery turned to frenzy by the grinning white teeth of the black faced figurehead, she snatched and fired Mendoza's pistol, missed, then wrenched the wheel from the helmsman and put the helm hard up to crash the *Grâce*. But there had been time to reload both batteries. Dupont was sinking as he drifted downwind. Before Mendoza realized it, Gomez gained the bark's lee and his men came scrambling up her bulwarks. And again both broadsides of the *Grâce de Dieu* belched shot at point blank range that tore the hulls of Gomez and Mendoza—ripped their decks asunder—split them into wrecks that only floated because the sea takes time to pour through gaping seams.

Then even Mendoza hesitated mid-oath. As he gathered himself to leap at the side of the *Grâce de Dieu* a pistol bullet, aimed by Willie Tims, who crouched behind the taffrail, missed him by a foot. It struck Charlotta. As she opened her toothless gums to curse again the maker of the long toothed jest, the bullet met the curse. It blew a hole through the back of her head, and as she fell dead at Mendoza's feet he knew himself bereft of something more than a mere wench. Without her witchcraft, luck was gone too. And without luck, confidence.

Gomez' men had already gained the bulwark and were leaping down on the deck of the *Grâce de Dieu* before Mendoza's anger rallied him and with a brimstone oath he led his own crew from a sinking ship to drive his rivals overside and claim his pirate-lawful prey.

For an hour a battle raged three-sided

on the deck—no quarter asked or given. Some of Amen Tooth's men had to man the poop and shoot at survivors from Dupont's ship who were swimming from their sunken wreck and sought to add their number to the ranks of Gomez. So Amen Tooth had only two-thirds of his dock rat crew to fight—pirates who must win or die because their battered ships were useless.

But they say he fought like ten men. Willie Tims, armed with a pike, protected him until the fight died of exhaustion and survivors gaped at one another, dry throated, dumb, their weapons drooping on the blood smeared deck. Then pirates began dropping one by one into the sea to take their chance of swimming. But Mendoza and Gomez lingered, glaring at each other, pistols empty and no strength remaining to employ their swords.

"Hell have us all!" Mendoza swore then. "Some one go fire the powder barrels!"

Willie Tims passed pistols to his master, stooped, offered his own shoulders on which to rest them while the captain aimed. But Amen Tooth, his boatswain-mate and his boatswain dead beside him, and with seventeen men dead or dying on

the deck, saw fit to have his vengeance in his own way.

"Surround them, you there—I will pistol the man who flinches. Give them room, then put the 'cat' to them until they fight!"

So some one found the boatswain's cat-o'-nine-tails that he had tucked into his belt for use in hastening the gun crews at the sponging and reloading—nine knots to a lash, nine lashes. One blow across Gomez' shoulders and he made a virtue of necessity. One lash across Mendoza's and Mendoza met him midway. So they slew each other, each too drooping, tired, to guard against the other's thrust. Mendoza spoke before he died:

"You are a coward, Amen Tooth. You let another kill me. I would have killed you with my own hands, slowly!"

"But you did not." And then presently, "Is he dead yet? Launch both boats. We are too few now to work the ship home. Fire the powder barrels. She shall not fall into pirate's hands. Water the boats and patch wounds on the island." Then he turned to Willie Tims. "We will try to make Rio again."

"Amen, master."

"And so home, if it may be."

"Amen."





Cave of the Blue Scorpion

Was he myth or man, this Mr. Lu of the jade brain whose palace Peter the Brazen sought at the bottom of a Chinese mountain lake?

By LORING BRENT

Author of "The Hand of Ung," "Chinese for Racket," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

A LAKE OF MYSTERY.

DAWN, on a cold, thin little wind, crept into this mountain fastness of Inner China. It lay saffron light on torn and tortured ranges of raw granite. Jagged peaks,

silhouetted blackly against the glow, became massive chunks of iron bristling with spikes.

The faint light of approaching day, joining the unfathomable blue of the night sky overhead, sent dark and mysterious flashes into the small egg-shaped lake which, almost a mile below,

lay like a puddle of purple water at the bottom of a well.

To the sharp-eyed American girl who had, since the night previous, been climbing up the other side of the mountain, so that she could steal this forbidden glimpse, the little lake was dregs of purple in the bottom of a giant's cup.

the pass was out of the question. A slit in the opposite wall, so narrow that it seemed, at this distance, as if a man must walk sidewise to go through it, the pass was well guarded by the Chinese village perched on the narrow shelf at the lake's edge.

The pass was out of the question; impassable, unless a strong-armed

*Susan had no time to
cry out*



The granite walls fell away from where she stood, panting and spent from her night's exertions, as sheerly as the walls of any cup. Her eyes, which were not blue, but a deep and velvety violet, explored the encompassing walls and saw not one meager opportunity for a mountain sheep, let alone a man or a mere woman, to descend or to climb.

She could understand why it was called the Lake of the Flying Dragon. Nothing but a creature with wings could possibly make its way to the lake. Except, of course, by the pass. And

force could push through it and take the village by storm. Yet that village, so the girl had heard, had stood there for upward of four centuries, in the heart of the wildest, most hostile section of interior China, and no enemy, however powerful, had entered that pass and lived to return and tell of his exploit.

The American girl, breathing audibly from her exertions, seated herself on a granite boulder and removed from their case, which was slung from a shoulder strap, a pair of fine German binoculars.

For upward of fifteen minutes, while the apricot light of dawn brightened to lemon and to silver, she studied the purple lake and the village and the pass.

She saw a punt put off from the village. It did not resemble the sampans of the Treaty ports. It was so long and narrow that the girl wondered if it were not a hollowed log. A man standing in the stern manipulated a sweep. There were two passengers. But the distance was so great that she could not, even with the binoculars, distinguish them.

She saw the punt travel out—a brown splinter—upon the flawless purple surface of the little lake. Reaching the precise middle of the lake, it stopped. The two passengers seemed to be moving about.

She saw first one, then the other, slip over the side of the boat and apparently enter the water. Magically, they vanished into the purple mystery of the lake.

The man at the sweep maneuvered the punt about and headed for the village. The girl with violet eyes searched the spot in the lake where the two passengers had vanished.

They were not in the boat. They were not visible in the water. Their departure was attended by not the slightest ripple. It was as if, by some feat of Oriental magic, they had become invisible.

THE girl on the boulder did not move until the punt reached the village. Her heart was pumping with excitement. Her large violet eyes, overshadowing her other features, were dazzled with excitement. There was an eager little smile at her lips.

The rumors, she eagerly told herself, were true!

There was nothing now to wait for. She had found what she had hoped to find. Arduous days of climbing about these craggy mountains were amply repaid. Aching muscles, tired bones, bruised and scratched skin no longer mattered.

She had solved, she delightedly assured herself, the greatest riddle of her life.

With dancing eyes and a high heart, she began the difficult descent of the slope which she had climbed during all of last night.

Her saddle horse and her pack horse were patiently waiting at the bush to which she had tethered them the previous afternoon at dusk. She called to them gayly, affectionately. They gazed at her with pricked ears. The saddle horse whinnied.

Having to bestow her brimming exaltation on some living creature, she enthusiastically kissed the cold shining black nose of her saddle horse. She climbed into the awkward Mongolian saddle.

It was dangerous country here for a girl riding without escort. There were roving bands of bandits. There was the difficulty of finding water in time. There was always the chance of getting lost. But she had conquered fear. And she had surmounted the insurmountable.

Two days later, she reached Chung-king, which is a filthy and squalid town marking the northern end of the old caravan route into India. Chung-king, on the Yangtze-kiang, is the most westerly stop of the little river steamers which fight their way up the yellow torrent from tidewater, fifteen hundred miles away.

At Chung-king, the girl with violet eyes boarded a river steamer. She paid no heed to two filthy Chinese coolies on

the rotting old teakwood dock who gazed obliquely after her as she went aboard.

Nor would she have attached the slightest significance to the fact that one of these coolies, on parting, handed the other a tiny pyramid of pale-blue chalk. It could not, naturally, have occurred to her that her thirst for excitement had set into motion a chain of grotesque and shocking events.

CHAPTER II.

BEHIND THE SCREEN.

IT was a delightful little dinner party. Wong Poon, the president of the Ta Liang Shan Mining Company, was the host. His guests were Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Sing, of San Francisco, and Peter Moore, of Schenectady, New York.

The dining room of Wong Poon's house was cheerfully aglow with candles, according to the approved Western custom. Mr. Sing and Mrs. Sing were thoroughly Americanized, thoroughly modern, and they made charming dinner table companions.

They had, Peter Moore reflected, assimilated American customs and manners without losing any of the charm or courtesy which he admired so much in the well-born Chinese. Mr. Sing was a silk importer; he owned a chain of silk stores in California. They were in Shanghai on Mr. Sing's annual buying trip. Mr. Wong, their host, had met them on a ship on one of his recent trips to the United States.

Peter Moore was here to-night in his capacity of Asiatic representative of the General Electric Company. He and his host had been negotiating for ten days over portable power plants and electric pumps which he wanted to sell

and which Mr. Wong Poon wanted to buy.

They would, Moore believed, reach some agreement on the transaction after dinner to-night, perhaps after Mr. and Mrs. Sing had retired.

The meal was delicious—and entirely American. And it was served perfectly by three of Mr. Wong's wonderfully trained Chinese servants.

Mrs. Sing, a brisk, merry, outspoken little dumpling of a woman with gray hair and bright, snapping black eyes, was, she declared, tremendously disappointed with the trend of affairs in modern China.

"You young Americans out here," she said to Peter Moore, "are fighting a wonderful fight. But it's an uphill fight. I think China has gone to the dogs. There's no more romance in China. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Wong?"

MR. WONG courteously agreed with her. Peter Moore, looking at Mr. Wong, wondered about him. Mr. Wong, in his immaculate dinner clothes, looked out of place. He didn't look like what he was. He was a hard-headed Chinese business man. But he looked, in spite of dinner jacket, stiff white shirt, fastidious tie, as though he belonged to one of the wild tribes which swarm over the Shan hills.

His skin was deeply bronzed, not yellow. His high cheekbones gave him the look of a roving Tartar. He was certainly more Mongolian than coastal Chinese. His eyes, so black that the pupils were invisible, glowed with smoldering fires. There was fire, too, in his deep voice; the fire and the music of the great black hills and the desert which lay at their feet.

"Don't you think so, Mr. Moore?" Mrs. Sing's eyes were upon him.

He hadn't heard a word she had said. He smiled and said, "I do, indeed, Mrs. Sing."

"Don't you speak with authority?" she asked.

"Do I?" he answered, wondering if he were getting into deep water.

"Aren't you known in China as Peter the Brazen, because of your reckless adventures? I've heard about them," this thoroughly Americanized Chinese lady went on; "but I confess I don't take much stock in things I hear. I know China rather well, although I left here for America when I was sixteen. I'm convinced there has never been any of this deep-dyed mystery which so many romantic young people come here to find."

"You're quite right, Mrs. Sing," Mr. Wong said, with a laugh.

"It's a sordid country," the silk importer added.

"There are no mysteries here," Mrs. Sing said. "There is no romance."

Peter Moore was looking thoughtfully over Mrs. Sing's busy little gray head at a remarkable Chinese screen in a corner of the dining room. Its three panels of deepest blue satin were beautiful samples of native embroidery. The screen was a work of art, a treasure. It really belonged in a museum.

The American, gazing at it idly, was a little shocked when he saw, at one of the cracks between the panels, a spot of glittering light. The spark of light was at about the height of an eye in the head of a man of average size. It was precisely the kind of light which would be reflected from a staring human eye.

It was not, of course, a human eye. It could not be a human eye. Why should a human eye be staring out from behind an antique Chinese screen at Mr. Wong's dinner guests?

"China," Mrs. Sing was saying, "is nothing but a hotbed of revolution."

Peter Moore looked back at the screen. The spot of glittering light was still there. As he looked at it, the light blinked off, as if an eyelid had been lowered, then it glittered again.

"Don't you agree with me, Mr. Moore?"

"Of course I do, Mrs. Sing."

Who, Peter Moore wondered, with rising curiosity, was hiding behind that screen? For what purpose would Mr. Wong have a spy secreted there?

"The only mysterious society in China to-day," Mrs. Sing went on, "is the Beggars' Guild. And that isn't mysterious. It's like our American rackets. It's the oldest racket in the world. It's older than Confucius."

THE screen, with its three panels, formed a sort of alcove in that corner of the room. Was it placed there purely for decoration? It had no legs. The panels ran to the floor, so that, if some one were standing there, the spy's feet would have been invisible.

But was some one standing there? Or was Peter Moore the victim of an optical illusion?

He shifted his eyes quickly to Mr. Wong's bronzed, rather barbaric face. Mr. Wong was gazing at him. His eyes seemed to smolder. What, Peter Moore wondered, was going on here, literally behind the scenes?

As soon as he could politely do so, he would investigate that screen. His opportunity came when dinner was over.

Mrs. Charlie Sing was still scoffing at the romantic traditions of China. "Romance! Mystery! Show me anything here more mysterious than what we have back home, on Market Street

or the Embarcadero. Things sinister? Things glamorous? Don't you really agree with me, Mr. Moore?"

"Emphatically," he said, smiling at her vehemence.

Mrs. Sing briskly arose at Mr. Wong's suggestion that they have coffee in the living room. Her husband followed her out of the room. Mr. Wong waited at the doorway for Peter Moore.

The American went to the screen and said:

"This is a Ming screen, isn't it?"

Before Wong Poon could answer, he had lifted it out of the corner, as though he intended to examine it. As he moved the screen, he exposed a door about five feet in height by three in width, which was ajar. Cool night air drifted in through the opening.

"That's strange," Mr. Wong said in a surprised voice. "That door is never used except in the summer. It's always kept locked. It leads into my garden."

He seemed to be sincere. There was a puzzled look about his eyes. He was frowning.

Mr. Wong reached down to pull the little door shut. But his long, thin, brown hand did not just then touch the latch. Midway it hesitated, stopped. A convulsion seemed to pass through it. It dropped, very much as a hawk pounces on a chicken, to the floor. It came up from the floor in a doubled fist, but not before Moore had glimpsed what Mr. Wong had snatched off the floor.

The Chinese released one finger from his brown fist, caught it like a hook over the latch, and pulled the little door shut. With the same finger he pushed home the brass bolt. The striking bronze color had ebbed from his face. It was now a sickly lemon-yellow.

Small pearls of sweat gleamed on his forehead. His eyes were suddenly like ashes, as if the smoldering fires had been extinguished. They looked dull and lifeless. It was very evident that Mr. Wong was in the clutches of an unexpected, a mysterious and a very actual horror.

Peter Moore was not greatly puzzled at these evidences of alarm. It was some years since he had seen one of the tiny blue chalk pyramids such as Wong Poon had snatched off the floor. They always spelled trouble, and often spelled death.

Moore did not have to be told what that innocent-looking pyramid of blue chalk meant. He was pale and alarmed himself. But precisely what, he anxiously wanted to know, did the tiny blue pyramid portend?

Mr. Wong quickly, quite miraculously, recovered his composure. He was once again the courteous, the perfect Chinese host.

He said what the American expected him to say. "The screen is yours, my friend."

Peter Moore politely declined the gift. That, too, was expected. These courtesies, required by Chinese custom, attended to, the two men joined the Sings in the living room.

The American was very anxious to know what would happen next.

CHAPTER III.

WARNED IN BLOOD.

SEATED in Mr. Wong's luxurious study before a crackling grate fire, Peter Moore and Wong Poon got down to business. Charlie Sing and his wife had retired to their room for the night.

This transaction between Moore and

Wong concerned a certain lot of slightly used mining machinery which the American had taken off the hands of a defunct mining concern near Nanking. There were two portable gasoline-driven generators of fifty-kilowatt capacity, two electrical suction pumps designed for use in deep mines, a number of drums of power wire insulated for use under water, and an assortment of odds and ends.

In the present state of the Chinese mining industry the lot was worth, at the most, \$15,000, American gold. But the glimpse of that glittering eye behind the Ming screen, and his subsequent glimpse of that tiny blue pyramid, had given the American a hunch. He was now quite certain that Wong Poon was not at all what he claimed to be.

So he said, carelessly:

"I'm asking thirty thousand, gold, for the lot."

That his guess had been quite correct was proved by Mr. Wong's attitude. It was quite evident, now that they had passed the stage of polite negotiation, that he wanted the machinery more than Moore wanted to sell it, and Moore would have sold it to the first man who offered him \$10,000, gold; might, indeed, have taken as little as \$7,500.

When the deal was closed, as it was very quickly, at \$25,000, the American was sure that Wong Poon was either in a tremendous hurry for that particular machinery, or was holding back something.

And this latter surmise proved to be correct.

"Where," Moore asked, "shall I have it shipped?"

"Hankow."

"Strongly crated?"

"Very strongly crated."

That meant, of course, that the machinery was going well up the Yangtze. Chung-king? Where beyond?

Wong lighted a cigarette. His eyes were clearer. He seemed to have himself better in hand.

"I will be perfectly frank, Mr. Moore. This machinery is not destined for either of our mines in South China."

The American, knowing that it was not, looked innocently interested. He knew something more. He knew that the Ta Liang Shan Mining Company, of which Mr. Wong was president, was a defunct organization; and he had presumed all along that Mr. Wong had revitalized it with his own personal capital. Mr. Wong's rating at the Shanghai banks was excellent, his credit was good. And Peter Moore, with that tiny blue chalk pyramid in mind, knew precisely why.

"The truth of the matter is," Mr. Wong was saying, "that I am opening up new properties in the hills above Chung-king. I know I can take you safely into my confidence."

PETER MOORE, knowing just what the truth was, suppressed a smile.

"We have discovered very rich deposits of copper in the Shan hills," Wong Poon went on. "This particular consignment of machinery is intended for our first development. It should be," he said significantly, "the first of many orders for electrical mining machinery. I hope I can count on your full coöperation."

The American, murmuring his assent, wondered what was coming next.

"I would like very much, Mr. Moore, to have you accompany this consignment of machinery up the river and to the new properties, and to see

that it is properly installed. I know that you are one of the cleverest young electrical engineers in China."

Peter Moore, who was not so much an electrical engineer as an authority on wireless telegraphy, let this pass.

"I am willing to pay you very generously," Wong said. "It will take you better than two months to make this trip, but I assure you it will be well worth your time. Aside from the fact that it will lead to large orders for electrical machinery, I am willing to pay you, say, five hundred a week, gold, from the time you leave Shanghai until you return."

The American, fully aware of what was transpiring behind the scenes, pretended to think it over. But he did not have to think it over. He knew that, through Mr. Wong, he was being offered an opportunity to secure probably one of the largest orders for electrical equipment ever placed in China. And not only that, but Mr. Wong was holding open the door to him for an amazing but safe adventure. All of this he had deduced from his glimpse of the little blue chalk pyramid.

He pretended to be reluctant only because it was a good policy not to be too eager. It took Mr. Wong an hour of persuasion to convince Peter Moore that accompanying that consignment of mining machinery to Chung-king and beyond would be a profitable step for him to take.

Mr. Wong mentioned, among other things, that two or three first-rate American mechanics would be waiting at Hankow to go up the river.

"The very best men I can find. They are going up-river with certain other machinery. A gasoline tractor, for example."

Moore, wondering, finally gave in.

"Very well," he said, "I'll do it. It will take me about a week to get my affairs in order. I'll ship this machinery to Hankow by boat, and follow by train as soon as I am able."

Mr. Wong seemed tremendously relieved. His eyes shone. He smiled. He said a check for the machinery would be delivered to Peter Moore's office, on the Bund, in the morning.

"If I do not see you before," Mr. Wong said, "I will meet you in Kung Yang, which is the nearest village to the new properties."

They said good night, and Peter Moore returned in a ricksha to the bungalow he had rented on Bubbling Wells Road.

Lying awake, some hours later, he wondered if he would be permitted to see the fabulous hall of rose quartz, or the room paneled with mother-of-pearl. He again congratulated himself on this opportunity for amazing but discreet adventure, and for an opportunity to secure a stupendous order for electrical apparatus.

IN a genial state of mind, he fell asleep. He was awakened sharply by a sound. He could have been asleep no longer than an hour. The rays of the early spring moon, shining through his open window, were striking the floor at only a slightly different angle. Listening, he heard the sound again. Far away, across the sleeping city, came the faint wailing of a Chinese lute. But closer, somewhere within the house, occurred a groan. It was the groan of some one in mortal agony or mortal terror.

Moore switched on the lamp beside his bed; sat up. As he did so, the bedroom door opened and a man in a suit that had once been white staggered in.

The American, with a gasp of hor-

ror, sprang to his feet and stared. Only with the greatest difficulty did he recognize in this terrible apparition his houseboy, Wan Lee. The once white suit was streaked and spattered with blood. The man's ears were gone. Blood was spilling in great thick bubbles from his mouth. His right hand had been severed at the wrist. He had somehow bound a tourniquet, a length of rag, about the stump; but blood, in spite of it, came pulsing out.

When Wan Lee, staggering toward the American, tried to speak, only thick, bubbling sounds came from his mouth. His tongue had been torn out or cut out.

Peter Moore, knowing that Wan Lee was the most peaceable of Chinese, stared at him with utter horror. Wan Lee had been an honest and devoted servant. What had happened? Moore was certain he would never know. He was certain that Wan Lee was dying, and he wondered how Wan Lee, with those horrible injuries, could stand, could walk.

Wan Lee took another step and pitched headlong to the floor. But even in his failing strength he grasped the stump of his wrist. On his side, he looked up, with glazing eyes, into the American's face. He was trying to speak. He could not speak. Moore saw, in those glazing eyes, a desperate anxiety to convey some message.

The bleeding stump was moving in grotesque jerks over the mat on the floor, leaving its trail of blood. The American snatched a sheet off the bed and began tearing it into strips for bandages. But when he bent down over Wan Lee he knew it was too late.

His sickened eyes stared at the crazy pattern which the moving stump of Wan Lee's wrist had traced on the mat. It was, at first, obscure; but as

Peter Moore stared, the widening lines suddenly acquired a significance. There, in letters of crimson, was the word *scorpion!*

Even as the American stared, blood gushed from the stump and obliterated the writing.

But Wan Lee had lived long enough to deliver his message.

CHAPTER IV.

FRIENDLY ENEMIES.

A MESSENGER came to Peter Moore's office early the following morning with a certified check on the Eastern and Oriental Bank of Shanghai for \$25,000, gold. On receipt of it, Moore gave orders to have the mining machinery in his go-down strongly crated and shipped, via river steamer, to Hankow to await his orders.

The following afternoon he attended Wan Lee's funeral, in Native City, a funeral that befitted a mandarin and that Peter Moore paid for, down to the last firecracker, the last bowl of coolie rice, out of his own pocket. He was still sick over the death of that devoted servant, still hotly resentful over the fact that Wan Lee's horrible mutilation, his hideous death, had been merely a caprice on the part of the powerful, sinister figure who stood behind Mr. Wong like a black and forbidding shadow.

It took the spice, the thrill, out of the forthcoming adventure; but it had not changed his mind. His job, after all, was to sell electrical equipment. He would go to Hankow, to Chung-king, and on to Kung Yang.

He was meanwhile putting his affairs in order; notifying the head of the foreign sales department, in

Schenectady, of his projected long absence from the coast; notifying his agents scattered up and down the Asiatic seaboard.

One morning, a day before his planned departure for Hankow, he heard his Eurasian stenographer in the outer office utter a cry of astonishment. His door flew open. He received a bewildering impression of deep violet eyes in a tanned face. A girl's hat flew into the air. Her hair tumbled down. There was a yell of delight, and next moment Susan O'Gilvie was in his arms, kissing him, crying, laughing, knocking objects off his desk, whirling him into the middle of the room, and creating, generally, approximately the confusion of an unexpected intense Chinese revolution.

She held him off at arm's length, cocking her head from one side to the other.

"Darling, I'm so glad to see you! Tell me you're just as glad to see me!"

He was, indeed. He had missed Susan, in the four months which had followed their last quarrel, tremendously. And he had supposed that she had passed entirely from his life.

The quarrel had occurred at a birthday party—his birthday. Susan gave the party, a very elaborate and costly celebration for two in the dining room of the Astor House Hotel. She had, at its conclusion, given him his birthday present. This took the form of a jade Buddha. Peter Moore, who had a weakness for good jade, took one look at the birthday present and blew up. He knew that Buddha. It came from the Jade Garden Shop on Foo-chow Road. It was the finest specimen of jade in the Garden Shop's rare collection. It was worth seventy-five thousand dollars, gold.

He indignantly refused it.

Susan had been furious—outraged. After all, why not?

"I won't accept a gift as expensive as that from you. Take it back and buy me a necktie."

She had called him, among other items, a great hulking mule. After all, why not? Wasn't he the only man she had ever cared a damn about? Wasn't he the only living creature she cared a damn about? Upon whom was she to spend her money, if not upon him?

Susan had, she declared, received advices from the executives of her father's estate, to which she was the sole heir, that her fortune had been doubled by judicious short selling in the bear market.

"What am I to do with all my money, pray?"

Peter didn't know; didn't care. The bear operations of the executors had placed her, as far as he was concerned, just twice as far away as she had been before. She had been one of the wealthiest young women in America, anyway. This made it twice as bad.

IT was an old, old dispute. They threshed it over again. Should she give her fortune away, just to please his vanity?

"You'd marry me, Peter, if you were as rich as I am."

"Yes."

"Well, what I have is yours. We'll split it fifty-fifty."

His angry spurning of this proposal always infuriated her. But his spurning of the jade Buddha, which she had selected with such thought for him, was the last straw.

"I'll never see you again as long as I live. I hate you. I loathe you. Oh, how I detest you!"

And she had at least gone through the motions of making that threat

good. She had packed up and walked out of his life. Rather, she had, in a steamboat, steamed out of his life.

And now she was back, as slim, as lovely, as exciting as ever. She had been, she said, just bumming around. A while in Peking. Then an airplane trip to Tokio.

"I've forgiven you," she announced magnanimously. "Are you still sore at me, darling?"

"Only a confirmed dyspeptic," he said, "could stay sore at you."

"Do you kind of like me a little bit?" Her large violet eyes were searching his face. She was bewitching. There was something about Susan that set her apart from all women. Over-romantic, over-adventurous, with an inexhaustible capacity for dangerous experiment, she was—well, she was just Susan.

"What are you up to, Pete?"

He told her. He told her of his deal with Mr. Wong. Of the death of poor Wan Lee. She asked him what the tiny blue chalk pyramid stood for.

"The Blue Scorpion!" he said dramatically. "He's a kind of ogre, a myth, a legend of interior China. Certainly, the most powerful, most dangerous man in Asia. When you speak of the Shadow Over Asia, you're speaking of Mr. Lu."

"Who?"

"The Blue Scorpion. The man with the jade brain."

"What?" Susan squealed.

"It's the legend. Three hundred years ago, when he was a young man, he fell down the face of a cliff. He was picked up at the bottom, nothing more than a pulp. But a pulsing pulp. His face had been wiped off on the rocks. Most of his bones were broken. They say even his brains were oozing out."

"You wouldn't kid a girl, would

you, Peter?" Susan said. "Did you say—three hundred years ago?"

"I did!"

"This Mr. Lu, alias the Blue Scorpion, alias the man with the jade brain, is three hundred years old?"

"So they say. They say witch doctors gave him, in place of his brain, a brain of imperial, sanctified jade. There was upon him the sign of everlasting immortality. The jade brain possesses a quality of thinking that no human brain can possess. I know only a few authentic things about him. One is that he lives in a stupendous, magnificent, incredible marble cave in the bottom of a lake in the Shan Mountains—a palace of unbelievable glory in a lake bottom—"

"A dry lake bottom?"

"No. A wet lake bottom."

"Under the water?"

"Under the water. I know that's true, and I also know that he is something of a genius. He has had men of various nationalities captured and brought to him, so that he could master all the tongues spoken. And I know that none of these men ever returned. There seems to be truth in the rumor that no man who looks upon the Blue Scorpion ever returns."

THE girl was looking at Peter with clear violet eyes.

"Do you think this is true?"

"Some of it must be true, on the principle that, where there's smoke, there must be fire."

"But just where do you come in?" Susan demanded.

"What else," Peter answered, "does he want pumps for, but to keep his under water palace pumped dry? The Blue Scorpion is going modern. He will, I have a hunch, want his cave wired for electric lights and power ma-

chinery. Why not? A man of his age is entitled to *some* comforts."

"I'm afraid," Susan said. "I'm afraid you'll be like those other men—never come back."

Peter laughed. It was the light-hearted laugh of a young man who loved adventure.

"It sounds," she argued, "a little mysterious. Why was Mr. Wong so scared when he found that blue pyramid? Why was Wan Lee murdered so atrociously?"

"Simply," Peter reassured her, "to let me know that I was in the shadow of the Blue Scorpion. Wong, of course, is Mr. Lu's agent. One of his thousands of agents. In deathly fear of his master. The spy behind that screen was simply to let Wong know his master was keeping, literally, an eye on the proceedings. The horrible mutilation of Wan Lee was merely to let me know that Mr. Lu can do dangerous and dreadful things—to give me the proper respect for him."

Susan was pale, the pallor showed even under her bright tan. "You must be careful, Peter."

Looking at her, he smiled. "That doesn't sound like you."

"I'm footloose and fancy free," Susan said promptly. "I'm going along."

Thus began one of their long and heated debates. Any one hearing them would have assumed that two lifelong enemies were at death grips. At the end of an hour, neither had progressed an inch.

"All right, you big hulking mule," Susan said finally. "I'll go anyway. You'll have to take one of the regular river boats. I can buy a passage on it. I won't be a member of your exclusive party, but you can't keep me off that boat."

He begged her to be reasonable, logical, sensible.

Those things, Susan retorted, with flashings of her large, lovely eyes, weren't in her blood.

When Peter started for Hankow, two days later, Susan was on the same train, although not of his party. They weren't speaking.

CHAPTER V.

HEADED FOR—WHAT?

SEDATE and ordinary steamers can traverse the Yangtze-kiang, at some seasons of the year, as far up as Hankow. But beyond Hankow, a unique and marvelous type of river boat must be employed. It is of shallow draft, and it is driven by engines as powerful as those in a modern destroyer.

The Sochow transported Peter Moore, Susan O'Gilvie, three red-haired mechanics and a large assortment of crated machinery up the great yellow river, with its dangerous shoals, its furious rapids, to Chung-king.

Peter, meeting the mechanics, estimated them with the accuracy of a man who has had many dealings with their kind. Three amiable, rollicking, skylarking red-heads, they would have been termed, a little farther south, T.T.T.'s—typical tropical tramps.

One of them, their leader, Bill Jacobs, was a deserter from an American destroyer. The other two, Hank Roberts and Tom Dove, were simply gentlemen of the open road—excellent mechanics, ready for mischief at any hour of the day or night, but preferably the night; as quick with laughter as with fists. Three hard-boiled, red-headed devils.

The three red-heads spent most of

their waking hours on the after deck of the Soochow, shooting craps. When they were not there, they might be in the smoke room, drinking beer, or in the engine room or boiler room, annoying engineers or firemen. When they tired of doing nothing, they went into the boiler room and shoveled coal into the insatiable maws of the furnaces.

They introduced themselves to Peter, on leaving Hankow, with the respect and deference of adventurers meeting, say, the crown prince of their order. All had heard of Peter Moore, of his exploits up and down the coast of China and elsewhere. The legends about him, the audacity of some of his adventurous feats made him, in their eyes, a demigod.

Yet this deference, this respect, did not account for their attitude toward him as time wore on, as the Soochow, with grinding engines, churned its way up between red and yellow banks, fighting the great yellow torrent, toward Ching-king. It was a secretive attitude. It was mystifying. They would fall silent when he approached. They would watch him warily. It was not so much respect as it was caution.

But their attitude toward Susan was another matter entirely. They accepted her heartily and boisterously. They had heard of Susan, too, and of Susan's capacity for getting people into the most amazing kinds of trouble. She was a girl after their adventurous hearts: carefree, fun-loving, valiant, dauntless.

And there were other, unseen, activities aboard the Soochow. There were Chinese, invisible by day, who prowled at night, who poked about among the crates in the hold, who slipped ashore when the ship tied up, and were replaced by other men who prowled and spied. But Peter was unaware of

them. His thoughts were chiefly on Susan.

For several days after the Soochow left Hankow, Susan and Peter maintained their hostile attitude. Peter was cold and aloof. Susan was haughty.

A LARGE golden Chinese moon effected, one night, a reconciliation. The moon paved a path of cloth-of-gold down the river to the cleaving bows of the little steel steamer. There were scents of spring in the mild night breeze.

Peter was standing in the bows, enjoying all this, and thinking over some of his experiences with Susan. The wild, storm-tossed night they had met on a steamer crossing the Pacific. Her escapade in Shanghai in connection with a priceless jade scepter. Her impulse, which Peter nipped in the bud, to acquire the opium habit. Her fantastic theft, in Indo-China, of the black, withered hand of a native god. Her reckless and insincere infatuation with a Cambodian sultan.

Looking at the mellow spring moon and the cloth-of-gold it lay on the river, he reflected that Susan must have been born under a star called Danger. She loved trouble as most people love peace. Adventure ran like liquid fire in her veins. Yet she could, on occasion, be as discreet, as tender, as gentle as a mid-Victorian debutante.

She reminded Peter of the girl in the nursery rime, who was either very good or very horrid. When she was gratifying her thirst for excitement, she would have tried the patience of a saint.

The girl who came quietly up behind him this evening was on her very best behavior—the gentle, the sweet Susan, the tender Susan. She was, in these moments delightful. At these mo-

ments, he could have tossed his heart at her small feet. But these moments were so rare, so fleeting, that they were gone before you became aware that they were here.

She dropped her elbows to the worn teakwood rail beside his. Her soft shoulder touched his arm.

"Still sore?" she asked in her sweet, clear voice which always reminded him of good metal struck upon softly but sharply and which was, like the rest of her, curiously suggestive of romance. They were the first words she had deigned to address to him in almost a week.

He looked down into her upturned face, which was small and white and childlike in the moonlight. He smiled.

"Nope."

Susan, snuggling her arm into his, sighed and whispered, "Well, neither am I, darling. I don't suppose you have a kiss to spare for a heartbroken girl."

Peter did, it chanced, have a kiss to spare for a heartbroken girl. He delivered it with enthusiasm. Susan returned it with even greater enthusiasm. Her slim arms, which were so much stronger than they looked, remained fastened about his neck. She clung to him, weeping.

She was crying, she said, because she was so happy. Happy because he had forgiven her for being such a hateful brat. Happy because this was such a wonderful trip, and because they weren't mad at each other any more.

"I like you, Peter," she said, sniffing, "because you're so darned good to a poor, lonesome orphan. Do you realize that this is our thirty-eighth quarrel, by actual count?"

Peter was thankful that peace was restored again, that the quarrel was over. There would, he knew, be other

quarrels. He hoped they would all end as satisfactorily as had this one.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. WONG UNMASKS.

CHUNG-KING. Filthy and indescribably squalid. Half-naked, half-starved coolies on the rotting teakwood dock, staring with hopeless eyes at the little steamer, at the white faces on her single deck. Slat-ternly dwellings of bamboo. Streets of raw red mud. The stench of a Chinese river town. Camels with their cargoes from India. A thousand and one depressing, romantic, wretched, glamorous impressions. For this was the fabled heart of China, unchanged over four thousand years.

With Peter Moore as overseer, the three red-heads as gang bosses, the crated cargo was transferred from the Soochow's holds to the old teakwood dock. Yelping coolies, with stout bamboo shoulder poles, transported the crates through the muddy streets to the caravansary compound.

Bill Jacobs, leader of the red-heads, indicated one mound of massive packing boxes and said, "How about that tractor?"

"You'd better assemble it," Peter answered. "We can use it hauling the trailers and getting carts out of the mud."

"Okay, chief." To the very end, the bitter end, that would be the red-heads' customary way of accepting an order from him. "Okay, chief."

There were four commodious four-wheel trailers, intended for transporting countless drums of gasoline and lubricating oil.

While the three mechanics set to work piecing together the tractor,

Peter devoted himself to a spirited bargaining with owners of camels, mules, oxen and heavy carts with heavy wooden wheels.

One of the red-heads, gazing at one of these carts, observed, "There goes the original disk wheel. And we thought we had somethin' new when we put 'em on automobiles!"

All that night, in his room in the inn that adjoined the compound, Peter heard the rattle of hammers and the clank of wrenches as the three red-heads, working in the light of gasoline torches, cursing, as mechanics have cursed over their labors since there were mechanics, assembled the tractor.

And when he descended, early in the morning, to the compound, an astonishing spectacle greeted him. It was made of steel. It bristled with bolts and rivets. What he saw, glistening in the dawn, was a war tank.

The three red-heads were seated side by side on the caterpillar tread on the side nearest him, smeared with black grease, streaked with sweat. They were smoking cigarettes.

"Where," Peter asked, "did that thing come from?"

"This," Bill Jacobs answered, "is the tractor."

Peter said dryly, "That's strange. It looks like a tank to me."

"Chief," Jacobs said, "your eyes are okay. It is a tank. Mr. Wong told me to buy a big tractor. I couldn't find a tractor, so I bought this tank from the Nationalists. It's the same as a tractor. It'll do the same work as a tractor. But it's better in case it rains."

"Rains what?" Peter asked.

"Rain."

The three red-heads were looking at him with innocent round eyes. But Peter was suspicious.

"Not bullets?" he asked.

"I ask you," Jacobs said, "now, where could it rain bullets?"

"That's what I want to know."

But the three skylarking mechanics remained innocent. What, after all, was a tank but an armored tractor?

Susan, arriving in the compound from her room, greeted the tank with cries of enthusiasm. She wanted to go for a ride in it before breakfast.

"We ain't tuned it up yet, Miss O'Gilvie," Tom Dove said. "But you'll have a chance to take plenty piggy-back rides on this baby."

SUSAN was dressed for the expedition. She was trim and she looked efficient in whipcord riding breeches, laced boots, a deep-blue silk bandanna about her hair, a fuzzy blue sweater with pockets stuffed with cigarettes and matches. Peter, looking at her, decided that she was exceptional indeed. Few women would look as feminine as Susan did in that masculine outfit. A binocular case was slung by a strap from her shoulder. And at one hip was a holster containing an automatic pistol.

"I'm anxious," she said, "to meet Mr. Wong Poon."

"He'll be waiting in Kung Yang," Peter told her.

"How far is Kung Yang?"

"Two days."

She watched him with wistful eyes, sometimes with a secret look of anxiety, as he made arrangements for the caravan. Whenever he caught her eyes, she gave him a quick smile. Susan, he realized, was brooding about something. He had seen that look before. It generally spelled trouble.

The strangest caravan ever to set out over the old Merchants' Trail left Chung-king at dawn next morning.

The tank, rumbling and clanking and snorting like some steel-clad prehistoric monster, was terrifying alike to horses, camels and oxen. It led the long procession of carts, groaning under their heavy loads. There was, approximately, one cart to one crate, or box. The caravan was a quarter of a mile long.

Susan and Peter, on horses, rode ahead, to escape the dust. It was all, Susan declared, perfectly fascinating. And she said that Peter was perfectly fascinating. He looked like a bridge builder or something, so she said—very dashing in cordovan and olive drab, with a Stetson set rakishly over one eye, a pistol slung at his hip.

The day was clear; perfect. On their right, for the first few miles, the Yangtze swept by in a tumbling, raging torrent. And on their left were the raw granite hills, reduced to deceiving purple softness by distance. From the trail to the mountains was a sweep of golden sand which flashed and glittered. Even the air, washed by recent rains, seemed to flash and glitter. A brilliant blue sky arched overhead. And there was, in the air, the crisp smell of the wilderness.

But Susan did not seem as fascinated as she said. She was acting, Peter thought, queerly subdued. They rode along in silence disturbed by the muffled roaring of the tank, the creaking of leather, the squealing of unoiled axles, the shouting of men.

Peter asked her, after one of her long brooding silences, what was on her mind.

Susan withdrew her eyes from the distant purple mountains and looked at him sharply.

"Nothing in particular. Why?"

"You seem absent-minded."

"I'm just impressed by the magnificence of all this."

"You don't seem happy."

"I'm perfectly happy."

Her eyes went back to the purple mountains and she became silent again. Her vivacity seemed to have deserted her. The feeling grew upon Peter that trouble was brewing, but from what quarter it would come he couldn't imagine. It wasn't like Susan to be so quiet. She was, normally, a little chatterbox, with an inexhaustible capacity for enthusiasm. She would, ordinarily, have been exclaiming over everything they saw; pointing out to him strange or unusual things, joking.

THEY made camp that night on a site which had been used as a caravan encampment for more than three thousand years. It was a wide sandy space beside a roaring tributary to the great yellow river.

The sun, vanishing, left a bloody gleam in the sky. This deepened to purple, then to black and the sky was, suddenly, clustered with bright stars. A night wind sprang up from the great desert to the north, a hot dry wind at first, scented with the very spice of romance. Then, abruptly, the wind turned cold, and a camp fire was welcome.

Lounging on blankets before a fire of faggots which snapped and crackled and sent sparks leaping into the billowing smoke, Peter comfortably smoked his pipe and wondered how large an order for electrical equipment he would secure from that mythological monster who lived in a water-tight castle in the bottom of a lake—the man with a brain of jade! He wondered if he would be permitted to see that fabulous palace built under the waters of a lake.

Susan, near by, hugging her knees under her chin, stared at him. Fire-

light sparkled in her eyes, and gave her face a rosy glow. There was an elfin look about her.

"Peter," she said, "has any man ever seen Mr. Lu?"

"I never heard of one."

"But it seems so preposterous. I mean, these things we hear. Three hundred years old!"

"Methuselah lived to almost a thousand," Peter dryly mentioned.

"You honestly don't believe Mr. Lu is as old as the legends say."

"The secret of Mr. Lu's power, or part of the secret," the tall, lean young man beside her answered, "is that nobody actually knows. Perhaps he is the descendent of the original Mr. Lu. Perhaps he really is three hundred years old. It's never been disproved."

"And no one knows what he looks like?"

"All I've heard is that he is hideously malformed."

Susan shivered. "He sounds like a monster. Aren't you worried?"

Peter looked at her and smiled. "Nope."

She looked back at the fire, then flashed an oblique look at him from troubled eyes which gleamed with fire-light.

"Are you sure it's safe?"

He nodded firmly. "Yes. Mr. Lu can be just as powerful a friend as an enemy."

Once, some years ago, Peter had had just cause to be afraid of the mysterious and malignant Mr. Lu, but he was not afraid now. He saw Mr. Lu, regardless of physical appearance, as a man fabulously rich, a man who had heard of the wonders of electricity and would pay handsomely for them. And Peter was perfectly willing to sell him all the equipment he required.

He was smiling at Susan, but she did

not smile. She was looking past him, past the fire, toward the invisible mountains. There was a misty, brooding look in her eyes.

Across the encampment, with its glowing fires, its soft murmur of native voices, he heard the twanging of a lute. He recognized, in the eerie strain, a Chinese love song, a fragment from the Lute of Jade, and he said, "Susan, if I land the order I expect to from Mr. Lu—"

A STRANGE sound caused him to pause. It was, at first, like distant thunder—a sustained rumbling. It rapidly came closer; grew louder and louder until it was like the muffled beating of a thousand snare drums.

He sprang up. So did Susan. Men all about the encampment were awakening to activity. There were shouts and answers. Above the drumming, now almost deafening, Peter heard wild shrieks. He saw the three red-headed mechanics crawl on hands and knees toward the tank.

Susan was close beside him. "What is it—a raid?"

"We'll know in a moment."

Then, with thundering hoofs, a cavalcade of shrieking men swept into the encampment.

A great black horse, a Mongolian stallion, with trappings that glittered and twinkled with silver and precious stones, came pounding up to where Peter and Susan stood. Its eyes flashed wildly. It snorted and stamped. Foam from its mouth was streaked down its mighty chest.

A bronzed barbarian sat in the saddle; a man who was tall and straight and striking. A strip of gold cloth, studded with gems, was bound about his forehead. His jacket was blood-

red, worked with gold, with diamonds and emeralds. Black buckskin breeches tightly fitted his legs.

This was no ordinary bandit chief.

The black stallion reared, snorted. Susan ran aside to escape its pawing hoofs. The man swung himself out of the saddle. He came toward Peter with clinking spurs. Diamonds twinkled in them, too. There was a black revolver in his hand.

"Put that revolver away, Mr. Moore," he said, in a deep, rich voice.

"Wong!" Peter gasped.

The revolver in Mr. Wong's hand was aimed definitely at Peter's heart.

"A case of mistaken identity," Mr. Wong said pleasantly. "I am Prince Took Shan. These nine hundred men are my warriors. I regret that I must disarm you, Mr. Moore. You are my prisoner."

"You big brute!" Susan said in a thin, husky little voice.

Prince Took Shan bowed extravagantly, but he did not forget the revolver in his hand.

"A thousand apologies, Miss O'Gilvie. But a sable robe cannot be eked out with dog's tails."

Peter, sharply looking at Susan, saw that her face was crimson; her eyes were glaring; her fists were clenched. Still too astonished to think clearly, he perceived that Susan was, somehow, at the bottom of this.

She shrank back against Peter as Prince Took Shan uttered a deafening shriek. It was answered by a dozen shrieks. His men were working rapidly, applying the knout.

"**W**E are pushing on at once," the Tartar chieftain said.

"We should reach the Lake of the Flying Dragon by mid forenoon."

Peter said angrily, "This was not necessary. Mr. Lu did not have to send you out to capture me. I was going to him in a perfectly friendly spirit."

Prince Took Shan's white teeth flashed in a smile.

"You misunderstand, Mr. Moore. I do not represent Mr. Lu. I am his ancestral enemy. Mr. Lu possesses the treasure of the Shan Tartars. The men of my family have been trying for two hundred and eighty years to regain our rightful property. My ancestors failed because Mr. Lu was too clever for them. But I will not fail."

His eyes, in the firelight, had a fanatical gleam. His laugh was harsh, metallic.

"It will be so simple, Mr. Moore. We will storm the pass and set up your machinery. We will pump that lake dry with it. Cut off from water and food, Mr. Lu won't be long surrendering."

Peter stared at him incredulously. His fury was forgotten in his amazement at Mr. Wong's—or Prince Took Shan's—optimism.

"You know better than that," he said. "Mr. Lu knows you're planning this. What doesn't he know in China? His men outnumber yours fifty—a hundred—to one! You'll be wiped out, as those other expeditions were wiped out."

"I have no time to argue," Prince Took said curtly. "I know your reputation, Mr. Moore. You will understand why I am placing you under guard. I have no intention of harming you or Miss O'Gilvie unless you attempt to escape."

"Let her go back to Chung-king," Peter said quickly.

The Tartar chieftain laughed again. "Why should she be cheated of an op-

portunity for which she has paid so dearly? No! She has made this expedition financially possible. She must accompany us. She must see with her own eyes the treasure of my ancestors. Perhaps I will even give her the great Tartar Diamond."

"You can't," Peter said firmly, "get through that pass."

Prince Took Shan swung himself into the saddle and looked down at Peter with the contempt of the superior man for his inferior.

"There is a religious festival in Ling-Fo, beginning to-night. Mr. Lu's village will be deserted. There will be only a handful of old men and old women. We will get through the pass. And we will see to it that no one escapes."

The barbarian prince uttered a shriek. His men shrieked in answer. He and his warriors were so many madmen. They had whipped themselves into a state of frenzy. But they would not get through that pass.

The encampment was suddenly uproarious with the noises of departure. Prince Took Shan's men were freely wielding their knouts. Men yelled and hurried. Provisions were packed. Tents were struck and loaded. The night was full of yellow- and brown-skinned gnomes, laboring in the light of the dying camp fires.

Peter heard the muffled roaring of the tank's exhaust. He was quite sure that the three red-headed mechanics were part of this elaborate, astounding conspiracy. Many small mysteries were now explained. Susan was weeping like a heartbroken child. He could guess at her part in this tremendous, tragic mistake. She would talk later. Oh, she would talk so volubly in explanation of it all!

Peter, trying to think clearly, saw

nothing but a horrible ending to this piece of magnificent folly.

CHAPTER VII.

A MADMAN'S PRISONERS.

SIX tall and warlike guards rode, three on a side, and kept vigilant eyes on Peter Moore. Fresh horses had been saddled for him and Susan. Her fury at Prince Took Shan found an outlet in stormy tears. She said nothing until the encampment was far behind them, a faint rosy glow in the night. Sobs became fewer and farther spaced. Sniffles subsided.

"I did it all for you," she declared indignantly. "I wanted you to be rich. You said you wouldn't marry me until you were as rich as I am. I was going to let you capture the old treasure of the Shan Tartars from Mr. Lu."

Peter had suspected it.

"I met Prince Took in Peking," she went on. "He told me all about the treasure. He said you were just the man. He said if I would finance the whole expedition, you could have half the treasure. He said he had thousands of warriors who would spring to arms at a word from him."

"They sprang," Peter said dryly.

"So," she went on, "we organized the Ta Liang Shan Mining Company. I put up all the money for that. I put up all the money for buying the tank and for arms and ammunition for his men."

"How much?" Peter asked.

Susan told him passionately that he must not use that tone. "I'm hysterical enough now. I did it all for you. You are so stubborn. What does it matter how much it cost?"

"A quarter of a million, gold?"

"I don't know. More than that.

What difference does it make? That is not the point. I trusted Prince Took. I didn't dream he'd double cross me. He was so pathetic and so anxious to be helpful. Damn him!" Susan cried. She was silent a few seconds. Then she burst out angrily:

"Well, I've done it again. I've gone and got you into more trouble. We're going to get killed. The whole scheme is preposterous. How can we possibly match ourselves against anybody as clever, as ruthless as Mr. Lu?"

Peter had no answer to that. He wished he had. He had been, since the beginning of all this, in the malignant shadow that reached over Asia—the shadow of the most powerful, most sinister man, perhaps, in the entire world. What chance, indeed, had they to cope with this monstrous power, this evil genius who dwelt, like a horrible fish, in the bottom of that land-locked lake? The Blue Scorpion!

He was sorry for Susan. He did not see, at this dark hour, any hope of saving her or himself from this mad plan of Prince Took Shan's, or from the cold, spider-like wrath of Mr. Lu. An opportunity might present itself, but he saw no hope for them now.

A moon appeared presently, a wasted fraction of the moon past the third quarter, to shed unhappy magic on the caravan. It looked formidable enough in this half-light. In the lead, the tank sent blue-red flame from its exhaust. The tank might get through the pass. But what then?

The night passed. There was no pause for food. Whipped on by the fanatical Tartar chieftain, by his nine hundred blood-mad warriors, it progressed through the night and on into the new day. A purple mountain ahead was their objective. The pass was still invisible.

The purple of distance turned to blue, then to the cold raw gray of the granite itself. And Peter presently saw that slit through the mountain which they must traverse. His eyes, lifting, saw dots moving about up there. They would be, of course, Mr. Lu's guard. A religious festival might be taking place, which had drawn the bulk of the people from the shore of the Lake of the Flying Dragon, but Prince Took Shan was a fool indeed to suppose that Mr. Lu would leave the entrance to his lake unguarded.

WORD came presently that Peter and Susan were to go to the end of the line. They must not be exposed to danger. Yet, at the end of the line, there was no chance for them to escape. Their six guards, ranged three on a side, kept watchful eyes on them.

Above the shouts of men, the rattling of harness, the squealing of un-oiled axles, Peter suddenly heard the rapid, savage detonations of machine gun fire. The tank, in the vanguard, was opening the attack. And then he was a witness to one of the most amazing and horrible spectacles in his experience.

Prince Took Shan's men were swarming up the rocky face of the mountain, firing, using their swords, as they advanced. He saw them, in ones and twos, come to grips with the defenders; saw men, slaughtered, go rolling headless down the rocks; saw their heads go tumbling after them.

It was evident that Prince Took meant to make this a complete massacre. Not one life would be spared to take out word that the village was captured.

For it was evident, too, that Prince Took Shan's men, principally because

of the tank, would take that village. He learned, when he and Susan were eventually taken through the pass, that the tank had performed as a juggernaut, crushing out the lives of Lu's men who opposed it, grinding them down, driving them back and back.

It emerged triumphantly from the narrow slit in the rock, and poured its hail of steel upon surprised and helpless villagers. No one was to escape. Not one man, woman or child was to be spared.

Peter was thankful that he and Susan escaped seeing that. But they did see something of the horrible destruction, by the Tartars, of the men who defended the pass.

It was over in less than an hour. The Tartars finished with the sword what they had started with the rifle. Not one life was spared. Upward of five hundred men, women and children were slaughtered by Prince Took Shan's men.

Yet one gray shadow in the hills did manage to escape. Unseen by the Tartars, this shadow slipped from rock to rock; and so Prince Took Shan's very comprehensive massacre was, in the end, defeated of one purpose.

Peter and Susan were, late in the afternoon, conducted into a village the streets of which quite literally ran blood. It ran in thick streams through the gutters and out into the lake, until the lake was red with blood. The village stank of blood.

Susan, terrified and sick, stayed close to Peter. She was hysterical. It was all her fault. She had precipitated this.

With the exception of Peter and the three red-heads, every man in the caravan, every one of the Tartar warriors, was set to work carrying the dead out of the pass, burying them in

the sand on the other side of the mountain, in a deep trench.

PETER tried to comfort Susan. It wasn't, he said, her fault. Prince Took would have found some other means of executing this scheme if he hadn't succeeded in tricking her. He was a fanatic, and fanatics always found ways.

At least they were, for the time being, safe. Prince Took Shan declared to Peter, a little later, that they were more than merely safe.

"We are victorious! For the first time in centuries, in history, this pass has been penetrated by the Shan Tartars. I am proud. I am triumphant. I can think of my father and my grandfather and all the others who tried and failed, and without shame I can say, 'My genius has done this!'"

Boasting, Peter thought, was a little premature. He was watching the three red-headed mechanics and a score of native helpers feverishly at work setting up the power plants on the edge of the lake; assembling the great pumps.

"It will take you weeks, months," he said to Prince Took Shan, "to pump the water out of this lake. What will Mr. Lu's men be doing?"

"What if it should take years?" the Tartar chief countered. "We hold the pass now. We can hold it as Lu's men held it. No one can get through."

Peter looked up at the sheer granite walls of the mountains which surrounded the lake. He saw what Susan had seen from a distant mountain top months before—the utter impossibility of a force of men ascending or descending those steep walls.

"He can besiege you," Peter pointed out. "His men, blocking the pass, can prevent you from bringing in sup-

pies. You'll run out of food. This supply of gasoline and oil won't last more than a couple of weeks."

The fanatical light was shining in Prince Took Shan's black eyes. "Ah! But you don't know my plans, Mr. Moore. By the time our supplies are exhausted, Mr. Lu will have surrendered."

He looked out over the lake with flashing eyes.

"Can you imagine his feelings," he excitedly demanded, "when he learns that this pass has been taken? Can you imagine his state of frenzy when he learns that powerful pumps are draining the water from this lake? He will be frantic! He will gladly surrender!"

"Provided," Peter said, "he hasn't made his escape with your ancestral treasure through some underground passage."

"No!" the barbarian cried. "Because there is no underground passage!"

"Then how does he ventilate his palace? From all accounts, it's of tremendous size. There must be some means of ventilation. If you want my opinion—"

"I don't want your opinion!" the Tartar prince cried.

Peter's opinion, denied expression, was that the wisest move Prince Took Shan could make was to move himself and his warriors out of here as quickly as possible. He was sure that the prince was destined to a disastrous disappointment, and that they were all exposed to a sudden and complete annihilation.

Peter had the utmost respect for the man who dwelt in the bottom of that lake. He knew that his power was mighty, that it reached out into the farthest corners of Asia. He did not believe that, merely because this village

had been captured, Mr. Lu was trapped. He would strike back. And when he struck, Peter hoped that he and Susan would be far away.

But there was no opportunity for them to escape. They were under the constant watch of guards. Wherever they went they were followed, and they were not allowed near the pass.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. LU STRIKES BACK.

THE fantastic preparations for the final blow at Mr. Lu were meanwhile being carried forward with zeal and enthusiasm.

The three red-headed mechanics were the most zealous, the most enthusiastic of all. Peter, watching them, could not help marveling at their energy and their ingenuity. They had discovered that the lake level was higher than the land on the other side of the pass. They had decided to siphon off the lake!

With hundreds of sweating men working at this task, pipe lines were stretched from the lake to the slope outside the pass. The pumps were rigged up. The gasoline motor-driven dynamos were assembled on the edge of the lake. And by dawn of the next morning the dynamos were whining and the pumps were working.

Then the three tireless red-heads lost interest in pumps and syphons. They fell to work on a scheme of their own. They were erecting a power plant on a barge. Bill Jacobs, hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, explained to Peter what his plan was. It was, to say the least, an amazing plan.

They were going to drive the Blue Scorpion out of his cave with heat! They were going to boil him out!

They had, during the previous night, gone out in a small boat to investigate the strange contrivance they had heard about. The stories, Jacobs told Peter, were absolutely true!

"Dove took his clothes off and dived down and found this big bronze tube sticking up from below."

Through this great bronze tube Mr. Lu's visitors came and went. When not being used, it was kept under water. Some cumbersome machine raised and lowered it. If Mr. Lu wanted to admit anybody to his underwater palace, the tube was raised to the surface, like the periscope tube of a submarine. There was a hatch at the top, a watertight hatch. The hatch was opened and the visitor went down a stairway or a ladder inside the tube. Then the hatch cover, or lid, was closed, and the tube was pulled down under water.

Bill Dove, swimming around down there, had found the tube and the hatch.

Peter, listening to this exciting account, did not mention that he knew of the existence, from authentic hearsay, of a knob on the hatch cover which, if pressed, caused all this to happen.

"I'll tell you somethin', chief," Bill Jacobs went on. "We keep thinkin' these Chinks are behind the times. That tube isn't all."

He now described a remarkable system of upright spears which protected the tube from approach. They were in concentric circles, sticking up from the bottom to within an inch of the surface, like so many bayonets. When the tube came up, Bill Jacobs had heard, these spears went down; and when the tube went down, the spears came up again, so that no craft could approach within a hundred feet of the tube.

"That tube," the red-head declared,

"and those circles of spears are a wonderful piece of engineering. We damned near sunk our boat last night on them spears. But we've got him licked! We're going out there to-night in this barge and send all the current we have through the water by the tube. You know what happens to water when you send electricity through it."

Peter knew. The powerful current would heat the water. It would heat the bronze tube.

"Ain't that a great idea, chief?"

"I don't see it," Peter answered. "You can't heat up enough water to make him feel uncomfortable."

"We can give him one hell of a surprise, can't we? He'll think we're a flock of magicians, won't he? He'll wonder how we're makin' the water boil and turn his palace into a Turkish bath, won't he? He don't know anything about electricity. He'll think, sure as hell, it's white magic. You know how these natives are."

To Peter, the scheme was so fantastic, so madly impossible, that he laughed. Bill Jacobs gave him a hurt look.

"What's wrong with the gag, chief?"

"Mr. Lu isn't a superstitious native. You're forgetting what feats of engineering he must have accomplished to build that palace under water."

"But white magic is different, chief. We'll scare his pants off!"

PETER didn't think Mr. Lu would be greatly alarmed by electrically boiled water. And he didn't think that Mr. Lu was greatly alarmed by the capture of the pass and the village. The greatest mistake any man could make was underestimating the genius of the Blue Scorpion.

Both pumps and two siphons were

working. They had been working almost twenty-four hours, and the water in the lake had not yet receded a fraction of an inch. The lake was more than a half mile long and perhaps a quarter mile in width. To pump and siphon that lake away was quite as preposterous as the red-heads' scheme to frighten Mr. Lu with "white magic."

Peter was convinced, as he had been at the outset, that the safest and wisest plan was to escape before Mr. Lu struck. But there was nothing to be gained by arguing with these fanatical enthusiasts. They were within days, perhaps hours, of seizing that fabulous treasure. Even Susan had caught the infection. Still horrified by the scenes she had witnessed on entering the village, she was beginning, however, to believe that Prince Took Shan's scheme, by its very audacity, might succeed. And she was thrilled at the thought of those chests upon chests of precious stones—perhaps the greatest store of precious stones in existence!

Prince Took Shan was beginning to talk of using dynamite. He would drop sticks of dynamite on the underwater palace. Then he argued that, if he used dynamite, the palace would be ruined and the treasure probably lost forever. And Peter wondered if Mr. Lu had not thought of explosives when he had built the palace under water.

The approach of their second night in the village found Peter decidedly uneasy. Some years ago, thousands of miles from here, he had had an encounter with Mr. Lu's men, and he had learned how thorough, how clever, how ruthless Mr. Lu was. The Blue Scorpion was not merely a legend. He was an actuality—a man it paid to leave strictly alone.

Toward nightfall, an incident occurred which, while Susan and Prince

Took Shan accepted it lightly, confirmed his fears. From somewhere above them—and no one knew where—tiny pyramids of blue chalk began to fall. They might have been lumps of the very afternoon sky. Perhaps a hundred of them fell into the village.

But nothing more happened. Mr. Lu had sent his respects! How had he sent the tiny chalk pyramids? Just what did they portend?

But Prince Took Shan was not dismayed. Mr. Lu was trying to scare him. But Mr. Lu was whipped. He was using his famous little chalk pyramids as a last resort. But they didn't work. Not with Prince Took Shan!

The three red-heads accepted the chalk pyramids as a challenge. They'd show that yellow devil! The barge on which the gasoline-driven dynamo was mounted was pushed out into the lake. It made its clumsy way to the exact middle of the lake.

Darkness settled before it reached there. But Peter heard the whining of its dynamo, the soft mutter of the gasoline motor's exhaust. It was, Peter thought, the final incongruous touch—this strange attempt at steaming out the Blue Scorpion!

THE sky was overcast, and there would be no moon to-night.

Thunder grumbled ominously off to the north. The dynamo whined like a hysterical mosquito. The pumps chugged. Men's voices, speaking river Chinese, speaking the thin, cricket-like tongue of the Tartars were raised with excitement. All of them were talking about that treasure, for Prince Took Shan had promised each man a share.

He said to Peter, "I know you can think of much better schemes than we have devised. If you will help us, if you will give us the benefit of your

genius, you will be one of the richest young men in the world. Why won't you give us your advice?"

"I've given it," Peter said. "My advice is, clear out of here as fast as you can get these men and this equipment moving. Or—never mind the equipment."

"You credit Mr. Lu with supernatural powers," the barbarian accused him. "You believe all these legends. You refuse to realize that I have got him trapped at last."

"I only give Mr. Lu credit for having too much intelligence to let himself be trapped so easily. I know that he is the most powerful man in China. I know that his men are in all parts of the Far East."

He moved away from the Tartar chieftain and walked toward the pass. Somehow, he must get Susan out of here. He observed that the lights of the village were growing misty, and he wondered why. There were never fogs in this desert country. Where was this fog originating? Then it occurred to him that the fog was electrical. It was being caused by the electrically-heated water in the middle of the lake—vapor rising, covering the surface of the lake until it invaded the village in the form of a fog. Steam from a devil's caldron!

Then, suddenly, Peter became aware that the dynamo was no longer whining. Far out in the lake, he saw, through the mist, a ghostly white glow, and he wondered what was happening out there. Had the gasoline motor broken down? Had the dynamo burned out?

He walked slowly toward the lake. Mist in thin, tenuous wisps floated past his face—warm clots of dampness in the chill mountain air. He paused at Susan's tent and called. There was no

answer. A light gleamed at the flap. He called again, then pulled the flap back.

The tent was deserted. A candle burned on an empty crate near the head of the cot. A rifle and Susan's automatic pistol, easily identified by the mother-o'-pearl handle and the gold-mounted barrel, lay on the cot with an opened and nearly full package of pistol cartridges.

His own pistol had been taken away from him. He had instructed Susan never to leave her tent after dark. He called again.

Shrill native voices rose up all about him. Men grinned and gibbered over blazing camp fires. The Tartar treasure! They talked of nothing else.

"Susan!"

No answer. Anxiously, he ran down to the lake, calling her. The mist was like a veil. Somehow, he associated this mysterious fog with Mr. Lu, as if the Blue Scorpion were somehow magically creating it as a screen which would hide his actions.

At the edge of the lake, staring at the ghostly spot of light where the barge was, he stopped. The dynamo and the gasoline motor were still silent. The dynamo farther down the shore was silent, and so was the pump which it drove. The dynamo's gasoline motor had probably run out of gasoline. With the red-heads away, there was no one to attend to it.

Peter listened. The fog rolling in from the lake seemed to grow more dense. He was certain he heard, not far from shore, the scuffing of wood against wood, then the sounds of a struggle, quickly subdued.

"Susan!" he shouted.

This time she answered. Or did she answer? He heard, or thought he heard, a muffled scream, out there in

the mist. He called again. His forehead was suddenly wet. He felt cold and sick all over. There was no question in his mind that Mr. Lu's men, under the very eyes of the Shan Tartars, had captured Susan.

CHAPTER IX.

BENEATH THE LAKE.

SUSAN had been sitting on her cot, cleaning and loading her pistol, when the three men came in. They surprised her so completely that she had not time even to draw her breath and scream. She saw three yellow faces; three pairs of cool black eyes. One of the men had something pale-blue in his hands, like a wad of cloth. Before she could move or cry out, this cloth spun out about her. It seemed to infold her, as she struggled, as, perhaps, the strands of a web infold and tangle an insect.

Nothing was said. There was not even a whisper, but one of her captors must have struck her on the head, because, although she was frightened, she seldom fainted; and the world-engulfing blackness that suddenly blotted out all impressions must have been the unconsciousness resulting from a sharp and savage blow.

With legs, hands and face securely enwrapped in the blue cloth, she found herself, when the blackness went away, lying helpless on her side, with some sharp object prodding her just above the hip bone. She heard splashing water, but no other sounds save the babble of men's voices ashore, until her name was shouted. And it was Peter's voice.

Susan tried then to answer. The beginning of a scream left her lips, then a wet hand came smothering down on

her mouth. A finger and thumb pinched her nose, so that her breath was entirely shut off. She struggled to free her face of the imprisoning hand. She was suffocating. Rage and helpless terror swept her. Her heart was hammering madly in her ears.

And when the hand was taken away, she was too spent to utter a sound. Wood rubbed against wood. She heard the gurgling of water running along the sides of the boat. She could do nothing for a time but gasp for air. Something touched her face. The hand, again. And she knew that the instant she tried to cry out, the hand would clamp down and smother her again.

It was Susan's first taste of Mr. Lu's methods. For she knew that these could be no other than Mr. Lu's men. Merciless. Ruthless. As cold, as horrible, as that hand poised there, ready to clamp off her breath if she made a sound.

A gleam in the night drew nearer. She found, by twisting her head a little, she could look over the side. The worn flanks of a familiar object came into sight. It was the barge on which she had watched the three red-haired men embark upon their amazing adventure some hours ago.

Her breath caught in her throat, as sharply as a thorn, as the flat planking of the deck became visible. A large electric tubular flash light, the kind that contains dry cells, was lying on the deck, sending its white beam across the planking. The barge appeared to be deserted. All she could see was the formless bulk of the machinery looming against the glow.

Then she saw the blood. There were pools of it on the planks, and these pools were running off into the water in little streams. She heard the dripping of blood as it ran into the lake.

The air here—though this may have been in her imagination—was clammy warm. It must be due to the electrically heated water. Where, she frantically wondered, were Bill Jacobs, Hank Roberts, and Tom Dove, those three happy-go-lucky trouble hunters?

The cold wet hand dropped over her eyes. She was lifted up. Then a breath of sweetened air swam up about her. In it she detected the odor of sandalwood incense and the perfume of freshly cut jasmine, a sweetness that was almost sickening. These odors came rushing up about her in a strong draft. Her hand touched hot metal.

THEN she stopped descending, but she could not see, for the hand was still clamped over her eyes. There was no doubt where she was being taken. She was, there could be no question now, in the underwater palace of the Blue Scorpion. Icy tingles of fear danced over her flesh. So great was her terror that she had the sensation of her flesh pulling away from her bones; of actual iciness attacking her spine.

She was carried a long way. Once, through a crack between her captor's fingers, she caught a glimpse of a flesh-pink wall, which gleamed like the scales of a freshly caught fish. The sensation of dampness, which she had first experienced, was absent now. The smell of incense and of fresh jasmine grew stronger. It was sickening. It was overpowering.

Susan knew she was on the verge of fainting from sheer terror. Terror of the unknown. Terror of the thousand and one horrible legends she had heard of this human monster who lived under the Lake of the Flying Dragon.

Then, suddenly, the clammy hand

was taken away. With a whisk, the blue shroud was removed from her, and she was standing alone at the end of a room as blue as any cavern, any grotto, under the sea. It was a dazzling, sapphire blue, and it was in the shape of a thin, long triangle, or wedge. She stood in the center of the wide end of the wedge, looking down the room toward the apex. Looking into a glaring spot of brilliant, intense, sapphire-blue light.

This dazzling blue light hissed softly as it burned. Above the glare of it Susan, staring with utter terror, could see fumes rising—rising and vanishing, as fumes from an incense pot vanish upward into the stark blackness of a pagan temple.

Below the glare of flaming sapphire Susan saw, or believed that she saw, the black form of a man. But she could not be sure, until a voice spoke—a soft, thin, whispering voice, so cold that it sent chills through her and caused her legs to go weak and tremulous.

Yet it seemed an age before that shapeless black bulk below the glaring sapphire incandescence uttered these words.

In English, the soft, thin, whispering voice said, "Yes. You will do." Then there was a phrase in Chinese.

She did not have the strength to cry out. Her throat was parched. Her lips felt stiff. Every nerve in her body was shrieking a protest against this, against some hideous, inevitable fate.

HANDS seized her, and her flesh seemed to shrink from them.

She was propelled forcibly from the horrible blue grotto, with its staring sapphire light, and the formless bulk of the whisperer beneath it. Who but Mr. Lu? Who, indeed, but the Blue Scorpion—the man with the brain of jade?

Oh, she could believe these fantasies now. For this was Susan's moment of extremity, when fear and dread and hopeless horror had her for their own.

The hands propelled her from the wedge-shaped blue grotto. She was pushed across a corridor. Not in the hands of men now. She was the prisoner of a dozen—two dozen—silent, cold-eyed women. They pushed her down a corridor whose walls were of a gleaming snowy whiteness. A door swung open. A stronger breath of jasmine and incense assailed her.

This room, into which she was pushed, was of a pale and miraculous green. It was the green of a freshly cleaved glacier, of the chill Arctic seas. Green walls. Green ceiling. Green rugs of tremendous area and the familiar dragon design.

Mr. Lu's tastes evidently ran to vivid color effects. Even the benches were of pale green lacquer.

Susan was pushed and pulled, with no gentleness, into this room and down the length of it. She was roughly spun about. And she found herself staring, with transfixed eyes, at a white woman, dressed as she had been dressed; in laced boots, whipcord breeches, fuzzy blue sweater—a white woman with staring eyes and a face as white as chalk, with blue lips. A ghastly face. Her own face.

It was a silver mirror—a slab of silver polished to the brightness of plate glass. How wild her hair was!

She saw the native women as blue-clad ghosts, with light from invisible sources glittering on their varnished black hair. She shrank, whimpered, when she saw a knife gleam in the hand of one of them. A young woman with slit-like black eyes, high cheekbones, thin lips, pinched nose.

One of the other women snatched

the knife from this one's hand and lifted it above Susan's head. Powerless, robbed of all hope, Susan closed her eyes for the gleaming blade to strike. She felt the sweater come away.

The woman was slicing off her clothes. Swaying with faintness, Susan tried to master her nerves. She felt the last of her clothing snatched from her body. Swimming eyes glimpsed, in the silver mirror, a slim, ivory body that certainly could not be her own.

One of the women forced her to her knees. Another fetched a green-lacquered tray containing numberless pots and jars from which arose a sickening perfume. Undiluted attar of roses.

They did her hair, coiling it down, flattening it, drenching it with sickeningly sweet stuff. They brought garments—a scarlet jacket, with tiny pockets, sapphire-blue satin trousers, small sapphire-blue slippers.

In the mirror, Susan saw her slim white nudeness vanish into these scented garments. She saw the slit-eyed girl snatch up the knife from the floor where the older woman had laid it. She saw the yellow girl's lips part and reveal white, fine teeth.

And the knife, gripped firmly in the small yellow hand, flashed downward and sidewise at Susan.

ACTING on the certainty that Susan had been taken prisoner by Mr.

Lu's men, Peter wasted no time on inquiries. He ran back to Susan's tent, snatched up her pistol and the box of cartridges and stowed them in the side pockets of his coat. He ran back to the lake front, searched desperately for a boat of any description, and at length found a long narrow one—the very cratt, it may have been, which Susan had glimpsed through her binoculars

from the mountain top at dawn some months ago.

He found a crude and heavy sweep in the bottom. With this he maneuvered the craft away from shore and pushed on out into deep water, toward the ghostly glow where the barge lay. He was certain that any attempt at rescuing Susan was utterly hopeless—quite as hopeless, quite as fantastically hopeless, as the sundry schemes of Prince Took Shan for acquiring that fabulous treasure.

The Blue Scorpion had struck. It was an oblique stroke, such as might have been expected. And it gave Peter no choice between life and death. He would join Susan in the Blue Scorpion's palace—and that would be the end of them both.

Peter reached the barge, saw the pools of blood, and drew obvious conclusions. Then the moving prow of his boat collided with some object close under the surface, and nearly capsized. Peter's hand, fumbling in the warm water, encountered the point of one of the bronze spikes. Six inches to the right and six inches to the left, he found others.

He removed pistol and cartridges from his pockets, maneuvered alongside the barge and secured the flash light. This he added to the little collection in the bottom of the boat. He removed coat, boots and shirt, and lowered himself into the water. By bracing his feet against the spikes, he hauled the boat up and over their points. Then he pushed the boat again to the next ring of bronze spears. There were, in all, four concentric circles.

His frenzied efforts were quickly exhausting him. He reached and pulled the boat over the inner circle of the giant spikes, then dived down for the bronze shaft. He did not find it until

his sixth dive. Then, groping about the hatch cover, he fumbled until he had found the small square knob which had, long ago, been described to him. He felt the shaft begin to rise. It came slowly out of the lake until it was, perhaps, a foot out of water. The lid, worked by the same mysterious mechanism, slowly lifted.

A blast of scented air struck his face. He gathered up the pistol, cartridges and flash light and stowed them about him.

The shaft was in complete darkness. The fingering light of the flash light showed him rungs down which he went into dank darkness. Halls gave off from an octagonal cubicle in eight directions. Light glowed dimly down them all. He assumed now that the bottom of the lake was honeycombed with such passages off which, no doubt, rooms gave.

Any attempt at a search for Susan in this labyrinth would have been hopeless if he had not, fortunately, seen two imprints of a small heel, spaced at least twenty feet apart in the green mold which carpeted one of the tunnels. Susan, he presumed, had been carried, but her heel had touched the floor twice.

He ran down that corridor. The dampness came to an end. The walls and ceiling were cobalt blue. How these passages were lighted mystified him. It was as if the walls, the ceilings, had a luminance all their own.

He came to a cross corridor; glanced into a room of deepest crimson. Yet he saw no one, and he heard no sound, until, standing there, straining his senses, he heard a woman's faint cry. It might be Susan. It might be any one. She was lost. He was lost. They would never, he was certain, live to see the light of another day. His

only hope was that they might die together.

He plunged on down another cross corridor in the direction from which that cry had come. It was faintly repeated. He passed a room of alabaster white, with walls inlaid with mother-o'-pearl. It, too, was empty. So far he had seen no living creature. Yet he sensed that he was spied on, that his every movement was under observation.

He came to another cubicle which was like the hub of a wheel. Halls radiated out from it in ten directions. He was lost again. He was hopelessly lost.

CHAPTER X.

THE WORLD'S TREASURE HOUSE.

SUSAN might have been the statue of a girl clad in the barbaric garments of a sing-song girl of the Chinese rivers. She could not move. She could, if she had not been so terrified, have stepped aside or leaped back, to save herself from the girl with the jade-handled knife. But Susan had lost all power of action.

Women seized the girl, and Susan faintly screamed. The girl struggled, scratched and kicked. She broke away, still with that terrifying knife in her hand. And still Susan could not move, but she could, and did, scream again, this time at the top of her lungs. All of the terror of this last hour was expended upon that ear-splitting scream.

The yellow girl threw herself at her, and the gleaming knife, striking into Susan's arm, opened the flesh to the bone. Then the women fell upon the panting yellow girl and dragged her away. A door opened and Susan saw Peter, bare-footed, stripped to the waist, paused an instant on the thresh-

old. He came running down the room, shouting, "Susan!"

The women fled, silently vanished. And he was binding up the bleeding slash in her arm with strips of orchid silk from the pile of clothing that had been slashed and ripped from her. In her relief at seeing him, Susan was crying. She didn't mind the slash in her arm, though it was beginning to throb. Clinging to him, she asked him what they were going to do.

"Get out of here—if we can find the way."

"We can never find the way."

Peter went to a door and flung it open. Susan saw him stagger back a step; saw ghastly green light in his face, light as vividly green as kingfisher jade.

"Here it is!" he said excitedly. "We'll never live to tell about it, but—here it is."

There, indeed, it was. The fabulous treasure of the Blue Scorpion. The large room, with its walls of glittering jade, was full of chests, true to those traditions.

Chests of brass. Chests of teak, of sandalwood, of ebony; brass bound and brass studded.

They were not locked. In the dazzling splendor of their discovery, the man and the girl momentarily forgot their danger, forgot the shadow of the Blue Scorpion. The chests lined the walls of the great jade room.

Susan knelt at the nearest. It flamed and glittered with diamonds and emeralds. It was a solid mass of diamonds, unmounted; of emeralds of all sizes. It was like a dream of impossible riches. Here was the treasure house of the world. Chests of raw gems, some cut, some uncut. Chests of sapphires, of rubies, of diamonds. One chest alone was brimming with

carved jade, Buddhas, amulets, beads, pendants. That chest must have been worth millions in itself.

IT was a cruel, a maddening vista. Wherever they looked were greater, richer treasures. There were chests of the rarest rose quartz, chests of amethysts, of pearls. Pearls the size of marbles. Strings of pearls. There was a rug of pearls which filled one chest; which Susan seized and lifted out, forgetting once again the throbbing wound in her arm. The rug was, roughly, six feet square, of pearls bound together by slender gold wire—a treasure in itself richer than any undiscovered treasure in the world.

Susan was making soft whimpering sounds. She may have been one of the richest girls in America, yet her riches, compared only to that rug of pearls, were those of a pauper.

It made Peter's eyes go dull. It made him poorer than the most ragged beggar in the streets of the poorest village in Asia.

It was indeed the cruelest kind of torture. Mr. Lu, with his ingenuity as a torturer, could have planned nothing more diabolical than this. It was showing—and withholding—a drink of sparkling cold spring water to a man dying of thirst, with swollen black tongue and bulging eyes. It was displaying a feast to a man dying of starvation.

Here was the treasure of all his dreams, yet he could have none of it. Susan, with a cry of actual pain, had opened a chest of blazing blue sapphires. Sapphires were her favorite stones.

She could not resist the human impulse to stuff the little pockets of her jacket full of sapphires.

"It's useless," Peter said.

"I don't care," she cried. "It's cruel. It's torture."

"We must try to get out of here."

"Is there any use? Here it is, Peter.

Here's what I brought you here to have. It's all yours. You're richer than Midas, darling. You're the richest man alive. Here's your fortune. Compared to you, I'm but a penniless pauper."

A door across the room opened. A yellow face was suspended there. Peter fired. The face vanished. Peter seized Susan's hand and pulled her down the room.

He pulled her through a doorway into an arched black corridor. He did not know where they were in relation to the bronze tube. And this was the beginning of a mad, a hopeless search for an escape from the fabulous palace of Mr. Lu.

They raced down corridors which were parts of the elaborate underwater labyrinth. They ran into and out of empty rooms. Hopelessly lost, they were, Peter knew, being subjected to another cruel jest on the part of Mr. Lu.

It occurred to him presently to follow to its source the breath of fresh air which he frequently detected. This search led them eventually into a low arched tunnel which was cool with a strong current of the night air. The tunnel climbed up and up. The current of air grew fresher, stronger as they advanced.

The tunnel ended finally and forever in bronze bars as thick as a man's arm, set less than an inch apart into the solid masonry of ceiling and floor. Beyond was darkness. He used the flash light. Beyond were other bars; still other barriers of bronze bars. They were like reflections in two mirrors placed squarely opposite each other, so that

what you saw was repeated and reflected infinitely.

He said, in a thick, exhausted voice: "We've got to turn back. Look!"

Behind them, down the long tunnel, were a sea of yellow faces, turned toward them. By magic they had appeared.

Slowly these yellow faces advanced on them.

PETER began firing. Slowly, systematically, he fired. He saw bodies fall, wilting before the fire. Then suddenly the tunnel was plunged in darkness.

Susan frantically seized his arm.

"Take this flash light," he said.

She took it and played its wavering beam down the tunnel.

It was empty again! By some trick of mirrors, some legerdemain of Oriental mechanism, where there had been a swarm of yellow faces, of living yellow men, there was now emptiness.

The man and the girl, with hands touching, raced down the tunnel. The flash light was snatched from Susan by an unseen hand. Other hands snatched the pistol from Peter. Half-naked bodies brushed lightly against them.

Susan clung to his arm. A bony hand had clutched at her throat; relaxing, had let her go. There was no sensation in her body. They came to the end of the tunnel. Mysteriously, the lights came on again. But where were these mysterious lights? Peter would never know.

Hand in hand they passed an open doorway. Susan uttered a dry, pinched little scream. Sapphire blue light glared into their faces. And against the pure white wall beside them there fell the shadow, perhaps, of Mr. Lu—the shadow of the fabulous, the mon-

strous man known throughout Asia as the Blue Scorpion.

No half-crazed artist could have conceived of a figure of such hideous design as was cast by that black shadow. It was human, yet it was inhuman. Remotely, but only remotely, it suggested the spider-like form of a scorpion, with its scaly legs, its shiny black body, the poisonous, articulated tail. Only a horribly misshapen man, a human monstrosity, could have thrown such a grotesque and hideous shadow.

Shrinking from it, Susan recalled, as in a drugged dream, the tale of Mr. Lu's fall down a cliff; of his losing his entire face; of men finding his body a pulsing pulp at the cliff bottom. She could understand, in this monstrous shadow, that legend.

Momentarily frozen there, Peter dragged her on. He had smelled dampness. He would trace that smell of dampness. It took them down other corridors. It took them presently, to Susan's utter hysterical relief, to the octagonal cubicle from which rose the great bronze tube.

Neither she nor Peter was surprised when that tube, as they started climbing, began to rise. They were accustomed now to the dark magic of their Oriental host.

The little boat was floating where Peter had left it. Peter helped Susan aboard and followed her. He picked up the paddle and pushed off.

In the faint amber gleam of dawn he saw the bronze tube disappear, but knew that he was safely away from the concentric circles of spears. Susan was in the bow, crouched down, sobbing from sheer nervous relief. But Peter was certain that they had not yet enjoyed the last of their thrills at the hands of Mr. Lu. What, he anxiously wondered, would happen next?

And while he was wondering, Mr. Lu struck.

CHAPTER XI.

"OUR ONLY CHANCE!"

DAWN had come swiftly, changing from amber to the palest rose-gold, then to glowing ivory. Silver clouds floated luminously in the purple-blue of the night sky. On the shore there were signs of fierce activity.

Men were racing about. Horses were plunging. It reminded Peter of hasty retreats he had witnessed on battlefields. Shouts, shrieks, the brisk detonations of rifle fire reached him.

Mr. Lu was striking. And it was evident that Prince Took Shan and his men were running for the pass. Standing in the stern of the little boat, he saw the barbarian chieftain vanish into the hatch of the tank. And he saw the tank stagger off toward the pass. He saw, too, that the mountain on the right hand, the northern side of the pass, was dark with swarming men. Mr. Lu's warriors. There were thousands of them. They were swarming down the hill. They were hurling rocks. Prince Took Shan's men, and the men of the caravan, had evidently, in their dreams of fabulous treasure, been taken completely by surprise.

Peter did not know just what had happened. And he would never know. He reached shore as the war tank, rattling and clanking, started through the pass, climbing over the bodies of dead and dying, climbing over the bodies of horses and mules and oxen; smashing down carts.

He saw boulders go sliding and leaping down the steep side of the pass; saw them bound from the steel

turtle-back of the tank. A boulder larger than the tank, somehow set free from above, came plunging down. It blocked the tank's path. The caterpillar treads ground hopelessly against it. More boulders came down. With them a hail of smaller stones, some the size of a man's head, others no larger than a fist.

They came down by the thousands. By the ton. They rose about the tank until only its top was visible. Then, in a deluge of rocks, it became invisible.

Peter waited to see no more. He had witnessed, he felt sure, the sealing of Prince Took Shan's tomb. The last fantastic attempt on the part of the Shan Tartars to recover their fabulous treasure had failed as had all the previous ones.

Hordes of men in blue were sweeping down the hill, leaping with remarkable precision from niche to niche. Some stumbled. Some fell headlong to their doom.

Peter succeeded in reaching Prince Took Shan's tent. He found a sub-machine rifle, a half dozen disks loaded. He gave Susan the disks and told her to follow him. He took his stand behind the pump which had pumped its last futile stroke. But its steel bulk would turn aside bullets and rocks alike.

When a spearhead of men, fifteen or twenty in number, came charging across the opening from the base of the mountain, he fired into them until the last man stumbled and dropped. One disk of ammunition was gone. He ran, with Susan beside him, clutching at his arm, to the nearest of the great boulders which Mr. Lu's men had dislodged and sent crashing down. There he withstood another charge.

The next sprint would take Susan and him into the pass. But did they

dare enter the pass? It was, it seemed to him at the time, a miracle that they had been saved thus far. Rocks were still plunging down on the remnants of Prince Took Shan's men, and on the remnants of the caravan. It was quite evident that Mr. Lu's warriors intended to do quite as thorough a job as had Prince Took.

Peter, crouched behind the rock, emptying the submachine gun into bodies of the blue-clad warriors as they came endlessly down the steep slope, became certain that he and Susan would not escape. He saw Prince Took Shan's men put to the sword, mercilessly decapitated.

The stench of blood and the odor of hot flint filled the pass. Pulverized rock formed a dust cloud as dense as the thickest fog. Through that cloud, Peter and Susan might escape. Yet he was sure that Mr. Lu had willed that they must not escape.

He said finally, "It's our only chance—before this dust settles."

THEY raced toward the pass. Through the fog of dust they saw phantom forms—specters. They climbed over dead bodies. They slipped in pools of blood. The rain of rocks had ceased.

Holding the gun in readiness, with Susan following him, Peter made his way into the pass. He exhausted another disk of ammunition before they had progressed a hundred feet. The dust became thicker. Here, the pass was its narrowest, hardly twenty feet from wall to wall, and filled now with large and small fragments of rock. These fragments, many of them larger than coffins, gave him a new conception of the ruthless fury of that human monster who lived in his incredible under-water palace. Mr. Lu had given

the order that the invaders be wiped out. And his men had responded accordingly.

The invaders had been wiped out. Yet, by one of the miracles of that dreadful night, Peter and Susan were spared. His rifle was jammed; useless. They were unarmed, subject to destruction at any instant.

Perhaps it was the fog of dust that saved them.

Suddenly, they were beyond the pass. The yielding golden sand of the desert was under their feet. Yet they could not see. For the dust cloud, pouring from the pass, was a billow of fog.

In this lesser fog they saw no living thing. The horrible scenes in the village, in the pass, were definitely behind them.

Peter threw away the rifle. He and Susan started trudging in the direction toward which he believed the old Merchant's Trail lay. Yet he did not take hope until they gradually left the dust cloud behind them. The mid morning sun blazed down on them from a sky as blue as sapphire.

Peter, taking stock, did not believe that they could reach the Merchant's Trail. His lungs and throat were parched from the fine, cutting dust. He was bleeding from an unaccountable gash in his left cheek. And Susan was utterly spent. Now that they seemed safe, for the first time in hours, she was on the verge of complete physical collapse. The wound in her arm hurt her terribly. Her legs, she said, were giving out.

"Darling, I can't go any farther. What are we going to do? I've got to rest."

They sat down on a dune. Susan's head drooped to Peter's shoulder. She was either instantly asleep or instantly

unconscious. Perhaps it was a combination of the two. But there was nothing Peter could do about it. There was no water within a day's travel. And the sun was rising, growing hotter. Without a hat, without clothing to his waist, Peter wondered how he could withstand sunstroke.

A MOCKING answer to his problem was provided, as he sat and wondered, by that most perverse, most provocative of all living creatures, a mule. It was a pack mule, a stray survivor of the caravan. It came strolling out of the dust cloud to the east. Its bone pack-saddle was laden with food. Skins of water hung on either side of the cantle.

Peter, deserting Susan, walked toward the mule. It eyed him warily. He whistled. It cocked its ears. He walked toward it with the outstretched hand of friendship. It backed away. He ran. The mule trotted. It stopped and gazed at him with wide, curious eyes. He called to it, in English, in Chinese, in one of the few phrases of Tartar at his command.

But the mule declined his friendship. It was content to stay near, but it would not let him approach. It narrowed simply to this: Peter had to have those skins of water. He would prefer to have the mule, but he must have the water for Susan. Quite obviously, he could not secure the mule without securing the water.

The mule would permit him to approach almost within grasping distance of the water, then it would shy away. Peter, so exhausted he could hardly stand, let alone walk, forced himself to run.

This cruel game went on, Peter supposed, for hours, at least until the desert sun was high overhead. Then

without reason, without cause whatsoever, the mule capitulated. It lost interest in the game and permitted him to seize its horsehair lead-rope.

Grasping that rope firmly, Peter led the mule back to where he had left Susan. He poured water into her mouth and over her face from the skin. She was alive. But she was unconscious. He discarded such items from the mule's load as were least useful, and loaded Susan into the saddle. He found a blouse of coarse blue cloth strapped under one of the water skins. This he slipped on over his head. The situation, he congratulated himself, was at last in hand.

But he wondered if Mr. Lu, in his underwater cave, was through toying with him.

Late in the afternoon, with the round blood-red sun of the desert poised for its plunge into the west, the three survivors of Mr. Lu's ruthless attack entered the encampment of a tea caravan. The amiable tea trader, a fat and jolly Chinese, took them in; gave them thick green tea to drink and roasted goat meat to eat. He was going on to India. He took Peter's *chit*—or Chinese I. O. U.—for a pair of fresh horses. And next morning, refreshed and once again optimistic, Peter and Susan set forth down the trail from Chung-king.

Susan was quiet and thoughtful at the beginning of that morning. The wound in her arm ached. But as the day advanced, her spirits arose, and it wasn't long before she had decided that the adventure they had been through had been, by long odds, the most exciting, the most thrilling adventure she had ever had. It had been, she decided, perfectly fascinating.

It seemed like a dream, she declared. Would he ever forget the horrible

hopeless feeling as they had run here and there in the labyrinth which was Mr. Lu's palace?

"Never," Peter said, with feeling.

Susan uttered a little cry.

"I'd forgotten the sapphires!" she cried. She plunged both hands into the little pockets of her Chinese jacket. Her face suddenly lost its eagerness. Her mouth and her eyes became round.

"Peter!" she whispered. She looked down at her hands. He looked, too.

In the palm of each hand lay, not sapphires, but a cluster of tiny blue chalk pyramids!

CHAPTER XII.

MR. LU'S LITTLE JOKE

CHUNG-KING again. But no longer a filthy, squalid Chinese village of the third order. It was civilization. Here, one could step aboard a stout little steel steamer and be spirited away from terrifying shadows and Oriental ogres.

There was a steamer in four days. Peter secured the money he had left with the innkeeper, and paid for their tickets to Hankow.

The steamer started down river at dusk. Peter and Susan were standing on the after deck when it got under way. Chung-king vanished into the blue mists of evening. A coolie approached Peter. He carried on his upturned palms a rectangular box painted a vivid sapphire blue.

Chinese characters on the box spelled Ren Beh Tung—literally, Man of Bronze. Peter had earned that picturesque name six years before. It was the Chinese equivalent of Peter the Brazen. Without opening that box, he guessed that its contents would prove to be ironical. A tiny pale blue square,

in the lower left-hand corner of the lid, gave him this hunch. He was being presented, he suspected, with a parting gift from the Man with the Jade Brain.

He hesitated to open it. It might contain some Oriental surprise that would kill him. Susan was—being Susan—tremendously curious. But Peter was wary. He would not, he declared, let her see what was in the mysterious box until he had himself examined its contents.

The lid was nailed down. He borrowed a screwdriver from the polite Chinese chief steward and took box and screwdriver to his stateroom and locked the door.

There, alone and unobserved, he pried off the lid. It came off quite easily. Peter, with a gasp, dropped the box to the floor.

Within the neat sapphire box, side by side, were the embalmed heads of Bill Jacobs, Hank Roberts and Tom Dove. But that was not all. There were also the hands of the three red-headed mechanics. And they were arranged in a very familiar, conventional Chinese manner. The hands of Bill Jacobs were nailed down with bronze spikes to his eyes. The hands of Hank Roberts were nailed down with bronze spikes to his ears. And the hands of Tom Dove were nailed down with bronze spikes to his mouth.

It was quite like Mr. Lu to send him this grisly souvenir, this favorite symbol of the three great Chinese virtues:

Hear no evil—see no evil—speak no evil!

A hint worthy of Mr. Lu.

And it was fortunate that there was an open porthole in Peter's stateroom.

He returned to the after deck when he had himself in hand, and lying freely, told Susan the sapphire box had

contained probably one thousand tiny pyramids of blue chalk.

It occurred to him, as Susan slipped her soft, warm little hand into his and snuggled against him, that he was on the verge of making the same vows that he had made some half dozen times previously. But this time he meant them. Susan—the lovely, the alluring, the adorable Susan—had once again pushed him just a little too close to the brink of disaster. She would, in a very little time, be plotting ingenious new ways to satisfy her thirst for excitement. That horrible experience above and under the Lake of the Flying Dragon was already, to her, a glamorous adventure.

No. She would never satisfy her thirst for excitement. But he had had his fill. He loved her. He would probably always love her more than any girl he would ever know. But Susan was, decidedly, not for him. What he wanted was peace.

"I hoped," she said wistfully, looking up at him with her big violet eyes, "that you would get that treasure. But I'll have other ideas."

Peter shivered slightly. He hoped he wouldn't be within reach when she had them.

PETER was back at work, in Shanghai, trying to sell electrical equipment. Susan was preparing to run down to Hongkong to visit friends. It chanced that, at their farewell dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Sing, of San Francisco, espied Peter.

They paused at Peter's table and he introduced them to Susan.

"You've been away on a business trip," Mrs. Sing accused him. "I'm sure it was successful. Do you remember that talk we had at Mr. Wong's?"

Peter, recalling also the eye that had stared at him from the priceless Ming screen, said that he remembered it very clearly.

"I'm never coming back to China if I can help it," Mrs. Sing said. "It's grown too sordid. We've been here almost three months. I've been bored every minute. China is spoiled and dull. Where is there any romance? Any adventure?"

"The future of this country," Mr. Sing said, "is up to hardheaded, practical young American business men like you."

"I hope," Mrs. Sing added, "you're selling lots of machinery."

Peter thanked them. They went on, across the hotel dining room, to their table.

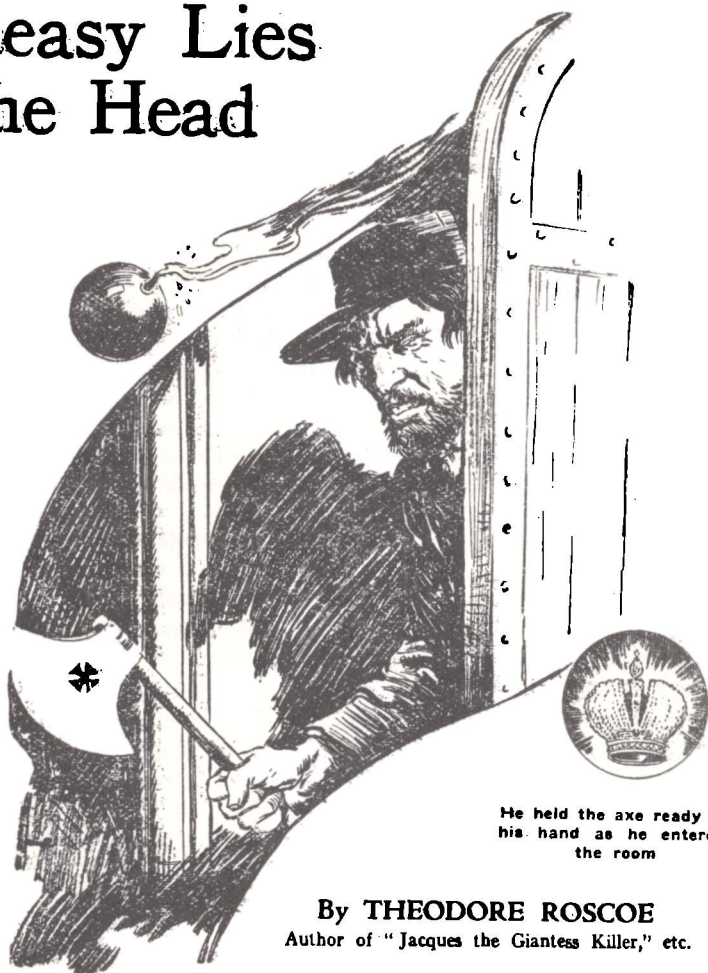
"I love that," Susan said. "No romance! No adventure!"

She laughed. But Peter didn't laugh.

"I think," he said slowly, "that this is one adventure neither you nor I will ever mention to any one." The memory of the three red-heads was strong in his mind. "Mr. Lu has his own special treatment for people who know too much about him and are indiscreet. So, as far as you and I are concerned, Miss O'Gilvie, the adventure in the Cave of the Blue Scorpion never happened."

THE END.

Uneasy Lies the Head



He held the axe ready in
his hand as he entered
the room

By **THEODORE ROSCOE**

Author of "Jacques the Giantess Killer," etc.

This is the annual Argosy What-is-it. Is it Comedy (Ha-Ha!)? Is it Tragedy (Curses!)? Is it the moon-beam stuff of Fantasy? . . . The Editors do not know. Roscoe will not tell. So we leave it to you, gentle reader

THE Kingdom of Svengary lay asleep. A pale moon coursed lopsided above silhouetted roofs, dragging a scud of greenish cloud that trailed like thin flowing hair. On Boulevard Wenzel Rupprecht the street

lamps were frosty satellites suspended in black-green night, and the heels of the *gendarme* patrol echoed coldly across deserted pavements.

The boy with the thin face and turned-up collar hugged back into the

doorway to watch the policemen pass.

His fists in his pockets were icy, but his eyes were hot. "Hobnails!" he whispered after the *gendarmes*, remembering the words of Andreyev—"Hobnails in the Iron Heel of Oppression."

When the Hobnails in the Iron Heel of Oppression had rounded the corner, he ducked out of the doorway, crossed the boulevard, scouted past a row of ornate building fronts and dark theater marquees, and slipped up a side alley to a back street.

"Keep off the main boulevard," Andreyev had instructed. "The Secret Police—those cursed royal spies!—are everywhere. They know an attempt has been planned on this date against the monarchy. That is why our Leader has decided to go through with it as arranged. Having discovered the plan, the police will think we have abandoned it; expect us to change the date. Nevertheless our peril is increased. But do not be afraid. It is for the Cause."

The great capital city could be frightening to a lad from a border province, but the boy with the turned-up collar told himself he was not afraid. Who, as Andreyev had cried, could quail when his pathway was lighted by the Cause? It was a great shining torch to lead him on, a white light, deathless and historic.

"But," Andreyev had whispered, "do nothing rash. Follow the street behind the theater district. You will know the alley called Old Market by the sign advertising Citroën Automobiles at its end. Go to Number Nine. Be there exactly at half past one. Knock three times, then twice. Give the password, 'Down with the Government! Death to the Crown!'"

"Down with the Government!
Death to the Crown!"

"Then the door will open. The Leader of the Black Knights—The Leader, himself, will admit you."

The Leader! The boy from the provinces had shuddered ecstatically. He was to meet The Leader, director of the whole glorious Cause, master mind behind the Black Knights, that secret organization which made the police shake in their boots and the king tremble on his throne.

"How will I know him?"

"He will be wearing a bushy black beard," Andreyev had confided in a low voice. "A long purple opera cape, a broadbrimmed hat pulled low. Under his cape he will carry the short-handled headsman's axe with the Maltese Cross on the blade, the emblem of the Black Knights. Farewell, and remember. Old Market, Number Nine. At half past one. The Leader will give you the bomb. You, yourself, will throw it at the king. Down with the Government. Death to the Crown."

The boy had repeated the watchword through his teeth. He muttered it again, hurrying along the empty back street behind the theater district. The great city at night was scary; he had visited it but once before, as a child. And as he muttered, "Death to the Crown!" in his memory formed a domineering face with black mustaches spiked at the tips and glittering, haughty eyes that could ignore a small boy and his peasant father as if they weren't good enough to wipe the royal boots. Seen long ago, that face, but never forgotten. The youth with the turned-up collar set his teeth together and trembled a little.

SPIRED on the skyline with the moon behind it, the tower clock of Saint Ludlof the Repentant bonged twelve, midnight. He was in the city

ahead of time. But he'd wanted plenty of time to scout how the land lay. He slowed his steps, fumbling for a cigarette, then pulled into the shadow of an unlighted brick court to get out of the wind. But suddenly the match dropped, startled from his fingers. He froze against the bricks, tense, breath drawn.

The stealthy sound of a window coming open made his skin tingle. In the court wall not a yard from his head a sill was going up. Light from the street lamp did not reach the dark pane. Very quietly it was being raised. Then, from the inside, a leg came over the sill. The boy heard stifled breathing.

Inhaling a gasp, the boy dropped to a crouch behind an ash can. Sweat sprouted on his forehead as the leg over the sill was followed by another; then a body, head, shoulders, two shadowy arms. The man's boots plunked to the pavement quietly. The shadowy arms reached back into the window to haul out a parcel like a woman's hatbox wrapped in stout paper. Carefully then he closed the window, and, hugging the parcel in his elbow, peered up and down the street, warily.

From behind the ash can it was impossible to see the man's features. He wore a long old-fashioned redingote, collar flaps turned up like the blinders on a horse, and his eyes and nose were ambushed under the brim of a green fedora. Clutching the parcel, he thefted across the cobbles, prowled along a dark wall, then vanished into a between buildings alley.

The boy crept from behind the ash can with confused eyes. His confusion shocked to alarm as his glance, traveling to the invaded window, spied a dark stain on the sill where the man's hand had been. That was blood!

With an emptiness in his stomach that wasn't hunger, he moved to the window, forced up the glass, peered in. Stale warmth breathed out of inner blackness; in the dark he could discover nothing. Recklessly he struck and held a palm-cupped match.

The scared matchglimmer showed little of the room within, but what little it showed was too much. The walls and ceiling were lost in swoopy shadow, but the floor under the window came into view, and in the pallorous reach of matchlight lay the body of a man. A man in blue and scarlet uniform—night watchman, undoubtedly—boots pointed toward the window, legs together rigid, arm stiff at sides, neck trailing off into the shadow. It was the way that neck trailed off into the shadow that stole the boy's appetite out of him and made him jump back from the window in horror. The body had no head!

HIS own head reeled. That parcel under the thief's arm! Holy St. Gaudens! That thief had murdered the night watchman in there, decapitated the body and scuttled off with the head. The boy fled into the street, mouth open to call the police.

He called "Pol—" and swallowed the "ice" just in time. Great heavens! he couldn't call the police! Bring the *gendarmes* down around him when every secret agent in the city wanted nothing more than to catch him with the letter he carried in his cap? The Cause would be lost, tonight's work go undone! Hadn't he sworn a tremendous oath to let nothing stand in the way of the Cause?

But he couldn't stand here and let that fiend escape red-handed into a sleeping metropolis. The fellow might be a madman. He was a monster, a men-

ace to the People—the very type of villain the Black Knights were sworn to stamp from the country. Only there was nothing in the Black Knights' Oath that told a member what to do when he saw a fiend climb out of a window with a head under his arm. The boy looked around in gulping terror. Only one thing he could do. By the clock of Saint Ludlof the Repentant he had an hour. He must follow that fiend and somehow give warning.

Darting to the alley, he was in time to see the figure with the noisome package scoot spiderishly around the corner at the far end. Somehow he forced his sickened boots in pursuit. The trail led into a windy comb of twisted old European streets, rheumatic faubourgs where all good citizens were long in bed and curtains drawn. Never had he known a moonlit night to be so full of ghosts, haunted corners, crooked turns.

It seemed as if every *fiacre* in town had decided to keep off the cobbles. Boulevards were deserted of traffic, and there was a desolate park where the lamps were out and the wind crackled through wintry shrubbery. *Tok, tok, tok, tok*, echoed the boot-heels. The creature in the lead was walking fast. Fedora bent to the wind, redingote flapping, hurrying brazenly along as if the head under his arm were no more than three pounds of liverwurst from the butcher's.

The boy followed. If only somebody would stop that murderer! Where was everybody? Now they were crossing the Plaza Royale. He wanted to call to the *gendarme* whose conical hat and slung carbine gleamed almost comfortingly in the window of a traffic sentry box. His heart sank as the man with the package hurried boldly past the traffic station, and the *gendarme*

did not stop him. The *gendarme* was yawning, looking the other way.

The boy's legs shook, slinking him along the plaza. Three blocks farther on his heart almost stopped ticking. The man with the parcel swerved into a lane marked "Dead End Street." That was the term for it, all right.

Blank walls gloomed up on either curb of the *platz*, a chalk-white wall stood barrier at the end. On one of the side walls there was a weather-beaten circus poster, last year's, advertising the *Cirque Hiver—JoJo, Famous International Clown*. There was a small iron door in the back wall, and the clown-face on the side wall grinned hugely as the murderer halted before the little iron door to fumble in his redingote.

THE lad from the provinces did not grin. Huddled against an elm at the entry of the dead end street he watched in sick dread; heard the grit of key in lock; saw the iron door swing inward, the bearer of the evil package glide through. A glimpse of gardening beyond the wall, lawns blue with moonlight, a cold gravel path, ghostly statuary posing among shrubs. The iron door closed with the ghost of a clang; murderer and parcel were gone.

"Must be a cemetery," the watcher thought.

An owl-hoot certified his conviction. Listening, he could hear rapid footfalls fading along the gravel. Then long silence loud with the pounding of his heart. He peered from behind the elm, teeth clicking. He ran to the iron door, found it locked. He also saw that it would be impossible to scale the wall with its fringe of iron spikes at its top.

Back at the elm, he leaned on the

rough bark for support. Oh, God, what should he do? The clown face on the poster grinned sidewise at him. He wished he were at the *Cirque Hiver*. He wished he were home in bed on the old farm. He wished he were back in Andreyev's warm cellar with the Black Knights all around him in their purple robes and skull-and-cross-bones hoods, boldly scheming the overthrow of Poverty and Oppression. He wished he were anywhere but in this strange city at night watching the iron door to a soundless cemetery where a madman had gone with a head. Why hadn't the *gendarmes* caught that fiend? Where were they?

Oh, Lord! Boots sounded on gravel. The creature was coming *back!*

His hair almost doffed the cap from his head as he heard that key again and saw the iron door opening in the wall. It was he! But this time the figure in the redingote had no package; in the cemetery the parcel had been delivered.

The creature in the redingote wheeled to lock the little door, then adjusted his green fedora and walked flappily out of the dead end street. For one nightmare second as the shadow passed the elm, the eyes above the high collar glared straight at the tree where the boy was hiding. They were terrible eyes, piercing, and steely. Fierce eyes that went straight through the tree like swords to stab the boy where he huddled. Somehow they didn't see him. He heard the footsteps go *tok, tok, tok*, tapping off down the wind-swept boulevard.

How he forced his own footsteps to go after that figure, the boy never knew. One thing he did know, and the realization swept through his stomach like a taste of mint gelatine. It was up to him to capture this maniac single-handed and—that was it!—take

him to Number Nine, Old Market; turn him over to The Leader. A *bong* from the spire across far roofs filled him with new panic. One o'clock! He must report to The Leader in half an hour, and bring this monster with him. He must creep up on the creature, rush forward, leap—

But try as he would, somehow he couldn't make his shoes overtake that lonely figure. Up one street and down the next, they went, through alleys. Crossing the Plaza Royale again, where, again, the traffic *gendarme* seemed to be looking the other way. A far-away street car whined in the distance, but didn't come in sight. An auto horn, blocks away, only emphasized desolation. Was the whole city dead? Now they were passing a row of big department stores, but blinds were drawn in the show windows, the district gloomy as a hearse. The boy's forehead dripped. He'd be late at The Leader's. The Cause! The Cause! He must rush up behind that fiend—

BUT the figure up ahead saved him that desperate move. The redingote flapped suddenly into an alley that bent at an abrupt right angle off the boulevard. Watching those vanishing coattails from the opposite curb, the boy was all at once aware of a flat electric sign on the roof of the corner building, twitching letters that spelled *Citroën Automobiles* against black sky.

Blood of Sebastopol! the murderer had led him straight to Old Market, the very alley where he was to meet The Leader. On swift, shivery feet, the boy crept to the alley-mouth; then drew back into corner shadows aghast. The creature in the redingote was nowhere in sight. Footsteps had stopped. The alley was empty, cobblestones deserted,

on either curb a row of silent doors. Somewhere that figure had ducked inside.

Frost formed on the boy's temples as his eyes traveled the dark house-fronts and stopped at a shabby door. Number 9. The house showed boarded-up windows, a smeared "For Rent" card tacked to one broken sill.

Saint Ludlof the Repentant bonged half past one.

The boy pulled a breath and scrubbed his wrist across his forehead. There was no feeling in his knuckles by the time he reached that Number 9 doorstep to knock. *Bok, bok, bok—bok, bok.*

"Who's there?" The voice that answered through the wood was guttural.

"D-down," the youth managed, "with the Government. Dud-death to the Crown—"

The door opened four inches, and a face that looked like death to almost anything peered out. Fanatical eyes shadowed by a broadbrimmed black hat. Teeth, equally fanatical, in a beard that spread like some colossal black-blue fungus from ear to ear. Swooping purple opera cape that fell like a shroud from the collar, and in the wearer's left hand a short headman's axe, the blade marked with a Maltese Cross.

"Down with the Government. Death to the Crown!" the whiskers whispered on a hurricane of garlic. "Very good, young man. Come in."

The right hand shot out like a huge, hairy spider; caught the boy by the wrist. He was whisked through the door as if he were a fly.

FOR sixty seconds that dragged by like sixty years there was no sound in the world save the thumping under his ribs as his heart tried to break

through and make a get-away. Around him a hallway prowled off into darkness under a flight of bony backstairs, and doors like coffin lids shut off air on every side. There was a smell of long-cold plaster and sick breath from a gaslight that was dying of the flu on the wall, and in this algid gloom he stood like something jelled in a refrigerator while the man with the garlic whiskers, axe in hand, regarded him sternly, as if wondering which portion to cut off first.

Finally the beard ruffled in speech. "Well?"

The boy pulled his skeleton together; tugged off his cap. "The letter," he stammered out. "The letter Andrejev told me to give you."

The tarantula hand shot out to snatch the envelope. Breath came in little garlicky snorts; the fanatical eyes flashed over the missive. Addressed simply *To The Leader*, it was worded:

The bearer, Michael Croupin, is a student and a Black Knight. Sworn to the Cause, he hates the royalty and has volunteered to throw the bomb at the king. He is an idealist and ready to die for his ideals.

Hairy fingers pinned the bearer's shoulder to the wall.

"You are Michael Croupin?"

The boy nodded, dumbly.

"How old are you?"

"Nuh-nineteen."

"Ready to die for your ideals, are you? So you're the one they sent to kill the king?"

If the tone implied he might not be man enough, Michael Croupin could make no contradictory reply. Gassy hallway, dark doors, Dracula shadows, The Leader himself, whirled out of focus on Michael Croupin's eyeballs. All he could see was that short-han-

dled axe in the hairy left hand, that headsmen's axe marked with a Maltese Cross, like a huge steel tooth, shining in the dusk. He stared in terrible fascination, eyes riveted. Why couldn't he drag his gaze from the thing?

"Have you had any experience at regicide?" The Leader was saying. The steamy voice had harshened. "Have you had any experience with killing, before?"

An apple of air stuck in Michael Croupin's throat. He was peering through a window at a body that lay in matchlight, the neck trailing off abruptly into shadow, nothing beyond. He swallowed; shut his eyes; opened them to face that fanatical stare. Suspicion that had been piling up inside him became certainty as he met The Leader's fierce glare.

"Have you had any previous experience with killing?" The Leader's voice was impatient.

"Yuh-yessir." His voice squeaked, small, as if there were a mouse in his throat. He managed to make it a husk. "You—it—it doesn't seem to bother you at all, does it, sir?"

Anger, then amusement gleamed in the bearded man's eyes. He considered the axe in his left hand with an affectionate grin that showed ripe pink gums under his drawn upper lip. "Why should it bother me when it's my business? If you had killed as many as I have, young man, it would trouble you no more than slicing a chunk of bread. Of course—the first two or three—I suffered a few minor qualms. Now it is merely a matter of leaving the scene in time to change disguise."

"Do you—" Michael Croupin tried not to choke. "Do you take them all to—the cemetery—"

"Cemetery?" The fierce eyes

frowned, then twinkled. The reply was oiled by a tiger's chuckle. "What do you think I would do, take them home with me and stuff them for a trophy case? A police agent in Bulgaria I did stuff down a chimney. Ha! But the Archduke of Liechtenstein I deposited in a refuse barrel. Prince Horlitz of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha was burned in an old mattress. Well," the glare blazed savagely again, "what on earth are you sweating for? What difference what we do with them when they represent Law, the cursed Government, or the Royalty? Don't you hate the Royalty?"

Michael Croupin gave a sickly nod.

"And the Government?"

Michael Croupin inclined his head.

"And the Law?"

Michael Croupin opened and closed his mouth.

"You joined the Terrorist Movement, didn't you? You enlisted in the Black Knights who are sworn to destroy all agents of police, all arms of Law, all members of Government and Royalty. Didn't you want to be a Terrorist?"

"I—"

"Well, what," the beard snarled, "do you think a Terrorist is, someone who goes around throwing roses? Didn't you come here tonight, volunteered to throw a bomb at the king?"

"Yes," the boy whispered. "Andrejev called for volunteers."

The Leader said sternly, "And you realized such an attempt would cost you your life? You knew, when you volunteered, you were going to your death? You would be killed by the palace guards after you threw the bomb, or by the Black Knights if you didn't?"

"I realized that," Michael Croupin whispered. If his knees would only quit shuddering! He must pretend

he was not afraid. It would have been easier if The Leader hadn't been polishing that axe on the hem of his opera cape as casually as if it were a small boy's nose on a handkerchief.

THE fanatic eyes concentrated a moment on the polishing operation, then flamed at Michael Croupin's drawn face.

"Attend then. Everything is prepared. The Secret Police ordered a curfew tonight, all citizens to be off the streets. But Ulrici, head of the Secret Police, is bribed and with us. He issued a second order unknown to his colleagues; the *gendarmes* are to molest no pedestrian. The city police, then, will let us pass. We go to the palace. All sentries have been bribed. Our king's bedchamber is easy of access. We climb a balcony to his window. The sentry has been removed. The king will be absolutely unattended save for his Royal House Guards stationed at the palace rear. They will come too late. The monarch has not a friend in Svengary who can save him."

"The—the head of the Secret Police? Bribed too?"

"Pay enough," The Leader chuckled butterishly, "and we could almost bribe the king to blow himself up. However, the honor is yours. But you are pale!" The fierce eyes narrowed. "Want to back out now, is that it?"

"No," Michael Croupin whispered. "I will not back out."

"Why do you hate the king?" The Leader said suddenly.

Michael Croupin knew it was a catch question to try his loyalty to the Cause—the opening question in the ritual of the Black Knights. How often had he recited this catechism in the smoke-filled, book-wormed, idea-buzzing, beard-crammed little turnip cellar un-

der the house of Andreyev where the Black Knights met in exhilarating secrecy to plot the overthrow of Monarchy, Government, Injustice—

"I hate the king because he is rich and the People are poor—"

"I hate the king because he is the Iron Heel of Oppression—"

There were fifteen answers, all sound Terrorist doctrine. By the time he had hoarsed out all fifteen, ending with the flaming declaration, "I swear to give my life for the Cause because it is better to die young in action than of useless old age in bed—Death to the Crown!" nobody could have doubted that he, Michael Croupin, definitely hated the king.

"One last thing," The Leader was belting the axe under his cape. "You must make no mistake. Have you ever seen the king?"

Michael Croupin whispered, "Once when I was five years old my father brought me on a visit to the capital. We—we were just poor peasants, and I—I never forgot. A great room full of lords and ladies all in jewelled dress, and the people standing humbly in line. My father lifted me up and took me over to meet the king. He said, 'Sire, this is my son.'"

"What? Your father spoke to the king? Your father was a friend of the king?"

"The king was no friend," Michael Croupin remembered miserably.

"What did the king say to your father, then? Tell me that!"

"Nothing," Michael Croupin muttered. "Just stared. Haughtily. Until my poor father turned away. As if my father was a—a common dog. I was little, and I cried. Yet my father died the next year from wounds he got in the Balkan Wars serving this king. I—I never forgot. That is why

I joined the Black Knights. I—I remember the king's rich uniform, his spiked black mustache, his glittering eyes that stared—”

The Leader snarled, “You will know him, then. Only you will see some gray in the royal mustache after all these years. Ha! I fancy it would turn snow white if it knew of tonight's enterprise.” The tarantula hand swooped into the cape, produced a shiny black melon of iron with a little trigger at its stem. “The bomb! One jolt and it blows all to Perdition. I will carry it until we get there.” It went back into the cape; the tarantula hand closed on the front doorknob. “To the palace then! Death to Conrad Alejandro Alexis Svevo Cesaire Alexander vom Mecklenvurg—Peter the Third, King of Svengary! Down with the Government! Death to the Crown!”

“—to the Crown!” Michael Croupin echoed desperately, his eyes on the bugle under the purple cape. Melons had never agreed with him. This one, coming on an empty stomach (if he could only forget that body lying stiff with nothing beyond the neck) was going to make him sick.

THE LEADER walked fast; Michael Croupin could hardly keep up with him. He had to tug down the visor of his cap and set his jaw. He had to mutter the brave oaths Andreyev had taught him. He had to keep up. Above all, he must not lose his own head.

He had not expected the night to be so quiet as this. He had not expected a lopsided yellow moon to be dragging a scud of cloudy hair. He had not expected to walk boldly cross-town to the great plaza fronting the palace where The Leader had only to whistle out of

shadow for the sentry to open the massive gate.

The sentry was looking the other way. All the world seemed to be looking the other way. The moon burrowed into a cloud to let them dart unseen from bush to bush across the palace grounds, as if the sky itself had been bribed to share in the conspiracy. No soldier was there to challenge the bearded man who moved like a panther to lead Michael Croupin through a clump of laurel, across a concrete driveway, into a mass of black rhododendron under the very shadow of the palace walls.

Often enough he had seen the palace on gaudy postal cards, but this looming jumble of gables and masonry did not look like the palace on the postcards at all. It was the same marble lions, stone gingerbread and vines, but the wall against Michael Croupin's trembling elbow was rain-streaked; the gallery overhead looked shabby; a sooty stone cupid, looking down from a cornice, had lost the tip of its nose. He hadn't expected a sooty cupid with a broken nose to smile at him where he crouched in the king's rhododendrons, come there to kill the king.

“I would not like to live here,” he heard himself mumble to the bearded man.

“You didn't come here to live,” was the guttural rejoinder. “Give me a hand up to that gallery. Don't be afraid; the sentry's bribed. What are you shivering for?”

“I'm not shivering,” Michael Croupin shivered. He inhaled for courage, and a dogged light came into his eye. He thrust out a hand that was almost steady. “Can't I carry the bomb?”

The Leader snarled dissent. “You might jar it or pull the firing pin. When we reach the king's window I'll give it

to you. Don't worry, you're the one that's going to throw it."

Cords pinched on Michael Croupin's necknape as he made a stirrup of his hands and boosted the purple-robed Leader aloft to the gallery rail. The Leader's stomach was not empty. It became apparent that dealing out Terrorism had not caused the bearded one to lose weight. Any minute the boy expected either his heart or that bomb in the big man's cape would burst. But all too soon the man was up and over, reaching down a hand and breathing hot garlic down at Michael Croupin's face.

"Did I not tell you?" he puffed savagely as they crouched together on the balcony under the moon. "Didn't I say all the sentries were fixed? Why, it's easy as knifing butter. Listen—"

No sound broke the night save the cry of the wind that was hunting across the roofs, the chugging of blood in his ears, and the puffs of garlic from the bearded man's nose. Michael Croupin crouched in twitching apprehension. Lawns and shrubs seemed miles below. The moon was close.

"The window," breathed the bearded man. "Just around the corner. Come on." Stooped low, he scuttled up the gallery, keeping his head below the line of the stone rail. With bursting lungs Michael Croupin followed. Cupids looked down from the roof line and a griffin bared its fangs at the corner waterspout. Rounding the turn, Michael Croupin shocked stiff in his tracks. Pressed close to the wall, The Leader was moving on tiptoe toward a window that was open to the gallery there, a tall, stone-silled casement that must reach from floor to ceiling of the room within. A white curtain stirred in a draught, and the man caught the lace in a stealthy hand, clutching it

aside that the boy might see. The bedroom of a king! As long as he lived Michael Croupin knew he would never forget that room.

It was as vast as the railway station back home, but somehow far less comfortable. Windy corners and great bare walls and a carpet like the one in some vacant hotel. Moonlight made a blue path down the carpet, a path that seemed to go for miles before it reached the great bed in a distant corner. The bed had four posts that towered to the cloudy ceiling, and in the acres of counterpane, seen at a distance, the figure on that bed appeared no bigger than a doll.

"The king," The Leader's soft snarl touched Michael Croupin's ear. "Sleeping his last sleep, by God!"

Michael stared.

A single candle twinkled at the vast bed's foot, touching the face on the pillow with flickery light. Covers were pulled up under the chin, the nose upturned to the ceiling. Michael Croupin saw it might have been Santa Claus waiting for his Yuletide beard to grow. In the candle-gleams the cheeks were like polished apples; the eyes shut in merry wrinkles under white cotton brows; the mouth smiling cheer beneath the snowy wings of a kind old man's mustache. Had he not remembered that dominant nose, Michael Croupin could have believed it his own grandfather. It might have been any fussy old gentleman who would wake up in a cold room with arthritis—there was even a pair of shoes, toes neatly together, at the bedside.

Michael Croupin stared at the face of Conrad Alejandro Alexis Svevo Cesaire Alexander vom Mecklenvurg, Peter the Third, King of Svengary, and stiffened his resolve with an oath.

"Give me the bomb—"

COLD iron was thrust in his fingers. Slippery iron, smooth, something that weighed a hundred tons. He tried to remember what Andreyev had told him about bomb-throwing. Andreyev had demonstrated with a turnip. One must stand thus and throw so, then fall flat as a pancake to escape the blast.

"Pull yourself together," garlic breathed in his ear. "When I get around the corner of the gallery—throw it."

Michael Croupin pulled himself together. And in that desperate effort all the panic cleared from his head, the thing between his hands seemed feather light. His chin jammed out and his eyes hardened. He could hear with astonishment his own voice going, level, determined, hard as stone.

"You aren't going around the corner of the gallery. Stand there!"

The Leader was almost as amazed as Michael Croupin. "Quiet! What the devil! Do you want to wake up that—"

"Put up your hands!" Michael Croupin snapped crisply. "Put up your hands and step into that bedroom before I blow your damned head off."

"Blow my—whaaaat? You're mad! You don't know what you're doing! The Cause—think of the Cause—"

Michael Croupin shouted, "I'm thinking of it!" and nudged iron destruction into the bearded one's middle. "I thought being a Terrorist would be brave, dangerous. I—I wanted to give my life for a Cause. I thought it would mean running a gauntlet of police and outwitting Secret Service agents and destroying a monarchy that crushed people with spies and detectives and police everywhere like hobnails. Hobnails!" Michael Croupin shouted. "Hobnails? There aren't

half enough police in this country. Not one *gendarme* even stopped me tonight. I wasn't even followed. I didn't know all the sentries in the palace had been bribed, either. All we have to do is walk in. Even the head of the Secret Police is sold out. And *you!* You can just cut off a watchman's head like you did tonight and walk around with it as if it was a cabbage, nobody stopping you, and bury it in a cemetery without even—"

"You're mad!" The Leader yelped.

Michael Croupin went on. Through no volition of his own, but as if something inside of him had been wound up, turned on, and couldn't stop. "Well, Andreyev never told me the king would be deserted by everybody and lie there in that great barn of a room all alone, just a lonely old man in bed like anybody with his shoes beside the bed and his—"

The black beard cut in with a low scream, "So you think to save yourself with this trick, you little fool? Call the police. Go on! Ulrici will set me loose. I'll go Crown's evidence against you, and you'll hang like—"

"I expected to die," Michael Croupin said clearly. "I'm not scared to die. But I won't kill any poor old man in his—"

"Give me that!"

Michael Croupin never quite remembered how it happened. That spidery hand snatched out. Garlic and whisks smothered his face, and fingers like steel closed on his wrist. Pain was shooting up his arm, and the iron globe dropped from his fingers; struck the stone floor underfoot. Then a dreadful *tik-tok, tik-tok*, loud as clockwork. The Leader's frightened howl, "The fring pin!" That lightning-fast hand scooping up the bomb to hurl it spinning through the window at that bed.

FLUNG to the gallery floor, Michael Croupin saw the whole thing in one dazzling, cataclysmic flash. A burst of salmon-colored fire—a cloud of kindling where the bed had been, and the ceiling coming down and the carpet jumping up. Then the whole room was tangling together, galing out of the window as if sucked by a draught; bits of wood, metal fragments, a candlestick, cloth and plaster; objects that whistled, spun, sang, flew like birds going over his head. And leading the flock, a terrible sort of bird flew on outspread snow-white wings, trailing a whoosh of pillow feathers in its wake. It went out of the window as if shot from a gun, cleared the gallery rail, planed up against the sky. Michael Croupin had one flickering glimpse of the two closed eyes, the dominant nose, cheeks like polished apples, the mouth that smiled as it went by. He saw it soar in black silhouette against the moon, smaller and smaller. For a second it stood in profile like the head on a gold coin.

Then it was gone.

There was only sound.

Things were dropping on the grounds below like hailstones; the gallery was shaking; a dark figure in blowing cape was running like a shadow for the gallery's bend. Michael Croupin was running after him through sound, shouting, "Stop! He killed the king! Stop! Stop!"

But the bearded Leader did not get away. Michael Croupin saw another shadow, a shadow more terrible than The Leader's, come swooping around the bend of the gallery. A tall stooped figure, it was, in an old-fashioned redingote, the collar-flaps turned up like the blinders on a horse. Under the down-pulled brim of the green fedora the eyes were terrible in moonlight.

Piercing, steely, fierce eyes that flashed like swords to stop the purple-caped Leader in his tracks and freeze the boy behind The Leader to a thin statue in ice. A gun in that shadow's hand looked bigger than a cannon, and his voice was like another echo from the bomb.

"Put up your hands!"

Never had The Leader's spidery hands been quicker. "Who are you?" he gasped.

"I," the voice from the redingote collar was stern, "am the Law."

The Leader squalled, "Arrest that boy behind me! An anarchist. Just blew the king's head off with a bomb. I saw him do it, I tell you. I am the Archduke Boris, cousin of the king." He swept off his broadbrimmed hat. "Summon the head of the Secret Police. Ulrici will tell you."

"Ulrici did tell me," was the harsh retort. "Ulrici was uncovered by his own agents, and confessed three hours ago. He did not, however, know your real identity. It was to find this out that I allowed you to carry out your plan. I am happy," the harsh voice harshened, "to know at last who The Leader is. I am happy to know you, Cousin Boris."

Michael Croupin did not understand.

The Leader did not understand. "Cousin Boris?" Garlic rose above the dynamite fumes.

The figure in the redingote squared its shoulders. The collar flaps fell open. The green fedora came off. The moon sailed out from behind a cloud, and Michael Croupin was staring at a dominant nose, cheeks like polished apples, the wings of a snow-white mustache that was spruce but not pointed at the tips. Only this time the mouth was not smiling, and the eyes beneath the

white cotton brows were gleaming lights that dropped Michael Croupin stunned to his watery knees; lights that blazed blue at The Leader's face, wrung a shriek of terror from the murderous beard, sent him leaping in a whirl of purple cloth, a wild jump for the gallery rail.

Then there were garlic and dynamite fumes and a smell of gunpowder together; a sodden crash in the rhododendrons down below. Michael Croupin was on his knees, looking up into eyes that were not fierce any more.

"The king!"

From the night below a company of House Guards thundered the response. "Long Live the King—"

THE boy from the provinces was not afraid to die, but this big gray car, the shimmering lines of steel, clatter of following cavalry and vast crowd-roar ahead was terrifying. He sat in cold fear as the long car droned between surging banks of people; then it seemed as if his windpipe was choked off. They were passing a corner marked "Dead End Street," and his eyes bugged, remembering that elm, that circus poster's grin, that wall at the end with the little iron door.

"So you thought it was a cemetery," the man beside him said kindly. "I always said those statues in the grounds behind the palace made it look like a graveyard. But it must have taken spunk to trail me there and then to that house in Old Market. You thought I went into Number Nine? Lucky for me you didn't see me in the place next door with my ear to the wall. You know, Michael Croupin, I heard everything you were saying."

Michael Croupin opened his mouth; couldn't utter a sound. Sunlight

beamed down on the open car as it wheeled into the Plaza Royale, and the kindly voice was speaking above a crash of music. "One learns it is one thing to die for a Cause and another to kill other people for it. I, too, have learned something. I have at least one loyal subject." The eyes under the white cotton brows were smiling. "Last night I thought I could count on no one but myself. Imagine having to creep out of your own house to steal your own head. Imagine having to plant your own head on a pillow to await a bomb."

Michael Croupin could not imagine it. He could only stare at the sunlit boulevard ahead, at the flag-draped marquees of the theater district where massed faces roared from the curb and a sea of hats uplifted on waves of cheering. The long car purred through a blizzard of colored streamers. The king's hand was pointing.

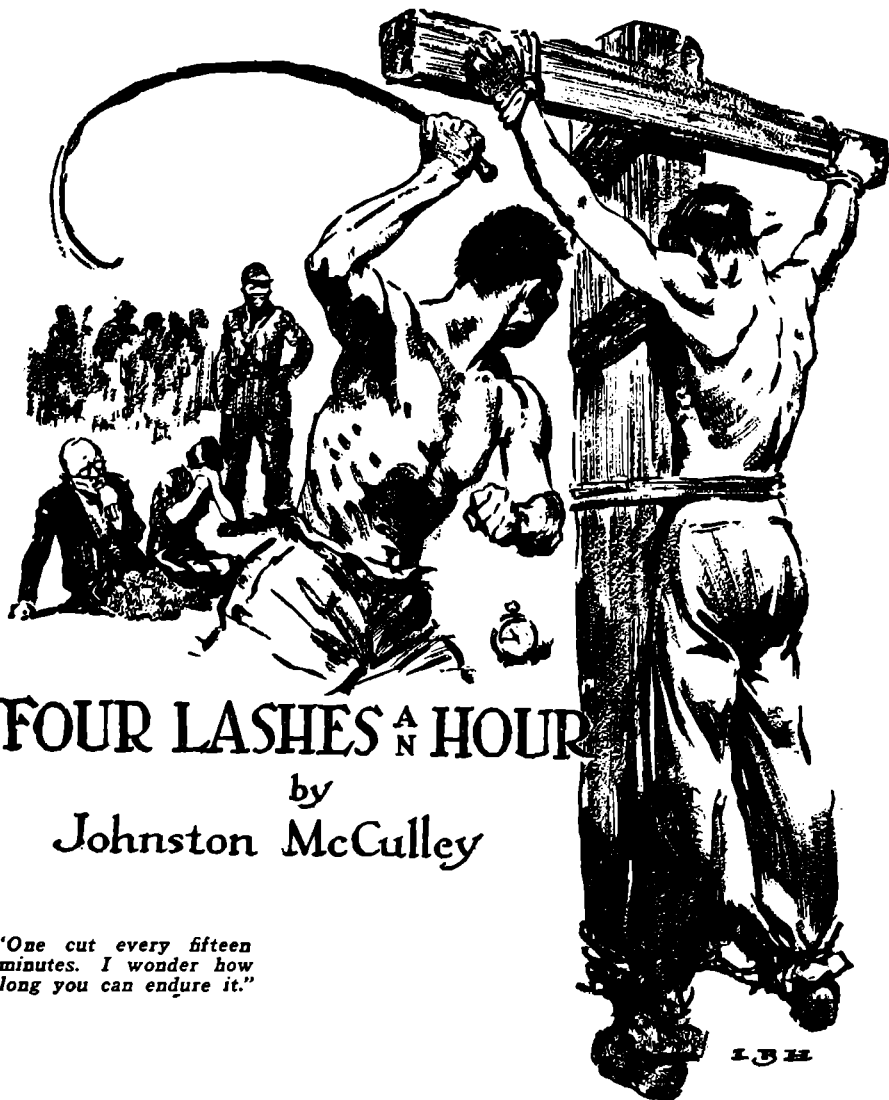
"Observe the very place I stole it from. They ought to clean up those rooms at the back; I gave my thumb a nasty cut in some of that rubbish. You know, Michael Croupin, that must be the place where your father took you to see me when you were five years old. I never did like that face they put on me, either. They do them more naturally nowadays."

In the blowing drift of paper petals, he lifted stunned eyes to the building's façade. Arched across the entrance was the sign.

Madam Gibaud's Wax-Works. Up To Date Life-Like Models Of Famous People. See Historical Characters in Wax. Great Generals. Kings—

Michael Croupin choked. But the king's hand was friendly on his shoulder, and in a bright burst of color and martial music the parade moved on.

THE END



FOUR LASHES $\frac{1}{15}$ HOUR

by
Johnston McCulley

"One cut every fifteen minutes. I wonder how long you can endure it."

BAYTON had been bound to a twelve-by-twelve post set firmly in the hard ground. The post had a cross piece about eight inches above Bayton's head. Bayton's outstretched arms were bound to the cross piece at the wrists with leather thongs, so tightly that blood circulation was impaired and already his fingers were growing numb. More thongs held him closely against the post at the waist. His ankles were tied to the post also, but so he could brace his feet about eighteen inches apart.

Bayton was naked down to his waist. They had stripped his heavy shirt off him roughly, for Bayton had put up a fight. He had hoped that the fight would result in his quick and merciful death. But perhaps they had guessed that, for death had been denied him. They had taken punishment from his fists and feet, but they had not injured him in return beyond a little necessary battering.

Bayton could move his head to either side of the post far enough to look beyond it. He could see where the others

had been compelled to sit on the ground about twenty feet in front of him. That was to be an exquisite point of this torture: they would suffer as they watched him suffering, and he would suffer to see the agony in their faces.

He braced his feet and opened his eyes. Doc Moore was sitting there, staring at him. Doc was slight in stature, nervous in manner, stoop-shouldered, and squinted through thick eye glasses. A weakling physically, but fire and courage and firm conviction inside. But that had availed him nothing. Doc was here in the hands of Chung, and the dispensary at the mission was only ashes.

Lucy Adkins sat beside Doc, her face white but otherwise inscrutable. She was a rather pretty girl, twenty-eight, tall and lithe and with strength in her body. She was a practical nurse who had been working at the mission with Doc, serving dregs of humanity regardless of race or politics. But here she was, a prisoner of Chung.

Chang's bandits were scattered in the background, eating food they had stolen from the plundered mission and gambling for bits of finery they had found. And walking slowly toward the post came Change himself.



CHANG was no ordinary human clod elevated to a position of power through chance.

He came of a good family, and had been educated in England. Political moves had ruined the fortunes of his family. So he had cast aside his real name and lineage and had become merely Chang.

From an enemy, he had stolen enough to equip a few followers, and had taken to the hills. Recruits had flocked to him, for there was always loot where Chang led his men on audacious raids. And he was a torturing fiend who had a refinement of method that made his tortures doubly fiendish.

Bayton saw with surprise that Chang was carrying an alarm clock, which no doubt he had taken from the burning mission. He put the clock down on a rock a short distance in front of Bayton. Then he stepped closer.

Chang spoke in a well-modulated voice, using precise English:

"You are Phil Bayton, the famous traveler and writer of books. I have been told that you are the unusual combination of brains and brawn. That point has interested me. It has always been my contention that the greater the intelligence of a man the greater his imagination and mental suffering under stress. The ignorant brute can endure greater physical pain than the man who had become supersensitive through developed mentality."

Bayton drew himself up. He was six feet and some inches tall, built like a giant, with great strength.

"Let's cut it short, Chang," Bayton suggested. "You're going to experiment to see whether my mentality can stand up under torture to my physically fit body—is that it?"

"How quickly you grasp things," Chang said.

"How are you going about the experiment?"

"The whip on your back, Mr. Bayton, but not in the usual manner. One cut of the lash every fifteen minutes, by this clock you see before you. Four lashes an hour. I wonder how long you can endure it."

"An interesting experiment," Bayton said.

"After each blow, my executioner will demand your name, and you will answer him. The answer will inform us you still have command over your mind and body. To give you an incentive—as long as you are able to answer, these two friends of yours, Dr. Moore and the lady, will be unharmed. However, when you reach the point where you no longer are able to give your name—But I am sure it is unnecessary for me to go into details."

"Quite unnecessary," Bayton replied. "The cruelties and injustices of Chang are well known, and he can't be expected to act like a human being toward prisoners."

Chang smiled slightly. "If it is in your mind that insults will enrage me and cause me to order your death, you may put such thoughts aside. I read the book you published two years ago,

in which one chapter was devoted to me. You made me out quite a monster. It would be unkind of me not to live up to that estimation. I would not make you out a liar."

"I'm quite sure you'll not," Bayton replied.

Chang smiled and gestured. A giant of a man stepped forward. He wore only tattered cotton breeches and straw sandals. His naked torso glistened with sweat. The whip he held was a knout, of the sort used in the days of the tsars.

Bayton braced himself as the executioner took up a position behind him and a little to one side. As the knout swished through the air, Bayton suddenly relaxed. The force of the blow was broken, but it was strong enough to bring blood and raise a welt.

"What is name?" the executioner demanded.

"Phil Bayton, you offspring of a sow!"

The executioner glared at the insult, but tossed the knout on the ground and sat down cross-legged in front of the clock. Doc Moore's face had turned white. Lucy Adkins had closed her eyes and swayed slightly against the doctor.

"Four lashes an hour, at intervals of exactly fifteen minutes," Chang said. "That is all. You may watch the clock yourself to see there is no cheating. A strong man should endure such a thing for a long time, you think? Fifteen minutes should give him ample time to recuperate from a blow and give him strength to endure the next? We shall see."



IT started in mid-afternoon. It was not so bad at first. Bayton recuperated between blows. But now his arms were numb and his legs seemed like lead. He found that the actual pain of the blows did not distress him as much as the anticipation of them. The cruelty was mental more than physical.

Doc Moore and Lucy Adkins remained where they were sitting. Chang sent them food in the evening. The executioner gave Bayton a gulp of stagnant water. Chang was away somewhere, knowing Bayton would not break

so early. In the background, the bandits still crouched around their cooking fires.

Sunset painted the rocky hills, and the dusk came. The executioner put a shielded candle on the ground so the dial of the clock would be illuminated. Bayton began fighting himself to keep from watching the clock.

At the end of each fifteen-minute period, the executioner got up, stretched his arms and legs, picked up the knout and took position. The lash fell across Bayton's back, which was becoming a mass of welts from which blood oozed.

"What is name?"

"Phil Bayton, scum!"

Stars and moon wheeled the sky. Leaning against each other, Doc Moore and Lucy Adkins slept the sleep of exhaustion. Bayton dozed at times against the post, to be awakened by the sting of the lash and a voice demanding his name.

Dawn came stealing over the hills, then the merciless sun blazed down. Swirls of mist rose from the rocks. Yawning, Chang approached.

"You endure the ordeal remarkably well," Chang said. "For the sake of your friends, I hope you remain conscious a long time."

The hours passed. Bayton found it impossible to keep from watching the clock. His anticipation of the blows caused him mental suffering. He watched the hands of the clock getting closer and closer to the moment—

Swish . . . thud!

"What is name?"

"Phil Bayton."

Doc Moore and the girl were fed again, and again the executioner gave Bayton a gulp of water. The blazing sun broiled his lacerated back. He told himself he must hang on, must always be able to answer with his name.

Bayton knew something Chang did not know, that a detachment of Chinese regulars were approaching the mission. The soldiers would make short work of Chang and his men if they could make a surprise attack. He must hold on until the troops came. Perhaps Chang would not be able to destroy his prisoners in the last moment.

Mere physical punishment would take

a long time to break him down. But mental agony might do it sooner. He watched the clock. Five minutes or so before time for a blow, he began feeling the lash across his back. His body crawled, twitched. He anticipated the cut, the sting, wondered whether this time it would fall high across his shoulders or nearer the waist.

The thing for an intelligent man to do, since he could not prevent his mind working, was to compel it to serve him, guide it into proper channels. He could think of other things, could carry himself away from his predicament, from this scene, on the wings of memory. He could make his mind so active with memories that it would not take cognizance of what was happening to his body here and now.

He cast about in his mind for some topic which would be engrossing, and found it readily. There came now to Phil Bayton the thought which has come to thousands of men facing an extremity:

How came I here?

By what strange trail of circumstances had Phil Bayton arrived at this post in China, a prisoner of a bandit, suffering the ignominy of the lash? What had started him on the long journey which had brought him to this end?

He closed his eyes, and his mind went back. . . .



BEAUTIFUL, alive, vibrant Sue Fielding had been all of those. Bayton had fallen in love with her at college. There had been a night on the campus when he had held her against him tightly, fiercely, as if he never would let her go. Their lips had met and clung.

When commencement came, Bayton had made no definite decision regarding his future life. Sue Fielding seemed puzzled that he should have both brain and brawn in predominating quantities. She admired him as an athlete, as a woman always admires a strong man who gives her a sense of protection. But she admired his mental qualities more.

The few little things he had written in his senior year, which he had sold to magazines—how proud she had been of

them! He would become a famous writer, she declared. He must concentrate on his work, let nothing interfere. She would wait. When success came, and it was possible economically so she would not be a burden to him, they would be married.

So Phil Bayton had started his battle against the world. He had a measure of success at first, for his work was bright and fresh. Then it grew stale.

"You're not doing the thing you want to do, Bayton," an editor told him.

"Writing is what I want to do."

"But you're not writing what you want to write. You're writing what you think will sell immediately, not what you actually want to put on paper. There's no enthusiasm, no fire in your stuff. If you ever hear the far-off places calling to you—"

"That's it! They're always calling."

He got his chance within a month, to go with an exploring party. In a burst of enthusiasm, he told Sue Fielding about it. She took the news coldly, refused to meet him half way in his ambitions.

"With your fine mind, you want to be a common adventurer," she accused. "That's the brawn in you fighting and overcoming the brain."

So they quarreled, and she gave him back his ring. It was a pity, for the expedition he was to have joined was postponed. But the far places still called to him, and now he did not have the anchor of a fiancée to hold him.

Swish . . . thud!

"What is name?"

"Phil Bayton."



FOR the first time in his life, he got drunk on the boat going over. He never was quite sure how he got to Marseilles. But there he roamed alone at night in the wrong part of town. There was a fight in a narrow street, with knives flashing in the fitful light and Bayton, with his back against a wall, defending his life and what money he had on his person.

"Stand to'm, matey!" a squeaky voice called.

Out of the night dashed a strange man to stand beside him and fight with him, a much smaller man who seemed to know the rules of this sort of combat. It ended with one of his attackers on the ground with a knife in his breast, others scurrying like rats to their dark holes, and Bayton's unknown benefactor clutching his arm and whispering for him to hurry, that the *gendarmes* were coming on the run.

Then, flight through the narrow, evil-odored streets, and escape. Tommy Delch—that was his name—giving directions and advice. Gasping, panting, they reached a hole where the air stank, where men moved furtively through the shadows, but where Tommy Delch declared they were safe.

"You did for'm proper, matey," Tommy Delch whispered, as they drank thin sour wine. "Took his own knife away from'm and used it on'm. A man with your size and strength—they could use you where I'm goin'."

"Where are you going?" Bayton asked.

"I'm joinin' the Legion, matey, no less. There's somethin' behind me in Lunnon . . . but never mind that. The Foreign Legion, matey. 'Tis a haven and a refuge—"

"Why not?" Bayton said. He joined the Legion with him.

At Sidi-bel-Abbes, he towered above the other recruits and soon attracted the unwelcome attention of the non-coms. Such a giant of a man who carried himself as if he thought he was the equal of any might have ideas regarding his importance, they thought.

But they had difficulty "whittling down" Bayton. He endured their petty cruelties, fought when fight was forced on him, and won respect. Only one, a certain Sergeant Krontz, remained vindictive.

Drill . . . full packs under a broiling sun . . . extra duty for every slight infraction of rules . . . recreation hours spent in swilling thin wine in native dives . . . trouble about passes . . . up in front of caustic Captian Foulard for a lecture . . . Algiers . . . a certain langorous beauty at whom Phil Bayton laughed and turned aside—because he

could not get the memory of Sue Fielding out of his mind.

Into the desert country . . . the monotony of life in a post around which the wind-shifted sand hissed like a thousand serpents . . . drill . . . Sergeant Krontz' enduring enmity . . . death always lurking behind the next sand dune.

Then the reconnaissance march which started at midnight . . . plod, plod, plod! . . . a blazing sun . . . a gun exploding behind a rock!

The parched earth seemed to vomit the Beni Ulad. They swept down to complete the ambush with a massacre. Legionnaires tossed up their arms and dropped. Shots echoed from the crags and bullets sang as they ricocheted. A machine-gun stuttered. Bayton was at the gun. His comrades were strewn around him, some with eyes glazed and others moaning and cursing. A face-blackened wounded man crawled to him—Sergeant Krontz.

"You are a dog, Bayton, but a fighting dog. Relief column on the way . . ."

"When we get out of this, Krontz, I'll remember you called me a dog."

Back at the post again, the sorry remnant of them, licking their wounds. Whispers passing among the men. Tommy Delch holding Bayton's hand and dying with a grin on his face. Then a bright moonlight night when the officers obligingly remained in quarters or turned their backs. Bayton and Krontz beside the wall, the latter without insignia of rank, and men of the battalion gathered around them. . . . Veterans talk yet of that battle, and call it the an hour before Krontz finally went down to stay down, and Bayton reeled aside and collapsed.

Things were easier after that. Bayton got his corporal's stripes when they went back to Algiers. He and Sergeant Krontz became friends. Afterward, he made much of Krontz in the book he wrote when he got out of the Legion, the book which made such a furor and established Phil Bayton in the literary world. He wondered if Sue Fielding had read it. . . .

Swish . . . thud!

"What is name?"

"Phil Bayton, you scavenger dog!"



.... A TUMBLER desert waste, then a jungle almost impenetrable. Abode of reptilian life, fauna that seemed of another world, a climate which changed the natures of men and even their modes of thought.

Bayton had no difficulty connecting himself with the expedition searching for Mayan ruins and intending to study Mayan customs and culture. Irascible Dr. Burnsten, the scientific head of the expedition, accepted him instantly. Bayton had brains, endurance, strength which would prove of value in emergency.

But Dr. Burnsten's seemingly ridiculous discipline irked him. It was a childish discipline based on innumerable petty rules, not the strong discipline of the Legion.

The latter made men and welded them together, whereas Dr. Burnsten's sort of discipline caused them to grow peevish and dissatisfied and wrecked morale.

Bayton rebelled without showing it. He broke away one Sunday afternoon alone, saying he was going hunting. He penetrated the jungle in a direction none of the expedition had gone. In an hour he was lost.

The jungle pressed down, enveloped, smothered. The silence hammered at his ear drums, was broken only by a sibilant whispering Bayton could not translate. He fought the tangled growth, stumbled on. Fear came to him for the first time in his life.

But he controlled himself. He tried to was nothing which would burn.

He fired his revolver once, strained his ears listening for a reply which did not come, then decided to save his remaining cartridges.

He wandered until he struck a sluggish, crooked river into which the jungle dipped its branches on either side. The water was reddish, with slimy green streaks in places. Bayton followed the river.

On he staggered through the jungle, perspiration bathing his body, his boots sinking into the ooze. For two days and nights he traveled, following the sluggish stream. Gradually he came to higher

ground, and the vegetation changed, and the air was not so charged with odors of fetid jungle growth. Then he reached a clearing, sprawled thankfully beside a pool of clean, cool water and drank, rolled over and slept dreamlessly.



HE was prodded awake, to find a score of natives around him. They were tall, with intelligent faces, wore garments of skins and feathers which seemed to follow a fashion.

Bayton got to his feet and stretched his limbs. The attitude of the natives was not hostile. One, who seemed to be their leader, bowed before him, spoke in a tongue Bayton did not understand. Bayton bowed in return, then held his head high. Two men brought food forward, well-roasted flesh, and Bayton ate thankfully. The leader spoke, and a garment was put over Bayton's shoulders—a magnificent cape of gorgeous bird feathers.

They indicated he was to go with them. They followed a curving path through the jungle growth, making for higher ground. Sentinels were stationed along the path. Through a narrow pass they went, and suddenly Bayton looked down upon a small blue lake surrounded by high rock walls. On the shore of the lake was a city built of rock, with a magnificent building at one end, which had the aspect of a temple or ruler's palace.

Bayton inspected the tribesmen as they entered the city. They were intelligent-appearing, well dressed after their manner. Their habitations followed a decent architectural design. The utensils he saw were serviceable, not makeshift. There were signs of a civilization and culture.

Bayton was taken to the big building, and ascended a flight of stone steps to a wide portal where six magnificent specimens of the tribesmen stood on guard. There was a long wait in a large hall. Another robe, more magnificent than the first, was draped over Bayton's shoulders.

They took him to a large room where men and women stood ten deep around the walls. The women were dressed in clinging robes. They were tall, straight,

and looked at him with lively interest.

A command rang out, and those in the room prostrated themselves. Bayton was led forward to the front of a huge stone throne upon which sat a withered old man whose eyes gleamed strangely. This was the *cacique*, Bayton judged.

The *cacique* addressed him. Bayton bowed slightly, then raised his head and looked about as one superior to them all. They did not seem to resent this. The withered old man was helped down until he stood directly in front of Bayton. He was trembling, but he put out a scrawny hand and touched Bayton on the arm, then gestured, and the guards cleared a path to another door.

Bayton was made to understand that was his apartment into which he was ushered now. There was considerable hand-clapping to summon servants. Half naked girls entered with huge jars of warm, perfumed water, and emptied the water into a stone tub equipped with a drain. A bath!

While the bath was being prepared, heaps of clothing were brought for him, platters of cold meat, queer fruits. Strains of strange music came from somewhere. The *cacique* and his men retired, but the maidens prepared to give Bayton his bath. He drove them out and dropped the skin hangings in front of the door. He heard them jabbering in the corridor.

Bayton took his bath, and dressed in some of the garments. His sheath knife was almost as sharp as a razor, and he managed to shave after a fashion. He kept his knife and revolver on his body, and his matches, flashlight, pipe, a pouch half filled with soggy tobacco.

No doubt he was being watched, for now the skins were lifted over the doorway, and some of the maidens entered again, to stand against the walls like servants awaiting orders. There was more strange music, and the *cacique* came, holding by the hand one of the most gorgeous women Bayton ever had seen.

She was tall, straight, young. Her skin was almost bronze, her eyes dark, her long dark hair cascading to her hips. Her clinging robe revealed a form over which an artist would have raved. She

wore a girdle of gold in which gems flashed, and her firm young breasts were held up by a golden band.

The *cacique* made quite a speech, put the woman's hand in Bayton's and withdrew. The woman sat on the bench and drew Bayton down beside her. She crooned to him, ran her fingers through his thick hair. She clung to him so closely that Bayton could feel the warmth of her body.

Fiction stuff, he thought. Perhaps they took him for a god whose coming had long been awaited, and this was the fair daughter of the *cacique* who was given him for wife. He got up and strode around the room, stopped and looked at the maidens against the walls. They bowed their heads and hurried outside, dropping the skins over the doorway. He was alone with the *cacique's* daughter.

But he did not try to profit by the situation. She got hold of his hand and pulled him down beside her on the couch again, and spoke rapidly in her own tongue. There was love-making in her voice. And as Bayton leaned back, she slipped her arms around his neck and kissed him. That meant the same in any language.

He smiled at her, got up, took her hands and lifted her. Slowly, he led her to the doorway, lifted the skins and gestured for her to go. A puzzled expression came into her face, but she hung her head and obeyed.

Bayton ate more, slept, awoke to hear another burst of wild music. The *cacique* appeared with another beautiful maiden. The first had not been acceptable in Bayton's eyes, the *cacique* thought. Bayton shook his head after scarcely looking at the girl, and the *cacique* retired with her.



THE night passed, and in the morning, after another meal, Bayton went down the long corridor and to the entrance of the palace. The guards sprang to attention. One called in a strident voice, and others came running. They were not hostile—they formed an escort of honor.

So Bayton began his trips through the city. He learned a few words of the

language. He inspected buildings, saw how crops were raised and stored, tried to study the economic and political systems and religious belief. When he passed, men bowed in the dirt, but the young women stood still and straight so he could inspect them. He realized he was expected to pick his own mate after rejecting the *cacique's* daughter.

Here was material for a book. He charged his mind with data, for he had no writing materials. He made mental notes of the designs and inscriptions on the walls. What he would have given for a camera and a few rolls of film!

Then he realized there was civil turmoil over something, and that possibly he was the something. The old *cacique* had a political enemy in another man who seemed a sort of vizier. Bayton caught a word here and there. And once the *cacique's* daughter came running to his apartment, terrified, and jabbered a torrent of words he could not understand. She seized his arm, tried to pull him along with her, and Bayton went.

She led him through a corridor to the rear of the great room where he first had seen the *cacique*. Holding back the skins from a doorway, putting finger to lips in plea for silence, she let him look through.

The *cacique* was on the stone throne, and the vizier stood on the steps below him. The vizier was making a speech, his tone sarcastic. Sullen men lined the walls. They stepped out as the vizier reached a peroration and lifted his arm.

The old *cacique* was bristling with rage. He, too, lifted an arm, and with a gesture ordered the vizier to be gone. But the vizier laughed, and his followers surged forward. Bayton felt the girl beside him clutching his arm, jerking him, heard a few muttered words, saw the fright in her face. He understood a few words, and knew he was looking upon a political assassination.

Bayton brushed the skins aside and strode into the room. With great strides, he reached the steps which led to the throne, and sprang upon them. The vizier recoiled, shouted to his followers. A spear was hurled, and grazed Bayton's arm.

He jerked out the revolver he wore always beneath his robe, and fired one

shot. Purposely, he hit the man who had thrown the spear. He howled and collapsed with a bullet in his leg. The others in the room prostrated themselves. The old *cacique* trembled, but remained on his throne.

Bayton felt the need of saying something.

"Outside!" he howled, gesturing wildly and lifting the gun again. "Out, rats! I don't know what it's all about, but the old boy's been good to me and I'm standing by him. Out!"

They howled and rushed out, taking the wounded man with them. Bayton found the *cacique's* daughter clinging to him, trying to kiss him, weeping and crooning at the same time.

The vizier was not done. Battle began that night. But Bayton wanted no part of it. He had assured himself that the old *cacique* probably could control the situation now. And Bayton wanted to get away during the confusion.

He had a small bundle which contained a few images he had found in a temple, a building brick with an inscription on it, other articles to prove his story if he lived to tell it. He made up a pack of cold food, and fastened a skin of water to his shoulder. As the battle raged, he slipped from the palace and got to the jungle trail, hurried along it, alert to dodge sentinels if they had not all hurried to the town.

He found the stream and started down it. Then began his long fight with the jungle again. He was a broken man when some tribesmen far down the river found him—the tribesmen who had seen white men before and knew something of their talk.

Then a long period of recuperation, and a return to the civilized world. Bayton wrote his second book. Dr. Burnsten denounced him as a fakir, despite the images and building brick which he had brought out. Scientific societies argued about it, and Bayton prospered.

A year later, it all seemed like a nightmare to him. Aviators who tried to locate the ancient city by the lake had failed. Explorers said the jungle could not be penetrated at that point for any important distance by an expedition large enough to be of valuable service.

Funds for such an expedition were not forthcoming. Interest died.

But a museum had the articles Bayton had brought out, and he had memories—

Swish . . . thud!

"What is name?"

"Phil Bayton, thou hunk of pony dung!"

The sun was sinking again. Doc Moore walked around nervously in front of the post, with Lucy Adkins clinging to his arm. They looked at Bayton.

"Don't worry," he croaked at them. "I'm a long way from breaking."

Chang inspected him.

"Remarkable!" Chang admitted. "But you'll break in time."

"Not as long as I have things to remember," Bayton said.



IT was a night of terror in Vladivostok. Bayton had been caught there waiting for a ship for the States. He had no personal concern in the political upheaval. It was the average human being he studied, not political moves.

He had gone to a café to dine. The place was crowded with men and women who spoke in whispers and glanced at one another furtively. They were well-dressed, prosperous-looking men and women, not hungry scum such as a man stumbled over out in the streets.

Bayton knew he was being observed closely. He was a stranger here, and at the moment all strangers were under suspicion.

He glanced up from his food as somebody stopped at his table. He saw a woman, tall and dark and dressed becomingly. Her eyes were dancing with excitement, and her smile was a ravishing thing. She was touching the back of a chair across the small table from Bayton.

"It is permitted?" she asked.

Bayton arose, bowed, held the chair for her while she seated herself. She stripped off her long gloves as she looked around nervously. Jewels flashed in the rings she wore.

"You may call me Olga," she said. "And act as though we were very friend-

ly, as though we were—perhaps lovers."

Bayton smiled. "It should not be difficult for any man to act that way toward you, madame."

"Mademoiselle," she corrected.

"But I am curious to know—"

She stopped him with a gesture. "To know why I come to your table, pretend we are old acquaintances? I am in danger, and need a friend."

"And have none? Don't you run a risk making a friend of a stranger?"

"In these days, strangers are often better friends than those one knows well," she said.

The waiter hovered near. Bayton beckoned him, raised his eyebrows at the woman. She ordered food and wine. The waiter hurried away.

"Music and laughter," she said. "Yet they are sitting on a volcano. That is Russia. They know what may happen at any moment, but will not admit it."

"I'm sailing in the morning for Seattle," Bayton said.

"Yes, I know."

"You know?"

"I have made it my business to know. I have need of the services of a man who is sailing immediately, a man who can be trusted, preferably an American."

"You are sure I can be trusted?"

"I am sure," she said, simply.

"What is it you wish?" Bayton asked.

"After we have dined, you'll pretend we are leaving. Naturally, you will hold my cloak for me. Just inside, at the throat, is a package. As you help me with the cloak, take the package in such a manner that none will see."

"And then—?" Bayton asked.

"You are to sail on the *Continental*. I shall try to get aboard also. If I manage, you will kindly return the package to me. If I cannot manage, you will open the package and deliver the contents to the person whose name and address you will find written on a slip of paper inside. The address is in San Francisco. You will be well rewarded."

"Will you tell me what the package contains?"

Her face grew bitter. "All that is left of a dynasty." Quickly, she smiled again for the benefit of those who might be watching.



BAYTON continued his meal. There was music and dancing. The woman who called herself Olga chatted with him, smiled, acted like a woman flirting a little. Bayton observed her closely. She was a woman of culture and refinement, no jewel-bedecked adventuress such as could be found in almost every café in Russia at that hour.

They finished their dinner. She nodded slightly, and Bayton rose quickly and walked around to her. He clutched the cloak as she got out of her chair, smiling at him over her shoulder.

"Pray that we meet on the ship," she whispered.

He pretended to laugh at what she said. He got the package without much difficulty, and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat as he put it on. He tossed money to the waiter, who bowed and waved them toward the door.

They were almost to the door when the café was invaded. Shouted orders, rushing soldiers, a sudden cessation of the music brought screams from the diners. Faces turned white.

Bayton found himself and the woman the center of a charge. She was torn from his side. He had a glimpse of her white face, then others were between them.

"What—?" Bayton began.

An officer brushed against him, seized his arm and motioned him to the door. "For questioning."

"I'm Phil Bayton, an American. I know nothing of the woman. She came to my table uninvited. I supposed she was a—"

The officer shook his head. "Not that one. However, we have been watching her. We know you are not one of her intimates. A few questions—"

Bayton seemed to acquiesce. He buttoned his overcoat and turned up the collar. His huge bulk filled the doorway as he passed through. There was turmoil outside. The woman was being put into a carriage. The officer stepped forward, shouting commands.

Bayton struck aside a soldier and ran. A gun exploded behind him, but the bullet sang off to his right. Then he was in deep shadows.

He made the ship safely. The captain, an old friend, hid him until sailing time. Later, in his cabin, he took out the package and looked at it. Inside the paper wrapping was a bag of chamois. Inside the bag was a mass of glittering jewels and a scrap of paper containing a name and address. The name was that of a Russian refugee in San Francisco, a man before whom thousands formerly had bowed.

Bayton whistled, then stowed the bag away safely. He left his cabin and drifted to the smoking room. As he sipped his drink, he listened to the talk of two passengers at a table a few feet away.

"Yes, the Princess Olga . . . grabbed her and hustled her away to prison . . . firing squad this morning . . ."

Bayton gulped the remainder of his drink quickly. He was thinking of her regal bearing, her brave smile. He knew now who had missed the boat, and why. . .

Swish . . . thud!
"What is name?"
"Phil Bayton."



IT had grown dark again. The dial of the little clock was illuminated by the candle.

Bayton found his eyes focused on it, watching the hands. Fifteen . . . fourteen . . . thirteen minutes more, and the knout would cut into his back again!

Doc Moore and Lucy Adkins were sitting a few feet away, their faces ghastly in the moonlight.

"Hello . . . people," Bayton croaked.

"Bayton!" Doc Moore cried. "You can't endure much more, man. There can be only one end."

"Why should you weaken?" Bayton asked. He tried to laugh, hoping Chang was near enough to hear it, but only a croaking sound came from his throat. "How are you, Miss Adkins?"

"I—I'm all right," she said.

"Maybe all of us will be, if I can hold on a little longer. Something may happen at dawn."

"What?" Doc Moore cried. "What can—"

"Can't tell you now. Our handsome friend may understand English."

"He's not the same one," Doc Moore said. "They change 'em every few hours."

"They all look . . . alike to me," Bayton replied. "Must stop talking . . . save strength . . ."

He had difficulty sending his mind away this time. He closed his eyes.

"Must get my mind—far away—" he muttered.



HE hadn't really been taking sides that time in Mexico. He had been studying ancient civilizations again. He knew vaguely there was dissention, talk of a revolution. But he had already made plans to leave.

In the pink dawn, shots awakened him. He tumbled out of bed and into his clothes. By the time he was ready to leave his room, a battle was in progress in the street and around the plaza.

The hotel office was a scene of excitement. The small windows had been shattered. Two wounded men were groaning on the floor, having crawled in from the street.

Bayton wanted to get away. He wanted none of this. He had the data he had come to collect, and his publishers were waiting for his new book. He was eager to get back to New York.

The battle surged to the other side of town. Bayton engaged a frightened peon to carry his scant luggage. They hurried down the street to the railroad station.

Government troops held the station. A train was due soon, and officials might wish to escape on it if the battle went against them. They did not bother Bayton, for they knew him and his purpose there.

Bayton prepared to depart on the train. The surge of battle came toward the station. It was engulfed, men were firing around it, falling, dying. Bayton tried to leave, to go up the tracks. Twice he was driven back from the door. He was not sure who was firing at him.

On the platform, not far from the door, was an abandoned machine gun ready for service. Its crew had fled. Bayton knew how to work that gun alone. If he could clear a path with it, perhaps he could get through.

There came a lull in the fighting, and he darted out on the platform. Bullets were zipping around him. They were firing at him, and they knew his identity, knew he had no concern in this. So Bayton went into action.

He gave a screech of defiance such as he had given in his Legion days. The gun stuttered and swept the end of the platform clean. Bayton left it and started to run down the track.

He pitched forward into flaming oblivion.

It was dusk when he regained consciousness. Moaning men were on every side of him. There was a stench of blood. He twisted from the squirming pile. Somebody grasped his arm and helped him.

"Ah, *señor*, you live again? I saw it, *señor*. They creased your head with a bullet, then picked you up and tumbled you in here with the rest of us."

"Who did?" Bayton asked.

"The rebels. They were victorious, *señor*. The *federalistas* fled on the train. But you sprayed them well with that gun, *señor*. However—"

"It was the rebels I sprayed?" Bayton asked.

"The rebels? *Sí, señor!* So you know what will happen to you at dawn, as will happen to the rest of us. But a man lives only once, and perhaps the next life will be better. Could I trouble you for a cigarette, *señor?*"

"We'll both smoke," Bayton replied.

They lit smokes, and Bayton passed the remainder of the package to men near him.

"It will be dawn in an hour," the man beside Bayton said. "Twenty-eight of us here. The firing squad will have a busy time of it. You are an *Americano*, it is true, but you sprayed them with bullets, *señor!* And a damned good job you did!"

Dawn crept through the window. The mist swept through and sweetened the air. Men carrying rifles appeared in front of the door.

A screaming man was led out and his arms bound behind him. Another went stoically. Boots thumped the ground as they were led away. A volley crashed.

The men came back and opened the

door again. They jerked out another man. One fought, and they thumped his skull with a gun butt. Another volley cracked in the gathering day.

Two by two.

"I am happy to have met you, *señor*, and to have had this last smoke with you," the man beside Bayton said. "I am Felipe Cortez—not that it matters now. My parents expected great things of me. *Señor, á Dios!*"

"*Dios.*" Bayton muttered, choking.

They led Felipe Cortez out and tied his arms behind his back. The end of the cigarette still dangled from his lips.

"Come, *señor*, or we come in for you," growled a man at the door.

"Come in for me. It'll make it more interesting," Bayton growled in reply.

"It is best to submit and die quickly and quietly, *señor*. That is much better than to die slowly, by inches, as will surely happen to you if you cause us annoyance. Come out."

"Come in. I am waiting, scum!" Bayton called.

But they did not come. The *federalistas* had returned with reinforcements. A volley smote the firing squad even as Felipe Cortez died with a smile of derision on his lips. Battle raged again. And in time Bayton was released, and went to New York to write his book. . . .

Swish . . . thud!

"What is name?"

"I . . . I . . ."

"What is name?"



BAYTON opened his paining eyes. He tried to collect the little strength he had remaining. His lips twitched when he tried to move them. He seemed stricken dumb.

He saw Doc Moore's burning eyes. Lucy Adkins was on her feet, holding out her hands to him imploringly.

"Chang! Master!" the executioner called. "He cannot give answer!"

Chang came hurrying from the nearest cooking fire, where he had been giving orders to his men.

"So it is the end?" Chang asked.

Pain shot along Bayton's parched throat. He closed his eyes, gulped.

"I . . . am . . . Phil . . . Bayton," he croaked. "And you . . . Chang . . . you scum . . ."

Chang's eyes glittered.

"I think one more time," he said. "One more fifteen minutes."

Bayton kept his eyes closed. He was trying to start a flow of saliva down into his throat. He did not see the clock now, but could hear it ticking. Each tick brought the blow of the knout nearer. It would cut into his lacerated back. It would bite and sting. Then the question would come, and he must be able to answer. Doc Moore and the little nurse were depending on him.

His mind refused to invade the field of memory again. Mind and body both were almost at the end of endurance. If he could only think of something!

There was that expedition into Africa, when the natives had attacked. There had been a political move behind that. The natives had been furnished new and modern firearms. Rifles had cracked, as they were cracking now.

As they were cracking now!

Bayton heard Doc Moore yell something, heard Lucy Adkins give a wild cry of alarm. He fought to get his eyes open. Chang's men were scattering, yelling, firing, running for their ponies. The prisoners were forgotten. The Chinese regulars had arrived to make their surprise attack.

Then Doc Moore was cutting away the thongs which bound him to the post, and Lucy Adkins was holding water to his lips. A Chinese officer was hurrying toward them.

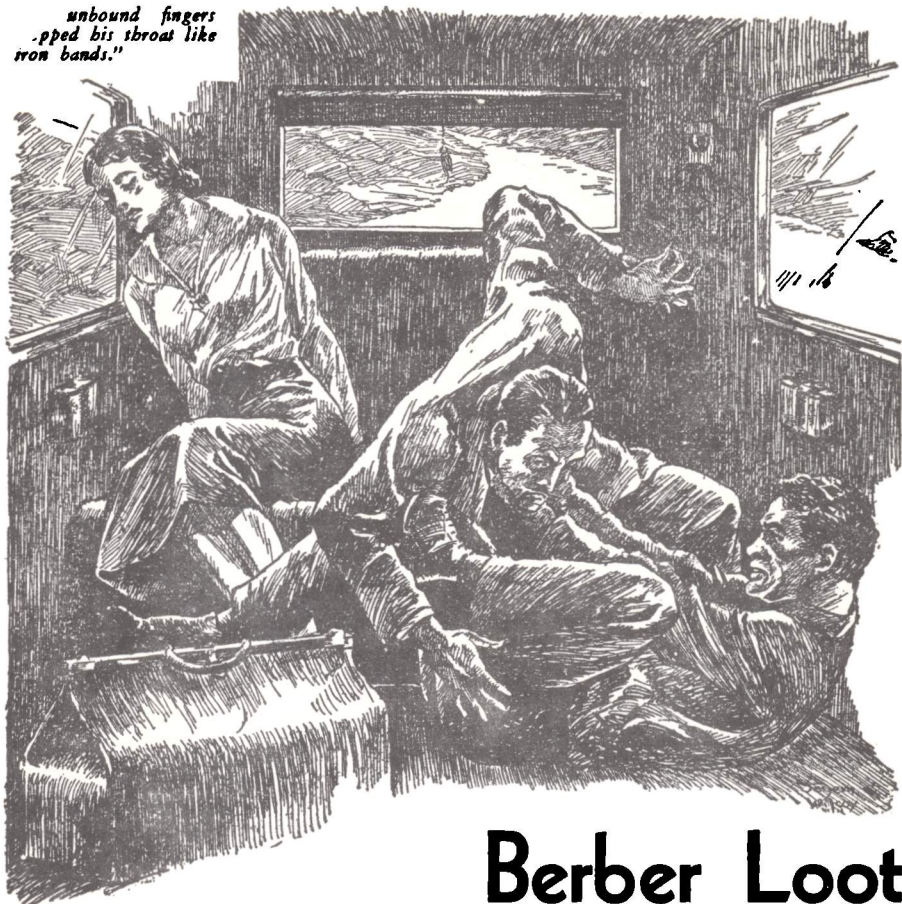
Bayton was thinking: "A great chapter for the new book . . . write the things you've lived . . . Sue . . . Sue Fielding, I've had enough of wandering . . . I'm coming to find you . . . as soon as I can."

"Bayton!" Doc Moore was babbling. "It was just in time. You couldn't have held on half an hour longer."

Bayton smiled weakly. "Much longer than that . . . I had many memories left."

And they wondered what he meant by that, and thought perhaps his mind was wandering because of what he had endured.

unbound fingers
pped his sbroat like
iron bands."



Berber Loot

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

The story of a madcap adventure in Morocco, told as only Bedford-Jones can tell it—a story of thrills, romance, and sudden death, in a wild hunt for stolen treasure

HENNESSY was a tough egg, any way you looked at him, and at the present moment he was in a tough place.

His cap, his attire, his fingers, the silver Senegal coins he handed out, all showed that he was from the engine-room of the tramp. She had just arrived in Casablanca from Dakar. He was bronzed, efficient, scarred, with a warm but deceptive grin.

Croghan, lean and dark, sat beside him. They drank, and watched the Berber dancers whose thudding feet seemed about to tear the platform apart. Shipmates two years previously, they had met here in Morocco, by sheer accident, half an hour ago.

Croghan seemed at home here. This was the one place in Casablanca where they might have met. It was the new "ville Arabe," expressly designed for

pleasure. And it was the one place where Croghan could tell his amazing story in safety. The squealing fifes and fiddles, the monotonously beating drums, the iron heels of the Berber men thudding dust from the planks, all served to cover up his words.

The room was long and low. At one end, a platform held a score of Berber men and boys, the platformers. The trestles were crowded with girls of all shades from pitch-black to white, and with all sorts of men—Arabs, Berbers, French civilians and tourists. Occasionally one of the fuzzy-haired girls would approach the two men who sat talking together, only to be sent away by a negative gesture from Hennessy. Men and girls were coming in or leaving every moment, causing a continual flow of movement in the place.

As the police agents in the streets outside, and at the entrance gates, bore witness, this was a place created not alone for the native quarter, in this comparatively new city of Casablanca, but for every one—and for the amusement of every one. From down the street came other music, indicating Arab dancing, and the bustle and stir on every hand showed that the night had just begun for this Moroccan underworld.

Hennessy gave the dark Croghan a hard, level look.

"Are you talking stage money, Frog dough, or cold cash?" he demanded.

"All kinds, cash included," said Croghan. "The Berber who told me about it was one of this crowd right here. Met him here last night and he recognized me right off. He was going to meet me tonight. And half an hour after telling me, from what I can learn, somebody cut out his gizzard. I mean just that, too; you know, these natives think a knife is

meant to rip any one from the ribs down——"

"Keep to the point," said Hennessy. "How come this Berber recognized you?"

"I was running guns up into the hills last year. Rather, acting as agent for the main guy, and collecting," said Croghan. "That's all ended now, of course. Durell, the head of the outfit, is here in Casablanca now. I quit the game and have been running an auto stage to Rabat and Fez the last few months. Are you interested or not?"

"In fifty thousand dollars? Boy, you said it," Hennessy assured him.

"All right, then listen," said Croghan, dropping his voice. "During the troubles, this Berber and some of his pals raided the hill castle of a pacha; you know, the Berbers hate all the pachas, who are held in power by the French. They got the old boy's loot, got away, and then set in to kill each other off for the loot.

"This Berber of mine, and another named M'tel, double-crossed the rest of the outfit and cleared out with the loot. They ran afoul of a French column and were captured, but hid the stuff first. They were sent up for two years each, to different prisons, M'tel was sent to Marrakesh, but my chap went to the prison at Rabat. That's where I got next to him—he fixed it for me to get in touch with his people and so forth, about the munitions."

So Croghan had been in prison, then! Hennessy sipped his mint tea and said nothing.

"Day before yesterday, time was up for them both," said Croghan. "This bunch of Berbers met my friend in Rabat and came down here to keep their dancing engagement; I dropped in last night, and all was jake. The other one, M'tel, is in bad with his tribe. Most likely, he came

along and knifed my friend. I had a hint he had thrown in with Durell, the same chap——"

"Say, listen!" broke in Hennessy abruptly. "Is this some pipe-dream or what?"

Croghan leaned forward earnestly, sweat standing out on his forehead, a snarl on his thin lips, his dark eyes blazing at Hennessy.

"Cash: bank-notes and gold! Is that a pipe-dream, you fool? I know exactly where it's hidden. I can get it."

"What I want to know," said Hennessy, "is why somebody——"

"I don't give a hang what you want to know," snapped Croghan. "I can answer every argument you put up, explain everything you don't understand; but not here and now. I've no time. I've got to get somebody to lend a hand with this job, because M'tel and that chap Durell will be after the stuff in no time. If you want in on it, say so—yes or no. A fifty-fifty split."

Hennessy grinned.

"Agreed," he said. "When do we start?"

"In an hour, if you can be free of your ship in that time."

"I can so," said Hennessy promptly. "All I have to do is get my pay from the Old Man and leave her. He can ship a dozen engineers here, and he knows it. Will you come to the dock for me?"

"Not much," said Croghan. "I'm scared, I tell you; I'll not monkey around the port at night! Hennessy, I'm plenty tough, and so are you, but let me tell you that we're up against a bad gang if Durell is in on this. Let's separate here and now. Meet in an hour's time at my hotel, the Bonaparte. It's a little joint, clean and honest, in Rue Bonaparte. I'll have my car ready."

"Okeh, feller," said Hennessy. "Your car? Where do we go, then?"

"A hell of a long way," said Croghan, and drained his glass. Then he started and set down the glass abruptly, and slid from the bench. His hand gripped Hennessy's shoulder for an instant. "Look there—the chap with the chauffeur's coat! That's Durell himself. So long."

Croghan was gone, through one of the several exits—gone like an eel.

HENNESSY drew down his brows and looked at the man swaggering in, seeking an empty place at the long table. He wore the white dust-coat of a chauffeur, and a cap pulled over one ear, but he was clearly no chauffeur. His figure was lean, spare, powerful, his high-boned face was framed by black hair, sideburns, and centered by a short black mustache. It showed hard and ruthless lines, an expression of cool effrontery and the nerve to back it up. It was plain that Durell was well known here. Some called to him, others glanced at him and muttered hastily to their neighbors. Durell waved his hand, sauntered along, and slipped into the place just vacated by Croghan.

Hennessy sipped his mint tea, and stared at a soldier and a half-caste girl opposite.

"If you know what's good for you," said a voice in faintly accented English, somewhere close at hand, "you'll get back to your ship and leave that rascal Croghan alone."

Hennessy glanced around, but no one was paying any attention to him. Durell had just given an order to the waiter and was breaking open a packet of "jaunes." As he selected a cigarette, Hennessy shoved a package of matches along the board.

"Thanks," he said. "Have a light."

Durell glanced up swiftly and met his

gaze. The dark, vivid eyes struck against the calm, laughing gray ones, and a smile curved Durell's hard lips.

"Obliged to you," he said. "Stranger here?"

Hennessy nodded. "You seem to know," he said amiably. Durell surveyed his clear, laughing eyes, his heavily built, strong features, his wide shoulders, and shrugged.

"Better take my advice, my friend. Croghan ignored it; he'll be sorry, within the next half-hour. Better take it."

"Thanks, I will," said Hennessy, and rose. "I'm back to the ship right now."

He started for the door that gave on the street. Half-way to it, two Frenchmen wearing the blouses, red sashes and voluminous corduroys of workmen, suddenly seized on a girl who was passing them—a girl whose tattooed white forehead showed she was a Berber. One grasped her hair, the other caught her arms, and the first tried to empty a cognac bottle down her throat.

Amid the rough horse-play all around, the scene was unnoted, except to provoke laughter, but Hennessy caught a glimpse of the girl's face, and the stark fright in it jerked him into action. With a shove, he sent the first man reeling headlong into the wall, and his fist smashed into the face of the second man, who was knocked sprawling. The first man came to his feet like a cat, a knife glittered, shrill screams went up; but Hennessy crashed in a blow that doubled the man up in agony.

Then, elbowing a way out, Hennessy left the tumult behind him and slipped into the night, well aware of the police consequences for using fists—something abhorrent to the French taste. He strode down the street to the entrance, whose significant posters on either hand indicated the character of the place, and so

to the line of taxicabs waiting outside the wall. Two minutes later, he was on his way back to town and the waterfront.

HB SETTLED back comfortably in the car and thought of Croghan. He knew perfectly well that Croghan was unscrupulous, hard as nails, and a distinct social liability; on the other hand, he was dependable and resourceful. Hennessy was no shining society light himself. Having knocked around the French and Mediterranean ports considerably, he had a working knowledge of impolite French; while his ability to handle recalcitrant men and at the same time take care of himself, resembled that of an old-time bucko mate. The engine room is not a school of polite manners.

That Croghan had been pursuing fickle fortune in Morocco for the past couple of years, doing everything from filibustering to killing jail lice, did not convince Hennessy that his yarn of Berber loot held any truth. What did appeal to Hennessy was the intervention of this Durell, and the fact that Durell had been keeping a watch on Croghan, as his words proved.

"He'll be having me followed, too," reflected Hennessy cheerfully. "So I'll stop long enough aboard ship to convince him. Then I'll slip off up the docks. Hm! Not far uptown, and this Rue Bonaparte isn't a great way off. I'll walk. If Croghan is waiting, I'll take a chance with him. If not——"

Would Croghan be waiting? He strongly doubted it. Durell's words showed that something was in store for Mr. Croghan, and something distinctly unpleasant. On the contrary, Hennessy was well acquainted with Croghan's innate abilities. The odds were about even.

Having been in port for three days, Hennessy was by no means loth to throw up his job and go careering off on a wild

gold-hunt in Morocco. With Croghan as cicerone, there would be nothing tame about the trip—even leaving himself out. It might end in jail, or worse, but it would certainly not lack in excitement. Croghan certainly believed in the existence of this loot.

"It's plausible, anyhow," decided Hennessy, and dismissed further arguments.

Forty minutes later, without the least misadventure and without being followed so far as he could tell, Hennessy approached the Hotel Bonaparte on foot. It was a small hotel in a small street well down from the old Arab town. As he drew near, the lights of a car standing before the hotel entrance were flashed on, and he heard Croghan's voice.

"If that's you, Red, hop in and do it quick."

Hennessy, whose hair was not red but close enough to it to get him the name, quickened his pace. The car was a small but powerful Fiat sedan.

"Step lively," said Croghan. "Can you drive this outfit?"

"Me? I can drive anything," returned Hennessy.

"Then get under the wheel and let's go," ordered Croghan, his voice urgent. "Straight down past the docks to hit the Rabat road. Don't switch on any dash-lights, either."

Hennessy obeyed. As he settled under the wheel he was aware of Croghan's dim figure at his side, and sniffed.

"What you so blamed busy at? Smells like blood."

"It is," snapped Croghan. "Found two birds up in my room laying for me. They're still there and I've got repairs to make. Hurry and get out of here, blast you!"

The gears clashed. A moment later the Fiat went roaring down the street,

and Red Hennessy was off on the trail of Berber loot.

2

A FEW miles outside Casablanca, on the straight paved highway following the coast, Hennessy pulled out of the road and halted. Under the headlights of the car, he assisted Croghan in his repair job.

This was no elaborate matter. Croghan had suffered a number of slight cuts about the arms and hands, which momentarily interfered with his driving, and a life-preserver had given him a nasty rap over the ear, but he was quite content.

"You should see those two birds who laid for me!" he observed darkly. "Luckily, I knew Durell's little ways, and kept my eye peeled."

"No police around?" queried Hennessy. The other sniffed.

"Police? You don't know this country; anything goes! Between the native police and the French police, the double court and jail system and so forth, you can get away with murder. This isn't part of France, but a separate country so far."

Hennessy started the car again and related his encounter with Durell, touching briefly on the incident of the Berber girl. At this, Croghan cursed.

"Durell will have the cops after you for that, sure! Why didn't you kick, instead of hitting—don't you know the French yet? So he had you spotted, eh? Sure, I knew I'd been trailed for the past day anyhow."

"Well, produce some information," said Hennessy. "How do you know this money has been lying untouched all this time, huh? Why didn't those two Berbers send somebody for it?"

"Nobody to trust," replied Croghan. "You don't know this country. Anybody would cut his own brother's throat for a

tenth part of that coin, Red! And the French would grab it in a minute if they caught on. No, that cash is lying under a boundary rock up in the hills, fifty feet off a road, an hour's drive outside Fez."

"Lying under a rock!" repeated Hennessy in scornful accents.

"Yeah. Boundary rocks don't get moved in those parts, without bullets flying. When these two chaps got caught by the French, they slipped the money under that rock, and it's still lying there, all right."

"Maybe. Once out of jail, why didn't either of 'em head straight for the spot? Especially if it was a question of which one got there first?"

"Why did my friend take me in on the deal? Why has the other chap, M'tel, taken Durell in with him?" responded Croghan. "Allee same need help to dispose of the loot; the country isn't what it was a couple of years ago. There's slathers of buried money, but not banknotes. An unknown Berber can't walk into a foreign bank with that amount of money and cash in on it, not without questions asked! But one of us can. Have you got a gun?"

"Two," said Hennessy. "Well, what's your program? How far is this place Fez from here?"

"Let's see. Ninety-two from here to Rabat; from there to Meknez, a hundred and forty; from there to Fez, sixty more. That's nearly three hundred."

"Miles?"

"No, you nut! Kilometers. About a hundred and seventy-five miles."

"That's easy," declared Hennessy, with a laugh. "No speed limit in this country, I hear. We'll tap your rock sometime tomorrow morning — it isn't eleven yet. Good roads, too."

"Sure. Only, Durell will know that we're on the way. He's got a Cadillac."

Hennessy stepped on the gas. The needle rose to a hundred, and passed it.

"We're doing sixty now, in miles. Suit you?"

"This is no race, Red," said Croghan bitterly. "Get that out of your head. Durell ain't in any great rush. He's got a pull, get me? All he has to do is telephone on to Rabat or Meknez, and have us pinched or else met by some of his gang."

"Well, what d'you expect to do? Fly?" asked Hennessy. "Can't we cut around those towns?"

"Not a chance. No network of roads in this country. Have you any papers?"

"Nary a one," said Hennessy cheerfully. "The skipper promised to leave the necessary documents at the consulate in the morning, with my pay."

"Then you're in dutch if the police hop on us. Maybe Durell will stick to his own gang, though." Croghan lit a cigarette, passed it to Hennessy, and lit another for himself.

"Well, what's your program?" asked Hennessy. "Crowd her through regardless?"

"You bet. Suit you?"

"Okeh by me, feller."

They swept on by hill and dale, once the coast was abandoned, then swooped down long valleys, leaving the occasional farms and old towers to right and left, the rolling boom of surf coming to them again to speak of the returning shores.

Twice they plunged across great chasms on suspension bridges, the road following the railroad rails with what seemed to be a dizzy lack of appreciation of any danger. They were ten miles out of Rabat when, topping a rise, the lights picked up a car stalled by the roadside below, two figures beside it. One of these stepped out and signalled frantically with a pocket torch.

"Go through," said Croghan. Hennessy slowed.

"Nope. Women. Have your gun ready, though."

"What the hell!" exploded Croghan. "Durell has women agents——"

THE brakes ground. Croghan, his gun ready, opened the window. Hennessy kept the headlights on the stalled car and its two passengers—a chauffeur in white dust-coat and cap, and a woman in a dark cloak. It was the latter who had signalled, and who now addressed them in French with a strong accent.

"*Messieurs*, can you have the goodness to help us in to the city? Our petrol has given out, and no other cars have passed to give us aid——"

Hennessy saw that her car bore a French license, indicating a tourist, as did the luggage piled on the top. It was a handsome car, a large Renault painted a bright blue, with brass trimmings; no hired hack.

"Certainly, *madame*," responded Hennessy. "One moment, if you please." He turned to Croghan and spoke in rapid English. "Get out and look at their tank. See if it's a stall. I'll keep 'em covered——"

"Oh! Are you Americans?" came the quick exclamation from the woman. "So am I! And I took you for French! This is certainly a relief. You can give us a ride to the city?"

"Yeah," returned Hennessy. "Go on, Croghan! Take no chances. I've got an idea.—Miss, let me talk with you a minute. Come over here by the car. My name's Hennessy, usually called Red for short, and this here is Croghan, and we're in a tough jam."

He paused in astonishment. The ray of the electric torch fell for an instant on his face, while Croghan was getting out.

Then the woman who held it, flashed it on herself briefly. Hennessy had a vision of a laughing face, framed in masses of dark hair, and gasped.

"Lord! I thought you were an old hen," he exclaimed, as she came close. "Who are you?"

"Good sir, I am a poor wandering damsel out of gas but with plenty of mad-money," she responded merrily. "By name, Mary Gray. My chauffeur speaks no English, luckily. You look too bronzed and happy to be a tourist."

"Correct," and Hennessy chuckled. "Where you headed for? And why all alone?"

"Because I *am* alone," she returned. "I'm not as young as I look, Red, being thirty-one last week; so I don't need to be chaperoned, if that's your notion. I'm an artist, a painter of this and that, and I'm supposed to put in a couple of weeks at Rabat and have an exhibition and so forth. The luggage you see is mostly works of art. Now do you know enough about me?"

"No," said Hennessy promptly, "not near enough.—Croghan! Never mind; gather round and listen. This party's on the level, and I've got an idea.—Miss Gray, we need your car."

She broke into a laugh. "How'll you make it run?"

"Listen, this is serious!" exclaimed Hennessy. "Half of Morocco is or may be looking for us right now, having a description of our car. Chances are, we'll never get to Fez without trouble, unless we get another car——"

"Check," she broke in quickly. "Who's after you? The police?"

"No." Hennessy caught a growl from Croghan, and grinned. "She's straight, partner, so shut up. No, not the police, but they may be later. Right now, a bad gang is looking for us. We're looking

for treasure, if you want it straight, and the gang wants it——"

The flashlight bit up at him again.

"No," she observed, "you certainly don't look drunk, Red! Does this car belong to you?"

"Belongs to me, miss," said Croghan.

"What we want," went on Hennessy quickly, "is to swap cars. We'll put most of our gas in your tank. You put your luggage in this car and go on to Rabat. Then later on, we'll bring back your car. We're responsible folks——"

"Yes, you talk like it," she broke in, with a silvery laugh. "Is your treasure hunt on the level?"

"Croghan has a few knife-cuts to say it is," replied Hennessy. "And if this cussed Durell ever catches up with us, they'll get paid back——"

"Durell!" came her voice sharply. "Not Carlos Durell, of Casablanca?"

"My gosh! Do you know him?" snapped Croghan.

"I've met him, to my sorrow; only a couple of days ago. Here, wait! Climb out of your car, both of you, and shift over some gas. Can you do it?"

"Sure," said Croghan. "I've got a rubber tube. Siphon it easy."

"Pull up beside us, then, and get to work," she ordered with decision. "I'll have Jules change the luggage. Where's yours?"

"We travel light," said Hennessy. "If we have luggage later, we're satisfied."

He drew up alongside the other car. Croghan was mouthing admiring oaths as he glimpsed the strategy in view, and leaped to work on transferring some gasoline.

"How'd you come to run out?" demanded Hennessy, as Jules shifted over the luggage.

"Came up from Marrakesh today," replied Mary Gray. "Thought we had

enough to go right on to Rabat, but there's something wrong with the gage. Where are you headed for?"

"Fez, or the other side of there," and Hennessy proffered a cigarette. She accepted. "Was Durell down at Marrakesh?"

"Yes."

To himself, Hennessy thought that this rather backed up Croghan's yarn, for the Berber M'tel had been in prison at Marrakesh. Durell had probably met him when he was turned loose and brought him on to Casablanca.

"There! Got enough to reach Rabat now." Croghan straightened up and turned to the woman. "Miss Gray, it's mighty white of you to let us use your car like this. Means a lot to us. If we win out, we'll sure let you know how much we appreciate it! Come on, Red."

"I'm going too," said Mary Gray abruptly. The two men stared at her in the starlight.

"You are not," spoke up Hennessy. She laughed lightly, and then he caught her arm and led her to one side. "Listen here," he said, "don't be silly, now. We don't want any woman along on this trip. It's not safe."

"So I judged," she returned coolly. "That's why I'm going. I'm interested."

"Well, get uninterested, then," snapped Hennessy. "Me, I'm a second engineer out of a tramp from Senegal. This guy Croghan is an ex-jailbird and gun-runner. Durell's gang——"

"Better and better!" she cut in. "But you listen to me a minute. I've met this Durell, as I said. And I'd give a good deal to meet him again, and help any one else give him a black eye. I'm going with you, and that's flat. Maybe I can help."

"You can't. You'd be in the way."

"Nothing of the sort. You can swear all you like; I can swear too, for that mat-

ter. I'm no tenderfoot, Red. I can drive as well as you, too. I use a chauffeur for looks and as a guide. Jules can take my things on to the Transat hotel at Rabat and wait for me. I'm going, so you may as well stop your protests."

The fire in her voice, the vibrant personality of her, conquered.

"All right, but when the shooting starts——"

"I have a pistol in the car, and a government permit to carry it."

Hennessy threw up his hands and strode to the Renault, where Croghan was still standing.

"Does she mean it, Red?"

"She does. And short of using force——"

"Let her come, then," said Croghan bitterly. "Damn it, we've got to be half-way decent, but for two cents I'd ditch her somewhere."

"Better not try it," said Mary Gray, who had caught the words, and laughed again. "Cheer up, Croghan! I'm not such a bad sort, really. Jules! Take the other car to the hotel in Rabat and say I've been delayed and will be along later. And keep your mouth shut."

"Yes, *mademoiselle*," responded Jules.

Croghan climbed sullenly into the Renault, and two minutes later, with Hennessy under the wheel, they moved off. As they got into speed, Hennessy chuckled. Mary Gray, who had the front seat beside him, gave him a sharp look.

"Well? What's the joke?"

"I was thinking that Jules might run into trouble with that car."

"Oh! Well, I was thinking so myself. That's one reason I'm in this car now."

Hennessy broke into a low laugh. She was all right!

AS CROGHAN admiringly stated, one had to admit that Mary Gray was a useful companion.

While the two of them huddled under a blanket on the floor of the tonneau, she got the Renault filled with oil and "essence", and drove off; then Hennessy resumed the wheel, and Croghan steered him out of town, knowing all the back streets of the French city that here, as in the other old Arab towns of Morocco, had been built adjoining the more ancient huddle of masonry and apart from it.

Then they went soaring on through the night to Meknez, the great garrison city, whose enormous ruined walls in which thousands of Christian slaves had been buried alive ran off across the hills for miles. It was two-thirty when Meknez fell behind them, and a quarter past three when the lights of Fez flashed into sight ahead.

Hennessy pulled out of the road and wakened his two companions, who were dozing.

"Conference, partners," he exclaimed gayly. "If you ask me, we've made time."

"I'll say you have!" said Croghan. "There's Fez. What you stopping for?"

"Orders. We need gas and oil, not to mention sleep. Do we go straight through, or break the trip here?"

"I need daylight to locate the right spot," said Croghan, doubtfully. "And you must be about done up. It'd be safer to go right through, but——"

"There's a new hotel in the French town, this side of Fez," spoke up Mary Gray. "Why not take rooms there, get an hour's sleep and an early breakfast, and go on about six?"

"The only reason why not," said Croghan, "is that we must give our names when we light, and fill out the usual

police card. If any one is looking for us, they'll know it in twenty minutes."

"Well, no car has passed us, so Durell's not ahead," said Hennessy. "We've broken the back of the trip, and I vote to start fresh at six."

"O. K., then," assented Croghan.

Another ten minutes, and they halted before the Hotel Splendide. Here Mary Gray took charge, issued the orders, obtained rooms, and Hennessy thankfully crawled between the sheets and was asleep on the instant. The nerve strain of that night drive at top speed had been terrific.

He had no luggage except the clothes he stood in and a toilet kit. Wakened at five-thirty, he was shaved, dressed and downstairs ahead of the others, and went outside to find that the hotel had refueled the car. Over the ancient twin cities of Fez was hanging the usual morning mist of smoke, so that, with the hill forts on either hand, it looked like a scene from fairyland.

Hennessy turned back into the entrance, then halted. A big car was just coming up, a Cadillac with a Moroccan license. With sharp premonition, Hennessy drew back into the doorway and watched. The new arrival halted behind the Renault. Sure enough, Durell got out, stretched himself; he was followed by two other Frenchmen, and then by a red-headed Berber in a new white jellab.

Waiting to see no more, Hennessy strode back into the lobby and encountered Croghan.

"Hey, Red! She's in the dining-room. Hustle in and eat—what's the matter?"

"Durell's here. Looks pretty done up. Come along, take a chance on the dining-room. Damned if I want to hide from that skunk! If he doesn't come in, so much the better."

THEY passed into the dining-room, a small alcoved room highly decorated with tiles and carved plaster in Moorish fashion. And here Hennessy had his first real look at Mary Gray, as they came toward her table.

Again he got that impression of vibrant personality, of laughing energy. Dark hair and dark eyes, firm feminine features—nothing spectacular about her, until she laughed and spoke. Then her face lit up with animation, with eager interest in everything around her. Thirty-one? He would have set her down as little over twenty.

And she, looking up at Hennessy, warmed to his quick laughing blue eyes, his alert, crisply carven features, the touch of whimsical recklessness that set him apart. She gave the two of them a bright greeting, and waved her spoon at the chairs adjacent.

"Settle down, comrades. I've ordered for you. A real breakfast, not a French snack. Well? What's gone wrong?"

"Durell's here," said Hennessy, as he seated himself.

She was facing the door, and looked past him, then frowned slightly.

"Let him be here, then!" she exclaimed. "When did he come?"

"Just now."

Their words died, as the waiter approached with a laden tray. During their night ride, Mary Gray had heard the entire treasure story, by snatches, but had related nothing about her knowledge of Durell. Now Hennessy recollected it, and spoke.

"You seem downright set against poor Durell. What'd he do to you?"

Anger lightened her dark eyes.

"He kissed me."

"Shucks!" Hennessy grinned cheerfully. "That's no crime. That's merely following a perfectly natural inclination."

She gave him one furious glance, then broke into a laugh.

"You're—well, Red, you're a caution! Not only that, however; he was insulting about it, and I didn't like him anyhow. He came along when I was sketching the Koutoubia, down at Marrakesh; it was built by the architect of the Giralda at Seville, you know. He just naturally got his face slapped, and then he grew ugly, but Jules came along and he decamped."

Hennessy rose and laid down his napkin.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said. "Just thought of something——"

"Sit down!" she exclaimed sharply. "You hear me? Sit down! None of your nonsense, Red. I can read your mind. I won't have it, d'you hear? Leave Durell alone."

Before her determined words and look, Hennessy shrugged and seated himself. Croghan grinned.

"You'd better not be reading his mind, Miss Gray——"

"Hold everything," she said quietly. "Here he is. Please don't have any trouble in here."

The two men, seated with their backs to the entrance, exchanged a glance and fell silent.

Durell descended the two steps into the dining-room, glanced around casually, then came to a dead halt as his eyes fell on Mary Gray, facing him. Delight sprang in his eyes, and regardless of her cool stare, he approached and doffed his cap with a gay greeting.

"My lady of Marrakesh!" he exclaimed. "Come, this is nothing short of a miracle! What good fortune has brought you to me here?"

Mary Gray regarded him for a moment, then shrugged.

"A madman," she observed to Hennessy. "Pay no attention to him."

Durell broke into a laugh. "Ah, but——"

Hennessy came to his feet and swung around to face the other. Then Durell recognized him, glanced down at Croghan, and for an instant seemed frozen. His eyes hardened into cold pin-points. The recognition was an obvious shock.

"So, this is it!" he said slowly. "This is where you disappeared——"

"On your way," said Hennessy, curtly. "Did you ever hear of the bum's rush?"

Durell's gaze bored into him with a flame of hatred; then the man bowed, turned, and went striding out of the room.

With a grunt of disgust, Hennessy resumed his seat. "Eat fast," he said. "Pitch in, everybody!"

"And get away," said Mary Gray. "Right. Everything's paid, including breakfast, and a lunch is being put into the car now. Quickly!"

No time was lost. Swallowing a hasty meal, all three rose and departed. They saw nothing of Durell. His two companions stood in the lobby, and by the door was the red-headed Berber, who looked at Croghan with a curl of his bearded lips and a flash of hatred.

"That was our friend M'tel, right enough," said Croghan, opening the car door. "Hop in! Durell's probably telephoning and raising trouble. Straight back to the highway, Red, and then follow it out to the left, around the walls."

A tip to the attentive garçon, and they were off with a roar, Croghan now sitting beside Hennessy in front. A long block away from the hotel, Croghan uttered a startled oath.

"Stop," he exclaimed. "In to the curb, Red——"

A MOMENT later he jumped out, glanced at the tires, and suppressed certain violent words.

"Nail in the right rear," he said, climbing in. "Ain't flat yet—there's a garage dead ahead, though I can't say much for it. May be open now. You can reach it."

"Right," said Hennessy. "Now we know what M'tel was doing outside, eh?"

"Yeah. He got the nail part-way in, which is some job, and before we rolled a block, the car did the rest. There's the place, over to the left. She's open, too! No use sweating around and wasting time with tools, when we can get it done quicker. I'll give the mechanic a hand. Looks like a native."

A native it was, who had just opened up the garage. The *patron* was here, he told them, but was at the telephone. Hennessy thought nothing of this, at the moment.

They rolled in. The proprietor, a greasy-faced Provençal, appeared with great expressions of his desire to serve them; and Croghan got the native mechanic to work. Hennessy, having taken for granted that this was entirely a scheme to delay them, was watching the work and talking with Mary Gray, who refused to get out of the car, when the proprietor appeared at his side.

"A thousand pardons, *m'sieu*," he said with a smirk, "but am I speaking with M'sieu Hennessy?"

"You are. How the devil did you know my name?"

"A lady asks for you, *m'sieu*, on the telephone."

Amazed, Hennessy followed him into the office at one side, catching a laughing jest that Mary Gray flung after him. The Provençal threw open a door at the end, opening into another room.

"The telephone, *m'sieu*, it is there——"

Hennessy strode through. The door was slammed after him. A blackjack slammed into the door, as he sidestepped

like a shadow. A moving streak had given him warning.

Two of them, on him hammer and tongs as he slipped aside; knife and slungshot lunging and falling venomously. No time for questions. Two brown shapes, lithe and active as scorpions, displaying all the marvelous agility of Arabs, despite their apparently clumsy robes.

Somehow Hennessy evaded the rush, side-slipped like a phantom. The pair were silent, deadly, their eyes glimmering with intensity of emotion; they meant to kill, and they were not wasting time about it. Hennessy ducked, took the blackjack on his shoulder with numbing effect, swerved aside as the knife drove in for his belt; then his foot slipped and he shot sideways, falling headlong.

The place was littered with old tires, disused implements, empty tins. Hennessy rolled over and over, came to his feet like a cat, and brought with him a Ford tire-tool. The knife lunged in, but his weapon slanted down athwart the brown wrist. The Arab screamed shrilly as the knife fell.

The second man was rushing in. Hennessy unexpectedly met him half-way, caught his swinging weapon-arm, and slapped him over the skull with the iron. He crumpled, and Hennessy swung about. The first Arab was picking up the knife with his left hand. Hennessy booted him under the chin, then gave him a savage blow across the skull.

"You asked for it, and you got it——"

He started suddenly, now aware of a frantic honking of the car horn. It ceased as he stood panting, listening. Hennessy caught up the blackjack; then the room door was flung open, and into the place came the greasy Provençal, dragging Mary Gray by the wrist.

"Come, pretty one, and join your

American friend," he panted. "Ah! Thunders of heaven——"

He staggered back under a stinging blow in the face from her fist. Then Hennessy came down upon him, just as the man was gathering himself to rush upon her. He swung the greasy fellow about, pinned him against the wall with one long arm, and slapped him hard, twice, with jarring force. Then, deliberately, he swung the persuader and put the man out for good.

"All right, Mary," he said, and grinned at her. "Hurt?"

"No. But they killed Croghan——"
"Come on."

Hennessy leaped into action. He was gone through the office like a streak, running swiftly, silently, his face a blazing mask of fury. There was Croghan lying beside the car on his face, the Arab mechanic rifling his pockets.

The native had no warning whatever until Hennessy was upon him. Then he straightened up with a frightful cry of terror. Hennessy caught him by the throat and shook him for a moment, lifted him and shook him again, then flung him down to the cement floor.

"Fix that tire and do it sharp! Or else——"

For the first time, recollecting his pistols, Hennessy jerked one out. The Arab let out a howl and bent over the half-completed tire job. Hennessy glanced around, and found no one else in the place.

"Here." He shoved the pistol into the woman's hand, and spoke in French. "Kill this man if he stops working."

Stooping above Croghan, he found that the latter was not dead, and had suffered nothing worse than a crack over the head. Mary Gray's voice struck at him, and he was astonished to find it perfectly cool.

"They struck him down before I knew

it. I honked the horn; then they pulled me out of the car——"

"Thought you had a gun!" snapped Hennessy.

"It's in the car. By the driver's seat."

"Keep mine, then. Watch that bird, there!"

He lifted the inanimate Croghan and bundled him into the rear of the car. Two minutes later, as the last nut on the rim was tightened, the Arab mechanic came erect and bleated in stark fear as Hennessy strode at him. The slungshot darted out. The native slumped over and lay in a crumpled mass.

Abandoning the punctured extra tire, Hennessy stepped on the gas. Next moment they were out in the street, swinging on two wheels, heading out and away.

Behind them, the telephone in the office was ringing steadily, vainly.

4

"WASN'T that brutal?"

"Eh?" Hennessy glanced at the woman beside him. "Wasn't what brutal?"

"Hitting that mechanic. He was in deadly fear of you——"

"Sure." A joyous, savage laugh broke from Hennessy. "I aimed to be brutal. When you're caught in a jam and want to get out alive, young lady, don't sit around manicuring your nails. That's a free trip. Say, just how did all that mess happen? By accident?"

"I doubt it." She regarded him for an instant, fascinated by the fighting glow in his eyes, the splendid laughing eagerness of his expression. "That Berber put the nail in the tire. There was only the one garage, straight on our road——"

"I see," and Hennessy nodded, realizing the truth. "Say! That chap Durell is no slouch! He must have telephoned over; probably knew the garage man.

Those two Arabs meant to kill me, and no mistake——”

“Two Arabs? Where?” she exclaimed. He flung her a laugh.

“Didn’t you see ’em, in that inner room? Too busy to notice them, I suppose. That was a fine crack you hit the grease-spot! Yes, Durell phoned from the hotel, framed up everything in a flash. How much law is there in this country, anyhow?”

“Depends on what you can get away with, I fancy; about like Chicago. Oh!” She stirred swiftly. “I’ll climb over in back—I forgot poor Croghan——”

“Right. Wake him up. We need directions. Crossroad ahead——”

“Turn right,” she exclaimed. “We go past Fez, anyhow. When you come to the walls, turn left. The highway circles outside the city.”

They swung into the highway and picked up a small column of marching soldiery, for the camp and aviation field were close by. Hennessy waved his hand gayly as he swept past, and a chorus of eager replies broke from the Frenchmen—something in this laughing, eager man compelled a comradely greeting from them in the sunrise.

Without regard for dignity, Mary Gray climbed into the back of the car and opening a bottle of wine from the lunch-basket, poured some down Croghan’s throat. The latter coughed, opened his eyes, and struggled to sit up.

“Hello!” he exclaimed. “What hit me?”

“The sky dropped on you, partner,” said Hennessy, without looking around. “Wake up and watch the road! Looks like we go slap into that gateway ahead——”

“Turn left!” cried Croghan sharply. Directly before them loomed the high crenelated walls of Fez, a wide gateway

thronged with men, horses, mules, camels, soldiers. Hennessy saw the left-hand road, swerved into it abruptly, and sent the car roaring along.

“Sure we’re right?” exclaimed Mary Gray. “If you’re heading for Taza, Croghan, we should have gone to the south of the city——”

“We’re right,” said Croghan. “Straight on up the hill, past Fort Chardonnet, and then swing left on Highway 26. You can’t miss the marker. Well, what happened?”

When he learned, his lean dark features contracted with anger; but he said no word, and after fingering his head and finding no great damage done, lit a cigarette and sat staring silently at the olive groves as they wound up the long hill slopes.

So they came to the shell-ruined tombs of the Merinide sultans. Now, below them, lay outspread the massive walls, the far-reaching twin cities of thousand-year-old Fez in the curving valley. Then all was gone, and they were sweeping past olives and cemeteries, circling with the twisting road, until they gained the fork and the six-foot section of wall that served as a marker.

So Fez fell away behind them.

THE empty road ahead drew in among the hills, apparently absolutely deserted and yet in reality filled with native life. Suddenly Croghan came to life.

“Hey, Red! Something wrong!” he exclaimed. “What’s that knocking?”

“Search me.” Hennessy slowed, then quickened the pace. They were passing a crossroad, where stood a neat little building corresponding to an American hot-dog stand. Presently, half a mile farther, the knocking became more distinct. Hennessy pulled out of the road, and Croghan uttered a groan of despair.

"Can't be the bearings, surely! Didn't they put in oil?"

Hennessy glanced at the gages. "Full when we left. Empty now——"

With a subdued oath, Croghan was out of the car. He dived underneath for a moment, then rose and kicked the front tire savagely.

"Broken oil line. Bearings burned out. This is a sweet mess!" he said. "Probably was broken last night and we got in without oil. Been losing ever since."

"Can't we go on regardless?" asked Mary Gray. Croghan gave her a bitter look.

"And have the rods bust through the pan? Not a chance. Ten miles to go yet—blast the luck! Just when we had him beaten——"

Hennessy lit a cigarette and regarded the others, whose dismay was complete.

"Facts are facts; no use blinking them," he observed coolly. "I suppose Durell must come this way? Or could he take another road?"

"No, he'll be along," said Croghan, frowning blackly.

"And he won't be wasting any time, either, once he finds what happened at that garage. Hm!" Hennessy puffed for a moment, his gaze darting around, scanning the road ahead. They had halted just around the bend of a curve. "Croghan, you hop out. Walk back to that crossroad; I saw a telephone line at the eating-stand. Get another car out here from the city. Can do?"

"Huh? Sure," responded Croghan, staring at him. "But by the time another car gets here, Durell will be digging up the stuff."

Hennessy grinned. "Not if he comes this way. You keep your eye on the road as you go, for if he comes along and sights you, you'll die of lead poisoning in a hurry."

"And what about you?"

"We'll be sitting here, partner. And if we have any luck, there'll be a Cadillac sitting here likewise, when you come along."

Croghan stared at him for a minute, the dark eyes a-glitter.

"You're a fool to chance it! What about her?" and he jerked his head toward the woman.

A laugh broke from her. "Never mind about us!" she said gayly. "You get going, will you? Trust Red."

"All right."

Croghan climbed out of the car, waved his hand, and started on the back trail without more questions. Hennessy met the merry, inquiring eyes of Mary Gray, and chuckled.

"You've got a lot of faith in me, young lady!"

"You deserve it. What's your program?"

"You'll see."

Hennessy started the clanking engine and ran the car a dozen feet ahead, then halted it half on the road, half off, as though it had run suddenly out of control. He pointed to the scattered boulders lining the sloping hillside to the right.

"You get up there and take cover—and keep it. Understand? No matter what happens, you remain out of sight. If anything goes wrong, stay hidden."

She nodded, her eyes searching his face. "And you?"

"I'm taking cover too, but closer to the road. This has come down to a real private war, and the less you have to do with it, the better. Promise to keep out of it?"

"Of course. But you've got to tell me what you mean to do——"

"You'll see that for yourself." Hennessy got out of the car and extended his

hand. "Come along; I want to see you tucked away securely."

She shrugged, and obeyed.

Fifty feet up the hillside, Hennessy left her ensconced in a snug nest of boulders and cactus, completely hidden from the road below. The sun by this time was mounting well into the blue sky and was blazing down fiercely. As usual in upland Morocco, the landscape was precisely that of the California hills, with the exception of the huge cactus cultivated for centuries by the Arabs in place of fences or hedges. This was scattered wild over the hillside among the boulders, and came down close to the road. On the other side of the road was a steep descent, running off out of sight into a ravine.

Some distance ahead of the car, Hennessy settled down behind two small boulders, completely screened by cactus that hid him without preventing his observation, and composed himself to wait, pistol in hand. He was convinced that Durell would halt at sight of the Renault; if not, he would be halted anyway. As he well knew, no half-way measures would now be used, for he was dealing with Durell in person, and that made all the difference.

THE moments dragged. Every minute of delay now meant that Croghan was farther on his way to the crossroads; in fact, Hennessy calculated that Croghan must have reached there long since.

"No doubt whatever now, about that loot!" he reflected. "Improbable as it seems, this is a country of improbabilities, sure enough. Durell wouldn't be so cursed hot after it, if he wasn't certain. He's a slick one, too! The way he walked out of that hotel dining-room and then got his gang to work was a caution. Well, if I have any luck now, I'll pay him back

for the tire he ruined, and with added interest——"

The hillside gathered and reflected the vibration of a car's engine. Hennessy gathered himself together, assured himself by a glance that Mary Gray was out of sight, and gave all his attention to the curve in the road.

An instant later, a car swept around this, going at high speed. It was Durell's Cadillac, and the Frenchman—though Mary Gray had intimated that he was half Spanish—himself was at the wheel.

As Durell sighted the stranded Renault, his brakes screamed. By his side was M'tel, the red-headed Berber; in the rear seat were the other two men Hennessy had seen at the hotel. All were craning out at the Renault. The Cadillac slowed down; then Hennessy saw Durell make a sudden gesture and pick up speed.

"Too smart to stop, eh?" thought Hennessy. "Doesn't like the deserted look of things. All right, mister——"

His pistol came up. He fired twice, rapidly. A third report made answer, as the right rear tire of the Cadillac was blown into ribbons. The big car lurched, swerved wildly, and just to make sure, Hennessy fired again and the other rear tire went out.

There was his mistake. He knew it instantly, too late to check his action. Instead of firing again, he should have held them under his gun. Even as he realized this, pistols roared from the halted car, almost directly opposite him. The cactus around him popped and split under a hail of lead.

Hennessy fired twice more, frantically, then fell forward and lay quiet.

Durell's imperious voice halted the fire of his companions. One of the two Frenchmen lay slumped in the rear of the car; Hennessy's last bullet had gone

through his brain. Durell's gaze searched the hillside rapidly.

"No sign of the other two," he observed. "See anything, M'tel?"

"*Mais oui!*" responded the Berber at his side, after an instant. "Something moved in that clump of rocks and cactus up above."

"So? Croghan's there, hurt, no doubt; their car ran off the road," said Durell, and then spoke rapidly. M'tel nodded and wriggled out of his jellab. Durell got out with his remaining companion, on the far side.

"With me, Pierre," he said, then lifted his voice. "He's shot dead? Good! Come along and take care of him. Why the fool shot at us, heavens knows! Luckily we have two spare tires——"

He beckoned Pierre. They darted forward to where Hennessy lay, a trickle of crimson running over his face. Durell spoke rapidly, softly.

"Lift him to the car. Hurry. She is up there, you comprehend?"

Meantime, the Berber had slipped from his car, free of the jellab, and darted forward down the road. After a moment he began to ascend the hillside among the rocks.

Lifting Hennessy's body, Durell and Pierre carried him to the far side of the car. Then Durell flung himself on the American, with a snarl, and searched him thoroughly. Finding nothing of importance, he straightened up.

"He's not hurt; a bullet merely clipped his thick skull. Tie him up and shove him in; we can make use of him later. Leave Moreau's body among the cactus yonder, across the road. He's dead enough. We'll carry him over in a minute. I'll fasten his murder on this blundering American, you comprehend?"

"And the tires, *m'sieu?*" questioned Pierre. Durell made a sharp gesture.

"Wait. Watch."

He peered up the hillside. There, nothing was to be seen. Hennessy, firmly tied hand and foot, was bundled into the rear of the Cadillac. Pierre lit a cigarette, waiting. The road remained empty in the morning sunlight.

Suddenly a sharp cry broke from the hillside. The figure of M'tel appeared, and waved a hand.

"I have her, *m'sieu!*" he called. "She's alone."

5

THE men of northern Africa waste no time on recalcitrant women, whose value is that of a few sheep, no more.

Her whole attention fastened on the road below, caught entirely by surprise when M'tel leaped upon her from the rear, Mary Gray had no chance to use the pistol in her hand. M'tel knocked it away, and as she fought him savagely, clipped her over the head with a stone and picked her slim body up in one brawny arm.

He grinned as he came down to the car. He was a big fellow, blue-eyed like many Berbers, brutal and uncouth of expression. Durell came to him savagely.

"Have you hurt her? If you have, then——"

"A tap, no more. She fights like a man," said M'tel. "Tie her hands if you mean to take her along."

"No sign of Croghan?"

"None," answered M'tel positively.

"Then he must have gone for help—— ah!" Durell started slightly. "He could telephone from the crossroads, back there! That's it. Well, to work! We have two tires to change. Let her wait in the car. Don't tie her up. I'll take her."

He took the woman in his arms, looked into her unconscious face, and laughed softly.

"So, my precious one! Your lips are too good for Carlos Durell, eh? We'll see about that, and if you want to fight, just try!"

He placed her in the tonneau, and went to work with the other two. The body of Moreau was tumbled among some cactus on the downhill side of the road, the two spare tires were slipped in place, and in high good-humor, Durell gave his orders.

"Pierre, you drive. Sit with him, M'tel, and show the road. I'll ride with the lady and the American. Now to finish it up quickly!"

"And the man Croghan, *m'sieu*?" questioned M'tel. Durell laughed.

"We'll attend to him. Forward!"

When Mary Gray opened her eyes, the car was bouncing over a rough hill road, and Durell, his arm supporting her, was smiling down into her eyes. She recoiled from him, and his arm tightened about her.

"Fight, little bird, fight!" he exclaimed delightedly, in English. "You have spirit, and when you learn who's your master——"

Her clenched fist struck him in the mouth, twice, so that the blood spurted from his cut lips. Again Durell laughed, drew her more closely despite her struggles, and pressed his lips to hers until his blood was smeared on her face.

"There, little one, you'll soon learn to love me!" he exclaimed, the two in the front seat glancing back and laughing heartily. "Come, be a sweet child. You won't?"

He winced as her fingers sank into his neck, driving his head back. With this, he struck her twice, as he would strike a man, so that she sagged limply back in the seat, unconscious again. A torrent of oaths rushed from him, and M'tel uttered a roar of laughter.

"That's right, *m'sieu*!" he cried. "You know how to handle a filly, eh? Better leave her as she is. We're nearly there now."

Durell wiped the blood from his lips, produced and lit a cigarette with a grimace, and then watched eagerly as M'tel pointed to the road ahead. He did not observe that the eyes of Hennessy, doubled up at his feet, were open a trifle, watching what passed.

"We'll just take no chances on her making a dash for it," he said, as the car slowed. He leaned forward and knotted his handkerchief about Mary Gray's ankles, then prodded Hennessy with his toe. "Awake, swine?"

Hennessy gave no sign of life, and Durell, laughing, swung open the door; the car had come to a halt.

To their right was an open field, sown in wheat. To their left, the hillside rose quite sharply. Part-way down it came a ragged hedge of cactus, ending at an irregularly shaped boulder of some size. No house was in sight, nor any living thing.

"There it is," and M'tel jerked a thumb at the boulder. His bright blue eyes were glittering with an eager light. "There's a hollow under the stone, into which it fits like a socket. Two of us can lift the rock."

"How d'you know it hasn't been lifted?"

"It is death to touch a boundary stone, *m'sieu*—that is, to move it."

THE voices receded. The three men strode away toward the stone, two hundred yards up the long slope.

Hennessy stirred, moved, wrenched himself around. Frantic desperation spurred him to herculean effort, but he was powerless to break the cords about his wrists. He strained upward,

flung his voice at the woman on the seat.

"Mary! Mary Gray! For God's sake, wake up, Mary!"

That urgent, piercing voice broke through to her consciousness. Her eyes opened. She looked down at him blankly. Hennessy spoke again.

"Mary! Get the knife from my pocket—quick! Wake up! Get the knife, cut me free!"

The words registered. She leaned forward, fumbling at his pockets. He guided her with sharp words, twisted his head, looked out. Durell had left the car door ajar. Up the hillside, he could see the three men clustered about the stone there.

Then her hand had found the pocket-knife. She drew it out, opened the blade, and swayed over in the seat.

"I—I can't——" she murmured, and Hennessy feared that she was about to faint. Her face was bruised from Durell's blows, and blood-smearred.

"Cut my wrists free!" snapped Hennessy angrily.

The bitter authority of his tone drove into her. She blinked at him, and leaned forward anew. The knife-blade bit at the cords, bit at his skin, sawed almost blindly.

Then a low cry of helpless effort escaped her lips, and she collapsed again.

Hennessy swore in heartfelt desperation, as the knife fell to the floor beside him. He looked down at his bleeding wrists—and to his amazement, perceived that the cords were severed. One burst of straining muscles, and his hands were free. Yet he could feel nothing in them. So tight had been those cords that his fingers were purpled, the circulation was cut off.

He glanced up the hillside. The three men were returning, Durell was holding in his arms a brief-case, of all things. Desperately, Hennessy moved his right

hand, caught the knife clumsily in his numbed fingers, slashed at the cords about his ankles. They were severed. He was free, but momentarily helpless. The knife fell by his feet and he could not recover it.

He hurriedly resumed his doubled-up posture, crossing his hands before him as before. He saw in a flash that he must gain time. If they knew now that he was free, they would shoot him without mercy. His hands and fingers were tingling with renewed circulation, strength was flowing into him. He felt no pain from his hurt head. His own fate and that of Mary Gray depended on him now, entirely.

The three were close upon the car. Their voices came loudly.

"She has not wakened, eh?" said Durell, with a laugh. "Excellent. Pierre, you shall have the honor of sitting with *madame*——"

"Stop! First, about the money," intervened M'tel, his voice ugly.

"You shall look into that while I drive," said Durell, "and count it. We know that money is here; nothing else matters. Take it."

"Good," replied the Berger. "There is that man Croghan——"

"I have thought about him," said Durell. "Get in, Pierre, get in! And don't forget poor Moreau. Here are three of us who can swear we saw this American try to hold up our car, shoot our tires, kill Moreau."

"If the woman tells a different story?" suggested Pierre, climbing in over Hennessy. Durell uttered a low laugh.

"She will not. She will tell no story whatever, because she is to be my guest for a long time; that is, until I grow tired of her. We'll not return as we came, but drive straight on to your village, M'tel. You keep her there. We'll arrange everything with the authorities and say that

you were a witness. We'll come back tonight and pick her up and take her to Casablanca. You understand?"

The Berber grunted assent, as he settled himself in the front seat. Durell got under the wheel and started the engine, ordering M'tel to open the brief-case and count the money.

A low exclamation of astonishment came from Pierre. Hennessy, peering up through half-closed lids, saw the man staring down, saw him lean over amazedly. He had discovered that the cords were gone from Hennessy's wrists. He stooped down to make certain of this incredible thing—

The unbound fingers gripped about his throat like iron bands.

In the front seat, Durell was driving slowly along the hill road, with half an eye on the Berber beside him. M'tel had opened the moldy leather case, raking out to view thick packets of banknotes—American notes, Bank of England, Bank of France, Bank of Algiers and so on. Both men were utterly absorbed in their occupation, the Berber aflame with cupidity, Durell half watching him, half intent on the road.

Neither of them paid any heed to the rear seat. There was nothing to draw their attention, except a slight thudding as the wildly flailing hands of Pierre hit the body of Hennessy and the car floor. Pierre had been drawn forward, off the seat and on top of the American, as those clamped fingers sank into the flesh of his throat.

Presently his struggles became fainter, then ceased entirely.

HENNESSY drew clear of the man's body, came to one knee. His intention was to get Pierre's pistol, when he would have the pair in the front seat at his mercy. At this instant, however, M'tel

glanced around, glimpsed the face of Hennessy behind him, and broke into a shrill cry of alarm.

The American's fist promptly smashed him under the ear.

Against two pistols, once they came into use, Hennessy well knew that he had not a chance. His whole idea now was to prevent a pistol being used. Durell instantly slammed on the brakes but could not abandon the controls. A flurry of banknotes spread over the whole front seat.

Driving another blow into the Berber's face, Hennessy flung himself on the man bodily, trying for a grip about his throat, twisting his own body over the back of the front seat. He kicked out viciously, and the car lurched wildly as his heel met Durell's cheek. A moment later, the car halted, still on the upper road above the stone marker.

In that moment, however, things happened rapidly.

Hennessy was sprawled above the two men, keeping Durell occupied with his feet, and giving his prime attention to M'tel. Hard as iron, apparently impervious to blows, the Berber put up a vicious fight, but Hennessy roughed him, and then, as the car halted, got a purchase and slammed his head and shoulders forward with terrific force.

M'tel's skull was smashed against the windshield frame, the impact cracking the thick glass. The Berber went limp. Hennessy had caught Durell's neck between his legs, and flung himself backward as the other frantically threw open the car door. Both men tumbled out in the dust together.

Durell came up with a pistol in his hand. It exploded, but the bullet went wild—Hennessy kicked at his wrist, knocked the weapon away, and flung himself on Durell.

He was met with a smashing crack that drove him sprawling.

Durell wasted no time trying to retrieve his pistol. He stepped into Hennessy's rush with a beautiful left from the shoulder that should have finished the matter straightway. Before the American could regain his feet, Durell was in upon him like a flash with a vicious kick to the face.

The engine room of a tramp, however, affords a wide range of education. Hennessy dodged that kick somehow, took another in the chest, then came to his feet, only to meet a storm of terrific smashes to the face and body. Durell could use his fists; he could use everything; and now he used all he had, to the very limit.

Hennessy had been up against many a battering in his day, but after the first ten seconds of this, he knew he had to fight with his head. He gave ground rapidly. Before him burned the snarling, bleeding, blazing-eyed face of Durell, alight with malignant hatred; the man was in the grip of an incredible ferocity. Hennessy evaded, ducked, parried, then got his balance, found his second wind, planted a straight left to Durell's belt and crossed over his right to the jaw.

Durell was halted. Like a flash, Hennessy bored in, beat the man back with a storm of blows, and landed one perfect crack flush to the chin that snapped back Durell's head and shook him badly. Panting, the Frenchman covered up, retreated, took another right and left that dazed him, and slipped in the dust. He was definitely mastered now, and realized it. Hennessy instinctively stood back to let him rise—then cursed himself for a fool.

Durell, lying on one elbow, kicked savagely. Hennessy's feet were knocked from under him. The Frenchman flung himself sideways and his arm shot out. The for-

gotten pistol in his hand, he came to his feet, cat-like, just as Hennessy rose.

The pistol cracked. Hennessy staggered to the impact of the bullet. Then, surprizingly, he hurled himself forward. Durell fired again, and missed clean. Hennessy was upon him, knocking up the pistol, planting a final blow in that high-boned face—and then slumping down in a heap. Durell looked down at him, laughed, lifted his weapon.

Another pistol-shot reverberated from the naked hillside.

6

THIS shot came from the pistol of Croghan.

Wholly absorbed in that frantically savage battle for life, neither of the two men had observed anything around them. They had not seen the approach of the Renault, had been blind to the figure of Croghan leaping from it and running toward them. Not until Durell lifted his weapon to blow out the brains of Hennessy, did his eye catch the moving object. Then it was too late.

Croghan's one shot whirled him around and dropped him, for good.

When Hennessy came to himself, he was in the rear seat of the Renault, and Mary Gray was pouring wine between his lips. He spluttered, met the grin of Croghan, and sat up.

"What's this? Thought I was dead! Felt Durell's bullet hit me——"

He looked around in utter stupefaction. No sign of the Cadillac, of the hillside, of anything. The Renault was pulled up beside the gray-green mass of an olive grove, hot in the noonday sun.

"Good lord! Was that all a dream?"

"You'll know if you move around," said Croghan. "That bullet slapped your ribs, partner, and we've been patching you up for some time. Gosh, man!

What you did to those three devils was a plenty! You hardly left enough of Durell for me to shoot."

"You!" Hennessy felt under his shirt, found himself bandaged heavily, and comprehended. "You—shot him?"

Croghan nodded.

"Yep. We've got the loot we came after, and now we're going to get something to eat and drink. We all need it."

Hennessy met the dancing eyes of Mary Gray; they were no longer laughing, and their gay merriment was sobered, but the smile that came to her lips, the pressure of her hand, brought swift answer from him.

"And now we've got to pay the piper," he said, and then bit into the sandwich Croghan passed him. The lean, dark man nodded gravely.

A bite to eat, a bottle of wine, and the three regarded one another. Croghan was the first to break the silence.

"No use blinking it," he said. "Durell was a bad egg and no one will mourn him, but all the same, if we go back to Fez there's going to be merry hell raised over all this."

"No place else to go," said Hennessy. "We've nothing to be afraid of. See the thing through, tell the truth and shame the devil——"

"Not for me," and Croghan shook his head. "I've been in jail, remember. I've got a record here. We may get off eventually, sure, but they'll jail us and grab the money, and we'll not see a red cent of it. We've worked for that loot, partner."

"I'll say we have," said Hennessy, frowning. "What else is there to do, though?"

"Well," said Croghan, "I made a mistake. Got a man out from town, soldered up the oil line of this car—and she'll go. The bearings aren't out after all. I came

on alone with her. We can make the north highway and hit for Spanish territory, or get the railroad up to Tangier. There's an afternoon train. In a couple of hours we can be clear outside any zone of danger—or I can."

"I've no papers," said Hennessy slowly.

"Won't need any, until you get into Tangier itself. The consul there can wire the consul at Casablanca and fix up your status all right. There won't be any hunt for us if we do the vanishing act—they won't pin this on us, or connect it with us. In fact, there may not be any trouble at all, but I simply couldn't take the chance."

"I don't like Morocco anyhow," said Hennessy whimsically, and met the eyes of Mary Gray. He started slightly. "Hey! But what about you, young lady? If——"

"Let's all go to Tangier and see what happens," she said quickly.

"Nonsense! You have pictures at Rabat——"

"Pictures be hanged!" she exclaimed, her dancing eyes suddenly aglow with eagerness. "What are pictures? All aboard for Tangier! We can make the train, at least, and settle everything else by wire. Ready? Then, let's go! You take the first spell at the wheel, Croghan!"

Croghan twisted about in his seat and shied the empty wine-bottle from the window.

"O. K., then," he rejoined. "Want to sit in front, Red? Won't joggle you so much there."

"No, thanks," and Hennessy met the eyes of Mary Gray, and caught her fingers in his own. "I stay here—all the way! There's better and bigger loot than money. Right?"

"Right," said Mary Gray, with her old silvery laugh.

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