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RED BLADES OF BLACK CATHAY

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by
Tevis Clyde Smith
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February - March
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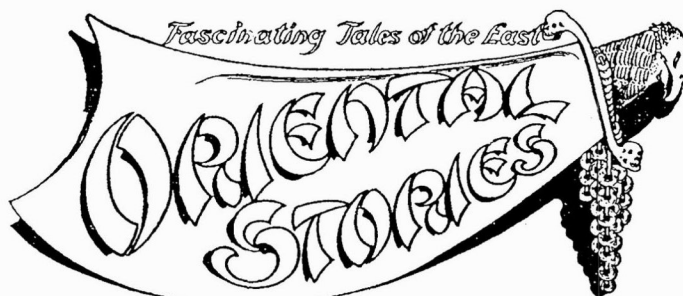
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The Seer Says! ..

*It is written
and it has been
said*

**That the next issue of this magazine will
contain a colorful group of superb stories.
Among these will be:**

TSANG, SEA CAPTAIN, by James W. Bennett

An up-to-the-minute tale of the Red revolution in China, full of thrills and vivid action.

THIS EXAMPLE, by S. B. H. Hurst

A tale of a love that conquered all obstacles—of a strange voyage across the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal—a story of Burma and the Andaman Islands.

THE DRAGON MAN'S SECRET, by Otis Adelbert Kline

Another tale of Hamed the Avar, and how he was dragged through tortures by Khallal the Strong.

HAWKS OF OUTREMER, by Robert E. Howard

A stirring tale of the Crusades, of Saladin, Lion of Islam, and Cormac Fitz-Geoffrey, intrepid Irish-Norman soldier of fortune.

TADO, SAMURAI, by Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner

A Japanese story of a youngster who proved himself worthy of his Samurai ancestry.

THE FANATIC, by Kobold Knight

The Moplah rebellion broke out in bloody fury, and a grim incident of the revolt occurred in Pallampaki, whither an English woman had come to "convert the heathen."

BIBI LOVE, by Solon K. Stewart

A romantic story of the love of a British soldier for an Arab girl—a tale of the Mesopotamian campaign.

APRIL-MAY ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 15



S B. H. HURST, whose stories are one of the strongest features of ORIENTAL STORIES, bemoans the Europeanization of the Orient. "Afghanistan," writes Mr. Hurst, in a letter to the editor, "is probably the last left of the real backward Orient, since Turkey has become modernized, and China never gave me so much the feeling of the Oriental as merely different from England. The Orient seems to demand houris and Persian poetry, both of which are found in Afghanistan, while a slant-eyed Chinese woman lacks entirely the voluptuous, romantic, mysterious appeal of the Aryan Oriental. Afghanistan as yet lacks any railroad, unless one has just been built, which is doubtful."

The coronation of Nadir Shah as Amir of Afghanistan, according to the news dispatches, was truly European in character, and shows that Afghanistan has changed vastly in the few years since Mr. Hurst was in that strange and picturesque land. The principal actors in the coronation ceremonies rode to the coronation in American-made cars, and Nadir Shah himself arrived in a Rolls-Royce. Airplanes zoomed overhead, and after the coronation, Afghan school children, in European clothes, put on a football game for the entertainment of the spectators. Alas for the picturesqueness of the Orient, when even in Afghanistan such Europeanization holds! And King Feisal of Irak flew to the sickbed of his father in Cyprus by airplane. And the rickshaw coolies of Shanghai have called a strike. Modernization is slowly forcing the world into a common standard of customs.

The picturesque Orient, however, will continue to live and breathe in the pages of this magazine. Hurst himself has written a thrilling story of Afghanistan of a few years back—Afghanistan as he remembers it so vividly. He has given it the flavor of Kabul—the slow, dream-like, yet brutal, quality of its coffee shops. And the end of the yarn is about the most dramatic thing he ever wrote. This story, *The Test of a Ghost*, will be published soon in ORIENTAL STORIES.

The first of our historical tales, *Red Blades of Black Cathay*, appears in the current issue. Although this magazine will present the glamor and mystery of contemporary Asia, we will publish an occasional historical tale, bringing to you the picture in vivid action of past epochs. That is, we will do so if you want us to. These stories will be selected not because they are historical, but because they are corking good stories, replete with thrills and fascinating interest, and filled with the flavor of the Orient. We will publish another historical tale in our next issue: *Hawks of Outremer*, by Robert E. Howard. This is a tale of the Crusades, Outremer

(Continued on page 429)



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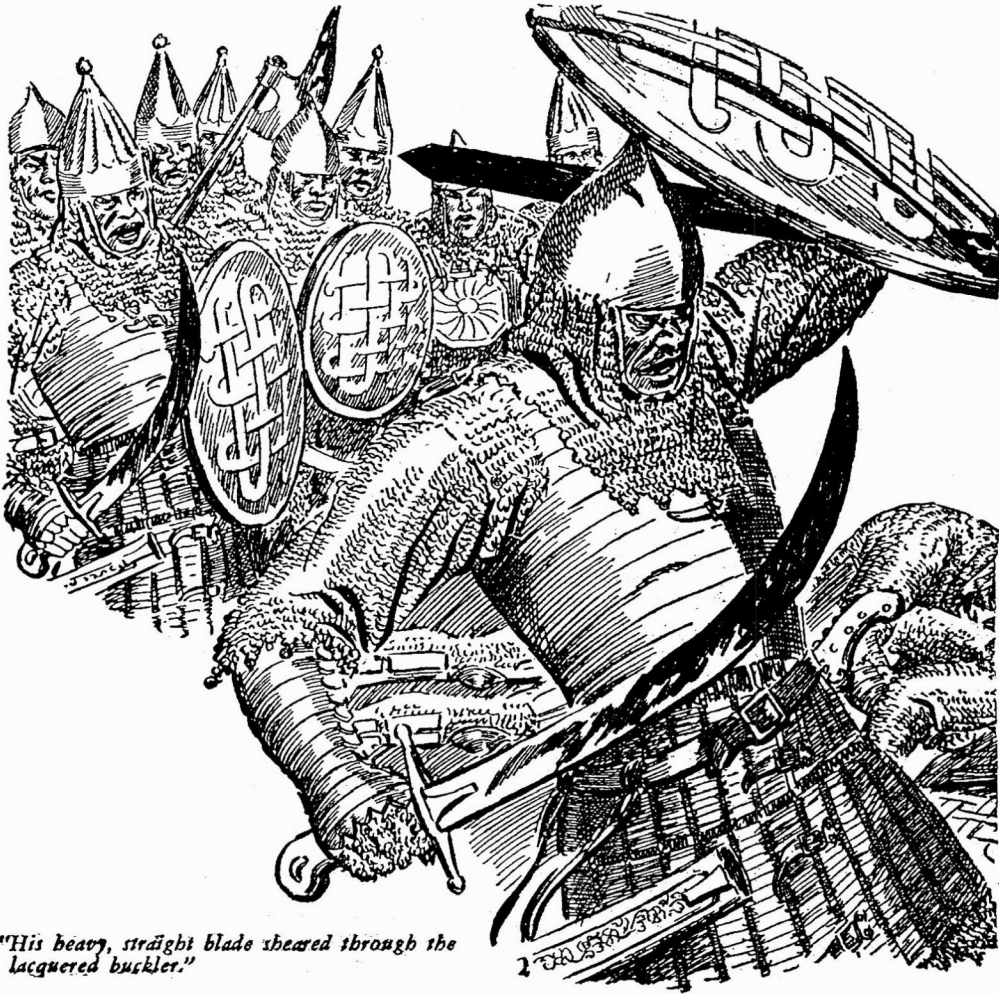
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"His heavy, straight blade sheared through the lacquered buckler."

Red Blades of Black Cathay

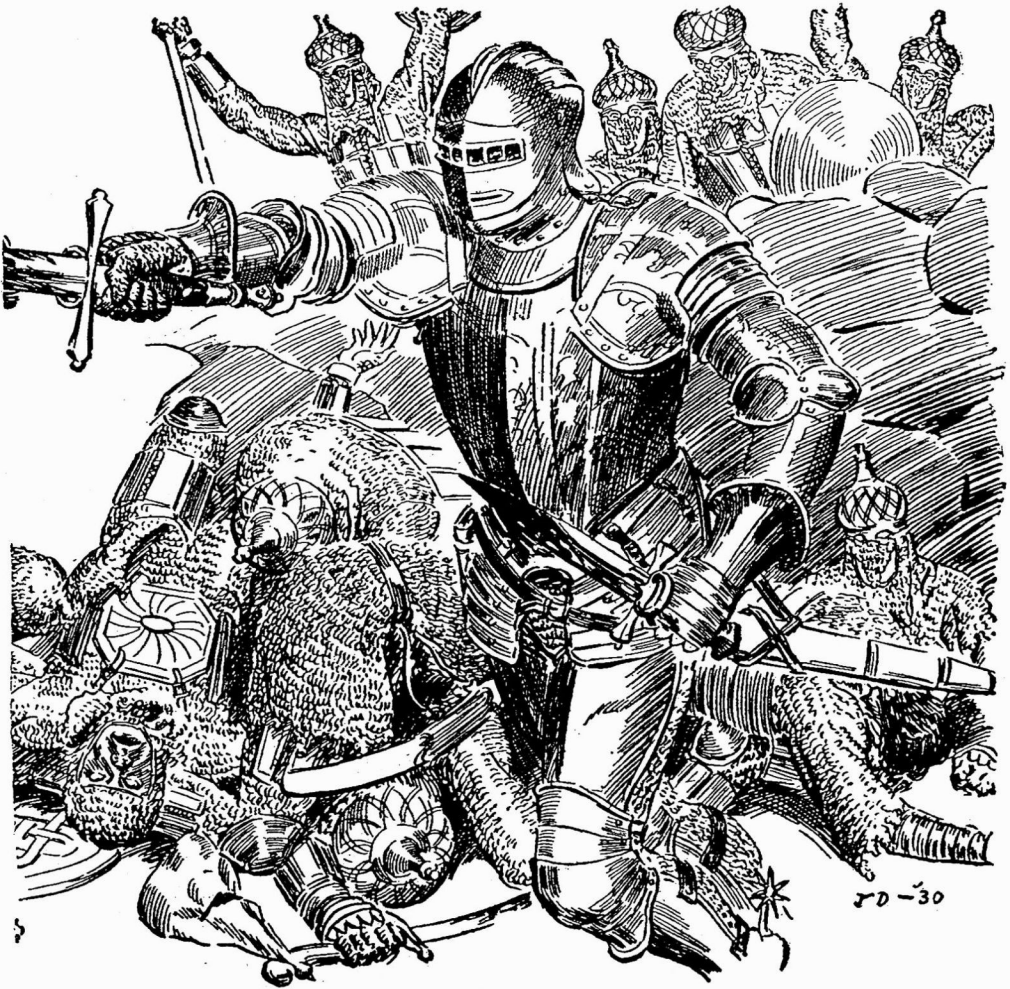
By TEVIS C. SMITH and ROBERT E. HOWARD

A Vivid Tale of Genghis Khan

Trumpets die in the loud parade,
The gray mist drinks the spears;
Banners of glory sink and fade
In the dust of a thousand years.
Singers of pride the silence stills,
The ghost of empire goes,

294

But a song still lives in the ancient hills,
And the scent of a vanished rose.
Ride with us on a dim, lost road
To the dawn of a distant day,
When swords were bare for a guerdon rare—
The Flower of Black Cathay.



CHAPTER 1

THE singing of the swords was a deathly clamor in the brain of Godric de Villehard. Blood and sweat veiled his eyes and in the instant of blindness he felt a keen point pierce a joint of his hauberk and sting deep into his ribs. Smiting blindly, he felt the jarring impact that meant his sword had gone home, and snatching an instant's grace, he flung back his vizor and wiped the redness from his eyes. A single glance only was allowed him: in that glance he had a fleeting glimpse of huge, wild black mountain; of a clump of mail-clad warriors, ringed by a howling horde

of human wolves; and in the center of that clump, a slim, silk-clad shape standing between a dying horse and a dying swordsman. Then the wolfish figures surged in on all sides, hacking like madmen.

"Christ and the Cross!" the old Crusading shout rose in a ghastly croak from Godric's parched lips. As if far away he heard voices gaspingly repeat the words. Curved sabers rained on shield and helmet. Godric's eyes blurred to the sweep of frenzied dark faces with bristling, foam-flecked beards. He fought like a man in a dream. A great weariness fettered his limbs. Somewhere—long ago it

seemed—a heavy ax, shattering on his helm, had bitten through an old dent to rend the scalp beneath. He heaved his curiously weighted arm above his head and split a bearded face to the chin.

"*En avant, Montferrat!*" We must hack through and shatter the gates, thought the dazed brain of Godric; we can not long stand this press, but once within the city—no—these walls were not the walls of Constantinople: he was mad; he dreamed—these towering heights were the crags of a lost and nameless land and Montferrat and the Crusade lay lost in leagues and years.

Godric's steed reared and pitched headlong, throwing his rider with a clash of armor. Under the lashing hoofs and the shower of blades, the knight struggled clear and rose, without his shield, blood starting from every joint in his armor. He reeled, bracing himself; he fought not these foes alone, but the long grinding days behind—the days and days of hard riding and ceaseless fighting.

Godric thrust upward and a man died. A simitar shivered on his crest, and the wielder, torn from his saddle by a hand that was still iron, spilled his entrails at Godric's feet. The rest reined in around howling, seeking to overthrow the giant Frank by sheer weight of numbers. Somewhere in the hellish din a woman's scream knifed the air. A clatter of hoofs burst like a sudden whirlwind and the press was cleared. Through a red mist the dulling eyes of the knight saw the wolfish, skin-clad assailants swept away by a sudden flood of mailed riders who hacked them down and trampled them under.

Then men were dismounting around him, men whose gaudy silvered armor, high fur kaftans and two-handed simitars he saw as in a dream. One with thin drooping mustaches adorning his dark face spoke to him in a Turkish tongue

the knight could faintly understand, but the burden of the words was unintelligible. He shook his head.

"I can not linger," Godric said, speaking slowly and with growing difficulty, "De Montferrat awaits my report and I must—ride—East—to—find—the—kingdom—of—Prester—John—bid—my—men—mount——"

His voice trailed off. He saw his men; they lay about in a silent, sword-gashed cluster, dead as they had lived—facing the foe. Suddenly the strength flowed from Godric de Villehard in a great surge and he fell as a blasted tree falls. The red mist closed about him, but ere it engulfed him utterly, he saw bending near him two great dark eyes, strangely soft and luminous, that filled him with formless yearning; in a world grown dim and unreal they were the one tangible reality and this vision he took with him into a nightmare realm of shadows.

GODRIC'S return to waking life was as abrupt as his departure. He opened his eyes to a scene of exotic splendor. He was lying on a silken couch near a wide window whose sill and bars were of chased gold. Silken cushions littered the marble floor and the walls were of mosaics where they were not worked in designs of gems and silver, and were hung with heavy tapestries of silk, satin and cloth-of-gold. The ceiling was a single lofty dome of lapis-lazuli from which was suspended on golden chains a censer that shed a faint alluring scent over all. Through the window a faint breeze wafted scents of spices, roses and jasmine, and beyond Godric could see the clear blue of the Asian skies.

He tried to rise and fell back with a startled exclamation. Whence this strange weakness? The hand he lifted to his gaze was thinner than should be, and its bronze was faded. He gazed in perplex-

ity at the silken, almost feminine garments which clothed him, and then he remembered—the long wandering, the battle, the slaughter of his men-at-arms. His heart turned sick within him as he remembered the staunch faithfulness of the men he had led to the shambles.

A tall, thin yellow man with a kindly face entered and smiled to see that he was awake and in his right mind. He spoke to the knight in several languages unknown to Godric, then used one easy to understand—a rough Turkish dialect much akin to the bastard tongue used by the Franks in their contacts with the Turanian peoples.

"What place is this?" asked Godric. "How long have I lain here?"

"You have lain here many days," answered the other. "I am You-tai, the emperor's man-of-healing. This is the heaven-born empire of Black Cathay. The princess Yulita has attended you with her own hands while you lay raving in delirium. Only through her care and your own marvelous natural strength have you survived. When she told the emperor how you with your small band recklessly charged and delivered her from the hands of the Hian bandits who had slain her guard and taken her prisoner, the heavenly one gave command that naught be spared to preserve you. Who are you, most noble lord? While you raved you spoke of many unknown peoples, places and battles and your appearance is such as to show that you come from afar."

Godric laughed, and bitterness was in his laughter.

"Aye," quoth he, "I have ridden far; the deserts have parched my lips and the mountains have wearied my feet. I have seen Trebizond in my wanderings, and Teheran and Bokhara and Samarcand. I have looked on the waters of the Black Sea and the Sea of Ravens. From Constantinople far to the west I set forth

more than a year ago, riding eastward. I am a knight of Normandy, Sir Godric de Villehard."

"I have heard of some of the places you name," answered You-tai, "but many of them are unknown to me. Eat now, and rest. In time the princess Yulita will come to you."

So Godric ate the curiously spiced rice, the dates and candied meats, and drank the colorless rice wine brought him by a flat-faced girl slave who wore golden bangles on her ankles, and soon slept, and sleeping, his unquenchable vitality began to assert itself.

When he awoke from that long sleep he felt refreshed and stronger, and soon the pearl-inlaid doors opened and a slight, silk-clad figure entered. Godric's heart suddenly pounded as he again felt the soft, tender gaze of those great dark eyes upon him. He drew himself together with an effort; was he a boy to tremble before a pair of eyes, even though they adorned the face of a princess?

Long used was he to the veiled women of the Moslems, and Yulita's creamy cheeks with her full ruby lips were like an oasis in the waste.

"I am Yulita," the voice was soft, vibrant and musical as the silvery tinkle of the fountain in the court outside. "I wish to thank you. You are brave as Rustum. When the Hians rushed from the defiles and cut down my guard, I was afraid. You answered my screams as unexpectedly and boldly as a hero sent down from paradise. I am sorry your brave men died."

"And I likewise," the Norman answered with the bluntness of his race, "but it was their trade: they would not have had it otherwise and they could not have died in a better cause."

"But why did you risk your life to aid me, who am not of your race and

whom you never saw before?" she pursued.

Godric might have answered as would nine out of any ten knights in his position—with the repeating of the vow of chivalry, to protect all weaker things. But being Godric de Villehard, he shrugged his shoulders. "God knows. I should have known it was death to us all to charge that horde. I have seen too much rapine and outrage since I turned my face east to have thus thrown away my men and expedition in the ordinary course of events. Perhaps I saw at a glance you were of regal blood and followed the knight's natural instinct to rush to the aid of royalty."

She bowed her head. "I am sorry."

"I am not," he growled. "My men would have died anyhow today or tomorrow—now they are at rest. We have ridden through hell for more than a year. Now they are beyond the sun's heat and the Turk's saber."

She rested her chin on her hands and her elbows on her knees, leaning forward to gaze deep into his eyes. His senses swam momentarily. Her eyes traversed his mighty frame to return to his face. Thin-lipped, with cold gray eyes, Godric de Villehard's sun-darkened, clean-shaven face inspired trust and respect in men but there was little in his appearance to stir the heart of a woman. The Norman was not past thirty, but his hard life had carved his face into inflexible lines. Rather than the beauty that appeals to women, there was in his features the lean strength of the hunting wolf. The forehead was high and broad, the brow of a thinker, and once the mouth had been kindly, the eyes those of a dreamer. But now his eyes were bitter and his whole appearance that of a man with whom life has dealt hardly—who has ceased to look for mercy or to give it.

"Tell me, Sir Godric," said Yulita,

"whence come you and why have you ridden so far with so few men?"

"It's a long tale," he answered. "It had its birth in a land half-way across the world. I was a boy and full of high ideals of chivalry and knighthood—and I hated that Saxon-French pig, King John. A wine-bibber named Fulk of Neuilly began ranting and screaming death and damnation because the Holy Land was still in the possession of the Paynim. He howled until he stirred the blood of such young fools as myself, and the barons began recruiting men—forgetting how the other Crusades had ended.

"Walter de Brienne and that black-faced cutthroat Simon de Montfort fired us young Normans with promises of salvation and Turkish loot, and we set forth. Boniface and Baldwin were our leaders and they plotted against each other all the way to Venice.

"There the mercenary Venetians refused us ships and it sickened my very entrails to see our chiefs go down on their knees to those merchant swine. They promised us ships at last but they set such a high price we could not pay. None of us had any money, else we had never started on that mad venture. We wrenched the jewels from our hilts and the gold from our buckles and raised part of the money, bargaining to take various cities from the Greeks and give them over to Venice for the rest of the price. The Pope—Innocent III—raged, but we went our ways and quenched our swords in Christian blood instead of Paynim.

"Spalato we took, and Ragusa, Sebenico and Zara. The Venetians got the cities and we got the glory," here Godric laughed harshly. A quick glance told him the girl was sitting spellbound, eyes aglow. Somehow he felt ashamed.

"Well," he continued, "young Alexius who had been driven from Constantino-

ple persuaded us that it would be doing God's work to put old Angelus back on the throne, so we fared forth.

"We took Constantinople with no great difficulty, but only a scant time had elapsed before the maddened people strangled old Angelus and we were forced to take the city again. This time we sacked it and split the empire up. De Montfort had long returned to England and I fought under Boniface of Montferrat, who was made King of Macedonia. One day he called me to him, and said he: 'Godric, the Turkomans harry the caravans and the trade of the East dries up because of constant war. Take a hundred men-at-arms and find me this kingdom of Prester John. He too is a Christian and we may establish a route of trade between us, guarded by both of us, and thus safeguard the caravans.'

"Thus he spoke, being a natural-born liar and unable to tell the truth on a wager. I saw through his design and understood his wish for me to conquer this fabulous kingdom for him.

"'Only a hundred men?' quoth I.

"'I can not spare you more,' said he, 'lest Baldwin and Dandolo and the Count of Blois come in and cut my throat. These are enow. Gain ye to Prester John and abide with him awhile—aid him in his wars for a space, then send riders to report your progress to me. Mayhap then I can send you more men.' And his eyelids drooped in a way I knew.

"'But where lies this kingdom?' said I.

"'Easy enough,' said he; 'to the east—any fool can find it if he fares far enough.'

"So," Godric's face darkened, "I rode east with a hundred heavily armed horsemen—the pick of the Norman warriors. By Satan, we hacked our way through! Once past Trebizond we had to fight almost every mile. We were assailed by

Turks, Persians and Kirghiz, as well as by our natural foes of heat, thirst and hunger. A hundred men—there were less than a score with me when I heard your screams and rode out of the defiles. Their bodies lie scattered from the hills of Black Cathay to the shores of the Black Sea. Arrows, spears, swords, all took their toll, but still I forged eastward."

"And all for your liege lord!" cried Yulita, her eyes sparkling, as she clasped her hands. "Oh, it is like the tales of honor and chivalry; of Iran and those You-tai has told me of the heroes of ancient Cathay. It makes my blood burn! You too are a hero such as all men were once in the days of our ancestors, with your courage and loyalty!"

The sting of his healing wounds bit into Godric.

"Loyalty?" he snarled. "To that devious-minded assassin, Montferrat? Bah! Do you think I intended giving up my life to carve out a kingdom for him? He had naught to lose and all to gain. He gave me a handful of men, expecting to receive the rewards of what I did. If I failed, he was still winner, for he would be rid of a turbulent vassal. The kingdom of Prester John is a dream and a fantasy. I have followed a will-o'-the-wisp for a thousand miles. A dream that receded farther and farther into the mazes of the East, leading me to my doom."

"And had you found it, what then?" asked the girl, grown suddenly quiet.

Godric shrugged his shoulders. It was not the Norman way to flaunt secret ambitions to any chance-met man or woman, but after all, he owed his life to this girl. She had paid her debt to him and there was something in her eyes. . . .

"Had I found Prester John's kingdom," said Godric, "I had made shift to conquer it for myself."

"Look," Yulita took Godric's arm and pointed out a gold-barred window, whose

sheer silken curtains, blowing inward, disclosed the rugged peaks of distant mountains, shouldering against the blazing blue of the skies.

"Beyond those mountains lies the kingdom of him you call Prester John."

Godric's eyes gleamed suddenly with the conquering spirit of the true Norman—the born empire-maker, whose race had carved out kingdoms with their swords in every land of the West and Near East.

"And does he dwell in purple-domed palaces of gold and glittering gems?" he asked eagerly. "Do, as I have heard, learned philosophers and magi sit at either hand, doing wonders with stars and suns and ghosts of the mighty dead? Does his city loom among the clouds with golden spires thrusting among the stars? And does the deathless monarch, who learned at the feet of our fair Lord Christ, sit on an ivory throne in a room whose walls are carved of one great sapphire dispensing justice?"

She shook her head.

"Prester John—Wang Khan we name him—is very old, but he is not deathless nor has he ever been beyond the confines of his own kingdom. His people are the Keraites—Krits—Christians; they dwell in cities, true, but the houses are mud huts and goatskin tents, and the palace of Wang Khan is as a hut itself compared to this palace."

Godric fell back and his eyes went dull.

"My dream is vanished," he muttered. "You should have let me die."

"Dream again, man," she answered; "only dream something more attainable."

Shaking his head, he looked into her eyes.

"Dreams of empire have haunted my life," said he, "yet even now the shadow of a dream lingers in my soul, ten times less attainable than the kingdom of Prester John."

CHAPTER 2

"Scrawled screens and secret gardens —
And insect-laden skies—
Where fiery plains stretch on and on
To the purple country of Prester John
And the walls of Paradise."
—Chesterton.

THE days passed and slowly the giant frame of the Norman knight regained its accustomed vigor. In those days he sat in the chamber with the lapis-lazuli dome, or walked in the outer courts where fountains tinkled musically beneath the shade of cherry trees, and soft petals fell in a colorful rain about him. The battle-scarred warrior felt strangely out of place in this setting of exotic luxury but was inclined to rest there and lull the restlessness of his nature for a time. He saw nothing of the city, Jahadur, for the walls about the courts were high, and he presently understood that he was practically a prisoner. He saw only Yulita, the slaves and You-tai. With the thin yellow man he talked much. You-tai was a Cathayan—a member of the race who lived in Greater Cathay, some distance to the south. This empire, Godric soon realized, had given rise to many of the tales of Prester John; it was an ancient, mighty but now loosely knit empire, divided into three kingdoms—the Khitai, the Chin and the Sung. You-tai was learned beyond any man Godric had ever known and he spoke freely.

"The emperor inquires often after your health," said he, "but I tell you frankly, it were best that you be not presented to him for a time at least. Since your great battle with the Hian bandits, you have captured the fancy of the soldiers, especially old Roogla, the general who loves the princess like his own since he bore her as a babe on his saddle-bow from the ruins of Than when the Naimans raided over the border. Chamu Khan fears any one the army loves. He fears you might

be a spy. He fears most things, does the emperor, even his niece, the princess Yulita."

"She does not look like the Black Cathayan girls I have seen," commented Godric; "her face is not flat, nor do her eyes slant as much."

"She has Iranian blood," answered You-tai. "She is the daughter of a royal Black Cathayan and a Persian woman."

"I see sadness in her eyes, at times," said Godric.

"She remembers that she is soon to leave her mountain home," answered You-tai, eyeing Godric closely. "She is to marry prince Wang Yin of the Chin emperors. Chamu Khan has promised her to him, for he is anxious to gain favor with Cathay. The emperor fears Genghis Khan."

"Who is Genghis Khan?" Godric asked idly.

"A chief of the Yakka Mongols. He has grown greatly in power for the last decade. His people are nomads—fierce fighters who have so little to live for in their barren deserts that they do not mind dying. Long ago their ancestors, the Hiong-nu, were driven into the Gobi by my ancestors, the Cathayans. They are divided into many tribes and fight against one another, but Genghis Khan seems to be uniting them by conquest. I even hear wild tales that he plans to shake off the liege-ship of Cathay and even make war on his masters. But that is foolish. This small kingdom is different. Though Hia and the Keraites lie between Chamu Khan and the Yakkas, Genghis Khan is a real threat to this mountain empire.

"Black Cathay has grown to be a kingdom apart, pent in the fastnesses where no strong foe has come against them for ages. They are neither Turks nor Chinese any longer, but constitute a separate nation of their own, with separate traditions. They have never needed any alli-

ances for protection, but now since they have grown soft and degenerate from long years of peace, even Chamu realizes their weakness and seeks to ally his house with that of the Chins of Cathay."

Godric mused a space. "It would seem Jahadur is the key to Black Cathay. These Mongols must first take this city to make sure of their conquests. No doubt the walls throng with archers and spearmen?"

You-tai spread his hands helplessly. "No man knows the mind of Chamu Khan. There are scarce fifteen hundred warriors in the city. Chamu has even sent our strongest detachment—a troop of hard-riding western Turks—to another part of the empire. Why, no one knows. I beg you, stir not from the court until I tell you. Chamu Khan deems you a spy of Genghis Khan, I fear, and it were best if he did not send for you."

BUT Chamu Khan did call for Godric before many days had drifted by. The emperor gave him audience, not in the great throne room, but in a small chamber where Chamu Khan squatted like a great fat toad on a silken divan attended by a huge black muté with a two-handed simitar. Godric veiled the contempt in his eyes and answered Chamu Khan's questions regarding his people and his country with patience. He wondered at the absurdity of most of these questions, and at the emperor's evident ignorance and stupidity. Old Roogla, the general, a fiercely mustached, barrel-chested savage, was present and he said nothing, but his eyes strayed in comparison from the fat, helpless mass of flesh and arrogance on the cushions to the erect, broad-shouldered figure and hard, scarred face of the Frank.

From the corner of his eye Chamu Khan observed this but he was not altogether a fool. He spoke pleasantly to Godric, but the wary Norman, used to

dealing with rulers, sensed that dislike was mixed with the khan's feeling of obligation, and that this dislike was mingled with fear. Chamu asked him suddenly of Genghis Khan and watched him narrowly. The sincerity of the knight's reply evidently convinced Chamu, for a shadow of relief passed over his fat face. After all, decided Godric, it was but natural that an emperor should be suspicious of a stranger in his realm, especially one of such war-like aspects as the Norman knew himself to be.

At the end of the interview, Chamu fastened a heavy golden chain about Godric's neck with his own pudgy hands. Then Godric went back to his chamber with the lapis-lazuli dome, to the cherry blossoms drifting in gay-colored clouds from the breeze-shaken trees, and to lazy strolls and talks with Yulita.

"It seems strange," said he abruptly one day, "that you are to leave this land and go to another. Somehow I can not think of you save as a slim girl forever under these blossom-heavy trees, with the dreamy fountains singing and the mountains of Black Cathay rising against the skies."

She caught her breath and turned away her face as if from an inner hurt.

"There are cherry trees in Cathay," said she, without looking at him, "and fountains too—and finer palaces than I have ever seen."

"But there are no such mountains," returned the knight.

"No," her voice was low, "there are no such mountains—nor——"

"Nor what?"

"No Frankish knight to save me from bandits," she laughed suddenly and gayly.

"Nor will there be here, long," he said somberly. "The time approaches when I must take the trail again. I come of a

restless breed and I have dallied here overlong."

"Whither will you go, oh Godric?" Did she catch her breath suddenly as she spoke?

"Who knows?" In his voice was the ancient bitterness that his heathen Viking ancestors knew. "The world is before me—but not all the world with its shining leagues of sea or sand can quench the hunger that is in me. I must ride—that is all I know. I must ride till the ravens pluck my bones. Perchance I will ride back to tell Montferrat that his dream of an Eastern empire is a bubble that has burst. Perhaps I will ride east again."

"Not east," she shook her head. "The ravens are gathering in the east and there is a red flame there that pales the night. Wang Khan and his Keraites have fallen before the riders of Genghis Khan and Hia reels before his onslaught. Black Cathay too, I fear, is doomed, unless the Chins send them aid."

"Would you care if I fell?" he asked curiously.

Her clear eyes surveyed him.

"Would I care? I would care if a dog died. Surely then I would care if a man who saved my life, fell."

He shrugged his mighty shoulders. "You are kind. Today I ride. My wounds are long healed. I can lift my sword again. Thanks to your care I am strong as I ever was. This has been paradise—but I come of a restless breed. My dream of a kingdom is shattered and I must ride—somewhere. I have heard much from the slaves and You-tai of this Genghis Khan and his chiefs. Aye, of Subotai and Chepe Noyon. I will lend my sword to him——"

"And fight against my people?" she asked.

His gaze fell before her clear eyes. "'Twere the deed of a dog," he muttered. "But what would you have? I am

a soldier—I have fought for and against the same men since I rode east. A warrior must pick the winning side. And Genghis Khan, from all accounts, is a born conqueror."

Her eyes flashed. "The Cathayans will send out an army and crush him. He can not take Jahadur—what do his skin-clad herders know of walled cities?"

"We were but a naked horde before Constantinople," muttered Godric, "but we had hunger to drive us on and the city fell. Genghis and his men are hungry. I have seen men of the same breed. Your people are fat and indolent. Genghis Khan will ride them down like sheep."

"And you will aid him," she blazed.

"War is a man's game," he said roughly; shame hardened his tone; this slim, clear-eyed girl, so ignorant and innocent of the world's ways, stirred old dreams of idealistic chivalry in his soul—dreams he thought long lost in the fierce necessity of life. "What do you know of war and men's perfidy? A warrior must better himself as he may. I am weary of fighting for lost causes and getting only hard blows in return."

"What if I asked you—begged you?" she breathed, leaning forward.

A sudden surge of madness swept him off his feet.

"For you," he roared suddenly, like a wounded lion, "I would ride down on the Mongol yurts alone and crush them into the red earth and bring back the heads of Genghis and his khans in a cluster at my saddle-bow!"

She recoiled, gasping before the sudden loosing of his passion, but he caught her in an unconsciously rough embrace. His race loved as they hated, fiercely and violently. He would not have bruised her tender skin for all the gold in Cathay, but his own savagery swept him out of himself.

Then a sudden voice brought him to himself and he released the girl and whirled, ready to battle the whole Black Cathayan army. Old Roogla stood before them, panting.

"My princess," he gasped; "the courtiers from Greater Cathay—they have just arrived——"

She went white and cold as a statue.

"I am ready, oh Roogla," she whispered.

"Ready the devil!" roared the old soldier. "Only three of them got through to the gates of Jahadur and they're bleeding to death! You are not going to Cathay to marry Wang Yin. Not now, at least. And you'll be lucky if you're not dragged by the hair to Subotai's yurt. The hills are swarming with Mongols. They cut the throats of the watchers in the passes, and ambushed the courtiers from Cathay. An hour will bring them—the whole horde of howling devils—to the very gates of Jahadur. Chamu Khan is capering about like a devil with a hornet in his khalat. We can't send you out now—Genghis holds all the outer passes. The western Turks might give you sanctuary—but we can not reach them. There's only one thing to do—and that's hold the city! But with these fat, perfume-scented, wine-bibbing dogs that call themselves soldiery we'll be lucky if we get to strike a single blow in our defense——"

Yulita turned to Godric with level eyes.

"Genghis Khan is at our gates," said she. "Go to him." And turning she walked swiftly into a near-by doorway.

"What did she mean?" asked old Roogla wonderingly.

Godric growled deep in his throat. "Bring my armor and my sword. I go to seek Genghis Khan—but not as she thought."

Roogla grinned and his beard bristled.

He smote Godric a blow that had rendered a lesser man senseless.

"Hai, wolf-brother!" he roared; "we'll give Genghis a fight yet! We'll send him back to the desert to lick his wounds if we can only keep three men in the army from fleeing! They can stand behind us and hand us weapons when we break our swords and axes, while we pile up Mongol dead so high that the women on the battlements will look up at them!"

Godric smiled thinly.

CHAPTER 3

"To grow old cowed in a conquered land,
With the sun itself disrowned,
To see trees crouch and cattle slink—
Death is a better ale to drink,
And by high Death on the fell brink,
That flagon shall go round,"

—Chesterton.

GODRIC's armor had been mended cleverly, he found, the rents in hauberk and helmet fused with such skill that no sign of a gash showed. The knight's armor was unusually strong, anyway, and of a weight few men could have borne. The blades that had wounded him in the battle of the defiles had hacked through old dents. Now that these were mended, the armor was like new. The heavy mail was reinforced with solid plates of steel on breast, back and shoulders and the sword belt was of joined steel plates a hand's breadth wide. The helmet, instead of being merely a steel cap with a long nasal, worn over a mail hood, as was the case of most Crusaders, was made with a vizor and fitted firmly into the steel shoulder-pieces. The whole armor showed the trend of the times—chain and scale mail giving way gradually to plate armor.

Godric experienced a fierce resurgence of power as he felt the familiar weight of his mail and fingered the worn hilt of his long, two-handed sword. The languorous illusive dreaminess of the past weeks van-

ished; again he was a conqueror of a race of conquerors. With old Roogla he rode to the main gates, seeing on all hands the terror that had seized the people. Men and women ran distractedly through the streets, crying that the Mongols were upon them; they tied their belongings into bundles, loaded them on donkeys and jerked them off again, shouting reproaches at the soldiers on the walls, who seemed as frightened as the people.

"Cowards!" old Roogla's beard bristled. "What they need is war to stiffen their thews. Well, they've got war now and they'll have to fight."

"A man can always run," answered Godric sardonically.

They came to the outer gates and found a band of soldiery there, handling their pikes and bows nervously. They brightened slightly as Roogla and Godric rode up. The tale of the Norman's battle with the Hian bandits had lost nothing in the telling. But Godric was surprised to note their fewness.

"Are these all your soldiers?"

Roogla shook his head.

"Most of them are at the Pass of Skulls," he growled. "It's the only way a large force of men can approach Jahadur. In the past we've held it easily against all comers—but these Mongols are devils. I left enough men here to hold the city against any stray troops that might climb down the cliffs."

They rode out of the gates and down the winding mountain trail. On one side rose a sheer wall, a thousand feet high. On the other side the cliff fell away three times that distance into a fathomless chasm. A mile's ride brought them to the Pass of Skulls. Here the trail debouched into a sort of upland plateau, passing between two walls of sheer rock.

A thousand warriors were encamped there, gaudy in their silvered mail, long-

toed leather boots and gold-chased weapons. With their peaked helmets with mail drops, their long spears and wide-bladed simitars, they seemed war-like enough. They were big men, but they were evidently nervous and uncertain.

"By the blood of the devil, Roogla," snapped Godric, "have you no more soldiers than these?"

"Most of the troops are scattered throughout the empire," Roogla answered. "I warned Chamu Khan to collect all the warriors in the empire here, but he refused to do so. Why, Erlik alone knows. Well, a man can always die."

He rose in his saddle and his great voice roared through the hills:

"Men of Black Cathay, you know me of old! But here beside me is one you know only by word of mouth; a chief out of the West who will fight beside you today. Now take heart, and when Genghis comes up the defile, show him Black Cathayans can still die like men!"

"Not so fast," growled Godric. "This pass looks impregnable to me. May I have a word as to the arranging of the troops?"

Roogla spread his hands, "Assuredly."

"Then set men to work rebuilding that barricade," snapped Godric, pointing to the wavering lines of stone, half tumbled down, which spanned the pass. "Build it high and block that gate. There'll be no caravans passing through today. I thought you were a soldier; it should have been done long ago. Put your best bowmen behind the first line of stone. Then the spearmen, and the swordsmen and ax-fighters behind the spearmen——"

THE long hot day wore on. At last far away sounded the deep rattle of many kettledrums, then a thunder of

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myriad hoofs. Then up the deep defile and out onto the plateau swept a bizarre and terrible horde. Godric had expected a wild, motley mass of barbarians, like a swarm of locusts without order or system. These men rode in compact formation, of such as he had never before seen; in well ordered ranks, divided into troops of a thousand each.

The tugh, the yak-tail standards, were lifted above them. At the sight of their orderly array and hard-bitten appearance, Godric's heart sank. These men were used to fierce warfare; they outnumbered his own soldiers by seven times. How could he hope to hold the pass against them, even for a little while? Godric swore deeply and fervently and put the hope of survival from him; thereafter during the whole savage fight, his one idea was to do as much damage to the enemy as he possibly could before he died.

Now he stood on the first line of fortifications and gazed curiously at the advancing hosts, seeing stocky, broad-built men mounted on wiry horses, men with square flat faces, devoid of humor or mercy, whose armor was plain stuff of hardened leather, lacquer, or iron plates laced together. With a wry face he noted the short, heavy bows and long arrows. From the look of those bows he knew they would drive shafts through ordinary mail as if it were paper. Their other weapons consisted of spears, short-handled axes, maces and curved sabers, lighter and more easily handled than the huge two-handed simitars of the Black Cathayans.

Roogla, standing at his shoulder, pointed to a giant riding ahead of the army.

"Subotai," he growled, "a Uriankhi—from the frozen tundras, with a heart as cold as his native land. He can twist a spear shaft in two between his hands.

The tall fop riding beside him is Chepe Noyon; note his silvered mail and heron plumes. And by Erlik, there is Kassar the Strong, sword-bearer to the khan. Well—if Genghis himself is not here now, he soon will be, for he never allows Kassar long out of his sight—the Strong One is a fool, useful only in actual combat."

Godric's cold gray eyes were fixed on the giant form of Subotai; a growing fury stirred in him, not a tangible hatred of the Uriankhi but the fighting rage one strong man feels when confronted by a foe his equal in prowess. The knight expected a parley but evidently the Mongols were of a different mind. They came sweeping across the boulder-strewn plateau like a wind from hell, a swarm of mounted bowmen preceding them.

"Down!" roared Godric, as shafts began to rain around him. "Down behind the rocks! Spearmen and swordsmen lie flat! Archers return their fire."

Roogla repeated the shout and arrows began to fly from the barricades. But the effort was half-hearted. The sight of that onrushing horde had numbed the men of Jahadur. Godric had never seen men ride and shoot from the saddle as these Mongols did. They were barely within arrow flight, yet men were falling along the lines of stone. He felt the Jahadurans wavering—realized with a flood of blind rage that they would break before the Mongol heavy cavalry reached the barricade.

A bowman near him roared and fell backward with an arrow through his throat and a shout went up from the faltering Black Cathayans.

"Fools!" raged Godric, smiting right and left with clenched fists. "Horsemen can never take this pass if you stand to it! Bend your bows and throw your shoulders into it! Fight, damn you!"

The bowmen had split to either side,

and through the gap the flying swordsmen swept. Now if ever was the time to break the charge, but the Jahaduran bowmen loosed wildly or not at all and behind them the spearmen were scrambling up to flee. Old Roogla was screaming and tearing his hair, cursing the day he was born, and not a man had fallen on the Mongols' side. Even at that distance Godric, standing upright on the barricade, saw the broad grin on Subotai's face. With a bitter curse he tore a spear from the hand of a warrior near by and threw every ounce of his mighty-thewed frame into the cast.

It was too far for an ordinary spear-cast even to carry—but with a hum the spear hissed through the air and the Mongol next Subotai fell headlong, transfixed. From the Black Cathayan ranks rose a sudden roar. These riders could be slain after all! And surely no mortal man could have made that cast! Godric, towering above them on the barricade, like a man of iron, suddenly assumed supernatural proportions in the eyes of the warriors behind him. How could they be defeated when such a man led them? The quick fire of Oriental battle-lust blazed up and sudden courage surged through the veins of the wavering warriors. With a shout they pulled shaft to ear and loosed, and a sudden hail of death smote the charging Mongols. At that range there was no missing. Those long shafts tore through buckler and hauberk, transfixing the wearers. Flesh and blood could not stand it. The charge did not exactly break, but in the teeth of that iron gale the squadrons wheeled and circled away out of range. A wild yell of triumph rose from the Jahadurans and they waved their spears and shouted taunts.

Old Roogla was in ecstasies, but Godric snarled a mirthless laugh. At least he had whipped courage into the Black Cathayans. But here, he knew, he and Roogla and all the others would leave

their corpses before the day was over. And Yulita—he would not allow himself to think of her. At least, he swore, a red mist waving in front of his eyes, Subotai would not take her.

The yak tails were waving, the kettledrums beating for another charge. This time the bowmen rode out more warily, loosing a perfect rain of shafts. At Godric's order his men did not return the fire, but sheltered themselves behind their barricade; he himself stood contemptuously upright, trusting to the strength of his half-plate armor. He became the center of the fire, but the long shafts glanced harmlessly from his shield or splintered on his hauberk. The horsemen wheeled closer, drawing harder on their heavy bows, and at Godric's word the Jahadurans answered them. In a short fierce exchange the men in the open had the worst of it. They galloped out of range with several empty saddles, but Godric had not let his attention stray from the real menace—the heavily armed cavalry. These had approached at a rapid trot while the arrow fire was being exchanged, and now they struck in the spurs and came like a bolt from a crossbow.

Again the sweeping rain of arrows met and broke them, though this time their momentum carried them to within a hundred feet of the barricades. One rider broke through to the lines and Godric saw a wild figure, spurting blood and hewing madly at him. Then as the Mongol rose in his stirrups to reach the knight's head, a dozen spears, thrusting over the backs of the bowmen, pierced him and hurled him headlong.

Again the Mongols retreated out of range, but this time their losses had been severe. Riderless horses ranged the plateau, which was dotted with still or writhing forms.

Already the Jahadurans had inflicted more damage on the men of Genghis

Khan than the Mongols were accustomed to. But from the way the nomads ranged themselves for the third charge, Godric knew that this time no flight of arrows would stop them. He spared a moment's admiration for their courage.

The supply of arrows was running low. Black Cathay, as in all things pertaining to war, had neglected the manufacture of war-arrows. A large number of shafts remaining in the quivers of the archers were hunting-arrows, good only at short range.

THIS time there was no great exchange between the bowmen. The archers of Subotai mingled themselves among the front ranks of the swordsmen, and when the charge came, a sheet of arrows preceded it.

"Save your shafts!" roared Godric, gripping the ax he had chosen from the arms of Jahadur. "Back, archers—spearmen, on the wall!"

The next moment the headlong horde broke like a red wave on the barricade. Evidently they had misjudged the strength of those stone lines, not knowing them newly reinforced—had expected to shatter them by sheer weight and velocity and to ride through the ruins. But the strengthened walls held. Horses hit the barricade with a splintering of bones, and men's brains were dashed out by the shock. Doubtless they had expected to sacrifice the first line, but the slaughter was greater than they could have reckoned. The second line, hot on the heels of the first, plunged against the wall over its writhing remnants, and the third line piled up on both. The whole line of the barricade was a red welter of dying, screaming horses, lashing hoofs and writhing men, while the blood-maddened Jahadurans yelled like wolves, hacking and stabbing down at the crimson shambles.

The rear lines ruthlessly trampled

down their dying comrades to strike at the defenders, but the ground was thick with dead and wounded and the plunging, writhing horses fouled the hoofs that swept over them.

Still, some of the Mongols did gain through to the lines and made a desperate effort to clamber over the wall. They died like rats in a trap beneath the lunging spears of the inspired Black Cathayans.

One, a huge brutal-faced giant, rode over a writhing welter of red torn flesh, reined in close to the barricade and an iron mace in his hands dashed out the brains of a spearman. From both hosts rose a shout of: "Kassar!"

"Kassar, eh?" growled Godric, stepping forward on the precarious top of the barricade. The giant rose in his stirrups, the clotted mace swung back and at that instant the twenty-pound battle-ax in Godric's right hand crashed down on the peaked helmet. Ax and helmet shattered together and the steed went to his knees under the shock. Then it reared and plunged wildly away, Kassar's crumpled body lolling and swaying in the saddle, held by the deep stirrups.

Godric tossed away the splintered ax-haft and picked up the mace that had fallen on the stones. He heard old Roogla shouting: "Bogda! Bogda! Bogda! Gurgaslan!"

The whole host of Jahadur took up the shout; thus Godric gained his new name, which means the Lion, and crimson was the christening.

The Mongols were again in slow, stubborn retreat and Godric brandished the mace and shouted: "Ye be men! Stand to it boldly! Already have you slain more than half your own number!"

But he knew that now the real death grip was about to be. The Mongols were dismounting. Horsemen by nature and choice, they had realized however that

cavalry charges could never take those solid walls, manned by inspired madmen. They held their round, lacquered bucklers before them and swung stolidly onward in much the same formation as they had maintained mounted.

They rolled like a black tide over the corpse-strewn plain and like a black flood they burst on the spear-bristling wall. Few arrows were loosed on either side. The Black Cathayans had emptied their quivers and the Mongols wished only to come to hand-grips.

The line of barricades became a red line of hell. Spears jabbed downward, curved blades broke on lances. In the very teeth of the girding steel, the Mongols strove to climb the wall, piling heaps of their own dead for grim ladders. Most of them were pierced by the spears of the defenders, and the few who did win over the barriers were cut down by the swordsmen behind the spearmen.

The nomads perforce fell back a few yards, then surged on again. The terrific shocks of their impact shook the whole barricade. These men needed no shouts or commands to spur them on. They were fired with an indomitable will which emanated from within as well as from without. Godric saw Chepe Noyon fighting silently on foot with the rest of the warriors. Subotai sat his horse a few yards back of the mass, directing the movements.

Charge after charge crashed against the barriers. The Mongols were wasting lives like water and Godric wondered at their unquenchable resolve to conquer this relatively unimportant mountain kingdom. But he realized that Genghis Khan's whole future as a conqueror depended on his stamping out *all* opposition, no matter what the cost.

The wall was crumbling. The Mongols were tearing it to pieces. They could not climb it, so they thrust their spears

between the stones and loosened them, tearing them away with bare hands. They died as they toiled, but their comrades trampled their corpses and took up their work.

Subotai leaped from his horse, snatched a heavy curved sword from his saddle and joined the warriors on foot. He gained to the center of the wall and tore at it with his naked hands, disdaining the down-lunging spears which broke on his helmet and armor. A breach was made and the Mongols began to surge through.

Godric yelled fiercely and leaped to stem the sudden tide, but a wash of the black wave over the wall hemmed him in with howling fiends. A crashing sweep of his mace cleared a red way and he plunged through. The Mongols were coming over the ruins of the barriers and through the great breach Subotai had made. Godric shouted for the Jahadurans to fall back, and even as he did, he saw Roogla parrying the whistling strokes of Chepe Noyon's curved simitar.

The old general was bleeding already from a deep gash in the thigh, and even as the Norman sprang to aid him, the Mongol's blade cut through Roogla's mail and blood spurted. Roogla slumped slowly to the earth and Chepe Noyon wheeled to meet the knight's furious charge. He flung up his sword to parry the whistling mace, but the giant Norman in his berserk rage dealt a blow that made nothing of skill or tempered steel. The simitar flew to singing sparks, the helmet cracked and Chepe Noyon was dashed to earth like a pole-axed steer.

"Bear Roogla back!" roared Godric, leaping forward and swinging his mace up again to dash out the prostrate Mongol's brains as a man kills a wounded snake. But even as the mace crashed downward, a squat warrior leaped like a panther, arms wide, shielding the fallen chieftain's body with his own and taking

the stroke on his own head. His shattered corpse fell across Chepe Noyon and a sudden determined rush of Mongols bore Godric back. Even as the Jahadurans bore the desperately wounded Roogla back across the next line of stone, the Mongols lifted the stunned Chepe Noyon and carried him out of the battle.

Fighting stubbornly, Godric retreated, half ringed by the squat shapes that fought so silently and thrust so fiercely for his life. He reached the next wall, over which the Jahadurans had already gone, and for a moment stood at bay, back against the stones, while spears flashed at him and curved sabers hacked at him. His armor had saved him thus far, though a shrewd thrust had girded deep into the calf of his leg and a heavy blow on his hauberk had partly numbed the shoulder beneath.

Now the Black Cathayans leaned over the wall, cleared a space with their spears and seizing their champion under the armpits, lifted him bodily over. The fight rolled on. Life became to the men on the walls one red continuance of hurtling bodies and lunging blades. The spears of the defenders were bent or splintered. The arrows were gone. Half the Black Cathayans were dead. Most of the rest were wounded. But possessed of a fanatical fervor they fought on, swinging their notched axes and blunted simitars as fiercely as if the fight had but started. The full fighting fury of their Turkish ancestors was roused and only death could quench it. After all, they were of the same blood as these unconquerable demons from the Gobi.

THE second barricade crumbled and the Jahadurans began to fall back to the last line of barricades. But this time the Mongols were over the falling stones and upon them before they could make good their escape. Godric and fifty men, cover-

ing the withdrawal of the rest, were cut off. Then the others would have come back over the wall to aid them, but a solid mass of Mongols were between that balked their fiercest efforts.

Godric's men died about him like hunted wolves, slaying and dying without a groan or whimper. Their last gasps were snarls of deathless fury. Their heavy two-handed simitars wrought fearful destruction among their stocky foes but the Mongols ran in under the sweep of the blades and ripped upward with their shorter sabers.

Godric's plated mail saved him from chance blows and his enormous strength and amazing quickness made him all but invincible. His shield he had long discarded. He gripped the heavy mace in both hands and it smashed like a black god of death through the battle rout. Blood and brains splashed like water as shields, helmets and corselets gave way.

Across the heads of the hacking warriors Godric saw the giant frame of Subotai, looming head and shoulders above his men. With a curse the Norman hurled the mace, which spattered blood as it hummed through the air. Men cried out at the long cast, but Subotai ducked swiftly. Godric whipped out his two-handed sword for the first time during the fight, and the long straight blade which the Pope had blessed years ago shimmered like a living thing—like the blue waves of the western sea.

It was a heavy blade, forged to cut through thick mail and strong plates, armor many times heavier than that worn by most Orientals, who usually preferred shirts of light chain mail. Godric wielded it in one hand as lightly as most men could swing it with both. His left hand held a dirk, point upward, and they who ducked beneath the sword to grapple, died from the thrust of the shorter blade. The Norman set his back against a heap

of dead, and in a red haze of battle madness, split skulls to the teeth, cleft bosoms to the spine, severed shoulder bones, hewed through neck cords, hacked off legs at the hip and arms at the shoulder until they gave back in sudden, unaccustomed fear and stood panting and eyeing him as hunters eye a wounded tiger.

And Godric laughed at them, taunted them, spat in their faces. Centuries of civilizing French influence were wiped away; it was a berserk Viking who faced his paling foes.

He was wounded, he faintly sensed, but unweakened. The fire of fury left no room in his brain for any other sensation. A giant form surged through the ranks, flinging men right and left as spray is flung by a charging galley. Subotai of the frozen tundras stood before his foe at last.

Godric took in the height of the man, the mighty sweep of chest and shoulder, and the massive arms which wielded the sword that had more than once, during the fight, sheared clear through the torso of a mailed Jahaduran.

"Back!" roared Subotai, his fierce eyes alight—those eyes were blue, Godric noted, and the Mongol's hair red; surely somewhere in that frozen land of tundras a wandering Aryan strain had mingled with the Turanian blood of Subotai's tribe—"Back, and give us room! None shall slay this chief but Subotai!"

Somewhere down the deep defile there sounded a rally of kettledrums and the tramp of many hoofs, but Godric was hardly aware he heard. He saw the Mongols fall back, leaving a space clear. He heard Chepe Noyon, still slightly groggy, and with a new helmet, shouting orders at the men who surged about the wall. Fighting ceased altogether and all eyes turned on the chiefs, who swung up their blades and rushed together like two mad-dened bulls.

Godric knew that his armor would

never stand against the full sweep of the great sword Subotai was swinging in his right hand. The Norman leaped and struck as a tiger strikes, throwing every ounce of his body behind the blow and nerving himself to superhuman quickness. His heavy, straight blade sheared through the lacquered buckler Subotai flung above his head, and crashing full on the peaked helmet, bit through to the scalp beneath. Subotai staggered, a jet of blood trickling down his dark face, but almost instantly swung a decapitating stroke that whistled harmlessly through the air as Godric bent his knees quickly.

The Frank thrust viciously but Subotai evaded the lunging point with a twist of his huge frame and hacked in savagely. Godric sprang away but could not entirely avoid the blow. The great blade struck under his armpit, crunched through the mail and bit deep into his ribs. The impact numbed his whole left side and in an instant his hauberk was full of blood.

Stung to renewed madness, Godric sprang in, parrying the simitar, then dropped his sword and grappled Subotai. The Mongol returned the fierce embrace, drawing a dagger. Close-locked they wrestled and strained, staggering on hard-braced legs, each seeking to break the other's spine or to drive home his own blade. Both weapons were reddened in an instant as they girded through crevices in the armor or were driven straight through solid mail, but neither could free his hand enough to drive in a death thrust.

Godric was gasping for breath; he felt that the pressure of the Mongol's huge arms was crushing him. But Subotai was in no better way. The Norman saw sweat thickly beading the Mongol's brow, heard his breath coming in heavy pants, and a savage joy shook him.

Subotai lifted his foe bodily to dash him headlong, but Godric's grip held

them together so firmly this was impossible. With both feet braced on the blood-soaked earth again, Godric suddenly ceased trying to free his dirk wrist from Subotai's iron grip, and releasing the Mongol's dagger arm, drove his left fist into Subotai's face.

With the full power of mighty arm and broad shoulders behind it, the blow was like that of a club. Blood spattered and Subotai's head snapped back as if on hinges—but at that instant he drove his dagger deep in Godric's breast muscles. The Norman gasped, staggered, and then in a last burst of strength he flung the Mongol from him. Subotai fell his full length and rose slowly, dazedly, like a man who has fought out the last red ounce of his endurance. His mighty frame sagged back on the arms of the ringing warriors and he shook his head like a bull, striving to nerve himself again for the combat.

Godric recovered the sword he had dropped and now he faced his foes, feet braced wide against his sick dizziness. He groped a moment for support and felt firm stones at his back. The fight had carried them almost to the last barricades. There he faced the Mongols like a wounded lion at bay, head lowered on his mighty, mailed breast, terrible eyes glittering through the bars of his vizors, both hands gripping his red sword.

"Come on," he challenged as he felt his life waning in thick red surges. "Mayhap I die—but I will slay seven of you before I die. Come in and make an ending, you pagan swine!"

MEN thronged the plateau behind the tattered horde—thousands of them. A powerful, bearded chieftain on a white horse rode forward and surveyed the silent, battle-weary Mongols and the stone bulwark with its thin ranks of bloody defenders. This, Godric knew in a weary

way, was the great Genghis Khan and he wished he had enough life left in him to charge through the ranks and hew the khan from his saddle; but weakness began to steal over him.

"A good thing I came with the Horde," said Genghis Khan sardonically. "It seems these Cathayans have been drinking some wine that makes men of them. They have slain more Mongols already than the Keraits and the Hians did. Who spurred these scented women to battle?"

"He," Chepe Noyon pointed to the blood-stained knight. "By Erlik, they have drunk blood this day. The Frank is a devil; my head still sings from the blow he dealt me; Kassar is but now recovering his senses from an ax the Frank shattered on his helmet, and he has but now fought Subotai himself to a standstill."

Genghis reigned his horse forward and Godric tensed himself. If the khan would only come within reach—a sudden spring, a last, desperate blow—if he could but take this paynim lord with him to the realm of death, he would die content.

The great, deep gray eyes of Genghis were upon the knight and he felt their full power.

"You are of such steel as my chiefs are forged from," said Genghis. "I would have you for friend, not foe. You are not of the race of those men; come and serve under me."

"My ears are dull with blows on my helmet," answered Godric, tightening his grip on his hilt and tensing his weary muscles; "I can not understand you. Come closer that I may hear you."

Instead Genghis reigned his steed back a few paces and grinned with tolerant understanding.

"Will you serve me?" he persisted. "I will make you a chief."

"And what of these?" Godric indicated the Black Cathayans.

Genghis shrugged his shoulders. "What am I to do with them? They must die."

"Go to your brother the Devil," Godric growled. "I come of a race that sell their swords for gold—but we are no jackals to turn on men that have bled beside us. These warriors and I have already killed more than our own number and wounded many more of your warriors. There are still three hundred of us left and the strongest of the barricades. We have slain over a thousand of your wolves—if you enter Jahadur you ride over our corpses. Charge in now and see how desperate men can die."

"But you owe no allegiance to Jahadur," argued Genghis.

"I owe my life to Chamu Khan," snapped Godric. "I have thrown in my lot with him and I serve him with as much fealty as if he were the Pope himself."

"You are a fool," Genghis said frankly. "I have long had my spies among the Jahadurans. Chamu Khan planned to sacrifice Jahadur and all therein to save his own hide. That is why he refused to bring more soldiers to the city. His main force he gathered on the western border. He planned to flee by a secret way through the cliffs as soon as I attacked the pass."

"Well, he did, but some of my warriors came upon him. They only asked a gift of him," Genghis chuckled. "Then they made no effort to hinder him. He might then go where he would. Would you see the gift they took from Chamu Khan?"

And a Mongol behind the khan held up a ghastly, grinning head. Godric cursed: "Liar, traitor and coward though he was, he was yet a king. Come in and make an ending. I swear to you that before you ride over this wall, your horses

will tread fetlock-deep in a carpet of your dead."

Still Genghis sat his horse and pondered. Subotai came up to him, and grinning broadly, spoke in his ear. The khan nodded.

"Swear to serve me and I will spare the lives of your men; I will take Black Cathay unharmed into my empire."

Godric turned to his men. "You heard—I would rather die here on a heap of Mongol dead—but it is for you to say."

They answered with a shout: "The emperor is dead! Why should we die, if Genghis Khan will grant us peace? Give us Gurgaslan for ruler and we will serve you."

Genghis raised his hand. "So be it!"

Godric shook the blood and sweat out of his eyes and snarled a bitter laugh.

"A puppet king on a tinsel throne, to dance on your string, Mongol? No! Get another for the task."

Genghis scowled and suddenly swore. "By the yellow face of Erlik! I have already made more concessions today than I ever made in my life before! What want ye, Gurgaslan—shall I give you my scepter for a war-club?"

"If he wishes it you may as well give it to him," grinned Subotai, who was no more awed by his khan than if Genghis had been a horse-boy. "These Franks are built of iron without and within. Reason with him, Genghis!"

The khan glared at his general for a moment as if he were of a mind to brain him, then grinned suddenly. These men of the steppes were a frank, open race greatly different from the devious-minded peoples of Asia Minor.

"To have you and your warriors fighting beside me," said Genghis calmly, "I will do that which I never expected to do. You are fit to tread the crimson road of empire. Take Black Cathay and rule it as you will; I ask only that you aid me in my

wars, as an equal ally. We will be two kings, reigning side by side and aiding each other against all enemies."

Godric's thin lips smiled. "It is fair enough."

The Mongols sent up a thunderous roar and the bloody Jahadurans swarmed over the barricades to kiss the hands of their new ruler. He did not hear Genghis say to the warrior who bore the grisly severed head of Chamu Khan: "See that the skull is prepared and sheathed in silver; and set among the rest that were khans of tribes; when I fall I would wish my own skull treated with the same respect."

Godric felt a firm grasp on his hand and looked into the steady eyes of Subotai, feeling a rush of friendship for the man that equaled his former rage.

"Erlik, what a man!" growled the chief. "We should be good comrades, Gurgaslan! Here—by the gods, man, you are sorely wounded! He swoons—get off his armor and see to his hurts, you thick-headed fools, do you want him to die?"

"Scant chance," grinned Chepe Noyon, feeling his head tenderly. "Such men as he are not made to die from steel. Wait, you big buffalo, you'll kill him with your clumsiness. I'll bring one more fitted to attend him—one that was found being forcibly escorted out of Jahadur by the palace eunuchs. I saw her only five minutes ago and I am almost ready to cut your throat for her, Gurgaslan. Genghis, will you bid them bring the girl?"

Again Godric saw, as in a closing mist, two great dark eyes bend over him—he felt soft arms go about his neck and heard a sobbing in his ear.

"Well, Yulita," he said as in a dream, "I went to Genghis Khan after all!"

"You saved Black Cathay, my king," she sobbed, pressing her lips against his. Then while his dull head swam those soft

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The Rajah's Grandmother

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, Jr.

Number 638 of the Indian Secret Service was offered a bribe of thousands of rupees if he would be false to his trust

MAHBUB the jeweller was sitting impassively in his disreputable shop and caressing the amulet with lean possessive fingers when Dorety asked, "How much?"

Mahbub turned his head to the door and chuckled. "It is a good thing, Dora Tea, that no one heard you ask that. Men have been cut in two for less."

Dorety examined the amulet critically. He rubbed it slowly all over to see if it was scratched. He held it up to the light and shivered with pleasure when it seemed to catch fire. "A king's ruby," he muttered reverentially. "Who bids against me?"

"No one," grimaced Mahbub, "but the Rajah's grandmother wants it, and that is enough!"

"But if I should offer you a thousand mohurs?"

Mahbub gripped the counter convulsively. "I will sell it, Dora Tea. I have decided to risk everything. But I am ruined if you show it to the Rajah."

"I will take it now," said Dorety. "You know as well as I do that the Rajah wouldn't give you a rupee for it. And with your tongue burned out of your silly mouth you couldn't very well reproach him."

Mahbub groaned and slapped his hands to his ears.

"Don't, Dora Tea. Is it not enough that I live in terror of the Rajah's grandmother? She would hire an assassin, Dora Tea. Still, for fifteen hundred mohurs——"

"I offered you a thousand," snapped Dorety.

"For twelve hundred mohurs," droned Mahbub, "I will sell it. But may your daughters all be dishonored if you show it to the Rajah."

Dorety scrawled a few lines on a scrap of yellow paper and handed it to the shopkeeper. Mahbub blinked and scrutinized it closely. "It is well," he said at length. "I will trust you, Dora Tea. For one thousand mohurs the amulet is yours. When shall I call for the money?"

"Tomorrow," said Dorety, "but I shall take the amulet at once."

Mahbub parted with it reluctantly. "Be careful of it, Dora Tea," he warned. "It is not redder than the blood that has been spilled for it. And if the Rajah questions you, say that the devil sold it to you."

"That would not be a lie," smiled Dorety. "I think you are in league with the Rajah's grandmother."

Mahbub shivered. "That is not a wise joke, Dora Tea. The Rajah's grandmother devours all virtue in a pure mind. She would ruin my Karma."

"What do you know of her?" Dorety asked suddenly.

"What does any man know of her, Dora Tea? She is an impostor, of course, but the Rajah is weak-minded and easily deceived, and he swears she resembles his father."

"How long has this been going on?" asked Dorety.

"For three months. The Rajah found her in rags on his doorstep and wept like a drunken Bhat. And now he worships her. Dora Tea, he permits that vile

woman to rob us. He thinks she is positively pious and you know how many wires he can pull when your absurd government pricks up its ears."

"You may call tomorrow for the money," said Dorety in a flat voice as if turning over in his mind what the shopkeeper had told him. Then he slowly nodded and walked out of the shop.

D ORETY'S room overlooked the crookedest street in Katmandu. Immediately beneath his window a Tibetan dog sat on a bale of vermeil from Turkestan and howled dismally at the moon. A few dark forms passed to and fro in the shadows, but a curious silence pervaded the street and Dorety could almost hear the gnawings of a million maggots furiously at work on the piles of garbage heaped against the window. His head was burning with excitement and he had thrown open the blinds to cool his flushed cheeks. But as an obscene breeze arose to greet him he retreated quickly, shutting the blinds with a bang and swearing at the constables who permitted such vileness.

He retreated into the room and sat down on the bed. On the table at his side a lean candle guttered and flared. Dorety reached over and nipped it. A sickly darkness settled down over the room. Dorety lifted both his legs and lay flat upon the white sheets. His fingers toyed for several moments with something under his pillow; then he withdrew his hand and closed his eyes.

He waited. He was very comfortable. Presently the door creaked on its hinges, and some one glided into the room. The stranger's bare feet pattered ominously on the smooth floor. A flashlight pierced the darkness, and for a moment Dorety's prone form was illuminated by its disturbing glare. Cautiously the intruder

approached the bed and bent above its occupant. "Ah-h-h!" The exclamation was followed by a low hiss.

The intruder's hand slid under Dorety's pillow, and grasped the amulet in its hard fist. Dorety's hand shot over it, closing tightly. The intruder started up, shrieked and endeavored to break away. Dorety sprang from the bed and struck at him. They went down upon the floor in a confused grapple. But the outcome was never uncertain. Dorety wore his opponent down by the sheer ferocity of his attack.

"Mercy, Sahib. You wouldn't harm a woman!"

Dorety grinned. He got quickly to his feet, holding his captive by the neck. He breathed harshly but his long fingers bit like steel into soft flesh. With his free hand he felt for the candle and struck a match. A pallid yellow glow spread through the room.

With staring eyeballs Dorety looked at the creature he had subdued. An incredibly ancient hag stared up at him and pleaded for its life. With an effort Dorety repressed a shiver of disgust and threw the creature from him. It collapsed in a heap on the floor and when Dorety spoke to it it whimpered.

"I knew the ruby would bring you," muttered Dorety.

"Ah-h-h!" moaned the thing on the floor. "You do me a great injustice. The Rajah will be furious when he hears of this. He will have you shot. You are a fool to defy my grandson."

Dorety straddled the table and swung his legs violently back and forth.

"So you are the Rajah's grandmother!" he murmured casually. "A pretty creature indeed. What will you give for the amulet?"

"Give? Give?" the creature shrieked. "The Rajah will give you six hundred stripes on your naked back for it!"

"Very well," laughed Dorety, "I shall take it to the Rajah."

The Rajah's grandmother was genuinely startled. Her lips opened and closed, but no sound came from between them. It took five minutes for Dorety to convince her that he was only jesting.

"I will give you five hundred rupees for it," she said at length.

"No!"

"A thousand!"

Dorety shook his head.

"Then you will not sell it?"

"No." Dorety was determined. The Rajah's grandmother folded her hands and waited. She was absolutely at his mercy, and it is to her credit that she made no attempt to disguise her fear. Her teeth knocked together until the room grew clamorous with their chattering; she turned up her eyes until only their whites were visible.

"I will tell you a story," said Dorety. He stroked his chin meditatively and watched her out of the corner of his eye. When she nodded he clipped and lit a panetela.

"A tragic one," continued Dorety. "A story of evil and cunning triumphant. You will not like it."

The creature on the floor spat, and ran her fingers savagely through her thin white hair. "I will listen," she said.

"Very well. I am Dorety of the Secret Service. My number is 638, which doesn't concern you. But there are other matters in which you are directly involved. Five months ago in Delhi an old woman was brutally murdered, and her body disfigured beyond recognition. Her throat—but I will not weary you with details. The affair would have attracted no attention ordinarily, but the victim happened to be of royal blood, and for ten years the police had been searching for her. An amulet which they found on her body established her iden-

tity. A Lama had bewitched her and since her fortieth year she had been wandering idiotically from town to town disguised as a beggar. It is difficult to imagine anything more absurd, but no degradation seems unsuitable to those who follow the teachings of Lamas. When the poor creature disappeared she was the mother of a reigning rajah with royal privileges, and if she were alive now she would be a rajah's grandmother. I believe there are twenty varying legends about her in Nepal."

Dorety stared contemptuously into the old woman's eyes. "Before this woman was murdered some one tortured her and discovered everything. Her left breast bore the impress of a red-hot iron. Whether the torturer was the murderer I am not prepared to say. But certainly she was unwise in overlooking the amulet, which would have established even a twice-born in the good graces of——"

The old woman interrupted him with an impatient shrug. "What is this to me, Sahib?"

"Why did you kill her?" asked Dorety.

To his amazement the creature on the floor did not equivocate. "I was very poor and my life was a hard one. Why should I have spared her? Have you not said that you considered her actions idiotic? She was a silly old fool and unworthy of life. I spit on all who follow the teachings of Lamas. May their livers rot! You and I, Sahib, know that there are no good laws in the universe, and that we may all do as we please. Is it not well that we should enjoy ourselves for a few years before the worms take us? How did the amulet come to Katmandu?"

Dorety scowled. "They stole it from us before we could show it to the Rajah. It was necessary to have that to prove you an impostor. We traced the jewel here and yesterday I purchased it for one

thousand mohurs in the shop of Mahbub the jeweller. I could have confiscated it but the service wanted me to evade suspicion by purchasing it. I knew that it would bring you here. I have suspected for some time that the Rajah has doubts of your identity. He wants more definite proof and this amulet will furnish it."

He held the amulet in his right hand and turned it over in the yellow light. "A beautiful thing, is it not?" he asked. "And think of what it would mean to you! Unfortunately, you must rot in a filthy jail."

DORETY got down from the table and removed a pair of handcuffs from his coat pocket. They dangled sinisterly in the shadow cast by his body and a faint smile lingered for a moment about the corners of his mouth. The Rajah's grandmother swayed pathetically back and forth and crooned.

Dorety stooped and was about to slip the steel bracelets on her wrist when she sneezed. Her breath smelt strongly of gin and Dorety made a wry face. "Make the best of it, old lady," he said. "You've had a good time and your luck lasted splendidly."

The old woman noted with delight the growing reluctance in Dorety's voice. When he drew near again she smirked at him.

"Well?" he stammered, losing color. "What's on your mind?"

"Ninety thousand rupees," said the Rajah's grandmother in a very low voice.

Dorety's heart missed a beat. The color left his cheeks; his eyes watered. "You mean that you have access to the Rajah's coffers?"

The old woman smiled. "My friend, were I younger I should offer you that which would make all the Rajah's gold seem worthless. But since you want

gold, listen! The Rajah carries upon his person twenty fortunes. He wears a belt made of diamonds as large as onions. Rubies encircle his ankles; emeralds his wrists. His ear-rings glitter in the dark; they are luminous with pearls. And he sleeps heavily. For ninety thousand rupees, then, you will sell me the amulet?"

Dorety hesitated and looked long and searchingly at the handcuffs. His heart came up into his throat. It was a temptation, but there was his duty to the service. Into the eyes of the woman who sat waiting crept something of compassion. "It is a hard decision, Sahib," she said, "but with ninety thousand rupees you would own the world. Think of the nautch girls you could buy with it. Nothing is so beautiful to a young man as a nautch girl unbraiding her hair. With ninety thousand rupees who would dare to reproach you?"

"If the service should find out," said Dorety, "I should be utterly ruined." He started, realizing that he had practically repeated the words of the vile little jeweller Mahbub.

"But who would ever find out?" muttered the old woman. "Ninety thousand rupees would buy you rivers of wine, and days and nights of love. If you are wise you will intoxicate yourself before the worms possess you. No one saw me come here tonight. If you need an excuse you can say that your life was threatened. Few would care to defy the Rajah's grandmother."

"Ah-h-h!" Dorety advanced suddenly and slipped the handcuffs over the crone's wrists. He gave them a sudden jerk as she shrieked and rose to her feet.

"You wouldn't do that to me!" she pleaded. "I should die in three weeks in the Rajah's jail."

"I shall not put you in the Rajah's jail," said Dorety. "I shall take you to

Delhi. I was tempted, but thank heaven, I have conquered my blind folly."

"The Rajah has rubies in his coffers," said the old woman, "that would make your heart ache. He has black and yellow diamonds. He has pearls. He has a turquoise as large as a new-born babe. He has an opal that bleeds when the moon rises. He has a virgin garnet that has been known to utter prophecies. He has emeralds—ah-h-h——"

Dorety was twisting the handcuffs violently and the prisoner writhed in agony. But his own features were distorted with the pain of indecision and his brain swam.

"You are vile," he shouted. "You slashed that old woman's throat from ear to ear."

"Diamonds that would make your heart ache," repeated the crone through quivering lips. A strange light shone in her eyes.

Dorety was fumbling with his key at the bands that bound her. His teeth chattered, and a voice whispered in his ear. "The thing that you do is very evil. Men have been damned for less. And there is the oath you took!"

It wasn't an imaginary voice. It was the old woman speaking to him. Why had she changed so suddenly? But she hadn't changed. He was sure that she was mocking him. He got the handcuffs free and stepped back. "A surety," he blustered. "How do I know that I can trust you?"

The Rajah's grandmother laughed long and shrilly. Her hand went to her breast and in a moment she had found the thing she sought. She held it forth in the palm of her hand so that Dorety could see it. It was an emerald as big as a man's thumb. Dorety stared until tiny nodules of sweat came out on his forehead. At the prospect of owning a stone so precious his heart failed him.

He stood very still and waited for the old woman to speak.

"This is the price of my liberty and the amulet," she said at last. "This stone is worth one hundred thousand rupees and its duplicate can not be found in all the world."

Dorety extended a shaking hand. "The amulet first," she demanded.

Dorety took up the amulet and threw it at her. "Take the accursed ruby and be gone," he shouted. "But give me the emerald!"

The old woman deposited the amulet in her shaking palm and swore at him. Then she turned and stumbled out of the room.

FOR a moment Dorety stared at the thing in his hand, and his eyes bulged. But his madness did not last. When he raised his face and saw the closed door he shrieked and recoiled as though he had received a slap in the face. Dimly he seemed to realize that she would descend into the street and make her escape. The thought of his own vileness nauseated him.

He ran to the door and threw it open. A breath of hot air streamed past him. The hallway was damp and smelly. He descended the stairs three steps at a time, holding his horror very firmly to him. He wondered if the old man on the second floor could hear the hammering of his heart.

Out in the street the moonlight lay in frigid stripes on great bundles of vermeil and vair. A beggar crouched in the shadows and held out pitiful, crooked arms. Several of the unclean lay sleeping in the gutter. In his haste Dorety stepped upon them, but they did not stir. Life had slammed its doors in their starved faces, and they bore all indignities with gloomy resignation. A dark figure

was racing down the street ahead of a lean dog that growled and barked.

"Not for a Rajah's ransom will I let her escape," groaned Dorety. "I have been a fool, but I am whole again."

The pursuit was furious. Dorety ran with head thrown back and arms bent at the elbows; the old woman hobbled on from square to square with amazing agility, always keeping her distance. They passed stinking bazars where fat, greasy Musulmans lolled on cushions, snoring lustily. They passed the covered carts of fruit-venders, and the red-litten windows of shameless houses from which nautch girls leaned and tittered obscenely, and once Dorety almost lost his quarry in the mazes of a Rajput slave-bazar.

They were on the outskirts of the city when Dorety brought the old woman to bay. He advanced upon her threateningly, holding the handcuffs in his right hand. He had lost all fear and it wouldn't have worried him if her cries had brought the Rajah's soldiers. But she made no outcry. Instead, she eyed him calmly, and laughed.

"Have you changed your mind?" she asked.

"Yes," said Dorety, "and I want that amulet. You'll not escape this time."

She was fumbling with something in her dress and in a moment she had it out and was levelling it at him. "Don't come near me," she said. "You won't get the amulet and you won't get me. I should think the emerald would have satisfied you."

Dorety gasped. "You had a revolver and yet you let me threaten you!"

"It amused me," said the old woman, "and perhaps I had a reason."

Dorety stared in growing bewilderment. "Who are you?" he muttered.

"Don't you know me, *Dora Tea*." The figure was still smiling. "Is it so difficult to recognize beneath a little paint the face of a colleague?"

"You are——"

Slowly the figure nodded. "This afternoon I was Mahbub the jeweller, but I am now, unfortunately for you, merely 692. We have suspected for some time that you might betray the service in an emergency, and to trap you we let you infer that Mahbub had the amulet. We have traced the jewel, but it is in the possession of another shop-keeper. 749, a chap named Simmons, will see that it is recovered and the Rajah's grandmother exposed—the case was transferred to him when I offered to expose you by impersonating Mahbub, and an old hag."

His voice grew terse. "Tomorrow, Dorety, you will send in your resignation. Your belated repentance has saved you from a court-martial, but this amulet is all the proof I need that you are an incorrigible bribe-taker."

"But the emerald," gasped Dorety, "the emerald you gave me——"

"Was made of paste."

For a moment 692 looked at 638 with shrewd and pitying eyes. Then he turned, and walked briskly away.



A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

—*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.*

WILLIAM

By S. B. H. HURST

His exploits while "absent without leave" from His Majesty's army in India were spectacular and thrilling, but his last adventure was the most astonishing of all

"A FIGHTER, boy! It's a fighter you are!" shouted the man with the wooden leg. The boy grinned. He enjoyed fighting, but he also enjoyed wandering. A craving to find something. No certain or particular thing, but just to wander until something new turned up. He was an orphan, and the people in the little English village had a simple explanation for his love of wandering.

"He fell out of the cradle and lit on his head. Them as does that is always different!"

His name was William Dobbs, and he was far from the village when he won the fight about which the wooden-legged man cheered. The periods of his absence varied. Once he was gone a year. That was the time he walked to the coast and shipped on a schooner. He never talked about his adventures. He was largely affectionate but did not fall in love. He was twenty, standing six feet and weighing two hundred and ten pounds of bone and muscle, when he wandered, as was inevitable, to London. . . . A keen-eyed sergeant of the British Army watched William polish off a tough known as "The Thames Terror," near the East India Dock.

"You ought to join the army and get paid for your fighting," said the sergeant as he helped William on with his ragged coat. "Feel like a bite to eat?"

William agreed that he was hungry. On the wall near the eating-house was the well-known picture of several strapping men in the uniforms of various regiments. The sergeant took a shilling out

of his pocket and pointed to the picture.

"Which of those uniforms would you like to wear? . . . The shilling is yours," he said.

"Never bothered much about clothes," answered William dubiously.

"Well, let's eat," said the sergeant cheerfully. "That was the Queen's shilling I gave you!"

William regarded the shilling with interest. The sergeant explained.

"All right," said William.

So William Dobbs became a private in a famous regiment that had been for some weeks expecting orders to proceed to Burma. Large bands of robbers and murderers known as *dacoits* were raging up and down the country, burning villages and often getting the best of the soldiers. . . . But William found himself busy at once. He had to fight every man his size or near his size in the regiment. He won the fights. After that he was a hero, and men wanted to buy him beer.

But after a week of this William became restless. There was no one else to fight. So he became absent without leave. He just had to wander and find something of interest to content him. It was summer in London. William wandered to Hampstead, where a small circus intrigued him—chiefly the solitary elephant. William attached himself to the elephant. Thus it came about that a newly joined subaltern was horrified to behold a man of his regiment, in uniform, exhibiting an elephant for the benefit of the populace. The subaltern went closer. He recognized William, who was then giving



"William fought on, raging at the breakers."

the elephant a drink. The elephant and the man appeared to be on the best of terms. . . .

The young officer touched William on the shoulder.

"On leave?" he asked.

William admitted that he was watering an elephant without official permission. But he saluted when he spoke to the officer. Then he grinned. It was such an engaging grin that the officer failed to feel offended. And feeling that some explanation was in order, William explained.

"I take an awful lot of interest in new things, sir! I just can't help doing them!"

The officer had only recently left the

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military academy, where his reputation for decorum had not been of the best. He might try to be stern, but the lure of watering an elephant lurked in his soul.

"But, you know, you can't do this!" he exclaimed.

William said nothing. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"Go back to barracks," ordered the officer. "You are in my company. You will be punished for this, of course, but. . . ."

The "but" amounted to a talk with his superior, and the lightening of the punishment of William Dobbs. William was grateful, and he tried to show his gratitude by an explanation.

"You see, sir," he told the kindly offi-

cer, "It's new things that make me want to see them. I get restless and have to go some place. I was always like that, sir!"

With a vast effort the officer achieved gravity, and lectured William upon the sin of going absent without leave. He felt that he was wasting breath. He ended with:

"We'll be ordered on active service—any day now, Dobbs. There's more to see in Burma than there is here. You won't want to miss that, will you?"

"I won't be missing then, sir," replied William.

He saluted and left. And for two days he stayed in barracks. Then the lure of the world beyond the sentry got him. So he went absent without leave again.

The young officer worried. He liked William. There was something very attractive about his easy disposition and his fighting qualities. Everybody liked William, and the regiment did not want to lose him. The young officer talked to his captain, even to the colonel.

"Talk some sense into him," growled the latter.

And, unofficially, the entire regiment sought William. But it did not know where to seek. William was a genius in his straying. Other men would have been sought in public houses, but William was not a drinking man. No one found him. He came back himself, and he reported to the friendly young officer. He saluted, grinned in his disarming and respectful way and said:

"I've come back, sir!"

"Where the devil were you this time?" asked the officer, trying to be stern.

William was not good at explanations. Besides, to tell the officer that he had put in a lot of time amusing crippled children at the Home in South Kensington would be difficult. William felt that

six feet of soldier in uniform standing on his head was unusual. The children had enjoyed it immensely. . . . William looked down at his feet. They moved uneasily.

"Well, sir, it's . . . there's a lot of things to look at in London, sir. And when I get to looking at new things the time goes awful fast!"

The officer could no longer try to be stern. He laughed. It might be very bad for discipline and all that, but he could not help laughing. He dismissed William and reported the matter to his superior. William got off with a severe "talking to".

A week later he became interested in the Salvation Army, which in those days was a novel institution. The British Army allows every man to choose his own form of religion, and there was no regulation against William marching along the street with the Salvationists and singing as lustily if not as tunefully as any of them. But the five privates and two sergeants who almost caused a riot by dragging William to the sidewalk explained that absence without leave was no period for religious observance. What really captured William, however, was the sergeant shouting in his ear:

"You big mountain of meat! We're ordered on active service! Burma! Come erlong out of this and fight!"

"Burma!" shouted William, forgetting all about the Salvation Army. "Burma! That's where them dacoits is!"

Forty-eight hours later the regiment entrained for Portsmouth. William found the transport a joy until he had explored it thoroughly. But the ocean curtailed his wanderings until the ship reached Rangoon, and once there the tales of sick and wounded men down from the Front saved him from dangerous Oriental byways.

GONG up the Irrawaddy in a paddle steamer of the Flotilla, William felt himself coming into his own. All past fights and past adventures had been but the games of a child. Among his other accomplishments, it had been discovered that he was a natural shot. As shooting was a fighting man's occupation he was not at all surprized. But he preferred the possibilities of the bayonet.

The glaring river, ageless in history of fighting men and kings travelling upon it, made William gloat. The green forests, the low shores, the heat. All new, alluring, promising. How soon would they get into action with them dacoits? William rejoiced to learn that it would be as soon as possible.

It was very soon.

The regiment struggled through the jungle. There were no roads. Steamy heat waves in a dense green. Screaming parrots, chattering monkeys. Insects, centipedes. Nights and the swarms of giant moths. . . . From behind any one of a thousand trees came a shot. A man with whom William had fought the day he joined the regiment fell writhing with a bullet in his bowels. . . . A silent Scot grimly stalked the dacoit scout and shot him from behind another tree. . . . The regimental surgeon did his best but the microbes of Burma did better.

This went on for weeks. The strength of the regiment dwindled. Then the unexpected. William awakened hurriedly just before dawn to a regular battle. The pickets had been driven in. The British were surrounded by double their number. Instead of waiting to be attacked, an unusually large gang of dacoits had surprized the regiment.

There was little shooting. The dacoits knew they were no match for the regiment in that sort of fighting. They calculated that their extra weight in manpower would win for them. From the

dawn of history the Burmese had always beaten their enemies by hand-to-hand fighting. Hence the surprize in the dark, after a silent creeping all night through the jungle. It was also the sort of fighting for which the gods had created William Dobbs. William, as always, fought silently, savagely. The daylight flooded the forest. Dacoits streamed upon the regiment from every point. The trees made cohesion impossible. The regiment was split up into desperately fighting groups. But William had no time to consider this. Neither would consideration of it have troubled him. He had no interest in anything but his immediate enemy. That one disposed of, another demanded attention. Often two or three enemies at the same time—raging and screaming and slashing at the big man who seemed invulnerable, and whose touch was death. They yelled that he was a devil. A devil who must be killed. The screamers carried their assertion to another world, and William's bayonet found another target.

Through the delightful, red haze of combat some notice of his surroundings seeped into William's brain. Instinct had maneuvered until his broad back was protected by a giant tree. No knife could get at his back. His enemies had to face him. He knew that the captain of his company had fought by his side until, his sword broken and his revolver empty, he had fallen, cut to pieces. He knew that twenty men lay about him, and that they would never drink beer again. And through all the noise he had heard one cheerful voice encouraging, shouting—the voice of the young officer who had severed William's connection with the elephant of the circus. But the voice was growing weak. The young officer was bleeding from a dozen wounds. William, fighting as many dacoits as could get at him, became conscious of another sort of fighting rage. The

spiritual fury of a man who fights to save a friend.

The young officer had fallen. He still cut feebly at the legs of the dacoits, but he was done. Then did William truly become a devil. Before this he had fought as a big and gallant soldier will fight. Now he fought like ten.

"Get out of this, Dobbs! Cut your way out, and get back to the regiment. Never mind me—I'm done, anyhow!"

William laughed—a strange, wild laugh. The officer and himself, ringed by dacoits, were alone except for the dead.

"God bless you, sir!" shouted William. "Keep your mind easy while I finish this fight. Then I'll carry you to the doctor!"

"You can't, Dobbs. There are too many for you. You will be killed. Go—you can get through. Go, and save yourself! Go, I tell you! It's an order, Dobbs!"

William laughed and spitted another dacoit.

"Go! Save yourself! Do as I tell you. Obey me, Dobbs!"

The work had become too close for the bayonet. William, with one hand, used his rifle like a club. With every swing of it he crushed a head. With a swift movement he picked up the broken sword of the captain. This he thrust with short stabs and terrible effect into the faces too close for the club.

"I order you to go, Dobbs!" the young officer sobbed.

"I wouldn't obey God himself—if He told me to leave you!" yelled William.

Such terrible strength and fury was too much for dacoit nerves. This white soldier could not be human. The dacoits recoiled. They waited a few yards away for breath and another combined charge upon William. They looked at their dead and shivered. But there were ten

of them left. Demon or not, this white man must die. . . . William looked down and saw the deathly pale face of the young officer. He laughed his strange, wild laugh again. So, the officer was dead. All the tiredness left William. The concentrated fury of a dozen men lifted his soul. For a second he glared at the dacoits. His teeth gritted.

"He . . . is . . . dead," said William slowly.

He shook his head as if to clear his brain. Then with another wild laugh, he charged the dacoits.

As he did so, one of the regimental pipers, lying fifty yards away with a bullet in his thigh, sounded forth the inspiring war cry of *The Campbells are coming!* The dacoits broke. From somewhere the colonel himself, with forty men, came upon the scene. These disposed of the fleeing dacoits.

William wiped his face with the back of his hand. Then he turned, gently lifted the young officer, and carried him to the doctor.

He turned away from the dreadful sights of the impromptu surgery. A numb grief possessed him.

"How is he, sir?" he asked the surgeon.

"Pretty bad," the surgeon had answered. "He's alive, that's all I can say. But I can't say how long he will live."

And now William felt very tired. He looked at his empty hands. Where was his rifle? He had thrown it down when he picked up the young officer. He would have to go back and get it. He wiped the sweat from his eyes, and found himself facing the grave colonel. William saluted.

"I shall recommend you for the Victoria Cross, Dobbs," said the colonel.

William seemed puzzled.

"The greatest honor in the army," added the colonel, as if to explain.

"I know, sir," said William.

THE badly cut up regiment buried its dead and the dead dacoits. Then it rested. William, a bit bruised, did not rest. He haunted the hospital orderlies. How was the young officer? He insisted upon having word every hour. He cursed his helplessness. Why couldn't he do something? Finally he thrust the orderlies aside and burst in upon the doctor.

"I've got to know, sir! How is he? Will he get well?"

The tired doctor managed to smile.

"I didn't think he would, at first, Dobbs. But I do now. He is young and strong. Yes, I'd be willing to bet now that he'll live to become a general. But I didn't give him a chance when you first brought him in."

William just had to celebrate. He took his rifle and went for a walk. The jungle was as dark as pitch, weird with insects and strange noises. William hadn't the slightest idea where he was going. The regiment woke to find him gone. Gloom descended upon it. The jungles of Burma are no place for a lone white man, even one skilled in woodcraft, of which William had none. When two days passed without William's return the regiment mourned.

"Poor old chap! Went out and got lost. Took a walk like he used to do in London, just to see the sights. A snake or tiger got him. Gawd bless him—he was a man!"

Such they deemed was William's epitaph.

But no snake or other creature had got William. He was having the time of his life. One of those times, anyway.

It grew cooler under the big trees. He found a narrow animal trail. He was enjoying his walk. His entire being throbbed to the delight of going somewhere he had never been before.

William lost the animal trail in some dense brush. He found the line of least

resistance, and went that way. The night passed. At dawn the forest awakened to shrill noises. The monkeys and the parrots had seen William and were making rude remarks about him.

The idea of breakfast entered his system, but he was too content to be troubled by it. Nearing noon, he came upon a tiny village—four houses standing on stilts. Very interesting to William. Many chickens. No people, apparently. Then a wakeful child, peering from the top of one of the house-ladders, saw the big white man and gave tongue. The village roused to greet William.

A kindly little village, a collection of relatives. Four families. Parents, grandparents, children. Pretty women smoking their large cheroots, smiling at the big soldier. The old folk chattering about him, praising his bulk. They prepared a mighty meal for him, to which he did justice. The matter of pay troubled him. He had two rupees in his pocket—a large sum to such a village—but his innate courtesy shuddered at the idea of giving offense to his hospitable hosts. He sat on a creaky platform, eight or nine feet from the ground, between two houses, the women clustered about him like a bevy of loving sisters. The men sat around and laughed. Now, would it be decent to offer money for the meal? William was never fond of thinking, and the problem harried him.

A sudden scream interrupted everything. Terrified women pressed against William. He heard shots, yells, curses. As he struggled to free himself from the screaming women his rifle fell off the platform into the narrow alley between the houses. He grabbed for it as it fell, and slipped. He heard wilder screaming and cries and more shots as he crashed the nine or ten feet into the alley. His head struck the ground, and William lay unconscious.

He recovered consciousness. He was not hurt. He had merely been knocked out. But while he lay there terrible things had happened. The first scream had been that of an old woman when a gang of eight dacoits came upon her stealthily from the forest. A blow had killed her. Then the shooting of the unarmed men of the village. The usual dacoit butchery. The dacoits had not seen William. The frantic women had been as a lovely terrified screen when he fell.

William knew all this when he heard the piteous crying of the women—the young and pretty women, the spoils of the raid. The older women and all the men were dead. Peering cautiously between two boards, William saw! A sight to make any man fighting mad. But William was far too good a natural fighter, as well as a trained, not to take every advantage. His object in every fight was to win it. His fury was always a stimulant, never a detriment, to vigilance. Between the planks William looked and made his plans. He saw eight dacoits—one of the remnants that had escaped after the recent battle—and seven pretty little women. Every dacoit wanted one of the women. That was why they had raided the village. The women were all the value the village contained. . . . Eight dacoits and seven women. It looked as if the dacoits would fight among themselves for the women. Instead, with leering enjoyment they began to count "odd man out!"

Meanwhile the women waited in anguish. Honor to a Burmese woman is as dear as it was to Lucrece. But the dacoits were careful to leave no chance for the women to kill themselves.

William lifted his rifle. He had six bullets. He was a first-class shot. The distance was so short that even a moderate shot could not miss. He would kill six dacoits from behind the boards where he waited. The boards hid as well as

protected him from bullets. He was not there to take spectacular chances but to save the women. He would shoot six dacoits. That would leave two for his bayonet. He would have to rush those two before they could shoot him. Fair enough! William had a sort of contempt for the long Burmese knives of the dacoits. He would have to be quick because the dacoits would turn and fight at his first shot. The heavy teak boards would be useful then. He hoped the dacoits would not imagine that more than one man was attacking them. William did not want any dacoits to escape into the forest. The agony of the women made him very anxious to kill. William looked to his rifle. One of the boards on his left was a trifle loose. One good push and that board would fall. Through the gap William would rush the dacoits when he had fired his six shots. But he could not begin immediately. The dacoits were holding the women, and none stood still. The women were pleading heartrendingly. The dacoits laughed at their sobbings. The women knelt down and prayed. Such pretty little lifted hands.

William waited. The play was coming his way. One of the dacoits tore the jacket off a woman. She stood bare to the waist, horrified. Then she threw herself on the ground. The other women threw themselves beside her. Their voices rose in mingled prayers to many gods. William answered their prayers. It was the best and fastest shooting he had ever done, which is saying a lot.

Heads had always been William's pet objective. Nose or jaw in his earlier days, sometimes eyes. He aimed at heads now. A bullet in the head avoids the argument that sometimes arose between regimental chaplains and less sentimental officers—should time and doctors be wasted upon wounded dacoits? William, who could be a Christian upon occasion,

aimed at heads and saved argument. Two shots felled two dacoits so swiftly that a third and then a fourth did their work before the murderers recovered from a paralyzing shock of surprise. Thinking perhaps that British soldiers in the forest had ambushed them, the others ran for shelter among the houses. They ran toward William. Two more shots met them efficiently. Then William really began to fight. With a silent fury and a flickering bayonet he charged the enemy like some marvelous avenger created for the purpose by an offended deity. The astonished women were screaming. But the dacoits passed to where while screaming is understood to be general it is not heard by mortals.

THE work being done, it came to William that he faced a problem besides which killing a few dacoits was simple. The women. Who was going to take care of them? William knew they would not stay another night in the village where their husbands and relatives had been killed. The women and their babies—for of course not even a dacoit will harm a child in Burma.

Taking things in order, William decided that a large funeral came first. Two graves, since murdered and murderers could not be expected to sleep together. In this the women helped, digging as they wept. Of course they would have nothing to do with the dacoits, so that job was left to William. And when it was all over the pathetic little women turned to William. Without a word they decided that he would adopt them all, women and babies. He had saved them, so they were his! Simple but embarrassing logic.

So when the heartrending burial was ended and many strange ceremonies had been accorded the village dead, William found himself needing thought. What was he going to do with these women and

babies, who would not remain in their village, who apparently wished to follow him to the ends of the earth? A sudden and relieving idea came to him. He would take them all to the regiment. It was time he got back there, anyhow. The colonel would arrange to have the women taken care of. William had a lot of faith in the colonel. Yes, the women and babies would find shelter with the regiment. The details of this shelter never entered William's head. He seldom troubled himself about details. So by signs he explained, or thought he did, that he would take the women and babies to the haven of the regiment. He pointed vaguely in the direction whence he had come. The women, understanding only that they might travel with William, began to look less like recently made widows and more like flowers after rain.

A charming company but a harried William. The regiment was somewhere. And that was almost all William knew. Vaguely he began to pilot his flock. Fortunately the flock came to his assistance. The flock found food. The flock made a fire when a fire was needed, William having neglected to bring matches. The flock adored William as if he were a god, made an idol of him. And so, with many prattlings, the flock found the way back to the regiment by some innate sense of woodcraft beyond the cunning of white men.

A startled regiment saw William arrive. He appeared to be embarrassed.

"Gad!" exclaimed a rabelaisian captain. "Here comes Dobbs with a harem! What a glutton!"

The exclamation stood for the regimental opinion—or at any rate the regiment pretended it did—until the truth appeared. The superficially irate but inwardly amused colonel berated William, promising dire punishment—William having failed to explain. The flock un-

derstanding, one of its number ran forward and fell on its knees before the colonel. The rest of the flock, including the babies, fell on its knees likewise. To the civilian interpreter at the colonel's elbow the flock explained all about its being there.

"Eight dacoits!" exclaimed the colonel. "Why the devil didn't you tell me that in the first place, Dobbs?"

"Well, sir, it wasn't much to talk about."

The colonel laughed.

"You're a sort of wandering miracle, Dobbs. To punish a miracle is not possible." The colonel paused. He was about to tell William that the Queen had granted him the Victoria Cross, but he decided that the news would sound better if told before the entire regiment, on parade. "Go to your quarters, Dobbs. The women and children will be taken care of." William saluted.

"Very good, sir! And thank you!"

William turned and walked toward the hospital tent. With one accord the women and children began to follow him.

"Tell them not to follow him!" said the grinning colonel to the interpreter.

The interpreter obeyed. The women laughed, the babies laughed. Laughter and happiness and an entire freedom have been the birthright of Burmese women and children for at least two thousand years. The women picked up their babies and followed William.

"But we can't have this, sir!" exclaimed the startled adjutant.

"Certainly not!" The colonel did his best to be stern. "I can't have a man like Dobbs annoyed!"

The adjutant felt that his superior was basely deserting him.

"And also," went on the colonel, "the women and babies don't belong to Dobbs—not any more. Didn't he bequeath them to the regiment?" The colonel was

enjoying himself. "Pretty, too, those women. Don't you think so? Do what seems best, but please don't bother me with the details!"

The adjutant laughed.

"Very well, sir! But if Dobbs isn't put under restraint he is liable to go out on more of these crazy knight-errant escapades of his—and bring in all the women in Burma, not to mention the babies!"

"Not all of them, surely!" said the colonel.

"The dacoits are pretty well cleaned up," went on the adjutant, "so Dobbs will have a hard time finding any more of them. But women and babies—why, even the woods are full of them. And they all love Dobbs! Imagine what will happen, sir, if he continues to do this sort of thing." The adjutant fell into the colonel's happy mood. "Why, the regiment will be demoralized! It will become half orphanage and half nunnery!"

"Your argument seems illogical," laughed the colonel. "But, as I said, don't bother *me* with details!"

Meanwhile William had reached the hospital tent.

"Good job you turned up again," grinned an orderly. "The lieutenant has been crying for you!"

"Eh?" answered William, so grimly that the orderly recoiled.

"He wants to see you anyway," amended the orderly.

"Wants to see me? What for?" demanded William.

The orderly did not feel called upon to answer that question. Instead, he entered the tent and told the young officer that Dobbs had arrived.

"Bring him in!" ordered the officer. So William found himself saluting and stammering by the cot. The officer held out his hand.

"First chance I've had to thank you, Dobbs!"

William stared uneasily at the ground. His face grew redder. His boots lacked steadiness, and began to dig holes in the ground. He felt that he ought to say something, but words escaped him. Finally, however, memory inspired him. The various returns from being absent without leave to the London barracks. He grinned respectfully at the kindly boy for whom he would cheerfully have given his life. He saluted again. His feet dug deeper holes.

"I've come back, sir!" said William.

The young officer laughed happily.

WILLIAM left the hospital. The glaring sunlight showed him to the world. The women who were differing wildly with the adjutant and the harassed interpreter, saw William and shouted gleefully. William ran.

The women were annoyed. William sought protection among his friends—which meant the entire regiment. A hilarious regiment invented weird plans for William's protection and vastly enjoyed its helplessness. So William had to solve the problem himself. He disappeared again.

The regiment laughed and waited. William would show up in a day or two. And what new wonder would his return reveal? The adjutant arranged for the care of the women and babies, but *not* by the regiment. The regiment waited for William to come back, anticipating great things. But William did not come back. The regiment worried. Still no William. Orders for Home, but still no William. But the regiment did not lose faith. William would show up! All the way down the Irrawaddy the regiment looked for William's reappearance. But no William appeared. Until the last moment, when the troop ship, *Dalhousie*,

carrying the regiment, swept down the Rangoon River into the Bay of Bengal, bound for England, the regiment looked for William. But there was no sign of him. And then faith died in grief.

"Something got him at last. Poor old chap, he was a man!"

William meant to remain away until such time as the adjutant persuaded the women to accept other asylum than the regiment. He regretted giving the adjutant so much trouble, but as he could not have left the women in the ravished village his conscience was clear. Peace had come upon the country, and what few dacoits remained were harried fugitives in the hills. There was no more fighting to be done, so the regiment did not need him. This, however, was not what caused William to remain absent longer than the time he calculated the adjutant would require. The strolling wrestlers were responsible for this.

William heard their grunting song in the early morning. He had found a fairly wide trail in the forest, and the rhythmic grunts were coming toward him on the trail. It was very interesting. At first William believed that a family of gorillas was coming in his direction. He then remembered that there are no gorillas in Burma. The song, issuing from huge men, sounded like: "Ounch! . . . Ounch! . . . Ounch! . . . Ounch! Ounch! . . . Ounch! Ounch!" Repeated and repeated with vast outlets of breath.

William grinned, and walked to meet the grunts. What new marvel was this? For a fleeting moment William thought it might be elephants. He would not have been alarmed, or even considered the need of his rifle, if the noise had been made by elephants. For William's mind had never limned wild elephants. His knowledge of elephants was limited to the friendly elephant of the circus of happy memory. . . . The turn of the

trail showed William eight huge Burmans, nearly naked, their bodies glistening. . . . William's grip tightened on his rifle. But these could not be dacoits! They had no weapons. . . . What great legs and arms they had!

The wrestlers paused. They grinned at William. William grinned at the wrestlers. Diplomatic relations thus being established, the wrestlers admired William's size. Then, to explain their way of life, two of them did a bit of easy wrestling.

William was entranced. Eagerly he removed his tunic and pointed to the largest of the wrestlers. During his wanderings William, while preferring boxing, had picked up a useful knowledge of catch-as-catch-can. The wrestlers grinned generously. Here was a democratic sahib with whom enjoyment could be obtained. But they shook their heads at his heavy army boots. If one of those boots, backed by the two hundred odd pounds of William, pressed upon a wrestler's toes! Signs told this to William, who obligingly removed his boots. The wrestlers were honorable men. William's shirt and pants would be a handicap to William. One offered a sarong. William grinned, stripped and donned the sarong. Thus equipped, he faced the large wrestler.

The wrestler weighed about fifty pounds more than did William, but the excess was fat. This, however, was not entirely what caused the wrestler's downfall. His downfall was caused by the antiquity of his methods. The tricks and holds of Burmese wrestlers are thousands of years old, cherished because of hallowed associations by the conservative guild. As wrestling is a form of fighting, is at any rate a struggle, William was anything but conservative. He also lacked any sense of restraint, and his playful moments were dangerous. The large wrestler bumped heavily. He felt out-

raged by the novelty of William's methods. William understood this, and managed to explain that catch-as-catch-can was devised to obtain results and not to charm by artistic posturing. However, he would like to travel with the wrestlers for a little while, and he promised not to hurt any one.

The Chief of the wrestlers beamed. He was of course a professional showman, and in William he saw a novel and profitable show. He would have to explain to his audiences that while William's unfashionable style was of course not the correct thing in wrestling it was, at least, interesting. And there was the chance of large bets! The Burmese are inveterate gamblers, and where was there a Burmese wrestler who could stand up against William—no holds barred?

So began a connection profitable to the wrestlers, and highly diverting and also profitable to William. Rapidly he picked up the peculiarly toneful dialect of the Burmese, and he saw country seldom if ever seen by white men. His fame spread, villages waited eagerly for sight of him. His progress was as the progress of a king—a king who was largely Sun-god. But it began to tire William. Always seeking the new, and with the lurking notion that it was time to return to the regiment, William decided to leave the wrestlers. The decision came to him one hot afternoon in a village on the lonely coast north of Bassein. It was very hot. The sea like smoky glass. Heavy clouds weighed down upon the world. One of the wrestlers explained that bad weather was coming. William, looking out on the sea at sunset, wondered at the dreadful majesty of the threatening sky. He did not need the explanation of the wrestler. A child could have told that a hurricane was approaching. Well, he couldn't stop it! Might as well go to bed!

THE wrestlers sat around their little fire. About them all the moths and most of the bats of Burma swooped. So it seemed to William who, while able to accustom himself to most things, could never, to quote him, "Stomach them flying things!" He smoked a last pipe, said good-night to the betel-nut chewing wrestlers, waved a cheerful hand to the villagers of both sexes, and retired. He tossed for a while in the heat, but finally slept.

He awakened to what seemed the end of the world. To a world gone mad in its dying agonies. To a continuous awesome roar and the weight of a crushing wind. As he awoke, one tiny sound, seemingly isolated from the roar, fluttered for a moment and was gone—like the feeble sound of a match struck during an artillery duel. That was the village—the houses of the village seized by the wind, clutched and crumpled and thrown far among the breaking and thrashing trees. Sleeping on the ground, it seemed to William that a great hand gripped the house, tore it from over him and threw it away. And then the deluge from the bursting heavens. And a great darkness.

Unhurt, William got to his knees. To stand up would be as foolish as to stand up against rifle fire. Unable to face a wind that drove the breath back into his lungs, William, creeping, sought the wrestlers and the people of the village. He found them all huddled together, the children among them. The children sobbed fearfully. Now and then a woman wailed spasmodically.

Presently a wild dawn broke. Black and red, with livid rents showing a sickly yellow beneath the clouds. Broken trees, a bending and shivering forest. The place that had been a village. Drenched and weary humans. The parrots had been driven far inland by the wind, but the monkeys, exhausted by their shrieking,

clung pitifully. Upon this wreck of a world a wild sea breaking. Spray that flew half a mile after every wave that tore itself to pieces on the shore.

It was nearly two in the afternoon when the wind ceased its tearing and merely blew hard. After an East Indian hurricane a strong gale seems like a breeze. Men could stand up and move about. The villagers began to seek their household goods. . . .

It had been strangely dark all day. Staring seaward, William suddenly shouted. The people ran to him. William pointed. The wrestlers grunted deep in their chests. They saw a large steamer fast ashore, a steamer which would soon break up. Her boats had all been washed away. Upon her listed decks many men clung helplessly, waiting for death.

William looked. Then his face set. He spoke to the wrestlers. They shook their heads. Nothing could be done, they said. Even if there were any boats, no boat could live in that sea, no boat could land in those breakers.

"Nothing we can do?" asked William.

"Nothing, brother," answered the Chief of the wrestlers. "We be strong men and not cowards, and could we help we would help gladly. But we can do nothing!"

William walked to and fro over a space of a few yards, restlessly. He was trying hard to remember. Wasn't there something he could do to save the people on the wreck?

Presently he stood still. He smiled, ever so slightly. The wrestlers watched him avidly. William was remembering earlier days. That time he walked to the English coast and shipped on the schooner. Talks with old sailors who manned her. Yarns of wrecks and rescues! . . . What was it now? A rope! . . . Yes, a rope! . . . A thin, light rope first. Then a larger rope. And, finally, the heavy,

stout rope, and the breeches buoy. Something people could sit in, one by one, while they were hauled ashore. But the sailors on the steamer would know how to do all that. The difficulty was to get the first rope to the ship. Coast guards in civilized countries fired the rope across the ship in distress. No coast guards on this coast, and no gun in the village to fire the rope.

William turned to the wrestlers and spoke.

"Rope," he said. "Get me a long rope. More than enough to reach from here to the ship. That thin, plaited stuff the women make so quickly. Get the rope. Now I will tell you what you must do. I am going to swim to that ship, and take the rope with me."

The chief of the wrestlers stared at William. Then he looked at his men. They nodded at the look on his face.

"Hurry," said William impatiently. "Those men out there are dying by minutes!"

"It is a brave thought, Big Man," answered the chief. "But it can not be done! Neither will we let you try it, for you could never swim to that ship in such a rough sea, strong beyond other men though you be. It is folly when a brave man throws away his life. You could never swim to that ship, not even if you carried no rope. Turn your back to the sea, brother, so that the pain of watching drowning men may not be yours. Some may be washed ashore. Such we may help. There is rope in the village, brother, but we will not let you throw away your life trying to swim to that ship!"

"Will not?" asked William.

The Chief could not meet William's eyes.

"Will not let me try it?" repeated William.

"We beg you not to," amended the Chief. "For we love you!"

"Get the rope, and hurry!" said William.

"But, brother——"

"Bring the rope, quickly. . . . I, also, love you, my brothers. But this is Duty! Get the rope!" said William.

The Chief bowed. He turned to his men, and gave swift orders. He shouted, and the village mustered to his shouting. The rope was brought, strong stuff but light. William, naked, made a loop in one end of the rope. He put the loop over his head, so that it rested on his left shoulder and under his right arm. The spray flew across the beach.

"The gods go with you," said the Chief. "When you get your end of the rope to the ship we here will know what to do—as you have told me. The gods go with you, great brother!"

WILLIAM walked into the sea. The heft of it lifted him off his feet. He fought and found his feet again, for he could not swim so close to shore. The water hurled against him. He gasped and fought on. Pebbles lashed against his feet. William fought on, raging at the breakers. Behind him, the Chief payed out the rope carefully, all the village watching. The backwash took William, and he struck out lustily. A wave's recoil took him forty feet toward the ship. An incoming wave threw him back. But there was some gain, and William struggled on.

He got through the breakers of the shore. The wrestlers and the people of the village set up a mighty cheer, but William could not hear them. Nor could he see very much, for the wind was whipping the tops of the waves into his face, blinding him.

William was not a very good swimmer. He had never tried to swim so far in his life. Effort became a choking nightmare in which he fought. The rope dragged at

him and cut his flesh. The waves smothered and pressed him down. The buffeting numbed his mind, and the spray was a blizzard. He felt lonely, as if he had left the world. He was fighting out of his element, and he knew it. He became dizzy and sick.

Sense of time left him. What a long while it seemed since he had walked into the water! And an awful tiredness was trying to make him quit. What did it matter? Common sense told him he could never make it. Why not just let go? End the terrible strain. Find peace. . . . Funny, how sleepy he was. Fancy, getting sleepy in the water, and such rough water.

There was no longer any time, and no longer any feeling in his body. Neither could he see. He struggled on, like a fighter out on his feet, will and a courage that would not quench driving him.

A sound came down the wind. Dimly William wondered at it. The sound echoed in memory and gave the man new strength. Somebody was cheering. Yes, cheering him on. Now, who could that be?

Something struck him sharply. William paid no heed to it. He was swimming very feebly, almost done. His soul wandered among the vague fancies that come just before unconsciousness. Then something struck him again. He sensed that it was the same thing that had struck him before. And there was the cheering again. Louder now. Much louder. And near . . . With that terribly painful effort with which men try to wake from dreams, William became partly conscious. The thing that had struck him. Oh, yes, that was a rope. A long time ago! Not a second had passed, but to William it seemed an hour. Automatically he

clutched at the rope. Both hands took hold of it with the grip of a drowning man. Then everything went out in blackness.

He was dreaming again. In the dream he was still swimming. Then he opened his eyes.

He was lying on the deck of the ship. The noise, the shouting told him that the breeches buoy had been rigged, and that men were being hauled ashore. He had saved them, then. He closed his eyes again.

"He's all right!"

The voice roused William again. It was close to him. He opened his eyes. What he saw thrilled him and startled. Faces he knew bending over him. The regimental doctor. The young officer.

"I called him a miracle. But this is the greatest thing he has ever done!"

William recognized the colonel's voice. He felt wretchedly embarrassed. They would make a fuss about what he had done. . . .

William had closed his eyes again, quickly. He was thinking. So the regiment had been going home on the ship. Troopship, thrown ashore by the hurricane. Well, it was about time he got back to the regiment. His attractive grin played about his face. He no longer felt tired. He felt very happy. He thought of the elephant and the circus, and the many times he had come back to the regiment. Well, he would have to face it. He opened his eyes again. The young officer was smiling at him. William grinned respectfully at the young officer.

"I've come back, sir," said William.

In the next issue of *ORIENTAL STORIES* Mr. Hurst tells a tender and moving story of Burma and the Andaman Islands, the story of a native woman's unconquerable love for her man.



The Dragoman's Revenge

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Hamed the Attar was accused of a foul murder he did not commit—a strange tale of Arab justice

YOU would hear a tale, *effendi*? So be it. Here in the coffee shop of Silat we can find rest and refreshment.

Ho, Silat! Let there be coffee, bitter as death, black as Eblis, and hot as Johannam. And bring two *shishas* well filled with jabali latakia.

You know me, *effendi*, as Hamed bin Ayyub, the wrinkled and white-bearded dragoman, whose sands are nearly run. You should have seen me when, like you, I was young and vigorous. In those days I was tall, straight and strong, with handsome features, flashing eyes, and a beard black as a moonless night. Aihee! Those were the days!

Silat brews excellent coffee, *effendi*.

But you asked for a tale. Well then, I'll tell you of a strange adventure that befell me in my youth, when first I became a dragoman.

One day as I was walking down the Via Dolorosa, the street along which Sayyidna Isa once carried the cross, a stranger saluted me with the *salam* and inquired if I could speak Turkish. I replied that I could, quite fluently, whereupon he invited me into a richly furnished house near by. The *majlis*, or living-room, was of itself a jewel of precious beauty. The *berdelik*, that is, the wall hangings, were of the finest silk from the looms of Kashan, Yarkand and Kashgar, and there hung above the chief *diwan* a magnificent rug of Samarcand in which gold and silver threads were cunningly woven with the silk. On the floor, which was an excellent example of mosaic, were scattered the finest weaves of Kashan,

Feraghan and Ispahan. And in the center of the room there played an exquisite fountain of ivory and carnelian.

After serving sherbet, pipes and coffee, my host offered me a substantial sum if I would do some interpreting for him. He and I were about of a size, and he somewhat resembled me, although I was dressed rather plainly while his apparel was so magnificent as to proclaim him a man of great wealth and high station.

"I will go and fetch the people you are to meet," he said, "but as my guests are to be men of importance, it will be well if you are more suitably attired. Permit me to find clothing for you."

So saying, he parted a pair of hangings and entered another room, from which he presently returned, bearing a gaudily colored head-cloth and a complete outfit of bright and costly raiment which, despite my protests, he politely assisted me to don.

When I was fully attired and once more seated before pipe and coffee, he said:

"I go, now, to bring my guests. But before I go let me warn you that there are certain conditions which you must fulfil. First of all, you must not leave this room under any circumstances. Second, you must pay no attention whatever to Jenene, my slave girl, who will return from the *souk* in a short time, even though she may act strangely and perhaps run out of the house upon seeing you. She is weak-minded and very fearful of strangers, but perfectly harmless. Do you agree to these terms?"

"I see no reason to do otherwise," I responded. "I am comfortable enough

here, and weak-minded girls do not frighten me."

"Good! I will go now."

He rolled my clothing into a bundle and carried it through the curtained doorway.

"I'll leave your garments in here," he said, "where you may get them later."

In a moment I heard him pass out a door in the rear of the building.

I sat for some time in solitude, smoking and sipping my coffee while I puzzled over the two requests of the stranger—that I should not leave the room under any circumstances, and that I should speak no word to his slave girl, Jenene.

Presently I heard the rear door open once more, and the tinkle of anklets which accompanied the patter of small feet told me that the girl had arrived.

The more I pondered and listened to

her moving about in the rear of the house, the more curious I became about the whole affair. At length I concluded that the fellow was merely jealous of the girl, and decided to attempt to have speech with her. Accordingly, I clapped my hands to summon her.

In a moment I heard her coming toward me through the curtained room. But before she reached the entrance she stopped and uttered a loud shriek. The curtains parted, a veiled face looked out at me, and there was wafted to me a hint of intoxicating perfume. But the curtains were quickly closed, shutting off the vision, and there was a second later a



"The silken furnishings were disarrayed and spattered with blood."

louder shriek. Then, in accordance with the predictions of her master, I heard the girl dash wildly out of the house.

I smiled as I remembered the warning of the man who had employed me, but shortly thereafter grew grave again as I reviewed in my mind the incidents that had just taken place. The girl, I recalled, had stopped and shrieked somewhere in the curtained room before she had seen me. It followed that there was something in that room which had caused her to cry out. She had shown new surprise and horror on seeing me, but I was evidently not the primary cause of her terror.

Under the circumstances, I resolved to go at once and have a look at that room. I accordingly got up, and advancing to the doorway as quietly as possible, parted the curtains.

I gasped in astonishment and horror as I saw, lying half on and half off a magnificent *diwan*, the body of a handsome, richly dressed young man, with the jeweled hilt of a *jambiyah* protruding from his chest. The silken furnishings and cushions were disarranged and spattered with blood as if there had been a considerable struggle.

I WAS staring down at this horrible sight in stupefied astonishment, when the rear door suddenly opened, and the slave girl came running in, accompanied by three armed men.

"There he is!" she cried hysterically. "There is the traitorous assassin who murdered my master!"

Alarmed, I turned to flee, but my way was blocked at this moment by two men who entered the front door with drawn simitars.

"Surrender your weapons, dog," cried one, "if you would not be cut down in your tracks."

My own simitar, dagger and pistols had been taken into the other room by the

man who had employed me, along with my clothing. I had not noticed, as he buckled the new simitar about me and arranged my sash, that I was wearing the curved, empty sheath of a *jambiyah*. The fellow had brought me no pistols.

Dropping the simitar, which I had instinctively drawn, for I saw that it was useless to attempt to defend myself against five men, armed to the teeth, I said:

"To the argument of your many blades, I yield, but I am an innocent man. The real murderer brought me here on a pretext, in order that I might be trapped and shoulder the blame for this crime."

"O father of deceit and brother of a thousand filthy pigs, is that not your *jambiyah* in the breast of Zayd, who has been received into the mercy of Allah?" said one of the men. "If it fits not your sheath, then will I triply divorce the daughter of my uncle."

"And if that be not evidence enough, O lying spawn of a pestilence," said a second, "are not those blood spots on your raiment sufficient proof of your guilt?"

Several small red spots on the clothing which had been given me, and which I had not previously noticed, were now pointed out to me.

"But these are not my garments," I protested. "I was asked to wear them by the man who——"

"Enough," gruffly interrupted he who had first spoken. "Seize and bind him, men. We'll take him before the *kazi*."

And so, despite my struggles and protestations of innocence, I had my hands bound behind my back, and with a rope looped around my neck, was led away.

THEY led me through the *souk* first, to what had been the shop of the murdered Zayd, who had been a prosperous goldsmith. We quickly drew a large fol-

lowing of curious people, for my captors had taken every possible precaution to humiliate me. One of them walked ahead, dragging me by the rope around my neck as if I had been a haltered beast. Beside me, on each side, walked two others with naked blades in their hands. And behind us walked Jenene, the slave girl, whose lissom grace, tinkling anklets and lustrous eyes above her flowing *yashmak* were sufficient, of themselves, to turn the head of any man.

As we arrived at the stall of Zayd we found that it had been closed. Standing before it were three men. The first I instantly recognized as the consummate villain who had led me into the trap. The other two were the merchants who occupied the two adjoining booths, one of whom sold rugs and the other fruit and cakes.

For a moment I was blinded with rage as I saw the author of my humiliation and almost certain death standing before me, and violently endeavored to free my hands that I might throttle him. But he who held my lead-rope nearly choked me by jerking me backward.

"Who is this wild-looking person?" asked my betrayer of the man who had haltered me.

"He is a traitor to the salt—the unspeakably vile murderer of Zayd, the Goldsmith," replied the fellow. "He claims to be a dragoman named Hamed, but we doubt this, so we have brought him here to see if any of the merchants can identify him before we take him to the *kazi*."

"I know him!" cried he who sold the cakes. "He is Kasim ben Musa, who arrived this morning with the caravan from Damascus. I distinctly remember his black beard and the clothing he wears. He talked with Zayd for a short time this morning, whereupon the goldsmith closed his shop and went away with him."

O. S.—4

"I also remember him, and can bear witness that it was he who went away with Zayd," said the rug merchant.

Upon hearing these words, the fellow who had employed me simulated great anger, and whipping out his *simitar*, made as if he would strike off my head.

"So, O violator of the salt, and seed of a loathsome disease!" he exclaimed, his voice quivering with feigned anger, "you have slain my pious and noble cousin! Then by my beard and the life of my head will I see that justice is done upon you here and now."

But ere he could use his *simitar* the others restrained him, one of them saying:

"Peace! It were better to take him before the *kazi*. Full justice will be done, never fear, for there are eight of us who can bear witness to his perfidy."

"Oh, Zayd, Zayd!" said the deceitful one, now pretending great sorrow. "My cousin whom I loved as a brother! To think that you should have come to an untimely end, and by the hand of so vile and unspeakable a wretch! My grief is more than I can bear!" Whereupon he plucked at his beard, heaped dust upon his head, and rent his garments, while great crocodile tears coursed down his cheeks.

The two merchants then closed their stalls, and they, together with the trickster who had brought me to this pass, accompanied us to the audience with the *kazi*.

ABU TAYI, the *kazi*, was a venerable and learned man with an enormous turban. Among our people, the greater a man's learning, the larger the turban. Thoughtfully stroking his white beard, he looked down at the fellow who was dragging my rope, and said:

"Of what is this man accused, and who is there to bear witness against him?"

"He is accused of the murder of Zayd, the Goldsmith, O *kazi*," replied the fellow, "and there are eight of us here to bear witness."

"Then let us hear your testimony in order," said the *kazi*. "You may testify first."

Whereupon the fellow told how he had been standing in the street conversing with four friends when the slave girl of Zayd had run out of the house screaming that her master had been murdered and that the murderer was in the house. He further told how he had stationed two men at the front door, and taking two more with him had accompanied the girl through the back door, where they had caught me red-handed, my garments spattered with blood and my *jambiyah* still sheathed in the heart of Zayd. He then pointed out the blood spots on my clothing and displayed the bloody *jambiyah* which one of his companions had brought along.

The *kazi* then questioned his four companions, one by one, who verified his story.

After the five had testified, the slave girl came forward and told that I had come in with her master that morning and broken bread with him, and that he had sent her to the *souk* for supplies with which to prepare the evening meal. But on her return she had found her master murdered and me still in the house, whereupon she had summoned the five men who captured me.

The *kazi* then asked me if I had ought to say.

"Insofar as what the men have seen with their eyes and heard with their ears is concerned, they speak the truth, O *kazi*," I replied. "As for the girl, she was deceived by my resemblance to another if she thought it was I she left with her master when she went to the *souk*. I swear to you by Almighty Allah,

Lord of the well, Zemzem, and of the Hatim Wall, that I am innocent of the crime attributed to me. If you will grant me leave to tell my story, I'm sure I can prove——"

"Enough!" interrupted the *kazi*. "Your own story will be heard later. At present all I want is your corroboration or denial of the stories of these witnesses. Now let us hear what the two merchants know of the matter."

Whereupon one of the merchants, he who sold cakes and fruit, stepped forward and testified that he recognized me as Kasim ben Musa, who had arrived that morning with a caravan from Damascus, and that he had seen me go away with Zayd when the latter closed his shop. The other witness then corroborated his evidence.

"What have you to say for yourself, prisoner?" asked the *kazi*.

"Falsehood is as smoke and fact is built on a base which shall not be broken, O *kazi*," I said, "and the light of truth dispels the night of untruth. This is a case of mistaken identity, planned by that lecherous consort of a mangy camel who slightly resembles me, and who came here with the two merchants to testify falsely against me. He is the real Kasim ben Musa, murderer of Zayd, and these are his clothes I am wearing."

The *kazi* turned to my betrayer.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Akrashah ibn Mahmud of Bagdad," was the reply, "and cousin of Zayd the Goldsmith, may Allah be merciful unto him."

"What do you know of this matter?"

"I arrived with the same Damascus caravan as that in which this vile murderer traveled," he said, "in order to pay a visit to my cousin, on whom be Allah's clemency. But it was some time before I was able to find his shop, as I was unfamiliar with this city. When I found it,

it was closed, and these two merchants told me that Zayd had departed with this malevolent malefactor. As I stood before the shop conversing with them, the girl and the five men arrived with the murderer and informed me that he had violated the salt and taken the life of my cousin, whom may Allah receive into paradise. Whereupon my bosom was constricted with sorrow and wrath, and I would have slain him then and there in the excess of my grief and anger, had not these friends persuaded me to the reasonable course of bringing him into your honorable presence. And if you judge rightly between this unspeakable villain and your servant who has suffered this great wrong, may your life span a mighty span, and may peace and happiness be multiplied unto you with each year."

"Now, prisoner," said the *kazi*, "tell me your story, that you may be heard before sentence is passed on you."

While the venerable Abu Tayi sat there, stroking his white beard and glaring at me with an expression which told me as plainly as words that I was already guilty in his mind, I related all that had happened since he who called himself Akrashah ibn Mahmud had accosted me on the Via Dolorosa. When I had completed my tale of the cunning and perfidy of Akrashah, the *kazi* turned once more to him.

"What have you to say to this, O Akrashah?" he asked.

"That not one single word of it is true," replied my betrayer. "This man is the most preposterous prevaricator I have ever met."

"O father of lies!" I said. "O sink of corruption! For this added falsehood may your tongue turn to a serpent and bite you."

"And for your brazen deceptions, O stench of an abomination," he replied, "may your beard turn to a nest of scor-

pions and sting you for a thousand years."

"Enough of this abuse," said the *kazi*. "I will now pronounce sentence."

"I swear to you by the Most Great Name that I am innocent," I said. "Spare me until I can find witnesses to vouch for me."

"Throw the prisoner into the dungeon," said the *kazi*, "and tomorrow at sun-up, bring me his head, that I may display it before my door as a warning to whosoever will be warned."

"Harkening and obedience," replied two burly guards, who seized my arms.

As I realized the full import of the *kazi's* words—that I had been sentenced to die before dawn—a cold perspiration suffused my body and my knees sagged beneath my weight, so my guards were forced to half drag, half carry me.

I WAS thrown into a dark and filthy cell with my hands still bound behind me. A jailer came, presently, bearing food and water. I implored him to release my hands that I might eat, whereupon he held his lantern before my face and exclaimed:

"Hamed! I thought your voice was familiar! What crime have you committed that you have come to this pass?"

I recognized him instantly as Ibn Khalud, a friend of my boyhood whose life I had once saved, and who was sworn to me as a blood brother.

"Release my hands, O my brother," I said, "and I will tell you my story."

He instantly opened my bonds, and then sat and listened to my story while the bread and water he had brought me stood untouched.

"It is a horrible injustice!" he exclaimed. "I will go before the *Sharif* himself and lay the matter before him."

"Alas!" I replied. "The *Sharif* went hunting yesterday, and will not return for a week."

"Then I will go to the *kazi*."

"That is useless, also, and would only cast suspicion on you if I were to make my escape. He already had me condemned in his own mind before half the evidence was presented. I saw it in his eyes."

"Then, by Allah, and by my head and beard, I will take the matter into my own hands, O blood brother," he said. "Expect me after the last call to prayer."

So saying, he departed, leaving me once more in darkness.

IT SEEMED to me, waiting there in the stinking blackness, that at least a full day passed before I saw the yellow flicker of Ibn Khalud's lantern, followed by his quiet entry into my cell. He had brought with him a dark-colored head-cloth and burnoose, both of which I donned over the garments I was wearing. Then, commanding silence, he led me through many devious passageways, to a place where a rusty iron ring dangled from the ceiling. Leaping into the air, he grasped the ring, whereupon it slowly descended on the end of a thick chain, and a slab in the floor ahead of us rose, revealing stone steps leading downward.

We descended the steps, whereupon Ibn Khalud moved a lever at the base, and the slab came down, closing the opening above us. It seemed to me that we penetrated deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth. Water seeped through a thousand crevices in the walls, and dripping and trickling to the floor, combined with the moss, mold and slime, to make our footing exceedingly slippery. We presently came to the foot of another stair, where my blood brother, after locating the lever, hooded his lantern. Then, by working the lever, he moved a great slab of rock at the top. We climbed the stairs and emerged into the clear night air.

"Leave the city at once," he counseled.

"I go, now, to drug the guards with *bhang*, so it may appear that you escaped through the courtyard while they slept. *Salam aleykum*."

"May Allah reward you for this good deed," I replied. "*W'as salam*."

With that I left him, and soon recognized the district. I had been let out through a secret passageway in the city wall not far from my own home. Making my way to it as quickly as possible, I entered my dark and lonely house, struck a light, and sat down to think. I had no intention of leaving the city if this might be avoided, but on the other hand, there would be a hunt organized for me as soon as my escape had been discovered, and sooner or later some one would be sure to recognize me.

I have ever been a man of action, and it was not long before a plan occurred to me.

In my house, carefully put away in a great chest, were the clothing and jewelry of my mother, who had been received into the mercy of Allah. As she had been a rather large woman, I knew that I should be able to wear her garments without trouble. Quickly attiring myself in black, and covering my countenance with a white face-veil, I stood before the mirror in the bent attitude of a very aged person, and saw that, to all appearances, I was a very old woman. As I have ever been an adept at changing the tones of my voice, I knew that it would be a discerning person indeed who would penetrate my disguise.

To conform to the plans I had formed, I selected from among my mother's jewelry a necklace of most exquisite pattern and craftsmanship, and of considerable value. Taking this with me, and also a goodly quantity of *bhang*, I closed my house once more, and arriving at the Via Dolorosa, turned my steps to the house of Zayd.

Upon my arrival I glanced up and down the street, and on seeing that it was deserted, swung myself up onto the balcony which jutted out beneath the front windows, and looked within.

Zayd, having died in the morning, had been buried that afternoon, as was the custom in those days when embalming or refrigeration was unknown. This I had foreseen, and also, that Akrashah would most probably be alone with the slave girl at this hour. But I wanted to make sure.

My hopes were instantly realized when I saw them both seated on the main *diwan* in the *majlis*, sipping wine in violation of the sacred teachings, and eating cakes and fruits while the villain made love to her, imploring her to remove her veil. She coyly refused, yet did not seem at all displeased.

Descending noiselessly from the balcony, I rapped on the door. Presently there was the sound of soft footsteps and the tinkle of anklets, and the slave girl opened the door.

"Peace be upon you, mother," she said, politely. "What can I do for you?"

"And upon you, my daughter, may the peace of Allah descend. I must have instant speech with your master, Zayd," I replied, in the quavering tones of an old hag. "Will you take me to him?"

"My master Zayd has, alas, been taken to the bosom of Allah Almighty," she replied. "But come in, mother. His cousin and heir, Akrashah, who is now my master, will no doubt see you."

AS I STEPPED through the doorway I pretended to a great weakness and tottered so unsteadily that Jenene permitted me to lean on her shoulder for support. When I approached him, Akrashah looked up at me from his seat on the *diwan* as if in considerable annoyance, whereupon I tottered the more, and made

as if I would fall. The wine and glasses, I noticed, had been concealed.

"What is wrong, Jenene?" he asked. "Is the old woman ill?"

"She is very weak, and craved speech with your cousin, O my master," replied the girl, "so I brought her to you, as she says it is a matter of great importance."

Akrashah reluctantly placed a cushion for me, and Jenene solicitously helped me to be seated.

"Brew coffee at once, Jenene," ordered Akrashah. Then he said to me: "We shall have food and drink for you in a hurry."

"I stand not in need of coffee or food," I replied, quaveringly, "having just dined with a friend. However, I have a giddiness which might be allayed by a little wine. Although I am a true moslemah and would not drink wine for the purpose of becoming intoxicated, I find it a ready cure for this dizziness which often assails me."

"Did my cousin, Allah rest his soul, have any wine in the house, Jenene?" asked Akrashah, with pretended innocence.

"He kept a little for medicinal purposes," replied the girl.

"Then bring wine," he said, "and three cups, for our breasts are straitened by the calamity that has befallen this house and our hearts hang heavy with sadness, so we may drink a little wine to broaden them and to hearten ourselves."

After each of us had drunk a glass of wine, and our goblets had been replenished, I brought out the necklace.

"It was about this piece of jewelry that I came to consult Zayd," I said. "Although it is a family heirloom, and unless there were great need I would not part with it for any sum, I find myself destitute and forced to sell it. Knowing Zayd for an honest tradesman I came here, hop-

ing to receive its value, for I have no idea of its worth."

Akrashah took the necklace in his right hand and slowly drew it across the back of the left. I saw his eyes light up with cupidity and avarice as he noted its great beauty and value.

"Oh, master!" exclaimed Jenene. "Is it not beautiful?"

"It is well made," was his reply, "but the materials are not very costly. The jewels are imitations, and the settings plated. I'm afraid I can't offer much for it."

"Nevertheless I would give much for the trinket," said Jenene. "Perhaps if the master does not want it you will sell it to me, mother."

"It may be, my little Jenene," said Akrashah, "that I will buy it for you, seeing you are so set on having it. But I warrant you I shall not pay any outrageous price for it."

"You know the worth, good sir," I said. "Name the price, then, and I will sell it to you and depart."

"Nay, mother, you name it," he replied, refilling my glass and winking slyly at Jenene. "After all, it is your property."

"Very well, then," I replied, and named a price which I knew to be about half the value of the necklace.

But Akrashah was as grasping as he was villainous, and laughing at the price I asked, offered me about a tenth of the amount. Thereafter we haggled spiritedly until the bottle of wine was entirely consumed and a second had been brought out. I noticed, in the meantime, that Akrashah and Jenene, who had evidently been drinking much wine before I arrived, were becoming quite intoxicated. Concluding that it was therefore time to do what I had planned to do, I palmed a bit of *bhang* and slyly dropped it into the glass of my betrayer. A few moments

later I succeeded in dropping a piece into the glass of the slave girl.

It was not long before the drug got in its work, and both were lying insensible before me. I had taken care to give each of them a good heavy portion, so their slumber would be long.

But I still had much work to do, and that quickly, before the morning should dawn, so I swiftly divested myself of not only the garments of my mother, but the raiment which my betrayer had put on me that morning. I then undressed him, and after donning his clothing, dressed him in the blood-spattered garments he had worn when he committed the murder.

Upon going through his pockets I found that he was not Akrashah, cousin of Zayd, but was really Kasim ben Musa of Jerusalem, late of Damascus, who had prepared forged papers and committed the crime in order to thus gain the possessions of the wealthy young goldsmith.

As soon as I had determined these things, I wrapped the insensible Kasim in the cloth covering of the *diwan* and shouldering him, carried him out into the street. By singular good fortune I did not meet any one on the way to my destination, which was the wall of the courtyard of the prison in which I had been confined.

There, in the shadow of the wall, I unwrapped the limp Kasim. I then hoisted him to the top of the wall, and pushed him so that he rolled over into the courtyard. At the sound of his falling body I heard a guard running, and knew that he would soon be discovered.

Rolling the cover of the *diwan* into a bundle I departed noiselessly.

Upon coming to the house of Zayd, I found Jenene still lying in a stupor. Replacing the *diwan* cover, I took the clothing of my mother and returned it to my house. I then went back to the house of Zayd, and after brewing some coffee and

lighting a *shisha*, waited for Jenene to regain consciousness.

She did not awaken until long after the dawn prayer. Seeing me attired in the clothing of Kasim, and still half dazed by the wine and *bhang*, she took me for her master without question. I gave her some coffee, which seemed to refresh her greatly. Then she remembered the old woman, and asked what had become of her.

"The old mother of a calamity became very drunk," I replied, "and continued to ask more and more money for the necklace which I wished to secure for you. In the meantime, it seems, the wine went to your head, and I saw that you had fallen asleep. But I was determined to get this necklace for you at any price, and finally paid the old hag twice what she had originally asked. She then took her departure, and I waited for you to awaken, that I might acquaint you with the news."

So saying, I handed her the necklace which had so intrigued her fancy.

"Oh, master!" she cried. "So splendid a present is far more than I deserve!"

"I have no doubt," I replied, "that your own beauty will so outshine that of the precious stones as to make them appear like pebbles."

"Last night," she said, "you asked me to unveil and I refused you. But I may not refuse so generous and kind a master longer. Permit me but a few moments in my apartment and I will comply with your request."

So saying, she rose and went into her apartment, while I burned with impatience to see what beauty her robes and veil concealed.

LIKE any woman who wants to look her best, Jenene was absent for a long time. Presently, however, she came through the curtained doorway unveiled,

and wearing a filmy, diaphanous garment that revealed every line of her beautiful young body.

"Do I please you, master?" she asked, archly.

The sight of her beauty then and there interposed between me and my wits, for never on earth had I imagined there could be a damsel to compare with her. She had a mouth magical as Solomon's seal, hair blacker than the night of estrangement to a lover, a brow white as the crescent moon at the Feast of Ramazan, cheeks like the blood-red anemones of Nu'uman, breasts that were twin pomegranates of enchantment, and a graceful form and carriage that would put to shame a branch of *ban*, stirred by the soft breezes from the Valley of the Zarab Shan.

"You are magnificent," I said. "I glorify Allah, the one and true God, who has given you to me."

Rising, I took her in my arms and kissed her until she grew faint and could not stand, whereupon I carried her to the *diwan*.

And so it came about that I inherited the wealth and lived in the house of Zayd, but greater and more precious by far than both of these, had their value been increased a thousandfold, I inherited Jenene, who loved me with a love that was past all understanding, until the destroyer of delights and the sunderer of societies took her from me forever.

But to return to that first day with Jenene. In the afternoon she went to the *souk* to buy food for our evening meal. When she returned, she said:

"I have just seen a horrible sight, O beloved master. Impaled on the point of a lance stuck in the ground before the house of the *kazi*, I saw the severed and bloody head of that foul murderer, Ka-

sim. It is said that he drugged two guards and attempted to escape over the wall, but fell, and was caught and executed."

"Allah is just," I replied. "*Alhamdo-*

lillah! Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Three Worlds!"

Ho, Silat, bring the sweet and take the full.

The Kalgan Road

By WILLIAM DOUGHTY

A tale of Mongolia, Tibetan lamas, Chinese bandits, and the kidnapping of the Living Buddha

IF THE lamas loitering about the hall of the Golden Buddhas had watched the bearer of the sack of argol, they might have detected a little stiffness in his devotions. He was a big man, wearing the conventional robes of the yellow lamas, and with a cast of countenance which might have meant a slight admixture of white blood in Mongolian ancestry. His personal dirt, which successfully disguised his face, and the stinking bag of camel's dung fuel he carried with him, all fitted into the picture. The only thing wrong was the slight laboriousness with which he climbed to his feet after each reverent prostration.

"These damn Chinks sure have good belly muscles!" he muttered to himself, when no one was near to hear him. He reached forward and yanked one of the handles that protruded from a bank of prayer wheels. Some lazy monk, in forgotten ages past, had hooked them together so that one pull of a lever whirled three or four dozen drums containing paper prayers, thus, with the least possible effort, sending heavenward a whole cloud of oblations.

In Urga, the local form of genuflection is to flop down at full length upon the ground, to raise one's body stiffly in a

push-up, and then to leap lightly to one's feet. The Tibetan lamas could cover half a mile around a temple with no apparent effort. This impostor found himself swearing at every lift.

But he was drawing closer to the private quarters of the Living Buddha. "Not a hell of a distance to go," he thought. "But then my troubles begin! And I don't mean maybe——"

An American—and in spite of his appearance, this lama's thoughts betrayed him as an American—has about as much chance in the *kuren* of Urga as he would have at the Ka'ba in Mecca. If they spotted him, the other monks—whose average height was over six feet—would tear him limb from limb. Jim Crane knew what he was up against. He was playing for big stakes, and when he gambled he was not a piker. From the Congo to Kamschatka he had staked his life on the turn of stranger cards than those which now controlled his destiny, and he did not often get scared until the affair was over and he had time to think about what he had been through. But inching along this way did not occupy his mind, and he knew he was surrounded by plenty of troubles—about 13,000 of them. There were 13,000 lamas in the *kuren* of

Urga, and if he were found out every one of them would want a crack at him.

Jim Crane's real front name was "Whooping". He had that sort of a voice, and enough Indian blood to entitle him to the Indian title. But the war had brought him close to the white man. He had been a notable scout on the Western front, and then he had gone to Siberia to make the railways safe for the Chinese. He had liked the country. It was a real frontier. He had pulled strings, been mustered out there. A few years in Manchuria, and he had seen the opportunities in Mongolia. He had transferred his activities—chiefly trading—and here he was.

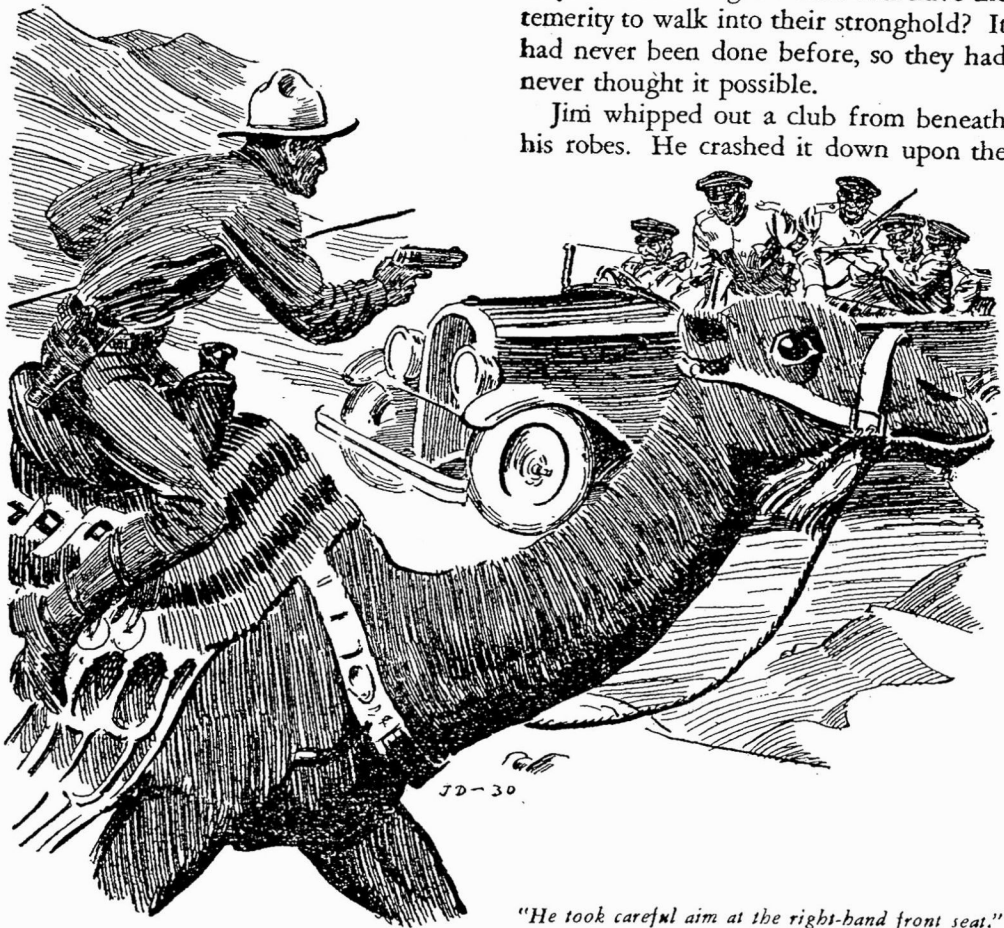
He stood up after the last prostration, and dusted himself off. "Guess I always

was a damn' fool," he thought. "I feel like a Ku Kluxer tryin' to kidnap the Pope." He grinned, and opened the door in front of him.

Kidnapping the Pope was exactly his stunt. The fact that it happened to be a Tibetan Pope does not alter the case, except to make his case more desperate if he were caught.

He spotted the Living Buddha. He fell reverently upon his face. The four lamas who surrounded the old man scarcely glanced at him. Their argol fire smoked in a corner. Jim scrambled to his feet, walked over to it, and emptied his sack of fuel onto the heap that already lay there. He turned slowly about. Once more nobody watched him. Why should they? What stranger would ever have the temerity to walk into their stronghold? It had never been done before, so they had never thought it possible.

Jim whipped out a club from beneath his robes. He crashed it down upon the



"He took careful aim at the right-hand front seat."

skull of a lama. The man crumpled. The other three looked at him in blank surprise. That gave Jim time to fell another. Then, with a roar, the other two jumped him.

The old Buddha, in his dotage, and half dead with most of the diseases that ravage Mongolia, did not pay any attention to them. As Jim dug his fingers into the throat of one of the lamas, he thanked his lucky stars for that. He might handle two of the monks, but if the old boy started yelling . . .

The attackers must have weighed two hundred pounds each. As he went down, Jim was between them. One of them lay beneath him, pummeling him savagely but ineffectually. The other, on top, had found the American's eye, and was gouging it cruelly with his thumb. The club had flown out of Jim's hand. He snapped back his elbow, drove it into the eye of the man beneath him. The lama screeched—exactly what Jim feared most. If they heard him from outside—good-night! He knocked away the thumb that punished his eye. The lama squirmed a little to one side. Almost enough room—then enough—and the American's knee came up in the murderous knee-punch he had learned from Kru boys in Nigeria. The man on top of him screeched, relaxed. Jim heaved him off. He whipped about, to hit the man who lay beneath him.

Then he saw his club. He dived at it, slammed it against the face of the man he had pushed aside. The man whose eye he had smashed opened his mouth to yell. The falling club brought blood just in time to choke off the cry.

Jim leaped to his feet. All four of the monks were prostrate, but two gave signs of life. Cold-blooded taps from the stick silenced them for as long as Jim needed. He opened the door through which he had come, peered out. No monks were

in sight. He turned back to the old man, the Living Buddha, the sacred object in all central Asia. If those yellow hordes who roam the continent from the Kirghiz steppes to the peaks of Tibet could have seen him now, Jim Crane would have been saved alive for years until they could have devised a torture terrible enough for the enormity of his offense.

Jim dashed his fist at the face of the old man. He stopped it when he barely touched the sunken nose. "Good," he grunted. "Blind as a bat." He ripped some strings of cloth from the robes of the unconscious monks, swiftly tied them around the mouth of the Buddha. Then he bound his legs and arms and, without more ado, jammed him into the sack which had held the argol.

"Tough luck for you, old fellow," he muttered, "but you're just the innocent bystander. Let's go!"

SWIFTLY and cautiously, with the sack thrown over his shoulder as it had been when he came in, he let himself out another door, surmising that it would lead him into the temple courtyard. He was right! He prostrated himself a few times, before he came to the gate, in order to avoid too great an appearance of haste, and then started full tilt for the foreign quarter.

When, fifteen minutes later, he burst into a room where sat four white men, he was pursued by a rising chorus which sounded like feeding-time in a vast pack of lions. The kidnapping had been discovered!

He did not knock, as he dodged through the door of the one-storied shack which was one of the most pretentious buildings in the Holy City. Four white hands reached four holsters concealed in four different places. Then, carefully depositing his bag onto the floor, he tipped back his hat, and they recognized him.

"*Mon dieu, Cran'*," exclaimed Dupont, "but your disguise, eet ees pairfect!"

"I say, old top; how did you ever get away alive? When we heard that riot starting——"

Crane sank panting into a chair. "Listen," he exclaimed, in his booming voice. "There's no time for talk, now. Jensen, nab me the best riding-camel you can, and get it here, *pronto*."

"You bate!" answered the little Dane with a grin, and disappeared.

"There was no trouble," announced Crane, grimly. "At least, not after I tapped a couple of lamas over the head. I don't think they recognized me. My Sioux ancestry, and all this dirt, make me look like one of 'em. And I got the old 'un."

"You what?"

"In that sack. Hope he hasn't smothered to death. There's the devil to pay, of course. But they don't guess it's not one of their yellow brethren who did it; I'm pretty sure of that.

"Now, I'll get out. I'll take him with me. The machine-gun and ammunition you have will save you for a little while. If the Reds try to interfere, spill the beans. Promise the lamas that you'll bring back the Buddha—if they'll give you time. That'll get 'em on your side.

"Weston ought to be pretty well on his way here from Kalgan. If he's ducked Yen Ghiz's bandits he ought to get through. He'll bring plenty of ammo. I'm going out. I'll take the old fellow with me. He'll be a hostage—in case I run into anybody who tries to make trouble. Somehow, in a day or two, I'll bring in the ammo from Weston—even if Yen Ghiz has found it. Get all the women and kids into this quarter. Don't take any chances. Don't let 'em know how serious things are."

"They already know," said the Englishman, dully.

"That's too bad. They'll have a tough time until they know there's nothing more to worry about."

"My wife went crazy, this morning," continued the Englishman. "She shot herself, rather than face these yellow devils. I am afraid she won't live."

Crane was silent, for a moment, before the pain and grief of the man. Every occupant of that room felt the deepest sympathy for Calthrop. And every one, except the American, who was not married, feared, in the secret depths of his heart, that he might have to face the same tragedy. Then Crane spoke: "I'm sorry, Calthrop, damned sorry. After I leave, tell her not to worry—that I'll get through somehow.

"If we can possibly get our hands onto that ammunition, we can hold off any of these beggars—Chinese or Mongol—with our machine-guns. For the love of God, don't use up all the ammunition you have before I get back. Save enough to keep them scared. The marines ought to be up from Peking in ten days."

While he spoke, he ripped off the lama's robes, scrubbed himself with strong yellow soap, and climbed into the American khakis that were his usual costume on the desert roads. As he finished dressing, he did not talk. He had plenty to think about. This Yen Ghiz was the most powerful war lord in western China. He had announced to the world that he was a direct descendant of Ghenhiz Khan of old; that, like his terrible ancestor, he was going to conquer the world; and that the white races must melt away before the yellow. It was beginning to look as if he would carry out his threat.

The disordered forces of republican China, under the weak leadership of Chiang Kai Shek, had been able to do nothing. Yen had moved some of his

forces steadily westward until Urga lay directly in their path. The Bolsheviki had hailed him as a member of the Internationale, and they would do nothing for foreign traders in the city. Yen's army had snowballed on the way, and now he had thousands scattered over Asia. Most of them, under his personal command, were moving toward the Yang-tze. A few thousand pushed on to the west.

They were never paid. They stayed with the army in the hope of being fed, and when they conquered a city they swept through it like a plague. The officers took what they wanted, and left the rest to the rank and file. If they reached Urga, the days of Ungern, the mad baron, would be repeated, and a thousand times magnified. In Ungern's times, only Jews had suffered; now it would be every white man, woman and child. These Europeans had seen men skinned alive; women had hung from doorways by their heels until their agony was ended by the frenzy of blood-maddened wild dogs. No wonder Calthrop's wife had shot herself, rather than wait for the advent of the yellow hordes!

THE rioting was spreading from the monastery quarter. Wailing, and furious cries, crashed through the shattered window. Lamas, astride their wiry ponies, were dashing about the muddy streets, raising the cry of alarm. Somewhere, somehow, a traitor had arisen in the holy city. The report—started by the first priest Jim had hit—that the kidnapper had been a dragon devil clad in the uniform of Yen Ghiz's hordes, lost nothing in the repeating, and as the white men listened to an excited colloquy outside their window, they breathed a little more easily. Perhaps, now, they would have the doughty monks on their side, when the bandit came!

But it was a forlorn hope. Two of the

men had fought with the interloper, and they spread their story that the assailant had been dressed like one of themselves.

Jensen burst into the room. "The camel, it is outside, already," he cried, "a white camel, and a famous runner. She can make a hundred miles in a day, carrying a man."

"Good work," said Jim. "I'll see you, when I can bring in some ammunition with me."

He picked up the sack that contained the old man. He shook it, anxiously. There was a little stifled whimper from within. "Good," he thought. "The old boy's standing the racket pretty well. He'll come in handy!"

He seized his American saddle-bags, dragged the Buddha after him, and lashed them both onto the saddle behind him. He warned the men who watched him: "Keep your eyes open! I'll have a devil of a time getting back with the ammo. God knows how I can get away with it. But it'll come in, somehow—with me, or without me."

He commanded the camel to rise. The ungainly beast, complaining bitterly, clambered onto its spindly legs, and shuffled down the street, through a mob of yelling, cursing lamas, who knew they must do something to bring back their Buddha—and who had no idea what it might be.

There is no primitive means of conveyance, not even the wind-spawned steeds of the Arabs or the vast war canoes of the Alaska Indians, that can cover territory like a good camel. Crane, settling himself to the rocking gait, watched with satisfaction as familiar landmarks flew past him on the Kalgan road. Somewhere, down there, was George Weston with a carload of belts for the machine-guns the Europeans and Americans had carefully cherished for years. If they had been discovered — indeed, if they had

been found with their automatic pistols—they would have been summarily executed by the Soviet Buriats. They had treasured the arms for such a time as this—and now the assault was upon them on a grander scale than they had ever feared. They could hold off the yellow devils for a day—or two days—or even three days. But that would not be enough. The marines who had been summoned from Peking could not reach them for many more days than that. If Weston got through, if he could make the city, they might hold off the bandits. If not—every man there knew he would kill his wife and children rather than let them fall into Asiatic hands.

THE slow northern twilight was gently shrouding the desert when Crane ran into the Chinese outposts. The soft pads of the camel had not betrayed his approach until he was almost upon them. There were cries, an order to halt. He pulled his beast off to one side of the road. He could dimly make out an automobile full of men in uniforms. If he stopped, he knew that he would not get away from them for hours—if ever. With his camel-driver's stick, he urged on the beast. Her legs flashed like electrically operated stilts. A shot rang out. Jim slumped behind her neck. The chances of being hit by a Chinese soldier are small. He took careful aim at the right-hand front seat. It was a European car, and he hoped to disable the driver. He pulled the trigger three times.

There were angry cries, spurts of flame in the darkness. The car lurched crazily, nearly turned over. The American vanished beyond it. The motor stopped, and he did not hear it start again. It had been a close shave; and he might run into more trouble at any minute.

He stayed a hundred yards from the road. The camel groaned at the effort

of traveling over the uneven ground, but still they made good time. Shadows passed by. Commands to halt were shouted after him, but there were no more shots. He knew he must be among the vanguard of Yen Ghiz's straggling army.

Then, far ahead, he heard the rapid barking of many arms. Some kind of a fight had broken out. There were the sharp explosions of rifles; the harder, staccato bursts from a single automatic.

"Sounds damn funny," muttered Jim. "Better make look-see." He pulled in the camel, and as silently as possible crept toward the shooting. Then he signaled his beast to kneel. He dismounted, took an automatic in each hand, and stealthily stole forward.

Bullets began to crackle past. He crouched lower. Still he could see none of the attackers. A spurt of sand flew up at his feet. "Gettin' close," he muttered.

He dropped to his belly, and began to creep forward. His elbows swung like the legs of a big spider. Thus, many times, he had stolen across No Man's Land, and in the manner of his ancestors, silenced some sentry who blocked the path of a raiding-party. None of these attackers seemed to be near him. Still, he could not see what they were shooting at. Then a large, dark form loomed up in the night. An automobile!

Closer and closer crept Crane. His fingers tightened on the automatics. They were Lugers, of the type developed in the war; each magazine was a long coil, holding three dozen cartridges.

Would it be friend or foe? Was the car Chinese—or Russian—or one of their own? From the size of a sheep it had grown to the size of a camel. Then he discovered it was a Ford—a station wagon.

There was one man crouched somewhere alongside it, answering the shots of the attackers. Did he dare approach?

Could it be Weston, come this far? Jim did not know, and he could see nothing.

Then there was a cry. The driver had been hit! A string of curses broke out. Weston's voice!

"Yo, George!" whooped Crane. He jumped to his feet, and howling a long Comanche yell, dashed toward the car. The attackers had heard him. Perhaps they had seen him. Bullets began to whistle past his ears.

Weston, clinging to the side of the little truck, was still firing. But as Crane caught him, dragged him to a more comfortable position, his hands were sticky with blood from a yawning chest wound.

"Keep 'em off—Jim," panted the wounded man. "I've got ammo—all we need. For God's sake, keep 'em off—an' take it in."

Jim hesitated for a split second. Weston was done for. He was all too sure of that. That left nobody between the bandits and those men back in Urga, but himself. If they got him, it would be the end of the fracas, except for the murdering.

Then he stood up. "What the hell!" he yelled. "If my number's up—it's up!" More than once he had bluffed his way out of a scrape with the Chinese. They still believed in devils, and were more than half convinced that all foreigners were inhabited by them. Yelling like the redskin he was, an automatic spitting in each hand, he dashed toward the attackers. He blessed in a thousand ways his coiled magazines. And he prayed in a thousand more that they would not jam!

Straight into that scattering fire he ran. Bullets flew closer. He could not help ducking, when one pierced the brim of his hat. A bandit loomed up in front of him. The man went down minus most of his face. Another jumped toward him, thrust a rifle against his breast. There was no time to shoot. Jim knocked up the

barrel, drove the end of his own pistol against a mouthful of leering teeth. A gun butt crashed across his shoulders. For a second he stopped, paralyzed by pain. Then he killed the man who had clubbed him. He was swearing in six languages—English, Sioux, Russian, Chinese, Tibetan and Fang. He began to feel like singing. In fact, desperate as the situation was, he was having the time of his eventful life.

Seven times, in quick succession, his automatics snarled. A wail went up from the Chinese. It was in a dialect Crane did not understand. He shot in the direction of the noise. Then the bullets which had been bombarding him stopped. He waited, tense. Was this some new surprise?

Then he heard the crumbly noise of feet padding away across the sand. He had outbluffed them!

He dashed back to Weston. The man was unconscious. Jim forced the neck of the brandy flask between the set teeth. The liquid fire stung him back to life. "I'm—goner," he murmured. "Go on—with stuff. It's—in—blocks of tea. Yen—flanking movement—off road. Between here—and Urga. No Marine planes—at Peiping—won't be here—for weeks." His will broke. By supreme self-control, he had hung on to the thread of life long enough to give his news to Crane. Now, with a bubbling of blood in his throat, he dropped his head, and died.

Jim lifted his body into the back of the car. He could not take the time to bury him, now. He jumped into the driver's seat, tried the motor. Good! It still worked—if they hadn't plugged the gas tank.

He waited only long enough to refill his magazines, and then he gave the bus all it would take. He bumped off down the road to Urga. "If I can only get through before Yen hits the road again,"

he thought, "we'll be able to stand them off."

Then he swore aloud. He jammed on the brakes. "Of all the camel-headed, verminous Buriats, I'm the worst!" he yelled. He had completely forgotten the old living Buddha!

Hethrew the Ford into reverse, bumped back along the road to the place of the fight. He jumped off and raced back to where he had left the camel. She was gone!

"Hell's bells!" He ran to the car, got out a flashlight. It was inviting disaster, he knew, but he had to do it. Why, if he didn't get the old fellow clear of that sack for a while, he might die. And there was no telling where the camel might have taken him!

The animal had vanished like smoke before a gale. Jim followed the tracks a little way. There was no sign that the Chinese had been near the beast, but he knew he would never find it in the darkness. It might be miles away, by now! There was nothing to do but wait for morning.

Cursing in several more languages than he had before, he climbed back into the car, and drove it off the road, where there would be less danger of detection. Then he chewed tobacco, and the cud of disgust with himself. By this time the lamas might have turned against the Europeans. If the return of their Buddha had been promised, and if he came back dead, or not at all, well, the bandit attack would have been like a Sunday school picnic alongside what would happen to the foreign devils then! To keep his mind from that troublous possibility, Jim dug a deep grave and buried the unhappy Weston.

FORTUNATELY, the northern dawn came early. Not two hours after he had dispersed the bandits, a plover—reminiscent of American meadows—flew

crying overhead, and Jim could see the long wings against the sky. Gradually shapes began to emerge out of the gloaming. Seven or eight dead Chinese, used shells, bandoliers, lay sprawled about. There was not a man in sight on all the plain—and not a camel.

Time was precious. It might be only a matter of a few hours when the forces of Yen would attack. But if he came back without the Living Buddha, they would find themselves between the devil of the bandits and the raging sea of thousands of monks.

"Well," he said aloud, at length, "I've got to make tracks and I've got to find that camel. Here's where I do something Dan'l Boone never thought of."

He stepped on the starter, and set out to follow the trail of the camel—in the car! Fortunately, the sand was hard enough to support him with little difficulty; and at the same time, the surface was yielding enough to hold the traces of the missing animal. There were minutes when he rocketed along at thirty-five miles an hour. Again, he would have to climb out and meticulously scan some sand-swept rock for the few dislodged grains which meant a fresh trail.

Fortunately—if he caught up with it, and unfortunately if he didn't—the beast was travelling in the general direction of Urga.

"This sure is one noble bus," thought Crane, when he had weathered a particularly difficult range of dunes. "She couldn't do much better if she had wings." He groaned as he saw a steep wall of sand in front of him. The camel had gone straight over. He doubted if he could make it. But on either side, broken-out croppings of rock presented almost insurmountable difficulties.

"Well, here goes!" He threw the old car into low gear and ground slowly up the side. At times the sand gave under

the wheels, and they slithered crazily, as though the hill had been ice. The engine was boiling madly. There was no water within miles. The wind had cut out a furrow from under the top of the dune, until the sand hung at an impossible angle. Jim, all unconscious, was grunting along, as the flivver tackled the ascent. The engine coughed. The loose sand slipped under the wheels. They spun madly. The front of the car skidded around, and began to slip down sideways. It leaned to one side, tipped, rolled completely over, and stopped.

With a whoop, Jim jumped clear. The Ford lay on its side, and the wheels, freed of the resistance of the earth, raced crazily. He jumped down, reached in, and turned off the switch. Blocks of compressed tea were scattered all over the place.

"This is a hell of a note!" He looked at the bus disgustedly. "Sheridan, twenty miles away, hasn't anything on me! Well, here goes!" There was nothing he could do there. There wasn't a thing in sight he could use as a lever. With the assistance of the camel, he might be able to drag the flivver back onto its base. He'd have to keep going, until he caught up with the beast!

Resolutely he scrambled over the dune, thinking that he couldn't blame any product of Detroit for refusing that ascent. Down into the next valley went the pad marks of the beast he followed. He climbed the next hill, went over the top, and stopped with a surprised exclamation.

Beneath his feet was a tiny camp. A felt *yourt* stood by a fire of tamarisk. The camel, minus the monk, crouched contentedly by the door. And, at the end of the depression, there grazed a herd of several hundred sheep and goats. Food was scarce, but they seemed to find sustenance in the dry desert growth.

With a gun at ready, Jim walked cau-

tiously down toward them. A dog rushed out barking. A man came from the door, raised his hand in a gesture of peace.

"This is perhaps your camel you are seeking?" he asked in Chinese with a glance at the weapon.

"It is. And my grandfather?"

"He is well—in there." The man, apparently a tribesman from western Siberia, waved toward the *yourt*. "By the beard of the Prophet, it is a strange way you carry the old!"

At the words, Jim sighed with relief. The man was a Mohammedan. He would not be interested in the Living Buddha.

A few questions, and the herder's story was out. He had been bringing sheep and goats to sell to the Soviet government at Urga. He had heard of the approach of Yen Ghiz. A few sheep and goats which remained, he had left, hidden, in a lonely gully. The rest had been stolen, to feed the bandits. By this time, said the herder, whose name was Ali, the Chinese must have camped before the city.

Jim's heart sank. He had found the old man. He had the ammunition. He was not far from his destination. But how the devil would he get through those hundreds of bandits? If they spotted the machine-gun bullets, nothing on earth could save him.

He sat down, for a ceremonial cup of clabbered goat's milk, with Ali. He had to think. He had just about twenty-four hours in which to get through. The friends he had left in the city could bluff that long. But when the Chinese found the stream of machine-gun bullets falling off, like water from a hose that has been cut, it would be all up with them. He conversed politely with this trader, who cursed the bandits with all the maledictions known to Islam. "Maybe," thought Jim, "the beggar will help me."

Suddenly he jumped up. "Will you sell your herd?" he asked.

"I, even I who am a famous trader, will sell for but little," whined the Kazak. "What doth it profit me to hold my herds for the thieving bandits of infidels?"

"I tell you what I'll give you. Follow me!"

The little Mohammedan dashed off after the long-legged American. In a few minutes they were back at the car. Jim told him he could have it, with all the tea it held, for the sheep. This was such wealth as Ali had never before dreamed of. He looked at this stranger as if he thought the desert sun had affected his mind, and swore eternal fealty if the American would but help him right the devil-engine, and tell him the prayers that would send it flying.

Swiftly, then, the two got to work. They brought over the unwilling camel. They broke up the tea bricks. In the center of each were from ten to fifteen cartridges for the empty belts Jim knew filled the machine-guns back in Urga. They loaded the bullets into the argol sack, and carried them to the herder's camp.

There, for a space, they were stumped. Then, diffidently, the Moslem walked across to the camel, seized a handful of hair, and yanked it loose.

"Good boy, Ali!" yelled Jim, in English the herder could not understand. "I forgot the beasts were shedding, this time of the year."

Ali summoned his two wives from the *yourt*. They were quite unabashed at the presence of the white man. Their lord and master spoke to them in his own dialect, and they set to with a will, twisting thin, strong cords from the camel hair, and then knotting them securely about the machine-gun bullets.

The herder took Jim out to the herd. He carried his lariat, a long hair loop on the end of a six-foot stick, and one by

one he caught the sheep and dragged them back to the fire. One man sat on the heads of the beasts, the other on the rear end. Carefully separating the long belly wool, they tied in little bundles of three or four machine-gun cartridges, where they were completely hidden, and where they could not be shaken loose. The camel's hair held well. The sheep did not particularly object. By late afternoon, working without rest, the four had several thousand rounds of ammunition safely concealed.

Crane was about ready to drop. But this was no time for rest. He gave a few orders to Ali. The sheep, driven on by the black dogs, would follow as soon as the women could strike the felt tent.

Then Jim led out the Living Buddha. The poor old fellow had not had so much exercise for years. He was accustomed to being roughly handled by his ministers, who knew what a fraud he was, and who used him for their own ends. He was an extremely sick man. He had been, before the kidnapping, and the hard usage did him no good. But there is scarcely any limit to what a Mongolian can endure. All the weaklings die out as babies. The men will thrive for years under sickness and injuries that would kill a European in a week.

The Buddha climbed onto the camel ahead of the American. Jim made him as comfortable as possible, and slowly guided the beast toward Urga. He felt a strange elation. He had always been a gambler. More than once his life had been saved by a lucky turn of Fate's cards. But he had never gambled against such odds as these.

He was something of an actor, as any successful adventurer among savage peoples must be, and on this acting ability would hang his salvation, and that of the white men in the beleaguered city. In the next act of the comedy, he was to play

the part of a fearless man. He knew he would have the sternest of critics; and if they were not convinced, that the penalty would be death.

A FEW hours' riding brought him to the edge of the long plain stretching north toward Urga. It was still dark, and in the blackness he could see the billet fires of the Chinese bandits. There must have been hundreds of them. He settled himself as comfortably as he could, to await the dawn, and the arrival of the sheep. The wild black dogs, the scourge of the Mongolian plain, circled warily about him. He surmised that they had already closed with the bandits and learned a new lesson—caution.

The first flames of the sun were searing the east when, far behind him, he saw the dust cloud that meant approaching sheep. He shook the Living Buddha, to awaken him. "Hold on, grandfather," he commanded, "again we fly!"

He urged the camel forward. Some of the Chinese perceived his approach. They ran out, threatening him with their rifles. Jim paid no attention. They fired over his head. But, with a grim face, he rode straight toward them. They quickly realized that he was in their power, and ran forward. One of them seized the old man by the foot, nearly dragged him from his perch. Jim cursed the Chinaman, and slashed him across the face with his camel stick. Then, addressing them as the offal of the earth, he demanded that they take him to their commander.

They stood back, awed. Then one of them beckoned, and respectfully led the way toward a tent in the middle of the encampment. The sentry at the door tried to halt them. Crane looked at him, scornfully, lifted the old man from his seat, and pushed past into the tent.

Despite the earliness of the hour, four Chinese, dressed in "officers'" uniforms,

squatted about a low table on which there was a pile of papers, and a pot of tea. They jumped to their feet when Jim entered. One of them yelled for the guard.

Coolly, and quickly, the American dropped his burden and whipped out an automatic, which he thrust in the face of the man who called. There was a breathless instant of silence. The Chinaman's eyes narrowed dangerously, and Jim nearly squeezed the trigger. It looked as though he would have to fight for it. Then his stare conquered that of the yellow man, who turned away his eyes. He ordered the guard, who came to the tent door, to withdraw.

"It is well, fathers," said Crane meaningfully. "Now—see ye the old man I carry with me?"

They nodded, without saying a word. He continued: "Ye have heard of the Pope of the Lamas—the Buddha Who Lives?"

Once more they nodded silently. "Then look—and look well."

Their yellow faces might have been varnished masks. But he knew they understood.

"He was stolen," he went on, "from the Holy of Holies. Death stalks through the city until he returns. And to him who injures the Living Lord will fall the Thousand Knives and the Running Fires."

He watched their faces, narrowly, while he pretended that he concerned himself with the old man. "I have rescued him, I, single-handed!" The four Chinese stirred. Jim was beginning to think they believed him. If they did—he must be a mighty warrior in their eyes.

"From a hundred renegade Mongols and Russians I captured him." Still there was no response, but Jim could see that he was getting an effect. "I shall take him through your lines this morning.

"Damn their souls!" he thought, "why don't they say something.

"If anything happens to him," he continued, "you will be held responsible!" He pointed the muzzle of his pistol at the officer he judged to be in charge of the bandits. "There are thirteen thousand monks within the city. If he is not given safe conduct, they will strangle your men with their bare hands."

The Chinaman he addressed smiled ironically. "I have no battle with the monks," he said, "but with the foreign devils, and their gold. They are what I came for." Jim flushed at his insolence. "Take in the Holy Father. He will not be harmed."

"Now!" thought Jim, taking a deep breath. "Here goes:

"With him must go his herd," he said casually.

"My men are hungry men," responded the officer.

"The monks are hungry men," interrupted Jim. "These are sacred sheep. They are dedicated to wiping out the insult to the Buddha. The death of a single sheep can only be expunged by blood."

"I will see what I can do."

"The death of a single sheep," said Crane grimly, "might easily result in the death of the Buddha." And with that threat, he turned, and carried the old man from the tent.

He placed his burden upon the camel, clambered aboard himself, and rode back to meet Ali and the sheep.

"All right, Ali," he said. "We go through."

The little Mohammedan grinned, bleakly. "I shall die, maybe, with all my sheep?"

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "If the yellow men seize one sheep and slit its belly, we all die. If they do not, you will be paid in many gold pieces."

"It is Kismet," murmured the herder,

smiling again. "Lead the way, my master."

STRAIGHT to the edge of the camp rode Whooping Crane. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. The bandits opened a grudging way for the animals. Jim halted, waited for the turmoil of animals to move past him. The Asiatic sheep-dog is not so intelligent as that of the West. Ali's were of little assistance, except to keep the animals moving. The herder, himself, darted here and there heading up the herd, and keeping wanderers in place.

When the end of the procession had reached him, Jim followed after on his camel. The bandits had crowded up to the line of march. An uneasiness moved through them. They were hungry. They had not been paid. They cared nothing for the old yellow man who sat before the foreign devil upon the camel. Why should they not eat? Their officers were fools——

Three of them jumped on a sheep. Three times the American's pistol cracked. Three men lay dead or wounded upon the sand.

The crowd closed in. Someone hit Ali. Again the automatic snarled, and another bandit dropped.

The advance was halted. He could shoot as straight and as quick as lightning, this camel-driver. The men within range of his gun hesitated. Then somebody shot at him from the rear. He whipped about. Again rifles rang out. The camel he was riding screamed, collapsed under him. There was barely time to yank off the old man, when the Chinese closed in.

"Go on with the sheep!" he yelled to Ali. Then he cut loose with his gun. Once more the coiled magazines of the Lugers proved to be life-savers. Eight Chinese fell before his first volley. Some of them shot at him—and killed each

other. They broke, backed away from him. Some dropped to the ground, to avoid his bullets, to steady their own arms. A way opened. Yelling like a maniac, dragging the sacred Buddha under his left arm, Jim charged.

Some of the sheep had been separated from the flock. They had been captured by the bandits. Discovery, now, was only a matter of instants. Once the ruse to get the ammo through the lines was discovered, hell would cut loose, and he would be at the bottom of it.

But still there was time. Nobody quite dared face this yelling, shooting Yank. The poor old man, silent under all his mistreatment, began to babble aloud: *Om mani padme hun*, a Tibetan prayer which, for once, a prayerwheel could not say for him.

The Chinese are the worst shots in the world. Bullets flew all about Jim and the Buddha, but they would have been hit only by accident. The men behind were shooting; those in front wanted only to get out of the way. He caught up with the sheep. The animals, still herded by the excited Ali, were stampeded, now—but they were running in the right direction.

Jim passed them. He was out of the ruck of Chinese, now. The edge of Urga lay ahead. A cheer went up. The white men there had seen him! They fired a brief burst of machine-gun fire over his head, as warning to the pursuers.

Then a shriek rose from behind. "The sheep! The sheep!" he heard the bandits yell. "They carry bullets for the devil guns!"

Firing broke out anew. They were shooting now, not at him so much as at the racing animals. He glanced back over his shoulder. Some two dozen men, all giants, had detached themselves from the ranks and were pursuing him with the fury and impetus of water buffalos. They

had discovered his perfidy; they would have their revenge!

Jim looked back, again. Carrying the old man, as he was, he could never escape. He looked ahead. At the rate these men were running, they might easily head off the sheep. Besides, the marksmen were getting the range now. Animals lay dying all over the plain. The great flock, slashed by the fire, showed signs of breaking up.

He could plainly make out the men in American clothes. But those men were helpless. They had no arms except the machine-guns. And for them the ammunition must be low. Besides, he was in the line of direct fire.

Then, farther to the left, he saw a huge mob of red and yellow lamas. They understood that there was no threat to them in the attack. They were watching with considerable delight the danger and discomfiture of the white men. If those foreign devils were wiped out, so much the better.

Jim stopped. He dropped the Buddha. He cupped his hands before his face. And from his throat burst one of his famous whoops: *Om mani padme hun!*

Twice he shouted it. Then he lifted the living Buddha high above his head, and began to race toward the lamas. They heaved, like an oily wave before it breaks, and then they spilled forth upon the plain. Most of them were armed only with primitive weapons. But there was a foreign devil trying to save their Lord from a crowd of Chinese bandits.

Jim was right. They did what he expected. Half a dozen of them came to him, snatched away the old man. The rest—thousands of them—set upon the Chinese. They did not wait for the bandits to use weapons. They dashed into hand-to-hand combat so quickly that the Chinese gave, with the shock. The ban-

ditions were completely disorganized. The clubs of the Tibetans were more effective than the butts of the rifles. Jim turned, dashed toward the Americans and Europeans.

Ali stood out before them, dancing up and down like a jack-rabbit. The men had herded the sheep into a street, and were even now tossing them onto their backs and ripping out the precious cargo they carried.

Jim looked back. There were a few stray bullets flying, but he was used to

them. The Tibetans were beating the Chinese off, for the time being. The machine-guns would do the rest—until the Marines came!

Whooping Crane stopped. He was suddenly very tired and hungry. "Well," he thought, "I gotta come back in style!" He tightened his belt. He raised his voice in a throat-splitting war-whoop. Then, strolling toward the defenders of the city, he bellowed a famous battle-song of the pale-faces:

"Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parley voo . . ."

Rondeau Orientale

By ALICE I'ANSON

Here by the sea the soft lights glow
Over quaint Fuji's cap of snow;
'Tis blossom time and the wind is sweet
From Fuji's crown to the white-winged fleet
Of seabirds fluttering to and fro!

Cool little wavelets come and go;
But only the ghosts of "sampan" show
When the moon sails up to my calm retreat
Here by the sea!

And ah, the song of the Geisha!—so
The mermaids sing in their caves below!
I dream of the gray surf's restless beat
To the rhythmic patter of dancing feet
With the old, old lure that the Ages know,
Here by the sea!

THE SECRET TRAIL

By G. G. PENDARVES

The slave city of Zug—a vivid tale of the Zawa Arabs and a white girl carried into captivity

“WE ARE lost, then! I’ve often wondered what it would be like to be lost in the desert—now I know!”

Paul Graham looked down at the small figure trudging by his side, and his heart sank to his cracked dusty boots. Bad enough for his partner and himself and the handful of men and camels that made up their small *garfla*; but to have a girl, and, moreover, this particular girl with them in such a crisis made the situation a nightmare to the man.

He and Joseph Southey had been engaged in superintending excavation work in the Ashaggar region of the Sahara for the past six months. His partner was an elderly man with a first-class brain and a quite uncanny intuition and knowledge of where and how to dig for treasures of ancient civilizations. Valuable qualities in a partner for Paul Graham, who possessed no very remarkable mental gifts, but whose humanity and understanding of his men had saved the situation numberless times, when Southey’s irritable impatience threatened to break up things entirely. The senior partner was a crabbed, dyspeptic, mean little man, with just one ruling passion in his life—the collector’s passion, an insatiable desire for more—always more!

His daughter, Joan, motherless since she was a baby, had been brought up on her uncle’s ranch. Travel and adventure were irresistible lures to her, and, when she had heard from her father in Tunis eight months ago, that he was arranging an expedition to the interior, she decided to join him. Taking things in her own

capable hands, she had landed at Algiers, established herself at the Mustapha Hotel, interviewed consuls of all kinds and colors, made lasting friends of a very highly-placed and corpulent Government official, a well-known diplomat, several officers in a famous Spahi regiment, and a host of minor celebrities.

Her well-defined ideas were translated into solid facts in the course of a few weeks, in spite of the inertia, red tape, and prejudice which heaped up obstacles in her way. She joined her father and Graham at Ghadames one blazing autumn day, with her camel, her little retinue, her baggage, and a disarming cheerful assurance that a welcome awaited her.

Even her father grudgingly admitted that she could ride and shoot better than most men he knew, and that he didn’t mind having her as long as she didn’t interfere with his work. Graham, after his first sight of Joan scrambling off her big mount, sunburned, dusty, and very happy, felt that not only could he overlook her mistake in choosing so disagreeable a father, but that it was his plain duty to prevent her making further mistakes in her life—in the matter of a husband, for instance!

Their excavation completed, the *garfla* was working south toward El Musa, when disaster overtook them in the form of the dreaded *gibli*, plus a guide who proved at fault in the crisis. They were lost, and the prospect of finding water grew hourly fainter. Paul groaned inwardly at the thought of what the desert might yet hold in store for the dauntless little companion at his side.

"A flash of steel in the moon-light, and his victim's head rolled in the dust."



"Well, Mr. Owl, don't blink at me in that solemn way! I feel as though I'd been caught stealing my uncle's cherished grapes. Oh, why did you remind me of grapes? I feel ten times thirstier now!"

"Try sucking a dried date." Paul pulled one out of his pocket and offered it. "It's a sort of Arab chewing-gum—specific for many ills!"

"Do you think the guide will recover soon?" she asked presently, after a long interval of silent difficult progress, their feet sinking to the ankles in the fine, recently blown sand. They were travelling in the wake of the *gibli*—that nightmare

of the Sahara—which rushes in howling mad destruction from the south, levelling great dunes to a flat tableland, piling vast mountains of sand to a thousand feet above the plain, lifting the crests from the sand-waves in great whirling pillars of dust—sand-devils, the Beduins call them—burying man and camel, village and oasis, caravan and lonely traveller beneath its dusty pall.

"It's an even chance," replied Paul. "The *gibli* has destroyed all the landmarks on this trail, and at the best it was not a well-marked route. It is rarely used by caravans, there are so few wells. Only a

small *garfla* such as ours, which can travel light and fast, risks the lesser known routes."

"H-m-m-m!" Joan sucked her date industriously. "It's a great pity Father used our last compass to try out the thickness of Hassan's skull. He might have known which would win."

"I doubt if a compass would help much in this uncharted country. One is obliged to trust to what is called 'Beduin instinct.' A few yards to right or left makes all the difference in finding a well, or . . . not finding it!"

"*El mektub—mektub!*" quoted Joan. "That's what Yahia, the guide, told father this morning. *What is written—is written!* I think it's rather comforting. You feel it's no use worrying, so you just stop doing it! Now, if Father would only develop a little Arab philosophy it would be so good for his digestion. Not that he's had much to digest these last few days, poor lamb!"

"In wolf's clothing!" murmured Paul.

"What the devil's that cursed guide doing now?" The "lamb's" voice was harsher than ever, for thirst does not tend to soften the vocal chords.

A dried-up, deeply lined face poked out from the folds of a blanket on the camel which had just overtaken the couple.

"You'd better shoot that fool! He's changed his course every half-hour since we started at sunrise. What did you want to pick Yahia for, anyway? Look at him now! And there you two are strolling along as if this were Broadway!"

"Why, Dad, it was you who chose the guide! You said——"

Mr. Southey retired under the comparative shelter of his blanket, like a cuckoo vanishing behind his clock-door. He alone of the *garfla* rode; not one of the rest of them would have added a pound

to the loads the poor exhausted beasts carried.

It was true that Yahia was behaving more and more erratically. As the Arabs say, he had "lost his head", which is reckoned a definite disease amongst them. It was five days since a curious vagueness had descended on the guide. His eyes had become clouded, and he walked with bowed shoulders and *jerd* trailing in the dust. Later, he began to wander, changing his course every now and then, taking no notice of any of the more salient features of the desert, deaf to the complaints and threats of the angry, frightened retinue. Helpless, they were obliged to follow him, hoping that he would recover his instinct, hoping that some rock, or line of dunes would recall his wandering wits.

The Arabs were at one with Mr. Southey in wanting to shoot him. They looked at the trailing figure with murder in their eyes, and agreed that if they were going to their death, then Yahia should certainly go on ahead to lead the way.

They began to discuss their probable end with the fatalism of their race. They exchanged grisly stories of disasters that had occurred on these little-known southern routes: stories of men dropping within a few spear-lengths of a well; of men gone mad and sun-blind, travelling in circles within sight of an oasis; of bands of prowling desert-dogs waiting until a tortured traveller dropped in his tracks, then rending him to pieces; of *jinnees*, and *shaitans*, and all the fabulous terrors with which the lonely untrodden wastes are peopled.

The men forgot their weariness in vying with one another; even their increasing hate for Yahia was submerged in the flood of anecdote and fable.

"Look!" Joan's voice was hoarse with fatigue. "Is that only another mirage, or do you see dunes over there?"

"I have been watching it for the last few minutes," replied Paul. "I was hoping Yahia would make some sign, but he seems totally uninterested."

Excitement rose to fever pitch amongst the rest of the Arabs. The sun was setting, and all struggled along as fast as their stiff and weary limbs would let them, to get a sight of the land beyond those dunes before darkness fell.

Hassan scrambled to the top of a long high ridge, and for a moment was outlined against the vivid green and violet of the sky; then he dropped in a pathetic heap, a mere bag of dusty clothing on the ridge.

"But there are bushes . . . it is green everywhere!" Joan was bewildered, as she too, panted to the summit, and stood blinking at the country beyond.

But the Arabs stood dejectedly, and the camels, after their first wild rush to the feathery green bushes, stopped short and made no attempt to graze.

"I know this place!" Hassan's voice broke the silence of despair. "It is called the Place of Thirst. There is water—but it is salt! I have heard my people speak of this place . . . it is death . . . we are lost! *Allahu Akbar!*"

The fact that Hassan spoke in his native tongue, instead of airing the French and broken English of which he was inordinately vain, was a sign that he was utterly vanquished.

THE hours of the following day never seemed quite real to any of them. It was a long hazy blur of suffering, an interminable journeying on and on and on toward an horizon that remained utterly blank and featureless as the hours wore on.

Suddenly Yahia, who was stumbling and wavering uncertainly in a southerly direction, gave a queer squeaky cry.

"Land! Land!" he croaked, pointing

with one lean shaking hand to a flat bluish blur on their extreme left; for on march, the Arabs refer to any striking feature as "land".

They reached it late in the afternoon—an oasis with date-palms and a well, and good grazing for the camels.

Yahia regained his lost poise as if he had never "lost his head" at all, never led them to within an inch of death out there in the cruel wilderness.

"This is one of many oases," he informed them. "They are scattered over this region as beads from a chain. They belong to the Zawa tribe. That largest one over there must be the one called Zug."

Hassan, restored by this time to his habitual eloquence, turned to Paul.

"*Arfi*, the Zawas are indeed of a great evilness. Is it not written on a cucumber leaf that they are dogs, and sons of dogs? To go to Zug—that is to go also to death! They are as the biting worms that creep quick on their stomachs—and behold one dies with a great swiftness!"

"We must have a guide to El Musa. We must have food. There is no choice: it is Zug—or nothing!"

"Better a nothing . . . much, much better!" Hassan assured him.

"Yahia can go ahead and do the scouting for us. This is his program, anyhow. We're going to Zug, Hassan, for the excellent reason that we can't go anywhere else. Turn on another record, old fellow, and make a fire."

2

WITHIN the sun-baked walls of Zug, the inhabitants stirred like rats from their holes, to watch the coming of a solitary rider. They were an unattractive crowd, with none of the characteristics of the bold, warrior tribes of the desert. Greed, cunning, and suspicion

were written large on their cruel faces, and in their restless eyes.

They swarmed to the gates as Yahia approached, their dirty rags hardly covering their unwashed limbs. Ill-formed, naked children pushed and crawled their way among their elders, in company with the mangy dogs that skulked in the narrow streets. Refuse and dirt were strewn on the flat roofs of the dwellings, to rot and dry in the sun. The ways were darker and more tortuous than was usual even in a desert stronghold; many streets were merely walled-in passages, with corners and recesses where a man might hide, to slit the throat of an enemy as he passed.

The place was rotten to its core—a sweltering, fly-ridden huddle of dark, cave-like dwellings, where long oppression had turned the people into weak and vicious brutes.

In the center of the walled city, however, the miserable streets and hovels fell back abruptly from a vast square, where a spacious palace, with pillars, arches, minarets and towers stood proudly aloof from the indescribable squalor of its surroundings.

Here the Shekh Timgharba lived in barbaric splendor with his *bareem*, his warriors, his musicians and dancing-girls, his innumerable slaves—wealthy and secure behind his double rampart of walls in the heart of an almost inaccessible desert.

And to Timgharba, Yahia demanded to be taken, when he halted at the gates to parley with the pock-marked vicious guard.

With sublime assurance, Yahia passed under the carved arches of Timgharba's palace, where those, not of the household, entered with a great uncertainty in their minds as to whether their feet would ever tread that threshold again!

But Yahia strode in past the evilly

grinning guards, and vanished with an assured swing of his dusty *burnous* behind the gold-embroidered, purple velvet hanging which shut off the audience room. He emerged an hour later with even greater assurance in his bearing, and after a leisurely and sumptuous meal he was led back to the gates of Zug. A fresh camel awaited him there, and mounting, he rode away in a direction quite contrary from that in which lay the small oasis where the *garfla* awaited his return.

THE sun was sinking, sending long spears of light across the desert, when the anxious watchers saw a cloud of dust approaching. The cloud developed into a group of horsemen, which swooped down on them, yelling and waving long spears, with *burnouses* flying like sails behind.

They were Sudanese blacks, gigantic fellows, and they certainly made an imposing array in their richly striped cloaks, their glittering weapons and jewels, mounted on Arab horses which chafed to be off and away. They had reined in their steeds with superb control almost under the noses of the startled little group by the well.

One of the riders saluted with upraised arm:

"The Shekh Timgharba sends thee greeting! We will lead thee to his palace at Zug!"

"Where is Yahia, our servant?" demanded Paul.

"*Effendi*, he awaits thy coming at the palace. Thou wilt follow him."

It was a command, and Paul turned to Joan and her father.

"Seems to be no choice about it," he remarked.

"None," the girl decided promptly. "No use arguing with outsizes like these! And will you look at Dad!"

Mr. Southey was entirely fascinated

with the barbaric splendor of the warriors. His acquisitive instincts were alive and bristling, in spite of his thirst and aching body. He looked with positive awe at the weapons, jewels, and accouterments of the escort.

"Look—only look at them!" His voice was as hoarse with emotion as with genuine fatigue. "Those jeweled clasps and belts—the scabbards of their daggers! Why—why they're priceless! Things like that were bartered and sold in Alexandria, and Carthage when Rome was only a village. In the time of Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius—and long, long before that even . . . !"

He positively snarled at Joan as she gazed doubtfully at the fierce faces of the waiting blacks.

"Well, what more do you want? Do you expect them to lay red carpet for us to walk on from here to Zug?"

He turned to his camel, and kicked and swore at the exhausted animal until it got to its feet, gurgling and complaining loudly. When at last the little *garfla* set out, stumbling along on swollen blistered feet after the pacing horsemen, Mr. Southey followed closely on his camel, his eyes fixed covetously on the escort, appraising each jewel that flashed in the setting sun, recalling the history and period of each weapon and curious piece of armor the warriors carried.

"*Ugurrab!* My feet burn as one who treads the thrice-heated halls of Jehannum!" said one of the camel-men.

"May Allah guard us," answered another. "There is Zug even now before our eyes. *Gibani!* Its walls spread like the dark wings of a *jinnee!*"

Hassan voiced the same opinion as the drivers.

"Master, who but a *shaitan* can be wishful to rule inside of such an awfulness?"

Joan gave a hoarse little chuckle.

"Your father is enjoying himself, at any rate!" Paul remarked to her.

"Poor Daddy! He'd follow those circus-riders into Zug now, if the Zawas had horns and hoofs."

Hassan pricked up his ears, always eager to extend his vocabulary.

"Hawnsanoof! But of a certainty there is no Zawa without such an hawnsanoof, if it is but evil!"

"Hassan, you're priceless!" Joan's face crinkled into laughter. "I wish I could always have you with me when I'm afraid."

"Are you afraid?" Paul was genuinely surprised. It was absolutely the first time she had ever voiced such a confession in his hearing.

"I am," she admitted. "I'm not very impressionable, but I can't help thinking that the nearer we get, the more Zug looks like some black horrible toad squatting in the dust."

"Fever," was Paul's comment. "Quinine and a good sleep is what you need."

But in spite of his casual words, he was full of apprehension himself, and he pulled himself up sharply for a morbid fool, as the thought occurred to him, that after all, death out there in the freedom of the wilderness might have been preferable to the hospitality of Zug!

3

IT WAS on the sixth day that Stephen I Arpad turned up.

In the winding intricacies of Timgharba's palace, Mr. Southey, Paul, and Joan, together with Hassan, had been entertained lavishly for six days. They had been told that Yahia had gone on to El Musa to present the credentials of his party to the great Shekh of that city, and that he would return to guide them if the Shekh thought favorably of the white

men's intentions and the introductions they carried.

"It is a trap!" declared Hassan. "May I never stroke my beard again if Yahia is not a lump of black mud! *Arfi*, is it not that Yahia 'lost his head' out there?" Hassan flung out an impassioned arm. "When it is spoken in the *suk* that Yahia has done this, no more will any hire him to lead the *garflas* over the wilderness. No! Therefore I tell you, *Arfi*, Yahia would have us always never come again from Zug! Yahia return? *Ugurrab!* . . . never here . . . never again here!"

The others were inclined to agree by the end of the sixth day. Timgharba had been undoubtedly impressed by the letters shown to him—letters of safe conduct from Tripoli, Tuat, El Atasch, and Zidoura. The Shekh of Zug had read, and placed the letters to his brow and lips, had sworn that he lived merely to further the interests of his distinguished guests. But, as the days passed, and no word came back from El Musa, his distrust became obvious, and he was definitely hostile at any mention of their leaving Zug.

Matters looked so serious that Paul returned from interviewing Timgharba on that sixth day with a definite resolve to escape at all costs. Mr. Southey, however, was all against it. He was blind and deaf to any possibility of danger. Danger? In a city where such treasures of antiquity were to be had for a few *mejedies*? He found the days all too short for his discoveries within these ancient walls; and, attended by two slaves from the palace, he peered and poked about the filthy streets and alleys, bargaining with the astonished inhabitants, from dawn till eve. Danger—from whom?

Mr. Southey put the question with great bitterness. Not from the Zawas, poor dirty brutes—who would sell him an armlet worth a kingdom for a handful of miserable coins. Not from Timgharba—

who lavished every luxury and attention upon them. What *did* they fear, then?

The prisoners were discussing the question after their evening meal on that fatal sixth day. Black slaves had brought in the usual banquet on immense brass trays. Dishes of lamb cooked in a dozen different sauces. Great bowls of *couscous*. Mounds of rice with hard-boiled eggs and sausages. Sour curdled milk, and huge stoneless dates.

After pouring scented water over the hands of the diners, and bringing to them a second serving of peppered coffee, the slaves were preparing to depart on noiseless feet, when a sudden noise in the labyrinth of corridors made them hesitate. They exchanged fearful looks—the whites of their eyes glinting—then with one accord swiftly melted from the room.

A curtain was drawn back from a carved archway of the room, and on the threshold a man stood and stared silently and long at the occupants.

Hassan stood transfixed, with a cup in his hand, and muttered in his beard: "*Maleish!* Now is come also a great white devil to torment us! Truly Allah hath forsaken us!"

Paul, who overheard, thought this a fair statement of fact. The intruder was a huge man, well over six feet, with a breadth of chest and length of limb that made him resemble some great ape. His attitude deepened the impression, for his legs bent outward at the knees, his long arms and hairy hands hung limp and clumsily from heavy stooping shoulders.

But what roused Paul to fury was the keen, appraising look the man bent on Joan. At both Mr. Southey and himself he glanced with slow contempt, but on Joan's face and figure his small eyes dwelt so long and so unpleasantly that the girl flushed to the roots of her hair, and involuntarily her hand went out toward Paul.

At her nervous touch, he was on his feet instantly, interposing himself between her and this insolent intruder, who came forward with a high squeal of laughter.

In spite of his clumsy bulk he was impressive—or perhaps because of it. His simian shape, ill-formed skull and repulsive features obviously expressed a nature so low and cunning, a mind so impervious to any kindly human impulse, that ordinary reactions of aversion or even hatred were swallowed up in a sort of amazement. He was paralyzing—quite beyond the ordinary rules of human psychology!

"Well, well, well! This is very wonderful! My friend, Timgharba, told me he had guests, and I hastened to present myself as a fellow-traveler—a fellow-countryman perhaps!"

The high thin squeaky voice issuing from his great bulk was so unexpected and unnatural that an element of fear crept into the repulsion which his appearance inspired. He bowed low to Joan, and she shivered perceptibly as her eyes met his look. She stirred her coffee, apparently oblivious of his outstretched hand. The man's eyelids narrowed wickedly, and a light like the gleam of a storm on a far horizon showed for a second in the depths of his slightly oblique eyes. He turned to Paul and Mr. Southey, smiling and very much at his ease.

"So you are going to El Musa, Timgharba tells me! Lucky for you that you struck these oases; you are considerably off your trail—as I suppose you realize now?"

He squatted down amongst the pile of cushions heaped on the priceless carpets, and turned to Mr. Southey again.

"You, sir, have certainly made your name famous throughout the Sahara. The Touaregg tribes—Hoggars, Asgars, and

Kelowis—regard you as a kind of magician, who can see right through the sand and rock to what has lain buried for centuries."

"The Touareggs!" Mr. Southey exclaimed in surprise. "I never had those bandits and rascals near my camps, that I know of . . . a lot of murdering thieves!"

"True! But no one crosses the desert near their territory without their knowledge. Every place you have camped, every man in your pay, every treasure you have unearthed is known among these tribes from Tuat to Sokoto, and from Adrar to Tibesti."

"Then, you certainly have the advantage of us," interpolated Paul, very quietly. "We know nothing of your activities in this part of the world."

His voice intimated very pointedly that he had no wish to do so, but the barb glanced from the behemoth's thick skin.

"That's so, I forgot that you did not realize who I am. My name is Arpad—Stephen Arpad."

No gleam of recognition showed in the faces of the three white members of his audience; but Hassan, busy with the coffee-cups, stood as if turned to stone, and his face went a dirty ashen-gray as if he had received some terrible shock.

Like a huge wary beast of prey, Arpad's small eyes travelled from face to face, and, apparently, what he saw—or did not see—satisfied him, and he relaxed and turned to Hassan.

"Why don't you pour my coffee, you lazy nigger!"

All the startled blood rushed back to Hassan's face as he presented a cup to Arpad with a hand shaking, not with fear, but a deadly primitive rage at the insult.

Paul was very much on guard in the hour that followed, though it was the hardest task he ever set himself, that of sitting quietly and watching Arpad with Joan. To see her shrinking repulsion and

the other's bold coarse advances was torture to the man who loved her. It had hardly required Hassan's revealing glance, however, to tell Paul that Stephen Arpad was going to complicate their dangerous situation very seriously.

Listening attentively, Paul realized that Arpad was no passing traveller like themselves, but one who knew the southern desert and its unruly tribes as one knows the palm of one's own hand. He was evidently hand in glove with Timgharba, and, more than that, he had the freedom of the city, and the Shekh's authority to him was no more than a puff of thistle-down.

Hassan, no doubt, could give some information later, but meantime it behooved him to sit tight and discover what clues he could that might help him to match wits and strength against this new enemy.

4

"**M**AY all the *shaitans* of the wilderness baffle his footsteps! . . . may they drag him down to Jehannum! An hound is he . . . his face accurst by Allah! *Inhadden beytich!* Nigger . . . nigger was his thrice accurst word!" Hassan was beside himself with fury. "He hath blackened the face of my father! By Allah, and by Allah I will——"

"You will stop wagging that infernal tongue of yours and listen to me!" Paul's voice was very stern.

"*Arfi!*" The distracted Arab salaamed, collapsing like a pricked bubble under his master's steady eyes. "My ears are open to thy words as the mouth to the wine-skin! Thou art my father and my mother, and——"

"Dry up, Hassan! Never mind what the great ape said to you. Tell me where you heard his name before. You know something about him—tell me all you know, and tell me quickly."

Hassan put his master's hand to brow and lip with a dog-like devotion in his dark eyes.

"Thou hast but to command." Hassan dropped into his native speech. "Truly his name is whispered in the *suk* and on the caravan trails, *Arfi!* The people cover their faces when that name is spoken, and fear it as they fear the death-bringing *gibli*. Ahhpahd!" Hassan's voice sank to the merest thread of a whisper. "That son of Eblis! Canst thou not guess wherefore he has gold, wherefore Timgharba the Shekh bows before this white devil, wherefore Timgharba also has so great wealth in this city of dogs and devils? *Slaves!*"

Hassan spoke the last word in a hiss that made Paul glance round apprehensively. They were in the circular domed alcove which was the latter's sleeping-apartment, opening off the vast pillared hall where they had dined.

"Are you sure of this?" Paul's words dropped like pellets of ice; his tanned features and pleasant kindly eyes had hardened incredibly.

"By the sacred palm-tree, *Arfi*, I am more sure of this than that I am Hassan, son of Hassan! Were not my father and my mother taken by the servants of this white devil as they worked in the open, cutting fodder for camels? Were they not branded as slaves and sold in the market-place at Kano?"

"Also my brother," he continued. "He, and his wife, and his four sons, and all his servants, were they not enslaved also by this white devil, as they journeyed on the trail to Ghadames? Their camels and goods were seized, while they were bound, hidden deep among the white devil's baggage, and taken to Tripoli—from thence to Constantinople! One youngest nephew escaped to tell me all! The rest I never saw again! Had I not been ill at the house of my uncle in Tim-

buktu at that time, I, too, should be a slave! And there are others . . . I can tell you——"

"Not so loud, Hassan!" Paul put a steadying hand on the Arab's shoulder. "But tell me more—all you know, or have heard of this man."

"Timgharba, they say, is his dog. There are dungeons beneath this palace where the unfortunates are kept until the white devil has enough to send to the slave markets. Listen, *Arfi*!" Hassan approached his dark face to Paul's ear. "There is a secret route, a slave-trail which the white devil's victims have worn deep between Abyssinia and Sokoto. For ten years this path has been trodden in blood and tears by my people. For ten years the trail has been marked by the bones of those who died under his lash. *Arfi*, the cup of their sufferings is full, and brims over as the Great River rises and spills over the land! By the life of Allah, their ills are many as the sands of the desert!"

"I believe you," responded Paul, recalling the narrow receding brow, the heavy jowl, the purplish thick lips, and cold eyes of Stephen Arpad. He went on in a low tone. "Have you discovered anything yet about the men of our *garfla*?"

"*Arfi*, no man can tell me aught of them—they are swallowed up in this evil quicksand of Zug."

"Listen to me, then. We must get away at once. Yahia may or may not be a traitor to us, but we can not wait to know that. You have been round with the slaves and the soldiers—is there any chance of help from them?"

"There is one, *Arfi*, whom we can trust. One only. They are all afraid . . . but very greatly afraid!"

"And this one—why is he not afraid, too?"

"He is Aman, a prince in his own land of Aïr. He is a lion of courage and fears

not even the white devil. He would escape from Zug and return to his own people—he would rouse the tribes and lead many warriors against this evil city."

"But couldn't he rouse up Timgharba's men to come in with us? Organize a full-size rebellion?"

"*Arfi*, all are slaves here—not men! The soldiers, the servants, the councilors, the musicians! All . . . all who serve the Shekh are slaves . . . slaves whom the white devil hath sold to the Shekh!"

"Timgharba and Arpad! That's a fairly water-tight combination. Almost impossible to get anything on the white man, with a shekh of Timgharba's standing to cover his tracks."

"They are as secret as the deep rivers that run beneath the desert," declared Hassan.

"And this Aman—what is his position here?"

"He is one of the guards."

"Go at once, then, and see if you can get hold of him. But don't forget that not only must we get out of the palace and through the gates of the city, but we must have camels to take us away from here."

"*Arfi*, I go!"

Left alone, Paul's thoughts reverted to the crux of the situation—Joan! It was she who made the whole adventure so full of horror for him. The danger that threatened them all was only dust in the balance compared with the unspeakable threat of Arpad's proximity to the girl's young beauty.

The dome above him was open to the sky, and through it presently blinked the first pale evening stars. Night followed swiftly—the blue darkness of an African night—and still Paul sat waiting . . . waiting alone, thinking, planning and hoping desperately.

5

"ARFI! Arfi!"

It was nearly midnight, and Paul did not see the distraught figure until it was at his side, plucking at his sleeve. Hassan had returned at last—and what a Hassan! His face was lined and terrified, his turban slipped awry, his *burnous* soiled and torn, and the red leather slippers, of which he was so vain, were missing.

"What . . . what, man? Speak!"

"The *Sitt*! The *Sitt* . . . she is gone! He has taken her . . . the white devil has taken her!"

For a few seconds the moonlit room swung in circles before Paul's eyes, the sound of roaring water was in his ears.

"Tell me . . . at once, Hassan!" Paul's voice was unrecognizable.

The Arab gasped out his story. Aman had but now told him all. Arpad had come to Zug—leaving a great *garfla* of his slaves and camels and soldiers at an oasis not far from the city—to collect additional slaves, whom Timgharba had obtained for him. Merchants, with their loads of skins, ivory, ostrich feathers, and guineacorn, on their way from the Sudan to the markets of Kano. Some hundred or so of these unlucky traders, all imprisoned in the dungeons of the palace, awaited Arpad's arrival.

Arpad had come early in the day, many hours before he visited the white men. He had inspected Timgharba's haul, had the merchants shackled and sent on to await his pleasure with the rest of his victims, on the fringe of the oasis-belt.

"And the *Sitt* . . . speak, Hassan!" Paul urged the panting terrified man.

"She was drugged . . . as soon as she went to her room. Drugged . . . and bound on the big *mebari* which none but the white devil rides. He mounted and bore her off with him. They are gone

many hours now. They go with the *garfla* on that hidden way . . . the secret slave-trail to Kano!"

"Why did you not return before?"

"They suspected me—those thrice accursed slaves! They found me in a forbidden part of the palace and bound me and put me in the dungeons. Thence, Aman rescued me. . . . I have come with all speed to thee, *Arfi*! But that is not all . . . wait . . . wait, *Arfi*! Aman hath also told me that Timgharba waits only until daybreak to put us to the torture . . . we are to meet him—Aman—in the dungeons! There is a way down that few know of here, save only the guards. . . . I will lead thee."

"Where is Southey *effendi*? Have you seen him tonight?"

"Yea—he sleeps, *Arfi*. He sleeps and mutters in his dreams of his many treasures."

"We will wake him," said Paul grimly.

They found the wizened little antiquarian tossing and muttering as Hassan had said, and at Paul's touch he sprang up, crying: "I will give thee thirty *mejedies*, thou rogue! It is worth only——"

He blinked as Paul shook him unceremoniously awake, and listened in the worst of humors to the news of his daughter's abduction, and the need for instant action.

"Hassan is a scaremonger! You know these natives. He's been drinking palm-wine and gossiping with the slaves. Probably there's not a word of truth in what he says."

"Believe it, or not, as you like." Paul did not conceal his contempt for the little man. "We can't stop to argue. Decide quickly. Will you join Hassan and me in escaping . . . in going after Joan? Or do you prefer to stay here and be tortured by the slaves in a few hours?"

"Very well, very well, I'll come!"

He was soon ready, thanks to Hassan,

and turned to sling a heavy knapsack over his shoulders.

"Leave that right there," Paul ordered in a voice which made Mr. Southey look at him with open mouth. "I'm not hiring baggage-camels for you this trip."

In a fury of impatience, quite foreign to him, Paul seized the knapsack and flung it across the floor.

"You damned little scavenger!" he said. "Can't you behave like a man for a few hours?"

Overawed by this entirely new aspect of his quiet partner, Mr. Southey meekly followed him, and, with Hassan, they made their stealthy way through the intricate ways of the palace. Through vast courts, where fountains splashed and great palms rose toward the vaulted roofs; along endless narrow corridors where the three played grim games of hide-and-seek, darting into the deep wall-recesses, crouching low behind gayly painted chests, slipping like shadows behind the friendly folds of rich hangings, they arrived at last at a smaller court whose three sides were open to the night.

Here, Hassan pulled aside a silken rug, and tugged at a ring concealed beneath it. A trap-door lifted on oiled hinges, and a flight of stone steps was dimly revealed.

Hassan led the way, and Paul pulled the trap-door after them. They had no torch and Mr. Southey muttered and complained bitterly as he stumbled between the other two. Thoroughly awake now, and relieved of the influence of Paul's stern eye and Hassan's murderous looks, he was remembering what he had left behind: the fruits of his whole expedition, the result of months of toil and danger in the desert; and, in addition, the undreamed-of spoils of these last few days in Zug. If only he could have brought that knapsack with the jewelled armlets

and the dagger . . . even that one precious dagger!

The air became more foul and stagnant as they descended, decay breathed from the dank walls they touched in their descent. The steps underfoot grew slippery, and Hassan led more slowly, with whispered cautions.

Down . . . down . . . down!

Hassan stopped abruptly before a massive door, with a tiny barred aperture through which a grayish light beyond was visible. The Arab tapped—three light strokes and a heavy one. Twice he repeated this. A voice from the farther side called:

"The Well of Tiz!"

"And the Seven Streams of Amadgan!" was Hassan's instant response.

A key was inserted, turned, and the door opened silently. A tall burnoused figure drew them inside, closed and locked the door carefully, and led them to a dismal cell where a primitive lamp—a scrap of wick burning in a bath of oil—glimmered faintly in the foul air.

"This is Aman the guard, *Arfi!* He will tell you of his plan." Hassan turned to Paul.

"Only if thou dost promise that thou wilt take me with thee, that I may help thee to slay the white devil—or be slain! At least out there I can die a man's death, not as a slave in this rat-trap of Zug!"

Paul looked with pity at the guard's branded face, his haunted tragic eyes, and the grim lines of suffering about his mouth.

"You shall come, Aman."

"And after . . . if we slay him? Wilt thou speak for me to the Governor at Sokoto, that I may return in peace to my tribe?"

"Yes, I promise that, too. But what is the plan? We are losing time . . . every minute they are getting farther on the trail!"

"All haste is of the devil!" quoted Aman. "We have time, *effendi*! It would not be well that they should see us in pursuit, and they can not reach the secret trail until night."

"You are sure of the way?"

As I am sure of death when Allah wills!" was Aman's reply. "As captive and as the guard of captives have I trodden that way, seen it grow wide and deep, watched the bones of men and camels pile up along the trail."

Paul shivered at the thought of Joan's young eyes seeing that *via dolorosa*—and in Arpad's company!

"Now I will show thee." Aman took up the lamp and led them on, through a maze of narrow twisting passages, cut in the rock foundations of the great palace. Opening off the passages on either hand were small, roughly-squared dungeons, where iron staples set in the walls, each with its length of chain and manacles attached, bore mute testimony to the nature of the place.

Mr. Southey bent over one of the chains, examining it closely.

"Very primitive—very ancient type," he muttered, as Paul laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Only ones I've seen of that type before were in a Tibetan prison. This supports the theory of Professor Ghrylls that——"

Aman stopped at last before a recess where no chains appeared, but only bundles of soiled native garments.

"For you," he told the white men.

Quickly Paul shed the linen suit he was wearing, pulled a tunic over his head, drew on the long white *kortebbas* over his legs, and wrapped a *burnous* closely about him, drawing its hood well down over his face, while Aman lashed on the *ghatemin* whose rawhide thongs passed between the toes and were fastened at the ankles.

Hassan performed the same office for

Mr. Southey, who was much intrigued with this most primitive of foot-wear, and gazed at his feet and legs with child-like satisfaction.

"This is the 'Slaves' Gate'." Aman indicated a narrow door set in the massive walls close by. "The prisoners enter and leave by this entrance only."

He unlocked it, and they had now to toil up a similar flight of steps to the one they had previously ascended. It seemed an endless pilgrimage to Paul. In the thick foul darkness he seemed to see Joan's face and slender boyish figure always before him . . . pleading and entreating him to hurry . . . hurry . . . hurry! It was a fearful strain to walk so quietly after the deliberate Arabs, with Mr. Southey slipping and grumbling and muttering at his heels, and all this time Joan was out there in the great desert with Arpad . . . Arpad!

They reached the top at last, and this time no trap-door, but a heavy upright one of hammered bronze opened to let them out on the streets of Zug.

Like shadows the four made good speed, Aman leading. Few of the inhabitants were astir, but now and then a ragged form would turn to scowl menacingly in their direction. Aman sought the darkest, narrowest ways, and the great walls of the city were only a stone's throw off, when the thing happened.

In one of the deep recesses of a wall, a filthy Zawa lay asleep, his scant clothing leaving much of his body exposed. Around his waist a leather belt was fastened, and from it a dagger in its sheath depended, on which the native's claw-like hand lay, half relaxed in sleep.

With an exclamation, Mr. Southey bent over him, touching the sheath with eager, exploring fingers. Too late Hassan sprang forward, too late Aman and Paul turned to help. There was a snarling cry—"Ugurrab!" from the startled sleeper—a

leap—a flash of bright steel—and Mr. Southey fell backward, the Zawa on him like a panther.

Hassan's attack was as swift as had been that of the Zawa, and his long knife ended the latter's life in one lightning stroke. They pulled him off his victim, but it was too late.

The collector had paid more than a few *mejedies* this time. But the dagger he had coveted was his . . . in his very heart!

Paul examined him very thoroughly, more so because of the relief he felt that the little miserable creature was gone. He would have been nothing but a danger and a burden to them. Now he could ride fast and far with only these two fighting men at his side. Satisfied that life was extinct, he rose to his feet.

"We can do nothing for him."

Hassan looked down at the white man huddled in his borrowed clothes, eyes widely opened in a curious expression of surprise.

"What is written—is written!" was his grave comment.

With an upward jerk of the chin, Aman assented to Southey *effendi's* brief epitaph and turned to lead them on to the gates of Zug.

6

A FEW more steps and they were at the end of the passage, on the margin of a square some hundred yards across. The moon was high, and flooded the open space which the three fugitives were obliged to cross.

Around this square were the quarters of the guards, living like wary animals behind the narrow slits of windows in the otherwise blank white walls that formed the square. Day and night, fierce eyes watched from these tiny windows; day and night dark brutal faces peered from behind those sinister peepholes that fo-

cussed on the square before the gates of Zug.

"Pull thy hood close, *effendi*," urged Aman, as they hesitated on the verge of that perilous last hundred yards of moonlight. "Walk thou at my heels, both thou and Hassan. Drag thy feet, and hang thy heads, and bow thy shoulders as those who walk in grief and affliction. Speak not a word, or by the Holy Kabalah we are lost!"

Aman walked out boldly into the strong white light; at his heels Hassan and Paul shuffled and stumbled uncertainly in the dust.

A hoarse cry came from behind one of the narrow slits.

"Who seeks the gates of Zug, when naught save the lion and the jackal are abroad? Speak!"

"It is I—Aman the guard! I follow Arpad *effendi*, with two of his slaves."

There was a long pause. Aman waited, standing in the strong moonlight with head erect, his spear in his hand, a pistol at his belt, and, slung crosswise across his back, a two-edged sword in its richly worked sheath. A brave picture of a warrior he made, but the two standing bowed and dejected a few paces behind him saw that the bright spear quivered in his grasp.

"Who are these two slaves, that they stand here unshackled in the streets of this city? Wherefore did they not leave with the other slaves at noon?"

"Behold, these two were brave and cunning beyond the rest. They made themselves invisible as the others passed through the 'Slave Gate' of the palace, and hid themselves in one of the dungeons. There I found them when I went my rounds. I take them on at the command of Timgharba the Shekh. His anger will fall like the lightning upon any who delay me on his errand."

The bluff succeeded. From other windows came cries and shrill calls.

"Yea, and not thou alone, Ali, but all of us will suffer for thy fault. Go thou in haste, Aman, and do the bidding of the Shekh!"

Aman stood very straight and defiant.

"Yea, and shall we run on foot to overtake the *garfla*? Ye lumps of swine's flesh! *Hamdulillah*, we must have camels—three of the strongest and swiftest *mehari*!"

Aman's anger and boldness called forth instant response. Terrified of hindering him and bringing down Timgharba's wrath on their heads, the black arched openings round the square began to spew forth excited gesticulating figures.

"Down!" whispered Aman. "I return with camels!"

Hassan and Paul collapsed, and sat huddled on the ground, as Aman strode to meet the agitated guards he had aroused. After a short dispute, he disappeared with them down one of the narrow streets. Long minutes came and went . . . an eternity of waiting to Paul and Hassan who sat in the center of that moonlit square. Voices called from the windows—insults, jeers, foul epithets were hurled at them from all sides, but they continued to sit cross-legged in the dust, a pair of helpless, hopeless captives, sunk in despairing misery!

After an interminable agony of suspense, a clamor of voices approached—Aman and his fellow guards returning at last, and, swinging proud disdainful heads, three magnificent *mehari* towered above the rabble.

Aman strode across to the supposed slaves.

"*Ugurrab!* Spawn of the devil! Arise, and mount these heaven-born beasts, unworthy though thou art to ride such jewels of the desert!"

The guards, all eager now to speed Aman on his way, ran to the gates and

helped those on duty to let down the massive wooden bars, and fling wide the heavy doors. The three camels were led through the opening, and made to kneel in the soft sand that drifted up to the great walls of the city. The sentry outside was hardly allowed to question Aman, so thoroughly had he impressed on those inside the necessity of a speedy departure. The fugitives mounted, and with cries and blows from many helpers, the beasts were urged to their feet.

Another minute and the tall majestic *mehari* swayed forward, settling down into their long easy stride, leaving behind the black squat walls, the shouting guards, the luxurious palace set like a jewel in a rotting dung-heap . . . leaving Timgharba and his soft-footed slaves, the beast-like inhabitants, the dreadful travesties of childhood, the dogs and dirt and smells that made up the city of Zug.

Free! For a moment Paul's heart leapt with a fierce joy as the clean night air brushed him softly, and the wide horizon greeted his aching eyes. Then Joan's peril—her need of him—blotted out that momentary exultation, and with knee and voice he urged the *mehari* to its utmost speed.

7

THE sun was setting—a flaming ball in a gorgeous haze of green and violet—when the three fugitives reached the gorge, which was their objective.

Seventeen hours in the saddle, with the briefest possible rests, had reduced them all to a pitiable state, but the sight of the gorge restored them like a powerful cordial. Aman had proved a wonderful guide across the uncharted country they had covered that day; and they hobbled their camels amid the shrubs and thorny growths at the western mouth of the gorge, and stared down the narrow ravine with red-rimmed thankful eyes.

"We are in time!" Paul croaked, his tongue stiff and swollen between his blackened lips. "The trail beyond is untrodden."

"*Effendi*, the *garfla* is a very great one. The moon will be high before the white devil reaches this place; we have long to wait."

"They will not camp in the gorge?"

"No, *effendi*! It is narrower than the streets of Zug, and twists as doth a serpent. Let us eat and drink and rest here for a brief space, *effendi*, for it is evil to fight on an empty stomach."

"*Arfi*, that were indeed well!" pleaded Hassan, as Paul continued to stare up the twisting gorge. "Thou wilt be even as one who hath drunk of the palm-wine, whose legs are soft as wool, and whose hand quivers as doth the long grass at the first hot breath of the *gibli*."

Paul's stiff lips relaxed into something approaching a smile at this vivid picture of his decrepitude, and he nodded to his anxious followers. They ate and drank and stretched themselves out on a carpet of rank yellow grass, easing their cramped aching limbs, while they went over their plan of attack.

"And afterward—if we succeed and win clear with the *Sitt*—where do we go?"

"*Effendi*, that thought also has been in my mind. Now, there is a certain small ravine which leads north through the wall of rock in the greater gorge. The *Zawas* say that a great *shaitan* dwells there, and never enter it. But I have asked much concerning that small ravine—having always my escape before me—and it leads to the great plains where the *Touaregs* pasture their flocks at this time of year. They are a very powerful and fierce tribe whom even the white devil does not disturb. To me, whose mother was a *Touaregg*, they will give help and shelter."

"Aman, we owe everything to you." Paul held out a hand which the other saluted with respect. "I only hope we'll live for me to prove my gratitude."

A little while they watched the crimson banners of cloud fade out overhead, while night stole down to blot out the scorching hours of that long terrible day,

Perforce on foot, they presently began to make their way along the gorge. On the rocky slopes it was no easy going, among the dense thorny shrubs, patches of prickly pear, and poisonous milk-plants that clung to the steep walls of the gloomy ravine. They dared not risk the trail proper, for a scout, acting as advance-guard, might at any moment turn a sudden rocky corner and meet them face to face.

When the moon at last lifted above the rim of the opposite rock wall, they made better speed, and had worked far down into the very heart of the gorge, before the first far-distant sound of the approaching *garfla* reached their ears.

It was the high agonized shriek of some wretched slave that preluded the white devil's grim caravan—a thin inhuman wail, that rose and fell and rose again to a note, made Paul clench his teeth and draw his breath sharply. Aman's face twisted in a grin of hate that made his good-looking intelligent features almost unrecognizable; while Hassan's hand stole to the dagger at his belt.

"Follow closely, *effendi*!" urged Aman, pushing through the scrub. "We will await them there on that small plateau of rock."

The plateau proved a most strategic position. Screened by high grass and bushes from those passing beneath, it commanded a view of the trail that was all the watchers could desire. The path was a mere ribbon at this part of the gorge, where the *garfla* must needs go single file, and ran straight for some fifty

yards westward — the direction from which the three had come, and toward which the oncoming caravan was heading. The trail then took an acute angle behind a wall of rock, so that, once past that corner, the *garfla* would be cut off as though by a stone screen from the plateau where Paul and his two Arabs were ambushed.

Tense, silent, shivering with excitement and the cold wind which had risen and begun to whistle down the long gorge, the three waited. The moon climbed steadily, as if curious to watch the coming drama in this desolate place.

"By Allah, some *jinn* hath surely swallowed the white devil and all his caravan!" grumbled Hassan in an undertone.

"Peace!" breathed Aman. "There are voices in this accursed place which will whisper thy smallest word in the ear of the white devil who comes!"

Hassan showed the whites of his eyes, and shivered.

"They come, *effendi*!" Aman's mouth was at Paul's ear, but, though the latter strained his aching eyes he could see nothing on the trail, and in his ears there was only the throb-throb of his fast-beating pulses.

Several more minutes dragged by, before the white man's less acute senses caught the gurgling protest of a camel. A moment later the bulk of a laden *jemal* loomed up on the moonlit trail, far away but unmistakably moving with steady mincing gait toward the plateau.

Slowly the *garfla* advanced, led by that *jemal* and the guide who walked in its shadow. In half an hour the long terrible procession began to file past the three watchers. It was a nightmare to Paul, a hideous inhuman sight that sickened him to the heart. Some little he had seen, some little he had heard of the slave traffic, and the sufferings of its victims; but such inconceivable torment as this he was witnessing never had crossed his mind.

Under the constant flail of the terrible whips carried by the guards, the victims, clad only in cotton tunics, stumbled bleeding along the stony path. They were fastened — fifteen or so together — by means of long wooden yokes, with holes cut for their heads. The weaker ones hung fainting from the terrible punishment, adding their weight to the unspeakable sufferings of the more enduring.

Once a thing so monstrous occurred, that even Paul's iron nerves betrayed him, and he reeled against Aman with a cry fortunately lost in the groans of the slaves themselves. One man, at the end of his tether, had collapsed, and hung with trailing limbs in the yoke, and the rest, being utterly spent, could no longer drag him over the rough uneven tracks. The nearest guard applied his lash in vain, and taking his curved sword he swung it high. A flash of steel in the moonlight . . . and the head of the victim rolled in the dust—his body being kicked to one side to add its bones to the ever-growing heaps.

Slowly, very slowly the long snake-like caravan wound its way along, until the whole world, to Paul, seemed nothing but blood and agony and tears. He felt he had watched it from the beginning of time. Everything else he had ever seen or heard or felt, save this spectacle of suffering, seemed unreal and belonged to a far-off world of fantasy and dreams.

The rock walls rang with groans and cries and shrieks. The slow minutes dragged, and still the captives crawled on . . . and on . . . and still others followed on the blood-stained trail. Yoke after yoke, yoke after yoke they stumbled and fell, only to rise and stagger on again under the whistling merciless lash.

But at last the draft-camels which formed the latter half of the *garfla* began to appear. The endless string of *jemals* seemed interminable, and tried the nerve

and patience of the three on the plateau to the utmost.

THE long *garfla* thinned out gradually to a few slow, heavily laden beasts strung out at the tail-end of the rest, their husky drivers walking each man behind his own *jemal*. And a few spear-lengths beyond them, two white *mehari* paced with immense dignity along the narrow way—the only white camels in all the hundreds, ranging from biscuit to darkest brown and even black.

Under the immense silver moon the *mehari* looked wraith-like—two phantom beasts following a haunted fearful trail!

But if the drooping sad little figure on the leading camel did not destroy this illusion, the one who rode last of all that *garfla* certainly did.

Nothing less ghostly, or more gross, could have burdened the beautiful white *mehari* that brought up the tail of the endless procession than Arpad's vast bulk. More simian in outline than ever, he sat humped on his saddle, his ugly head sunk between bowed shoulders, his eyes glued to the small dejected figure just ahead.

Joan, her face lined and drawn with fatigue and the nightmare terrors of the past day, was envying even the wretched slaves with all the energy left in her exhausted body. How gladly she would have exchanged her *mehari* for the yoke, and stumbled on foot in the dust, if by that she could have escaped Arpad, and the unthinkable destiny to which he was taking her!

Suddenly, shots from the hillside on her left roused her abruptly. She turned to see Arpad sway in his saddle and draw a weapon which spat venomously toward the undergrowth. Like a cat he sprang to the ground, on the right of his camel, and the well-trained beast sank to its knees at his word of command. He crouched

down in its lee, a blood-stain spreading rapidly on his shoulder.

Three drivers came running back, drawing wickedly curved daggers from their belts.

Arpad squatted behind his camel and raised a cautious head as he steadied his weapon on the pommel of his saddle. Instantly spurts of flame flicked out from the bushes above him, and he cursed foully as a bullet cut a furrow through his hair, grazing his scalp so that the blood trickled down over his face and eyes. He ripped out an order to the drivers, and they made reluctantly for the spot whence the shots had come.

There were rustlings in the dry grass, the sharp rattle of pebbles dislodged, then a loud yell. Two Arabs—Hassan and a driver—rose to their knees locked in a tight embrace, each struggling to use his knife. A blade rose and fell . . . a faint choking cry . . . and silence.

Another shot echoed, and a wounded driver rose to make his way back to the path, swayed in the moonlight, and crashed like a falling tree. The grasses waved uneasily at a little distance from his body; there was a startled exclamation—a gasp—followed by a complete cessation of the rustlings.

More drivers came running back along the trail, when suddenly, Paul and Aman rose in the path directly opposite to Arpad.

He was lost—but cunning, swift, treacherous as any wild beast of the jungle, he turned his weapon not toward them, but covered the girl. He fired the fraction of a second before two bullets tore through his brain, and Joan, with that first cry of surprise on her lips, fell forward on her camel's neck.

Aman, with his knife in his left hand, slashed Arpad's face from brow to chin, then leaped to face the oncoming drivers.

Hassan was struggling to his knees,

having accounted for his man, and ran to help. The drivers — slaves with little spirit left in them for a fight—lost two of their number and then turned tail and fled after the vanishing *garfla*, for the gorge echoed on all sides with the shots, as if the thick scrub hid a regiment.

Hassan and Aman waited until the last man had vanished round the rocky screen, then turned toward Arpad's body, sprawled grotesquely under the moon.

"May his soul be accurst forever!" pronounced Aman solemnly. "May a thousand *shaitans* hunt it along this trail he hath made, until the stars drop from heaven!"

"Yea, by Allah!" agreed Hassan. "Did he not call me nigger? But the Sitt—is she also dead?"

"Even so! The white devil did this evil so that he might rob the *effendi* of his joy!"

"*Aie! Aie!*" wailed Hassan softly. "My master's heart will be empty as a dry well forever! Truly was she his flow-

er and his delight! I, Hassan, say this, who knows! *Aie! Aie! Aie!*"

Both men turned aside that they might not witness Paul's first despair, and Hassan's wails drowned the voice that Paul never thought to hear again.

"He shot me . . . I am . . . I must be dead . . . is that you, Paul? . . . are you, too——"

"Very much alive — so are you, darling!" His voice shook as he met her wide blank gaze. "It's Arpad who's done all the dying in this little party. His bullet only grazed you, dear. D'you think you can ride if I hold you? We must get away from here."

The two white *mehari* were soon pacing swiftly toward that northern cut which led to safety, their double burdens carried easily, their heads high and proudly held, as if conscious of the good deed they were helping to complete.

And behind them, from the rocky solitudes of the ravine, crept the lean jackals, slinking amongst shadows and between thorn-bushes toward a huge sprawling carcass in the dust of the slave-trail.

Ah, my Belovéd, fill the Cup that clears
 TODAY of past Regret and future Fears:
Tomorrow!—Why, Tomorrow I may be
 Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years.

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
 That from his Vintage rolling Time has prest,
 Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
 And one by one crept silently to rest.

And we that now make merry in the Room
 They left, and Summer dresses in new bloom,
 Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
 Descend—ourselves to make a Couch—for whom?

—*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam.*



"The pearl-diver was dashing away through the bazar."

The Merchant of Basra

By DUDLEY HOYS

*He looked upon his daughter as a chattel to be sold to the highest bidder,
but he underrated the shrewdness of Ibu Seyyed*

"**S**ON of a jackal!" screamed Auda Din. "You dare to tell me this!" His skinny hands twitched with fury.

The stolid Kurdish laborer touched his forehead. "I have searched for an hour, master, and it is nowhere."

"Then search for another hour—a day

—a week! And if you return with empty hands——" Auda Din could say no more. Rage choked his throat. He pointed to the doorway, and the unlucky laborer went meekly out into the dust.

Auda Din spat after him, then sat down in a murky corner of his shop. His gray beard bristled. The heavy *abba* he

wore seemed to quiver with irritation. The melon-headed Kurd had lost a silver stud, one of a set of eight destined to adorn a customer's saddle, and the loss tortured every miserly instinct in the old man's body. He kept muttering to himself and glaring out at the narrow stretch of the bazar.

Had his neighbors heard the news, they would have laughed. After forty years as a silversmith in Basra, he held the reputation of being the meanest trader in the town. Also, he was credited with immense wealth. He had worked hard in the little shop near Ashar creek, hoarding steadily. During the war, trade had increased by vast bounds, for there were white soldiers, and white sailors from the big ships, who bought Amara ware and inlaid ornaments at a price reduced from triple value to double value; consequently, they believed that their haggling had secured real bargains from this follower of the Prophet—and of the profit.

Yet Auda Din was not worth robbing, for it was common knowledge that every spare piastre went straight to the European bank facing Ashar bridge. True, if Port Said is the world's sink of iniquity, Basra is its cesspool, and its shady characters had often discussed the old man as a potential victim. But they had come to the conclusion that he could not be outwitted. His money was too cunningly protected.

This morning, as he crouched in the shop, thought of that lost silver stud prevented him from working. While he brooded, his beady eyes stared straight ahead through the doorway. Beyond, a motley crowd passed through the odorous bazar—Persian *mujtads*, skin-clad water-carriers, holy mullahs with their black robes and steel rods and rings, wild-eyed Bakhtiari tribesmen hurrying with the grace of fauns. From the coppersmith's near by echoed the clanging rhythm of

hammers, and in some tortuous alley behind a boy's voice rose in the shivering minor notes of a love-song.

Presently the old man grinned. The frown vanished from his yellow forehead. He leaned forward, watching a slim, youthful Arab who had come to a halt outside the shop and was gazing upward. If ever a man looked forlorn, then it was this handsome youngster.

Auda Din gave an eager, half-derisive chuckle. He was enjoying himself. Treading softly he ascended the rickety stairs at the back, and suddenly opened a door. Reward paid his caution. He caught his daughter, Nouveya, peering through a barred window and sighing audibly.

She turned quickly. Her fine dark eyes winced.

"Why does he waste his time?" said Auda Din mockingly.

"Because he loves me." Nouveya's voice trembled. "And I shall always love him." This was said with no defiance, but a sort of wistful steadiness.

The old man fingered his beard and smiled maliciously. "No, my little one. With Muchaidie Nafa as a husband, you will forget Ibu Seyyed. I say you will," he went on sharply, as she shivered. "Muchaidie Nafa is rich. He has a fine house at Shaiba, and many thousand palms, and a boat driven by an engine——"

"And three wives."

"What of that? He is a true follower of the Prophet."

Nouveya's lip quivered. "He is old, and ugly. Ibu Seyyed is young and beautiful."

"A beggar, nothing more!"

"He has a new, big *dhow*, and——"

"Enough, am I not your father?" Auda Din rubbed his hands and looked at her appraisingly. Small, dainty, with perfect features, she seemed to have collected all

the best traits of Eastern charm. Neighbors had been astonished at his sudden display of generosity when he sent her to the Government school at Baghdad. But as always, his object had been gain. Cultured, she would be worth her weight in gold to the rich type of Basra merchant. Many would pay heavily for the privilege of receiving a wife quite different from the other inanimate, doll-like creatures.

So far, Muchaidie Nafa had made the highest offer, and Auda Din had decided to accept. Fortunately for him, Nouveya's education had not quite overcome the old, deep-rooted instincts of filial obedience. In her veins was the blood of women who for hundreds of years had been slaves in all but name, submissive to a religion that dubbed them the mere chattels of men. So the old man felt little fear of her trying to escape.

Still grinning, he walked to the window. Only once had he spoken to Ibu Seyyed. That was when the young *dhow*-owner, back from a trading voyage down the Gulf, had asked him for Nouveya. Auda Din had dismissed him with contempt, warned him never to come near again. Since then, Ibu Seyyed had appeared several times in the bazar outside, watching with yearning eyes for a glimpse of his forbidden paradise. His despair tickled the old man's sense of humor.

"He will think it is you," said Auda Din, and pressed his ugly face against the window. Below, the young Arab glanced up with sudden, breathless eagerness. Then his expression changed. He saw the toothless mouth, the wiry beard, and bowed his head and walked away. Auda Din laughed, watching his retreating figure until a tall man in a white *burnous* crossed the narrow street as if to enter the shop beneath. At sight of this probable customer, Auda Din turned away and made for the stairs. He took no notice of his daughter, crying

softly and hopelessly, with her hands to her face.

IN THE shop he found the tall man leaning idly against the wall. His strong brown fingers were playing with a bag of plaited straw.

Auda Din put on an ingratiating smile. "You have come to buy some of my silver work, no doubt? Of a truth, there is no craftsman from Muscat to Lake Van——" He stopped abruptly, as the customer made a silencing gesture.

"I am no buyer, but a seller. Look at these." He drew from his bag some tear-bottles, small stone flasks that had held the weepings of sad ladies long before Mahomet preached his deathless gospel. "There has been digging at Samarra, and these are from the ruins."

The old man's politeness vanished. Tear-bottles could be found by the legion. Even the gullible infidels had come to value them lightly.

"They are worth nothing to me. Take them away."

Instead of showing disappointment, the man gave a curious smile. "They are worth," he said, "one hundred Egyptian piastres each."

Auda Din gave an impatient grunt. "I have no time for fools." He pointed to the doorway.

The man stooped, heaped the bottles in a pile on a small stool, then turned and spoke with a confidential air.

"You will sell these for a hundred piastres each. And I am willing to take half."

There was something about his attitude that alarmed Auda Din. He wondered if the man were mad—or a thief trying some ruse.

"What is this trickery?" he asked slowly.

"Trickery? Auda Din, you are known throughout Basra as a wise and careful

merchant, fond of a bargain. Here I offer you a bargain. I will leave these tear-bottles with you if you agree to charge a hundred piastres each, and give me half. If they fail to fetch that price, do not sell. Is it agreed?"

Auda Din tugged at his beard, and regarded the man with shrewd eyes.

"Forty years have I traded, and my knowledge is sure as the sunrise. A drunken infidel would not give ten piastres for all the bottles."

The man laughed. "The hawk is wise, but the serpent is wiser. A sober son of the Prophet will do as I say."

Auda Din was silent, trying to find some explanation, some motive for the offer. He was an expert in the Eastern art of oblique thought. As he pondered, the drone of voices, the rattle of gharries, and the ghostly padding of feet trampling the dust outside blended in a drowsy hum. Try as he would, Auda Din could not penetrate the man's true object.

At last he spoke abruptly. "I could cheat you if I wished. You have no safeguard."

There was a sort of mocking amusement in the man's eyes. "I read men's souls," he said. "You, of all, would never destroy the fruitful. If you cheat me, I shall bring no more bottles. Then you would lose what is your lifeblood—money."

"Tear-bottles are cheaper than melons. I could obtain them anywhere."

"True. But buyers are hard to find." The man said this so meaningly that Auda Din's suspicions were confirmed. There was something unlawful behind the affair. But so long as he knew nothing, he was safe.

"What is your name?"

"Call me Hussein."

"Hussein, I will take them."

"As I told you," said the man, "in a few days I will call again, and bring

more." He touched his forehead and walked out of the shop.

THE moment Hussein had vanished in the bazar, the old man picked up one of the bottles. With trembling, curious fingers, he pulled at the stone stopper, worked it loose, and tilted the bottle into his hand. A small stream of some grayish-white mixture trickled on to his palm.

Immediately his groping mind saw light. He was handling *hasheesh*, the drug so alluring that its early devotees formed a religion in its honor.

Very shakily he poured the mixture back and replaced the stopper. Visions of the gendarmerie and prison arose before him. Under Turkish rule, the drug traffic had been open, untaxed, a thing of public trade. But since the war, strict rules and merciless punishment had been prescribed to check a vice that made men's minds become wild and horrible.

Then the hot pricking of fear gave place to the clamor of greed. Every bottle meant a profit of fifty piastres. How could he be suspected? For forty years he had traded here, selling all kinds of silver and curios, and many people came to buy. The man called Hussein must have found himself being watched by the gendarmerie, and devised this plan for supplying his clients.

Old Auda Din chuckled and locked the bottles in a cupboard. The spirit of gain was warming his veins.

Scarcely an hour had passed before the first bottle was sold. The customer was a Persian scribe. He paid a hundred piastres without a murmur, and went his way. Auda Din almost crooned with delight. When, within two days, he had sold twelve tear-bottles, he began to commune with himself. Hussein was in his power. If he chose to take seventy-five piastres out of every hundred, the man could get no redress.

"*Allah il Allah*," murmured the old merchant, feeling that life was good.

Eight more tear-bottles went on the third day. Not one of the purchasers complained of the price asked. They all showed an abandoned eagerness to buy that made Auda Din rub his claw-like hands. Victims so deep in the clutches of the drug might pay two hundred, three hundred piastres to satisfy their relentless craving.

A visit from Muchaidie Nafa crowned his gloating delight. The wealthy palm-owner smoked a *nargileh* with him, drank coffee, and in a long, tortuous conversation made it known that he would add another hundred *lira* on his price for Nouveya, providing she were transferred to him at once.

The sad-eyed girl was brought down. Auda Din, scrupulously careful of her *yashmak*, waved her toward her future husband.

"My beloved, see how you are honored. Muchaidie Nafa says he can not wait any longer. Without you, he will die of love."

Nouveya made no answer. She was trembling like some forlorn and frightened child. All the little stone bottles in her father's shop could not have held the tears she had shed. The fat Muchaidie Nafa licked his lips at the sight of her. Her silence and her loathing did not worry him. He knew how to overcome feeble girls—as his other wives could prove to their sighing selves, in the prison of the harem.

So the marriage was fixed for the following month, and Nouveya went back to her room, and because she could weep no more, lay in a kind of stupor upon the quilted ottoman. From her window that night she watched the dull orange of the sky give place to blackness, saw the white moon rise up and shine over the distant, feathery palms and the silver bosom of

the Shatt el Arab. The gliding *dhow*s sailed there as pale-winged birds, bringing thoughts of Ibu Seyyed. Five school years in Baghdad had taught her the dazzling glory of love and freedom. With Ibu Seyyed, she could have had both. Like her, he was young and modern, believing that in one wife alone could a man find true happiness.

For a while, a pitiful rebellion against Fate stirred her pulses. But instinct reasserted itself. Her father had decided, and there could be no appeal. The little time left to her must be spent in thinking of her beloved Ibu Seyyed and watching the freedom of the world that never could be hers.

While odd jackals wailed, and the moon climbed through the velvet of the sky, her dusky eyes stared yearningly through the window. All night she stood, until the pearl and rose of dawn stole out, and the muezzin's reedy cry echoed from the mosque. Then she turned away, trying to sleep and forget.

AUDA DIN looked up from his work. The man called Hussein was entering the doorway. He carried the basket of plaited straw, and by the look of its bulging sides, it was full.

"There have been buyers," he said, without preamble.

"True." The old man took a small book from the folds of his *abba*. "Here is the tally. I have sold twenty tear-bottles."

"Then my share will be a thousand piastres," said Hussein.

"Yes, a thousand piastres." Auda Din counted out the money slowly and handed it over.

"And now," he resumed, "let us talk of the days to come. From this hour onward, my share must be seventy-five piastres."

"Son of a jackal! Thieving, skinny old

buzzard!" The man called Hussein advanced on him fiercely. "Not for nothing are you called the maggot of Ashar! Fifty piastres will I have, or——"

Old Auda Din raised one hand. He was frightened, but greed steeled his nerve. "Seventy-five piastres," he repeated.

"No, thieving scavenger!"

"Yes, Son of profanity. You dare not refuse." Auda Din gave the ghost of a leer. "You dare not refuse."

The man called Hussein seemed to recover his composure. He showed his white teeth in a laugh. "Let it be so. You're bargaining is keener than the sting of a scorpion."

"Because there are many risks." For a moment Auda Din actually thought of them, and his wizened frame shook as with ague.

"Without risks, there is no good trade," said Hussein. He undid his basket and tipped out the second load of tear-bottles. "There is one warning I will give. Your share shall not grow beyond seventy-five piastres."

"No man can foretell the morrow," said Auda Din. Though he had won, he felt a kind of nervous apprehension. There was something in Hussein's manner he could not understand. It was a sort of mocking amusement, and it filled the old man with vague discomfort.

But five minutes later he had forgotten his fears, in the exquisite pleasure of selling two more tear-bottles. The customer was a gaunt and singularly clean Arab—probably a Bahrein pearl-diver, thought Auda Din. He noted the twitching hands as they grasped the two bottles, the hungry, yellow light in the staring eyes.

As the customer hurried out through the doorway he collided with a passing pedestrian. One of his precious bottles fell on the slab of stone that did duty for a step.

Came a muttered apology from the pedestrian. It was Ibu Seyyed. He stooped to pick up the bottle. It had split in two, and between its cracked edges trickled a grayish-white mixture.

Ibu Seyyed, his eyes narrowed curiously, turned to offer it to its owner. Then he stared in as much surprize as an impassive Arab can show. The pearl-diver was dashing away through the bazar like a startled gazelle.

Ibu Seyyed looked again at the broken tear-bottle. He sniffed the grayish-white mixture, touched it with the tip of his finger, took a delicate taste. Suddenly he stiffened. His clear eyes stared straight at Auda Din.

"Begone!" cried the old man shrilly. Yet he could not quite hide the panic that made him pluck at his beard. A tinge of yellow had crept into his leathery skin.

Ibu Seyyed said nothing. He stood there motionless, like a hawk poised to strike. And the old man knew. The silence frightened him more than any words. Beads of moisture oozed out on his cheeks. His skinny hands writhed together.

At last Ibu Seyyed stirred. "Kismet is kind. Had I not been passing——" He broke off and held up the bottle. "There is much profit in *hasheesh*, Auda Din."

"May Shaitan strike you for a liar!" The shrill voice trembled, dropped to a mumble. "That is not *hasheesh*. It is——"

Ibu Seyyed's cold laugh silenced him. "Auda Din, those who travel are seldom fools. Have I not sailed to all ports in the Gulf, to black Muscat, even to the sweating loneliness of Aden? If I can not tell the look and taste of *hasheesh*, then I am an unborn child. Doubtless you have other harmless tear-bottles. Let me see them."

"There are none," snarled Auda Din, licking his dry lips.

"Belief will come with the proof," Ibu Seyyed half turned, looking down the narrow bazar passage. "There is a *rais* of the gendarmerie outside Mustapha Ali's shop. I will call him."

"Ibu Seyyed! Ibu Seyyed!" Auda Din tottered forward, seized a fold of his *burnous*. "I am an old man, and——"

"Let me see the tear-bottles."

Auda Din shuffled to the cupboard, unlocked it and produced his store. The watching Ibu Seyyed nodded, his mouth a narrow line.

"The new law has a fine of ten thousand piastres for this, and a prison term of three years. Prison work makes even young bones ache, Auda Din."

"But I did not know!" protested the old man wildly. "I am innocent."

"Shriveled old liar, be silent! I say you knew, and the law will have no mercy."

Auda Din shivered, drawing his *abba* about him as if against sudden cold. "You will say nothing? Ibu Seyyed, I am very old. You wish me no harm?"

The young *dhow*-owner stared at him. His eyes were like points of steel.

Auda Din leaned against the wall, his head bent. He was broken. Prospect of imprisonment he might have faced. But the thought of losing ten thousand piastres held the bitterness of death. He would never recover from the ceaseless, cankering regret.

From outside, the drone of business drifted into the hot silence of the shop. He heard the cries of the sweetmeat vendors, the haggling voices of traders, the dull chant of a Kurdish labor squad as they unloaded pots from a grunting camel. It came to the trembling Auda Din that these were the sweetest sounds in the world—the music of trade. In prison, the beating pulse of the market would be dead to his ears. Besides, what would happen to his shop? Other silver-

smiths would gain the trade that should be his.

"Ibu Seyyed," he said suddenly, "you love Nouveya. Would you send her father to prison?"

"Give Nouveya to me, and you are safe."

"But she is promised to Muchaidie Nafa."

"As you are a liar, another broken promise matters little." Ibu Seyyed took a step forward, towering over the old man. "Will you give her to me or shall I call the gendarmerie?"

Auda Din tried to read hope in those flashing eyes, but there was none. Quite abruptly he raised his palsied hands.

"Eternal fires burn you! Take her."

THE warm breeze that ripens the dates was sighing gently across the gulf. It stirred the water into tiny blue ripples, played with the palms fringing the shining whiteness of Muhammerah, and sent Ibu Seyyed's *dhow* gliding toward the coast like a sea-bird. The one great sail was a graceful, quivering curve.

At the tiller stood Ibu Seyyed, boyish in his utter happiness. One eye he kept on the steering, and one on Nouveya, who was leaning over the side of the *dhow*. Passage of the sunny minutes seemed almost to frighten her. The ecstasy of life was so short. Now and again she turned to look at Ibu Seyyed, with a fluttering movement, as if afraid that reality might escape her. The smile on her parted lips held enchantment.

Presently they reached the coast. Ibu Seyyed had come to pick up his mate, who had sailed to Muhammerah in another trading *dhow*. As they brushed up against the low quay, a tall man rose from a coil of rope and called out gayly. The next moment he had vaulted lightly aboard.

"This is my mate," said Ibu Seyyed,

and Nouveya smiled at the tall man, who was touching his forehead.

"I have met your father." There was a twinkle in the mate's brown eyes. "No doubt he will ever remember a stranger named Hussein. We traded together, in flour and gray sand."

Nouveya stared at him in pretty wonderment. Ibu Seyyed broke into a huge laugh.

"Yes, flour and gray sand, beloved. But for that magic mixture, and the

kindness of many friends, the sun would not be shining for us today. Remember, rose of my dreams, to look upon my mate as the giver of our happiness."

The man called Hussein clicked his fingers. "It was nothing," he said, in his jocular way. "You planned, I acted—no more." He touched Nouveya's arm gently. "Behold in your husband a great man, and be glad. You have a future paved with success."

"I have something greater than that," said Nouveya softly, "I have love."

Scoundrels by Night

By RICHARD KENT

The beauty of Sumatra Sue, the tavern-keeper in Weltevreden, was like the ravishing beauty of a tropical night—a tale of Java and a bold attempt to steal a plantation.

GILLEN gazed in horror at the dead man lying beside him. He knew that he had been very drunk the night before, but he had no recollection of having killed a man. He was still groggy from his night of carousing. His head was spinning round and round. His mouth felt as though he had been devouring alligators. He struggled to free his memory from the fog in which the rotgut liquor had left it. The morning was intensely hot. Not a breath of air came in through the window, which was half obscured by a matting curtain.

Gillen felt old beyond reason. He felt as though the weight of the world were bearing down upon him. He was no Atlas. He groaned in anguish. Then once more he gazed at the body beside him. There was a fiendish grin on the man's

face. His hands seemed to be clawing at the air. There was dried blood on his throat.

"Swell little comrade," muttered Gillen hoarsely.

Then he rose to his feet and staggered to the window. He tried to get a breath of air. But the window opened on an alley in which heaps of garbage and other refuse was piled. Occasionally a Chinaman crept along the mangy road, the pattering of his footsteps dying away in the distance. It was a morning of horror. The sky was a yellow-copper. It was inflamed with heat and blood. Perhaps that day was to be the last of earth. The blood-burning sun had decided to blot out all human life so that the world might be purged of all morbid things.

Gillen felt as though his tongue was on



"He tossed him headlong into the boiling lava of the volcano."

fire. It was parched and blackened. He'd have sold his soul for a drink if he had not already done so. He craved for water, which he had not tasted for weeks. He had drunk everything but shellac, but water he had spurned. Now he desired water more than anything else.

Gradually, as he stood by the window, it dawned upon him where he was. He was in the hotel of Shack Gunga in Singapore, one of the most ill-reputed hosteleries in the world. It stood in Singapore, "the cross-roads of the world," so that all the scoundrels of the Orient might the more readily find it out. Occasionally decent people, men of wealth, took rooms

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at the hotel, but they seldom stayed for long and they never were rich when they left it. The halls of the hotel were swarming with scoundrels by night. By day they were almost equally as dangerous.

Gillen had arrived at the hotel only the night before. With a party of sight-seers he had been visiting the underworld of Singapore. He knew nobody in the crowd but he had gone along because he was bored with existence and in search of a thrill. In the course of the evening he had become maudlin drunk and insisted upon weeping on the shoulder of a young, well-dressed but crafty-looking Englishman who was a product of Lime-

house but bought his clothes in Bond Street. Now this Englishman's name was Barry Gair and he was rather pleased that his shoulder was handy for Gillen to weep upon. He was in search that night in the maze-like streets of Singapore for a stranger whom he could bend to his own wishes. Gillen considerably lessened his dilemma. Later he had suggested to Gillen that they desert the party and go off somewhere to sleep. In Gillen's remorseful state it had not been hard to persuade him that sleep was the supreme thing he needed. Nor did he question where Barry Gair led him.

"All women are the same," he murmured, "and all beds. I'll leave everything to you. You find the hut an' I'll do the sleepin'."

Barry Gair was in a delectable humor as he led his boon companion to the sinister house of Shack Gunga. Shack met them at the door, a rather greasy, smug, fawning type of individual, with a weak mouth, no chin, rheumy eyes and a constant smirking expression. It would have been hard to guess his nationality, but evidently his mother had no pride of race.

"Give us a room where we can be alone," said Barry Gair. "Tonight we are in luck. This guy is so stupefied he hasn't the mentality left of a two-year-old. Bring us a few more drinks and make 'em strong. Don't want him to wake up too soon."

All this was said in an undertone as Gillen lurched ahead of them down the hall. He was singing a rowdy song:

"Oh, West is West and East is East,
To hear the poor fools tell it,
But at a grand and gaudy feast
I'd rather have a girl of the East
And I will loudly yell it!

A frail from the smug and dreary West
May wear good clothes and talk the best—
To hear the wise guys tell it.
But that's just bunk and even more
For they're no damn use in Singapore,
They don't know how to hell-it."

That had been last night. And now it was morning, a boiling blazing morning. Gillen was quite alone with a corpse for company.

He leaned over and gazed at the dead man's face. Then he shook his head wearily. His mind wasn't functioning properly. It needed the carbon removed even though he felt as though the motor was whirring dizzily. As he studied the face there seemed something oddly familiar about it. He had not been with the man the night before. That he knew. Nor had he ever passed an evening in his company.

Then he began to wonder. A few weeks before, in the Evans House in Singapore, during the heat of the night, a stranger had entered his room and rifled his pockets. He awakened too late to get the man but he had pursued him out into the hall, where a feeble hall light burned. For a moment he had caught a glimpse of the man's face as he sped down the stairs. It had been a fleeting glimpse, but now he was almost certain it was the same fellow who now lay dead before him. He smiled viciously.

"At least," he snarled, "that prevents me from killing him."

Gillen that night had been robbed of every cent he had in the world. He was stranded in Singapore, a wrecked ship like thousands of others cast upon the beach of Singapore. Since that time he had worked intermittently, sometimes as a stevedore on the docks, sometimes as a dish-washer. Once after a particularly heavy spree he had sat in the filth and dust of the road and whined like a beggar until he had collected enough coins to return to the saloon. After he had been robbed, his descent had been swift and rapid. The atmosphere of Singapore is a great incentive to vagabondage. During that period he had gone under an as-

sumed name, for reasons known only to himself.

Now as he thought all this over, he laughed shortly. Even though the man had been a dirty thief, that did not help any in Gillen's dilemma. He was dead nevertheless. And even though dead men as a rule tell no tales they have nevertheless a most provoking way of telling enough in their own mute way to get a man into trouble. The fact of their death is most eloquent. It is sufficient argument to thrust many a man into solitary confinement and worse. It has a greater effect on a judge than the most eloquent plea of a district attorney.

GILLEN scratched his head. What was he to do? If he left the room would he be taken into custody? Might there even now be an officer outside that door waiting for him to emerge that he might place him under arrest? And always there was the greatest puzzle of all. How had that corpse gotten into the room? He was positive that he had not committed the murder. His brain was gradually clearing. He was more than certain that he and Barry Gair had been alone in the room the night before. This line of reasoning led to another question. Where was Barry Gair now?

Even as the question came to him, there came a loud knocking at the door. Gillen glanced furtively about the room. Self-preservation is an ingrained trait. It is almost an involuntary action. He was searching for somewhere to hide the body. Even though he was guilty of no crime his attitude, had he been observed, would have been the surest evidence of crime. But the room was an absolute square. It contained not even a dark corner. The blazing sunlight streaming in through the window lightened everything until the white walls were dazzling. The only furniture in the room was two chairs and a

very low bed which was only about five inches above the floor. One could not have hidden the body of any one under that bed, not even a midget.

Once more there came that banging on the door, and a voice yelled, "Come on; open the door!"

Gillen walked slowly across the room. He might as well let his visitor in. If the man continued bellowing he'd have half the population of Singapore about the place, and that was a form of notoriety Gillen was not seeking. To his dismay he found that the door was locked and the key was on his side. He was locked alone in a room with a corpse and he had the key on his side of the lock. The evidence was piling up against him. Of course it would have been quite easy for a murderer to have escaped from the room through the window but Gillen did not think of that at the moment.

Once more the pounding and screaming began.

With an oath, Gillen turned the key and threw open the door.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he cried. He decided it was best to assume an air of bravado.

On the threshold stood Shack Gunga bowing and smirking in his usual snake-like manner.

"Good morning," he said, "but a trifle hot even for Singapore."

Then he threw up his hands in feigned horror as he beheld the stark body lying on the bed.

His face seemed mottled with anger as he walked over and seized Gillen by the shoulders. "You have killed him!" he shrieked. "You have killed a man in my refined house!"

"Shut up!" cried Gillen. "I've killed nobody."

Shack Gunga shook with fury. "Well, you haven't done him any good! A murder in my establishment! This is awful!

"What shall I do?" And he commenced to moan.

At that Gillen's nerves went all to pieces and his arm shot out and landed on Shack Gunga's jaw. It was not a particularly hard blow but sufficient to topple him off his feet. Shack Gunga lay on the floor rubbing his chin. At least for the moment he was speechless. Instantly Gillen had sprung upon him and seized his throat.

"That's just a sample of the little show I've got in store for you," he said crisply. "If you utter one more moan I'm going to take you apart. If I did I'd be conferring a favor on Singapore. You're a rat and a hypocrite. You know a whole lot more about this murder than you are letting on. Now come across and come clean. Out with the whole story. What's the idea?"

Shack Gunga commenced to gurgle and splutter. He was tongue-tied with fear. He was known in Singapore as a powerful, sinister character who was fearless. He *was* fearless when he had a gang of his followers with him. Shack Gunga never did any of his fighting personally. He usually delegated the task to a lieutenant.

"Come on!" cried Gillen. "Speak up! If you can't find words, perhaps I can shake them out of you."

"I don't know nothing," Shack Gunga managed to gasp at last.

At that moment, Gillen knew that somebody had entered the room and was standing over him. He glanced up quickly into the smiling face of Barry Gair. Well-groomed, clean-shaven, debonair, Gair stood and gazed down on his companion of the night before and chuckled amiably.

"You're an amusing chap," he drawled. "But you are making yourself rather ridiculous. You can kill Shack Gunga if

you like, of course much to his discomfiture, but I assure you that he knows nothing about what happened in this room last night. It is too hot to bother killing any more people on such a sunlit morning."

Gillen leaped to his feet and faced Barry Gair.

"Do you mean by that," he cried, "that I killed this fellow?"

Barry Gair lighted a cigarette carelessly before he answered. Then he said, "What else would you call it? He's dead, isn't he? If he isn't, he's a darn good actor."

At this point Shack Gunga broke into the conversation. He had somewhat recovered from his hysteria now that reinforcements had come.

"Oh, my house! my house!" he cried. "my trade will be ruined!"

"Your face will be ruined too," growled Gillen, "unless you keep your trap shut. If I were you, for my health's sake, I'd sneak out of here and hold my damned tongue until talking was not taboo. Everybody keeps insisting that I've killed a man. And it might as well be two."

As Gillen spoke he took a step toward Shack Gunga, who wisely decided to withdraw. He smiled to himself as he did so. He was rather proud of himself as an actor. He was sure that Barry Gair would be satisfied with his performance. Shack Gunga was possessed of no little ability in various directions. He could play sundry parts at a moment's notice. That is why his talents were so frequently in demand by the underworld of Singapore. He rubbed his chin, which still pained him from the force of Gillen's blow. He imagined that one of his teeth had become loosened. Some day Gillen must pay for that blow. Gillen was a disgusting character. Shack Gunga was rather annoyed with Barry Gair for having taken up with such a scoundrel.

MEANWHILE Barry Gair walked across the room and locked the door. Then he went over to the dead man and rifled his pockets with a speed and sureness that suggested he was an adept at the trade.

"This guy won't need this stuff any more," he said; "so I may as well take it, since there is no one else in the vicinity who has a better claim. I guess you wouldn't want it, because if you were found with these papers in your possession, it might be just the evidence that is needed to convict you. As it is, you're in a most precarious position. Justice in Singapore seldom strikes, it's usually too busy, but when it does it is sure and swift. I may as well tell you that that guy you carved up so nicely was a rather good friend of mine. In happier moments he was more pleasing in appearance. His expression was less awesome. Last evening I met him in the lobby of the hotel, where I had gone to get some cigarettes. I invited him to our room. God, but you were drunk! He wasn't with us half an hour before you were engaged in an argument. Decent fellow, too. I can't understand why you two couldn't get along. I left the room for awhile to see if I couldn't get a cot put in the room for him to sleep on, for he'd had a trifle too much to drink also. When I returned he was dead, and you were bending over him, laughing. At first I was going to inform the police. Then I decided I wouldn't. You were a pal of mine and perhaps the assault had not been unprovoked. Besides, after a guy has lived long in the East, he doesn't look on unpremeditated murder as such a heinous crime. Sometimes it's a worse crime to permit a guy to go on living. Now I can save you if you want me to. Or if you prefer a dirty, boiling jail, you can have it. The decision is yours."

"It won't take me long to make up my

mind," declared Gillen. "Help me out. But what I don't understand is why I have no recollection of the murder or even a fight. Where did I get the knife? And why after living all these years a reasonably sane life do I suddenly become a raging maniac? Furthermore, why am I so calm now?"

"That's much too many riddles for me to answer on such a hot morning," yawned Barry Gair. "If I could read your mind, there wouldn't have been any crime. The heat of the Orient affects men in mighty peculiar ways. Also, don't forget, you'd been drinking some pretty vile liquor. Anyway, speculating on the matter won't get us anywhere. It will certainly not get you to safety. Understand that by helping you escape I'm putting a noose around my own neck—sort of an accessory to the crime—but I'll take the risk if you'll help me out, too."

"What's the matter?" demanded Gillen suddenly. "You got somebody else you want murdered?"

"I should say not," was the quick reply. "But I'm not going to discuss my affairs here. It's too dangerous. Suppose the police should be tipped off that a crime has been committed at this hotel. We've got to clear out. Needn't worry about the body. Shack Gunga will attend to that. He runs a respectable house, but occasionally a corpse or two is discovered in the rooms which he manages to dispose of surreptitiously. I do not know why yon body should cause him any great mental anguish. What we've got to do first is to go to some clothing store and get you rigged out in decent clothes. Those you've got on are rather the worse for wear. There may even be a bit of blood on them. A shave, too, would not be amiss."

TWO hours later they sat in a tea-house in one of the better sections of the city, eating rice cakes and drinking tea

in a most affable manner. The metamorphosis in Gillen was complete. He looked like a prosperous businessman touring the Orient. His ready-made suit fitted him well and was of excellent material. Even though it was not as good as the suit of Barry Gair, which had come from Bond Street, it was adequate.

At that hour the tea-room was almost deserted and there was no one sitting near them, so they were able to talk without fear. They sat near an open window which opened on to one of the main streets of Singapore. The noise and clamor of the street was not unpleasant. Here was one of the main arteries of the East, and the blood of life was pulsing through it.

"Now," said Gillen at last, putting down his cup, "since we have drunk our tea and munched our rice cakes, I wish you would acquaint me with the vast duties I must perform in payment for my freedom." There was a half-hidden sneer in his tone but Barry Gair preferred not to notice it.

"Things are not nearly so bad as you suggest," he said slowly. "Already you are washed and clothed like a gentleman. To judge by your comfortable attitude, I do not think you have found this a hardship. The progress of my plan I believe you will find even less arduous. To begin with, let me inform you that I am in charge of a vast rubber, tea and coffee plantation in Weltevreden, which as you no doubt know is in Java. For the past few weeks I have been in Singapore for two reasons. The first and most important was to get a much-needed rest. The second was to try and locate the whereabouts of Frederick Hulig, who has recently inherited the plantation of which I am in charge. His uncle, Otto, died some months ago leaving the vast estate to the nephew whom he had never seen, with the proviso that the plantation was

to be kept going intact as long as the nephew lived."

"All this is very interesting," declared Gillen, "but rather beside the point. I can not see where I enter into the matter. What concern is it of mine?"

"Much," said Barry Gair shortly. "It might interest you to know that the man you murdered was Frederick Hulig, who was en route to claim his inheritance in Weltevreden. It is assumed that he lingered rather too long in Singapore to carouse. Had he gone onward at once to Java, he might still be alive. But of this enough; the bad feature of the matter is that now under the terms of the will the plantation may be sold or divided. If either is done, I lose a rather lucrative position as foreman. To hold the place intact, Frederick Hulig must arrive safely in Java."

"How can he," asked Gillen curtly, "if he's dead?"

"You've got to impersonate him!" Barry Gair leaned across the table and gazed into Gillen's eyes. "I will not lose everything because of you."

"Nice," said Gillen grimly. "You are a swell little playmate."

"Don't complain," snarled Barry Gair. "I'm offering to get you out of a rotten predicament. I am offering you wealth and freedom instead of a cell, possibly death. You should be thankful for my interest. Nor can you blame me for refusing to be willing to sacrifice a position of power that I have fought hard to attain. After all, is there anything so hard about what I am suggesting? Nobody in Java knows Frederick Hulig. He has never been to the island. You are violating no sacred trust when you impersonate him; on the contrary you may do a vast deal of good by keeping hundreds of people in employment. The papers which I drew from the body of Frederick Hulig are sufficient for your identification. It will not

be hard to prove your claim, especially with my help, for I am in many respects the head of the estate. Now what do you say? Are you willing to help me out? If not you have only one alternative. I'm not going to risk my neck for you unless you are ready to do something for me. One-sided friendships aren't any good."

Gillen puffed for a moment on his cigarette. He glanced absently at the ceiling. At last he looked at Barry Gair and laughed shortly.

"All right," said he, "I'll do as you wish."

Barry Gair's expression brightened at once. "Fine," he said jubilantly. "I'll see about our tickets at once. The sooner we get to Java the better. Bear in mind one thing: for the next few months at least you are taking orders from me. Together we'll clean up a fortune. We'll both be kings in Java. This, my boy, is one of the luckiest moments of my life. Ditto yours. I need scarcely tell you that I have implicit confidence in you. I think you are dependable."

"Quite," drawled Gillen, "and things couldn't be working out more perfectly even if you'd placed that corpse in the bed beside me."

"One more crack like that," cried Barry Gair, "and you can go hang!"

"It will not be repeated," smiled Gillen. "From now on we'll hang together."

"That's better," said Barry Gair. "But now we've got to be getting along. We have a lot to do."

From the tea-house Barry Gair led the way to one of the better hotels near by where he had already secured rooms. It was the hotel at which he usually stopped when business brought him to Singapore.

"You'll have to get some more clothes and other stuff you may need," said he. "Of course I'll put the money out for everything and you can reimburse me

later. By the way, I had almost forgotten: perhaps you have a room somewhere in town where you have a bit of junk."

"Not exactly," replied Gillen. "I'm like Monte Cristo: 'The world is mine.' I can sleep in any street in Asia."

"Meaning that you are homeless?"

"Or that the world is my home, depending on one's point of view. Since I've been in Singapore I've met with business reverses, also thieves. They both accomplish the same results."

"Then," suggested Barry Gair, "to you I'm something of a Good Samaritan."

"Samaritan, maybe," said Gillen, "but omit the good. You may be your brother's keeper, but don't keep him under too close watch."

"I don't think it will be necessary," declared Barry Gair, a trifle pompously.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Gillen, "it won't."

THEY sailed for Java two days later on one of the express boats from Singapore which complete the voyage in a trifle less than forty-eight hours. Little of adventure happened on the trip. It was merely a period of pleasant leisure for which Gillen was thankful. Barry Gair spent much of his time acquainting him with the peculiarities of his new homeland.

"Although Java is Dutch," he said, "and has been controlled by the Hollanders for upward of three hundred years, almost every one speaks good English there except the Americans. It is a strange, uncanny country, weirdly beautiful, blazing hot. Its very air, heavy with moisture, heat, fever, and perfume, is worse than a drug. You hate it and yet you can't leave it. Old Batavia, which really means 'Fair Meadows,' was settled by the Dutch, who then proceeded to die off with startling rapidity. The climate itself was a plague. No one

could stand it. And the Dutch ships kept bringing more and more people to be slaughtered by a climate for which they were not suited. But men have never meant anything when the wheels of progress had to be greased. Blood has always been an adequate lubricant. It is amusing how willing we all are to sacrifice other people's lives. The recent war was one of the swellest monuments to progress that civilization has erected for some time. No savage of Borneo could have invented a fight so fiendish. But perhaps in time when missionaries have accomplished their purpose he may be brought up to the white man's level of intelligence, cease to kill his enemies with poison arrows, use poison gas instead. Personally I can't see much improvement in the method, but then I have never claimed to be a profound philosopher. Anyway I'm getting pretty far away from Java, so I'll hasten back.

"Today most people live in the new town of Weltevreden, which lies only a few miles from Batavia but is of course more healthful. The plantation is a few miles beyond that. Don't think our town is merely a clearing in the wilderness, for there you will see houses that are almost palaces. The Dutch know how to build homes spacious and comfortable. The Dutch colonists differ from the English in this respect. They go to Java to stay, to make their homes. The English go out for a few years only, always looking forward to getting back to Blighty. I might add for your instruction that the city is the official capital of the Dutch East Indies, even though the Governor-General spends most of his time at lovely Buitenzorg far up in the hills.

"Even though the climate of most of Java leaves much to be desired, there is more beauty here than can be found in any other spot in the world for its size. Gorgeous, verdant iungle in which a mil-

lion plants and flowers grow in wild profusion, marvelous mountains and lovely sensuous women. Just wait till you meet Sumatra Sue, who keeps a sort of hotel and bar not far from our plantation. She is as vivid as a dew-splashed red rose but she has on occasion a temper that would make a tiger tremble. Her form is divine, the grace of her figure might make even a sculptor tremble, but no man would dare to lay a hand upon her. She'd kill him and gloat over it, kill him without mercy or without regard. Half the men of Java would crawl to her on their knees, prostrate themselves in the dust, become lowly slaves, if by so doing they could gain her favors, but to my knowledge she cares for no man. Most of them she despises. I myself would go through searing flames for her.

"Don't think from what I have told you that she is a miserable, unkempt woman. She is not. She is young, young and captivating. Her firm young body is as strong as that of any forest animal. Her soft slinky movements as she walks across the room are like those of a panther. She wears few clothes, but those she does wear are of excellent material. What nationality she is, nobody knows, though she may be French. Certainly her skin is too white to be a native. Nobody even knows her full name. She is called Sumatra Sue. But it is a question whether she ever lived in Sumatra. She came to Weltevreden about seven or eight years ago with her father, who was known as Big Boag. He opened his hotel and bar and then proceeded to drink himself into forgetfulness. It was a race between insanity and the grave. Five years later the grave won, but only by a fraction. After that Sumatra Sue kept up the bar and made it prosper. She has a huge negro named Dike who guards her even though she professes to fear no man. Then there is

an old Chinese woman named Lily Morning who is like a mother to her. Lily is very old, so old that she has forgotten her own age, but she often jokingly asserts that she remembers when Marco Polo called on Khublai Khan in old Cathay. And that, you'll admit, is a good enough memory for anybody."

Barry Gair paused for a moment to light a cigarette.

"I think," said Gillen, "I'm going to like it."

"Of course you will," agreed Barry Gair. "Wetvreden beats Singapore all hollow, even if it isn't so glamorous and crowded with humanity. But then Singapore has nothing to be proud of, for it usually gets the dregs."

"At this point," murmured Gillen, "I suppose I should take a bow. Your last remark is, I feel, a veiled allusion to myself. It is well, though, to bear this in mind. Somewhere it has been written that 'the largest mountain does not reject the smallest dust.' Therefore Singapore should not reject the dregs, since therein lies much of its glamor and color. We can not all be mountains. If we could, the earth would look like a level plain. Likewise if all women were beautiful there would be no beauty. Therefore we should thank the ugly women for beauty, because it is only by comparison to them that we are aware of it in others. You see, I am penniless, a beggar, and therefore it is but fitting that I should be somewhat of a philosopher; for truly the most learned men are never the richest."

Barry Gair gazed at Gillen in astonishment. "Say," he said, "I think you're going to be a whole lot more interesting than I had at first believed."

"You are right," agreed Gillen airily. "I am a most interesting and likable chap when you get to know me."

"Well," cautioned Barry Gair, "don't get too likable. Remember Java is noted

for its unhealthful climate, and statistics prove that the most garrulous die the soonest. Understand I am merely warning you. Talk as much as you like, but be careful you do not say anything that is of any consequence."

"Don't worry," said Gillen, "up till now I never have. But I may as well tell you that even though I admit you are in charge of this expedition or whatever you call it, you are not going to get far if you begin by threatening me. It makes me peevish. And after all it may be well to remember that you are pretty talkative yourself. There is always the possibility the climate may have an equally bad effect upon you. If you are going to nag me to death, let's dissolve partnership right now. I've always been more in favor of death in a big chunk rather than in little bits. Plunge in the knife if necessary but don't scratch my ribs with it. Remember you are not dealing with a fool now."

GILLEN'S tone was anything but friendly, but Barry Gair remained unruffled. He refused to become angry. He commenced to think that he had gone a bit too far and decided to change his tactics.

"Of course," said he amiably, "you are not a fool. If you were, do you think I'd bother with you at all? Being head of that plantation isn't all skittles and beer. You are going to be up against a lot of propositions that'd make a squeamish man tremble. The nights, darkness, jungles, insects. The heat, crushing, gnawing, biting into the flesh. It is truthfully said that one never knows the teeth of the sun until one has dwelt in Java. The rainy season. Day after day of rain. The air filled with scalding moisture. And love, devastating, passionate, sensuous. God, the very trees are full of it! It is breathed forth in the

perfume of flowers. The air is impregnated with it. It is in the purple evening sky, and the salmon-splashed sky at dawn. What need has a man for hashish or opium, who has lain for an evening under a Java moon? Every girl one meets seems to have an air of elusive mystery about her, shining dark eyes, swaying hips. The Javanese women are small, almost like beautiful children. Their skin is of a yellowish hue. Their eyes are fiery black, though no blacker than their long strong hair. Thick lips usually spoil their beauty, though they detract little from their sensuous attraction. Their teeth are pearls, the most renowned and beautiful teeth in the Orient. They are mostly of Mohammedan faith, sober, patient, easily led. Yes, I might even say, far too easily led. They are of a child-like faith and simplicity. They love flowers, music, all that is colorful. They are poor in hatred, rich in love. They are like people of a fairy-tale. They walk slowly through the moonlight as though they can hear the voices of nymphs and dryads singing in the woodland. I have all my clothes made for me in Bond Street. I hate to lose my grip on England. Most of my shopping is done by mail. Always I tell myself that some day I will go back, but I am lying to myself and I know it. Java has got me. Java has fastened its teeth in my side. It is a vampire that kills deliciously without pain. I shall never return to London to live permanently. If I did I would be a fool. What man in his right mind would exchange Java nights for a London fog?"

"You forget the fevers," interjected Gillen. "The insects, the fevers, the snakes."

"What matter," said Barry Gair wearily, "as long as I have not forgotten the women?"

THEY arrived at Weltevreden in the evening, and the torrid sun setting in a yellow liquid sky made everything appear like the figment of a dream. The broad, spacious plantation house looked particularly inviting after the scorching heat of the day. A few native Javanese were working listlessly about the floral garden that grew about the house. They moved with a slowness that went well with the humid atmosphere. What matter time, what use to rush and accomplish? Why haste and to what purpose? Despite rush, death overtakes a man at will. His period of life is but a little journey between two eternities. Why not strive to enjoy it? So the Javanese strolled about their tasks, smiled, breathed deeply of the pungent perfume of flowers that hung over the countryside. How different from the nauseating devastating odors of Canton, and the fetid ones of Singapore which were slightly less intense!

As they entered the cool shade of the massive hall—a hall so wide that a regiment might easily have gone through their drill in it—an old man came slouching toward them. He had a long white beard and for a moment the thought occurred to Gillen that Santa Claus was making a tour of the Dutch East Indies.

As the old man, who had a most jovial expression, came forward, Barry Gair introduced him. "This," he said, "is Papa Campo, one of the most trusted of all my lieutenants." He winked at Gillen as he spoke and slapped the old fellow on the back. "Papa Campo is not as old as you might at first believe. Everything flourishes in this island paradise and Papa's beard has grown like a weed. He is also very strong. It is rumored that no man in Asia has such power in his fingers. It might almost be imagined that Papa Campo was cut out to be a strangler. What say, Papa?"

Papa Campo laughed shortly. His laugh was not quite as pleasant as his expression.

"I am but a poor old gentleman," he said. "I like to doze in the heat of the afternoon. Do not believe him, master, when he tells you that these poor hands are of such mighty strength. I am infirm with age. I wish and pray that good may come to all the world."

"Good what?" inquired Barry Gair curtly. "Do you mean, good riddance? I think possibly that there are certain people in Seoul who might be interested in your good wishes."

At that the smile disappeared from the face of the old man and his weak fingers stiffened perceptibly as though there might have been more than idle sally to Barry Gair's assertion.

"Don't get peeved, Papa," cautioned Barry Gair, placing his arm about the old fellow's shoulder. "Your secret, if you have one, is safe with me. I wouldn't go to Seoul or any other town in Korea if you made me a present of Ceylon. I don't like the Koreans' style in millinery, for one thing. For another I detest their elaborate mannerisms. They always walk down the street as pompously as a king, as if they are bound on a mission of vast importance. The impoverished Korean tries to appear like a potentate. It would be supremely funny if it were not tragic. The entire country isn't going any place unless it's to the bow-wows. Anyway, Papa, even though I've been too busy to mention it before, this is Frederick Hulig, your new boss. He's a regular guy. And to make the introduction mutual, I might mention to you, Mr. Hulig, not to take Papa Campo too seriously. He isn't the Papa of any one that he admits. I don't know why any one should call him that unless it's his first name. Nor is he a relative of any person here, least of all yourself. He is merely one of the nu-

merous incumbrances which one finds on every plantation. I found him one day a few seasons ago wandering along a jungle road. He did not look like a Korean, for he was far from pompous. But he had this in common with a native of Seoul: he wasn't going any place. So I brought him along with me to the plantation. I thought he might be of use to me. But he never has been. He's just a dozer. He walks about all day looking for charming places to doze. Then he proceeds to do so. I don't see how anybody can use up so much sleep."

Barry Gair was interrupted by the sudden entrance of an aristocratic-looking old lady. She was handsomely gowned in black satin with old lace about the throat of her dress. Despite her age, she was still extremely handsome. Her bearing was that of a queen. Barry Gair bowed as she entered.

"Good evening, Mistress," he said. "At last I have returned with my mission fulfilled. This is your nephew whom you have never met, Frederick Hulig." To Gillen, he murmured, "This is your aunt, your mother's sister, Mistress Ewing."

The old lady came forward and threw her arms about Gillen's shoulders and kissed him on the cheek.

"It is so good to have you here," she said. "The plantation is vast. It needs a man in authority." Then she held him from her. "How like your dear mother you look!" she sighed. "I have not seen her since childhood, at least not since she was eighteen, but you are her image. I would know you anywhere."

Barry Gair turned his head away to hide a smile. The power of imagination is mighty. Ofttimes it is possible to see a resemblance when no resemblance exists.

"But now you must be tired and hungry," the old lady continued. "Go to your room. Papa Campo will show you

the way. Dinner will be ready in half an hour."

But Papa Campo did not show Gillen to his room. Barry Gair decided to do that service himself.

WHEN they were alone together, behind closed doors, Barry Gair said, "Let me warn you that Mistress Ewing is a woman that requires great care in handling. Although she is old her mind is ever alert and agile. It is hard to put anything over on her. If you make a single slip, she will be suspicious at once. The hardest part of your impersonation is going to be when she starts questioning you about your mother who is her sister."

"I am not so worried about that," said Gillen, "as long as she has not seen her since she was eighteen. I'll talk a lot to her if I have to but I'll tell everything in a rambling, veiled, vague way. Apparently I'll be very open, almost garrulous, but I won't tell her anything that it is not good for her to know. Don't forget that I've got as much at stake as you, and I'd hate to have anything go wrong."

"That's fine," said Barry Gair jubilantly. "I'm sure I can depend on you, and I need hardly add that you can depend on me. Papa Campo, too, is reliable. He is my most trusted lieutenant. It is fortunate that he has such a jovial face. Nobody ever suspects him of being more than the maudlin old lazy lout that he pretends to be. Now what I propose doing is to gradually get rid of the men about the place who are liable to cause us any trouble and replace them with men whom Shack Gunga will send us from Singapore. The future is going to be mighty pleasant. If it doesn't prove to be a bed of roses, at least it is going to be quite fragrant."

While Barry Gair had been speaking,

Gillen had removed his hat and was washing and brushing his hair.

"Too bad," he grumbled, "that in this enterprise we've got to wash so much." And he sang, "In Java we've got to wash more and more, than we ever had to wash in Singapore, but darned if I know what the cleaning's for——"

Gillen paused abruptly in his ablutions, and surveyed himself in the mirror. "Say," he said, "I am swell-looking. It would be hard to tell me from a gentleman. After all it only takes an ermine cloak to make a king. Remember that old Chinese ditty?

"Once twenty coolies went to swim
And also twenty kings.
A playful wizard mixed their things
And made the coolies into kings.
The clothing fitted all so well,
Alas! thereafter none could tell
The coolies from the kings."

Barry Gair laughed heartily. He liked Gillen's mood. Everything was going far more splendidly than he had dared to hope. It was good to think that he was now practically master of that entire vast estate. Of course they'd have to go into Batavia and see the lawyer, Peter Stelze, who was the sole executor of Otto Hulig's will. But there was nothing to worry about in that direction. Peter Stelze was a respected man in the community. He had been Otto Hulig's greatest friend. Money meant little to him. He had always been wealthy. All he desired was peace, the friendship of his fellow men and a long black pipe to smoke. Peter Stelze was the least of their troubles. Besides, perhaps the most important thing of all was that Gillen could forge the signature of Frederick Hulig so well that it was hard to tell it from the original. There had been some letters among the murdered man's papers which had never been posted and now never would be. Gillen had practised the signature of Frederick Hulig for hours

until at last he could sign the name so perfectly that it would have misled an expert. Naturally this art of penmanship relieved Barry Gair of a great worry. It would enable Gillen to get by and secure the success of their enterprise.

Barry Gair rubbed his hands together. It was almost too simple. It didn't seem possible that all barriers should fall so easily before them.

As they walked downstairs to dinner, Barry Gair said, "You will find many girls about the place of fascinating beauty, doing the housework and serving. Otto Huldig loved beautiful women, especially the doll-like Javanese. He never married. No single girl appealed to him. He liked to view them all walking about his house and garden. Their slow sensuous movements were pleasurable to contemplate. Sometimes in the evening the Javanese beauties sit around beneath the trees and sing and dance and repeat countless legends which have been handed down for generations."

DINNER that night was all that any one could wish for. The dining-room was of immense size. Besides Mistress Ewing and Gillen, Barry Gair and Papa Campo sat down at the table. Papa Campo had many privileges on the estate because of his venerable years.

The dining-room was of vast size and each one at the table had his own Javanese serving-girl to wait upon him. To Gillen this was particularly alluring. Each of the girls was dressed in a single garment, a sort of shawl which was wound about her body like a tight-fitting dress, leaving only her tan shoulders and arms bare. Her sleek, black, glossy hair was drawn straight back, a severe test for her somber beauty.

Mistress Ewing was in splendid humor that night. She smiled benignly on every one. She was like a stately dowager queen

bestowing benevolence upon all those about her. That night she was holding court and Gillen willingly became one of her most devoted subjects. It was a privilege to sit at the same table as that grand old lady. During the meal she acquainted him with many plantation details. Cotton and tea were raised in abundance, and also rubber. In smaller quantities were cultivated nutmegs, pepper, tobacco, cochineal and coffee.

"Weltevreden," she said, "is one of the true garden spots of the world, a veritable floral paradise, and our plantation has been well favored. We have never lost crops to any measurable extent through insects or drought. Everything has seemed to co-operate to insure our success until recently. Now we are molested occasionally by robbers. Twice Mr. Gair has been attacked by masked riders when he was on his way back with the pay-roll from the bank in Batavia. Several other plantation owners have reported marauders about their places. They have all banded together under Barry Gair's leadership, and though they have beaten the jungles for miles around no trace of the prowlers has been found."

"That's odd," mused Gillen. He looked directly at Barry Gair, who was gazing listlessly at his plate as though his thoughts were miles away. He was not surprised that Barry Gair had not been able to capture the bandits. It would have been strange if he had. Then he decided he'd throw a bomb, verbally, that would rouse Barry Gair from his lethargy.

"From now on," he said deliberately, "I'll accompany Mr. Gair, when he goes to Batavia for the money."

The statement had its effect. Barry Gair almost leapt from his chair.

"What?" he cried belligerently. "You are going with me?"

"Of course," replied Gillen, equally vehement. "What is wrong with that?"

Barry Gair mopped his brow with his handkerchief. He realized that he must hold his anger in check until later. "Nothing," he said finally, "only it doesn't look as though you could trust me."

"Oh, I trust you all right," was the reassuring response. "Only I think some one ought to go along to protect you."

"That's an insult!"

"It is not meant as such," said Gillen calmly. "But it is for you to decide. From now on the pay-roll is going to get through without hindrance. After all, this is my plantation, and I'm issuing orders. I think there is enough work for both of us. You attend to the men and crops. I'll handle the business end."

Barry Gair made as though to speak but thought better of it. For a moment silence reigned in the room. Mistress Ewing gazed from one face to the other. She sensed antagonism. These two young men were not going to get along together. But she admired the spunk of her nephew. Here was a born leader, a chap well able to administer the affairs of the estate. In her own mind she alined herself with him. She smiled inwardly. There were many strange things that were happening lately in Weltevreden which she had the feeling would soon cease. Her nephew would prove eventually to be quite a force in Java, at least in that section of the island that was bound up so intricately with their lives.

LATER that night when Gillen was alone with Barry Gair, the latter turned upon him like an infuriated animal.

"What was the idea," he cried, "of assuming such complete authority at supper?"

"Why question me," asked Gillen curtly. "Am I not the master? Did my uncle not leave me this plantation?"

"Rot!" snarled Barry Gair. "You are

just my man Friday. I'm giving orders. You are the nominal head. You've got a title. But you're only a figurehead."

"Sorry we've got to clash again," yawned Gillen, "but it can't be helped. I'm not Friday nor Thursday. I'm Leap Year, so watch your step that I don't leap at you. You are wrong when you say I have no power. I am boss. You made me the owner of this estate. It was your wish. You bullied me into coming and now I like it. I've never been a figurehead and I'm never going to be. And since we're on the subject I may as well tell you frankly that I think you are the bandit of whom all Weltevreden is in search. Of course you'll never be captured, since you are the leader of the searching-party. Now get this! No more pay-rolls are going to be lost. And I am going with you, for your own protection."

"And who," asked Barry Gair sulkily, "is going to protect you?"

"Am I to accept that as an admission of your guilt?"

"Accept it for what you want!"

"All right then," said Gillen, "I'll take it as a threat. And I won't be threatened. You have placed me in power. I shall use it. Unless you are more diplomatic in your treatment of me, I may take drastic action. What would you do if I fired you?"

"I'd kill you!" declared Barry Gair shortly.

"In that case," mused Gillen, "I'd better kill you and then fire you. If you want to get along with me, treat me as an equal. Then you may get through."

Barry Gair tried to appear nonchalant as he lighted a cigarette but his hand shook immeasurably. He was consumed with anger. This rebellion on the part of Gillen was the last thing for which he had bargained.

"I think," he said at last, "that the

climate of Java is not going to agree with you. You may be forced back to Singapore for your health's sake."

"You are wrong," declared Gillen. "You may have a touch of sun, but I rather like being a wealthy landowner. Now I suggest that you reflect calmly over existing conditions. You can't expose me as a charlatan because if you do you'll lose your own position. To unmask me, you must unmask yourself. In this poker game of life we are two of a kind—perhaps both deuces. Besides, suppose I were to deny the whole story. I most emphatically deny that I killed a man in Singapore. Suppose I denied that there was a man killed at all? Would you write to Shack Gunga to mail you the body? Do you think he's kept it? These are merely a few facts which occur to me. I hate to mention them, but do so merely to point out that you are dealing with a brain almost as smart as your own. If you want to go fifty-fifty with me, all right. Otherwise I guess you've drawn badly. You didn't hold the right cards."

Abruptly Barry Gair's manner changed. He came over and smacked Gillen on the back. "You're a great guy," he said, chuckling. "Guess I'll have to handle you with gloves. Anyway there is nothing to be gained by always squabbling. If you have any grievances, forget them. Let's go down to Sumatra Sue's place and have a drink. I think you'd be interested in meeting that girl anyway."

"Good idea," said Gillen. "My throat's parched and a bit of oiling would do it no harm."

So they set off down the road together, apparently the best of friends. Therefore it was impossible for Gillen to know that Barry Gair had not forgotten his grievances and was even then planning the accidental and sudden demise of his new master. Gair inwardly cursed himself for having chosen such a Tartar for his pur-

poses. With millions of men in Asia, he had to choose the very one who was obstinate. He did not know what would happen to the plantation after Gillen was dead, but he was certain no great benefit could result to himself with Gillen living. It had always been the policy of Barry Gair to remove any obstacle that stood in his way, whether living or dead. He had always managed to appear as a well-dressed cultured gentleman. But the people of Weltevreden who welcomed him enthusiastically into their homes would have been surprized if they had known his true nature. There were few big enterprises engineered by the underworld of Java in which he did not have a hand. Now he was playing one of his greatest games, a game that would put him in complete possession of the mighty acres of the Hulig Plantation, only to be frustrated by Gillen, who had been little better than a penniless bum when he found him in Singapore. His inward rage was colossal. He felt as though it were destroying him. Its very intensity was burning him up. He must get drunk. He must drown his wrath in good liquor. The oppressive night did not add to his general condition. Java was a hellhole. It was no fit place for a white man. The most famed Javanese plant is the chettik or upas, the famed legendary poison-tree. It is a symbol of Java.

"Java," Barry Gair reflected, "is poison. It destroys everything that comes within its grasp. A country of more than five thousand known species of plants, each one breathing forth a seductive poison."

BEFORE that night had ended, Gillen had fallen completely under the spell of Java nights. A lazy moon hung above the immense treetops, as though meditating about the futility of life. The wind sighed sadly through the huge ferns

and palms. The night was so still that even the trembling of a leaf could be heard. And in the silence there seemed to be the echo of countless mysterious noises. Perhaps it was the music of the flowers crooning to the moon.

But it was not so much the spell of nature which impressed itself so deeply into the mind of Gillen that night. Rather was it the strong, vivid beauty of Sumatra Sue, who stood behind the bar and served out drinks with the speed and expediency of a famed barmaid of Limehouse. But as Gillen watched her it seemed to him as though she served the drinks in a very impersonal way. She nodded to the idlers who grouped along the bar, the motley throng of Dutchmen, Britishers, half-breeds and beachcombers, but she scarcely was aware of the presence of any of them. Her thoughts seemed to be far away, perhaps off to the famed mountain chain of Gunung Kendang which runs from end to end of the island. A large number of peaks in the mountains are of volcanic origin, still active, and Sumatra Sue never tired of wandering up there on their crests among the lava and grotesque formations where all life has been blotted out and the air is so laden with the fumes of sulfur and other gases one can scarcely breathe. Sometimes in the night she roamed up there with her famous black protector, Dike, the native of unknown origin who was as tall and strong as a giant and yet as faithful to her as even old Lily Morning who claimed to have been a friend to Marco Polo. And there by the weird red glow of the volcanoes, Sumatra Sue would dance in wild abandon, her white teeth gleaming more pearl-like than ever in the eery glow, her body glowing in the light of the flames. Dancing, with her, was as important as eating or sleeping. It was vital to her existence. It was a means of escape. Perhaps dancing the world over

is popular for that very reason. People everywhere long to break free from the monotonous rock whence they were hewn. So Sumatra Sue would dance until she fell from sheer exhaustion. In pure ecstasy she would lie on the ground and cry and moan. At such moments life was almost too beautiful to be endured. The everlasting mystery of those vast natural cauldrons, always in ferment, boiling, seething. Perhaps even the lava itself had worked itself up to such a pitch that it was dancing, seeking a means of escape from the prison of life.

Now as Barry Gair and Gillen entered the bar room, her expression changed perceptibly. No longer were her thoughts roaming about the hills. Her eyes darkened. They became almost sullen as she darted a look toward where Barry Gair had thrown himself into a chair. He tapped the table and called for a drink. One of the native boys brought two whiskeys to them. Barry Gair gulped his at a single swallow and ordered more. Gillen drank more slowly, the while keeping his gaze on the glory of Sumatra Sue. She was dressed in a tight-fitting silken flaming red costume which emphasized the beauty of her hair. Her face in the flickering lamplight was extremely vivid. Her red lips were like flames. She noticed Gillen's rapt expression and lowered her eyes. She sensed who he was, because she knew Barry Gair had gone to Singapore to meet the new owner of the Hulig Plantation. Nor was she disappointed with her first impression of him. Gillen was rather handsome in a firm rugged way. He did not look like a collar 'ad' but there was an attraction about him that was undeniable. Barry Gair had overlooked the firmness of his jaw when he chose him for his enterprise. Gillen was the type of man who might be easily led but couldn't be driven.

Sumatra Sue continued eyeing Gillen,
O. S.—7

until finally she relinquished her place at the bar to one of the boys, and walking over she seated herself at the table with him. Barry Gair glanced up and smiled.

"It is not often," said he, "that you honor us with your company."

"Do not be too careless with your gratitude," she said shortly, "for there is no occasion for it. I came to this table not because of you but in spite of you."

"Still the same little tigress," he commented.

"If I really were," said she, "I'd take extreme pleasure in clawing you. It would be swell to rip your collar and muss up your clothes."

"You've already mussed up my life," said he, "and deeply wounded my heart with your sharp eyes. Is not that enough?"

"Quite," said she. "But aren't you going to introduce me?"

"Yes," he mumbled. "This is Frederick Huldig, my new master. I suppose there is no need to introduce Sumatra Sue," he added, turning to Gillen. "In all the world there is no other like her."

Gillen gazed into her face and gasped at her beauty. He could not turn his eyes away. "I can quite appreciate that," he said.

Sumatra Sue placed her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her hands.

"I am rather glad you have come to Java," she said. "Lately things have grown intolerably monotonous. Mr. Gair is like the weather in Weltevreden. You can hardly stand him. And the other men are little better. The white men in Java are for the most part a dull or lazy lot. They like to sit around and smoke and drink beer. Or else they try their hand at love. They drool at the lips. Is it the climate that makes them so disgusting? For the most part I like the natives best. They are more free and gentle. They are seldom treacherous when they are unmolested."

O. S.—8

"What's that you are shouting, a sermon?" demanded Barry Gair.

"If it were," she replied, "you'd never recognize it."

Now Barry Gair had been drinking quite a lot that day, and since his arrival at the saloon he had drunk quite a number of tall whiskies. Added to this, his anger with Gillen didn't serve to hold him in check.

He rose to his feet menacingly and snatched Sumatra Sue up into his arms. But before he had time to kiss her, Gillen had torn them apart.

"I've wanted to take a wallop at you for quite awhile," said Gillen, "and this is as good a time to appease my appetite as any other."

As he spoke he let drive a strong right that clipped Barry Gair on the chin, a clean knockout. It ended Barry's festivities for that evening. Gillen rolled the unconscious form with his foot over into a corner where he wouldn't be stepped on; not that he particularly cared, but merely as an act of courtesy.

Then he took Sumatra Sue by the arm. "Let's go outside," he suggested, "where we can get a breath of air. This place is stifling."

SUMATRA SUE led the way to a secluded corner of the great veranda, where there was a hammock. And there they sat side by side for hours, until the very moon melted into the dawn. Something wonderful had happened to Gillen that night. The fascination of the veil of enchantment caught him up in its grasp. Something of the mystery of the forests surged into his blood. Mechanically his arm stole around the waist of Sumatra Sue. She did not protest but nestled close to him. Then under the spell of the Java moon he found her lips, lips like crushed peonies. The perfume of her lips submerged the perfume of the night. En-

chantress, more subtle than the Sirens. He would never more be free. But what is freedom? Who wants to be free? Greater far to be slave to a beautiful woman, a vivid, gorgeous woman whose love is a vibrant flame.

In the distance the glare of the volcanoes occasionally lighted up the sky. Java is a strange, strange country, a veritable wonderland of orchids, rhododendrons and magnolia, of myrtle and teak. Everything about Java is breath-taking. The superb reach of the trees towering up to meet the sun, richly clad with tree-ferns and fungi and oftentimes crowned with lovely blossoms. Here roam in the hush of the night deer, tigers, rhinoceros, wild swine, crocodiles and serpents. A land of wraiths, grotesque rocks, of fragrance and love.

So the night wore on. Sumatra Sue closed her eyes in ecstasy. She who had never cared for any man was now enamored of this stranger, whom she had known only a few hours. There was nothing strange in their absorption in each other. If love exists at all, it must be spontaneous. It is a crushing force, often devastating at first meeting. It is the one seed that fails to react violently if it is cultivated and nourished too tenderly.

But even as love welled up for the first time in the heart of Sumatra Sue, fear crept in with it. She knew that the life of Frederick Hulig was in imminent danger. Her companion had knocked Barry Gair senseless. By so doing he had made Java his debtor, but it was unlikely that Barry Gair would appreciate the achievement. She mistrusted Barry Gair. Many suspicious things had happened which pointed an accusing finger at him. There was the occasion when a beautiful native girl had been found strangled in the forest back of the saloon. Barry Gair had been loitering about the place in an ugly humor the night before the discovery. With him was Papa Campo. Papa Campo was al-

ways smiling graciously, apparently a friend to all the world. But Sumatra Sue did not like the way his long fingers kept forever moving as though they were serpents reaching for their prey. Once she had beheld him killing a wild turkey by choking it to death. And she had watched his expression, an expression that verged on madness, as his cruel fingers crushed the bird's throat. Long after the turkey was dead, Papa Campo was still clawing at the poor broken neck. Might it not have been Papa Campo who strangled the girl at the request of Barry Gair, who seldom took part in any brawl? He hated to soil his hands. She shuddered as she thought of the bare possibility. And she was glad that the mighty Dike, whose strength was like that of a dozen men, was constantly near her to guard her from the slightest danger. Even now, as she sat in the hammock with Gillen, the monstrous black man was crouched beneath a tree within call, dozing, drowsing, waiting. Dike had the courage and strength of a giant but he seldom used it like a traditional giant.

Gillen was amazed at the fund of knowledge which Sumatra Sue possessed. Her education had been deep and profound. She had studied life in the raw. The chapters were not all pretty, but they were absorbing. Perhaps there is no school that delves so deeply into life as a tavern. Its lessons, once learned, can not be soon forgotten. Sumatra Sue loved poetry and music. But best of all she liked to meditate and dream. The greater part of her life was mystic. Poetry charmed her; dancing held her entranced. That vast mountain chain of Gunung Kendang had cast a veritable spell over her. She loved the silent valleys wherein death in the form of noxious gases gasped up from beneath loosened rocks. Hell itself was in those mountains. The constant tremble and roar suggested that na-

ture was laughing at the puny efforts of man, man who was unable to live when his supply of air was withdrawn, depending entirely on the elements for his miserable life.

The very grimness of those hills fascinated Sumatra Sue, so much like life they were—a flare in the night, a moment of madness, then eternal blackness and silence.

Sumatra Sue was a born psychologist. She could read the faces of men as easily as she could read a book with large print. And the stories that thus passed before her eyes were not pleasant. They had made her slightly morbid. All her life she had thirsted for knowledge. She had studied long hours. She had read every book of consequence that came within her grasp. The eternal problem of existence tortured her. What was it all for? Her father, Big Boag, had during his lifetime been somewhat of a scholar. He had won honors at Oxford and lost them in the South Seas. He had purchased all the books she desired; besides, he had an enormous library. For hours in her youth she had read books that she could not understand until she was dizzy. Sometimes when she couldn't comprehend a thing she went to her father, and after his satirical explanation she understood it less.

"When the world was created," he had told her, "improper care was taken of it. Thus parasites sprang up, insects which multiplied, grew and developed until they became men. Men constantly fight Nature. Some day Nature in her wrath will rise up and rid the world of insects, the scourge of men. They've been tolerated hundreds of thousands of years, but they haven't accomplished anything. The first man was as fine morally as our greatest scholars. The world was better off when only trees and flowers grew upon it. At least trees do not make war on one

another, nor are flowers sufficiently civilized to slay their neighbors."

With such philosophy constantly drummed into her ears it is no wonder that Sumatra Sue developed an intellect far beyond her years and grew to despise men. Then Gillen had come along, and at once all her anathema for men was swept away. Here was love at last that swept aside inhibitions and dislikes, here was love that transcended every other thing. Here was the riddle of existence explained at last. She had been created for this moment. Her eyes were glowing with a strange fire; her lips moved as though in prayer as she lifted her face to his in complete surrender.

IT WAS not until lunchtime of the following day that Gillen met Barry Gair again. They were in the dining-room before Mistress Ewing had appeared.

As Barry Gair noticed Gillen, he rubbed his jaw and smiled.

"My word," he said affably, "but you gave me an awful wallop!"

"I had to," said Gillen. "You were frightfully drunk. You insulted Sumatra Sue."

Barry Gair's lip curled slightly as though with contempt.

"It seems to me," he said, "that you're taking quite an interest in that girl."

"I am," agreed Gillen curtly. "I intend to marry her."

"Have you mentioned the fact to the lady?"

"I certainly have," replied Gillen, "and she agrees with me."

Barry Gair paled slightly. No use telling Gillen that he had hoped to marry Sumatra Sue himself, that he cared as much for her in a sensuous way as he could care for any woman. What was wrong with him? He seemed to be making a mess of everything. Momentarily his hatred for Gillen was growing.

The earth was too small to hold them both much longer. But he must be careful. His plans must not be suspected.

"Congratulations then," he said cordially. "And for last night I am sorry. You did exactly the right thing. Had I been in your place, to sock like that would have given me considerable pleasure."

"I assure you," drawled Gillen, "that it did."

The conversation was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Mistress Ewing, smiling, gracious, looking more queenly than ever. She swept into the room, arrayed as usual in a black silk gown. Papa Campo was in her wake.

"I am hungry enough to eat an alligator," he chuckled.

"If you did," declared Barry Gair, "it certainly would be one meal that wouldn't agree with you."

"Do you think it would agree with the alligator?" queried Papa Campo drolly.

As Gillen joined in his infectious laugh, it was hard to believe that Papa Campo was the dangerous character that Barry Gair had inferred. He appeared so jovial and friendly, like a garrulous old man who had no greater vice than to lie dozing in the sun. Sumatra Sue had not voiced her suspicions of Papa Campo to Gillen. Had she done so, perhaps he might have paid more attention to the occasional crafty, sinister shift of the old man's eyes.

As the meal progressed, Mistress Ewing played unwittingly into the hands of Barry Gair. Had she been an accomplice she could not have helped him more perfectly. Yet she was a dear simple old lady who was loved by everybody in Weltevreden. She would have been speechless with horror had she known that she was aiding and abetting a contemplated major crime. All that she did was to talk enthusiastically about

the beauty and wonder of Java, which was a subject she never tired of.

"Here in Java," she said, "at Buitenzorg are to be found the most glorious Botanical Gardens in the world, which are more than a century old. Here, year after year, the Dutch with consummate skill have raised and classified almost every known flower in the world. No poet could dream of an elysium more complete—a vast rug of plants and flowers whose fringe is a mountain landscape of lava-capped peaks and jungle slopes. Here too are to be found drives that are breath-taking in their loveliness, by far the most famous of which is that which leads to Kota Batoe."

"You are right," agreed Barry Gair, "and it seems to me that Mr. Hulig should make a few pleasure trips to become somewhat better acquainted with the land which is to be his permanent home. He ought to visit Garoet, which is the most healthful spot in the world, several thousand feet above the sea with a delightful climate and a panoramic view which can not be surpassed. Then there is picturesque Djokja, as fascinating a spot as could be found in *The Arabian Nights*, and the Prambanan Temples near Boroboedoer, which were consecrated to Siva and Kali of the Hindoo group of gods."

"You ought to work for Cook," commented Gillen. "You certainly make the tours you suggest most alluring. To tell you the truth, I wouldn't mind going off sight-seeing for a few days before I settle down to the routine work of the plantation. Perhaps I can leave with you tomorrow or the next day if you can accompany me."

"Of course I can," said Barry Gair. "Remember that you are my boss, and since from now on you will be paying my salary you have a right to direct my activities. I suggest that we go first up

to the mountains, to tour the craters of half-slumbering volcanoes. Nothing in Java can quite equal them. They are breath-taking. We can catch the morning train to Buitenzorg, which leaves soon after dawn. Java trains, you know, do not run at night. Guess they are too lazy. The journey will only take about an hour. We can book a room at the hotel, and then go afoot up into the mountain ranges. And there you will see sights such as you have never seen before and perhaps will never see again. From Buitenzorg we can continue on, planning our pilgrimage from day to day until you grow tired."

"It certainly sounds swell to me," said Gillen emphatically.

But the proposed explorations did not find as much favor with Sumatra Sue when he told her about them that night. The fact that Barry Gair had suggested that Papa Campo accompany them only served to fan her smoldering suspicions into roaring flame. However, she said nothing to Gillen about her gloomy forebodings. He would probably have laughed at her. Certain it is he would not have taken her imaginings seriously.

It was a rather miserable moment for Sumatra Sue, despite the fact that Gillen was with her. She sat with him on the veranda and clung to him as though she would never let him go. There was little conversation between them. Occasionally he leaned down and kissed her warm, caressing lips. They were made for one another. God, what had he done to deserve such rare good fortune! Java girl, Java night, Java moon. The sighing of the wind in the treetops. The music of the stars. The everlasting whispering of the wild.

THE next morning found Gillen, Barry Gair and Papa Campo on the train en route to Buitenzorg. It was a

sweltering morning and the air was so heavy with moisture, it seemed to have substance, a golden glaring substance. They slouched in their seats and melted. They closed their eyes and tried to sleep. But it was useless. The car was full of Dutchmen who laughed and talked and smoked. They took the torrid heat as a matter of course. So did the myriads of insects that invaded the train. They seemed to work harder than ever in the humid haze to make existence for humans as miserable as possible.

But fortunately the journey was a short one, despite the fact that their jangled nerves made it seem endless. They lunched at the hotel in Buitenzorg that was most famous for its cool, shady verandas. They had decided because of the intense heat not to go up into the mountains until the heat of the day was passed.

Papa Campo slept most of the day in a large deck-chair that was almost as comfortable as a bed. Gillen idly read over a copy of the *East African Standard* which by some restless, unexplainable urge had found its way to Java. Barry Gair sat moodily gazing off into the glaring distance and consumed cigarette after cigarette. There was no chance of his dozing. His brain was too alive, too active, too filled with plans for vengeance. He was a fool ever to have taken up with such a stubborn, unmanageable chap as Gillen. His plan originally had been of splendid magnitude, yet it had failed miserably. And Gillen must pay for its collapse.

LATE evening found them on the teeth-like ridges of the mountains. The day had expired and only a few flickering reflections of the sun remained. The glow from the eternal fires of the craters lighted up everything sufficiently for them to see about them without trouble,

but not sufficiently to dissipate the ghosts and wraiths which their very shadows seemed to assume. There was a constant murmuring in the air. The seething lava was growling and groaning in despair. The air was heavy with sulfur fumes and gases and many times they had to step back as desultory breezes carried the fumes too heavily to their nostrils. Papa Campo seated himself upon a rock and commenced at once to doze.

Gillen and Barry Gair walked over to the very edge of the crater. They gazed down into the pit of seething, glowing, boiling lava.

"It is almost as though one were gazing at creation," observed Gillen, "watching a world being born."

"It is rather awe-inspiring," admitted Barry Gair. "Take a good look at it, because you may never see it again."

Gillen noticed the menace that lay hidden in the words. It was quite apparent to him that he was not in a particularly enviable position. No more fitting spot than this could be chosen for murder.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked easily.

"Merely that we've come to a show-down," Barry Gair told him. "No enterprise can ever succeed that has two leaders. One of them must retire. And I tell you frankly, I'm not going to. It's up to you to decide what you are going to do. If you oppose me any longer, tonight will mark your exit. The decision is yours."

Gillen thought quickly. There were two of them against him. That called for quick action. Suddenly he straightened up and his arm shot out with frightful force. There was a sickening thud as the blow caught Barry Gair flush on the jaw. He scarcely moaned as he fell. But quick as had been the action of Gillen, that of Papa Campo

was even quicker. No longer was he a lovable old man who joyed to doze in the sun, but a panther, agile, deadly. He sprang at Gillen, his mouth open, drooling, his eyes bloodshot with fury, his terrible hands working convulsively. The next instant they had found Gillen's throat.

He had no chance to escape. So sudden was the attack, he fell to the ground, with Papa Campo on top of him. Those claw-like fingers bit into the flesh of his throat as though they had mouths. He could not breathe, he could not even gasp. Those fingers were merciless. His eyes bulged as though they would break free from their sockets. His tongue hung from his lips as though searching for air. He was utterly powerless. There was a frightful din in his ears and everything was swimming giddily about. He felt as though his head were a bomb about to burst. Papa Campo gazed down into Gillen's face and laughed fiendishly. He licked his lips with relish. This was a job he loved. To claw, to strangle, to destroy! Slowly he dragged Gillen's inert form toward the crater's edge. All this had taken scarcely a moment but to Gillen it seemed an eternity. He was standing on the brink of death and he yearned for oblivion so that the frightful roar in his ears might cease.

But now out of the shadows there leaped a monstrous figure. It was the faithful Dike, who had followed Gillen and his companions on their pilgrimage. Sumatra Sue was with him. It was her idea. She knew that Gillen was en route to death.

In the eery flickering red glow of the volcano the form of Dike loomed up to monstrous proportions. His shadow was so immense it seemed to blot out the very earth. In a second he had caught Papa Campo in a grip which no human man

could withstand. Dike was the strongest man in Java. Papa Campo released his hold on Gillen's throat. He could not imagine from whence this black fury had dropped. For an instant he thought that it must be a huge gorilla. Even as the thought came to him, Dike swung him high into the air. With one mighty heave he tossed him headlong into the seething, glowing, boiling lava of the volcano. Papa Campo uttered one terrifying shriek that echoed and re-echoed through the bleak mountains as he disappeared from view into that murmuring, molten mass. Then Dike strode toward Barry Gair, who had been brought back to consciousness by the scream of Papa Campo. He sat up and gazed about him blearily. His jaw pained him so frightfully, he was sure it must be broken. And now Dike seized Barry Gair in his arms. But Gillen interposed. He had found his breath once more and staggered to his feet.

"No," he said. "Don't do it. There has been horror enough here for one night. Let him come with us down to the hotel. I want to talk with him a bit."

Dike acquiesced at once. He was a splendid servant. He never argued nor permitted his own wishes to interfere with those of his superiors except upon occasion. There are times when the vision of savages is much clearer than that of white men. At such times they must act.

SUMATRA SUE had come out from the shadows. She was crooning softly a wild, weird love song. Her teeth were glowing whitely in the strange red light. And as she crooned she danced, danced with an abandon that suggested all the savagery of old Java. It was a dance of love and death. She was dancing in celebration of the death of Papa Campo. Gillen gazed upon her enraptured and

when she had finished he gathered her into his arms. For a moment he held his lips to hers. Then slowly they commenced to descend the mountain trail. It was not particularly hard, for they had flashlights with them and there was a moon.

Later, at the hotel, Gillen sat at a table opposite Barry Gair. Sumatra Sue sat beside him, while Dike remained in a far corner of the room.

"I hate to gloat over a man when he is down," said Gillen, "but in this case I can't help it. You are much farther down than you imagine. All your elaborate plans have failed. It is rather pitiable. And I will explain to you why. In the first place you chose the wrong man for your purpose, for I *am* Frederick Hulig. That is why I could so easily copy his signature. The man who lay dead beside me in the bedroom in the hotel of Shack Gunga got no more than he deserved, even though it was at your hands, or at least at your instigation. He was a common thief. He had robbed me of my papers several weeks previously in Singapore. I thought I recognized him that morning when I was in rather a trying position. After he robbed me of everything I possessed, I was left stranded in Singapore. I couldn't leave, because I wanted to secure the return of my papers. Thanks to your help, I did. But of course, even though you aided me then, I can not overlook the fact that you have since developed an unholy desire for my death. And I do not crave to die now that I am about to marry Sumatra Sue. Therefore, for my health's sake, you must leave Java. You must be off the plantation by tomorrow night. So you'd better catch the first train from Buitenzorg to Weltevreden in the morning. I suppose I am weak to let you go like this, unmolested, but I do not care to have any deaths chalked up against me

at such a delightful moment of my career. Now get out. For tonight, I don't care where you go as long as you do not remain at this hotel."

Barry Gair hung his head. He made no answer as he rose to his feet and walked from the room. He had not expected to get off so easily. He was still badly shaken over the frightful death of Papa Campo. Perhaps some day he would have his revenge. Gillen's success was only temporary. Gair laughed softly as he walked slowly down the road that led away from the hotel. And gradually as he walked his good spirits returned to him. He commenced to plot his revenge. He would not leave Java. In Java he was a power to be reckoned with. He had many followers. It was only a temporary set-back. So engrossed was he in his plotting, he did not notice the great shadow that loomed up behind

him as he reached a particularly lonely spot on the road, nor did he emit the faintest cry as a long, thin, cruel knife descended into his back. The aim was swift and true. Barry Gair ceased his plotting. He was right in one thing at least. He would nevermore leave Java.

Dike leaned over the body and withdrew the knife. Then he held up his hands toward the moon as though in adoration. Dike was a savage. He knew only one law, the law of the wild, the law of the jungle. This was one instance in which he took matters into his own hands that were too big for the white man to handle. Dike knew that Barry Gair would never rest until he got revenge. While Barry Gair lived, the life of Gillen would never be worth the toss of a coin. Dike smiled to himself as he returned peacefully to the hotel. He had secured the future of Gillen and Sumatra Sue.

THE GIANT

By HUNG LONG TOM

On the mountain-top I stand.
The night is clear.
The sky seems so low
I could almost pluck a star.

For tonight I am a giant.
If I wished I could reach
Down from the high hills
And drag little men
From their beds.

How the mountain would laugh
If it could hear
Vain boasting of my puny strength.

The Slave of Justice

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

*A strange dilemma faced a minor Asiatic potentate, who
had to pass judgment of death on his own son*

"**M**ASHALLAH!" marveled Ismeddin the darvish, "how that executioner could shear off a head! Whether the victim was kneeling or standing, resigned or struggling, it was all one.

"When the sultan's right hand rose from his hip to touch his left shoulder with his finger tips—thus—the blade was poised. And as the sultan's hand swept swiftly back again to the right, the stroke followed flaming and faultless.

"*Wallab!* But it was beautiful to see!"

The darvish paused long enough to trim the fire of the fuming *narghileh*, coil its flexible stem twice around his wrist, and drink deeply of the fragrant smoke. Then he resumed his rhapsody, telling of the great days of the sultan, Ayyub the Just: how he sat in judgment, without pity, without passion, without prejudice; relentless justice incarnate on a lofty dais.

Like the refrain of a pagan chant came the recurrent theme of the sultan's sinister, swift gesture and the flickering doom that followed; so that finally I knew that at last I was to learn what had led up to the strange meeting I had witnessed one evening, several months ago, at the edge of an oasis three days' march from Angorlana.

ISMEDDIN was sitting cross-legged on a sultry red Boukhara rug just at the edge of the oasis. With the heel of his hand, and with his knuckles and finger tips, he smote and caressed a tiny drum so that it purred, and rolled, and thundered in cunningly varied cadence and

volume; and all the while he chanted in the language they speak in the hills.

A groom drew up with Ismeddin's *kochlani* stallion, all decked out and resplendent, halted a few paces to the right, then unslung the embroidered Shirazi saddle-bags and the glittering Ladder to Heaven in its curved scabbard, and laid them at Ismeddin's right.

The camel-drivers about the guard fire ceased their quarreling and gaming, and marveled.

"Haaj Ismeddin is making magic," muttered one, as he made an odd sign with the fingers of his left hand.

"He is expecting Azrael the Dark Angel," hinted another somberly. "When one has lived a hundred years such as his——"

"Perhaps he expects a visit from the sultan," suggested a third solemnly. "He is wearing a clean *djellab*."

"Sultan!" scoffed one who missed the jest. "What sultan ever saw Haaj Ismeddin in a clean, new *djellab*? And sultans can be seen and heard from afar, with their Chinese and Indian music and clanking captains, and emirs on *asil* horses. . . ."

"Ismeddin is making magic," reiterated one with finality.

And thus and thus, while Ismeddin chanted into the dusk that rolled across the desert and ascended the mountains that rose up before us.

The sonorous chant and the sultry glow of the guard fire must for a moment have lulled me into a half-sleep; for with a start I realized that a beggar had ma-

terialized before Ismeddin where only an instant ago there had been but empty dusk. A beggar in a *djellab* as tattered and grimy as Ismeddin's customary garb, washed early in the reign of the present sultan's grandfather. A beggar whose head was cocked oddly to one side, as that of a bird pausing in preening his feathers. And his eyes were bird-like . . . like those of a bird of prey. A beggar who—but was that hard-bitten stranger any beggar?

The drumming and the chant suddenly ceased, leaving an emptiness that something had to fill.

"A thousand years, *baaji!*" greeted the stranger in a curious, shrill, piping voice.

He was old, but the shrillness of his voice was not that of senility; nor was it the shrillness of the plump, oily eunuchs who guard seraglios.

"And to you, a thousand, *saidi!*" returned Ismeddin as he rose and bowed very low. "Prayer on you, my Lord, and the Peace!"

He stepped aside so that the wanderer might seat himself on the shimmering silky rug.

The stranger declined, remaining standing, his head still cocked to one side; but his glittering eyes looked Ismeddin full in the eye.

Ismeddin laid the saddle-bags, stuffed to bulging, at the stranger's feet.

"Food, my lord. And a horse," he continued, as he offered the beggar the reins of his own richly caparisoned mount. "Ride out of the hills and be sultan. They cry for you in Angorlana. Schamas ad Din is gone, and his nephew misrules in his stead. There is no justice."

So this beggar was to be sultan? Well now, by the rod! For all his piping voice and curiously wrenched neck, and rags, he was every bit a sultan; the kind that ruled in the old days, before sultans

dissolved hasheesh in their wine, and paddled sluggishly in pools of outrageous diversion.

Ismeddin half unsheathed his simitar with its Kufic characters of pale gold inlay, then drove it back into its scabbard and thrust the ringing blade hilt foremost at the stranger, tempting him with its smoldering rubies and cool sapphires.

"Let us ride, *saidi,*" the darvish entreated. "I will follow."

"Neither swords nor horses, old friend," piped the wanderer, recoiling from the glittering hilt before him. "Nor Justice either . . . fresh-spilled blood creeps up through the sand they spread on the blood-splashed tiles. . ."

He paused, brooding somberly for a moment, then: "But—*inshallah!* One must eat."

He stooped to pick up the embroidered saddle-bags at his feet. Then I saw why his head was so strangely cocked to the left: an incredible scar, broad and ridged and long, showed how narrowly he had escaped decapitation. The severed muscles in healing had contracted and given his head that slant, and distorted his vocal chords. How any one could survive such a cut!

"One must eat," he piped. "But do not tempt me with horses, and thrones. Blood creeps up through the sand. . ."

He shouldered the saddle-bags and strode into the darkness.

THEN I regained the thread of Ismeddin's repetitious tales of the just sultan, and wondered if he had noted my lapse of attention. But he hadn't; Ismeddin and his *narghileh* were utterly absorbed in their memories of the old days when Ayyub sat in the shadow of slowly swaying peacock-plume fans and pronounced swift doom or unexpected pardon.

" . . . There was one accused of hav-

ing a second time used false weights in the *souk*.

"Ayyub considered the evidence, and recognized the culprit as one who had been previously dismissed with a hundred lashes for a like offense.

" 'This becomes monotonous,' remarked the sultan.

"But before his finger tips could reach his left shoulder, a *wazir* interposed.

" '*Saidi*,' he said, 'a man's life is a heavy penalty to pay for petty fraud.'

" 'Flogging,' smiled the sultan, 'has been futile. Still . . . as you say . . . well, then, cut off his right hand.'

" 'But he is the son of Ibn Saoud, who saved your life at——'

" 'All the worse!' declared Ayyub. 'There are neither sons nor friends when I sit in judgment. Were he my own son——'

"And even as he spoke, the sultan's hand left his hip; finger tips touched his left hand for an instant, and swiftly swept back to his right. The two-handed sword sheared faultlessly. By Allah! But there was justice for you, executed before the criminal could even think either of mercy or bribery.

"The head was carried off in a basket, and the body dragged away with hooks. And while they were scattering fresh sand on the blood-splashed tiles, a detachment of the guard entered the hall of judgment, leading a stalwart brigand from the hill tribes. A stout, handsome fellow, with hard eyes and a hooked beak like the sultan himself, and the sultan's father before him. One of those fierce men from the hills. Had it so pleased Allah, he might amply have filled a throne and sat in judgment on him before whom he himself was now to receive sentence.

"The executioner was wiping his blade.

"Old Amru with that deep rich voice of his read the charges: How, single-

handed, the hillman had charged into the outpost of Al Azhár, routed a detachment of the guard posted there, and started for the hills with three horses and the arms of three men.

" '*Mashallah!*' marveled the sultan. 'What a man!'

" 'There are more like me in the hills, *saidi*,' boasted the prisoner, and smiled. Then, nodding at the headsman, whose blade gleamed again: 'Let him strike clean.'

" 'Allah upon you, young fellow,' smiled the sultan in return. "Have no fear on that score.'

"And then the jest died on his lips, and the dying was bitter.

" 'Ismail,' said the sultan to the captain who had brought the prisoner before him, 'you might have let this fellow escape after making him swear to appear and offer his services in the Guard. He is worth three of the cowards he slaughtered at Al Azhár.'

" 'Is that then your pleasure, Magnificence?' queried Ismail hopefully; for Ismail took small pleasure in the day's duty.

" 'It would have been, stupid and all too zealous captain,' replied the sultan. 'But it is too late: for now he stands not before me, but before Justice.'

"Then, to the prisoner: 'Young fellow, have you anything to say before we strike? And what favor, aside from your life, would you choose?'

" 'First, my lord,' grinned the bandit, 'I should have been content with one horse and sure escape. Second, let me stand to take the stroke.'

" 'Granted,' agreed Ayyub.

"I saw that justice was costing Ayyub dearly: for there before him stood a man after his own heart. And Ayyub himself was the son of a robber from the

hills, and had stolen a kingdom; yet justice was justice.

"'Ismail,' muttered the sultan, 'you were wrong.'

"Ayyub glanced from the prisoner to the sentries posted at the entrance of the hall of judgment; glanced at the door itself, and measured the distance with his eye. . . .

"'A man after my own heart,' pronounced Ayyub. 'Let him therefore be unbound so that he can die as befits a man whom I would pardon if I could.'

"The cords that bound the bandit's wrist were cut, and he stood free and unafraid.

"Again the sultan glanced from the prisoner down the length of the hall, and at the door, but without hope; for Ayyub knew that the guard would cut the prisoner down unless Ayyub made the gesture of pardon. And that gesture the slave of justice could not make.

"Each white-bearded captain who had years ago ridden out of the hills behind his chief felt himself standing before the throne to face doom; and although Ayyub had glanced at the door, he saw nothing but hopelessness: so that none noted the old woman who entered the hall of judgment.

"Ayyub's hand rose very slowly from his hip.

"**T**HE woman's shriek startled the sultan, and the sign of doom stopped before it had fairly started.

"Evading the guard, she knelt at the foot of the dais.

"'Who are you, old woman?' demanded the sultan as his hand dropped back to his hip. 'And what have you to do with this?'

"Ayyub breathed deeply and relaxed. He could not relent; but he welcomed the moment's respite. By Allah, but you

would have thought that it was his own sentence that had been postponed.

"'I am his mother, *saidi!* And why for the sake of three horses should he lose his head, when you, the son of a bandit, rode from the hills and took this city!'

"The captains gasped, and stroked their beards, and marveled. But Ayyub, staring at the woman, gave no sign to have her ejected.

"'You, his mother? By Allah, old woman, but you are before Justice rather than before any sultan. That blood creeping from the sand just at your knees was spilled by the thieving son of an old friend.'

"Ayyub's right hand rose——

"The woman leaped to her feet and seized his wrist.

"The lords and captains were confused, for they did not know whether to stand fast, or to drag her from the hall.

"The prisoner smiled just the shadow of a smile.

"'Old woman,' said the sultan as his hand again dropped to rest at his hip, 'I am sorry that your son is before me. For when I am in this hall, I am very Justice itself, for I rode from the hills to establish Justice. And after all, each of those many who have lost their heads in this hall have had mothers. Then who am I to thwart Justice for the sake of——'

"'For the sake of one mother?' mocked the woman.

"*Wallah!* And how her voice derided Ayyub!

"'Saidi,' she continued, 'I am more than the mother of that bandit, my son. I am all those women whose sons have died for that heaven-sent Justice of yours, heaven-sent prince!'

"The lords and captains listened, and forgot to stroke their beards.

"'I am the mother of Persian Hafiz

whose song is poison-sweet as hasheesh mingled with Shirazi wine.'

"Her voice grew clear and mellow and chanting and golden rich.

" 'I am the mother of that fierce Mongol who enthroned himself in Samarcand. I am the mother of Iskander of the Two Horns. I am the mother of al Khayyami whose sonorous phrases you sing of an evening when wine washes the dust of justice from your just lips. And I am the mother of those stout brigands who rode behind you, a brigand, and carved a kingdom for you out of this madhouse of the plains. And this man before you might be the equal of any of his brothers. . . .'

"The sultan stared, and his lean face became yet more drawn and lean. He rose from his dais, standing as one who has met destiny at the crossroads.

" 'Old woman, who are you?' he thundered in a voice great with wonder, and trembling with a fear that was gnawing at him.

" 'I am Dhivalani the Kashmiri dancing girl,' that golden voice intoned, 'and that bandit my son is your own son who was born after Abdurrahman al Durani raided your camp and carried me to his stronghold.'

"She tore aside her veil.

"Old, and wrinkled, and leathery: but there was the firm stamp of ancient beauty, and the fire of those smoldering Kashmiri eyes.

" 'Then if he is my son,' spoke the dazed sultan in wide-spaced accents, 'why did you not send him to me years ago?'

" 'It has been twenty years since I last saw him, or knew that he was alive. Only yesterday I learned who he was. They loved him in the hills, and feared he might forget himself and descend to a throne.'

"The just sultan stared at his son. Yet

he made no sign of pardon; for from the sand on the tiles before him crept the fresh-spilled blood of his friend's son.

"Then he muttered in my ear. The man might yet cast off the bondage of justice.

"I passed his command to the captains and the lords of the court.

"They filed from the presence as dead men walking from their graves.

" 'Allah, the Wise, the All-Knowing, is Just,' pronounced the sultan. 'And since it pleased him to put me on this throne, I can not be less.'

"He glanced again at the stains on the floor. Then he advanced a pace . . . two paces . . . a third.

"He halted, and stared full at the son of his first and favorite wife. The lost lion was doomed, leaving only those other sons, that litter of jackals.

"The bandit smiled ever so slightly at the sultan's misery.

"Ayyub's hand, half raised, dropped. Then it rose again, finger tips touching his left shoulder an instant, and back. . . .

"The blade flamed wide. . . .

"With a great cry, the sultan leaped forward, thrust the bandit full on the chest, striking him flat to the floor before the shearing stroke could behead him. But it was too late for the faultless executioner to check his blade and spare the sultan."

ISMEDDIN exhaled a deep draft of white smoke from the stem of the bubbling *narghileh*; stared me full in the eye for a moment; and then answered my unspoken question: "No, *saidi*, that was no dead man you heard me offer my simitar. The headsman's stroke was not quite true, so Ayyub did not catch enough of the blade. And for the sake of his one injustice, the Slave of Justice lives in a small cave in the mountains."

Della Wu, Chinese Courtesan

By FRANK OWEN

A tender and beautiful tale of Old China and the revenge of Nen-Tsang

GAZE for a moment on the portrait of Della Wu, Chinese courtesan. She was born of fabulously wealthy parents. Her father had amassed fortunes in tea, in jade, in opium. The home of the family in Canton spread over many acres. It was a veritable village in itself, a garden of moon-bridges, lily ponds, gorgeous flowers and many red-roofed houses peeping in and out from among the trees like lost pomegranates.

The main house was an affair of spacious rooms, sweet incenses, cushions, lanterns and eery music. No cooking was done in this house, which was given over by the master to dreams and meditations. Frequently the dreams were flavored by poppy fragrance and the meditations were over the languorous young sloe-eyed women that came so frequently to the home of Nen-Tsang. In appearance the master was large, expansive in form and expression. Tolerant, quick in mind, sluggish in body. His face was as round as the full moon and quite as expressionless.

No one would have imagined that his commercial genius was a by-word round the world. He dressed lavishly, squandered vast sums upon his guests, but never in the period of any one's recollection had he been known to give even a copper coin to the poor. Poverty in his eyes was the one unforgivable crime. Murder could be justified, and frequently was, but poverty had no excuse for being.

"When a flower," he used to say, "becomes wild in a garden, it is plucked and destroyed. Beggars should be so

treated. In the gardens of earth, they are vile weeds."

Nen-Tsang admitted of no religion. He was his own god, addicted to self-worship. He gave himself over to every license. And he encouraged riotous living upon his beautiful daughter, Della Wu. Her mother had been half French and half Annamese. She had been born in French Indo-China. Nen-Tsang had come across her while he was on a pilgrimage to sundry southern traders. He gazed upon her vivid dark beauty and was entranced. At once he decided that he must have her for his wife. The fact that she did not care in the slightest for him and was enamored of a young Frenchman in the consular service mattered not at all. Nen-Tsang negotiated for her purchase. He was a shrewd trader. He seldom failed in his business enterprises. The father of Nana was a victim of cupidity. He could not withstand the jingle of gold. In the end, despite the protestations of Nana, she was carried back to Canton to become the wife of the wealthy Nen-Tsang. He treated her splendidly, showered gifts upon her that were of mythical value; the finest of silks were procured for her costume, for her bath the sweetest of essences. The very tea she drank was of a special blend and cost the equivalent of sixty dollars a pound in American money. Musicians were procured to wander through the paths of the garden to play gentle love songs to her. But all the efforts of Nen-Tsang were in vain. Everything had been granted her save love. And love alone she needed.

Now Nen-Tsang was shrewd in his



"Even as he smiled, he was crossing the bridge."

business judgment and he knew that unless Nana met once more with Monsieur Jacques of Cholon she would perhaps fade away like a broken flower. This annoyed him. Nana was far too beautiful to be destroyed by a frustrated love. He racked his agile brains for a remedy. He was not squeamish in his morals. His wife's every wish must be granted. So he dispatched a courier to Monsieur Jacques bidding him come to the garden for a lengthy sojourn as his guest. Monsieur Jacques, who had thrown up his government position since the loss of Nana and was fast drinking himself into insanity, came at once.

There followed days of witchery.

Nen-Tsang graciously withdrew. He journeyed off to Hongkong on some trumped-up business. But he had the foresight to leave a trusted spy to watch over the lovers and report their every move.

At night Monsieur Jacques and Nana walked beneath the moon, through the flower-scented paths of the garden, while a musician played softly on his lute and the very breeze itself seemed to take up the refrain. On the tiny river that ran through the garden there was a boat, a love-boat of soft lights and cushions, of soft lights and veiled love. To this boat each night Nana and Monsieur Jacques retired. For

hours he told her how much he adored her. And he was loud in his curses against Nen-Tsang who had torn her from him.

Then one night he stayed with her until the dawn. Her head was pillowed on his arm as the sun rose over the garden. The birds began to sing anthems to the dawn. The flowers commenced to unfold and Nana awakened to behold Monsieur Jacques sleeping beside her. At that moment she would have welcomed death. Her fondest dreams had come true. Nothing ever could equal again that night of love beneath the lantern moon.

She rose softly and pushed aside the curtains that hid the doorway. Breathing deeply of the dew-drenched air she extended her arms as though she wished to draw all that great beauty to her. Her eyes were shining, her lips seemed more vivid than ever, her cheeks were flushed. And as she breathed, her breast rose and fell discernibly. So great was her happiness, her ecstasy, she felt as though it were killing her.

Meanwhile Monsieur Jacques had awakened. He gazed about him. Nana was gone, but on the pillow where she had lain, there lay coiled a mamba, one of the most poisonous of all known snakes. Its slim green body was fascinating as it lay prepared to strike. Monsieur Jacques gazed upon it with horror. He could not cry out. His vocal cords were paralyzed. And the snake darted its wicked head toward his throat.

When some time later Nana re-entered the love-boat, Monsieur Jacques was dead. The snake had disappeared. Gone, too, was her love and all the beauty of life.

THAT afternoon Nen-Tsang returned from Hongkong with a necklace of matched pearls for his superb wife. But she was prostrated with grief. She lay and moaned and scarcely glanced at the lovely trinket.

Nen-Tsang smiled sadly. He was infinitely patient. Nor did he tell her that Monsieur Jacques had brought about his own death. A man who will enter a garden to steal the wife of his host is a viper, fit only to associate with snakes. Such was the belief of Nen-Tsang and on that basis he had left instructions with his faithful spy.

But Nen-Tsang was a mighty merchant and he had outwitted Monsieur Jacques. Of the two, his treachery was the greater because it ended in complete destruction.

Nen-Tsang could not help smiling broadly as he contemplated the way the liaison had ended. Now perhaps he might be able to enjoy the society of his wife without interference. She could never hold the death of Monsieur Jacques against him, for had he not been traveling on the road to Hongkong while they had been under the spell of romance in the garden? The fact that Nana evidently did not love him mattered little to Nen-Tsang. If she were an obedient wife, that was all that he desired.

But there is one bad feature about laughter, about gloating over one's victories. It is hard to know exactly the proper time to laugh. It is a question when one is a victor.

Poor Nana went into a decline. For days and nights on end she mourned her lover. Nen-Tsang made no effort to assuage her grief. It must wear itself away, consume itself by its very intensity. During those days he seldom visited her, though often he sent gifts of jade to her, and carved amber. He

scoured the world for the most luscious fruits, strawberries with mountain snow still upon them, ripe figs and nectaries. But he did not force himself into her presence. It was better to wait, even though it took months, or years. Eventually she would return to his side.

So the seasons passed until there came the period of the Dragon Festival which occurs on the fifth day of the fifth moon, usually June or July. As a rule the celebration is a water regatta with the canoe-shaped boats fashioned into dragon heads at the prow. There are, of course, endless feasting and various sport exhibitions.

But within the garden of Nen-Tsang the Dragon Festival was celebrated in a far different and more unusual manner, for on that day Nana gave birth to a baby girl. The ladies in waiting went about with long, solemn faces. There was no use in congratulating the master on the birth of a girl. It was a most awkward situation. A boy is a cause for rejoicing, but the birth of a girl is looked upon in China as something approaching disgrace.

Nen-Tsang did not mind being left alone. In seclusion he remained throughout the day, for it was only now that he realized that he had laughed too quickly. Monsieur Jacques was dead, but even now he must be laughing. For the baby that was born unto Nana was the daughter of the young Frenchman. Nen-Tsang groaned in his anguish. He gnashed his teeth. How can one take vengeance on the dead? If only Monsieur Jacques was still alive, that he might slay him once again! And how he would have gloated over his writhings in pain! But now it was Nen-Tsang who was in pain, and perhaps somewhere in some different form, Monsieur Jacques was grinning at the suffering of the mighty merchant. Enor-

mous though his wealth had been, it had been insufficient to buy the love of his wife, which had been squandered on a penniless vagabond from Cholon. Truly the ways of Destiny are devious and hard to understand.

Meanwhile Nana smiled wistfully and held the tiny mite of humanity in her arms. As long as the baby lived, Monsieur Jacques was not completely dead. Some part of him which he had given unto the child would still live on. Her eyes glowed with a strange fire as she thought of this. She had given everything to Jacques, and now that she had been delivered of his child, there was naught more to live for. She named the baby Della Wu. It was her final effort. Then she turned her face toward the open window that faced the wondrous garden. A nightingale was singing in the tree tops as her eyes closed. During the night she died, peacefully, so calmly that those about her thought she was still sleeping.

Whether or not the passing of Nana was a great blow to Nen-Tsang, who can say? Was he a base materialist? A cold, shrewd trader? Or was he, too, like most of us, a merchant who dealt in dreams? Was the blow so hard that he could scarcely bear its lash? These things no one could answer. Life in the garden went on much the same as ever. Nen-Tsang continued his numerous enterprises. He submerged himself in business to the exclusion of all else.

THE years advanced and Della Wu grew into wondrous girlhood. All the vivid coloring of Nana was repeated in the girl. There was an Oriental cast to her face, to her bronzed skin, due to her Annamese ancestors. But the glowing French beauty of her father came out in even more startling prominence. She might have been compared

to that beauty of the Han dynasty of whom it has been written that one glance from her eyes would overthrow a city, two glances would cause an empire to totter.

Nen-Tsang gazed upon her and groaned. In loveliness, she was a veritable Nana reincarnated. Nana was gone, but this vision of her he must forever gaze upon. Nana was not worth thinking about. Too bad that her memory kept obtruding into his consciousness. It was well that she had died. It saved him the trouble of killing her. Was he to be always frustrated in his efforts toward revenge? She was not worth a tear—a vile courtesan who had brought tragedy into his garden. And Della Wu was her daughter and the daughter of Monsieur Jacques. There was no use denying it. Facts are stubborn things. Well and good. Della Wu resembled her mother who was a courtesan. He would make the resemblance even more complete by bringing her up as a courtesan. He himself would supervise her education. He would teach her that the sweetest thing in life is surrender, to yield to every impulse, to surrender to every passion, to have no moral sense whatsoever. She must be worthy of her mother.

To further his plan of education he taught her the history of Ta' Ki, who was the famous slave of Shao Sin of the Chow dynasty who lived several thousand years ago. According to legend, Ta' Ki was the most beautiful woman that ever lived but of a viciousness that makes one shudder merely to read about. She caused the dynasty itself to fall, a dynasty which was the most famous of China because among others it contained the name of Confucius. It was rumored that she was a fox-fairy who assumed the form of a woman that she might more quickly and

thoroughly accomplish the ruin of China.

According to the myth, the change to woman form was complete except for her feet, which still remained those of a fox. To hide this defect from the ladies of the court she caused her feet to be bound. To curry favor with the famous concubine, the ladies of the court followed her example and bound their feet in like manner. That is why foot-binding came to be a universal custom, one of the most cruel and barbarous practises ever devised by human beings. It resulted in untold, senseless agony and countless cripples hobbling about on stumps of feet in the name of beauty.

Nen-Tsang acquainted Della Wu with all the artifices and practises of other famous Chinese courtesans, including Yang Kuei-Fei, who is acknowledged universally as the most artful. A history of this crafty woman of peach-like beauty has recently been pulished in America by Mrs. Wu Lien-teh. So famed was the devastating glory of Yang Kuei-Fei that even Li Po of the Immortals composed verses in her honor. Thus did he write:

"Upon the clouds I gaze and see thy vesture floating fair.
Upon the flowers I gaze and lo! thy cheek is kindling there.
The zephyr brushing through the stoep thy footfall seems to be.
The dew, so like thy freshness, brings the sense of loss to me."

Some say that the verses were written by royal command. If so, what matter? Does that detract from their fragile tenderness?

Nen-Tsang secured the services of a woman famed in "make-up," who taught Della Wu the mystery and lure of perfumes, the way to increase the brilliance of the eyes with mauve tints and mascara, to heighten the arch of the eyebrows with

kohl, to clip the eyebrows with tweezers to add to their natural grandeur. The "make-up" of lips and cheeks was given attention; even the toes and tips of the breasts were not neglected.

Meanwhile she was taught all the love songs of the Chinese poets, the cream of Tu Fu, Li Po, Po Chu-i and Tao-yun. She was instructed in the art of the dance by Collette Degas, who was brought all the way from Paris for the purpose. Sometimes she danced almost nude in the night among the flowers, an amber girl under an amber moon.

Thus her education as a courtesan went forward day by day. She absorbed all that was spread out before her willingly. Love, she was told, was as necessary to the life of a young girl as food or drink. Nothing sordid was allowed to interfere with her education. Her footsteps were deftly guided into the paths Nen-Tsang had chosen for her. She was initiated into all the curious lore and art of love as exemplified in the ancient Kama Sutra of the Hindoos.

"If love," declared Nen-Tsang, "is the greatest of all arts, then it should be granted the most hours of study. The pursuit of pleasure is the sole reason for existence."

But though Nen-Tsang in his anger was endeavoring to direct the future of Della Wu into the ways of a courtesan, he never by word or deed even suggested to her that she was not his legitimate child. He hated to do so. Despite all his assertions to the contrary his very existence was bound up in the welfare of Della Wu. She was so much like Nana that for hours, at times, he sat in the evening-garden watching her dancing in the moonlight. She had the same fatal attraction for him as had Nana before her. The very force of his hatred was consuming Nen-Tsang. It verged on love or madness.

He did, however, tell Della Wu that her mother's death was due directly to a man, a false friend who slipped like a snake into the garden.

"Men," he said, "are all evil. At heart they are worthless. They are fit toys for a beautiful woman, playthings for an hour. The clever woman is one who makes fools of men, destroys as many of them as she can. If a man is not destroyed by a woman, he destroys her."

Endlessly he whispered this warped philosophy into the ears of Della Wu, nor could it fail to have its effect. Her mother had died because a man had betrayed her. Now all men must pay until the stain had been wiped out. She studied the art of beauty the more intensely that she might be the more alluring to the stream of suitors who came constantly to the garden.

Nen-Tsang was a clever host. He plunged into a round of gayety, lavish, gorgeous, seductive. Every license was permitted in the garden. The art of love was studied in a thousand different forms. The paths were heavy with perfume and music and young love.

Della Wu was the center of a veritable court. Men no sooner met her than they wooed her. The predominance of French blood in her veins was more deadly than a drug. Men could not escape, once they had fallen under her charm. Sometimes she sang, sometimes she danced. But more often she lay on a stone bench beneath a willow tree and listened to the gentle song of the wind through the tree tops. The trees and the flowers were far more appealing than any man. They gave of their best and yet expected no sacrifices in return.

Frequently men walked with her down near the river where the love-boat lay at anchor. They gathered her into their arms and made the most preposterous promises to her. The fragrance of her

body was devastating. Sometimes she made a rendezvous with them to come to the love-boat at a certain hour, always after the moon had set and the garden was in comparative darkness. And then stealthily they would creep to her side in the love-boat and spend hours in her arms. Never during these periods were they permitted to speak. And always before dawn they were pushed gently away. They did not know that the occupant of the love-boat on those evenings was a negress of alluring form whose body had been rubbed with sweet oils and perfumes. Never was Della Wu in the boat. She would be in her own rooms in the house that had been assigned to her, sleeping alone in the sheerest of silken gowns by the open window listening to the willow-songs of the swaying trees that she cared for more than the love of any man.

It was good to make fools of men. She was securing payment of the debt which men owed to her mother.

But the real Della Wu, who had been reared as a courtesan, was never possessed by any man. The very plot which Nen-Tsang had woven about her acted like a mesh to keep suitors away. She was cold to all men, though her eyes shone with fire as she danced and her lips were vibrant flames. She was in love with nature, with the sky and the garden, with life. And the fools of men thought that she was in love with them. In their blind idiocy they imagined that they were the cause of her agitation as she danced.

The education of Della Wu had been complete. But she had learned more than Nen-Tsang had bargained for. From her teachers she drew more knowledge than had been intended. If men were such brutes, then the world was not created for them. It must have been created for sheer beauty, for the trees and the flowers. Flowers were the highest form of life. And the most charming countries

were the countries of the sky. What matter that one could only visit the sky-cities in dreams? Dreams were more real than material things, and far more magical. "Flowers," she had read somewhere, "were only butterflies resting for a moment on a branch." And again she had read that snow is naught but butterflies flying in a mist. There must be some great reason for everything. Music was enchantment, dancing a means of escape. For hours she oftentimes roamed alone through the garden musing over sweet thoughts which ran like the music of a brook through her mind.

She was not Della Wu, courtesan, but Della Wu, weaver of rich tapestries of dreams.

GRADUALLY the fame of Della Wu spread throughout the province. Fantastic tales were invented about her. It was said that she was a daughter of the sun, the loveliest woman in all of China. In whispers her numerous exploits were recounted. That few of them were true and many were highly seasoned did not detract from their piquancy. Like dozens of other women of history, she attained fame through legends of her infamy.

Men of wealth, of jaded nerves and appetites, who were parched for new thrills, heard of her and sought audience with the mighty Nen-Tsang. It was not hard to secure an invitation to the garden if one were wealthy and of pleasing appearance. The guests brought heaps of presents to Della Wu, jewels and satins and rich tapestries. One there was who brought her a golden chest of tea which had been grown on Ming Shan, a small mountain in western Szechuan, by the priests of a Buddhist temple. There are only a few pounds in every crop, so that the gift of this rarest tea was equal to that of precious stones.

"Always," said the stranger, "this tea has been reserved for royalty. That is why I have brought it to you who are worthy to be 'Empress of the Dawn.' "

Della Wu took the tea and smiled. Yes, tea was a gift worth receiving, for in the aroma was the stuff that dreams are made of. But what need had she for the carved jewelry or precious stones? Could any of them equal the glory of the stars in the velvet sky? The poorest beggar can become a prince simply by turning his face toward the stars. Men may grow rich, they may hoard money and jewels and gloat over them in secret. But the rarest gifts of earth are for the multitude. Sunsets, flowers, and the spray-flung crest of the sea.

Della Wu believed that if there were aught of happiness to be had in life it must be found in the wind. For the wind brings storms, rain to lave the soft faces of the flowers, to brighten up the garden. It is the wind that later blows the storm clouds away so that men may behold the sun once more. It is the wind that hastens golden galleons on the highroads of the sea on numerous treasure quests. It is the wind that carries the strains of music, the fragrance of the rose, the pungent breath of spices, the voice of a beloved friend.

"Some day," she mused, "perhaps I too will find in the wind a song worth singing, my own song, formed for my ears alone."

Among the teachers of Della Wu was an old mystic known as Vung Thoong, who had led an austere life of meditations, privation and abstinence.

"When a man is almost starving," he declared, "his faculties are intensified in power. At such time one can almost hear the music of the spheres. At birth a bit of Heaven is given unto the body of every man. It is frequently absurd what he does with it. Because he possesses a bit of

Heaven, he frequently imagines himself a god. It is that divine speck of Heaven that makes a man a saint or a sinner, according to how he disposes of that precious gift. If religion is worth anything at all, men should not fear to die. Yet even the most faithful fear death, which, if the sacred teachers are correct, should only be a gentle passing from a lesser world to an eternal. The simplest thing in life is death. For death is merely the release of the spirit to wander in the infinite blue meadows of the sky."

Vung Thoong did not profess to be a Christian, although he was well-versed in the tenets of that religion.

"There can only be one real religion," he mused. "The universe can not be divided into sections like a continent with the God of the Hindoo ruling over one province, the God of the Christians ruling over another, with sections for the Buddhists, Jains and Parsees. There is only one religion and that religion is the religion of the stars, a religion of quietude and peace. Forever men are gazing into Heaven when they gaze unto the skies but few there are who realize it."

Vung Thoong had his own theories regarding everything. Whether they were true or not is of little import. At least they were as credible as the views of most other philosophers. Nen-Tsang had summoned the aged mystic to his garden because he believed that Vung Thoong was a superb teacher. A great courtesan must be a deep thinker. In ancient Greece and Rome the courtesans even swayed the administration of justice and helped frame the laws of the country. Courtesans have changed measurably the history of the whole world.

Della Wu was fond of the strange old man. She liked to walk beside him in the garden, to listen to his quaint ramblings. He was very old and his face was like dried parchment, as brown as the soil

from the heat and dust of more than half a century's residence in the desert. He was as tall and thin as a reed growing beside a rice-field. There was little materialism about him. He seemed almost like a gaunt specter which the wind blew through the garden. His footfalls were so soft they could not be heard.

Sometimes Della Wu engaged him in serious conversation.

"Tell me," she cried on one occasion, "are men really as vile as I have been brought up to believe?"

Vung Thoong gazed for a moment toward the sky. Then he said slowly, "No matter what the world may say, no man is ever entirely good or entirely evil. If he were good without stain he would be a god. Men might then bow down before him in worship. If he were all evil, he would be a spirit of destruction, destroying all that came in his path. Most of the evil we see in others really lies in our own hearts. It is easier to find evil than good in our neighbors because we search more ardently for it."

Now it so happened that at this time there came to Canton from the outer districts of Mongolia a wealthy mandarin who prided himself on his fine figure, good looks and accomplishments. In his household there were many women, and among his women were many beauties, but still he lacked contentment. To hold the love of women mattered little to him. It was the chase he gloated over, the joy of conquest.

When he heard of Della Wu he set out at once for Canton. In great splendor he arrived at the garden of Nen-Tsang. He came as a merchant that he might the more readily ingratiate himself. Nen-Tsang was a trader before all else. And the mandarin, whose name was Lee Nyoen, brought with him samples of jade wine-bowls, amber vases and ink-slabs of

cornelian that were of magnificent workmanship. He also brought samples of rice that had been chemically treated and polished until they were like pearls which had been threaded and worked into necklaces and screens.

Nen-Tsang was loud in his praise of the trinkets; and he welcomed Lee Nyoen with as much enthusiasm as though he had been his own son. In the evening Lee Nyoen wandered with Della Wu down to the tiny river where the love-boat lay at anchor. He wooed her with the most extravagant phrases. She was a white dove flying across the purple sky. When she awakened to watch the dawn, the sun hid behind curtains of gray cloud because it could not stand her dazzling beauty. Her supple body was a gorgeous glowing opal, devastating in the heat of its fire. So on and on, in the manner of Li Po and Li Yi.

It was inevitable that they should arrange to meet in the love-boat later that evening, under the veil of darkness, when the garden was enshrouded in its robes of night. As usual she exacted promises from him that he would depart before daylight and would not endeavor to converse with her during the dreamlike interlude. Of course Lee Nyoen acceded to her wishes. He promised explicit obedience. But to Lee Nyoen promises were made to be broken. Some hours later, within the love-boat, he suddenly struck a match and gazed ardently, eagerly into the face of the girl that was in his arms. It was an extremely handsome negress whose body breathed forth the incense of a thousand flowers.

Lee Nyoen released the girl and sprang to his feet. With an oath he leaped from the boat into the quietude of the garden. Everything was in blackness except the tops of the trees which stood out in silhouette against the sky. As he walked along his body shook with anger and pas-

sion, cold perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead. Della Wu had tricked him. He had lost face. No woman had ever before dared hold him up to ridicule. She must be his! There was no other way to erase the stigma. For hours he walked through the garden, raving in his anger.

Just before dawn, when the shadows of night had commenced to melt from the garden, he encountered an old gardener who was out early to tend his beloved flowers. Lee Nyoen sprang forward and seized the old fellow by the throat. His fingers closed until the old man gasped for breath and his eyes bulged in terror. Then Lee Nyoen relaxed his grip and demanded to be directed to the house in which Della Wu slept. When the gardener hesitated, the steel-like fingers closed again about his scrawny throat. After that it was not hard to persuade him to be a guide.

A short while later, Lee Nyoen was in the simple chamber wherein Della Wu slept by the open window. He gasped at the beauty of this glowing amber girl. Her gorgeous body was enhanced by the soft texture of the night-robe she wore.

Gently he lifted her in his arms and strode swiftly toward the garden. But he had not gotten far from the house when Della Wu awakened. In a moment she realized her peril. She struggled, but to no avail. The arms of Lee Nyoen were relentless. His muscles were like steel cables. Her strength was puny by comparison to his. Nevertheless her will was strong. Valiantly she struggled, engaging all Lee Nyoen's attention. He had to lessen his stride to keep from falling.

Lee Nyoen had decided to carry her across a moon-bridge over the tiny river to where there was a pavilion particularly suited to the pursuance of love's pleasures. He had visited the pavilion in the afternoon and so he knew that no one

slept in it throughout the night. Now at last Lee Nyoen was master of that garden. Likewise, too, was he the master of the glorious Della Wu, who was a trickster extraordinary. Very smart was Lee Nyoen. He had the reputation of never failing at anything. But smart though Lee Nyoen was, his thinking capacity was dwarfed in comparison to that of Della Wu. She had anticipated just such an emergency. She had ruminated on what might happen if one of her sundry suitors discovered her trickery. Fortunately the old gardener had been one of her faithful followers whom she had taken into her confidence. And now he acted according to instructions previously arranged. He sped down to the moon-bridge by a short cut across the flower beds. And there he loosened two boards in the center of the bridge. Lee Nyoen had no eyes for any one but Della Wu. Her beauty absorbed his thoughts, her struggles absorbed his strength. But now as they reached the moon-bridge her efforts ceased and her eyes closed. Lee Nyoen gloated over his victory. He was glad that at last she had been beaten into submission. Perhaps he could be pardoned a bit of conceit, for now Della Wu was to be his.

Even as he smiled, he was crossing the bridge. He had stepped upon the boards which the old gardener had loosened. The next moment there was a splash. Lee Nyoen struck his head as he fell. The blow was sufficient to knock him unconscious. But it was not sufficient to cause him to relax his hold on the form of the wondrous Della Wu. Although the river was not wide at this point it was very deep. Together they sank into the black waters just as the dawn crimsoned the eastern sky. Della Wu did not struggle. Life seemed so futile, and after all perhaps Vung Thoong was right. To fear

(Continued on page 432)

For the Sake of Enlightenment

By COUTTS BRISBANE

Even in China they have quack doctors, as this amusing story about Doctor Fung Lee shows

AT THE corner where the street named Redolent-of-Virtue gave upon the marketplace of Sao-Ping, Doctor Fung Lee halted. Here was the strategic point most favorable to his campaign. Though it was but a little after daybreak, people from the surrounding country were already trickling through the gate at the farther end and soon street and market would be crowded. It was a first-class pitch.

Doctor Fung Lee laid down his heavy pack and turned to the owner of the shop by him, an obese person engaged in setting out to the best advantage a varied store of wares, mostly damaged or of poor quality, ranging from old clothes to packets of spices and musical instruments.

"Honorable sir, this despicable person is a practitioner of the estimable and venerable art of healing, come from very far to benefit the people of Sao-ping with his wisdom. Deign therefore to allow him to display his sign and chart upon this shutter. Besides acquiring merit by a benevolent action, you will assuredly benefit by much custom from the crowd that will infallibly assemble to witness the cures I shall perform."

The shopkeeper, by name Chow Ming, assumed a disdainful countenance.

"Ten cash," he growled.

"A stick has two ends. This street has two corners. Four cash—or I go over the way," replied Doctor Fung. "Also I will give you a dose to relieve the constriction of your honorable head. And see, already I attract attention."

Two peasants loaded with garden produce had halted at gaze. Chow Ming yielded reluctantly.

"Four, then. Money down," he growled.

"The gods witness your disinterested benevolence," murmured Doctor Fung sarcastically, and paid from a flaccid purse.

At once he became busy and unrolling a wide scroll of tough paper, hung it upon the shutter. It displayed a life-size outline of a human figure, divided by thin red lines into a hundred spaces of about equal area, each bearing a number. An inscription in red and gold proclaimed:

"Dr. Fung Lee, healer of all pains. Stomachs relieved, Blindness, Deafness, Epilepsy, Oppression after Meals, and all other diseases cured. The Fee is small, the Relief immediate and lasting. Doctor Fung Lee, Healer of Mandarins."

Doctor Fung next opened his pharmacy, a large box divided into one hundred compartments, each numbered to correspond with a division of the chart. He brought from one wide sleeve a little brazier of bronze and revived the charcoal in it by blowing. Beside this he set an assortment of knives and cautery irons, a small but horrid-looking demon of brass, a silver spoon, graduated for measuring doses, a silver tube, a large bundle of firecrackers and a gong. Then he squatted, ready for action.

Chow Ming, having completed his window-dressing, came out grunting dismally.

"My head still aches," he remarked pointedly. "A cure was promised."

"It will not ache for long. Mine are potent and far-reaching drugs," quoth Doctor Fung and rose briskly. "Condescend to indicate the exact seat of the pain."

Chow Ming rubbed his forehead. Doctor Fung glanced at the chart. That region was Number Four; therefore the doctor opened compartment Four of the pharmacy, dug out a generous spoonful of gray powder and grinned at his patient.

"Give yourself the trouble of opening wide your capacious and magnificent mouth. So!" With the dexterity of long practise he tossed the powder into the patient's gullet. "Go take a cup of hot tea," he added as Chow Ming spluttered and choked. "You will quickly recover your accustomed serenity."

Ming departed, too full for words. One of the peasants, having consulted with his friends and the four others who had joined them, now stepped forward.

"I have two pains. What is the fee?" he asked.

"Where are the pains?" countered Doctor Fung.

"Here and here." The man indicated stomach and eyes. "I am dizzy and there are strange spots that fly before me like soot from a dirty chimney."

"Two cash," said Doctor Fung and thrust the largest of his cautery irons into the heart of the glowing brazier. "For two cash only I will relieve you. You shall skip like a young goat in the spring."

"Will you not take a couple of watermelons? I am a poor man."

"Two cash!" insisted Doctor Fung with great firmness. "Mine are mandarin medicines of great potency."

"What is that for?" The man pointed to the cautery heating in the brazier. He seemed to distrust it.

"Am I to explain the secrets of my art to one void of understanding?" grunted Doctor Fung testily. "If you do not want relief, pass on. Others wait. But in a little while the earth will rock

beneath your feet, your head will whirl——"

"It is so already, great father!" moaned the man. "Cure me. Here are the cash."

Doctor Fung smiled, glanced at his chart, identified the storm centers, swiftly spooned a portion of powder from Number Six—the eyes—another from Number Fifty—the midriff—mixed them with the long index finger nail which he used for writing, and bade the patient swallow.

"Now, shut your eyes!" he commanded as the man convulsively got the mixture down, and as he obeyed drew the glowing iron from the brazier. "So!"

A wild howl of pain, a mad leap into the air. Swiftly and dexterously Doctor Fung had applied the cautery to Number Fifty.

"Like a young goat, even as I said," murmured Doctor Fung blandly. "Go, my son. In a little the demon that has oppressed you will depart." And he lit a firecracker and, as it banged, smote the gong, while the sufferer was led off by his friends.

THE crowd thickened. Many folks passed into the market, sold their wares and set about shopping. With voice, gong and crackers Doctor Fung advertised his presence, praising himself and his medicines without stint. The lean purse grew heavy; some of the compartments of the drug box had to be refilled from bags taken from the inexhaustible pack; the big cautery iron, the doctor's favorite weapon, began to show signs of wear. Patients came in a steady stream and departed—mostly writhing.

But at last the rush slackened. The market was over, the folks going home, and Doctor Fung had leisure to refresh himself with a bowl of chop and a pot of tea brought from a neighboring cookshop. He lit his pipe and leisurely began to pack up with a contented mind. He

had had an excellent day. He proposed to fare sumptuously at a restaurant he knew of, the Abundant-Bestower-of-Succulence; then he would hire a coolie and wheelbarrow and be trundled comfortably to the neighboring town of Sao-Hang in the cool of the evening.

He had completed his packing and was preparing to move when a man, who for the past two hours had been observing his activities from the garden porch of a house of some pretensions on the farther side of the street, crossed to his side.

"Is this lowly and ill-nurtured person permitted to speak with the highly estimable Doctor Fung on a matter concerning the health of a trebly revered male parent?" he asked softly, after looking round to make certain that none could overhear.

"Filial piety is the chief jewel in the necklet of the superior virtues. Speak!" With one swift glance Doctor Fung had appraised his man. He was clad in fine silks, his body was of a beautiful rotundity, his cheeks were pendulous. A crimson birthmark on his forehead was the sole blemish of a moon-like countenance. Doctor Fung judged him good for a fat fee. "I have other and finer medicines for such as your revered and venerable progenitor," he added. "Calcined tiger's claws, gall of serpents, musk from——"

"No. Those I have watched at work with soul-stirring effects will suffice," said the filial one. "I have noted that for those who suffer in various parts of the body, you mix powders of various sorts."

"Such, my son, is what I have learned by close application and long study. But as I have said, for cases such as——"

"My revered parent suffers all over. There is no part of him that does not ache, from the crown of his head, filled with wisdom and the maxims of the sages, to the tips of his melodious toes. Therefore I have considered. Other heal-

ers have treated but one part of him at a time. My revered parent remains as before. Yet perhaps if you were to administer to him *all* the medicaments in your box, he would recover?"

"I think he would be more likely to become an ancestor, at once and with noises as of not distant thunder," replied Doctor Fung dryly. "Yet that is an experiment I have often wished to try for the sake of my own enlightenment. It is for you, filial one, to decide. The risk that you will be involved in the expense of a fitting funeral is great. The expense of the experiment will also be great. One thousand taels will defray it, and I must also enjoy the hospitality of your honorable progenitor's palatial roof that I may observe his progress, either toward the ancestral tomb or the enjoyment of a ripe and long-enduring old age."

"By what I have noted of the wondrous effects of *three* of your dragon-subduing drugs administered together, I can have but little doubt of what will follow the addition of the remaining ninety-seven," murmured the dutiful son. "But since my revered father is already at the very stirrup of the heaven-aspiring steed, the experiment is worth trying. Follow me. You shall have your fee. Then you shall exercise your unsurpassable skill and remain under my roof while all the necessary ceremonies are performed."

Doctor Fung Lee lifted his pack and followed the filial one through the portal and a well-tilled garden, to an airy pavilion attached to the rear of the house. Here, upon a bed of carved rosewood, propped about by silken cushions and covered with quilts stuffed with the superior down of wild geese, lay a man advanced beyond the middle years of life and of a figure that assuredly exceeded the bounds of the canon of Feng Tien, for his girth was greater by four hand-spans than his height. He regarded his

son and the doctor with blinking eyes but gave no other sign of animation.

"Behold, most honorable father, I have brought a physician whose merit is written in letters of pure gold upon the scroll of fame. He will undoubtedly cure you," said the dutiful son.

"If it is so ordained," murmured Doctor Fung, who had his doubts. "I require more charcoal for my brazier," he whispered. "Also there was a fee promised."

"All shall be brought. Speak soothingly to my father while I procure it. His name is Wu Lung. Mine is Ti Lung. I go—yet is the hot iron needful? Surely a hundred drugs should suffice?"

"I shall proceed according to the rules of science!" replied Doctor Fung magisterially and turned toward the patient. "You are sure that pains afflict you in every part of your magnificent body, oh revered Wu Lung?" he asked.

The patient blinked rapidly and apparently affirmatively, but though his lips moved, no sound came forth. Doctor Fung shook his head and busied himself with his preparations. He took a large bowl from his pack and with meticulous care measured equal portions from each compartment of his drug box. Though each was small, the aggregate made a goodly pile. He added water, stirred the mess, and once more blew up his brazier.

The excellent Ti Lung returned with a basket of charcoal and a heavy bag, and having made certain that the sum of taels was correct and the pieces of good silver and fair weight, Doctor Fung at once began his work.

With the aid of the filial Ti and an old woman servant of sinister countenance but strong arms, he transferred the contents of the bowl to the interior of Wu Lung, then settled down to await results.

Shortly after the results began to occur. They continued to occur throughout the

remainder of the day and far into the night, while the patient heaved and howled and performed the most extraordinary contortions, stimulated whenever he showed signs of slackening in endeavor by well directed touches of the cauterizer. It was observable that his bulk was lessened by midnight, at which time Doctor Fung Lee judged it well to allow him to subside into the sleep of exhaustion.

All the next day the patient slept, which time Ti Lung, a prey to filial grief, spent in bargaining with a well-deserving undertaker; also he continued to sleep through the ensuing night. On the following morning he awoke, greatly diminished. Doctor Fung Lee at once ordered fitting nourishment, swallows'-nest soup, rhubarb stewed in butter and a duck simmered in wine. These delicacies he administered to the patient with excellent effect.

From that moment the recovery of the excellent Wu was rapid, and ere the evening he was able to proclaim to several old friends who had come to witness his last moments at the instance of Ti, that the heaven-aspiring steed had for that time been returned to his celestial stall with an empty saddle.

Three days later he was sufficiently restored to bestow upon Doctor Fung Lee yet another thousand taels and the assurance of his eternal gratitude, with which Doctor Fung took his departure.

Ti Lung, who, at his recovered parent's express desire, accompanied the physician to the street gate, presented to him a moon-like countenance wreathed in deep gloom, despite the successful outcome of the experiment which he himself had inaugurated.

"May you shortly cease to have an existence!" he said with much bitterness. "But for your ill-timed meddling with the decree of the gods, my revered father

would ere now have been relieved of the burden of prolonged sojourn amongst us, while an excellent if avaricious undertaker would have been providing Sao-Ping with the spectacle of a superb and mind-elevating funeral of unsurpassed magnificence."

"Refrain from these unfilial and evil-deserving observations!" quoth Doctor Fung in stern rebuke. "Rejoice rather that you have been the cause of enlarging the knowledge of this humble but earnest student of the science of healing. Farewell. May your honorable shadow cover a continually increasing area."

Whereupon Doctor Fung, wearing a benevolent smile, made haste to the town gate where he joined himself to a well-armed company of merchants, fearing that otherwise an overwhelming parsimony should impel the filial Ti Lung to cause him to be intercepted and relieved of his gains.

A FULL year of profitable endeavor had passed before Doctor Fung Lee again visited the town of Sao-Ping. Once more he established himself in the shadow of the benevolent Chow Ming. But scarce had he banged his gong thrice ere he observed on the opposite side of the street a beggar who glared at him with incredible malignity. With some difficulty, for the fellow was of a meager habit, Doctor Fung recognized by the fiery birthmark upon his forehead the erstwhile sleek and well-conditioned Ti Lung.

"How is this?" he inquired of the benevolent Chow Ming. "Is the honorable and well-venerated Wu Lung again on the point of joining his ancestors and

does Ti Lung adopt this dress and deprive himself of sustenance to placate some demon who afflicts his revered parent?"

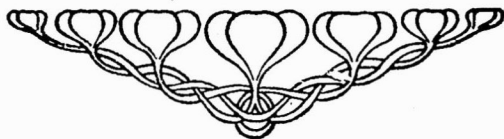
"You yourself are the cause, honorable and gifted healer," replied Chow Ming. "Know that Ti Lung was but a late-adopted son. After your skill removed Wu Lung from the very saddle of the heaven-mounting steed, he grew strong and lusty. He wedded a sprightly maiden. Now twin sons of a superior beauty and unexampled strength of lungs adorn the hearth of Wu, and Ti Lung, having given way to reviling the decree of the gods, has been cast forth to earn his own bread."

Doctor Fung arose, repacked in haste, and sent a boy for his barrow man. Then he beckoned to Ti Lung, who approached with a lowering and evil-bespeaking countenance.

"A year past, oh virtuous and filial one, your honeyed tongue persuaded me to a certain experiment. It was successful, but of its full fruition I have learned but now. The head mandarin of Ning-Po, a very wealthy person, lacks a son to make the offerings. He has proclaimed a reward of ten thousand taels to any one who can procure him that supreme felicity. I go in haste to earn it, yet it is but fitting that you, through whom my feet were put upon the path of enlightenment, should be rewarded according to your surpassing merit."

Thereupon Doctor Fung mounted his barrow, dropped something into the outstretched hand, and was trundled swiftly away, urging his man to speed.

Ti Lung remained motionless and speechless. In his palm lay the reward of merit—a single brass cash.



(Continued from page 292)

(literally "Beyond-the-Seas") being the name by which the Crusaders' conquests in the Holy Land were known. It is a tale of the Sultan Yusuf (el-Melek en-Nasr Abu el-Mozaffer Salah ed-Din), Sultan of Egypt and Syria, known to the Western world as Saladin, the Lion of Islam. The story lives up to its subject. And Saladin is truly a fascinating figure in history. Many tales are told about him by the Moslem chroniclers, extolling his great piety and fanatical zeal for the propagation of the Muhammadan faith. Beha ed-Din, one of Saladin's ministers, tells approvingly of one spectacular incident when two captured French knights were brought into his tent with their hands bound behind them. Saladin seized his simitar and struck a blow at one of the knights, intending to cut off his head, but the knight ducked, and the blade clove through his arm. Then Saladin stabbed him through the heart and had the attendants drag out the corpse. The other knight naturally expected to suffer the same fate; but Saladin, to show that there was no personal animosity in his attack on the first knight, had the second knight's bonds struck from him, and invited him to sit at table with him and share his repast. He then held him for ransom, and the knight was finally returned to the Crusaders, unharmed. It seems that it had come to Saladin's ears that the first knight had foully insulted the name of Muhammad, and Saladin had sworn an oath that he would put the knight to death if he were ever captured. He could overlook an affront to himself, but not to the Holy Prophet! Although Beha ed-Din relates this incident as an example of Saladin's praiseworthy piety, it sounds a bit fanatical to our modern ears. Mr. Howard's story in our next issue, however, pictures Saladin in his more noble aspect, and makes him truly a heroic figure.

ORIENTAL STORIES continues to elicit enthusiastic letters of praise from the readers, and many suggestions as to how the magazine can be still further improved.

"Congratulations on the second copy of ORIENTAL STORIES, for it beats the first by a very creditable margin," writes J. E. Erdmann, of North Bend, Washington. "When I saw the first number I said, 'They won't ever equal it;' but now you've gone and beaten it completely. More power to your elbow. If number three is going to be like that, how can I wait for it?"

Nathan Schachner, of New York City, writes: "Permit me to congratulate you on your new magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES. The first issue was good, but the second is splendid. The tales have the authentic tang and glamor of the East, and I am sure that the magazine will be an overwhelming success."

E. A. Shaffer, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, writes: "Not only have I read and enjoyed ORIENTAL STORIES but I have studied it, and in conformity to its name I don't see how it could be improved, with the exception of a serial or two. Personally I like serials and I believe it a wise plan to get the public to buy regularly a favorite magazine in which say two serials are running." [The reason why ORIENTAL STORIES runs no serials is that it is published bi-monthly, and sixty days seems too long a time to ask readers to wait between installments. If enough of our readers ask for serials, of course you will get them. But in fairness to you, all stories will be complete in single issues, unless we get an overwhelming demand for serials.—THE EDITORS.]

"Congratulations on ORIENTAL STORIES," writes N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto.

"Otis Adelbert Kline, to my mind, captures the true atmosphere of the *Arabian Nights* in *The Man Who Limped*, and Howard's *The Voice of El-Lil* is also fine. The December-January issue looks equally good, though I haven't settled down to reading it yet."

Alice I'Anson writes from Mexico City: "ORIENTAL STORIES is certainly keeping up the reputation earned by its sister magazine, WEIRD TALES. In the December-January issue I cast my vote for Dorota Flatau's *Golden Rosebud* and *The Green Jade God* by John Briggs. Personally I like my Oriental stories very mystical, confined to Oriental characters, and with only a very appealing love interest that seems to be an integral part of the story. Historical characters of note are also prime favorites of mine; but I do not care so much for the sanguinary details of great battles, etc., though I am aware there must be variety in a magazine of this sort to suit the tastes of all its readers. Good luck and long life to this interesting new venture!"

A letter from George H. Wagmann, of Brownwood, Texas, says: "It was with the greatest of interest that I bought the first copy of ORIENTAL STORIES. I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for four years and I can not be blamed for seeing that I got in at the start of another publication by the same company. There is no doubt that you have opened up a field which will yield us many delightful and interesting stories of the East. Lovers of such stories will be exceedingly grateful that you have formed a medium whereby they may obtain Oriental tales of which they might never hear but for your magazine. My only objection is that you are making it a bi-monthly instead of publishing it every month. In my estimation, *Strange Bedfellows*, by S. B. H. Hurst, is the best story in the issue. My second choice falls to Frank Owen with his *Singapore Nights*. It is really a hard task to pick the best, as they are all good."

M. Artine Miller, of Worden, Oregon, writes to the Souk: "Just a line to tell

**MY FAVORITE TALES IN THE FEBRUARY-MARCH ISSUE OF
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you that I like the new magazine, *ORIENTAL STORIES*. It's fine. *The Circle of Illusion*, with its unexpected ending, and *Strange Bedfellows*, an unusually interesting story, vie with each other for first choice. One has to feel toward Bugs Sinnat the same as he did toward his 'deaf and dumb' companion. You can't help but admire him. But are we going to get only one issue in two months? Like the small boy who was trying to get three-fourths of the other fellow's apple, I feel like saying 'stingy.' I guess we ought to be satisfied with quality instead of quantity; but I do like Oriental stories well enough to want them oftener."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? As this number goes to press, three stories lead in popularity in the December-January issue. These are *The King of the Ferawabs*, by S. B. H. Hurst; *Golden Rosebud*, by Dorota Flatau; and *The China Kid*, by Frank Owen.



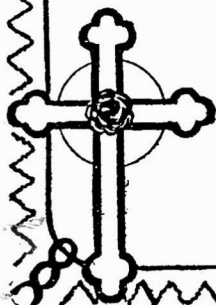

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NEXT ISSUE

Tsang, Sea Captain

By

JAMES W. BENNETT

A COLORFUL novel of the Bolshevik revolution in China, introducing Tsang Ah-bou, the Chinese detective. This is a vivid story of present-day China, crammed with action and replete with thrills.

KIDNAPPING, wholesale robbery, murder, gun-running, and unprincipled blackmail marked the career of the Count di Mazzino and his yacht; but he found himself in antagonism to the shrewd Tsang, whose detective methods were purely Oriental and accomplished results in much more effective fashion than the more subtle methods of Occidental police. This up-to-the-minute novel will be published complete

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Red Blades of Black Cathay

(Continued from page 313)

lips were withdrawn and a goblet took their place, filled with a stinging wine that jerked him back into consciousness.

Genghis was standing over him.

"You have already found your queen, eh?" he smiled. "Well—rest of your wounds; I will not need your aid for some months yet. Marry your queen, organize your kingdom—there is a great army drawn up on the western border ready to your hand now that there is to be no invasion of your kingdom. It may be the western Turks will dispute your liege-ship—you have but to send the word and I will send you as many riders as you need. When the desert grass deepens for spring, we ride into Greater Cathay."

The khan turned on his heel and strode away and Godric gathered the slim form of Yulita into his weary arms.

"Wang Yin will wait long for his bride," said he, and the laughter of Yulita was like the tinkle of the silvery fountains in the cherry blossom courts of Jahadur. And so the dream that had haunted Godric de Villehard of an Eastern empire woke to life.

Della Wu, Chinese Courtesan

(Continued from page 423)

death, to struggle against it, is to miss perhaps one of the most divine pleasures which earth affords.

The old gardener rushed forward on the bridge and gazed into the water. There came a few bubbles to the surface. Then all was still. Thus passed Della Wu, lovely Chinese courtesan, whose beauty and fame were known throughout the province.

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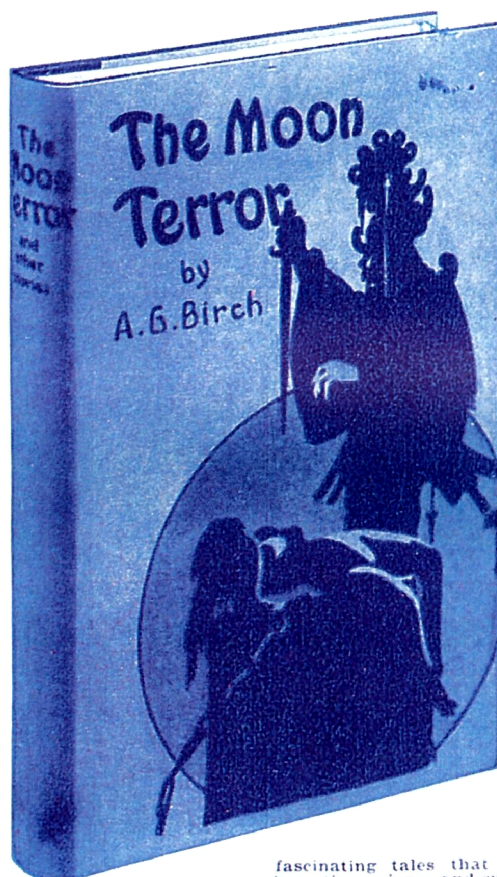
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