

GOLDEN FLEECE

20¢

DECEMBER

HISTORICAL
ADVENTURE



Two Against the Gods
by E. Hoffmann Price

• ALL STORIES COMPLETE •

GOLDEN CHAINS —
by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.

DEAD MAN ALIVE by H. BEDFORD-JONES



She was holding Lane's pistol point-blank on the commander.

Illustration for "Fire On Snow" in this issue.

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HISTORICAL ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1938

Vol. 1 No. 3

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COVER DESIGN

Painted in oils for "Dead Man Alive" by Harold S. Delay.

ILLUSTRATIONS

by Harold S. Delay and Jay Jackson.

These stories are fiction. If any character bears the name of a living person, it is purely a coincidence.

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The Coasts of Chance

THIRD OF A SERIES by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by HAROLD S. DELAY

DEAD MAN ALIVE

MY friend Haberlein had been away three months, doing the North Africa tour. When he breezed into my office, I shoved work aside and welcomed him fittingly. I like the fellow, even if he does consume too much of my time; no one could help liking him. And he is always having the damnedest adventures.

"So you went to Morocco!" I exclaimed. "The home of the old Barbary rovers. Did you go to Rabat and Sale, the twin city where the worst of those rovers had their nest?"

His manner changed. His vivacity departed. He slumped in his chair and his glittering black eyes echoed his sigh.

"Did I go there!" he repeated. "Harry, I spent two weeks there, and got the greatest story of my life!"

"Then why look so cursed melancholy?"

"Listen. You know the Street of the Consuls, that runs down from the citadel? Where they say the slave-market used to be held, in the days when they

brought in Christian slaves by the score?"

I nodded. "Sure. It's just around from the Transat hotel."

"Well, I occupied a house there for two weeks. An old, old house that had been a palace three or four hundred years ago. There's where I got the story."

I knew what was coming now, and glanced at the clock. Haberlein forestalled me. He swept aside the papers on the desk, leaned forward, and fastened his hypnotic gaze on me.

"Listen," he said impressively. "Did you ever stop to think what would have happened if a hundred thousand of the most fanatic, bloody, and best-trained fighting men in the world had been loosed upon England about the year 1698?"

"Don't be fantastic," I said. "It would have been a massacre, of course. England had no army to mention at that period."

"Well," he said, "don't you know that the Emperor Ismail of Morocco

offered to restore James II to the throne of England about that time?"

"Yes, that's no secret."

"Do you know why he didn't do it?"

"No. Why?"

"That," he said triumphantly, "is the story! Now, you know how the twin city perches on the cliff on each side of the river, above the little harbor—"

His voice flowed on. It took me back to the sights and sounds of Morocco, and the smells as well—that insidious, pervading smell like stale cold cream which Europeans find so nauseating. I never could figure out just why. Women who slather their faces with cold cream have the identical odor in their nostrils all night long, and love it.

Morocco, and the old city on the cliff above the sea! One of the famous spots of the world's history, crowded with romance, with horror, with momentous happenings!

* * *

THE acting consul of France at Sale, home of the dreaded "Salee rovers," could look directly down at the harbor from the window of his house on the cliff. He looked, saw the French ship heading in for the river mouth under escort of two pirate craft, and swung around to his visitor.

"Spies! Spies and intrigues everywhere!" he spat out. "King William sits in London, King James at St. Germain, King Louis in Paris—and here in Morocco we feel the echoes, in this land of blood ruled by the most deadly tyrant on earth! I have enough to worry me, without listening to your empty drivings."

He was a rascally little fellow, this Monsieur Jacquemot; but he had been in Morocco a long time and had great influence with the bloody rulers of Sale.

His visitor, a cool English merchant named Lane, smiled and produced a leather purse, which clinked dully.

"But you'll listen to this, eh? Not empty, by a good deal. Yes or no? We've no time to lose; the ship's coming over the bar."

Jacquemot squinted at the purse, and grinned. "Yes! What do you want?"

"No use trying to pull the wool over your eyes; you know too much already," said Lane. "You probably heard of the letter sent by the Emperor Ismail to the so-called King James—the exiled Stuart?"

"I believe such a letter was sent," admitted Jacquemot cautiously. "It offered all the navy, armies and wealth of Morocco, to put the Stuart king back on his throne."

"Precisely; and Europe is ready to go up in flames," said the Englishman bitterly. "If the Stuart accepts—and why would he not accept?—picture to yourself what will happen. James II will return to England backed by a French fleet, crammed with a horde of fanatic Arabs, Moors, renegades! Why, in his bodyguard of black Sudanese alone, Ismail has over a hundred thousand fighting men! Picture such a force landing in England—it would be like a nightmare of horror come to life!"

Jacquemot shrugged. "That's nothing to me, my friend. France and Morocco are friendly. Ismail sends envoys to Paris; the Grand Monarque sends gifts to Ismail, who has thirty thousand Christian slaves laboring for him. Naturally, you English and the Dutch are only too anxious to get a stronger foothold yourselves in Morocco; however, what do you want of me at present?"

Lane tossed him the purse. "The

Stuart pretender has answered the emperor's letter; that answer must never reach Ismail. Do you talk business or not?"

"Oh!" Jacquemot hefted the purse and scratched his sparse beard. He darted a sharp glance at Lane. "What of it? The answer would go direct to Tangier, and be sent on to the Emperor Ismail at Meknez, the capital."

"Not at all. We happen to know that, for greater security, the answer comes here, comes on that ship yonder, to be forwarded by the Pasha Al Barak to the emperor. The bearer is one Sieur de Caulain. Now do we talk business?"

Jacquemot made a wry face and hefted the purse again.

"Absurd! Is not England worth more than this?"

"Another like it; all we ask is your help. Send me word if the man comes—he may be using another name. When he is dead, when the letter is in my hands, you get the other purse. And you'll not be concerned in the matter, except to make no outcry; easy enough to claim later that the man never showed up. Eh?"

Jacquemot tucked away the purse. "Agreed."

IN these days of Emperor Ismail, at the close of the seventeenth century, a consul in Morocco was not what he had been in the grand old times, when the country was open to trade and adventurers like Captain John Smith could enjoy a turn or two with Moorish knights. Now all that was gone.

Ismail was an absolute despot, owner of the life and goods of every man in Morocco; he slew by the thousand and ten thousand, warred against all

Christians, and substituted piracy for commerce. Only Louis XIV of France got any trade out of him, and the French consul had influence but nothing more. Renegades, Dutch, English, French and Italian, filled the country in the west, and so great was the fear of Ismail that one or two of his black Sudanese bodyguard could overawe a province.

The Sieur de Caulain had no idea of seeking any consul, and no need. He was escorted by a member of the Moroccan embassy at Paris; he was an honored guest; he had nothing to do except turn over the documents he carried to the Pasha Al Barak at Sale, and start home again—a matter of a few days only.

Let it be confessed straightway: Caulain stepped ashore a perfumed, arrogant, laced and beruffled court dandy, unaware that from the modern ship's deck he was stepping literally into the barbaric Dark Ages. He was young, handsome, versed amazingly in the tricks of fence, skilled in writing delicate, languishing verse, and little else. In a word, a product of Versailles.

He stepped ashore, and his world ended. The pasha, he found, was visiting at a country estate but would be back next day to receive him. He was led through vile-smelling, narrow streets to a house on the river, placed at his disposal complete with slaves and a cook. His valet came ashore and joined him. He was visited by the French consul, a fox-faced little rascal. That evening, before dinner, he opened a bottle of wine presented to him by the consul; he drank some of it. He remembered nothing more.

A GREAT man in Sale, city of the corsairs, was the renegade Nu-

reddin, Light of the Faith—born plain Jean Dubois in Perpignan. He had been a follower of Allah many years and had risen to wealth and position, like many another renegade. In his care was all the artillery of the castle; the guns and gunners of the pirate fleet were in his charge. He was a lusty, full-flavored rascal with a white scar across his face, and with prosperity had run to paunch. Five miles up the river he had a farm, a country house, a hundred-odd white slaves, as many more blacks, a bodyguard of renegades, wealth incalculable looted from a thousand ships, and three-score wives who lived in a separate palace.

Upon a day, Nureddin sat sucking the stem of his waterpipe, in his gorgeous tiled patio where fountains played amid orange-trees. The English merchant, Lane, had ridden out from town to see him, and had gone away again looking much disturbed. Now Nureddin motioned to Ali, captain of his guards, who had once been a Levantine Greek.

"Ali! Bring in that French dog; the one whom I just told the Englishman was dead."

Ali grinned. "He's not far from it. At once!"

He departed, and presently came back with two slaves, who dragged after them a naked, bearded, dirt-encrusted object hung with clanking chains. Hair caked with matted blood, back and flanks cut with whips, he was a mere shadow of humanity.

"Ha! You look well, Monsieur Lestranger!" said the renegade in French, and grinned. The miserable captive blinked at him.

"That is not my name!" he said, in a voice as hollow as his cheeks. He was nearly dead of torture and starvation.

"I tell you I'm the Sieur de Caulain!"

"Indeed! A likely story," sneered Nureddin. "If true, you're an aristocrat; and I hate all aristocrats. But you're only a miserable rat who was captured with a Bordeaux trading ship, and your name is Lestranger."

"You lie!" snapped Caulain with a feeble spark of energy. "I bore letters from Paris to the Emperor Ismail! When the emperor hears of this, you'll be torn apart by horses!"

Nureddin grinned. "And when the moon's made of cheese, I'll eat some of it! If you bore letters, where are they? Certainly, none were found. Can you prove your story?"

Caulain regarded the renegade, and saw that the man was playing with him. Across his brain darted a flash of comprehension.

Days, weeks of torment, among Moorish slaves, criminals who did not understand a word of all he said, and added new torments because he was obviously a Christian; lashings, starvation, filth. His dazed senses had been close to madness. Twice this man had visited him, exchanged a few words of French, and departed laughing at his screaming protests and pleas. Days and nights of horror, the incredible and impossible become true. A slave, a slave!

And now, this interview. The letters! Of a sudden, Caulain began to understand, very dimly, why he had become the butt of destiny. At least, he had a glimmering.

"I might be able to prove it," he said cautiously. "Yes; there were letters."

NUREDDIN studied his victim. The man was broken, crushed, hopeless; but under that mask of beard

and dirt and blood, the long jaw was hard, the eyes were resolute. An aristocrat, an accursed aristocrat! And such a man could not be made to talk through terror.

A Moor, for instance the Pasha Al Barak, "The Lightning," would have gone straight to extremes, put the fellow to torture, perhaps have impaled

money. Perhaps worth power, favor, promotion. Well worth getting.

"Take the Christian dog to the window over the court," he said to the slaves, "then to the window that overlooks the garden." And in French, to Caulain: "Look from the two windows and then come back and make your choice."



She looked up, saw him, and uttered a stifled cry of fear.

him and killed him; and would have learned nothing. Nureddin knew better. Himself a renegade, he knew that a man in these bitter depths of hopeless misery would welcome death, even from torture.

A crafty rascal, this Nureddin. He had just told the Englishman, Lane, that Caulain was dead. The letters Lane wanted had never been found. Letters to the Emperor Ismail, eh? Worth money, obviously; a lot of

The staggering man was dragged to the first window, which opened on the courtyard. Some work was going on there, done by a band of miserable slaves, Christians; they were being lashed to it by relentless blacks. One, an old man with white hair, had been stripped and impaled; he sat upon his stake, twisting, writhing, shrieking blasphemies as the point of it ate into his vitals. Caulain uttered a cry of horror.

He was dragged to a window opposite. Here was a portion of the gardens, green and lovely, scented with orange-flowers and jasmine. Beside a fountain he saw a vision incredible; a slim fair girl with golden hair and a frayed gown of green silk, who sat working with a needle. She looked up, saw him, and uttered a stifled cry of fear.

The two guards dragged him back in front of Nureddin, who chuckled.

"Will you become a Moslem and be freed, wealthy, honored?"

"No," said Caulain.

"Then, will you talk a little? Tell me where those letters are. Instead of the stake, I'll give you the girl you just saw. A French girl; I've kept her as a present for Ismail, but the emperor has five hundred already. Would you like her? I'll give you an easy post as my gardener. You shall have the little house in the gardens, with slaves to obey you, with this girl to be yours. Yes?"

Caulain stared. "I don't believe you!" he said hoarsely. "It's a trick!"

"By Allah, I swear it!" Nureddin leaned forward, suddenly earnest. "Choose, aristocrat! The lash and the stake, if you're lucky enough to die quickly; or else the other. What did you do with the letters?"

"I hid them—" Caulain checked himself. What is in a man, will come out at the lowest ebb. Now, in this moment, his brain was waking. Desperate, hopeless, all but dying, he began suddenly to fit into his world, to find himself. He looked up at Nureddin and continued.

"Prove to me that you mean to keep your bargain," he said. "I'll show you where I hid the documents. Upon my honor."

"Done with you," said Nureddin, a gleam in his black eyes. He was in no hurry. He had yet to learn the value of those documents. "I go to Sale this afternoon; in two days I shall return. You ask for proof; you shall have it."

He summoned the overseer of his slaves and issued rapid instructions in Arabic. Then he went out and mounted his horse, and with his bodyguard around him started for the city, to hold cautious discourse with the English merchant Lane, who imported gunpowder and sold it to the Moors and thereby held secure place here, with the French consul, Jacquemot, and with others.

TO Caulain, the next few hours were like some fantastic dream. His chains were removed. He was taken in charge by two grinning black slaves, who bathed him, deloused him, and anointed his hurts with healing unguents. He was allowed to clip his long shaggy hair and was offered a razor wherewith to shave; this he refused, but trimmed his unkempt beard. Not for the world would he have shaved off that beard, in a land where a smooth face meant either a woman or a Christian slave! His brain, which had begun to waken, was functioning for the first time in his life. And it was making up for lost time.

He was given cool clean garments, native garments, with a handsome white jellab over all; and yellow leather slippers, without heels. He was perfumed and given tobacco. He found himself in a small two-roomed cottage in the gardens. Bowls of steaming meat stew and appetizing cous-cous were brought to him, and coffee and bread; he ate like a man in dream. And with the evening, he flung himself down

and there was none to waken him until Sidi Muhammad, the red morning sun, flooded into his eyes.

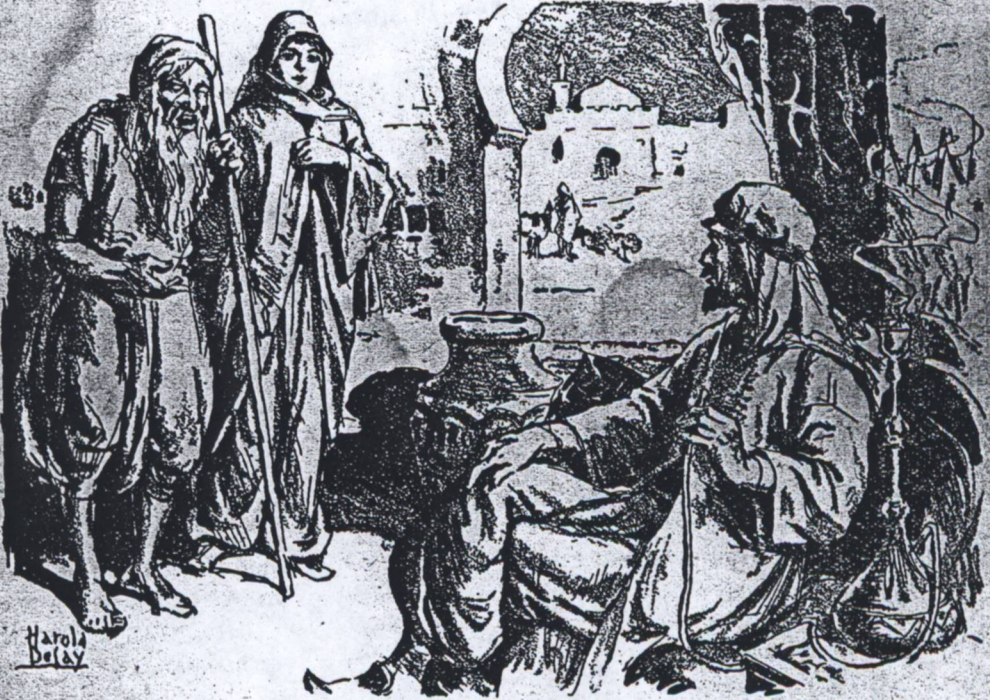
And, with morning, the girl he had seen in the garden was shoved into his presence.

"Who are you?" she demanded, staring in terror. "Why am I here? Do you speak French?"

gray hair and the garb of a slave—a bent, stooping, tortured old man, who bent his one eye on Caulain, and spoke in French.

"I've been appointed to serve mademoiselle and translate for her. She is of a high family in France—"

"Here she's a slave; we're all slaves, but she belongs to me," broke in Cau-



"I've been appointed to serve mademoiselle and translate for her."

"Who am I?" said Caulain. "A dead man alive, mademoiselle. The wretch whom you saw at the window yesterday—remember? The name is Pierre. And yours?"

"Elaine," she murmured, and turned. "Are you there, Mattei? Come, come!"

Caulain looked and listened, suspicious, wary, intent. She wore no green gown now, but the white robe of a Moorish woman. Into the room came a little old man with one eye and long

lain harshly. "How long have you been in this country, old man?"

"Eighteen years."

"Do you want to escape?"

The one bleared old eye probed and probed.

"No one ever escapes, except by death, from this hell. Can you do one thing, any one thing, supremely well, monsieur?"

"Yes," said Caulain, thinking of his skill with fencing. He was famed for it.

"Then put your skill at this one thing, whatever it is, at the service of our master, and make up your mind to live out your life here."

"Go outside and leave us alone," said Caulain. The old man obeyed.

Left alone with the girl, Caulain eyed her shrewdly. She had put back the robe, leaving her face and head exposed. A month ago he would have been all smiles and simpering courtesies; now he was hard, bitter, ruthless. With every moment, the flame burning in his brain leaped more brightly. Chance had given him one way in which to fight, and he meant to use it to the uttermost.

"Come here and sit by me," he said. "How old are you, Elaine?"

"Eighteen," she said. Shrinking a little, she obeyed and sat beside him; he saw a shiver run through her, but she faced him bravely.

"Captured aboard a ship?"

"No. The Hornacheros landed and raided; it was on the coast, south of Havre, in France itself. They burned our chateau and—*and* carried me off."

"Hornacheros?" He frowned. "You mean these accursed Moors?"

"Don't you know? Mattei has told me. Hornacheros—the people of a town in Spain, who were expelled fifty years ago by the Spaniards. They became fierce, deadly enemies of all Christians. They settled in Sale, made it their own, and ever since have raided the coasts of Europe." As she spoke, she watched his face. The terror died from her eyes. "What are you thinking about?" she demanded abruptly.

"That you're very beautiful, Elaine."

"No. Don't lie," she said quietly. "It was something about yourself."

He smiled. "True. I was thinking that I'll never go back to the hell I

left yesterday. And you? Do you know what fate awaits you here? You've been given to me; you might have been given to one of the black slaves, or sold."

Again that rippling shiver took her, but her eyes held true, unwavering.

"I'd sooner die!" she said passionately. "But I can't die. The Emperor Ismail has an English wife, they say; she was carried off from England, as I was from France. She hasn't died. Those who want to die, can't."

"By God, there's a motto for you!" broke out Caulain, a blaze in his face. "Those who want to die, can't! I've often wondered why and how my blasted ancestors happened to take a motto; now I know! And this one's mine. Those who want to die, can't!" He caught the girl's arm, leaned forward, looked into her face. "I like you; a woman with spirit, a woman worth having! You've been given to me, you're mine. Will you keep the bargain, if I get you out of here and back to France? Answer me! Will you help me, stand by me, and keep the bargain?"

Her eyes widened upon him. Suddenly she was seeing a man, such a man as none who had known the Sieur de Caulain would have recognized. She caught fire from him.

"Yes!" she gasped. "Yes—oh, yes! I swear it!"

A shuffle of native slippers at the door warned Caulain. He released her, drew back.

"Then wait for word from me. Where are you quartered?"

"In the women's wing; I come into the garden here every morning."

He nodded and relaxed. Into the room came Mattei, followed by the overseer of the slaves.

"And not a word to this one-eyed rascal," went on Caulain calmly. "I don't trust him; he'd betray me in a minute. Well, Mattei? What do you want?"

"The overseer has come for us," said the old man. "He says we must go."

"Then why stay?"

They departed, and Caulain was left alone, with his pipe and tobacco.

He wondered at himself with a fierce, avid delight. For the first time in all these long days and weeks, he had come to himself; yet he was not himself. He was a new man, a different man, desperate, acting on sheer instinct—a man with nothing to lose save life, and utterly careless of that. A dead man alive, imbued with a fierce, terrible cunning.

Finding himself free to go where he would, although well guarded, he went out that afternoon to where the slaves worked in the courtyard, and finding one who spoke French, talked with him at length. When he was finally sent packing by the guards to his own place, he had learned what he most needed to know—where he was, how far was Sale, and the way thither. After this, he sat brooding, thinking, scheming. What was it old Mattei had said—put to use the one thing he knew how to do?

He broke into a sudden laugh, a harsh, raucous, mirthless laugh, such as the *Sieur de Caulain*, the man who was dead, had never in all his life uttered.

LATE that night, Nureddin came back to his estate upriver; outwardly his usual brutal self, but inwardly on fire. He was very tired. He had been steadily on the go for a day and a half, drinking and talking with Jacquemot and Lane. They were convinced that Caulain was dead, and now

he had the secret, and trembled under its weight.

The ship that brought Caulain had long since returned, bearing word to France that Caulain had gone on to the Emperor Ismail with his letter. Jacquemot cared nothing; his one motivation was the gold that had bribed him. Lane, and the interests behind him—ah, that was different! Lane wanted to be sure that the letter from the Stuart exile was destroyed, or else wanted to get it and forge another; anything to end, once and for all, the menace to Europe. But now Nureddin wanted something else, with a feverish anxiety.

He forced himself to wait, to sleep, to be fresh. Already he saw himself a pasha, the ruler of a province, his wealth increased tenfold, his harem tripled, his power subject only to the emperor of Meknez. So he slept; and after the sunrise prayer next morning, sent for Caulain, after picking his guards carefully. He wanted none this morning who knew French.

"Come here; sit down. You look different. You are convinced of my promises?"

"Yes," said Caulain quite humbly. His back was stiff from the scourgings, but he felt like a new man. Stiffness would loosen up. "The girl pleases me, but your overseer took her away after five minutes. Don't you intend to give her to me?"

Nureddin cursed the overseer. "You shall have her when you like, and a hundred more! If you want your freedom, you shall have it." Breathing hard, he scowled at Caulain and made the mistake of overplaying his hand. "Look, monsieur. Our paths now lie together. The letters you brought are of the greatest importance—to us, to the world, to Ismail! That accursed

Englishman, Lane, tricked me into helping him."

He told Caulain enough to show the latter why things had happened as they had.

"Now," he went on with gathering excitement, "you shall go free. We must get back those letters; you shall take them on to Meknez, to the emperor. For both of us there'll be rewards. For Jacquemot and Lane, punishment. Ismail strikes terribly, and spares none."

True enough, but Caulain saw behind the plausible words. Let him go on to Meknez with the letters? Let him tell the whole truth? Not much; this Nureddin would be the first to suffer from the wrath of the emperor. All Nureddin wanted was to get possession of those documents and to deliver them himself.

"DO YOU know the house I occupied at Sale?" he asked, dissembeling his real feelings under an appearance of expansive trust. The renegade nodded, his black eyes avid.

"Yes. It is empty; the owner is in prison."

"Jacquemot visited me there and brought me drugged wine," went on Caulain. "Before he came, I put the letters in a secure place. Where are my clothes and belongings?"

"Lane took them," Nureddin was suddenly anxious. "No letters were found!"

"Then they're still in that house, where I put them in a safe place."

"Ah! Where?"

Caulain shook his head. He had to hide his objective carefully, if he would attain it.

"Let us go together and get the letters, mon ami. Look you! Suppose

the Englishman had tricked you; suppose he did get the letters and tampered with them! I must see that the seals are intact, as they were given to me, before taking them on to Ismail."

"True, by Allah!" exclaimed the renegade. "Or that accursed Jacquemot! He and Lane searched for the letters together. Good! We'll go back to town today. A French barque was brought in by the corsairs two days ago, but she had a safe-conduct from the Pasha of Tetuan, so she must be released. She'll depart at midnight with the tide. If those two rascals have tricked me, I'll have a word with the pasha; we'll set them aboard the French ship, stripped to the bone—we'll take everything they have and set them adrift."

"What? Not kill them?" queried Caulain drily. The renegade winked.

"No; not here, my friend. Too many might talk, word might get to Ismail, and he'd ask unpleasant questions and take most of the loot. He gets sixty per cent of everything we make, you know. But, an hour after the French ship leaves, we'll send a galley after her to overhaul her. Those two rascals will die at sea." Nureddin scowled. "Tricked me! They know too much, as it is. They got me to help put you out of the way; the emperor would not like that. I must protect myself."

"True," said Caulain, and could have laughed for savage glee. "You may depend on my silence, Nureddin; you're being my friend, and I'll see that Ismail knows of it."

The renegade rolled a sardonic eye and nodded. Let this Frenchman reach the emperor with his story? Not much! Anyone who interfered with letters to Ismail would be lucky if he were not flayed alive. Now that he had learned

the importance of those letters, Nured-din meant to close the lips of all concerned, at least to his own share in the business.

And Caulain, watching that scowling, brutal face, could read the flitting thoughts.

"But you promised me the girl!" he said.

"She's yours. Take her."

"Thanks. Suppose, then, we go back to that house in town—quietly, this afternoon, when everyone is enjoying the siesta hour. We'll find the letters. If they've been tampered with, I'll know immediately. If not, well and good. You can claim that you rescued me, that Lane and Jacquemot had put me out of the way. Speak with the pasha; get rid of the pair of them and shut their mouths, as you propose. I'll back up your story. Then we'll start afresh, and I can get off for Meknez, taking the girl with me. Eh?"

Nureddin's murky eye lit up craftily. "Do you know what was in those letters?"

"Of course not. I'm just a courier. They were from Versailles, from the king."

THE renegade nodded, and licked his lips. Letters to set the world afire! If they never came, as Lane proposed, the Emperor Ismail would be insulted, savage, suspicious; his whole fantastic scheme of letting loose upon England a flood of Moorish fanatics would go by the board. If they arrived, if his proposals were accepted by the Stuart exile—ah!

"Yes; your advice is good," said Nureddin slowly, with a hearty Provençal oath. This aristocrat could serve him well, up to a certain point; then all mouths would be shut. Start

for Meknez, and disappear by the way—easily done! Another hand, blacker and hairier, the hand of good Nured-din, would deliver those letters to Ismail and receive fitting reward. In the meantime, humor this aristocrat, and shut the other mouths.

"Aye, all can be arranged," he went on. "We'll find the letters, then send for Lane and Jacquemot; seize them, hold them while I speak with the pasha—ha! You and I will set off for Meknez and the emperor, together!"

"And the girl," said Caulain. Nured-din grinned.

"In a hurry, are you? Very well. She's yours; enjoy her until the siesta hour, and we'll all ride to town in company. Keep the hood of your jellab pulled up about your face, and you'll not be recognized—aye, it works out well."

Caulain departed to his little two-room house at the end of the garden.

He was sure of himself, now; everything had opened for him most amazingly. The girl Elaine complicated matters. He could have done better, perhaps, to think of himself alone; but now that was impossible. After his one talk with her, everything had changed. He found himself fascinated by her spirit, her beauty, her possibilities. And, he reflected, she might yet fit into the picture; he would have need of her. At least, he would have need of someone. Perhaps that old one-eyed Mattei.

She arrived unexpectedly—thrust into the room and followed by grinning slaves who bore a hearty repast. Then the two were left alone. The girl rid herself of the heavy outer robe. In simple white vest and native trousers she came to him, regarded him attentively.

"Well?" she asked. "What does it all mean?"

"Blood," said Caulain. "Quick, fast work when the time comes; killing, and no pity. Can you face such a prospect without shrinking? Can you kill a man?"

She smiled faintly, her eyes resolute and hard.

"If you had seen the things I've seen in this land, if you faced the fate that is mine, you wouldn't ask such a question. All I ask is the chance."

"Sit down and eat. Tonight we start for France."

"You're insane!" she exclaimed. "Mattei has told me about it; escape is impossible. Of the thirty thousand Christian slaves in Morocco, not more than two or three have ever escaped. You don't know what you're saying."

CAULAIN smiled, and began to eat. It was a strange meal; he refused to explain himself or his plans and devoted himself to reassuring the girl. Their acquaintance ripened, as she studied him. He lost his air of bitter harshness, and friendliness arose between them.

"You were wrong in thinking old Mattei would betray you," she said as they talked. "He has dreamed of escape for years. If you can use him, you can trust him."

"Very well; I can use him. You're my property, for the moment," and in blunt words he told her why she was here. "You must pretend to have accepted me, to escape a worse fate. When we leave for Sale, you must ask to have Mattei accompany you; if Nureddin assents, well and good. Play your part! Can you?"

She leaned forward upon the cushions, and smiling, her lips half parted,

her golden hair flung back from her face, caught his hand and pressed it.

"Play my part?" she repeated mockingly. "Would I not play any part to escape from this hell on earth? Do I play it convincingly?"

Caulain lifted his head, startled. He caught a scrape of slippers feet outside, the voice of Nureddin. Swiftly, he seized the girl and drew her to him.

"Careful! Play it convincingly if you can!" he muttered, as the door was thrust open and Nureddin walked into the room.

"What? The fine mademoiselle welcomes her husband?" jibed the renegade.

Caulain laughed, stooped his lips to those of Elaine; her arms tightened about him, and her eyes closed languorously. When he glanced up at the grinning renegade, he perceived that the desired effect was achieved.

"Well?" he asked. Nureddin turned to the door, with a mocking gesture.

"I only came to see if all was well; enjoy yourselves, my children! You have an hour before we start. A short honeymoon, so make the most of it!"

When the door closed, Elaine drew away, her eyes suddenly ablaze; but Caulain only laughed, and reached for his pipe. Neither of them spoke again for a long time, and it was just as well. That one embrace had set Caulain's pulses to stirring madly.

"I hate you!" she broke out, but meeting his twinkling eyes, she flushed and subsided. And, presently, she was smiling again.

IN THE heat of mid-afternoon, they were summoned. Nureddin and six of his guards were waiting, with donkeys for all to ride. The girl, muffled to the eyes like a native woman, halted



"What? The fine mademoiselle welcomes her husband?"

everything with her request; when the renegade understood that she wanted Mattei, he shrugged and sent for the one-eyed slave.

"Let him serve you, if it pleases you; he's past his term at hard labor and is good for little more."

Caulain rode with Nureddin; Elaine and Mattei followed, the guards went before and behind. They rode along the river; the land was still in the heat of afternoon. They passed the monstrous towering walls of the Chella, an ancient city that had vanished all save the enormous ramparts, begun by Roman legionaires. They came to the Mosque of Hassan, where a Moorish king had assembled his armies to conquer Spain; this had vanished also, except the one lone beautiful tower, where a cresset now burned of nights to guide corsairs into the harbor beyond.

And so on along the river to the little haven under the cliffs, and the city walls that ran up to the palace of the pasha, and the great bare gun-platforms on the corner. The guards passed them, saluting Nureddin; on along the deserted, sleeping city streets. Then Caulain saw the house ahead, and recognized it, and began to tremble as memories overtook him.

In the harbor below lay a small French barque, men busy on her decks and aloft. His heart leaped as he saw her. Then a native, one of the fierce, wild Hornacheros, came along the street with sharp yelps, and barked something at Nureddin, and went on rejoicing. The renegade chuckled.

"A cutter has just arrived. A big English ship has been taken; she'll reach the harbor tonight. Ah! Then you'll see a thing or two! She fought hard, the man says."

So they came to the house, and halted.

A watchman was roused up. He recognized Nureddin, opened the doors, and was promptly sent packing, as the donkeys filed into the stables just inside the entrance. Nureddin set two of his six men to guard the doors, and looked at old Mattei.

"Take the girl to the women's quarters; keep her there and wait till you're sent for. You four men, to the courtyard and await my orders." He turned to Caulain. "Come, monsieur! You and I together, to our business!"

"With all my heart," said Caulain eagerly, and wondered how he would pass the rest of the day when the renegade was dead.

They passed into the house together. The place was completely furnished; everything was precisely as it had been at the moment the unfortunate owner was seized and clapped into prison and his effects confiscated.

IT HAD once been a palatial dwelling, but was very old and fallen into decay. The doorways and upper walls, a lacy honeycomb of gloriously carved and painted plaster, were ruinous. The ceilings, of intricate marquetry, were broken and discolored. The gay tiles that covered the floors and side walls the height of a man, showed broken gaps. The rooms surrounding the central patio and fountain were heaped with rugs and cushions; weapons adorned the walls, and thick hangings of Berber weave. The scant furniture consisted of inlaid and painted wood.

"This is the room," said Caulain, entering the chamber he had occupied briefly as a guest.

He stepped in and glanced around anxiously. Relief took him; the room

was just as he had left it. An inner room, opening from another that gave on the patio; a single window looked out upon a small hillside garden.

Leather cushions; a rug or two underfoot; upon the walls, weapons hung as ornaments—Sudanese spears and arrows and curved knives, and a few crossed swords. One of these, Caulain had in mind; a thin, light, deadly sliver of steel looted from some Italian ship, no doubt. He had noted it when first he came here.

"Well?" demanded the burly renegade with suppressed excitement. "Where did you hide them?"

"It was sheer chance," said Caulain, stepping closer to that wall upon which the rapier hung. He eyed the blade. It was loosely held to the wall. Good! "I stood at the window, yonder, looking out on the garden. Happening to notice that one of the tiles was loose, I touched it, plucked at it; it came away in my hand and showed a hole in the wall beyond. A small hole."

He paused, and Nureddin, plucking nervously at his beard, nodded.

"Sometimes those holes were made purposely for women to hide their jewels in. The hand of a woman would enter; that of a man would not. Well?"

"It came to me," Caulain resumed, "that the letters might be safer there than in my pocket. It was a compact, sealed packet, not large. So I thrust them in, put back the tile, and turned away. A little while afterward, Jacquemot arrived—and you know the rest."

The renegade's eyes glittered. "The tile! Which one was it?"

CAULAIN went to the window, Nureddin close at his elbow. He tapped the tiles, touched one of them, and it came away in his hand. Beyond

showed an aperture. He reached in, and brought out a sealed packet.

The letters for Ismail—addressed in French and in Arabic.

With a hoarse growl, Nureddin seized upon it, examined it, turned it over, and lifted his gaze to Caulain.

"Look at it! Untouched! As you left it!"

"Obviously." Coolly, Caulain reached out, took the packet, glanced at it, and with a nod of satisfaction, thrust it back into the hole. He clapped the tile in place, pressed it firmly, and it stayed. Nureddin scowled suspiciously.

"What's that for?"

"Safe-keeping," said Caulain. "Careful, my friend; we still have to make sure of Lane and Jacquemot! Better not take any chances with those two rogues. You must not give them any chance to talk. Now, if they see all these guards of yours around, they may suspect something. Remember, I have a debt to settle with them; I don't want to see them escape you. In fact, nothing would please me more than to lend you a hand with them."

"Not a bad idea," said the renegade. "I can certainly trust you in that!"

"You can," Caulain said with conviction. "Why not send one of your guards for each of those rascals, and dismiss the other four until later? Once you get them here, trust me to guard them well until you've seen the pasha and arranged matters! By the way, how will you send them aboard that French ship?"

"How?" repeated Nureddin stupidly, blinking at him. "Oh, I see! There's an officer with a squad of men from the castle, aboard her until she departs; I'll just send the two aboard tonight with one of my men to show my seal," and he flourished a big gold ring that

he wore, engraved with Arabic characters. "Nothing could be simpler."

"Nothing, indeed!" said Caulain admiringly, and again repressed his insane desire to break out laughing. "Then send for the two and let's have it settled!"

Nureddin scratched his beard, nodded assent, and roared for his guards. When they came, he sent one man for Jacquemot, another for Lane, and dismissed the other four until he summoned them.

"Go to the castle and await me there," he said. "You others, bring those Christian dogs gently; don't alarm them. Bring them to this room and then stay on guard outside."

The six men departed.

CAULAIN went to the wall and took down the sword, loosening another at the same time. The blade was old and pitted, but of fine steel, bending to his hand and springing back instantly.

"Here, mon ami!" exclaimed Nureddin. "What are you doing?"

Caulain kicked the door shut, caught down the other sword, and tossed it to Nureddin.

"About to kill you," he said. "Fight, you hound of hell!"

And he launched the attack, so swiftly, so furiously, that the half incredulous renegade by sheerest good luck parried his first lunges.

He had meant to kill the man at once, but to his horror he found that the stiffness of his hurt back and the scabbed wounds from his handcuffs spoiled all his accustomed nimbleness of wrist. His blade went wild.

The renegade, with a sudden bellow of oaths, drove at him. Fat and out of hand Nureddin might be, but he was a

fighter and a killer. Caulain fell on the defensive, was beaten back and again back; desperately, he rallied, shifted stance, engaged afresh, and abruptly found himself. His wrist became supple, his blade steadied, he ceased to retreat.

"What, renegade?" A laugh broke from him. "Cry to Allah for help—quickly!"

The maddened Nureddin hurled back an oath of screaming rage and leaped in. Caulain parried the lunge and stiffened—wrist and arm and body like steel. The other literally spitted himself upon that sliver of steel; it passed directly through his heart. The sword fell from his hand. He took a backward step, another, and suddenly sat down on a round stuffed leather cushion in the corner, facing the door. He was dead in that instant. His head fell back against the wall; the corner supported his limp body, and he sat staring blankly. Upon his white jellab was not so much as a spot of blood.

Caulain regarded him sharply, spoke to him—realized the truth and came forward. Not until he touched the man's face, was he certain. Nureddin sat there, to all appearance, staring at the door. Caulain drew back with a certain awe in his face; he comprehended at length that the seemingly natural posture was aided by the voluminous white jellab, which hid the man's whole sagging body and revealed only the face.

Then, with a deep breath, Caulain relaxed.

"One!" he said, and laid his blade in the window embrasure. He picked up the other sword and leaned it against the wall, opened the door, and went into the next room. There he found a Berber rug of tufted wool,

dragged it into his own room, and tossed it into a corner. He looked again at the dead man, and could have sworn Nureddin smiled. So he did, indeed—the muscles of the face were relaxing hideously in death.

He went to the renegade, felt beneath the jellab, and drew forth the usual long, keenly curved dagger car-

"HERE." Caulain strode at him and extended the curved dagger. "Everyone has gone. Two of Nureddin's guards will be back—only two. Can you answer for one?"

A glitter leaped in the one eye. Mattei reached out a skinny hand to the knife.

"It is his! Where is he?"



It passed directly through his heart.

ried by every Moor. Blood enough there, underneath, but the jellab hid it from sight. With the dagger, Caulain strode out of the room.

Luckily, on his first visit he had been over the house; he knew where to find the women's quarters. From the central courtyard and garden, he mounted to the upper floor, and called. The voice of Mattei answered; the one-eyed old man appeared at a doorway.

"Dead. Answer me! Can you take care of one guard?"

"Those accursed renegades?" Mattei showed yellow fangs in a snarl. "Give me the knife. Tell me when. Watch me!"

"Wait in the courtyard. When they come, they'll bring the Englishman, Lane, and the French consul, Jacquemot. Tell them Nureddin said to thrust the two men into the room but not to enter themselves; they'll under-

stand. Then wait for me."

Caulain turned. The girl had appeared at the old man's elbow. He held out his hand.

"Come! I've no time to stand here talking. Quickly! You'll not have to use a knife, but I need you."

Silent, questioning him only with her eyes, she moved, took his hand, accompanied him back to the room below. At the door he paused, with brief warning.

"He's dead; don't be afraid."

She went in, stopped dead at sight of the sitting, staring figure, but said nothing. Caulain went to the wall and tore down a huge ancient pistol that hung there, and thrust it into her hand, pulling back the wheel-lock.

"It's useless, but that's beyond their knowing. Do you know Lane or Jacquemot? No? You've missed nothing. They're the two men who betrayed me to this devil Nureddin. They think me dead. They're coming here. Jacquemot's a little dark man who looks like a rat; leave him to me, cover the other one with your pistol and hold steady. Steady, mind!"

She nodded. She was white to the lips, but her eyes held true. Caulain smiled briefly and touched her hand.

"Listen, mademoiselle; you must make good your words, and look upon death. Our single chance of getting alive out of this hell, lies in killing. That's my job. One false step, one detail missed, and we're lost. I don't intend to be lost. Now do you understand?"

She looked into his face, took a deep breath, and nodded.

"Trust me," she said quietly.

"Then, when they come in, move against the door with your pistol."

He showed her where to stand so the

door would open against her, and went to the window. Voices reached him; old Mattei was bawling his message at the two renegades. Both were coming together, then!

FEET stamped and shuffled in the deserted corridors; European boots, Moroccan slippers. A slight pause. Then the door was opened. Lane and Jacquemot were shoved into the room, and the door was closed. They advanced a step or two, looking at the deathly-grinning Nureddin, and halted. Caulain swung around. For an instant, neither paid him any attention.

Lane was a big man, hard of eye, hard of jaw; such a man as would trade in gunpowder to be used against his own people. Big and cool and dangerous. He spoke to Nureddin.

"Why this summons, excellency?"

He was silenced by the gasp bursting from Jacquemot, who had recognized Caulain.

"Look! Thunders of heaven, look! It is he, the courier—there!"

Caulain bowed mockingly. "Yes; a dead man alive, my dear Monsieur Jacquemot. Your friend the renegade, yonder, desires you to join him. Steady, Lane! A pistol's covering you; await your turn, and you'll have a chance to fight. Here, little rat, take this sword and use it!"

It was a swift moment, full of motion, of happenings. The fact that Nureddin was dead, impressed itself upon the two. Jacquemot's first stricken terror of recognition passed into a snarl, as Caulain approached him, sword in hand, extending the second sword hilt first.

Lane comprehended everything in a flash. He took a swift sideways step, then saw the woman's figure with the

pistol covering him; he froze straightway. That pistol looked like the mouth of hell itself. He wore a sword at his side, but made no move toward it.

Jacquemot, snarling, fear in his eyes, backed away from Caulain.

"You must be the devil!" he burst out. "You don't understand; we had no desire to hurt you, monsieur. We

ward, hurled himself with it in panic desperation. Caulain could not avoid that murderous lunge. He felt the steel bite into him; but at the same instant he ran Jacquemot through the throat. The man plunged forward and fell on his face with a ghastly bubbling cough, as the life flowed out of him. Presently he ceased to move.

Jacquemot's first stricken terror of recognition passed into a snarl.



were forced into all this. It was not done with our consent, I tell you!"

"Stop babbling lies, rat!" said Caulain in contempt, and thrust the hilt of the second sword at him. "Here, take this, use it, or I'll kill you in cold blood!"

He forgot the proverb of the cornered rat.

JACQUEMOT stretched out a trembling hand to the hilt; he was white as death. Sudden-swift, he seized the hilt, plunged the blade for-

Lane stood silent, motionless, under the pistol's threat.

Caulain stepped back. The other sword was fastened into his thigh. He drew it out and felt the warm blood gush down his leg. He caught a sharp little cry from Elaine, and smiled.

"It's all right. You need not shoot our friend now. Lane! You wear a sword. Use it, you dog! I've more respect for an honest renegade than for you."

Lane put hand to hilt, and calmly drew his blade.

"You think well of yourself, Frenchman," he said coolly, and leaped to attack.

As the blades crossed and held, wrist feeling out wrist, Caulain knew instantly that he faced a swordsman. A cold, indomitable, deadly man who knew his weapon. Almost before he knew it, Lane disengaged and thrust twice—each thrust came within an ace of killing him. Yet each one missed.

The click and ring of steel, the stamp of feet on the tiles, the quick hot breaths—everything was sound and motion and fierce endeavor. Caulain cursed himself for having kept on the big jellab, which hampered him. However, it hid his wound from the Englishman; and the wound throbbed, and blood was lost.

His point reached Lane in the side. Lane cursed and redoubled his attack. Caulain fell back. He pinked the other again, in the neck, and a scarlet smear began to spread. Lane slipped in the pool of Jacquemot's blood, tried desperately to recover, fell on one knee; Caulain stepped back and smiled.

"Get up, get up," he said mockingly. "This is an execution, not a murder—"

Then the big Englishman did the unexpected.

He rose, indeed, but one leap carried him backward. He struck the pistol from the girl's grasp; reached out to open the door, and at the same time shortened sword and drove it into the girl. All in a flashing split-second. The door swung open, just as Elaine's gasping cry rang out.

Lane's boot, however, was still wet with blood; again it slipped on the tiles. And then Caulain was upon him with one low, passionate oath. Lane turned, tried to meet the glittering

steel, and staggered. He staggered again. The sword dropped from his hand. He reached out, gripped at the door, and it swung shut again. He wavered and collapsed, run twice through the body and dead before he reached the floor.

Caulain dropped his weapon and turned to the girl. Desperately, he helped her get free of her enveloping mantle; she emerged laughing, red-faced, unhurt. Lane's vicious stab had barely scraped her arm.

"So! Well, give me a hand," Caulain said grimly. "The life's going out of me."

He was not far wrong. His left thigh was ripped and gashed. The rat had bitten ere he died, and the wound bled fast. The girl's laughter quickly died, at sight of it.

"A cheap price to pay for freedom," he observed. "To work, Elaine!"

She obeyed; when the job was done and the wound securely bandaged, she leaned against the wall, sick and faint, her hands all blood. Caulain wiped them clean, kissed them, and picked up his sword.

"Go out and sit by the fountain," he said, and limped to the door.

Outside, he looked about. No one was in sight; the courtyard was empty. For one moment the horrible thought smote him that old Mattei might have betrayed them and fled—then he caught sight of the old, one-eyed man coming toward him.

"Where are those two guards?" he demanded. Mattei halted and grinned at him.

"Gone, monsieur. Gone to join their master. They are behind a bush in the garden. That knife you gave me is a good one."

Caulain comprehended. He stag-

gered to the fountain and sank down beside it; the tension was broken, and the reaction carried him away.

When he came to himself, the afternoon was waning into sunset. Elaine sat beside him, bathing his face with water, and old Mattei sat blinking at them and humming a tune. Caulain sat up. His leg was very stiff, but he could walk at need.

"Go and take the gold signet ring from the hand of Nureddin," he told Mattei. "You have work to do, my friend. You speak Arabic, so it's your task."

AN hour before midnight, with the flood tide nearly at ebb, the little haven below the cliff was aflame with torches and cressets, ringing with savage voices. A battered English ship had just been brought in by two battered corsairs; she had indeed fought well, but vainly. The French barque was bound and ready to slip out with the ebb.

The town gates stood wide. Soldiers, townsfolk, merchants were flooding in and out, exulting over the new capture, watching the captives come ashore to slavery, bringing in loads of plunder. Three figures slipped down to where a boat with lusty Moorish oarsmen waited—two Moors, by their dress, and the well-known slave of Nureddin, Mattei of the one eye. To the magic of Nureddin's signet, all was easy.

The boat slipped out to the French barque and lay alongside. Caulain mounted to the deck and spoke with the guard officer there, then with the French skipper. All was very simple. The three vanished below. Everyone was excitedly watching the scenes aboard the bloody decks of the Eng-

lishman; no one observed that old Mattei did not return ashore with his boat.

Ten minutes later, the guards piled over the rail; the tide was on the ebb, the Frenchman was free to depart. Men tailed on the lines. The canvas lifted. The anchor was in; she slid down with the river current, eased across the bar, and leaned over to the wind. In the stern, appeared Caulain and the girl, rid of their Moorish garments and in makeshift French clothes. Suddenly Caulain started.

"The devil!" he exclaimed sharply. "I forgot it—I forgot it!"

"What's wrong?" Elaine, startled by the emotion in his voice, caught his arm. "What is it? Your wound?"

"No."

He looked back at the ruddy lights, lessening in the darkness, at the twinkling lights of Sale and the castle. He thought of that room in the old house where three men lay dead, of Nureddin, sitting in ghastly stare, and Jacquemot on his face, and Lane crumpled up beside the door. Lane! The big Englishman who, right or wrong, had served the cause of his own king and had died for it.

And he thought, for the first time, of the loose tile beside the window, and the hole in the wall behind it, and the packet he had stuffed back into that hole—and forgotten in the rush. A low groan escaped him, as his arm tightened about the girl at his side.

"That accursed Englishman!" he muttered. "He has won the game, after all!"

And so he had, but did not know it.

* * *

HABERLEIN'S voice died. He leaned back, with a gesture of

finality, fished out a cigaret, and lit it. I stirred and wakened from my absorbed attention.

"How much of this is fact? How much is fiction?" I demanded suspiciously. "Where did you get the yarn anyhow?"

"On the spot. That's the tragedy of it all!" he said earnestly. "That house was the very house I occupied there. I was prying around one day, and found that hollow tile."

I started. "Good lord! Do you mean to say you found the packet of documents?"

He sighed again, and nodded. Producing a pocketbook, he took out an envelope and carefully dumped it on my desk. There fell out a mass of tiny bits of paper, yellowed and discolored with age.

"There y'are," he said mournfully. "The wax seals were intact; I've got them put away in my bags. But the paper went to pieces in my hands. While I was reading the writing, actually! And that's the tragedy, Harry; enough to break any man's heart! Especially mine."

He was right about that.



COMING



A LONG NOVELETTE

LORDS OF THE TIDELESS SEA

by H. Bedford-Jones

How Curtogalli, the Corsair, Braved
the Power of Rome and the Medicis!

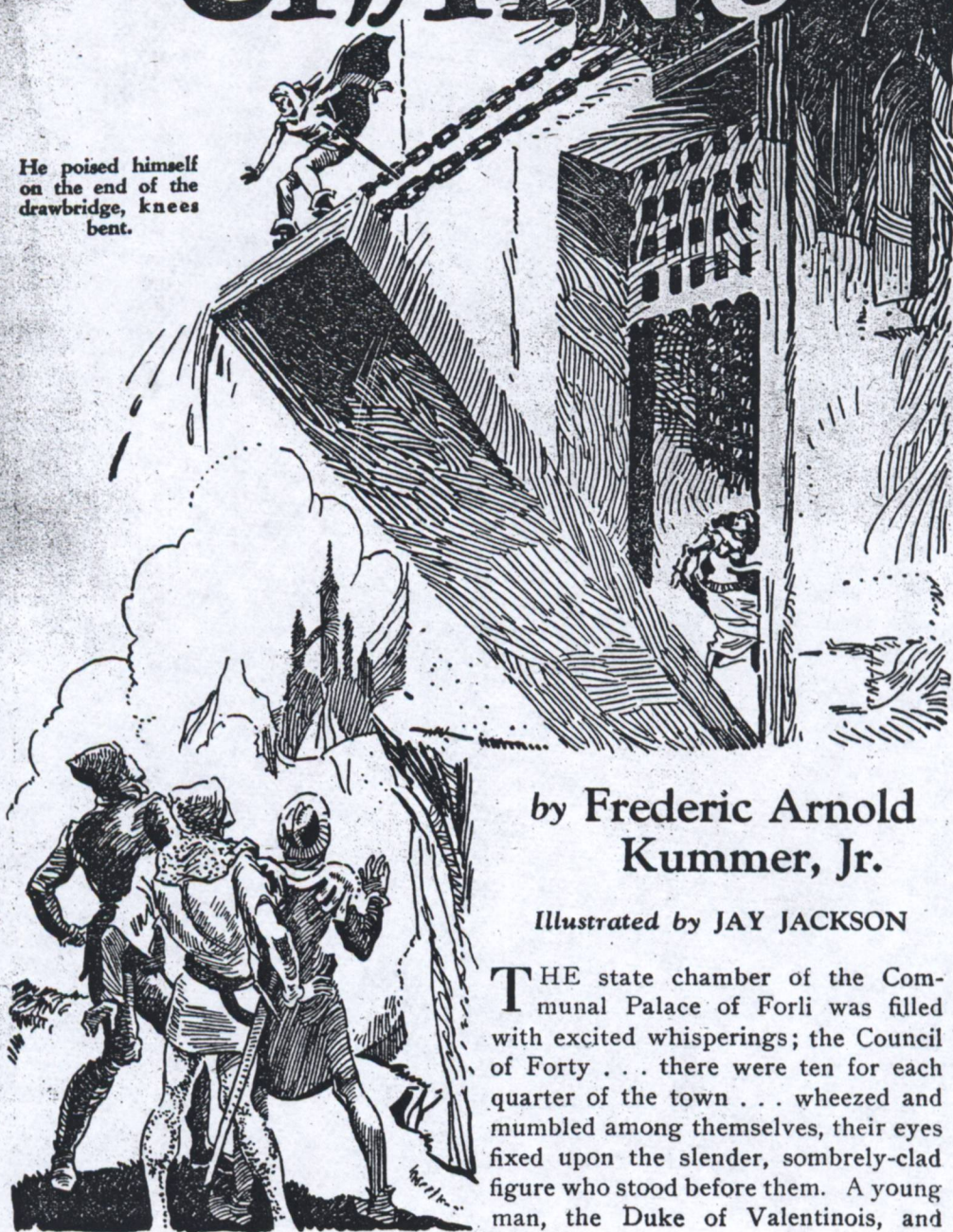


BEDFORD-JONES IN TOP STYLE



GOLDEN CHAINS

He poised himself
on the end of the
drawbridge, knees
bent.



by Frederic Arnold
Kummer, Jr.

Illustrated by JAY JACKSON

THE state chamber of the Communal Palace of Forli was filled with excited whisperings; the Council of Forty . . . there were ten for each quarter of the town . . . wheezed and mumbled among themselves, their eyes fixed upon the slender, sombrely-clad figure who stood before them. A young man, the Duke of Valentinois, and



Cesare studied her with a connoisseur's eye, moved closer to the moat.

handsome; his pale face, raw-gold hair, and hazel eyes were attractive, yet diabolical in their brilliant coldness.

Messer Venanzio, Head of the Council, arose, his multiple chins quivering with excitement.

"My lord Duke" . . . he bowed . . . "Forli has capitulated. What more do you ask of us?"

"Yet your Countess remains within her citadel and defies me!" Cesare Borgia's voice was harsh.

"But, excellency" . . . Venanzio waved fat hands . . . "we are no traitors! We surrendered the town, it is true, but only to avoid bloodshed, to spare our wives and children the horrors of a siege. Surely you do not expect us to attack our Countess, now she has retired with her troops to the keep?"

"A niceness of ethics I'd not have suspected in you," the Duke sneered. "Inspired, no doubt, by her large force rather than natural loyalty. You will not command the citizens to assist my men in an assault?"

"There was no word of this in the articles of capitulation." Venanzio glanced questioningly at the other members of the Council, who nodded in agreement. "We have," he went on more boldly, "surrendered the town, quartered your troops in our houses. Beyond that we do not feel . . ."

"Yours is the choice!" Cesare turned toward the door. "But by the Bones of the Saints, if my men should get out of hand, come not whining to me for redress!"

Messer Venanzio considered, stroking his pudgy cheeks. The position was beyond doubt a ticklish one. Before he could arrive at any decision, however, the door swung open and a tall, dark-skinned officer burst into the room.

"Pardon, highness!" he exclaimed. "A matter of the greatest import! The besieged wish to parley!"

"You'll excuse me, gentlemen." Cesare bowed mockingly to the Council. "And rest assured I'll remember your . . . co-operation." With a short, hard laugh he strode from the chamber.

THE great grey citadel of Forli towered like a clumsy giant above the surrounding city; Borgia's artillery had made little impression upon its massive walls. Now, however, the guns were silent while Valentino rode to the edge of the moat to hear the garrison's proposals.

As the Duke waited, accompanied by only three or four of his men, there was a grinding of machinery and the huge drawbridge swung down across the ditch. Standing before the heavy, iron-studded gates at the other end of the bridge was a woman, her richly embroidered cloak drawn tight as protection against the biting winter wind. She was beautiful, this Countess of Sforza-Riario, in spite of her tragic life. In her brief thirty-odd years she had married three husbands, all of whom had died; two by violence. Besides this, her brother and father had both fallen at the hands of assassins. Yet while this sorrow and bloodshed had left bitter marks upon her heart, her face was that of a young girl. A net of golden cord held her blue-black hair in place; soft, olive skin made a perfect setting for her dark eyes, her scarlet mouth. Now and again the wind would whip aside her heavy cloak, revealing slender thighs, firm, up-tilted breasts. She made a small yet gallant figure, standing there before the entrance to her castle.



She made a small, yet gallant figure, standing there before the entrance to her castle.

Cesare studied her with a connoisseur's eye, moved closer to the edge of the moat.

"You would speak with me, madonna?" he called.

"Speak, yes." The Countess' voice, carried away by the wind, was faint. "But not shout. It were impossible to discuss terms at such a distance."

Cesare hesitated, his long white fingers playing with the gold pomander ball which hung about his neck. Distrust was natural with him, as befitted one who lived by ambiguity and guile.

"Will you meet me at the centre of the bridge?" The lady Caterina took a step in that direction. "Surely you do not fear an unarmed woman!"

Cesare flushed; strode onto the drawbridge. No sooner had his feet touched the massive beams, when, with a clank of chains, the bridge began to rise. The Countess, prepared for this move, had stepped back to solid ground and stood waiting for the moment when Borgia must inevitably tumble down the steepening incline and fall at her feet. Already he was some distance in the air, with the angle increasing each second. The Duke, however, was not one to be taken prisoner without an effort at escape. Recovering from his initial surprise, he poised himself on the end of the drawbridge, knees bent. Then, with a mighty effort, he leaped for the opposite bank.

To those watching it seemed certain that he must land in the icy waters of the moat or on the sharp stones at its edge. Yet such was the herculean strength in his slight frame that he cleared the ditch altogether, alighting heavily but safely on the faded grass not far from his companions.

"My lord!" Ramiro de Lorqua rushed to assist him to his feet. "Art hurt?"

"Less than I deserve." Cesare smiled wryly. "Gesu! What madness to have ventured upon that bridge!"

"A knavish trick!" de Lorqua grunted.

"Yet one which you will do well to remember. It may prove useful some day." The Duke was never one to criticize trickery. Nor did he hold any particular malice toward the Countess; her ruse was typical of the Cinquecento. Rather was he annoyed at himself for his lack of caution.

"Bid the artillery continue the bombardment, Ramiro," he said. "Our strength will more than match the lady's guile."

FOR a fortnight the Duke's seven cannon and ten falconets kept up an uninterrupted fire at the citadel. From her battlements the Countess could see them in the square before the church of St. John the Baptist, belching forth jets of smoke and flame. Finally on the evening of January twelfth a section of the wall began to crumble, forming a breach, and Cesare ordered his men to the assault.

With wild shouts they sprang forward, sturdy Swiss and Burgundian mercenaries, swinging their pikes and great, square-bladed halberts. Working coolly under the rain of missiles from the walls, they tossed bundles of faggots into the moat until a passage was practicable. Over this unstable bridge they pressed, and up the heap of rubble that blocked the breach.

Here they were met by the defenders, fighting valiantly under the eyes of their Countess, and a furious conflict ensued. For over an hour the issue was in doubt. A heavy pall of dust and arquebus smoke hung over the ravelin; through it, vaguely, one could distinguish a whirling, shifting mass of men; red, wild-eyed men, devils incarnate, struggling in a man-made inferno.

Not until the ground was littered with some four hundred corpses did the besieged, stubbornly, step by step, give way.

From her tower in the Maschio, an inner fortress of the citadel, the Countess gave word that the second drawbridge be raised. This Maschio, a great tower of tremendous strength, was considered to be invulnerable and was sufficiently provisioned for a lengthy siege. Even as she gave the order, however, her exhausted men-at-arms, retreating across the bridge, found themselves so closely followed by the Borgia soldiery that any attempts to isolate the tower were impossible. After a half-hour's room-to-room fighting, the castle had fallen.

IN HER upper chamber Caterina stood like a pale, wax-work figure, a pallid, tragic wraith against the dark velvet arras. About her were grouped half a dozen of her gentlemen, Paolo Riario, Alessandro Sforza, Scipione Riario and others, their swords drawn, ready to defend her should any of the victorious mercenaries offer violence to her person. From below she could hear the clash of arms, hoarse shouts, loud groans.

Suddenly the door flew open and a gory, stern-faced soldier stepped into the room. His uniform proclaimed him to be a Burgundian serving under the Bailie of Dijon; his halbert dripped bright spots of blood upon the stone-flagged floor.

"Yield!" he cried. "You are my prisoners!"

For an instant Caterina's gentlemen seemed inclined to resist, to overpower this lone soldier. As they stepped forward, the Countess made a gesture of resignation.

"What matter?" she exclaimed bitterly. "As well surrender to this knave as to some other. There is no hope . . . now."

"Admission of defeat were a great virtue." The mocking voice came from the doorway. Cesare Borgia, a resplendent figure, his tunic of cloth of gold reversed with ermine, bowed with delicate derision.

"Aye," Caterina retorted wearily. "And you're an authority on virtue, are you not, my lord Duke?"

"At least I have the ability to recognize it," he said soberly. Then, to the Burgundian, "The Countess is your prisoner?"

"Yes, excellency." The soldier saluted deferentially. "There was talk of a reward . . ."

"Of twenty thousand ducats. You have earned it." Cesare turned to the moon-faced, clerkly man beside him. "Draw me an order for this fellow in the full amount."

"But, highness" . . . Agabito, the Duke's secretary, made protesting gestures. "This will all but empty your treasury. And since the Swiss are clamoring for their pay . . ."

"Peace!" Cesare waved his long white fingers in a motion of dismissal. "Have I not given my word? Let us hear no more of the matter . . ."

"Magnificence!" The Burgundian fell to his knees. "Now may I return to my family at Dijon a rich man. I shall pray for you, my lord . . ."

"You will be one of few," Cesare said dryly. "Good fortune attend you. I regret the loss of so excellent a soldier." He turned to the Countess. "Observe, madonna, how happy you have made this stout fellow. That should be some consolation for your misfortune."

"Your pleasure offsets it," she answered sharply. "But enough of this idle talk. What next, now that you have stripped me of my possessions . . . left me penniless?"

BORGIA studied her closely. Very lovely, he thought, her black hair hanging heavy about her shoulders, her slender figure tense with emotion.

"You will be my prisoner, madonna, of course, yet your captivity will be mild if you but swear to make no attempts at escape."

For a moment the Countess hesitated, her eyes fixed upon Valentino's pale face.

"Very well," she said at length. "You have the word of a Sforza."

The Duke considered this thoughtfully. "The word of a Sforza, I have found, is apt to be . . . shall we say . . . weak? Have you nothing better to offer?"

"The word of a Riario, then!" Sudden anger and shame burned in the Countess' dark eyes.

"Scarcely an improvement, I fear," Cesare murmured. "I mind the time when Raffaele Riario . . ."

"You mock me, sir!" Caterina cried. "What word do you then require?"

"Your word as a woman only," Cesare replied. "I have noticed that women are surprisingly punctilious concerning their word, saving only when it touches upon matters of the heart. And in this there is no question of love" . . . he smiled slowly . . . "as yet."

"You have my word as a woman, then," she exclaimed, "not to make any attempts at escape so long as I am your prisoner."

"Excellent." Borgia bent over her hand. "And since I have rendered you

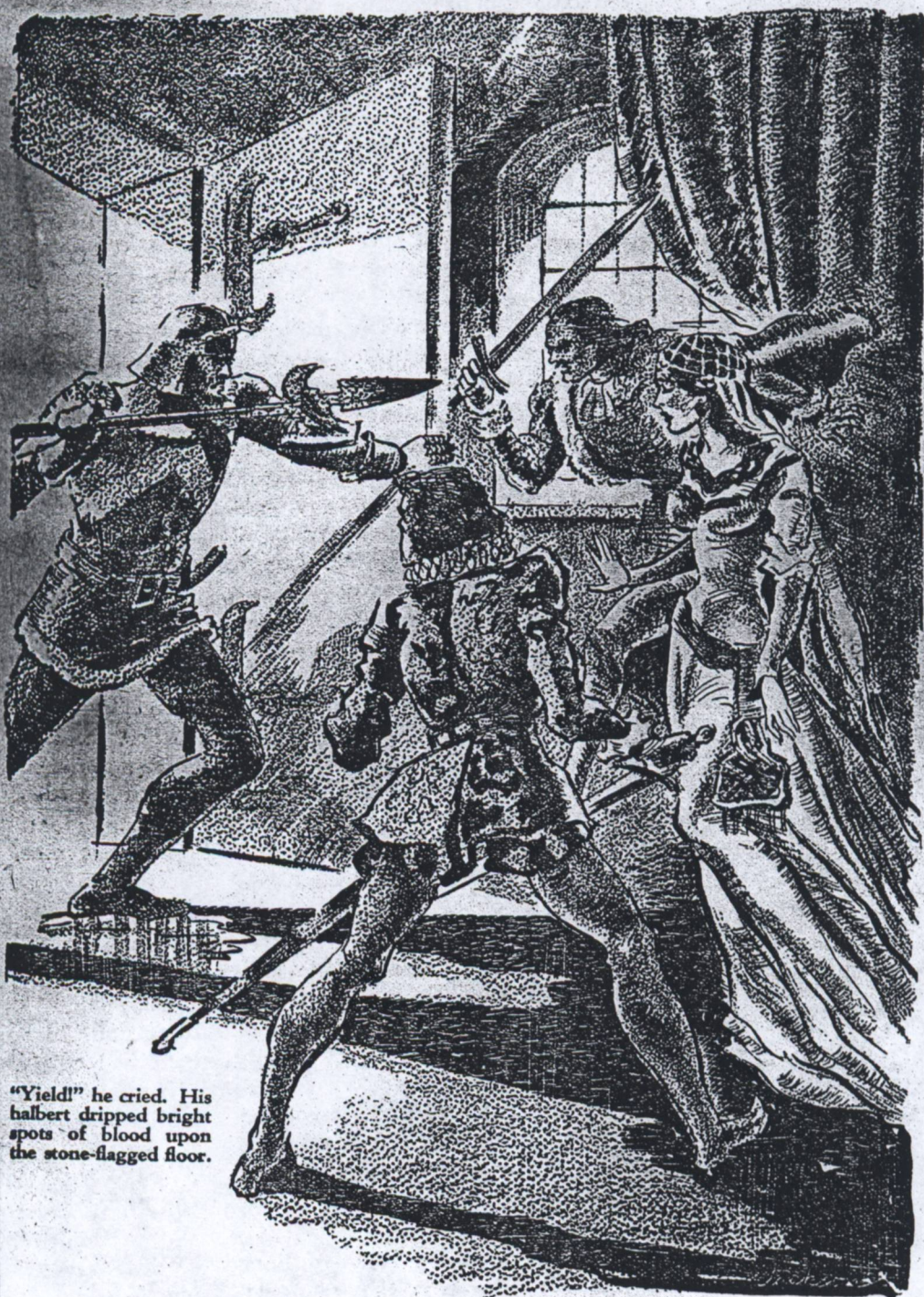
penniless, madonna, take this purse of two hundred ducats for any trifling expenses you may incur during the next week."

"My lord!" Agabito objected.

"By the Host!" Cesare cried. "Would you make me a miser, Agabito? The troops can pillage this citadel. That should stay them until my benefices arrive from Rome. Come, madonna. Allow me to escort you to the town."

CATERINA Sforza-Riario, sometime Countess of Forli, gazed from the tall windows of the Nomaglie Palace, eyeing with scant pleasure the pale new grass which grew raggedly between the grey flag-stones, the silver jetting of the little fountains as they wavered in the frail, irresolute winds. In the distance, over the roof-tops of the town, she could see the bare foothills of the Apennines, gaunt and menacing against the wan sky. A sound of hammers, the shouts of workmen from the direction of the citadel informed her that Borgia's troops were repairing its shattered bastions to protect the new garrison.

During the ten days that Caterina had been prisoner of the Duke, her anger and despair had in no whit decreased. To be sure, she was accorded every courtesy, given the freedom of the town; yet in spite of that she had conceived a bitter personal hatred for Cesare. His gentleness she mistook for mockery, his favors she despised, since it seemed that having despoiled her of her possessions, he merely sought to emphasize her poverty. Above all, she detested the appraising yet admiring glance of those hazel eyes; they seemed, somehow, to strip her naked.



"Yield!" he cried. His halbert dripped bright spots of blood upon the stone-flagged floor.

Her thoughts were more bitter than usual, this pale afternoon, as she stared out at the gardens of the Nomaglie Palace. She was just condemning herself for having given her parole, when clanking footsteps on the marble tiles brought her gaze back to the room. A tall man approached her, a heavy set and virilely handsome man, with tanned face, brown moustache, and quick, alert eyes.

"Forgive this intrusion, madonna." He spoke with some trace of accent. "But I wished to confer with you on a matter of importance. I am, as you may know, the Bailie of Dijon."

"One of Borgia's cutthroats," she said scornfully. "What do you desire?"

"To talk with you, if you'll listen." The Bailie tugged at his steel girdle, the expression on his face impatient. "My lord, King Louis of France, placed me in command of these Swiss and Burgundians . . . cutthroats, as you call them . . . and hired us out to the Duke of Valentinois. We have served under him as long as the contract provided. Also, this princeling owes us more than a month's pay. You begin to perceive my object, madonna?"

"Aye," she whispered fiercely, all hope now. "You would revolt against him?"

The Bailie's gaze took in her scarlet lips, her slender, seductive figure.

"I must confess," he murmured, "that since beholding you, my loyalty to the Duke has waned. We French have little interest in his petty quarrels. You, my lady, are temptation enough for any man. But my troops demand pay . . ."

"**W**IN me back my town of Forli and I'll see that they're paid." The Countess' black eyes flamed.

"Twice over! The citizens will gladly hire your troops, pay them from the treasury. But have you men enough to defy Borgia?"

"More than enough." The Bailie laughed. "Except for a few of his gentlemen, the army is mine. Even should he recall his Spanish and Italian contingents from Forlimpopoli, we'll still be a match for him. You agree, then, to pay my men from the treasury of Forli?"

"Have I not said so? Although my people surrendered the city to avoid bloodshed, they are still loyal to me. Thus we shall overcome" . . . she broke off suddenly. "Gesu! I gave my word to attempt no evasion . . ."

The Bailie shrugged. "A woman's word," he murmured.

"Which I have yet to break," she retorted sharply.

"But consider, madonna!" He stared at her, amazed. "You'll refuse this chance of escape because of a word given . . . under duress? I offer you your freedom and your city once more. Surely you cannot mean to . . ."

"I gave my word," she replied, her eyes barren.

The Bailie shook his head. Although scarcely a gallant, he had some knowledge of a woman's stubborn ways.

"As you wish," he answered stiffly. "I had hoped to serve you. You will, I trust, not reveal this matter to anyone. I bid you a very good morning."

He turned toward the door, an erect, soldierly figure in his leather hacketon, his velvet mantle, severely plain.

"**S**TAY." Caterina's voice shook with excitement. "I . . . I have a plan."

"Yes?" He swung around, faced her questioningly.

The Countess' fingers traced an aim-

less design on the top of a small bronze table. She was, it seemed, wrestling with a question of ethics.

"Suppose, sir," she said at length, "you and your men were to seize this palace, capture me? That, I believe, would in no way violate my word."

"True." He smiled with some contempt at this sophistry. "But since you will pay my men for the service . . ."

"Nay!" She laughed, an odd, wide laugh. "Not pay, sir. Ransom! You, a bold, unscrupulous villain, will slay the Duke and his officers, imprison me. Unquestionably the town will pay a sizable ransom to free me from your clutches. Thus at one bold stroke I shall be rid of my captor, regain my lands, while your men will be well paid. And my word will remain intact."

The Bailie pondered the question a time in silence. Subtle, to be sure, yet a woman's way of handling matters. He preferred a more direct and open attack. Still, it varied little from the original plan unless . . .

"You agree?" She stepped forward, laid her hand upon his arm. He could

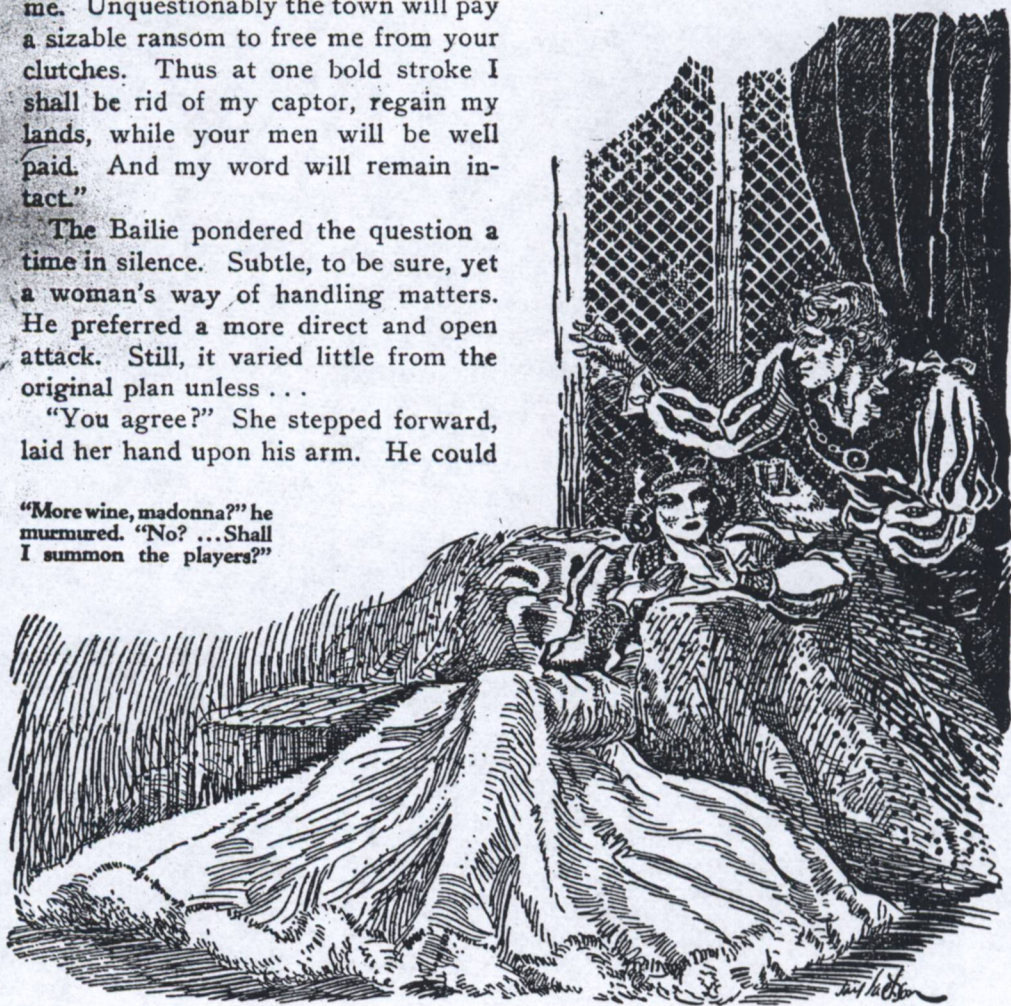
"More wine, madonna?" he murmured. "No? ... Shall I summon the players?"

not but notice the low cut of her gown across her bosom, the slimness of her waist, emphasized by a silver girdle with a beryl clasp. The faint trace of perfume which she wore, an intoxicating perfume, set his brain on fire.

"I'll agree to anything you propose, madonna," he whispered. "Tonight you shall be freed!"

"Tonight, then." She slipped away from him, smiling. "God be with you!"

THE great library was quiet that evening, devoid of those crowds of



Forlivese who thronged to the Nomaglie Palace seeking favors or audiences with the Duke. Wearied of public affairs, he had refused all petitioners, preferring to spend a few hours in the company of his lovely prisoner. A lofty room, that library, its ceiling bright with Mantegna frescoes, its walls hung with rich tapestries, its floors covered with thick Byzantine carpets. Tall candles lit those portions of the room unilluminated by the roaring fire. Cesare, magnificent in sapphire-colored hose and jewelled doublet, played the host with all of that charm and graciousness which he was capable of exerting when occasion demanded.

"More wine, madonna?" he murmured. "Tuscan sunlight is imprisoned in this flagon. No? Let me show you, then, this copy of Appollodorus, wonderfully illustrated by the good monks of San Giovanni. Or perhaps you would enjoy music. Shall I summon the players?"

The Countess shook her head; she was in no mood for such diversions. Already it approached the third hour of the night. Where, she wondered, was the Bailie? Had Cesare learned of the plot . . . did he mock her?

"You are quiet tonight, my lady," the Duke observed. "Almost I might believe you indisposed."

"Nay." She gripped the edge of the table, fiercely. "What have I to say to one who has stolen from me all that I possess?"

"Ill temper will not win it back." Cesare's gaze swept the soft form. "Since through no fault of yours, I am victorious and your cause lost, why cannot we be friends?"

Caterina watched his pale, graceful fingers as they idly turned the pages

of the book. She found it increasingly difficult to resist the charm of the man, the almost diabolical attraction of his bold, yet caressing glances. And he was so young, so handsome . . . She forced herself to think of the ruined citadel, the slaughter of her faithful garrison.

"You try so hard to hate me." No man was more adept at reading faces. "Yet I am curious to see if I can change that hate to . . . love."

As he said this, he stepped quickly forward, swept her into his arms. Caterina could feel his lips tight against hers, the jewelled buckle of his doublet cutting into her breast. Blood roared in her ears, increasingly loud; she forgot, or disregarded the fact that this man was her enemy. Her breath came in swift, frenzied gasps; suddenly, with a small moan, she sank limp in his arms. Then, as one in a dream, she heard the sound of shouts, of clashing weapons. Cesare's arms relaxed their grip; he stepped back, listening. Footsteps in the hall outside, the jingling of accoutrements. The Duke stood like a marble image, his eyes fastened on the door. All at once the room was full of men, rough, bearded fellows, Swiss and Burgundians, with the Bailie at their head.

"TO what happy circumstances do I owe this visit?" Cesare's voice was like brittle ice.

"You are my prisoner," the Bailie answered curtly.

"Prisoner?" With great deliberation Borgia lifted his cup, sipped daintily of the wine. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to enlighten me?"

"I'll leave that to the stranglers." The Bailie waved his men forward.

"Seize him! And the lady as well. Her ransom will pay our wages."

"Stay!" Cesare shook off the men.

"Fools! Kill me and you sign your own death warrant!"

"Say rather that all Romagna will hail me as its deliverer." The Bailie grinned, his face flushed with triumph.

"But in the matter of back pay" . . . Valentinois was growing desperate . . . "so soon as we reach Cesena . . ."

"Aye, and at Imola last month it was wait until we reach Forli! I've enough of your lying promises! Take him away!"

Two tall men-at-arms sprang forward, their faces ruddy in the fire-light. With a crash the cup of wine fell from Borgia's hand; gripping the edge of the table with his pale, deceptively fragile fingers, he toppled it into the advancing mercenaries. In a confused tangle of arms and legs they fell to the floor.

Cesare sprang back, tore his light, jewelled sword from its scabbard; his eyes flicked from side to side in search of some avenue of escape. A warning shout from the Bailie sent men to the tall windows, the door. The remaining men-at-arms, some half dozen in number, closed in on the Duke, their heavy halberts gleaming murderously.

Cold and white as a death mask, Borgia leaped to meet them. His blade licked out, found the throat of a burly Swiss. A gurgling scream echoed through the room and the man pitched forward on his face. Whirling, Cesare had barely time to deflect a chopping halbert stroke aimed at his legs. Quick as the flicker of candlelight he followed the parry with a deadly downward lunge which transfixed the halbertier's thigh. Streaming blood, the wounded man caught at a comrade's

arm for support, an instinctive gesture yet one which dragged down his companion's guard. Again the blood-stained steel shot out, and a third mercenary slumped to the ground, pierced through the lungs. Thirty seconds had not elapsed, yet three men lay wallowing on the floor.

The Bailie, standing well clear of the struggle, felt something akin to panic. Those rumors he had heard of the Borgias' pact with the Evil One . . .

"Forward!" he shouted quaveringly. "Will you let one man put a troop to flight?"

None too willingly the three remaining men-at-arms renewed their attack, hampered by the bodies of their companions, unsteady on a floor slippery with blood. Spangles of sweat dotted the Duke's brow; he seemed content to remain on the defensive, to await an opening. His sword an arc of steel before him, he began to edge, a step at a time, toward the Bailie.

CATERINA, huddled limply against the wall, watched with growing admiration. Cesare, his doublet cut to ribbons, stained by a dozen crimson patches, was unquestionably a gallant figure, the more so in comparison to the furious, red-faced Bailie. The Countess shook her head, faint from the smell of leather, of sweat, of spilled blood, and gripped the mantel for support.

Slowly Borgia continued to approach the Bailie. Steel rang on steel, deafeningly, as the Duke's light blade ward off the ponderous halberts. The men-at-arms stationed by the windows and door began to close in, fingering their swords, glancing at their leader for the signal to join in the fray. The Bailie was about to motion them forward when Borgia, a thin

smile clinging to his lips, sprang to the attack. His free left hand caught the edge of a chair, swung it, in a herculean burst of energy, at his opponents. Two of them went down, knocked sprawling; the third, hesitating, fell back with a swordthrust through the shoulder. In an instant Cesare was at the Bailie's side, his blade pressing insistently at that worthy's breast.

"Yield!" he gasped, breathless. "Call off these mutinous dogs or . . ."

That was as far as he got. One of the Swiss, but momentarily stunned by the blow from the chair, leaped up, a savage grin on his leathery, bearded countenance. Before Borgia could straighten out his arm to run the Bailie through, the Swiss plunged forward, snatched the sword from Cesare's grasp.

"Ah!" The Bailie, color flooding back into his face, was suddenly the epitome of valor. "So we have an end, then, to your dramatics! Seize him! We'll test his bravado with the stranglers!"

Somewhat hesitantly two of the mercenaries stepped forward. Cesare, sensing their reluctance, was taken with a swift inspiration.

"**T**HE stranglers!" he cried scornfully. "A curse upon your drunken stupidity! You forget that I am Gonfalonier of the Church . . . forget that His Holiness the Pope is my natural father. Do you dare suppose he'd let the murder of his Captain-General, his son, go unavenged? You risk excommunication, my friend!"

"Excommunication?" The Bailie crossed himself in superstitious awe.

"Exactly. No marriage for you, no christening of your children, no masses

at your death . . . and the fires of hell through eternity! This for you . . . and your troops!"

The two Burgundian men-at-arms who held Borgia fell back, their eyes bleak with fear.

The Bailie shuddered.

"Release him," he muttered. "What harm can one man do us? But the Countess we take." Then, to Cesare, "I give you until noon tomorrow to collect your personal effects and leave Forli. Come, gentlemen."

"Your generosity overwhelms me." Valentino bowed them from the room. As they left, Caterina, remembering her role, protested loudly, although naturally to no avail. For a half hour after they had gone, Cesare stood immobile by the fireplace, waiting until he was sure they had returned to their quarters in the market place. Then, going to the door, he summoned Agabito.

The secretary's round moon face shook with anxiety.

"My lord," he began. "Permit me to offer my sympathy for this terrible blow to your hopes. . . ."

"Peace, man!" The Duke waved an impatient hand. "Get you to the house of Messer Venanzio, Head of the Council. Bid him come here at once. If he demurs, inform him that these drunken mercenaries have revolted and carried off the Countess, perhaps to offer her violence. Those tidings should drag him from his bed. Go now, and quickly."

.
IN the house of a linen-drapeer overlooking the market place, Caterina Sforza-Riario dressed with sleepy clumsiness. It was early, earlier, in fact, than it was her custom to rise, yet she deemed it advisable to be up and about on so momentous a day. In a

few hours the "ransom" would be paid and she would have regained her city in addition to having a force of stalwart men-at-arms to defend it should the Borgia succeed in raising more troops. And in a way she was glad that the Duke had escaped death. . . .

A sharp knock interrupted her musing.

"A moment!" She added a few last touches to her toilette, opened the door.

"By the Host!" The Bailie shot a low-lidded, wine-whipped glance at her. "As beautiful as a rose at dawn! You'll pardon this early intrusion, I trust. I wished to see you before leaving for the Communal Palace, and discover if there is aught I can do for your comfort."

"Already you have been too kind," she smiled. "I shall be forever indebted. Your kindness and pity . . ."

"Kindness and pity have not influenced me in your case, madonna," he exclaimed. "Something more . . . infinitely greater. But of this, later. I must seek the Council at once and demand the 'ransom.'"

"And what news of Borgia?" she asked, anxious to change the topic.

"Having not yet been abroad in the town, I am unable to say." The Bailie shrugged contemptuously. "What have we to fear from one man?"

"And yet . . ." Caterina shook her head ". . . while he remains in Forli, I shall know no rest. He is cunning, treacherous . . ."

The Bailie crossed the room, flung open a window.

"Behold, madonna!" he cried. "The sight should ease your mind."

She approached the casement. Drawn up in close array across one end of the broad market place was the Bailie's army, some four thousand stout Swiss and Burgundians, great burly fellows,

professional soldiers. Early morning sunlight flashed ruddily upon their helmets, glinted from their polished swords and halberds.

"Where," the Bailie said proudly, "could he raise a force to equal these?"

"A magnificent body of men!" she cried. "Their presence reassures me. I'll not delay your visit to the Council longer, sir."

"I shall make haste." He turned toward the door. "I would speak with you concerning that other matter on my return. Farewell, madonna."

FOR some moments after he left Caterina stood at the window staring down into the sun-lit square. Thus she saw him step from the door of the shop, confer with his captains. Observing her, he doffed his cap, bowed, a tall, graceful figure, albeit a trifle florid.

It was at this precise instant that the noise reached their ears. A roaring noise, it seemed, a swelling cry from thousands of throats, which came from the direction of the Communal Palace. The Bailie straightened up, snapped a command to his men, who immediately drew their swords, deployed into fighting order. Nearer and nearer came the voices. Caterina could distinguish shouts of "Contessa!" "Contessa!" A puzzled look crept into her eyes. Had her people learned of Borgia's downfall and come to hail her? But she was supposedly a captive of the Bailie's. . . . She leaned from the window, anxiously awaiting a solution to this mystery.

Suddenly from the Street of the Fletchers came a tall, erect figure on horseback, a spare figure with soft fair hair and pallid face set in a grim smile. Beside him rode the corpulent Messer Venanzio, brandishing an ancient mace. They were followed, these two, by a

host of citizens, sketchily equipped, it is true, yet firm in their determination to free the Countess from those rapacious mercenaries. Thousands upon thousands poured over the square, into the adjoining houses, clogging the streets behind, a tumultuous wave, angrily shaking their weapons and shouting hoarse threats at the Bailie.

That worthy, amazed at the unbelievable turn of events, stood at the head of his men, uncertain and, no shame to him, frightened.

"So, sir . . ." a sudden silence fell over the square as Cesare spoke ". . . I come to adjust our recent differences. These good people of Forli, aroused by your acts of violence against their Countess, demand your surrender. An answer is expected at once."

THE Bailie considered these tidings a brief space. Then, aware of Caterina's gaze from the window, he swung about to order his men to the attack. Before he could utter a word, however, the mercenaries, in no way relishing the prospect of a hopeless and unprofitable battle, lowered their arms with a shout of "Duca!" "Duca!"

"That would seem to be the answer," Cesare said dryly.

"Indeed, my lord," the Bailie choked, "I am compelled to treat. Shall we discuss the terms of surrender?"

"Terms!" Cesare leaned forward in his saddle. "Body of God! Here's audacity! You dare talk to me of terms! Why, did I not value the friendship of your master, King Louis of France, I'd hang you from the nearest window! Ho, there" . . . he motioned to several of the citizens . . . "take me this fellow into custody and guard him well until such time as I pack him off to France! As for you" . . . this to the Bailie's

thoroughly cowed troops . . . "you'll receive your pay at Cesena and a higher rate thereafter."

From the casement Caterina listened with increasing hopelessness, her lovely face drawn in harsh lines. The irony of the situation appalled her. Twelve hours before, the Duke had been alone, one man against thousands. Now the tables were turned, with the Bailie tasting of that same bitter medicine. And . . . this was the cream of Cesare's jest . . . the Countess' own people had rescued her from supposed captivity. Her stratagem to gain freedom without breaking her word had been thwarted by the loyal townsmen of Forli. Tears of anger, of frustration, stung her eyes.

It was some few moments later when Cesare, accompanied by Messer Venanzio, entered the room.

"My apologies, madonna," Cesare observed ironically, "for the conduct of my troops. I trust you have suffered no hardships during your captivity."

"Aye." Venanzio bowed pudgily. "At the request of my lord Duke we have rescued you from those villainous knaves."

"In order," she cried contemptuously, "to hand me over once more to the Borgia!"

"Not of a necessity." The Head of the Council shot a hostile glance at Cesare. "I am in power here. Say but the word, my lady, and your people . . ."

"True," Cesare interrupted. "I admit my present numerical weakness, with the town in arms. Fortunately the lady has given me her word to attempt no escape and she, of course" . . . he smiled sardonically . . . "will not violate it. Furthermore, I sent a message last night to Forlimpopoli commanding the return of the two thousand men quartered there. These should be here

within the hour, and added to my four-thousand Swiss . . ."

"Since the Countess has given her word," Venanzio put in hastily, "there is no need for further discussion. I go to inform the townspeople of her decision." He left the room with a flurry of bows.

Cesare was smiling as he turned to the Countess.

"No doubt you are wearied from this trying experience, madonna," he murmured. "Permit me to conduct you once more to the Nomaglie Palace."

Caterina took his arm. She was indeed wearied . . . wearied of the hopeless struggle against this invincible man who possessed the cunning of a devil

and, she reflected glancing at him obliquely, the beauty of an angel. There was no fight left in her as she leaned heavily . . . more heavily than was necessary . . . upon his strong right arm.

Thus it was that when a month later Cesare entered Rome in triumph, the Countess Sforza-Riario rode in the procession, a black-gowned figure on a white horse, her wrists shackled by light golden chains. Among the thousands who crowded the streets there were many who wondered at the lack of anger or despair on her countenance, not knowing that she was bound to Cesare by stronger ties than golden ones.



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Illustrated by JAY JACKSON



"My lord," shouted de Courtenai, "you're drunk . . . this isn't man's vengeance . . ."

Wolves

"LOOK, *sidi*, a girl from Feringhistan—fit for the harem of a king—and only a thousand *dinars*—a thousand—"

The auctioneer's bleary eyes shifted toward a lean Turk who was licking his thin lips. "Nine hundred?" he wheedled. "Nine hundred, and Allah make you happy?"

The Turk shrugged. Captive women were plentiful as fleas in Cairo since Saladin had carved his way to the throne of Syria and Egypt. Though this one was different, in her white, frozen loveliness.

Hussayn, the auctioneer, whisked the mantle from the girl's shoulders, leaving her clad only in her unbound hair. It trailed to her hips, a red-gold veil that almost hid her white breasts—though their roundness was kissed by the late afternoon light that lanced past the

minarets of the El Azhar Mosque. The ruddy light gilded her sleek legs, accented the exquisite modelling of her face.

She was too proud to shrink from the eyes and hands that would go over her loveliness as though she were a horse put through its paces.

"Eight hundred?" pleaded Hussayn. "The daughter of an infidel prince, Allah burn him! Taken from a galley bound for Akka!"

The buyers were dubious. Her haughty green eyes warned them that she would be a handful to manage.

"Bound for Akka?" rumbled a broad-shouldered man whose peaked helmet towered over the kinky heads of the tall Sudanese guards. His hawk face was bronzed and arrogant. The eyes that narrowed beneath his dark brows were



of Kerak

granite gray, not the smouldering black of the lean Arabs about him.

"Ay, wallah! The galley of Henri de Montfried."

The tall man thrust himself a pace forward, and the auctioneer pleaded, "Seven hundred dinars, my lord emir! See those white arms—a mouth like a pomegranate blossom—"

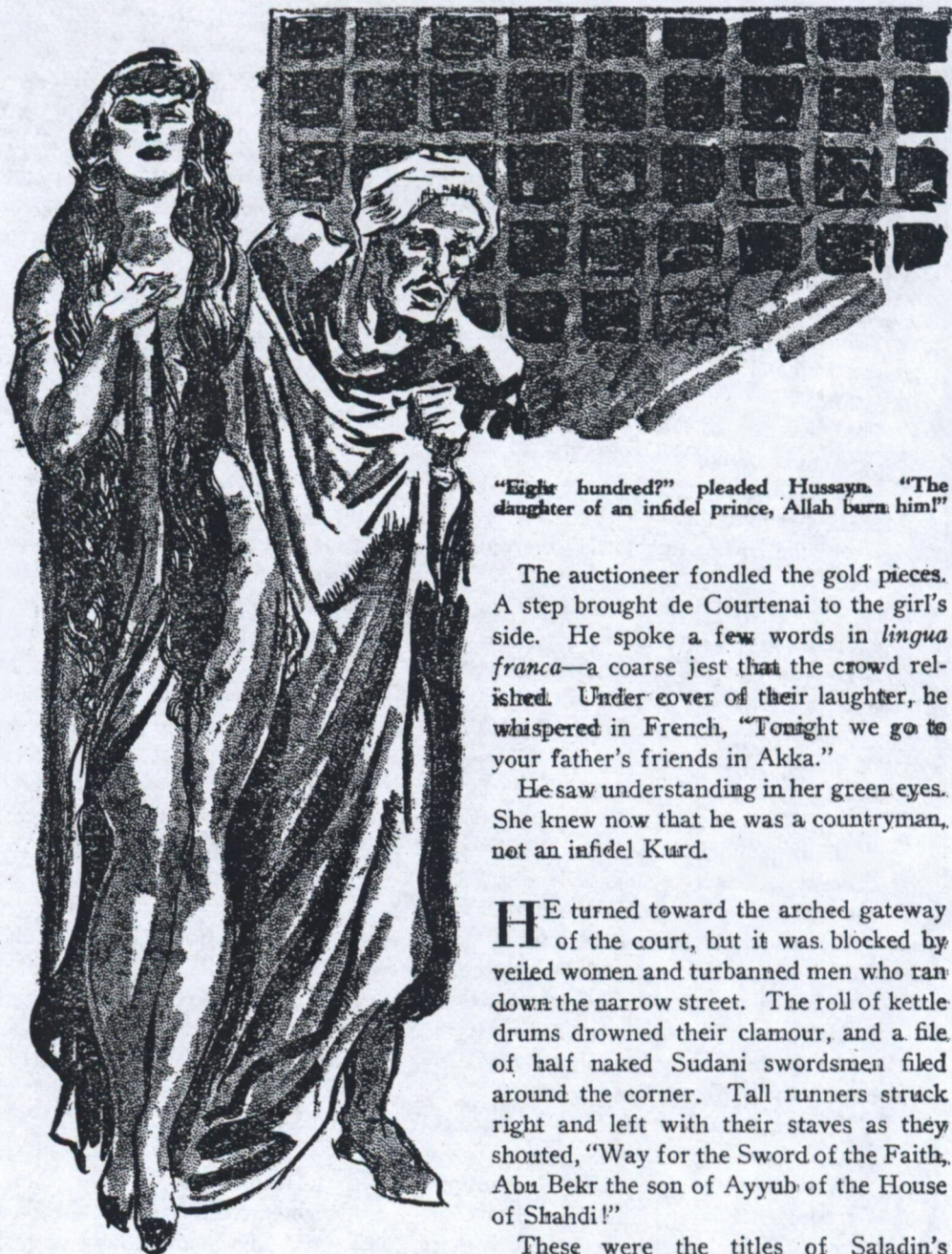
Poetry dripped from Hussayn's lips, and fire raced through the veins of Jehan de Courtenai, the tall spy from the Crusaders' outpost at Kerak. Her beauty was like exalting music, making him almost forget the chatelaine whose fickle fancy had sent him to find oblivion in the Holy Land. And she was a Christian, this girl on the auction block, stripped for the eyes of greasy merchants, rapacious money lenders, grim-faced *mamluks* of the sultan's guard.

Jehan de Courtenai's duty was plain: to move on, continue his gaming, drinking, jesting, listening to voices of Cairo to learn what troops El Adel was sending into Syria to join Saladin. But he could not so easily abandon this red-haired girl.

"Five hundred, and you are robbing me." After five years in the service of fierce old Raynald de Châtillon, he had learned enough about the East to bargain. Immediate acceptance would have betrayed him.

"Six hundred, and my children starve," groaned Hussayn.

But the payment of even sixty *dinars* would have left de Courtenai without a *dirhem* for the next day's bread. He had a horse and arms. He could sell them, ambush some drunken *mamluk* and get fresh equipment. And he could leave



Cairo that very night; he had El Adel's plans—

"Done, and Allah blacken you!" He dug into his purse. "Take this—in earnest—I bring the rest tonight—"

"Eight hundred?" pleaded Hussayn. "The daughter of an infidel prince, Allah burn him!"

The auctioneer fondled the gold pieces. A step brought de Courtenai to the girl's side. He spoke a few words in *lingua franca*—a coarse jest that the crowd relished. Under cover of their laughter, he whispered in French, "Tonight we go to your father's friends in Akka."

He saw understanding in her green eyes. She knew now that he was a countryman, not an infidel Kurd.

HE turned toward the arched gateway of the court, but it was blocked by veiled women and turbanned men who ran down the narrow street. The roll of kettle drums drowned their clamour, and a file of half naked Sudani swordsmen filed around the corner. Tall runners struck right and left with their staves as they shouted, "Way for the Sword of the Faith, Abu Bekr the son of Ayyub of the House of Shahdi!"

These were the titles of Saladin's brother, El Adel, the governor of Egypt. He rode a black horse, and his jet robes made a dark tall splash among the yellow tunics and chain mail of his Turkish guards. De Courtenai salaamed with those

who had taken refuge in the gateway. His voice swelled their applause.

Then the column turned, and the heralds cleared the gate. De Courtenai, though forced back against the jamb, could not hear what El Adel said to the tall *mamluk* who rode with him, boot to boot; but the Turkish officer's answer was plain enough: "She is here, in Hussayn's slave pen. On my head and eyes, *ya sidi!*"

She. De Courtenai's heart froze. The hoof beats of El Adel's horse ceased. A curb chain's tinkle broke the silence. Then El Adel demanded, "*Ya Hussayn! Where is the Feringhi girl—*"

"In the corner, my lord!" the *mamluk* cut in.

"*Ay wallah!*" said Hussayn. "This way, redhead."

El Adel's words seemed like clods dropping into a grave: "Send her to the palace—to Sitti Zayda's apartments." A tinkle of gold. The prince cut off Hussayn's flood of thanks. "And veil her, father of a dog!"

Drums rolled, and the black-robed horseman spurred his splendid beast through the gateway. Mail jingling, the yellow clad *mamluks* poured after him. El Adel resumed his march to the mosque.

Hussayn whined in de Courtenai's ear, "*Sidi*, your money—there is no bargain when the brother of the Victorious King buys. But I have other women—"

"*Shaytan* blacken you!" De Courtenai stalked down the street.

Who could oppose Saladin's brother? Certainly not a spy who dared not court notice. But this red-haired girl was more than just a Christian captive. De Courtenai's promise had revived her hope. He could not fail her now.

He stepped into the nearby *serai*, where his horse was waiting. "Saddle up!" he commanded to the groom. "Have him ready!"

SITTI ZAYDA was Saladin's sister. In the morning she was leaving with the caravan bound for Damascus, eight hundred miles away. That much de Courtenai knew from bazaar gossip; nor was the rest difficult to guess. The red-haired girl, sought out by El Adel himself, would go with the caravan; perhaps as Sitti Zayda's serving maid, perhaps as a hostage whose life would be bought with ruinous concessions from her friends.

There was still a way. The way of death and madness.

"Raynald has sent other spies who didn't return!" De Courtenai's laugh was iron as he rode that night toward the palace.

Hard men served Raynald. He could have no other kind; not in that hawk's nest southeast of the Dead Sea, perched on a high hill as a bulwark against the Moslem tide which relentlessly tried to engulf the long, narrow strip of Palestine that the Cross still held against the Crescent. Saladin's power grew day by day, and Raynald cursed the four years' truce which kept him from raiding the caravan trails.

Slowly, cautiously, not a link of his mail complaining, de Courtenai crept to the shadow of a bastion. Wrapped about his waist was a coil of silken cord. With infinite patience, he dug his dagger into the mortar, gouging toe holds. The moon rose above the domed tombs of the Khalifs as he reached the crest of the wall that girdled El Adel's palace.

But the shadow of a minaret reached out with a black band to hide him as he crouched, knotting the cord about a crenellation. And a moment later he was picking his way across a fragrant garden.

The spray of fountains mingled with jasmine. From afar, he heard the call of sentries walking their posts on the walls of the citadel. Presently de Courtenai slipped into the shadow of a pointed archway.

It seemed unguarded. From far within

came the wavering light of flambeaux. Then a harsh voice rasped, "Back, *ya emir!* Are you drunk?"

A long-faced eunuch accosted him, blinking, scarcely crediting his eyes. An armed man in the quarter reserved for El Adel's women!

De Courtenai made no move for his blade. He regarded the eunuch as he might some curious insect. "Maybe you'd like to ask El Adel what I'm doing here. Quick, brother of a dog! Where's your chief?"

The eunuch's eyes dropped. There was no fear in this man, nor had he touched a weapon. He could not be an intruder. His bearing accorded with his gilded mail and silken *khalat*.

"I'll get him, *sidi*. On my head and eyes."

An easy way out. Let the chief eunuch be responsible. But de Courtenai interposed, "Get *al-asfarani*—the yellow haired daughter of the infidel. El Adel won't risk taking her across the desert. She's to go by boat. I'm in a hurry—it sails at once!"

The tall Kurd spoke with authority.

The eunuch had no mind to confess ignorance of El Adel's plans, and for all he knew de Courtenai had entered through the guarded gate. "Wait, *sidi*. I'll see if she is ready—"

"Tell her to get ready, pig!" snapped de Courtenai. He dared give the eunuch no time to think! "Hurry—or I'll skin you alive!"

His voice made echoes rumble. It was not until the fellow had hastened along the passageway that de Courtenai shivered from the sweat on which a breeze blew coldly. He muttered a prayer. Moments dragged . . .

FROM somewhere in that luxurious pile of masonry came the notes of an eight stringed *oudh*. A woman was singing.

There was another voice; a man's. And the only man in this building must be El Adel.

A white shape blossomed in the dark arch of a cross passage. The tinkle of bracelets startled de Courtenai. He turned. It was a woman.

She hurried to him, slippered feet whispering across the tiles. As she came into the torch glow, he could see her splendid figure outlined by the frail fabric that clung to every curve.

"I'm Elinor de Montfried—I heard your voice." Her breath trembled in his ear, and her red hair caressed his cheek. "You're as good as dead—go! While you can! Maqsoud will find out—El Adel is taking leave of his sister—I'm going with her—he said so."

"With me!" He caught her hand. "Over the wall—"

Elinor clung to him, fingers sinking into his wrist. "You can't—good God—they'll miss me any minute—"

"You're not going to Damascus!" He lifted her from her feet. She was tall and shapely, but she gasped at the ease with which he swung her to his shoulder. "Hang on. That rope'll—take us both—"

It would, but it was too far away. From within came a babel of voices. It swelled and echoed. Women scurried about, chattering and screaming with excitement. A man shouted, and others answered. Their armor rang, their feet thudded against the tiles. The alarm was out!

De Courtenai, carrying the girl, raced across the garden. Torches glared in its further depths, and steel gleamed. He ducked into the shadow of a plane tree, hoping the search would sweep past him. But the file of *mamluks* wheeled and their drawn scimitars were crescents of silver.

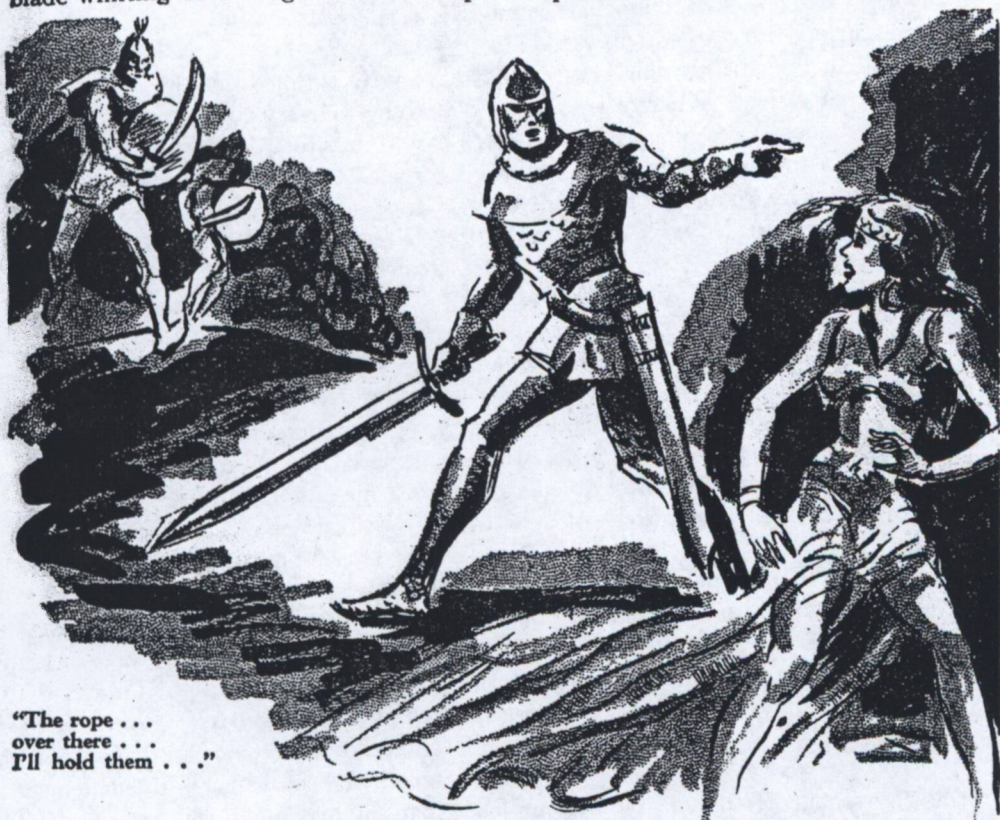
Elinor slipped to her feet. He said, "The rope—over there—I'll hold them—"

From the corner of his eye he saw the

white flash of her legs as she ran. So did the pursuit. They divided, and as de Courtenai's sword drew sparks from a peaked helmet, another squad came charging from his right.

They came at his flank. He leaped back, blade whirling in hissing arcs. The cap-

He had to. He could not cut down a company of *mamluks*; not while his life was valuable to Raynald de Châtillon. He whirled, dodging the tips of the crescent of blades that was swooping to surround him. He struck in passing, shifted swiftly, leaped clear.



"The rope . . .
over there . . .
I'll hold them . . ."

tain dropped, his neck mail shorn, and his throat with it. A scimitar splintered to shards against de Courtenai's guard. But the weight of the attack was bearing him back.

Beyond his assailants he saw Elinor's white body writhing in the grasp of four men at arms. Her cape yielded in the struggle. Then a circle of mail engulfed her. But one bare arm reached out, and above the ring of steel and the panting of his enemies, de Courtenai heard her scream, "The gate—the gate—go—"

ELINOR'S captors were dragging her into the palace. De Courtenai was separated from her by a wall of swords. And then he saw what she had meant by "the gate." It was open. Another squad of *mamluks*, summoned by the sentries, was rushing in from outside. They had him caged, or thought so; but if they had known him for one of Raynald's men, they would not have been so sure.

He moved faster than his first assailants could follow in the treacherous light of moon and torch; the newcomers did not

recognize him for an enemy until he struck with his flailing blade.

Surprise helped; wrath drove him, and the strong arm behind his heavy scimitar cut through. For a moment the sheer weight of steel against casque and shoulders seemed to crush him to the ground. But the enemy were in each other's way. Chain mail yielded to his savage slashing; tall, wiry men scattered before his charge.

De Courtenai, battered and sword-seamed, cleared the gateway. He cut a horseman from the saddle, took the dead man's seat as the milling footmen poured out after him.

Then de Courtenai raced down the avenue toward the citadel. A sentry challenged him. Cairo was awakening. But the swift desert horse swooped falcon-like into the wastelands, in and out among the tombs, and toward the Mokkatam Hills...

At the first oasis, he mounted a racing camel whose owner's lance had been no match for de Courtenai's blood browned sword...

LATE one night, the sentries at the outer works of the Castle of Kerak challenged a solitary rider. They could not understand his answer. His camel collapsed, and his peaked helmet gleamed dully as he sprawled in the sand near his beast.

"Another infidel trick—" But they called the captain of the guard.

"De Courtenai!" The officer recognized the hawk's beak; the rest was grimy parchment drawn over bones, and a beard caked with dried blood. But when they gave him a flagon of wine, the returned spy spat the dust from his lips and croaked, "Where's Sieur Raynald?"

Presently, supported by two men at arms, he faced his grim chief and reported, "El Adel's armies are marching to Kurdistan. To compel the atabeg of Mosul

to join Saladin. A holy war is brewing

"Well done, de Courtenai," approved Raynald, but as he turned, the spy detained him.

"A moment, sir. I raced Saladin's caravan from Cairo. It's bound for Damascus. On the road that passes not far from our eastern boundary. We can seize it. El Adel has a captive. Elinor, the daughter of the sieur de Montfried."

Raynald cursed, shook his grizzled head. "Can't do it. That damned truce! I'd like to help you. With that moon calf look of yours, when you ought to be thinking of food and rest. But forget it."

Then de Courtenai played his last card. "Wait—there's something else I forgot. Sitti Zayda, Saladin's sister, is with the caravan."

"God's death! Are you certain?" Raynald caught the other's shoulder.

"I learned that in El Adel's palace. But the truce, Sieur Raynald?"

It was now a horse of a different color. "Truce—body of God!" Raynald stormed. "I didn't make the truce! That pagan-loving Raymond of Tripoli—that weak-kneed King of Jerusalem—they made it! What a chance! After thirteen years in a Turk's prison!"

Raynald paced the flagging like a caged tiger. His sword-seamed face was exalted. "Get some rest! You, Guilford, send out scouts! Don't worry, lad—we'll get that girl for you. But if Saladin's sister isn't in that train, I'll hang you by your heels!"

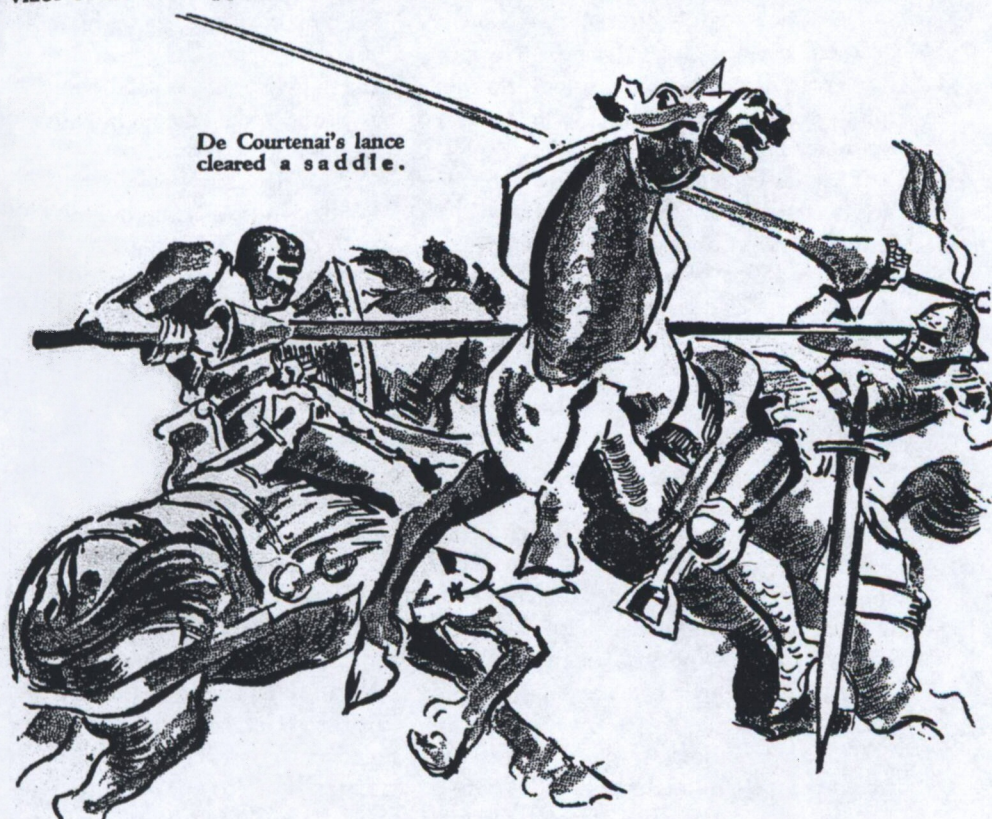
KERAK was already buzzing. The *snick-snick-snick* of whetstones on steel was the last sound that de Courtenai heard as he flung himself on a pallet of rushes. That, and the brazen blare of trumpets, was the first sound he heard, a full day later, when he stretched his aching limbs and tottered to his feet.

All day he scanned the shimmering horizon. Late in the afternoon, a white cloud rose toward the brazen sky. Many camels . . . fast camels—Saladin's camel, and Satan take all truces!

As the sun set, the iron men of Kerak nled down the steep hill. De Courtenai now wore his cross hilted sword, and the vizor of his flat-topped helmet masked his

muttered command passed down the column.

The nomad free lances swung from the troop. De Courtenai's heart hammered beneath his hauberker; hammered as it never had since his first battle. Time dragged as he pictured the nomads making a vast circle, looping back to the caravan's further flank—



De Courtenai's lance cleared a saddle.

face. He rode beside Raynald, and behind them came all the other wolves of Kerak; fierce Franks and lean Arab nomads who plundered all men alike.

Neither drum nor trumpet sounded. These men knew the desert and its warfare. They were intent on surprising the camp whose fires were a small winking red in the distance. There was only the muted voice of armor and curb chains muffled to avoid any betraying clank. And later, a

Time unending . . . and then he heard it, a far off yell, the rush of camels' padding feet, the drumming hoofs of desert horses. He lowered his lance, leaned forward in the saddle.

"Hold it, fool!" yelled Raynald. "Wait till they're sure the nomads are running—wait—"

But de Courtenai's beast stretched long legs. Devil take strategy! The caravan guards were already in triumphant pur-

suit of the nomads. The camel train would not race into the darkness with its precious cargo.

He charged into the glare of waving torches, riding down the Negro footmen. Arrows rattled against his armor. A platoon of horse, about to take up the pursuit of the nomads, wheeled about at the howling. Scimitars whirling, mail agleam in the light of a blazing tent, they swooped into the oasis.

De Courtenai's lance cleared a saddle. Another — and splintered as it swept a Kurdish horseman to the sand. He pivoted, and his sword flailed into the pack that enclosed him. A blade licked up from the ground. His horse lurched, hamstrung.

But the yell of triumph was drowned by the rumble of hoofs from the rear. Women screamed. Fallen torches set other tents aflame. Grooms galloped frantically across the desert. The wolves of Kerak had arrived.

THEY swept the camp clear, reformed and met the main guard that came from its phantom chase across the sand. De Courtenai, again on horse, rode through the confusion to join in the last stroke of destruction. But as he passed a broad silken pavilion, a squad of Turkish guards charged out. In their center was a veiled woman, and beside her was one whose red hair trailed like a banner in the leaping flames: Sitti Zayda, and Elinor.

El Adel's *mamluks*, whom no alarm could draw from their loyal mistress! De Courtenai spurred his beast athwart their path. Scimitars danced against his shoulders, hammered his casque. Lances tore into his hauberk, and blades licked at his maddened horse. But he stood in the stirrups, wedged in the heart of the pack. Sword gripped in both hands, he whirled it, and the chaff from his mill was red.

Then the rear guard troop from Kerak

poured in. De Courtenai's dripping blade waved them away from the captives. Elinor slipped from her horse and to his saddle bow. One arm steadied her; his other hand seized the veiled woman before she could bolt.

It was all over except for guards beyond the fire glow, fighting back to back until thirsty blades cut them down. And that had scarcely ended when Raynald returned from his red work at the further fringe of the oasis.

He reined in, eyed Elinor's white loveliness, and boomed, "God's blood, de Courtenai! I don't blame you. But I've found something sweeter!"

He leaned over in the saddle, reached for the Saracen girl's gold embroidered veil. De Courtenai's protest was too late. The frail fabric yielded, and her cape came with it in Raynald's great paw. Bare faced and bare headed; lustrous black hair all agleam with great rubies; pearls shimmered against her olive tinted throat, and a pearl pendant nestled in the hollow of her breast.

In the eyes of a Moslem, this was exposure shameful as the nudity of the slave market.

"My lord the wolf." Zayda's voice trembled with fury, and the glow of cheek and breast was more than the fire's reflection. "Saladin's own hand will cut that arm from your body."

The Lord of Kerak laughed gustily. "Let him seek me, any day."

"Sieur de Châtillon," interposed de Courtenai, impressed by the girl's proud bearing, "it's not her fault, your thirteen years' captivity."

Elinor caught Raynald's arm. "As a favor, let her be veiled."

Raynald shrugged, gestured to the trumpeter. Recall rang above the dying crackle of the flames, and soon the wolves of

Kerak were marching across the desert with their loot.

Elinor refused a horse. Arms twined about de Courtenai's blood splashed neck, bare shoulder leaning against his slashed hauberk, she whispered, "Take off your helmet. So I can see you. Every minute, as long as I can. It's so wonderful—I can't believe it—I heard in Cairo that father escaped—"

He doffed his battered casque, drew her toward him till she gasped from his fierce

"It's not that," she explained, "this raid will mean war. It's my fault—"



"My lord the wolf, Saladin's own hand will cut that arm from your body."

embrace. Then in the moonlight he saw that her eyes were tear-gleaming, and sorrowful as her face.

"I'll send a message to your father. He won't worry long—"

"A dozen wars!" he laughed. "This is worth them."

"No. It's the end for the Crusader's power. The holy fire has left them. In Cairo I heard that. Saladin is uniting all the infidel tribes who used to fight each other instead of us. The King of Jerusalem is an oaf. Count Raymond of Tripoli is more Saracen than Christian. We'll be swept into the sea—"

"We'll go back to France, you and I!" He kissed the qualms from her red mouth, but not the fear from his own heart. Elinor was right. Not this year, or next, but in the end. Islam had become a consuming flame.

THE rising moon welcomed the wolves to Kerak. Sieur Raynald ushered Elinor and Sitti Zayda to apartments in an isolated turret in the great black castle. He relished his vengeance and said, "Lady Elinor, I give you a king's sister to dress your hair!"

But the smouldering eyes of the Saracenic princess did not brighten. She knew the lord of Kerak and his undying hatred for her race.

"Rest while we drink," was de Courtenai's final word at the massive door. "Vengeance is sleep for Sieur Raynald. But you won't hear the splash of wine up there in the turret."

"Try and break away," whispered Elinor.

"You'd better bolt the door," he warned, knowing that she would not.

Down in the sombre acre of dining room, Sieur Raynald and his wolves feasted and drank. Circassian girls from the caravan poured their wine. Flickering torchlight kissed their unveiled beauty, brought fire from their gilded hair. Syrian slaves with languorous black eyes sang to the music of pearl inlaid rebeks.

"Bring out that wine from Samos!" roared Raynald, pounding his flagon against the board. "Out of the deepest

cellar! What we can't drink now, time will lap up! Dry dusty time—time that makes old men of me and Saladin—puts a white beard on my vengeance—"

"You've brought him out of his hole, Sieur Raynald!" boomed hook nosed Guilford, and others shouted, "Here's your war, Father of Wolves!"

So they drank and planned. War it must be, for they had seized a caravan that their overlord, the King of Jerusalem, had given protection.

But de Courtenai's thoughts were in the far off turret. . . . He watched the dancing girls from Hindustan, part of the royal loot. Their breasts were masked by hemispheres of gold, and their writhing stomachs were pale gold in the torch glow. The jewelled pendants of their broad girdles winked with the sensuous sway of their hips, and their black eyes seconded the passionate voice of the *sitars*.

When the table was cleared, half the wolves of Kerak were beneath it. Wine blazed in their eyes and dripped from the beards of those who were still in their chairs. They pounded their flagons as the nautch girls from El Adel's train swayed down the length of the table. Their slim legs twinkled, smiled through the frail scarlet skirts that swirled with their turning, rising hip-high, settling faster than the eye could follow.

The planning for war was over. The Syrian slaves left their corners, joined the girls from Hindustan. Their lips were ready for any master. Sieur Raynald slapped de Courtenai on the shoulder, nearly knocking him from his chair. "Go to the turret! *Pardieu!* She's waiting for you!"

He welcomed his dismissal, and laughed as Sieur Raynald reached for the nautch girl de Courtenai had thrust aside. As he stalked through the halls, he regretted a

frayed doublet and patched cape, the last of his once rich wardrobe.

SHE was waiting, eyes aglow — until they misted from his kiss. He carried her to the massive bench set into the turret's overhanging gallery. The poison sweetness of oriental perfumes no longer tainted her outlandish borrowed garb. In the shadows, all he could see was whiteness that reminded him of home and far off France.

He had kissed many women in many a mad Syrian night. But Elinor was a wonder that made him feel awkward and unworthy. To have her beside him was enough. Or so the thought was in his wine dizzied brain, until her nearness inflamed him, and she whispered, "Don't ever leave me! Love me as long as you can—there's war tomorrow — I'll be in Tiberias, waiting—"

And that was heady logic . . .

"I don't care why you left France . . . whose husband you killed," she murmured finally. "Father will let me marry you. After last night—"

But a cry cut into their kisses; low, wrathful, like the scream of a panther. It was Saladin's high spirited sister. "Dog and father of many dogs—"

Glass splattered. Cloth ripped. A triumphant laugh raised bellowing echoes. Sieur Raynald was seeking vengeance. De Courtenai leaped to his feet. Elinor followed, seeking a taper from a far alcove.

Zayda it was, and Sieur Raynald's powerful hands were more than full. Her gown hung in shreds to her slim waist, but her hennaed nails were raking his face.

"My lord," shouted de Courtenai, seizing Raynald by the shoulder, "you're drunk—this isn't man's vengeance—"

The wolf of Kerak whirled, flung Zayda asprawl. He was weaving on his feet, yet cat-quick for all of that. De Courtenai

flung up an empty hand to strike aside Sieur Raynald's dagger slash.

"Stop!" screamed Elinor. "She was good to me—as she could be—"

Sieur Raynald lunged, raging.

Zayda scrambled to her feet. "Saladin's own hands will cut the arms from you!"

But Elinor settled it as de Courtenai grappled with his wrath crazed chief. She smote him over the head with a candlestick, and he dropped.

"By God!" panted de Courtenai. "He's dead—"

The three eyed one another.

But Raynald was too drunk to be killed easily. He grunted, came to his knees, well sobered. "Maybe you're right, de Courtenai," he said thickly. "Take her away. Take them both to Tiberias. If that heathen wench is untouched, we can bargain with Saladin. Win time for that thin blooded King of Jerusalem to collect his wits and prepare for war."

He reeled, blinked. "Tonight, de Courtenai. Before the news spreads and the marches are thick with Saladin's men."

"But you, Sieur Raynald?"

"I stay to hold Kerak. Until those fools on the coast need me!"

SO THAT dawn, de Courtenai and a fairly sober squad of the wolf's pack set out for the black gorge of the Dead Sea.

As he rode, de Courtenai said to his men, "This infidel girl is Lady Elinor's maid. The first man who noises it about Jerusalem that she is Saladin's sister gets his skull split to the chin!"

And the wolves knew their captain.

Sitti Zayda said to him, "Why do you do this for me, *ya emir*?"

"For her sake, King's Sister," he answered in Arabic. "Because of you, not her, the wolf of Kerak made his raid. You were her fortune."

"Allah does what he will do," Zayda answered, shrugging her cape closer about her. "It was written."

And de Courtenai began to know why the holy fire of the crusades had dimmed. For a century, between battles, the invading Franks had rubbed elbows with the Moslem. They could no longer as fervently hate these people who accepted any turn of fortune as the unquestioned will of the One True God. The Crusader was no longer certain as he once had been; like himself, the Moslem revered Christ as a prophet.

King Guy of Jerusalem blustered and trembled when, days later, he received de Courtenai's report. The grim Templars brightened. Their Grand Master, iron hearted Gerard de Rideford, caressed his sword. But swarthy Count Raymond of Tripoli pulled his sharp face into sombre angles.

"This is not well, de Courtenai. We had two more years of truce. Two more years to prepare against Saladin's growing power. And with diplomacy—"

"Christ's blood!" growled the wolf's cub. "Were diplomats sent to hold Kerak? Sharpen sword, *monsieur le comte*! We've got—"

But he checked himself before he blurted out that Saladin's sister was a hostage. He could not betray that high spirited girl to this lukewarm pack; each night on the long march with Elinor had made him more grateful to Zayda. His Moslem disguise had been more than skin deep; Arab-like, he felt that Zayda was part of Elinor's *kismet*.

"We've got," he resumed, "the advantage of assembling before Saladin gets the news."

As he turned on his heel, Count Raymond detained him. "Raynald should be hanged by the heels, the hot-headed fool! But take a message to my wife in Tiberias.

If you will be so good, *monsieur*."

"At your pleasure, Sieur Raymond."

"King Guy's council," said the Count of Tripoli, "has appointed Nablûs as the rallying point. Tell her to send messengers north from Tiberias to Tripoli. And to Antioch."

At dawn, de Courtenai's party left Jerusalem.

"I'm afraid," shuddered Elinor. "God can't bless our love. It's causing war—fresh war, when there could have been two years' peace—"

"But war in the end, just the same," de Courtenai finished.

"There is no God but Allah," murmured the veiled maid-servant who rode the ambling jenny. "He does what he will do, and may he give my brother the right arm of Raynald!"

WHEN de Courtenai left the banks of the Jordan to skirt the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, he overtook villagers heading northward. Dust rose as far as he could see the road, and dust clouds trailed down the vine clad slopes, cut the dark green of olive groves, the ripe gold of wheat in the flatlands. The country was alive, and each beast of burden was heaped mountain high; not with farm produce, but with household goods.

The countryside was heading for Tiberias, and de Courtenai could taste fear in the very air. "Oh Uncle," he shouted to a grizzled Syrian bent double with the burden he carried, "what festival brings you from the hills?"

"Saladin has come to harvest!" moaned the woman at his side, stumbling from the naked children that ran at her heels. "The Turks come down from Damascus—last night we saw the flames of villages—"

They were on their way to Tiberias and the shelter of its walls. De Courtenai cursed, gestured at the gray towers and

walls of the city and the blue of the sea behind, where it bowed out to Mejdél. He had lost too much time. Some survivor of the caravan had ridden north. Saladin must have received the news in Damascus!

They ploughed on through the stream of peasants that blocked the road. They were caught by the vortex that poured into the gates of Tiberias that evening. The walls were manned, and knights with fresh crosses sewed to their surcoats spurred about, directing the men at arms who carried rocks and oil and sheaves of arrows to the parapets. It was stale news that de Courtenai brought to Eschiva, Count Raymond's wife and châtelaine of Tiberias.

"Madame," said de Courtenai when the countess received him in a hall all astir with her clanking captains, "I bring you greetings from *monsieur le compte*. But instead of giving you his message, I will take your news to him."

The blonde châtelaine thanked him, called for food and wine for his weary party. Then she said to Elinor, "Your father reached Tiberias, but his wounds are—" She checked herself.

"Tell me!" Elinor's nails dug into her palms.

"He died praying for your safety." Eschiva drew the white-faced girl to her side. "But you are welcome—to whatever war leaves us."

Elinor swallowed a sob, smiled bravely. She caught de Courtenai's hand and said, "It has brought me Jehan, *madame*. It will leave me with him. And this pagan girl who was kind to me during my captivity."

Eschiva's weary eyes brightened. "Sieur de Courtenai, the priests will soon be too busy with the dying. But there will be time for them to do a happier duty."

Elinor turned from the châtelaine's arm.

"Jehan," she said, "I'm so very much alone—and if you can love me, after the ruin I've caused—"

His kiss cut short her words of self-reproach. Then he turned to bow to the countess. "*Madame*, where is this priest?"

The countess laughed softly. "De Courtenai, give this poor girl a chance to get over that long march! And you're dying on your feet. Tomorrow—forgive me, but these officers are enough to drive one woman crazy!"

She turned to the captains who came to report. A steward ushered the travelers to their quarters. The countess was right. De Courtenai was perishing of weariness; but his last thought was that with a night's rest, he could handle Saladin and all his armies . . .

AT FIRST it seemed that a far off storm was brewing. Still half asleep, de Courtenai gained his feet, saw the gray of dawn against his window bars. Then knew that the sullen rumble was the voice of saddle drums. Trumpets shook the city, and the shouts of men on the walls drove de Courtenai toward his armor. The hoofs of Saracen cavalry were shaking the earth. Saladin's advance guard had ridden day and night to strike before the city was prepared for siege.

He bounded to his door; Elinor's trembling fingers buckled his hauberk, laced his helmet. Sunrise reddened the Sea of Galilee. Leaning from the window, they could see the gleaming helmets of the advancing horde. A crescent of steel was enveloping the landward side of Tiberias.

"Fate rides fast," said the girl in de Courtenai's arms. "God—look at them—" It was lighter now, and she could distinguish the black standards of Islam, the dirty brown of camels and the brown robes of Bedouin lancers who followed the wave of cavalry. "No! Don't go—not yet—"

He could not shake her loose. "I've got to join them." He gestured toward the squires who helped armored knights to their horses in the court below; to the horse and foot that already sortied from the city gates, pennons a-flutter and field music blaring.

"No — it'll be a siege — you're worn out—" she begged. "Tomorrow—there'll be days a-plenty for that!"

Her lips sapped his resolution. But Elinor recoiled from his arms when the châtelaine's quiet voice broke in, "Sieur de Courtenai, she's right. I'm recalling the hotheads who just left without orders. But you can serve us all. As no one else can.

"How, *madame*?"

"Ride to rallying point at Nablûs. Warn my husband and the king. More than the advance guard is surrounding us. A messenger arrived before dawn. It's the main body of Saladin's army."

Her slender arm reached beyond the embrasure, indicating the turbanned men who were unloading parts of siege engines from the backs of camels, and assembling the fitted beams.

"You can get through, disguised as an infidel. No one else could have done what you did in Cairo."

"No one," echoed Elinor, lips suddenly gray as she thought of one man, and that man her lover, facing Saladin's horde.

"I can," said de Courtenai, removing his flat topped helmet. "By slipping to the lake. Getting beyond their flank."

"Zayda," Elinor whispered fiercely, close in his arms. "Couldn't we make her buy them off?"

"No woman could stop that army! She's your luck. Don't betray her."

Then de Courtenai followed the Chatelaine to choose a Saracen's weapons from the armory. . . .

LATER, a patrol filed from a sally port, fanned out, charged at the besiegers. Dust and the wide line of steel blotted the enemy from de Courtenai's eye. When the charge of the Franks melted before a hail of Turkish arrows, he was afloat, unperceived by Moslems who followed the retreating horsemen to the very walls.

Miles south, his swarthy Turcople boatmen set him ashore. De Courtenai had no horse, nor was any to be found in that deserted lakeside. But a mule grazing beyond an abandoned village served his purpose. So he rode, turban wound to hide his helmet, a flowing cape to conceal his chain mail and scimitar.

The Wolf of Kerak was at Nablûs when de Courtenai gave the message to the council. "I left soon after you did," he laughed, "to prod these cattle into the field. But where's that heathen hell cat?"

"In Tiberias." This unexpected encounter with his chief left de Courtenai no other answer. Had he chosen a lie, he could not have convinced Sieur Raynald that Zayda had escaped. "But the Saracens won't raise the siege on her account—it's gone too far for bargaining."

The strategy of the Crusaders was direct enough: go north at once with what forces had gathered, menace the Saracen flank and block their southward march. In the meanwhile, the rest of the Franks could assemble and then join the advance guard.

The column of horse and foot set out the following dawn, an iron serpent that wound across the sun drenched plain. Heat devils danced ahead, and low hanging dust lingered behind. Armor speedily became blistering hot. Sweat blackened leather jerkins, foam whitened the horse gear—until the fierce breath of Palestine dried out both man and beast, and bitter dust burned eye and lip and nostril.

Slow, relentless, massive; giant men, ponderous mounts, heavy lances, going

north to meet lean horsemen who swooped like falcons across the desert's face. De Courtenai put pebbles into his dry mouth and husbanded his leather flask of brackish water like his chief. He had but one thirst: for battle beneath the walls of Tiberias.

Scouts came and went. Rumors were thicker than the dust. Tiberias had capitulated . . . Saladin had died in battle at Antioch, and victorious Franks were hurrying south to join their comrades . . . but that night, the blaze of looted villages winked from far off hilltops.

A second day. Then the third: a baking, stifling hell. Footmen stumbled over the furnace-hot, rocky terrain, and horses fell beneath the weight of armored riders. But at last they reached the shade and cool water of the springs at Seffuriyeh.

"Another day's march!" De Courtenai unlaced his helmet.

"The wolves of Kerak," growled Sieur Raynald, "could go tonight and strike at dawn!"

But there was no advance in the morning. Couriers came from the flank guards, and this time there were no rumors. Men riddled with lance and arrow were riding in from the Jordan. They had barely escaped the Saracen column that came from the east to ford the river and march along the Sea of Galilee toward Tiberias.

Taki-ud-Din, Saladin's nephew, had arrived with a second army of Kurdish mountaineers, bearded Bedouins, the atabegs of Mosul with their horse-tail standards. All Islam was in motion and moving swiftly.

The council of the Franks temporized. "Wait for reinforcements!" was a many-voiced demand that drowned the impatient clamor of Sieur Raynald, and de Courtenai's taunt to Count Raymond: "Coward! Your wife and your castle besieged—and you wait for men!"



DAYS passed. June ended, and July's flame burned the land. Troops, Templars, Knights of the Hospital, lords of outlying fortresses had come to Seffuriyeh to reinforce King Guy's army. All the power of the Franks was massed; but valor and strength were weakened by dissension.

Sieur Raynald and de Courtenai forced the issue. That was when a haggard courier came from Tiberias. Lady Eschiva could not much longer hold the beleaguered city.

"God's death!" stormed de Courtenai. "We can cut through! Ask Sieur Raynald!"

But Count Raymond, though haggard from brooding over his wife's peril, shook his head. "No. We've waited too long. There is not a well between here and Tiberias. Not a drop of water. Our men

would be dead on their feet before we met the Saracens."

"How many times can a man die?" mocked grim de Rideford, the Templar. "Or have you made another private bargain with Saladin?"

Count Raymond's sharp face whitened with wrath. He gripped his sword-hilt, but King Guy intervened. The count answered, wearily, "By God and the Holy Cross that goes before us into battle, I would rather lose my wife and castle than doom an army. You, de Courtenai—would you give all these men to the sword to save Lady Elinor—do you love her more than I my wife?"

"All these and as many more!" flared de Courtenai.

"And I'll lead them!" *Sieur Raynald* thundered.

They turned blazing eyes to the king who gnawed his blond moustache. He glanced helplessly from face to face. The rumble of voices dizzied him; some seconded Count Raymond's heroic sacrifice, some damned it as treachery, cowardice. And then de Rideford, Master of the Templars, advanced a pace.

"My lord king," he said, "I gave you the treasure I held in trust for the King of England. It has paid all these troops you summoned in this extremity."

"Lead us!" stormed the wolf of Kerak. And de Courtenai added, "Through hell if you will—let thirst drive us to Galilee!"

Count Raymond raised his hand, but de Courtenai's voice was a contagious fire, and so was the gleam in the Templar's eye. Though King Guy gestured for silence, it was his white face that stilled them.

"Lords, knights, burghers—we advance at dawn!"

FROM the hills about the well of Sef-furiyeh they marched east toward

Galilee. And the sun that baked them that day made all former heat a coolness; a slow torment of choking dust and parched lips. Men lagged, stumbled, rose again as the horsemen smote them with the flat of swords.

But de Courtenai and the wolves of Kerak mocked thirst. This was no worse than any desert march. Elinor was beyond the steep ridge that blocked the view of cool Galilee. Her welcoming arms seemed to reach out, urge him on.

Midway across the Plain of Turan, Turkish archers swooped from the flanking hills, taunting the advance guard, halting the main body while the wolves of Kerak met them in their own game. Harassed on the entire front, backing and filling, the Frankish army wore itself out, making no progress, nor yet closing with the elusive horsemen.

In camp that night the last water skin was emptied. Haggard men dropped in their tracks to sleep. Weary horsemen patrolled to guard against surprise. And priests moved softly to and fro, administering the sacraments to those who would die in the morning.

"*Pardieu!*" De Courtenai's dry lips twisted, but he refused to touch the water he had hoarded against the next day's march. "We were wrong, *Sieur Raynald!* These poor devils will die of thirst. We might have known they couldn't stand it."

The old wolf laughed as he sucked a cross bow bolt to save water. "God's blood, Jehan! Is that girl making you a weakling?"

"No. But the lives of these men are on my head and yours." Too late, de Courtenai realized that Elinor should have left Tiberias with him. But who could have foreseen Taki-ud-Din's army, the last fatal reinforcement to Saladin's horde?

A red sun rose into a brazen sky, fierce promise of the torment ahead. Trumpets

blared down the long line of spears, and pennons drooped in the still air. De Courtenai and the wolves of Kerak were the king's body guard; and with them went the True Cross, encased in gold. They trotted out, and as the ranks wavered from the broken ground, Sieur Raynald gestured to the dust cloud far ahead.

"God's death! They've come to welcome us!"

Cymbals clanged. Saddle drums muttered. The hills flung back the sonorous war cry of the Moslem. The Saracens had cut down the outposts; and the battle began before the march was half under way.

The two forces clashed in the deserted village of Lubiye. Dust clouds obscured the sun, and companies lost each other in the confusion. De Courtenai led the charge to the center of crescent. Lance shattered, he hewed with his blade.

Yard by yard, sheer weight of horse and man ploughed into the whirlpool of swooping horsemen. Arrows peppered de Courtenai like hail, lances bit his hauberk; but Sieur Raynald and the wolves smote home. Water and Tiberias were ahead. Death was behind.

"They're breaking!" He spurred his wounded horse into that hell roar of drums and thundering hoofs.

But as they advanced, the tips of the crescent closed in. Exhaustion killed more than did Turkish arrow or scimitar stroke. And narrow gullies broke the front of the advancing pike men. The battle became raging clusters of unorganized combat. Saracen cavalry swooped through gaps, diving to attack, then swiftly retreating. They had water at their backs and they were fresh.

"Once more!" roared Sieur Raynald, pausing at the king's side. "We're through the village! Guilford—de Courtenai—over there—"

COURAGE flamed anew. Men half dead of thirst took life from desperation. Scattered companies formed, aligned, shoulder to shoulder. Knights massed to lead the way. Over the next crest, then down the steep slope to the fresh waters of Galilee—



"How many times can a man die?" mocked grim de Rideford.

But a new foe met them. They saw too late why the enemy fled. The tamarisk brush of the gullies was aflame, and dense smoke billowed to join the dust. The hollow beyond the village was a furnace. Sparks rained, and arrows beyond number hissed through the enveloping curtain of fire.

Back—around — flank exposed — they

formed again, those who were not cut down. Ahead, above the blazing gullies, was barren ground. De Courtenai toiled up the slope of the crescent shaped hill. There, on the "Horns of Hattin," what remained of the Frankish army gathered around its king and the True Cross. Only a handful; the wolves of Kerak, and Templars pledged to accept no quarter—though none would be offered here.

King Guy wielded a broken sword. Shoulder to shoulder they stood, notched blades and axes, hacked armor still turning the Saracen charge. Then footmen closed in, driven ahead by the cavalry to overwhelm the king and his standard, whatever the cost.

Sieur Raynald went down. De Courtenai whirled, sword in both hands. It bit deep, slashed wide. But the Templar guarding his back caught a lance between the teeth. A mace smashed down on de Courtenai's dented helmet. He stumbled, dazed by the shock. And a surge of Turks trampled him into the ground, stifling him, weighting the blade he strove to recover. Another blow—the red sunset became black—

NIGHT had veiled the Horns of Hattin when de Courtenai crawled from among the dead. Ahead of him were the fires of Saladin's camp, and above was a moon that picked out the armor of the dead. Bit by bit he remembered, and as his strength returned, he dug into the tangle of Frank and Moslem about him. But he did not find Sieur Raynald nor the king.

A water skin from the saddle of a dead camel gave him fresh life, and with it, fresh woe. All this slaughter was on his head; his strategy had brought this to pass, and Sieur Raynald was a captive.

Desperation moved him. What he had done in Cairo, he could do again. He un-

buckled his armor, stripped a raw boned Kurd he found at the foot of the slope. He bandaged his wounds, armed himself anew. His brain was a fevered maze; he knew only that Elinor was in Tiberias, and Sieur Raynald in the Saracen camp. Perhaps he had thus far escaped Saladin's notice.

De Courtenai moved without plan or stealth. Madness succeeded where reason could not. He passed the lines, stumbled among the Moslems who squatted about guard fires. A word here—a word there—a battered, reeling Kurd was no novelty in that camp. Thus he heard the last heavy word. Tiberias had capitulated; with the Franks doomed at Hattin, the countess had no other choice. Elinor, captive again—

He was now too numb to move except by instinct. Find Saladin, assume Sieur Raynald's guilt. Ransom Elinor. Meet Saladin, stab him, and go down in a whirl of blades. Everything was confused, chaotic.

He halted near a pavilion lit by many torches. There were guards—in yellow khalats, emirs in gilded mail, bearded scribes and clerks; slaves and musicians. He knew that he was right, even before he saw that thin man whose weary face was darker than his beard; a frail man in black, older than El Adel, governor of Cairo, but with features like his.

Saladin, seated on a rug spread on the earth. Picked swordsmen about him, and others guarding the captives he faced. There was the blonde King of Jerusalem, and Sieur Raynald, sword-slashed but arrogant. The Sultan clapped his hands. A slave stepped to his side, presented a flagon of sherbert chilled by snow from Lebanon.

Saladin rose, took the flagon and with his own hands offered it to Guy of Jerusalem. De Courtenai relaxed. No man who tasted the Sultan's food and drink would bend his neck beneath the heads-

man's sword. The King, lips black with dust, could scarcely speak his thanks. He took a swallow, turned to hand the drink to Saladin's mortal enemy, the wolf of Kerak.

"Thank God," muttered de Courtenai. "Merciful in victory—maybe he doesn't know about Zayda—maybe—"

HE trembled, watching the flagon rise to Sieur Raynald's parched mouth. No one dashed it from his lips. And then de Courtenai's blood froze. Saladin said, "Drink, lord of the wolf pack. But your king gave it to you, not I."

Sieur Raynald started. Strong arms seized King Guy, who understood. Saladin's thin scimitar hissed from its sheath. De Courtenai's yell shook the wits of the bodyguard. He leaped into the pavilion, his own blade dancing.

But he was not quick enough to block the sultan's stroke. The keen crescent slashed through flesh and bone, shearing the right arm Sieur Raynald raised. He sank beneath the flailing steel of the guards who closed in to finish what their master had begun; and rough hands gripped the madman who cursed the grim faced Sultan.

Weight and weariness overpowered de Courtenai. King Guy was pale as he stared at the red heap that shuddered on the ground.

Saladin smiled. "You are a king, and

under my protection. But that man affronted the honor of my house and broke a safeguard." He turned to de Courtenai. "Another wolf, and loyal to the end?"

"Strike again!" challenged de Courtenai. "They kept me from you."

"A madman is in the hand of Allah," countered Saladin. "And you came to-night as a Kurd. As you came to Cairo and my brother's palace. Your life is yours, de Courtenai."

De Courtenai scarcely heard for the drumming in his ears. Saladin reassured him. "The power of the Franks ended this day on the Horns of Hattin. Others may come, but Islam is ready and waiting. So go your way. And take with you the red-haired girl who was my sister's maid."

He gestured to the curtain that divided the front of the pavilion from the back. De Courtenai bowed to the conquering king and the conquered; then he followed a *mamluk* down the silken passageway to the rear.

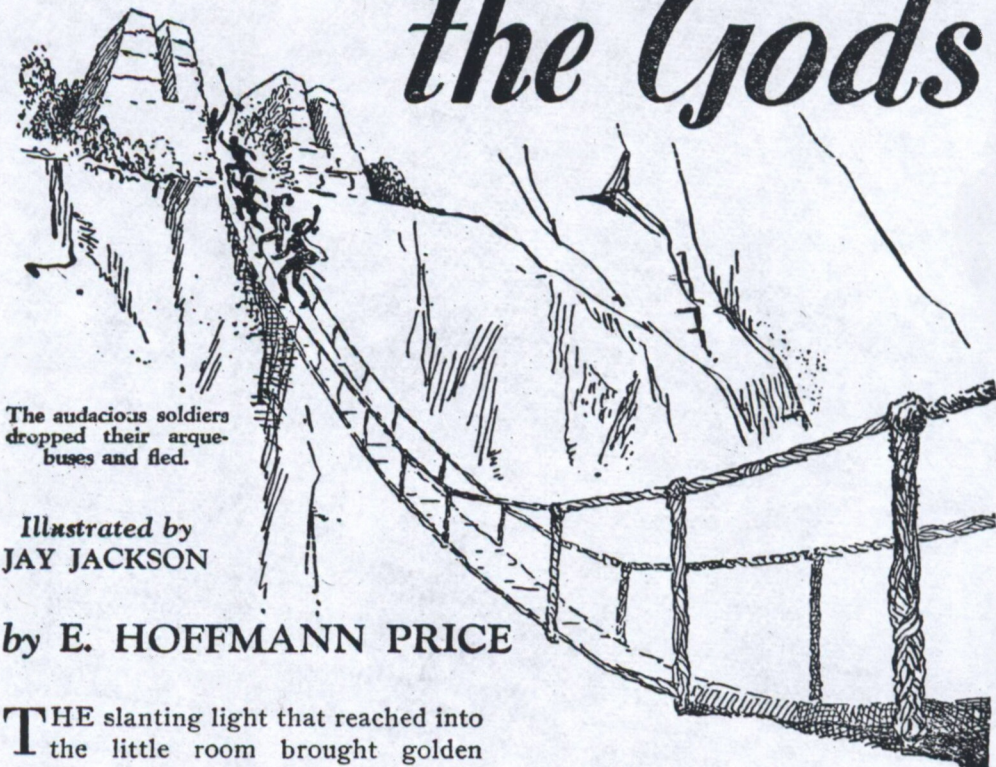
He still could not believe. Not until he saw Elinor and the tears that gleamed in her incredulous eyes.

"You—Jehan—but they told me," she sobbed against his dusty mail, "you were dead—Saladin sent men to capture you alive—"

"I cut them down before they could tell me!" He laughed exultantly, and his arms closed about that white loveliness which had led him to the Horns of Hattin.

**Be Sure to Read
January
GOLDEN FLEECE
FOR SOLID ENJOYMENT**

Two Against the Gods



The audacious soldiers dropped their arquebuses and fled.

Illustrated by
JAY JACKSON

by E. HOFFMANN PRICE

THE slanting light that reached into the little room brought golden glints from Oello's tawny skin and brought a cool green glitter from the emerald collar that circled her slender throat. Her face remained lovely and untroubled as she turned from the narrow window, but all the splendor that Felipe's kisses had coaxed to her dark eyes was gone.

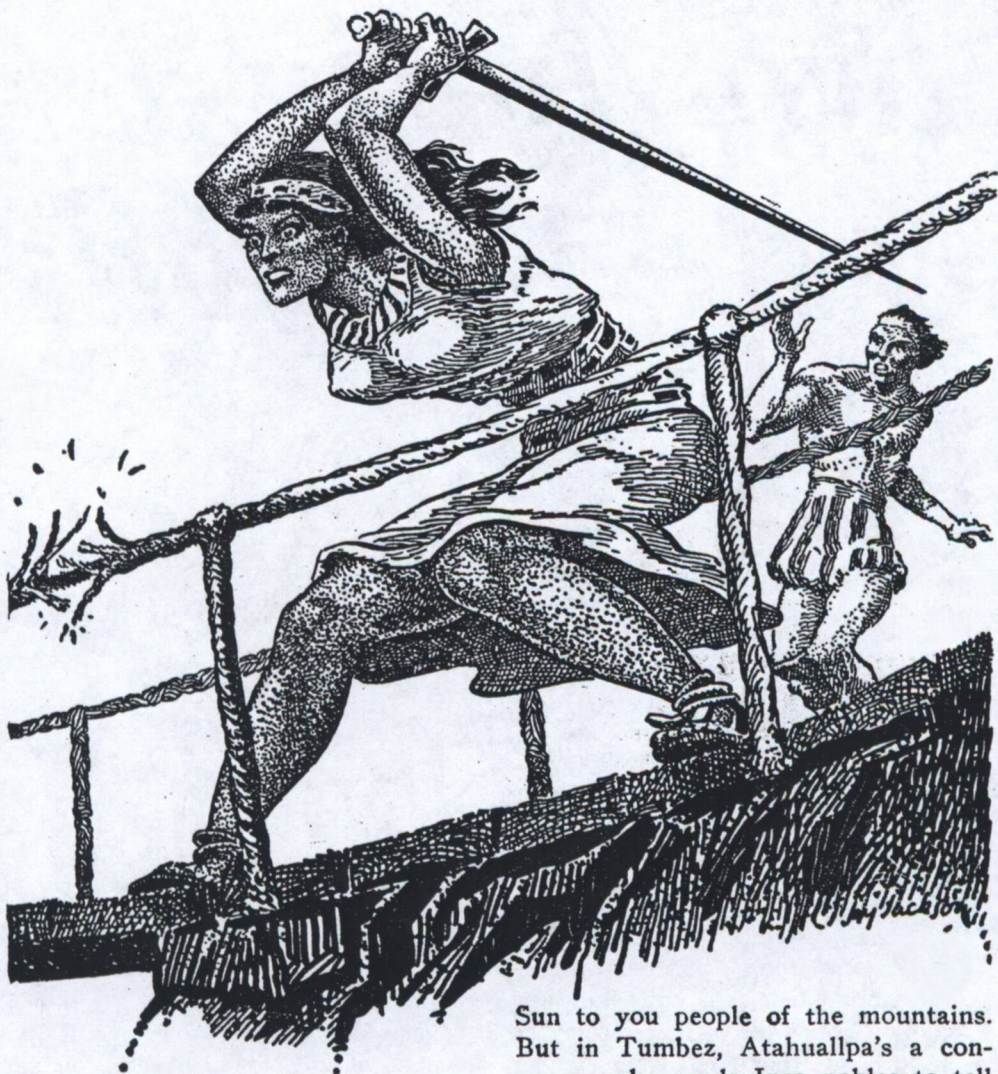
"Ten more llamas," she sighed, "and loaded until they can hardly walk."

Francisco Pizarro's interpreter sombrely regarded the caravan that was adding to Atahualpa's ransom. In another few days, Oello and all the other wives of the captive Inca would go with him to freedom.

"Suppose Pizarro does turn him loose?" Felipe challenged. "You and I can go to the coast. Atahualpa can't reach us, there."

Oello did not answer. Felipe caught her arms and drew her from the sill. He repeated, "Pizarro and the Inca can do without us!"

He was an Indian from Tumbez, but only his crisp black hair and swarthy skin marked him apart from the Spanish invaders whom he served; he wore a purple doublet and hose, none the worse for having been discarded by Ferdinand de Soto, who was second in



command. A sword and a wine colored cape hung across the foot of the low couch.

The Inca's wife regarded her lover with widening eyes. He was about the age of Atahualpa, and though his features lacked the fine modelling of the sacred Inca clan, he had a strong face and resolute mouth. His chin thrust out as he sensed Oello's blend of dismay and horror.

Felipe answered her unspoken exclamation: "He may be the Child of the

Sun to you people of the mountains. But in Tumbes, Atahualpa's a conqueror who sends Inca nobles to tell us what to wear, what to think, what crops to raise."

She was young and shapely. Beneath her flowing mantle of silk-soft *vicuña* fleece she wore a skirt and blouse of fragile cotton. The embroidery that enriched the frail fabric was heavier than the garments themselves. And though the heart beat of her close pressed body whipped his own pulse, Oello's beauty could not distract him from his wrath.

The heightened color of her olive

tinted cheeks, the misting of her long lashed eyes confirmed his resolution. As their lips parted, he said, "Atahualpa's an upstart. Huascar's the lawful Inca. You know that."

Oello smoothed her rumpled blouse, then flung back her heavy black braids. Stolen kisses were in themselves a high crime against the Inca; but somehow, outright desertion seemed even more sacrilegious.

Outside, a trumpet drowned the wrangling and gambling of the Spanish soldiers. Felipe picked up his cloak and sword and said to Oello, "There's a way of doing this. I'll tell you more tonight. Now, you'd better go back. The officers will be meeting Pizarro."

FERDINAND DE SOTO, the only one of that hard bitten lot who had any pity for Atahualpa, spent each afternoon rolling dice and playing chess with the captive Inca. But now that the trumpet summoned Pizarro's officers, Atahualpa would turn to the wives who had accompanied him in captivity. It was time for Oello to leave.

Felipe watched her slip stealthily down a shadowy passageway. If Atahualpa died before he won his freedom, Oello would have no further qualms.

Later, the interpreter saw his chance. There are more ways than one to kill a captive king. But neither tall Pizarro nor his assembled captains knew what a stake Felipe had in this deadly game of gold and kingdoms.

Torchlight gleamed on their full armor. Ever since that fatal half hour in which Atahualpa had become a prisoner, Pizarro's small force had slept under arms, lest sudden revolt catch them off guard.

"The Inca," said Pizarro, "says we ought to turn him loose."

He spoke slowly, weighing every word. His thin face was strengthened by a long, straight nose; a slow, patient man, immovable and remorseless as the Andes. Though born a swineherd, and for all his sixty years unable to write his own name, Francisco Pizarro commanded the respect of *hidalgo* and ruffian alike.

"Turn him loose? *Por dios!* You're crazy if you don't kill him!"

A short, one eyed man waddled forward a pace. Diego Almagro had spoken it all in a breath. Standing beside the handsome Ferdinand de Soto, Almagro seemed more toad than man. His broad shoulders and stocky legs made him appear shorter than he actually was. A twisted nose, somewhat the worse for having been broken and crudely set, combined with his one protruding eye to make him the ugliest man of the army.

"Blood of God!" seconded several others. "Almagro's right! The quicker you kill him, the sooner we can go to Cuzco."

Pizarro gravely stroked his beard. De Soto's generous mouth hardened. Felipe's eyes brightened. Thank God for Almagro!

Finally de Soto found a lull. He said, "Don Francisco, the Inca has paid for his freedom. He has done us no harm, only favors. You can't kill him, after accepting the biggest ransom ever offered by any king."

"*Caballeros,*" resumed Pizarro, "when reinforcements arrive from Panama, we can march to Cuzco. And safely release the Inca. Right now, we can't risk it with our small army, going so far inland."

"Sangre de Cristo!" Almagro raised

a warty fist. "You've hogged all the first loot, just because my men weren't here when you blundered into Cajamalca to grab the Inca, mainly by fool luck! Listen, Don Francisco! I've got two hundred men—good ones, and more than you have. We're marching to Cuzco, whether you do or not. How do you like that?"

Pizarro's face did not change, yet his presence abashed all but the volatile Almagro. "That is foolish, Diego. If we divide our force—even if we went together, through those dangerous mountain passes, the Indios could ambush us to the last man, and rescue the Inca."

"That's why," stormed Almagro, "you've got to kill him!" He turned to his own captains. "What do you say?"

"*Por dios*, you have already said it, Don Diego!"

Then Felipe's smile faded. Ferdinand de Soto took the floor. Though not yet thirty, he was grave and lordly; even self sufficient Pizarro respected the young lieutenant-general.

"This is a crime you plan! Worse, it is needless. God gave us the right to capture a pagan king, but murdering him is something else. Now, listen to this, *caballeros y muy señores!*

"Huascar, the lawful ruler, is locked up in a fortress somewhat north of here. Atahualpa is very much hated in some parts, being an usurper. Thus we can deal with Huascar, who is now the captive of a captive."

"What do you mean?" grumbled Almagro. "That's a bun for a loaf!"

De Soto's slow smile made Almagro redden and stutter. "Don Diego, perhaps I can make this clear. If we liberate Huascar, he will pledge allegiance to the King of Spain. He will be bound

to us by gratitude. Huascar will make things easy for us. Half of Peru hates Atahualpa; all Peru will obey Huascar!"

"*Santiago!*" Pizarro's sombre eyes gleamed. "Don Ferdinand, you have spared me an unpleasant necessity. How did you hit upon that idea?"

De Soto gracefully declined his chief's compliment. "It was simple enough, playing chess with the prisoner, to piece together enough casual remarks to learn where Huascar is kept under guard."

FROM that moment, Felipe hated the man whose rich garments he wore. Atahualpa, though deposed, would go free with all his wives.

He came forward, saying, "Don Francisco, there is more to this than *Señor de Soto* realizes. With all respect, he does not as well understand the Quichua language as a native would. Atahualpa and the nobles who wait on him are plotting revolt. An army is gathering in Huamachuco, making the most of the sixty days you gave Atahualpa to collect the ransom."

"*Por dios*, I told you!" Almagro cut in.

"Name me the nobles who discussed this with the Inca," de Soto demanded.

Felipe met de Soto's stern challenge, and readily: "My lord, even I do not pretend to know the names of all the Inca's officers." Then, to Pizarro, "When I hear more, I will report."

He was glad enough to be dismissed by his chief. Felipe did not like de Soto's unspoken questions, and the suspicion that clouded his eyes.

On his way from the officers' conference, Felipe took heart. Almagro and the two hundred men who had not shared the initial loot would over-

whelm de Soto's pleas for the captive emperor. . . .

That night, Felipe slipped back to the cubicle where he and Oello had exchanged so many stolen kisses. Finally, when moonlight crept across the three cornered plaza, and reached in through the narrow window, he heard the soft tinkle of her anklets.

Felipe caught her in his arms, and his kiss cut short her murmur of endearment. Then, suddenly, she broke from his embrace.

"I shouldn't have met you again. We can't see each other anymore."

He laughed softly. "I've found a way to free you."

She sat bolt upright. "But—why—that's impossible!"

"It isn't. They're going to depose Atahualpa, and put the Huascar on the throne. He'll wear the sacred red *borla*, and so Atahualpa won't be Child of the Sun. It won't be sacrilege if you leave him then!"

That was plausible, particularly in these troubled times. Before the civil war which had reached its gory conclusion some months before Pizarro arrived, such logic would have been impossible; but now, many tribes did mutter against Atahualpa, calling him an usurper. Moreover, if the Gods had not forsaken Atahualpa, Pizarro could not have seized him. Oello wavered; being one of many wives, she had never until now known one man's undivided love.

Felipe, moreover, though not of the lordly Inca clan, was a friend of the conquering Spaniards who could lay violent hands on the Child of the Sun and yet not be blasted by divine vengeance.

"But how can we stay in the clear till we're out of reach of Atahualpa?"

Having made up her mind, she was practical.

No Indian had ever dared form a plan like Felipe's. He had learned from Pizarro's daring and grim purpose. He said, "It's easy. You can get clothing for me, so I can go as one of the Inca's personal couriers. No one will dare question us."

"I'll have all that by tomorrow night." Oello's voice trembled from the enormity of the venture. "Now I'd better go."

But Felipe detained her. He sensed that she would weaken. As he drew her toward him, he said, "No one'll miss you tonight."

"No," she said, trying to break from his embrace. "I'm afraid. I've been afraid, these last few days—"

But she could not overcome his insistence. . . .

THE moon patch had not quite shifted from Oello's golden beauty when the lovers realized how sound her qualms had been. There was a sudden metallic sound, and a glare of torchlight from the low doorway. Had Oello's Indian nerves retained their usual steadiness, all might have been well; but dismay brought a cry from her lips as she bounded to her feet, wrapping her *vicuña* mantle about her.

Ferdinand de Soto and one of his soldiers blocked the way. He recognized Oello's high rank; her jewels and the fine fabric that only an Inca was allowed to wear betrayed her.

That one cry of dismay echoed down the dark hallway. Then de Soto said, "So this is how you learn Atahualpa's secrets? You misbegotten dog, a king is a king, even if he is a captive!"

Felipe said, "All you fine lords have women of your own! I warned Pizarro

of an insurrection. See if he condemns me!"

Oello stood there, lovely and motionless. Her one cry was beyond recall. As de Soto groped for words, sandalled feet made soft, slapping sounds in the hall.

officers, knowing him as the Inca's friend and seeing his wrath, made no move to pass him. They bowed, then retired; but what they said in their own language made Felipe's mouth tighten.

De Soto said to his orderly, "Get



Dismay brought a cry from her lips. . . . Ferdinand de Soto and one of his soldiers blocked the way.

Yupanqui, one of the Inca's officers, had arrived on the run. Another dignitary was on his heels. When they were able to believe what they saw before them, Yupanqui said in broken Spanish, "Kill him. Kill her."

De Soto interposed. The unarmed

Don Francisco's orders at once." Then, to Felipe: "Maybe you can save yourself by giving all the details of that revolt. When you came forward to contribute your bit to my plan, I smelled a native perfume on you, and I began to understand. No common

woman uses such a scent."

Moments dragged. The guard came, and marched the two prisoners into the Inca's reception room. There Atahualpa sat, and Pizarro with him.

The Inca's eyes blazed from beneath the long red fringed *borla* that reached to his lashes. He was tall for his race, and somewhat swarthy. This was the first time within the memory of man that anyone had dared look at a woman of an Inca's seraglio; yet his face was placid. Being a god in human form, he did not display emotion as men did.

"You saw this, Don Ferdinand?" he calmly asked. When the indignant officer assented, the Inca turned to the nobles who knelt, barefooted, before the chair on the dais. "Yupanqui? Sinchi?"

"We could not believe this thing," they answered, "without seeing. We beg pardon for having seen."

Atahualpa brushed aside the red fringe of his *borla* and turned to Pizarro. "They should both die."

"The interpreter," Pizarro said, mustering up his command of Quichua, "is mine. The girl is yours to do with as you please."

"*Sanctissima madre!*" de Soto's courtesy reached its limit. "You take that dog's part? You deny the Inca his just vengeance?"

"Felipe," was the deliberate answer, "is my man."

The captive king understood enough to know that one of the lovers would escape him. He said to his officers, "take her out, and do what is fitting."

Oello knew well what that meant: having offended the Sun, she would be buried alive, so that his rays could no longer bless her. Being one of the sacred Inca clan, her blood could not be shed. She cast one glance at Felipe:

this was farewell, without any hope.

The interpreter bounded forward. "Don Francisco," he demanded, "this woman is mine! She has become a Christian. I have converted her to your faith and mine. The Inca has no more claim on her!"

He had said that in Spanish. He turned to Oello and demanded in Quichua, "Is that true? Haven't you denied the Inca? Make this sign as I do—"

Scarcely understanding, she imitated him as he crossed himself.

Pizarro raised an imperative hand and said, "Father Valverde will be glad to hear of a new convert."

That settled the matter. When Felipe turned to face the Inca, Atahualpa looked the other way.

THE following day, Felipe's plans went all awry. True, he had saved Oello from the Inca's vengeance. But Ferdinand de Soto had gone out with a picked troop to reconnoiter in the vicinity of Huamachuco and determine whether there was or was not a concentration of troops awaiting the word to swoop down on Cajamalca to annihilate the Spaniards. Worse than that, a courier was on the way with a message from Atahualpa to the officers who guarded Huascar; the captive was to be brought to Cajamalca so that Pizarro could judge between him and the usurping Inca.

"*Cristo del Grao!*" Felipe sat hunched and frowning, studying it out. Oello watched him, sensing that this was no time for kisses. She did not know that he was thinking, "Almagro and Pizarro have snapped at the idea of putting Huascar on the throne and using him as a dummy. But de Soto will be back, saying there's not a sign of revolt any-

where. Atahualpa's going to live through this."

Felipe was not afraid of any immediate peril. Yet he knew that, sooner or later, Atahualpa's loyal retainers would stealthily seek him and Oello; the officials who had seen the affront put on their lord would not rest until they reported the death of the offenders.

To protect Oello and himself, Felipe had condemned Atahualpa to death. But to execute that sentence was another matter. Finally he looked up and smiled. "We still have to leave. Being Christians will not save us from secret vengeance. Get the clothes we need."

Although she did not understand his plan, she realized her peril and his. "While you're attending to your part," she answered, "I'll attend to mine. But I'm terribly afraid of horses."

He thrust out his chest. "I understand them. I rode de Soto's, once."

That evening, Felipe went to Pizarro's quarters and respectfully saluted him, "The holy saints alone know what *Señor de Soto* will learn about this revolt. It is possible that Atahualpa will secretly send fast couriers to have the Inca soldiers leave Huamachuco, to deceive us.

"But the worst is this—"

Diego Almagro raised his ugly face from a flagon of wine and cut in, "*Por dios*, what could be worse? Sending de Soto away from here!"

"Don Ferdinand," Pizarro slowly said, "is usually well advised."

Almagro spat. "That he may be, *verdad!* But me, I'd rather have him here. Where he can't be ambushed in the mountains. Where he can team up with us if we are attacked."

"We considered all that," Pizarro patiently replied. "Now, Felipe?"

"With your permission and Don Diego's—" The interpreter's courtly bow included them both. "Atahualpa is insane with rage—"

"About your way of making converts, eh?" Almagro laughed gustily, and Pizarro's thin face relaxed in a carefully weighed smile.

Felipe went on, "I am the faithful servant who kisses the hands of Your Excellencies. More than that, I have been foolish and the cause of Atahualpa's anger—"

"We can put up with *that!*" Almagro gulped some wine and chuckled.

Felipe continued, "I do not deserve your kindness. What I mean is this. For the affront he received in . . . ah . . . this matter of making converts to the True Faith, he is too angry to be sensible. He did send for Huascar, as you ordered. But I am afraid that Huascar won't get here."

Almagro rose so suddenly that his paunch tipped the table. The flagon crashed to the floor. "By God and Saint Jago! He'll kill Huascar just to spite us. The way he shut up, last night—he was too mad to shout. *Compadre*, you had better do something about it!"

PIZARRO dismissed Felipe with a gesture. He said to Almagro, "Send a courier after de Soto. Tell him to go to Huascar's prison and guard him closely, all the way to Cajamalca. He's too valuable to lose."

But Felipe did not hear this. Having planted new suspicion, he was eager to leave before he was too closely questioned as to details; though it was logical that the high tempered Inca, about to lose even the shadow of power, would stop at nothing to prevent Huascar from regaining the throne.

Almagro's greed and Pizarro's natural fear of a general revolt that would and could overwhelm his small army were Felipe's allies; yet a man's wits must at times direct destiny.

Indian stealth enabled the lovers to slip past the guards. Felipe had secured a horse; and at the start, he wore his Spanish costume. A mile beyond the walls of Cajamalca he met Oello, who had gone ahead to wait.

She emerged from hiding. A bundle was balanced on her head. It contained not only Felipe's disguise, but all the finery she had discarded in favor of the coarse alpaca gown of a peasant woman.

"He won't hurt you," Felipe reassured her as he reined in his borrowed horse. "Give me that bundle—put your foot in the stirrup—up you go!"

She made it, somehow. Her awkwardness at that unaccustomed exercise made the restive beast paw and snort. But Oello clung to her lover and maintained her seat behind the high cantle of the saddle. Though a clumsy rider, Felipe's triumph gave him confidence. The horse sensed that this man was not afraid; so he subsided.

That Felipe could ride at all made him splendid in Oello's eyes.

Finally she relaxed; it was now affection and not fear that kept her arms about Felipe. He half turned in the saddle, caught a swift glimpse of her beauty in the moonlight. His heart rose and choked him. No man from Tumbes had ever dreamed of such a woman!

Presently Felipe turned from the paved post road that reached twenty-two hundred miles, north and south, paralleling the one that skirted the sea.

"Hang on," he cautioned, leaning forward as the panting beast lowered his

head and dug into the nasty climb up a trail that followed a gloomy *quebrada*.

"What's the matter?" Oello was puzzled. "This isn't the way—is someone chasing us already?"

Felipe evaded, "Just to make certain."

There was no use telling her too much. Only those vague Christian saints could predict the outcome of his venture. They must be more powerful than Inca gods, and Felipe wished he knew them better. For luck, he muttered a prayer to Pachacamac, who was greater even than the Sun.

Before dawn, Felipe halted. Oello, cramped and shaken, slid stiffly to the ground. "Aren't you going to put on those clothes I brought you?"

He shook his head and smiled. "Not for a while. Now rest up, because we're going on, as soon as the horse gets his strength back."

Toward the end of the second day, Oello recognized the foaming Andamarca, far below them. But before they reached its banks, they would have to go afoot. The horse, improperly cared for and carrying double, had little strength left, so Felipe led the beast, and Oello trudged along, holding a stirrup for support.

A HEAD was a suspension bridge that swayed in the wind. Its cables were made of osiers and maguey fibre. They supported the narrow catwalk that crossed the thousand foot cleft which gaped beneath. Due to the sag of the cable, the drop was steep, and so was the ascent to the opposite lip of the ravine.

It took an hour of struggle to get the horse past the center. Pizarro's cavalry knew a few tricks that Felipe had not learned. Then, beaten and frantic, the beast bolted, shouldering

Oello off balance. Clawing for support, she slowly slid back, and between the guard cables. Each oscillation of the bridge robbed her of a bit more than she had gained.

Felipe, flung in the opposite direction, yelled hoarsely. "Quit kicking! Flatten out!"

He recovered enough to drop belly down. His toes laced in the strands that bound the floor boards. He caught Oello's wrist; but her weight, mainly unsupported, threatened to pull him loose with each deadly sway of the long main cable. They were facing each other from the edges of a devil's hammock. They had outwitted a god; he had made a toy of Pizarro's suspicions; but the mountain wind and a horse's panic mocked all that success.

Sweat made his fingers slippery. He could not risk trying for a better grip. Oello had ceased kicking in her efforts to get a knee back over the edge.

"Let go," she sighed. "I'll pull you with me. The gods hate us."

That was Indian fatalism. She was right. Felipe knew that, but he had marched with Pizarro, in whose iron heart was not one grain of resignation to fate.

A flash of that thin, remorseless face for an instant blotted out Oello's relaxing features. Felipe cried, "Wait till the next swing, you little fool! Hold on!"



The pendulum dip now tended to spill him through the guards; but the rise of the opposite edge supported Oello at the waist. He let go her wrist. His hand moved, an eye-tricking flicker during which he was slowly sliding back. But he made it; he caught her braided hair.

That gave him the advantage he needed, and likewise freed her hands, so that she could use them to draw herself back over the edge.

They crawled up the slope. When they reached the abutments, they crumpled against the cold rocks, panting and quivering. Later, when Felipe recaptured the horse, Oello said, "The Gods tried us, and you did not fail."

But Felipe did not hear. He was peering into the sunset haze, and toward the highway that ran north and south a thousand feet below. Oello clung to him, and wondered what could draw his thoughts so far away.

"Quick!" he said. "Open that bundle. I'm becoming an Inca courier."

HE seated himself on a rock at the opposite side of the trail and unbuckled his sword belt. He tossed her the weapon and said, "Hide it carefully, along with the rest of this truck."

He flung his doublet after the blade. As a second thought, he corrected, "And find a hiding place for yourself."

"For myself?" Her eyes became dark and troubled. "Why—"

"There's something down there I want to look into," he evaded.

Then Oello saw the black spots that moved along the highway right where it skirted the Andamarca's bank. She caught the gleam of bronze lance heads, the ruddy glint of copper loaded maces, the glitter of gilt against the quilted armor of Inca soldiers.

"Oh—" She began to understand. "We're near the fort where Huascar was locked up." She stood there, sword and scabbard in hand. "But don't worry. They're going south. Do you know, I'm certain that must be the convoy that's taking Huascar to Cajamalca. They won't notice us."

"Maybe," said Felipe, smiling oddly, "Huascar is with that convoy."

He was struggling with his boots. Sweat made them cling. Oello, her back toward the bridge, still strained her eyes, trying to identify the devices on the gaudy pennons the troops displayed.

"It must be Huascar! His standard—he'd fly it, even as a prisoner."

But Felipe's smile froze. He whirled about, hearing a clank of steel, the ring of horse's hoofs, the tinkle of curb chains. A deep voice shouted in Spanish, "You, there!"

Oello turned. On the other side was Ferdinand de Soto, splendid on his horse. A dozen men were behind him. They were about to cross the bridge. The girl moaned, "Runners from Cajamalca told him to chase us!"

Felipe, neither in nor out of his boots, pitched in a heap. His untethered horse, some yards off the trail, bolted at the crash of brush. There was no chance of flight. De Soto's skittish stallion shied from the bridge, but the lordly Spaniard wheeled him for another trial. He would make it, Felipe knew.

As he struggled with the damning boots, Felipe did not know whether to pray to Pachacamac or to the saints. De Soto repeated his shout, but the wind distorted his words; neither fugitive could understand.

Oello defiantly screamed, "We won't come back!"

Her legs stretched in a bound that brought her skirt swirling about her hips. She had the sword out of its scabbard. On the other side, the Spaniards muttered in amazement. Too late, they understood. An arquebus jerked into line, and another. "Fire!" shouted de Soto.

The keen blade chopped into the cable. The arquebuses coughed flame and smoke. Slugs spattered about Oello. Felipe cried, "Get back—I'll cut it!"

As he hobbled toward her, one foot half shod, the other bare, two soldiers dismounted and dashed toward the bridge. "Back, you fool!" de Soto shouted.

A crackling had followed Oello's final cut; then a popping, as each snapping cord put greater strain on the others. The audacious soldiers dropped their arquebuses and fled.

The cable parted. Though the other held, the bridge was impassable except to a man with the courage and strength to crawl down its dip, and then up.

"We've gained hours," said Felipe. "*Por dios*, who'd think Pizarro would pull de Soto from reconnoitering and set him to trailing us?"

Oello did not know. She was too happy to care. Twice in an hour, the gods had helped them out of peril.

THE purple shadow of the Andes had blotted out all details below. Camp fires now winked from the darkness of the highway. Huascar Inca was eating, and his respectful escort was drinking *chicha*. He would be happy, going from prison to a throne. . . .

An hour . . . two hours—descent of a crude trail. Then Felipe said, "Wait here, while I find out whether this is a searching party, or Huascar's escort."

Darkness and firelight favored him when he approached the sentries of the camp. Both officers and common soldiers were bivouacked about the rest house beside the highway. This assured him that the building must be reserved for Huascar.

He presented the wand that identified him as one of Atahualpa's personal couriers. Though the lowest peasant came with that token, he was for the moment entitled to the respect of the Inca's own presence. The sacrilege of imposture made deception inconceivable; but Felipe had learned from Pizarro.

The man who approached to bow before the sacred symbol was tall and sharp faced and commanding. The golden discs in his ears were so large that they made the lobes touch his shoulders. He was one of that sacred clan that could do no wrong; there was no life he could not take, no woman he could not demand, and yet be beyond criticism. But even he would be barefooted when he approached Atahualpa; he would have on his shoulder some small burden as a token of servility.

And that stately man in the crimson *vicuña* robe listened respectfully. He accepted the wand that made him the Inca's hand, for the execution of that order. He said, "It will be done as Atahualpa commands. Runners will go at once to tell him that the body is in the river. And that we return to our starting point."

He did not question Felipe, nor offer him refreshment. He knew that Felipe, who could command whatever was needed, was leaving the camp because there were duties other than witnessing the strangling of Huascar.

"Only Pachacamac or the saints," mused Felipe, "could take an Inca

woman, and put a king to death."

That thought made him light headed. The whine of the mountain wind became exalting music. When he rejoined Oello, he had to steady his voice to say, "It is well with those soldiers. But it is better that you and I return to Cajamalca. I didn't expect de Soto to hunt us in these mountains, for the sake of Atahualpa. Pizarro and Father Valverde are our best protectors."

"But the assassins who'll kill us for offending the Inca?"

He smiled, patted her hair as she helped him into his Spanish garments. He said, "He will have no one touch us. It has come to me, suddenly."

Intuition could give her no details. She knew only that Felipe had become more than a man. That he had ordered the soldiers to retrace their course proved that.

"Isn't Huascar going to Cajamalca?" She was diffident now.

"He is not. I forbade that, also."

She was almost afraid when she kissed him. The divine Atahualpa had never been half as much a king of men and a child of the gods.

So they rode to Cajamalca, not knowing that Ferdinand de Soto had not even recognized them, or known of their flight. Nor could they know that de Soto, finally finding another bridge, had crossed the stream and was now hastening to find Huascar's escort.

Felipe was weary. Oello was too ecstatic to be aware of fatigue. The runners who went to report Huascar's death to Atahualpa were far swifter than the jaded horse that carried double . . .

When Felipe and Oello approached the Valley of Cajamalca, sunset reddened the white walls, and long golden lances of light reached out the clouds

that swathed the *sierra*. Drums rolled, and the mountains flung back their thunder. Trumpets brayed; then the notes became shrill and soul shaking, so that Oello shivered, and Felipe's pulse began to hammer.

The barbaric sound beat and stabbed him; it was tragic, it was exultant, and strangely, it brought tears to his eyes. Yet for all the whimsical feeling that this fanfare welcomed him, apprehension made him flinch.

Oello whispered, "I'm afraid of that sound."

The trumpets ceased as suddenly as they had spoken. For moments, the lovers waited, and the ruddy glow became lavender and eerie before their eyes. Then a mumble of voices came from the city.

Felipe and Oello were troubled as they went on; nor did they know why.

"I'd think someone had died," she whispered.

"Maybe someone has," said Felipe. It had happened sooner than he had believed possible. He was dazed, now that it was done.

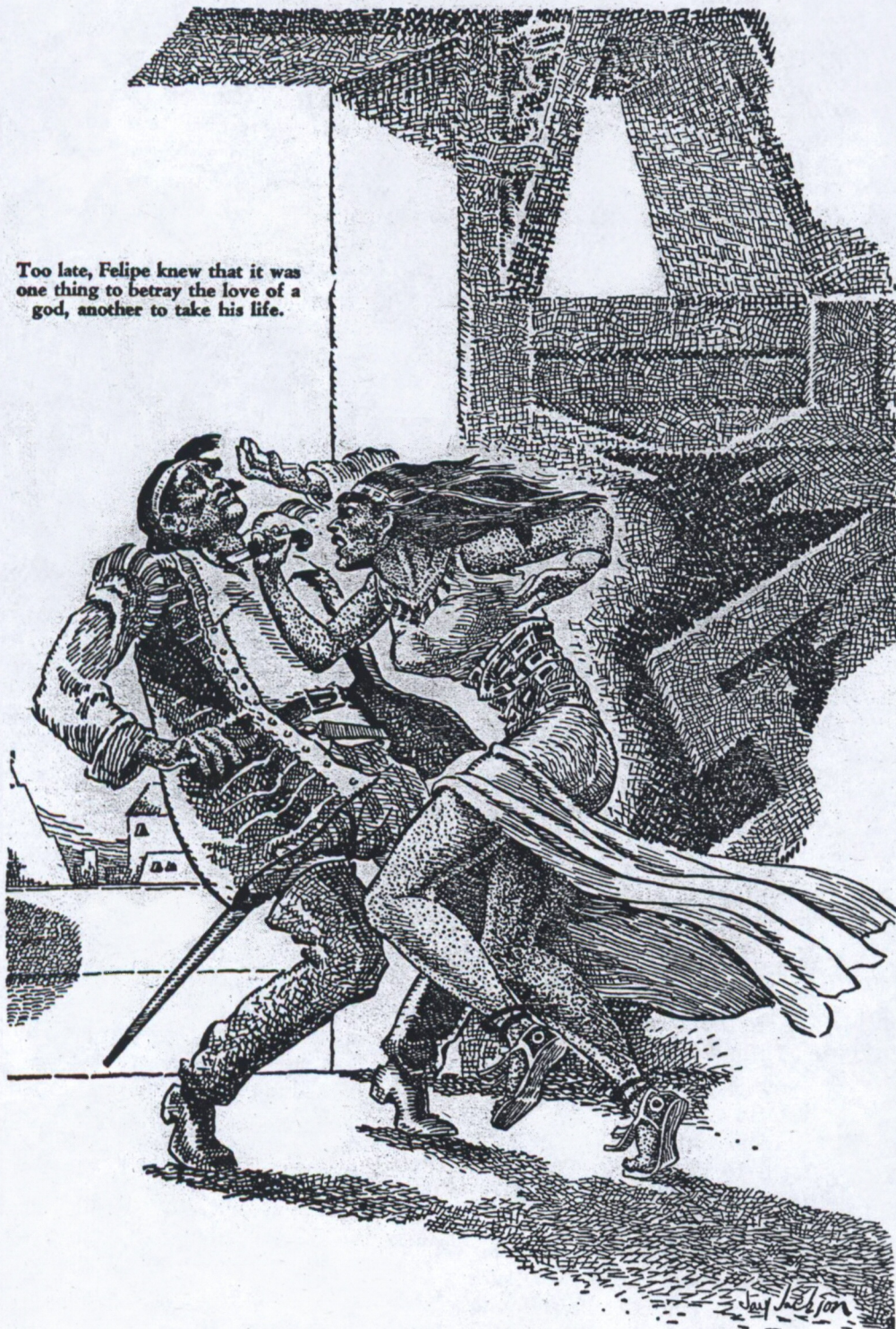
No one noticed the two who came into Cajamalca. The wailing of women tore the sullen silence. Two musketeers stood watch beside a stake in the center of the plaza.

A man was bound to that stake. His head slumped to his chest. There were faggots heaped about his legs, but there was no odor of burning. A soldier passed by with a flaring torch. The momentary glow revealed the plumes of the sacred *coraquenque* which the man at the stake wore in his headdress.

"Oh . . ." A quavering exhalation, and Oello faltered, "Atahualpa's dead. They've killed him—strangled him—"

"As he would have done to you," Felipe told her.

Too late, Felipe knew that it was
one thing to betray the love of a
god, another to take his life.



They were entering the quarters of the Spaniards when Almagro boomed from the door of the officers' salon, "*Por dios!* It's time you came back, you and your wench! Death and damnation, if we'd not had another interpreter, we'd have been let down nicely at the trial."

Horses' hoofs were drumming in the distance. A platoon of cavalry rode bell-bent. De Soto must be returning. Felipe wanted to keep out of his sight. He said, "*Señor*, I was afraid of Atahualpa's wrath—I—"

"Bring him in, Diego!" Francisco Pizarro was now speaking. "Since we're in trim for court proceedings, we might as well try this loafer!"

The monotonous wailing of Atahualpa's widows was for a moment blotted by the clatter of horses slowing down to a walk as they were reined in on the flagstones of the plaza. Sentries challenged, purely as a matter of form; a familiar voice answered, "De Soto and his troop!"

The guard turned out. The sounds gave Felipe the picture. His lips were dry, and he could feel the sudden fear that gripped Oello. No one kept her from accompanying him as he slowly advanced toward Pizarro's table at the far end of the hall.

Then Pizarro smiled. "Here, here! Don't look that way, man! Almagro's just having his fun. But if you were a soldier, I'd have you flogged." He eyed Oello; she was lovely, despite her fatigue. "I don't blame you—"

But that pleasantry was cut short when de Soto stamped into the hall.

"**B**Y GOD—you, Francisco! You Diego—" His outthrust arm was like a lance ready to impale the two leaders. "The saints forgive me for serving with you assassins! The min-

ute my back's turned, you murder Atahualpa! Reconnoiter—Christ's blood, there wasn't a sign of insurrection!" His blazing eye nailed Felipe. "Your trickery, you son of several dogs!"

Almagro's one eye fell before de Soto's accusation. Pizarro stuttered, "He was legally tried and condemned. Diego insisted."

"I? *Señor*—"

"Condemned for stirring up insurrection, and ordering the death of Huascar," said Pizarro, regaining his self possession. "But since he became a Christian, he was not burned at the stake. And if you were not his friend, moved by grief, I would hold you accountable for your unmilitary conduct."

"Why," demanded Almagro, "didn't you guard Huascar, as you were ordered?"

"Why," countered de Soto, "didn't you give Atahualpa at least a dog's chance? He was a king. Only our lord, the King of Spain, could try him for the murder of Huascar. This night's work makes me ashamed of my fellowship with you. How do you know Atahualpa ordered his brother's death?"

Pizarro answered, "A runner came to tell Atahualpa that his orders had been obeyed. That Huascar's body had been thrown into the Andamarca only a few minutes after the courier who ordered the execution had left. And then the escort moved north, as ordered. Does that answer you?"

"*Sanctissima madre!*" de Soto bitterly exclaimed. "If you were not my chief, I would question that. God forgive me, had not a frightened native cut a bridge under my very feet, I could have saved Huascar. And so saved Atahualpa, a king and a friend who served us well!"

He bowed his head. The grief that displaced his wrath distracted every

man's eye from Oello. She stood so close to de Soto that she could reach the dagger that gleamed from his belt.

No one saw her draw the weapon. Her eyes blazed with red fury. She screamed, "It is my fault that Atahualpa died!"

She spoke Quichua; but every Spaniard saw the flashing blade, the swift motion of body and arm as she turned on her lover. The dagger cut over his fending arm and bit home. It tore his throat, then sank into his chest. As she followed him to the floor, she screamed, "You ordered Huascar's death—to strike at Atahualpa—"

Too late, Felipe knew that to Oello, it was one thing to betray the love of a god, another to take his life. Choking and coughing, he tried to fight; but his wounds and her insane rage were too much.

Almagro's blade was out. It had killed many a woman and unarmed man before now. And Oello was Atahualpa's widow, going berserk. He struck before de Soto could intervene.

The lovers were in each other's arms; a quivering red huddle in which little life remained. Almagro's warty face twisted. "*Por dios!* She might have killed a couple of us."

"He'd have been a good interpreter," Pizarro finally said, "if he'd had sense enough to leave women alone."

He gravely shook his head, and wondered why hot headed de Soto stalked from the hall without reclaiming his dagger. But Almagro's thoughts went further. "Buck up, Francisco!" he chuckled. "With both Incas dead, we've got Peru in our pocket, and it'll be easy sacking Cuzco before these disorganized Indios get over the shock!"



NEXT MONTH

GATES OF EMPIRE

by ROBERT E. HOWARD

Rogue and Liar, Giles Hobson Be-
came a Hero in Spite of Himself

DON'T MISS IT!





Illustrated by HAROLD DELAY

CHAPTER I *The Duel*

A BLIZZARD was howling in off the Black Sea. Freakishly early for that winter of 1788, it lashed the Russian port of Odessa and screamed on through the outskirts of the town like the voice of a thousand damned souls. Frank Lane cursed it. He cursed all Russia as he battled his way against the snow, cursed the chance that had brought him here, cursed particularly the Russian fleet toward which he was heading, whose riding lights tossed at anchor in the black maw of the harbor below the blurred lights of the town.

As he protected his blond, wind-

whipped face with his arm he smiled sarcastically at the gold braid of a Russian lieutenant on his sleeve, the tasseled epaulet matted with snow on his shoulder. A Russian naval officer! He, Frank Lane, who had fought with John Paul Jones through every sea battle of the War for Independence, fighting his way from powder monkey to gunnery officer, who was as American as his native Virginia! He shrugged his shoulders caustically.

Well, it was Jones's doing, not his. Jones, with his world-wide reputation for seamanship, now that the American Revolution was over, had been asked by the Empress Catherine to command the Russian fleet in their war against the Turks; and Jones had asked his

On Snow



by J. J. des Ormeaux

young gunnery officer to accompany him. Lane yanked down the peak of his cocked hat with a snort.

What a fiasco! The Russian fleet in the Black Sea was a collection of leaky hulks, the equipment antiquated, and the officers, instead of receiving them with courtesy or respect, treated them with frank hatred. The Empress Catherine was a thousand miles away in Moscow, and their sojourn had been nothing but a series of jealous intrigues and schemes against Jones. Foreigner! Hireling! This was what the faces of the Russian officers expressed, from ensigns to commanders—not so openly against Jones, for after all he was their admiral, appointed by the Empress herself—but against him, Lane, they could bare their hatred more plainly.

Lane's grey eyes hardened. He had taken a good deal, during the months of the campaign, insinuations, veiled insults—taken it for Jones's sake; but

his patience was wearing thin. He had been away for a week accomplishing a mission for Jones, and the prospect of coming back to mingle with the officers of the fleet was far from pleasant. Well, he would make his report to Jones and—

A commotion somewhere ahead out of the snow startled him. He could see the lights of an inn, one of those scattered about the outskirts of Odessa, and beside it the tethered horse of a Cossack officer. There seemed to be some carousing inside. As he came nearer he saw a two-horse sleigh drawn up, with two women in it, who had apparently lost their way and were asking directions of a Russian officer. They were speaking French, the language used by the Russian upper classes of that day. The Russian officer, leaning over the sleigh, was saying in a loud voice:

"So you wish to know the way to the

command, eh? What command do you mean, the true Russian command, or that foreign dog of an Admiral Jones?"

The officer was obviously drunk, and as he spoke he lurched against the sleigh, striking one lady heavily with his shoulder. Both ladies were muffled in furs and thickly veiled against the cold; one was middle-aged and reclining half-exhausted, as if too stiff and numb with the cold to speak; the other, against whom he had fallen, cried out in a spirited young voice:

"You boor! Mind what you are doing!"

"Ah, so you take that tone, do you?" cried the officer with a drunken laugh. Lane recognized him, a burly young ensign of the fleet. "Well, in that case, for the information I demand a kiss!" And seizing her in his arms, he thrust his vodka-reeking mouth into her face.

The girl yanked back her arm, and slashed him across the face with her whip.

The ensign cried out, falling back. A red welt leaped like fire across his burly face. "I'll have it now, you vixen!" Infuriated, he plunged forward, ripped the veil from her face, and seized her bodily from the sleigh.

LANE took three steps forward, swung his fist from the hip, and knocked the ensign sprawling in the snow.

He should not have done it, perhaps. He felt that in the exact moment his fist connected with the ensign's jaw. But he felt a complete and tingling satisfaction at the same instant. The words "foreign dog" were still ringing in his ears. The girl, her fur cap half torn off, turned a face to Lane that was glorious in its wrath, cheeks rose-red,

eyes sparkling like blue-black fire, dark curls tumbling about her neck.

"Thank heaven," she cried, "there are still *men* in the Russian navy!"

Lane had never seen so lovely a face. An aristocrat to the fingertips, her delicate chin was trembling above her expensive furs, her red lips parted, her eyes burning like dark stars. Lane had that one glimpse of her when the ensign was on his feet again. His head was down; he seemed to be about to charge like a bull; then he stopped, jerked up his head, and shouted:

"The American!"

"Yes," snapped Lane in a cold voice. "Get in to your carousing; it appears to be all you're fit for."

The ensign, instead of answering, whirled toward the inn. "Come out, all of you!" he shouted. "Come out!"

His stentorian bellow penetrated into the inn; there was a commotion and half-a-dozen men rushed out into the snow. They were officers, and all had been drinking. One of them, with the stripes of a commander, remained in the doorway, the only one apparently entirely sober, staring down at the scene with a calm and hawklike stare.

"He struck me! Pistols! Pistols, somebody! I demand satisfaction!" roared the ensign, jabbing his hand at Lane.

"You're mad, Pavloff!" cried somebody, "you know the regulations against duelling!"

"It is the American!" Pavloff was almost beside himself. "I demand satisfaction!"

"The American!" In a second the situation was changed. The cry went up like the bay of wolves. They had not recognized Lane in the driving snow. "By heaven, so it is!" cried someone.

"The American, back from his week's leave!"

"Aye, while we sweat and work here!"

"Back to see the Admiral, his protector!"

"Aye, who is playing sick in the town!"

"Sick! Aye, feigning, most like!"

"So he will not have to lead us out to battle!"

"Probably selling us out to the Turks!" roared Pavloff.

The short hair rose on Lane's neck. This was the first time he had ever heard any of them speak as openly as this. "What's that you say?" he cried. His eyes went to the hawkfaced commander standing in the lighted aperture of the doorway. "Commander Britsky!" he ejaculated. "Do you hear what they say?"

The commander answered in a calm and icy tone: "I hear what they say."

The blood rushed into Lane's blond face. "And you allow it—I take it these are your opinions, too?"

Commander Britsky replied with a cold smile: "I think young Pavloff speaks the convictions of us all."

"**A** YE!" cried young Pavloff, almost beside himself with this support, "I say you and your admiral are a pair of dogs! Foreigners, hirelings, cowards! I say he is selling us out to the Turks, and the mission you were sent on was to bargain with them!"

The girl in the sleigh made a movement as if to interpose, but the middle-aged woman restrained her with a hand on her arm. Lane spoke to Pavloff, his eyes like grey slits. "You young fool," he said, "you are drunk. You deserve flogging. You are all drunk, but if he is the spokesman for you all, I will be

pleased to meet him at any day and hour he cares to name."

A yell went up. "By heaven, this is the chance we have been waiting for!" cried someone.

"He will fight! He will fight!" yelled another.

"Now!" yelled Pavloff. "Now! I demand it now!"

Lane suddenly saw one officer, with a brace of pistols in his hands, glance at Commander Britsky. Britsky nodded. This was almost more than Lane's eyes could credit. The officer thrust a pistol into Pavloff's hands. Lane's eyes, fixed on Britsky, were blazing.

"I see," he said, addressing the hawk-like Britsky, and paying no attention to young Pavloff whatever. "This falls very neatly into your hands, Britsky. I have heard before this that you were the ringleader in stirring up hatred against Admiral Jones. If you can force me into a duel, you see that it will discredit Jones, which is exactly what you seek."

Lane's blood was boiling; he was telling himself with every ounce of reason he possessed that he must think of Jones, that he must control himself, that he must do nothing to injure their position. He struck the pistol from the hand of the officer who had come up to offer it to him, and as he did so it discharged. Young Pavloff, too excited to see clearly, gave a shout and fired. The shot whipped over Lane's shoulder; Pavloff, completely beside himself, gave a yell and fired again. In that report was the detonation of two explosions; Lane had whipped his pistol from his belt and shot Pavloff, purposely winging him in the shoulder. Pavloff whirled completely around and fell, hitting the snow like a log.

For an instant there was absolute si-

lence, the men staring at Pavloff as if riveted. They were at that pitch of drunken excitement when the merest incident would have been enough to set them off. Their heads whipped around to Lane, convulsed with fury.

"He shot him!"

"The dog! Shoot him!"

In a drunken rout they leaped for Lane, yanking at their sidearms. In that instant the girl brought down her whip on the horses of the sleigh and drove them headlong at the officers. Plunging, rearing, the horses careened through their midst, knocking some headlong, making others dive sprawling in the snow. The instant's diversion was enough for Lane. He took half a dozen bounds, swung into the saddle of the Cossack horse, slipped the bridle, and swung away through the snow.

CHAPTER II

John Paul Jones

LANE was still boiling when he pulled up at Jones's quarters in the town. Across his recollection of the hurly-burly the girl's face floated, flushed and lovely, those long-fringed blue-back eyes blazing—he could not get them out of his mind. A surgeon met him on the stairs; he pulled up short at Lane's precipitate entrance. "His excellency is very ill," he said to Lane. "He must not be disturbed."

"Ill!" ejaculated Lane. "They were right, then! What—"

"Lane! Lane!" cried a voice, and at the top of the stairs appeared John Paul Jones himself. "No—no—run on, doctor, I must see this officer!"

Lane, snapping his hand in salute, stared at his superior and friend. Jones,

with only the star of the Order of the Russian Empire on his breast, had an old brown lounging-robe pulled over his shoulders; his person, like his quarters, was marked by that devil-take-the-frills simplicity so characteristic of the man. His aquiline brown face had two hectic spots in the cheeks; his wiry figure, compact and snub-nosed as a shell, was trembling with a feverish ague; his piercing black eyes were burning with an unnatural brightness.

"Come in! Come in!" he cried. "Did you accomplish what I sent you to do?"

"You're ill, sir!" exclaimed Lane. "I—"

"Nonsense—it's just my damned West Indies fever!" He stamped into the room, sat down heavily on the couch from which he had obviously just sprung up. "Devil take the misfortunes that dog us, Lane! As if it isn't enough to have a fleet that leaks like twenty sieves, a pack of officers who do nothing but intrigue against me, and an enemy superior in equipment and ships out there licking their chops for us in the sea—without my old fever coming in and knocking me on my back! You finished your job, did you?"

"I did, sir. The fan of floating mines, one hundred and forty-eight of them, have been laid as you designated, off the mainland at Ekaterina Head."

"Excellent!" The Admiral rubbed his lean brown hands. "Thank heaven I've got someone around here who can accomplish an order!"

"Sir," broke in Lane, "I have come to tender my resignation."

"What?" Jones shot the word like a pistol-ball. "Resignation! Are you mad?"

"I have just been party to an incident that is bound to discredit you."

"Discredit me! Nonsense! There is

nothing you could do to discredit me!"

"But—"

"I don't want to know what it is! I don't care what it is! There are more important issues at stake. Look here." The Admiral clapped his hand on Lane's knee. "Here I am, laid up—shaking like a baby in a crib—and you talk of resigning! Are you going to leave me in the lurch?"

Lane's eyes kindled. "I never have, sir."

A flash of something like affection gleamed in the keen black eyes. "And you never will, by the Lord Harry! If I didn't know your mettle I wouldn't have brought you along. Consider the matter settled." He rose abruptly and took a quick step about the room.

"You must have been within spyglass range of the Turks when you were laying your mines?"

"We were, sir, but with our boats disguised as Turkish fishing craft we were unmolested."

"No one knows of it?"

"No one."

"I mean among us!" exclaimed Jones.

"No, sir."

"Excellent," said Jones grimly. "I know what these Russians are saying about me—feigning sick, afraid to do battle—but everything depends on my stratagem! It's got to vindicate me in the eyes of the fleet. What a situation—I've got to win my own fleet to me! They're good enough, they're brave enough, but someone has been sowing lies about me, poisoning their minds against me until I think they hate me worse than the Turks! I don't know whom to trust. I don't know friend from foe. This Britsky, I have a sneaking suspicion, is in some kind of understanding with the Turks." He broke off suddenly. "Are the mines visible?"

"No, sir, except their contact caps. They are laid in a network and attached to the one boat remaining, a felucca, anchored in the roadstead."

"You abandoned the felucca as I directed?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about the detachment of marines who helped you?"

"I despatched them to the fortress at Promolsk."

"Good." Jones resumed his pacing.

"Now I'll give you the rest of my plan.

It needs only an east wind—an east wind, do you hear?" He snatched the window curtain aside and pointed out

into the snow-whirling blackness of the harbor. "Out there the Turkish fleet

is foregathering, in full strength. They number somewhere near thirty ships of

the line, according to my reports, frigates, galleys and sloops. It would be

suicide to attempt an engagement with them. Our fleet, our equipment, is pitiful.

He pointed to a map on the wall. "There lies the fan of floating mines,

attached to the felucca off Ekaterina Head; here—" his finger moved directly

across—"is the Turkish fleet; with an east wind, the felucca must be cut loose,

and the wind will drive it directly down upon the Turkish fleet, dragging its fan

of mines. Do you understand?"

"I do, sir."

"Are you the man to do it?"

Lane was on his feet, his grey eyes gleaming. "At your orders, sir."

"Well, that's better than talking of resigning!" cried Jones, clapping him on the shoulder. His smile was immediately erased by a scowl. "An east

wind! I have prayed for one; I would give my right arm for one! Instead

comes this freak blizzard off the Caucasus! If an east wind should come, off

you go, and cut loose the felucca." His

eyes were burning into Lane's. "If this stratagem fails, I'll be discredited. I wouldn't blame the Empress for removing me. I'd remove myself. We are in a wasp's nest, both of us, but by heaven we've come through worse, and by Yankee pluck we'll come through this."

An orderly entered and saluted. "A despatch from Moscow, excellency."

Jones took it, glanced hastily over its contents. His face went absolutely blank. For a moment his eyes opened to their fullest extent, as if he beheld a thunderbolt in the room. "This is impossible!" he ejaculated.

"What is it, sir?" cried Lane.

Jones seemed not to have heard him. "No, no!" he repeated, looking at the despatch, and speaking as if to himself. He suddenly noted Lane, made a gesture of distraught dismissal. "Leave me, leave me—come back in the morning."

LANE had no time to conjecture what the nature of the news was that had caused Jones such consternation. He had hardly emerged into the street, returning absently the sentry's salute, when a file of sailors closed about him in the snow. A heavy gauntlet touched him on the shoulder.

"You are under arrest, Lieutenant Lane," said a voice.

Lane stared into the face of a Russian lieutenant in greatcoat and gold braid.

"What? What nonsense is this?" cried Lane. "What for?"

"For shooting a brother officer in a duel."

Lane stared. For a second, in his concern about Jones, the incident of the drunken Pavloff had completely gone out of his mind. Then he almost

laughed. "This is preposterous," he said. "Very well, lead on; I will answer the charges."

His eyes were suddenly caught by the sleigh containing the two ladies drawing up in the street. The younger, head high, still unveiled, her rose-red cheeks whipped even brighter by the wind, was looking directly at him. A kind of shock went through Lane, deep and disturbing, as sudden as it was quieting. Something of the same shock was reflected in the glorious eyes of the girl as she sat perfectly motionless with her eyes on him. The feet of the sailors crunched, the horses shook their bells, they passed each other without a word. Both ladies looked after the detail disappearing up the street with Lane erect in its midst. The middle-aged woman, moving her lips stiffly, said in a voice faint with cold and fatigue:

"Go, Tania, see what they mean to do with the young man."

THE court had assembled in a huge building off the Artislaysia, towering high with domes after the Russian manner, with a cupola atop it where a lookout was posted to watch the environs of the harbor. The detail entered a gloomy low ground-floor room in this structure. This was the council room of the fleet commanders; it was heavy with smoke and with the noise and talk of a crowd of officers. Lane was led beside a wide snow-encrusted window, facing a long table where four commanders sat. He saw at once that at least two of them were of the faction most violently opposed to Jones.

The lieutenant in charge of the detail saluted the presiding officer. "This is the prisoner, sir."

Lane saw none of the drunken officers, but he saw Commander Britsky,

looking at him with the same hawklike smile as he had from the inn steps.

The presiding officer was a commander named Korzakoff, as huge and shaggy as a grizzly bear.

"Lieutenant Lane?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are facing a court of inquiry. You are charged with participating in a

tives," snapped one judge, with bristly sidewhiskers above his gold-lace collar, and the air of a martinet. "Every man in a duel shoots in self-defense. Kindly answer the fact. Did you or did you not shoot Ensign Pavloff in a duel?"

Lane's breast swelled. "Have the reasons for my action nothing to do with the case?"



"This is impossible," he ejaculated.

duel near the outskirts of Odessa and wounding Ensign Pavloff. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

Lane's eyes narrowed. He did not reply at once. He seemed to be sizing up the intentions and purposes of the men before him. The babble of conversation in the room had subsided; all eyes were on him. Lane answered levelly:

"The question must be qualified, sir. I shot Ensign Pavloff, but it was entirely an act of self-defense."

"We are not interested in your mo-

"This is a court of fact," clipped the same judge. "We are interested only in facts. We wish merely to determine whether or not you participated in a duel and shot a brother officer, contrary to all military regulations in time of war."

"You seem to feel there is some prejudice against you," put in the bearlike Korzakoff. "Your attitude may prejudice you in the eyes of the court, young man. Let me tell you that I, for one, have no prejudice against you because you are not a Russian. We have

the testimony of a ranking officer and an eye-witness, Commander Britsky, that you not only participated in the duel, but provoked it, and deliberately shot a drunken man."

The veins corded in Lane's blond forehead. "That is a falsehood, sir," he said. "The duel was engineered by Commander Britsky himself."

"Falsehood! Engineered!" Korzakoff ejaculated, and there was a lowering murmur in the courtroom. "These are extremely grave accusations, young man. What reason would Commander Britsky have for engineering you, a foreigner whom he scarcely knows, into a duel?"

"Simply to cast discredit on Admiral John Paul Jones," said Lane. His eyes flashed across the faces of his judges to the hostile, scowling faces of the officers in the background. "You are right; I am aware of the atmosphere in which I am standing. Were this a regularly constituted court, the charges against me would be dismissed summarily. I knocked down Ensign Pavloff for drunken and insulting behavior to a woman. He demanded satisfaction, he insulted both Admiral Jones and myself, and at the nod of Commander Britsky, he was given a duelling pistol. I only shot him when he had shot for the second time at myself."

THE only face in the courtroom which was looking at Lane with entire sympathy was the face of the girl Tania. She had had little difficulty, unusual as it may seem, in gaining admittance to the trial. She had merely thrust a hundred-rouble note into the sentry's hand, and while the man was still agape at beholding in his hand more money than he had ever seen in his life, had walked by him with the air

of a queen. At the back of the smoky, gloomy room, she was inconspicuous behind the throng of officers.

Her breath was coming fast and her blue-black eyes were flashing. From the beginning of the proceedings she had felt a growing wave of wrath against the court and an equally overwhelming surge of feeling in Lane's behalf. Why, she could not explain. Perhaps it was the manifest injustice, perhaps it was the young man's gallantry in the snow; at any rate, every ounce of her impulsive, spirited nature was on his side.

"I beg the judge to notice," put in Commander Britsky for the first time, "that the prisoner terms this an irregular court."

"I noticed the imputation," snapped the sidewhiskered judge. "Kindly explain your remark, prisoner."

"It is convened without the knowledge of the Admiral of the fleet," said Lane. "Were its proceedings known to him, it would be dissolved."

The judges looked at him in a curious silence. A slow smile, almost like satisfaction, spread over the face of the sidewhiskered judge. "It may perhaps interest you to know," he said, leaning forward and speaking in a silky voice, "that Admiral John Paul Jones has just been removed from command by an order from Moscow."

Lane stood perfectly motionless. There flashed through his mind the despatch that Jones had just received from Moscow. Among the jumbling thoughts in his brain came the realization that Britsky must have known of it—nothing else could explain his cool insolence in the snow.

Commander Britsky lifted his hawk-like face again. "I wish to suggest an-

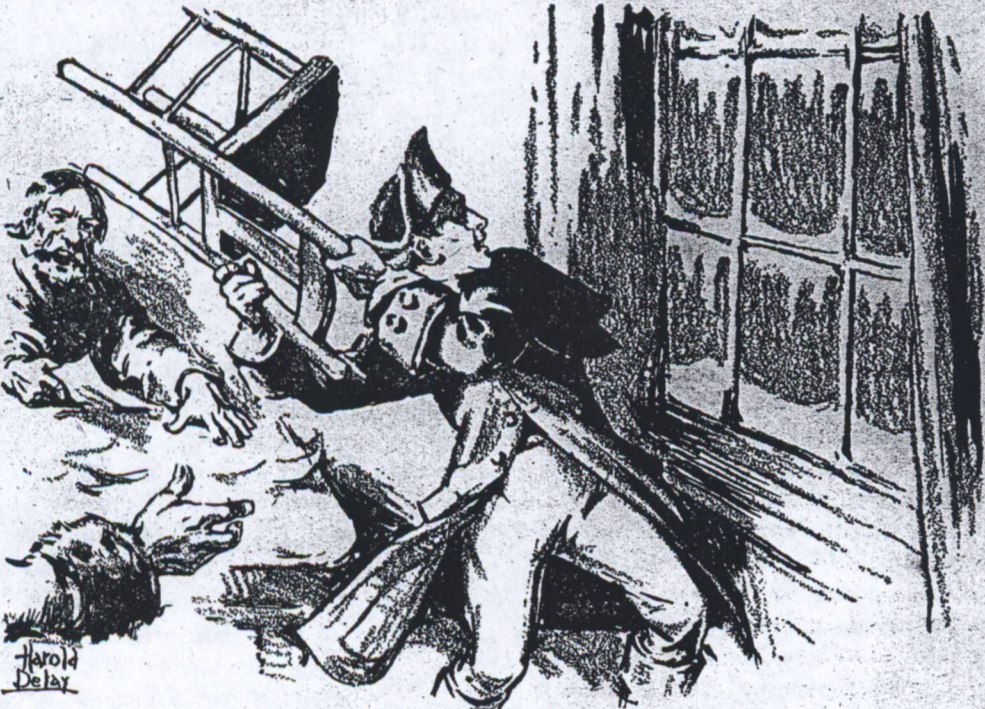
other matter to the court's attention," he said. "It is, the suspicion of treason against the prisoner."

The eyes of the judges flashed to Britsky.

"Treason!"

"What are your grounds for this, Commander Britsky?"

Lane looked at Britsky. The hawk-faced commander was staring at him with his eyes extremely centered, as if concentrating every ounce of attention on the words Lane was about to say. There flashed through Lane's mind the suspicion of John Paul Jones about Britsky.



He seized up a chair and pitched it through the window.

Britsky's cool and malevolent eyes were on Lane. "The prisoner has been, for the past week, in constant communication with a Turkish fishing fleet off Ekaterina Head."

A louder murmur, more ominous, arose from the courtroom. Korzakoff, his small eyes enormous in his shaggy face, bent his huge bulk forward toward Lane.

"Is this true, Lieutenant Lane?"

"It is," said Lane.

"For what purpose were you in such communication?"

"For a purpose I cannot divulge," said Lane.

EJACULATIONS, expletives, volleyed through the courtroom. The judges themselves were open-mouthed. Korzakoff, with an explosive curse, shaking his shaggy head as if he heard something he did not wish to believe, exclaimed sharply: "This amounts practically to a confession, young man!"

Tania, her heart pounding, her fists clenched, felt that she was about to cry

out. One word, she knew, would expel her from the courtroom, but—Mother of saints! These blind fools! These pigs! These martinets! That the imputation of treason might be true never entered her lovely head. She was passionately and absolutely *for* Lane, with a rush and wave of her impetuous spirit that amazed her even while it possessed her. Her red lips were parted; in another instant she would certainly have created a sensation in the courtroom, when a peculiar gesture of the prisoner arrested her.

Lane was leaning forward, his jaw dropping, staring like one stupefied at some scraps of paper that had just fluttered from the judges' table. Another paper followed, swirling to the floor; still with this extraordinary expression on his face he turned and looked at the window, whose curtains were fluttering in spite of its closed panes.

"Great God!" he shouted. "An east wind!"

The words, the shout, the incomprehensibility of his meaning, held the whole courtroom riveted in absolute surprise. With one whirl he swung around, seized up a chair, and pitched it through the window. In two motions, before the crash of glass had subsided, before the courtroom could catch its breath, he had leaped on the sill and plunged out into the snow.

CHAPTER III

An East Wind

THE courtroom was a bedlam. Lane did not even look back. He could feel that east wind full in his face; his mind held only one thought: Jones must be vindicated! Plunging around the corner of the building, he burst out into the street, almost colliding with a

figure running out as rapidly as he.

It was Tania.

"Come, come, my sleigh!" she cried, seizing him by the sleeve and pointing to the sleigh. "Hurry!"

What Lane felt in that moment can only be imagined. If an angel of light had sprung down from the sky to help him he could not have been more staggered. They were both, in that instant, without any clear sense of their actions; they sprang into the sleigh as the throng poured out of the courtroom.

Lane lashed the horses; a bullet cracked over their heads.

"Down!" he cried. The girl crouched forward as a second bullet whipped by them. Taking a wild swing into a narrow street to the left, Lane shot the horses down it; they went like a juggernaut past barred shopfronts, drifted high with snow.

The girl came up in her seat, her eyes dancing with exhilaration.

"What a fool!" she cried. "But what a magnificent, reckless fool!"

"A fool? No, no—" his voice was grim, his eyes on her still stunned with surprise. "Why do you do this?"

"Perhaps out of recklessness as foolish as your own," she cried. "Perhaps—who knows?—I might believe in you." She exclaimed in surprise: "But this is not the way to your Admiral's!"

Lane had jerked the horses suddenly to the left, wheeling toward the waterfront.

"I am not going to the Admiral's," said Lane. The rout, behind them, had become confused and indistinct. They suddenly emerged on the waterfront; before them was a small sloop, rocking indistinctly in the dark at the quayside. Lane, yanking the horses up, sprang down. "What boat it is I don't know," he said, half to himself, "but it has to

serve my purpose." He tossed her the reins. "Goodbye, lady of the ~~snows~~." His eyes, for an instant, were deep in hers, penetrating and profoundly stirred. "There is no way I can thank you for what you have done. I may never see you again. If I do not, let me say one thing: I have never seen, and never again expect to see, anyone so lovely as you."

He was gone, darting into the dark. An idea of the utmost importance seemed to clutch Tania. "No—no!" she cried. She sprang from the sleigh. "Come back!" She ran blindly after him. "Lieutenant Lane!" She raced down the quayside; even, in her excitement, onto the dark deck of the sloop. Here a pile of casks and cordage barred her way. She suddenly saw Lane, running forward, silhouetted near the bow of the boat. She opened her lips to call again, when something as startling as it was unexpected happened. The figure of a sailor, a mere blot in the darkness, sprang from the wheelhouse behind Lane. There was a flash of steel in the dark, the sound of an impact, and Lane went down as if cut down by an axe.

TANIA stood utterly stunned. Her parted lips did not move. The thing had happened so suddenly it was like some fantastic event in a dream. For what fraction of space she stood there she did not know; the heavy thud of a hawser landing on the deck was the first thing that jarred her back to her senses. She whirled toward the rail.

Six feet of water separated her from the quayside; the sloop was slipping out to sea.

Tania did not scream. For a second she thought she was going to; then she sank her teeth into her lip and gripped herself with every ounce of self-com-

mand. The sailor who had struck Lane turned; she cast one wild look at the tumbling space of water that now separated her from the quayside, and tumbled, rather than knelt, behind the pile of cordage. Two more figures flitted across the waist of the sloop; she saw the ghostly folds of a sail shake out. Lane's assailant was bending over him; she heard the scrape of metal on wood as he tossed Lane's pistol across the deck toward the scuppers. Tania's heart was going like a triphammer. What was this boat? What was it doing, slipping furtively out of the harbor without lights? What had they done to Lane?

The blizzard had abated; with the sudden shift of wind the snow had stopped as freakishly as it had begun. Black clouds were driving before the wind; a ragged gleam of moonlight illuminated the deck. Tania hugged the cordage, flattening her face against it. The dark had saved her so far; but if the moonlight—! A mushroom of cloud snuffed out the moon; she heard a guttural Turkish command forward.

Turkish! She was on a Turkish sloop!

A vise of horror closed about her heart. Mother in heaven! In Odessa harbor—a Turkish boat! Why had she not jumped, screamed, made any outcry while they were yet close to shore—but now— She glanced behind her, terror-stricken. The boat was several hundred yards out from shore, and tacking suddenly. She beheld a small lantern signalling frantically from the water. It was someone in a dinghy, rowing out from the harbor. The sloop, in obedience to the guttural command, was putting around to meet it. The dinghy pulled alongside, a ratline was flung down, and the occupant of the dinghy lashed it fast to the sloop. In a few

minutes he was coming overside; a sudden shaft of moonlight caught him as he vaulted the rail.

Tania dug her nails into her palms. That man—that man—it was the one who had stood in the doorway during the duel at the inn! For an instant her jumbled senses could not recall his name. Britsky! That was it—the hawkfaced commander!

Tania felt the shock to her heels.

Britsky disappeared almost immediately forward; as if in response to his coming, a crack of light outlined the window of the sloop's cabin. A larger fan of light gleamed as he entered, snatched out as he closed the door.

TANIA shot her terror-wide eyes about the deck. The sloop was now making for the open sea. Except for the man in the wheelhouse, whose burly shoulders she could see, the deck was empty. She looked at the cabin, looked, and saw a pocket of shadow where a stanchion rose beside the lighted window. She would be caught anyway; it was only a question of time. She shuddered. Then her intrepid spirit came to the fore; quick as a cat, she darted noiselessly across the deck into the shadow of the stanchion.

Voices were coming from the cabin. Inching her head to the strip of light, she looked in.

A lamp swinging over a table, made a swaying pool of light in which two men faced each other. One was Britsky; the hooked nose and razor-like lips of the other, even without the fez on his head, proclaimed him a Turk. The hilt of a short curved scimitar protruded from his sash; he was muffled in a kaftan, which, flung back from his shoulders, showed the interlaced crescents of an officer of high rank.

"We slipped into the harbor without mishap," said the Turk in French, "thanks to the passport you furnished us, and my four men disguised as Russians. We waited an hour. You missed your rendezvous. It was only by chance we saw your signal from the dinghy."

"I was delayed, Hussein Pasha," said Britsky, "by the court-martial of a young American, the particular friend of Jones."

The Turk's eyes were drawn together like his razor lips. "Such a matter seems hardly important enough to risk all our hopes on," he said acidly.

"On the contrary, it is a matter of the greatest importance."

"What do you mean?"

"This young American alone knows Jones's plan. But the dog would not reveal it, even under direct questioning."

Hussein Pasha, staring at Britsky, cursed sibilantly. "The one thing I had counted on, Britsky, was your learning Jones's plan. It is he we fear. Not your Russian fleet. He has some plan, I am sure; it is not like him to play cat and mouse with us this way except for some excellent reason."

"I have done something which will accomplish as much for us," said Britsky.

"What?"

"I went to Moscow and forged an order removing him from command."

The Turk's eyebrows shot up above his narrow eyes. "Excellent!" For the first time his expression exhibited some warmth toward Britsky. "Removed him! That is superb!"

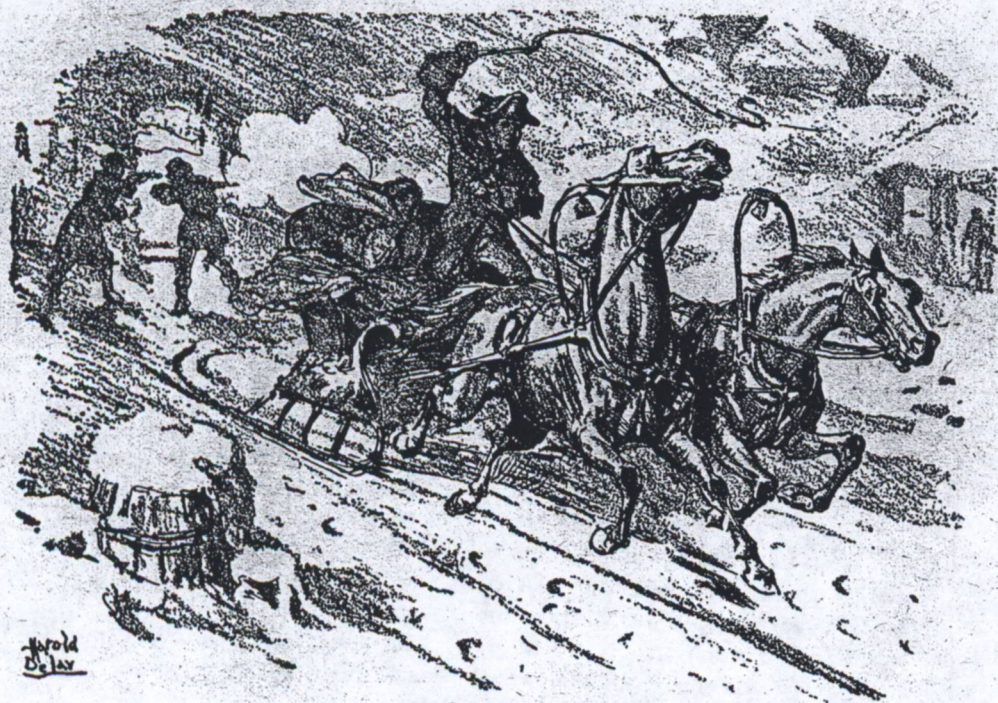
"The fleet is in entire confusion," said Britsky. "Naturally it is not clear who is to supersede Jones. The staff is too anxious to receive the despatch to

question its authenticity, and Jones is in no position to judge." He took out a folded paper from his pocket. "Here is my report for the effendi."

"Then we strike tonight," said the Turk with sharp decision. Gauging Britsky with his eyes, he said with a tinge of contempt: "Britsky, it is no concern of mine why you do this. I

THERE was a footfall on the deck. Tania dropped into the shadow of the stanchion. Two sailors approached the cabin, dragging between them the body of Lane. One knocked at the door, opened it, spoke in Turkish to Hussein Pasha.

"Throw him overboard," said Hussein Pasha carelessly.



Lane lashed the horses—a bullet cracked over their heads.

suppose you have your reasons. I merely wish to remind you that the fate of the Turkish fleet will be in your hands tonight."

Britsky's hawklike face contracted. "I have, as you so delicately suggest, my reasons for what I do. I have been passed over time and again in the service. Now a foreigner is put over our heads. I am, Hussein Pasha, an ambitious man—and your effendi offers me real scope for my talents. But you seem to intimate—"

Tania heard Britsky's chair scrape back. He must have caught sight of Lane's face. "Wait!" he ejaculated. "Wait! *Bóshe moi!*"

"What is the matter?"

"It is the American I spoke of—the confidant of Jones! How did he get here?"

Hussein Pasha questioned the sailors.

"They say he ran aboard, evidently mistaking this craft."

"He ran aboard trying to escape!" Britsky's voice was at the highest pitch

of excitement. "Providence be praised! Hussein Pasha, we have in our hands the knowledge of Jones's plan!"

Tania heard the Turk rise with an incredulous ejaculation. "Leave him," he said to the sailors.

They moved off, rounding the cabin past Tania; she could see the glint of their earrings. Shrinking motionless to the stanchion, she held her breath until they passed. Within the cabin she could hear sharp movements, broken sounds; they were evidently trying to revive Lane.

"Look, look," came Britsky's voice, "he is coming to!"

CHAPTER IV *Disaster*

LANE opened his eyes and looked dizzily at the two faces in the swaying cone of light before him. From a gash over his right ear blood made a crawling red vine down his cheek. His head was ringing, whirling; the hawk-like face of Britsky floated into his vision.

"You!" he muttered. His eyes focussed on Hussein Pasha. "A Turk!"

He half-stumbled up, to be yanked back cruelly by the bonds that held him to his chair. Britsky's gloating smile was thrust close to him. "You recognize me, eh? So this is the end of your little adventure! Yes, you are in the hands of the Turks, on your way to the Turkish fleet; but I think Hussein Pasha is disposed to make a very fair bargain for your life."

Hussein Pasha raised his narrow eyebrows in assent. "The commander informs me you know Jones's plan. Your life means nothing to me, but the plan does. I see you are a foreigner, not a Russian; the Russian fleet can mean

little to you. I am disposed not only to spare your life, but to go a considerable way in your behalf, in return for the information."

Lane made a tremendous effort to get hold of his whirling wits. A Turkish boat—with Britsky! Jones had been right, then. Where—where—points of light made a dizzy kaleidoscope before him; the side of his head felt like an anvil ringing under a hammer. Time! Time—he must have time to clear his brain. What were they asking? Jones's plan—he moved his tongue across his dry lips and tried to center his eyes on the lean face of the Turk. "What makes you think," he asked, speaking slowly and with great effort, "that I know Admiral Jones's plan?"

"Britsky assures me that you do."

Lane shook his head. "He is under some delusion."

"Come, come!" exclaimed Britsky, "the whelp is playing for time!" He slashed his heavy gauntlet across Lane's face. The blow could not hurt Lane; his head was already too numb and ringing to feel it. Britsky might have hit someone else. "What have you been doing," cried Britsky, "this past week off Ekaterina Head? With those disguised fishing boats? Under secret orders—that had nothing to do with his plan, eh?"

"What?" exclaimed Hussein Pasha. He looked at Britsky in surprise. "The fishing boats off Ekaterina Head? But there are none there, now. As we passed by there this evening, I put in myself to examine them. There was but one remaining, a felucca, anchored and abandoned; I did not know its purpose, but I scuttled her, to be on the safe side."

This brought Lane to his senses as if the floor had dropped from under him.

Scuttled her! Scuttled the felucca! His heart seemed to contract and congeal like ice. In that instant he saw the ruin of all Jones's hopes—the toil, the waiting, all the heartbreaking effort, gone for naught.

"Effendi!" cried a voice. A bo'sun put his head in, speaking rapidly in Turkish. Hussein Pasha's face expressed satisfaction. "Good," he said, "have it in readiness to light."

"What are you speaking of?" asked Britsky sharply.

"The beacon that is to guide the fleet to me," said Hussein Pasha. "My men have got it ready on the foremast top. It will be lit when we are beyond the harbor, so the fleet can move to me. That is what I meant by saying the fate of the Turkish fleet is in your hands tonight, Britsky, for you must pilot us through the channel to Odessa."

LANE suddenly spoke. His voice was level, deliberate, almost calm. "I am ready to tell you the whole of Jones's stratagem."

Both men stared at him. For an instant neither spoke. Lane's face was composed, very pale, so that the trail of blood stood out in bright relief, but his eyes were burning with an indefinable light.

Britsky's eyes contracted. "There may be a ruse here," he said. "This sudden change of face is very strange."

"What is his plan?" asked Hussein Pasha, watching Lane narrowly.

"It is a fan of floating mines, attached to the very felucca you have scuttled."

"What? Mines?" Both men were leaning forward.

"One hundred and forty-eight of them," said Lane. "The stratagem was very simple. With an east wind, the felucca would be cut loose, and bear the

fan of mines directly upon your fleet."

The eyes of both his listeners were shutting with a mixture of surprise, belief, alarm, incredulity.

"Come, come, there cannot be mines there," said the Turk, "for as I say, I approached directly westward of the felucca unharmed."

"They are laid to the east of the boat," said Lane, "they do not extend to the west."

"Why tell us this, so readily, without the slightest bargaining?" demanded Britsky.

"Because," said Lane evenly, "the plan is quite useless now the felucca is sunk."

Hussein Pasha probed Lane's eyes. He seemed dissatisfied. He rose and paced sharply about the cabin. "No, no," he said finally. "There is only one thing to do. I must verify this for myself."

Britsky nodded. "He comes out with it too patly. It is undoubtedly a ruse. He wants us to give the felucca a wide berth. How far are we from it?"

"A matter of moments," said Hussein Pasha. "I doubt it is entirely submerged yet." He strode to the door. "We will make for it at once."

He left the cabin. Britsky sat down before Lane. His eyes, narrowed cunningly, scrutinized Lane carefully. "My friend, I do not believe you," he said. "I think you are capable, if there are any mines, of running us upon them to give the alarm. It is quite obvious that your whole purpose is to get us to the felucca. There is a truth here which I mean to find by another method." He stood up, unscrewed the lamp from its chain, set it on the table. Taking a clasp-knife from his pocket, he removed the chimney of the lamp, and placed the blade in the flame. "Steel is

a very good conductor of heat," he remarked, glancing at Lane. "They say the eyeballs are very tender. Even through the protection of the eyelids, it does not take much to destroy sight." He turned the blade in the flame, smiling at Lane. "My friend, do you care very much for your eyes?"

Not a muscle of Lane's face altered. Britsky seized him around the neck, advancing the blade to his eyes. "Talk!" he hissed. "Tell me the truth!"

AT THAT instant the cabin door flung open. Britsky raised his eyes, to look into the white face and blue-black eyes of Tania. Her back to the door, she was holding Lane's pistol point-blank on the commander.

"Drop that!" she gasped. "Get up!"

Britsky's face went so void of expression it looked lifeless, holding nothing but a curious ratlike emptiness. With a purely reflex movement he came half to his feet; hung there, in a stunned paralysis. Lane, his face bright with shock, suddenly threw himself chair and all to the floor, groping for the knife Britsky had dropped. Tania did not take her eyes for a fraction of a second from Britsky. Her voice came sharp, breathless.

"Can you reach it?"

"Yes—watch him—shoot him if he moves!"

The color had flooded back to Britsky's face. His face convulsed; it was a kind of tremor; not of fear, but of stupefied emotions shot across by the hazard of the risk he was about to take. His eyes shot from the girl to the pistol to the door, where at any second Hussein Pasha should reappear. His own pistol was in a buttoned holster at his belt. The whit of an instant it would take to unbutton it he dared not risk.

His brain was darting between the chance of Hussein Pasha coming in the door and the chance of his own leap. Perhaps he hesitated too long; in that second's indecision Lane, cutting the last cord, staggered to his feet.

"Give me it!" Lane reached for the pistol from Tania; as his hand closed about it he felt it was soaked with seawater. Britsky chose that instant. He plunged; not for Lane or for the pistol, but for the lamp.

It was the very movement Lane had been anticipating. With every ounce of his strength, pivoting from the hip, he hit Britsky with his fist. Britsky jackknifed backward, his head hitting the opposite bulkhead; his neck snapped forward and he collapsed feet foremost like a sack.

Lane felt, rather than heard, the rush of air as Hussein Pasha opened the cabin door. He swung around; the Turk, for a moment absolutely confused by the scene before him, uttered a cry. That cry was the worst thing for Lane and Tania that could have happened. The next instant Hussein Pasha was snatching for his short curved scimitar. Lane met him, clubbing with the pistol, as the Turk whipped it out. Both men, seizing each other like bears, went headlong on the floor.

They fell just outside the cabin door. A shape came hurtling out of the darkness; it was the bo'sun, from the wheelhouse.

THE girl had Britsky's pistol. She fired point-blank. The bo'sun toppled over the men just as Lane, getting hold of the scimitar, drove it pommel-downward into Hussein Pasha's jaw. There was a shout from overhead. Three sailors, immediately above them on a boom of the mainsail, were in the

act of dropping to the deck. In that instant the crisis of the affair hung in balance. Had they made the deck, all would have been over in an instant. Lane made the most frantic effort of his life. Sliding, plunging with the motion of the vessel, he slashed the boom loose with his scimitar; it swung around with tremendous force and precipitated the three men into the sea.

The boom came crashing back, head on for Tania; Lane seized her, dragging her to her knees as it careened past. Their faces were very close, strained, tense, pale.

"How many in the crew?" he cried.

"Four!"

"You're positive?"

"Yes—I heard Hussein Pasha say!"

"Come!" cried Lane. He darted to the forward hatch, threw it open. Foul air met them; the hold was empty, windowless, unused. "Put your whole weight on this," said Lane, giving her the hatch. "Keep it from closing with the motion of the boat."

He ran back, returned dragging the bo'sun. He threw him headlong into the hold. He returned for Hussein Pasha, heaved him in after. Catching the hatch cover from Tania's straining hands, he latched it; then, picking up the capstan mallet, he drove a marlin-spike through the latch into the deck.

"Britsky I want," he muttered. "Come; hold to me, and watch the boom." He guided her across the wallowing, reeling deck. The wheel was unmanned; the sloop was rolling in a trough of the sea. In the cabin Britsky still lay unconscious, sliding back and forth with the motion. The lamp was guttering by his side, licking at the sheaf of paper he had given Hussein Pasha. Tania caught up the sheaf, stamping the flame out. Lane was drag-

ging Britsky through the door. At the foremast he bound Britsky with a lanyard, then led the way to the wheel-house.

Reaction suddenly clutched Tania in a spinning, giddy wave. She tried to fight it, to call out; she fell against Lane as they entered. He caught her in his arms, crying out; for a wild instant he thought she was hurt. Then he saw



They swayed through the night.

that she had fainted; he held her against him with one arm, holding the wheel with the other.

They swayed through the night, alone in that vastness of tumbling sea and black sky, only the creak and whine of the broken rigging sounding above the dash of the sea. He looked down into her lovely face, chin uptilted, her full round throat gleaming like warm ivory.

"Where did you come from?" he said half-aloud. "Who are you?" He looked at her long curved lashes, the round of

her cheek pressed against his shoulder.

"To have you like this—even for a moment," he muttered.

Then, perhaps because he felt himself so utterly alone, perhaps because he was a little light-headed from loss of blood, he bent down and brushed her lips with his.

TANIA stirred; her eyelashes fluttered and she looked at him; but whether she was conscious of what he had done it was impossible to say. Her eyes were on a great mass looming ahead through the dark. "What is that?" she exclaimed.

"Ekaterina Head."

"But—but—" her blue-black eyes were on him—"your plan—the mines—I heard you say—" She stopped at the expression on his face. "It is useless?"

"If Hussein Pasha has scuttled the felucca."

"You cannot attach the mines to this?"

He shook his head. "It would be the work of six men."

She looked at him for a long time. His face was grim and empty. "You have tried very hard," she said finally.

He shrugged. "No one will ever know, or if they did, would ever believe."

"At any rate, there is one who knew and believed," she said.

"Is there?" His eyes were on hers. "Tell me, what is your name?"

"Tania Ivanovna." She suddenly thrust her hand ahead. "Look!"

It was the felucca. Almost awash with the water, it lay keel uppermost, the waves breaking over it in heads of foam. Tania saw all expression ebb from Lane's eyes as he watched it.

"The Turk spoke the truth," he said. "It will be submerged in another quar-

ter-hour." He lashed the wheel and went forward. They passed Britsky, lashed to the foremast, an oiled end of rope dangling almost in his face. The sloop was now fifty feet from the rolling hull of the felucca, passing it to the south.

Lane's eyes, glancing from Britsky, suddenly sprung wide. He came up short. "Great God!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?"

Lane, without answering, ran to the capstan, seized up the mallet and began knocking out the retaining blocks. With a hoarse rattling roar, the anchor cable plunged down into the sea.

He whirled to Tania. "The pistol!" he cried. "Britsky's pistol!"

"But it's empty!"

"No matter!" he seized it from her, darted to the foremast, and struck the flint spark from it to the oiled end of rope. A spark of fire flared up the rope, disappearing toward the foremast top.

"Look!" cried Lane, pointing to the beacon, his face wild, exultant. "I cannot send the mines to the Turks, but I can bring the Turks to the mines!"

CHAPTER

Britsky

THE beacon flared in an orange mushroom of light from the foremast, illuminating the low deck and the waste of tumbling water around. Lane, working furiously, unrolled and flung a rope ladder into the dinghy, which, half full of water, still bobbed by the sloop's side. Tania suddenly saw how haggard and grey his face was. As he reloaded Britsky's pistol his hands shook; the wound in his head had reopened; he seemed to be going on nerve alone. He pointed to the dinghy. "Climb down—we'll row ashore!"

"But you can never row!" she exclaimed.

"Britsky will row!" said Lane grimly. He cut the Russian from the mast, drove him with the pistol overside and down the ladder into the boat. Britsky, breathing hard, his hawklike face yellow in the light of the beacon, did not utter a word. Lane took his place in the stern; Britsky was amidships, and Tania at the prow. "Row," said Lane tersely. "Straight ahead; one misstroke and I shoot." He cut the ratline.

Britsky began to row, his eyes on Lane. Tania began to feel a deep unsettling dread as they nosed out into the waste of water. Tania could not see Lane's face, but his pose was that of a man who has to use every ounce of strength to keep erect. Britsky kept his eyes centered on Lane, never relaxing, every ounce of attention in his narrow eyes.

Ahead of them Ekaterina Head loomed larger, arms of rugged woodland reaching down to the sea; behind, the sloop was slipping away, outlined fantastically by the beacon. Once, glancing into the darkness, Tania thought she saw lights moving briefly on shore. As yet nothing, not a sign, not a light, had come out of that expanse of blackness in the direction of the Turkish fleet. Her eyes came constantly to Lane, to the hunched broad back of Britsky. With the light receding behind them, she could see even less of Lane; it seemed to her he had slumped lower in the boat.

"Lieutenant Lane!" she said sharply.

"Yes!" he said, but there was a pause before he spoke and a dullness in his answer.

Her heart contracted. She wished desperately they had reversed positions, or she had held the pistol; it flashed

through her mind to make the exchange, but she realized the folly of passing the pistol over Britsky's head.

The jutting coastline was reaching toward them now, snow-covered arms of beach flickering faintly with the light of the beacon. Between long rollers they were washing toward a narrow spit of land. Britsky shot one glance over his shoulder toward the beach. Lane did not even move.

What happened then happened with the quickness of a breath. Britsky rose, swinging the oar; Tania gave a cry and struck at him from behind. The blow, deflected, hit Lane on the shoulder; Britsky stumbled forward as Lane half made his feet. Both men plunged into the sea; the dinghy, nearly capsizing, righted itself with Tania clinging inside.

Lane was conscious in that blinding plunge only of Britsky's face near him; he struck at it, felt himself sucked into roaring blackness.

LANE opened his eyes at a scorching rush of brandy down his throat. He was in the arms of two Cossacks; voices buzzed round him; he made out the familiar outlines of a gloomy room. Heads bobbed indistinctly before him; excited voices volleyed.

"It is—it is—the American!"

"*Gospodi pomiliu!* And—Britsky!"

"We were attracted by a flare, sir," he heard a Cossack before him say, "off Ekaterina Head; and proceeding there, our patrol found these men unconscious in the shallows."

A shaggy face swam out of the confusion before Lane—it was Korzakoff, the bearlike presiding officer of his trial. For one chaotic instant intervening events telescoped themselves in Lane's mind to the proportions of a dream; he was back at his trial, and the events of

the night had never happened. The shock, more than the brandy, restored his senses; he staggered erect from the supporting arms of the Cossacks.

He was, indeed, in the council room of the fleet, facing the very table where he had stood an hour before; he saw the faces of his judges, augmented now by other ranking officers; all were staring to his left, at Britsky. Britsky, wrapped like himself in a Cossack coat, pale, but apparently in full possession of his senses, was speaking rapidly.

"Thank God, gentlemen, I managed to apprehend him! He was on his way to the Turkish fleet!"

"What? What?" voices ejaculated.

"There!" cried Britsky, pointing at Lane, "that man—a spy and a paid tool! When he left here—when he broke from his own trial—he ran for a sloop in the harbor, whose purpose was to guide the Turks into this very harbor!"

All eyes swung toward Lane.

"Look—he is conscious!"

"The dog!"

"What does he have to say?"

Korzakoff thundered at him: "Prisoner, what have you to say for yourself?"

Lane was struggling to marshal his wits. He felt unutterably weary. His voice was low but very distinct. "It was I who brought Britsky back—not Britsky me. He has reversed the facts, playing his last card, for he has no place to jump now but back to you. It was he who had an arrangement with the Turkish command, and planned to lead the Turks here tonight. His performance as a liar is matched only by his performance as a traitor."

Expletives chorused. "What—you accuse Commander Britsky of treason?" cried Korzakoff.

"Gentlemen!" burst out Britsky.

"The man before you is an escaped prisoner—I have brought him back—am I to stand here and hear myself insulted by the very man I caught?"

The sidewhiskered judge leaped up. "The Commander is right! This is infamous! We have passed sentence once—let it be executed—we have more pressing matters before us!"

KORZAKOFF bent his shaggy head toward Lane. "Prisoner, in the face of your running from your trial, do you think we can attach any credence to anything you say?"

Lane made a gesture of his shoulders.

"Have you any evidence to substantiate your claim?" cried Korzakoff.

"The only evidence I have is in the person of a Turkish officer, in the hold of a vessel anchored off Ekaterina Head. But he cannot be sent for."

"Why not?"

"There may be a catastrophe there any minute."

Exclamations volleyed. "He is raving!"

"Prisoner!" cried Korzakoff, "why did you break from your trial?"

"To carry out the plan of Admiral Jones. It was a network of mines, to be carried by an east wind upon the Turkish fleet; as this could not be done, I anchored a Turkish vessel with a beacon there, to lead the Turks to the mines."

This time the chorus of exclamations rose in a storm.

"The man is mad!"

"What nonsense!"

"Put an end to this!"

The sidewhiskered judge was on his feet. "I call for a vote of the council! Gentlemen, this case has been judged—is the sentence to stand as passed?"

There was a nodding of heads all down the table. Korzakoff, turning to

Lane, said in a stern voice:

"Prisoner, this court has found you guilty of the most serious breach of discipline possible in time of war; and you are hereby condemned—"

He stopped; as if the words were cut off in his throat. The room seemed to have frozen where it sat. All eyes were riveted behind Lane; something like a

"So," she said, sweeping them with her eyes, "you fools, this is how you conduct yourselves! You are about to condemn the young man, are you? God help me, and God help Russia, if its fate is in the hands of men as stupid as yourselves! So John Paul Jones is removed, is he?" She threw the despatch from Moscow on the table. "Forged!"

She flashed a look
that was almost a smile
at John Paul Jones.



gasped burst forth from that silence.

"THE Empress!"

"Her Majesty!"

"The Empress Catherine!"

Lane, wheeling involuntarily, beheld in the doorway the middle-aged woman of the sleigh. He stood, blank with amazement, as she swept through the throng frozen at attention, her regal head high, lips compressed. Straight to the council table she proceeded. She faced the ramrod-stiff commanders with blazing eyes.

She wheeled to Britsky. "Seize that man!"

Two officers leaped to seize Britsky. The Empress's eyes blazed again at the council table. "I had heard of these machinations and plots against John Paul Jones, and came from Moscow to see with my own eyes what was going on. Separated from my retinue in the blizzard, with my maid-in-waiting I had a taste of the shape of things when we were insulted by a drunken ensign on the outskirts of Odessa. This man—" she pointed to Lane—"saved

your Empress from indignities; for that, for defending himself against a drunken lout, he was court-martialed. I sent my maid-in-waiting, the Countess Tania Ivanovna Varoff, to follow the proceedings, while I myself went to John Paul Jones. The Countess Tania has just returned with an eye-witness account of what has happened this night." Again she indicated Lane. "To this man you owe a gallant attempt against almost insuperable odds to save your honor and your fleet — to this man—" she indicated Britsky — "you owe the most despicable and heinous act of treason, proved by his very report to the Turkish command, written in his own hand!"

She flung on the table Britsky's flame-scorched report. She wheeled to Britsky. "Take the dog out to be shot!" As the officers moved out with him she turned again to the frozen line of commanders. "As for you, you fools, blundersers, schemers, who have done all you could to hinder the Admiral appointed over you—I degrade you all from your rank, and leave what further penalty should be given you to the decision of Admiral Jones."

LANE suddenly saw John Paul Jones in the room. He moved forward toward the Empress, his brown face acute. "Your Majesty," he asked, "may I beg a very great privilege from you?"

"It is granted, John Paul," Catherine answered. "What is it you wish?"

"It is," said Jones, "to restore these officers to their former rank and command."

It was a master stroke. The Empress realized it; she flashed a look that was almost a smile at John Paul Jones. "Granted," she said.

For one moment the line of com-

manders stood motionless. Then an expression of stupefaction convulsed the shaggy face of Korzakoff; he took a step forward, flung up his great arm, and cried: "*Ura!* Hurrah for Admiral Jones!"

The cry volleyed up all over the room, making the air ring; every face was a study in itself, alight, gleaming. In the echoes of that shout there was a dull, vibrating sound in the room, repeated, repeated again—coming one upon another, from far off, a series of heavy concussions.

Lane, whipping up his head, shouted in a great voice: "They have come to the mines!"

A midshipman burst into the room, so excited, so bursting with news he hardly seemed to know where to turn. "The lookout!" he burst out, pointing upward. "The lookout in the tower reports the sky off Ekaterina Head one blaze of fire, where a mass of ships is burning and sinking!"

"The Turks!" cried John Paul Jones. He took three steps to Lane. "You have vindicated me!" He wheeled to the Empress: "Your Majesty, the stratagem has worked!" He turned to the officers. "Every commander to his squadron, every captain to his ship! Under full sail to the scene to complete the demolition!"

The officers poured from the room; Jones was engaged in enthusiastic conversation with the Empress; Lane felt a touch from behind.

He turned to behold Tania, radiant, her blue-black eyes wide on his.

"It is you who have done this," she said.

Lane shook his head, smiling. "Together," he said.

"Together," she said, and he felt a warm white hand steal into his.

The White Rogue

Illustrated by
HAROLD DELAY



Then carefully trod with all his weight upon the suffocated body lying limp there in the ooze.

by ANTHONY M. RUD

ALL unaware that his fatal beauty would start more trouble than Helen of Troy's once did, the elephant calf later christened Lingga, was born among the tree ferns and cascading lianas of the Ulat-Bulu hills, in Sarawak.

This was an albino elephant calf, a white elephant. And true white elephants are rarer than albino crows, and considered sacred by several small but grimly determined nations of the East.

Lingga's mother was a very large but otherwise undistinguished slate brown cow elephant. Her skin hung in wrinkled folds about the eleven feet height of her gaunt and bony carcass, looking as though the skin had been intended

for a much stouter lady. She trumpeted mournfully at the slightest provocation, and between times muttered and grumbled to herself like an ill tempered racing mehari. She was not a monogamist, as most elephants are. She had visited the elephant's Reno at least three times; and this spouse was her fourth. Why she picked him, no one of the human tribe can as much as guess.

Lingga's father, and her spouse, was tall, gaunt and shambling. He was a small eared, eleven feet three inch bull elephant, with five toes on his fore feet, and only four toes on each of the rears—though many elephants have five in back, as well. He walked on what might be termed the very tips of his

fingers. But the heels of his hands also met the ground, making a long and huge print.

The father was a dark, bony beast so "left-handed" that at the middle age of forty-five, when Lingga was born to his cow, he had worn through his left tusk until it had snapped off short. He groaned deeply when he had to traverse the jungle from one mud wallow to another, for he suffered more than most of his confreres from the giant elephant leeches which swarmed over his skin.

Just one of these great leeches, which are all equipped with beaks that let them tap the blood through a solid inch and one half of elephant hide, inflates to the approximate size of a very fat bologna sausage. And at times, Lingga's father carried forty or fifty of them on his body, bobbing and swaying with his movements like so many toy balloons. It is no wonder that the old man was spiritless and ready to groan aloud.

Possibly this had something to do with Lingga's lack of ordinary pigmentation in his thick hide. But his cantankerous nature came to him honestly. Both of his parents had been captured and partially tamed in Sarawak—and then driven away as of little commercial use and a great deal of trouble. Both parents were grouches. And Lingga was to be an elephant devil, a real rogue. From the very start he was a problem child.

LINGGA weighed about three hundred pounds the day he was born. He was practically nothing but a huge appetite encased in a small, wobbly frame. On his second day, when his legs would support him for short periods of time, he stood 31 inches high. He nursed twelve times that day, swal-

lowing about a gallon and one-half each time. He nursed with his mouth, not with his trunk—as a certain deep rooted superstition has it. In later life he would fill his trunk with water, then squirt it directly into his mouth; but that was a trick yet to be learned.

Even on the third day of his life, the milk was not enough. He supplemented the liquid ration with a little grass and other green stuff. In three weeks' time he was munching the equivalent of half a bale of hay, and gradually weaning himself.

He did something at once that no ordinary elephant child will do. He ran away. True, he went only a quarter mile or so, finding a deep-shaded mud wallow for himself. Even then he avoided bright light, which struck him blind. He squealed and trumpeted and tried to escape when his parents found him and punished him.

Of course they did not understand. They were like the parents of a human child with unsuspected eye trouble. Their instinct was to make Lingga do exactly the things they did, and thus prepare him for the rigors of jungle life.

Lingga was an albino. He had no protective coloration in the irises of his eyes. The bright light tortured him. He tried to get away from it, and into the darkest, coolest jungle depths.

His parents never could understand. They made him a fury. He learned to do any number of mean little tricks with his trunk, like squirting liquid wild honey over the back of his mother, who thought it just some more water—until the ants found it.

Lingga's trunk, which was just like that of his father's, was a constant fascination to the young pachyderm. He

could do almost anything with it—and no wonder. There are many more muscles in this proboscis than in the entire body of a human being. The scientist Cuvier has devoted an entire volume to the dissection and first study of these thousands of tiny muscles and their functions. In a way it is as fascinating as the study of the middle ear, or the musculature of expression in a man.*

Lingga's stomach, an immense affair, had a second compartment beside the one used for food. Like a camel, he had this second tank in which he could store water. In adult life this would reach a capacity of ten gallons; and it was intended, of course, as a receptacle in which to store the liquid provision for a long journey, or a dry spell.

There was no lack of water in the jungles of Sarawak, on the northwestern side of the island of Borneo. So every now and then just for amusement, Lingga opened and closed a peculiar arrangement of valves, treating himself—but preferably others—to a sudden warm shower bath.

HE was a mean and incorrigible infant, then a meaner and worse calf. His mother and father never did guess at all why he shunned the sunlight and even the bright light of morning before the sun had risen. He positively had to be gored from behind in order to get obedience, except after sundown. So Lingga sulked, half blind even in ordinary green-gloomed jungle daylight; and had tearing rages during which time he would destroy vegetation—or any other form of forest life he could reach with his terrible trunk.

The result was that he became a true rogue elephant when no more than partially grown. Usually this does not happen until fairly late in adult life; and it does not have to happen at all, if an elephant is well fed and happy.

One queer result was that while he became cunning and shrewd in a low-class way, Lingga never did develop his brain to the full. An elephant's brain, after all allowances are made for bone and air spaces in the cranium, is enormous when compared to that of any other living mammal. It is small inside that great skull, which is large for the simple purpose of allowing some place for all the longer trunk muscles to attach. But an elephant's brain is huge and of fully as good quality as that of a fine horse or dog. It can be trained—or, it can lie fallow, and be stored with mere meanness and low cunning. It has been proved by experiment that an elephant *can* forget something he has learned. But it takes him several years to do it.

Two years passed. Lingga left his parents before they were really through with him—though they probably did not hunt very hard for him that last time he ran away. He had made life troublesome for them every minute of his existence. Now he was hidden in a jungle wallow, and forced to use his brain for himself. His tusks were still mere nubbins of ivory, no good as weapons.

When he grew a little older, these tusks would go back a full thirty inches into his head, be firmly anchored like the incisor teeth are in most animals, and be deadly weapons. But when his first life-and-death crisis came, his bout with the striped terror, he could not have gored a jellyfish—let alone a hungry ten foot tiger.

*Cuvier claims there are more than 40,000 muscles in the trunk. I do not feel quite up to believing that, myself, but I can furnish chapter and verse.—A. R.

LINGGA was one-third grown, as far as height and bulk were concerned. He had tried to join two or three small herds, approaching them at night. But none of the other elephants of the jungle would have anything to do with him. Perhaps his reputation had spread. More likely he carried with him, as do some men, an emanation of evil in very physical presence. Each time he made overtures to a herd, the bulls faced him, lowered their heads—and waited in grim silence. If he did not take the hint, they would charge. They would gore and trample the unwanted newcomer.

Lingga suffered this just once. For some reason, perhaps his youth, the bulls did not kill him, though they left him bleeding and bruised, almost unable to drag himself erect and stumble off into the coolness of the dark swamp.

In later years the white elephant would try every rutting season to induce or cut off a likely looking cow, for a mate. He never succeeded in his own efforts. He would have to wait—but that is ahead of his story.

Each time he was denied, Lingga ran amok, tearing through the jungle blindly, tearing up saplings, charging bamboo villages, going on regardless. The two apertures on his forehead exuded sticky fluid—always a sign of terrible temper, if not of actual madness, in an elephant.

Through the Sarawak jungle ranged plenty other single male elephants—rogues. No female elephant ever leaves her native herd except by accident, or when her turn comes to die of old age. Plenty of cantankerous old males leave, however, or are expelled because the rest of the herd, their relatives and comrades, refuse to stand for their idiosyncrasies any longer.

Lingga fought three older rogues, and was ignominiously put to flight each time. That was really not strange, since he was only six years of age, and these soured oldsters were at least fifty, perhaps much older. Lingga's frame had grown, and he had put on weight fast, however, so probably none of the real rogues thought of him as being more than a cocky but rather undersized elephant.

He bore scars from the tusks of these rogues; but the scars were nothing at all to the claw marks he got from Stripes. Even at that he was supremely lucky to have his life, for the Borneo tiger, first cousin to the Bengal tiger, likes young elephant meat the same way a husky young human football player likes six filet mignons rare, all on a platter before him.

STRIPES was scrawny. She had two kittens nursing, getting big enough so she had to leave them occasionally to pull down food. And by sheer chance her jungle lair was just one-half mile from the almost-dark mud wallow Lingga used frequently through the daylight hours. He did his foraging at night, as did she.

It all happened and was over in eighty seconds. Night was approaching. Lingga heaved himself, squirted water over his back, and lazily got to his feet. His trunklike legs made sucking sounds in the mire as he clambered to firmer footing.

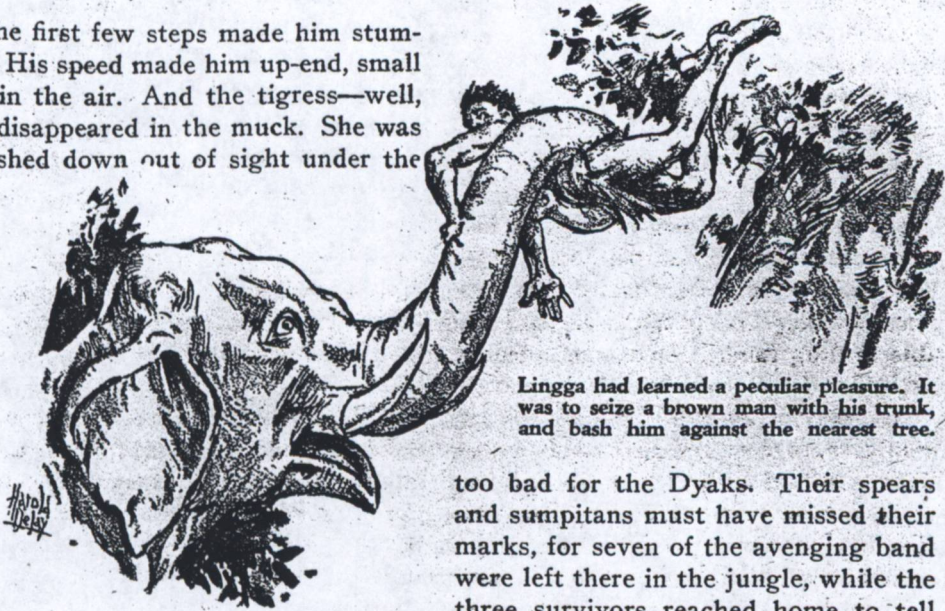
The tigress heard. She came swiftly, scenting young elephant. Lingga no more than reached the cane brake of shore when two blazing green eyes loomed. He snorted, tried to dodge as the tigress leapt.

In vain. She landed squarely on his back and forehead. Her powerful hind

legs clawed for the throat, at the same time her fangs tried to bite down through and sever the spinal cord at the neck.

Except for the swamp, Lingga would have died in another minute. As it was, he squealed, snorted, whirled. Blind with pain he started on a run back toward the deep wallow where he had lain.

The first few steps made him stumble. His speed made him up-end, small tail in the air. And the tigress—well, she disappeared in the muck. She was smashed down out of sight under the



Lingga had learned a peculiar pleasure. It was to seize a brown man with his trunk, and bash him against the nearest tree.

great forehead of the white elephant; and despite all her clawing, choking and struggle, she stayed right there. After a few more seconds Lingga arose, trumpeted nastily, and then carefully trod with all his weight upon the suffocated body lying limp there in the ooze.

He had won his first great victory, so great a victory it is probable that he did not realize it to the full.

Of course he had gouging wounds. The scars of these claw marks would remain with him till his dying day. But the remarkable fact was that he still lived.

TALES of the great white elephant began to be whispered through the villages, during the fifteen years that followed. Dyaks, vengeful because of a raid which almost totally destroyed one of their stilted towns, hunted him for months—and found him. They found him at night, and that was just

too bad for the Dyaks. Their spears and sumpitans must have missed their marks, for seven of the avenging band were left there in the jungle, while the three survivors reached home to tell fearsome tales of the white monster.

Lingga had learned a peculiar pleasure. It was to seize a brown man with his trunk, and bash him against the nearest tree until the brown man came apart.

But during these fifteen years which brought Lingga to adult strength and stature—and full rogue ferocity—two things were happening in the world of men outside the green jungle. These two factors were to influence the life of the white elephant.

First, over in far away America, a monstrous elephant named Jumbo died. Jumbo had been the idol of the American circus public, a pachyderm eleven

feet four inches tall at the shoulders. Not the largest elephant that ever lived, by far, but the largest ever to be captured and exhibited.

On Jumbo's death, immediately the call went forth: Find a replacement. Find a bigger elephant. So curious was the show psychology of the time, that any pachyderm almost as big as Jumbo had been, simply would not do. Not if he or she lacked a single inch of stature. The American public would gaze and marvel at a new elephant, and pay in their quarters and dollars, but only if the new pachyderm was larger than their oldtime idol, Jumbo. So big game hunters and collectors everywhere made exhaustive inquiries.

The Ringling agent, for instance, cabled the Guico-War of Guzerat, richest of all the Indian independent princes (and sometimes called the Gaekwar of Baroda), asking if His Majesty had ever heard of a twelve-foot elephant anywhere in his domain?

"How many do you want?" came back the astounding question-reply, which precipitated a wild rush to that far native state. But it soon developed that the native potentate had merely been trying to please. He never had bothered about the size of his elephants. The largest pachyderm under royal howdah measured only slightly over ten feet at the shoulder. . . .

The brown sultan of Trengganu also bragged that twelve-footers were so common about his domain that they actually got in his hair. But an exhaustive search brought to light only one bony oldster exactly eleven feet tall. He was so ancient and ill-favored that even the disappointed scouts could see no reason to transport him.

So for a period of three years, America mourned Jumbo, and got along

somehow with smaller elephants.

* * * * *

THE second world happening which was to affect Lingga was even more significant, though to one who knows little of the East it may sound obscure. The Royal White Elephant of Siam died.

Sir James Brooke, the Englishman who freed Sarawak from the bloody tyranny of Pangeran Makota, in 1847, has written at length concerning sacred white elephants, and their part in Asiatic history. As far back as 1607 Siam, Pego and Aracan engaged in a bloody triangular war over one white elephant. More than 35,000 soldiers were dead, and 200,000 wounded, before a truce came—brought about only because the white elephant in question died.

They took their white elephants seriously in Siam—and still do. It is hard for Occidentals to understand and believe, but the plain fact is that white elephants in Siam are regarded as reverently as a wisp of the beard of the Prophet is regarded by Islam. These elephants are symbols. While not exactly divine in our sense, they stand for success in war, fertility of crops, many sons, and general prosperity for the entire country. Any king or dynasty of kings not possessing and exhibiting such a white elephant, may expect ominous happenings. Famine. Childless wives. Revolution. Death—perhaps under the thousand knives, or some other exquisite Oriental form of torture.

In Siam as a whole, the white elephant of the Court stands next to the king and queen—and even crowds them a bit. He is far more important than the first son, the crown prince. He is

shown to the people twice a year, on the highest festival occasions.

Or he was—for there is no dynasty now in Siam, and Lingga had a great deal to do with this state of affairs.

But back there then in 1905 when the Court elephant died, Siam was appalled. Every resource of the rich treasury was thrown into a world-wide search for an albino pachyderm. Even a long-eared African elephant would do, provided he was near enough white. Any little eight-foot runt would do. Even a yellow-white one might do, if he could be bleached sufficiently for the Court occasions. . . .

But Siam simply had to have its white elephant. And this period of years seemed to be one of those lacunae, when albinos simply did not exist.

Lingga had ranged deep in the interior of Borneo. But now, fatefully enough, he came back to the northern coast. He exercised a perpetual grouch. He was really a rogue of rogues, the more fearsome because he just was attaining his full height and strength. He slept all day in a dark wallow, and roamed at night. When he ate it was his wasteful habit to uproot not only one tree, which would have been sufficient for even his giant appetite, but six or seven. And whenever he came upon a flimsy hut village in the jungle or on the river shore, he made it a point to barge straight through the hut stilts, bringing down to the ground to be trampled scores of screaming natives and Chinese, awakened from sleep to find themselves at the mercy of a dark monster who could see in the blackest night, who revelled in trampling them and bashing them to death.

ONCE a year, of course, Lingga ran amok—went *musth* with the de-

nial of his mating instinct. Even decent elephants are bad at this time. Lingga was a fiend. He razed whatever lay in his path. Once, for instance, he crashed into the encampment of a party of white orchid hunters, crashed down the four tents, tossed cots and men twenty feet away, then trampled or gored all those who could not find cover immediately.

Again, the villagers at a big native settlement called Bintula, found the white monster's spoor on the river bank—and in the branches of a banyan nearby, the frightfully gored corpse of a white hunter named Fishel.

From that encounter with the white hunter, Lingga had acquired a permanent limp. One of the hunter's explosive bullets had struck him in the rump, and ranged down and inward to the hip. Unfortunately for the hunter, no bone had been smashed to flinders. . . .

Then the first white man to see Lingga—and escape to tell the tale—came along. He was a mild, methodical little fat man, a Dutch botanist. He was chased by this mad elephant rogue, but managed to find a stout tree and scramble up like a monkey. Up there out of reach, the botanist sat and watched, blinking his watery blue eyes worriedly, while Lingga cursed and squealed his rage, and tried vainly to uproot a tree too substantial for even his vast strength.

The Dutch botanist had no particular interest in pachyderms, white or otherwise. But he did mark Lingga's exact height against the bole of the tree, then measured the distance from this mark to the ground, when finally the rogue elephant got disgusted and blundered away for easier prey.

In his own good time then, with his own long trip finished, the Dutch scien-

tist sat on a veranda of his club in far distant Surabaya, drank quantities of stone crock gin mixed with quinine tonic, and told of his narrow escape from the giant white elephant.

He did not notice the electric silence which greeted his words. Methodically he plodded along in narrative, stating that the great albino pachyderm was "almost eight cubits in stature at the shoulders. . . ."

Almost . . .

NO one paid any attention to the qualification then. An English cubit—and an English big game hunter had been listening—is eighteen inches, one-half yard. The hunter got away quickly, and cabled word that a twelve foot white elephant was roaming the jungles of Sarawak. A renowned and reliable botanist vouched for the measurement. This would be a bigger pachyderm than Jumbo!

No one thought of another difference, either. The Dutch use the Roman cubit, which is only 17.47 inches in length. The Dutch scientist had been absolutely correct, if one read exactly what he said.

But no one did. Three yellow nations, and the emissaries of two white countries, immediately set forth in expeditionary bands, to capture Lingga alive. And incidentally, as far as the yellow men were concerned, to fight a bloodthirsty and terrible war with each other for the privilege of hunting the white beast in Sarawak.

Lingga himself was on the loose for two more whole years, ranging at night, sleeping days. The yellow men fought each other. Thousands died—six vessels transporting hunters being sunk in one savage sea battle.

The Orientals thought only of Ling-

ga's whiteness. The British and American hunters wanted him because he was said to be bigger than Jumbo had been.

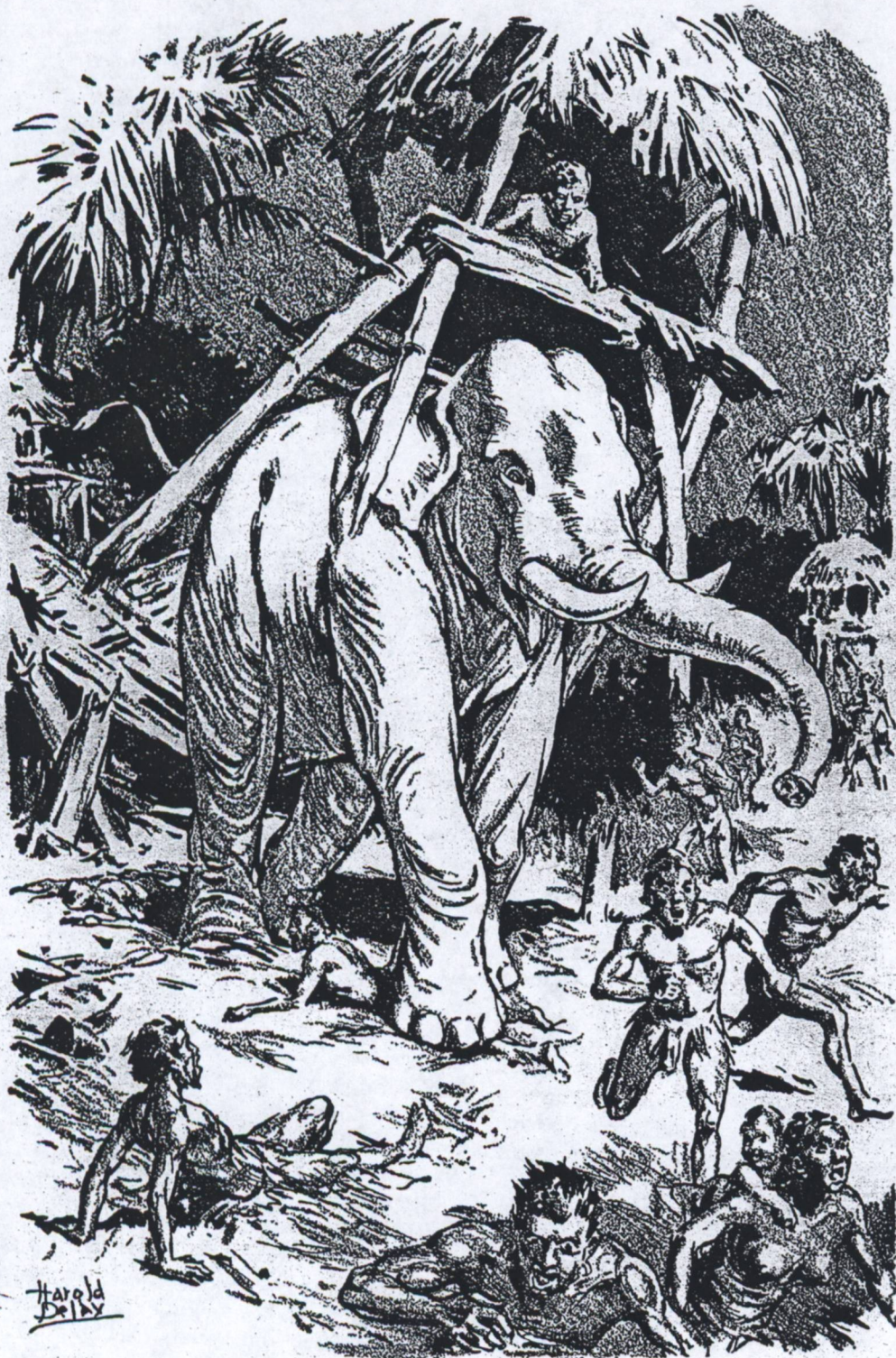
Then one day, right in the middle of all this hunting and strife, the unsuspecting Lingga appeared in quick succession to a pair of white officials of the Borneo Company, who described him wildly and excitedly—and in fourteen-foot terms—and then to a group of Chinese who were panning the meager gold sands of the Batang Lupar, near Marup.

That was the beginning of the end. They all knew within a dozen or so miles where he must be. Three expeditions of yellow men, each firing sporadically at the two others, came into the region. Then all three tangled in a pitched battle which lasted five days and nights.

Meanwhile an Englishman named Stafford, employed by an American circus, gathered an army of native beaters, started through the swamps in the daytime, started the totally blind albino giant, drove him meekly enough into a pole *keppah* (corral), and captured him.

AS SOON as darkness fell Lingga saw what had happened, and tried to destroy the *keppah* and all the hated humans who had shackled him. But there were chains on each of his huge legs—and each chain was attached to a tame elephant who was used to the business of subduing rogues. So that was that. Stafford and his men hustled Lingga away, out of reach of the embattled yellow armies.

Then, however, the horrid truth emerged at once. Lingga was almost pure white, sure enough, but he was only eleven feet one inch tall! This was three inches shorter than Jumbo. So



He made it a point to barge straight through the hut stilts, bringing down to the ground to be trampled scores of screaming natives.

Lingga, to American circus eyes, was just another pachyderm, and worth much less than the effort and treasure expended upon getting him.

Stafford was shrewd. He knew how Siam, for one, felt about white elephants. So he hid Lingga in the last place anyone would look for a beast—in the belly of a broken down and abandoned cargo junk—while he bargained.

After two weeks of courtesies and secret searchings, the yellow men gave up—and made an offer. It was instantly accepted. Lingga was sold to Siam at a price said to have been two tons of pure silver, Lingga's weight.

At any rate, he was taken to the Siamese Court, amid the greatest country-wide rejoicing. There he was pampered in every conceivable way—given a harem of sleek wives, careful feeding, and semi-yearly adoration from the populace. They even supplied him with all the karene-bong (Indo-China mountain men) mahouts he needed. And he required a constant supply of these expert elephant handlers, since Lingga was given to bashing them, or drowning them in his scented bath.

Lingga died of a lung ailment in 1931.

In that year revolution started in Siam, and the dynasty was overthrown.

San Diego to San Antonio, \$150

AT OLD TOWN, atop a hill overlooking a beautiful San Diego Bay and the tropical wilderness that was destined to become modern San Diego, California, a great celebration was in progress on July 9, 1857. Rugged and fun-loving pioneers poured black powder between two anvils and touched matches to the crude fuses that protruded out. The resultant explosions shook the whole hillside. Crude firecrackers boomed. Beer flowed freely. Bells pealed from the ancient church to add a note of dignity to the boisterous occasion. Local statesmen made speeches to those who would listen.

The celebration marked a great epoch in the history of Old Town and of the entire nation, although the average celebrant did not recognize the far-reaching significance of it then.

The start of the first overland mail, from San Diego to San Antonio, Texas, thence on to New Orleans on a route already established, brought to realization the dream of James E. Birchi, who had planned an overland mail route since 1849.

It required 56 days to make the first run from San Diego to San Antonio. The first east-west stage arrived on September 5, 1857, after only 34 days on the road, and another great celebration broke out in Old Town. A. W. Lane was the first driver out of San Diego, and James Mason drove the first

stage out of San Antonio, west.

Postage was reasonable enough, considering the hazardous journey and the great time-saving effected, the rate being three and one-half cents per ounce, but there was a hitch in arrangements when it was discovered that the San Diego postmaster had no stamps, the nearest source of supply being San Francisco.

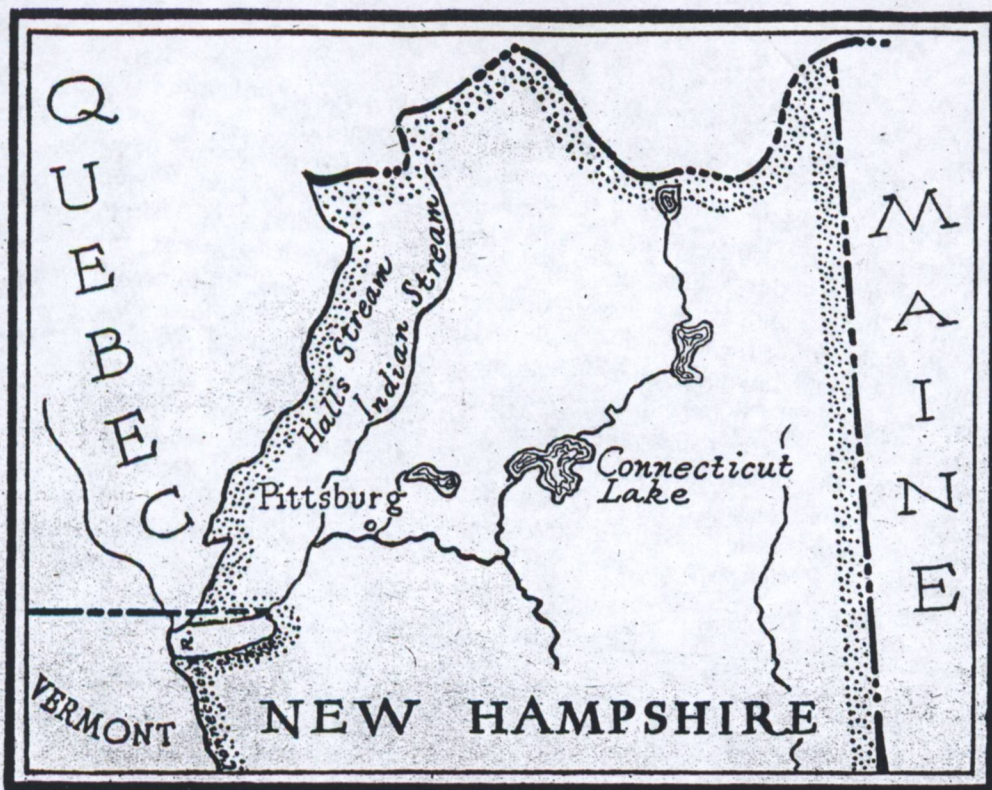
Transportation tickets on the overland stage were sold only from San Francisco, passengers going from there to San Diego by boat.

That an overland trip in those roaring frontier days was both hazardous and expensive, is shown by a typical Birch stage advertisement:

"Passengers must take arms and thick boots, woolen pants, three linen shirts and three woolen overshirts, a wide-awake hat, sack overcoat, soldier's overcoat, blankets, a piece of India rubber cloth, needles and thread, hair brush, 3 or 4 towels, money in silver or small gold. Price San Diego to San Antonio \$150.00."

Although Birch swung his route far south over the mountains, it was necessary for many years to abandon the stage at Green Valley ranch, at the foot of Cuymaca mountain. Here passengers mounted burros and rode 18 miles to Callecito in the desert.

—Ruel McDaniel.



Little Lost Republic

by HARRY VAN DEMARK

ALMOST forgotten among the events of this swiftly-moving age is the Lost Republic of Indian Stream. Few students of American history can lift their hands to attest that they have even heard of Indian Stream. Gone, too, are all, or nearly all, who saw that strange strip of territory on New Hampshire's Canadian border stand off the might of two great governments and strive desperately to maintain its independence.

The government records of the case are moldering in the archives at Washington and Ottawa. Even New Hamp-

shire now seldom recalls the affair, and Luther Parker, "President of the Indian Stream Republic," who, with a staunch body of settlers, defied troops and warring authorities and defended the domain, is but a dim memory to the few who remember.

The argument over Indian Stream and its 160,000 acres and three hundred citizens lasted for almost sixty years—in fact, from the Treaty of Paris in 1783 to the Ashburton treaty of 1843. It all came about because three New Hampshire traders secured from Chief Phillip of the St. Francis

tribe a deed to the territory of Indian Stream on the most northerly boundary of New Hampshire.

A survey after the Revolution had determined the boundary limits of Canada and the United States. In those days, however, surveyors were not always too clear with their local definitions, so that the actual boundary line was subject to two interpretations. It was either at a creek known as Hall's Stream or some miles further south at the Connecticut River. The tract in dispute was of magnificent fertility and scenic beauty.

"Connecticut Lake, chief of the river's headwaters, lies 1,618 feet above the sea level," writes one visitor to the territory. "Picturesquely irregular in outline, its shores in a large part forest fringes broken by green intervals, it is a handsome lake of fine proportions, as becomes a progenitor of so fair a stream. The neighboring hills are thick with trees, particularly the maple, mingled with spruce and fir. In the Autumn, while the trees are aglow with their rich tints, the heights are often white from the frozen mist that clings to the spears of the evergreen foliage. . . .

"Now full-formed, the river emerges from the rocky outlet of this river basin. For the first two and a half miles of its course it is almost a continual rapid. Then it drops into a more tranquil mood and glides along for some four miles, winding west and south-west. Receiving along the way two fair-sized tributaries and lesser streams, it flows again more rapidly to the meeting of the boundaries of New Hampshire, Vermont and Canada."

Such was the elysian scene in the Republic of Indian Stream. It bore many names in the earlier days. It was

variously known as Indian Stream, Indian Stream Settlement, Indian Stream Territory, the Township of Indian Village, the Township of Liberty in the United States, Indian Grant, Bedel's Grant, Bedel's and Others' Grant, and Bedel's and Associates' Grant. At present it is the northern part of Coos County, New Hampshire; but the records show that a good many vivid incidents had to happen before that incorporation was to come about.

DAVID GIBBS, Nathaniel Wales and Moody Bedel, the original grantees of Indian Stream, appear to have had heads for both pioneering and business. They in turn deeded parcels of the tract to others, receiving hard cash in return. Slowly in that out-of-the-way territory a population grew up.

The War of 1812 between the United States and England does not seem to have had much effect on the new project, which, by 1820, had increased to forty settlers and their families. They thrived under their own laws, and no one paid much attention to them until, in 1824, a visiting commission from New Hampshire reported that there were fifty-eight families, totaling nearly three hundred folk, in the old Indian grant.

Then came the first hints of trouble. The New Hampshire legislature wanted to know more about this odd settlement on its northern boundary, which was operating peacefully under its own government. Canada had taken only a desultory interest in the settlement, but now it also awoke officially to its existence. New Hampshire claimed Indian Stream territory as its own, and the inhabitants objected. Canada claimed it and the inhabitants likewise objected to that. Great Britain

took a hand and the affair was submitted to the King of the Netherlands for arbitration. He decided in favor of Canada. The United States refused to accept the word as final.

By that time the settlers of Indian Stream were asserting themselves with vigor. If Hall's Stream was the international boundary, then they belonged to the United States. If the Connecticut River was the boundary, they belonged to Canada. But they had not the slightest intention of belonging to either party in the argument until the elusive boundary had been nailed down to stay.

Such was the decision at which they arrived in the historic General Assembly meeting of 1832, when Indian Stream drew up its own constitution and stepped out for itself in the world as an independent republic.

The constitution was a remarkable document. It provided for an assembly, a council of five, an army, a supreme court. In short, it duplicated most of the branches of the United States Government. Quite possibly the republic of Indian Stream was not a complete Utopia. In the minutes of the year 1832 is found the notation that the assembly "voted to choose a committee of six to adopt some measure to prevent people from cheating, lying and swindling people out of their money." All other evidence points, however, to the conclusion that the settlers of Indian Stream were honest and industrious, with the exception of the usual handful of sharp traders to be found in any community.

THE REPUBLIC of Indian Stream had been created owing allegiance to no one but its own authorities. There was confusion as a result. The

United States Government took Indian Stream at its word and began to levy customs duties on all goods going into and coming out of the territory, much to the displeasure of the farming folk.

As soon as the King of the Netherlands had decided the dispute in favor of Canada the Canadian authorities began to insist that the territory's citizens should perform their military duty as dutiful subjects of Great Britain. This likewise appears to have irked the honest republicans of the spunky little community.

Indian Stream was thus hammered from both sides. Finally a decision was reached which it was hoped would brighten up the twilight enveloping the situation. New Hampshire officials were coming into the territory to serve writs on the inhabitants. A way had to be found to end such harrying. So Indian Stream addressed a communication to the Attorney-General of the United States asking for an opinion that the territory was under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, but not under that of New Hampshire, and demanding that the state authorities should cease their activities.

The reply of the Attorney-General was profoundly disappointing to the unhappy republic. He wrote:

"If you are within the limits of the United States, as has always been maintained by this Government, it is because you are within the limits of the State of New Hampshire."

The authorities of New Hampshire followed this blow with one of their own. They wrote to the Indian Stream Assembly that the state intended to assume full sway over the recalcitrant republic as a result of the Attorney-General's decision.

The reaction was prompt and deci-

sive. A very much enraged republic of Indian Stream, sixty out of its seventy-five voters signing, addressed a petition to the Governor of Lower Canada.

"Being unable to defend ourselves against the aggressions of the State of New Hampshire," was the substance of the document, "We now turn to you, asking what relief you can extend to us against new invasions."

The Governor of Lower Canada is reported to have been much pleased. He wrote back promptly that he would defend the citizens of Indian Stream against all encroachments on their liberties as British subjects. He was probably not aware of the fact that the new republic was a house divided against itself by now. It had its independent republicans, its Canadian party and its "New Hampshire boys"—each side pledged to a different government.

Indian Stream began to seethe. It seethed still more when Canadian authorities came in openly to arrest citizens on British warrants, and New Hampshire representatives appeared with New Hampshire warrants.

FOR YEARS Luther Parker had been a leading citizen of Indian Stream. He had served as a member of the first Council and later had been designated "President of the Republic." The Canadian officers of the law endeavored to lay hands on him and his brother Asa on a trivial charge. They called at his store. Luther Parker calmly produced his rifle and laid it on the counter. Asa Parker sauntered in with two large horse-pistols. The Canadian party evaporated.

Later on, however, they captured one of the brothers on a lonely road and took him across the border into Canada,

where he was released on bail. The case against him promptly fell through. It is doubtful if much of a case could have been made against anyone arrested in Indian Stream during those stirring days.

There was, for instance, an Indian Stream settler named Blanchard, whose allegiance was with the "New Hampshire boys." With New Hampshire officials he arrested a certain Tyler, and Tyler was rescued by his friends of Canadian sympathy. Then, as his move in the game, Tyler, leading a party of Canadian officers, went out to seize Blanchard on the charge of falsely arresting a British subject. The "New Hampshire boys" received the news that Blanchard had been captured and was being led toward Canada. They armed themselves and set off in pursuit. The hamlets of Indian Stream buzzed with excitement.

With a guard now grown to fifteen men, Blanchard was almost over the Canadian border when eight armed "New Hampshire boys" swooped down on them on horseback and demanded the release of the prisoner. Immediately Blanchard was turned over to his friends. This might have been the end of the trouble had not someone recalled that there was still a New Hampshire warrant and a \$5.00 reward out for Tyler, who had instigated Blanchard's arrest.

Two republicans started at once to invade Canada and capture Tyler. At the home of a Canadian justice-of-the-peace, a hot-headed hater of the republicans, a party of twelve Canadians was encountered. The justice called upon them to seize the pair of invaders. Pistols were brought out and cocked, and stones began to fly at the two lonely Indian Streamers.

A party of thirty more "New Hampshire boys" suddenly appeared. The august justice-of-the-peace for Canada was seized and dragged across the line, later to be released with a warning to behave himself in the future. Here and there were the hurts of sabre wounds and of a pistol shot or so. The situation bore a strong resemblance to war.

THE New Hampshire Legislature passed a resolution empowering the governor to use any means at his disposal to enforce the state authority over Indian Stream. At once a company of militia under the command of Captain James Mooney marched into the disputed territory. The sight of soldiers and bayonets with the full power of a state behind them, made its impression on the citizens of the republic.

Captain Mooney quartered himself in the house of Luther Parker, where, it is related, he spent much of his time when not out on active service in reading a book and rocking the baby's cradle. All around in the yard were the tents of the soldiers. There were sporadic arrests of trouble-makers; but the presence of militia tamed down the most ebullient. Slowly the excitement waned. Barracks went up for winter quarters, indicating that New Hampshire's militia had come to stay.

The Canadian officials were informed

that none of their representatives would be allowed to enter Indian Stream. A guard was posted on the roads leading into the republic. Many of the inhabitants, including Luther Parker and his family, despairing of the future of the new republic, sought other fields of pioneering. The rest settled down to a life of peace and quiet.

At last the Canadian Government promised to keep its hands off the Republic of Indian Stream and the troops were withdrawn. In a series of resolutions passed by the General Assembly, the Republic of Indian Stream dissolved its identity and came under the jurisdiction of New Hampshire.

In 1840 there was incorporated the town of Pittsburg, containing the territory of Indian Stream. Two years later the Ashburton Treaty defined the international boundary as being Hall's Stream. One more independent republic had vanished.

But all down the years there seems to have been a trace of the old independence left. It is related that back around 1915 the representative of the Pittsburg district, during an argument in the New Hampshire Legislature, called the attention of that body to the fact that his territory had once gone completely independent, and that, therefore, its voters had better be respected.

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gon Beyond

—he sagged at the knees, pitched suddenly forward.

by ARCHIE JOSCELYN

Illustrated by JAY JACKSON

THEY had sighted Oregon that morning. And with the promised land in sight, Marty Lou was dying.

That was the thing that hit Dave Jourdan and pierced him as he had seen men hit and pierced by Indian arrows, seven hundred miles back. Somehow now he had more understanding for the groaning of old Sam Belcher, who had coughed and shaken horribly, with the blood spurting when they pulled it out, but who had lived despite such a wound. Only, Dave Jourdan felt, if Marty Lou died, he would die too. They were to

have been married when Oregon was reached.

Looking back, he could see the long trail in retrospect. The start, seven months before, with all fresh canvas on the wagons, white and untorn. Now there wasn't a whole piece left in the wagon train. And they had weathered, as the occupants had weathered, in crossing half a continent. But on that first morning, most joyous with hope of them all had been Marty Lou.

There had been tears on the trail. As on the day when little Clarissa Ford,

just turned two, had died. They had buried her on one of the loneliest spots of the prairie, building a big fire over the grave, driving all the wagons across it afterward; so that the little grave might not be desecrated for a tiny head of golden hair . . . hair the same rich tint as Marty Lou's. It had been Marty Lou who prepared the baby for her last long sleep. Dave Jourdan remembered how Clarissa's mother had ridden then for days, looking back . . .

Privations in plenty had marked the long miles. There was the day when the last flour barrel had been scraped to the bottom. There had been, it seemed, no game in the country. The grass had withered under fierce drought, been further denuded by a horde of grasshoppers, ahead of their coming. Horses were weak, men scarcely able to stand erect, cheek bones showing gaunt and unshaven. Marty Lou had fainted, giving her own scanty rations, without their knowing, to Grandma Bascom. . . . Seeing her lying there, white and with skin stretching tight, Dave Jourdan had stumbled up, barely able to lift his long-barreled rifle. He had returned that night with two-fat badgers.

There was the heat, and again, the bitter cold. Marty Lou knitting socks and sweaters and mittens, mending, patching. An orphan like himself, with no family of her own, she had helped mother the whole train. . . . The storms, long, driving rains, and one day, hail that had shredded the canvas wagon tops. A blizzard across the open lands, lasting five days and nights, with the horses trying to break away, the cattle straying. Marty Lou, carrying pails of hot tea, using the last of her little cherished hoard of the leaves. . . .

Twice on the trip they had encoun-

tered bad water. Three times there had been no water at all, or virtually none. Again, flooded rivers. And that day when, on the long westward slope of the Rockies, his own brakes, worn thin, had burned out.

The four horses had done their best to hold it, but the load had been too heavy on such a slope. Dave Jourdan had set his teeth, bracing his feet, and calculated his chances. Two miles yet to the bottom, steep, rough, with a sharp turn or so to be made. He'd been glad that he was alone in the wagon.

And then Marty Lou, driving the big Conestoga for Bart Shaw, so that Bart might ride in the hospital wagon with his sick wife. Marty Lou had been the only one close enough to help, her own wagon following behind. He remembered how she'd whipped up her horses on that steep, rocky slope, galloped wildly past, swerving around on two wheels, hair streaming in the wind, blue eyes steady as the fine, sweet mouth of her.

With a deep, sheer precipice at the side and beyond. . . .

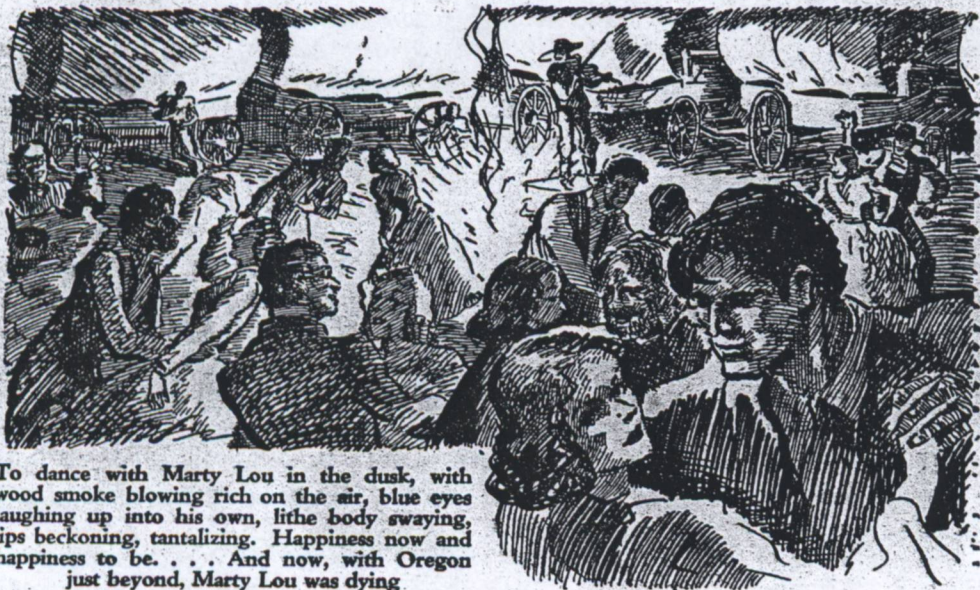
It was a trick to try the nerve and skill of any man, but she'd gotten ahead, before his own wagon could get clean away and force the straining horses into a wild run. She had brought her own under control again with brake and steady hands on the reins, done the most difficult feat of all—swung at such an angle that he could let the front corner of his own swing as he turned the horses, jarring against the rear of her own wagon.

For a moment they had both hung on the brink of eternity. Nearly three tons slamming hard against her own wagon on such a slope. If they'd gotten away then—

NOT all privations. There had been happy days, and nights, too, when Fiddler Tim had played and the whole party had danced and taken fresh lease on life. To dance with Marty Lou in the dusk, with wood smoke blowing rich on the air, blue eyes laughing up into his own, lithe body swaying, lips beckoning, tantalizing. Happiness now and happiness to be. . . . And now, with

other slogan, grimmer, but even more potent. "Beat the British to it!"

They had heard a lot about the Oregon country, back east. Tales, many of them past belief. How fertile a land it was, where the plow sank soft in loam of unguessed depth, where crops grew like boundless delight; of a climate soft and salubrious; of an empire waiting for the taking. If even a



To dance with Marty Lou in the dusk, with wood smoke blowing rich on the air, blue eyes laughing up into his own, lithe body swaying, lips beckoning, tantalizing. Happiness now and happiness to be. . . . And now, with Oregon just beyond, Marty Lou was dying.

Oregon just beyond, Marty Lou was dying.

Dave Jourdan's big hands clenched into slow fists, the cords of his neck stood out in slow but steady resolution. There was only one hope for Marty Lou, and the leaders of the train had decreed that, for the common and higher good, that chance must not be taken.

Oregon! Magic word which denoted the promised land. On to Oregon! A slogan which had led them like a beacon for those seven weary months. And, of late weeks, coupled with it, inseparable now in the minds and hearts of all, an-

half was true, this was the promised land indeed.

An empire for the taking. That was it. Even back east they had heard how England was turning covetous eyes toward this land flowing with milk and honey, was building forts under the guise of trading posts, sending settlers in. One of these days the question of sovereignty would be decided, and the country with the greatest population of settlers, the most secure foothold, would win the Oregon country!

They had heard much more along those lines of late. Only a week before they had been met by two men

new-come from the West, men who were riding in search of the wagon trains now supposed to be on the way, men whose sole purpose was to warn them of what impended and to urge them to hurry, hurry, and settle the Oregon country before the British could take it.

"The question is going to be decided mighty soon," had been the word. "How many in your wagon train?"

"Fifty, now—countin' women and children."

"Fifty, eh? Not many—but it'll help. So far's we can learn, you're the only train anywhere near close enough to count. And fifty more for the U. S. is apt to swing the scales our way. Get out there and settle, so you can be counted. You're just about there now. Only—watch out for the British! Don't get near Destiny Post, as they call it, whatever you do. There's a man named Winant in command there—it's really a fort, disguised as a post. He's got soldiers, on the excuse of guarding against Indians, and he's tricky as a snake. If they find out about you, they'll stop you on one pretext or another, keep you back till after the whole question's settled. Whatever you do, don't let them find out about you till you're there!"

Excitement had bubbled at fever pitch. Dave Jourdan had been among the most enthusiastic for the program. But that was before Marty Lou had come down with the fever.

It was the fever. Long John Hughes, in charge of the wagon train, had looked at her and made the pronouncement. He'd seen the fever before, knew its ravages only too well. Out of the depths of that knowledge he had smiled at Marty Lou and told her to hurry up and get well, and had, unsmiling and

grim, told Dave Jourdan the truth—the truth which, Dave read in her eyes, Marty Lou knew as well as Long John.

"She's mighty sick, Dave. In fact—well, you might as well know it now as later—she ain't got a chance. Not without a doctor."

"A doctor?" Dave Jourdan had grasped dully at that straw. "We haven't got a doctor."

"No." Long John's mouth had set like a steel trap. "That's the trouble. A doctor might save her—I've seen it done before. But there's no chance of a doctor this side of other settlers in Oregon, and, close as we are, that'll be a week too late."

IT was then that Johnny Osgood had ridden in with excitement bubbling in his changing voice, shrill one moment and deep and throbbing the next.

"There's a British post not two miles from where we're camped, Mr. Hughes. I darned near rode right on to it before I saw it."

"You sure?" Already a crowd was gathering. "They didn't see you?"

Scorn was in Johnny's voice at such a suggestion.

"Naw! Think I'm that big a chump, after I saw where they was? But they're right over there."

Long John himself, with half a dozen others, had reconnoitered, to find that Johnny Osgood had not overstated it. The fort was there, not two miles away. Trees and brush and hills hid them, but they had come unpleasantly close to driving straight past the gates of the fort.

"Looks like I've blundered," Long John said tersely. "This is Post o' Destiny, sure. And they've got a plenty strong enough garrison to stop us, too, if they knew we was near here."

"What'll we do, then? They may stumble on to us any time."

"Douse all fires." That had been ordered at the first report. "We'll play our luck for all it's worth. It wouldn't do to move now, we'd be seen sure. But when it gets dark we'll go on, and swing around them. By morning we'll be safely past."

Relief shone on other faces. But Dave Jourdan's was tense.

"You're sure this is Post o' Destiny, John?"

"Pretty sure, Dave."

"I've heard it said that they have a doctor at Destiny—a Frenchman named Bonneville."

For a moment the eyes of the two men clashed, locked. The others, about to withdraw, were listening, tense and expectant again, recognizing that here was crisis once more. Long John Hughes nodded.

"I reckon that's the truth, Dave. A red-headed Frenchman named Bonneville."

"Then—if there's a doctor this close—Marty Lou—"

Long John's lips were a little sterner. There was pity in the back of his eyes, and his voice, to hide that emotion, was harsher than usual.

"I'm right sorry, Dave. I'd give my right arm to get a doctor for Marty Lou. You know that. But if we go into that post and get him, it means we don't reach Oregon—not till it's under the Union Jack."

Dave Jourdan nodded. He was a big man, dark, slow-moving, a man, usually, of few words. An exterior which was deceptive, hiding the ability to think and move with lightning speed when occasion required, the light and play of deep emotions. Now his neck

muscles seemed to cord as his face drew taut.

"I thought of that, John. Nobody wants Oregon saved for the States more than I do. But—I can't let Marty Lou die. Not for all the country the sun ever shone on."

Long John considered, silent a moment, lifted his head.

"THIS is the way it seems to me, Dave," he said quietly. "There were over seventy of us when we started for Oregon. That was seven months ago. It was to be a promised land to all of us. It's been a long, hard trail—everybody knows how hard. Men and women and little children have died along that trail, and there are unmarked graves along the way. All the flowers they'll ever have will be planted there by God, and only His tears will water them while eternity rolls. We've paid our way with sacrifices and the blood of atonement. And now the promised land's in sight. From that hill, yonder, we sighted Oregon this morning."

He spoke, now, with something of the fervor of a prophet, with passionate sincerity and conviction.

"No matter what the cost has been, so far, we've paid it—and kept going. But he who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is not fit for the kingdom. It's a question now, not of one more life, but of success or failure. And it's not just our success or failure that hinges on it, not just one life. If it was only that, or the land I hope to get, the home I want to have—God knows I'd say to go and get Bonneville. We all love Marty Lou—she's been an angel to this whole wagon train."

Aprons were being lifted to eyes no longer dry, little children, not quite

understanding, clustered close to their mother's skirts. Men listened, stony faced to hide that same emotion.

"If we stop now, we lose. And, the way it seems to shape up, all the others who've gone ahead, those who are coming behind us—they lose, too. Instead of the stars and stripes rolling from sea to sea in such a land of the free as the world has never known, it'll be the Union Jack, out here, over the Oregon country—and if we go on later, it'll be to live under it—either that or turn back. When we started out, it wasn't to emigrate to a foreign country."

Again he was silent a moment. Then he finished.

"It's Marty Lou—one life, against all that, Dave. And if we don't go on, likely there'll be war, bloodshed, hundreds or thousands killed instead of one. One died, a sacrifice, that the whole world might live. Sometimes it's hard—but we've already sacrificed too much to lose it all now. That's the way it seems to me. But I won't set up to say, alone. The rest of you can vote."

It was the men who voted—not the women or children. Had they been permitted to say, it would have been different. Not a man there, as Long John had said, who did not vote against Dave with a catch in his throat. But, more than once, such a vote had been required of them on the long trail. For the salvation of the wagon train as against the life of one. Two dozen graves marked the way, but there were still fifty of them, and Oregon now was just ahead.

"That's the way it is, Dave." Long John's voice was not quite steady. "It's hard—but you know our law. We abide by the will of the majority."

Dave Jourdan listened in silence. He knew the law. But Marty Lou—he turned, stumbling a little, to where she lay now beneath a tree, breathing the fragrance of evergreen, catching the faint breeze which blew. Her face was so wan and white, now that the burning fever had relaxed its grip for a moment. He dropped on his knees beside her, and her eyes opened, smiled a little at sight of him. Her hand, moving to caress him, could barely reach his own.

"Don't—take it too hard, Dave," she whispered. "It's—going to be all right. You'll be happy—in Oregon. And someday, you'll find someone else—to make you a home."

"Never," he vowed thickly, and stood up abruptly. "Unless you go with me, Marty Lou, I'll never set foot on Oregon."

HE turned quickly, then, remembering that other eyes were watching him, schooled his footsteps to drag, his head to sag on his chest. He must deceive, he must be—that was the word for it—a traitor, in what he was about to do. They'd stop him if they suspected. But when it was a question of Marty Lou dying, or the color of a flag waving over a fort, then Marty Lou came first.

The underbrush, the little, ragged coulees had swallowed him now. Behind him he heard an exclamation, someone calling his name in a low, urgent voice. Then men from the camp starting out. He'd been missed, they intended to stop him, to bring him back. Which meant that he must move fast. He wasn't going back.

Dave Jourdan had been too much in Indian country to be found readily now. He looked to the pistol in a

holster at his side, made sure that the priming was ready. He moved more warily as he approached Post o' Destiny. There was a chance that he could accomplish his purpose and no one suffer for it.

He stood at the edge of the clearing, behind a dense cluster of bushes, to study the post a moment. It was a strongly built affair of heavy logs, but without a protecting stockade, such as he had seen further east. Men wandered here and there, and, though they lacked uniforms, there was that in their bearing to tell him that these were soldiers. It was a strong garrison, no question of that, but not for protection against Indians.

Everywhere, all around the buildings, the clearing had been carefully extended. To try and slip up to the post undetected was out of the question. Two hundred yards at the side, something moved, was still again. That was the old coonskin cap of Harley Manners, from the wagon train. Dave Jourdan faded in the opposite direction.

To march boldly up to the fort and demand a doctor meant revealing the full secret, but what other chance had he? He stopped, flattening himself against a tree, as voices sounded. Then, the shadow of a grin softening the stern lines of mouth and throat, he moved again.

HERE was a little creek, running jauntily to the sea. On shore, the clothes of half a dozen men, while the owners splashed like schoolboys in a pool beyond. Soldiers' uniforms, these, bright with regimental trappings, and well suited to his purpose. Dave Jourdan selected what he needed, worked for five minutes tying the

other garments into a tangle of knots. That would delay them, would turn suspicion to some one among their own comrades.

Then, dressed as a soldier, he walked boldly toward the post, though his heart misgave him. The holstered pistol was hid beneath his tunic, but what would he do when he got there? Then



He'd been missed, they intended to stop him, to bring him back. Which meant that he must move fast. He wasn't going back

he swerved abruptly to where a man sat on a bench beneath a single pine tree, the afternoon sun glinting on his uncovered head. Red-head! The man was tall, lean, lithe as a panther, a small black bag on the bench beside him.

He looked up to frown a little in surprise at sight of the approaching soldier, his eyes narrowing suddenly. Black eyes, Dave Jourdan noted, very keen and piercing, which had instantly pierced the disguise. But they had been keen enough to see the bulge of the pistol held ready under the tunic.

"You're coming with me." Dave

Jourdan said quietly. "It's not far. Don't make any noise, and you'll not be hurt. Turn and walk beside me, and remember that my pistol is bearing on you as we go."

"Not being a fool, I'll do that," the red-head agreed. "It's a lovely day for a walk, anyway."

His eyes held a gleam almost of amusement, and he carried no weapon so far as Dave Jourdan could see. He sauntered beside him as though this was an everyday occurrence.

"You'll be Dr. Bonneville, of course?"

"I'll be Dr. Bonneville, certainly. Is someone requiring my services?"

They had reached the edge of the clearing now, were in the timber, and no one from the post showing any suspicion or interest in their movements.

"It's Marty Lou. We're to be married when we reach Oregon. She has the fever, now. Long John says a doctor could save her, but that without, she'll die. You can save her, Doctor?"

"I've no doubt it can be managed, if Long John says so. He will be Long John Hughes you're meaning?"

"The same. You've heard of him?"

"Who hasn't. Then your wagon train is not far off?"

"Not far. I regret the inconvenience to you, but you'll travel with us a day or so."

"Don't plague yourself about the inconvenience. I'm delighted with the chance."

They came, presently, to the wagon train itself. None of those searching for Dave Jourdan had discovered them. Then into the open. Long John whirled, staring at the uniform, came up, an unwilling admiration struggling with anger on his face.

"Faith, and you seem to have gotten him, Dave. If so, and no alarm given, it's none so bad. But that uniform—he'll be missed."

"I doubt it." Dave Jourdan recounted briefly what had happened. Bonneville's eyes were hard and bright, now on Long John, then darting about the camp, estimating coolly. His voice was like them.

"And where is Marty Lou, now that we're this far?"

He stared down at her a moment, unwinking, took one hand in his and felt her wrist. Dave Jourdan's voice burst from him.

"You can save her, Doctor?"

"Save her?" Bonneville's voice was confident. "Why not? Isn't it what you brought me for? But first, we must get one or two things. Come and help me, and you too, if you will be so kind, Long John."

HE LED them a little apart, behind the thrust of a wagon's canvas, and his face was sardonic.

"It happens I serve the English King, and my pay is from the crown, my duty to my country. Raise a gun and fire three shots to bring them here from the fort. Once that is done, I'll cheerfully do my best for her. Otherwise, no."

Dave Jourdan stared, incredulous. Johnny Osgood had come up, his voice was shrill with scorn.

"And you call yourself a doctor—a man of medicine? I thought all such put the saving of life first?"

Bonneville's eyes were bright and sardonic as the glint of sun on his hair.

"Faith, boy, 'tis a pretty creed you recite. I'm willing to save life, but I have my terms, as I have my duty."

Long John's voice was soft but convincing.

"Which is all very well, Doctor. But it happens that you're here, your friends are not. Better forget duty a while and ply your trade. Otherwise, we may get rough."

Bonneville shrugged.

"What profit to you—or the girl? You could kill me, I'll grant it, but that would not save her. No, no, gentlemen. I have told you my terms. The matter now is entirely up to you."

There was angry clamor for a time. Through it, Bonneville was debonair, obdurate. And in the end, knowing there was no other way, and because the scales had swung in the last hour, and the saving of human life—Marty Lou's life—had become the issue to all of them, they bowed to the inevitable. Long John put it to a vote.

"I'm for letting them know we're here, if it will save her life." Harley Manners growled. "And when we get ready to go on—" he shrugged, left the sentence unfinished. But the temper of these words was in the hearts of all, the same thought. Three guns boomed in signal.

Another hour, and the soldiers had arrived in force, lounged about, viewing the pioneers with tolerant amusement. One of them reclaimed his uniform from Dave Jourdan, smiling with every appearance of enjoyment.

"My name is Mayes," he said. "Captain Mayes. We're about of an age and build, I'd say. That was clever of you—deucedly so. Reminds me of a joke I played, back in Cornwall. Most fun I've had for months, on my word. I'd like to shake your hand."

Dave Jourdan hesitated, accepted the hand. There was a genuine friendliness about Mayes, even if he was in the

camp of the enemy. Then, his long impatience surging to the fore, Dave Jourdan swung on the lounging Bonneville.

"WE'VE met your terms, Doctor. And now, keep your bargain. Treat Marty Lou—save her life."

Captain Mayes glanced quickly at them. Bonneville shrugged, black eyes gleaming sardonically.

"My bargain? I don't recall making any bargain, Jourdan. I agreed that Dr. Bonneville could doubtless save her, if any physician could. I agreed also to do my best for her—there are foods at the fort that may be superior to what you have, and they are at your disposal. But it happens that I'm not Dr. Bonneville."

"Not?" Dave Jourdan's neck corded. "You told me you were."

"No, no, I did not. I agreed to be him if that was what you wanted, when you had a gun on me and it was that or no telling what. I did not say that I was him. As a matter of fact, I'm Major Winant, in command of this post."

They were staring, amazed and shocked at the sardonic humor in the commandant's voice. Captain Mayes with the rest. Long John cried out.

"But you have a doctor at your post? Where is he?"

"It's truth you're saying, John. We do have a Doctor Bonneville here, ordinarily. For the present, however, and I regret to state it, he's five days away to the north on a case, for babies will still be born, it seems, even in such outposts as these. There's no telling when he'll be back, but not within a week at least."

"Winant," said Long John. "I've heard of you before, and the sort of a

man you were. There's been only one mistake in the telling—you're not a man at all. Man was made in the image of the Creator, but a snake was condemned to crawl on its belly."

Winant stared a moment, his face whitening dangerously. But it was Dave Jourdan's hand on his shoulder which spun him around, Dave Jourdan's voice, hoarse and harsh, that rose above the clamor.

"Let be, John," he said. "I brought him here, and I'll settle with him. Get yourself a gun, Winant, and defend yourself, or I'll shoot you as you stand."

Captain Mayes started forward, several men at his heels. His face was as white and strained as Dave Jourdan's own. But Winant laughed and gestured him back.

"Don't trouble yourself, Captain. Certainly not on my account, when you'd like to see me shot. Let the young fool alone. I warned you, Jourdan, that I was under the British flag, taking British pay and loyal to my King. I have only done my duty."

"It's a queer way you have of doing it," Dave Jourdan choked. He flung a glance to where Marty Lou lay, the red of fever burning in her cheeks again. Marty Lou, dying. The rest of the train had sacrificed all that they held most dear that Marty Lou might live, but now, with Dr. Bonneville five days away, Marty Lou must die. The shock of it, after hope had surged strong in him, crowded out all else.

"**G**ET a gun, Winant," he repeated.

"It's small love I have for Americans," Winant shrugged contemptuously. "But if I draw a gun against you, I'll kill you. I'd prefer not to do

it, and I call upon all to witness that, if I do, it is in a fight forced upon me."

"Get a gun," Dave Jourdan repeated.

"If you persist in such madness, then certainly I'll get a gun."

It was Captain Mayes who plucked at Dave Jourdan's sleeve as Winant half-turned to some one else.

"Don't do it, Jourdan. You haven't a chance against him," he begged hoarsely. "Not a chance. He's a dead shot."

"So am I," said Dave Jourdan, quietly.

"Maybe. But you'd never pull trigger. He carries a gun in a holster in his sleeve, and he can fire before you can draw. It's certain death, I tell you."

Dave Jourdan's face was a little whiter, but this was the white of anger. His voice whirled Winant back as though dragged by physical force.

"So you're a treacherous coward with guns as with all else, eh, Winant? Well, come on, damn you—now!"

Dave Jourdan had caught another glimpse of Marty Lou, the agonized appeal in her eyes, but he steeled himself and turned away from her. Marty Lou was dying, because of this man's treachery—or so it seemed to Dave Jourdan, for things just then were a little twisted in his mind. Marty Lou was dying, and he, of course, would die. But however sure Winant might be with his own pistol, or swift, Dave Jourdan knew one thing. He would live long enough to take him with him.

He couldn't hope to beat Winant, for his arm was already flashing up as Jourdan's darted down. And then one gun flamed, there was the rising smell of powder smoke on the air, and Dave Jourdan was staring, incredulous.

Across from him there was something of that same incredulity in the eyes of Major Winant, looking at the pistol in his hand, at the slow spreading stain of red upon his breast.

Still staring, still with that bewildered look in his eyes, he sagged at the knees, pitched suddenly forward. Dave Jourdan knew then. He'd looked to the priming of his own gun, had made sure. Winant had carried a hidden gun primed with treachery. But in a poor place to keep it well primed with powder.

The hush was broken, soldiers starting forward. But above the confusion, Captain Mayes' voice rang sharply.

"Stand, men!" He whirled on Dave Jourdan. But Jourdan's voice came ahead of him, though the gun in his hand was empty now of all but smoke.

"Stand back yourself, Captain. We've been tricked, but you can see now that we're determined. We want no trouble, but this is a country as free to us as to England, and we're going on—to Oregon. Marty Lou shall at least die on Oregon soil."

His eyes were blazing, the others of the wagon train were lining swiftly to stand with him, guns ready. Mayes stared a moment, nodded.

"OF COURSE," he agreed. "Go on when you will, by all means." He was silent a moment, staring down at the sprawled form, on whose red head the last of the sun seemed to glint in mockery.

"I hope you will understand, gentlemen, and pardon us. Major Winant was my superior officer. Much as I might, personally, disapprove of his course, I had no choice but to obey his orders. . . . However, his death leaves me in command. Our orders from Eng-

land are two—to do all that we can, in conscience, to save Oregon territory for England. But to do nothing to impair the friendly relations now existing between England and the United States.

"Major Winant, shall we say . . . forgot that last part of the order. Because of the course he has taken, there is, it seems to me, only one way to prove England's sincerity in adding that second clause. So, as the representative of England, I offer you my apologies, and pledge you my word that you will not be hindered in any way. As proof, I offer you every assistance within my power."

Dave Jourdan stared a moment, gripped again the hand extended. His eyes traveled back to the big tree.

"Captain—is it true that Dr. Bonneville is five days away?"

Captain Mayes' boyish face was troubled.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jourdan. It is the unfortunate truth."

Oregon, just beyond. And Marty Lou was dying. . . . Mayes was speaking again.

"But it may not be so bad for all that. I happen to know that there's an Indian encampment only half a dozen miles ahead, right on your line of march. They have been friendly to England, a bit hostile, I'm afraid, to Americans. But I can arrange that difficulty. There's an old medicine man—"

He smiled whimsically.

"Even Bonneville would approve, I know. For I've seen this medicine man cure cases of this same fever, when they were at least as bad as your fiancée. In fact, old man," and his smile was warm, "I've seen him cure cases that looked worse!"

The Round Table



AN OPEN FORUM FOR OUR READERS

Well, here we go. What do you like in **GOLDEN FLEECE**? What don't you like? Let's start off with that eminent old salt, Bill Adams of Walnut Creek, Cal.

"In your **GOLDEN FLEECE** story about the *Whale's Way* I find this 'Shake the reef out of the royals.'

Well, I knew some hundreds of ships in the sailing days, and was supposed to be something of a smart sailor. I am said to know a little about ships. The ships I knew were fine vessels and most of them from say 1500 tons up to round 2700 net register. They none of them ever had a reef point on a royal. And their royals would be maybe round fifty or sixty feet at the head, by probably 18 or 24 in the leech. Whalers were, of course, small vessels. Everyone may make a mistake. I do not wish to say that your author is cockeyed in speaking of reefed royals. But—it sounds very goofy to me.

The royals were, as you no doubt know, the highest sails of all; except in such comparatively few ships as carried skysails. They were therefore the first sails to be lowered in squally weather; the first to be furled. I can't imagine reefing a royal under any possible conditions. I have seen, a very few times, a topgallantsail with reef points. The tglntsl was the next sail below the roy-

al. If no clipper ever reefed her royals, how should a whaler do so? Whalers were never in a hurry. They were not built for speed. They were slow bluff tubs, able to ride out any old weather; but lacking in anything approaching ability to sail.

I have photos of many clippers on my study walls. Not a one of them has a reef point even on a tglntsl. The sole ship that I have with reef points is the old *Roanoke*, a big wooden Maine four post barque. She has a reef band on her main and mizzen tglntsls. But of course none on her royals. It just wasn't done, unless I am a Dutchman.

Cheerio!"

Bill Adams, Walnut Creek, Cal.

To which Bert Shurtleff replies:

"Sorry, I'm afraid Bill Adams scores a touch. I should have said 'reefed topsails.' Whalers probably never carried reefpoints on the royals, or seldom if ever. I saw a model of the full rigged *Niger*, New Bedford, built by a former mate of her, which had reef points on her royals but that doesn't let me out. I really meant topsails—not royals. In some extenuation please remember I was writing 'Whale's Way' under time pressure to meet a deadline."

Mr. Shurtleff, by the way, comes of a whaling family, and uses his grandfather's log books for reference.

Allen P. Wescott "Action at Shimonoski" in November *GOLDEN FLEECE*, says that "the projectile-throwing engine in October is a trébuchet of circa 1300 rather than a balista of the Greeks and Romans, as captioned. A Roman soldier was anachronistically shown in the act of firing a weapon developed several centuries after his demise, an error quite on a par with picturing Leif Ericson with a Thompson gun under his arm. The balista, developed by the Greeks and subsequently used by the Romans, had the appearance of a massive crossbow."

Mr. Wescott, who is an artillery officer and a consultant in matters pertaining to small arms, ammunition and ordnance, has made an extensive study of the balista, catapult and other projectile-throwing engines of the ancients.

We plead guilty! It seems that artists have been perpetuating the original offender's error for hundreds of years.

Paul L. Perry of Los Angeles cheers us a bit, however:

"It is with pleasure that I again find such a magazine as the *GOLDEN FLEECE* on the market.

I prefer Historical Fiction from the French Revolution, back to the Dawn of Time. I can overlook an author's mistakes as to dates or periods; likewise the wrong formula of a chemist. We always have enough of these self-appointed critics on the market. What we accept as bona fide truth today, becomes fiction tomorrow. An author must be allowed the 'Laissez faire' of times and places when it comes to turning out good work. After all, when we read this kind of literature we read it mostly for pleasure and not for a fact-finding proposition.

I hope that my suggestions, however they are, will give you an impetus to offer us some real fiction, something many of us have yearned for for years."

Mr. Perry gives us some excellent ideas for stories, which we hope to carry out, as well as those of George Parke of Canton, Miss., who writes:

"It is impossible to decide between

Mundy and "Hyphen" Jones, for both excel in the field of ancient tales. Perhaps Mundy leads a little. Anything they write is sure to be good and always accurate as to location, character and history.

Shurtleff is also fine in his field and accurate in the smallest detail. I have visited the island of South Georgia and know a little about whaling, so this last story was most welcome.

I have just read Gibbon's Rome and Mundy's tale comes in appropriately as a finale.

The American Mandarin was fine and I approve of the plan to print shorts about unknown heroes. There are many in history.

Your illustrations are good and true to the text. Keep them that way always. Many artists stray far from the story—so far that I fear they never read it."

"I congratulate you on the splendid make-up of the magazine. In Harold Delay you have one of the finest artists available," says Richard Frank of Millheim, Pa.

From Waukegan, Ill., William J. Durka writes, "Beautiful cover, smooth edges, fine stories. What more can we ask?"

Miss Belle Danolds of Chicago wishes us success in our "laudable venture" and finds the magazine "refreshing and unique!"

Ottillie E. Wigley of New York City rebukes us:

"May I be permitted to say that the paper used is hardly in keeping with your articles and so eminent an artist as Harold S. Delay. Having gone to the expense of one renowned in his field as he is, proved your judgment good, and therefore I am surprised that you did not go all the way and make a clean cut magazine of it."

To this we must answer that our economy on paper alone, is the reason we can afford first-class stories and illustrations.

Says Edith King of New York City:

"In looking over the magazines at a newsstand was attracted to *GOLDEN FLEECE* by its cover—'tis excellent . . . and going into a scrapbook. The artist sure knows his stuff! . . . What would you think of including a good

animal story? A dog story for instance, a short one?"

The editors accused each other of writing this one, since animals are a mutual weakness around here. We hope our readers enjoy Anthony Rud's poor misunderstood problem-child, Lingga, the White Rogue.

"I was surprised and delighted to find the GOLDEN FLEECE magazine, and I am even more delighted after reading the wonderful stories it contains. In my opinion GOLDEN FLEECE is a great idea; it is so different and so much better than magazines now on the market.

The type of stories you are now publishing is great, and I am strictly against stories of the present and future. Especially stories of the future. I like the magazine just as it is. I do think, however, that it would be good to publish a story each month telling of some great moment in history.

May your magazine have everlasting success and may I continue to sit at your Round Table."

Hughes Robertson, Salisbury, Md.

"All success to your new magazine, GOLDEN FLEECE. It is not only interesting, but constructive as well. This magazine fills a long felt want in the 'pulp' field.

I especially liked 'Roman Holiday' by Talbot Mundy. Though in singling this story out, I do an injustice to the writers of the other excellent stories in this issue.

All in all, you have started out with an auspicious edition. I have every reason to believe you will continue to interest readers of these red blood stories."

Bond Davis, Hollywood, Cal.

"I was much interested in the first number of GOLDEN FLEECE, and about the only criticism I can make of it is that it lacked a Johnston McCulley yarn. I have been hoping to get one to you, and expect to do so in the very near future.

GOLDEN FLEECE impresses me as the sort of book that will grow in popularity slowly and surely until it has a profitable number of faithful readers. I'm wishing you all kinds of good luck and prosperity with it."

Johnston McCulley.

So hope we all!

"Your inaugural issue of GOLDEN FLEECE caught my glance at the newsstand and, being somewhat of an ardent reader for anything historical, I purchased a copy.

Let me say that you've got something there. GOLDEN FLEECE is a splendid title, depicting all the glamor and romance of the olden time as was Jason's quest for the fleece itself. Any magazine reader who sees your periodical is instantly curious to know what it's all about, and if the person is familiar with mythology he is aware of what is in store for him. With all these 'thrilling' this and 'thrilling' that cluttering the stands these days, one really appreciates a noteworthy title such as GOLDEN FLEECE without the benefit of a 'thrilling' mast-head, placing the magazine in the same class."—D. C. Fabers.

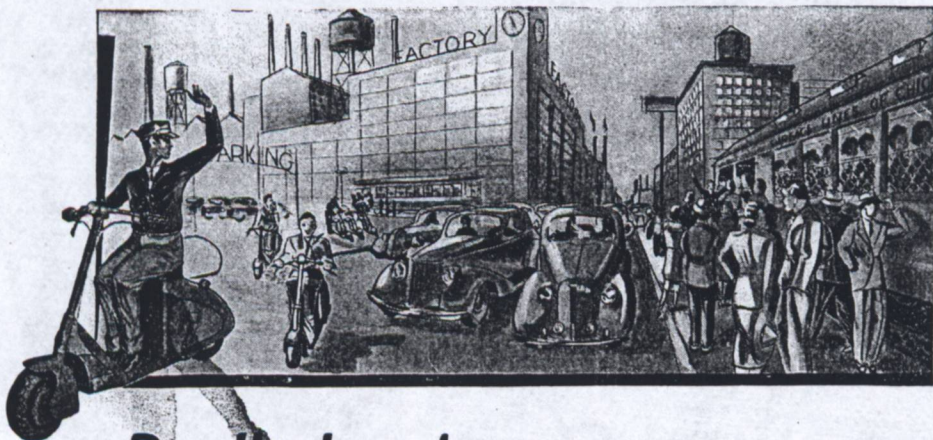
"I was glad to see your magazine come out. It's what I have been waiting for for a long time. And with CLIPPED EDGES, that was certainly swellegant. I was glad to see you start your magazine off with Talbot Mundy. I enjoyed his story very much. And Shurtleff's 'Whales Way' was beautifully written, so let's have more of these two authors. As for Bedford-Jones series, I need not say anything; he's always tops, and he overdid himself this time to make your magazine perfect. . . .

I noticed in your editorial that your policy is not fixed, subject to change according to the readers' demands. Well here is my demand, don't by all means make it modern adventure. The stands are overflowing with that trash. KEEP your magazine HISTORICAL ADVENTURE and add to it SCIENCE ADVENTURE. Then you would have something unique in magazine history. A novelty that could not be disregarded. I know that I will support your magazine either way you turn, but I wish it would be as I suggested. GOOD LUCK TO YOU."

John Giunta, Brooklyn, N. Y.

These and many other letters make us wish for an elastic ROUND TABLE, in default of which we say,

See you next month!



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