



*Fascinating Tales of the East*

# ORIENTAL STORIES



## THE KING OF THE JERAWAH'S

by

A.B.H. HURST

.VON GELB.

DECEMBER-JANUARY  
1931

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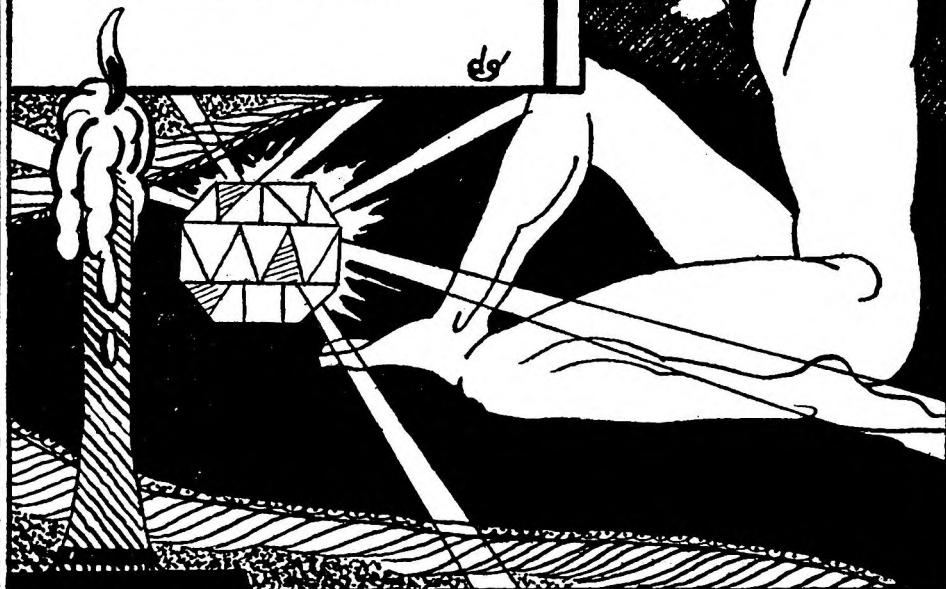
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## BY HUNG LONG TOM

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Of which Peking is the center.  
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Spirits of Earth, of Air, of Fire,  
Escape only can be found  
By seeking the center  
Of the Rug,  
Prostrating oneself in prayer,  
By making sacrifices  
To Spirits of Unknown Forces.  
For China will be China  
When all the earth  
Falls back to ruins,  
Just as China was China  
Before the cities of men  
Had come into being.  
China is a Rug  
Of which all else on earth  
Is the fringe.  
China is a great Rug  
Of which Peking  
Is the jewel  
That illumines the center.



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THE first issue of ORIENTAL STORIES has been hailed with delight, and commendations are pouring in to the editorial offices. The first issue has been on the news stands only twenty days as this second issue goes to press, but a brilliant success seems already assured for the new magazine. We will quote from but a few of the enthusiastic letters so far received; for it would take up too much space that could otherwise be filled with interesting stories to reprint them all.

"Yesterday I found at my favorite bookstand a new magazine called ORIENTAL STORIES," writes Mrs. Virginia Warner, of Sabina, Ohio. "It's a wow. I bought it and hurried home and read every story but *Singapore Nights*. I am saving that for a special treat. The magazine is really wonderful, and it fills a place long vacant. I just had to write and tell you about it. The Orient has always been and always will be fascinating. I particularly enjoyed the story, *The Voice of El-Lil*, by Robert E. Howard, and also *The Desert Woman*, by Richard Kent. All the stories in the issue are fine, though. But please—oh, please—don't put *too* much love in your stories. It spoils them. This first copy is perfect, and don't let any one tell you it isn't. I shall haunt my book store now until I get my second copy to see if it's as good as the first. More power to ORIENTAL STORIES."

Writes Wallace West, of New York City, himself an author of note: "Congratulations on the first issue of ORIENTAL STORIES. In one jump it has landed squarely among the leaders of the all-fiction magazine field. *The Circle of Illusion* is a word picture of surpassing beauty. After the first two pages I decided that the author was attempting another *Eve of St. Agnes* in prose, and it was refreshing to run across a couplet from the poem near the end of the story. *The Voice of El-Lil* and *Strange Bedfellows* also are out of the ordinary, the former being as good as H. Rider Haggard's best. The thing that most impressed me, however, was the 'atmosphere' of the entire magazine. *Singapore Nights* especially, though it was not so long on plot construction, captured the full flavor of the Orient."

E. Hoffmann Price, one of the most perfect writers of Orientales, from his home in New Orleans, writes a voluminous letter to the editor, full of helpful comments and suggestions. We have space to enclose just a small extract from his remarks: "*Strange Bedfellows* in my opinion is a mighty good Orientale, very convincingly and realistically written, and replete with those little niceties which distinguish the *soi-disant* Oriental story from the real article. The fact that Bugs is not a native does not in any way keep the story from being an Oriental story *par excellence*. I observe with

(Continued on page 285)

# We Hope That You Enjoyed This Issue

and if you did, we can assure you that you will be pleased with our next issue equally as well, for in it you will find such fast-moving stories as:

## RED BLADES OF BLACK CATHAY, by Tevis Clyde Smith and

Robert E. Howard

A tale of Genghis Khan, a red-blooded story of vivid action in the kingdom that stood in the road of the Mongol horde's sweep to the south.

## THE SECRET TRAIL, by G. G. Pendarves

A vivid and romantic story of the slave traffic of the Zawa Arabs, and a white girl who was carried captive along the bitter slave trail to Kano.

## WILLIAM, by S. B. H. Hurst

His adventurous exploits when "absent without leave" from His Majesty's Army in India were spectacular and thrilling, but his last exploit was the most astonishing of all.

## SCOUNDRELS BY NIGHT, by Richard Kent

A vivid tale of Java, two rascally white men, and the tropical beauty of Sumatra Sue, the tavern-keeper in Weltevreden.

## THE KALGAN ROAD, by William Doughty

A swift-moving story of Mongolia and an American who kidnapped the Living Buddha from the city of Urga.

## THE DRAGOMAN'S REVENGE, by Otis Adelbert Kline

Another tale of Hamed the Attar—how he was condemned to death for a murder he did not commit.

## THE MERCHANT OF BASRA, by Dudley Hoys

They called him "the Maggot," but he overreached himself when he tried to sell his daughter as a wife to Muchalidie Nafa.

## DELLA WU, CHINESE COURTEZAN, by Frank Owen

A tender and beautiful tale of Old China and the revenge of Nen-Tsang.

[ These are some of the wonderful tales in store for you in the next issue. We promise a variety of interesting entertainment that will supply you with many hours of pleasure. ]

**February-March Issue on Sale January 15**



*"What he saw dispelled any fear of ghosts he might have had."*

# The King of the Jerawahs

By S. B. H. HURST

*The treasure of Alexander the Great, guarded by wild Jerawahs, was legend throughout India—a tale of Bugs Sinnat*

**A** WELL built, bearded Afghan of the Durani Clan walked past the ruins of the ancient palace of the Peshwas, in Poona, India, toward the dense native quarter that spreads about the river bank where the river Mutla joins the Mutha. He entered the warrens of go-downs and huts which the police avoid. At the door of one of these go-downs a blind man sat in the hot sun in apparent comfort. From his aged mouth dribbled the juice of the betel-nut. To this one the Afghan spoke gently.

"Brother of the dust who has gazed upon so much beauty that his eyes can no longer see common things—I am Ben Mohamer of the Clan Durani! A follower of the Prophet, a worshipper of the One God. . . . And, strange to say, considering the heat, I seek fish!"

The blind man nodded.

"What sort of fish?" he asked.

"Bummollo mutche—the fish called bummollo, of course," answered Ben Mohamer.

"That fish does not grow in Poona,"



drawled the blind man. "Is there no other fish you crave?"

"Of course! Old fish! Young fish—any sort of fish so that it is fish!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

"Will the spawn of a very big fish serve?" queried the blind man.

"Better still!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

"Spawn of Alexander—will that taste good?" asked the blind man.

"The best in the world!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

"Pass to where that great spawn congregate!" said the blind man politely.

The Afghan, Ben Mohamet, stooped and entered the hut, through the fragile wooden door. He walked six paces—until he felt a rug under his bare feet.

Coming into the gloom out of the sunlight he could see almost nothing. He lifted the rug and felt for a ring of brass under it. He found the ring and raised a narrow trap-door. It was so small that he had to squeeze his wide shoulders through it, while his feet felt their way down wooden steps. As he dropped the trap-door over his head the blind man came in swiftly and replaced the rug.

Ben Mohamet went down a dozen steps, his hands groping against the earth walls. He came to a very solid door of heavy teak. On this he knocked twice, then once, then three times. It was opened and a fierce face looked out—another Afghan.

"Well," asked the face, "who in Jehan-num are you?"

Ben Mohamet laughed. "Jehannum—hell, eh? So you must be Shitan [Satan]!"

"I am a better man than Shitan," growled the other Afghan. "But answer my question!"

"My name is Ben Mohamet, of the Durani Clan!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet. "You have heard that name before!"

"A fairly common name among the Durani," said the other. "Who was your father?"

"Alexander the Great!" snapped Ben Mohamet.

"You had an excellent father," answered the other. "Your mother was—?"

"I never had any mother!" said Ben Mohamet.

The other Afghan threw the door wide open.

"Come in, brother Jerawah," he said courteously.

And Ben Mohamet entered the Sanctuary of the Jerawahs, a criminal society which claimed that it was founded when Alexander the Great gave their founder permission to steal from his camp followers, over two thousand years before, when he conquered northern India.

It was a fairly large place, this underground room. Three old brass lamps showed some light, but more shadows, through stained glass and fretwork. The room was full of eager men. Fifty or sixty Jerawahs. They were waiting for their king. Their king had sent word some days before that he was old, and getting tired, and that he would meet his subject Jerawahs in the Sanctuary, where he would appoint his successor, and give him the Key to the Great Secret. But the old king had not arrived. Ben Mohamet had hurried, afraid he would be too late. But something had apparently delayed the king. Conversation buzzed.

The day passed in anxious waiting.

Then the Jerawahs grew angry. They were equal with their king in everything but authority—an authority recognized through the years by the Society as necessary to its existence, its continued success by the maintenance of some sort of discipline among such wild, turbulent, brave outlaws. . . .

Among these men Ben Mohamet circulated. His popularity was great. To begin with, his reputation was remarkable. He was magnetic, and swayed his fierce friends easily—both by strength of mind and body. Then—and this was the crowning glory!—he could tell the smuttiest tales in the most delightful manner. In a land of sparse amusement, among such men, Ben Mohamet's ability in this line made him as popular as a free vaudeville theater in a desert. . . .

ANOTHER day passed, and still the king did not arrive. Three more days, and then Ben Mohamet acted.

He addressed the men in a strong talk. He told them he was going out to find the missing king, and practically ordered them to wait and do nothing until he returned. The men cheered his decision.

But when he left the go-down, and walked away from the native quarter, Ben Mohamet did what for a member of a criminal society was a most extraordinary thing. He went boldly to a row of buildings which housed certain white officials. So far nothing unusual, perhaps. But then he went directly to the private office of the coroner, and opened the door without knocking!

The coroner looked up, startled. Natives do not enter the offices of Englishmen this way. The coroner looked keenly at his visitor. He was alone, and when Ben Mohamet shut the door quickly, the coroner reached into his desk.

"Never mind the gun, doc! I won't

bite!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet, *in English*.

"Oh, Bugs!" the coroner laughed. "Another instance of your marvelous diversity. No one in the world would have taken you for anything but a big, tough and somewhat dirty Afghan!"

The doctor sniffed.

"And, by jingo, you have even taken on the typical Afghan stink with the stain on your skin. I congratulate you. But what's doing?"

Ben Mohamet—Horace Sinnat, Indian Secret Service 006, Domestic, known to his intimate friends as "Bugs"—laughed.

"I licked you, doc, for far less cheek when we were at school. You old son of a gun! At school you were the dirty little fag, and it was my job, as a member of the Sixth Form, to tell you to go and wash yourself. How are the mighty fallen! Ye gods, yes! That dirty little boy, now grown to more or less man's estate, tells me I stink. . . . Well, he is correct! The stink is a sort of life insurance!"

"What can I do for you?" laughed the doctor.

"I want to find out about an old Afghan who seems to have disappeared. Any dead old Afghans come your way recently?"

The doctor stared.

"Gad, Bugs, you are positively uncanny. How did you know about that old chap?"

"I didn't," exclaimed Bugs. "I thought something had happened to him, though! . . . Don't ask me too many questions, please, doc. What happened to him?"

"Can you identify the old man?" asked the doctor.

"I can," answered Bugs.

"Come back here with me, then, and see if I have the body of the man you are looking for. I am glad you dropped

in! There seems to be quite a mystery! The old fellow was murdered!"

"Murdered?" exclaimed Bugs.

"Yes! But you are the first person I have told. I just found out—did a bit of a post-mortem. . . . Here we are—is this your man?"

Bugs nodded. Lying in the morgue was the missing King of the Jerawahs!

"Please give me all the facts," said the secret service man. "Then have him buried without any comments. Not a word that he was murdered—that is a secret only you and I must share with the murderer. No relatives will turn up to claim the body—I know that! I was looking for the old man, remember! I will straighten out the entire affair. Make out an order in which I assume all responsibility. I will sign it, to protect you—although there will never be any need of that, never any investigation. And don't say a word to a soul!"

**B**ugs left the morgue and went back to the sanctuary of the Jerawahs. . . .

"The king is dead! Long live the king!" he muttered. "They don't know it yet, but the Jerawahs are going to elect another king—according to the rules when a king dies without appointing his successor. And that new king will be myself!"

He went down into the sanctuary. There he called the big, fierce men about him.

"The king is dead," he shouted.

For a moment there was silence. Then a roar that began to grow. Bugs managed to stop it.

"It is easy to find another king, and a younger and stronger king who will lead you to fresh conquests," he shouted. "For years it has been that our king was useless to us. The new king will be your help. So I have decided to help you—by becoming your king!"

Not a word greeted this announcement. The men just stared. They liked Ben Mohamet, knew him for a strong man, a man to follow; but his sudden announcement took their breath away. Bugs followed up this advantage.

"You will take me for your king," he spoke with authority, "because the Key to the Great Secret died with the old king, and I am the only man able to find it. And as king I will change the old law in this one way: For whereas all our kings have for more than two thousand years kept the Great Secret a secret—telling us they kept it for Alexander, who promised to come back—I will reveal the secret, and make you all rich men!"

A howl of questions answered him. How did he know what the secret was? Or where the key was hidden, and so on.

Bugs laughed at them.

"I wonder you have been content to wait so idly for so long," he said sarcastically. "Have you turned Buddhists?"

This was calculated insult. They demanded what he meant. They were all of them good Mohametans.

"Only a Buddhist expects a man to come back to earth again for another life!" he sneered. "Yet our kings have been waiting, it seems, for Alexander to return. . . . Oh, hell, forget it! The king is dead. And I am the administrator—of Alexander and our own old king—administrator of the dead king's bequest! And I have the Key! I will fight any man who says I am not his king! But I obey the law! And the law of the Jera-wahs says the new king must be elected if the old king does not name him before the assembly! Now, elect me swiftly, and don't make faces when you do it. Some faces are insults, and I will knock the face off the man who insults me! . . . Elect me, quickly. And I will share this treasure with you, my subjects!"

The strong braggart whom the Af-

ghans love! This was Bugs as he spoke.

He was elected unanimously. Then he gathered his men around him, and gave them very careful and very positive instructions. After that he left the sanctuary.

IT WAS night and grown a mite cooler. Fireflies, low stars, bats and flying foxes across the face of a low moon. Bugs walked toward a small house that stood, of course, in its own compound. It was the house of a white man—rented by a white man. It is easy to enter a white man's house in India.

Bugs slipped into the outer corridor. The old man sitting on his haunches pulling the punkah cord was startled by a big man sitting down by his side. He was relieved when he saw the big man was an Afghan and a fellow Mohametan. But he stopped pulling the punkah for a moment.

"*Tanol!*" [pull!] growled an English voice inside the house.

Bugs grinned at the punkah waller, and whispered.

"I have heard this white man is going on a hunting-trip, and will need a good man to go along. I want that job! When he asks thee if you know of a good man—which he surely will do—then tell him that your cousin Ben Mohamet is a fine, strong man. Such will be true, and I will give you eight annas for your trouble. If you don't do what I order I may break your neck! Now, pull your cord—I go forward a space to listen about this hunting-trip. The man has a friend with him—hear them! Keep your mouth shut, punkah waller, and earn thy money!"

The scared punkah waller, cherishing the hope of eight annas in real money if he obeyed this truculent Afghan, continued to pull. Bugs crept forward, until

he could hear two Englishmen talking in low tones and drinking whisky.

"The hell of it is," Bugs was thinking, "that I haven't got the Key to the Secret. I know what it is—every Jerawah does. But I don't know where the Treasure is hidden—only the old king knew that! I believe this murderer in here tortured the king and made him, an old man, tell where the Secret Place of Alexander the Great is hidden. If he did, I will make him tell me—and without either torturing or killing him. But if this brute hasn't got the Key to the Secret, well—then I will have to cease being a Jerawah. Because I won't be able to keep my promise to my 'subjects'! Hate to do that, because being a member of that old criminal society—about which no official in India has ever heard!—has helped me to pull off a lot of successful jobs. . . . Now—let's listen!"

Two Englishmen were talking.

"Well, Harris," said one, "now we have had the drink and the preliminaries may be said to be over—what's the great news you have been bragging about for the last ten minutes. Or are you just drunk?"

"Walters," answered Harris, "I am not drunk, although I have had a lot. The stuff won't take hold tonight, and I know why. You know, Walters, you and I have been partners in crime for many years, and have always trusted one another—we can trust each other, can't we?"

"Oh hell, cut out the chatter! What's wrong with you?" growled Walters.

"Murdering a man," Harris lowered his voice, "murdering a man always affects me like this—so it does you!"

"Don't use that word, you drunken fool!" hissed Walters.

"All right—anything to oblige," answered Harris. "It was only an old native, anyhow. Funny thing. Old chap

was taken sick outside my door, and my tender heart had him brought into my house. The old bird babbled quite a bit, and I listened. What he said determined me to keep him here till he—er, died! He would have died soon, anyway, being very old. . . . Well, Walters, you have heard about the buried treasure of Alexander the Great, haven't you?"

"Everybody in India has heard about that," growled Walters. "Many archeologists say it must be worth twenty millions. But it never will be found, so why talk about it? Besides, looking for it—how many hundreds have hunted for it, until now every one says it never will be found!—looking for it would be hard, honest and expensive work! . . . What in hell are you talking about, Harris?"

"I know where it is," said Harris softly. "And I am cold sober!"

"What!" exclaimed Walters.

"Not so loud! That old chap whom I—er, allowed to die. He talked. Oh, after his first babblings I used drugs to make him tell me all. I may have beaten him a little. Made a few mild threats, you know, too! Old men are like young men—they don't enjoy having the soles of their feet roasted. What does it matter? I had the body taken to the proper authorities—the morgue. I said I had done all I could for him, and was complimented upon my charity. Forget that! The big thing is that I know to within a few feet how to enter the underground pleasure room of Alexander the Great, up north in the Punjab, and how to get the stuff! It's a desert now—where the place is!"

"But," broke in Walters, "do you realize that you are talking about what is probably the greatest hidden treasure in the world? The historical, the archeological value! Millions! The old man was kidding you, Harris!"

"No, he wasn't. He babbled about

being the Keeper of the Secret of Alexander the Great, or words to that effect. He said he was on his way to pass the secret to some other man before he died, because one man had always known the secret, and only one was allowed to know it. Talked crazily about keeping the Key to the Treasure until Alexander came back to use it! Sort of Buddhist rot. But he didn't fool me about the directions. He begged and pleaded with me to let him go—so he could pass the secret on. But, naturally, I wouldn't let him go. Then, when he realized I meant to keep him till he died, he got scared that the Key would be lost. So he gave it to me—after I swore on a brass crucifix I went out and bought in the bazar that I would not tell about it except to one man. I don't know the man he had in mind. He was too near dead to talk coherently, but he babbled something about a Jera; wah—which in some dialects means an outlaw, as you know. That's all. The old man is dead and buried, and no one suspects I did him in. Now, our finances will permit us hiring one husky native to fetch and carry for us. When we get the stuff under our hands we will dispose of the husky native—we can't be too particular about this, and can't afford to have the government step in. Treasure trove is a funny law, you know. Now, call that punkah coolie. He will know of some strong native. Then we will raise all we can on promises and bad checks. Then, ho for the golden north! Call the punkah waller!"

Walters called. His heart throbbed at the wonder of the tale he had just heard. The treasure room of Alexander was authentic—no man in India doubted that; but no man believed it ever would be found. The years had covered it—with ruins, sand, what not. And India is a big country. But the place was—somewhere in the Punjab, probably.

Had Harris really obtained the secret of the place—supposed to have been lost when Alexander the Great died unexpectedly?

The punkah stopped and the coolie entered cringing. To him Harris spoke in fluent Hindustani about a hunting-trip, as Bugs had easily deduced he would do. Did the coolie know of a strong native, not a Hindoo, but a Mohametan, of course? . . . The coolie did know of such a one. His cousin!

"Sahib, I will find my cousin, who will be honored to work for the sahib, and send him in to you!"

Presently a well-built, swaggering Afghan came in. He did not bow or cringe. He was a man of the hills. . . .

"Did the sahibs need me?"

"We need a good, strong man who is not afraid. We go on a shooting-trip. Have you references?"

The big Mohametan had references—many of them. They were all good, even laudatory. His name was Ben Mohamet. Harris hired him.

"Do you understand or speak English?" asked Harris.

"I am sorry, but I don't know a single word except gotohell," said Ben Mohamet.

"You'll do," grinned Harris.

IT WAS a long journey, in terrible heat. Northward and through the country of the Rajputs, through the Punjab, the land of the Sikhs, to a small station at the end of a spur of single line, which ended at the desert, where there was nothing but a broken down dak bungalow, and an old man who lived in the deserted place. Their belongings were dumped off the train. The train crew seemed amused. The Scotch engineer wiped his face with a piece of waste.

"I am taking my train back the now," he said. "It will be five days before I am

back, and there is no other train. Was it to shoot jackals you came?"

He laughed.

"No!" snapped Harris.

"That's all there is on the desert," grinned the engineer, "except desert fever, which the doctors don't savvy, and a few other things, including vultures. The vultures are the undertakers hereabouts! It's a cheap burial, but not one I'd choose for myself. . . . Scotch, am I? Well. . . . But, thankit, I'm no maniac to go out on a blooming desert to shoot! I have heard there are 'holy men' to be found among the ruins. Maybe ye came here to shoot them!"

"I'll shoot you if you don't shut up!" shouted Harris.

The engineer put his thumb to his nose.

"Good-bye," he said as he started his engine. "Be careful the holy men don't eat you before the vultures get you!"

In the meanwhile Walters was inquiring of the kitmatgar regarding means of crossing the desert—was there a camel or two, or a bullock cart to be hired?

"Nay, sahib." The kitmatgar spread his hands pathetically. "Here there is nothing like that. Just heat waves, and some jackals, who are sick, and some facquires [holy men] who are mad. Only the sick and the mad go out on the desert—for the holy men are lepers, also!"

"Nice prospect!" growled Walters.

He walked out of the dak bungalow and met his partner returning from his unprofitable argument with the Scotch engineer. To him he told the ill news.

"Curses!" snarled Harris. "We can't walk. What in hell will we do?"

"Search me," answered Walters. "Looks like a lot of bad luck. There are lepers and madmen and sick jackals in the desert, and scorching heat and fever no doctor ever cured."

"Shut up," stormed Harris. "Or if you want to go back there is still time to flag that train! I'm going on, whether you do or not!"

"We're partners," responded Walters placatingly. "I'll stay with it. But have you seen Ben Mohamet recently?"

"Why, no! I thought he was in the bungalow with you!"

"And I thought he was out there in the sun with you—giving you his immoral support against the engineer!"

They called and searched, but Ben Mohamet had gone. He had gone so suddenly and quietly that he might have evaporated.

"So!" growled Harris. "He found out what the desert was like, heard about the lepers and so on, then heard there were neither camels nor bullocks—and then he deserted. Well, I'd like to shoot him, but you can't blame him—he has no stake in this and don't know what it's all about. Let's see what sort of a chicken the kitmargar has for dinner. I expect it will be one Alexander did not take away with him because it was too old to eat!"

It *was* a very ancient chicken. The kitmargar, who had done his best in a place where six white men in two years *was* a fair average, began to dislike Harris. Walters was not so bad, but Harris was not like a sahib at all. At length he turned angrily.

"The chicken was born on the same day as yourself, sahib—it was a day of ill omen!"

Harris jumped to his feet. Walters tried to restrain him.

"I'll shoot the *barboot cabutcha*!" Harris was shouting furiously, dragging at his revolver.

The frightened kitmatgar ran—just as Ben Mohamet appeared at the door.

"Oh," said Harris, becoming calm, for he had no wish to start trouble with this

powerful Afghan. "Oh, where have you been?"

The Afghan grinned.

"Sahib," he said, "this place is surely Jehannum [hell]. Behold, there is nothing for men—even the women have left it! But, back some miles, I had seen from the train a man with three camels. He was going back the way we came, but I managed to catch up with him. I—hem—I borrowed the camels!"

"You *borrowed* the camels?" gasped Harris.

"It is the way of my country," grinned Ben Mohamet. "When one wants a thing—a horse or a woman or some little thing—he takes it. That is, if he is a better fighter than the owner of the woman or horse or what not. As he pays nothing he says he borrowed it—the woman or the horse, or, as in this case, camels! But let us go swiftly, sahibs. The camels are here. The man I borrowed from may find police somewhere. Such men, who can not protect themselves, usually do. So let us go—wherever the sahibs desire to go!"

"My God!" exclaimed Harris enthusiastically. "You big Afghan, you are a man after my own heart. You won't lose by this, either. Will he, Walters?"

"I should say not," agreed Walters.

They started an hour after sundown. Day travel in that desert was well-nigh impossible.

**B**EN MOHAMET seemed to know a lot about camels, which was lucky as neither Walters nor Harris did. As they ambled through the vague sheen of the moon's reflection on the sand, the Afghan regaled them with typical Afghan stories—the sort which would have made Boccaccio blush. There was one about an interesting Sultan of Swat, at which Walters protested, but which Harris enjoyed.

"But," said Ben Mohamet with marvelous surprise, "I expected the sahibs would require entertainment in this dry march. However, if Walters sahib does not enjoy my tale—and he is the only man I ever met who did not—then will I talk of other things. . . . That old rock lying over there! It must be an ancient burial place. The sahibs know, of course, that this midnight moonsheen, near graves, is the best place to see ghosts!"

"Shut up!" growled Harris.

Ben Mohamet stopped the camels suddenly.

"See there!" he hissed.

The two Englishmen looked, and shivered. On the rock—a fallen piece of vast masonry—an apparition leaped in the light of the moon. It looked like a skeleton at its religious devotions. . . .

"He is worshipping Shitan!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet in awed tones.

"Worshipping Satan!" echoed Harris.

"Yes," answered Ben Mohamet in a matter-of-fact way, although his voice seemed to indicate that, brave and tough man though he was, he would rather be somewhere else. "Yes, he worships Shitan. Would the sahibs like to go and join him?"

"What the hell do you mean?" both sahibs asked the question.

"Oh, I thought the sahibs came out into the desert maybe to study the things of the desert!" apologized Ben Mohamet. "That is not a ghost over there! No, only some devil-worshipper with leprosy. Quite harmless!"

"Drive on!" growled Harris. "Our ideas of what is harmless differ!"

Ben Mohamet urged the camels forward, but that night ride was a ride through the dead of ages, and the Afghan, with all his country's love and dread of ghosts and djinns could not help talking about it. . . . The sand stirred by the camel's feet was the dust of dead

men—the dust of an army of long ago, the dust of many armies!

"What armies?" asked Harris.

"All of them," answered Ben Mohamet with historical generosity. "From the time of Adam and Eve, from the time the sons of Abraham came hither to spy out the land!"

Walters coughed sarcastically.

"But what does it matter to a ghost, what army he fought in?" asked Ben Mohamet. "That mess of ruins, lying so black in the moonlight, let us rest there!"

"We will not rest until dawn!" growled Harris.

"As the sahib commands," grunted Ben Mohamet.

Spectral shadows of monuments of lost races. Fragments of forgotten peoples. Old when Alexander crossed the Indus. Matters of deep speculation when Buddha dreamed under the Boh tree. Bits of the beginnings of the world. Stained by blood and tears, scorched by the same old sun. . . . And, as Ben Mohamet kept muttering, the air was so full of lost souls that breathing was difficult!

"And the devil-worshippers and lepers eat snakes and rock toads—else they would starve," added Ben Mohamet in the tone of a *moonsbe* [teacher].

"Will you shut up—*choop row, toom!*" shouted the exasperated Harris.

Ben Mohamet laughed.

"Surely if the sahib commands! But be not afraid, for I am with you! . . . Yet it is strange that ye are more afraid than I—for the English did certainly beat hell out of us Afghans in a couple of wars!"

Harris started to swear. His hand was on his revolver. Walters restrained him.

"Don't be a fool, and don't let him see you reach for that thing! We are helpless without him to drive the camels. Don't you know what talkers all these

O. S.—2

Pathans are? Take it easy, old man—he still obeys and will continue to obey, but he must talk—he can't help it any more than he could help stealing a camel or a horse or a woman that looked good to him!"

"Men came to India forty thousand years ago," muttered Ben Mohamet. "They drove the monkeys before them and took their cities—also adopted some of the monkeys' customs. But a Chinaman was here before them. He wrote in his book, . . . The desert bleaches souls and faces, and is terrible always, especially at night.' So, when he went back to China his face had turned yellow, and the Chinese faces have been yellow ever since!"

Walters laughed.

"Some day a man, or a hundred men, will collect the notions of the Afghans in a book," he said. "They are wonderful beyond education!"

"Get along, you spawn of filth," Ben Mohamet urged the camels.

And so the dreadful night passed. Ended in heat and sand. Clothes, eyes, ears, hair—all filled with sand. A horrible, clinging sand.

"Blood in it!" said Ben Mohamet cheerfully.

They made a weary camp among some ruins, so lonely and deserted that it might have been an apex of the world never reached by men—the ruins the broken toys of young gods. . . . They were too tired to eat. Ben Mohamet tethered the camels, but there was neither drink nor food for them. Then the three men sank into uneasy sleep.

But before sleeping Ben Mohamet faced in the direction of Mecca and said his prayers.

THEY started again that night. That desert has never been properly explored, and India is so filled with ancient

ruins and buried cities and monuments to the great dead—King Asoka alone erected sixty-nine thousand monuments all over the country to Gotama Sidartha—that the archeologists had never troubled the desert ruins, merely classifying them, more or less correctly or incorrectly, with certain periods. To Walters these wrecks of empires were intensely interesting, but they were not there to explore.

"I am coming back here some time," he whispered to Harris.

"You'll come alone, then," stammered Harris as his camel put its foot into a yawning hole, which Ben Mohamet explained, with his usual air of knowing all about the world's horrible things, was the grave of a woman who was never properly married!

"No grave of such woman ever closes," he said, "because the ghost of the woman who did not obey the Law ever tries to crawl out to go and get married properly—then slips back and crawls out and slips back for eons, until the time appointed!"

But they saw neither jackals nor holy men, which was a relief, and on the dawn of the fourth day Harris checked up and told Walters that the place was only a few miles ahead.

"If that old man you, er—hum," growled Walters, who was tired and nervous.

"If he what?" snapped Harris, who was equally worn out.

"If he really knew what he was talking about, and wasn't kidding you," Walters replied.

"He wasn't kidding me," answered Harris. "He believed I would keep my promise and carry the Key to the Secret to his friend. I swore I would, you know, on that crucifix! Unfortunately, the old man was unable to tell me the name of his friend! He only managed to babble

about a Jerawah, which means an outlaw. Otherwise, of course, I would have taken the Key to whoever the old man desired me to!"

"Of course!" laughed Walters. "By the way, it's a damn good job you made certain that Ben Mohamet does not understand English!"

"He's a good man," replied Harris, "and should be able to dig well. There may be quite a bit of digging, you know!"

But when they reached the spot which, according to the Key given by the King of the Jerawahs, was the entrance to the pleasure room of the great Alexander, Harris got a surprise. Ben Mohamet positively refused to dig!

"I am a Durani. I am a fighter. It is beneath a Durani to work," he said shortly.

"But——" began Harris.

"Dig yourself," said Ben Mohamet insultingly, and one must know India to appreciate what an insult it was, coming from an Afghan to an Englishman. "I knew you were lying when you said you wanted to hunt! Men don't hunt with little revolvers and shovels. But dig! I will sit here at my ease and watch you!"

Harris dragged out his revolver. Walters shouted at him not to shoot, but Harris aimed at Ben Mohamet and pulled the trigger. There was a click.

Ben Mohamet laughed. Harris screamed:

"There are no shells in it!"

Ben Mohamet laughed again.

"Of course not," he gibed. "I extracted them! I even threw away the extra ones you had! I did that when I discovered you were liars! Such liars might get angry with me, and try to shoot me! Well, I may be shot some day, or more likely, be hanged—as you will be. But if I am shot I want to be shot by a man—not by a liar!"

Astounded by the sudden turn of events, Harris could only gasp. Here was the servant he had expected to make do the heavy work of digging first refusing to dig and then reviling both Walters and himself, after carefully making their revolvers harmless.

Ben Mohamet was thinking: "Now, while eventually I intend to let these dirty crooks know who I am, I must be careful not to let them suspect I am a friend of certain members of a criminal society. The existence of the Jerawahs must remain unknown to them. Quite an interesting job! Because, also, I have to be very careful that the Jerawahs don't even imagine I am a secret service man!"

Aloud he drawled: "Go ahead and dig, sahibs! I won't stop your digging! All I will prevent is your shooting me! And as that is already accomplished—I will now rest and watch you dig!"

"You traitor!" stormed the helpless Harris.

"Not that," laughed Ben Mohamet. "You hired me to go hunting, not to dig. Had you told me all the truth there would have been no trouble."

Walters broke in with: "Wait till evening. We're all hot and tired now, and don't feel like doing anything. Wait, and keep quiet. We will find a way to handle this damned Afghan!"

So they waited through the heat of the day, until the dusk began etching fantastic shadows among the ruins—ruins of monoliths of the Dawn Men showing strangely among fallen façades of bits of Buddhist temples and palaces of dead and forgotten kings and empires—with an early moon lending a ghostliness to it all.

"You won't dig, Ben Mohamet?" asked Harris.

"Digging is for coolies!" drawled Ben Mohamet. "I will watch!"

There was nothing for Harris and

Walters to do but dig. And the sand was loose and difficult, and the night was hot. But to their surprise the way was not long. A few feet below the surface of the spot so carefully marked on Harris' chart—made from the feeble lines drawn by the finger nail of the dying King of the Jerawahs—their shovels struck wood. Exultantly they tore into their digging. The delighted exclamations rang oddly in broken English phrases among the ruins, where the dark lay like black pools edged with silver.

"Some one has been here not so very long ago!" panted Harris.

"The boards proved that!" gasped Walters as he tugged at the end of one of them. "And they also prove that it was not robbers. Robbers would not have troubled to cover the place again after getting the loot!"

Ben Mohamet, apparently indifferent, watched eagerly. . . .

The boards were lifted, disclosing a short flight of old stone steps.

"So," thought Ben Mohamet, "the kings, or some of them, who preceded me came here to see that everything was in order." He chuckled. "But I'll bet they didn't have two Englishmen to dig for them! Had to do it themselves!"

But Harris and Walters had dashed down the steps, and were trying to open a door of heavy brass—a beautifully wrought thing, green with the patina of twenty-two hundred years. They could not budge it. They sweated and pushed and tried to pull it open. They were tired with digging, and the door defied them.

The powerful form of Ben Mohamet came down the steps.

"I do not mind opening the door," he drawled. "Digging in the sand is different. But what in hell is this place? Tell me that!"

Walters answered, after a warning touch on Harris' elbow.

"An old tomb," he said. "We may find some little gold or other treasure there. Help us with the door, and you shall have some of the gold!"

Ben Mohamet laughed.

"I would open a lot of doors for gold," he said. "But I will not allow you to *give* me any. No! If I see anything I want I will take it—as I did the camels!"

"Let's jump him! There are two of us!" whispered Harris.

"Let him do the heavy work first," cautioned Walters, while Bugs grinned. He grinned, and then, as the swaggering Ben Mohamet, he cried out:

"One side, weaklings! Let a *man* do this thing!"

Bugs was an unusually strong man, with the gift of being able to release every pound of energy at a given moment. He applied himself to the door strongly. The door moved slightly. Bugs gathered himself and went at the door like a half-back making a touchdown through the line. Next moment he was sprawling in the stuffy darkness of the Pleasure Room of Alexander of Macedon. The door lay under him. He had broken it down, not opened it!

Astonished at such athletic force, Harris and Walters ceased for the moment to be crooks. They applauded as at a football game.

"Bring the lamps!" ordered Ben Mohamet, and the two Englishmen hastened to obey.

What did it matter? Nothing mattered now they had the place! So they tried to comfort themselves as they ran to obey their servant, the Afghan!

**E**AGERLY, with trembling fingers they lit the lamps and carried them down the ancient steps—steps once trodden by Alexander, his court, his slaves, his

dancing girls. The brief movements of the acrid desert air stirred faint whisperings in the sand, until even the callous crooks felt awed by a feeling of the supernatural, a sense of something beyond the senses. . . . At the doorway Ben Mohamet waited.

"I can hear, smell and see ghosts," he said hollowly. "And we had better wait a few minutes for the air in there to clear!"

"You afraid?" snarled Harris.

"Much afraid," answered Ben Mohamet, calmly and without shame. "Go in there in the dark—one may breathe but not easily—go in there in the dark, and maybe you will see what I saw! If you do you will . . . but go in, in the dark!"

"Hell," growled Walters. "The air's all right. Ghosts are the bunk. Come on, Harris, let's go in, with the lamps, of course!"

But Harris hesitated. The fear that comes to the murderer had gripped him.

"I'm just as eager as you to see what's inside, but let's wait a moment," he gasped.

Walters had better nerves. He laughed.

"What was it you saw in there that scared you, Ben Mohamet?" he asked.

"The ghost of an old man," answered Ben Mohamet, with an excellent shiver. "That ghost motioned me to go away. Its lips moved. I thought it was the guardian of the tomb—you said it was a tomb! But I was mistaken. Because the ghost tried to tell me that he had been a king when alive! I could not understand what country he was king of, but he did manage to make me understand that he had been murdered. So, I came out quickly, and very much afraid. All men know that the ghost of a murdered king is the most dangerous sort of ghost."

Harris felt sick. But the word "king" somewhat reassured him. He did not

know that he had killed the king of the Jerawahs.

"King?" he asked.

"He said so!" exclaimed Ben Mohamet.

And then he very accurately described the old king whom Harris had so cruelly murdered. . . .

"My God!" Harris leaned against the wall.

"Oh hell, come on in!" sneered Walters. "What's eating you? Scared of ghosts! Well, no ghost shows under lamplight, and we have three lamps! Come on!"

He went through the doorway, and Harris got hold of himself and followed. And what he saw dispelled any fear of ghosts he might have had. The Treasure of the Conqueror! The place of his many loves. The hidden sleeping-room and banquet hall of Alexander the Great, heaped high with the loot of conquered cities of India, which he had left there before he crossed the river Indus for the last time. The treasure he had left in charge of a criminal! And which the kings of the criminals had guarded ever since!

The marvel of this faithful care was, of course, lost to the two crooks, who knew nothing about the Jerawahs, but to the secret service man it was a greater wonder than the treasure itself.

Two pillars of gold, carved with ancient Greek inscriptions. The two crooks only cared that the pillars were gold, but Ben Mohamet was more interested in the inscriptions.

"Hollow!" exclaimed Harris, tapping the pillars. "But worth thousands!"

"Sayings of Aristotle engraved in gold!" thought Bugs. "Very fitting! Aristotle was Alexander's first teacher, of course! By Jove, Oxford University did teach me something besides football!"

"Those old lamps!" Harris' voice cracked. "Solid gold!"

Bugs noticed that the lamps had been left trimmed and ready—as if Alexander had gone hunting and was coming back there to his home to sleep.

Then suddenly the marvel of the place got Walters, who had some poetry in his soul and no recent murder on it.

"That little silver slipper in the corner there," he exclaimed. "The slipper of a slave girl. Lovely as a flower! The slipper dropped from her foot a few moments ago! She was scared by our coming in, and ran away in a hurry! See! There! She is watching us from over there, in the shadows!"

"Oh, cut it out!" growled Harris. "Do your play-acting on a stage when we get out of this with the stuff! Attend to business now! How are we going to get it all away from here? It will require a couple of motor trucks. More than that. . . . Never mind seeing girls among the shadows!"

He walked toward the shadows.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"What?" Walters almost squealed.

He might well cry out. For the shadow in which he had pretended to see the dancing girl was thrown by what has been called "The Legend of India." The magnificent bed of Alexander. Even the working coolies, the lowest castes, have been told the story of that bed by their mothers when they were children. . . . That great bed of ivory, of perfect elephants' tusks, a marvel of arrangement, interlaced and bound together by bands of gold. . . . That was the bed—all India knew of the bed! But the story—and all India knew the story!

For on the great bed, among the fragments of her tattered finery, lay the skeleton of the favorite dancing girl of Alexander. . . . And the simple, pathetic tale. She had danced her best for the

king, but he had been—as he often was at that time, when he was beginning to claim that he was a god—he had been irritable. He had not meant to hurt her, but he had said that her dancing was not pleasing to him. And the girl had flung herself on the great bed and thrust a dagger into her own heart, and died there. So grieved that her dancing did not please. . . . The fallen slipper was hers. The two crooks did not know the story. They were merely Englishmen, and the mothers of India do not tell their prettiest stories to the conquering race. But Bugs, Ben Mohamet, knew the tale. How Alexander had gone away from the place, leaving the body of the girl on the bed. How sudden remorse had overtaken him.

"Close the door," he had ordered. "The place shall be her tomb!"

One of his generals had suggested they remove the enormous treasure, but Alexander had turned savagely on him.

"Close the door!" he commanded.

Then he had placed the criminal Jerawah in charge of the tomb of the dancing girl.

"Guard it until I return!"

Then he had gone, leaving the dead girl amid the gold of a hundred cities. So, just as the Taj Mahal was the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal, the favorite wife of Shah Jehan, so was the ancient pleasure house of Alexander the tomb of a little dancing girl, whose name was quite unknown.

Harris had turned away from the skeleton, and Walters was saying, "Now, who do you think that was when it was alive?"

He spoke callously, sneeringly. He little dreamed that Ben Mohamet, who of course knew no English, had to hold himself, to control his anger with all the self-control he had so long cultivated—lest he, too soon, betray his identity as

Horace Sinnat by thrashing Walters, as such sacrilege deserved.

Harris was shouting. The old walls echoed to an alien language. Never before had they heard English.

"Urns! Urns! Golden urns!"

"Wine urns!" exulted Walters. "Open one and see if there's a drink in it!"

Harris tore the top off a magnificent Grecian urn. The light showed some little red mud at the bottom of it—the wine had dried to that. But even to such gluttonous crooks the sight of so much gold became oppressive. They began to wonder how they were going to get it across the desert; how they would sell it to the best advantage. . . . They were discussing this when Harris noticed that Ben Mohamet was not in sight.

"Where the hell has that swine gone?" asked Harris.

He learned quickly. Ben Mohamet came running through the doorway from outside. He was plainly scared.

"The robbers of the desert, sahibs!" he said. "And the big fool I was—throwing away the shells for your revolvers. The robbers come. They will kill us all! We can not fight them. They are terrible men. Let us run quickly, sahibs!"

"But the loot?" snarled Harris painfully.

"If we run quickly the robbers will not find us," Ben Mohamet spoke hurriedly. "We may close the entrance, and they may not find the place. But if we stay here they will hear and find us. . . . Let us run. We must, to save our lives. Quick, let us close the entrance!"

The robbers were very close! The two crooks hurried. They had laid down the planks—to lift the great door would have taken too long—and were trying to hide the planks with sand, when Ben Mohamet pointed with a trembling finger. And Harris and Walters saw!

Stalking among the ruins, the moon-

light that glittered on their weapons making them seem gigantic, was a body of men.

"Quick!" Ben Mohamet gripped an arm of each of his employers. "Run! This way!"

Fear took possession of the two crooks. They ran, stumbling through the sand and over fallen stones of antiquity—Ben Mohamet guiding them they ran—northward. They ran until the Englishmen could run no farther. Harris and Walters threw themselves down, choking with fatigue; and even Bugs was tired. But the loss of the loot rose in agony in them.

"I can never find my way back among those twisting ruins," sobbed Harris. "My compass and the chart are with our things in camp—and the robbers must have them. If this swine hadn't stolen our shells we might have shot it out with the robbers!"

"He's just a cowardly boaster," gasped Walters. "He was worse scared than we were!"

He stopped talking suddenly—horrified. Harris gripped him in terror. Ben Mohamet seemed unmoved.

Soft footsteps in the sand. And a horrible sound—men with broken mouths trying to talk, mewing like strange, sick cats. . . .

"The lepers!" said Ben Mohamet shortly.

They came forward cringing, those poor outcasts. The moon showed their hideous deformity, their starved and wasted bodies, the horror of their fell disease. They came and crowded about the horrified Englishmen. But Ben Mohamet waved them back gently. He turned to the two crooks.

"Find some small coins in your pockets," he commanded. "Then I will get rid of these. Otherwise they will crowd so close that they will touch us—and you

know what that will mean!" he concluded significantly.

Harris and Walters thrust their hands into their pockets and searched. They found altogether three rupees and six annas. They gave them to Ben Mohamet. Ben Mohamet waved the lepers farther back, and spoke sonorously.

"In the name of Allah the Compassionate Compassioner!" he intoned. "In the name of the One God and His Prophet Mohamet. In such great Names, and of the Charity ordained by the Kurān, do I give thee these alms. Take them, brothers of pain, and go thy ways, for, behold, it is all we have. In the name of Allah, the One God whose compassion for His children never dies—take these poor alms, and go in peace!"

He threw the money to the poor fellows. They picked it up painfully with broken and withered fingers. They bowed like shadows and went. The three rupees six annas was a small fortune to them. . . .

"My God," exclaimed Walters. "Ben Mohamet spoke like a Mohametan Mullah—with the voice of an English bishop of Oxford!"

"Forget the talk," growled Harris. "I am dying of thirst, and when I get a drink I shall be starving!"

"We need food and drink badly," Walters spoke to Ben Mohamet. "You gave all our money to those sick beggars. We have left millions behind us! What are we to do?"

Ben Mohamet laughed.

"That is easy," he said. "Money would not help you—there are no bazars on the desert. But I will get food and drink. You stay right here, so that I may find you easily when I come back with the food!"

"How will you get it?" Walters was incredulous.

"As I got the camels," laughed Ben

Mohamet. "Steal, of course. Those damned robbers will be in our camp. They will have food of their own, too. I will go back and take what we need—all I can carry—from those robbers. Steal it!"

Ben Mohamet walked away.

"The fellow is the most wonderful bunch of contradictions I ever saw," said Walters.

"Are you fool enough to think he will come back?" asked Harris.

"We'll wait and see, anyhow!" exclaimed Walters.

**B**UGS walked away from the two crooks. He walked fast, but he did not have to go all the way back to the treasure room of Alexander. Half a mile from where Harris and Walters waited, two "robbers of the desert," Jerawahs of course, met him with both food and drink.

"You obeyed orders well, Coomer Ali," said Bugs as he took the stuff. "Now act in my place, and guard the treasure until I come for it. The others will obey me, of course, even if they did not realize that they would be helpless trying to dispose of the gold. The British Raj is not so hard on poor men, and the Raj will pay us very well for the gold—better than any one else. The Raj will claim some of it—that is the law—for getting us money for it that we can use. But be at peace. We are just poor wandering men who found the treasure, and reported the finding honestly. The government will never know we are Jerawahs!"

"What did the white men know?" asked Coomer Ali.

"Just as I thought, and told you when you brought the camels," answered Bugs. "They were doctors in the hospital where the king died. They gave our king a talking drug, and got the Key of

the Place from him! But they told no one else. They dare not tell. They won't tell now, because they hope to come back some day—when it will be too late. And if they did tell they know that no one would believe them—because they are both known to be awful liars!"

"They must die!" exclaimed Coomer Ali.

"Don't worry," said king Ben Mohamet grimly. "They will both die!"

He made a significant gesture about his throat, and walked back to Harris and Walters with the food. . . .

"We are near the edge of the desert, to the north," he told them as they ate eagerly. "We will walk a few more miles. You must walk, or you will never have a chance to come back for the loot, because the robbers will miss the food and follow my tracks and find us and kill us! Hurry, now!"

They walked, painfully. As they walked they whispered a plot to turn and kill Ben Mohamet.

"We can't let this fellow get away with the secret of the place," said Harris. "See, the sand is getting firmer. We are at the edge of the desert, and soon will be at some town. When you are ready, say so. Then we will jump this damned Afghan!"

"Ready!" whispered Walters a few moments later.

The dark hour before the dawn was paling to the coming sun. Harris and Walters jumped suddenly at Ben Mohamet. With a swift movement he eluded them, laughing as he dodged. Then his voice grew stern, and he said grimly, *in English*:

"That's enough!"

And so quickly that neither Harris nor Walters could see where he got it from, Bugs pulled his automatic from under

*(Continued on page 288)*



# GOLDEN ROSEBUD

By DOROTA FLATAU

*A grim story of a blighted Chinese romance and the unutterable cruelty of China under the Mandarins*

FROM the high walls of Yunan-Sen slopes a bank, and it in turn is separated from the pathless road by a low, rough wall of uneven stones.

It was against this insignificant wall that the Yun Chong family leaned—to be exact, the emaciated forms of Mr. and Mrs. Yun Chong in their indescribably filthy rags leaned, while two small Yun Chongs played in the dust as happily as their accustomed hunger would allow. The third, a babe, lay like a small yellow corpse, breathing with difficulty, while thirteen-year-old Mei Fo sat sideways on the rough wall making such a picture, despite her rags, that passers-by, whether on foot, sturdy ponies, wheel-barrows or rickshaws, involuntarily smiled in her

direction or cried sincere but coarse compliments, for Mei Fo was indeed a beauty, with her long almond eyes over which arched brows like new moons, her masses of soft, unoiled black hair, which had been roughly secured in place with a wooden skewer, a scarlet pomegranate bud tucked over one perfectly shaped ear.

Mei Fo was as perfect a specimen of miniature maidenhood as the world has ever produced; even her feet were aristocratically lily-shaped, for despite the disappointment Mrs. Yun Chong had naturally experienced on finding her first-born a mere girl, she had carefully bound the baby's feet. But that was thirteen years ago, when the Yun Chongs were not so destitute and had a home of

their own. Now their home was wherever they happened to be, and their trade was begging; but trade was not good, and the Yun Chongs were starving and each one felt great sadness for the others, for they were a devoted family.

It was Teh Hur, the seventeen-year-old stripling, who had named Mei Fo "Golden Rosebud," for her skin was the color of a pale tea rose. Teh Hur was tall and straight. He stood now with the three-stringed fiddle which he had manufactured himself, running slim fingers over the strings and singing love words to his Rosebud, for Teh Hur loved Mei Fo, and she without coquetry admitted her love for him.

Mr. and Mrs. Yun Chong sighed over this, for they had nourished vague ideas of capitalizing the beauty of their daughter by hiring her out to a tea-house, but they were sentimentalists and smiled on the lovers, though Teh Hur was as poor as themselves. He was only a coolie, but, as Mei Fo pointed out, so clever, so ingenious. Was it not the fish he had caught in the Pu-To-Ho at daybreak that morning that had fed them, helped by the rice—only number nine rice, to be sure, but still rice—which he had bought with the yen earned by mending the broken wheel of a traveller's rickshaw? And so thoughtful, for he had remembered to pluck tender bamboo shoots which had made a very good salad; and his short trousers and blouse of blue dungaree were always spotlessly clean. Oh yes, Teh Hur was a good boy, and happy, although like the Yun Chongs he had nothing but love and hope. He sang and told them stories to make them forget their hunger; for who could fail to be interested in the story of "Why the auspicious house beckoned a renter," or "How the tortoise became a tortoise," the song of "The Shadow of the Black Wing" and "Charm of Peach Stone,"

and now the one he was singing of his Golden Rosebud?

Hi ya, hunger was a black potato, but the day was fine and generous travellers might pass and—yes, there in the distance, coming this way, going to Tonkin no doubt, they saw a rickshaw, a rich man's rickshaw, for four coolies impelled it and a retinue of servants followed.

It was Mei Fo who, picking up the begging-bowl, tottered well out on to the road ready to begin the singsong whine of—"Give, for the peace of thy ancestors, give," so soon as the rickshaw was close enough, the occupant of which could now be clearly seen. He was an elderly Chinese gentleman of praiseworthy corpulence; even the embroidery on his magnificent yellow silk coat could be desried, and now, his painted fan held in hands on which the arrogantly long fingernails were carefully bound.

Ignoring the warning hi ya's intoned by the coolies, Mei Fo stood her ground; this rich one would surely throw a few yen.

The rickshaw was alongside the family of Yun Chong, who had feebly begun to join their voices to that of Mei Fo in cries for charity, when a miracle occurred that sent fear to the hearts of the old couple and muted amazement to those of the young people, for at a word from the occupant of the rickshaw it came to a standstill, his train of followers immediately following their master's example.

The great Tung Wah, whose blue-buttoned cap denoted him a man of power (and such he was, being a confidential officer to the Emperor) looked through his currants of glazed eyes at the family of Yun Chong, but more especially at Mei Fo, into whose creamy cheeks had come a tinge of pink, for surely this so proudly plump gentleman had been sent by the god of Luck to help her and her family, and then maybe procure for

Teh Hur the ardently sought-for work, and then—oh then——!

"By what name is the Dawn of Spring called?" blandly and softly asked Tung Wah.

The pink deepened in Mei Fo's face; her little mouth widened in a shy smile disclosing small teeth like grains of rice. It was Teh Hur who was brave enough to answer.

"Golden Rosebud, oh honorable one," he said proudly.

"Are you her brother?" and again Tung Wah's voice was soft as a butterfly's wing.

"This baseborn one has not that honor, oh one of great magnificence," but no regret was evident in the lad's tone or bearing.

Tung Wah lost interest in Teh Hur. His eyes went again to Mei Fo, while he spoke a few words to his chief henchman, Yo Ting; then a quick word of command to his coolies and he was propelled rapidly in the direction of Tonkin.

Mei Fo's giggle of delight, as Yo Ting flung a small sack of money to her parents, changed to a wail of fear as Yo Ting, picking her up, flung her on to the floor of his own rickshaw, sprang into the already moving vehicle, and followed his lordly master with all speed.

Because Mr. and Mrs. Yun Chong clawed quickly at the flung sack, the tears that rolled down their prematurely lined cheeks were of real grief.

Teh Hur had raced in desperate pursuit after his little sweetheart, had gone on running even after his breath had given out, until blood poured from mouth and nostrils and he lay in the dust, incapable of moving.

On horseback it is a sixteen days' ride from Yunan-Sen to Tonkin. Teh Hur had no horse, and furthermore he knew only too well the power of officials who wore the blue button.

**T**UNG WAH was pleased with his Golden Rosebud; not very pleased, be it understood, for she would not smile, and as he had dreamed of her smile the whole way from Yunan-Sen to Tonkin he felt himself cheated, but at least he could congratulate himself that she had not been wicked enough to die—a catastrophe that had first threatened, and for which Mei Fo prayed, but youth is sometimes cruel in its strength.

Tung Wah's numerous wives were kept away from the new Blossom, and he had no mother; therefore she was free of a Chinese mother-in-law's customary cruelty. She was surrounded with the luxury of a reigning princess, living in her own exquisite pavilion built on the border of the Lake of the Moon of Jade. Her garden was a dream of delight, and Tung Wah loaded her with gifts and supplied her with a host of slaves. And yet she did not smile.

He tried shutting her in a cage where she could neither lie nor sit, then suddenly releasing her, eagerly watching for a smile of relief, only to frown disappointedly. She was starved, and then suddenly supplied with dainty foods and drinks; she was clad in rags and put in a pig-sty, to be lifted into a scented bath and arrayed in softest silks. And still no smile.

Hi ya, women are thorns!

He even thought of marrying her, but that would mean publicity, and the Emperor would hear and wish to see, and there was not such another beauty in the whole of China as this Golden Rosebud, and with one's august Emperor it is well to be guarded.

Never for a moment was Mei Fo unguarded; night and day she was watched until those on whom fell the task became wearied of such a silent, lifeless figure.

A year went by and then another. Mei Fo had not lost the art of smiling, for

when, as often happened, Tung Wah went on journeys of "squeeze" when his noble Emperor needed money, her mouth would curve in a forlorn small smile of relief, which Fung-Ko—a black-toothed old hag who resented Mei Fo, having hoped her own daughter might have held the Golden Blossom's position of Tung Wah's favorite—saw and understood, and made it her affair to see that her master heard of it.

"Oh, bringer of miserable tidings, take this paper to Yo Ting and you shall be justly rewarded," Tung Wah purred.

After overwhelming her "generous lord" with thanks, Fung-Ko ran as swiftly as her withered limbs would allow to Yo Ting and bade him hasten and give her what Tung Wah had ordered. As this happened to be twenty stripes on the sole of each foot with a thong of sharkskin, Fung-Ko crawled away with her resentment of Mei Fo grown to hate, but she could do nothing openly to manifest her feelings, for Tung Wah had expressly ordered that his Blossom was to be treated as though she were his Number One wife. Fung-Ko could do nothing but watch and wait. Each time the master went from home Fung-Ko prayed to her malevolent gods that they incite Mei Fo to attempt an escape, to do something that would kill the infatuation Tung Wah had for the ungrateful prisoner. But her gods may not have heard, for Mei Fo remained crushed and silent.

It was in August that Tung Wah had again to travel and make a "squeeze," this time to far-away Ta-Hin-Chang, a long journey across the Blue River, over the caravan trail and through the valley of Kien-Chang. Ah yah! a wearisome wandering.

Remembering Fung-Ko's words, Tung Wah caused the news of his journey to be told Mei Fo whilst unseen he watched

and saw the small shadow of a smile. Slight as was the smile, the memory of it accompanied Tung Wah, and he swore by his ancestors that he would make her smile, nay more, cause her to laugh aloud. But how?

He was on his way back to Tonkin. Sometimes he frowned, sometimes he smiled; he was searching for some way to bring laughter to Mei Fo, and he hurried, hurried to get back to his Golden Rosebud.

Life in Tung Wah's palace had been going smoothly, drearily; it was so hot. Mei Fo would lie for hours flat on her stomach looking into the lake, playing with the bullfrogs, or taking the very expensive lüs presented to her by Tung Wah and endeavoring to make it sound like the one Teh Hur had made, singing to herself scraps of the songs he had been used to sing.

It was so hot that Mei Fo had her sleeping-mat brought into the garden at night, and slept in the open. One night she thought she was dreaming, and sat up with her heart beating so fast it pained.

A whisper. She listened. Yes, a whisper. Teh Hur's voice. Her throat dried, the blood drummed in her ears, and Teh Hur was kneeling beside her.

They could not talk; their trembling hands met and clung.

When they could speak it was to tell their love.

Then in an agony of apprehension she begged him to go; she feared for his safety. He wanted to take her with him. They both agreed that would not be wise; with her lily-bud feet she could not climb walls or run fast. Now that he had found her, Teh Hur would creep away and plan some means of rescuing her. He would. He must. They loved so. He would return the next night.

Her fear and her desire for his return

wrung her heart. Oh, he would be careful, he promised his Golden Blossom.

At length he crept away and none saw him going as none had seen him coming.

THE following day Fung-Ko watched through narrow-slitted eyes and wondered, for Mei Fo had changed. It could have been nothing that happened during the night, the old hag assured herself; the pavilion and its gardens were too well guarded, so fiercely guarded that Fung-Ko had crawled indoors to rest her old bones, leaving her charge to sleep alone. But the next night she would watch.

She kept her self-made promise, saw a coolie youth creep close to Mei Fo, and with much trouble kept an animal growl that came to her throat from being uttered aloud. Now what to do? Call the guard? No, for they would kill the coolie, and Mei Fo might be cunning enough to persuade the infatuated Tung Wah that the story was a lie, and Fung-Ko's still scarred feet twitched uneasily. This coolie came last night; she was sure of that. He was here tonight—perhaps he would come again tomorrow. But it would be better to have witnesses, reliable witnesses of what was happening now. Perhaps that turbid egg Yo Ting could be used.

On hands and knees Fung-Ko crept through the pavilion and went as hurriedly as her agitated state would permit, toward the Palace, in through the doors, and there in travelling-attire stood Tung Wah.

In a moment he had wrung the story from her, and, ordering her to remain where she was, went swiftly, softly toward the pavilion. Tung Wah saw Mei Fo in the coolie's arms, her slender arms round his neck, heard the murmur of loving words. Then:

"We must go now, my tender flower, then away to the Shama Mountains in Lolo where none shall ever find us."

"Yes, quickly, and oh! so quietly, my loved one," whispered Mei Fo, and then Tung Wah stood before them.

Yo Ting had found Fung-Ko in the hall, had heard what she had to tell, and was beside his master when Tung Wah called.

Tung Wah had taken Mei Fo from Teh Hur's arms and was holding the shivering child-form when Yo Ting appeared.

"Throw that carrion out," he commanded in his monotonous undertone. Then, as his order was quickly obeyed by Yo Ting and a dozen of the guard, Tung Wah asked gently, "And why is my Blossom not sleeping?"

Three times he repeated the question until at length, "I—I could not," came through dry lips.

"You must sleep now," Tung Wah commanded, for he had it in mind to strangle her.

"I c-can not," Mei Fo's voice was a hoarse whisper; her fear was of worse than strangling.

"No," there was a firmer note in Tung Wah's voice. He had something better than strangling, and besides, he remembered he had sworn to make her laugh. He let her fall from his arms and clapped his hands to summon service. Mei Fo lay where she fell, longing for the death she expected, and praying, praying for the safety of Teh Hur.

"Carry the lady's sleeping-mat and cushions to the Amber Room. The lady does not wish to sleep; her wishes shall be obeyed."

Taking Mei Fo in his arms once more Tung Wah, walking with great precision through the most lovely starlit garden

that has ever graced earth, placed her on the hastily arranged sleeping-mat, her head on the scented cushions of softest down, and stood looking at her.

"You did not wish to sleep, Golden Rosebud. You shall not," and turning he left her.

A blur of thoughts steeped through Mei Fo's head, all to do with Teh Hur. Then she began to wonder what Tung Wah meant to do with her. She had caused him to "lose face," and no Chinaman will tolerate that.

Gradually her eyes focalized the small, dimly lighted room. The walls were queerly constructed of hollow amber cylinders, like drinking-glasses with the mouthpiece inward. She swam in utter fatigue; as her eyes closed she hoped they would murder her in the night.

Then she suddenly sprang to a sitting position as the door opened noisily and there entered half a dozen chattering females, neither coolies nor servants in appearance—young, gay, laughing girls who bore down upon her with trays of delicious foods and warm spiced wines. Ignoring her protest that she did not need food, they politely but firmly fed her and gave her wine to drink out of tiny jade cups.

When she could eat no more she bade them good-night; their chatter was hurting her head. Ignoring the hint, the girls, calling for fiddles and flutes, held a concert. Some of them danced, others sang to their sisters' instrumental accompaniments. The noise, together with the warm wine, dazed Mei Fo's already over-tired head; her eyes closed.

With little shrieks and much tinkling laughter soft hands pulled her head from the pillow, whilst others held her drooping lids wide open.

"You would not sleep, oh precious

pearl. We would talk with you," trilled one lady.

With a mighty effort Mei Fo sat erect in an endeavor to be polite. They would surely tire soon and leave her in peace, for now it was dawn.

In a daze she saw them go; her head fell heavily on to the scented cushions, only to be jerked erect by a girl she recognized as old Fung-Ko's daughter, Ah Foo, who had entered with a fresh group of girls.

"We have come to pay you a visit. Drink this and you will not behave as the low-caste girl you are," she whispered, holding a cup to Mei Fo's lips and forcing the liquid down her throat. "There, now the lovely Flower has revived," she said aloud.

Truly, Mei Fo felt suddenly very wide awake. Her brain became steel-clear, her eyes felt as though they could never again close.

And so through the interminable day fresh groups of merry girls visited her. They brought instruments on which they played; they sang, danced, acted and always chattered. Sometimes food, sometimes warm wine, or sleep-destroying liquid would be forced down her throat. It was a cup of the latter they gave Mei Fo as the sun slipped behind the horizon, and so they left her.

**A**T LAST she was alone, but the echo of the music and song and more especially the tinkle of laughter and talk dinned in her brain. Still, she was alone, and soon she would be able to rest.

Before the effects of that last drug wore off, she would search for a dagger and so end her miserable existence. Finding no weapon in the room she tried to break the cylinders of amber that formed the walls, but they resisted her feeble strength. A great many of the

glasses, she noticed, were hollow, but she did not seek a reason.

When would this cursed drug wear off? Her eyes and head were like burning globes of fire. She could not rest, not yet. She needed air. Round and round the room she went, searching for a trace of the door which her last group of visitors had closed after them.

No, no door, and at last she was beginning again to be sleepy, so with a sigh she threw herself on her sleeping-mat. No sooner had her head touched the cushion than she rose with a scream. Something soft and hairy had touched her, and through one of the inverted glasses waved a long hairy arm. She flew to the other end of the room and stood panting, with her head against the wall, only to be attacked by a similar arm. From one side of the room to the other she rushed, sobbing and screaming, to find refuge at last in the center of the room, where none of the terrifying arms could touch her.

She stood until her shaking limbs could no longer bear her and she sank to the floor, only to rise again, while shriek after shriek tore from her throat. The room was gradually filling with vermin of every kind—rats, mice, serpents, evil-looking toads.

It was at the break of cool pale dawn that the bell began. Not a loud or un-

pleasing tone, it rang once every ten seconds—just one clang, then one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, clang. Then again and again.

Mei Fo was counting and waiting, counting and waiting, when she went mad—dancing, singing, calling love phrases to Teh Hur, bidding him find a flower for her hair, whining the beggar chant, singing snatches of song learned from Teh Hur, and then she laughed.

Peal after peal of laughter rang through the Amber Room. She laughed until she gasped for breath, and laughed and choked and laughed again.

It was then that Tung Wah stood in the doorway.

"Ah, Golden Rosebud, so you have again learned to laugh," he said. Then, with devoutly bent head, "See, my revered ancestors, I have kept my oath made in your name," he added.

With no haste he stepped forward and put a scarf as soft as his own voice round the neck of Mei Fo, pulling, pulling, pulling.

Summoning Yo Ting, he spoke, saying, "Throw that carcass on the dung-heaps."

In China they say a bush of golden roses blooms on that dung-heap all the year round.

But in China they say many things.

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Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about; but evermore  
Came out by the same door where in I went.

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,  
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;  
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—  
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go."

—*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

# With The Veneer Ripped Off

By LEE ROBINSON

*The Rifians swarmed like flies in the outpost of Bab Taouna when the Legionaries made their sally from the dungeon—a stirring tale of mutiny in the Spanish Foreign Legion in Morocco*

**T**HREE was some delay in the opening of the heavy door of the sallyport. Growls went up from the sweating Legionaries around the water-cart, and Kirkland raised his hand for silence. Suddenly the invisible guard on the wall swung the muzzle of his machine-gun toward them, the wicket in the door was slammed open, and the voice of Sergeant Wheary barked:

"Pass your rifles through here, butt foremost. Any show of resistance will mean death."

Too late Kirkland realized that it had not been for the glory of the Spanish Foreign Legion that Wheary had asked him to take charge of the detail sent to fill the water-cart at the river. Too late he saw why the sergeant had warned him to choose only those men with whom he was willing to trust his life.

"Well, pass them in," insisted Wheary, behind the door. "You first, Joe Kirkland. I don't take chances with Yankees."

Knowing well that his fiery little countryman was not given to unmeaning speech, Kirkland advanced and passed his rifle reluctantly through the wicket. Silently the others followed suit, while they took turns in preventing the water-cart from rolling backward down the steep trail.

"Now," directed Wheary, "everybody grab hold of the cart, and keep hold of

it until you're told to let go. In you come."

The heavy door swung open, and slowly they pushed the dripping cart through the cool sallyport.

"Keep going," ordered Wheary, as the door slammed dismally behind them. "Watch your step, if you want to do well."

Across the oven-hot yard they proceeded ruefully, bounded by glaring white walls and the incandescent sky of Morocco. Though Sergeant Wheary and the sentries on the walls were the only men in evidence, Kirkland knew that the uncertainty was over and that his little squad was girdled by a ring of mutinous foes.

"Tight rein, fellows," he murmured, as they halted inside the water shed and stood motionless with their hands on the cart.

"Line up over here," called Wheary smartly. "Double rank."

Dumbly they obeyed.

"This is now a garrison of the Riffian *barka*," announced Wheary, his white teeth gleaming through his heavy black beard, his big head jerking emphatically in its twin-peaked *Legionario* cap. Unbelievably Kirkland stared at the row of medal ribbons on the sergeant's chest: the Spanish *Cruz de Maria Cristina*, the French *Croix de Guerre*, the American Victory and Philippine Insurrection.



*"A wave of cloaked and hooded figures appeared at the head of the steps."*

"I'm authorized," resumed Wheary, after a momentary silence, "to offer all of you service in the *barka*, with promotion according to your ability and safe passage to any point in Europe upon the signing of peace. That won't be all, of course, but anything else will depend upon the fortunes of war. You won't be expected to serve in the ranks of the infantry. Special service, of various kinds, will be what you'll fall in with—so I'm given to understand. Anybody with any mechanical knowledge, and anybody who knows anything about artillery or explosives,

O. S.—3

ought to get something good. Medical knowledge, also, is a ticket to a soft job."

Again there was silence.

"Any volunteers?" he asked abruptly. There were, it appeared, no volunteers.

"Right, face!" he snapped, and a squad of Legionaries emerged from a doorway with menacing bayonets. "You'll regret your refusal as long as you live. Forward, march!"

Treading on one another's heels in their anxiety to keep closed up, Kirkland and his companions scuffled across the blinding yard and plunged into the dark entrance of the dungeon. Down the narrow steps cut in the solid rock of the mountain they lurched, hanging together for support and halting only after the iron-barred door clanged shut behind them.

A CHORUS of voices below proved that their friends had preceded them to the dungeon. As the two parties vociferously compared notes, Kirkland realized that the whole thing had been scandalously easy.

The unheralded disaffection of Sergeant Wheary had been the decisive factor. Though Kirkland had mentioned to him his fears of wholesale desertion to the revolutionary *barka*, the sergeant had maintained that there was small chance of anything like a mutiny succeeding. He had even asked Kirkland to pick out the water detail and go with it, agreeing with him as to several of the men not being fit to trust outside the fort.

Sergeant Wheary was—or had been—an unknown quantity. He had seen stirring events, and remained undaunted. Claiming nothing smaller than the United States as a place of origin, no profession other than soldier of fortune, he lived to tell of his adventures and to thirst for more, though everywhere along his trail men had gone down in windrows. Almost a charter member of the Spanish Foreign Legion, having joined its first contingent in 1920, he had emerged from the desperate campaign of 1921 with the rank of sergeant, the Cross of Maria Cristina and the independent command of Bab Taouna.

That independent command, thought Kirkland, was what had done the trick—done what the Moro *juramentados*, the fanatics of a dozen teapot revolutions, the death-grapple on the Western Front and Abd el Krim's crushing campaign in 1921 had failed to do.

Kirkland's reflections were shattered by the wrathful debate going on all around him in the darkness.

"It's Russia, damn her! Russian Mohammedans are preaching through Morocco that Lenin——"

"Aw, can it! Russia, hell! They're starving to death. Do you see any Russians in the *barka*?"

"They say it's full of them."

"They say!"

"Bolshevik agents, however, have the Mohammedans believing——"

"Say, you with the mouth, how about that British ship that unloaded a cargo of rifles at Morro Nuevo? The German deserter from the Third Company, who was brought into Sidi Dris the day we left there, said he saw it—said its name was *Abyssinian Prince*."

"German, eh? Now you've said it. What is the biggest foreign element in the Legion? And what's happening to all of them?"

"Not all, *mein Herr*!"

"Most of them, then. They're landing in the *barka*. It's a put-up job for them to——"

"Poof! Put-up job!"

"We can't make a move that Abd el Krim doesn't know beforehand. And it's a known fact that a German ship brought him sixteen thousand rifles last year from Hamburg."

"Ach, Himmel! He gets help from Italy, Russia, America—Allah knows where!"

"Germany wants mining concessions."

"That's what they're all after. This country's lousy with all sorts of metal, and it's hardly been touched. In Beni bu Ifrur they mine lead right off the level ground. On Monte Uixxan you can see whole cliffs of iron. Every statesman in Europe has his eyes on the stuff."

"The whole damned world's against us."

"Aw, what the hell do the Riffians want with outside help? They get all they want from us. They captured enough junk at Monte Arruit and Annual to equip an army: two hundred field guns,

for one item; twenty thousand rifles, for another; and enough ammunition to last for years in a war like this."

"Yes, and plenty of stuff comes through French Morocco, too. France is sore because Spain won't give her permission to send troops into Spanish territory."

"Oh, rotten olives! Why don't you clean out your ears? France, herself, is on the verge of declaring war on Abd el Krim. In fact, French troops are in action regularly along the Beni Zeroual frontier."

"Who the hell said that, anyway?"

Saving his breath, Kirkland walked to the door and peered through the bars at a man who had just descended the stairs.

"Who's that?" he asked quietly.

"Corporal Schanz," was the gruff reply.

"What's the dope, *Feldritter*?"

"The dope is," answered the German: "you fellows had better throw in with us. You know what happens to prisoners in the *barka*."

"Who's back of this thing, Schanz?"

"Nobody especially, that I know of. The whole world is with the Rifians, though, in their fight for independence. They're going to win, and we're looking out for ourselves. There'll be a future in the Riffian Republic for those who help her now."

"No talking with the prisoners!" yelled Sergeant Wheary, at the head of the steps. "Not a word!"

The uproar in the cell finally subsided, the Legionaries philosophically making themselves comfortable on the cool stones. The day dragged on, the periodic changing of the sentry arousing keen interest as they pumped each new one for information. Toward evening the drone of an airplane caused intense ex-

citement as they speculated on the chances of the pilot's seeing anything wrong about the fort. The sound died away in the distance, however, and was soon forgotten in a wild clamor for food.

A lighted lamp was hung against the wall beyond the door, and the hungry Legionaries pounced joyfully upon their blankets when they were passed into the cell with the coffee, hard bread and sardines of the evening meal. An appeal relayed to Wheary even resulted in Corporal Garcia's guitar being sent to him, and far into the night they lay and listened to the haunting melodies of Andalucia sung in the little Spaniard's beautiful tenor.

All night long, between naps, Kirkland could hear mysterious voices and shuffling feet in the yard. Something was going on, and he guessed blindly at everything. Finally he slept soundly, to be awakened by a booming voice:

"Wake up, comrades. I want to talk to you."

Beyond the door stood Sergeant Wheary, flanked by two heavily armed Rifians.

"Men," said the sergeant gravely, when the prisoners were clustered near the door, "I'm sorry we're divided, and I'm trying to do all in my power for you. But the time has come when I can no longer do very much, unless you throw in your lot with me."

"Desert?" asked somebody at the rear of the cell.

"Well—yes."

There was a moment of strained silence.

"I was just thinking," remarked Kirkland, controlling his voice with an effort, "that you're about the crummiest excuse for an American I've ever seen. Our answer is: to hell with you and your lousy offer."

"That's telling him, little Yankee!" exulted Heinie Rittwagen, slipping his heavy arm around Kirkland's shoulders.

"Right!" rang the voice of old Hernandez, and the word was echoed from a dozen throats.

"It's entirely up to you, fellows," nodded Wheary, obviously disappointed. "I and my men are leaving Bab Taouna this morning, and you'll be turned over to the Beni Sidel as prisoners of war. I offer you protection, if you'll come with me. Otherwise, you'll have to take your chances."

"Bring one outside," suggested one of the natives, and after a murmured conversation the sergeant called:

"Corporal Garcia!"

"Here."

"Come outside a minute. I'm going to tell you all I know, and you'll have a couple of hours to pass it on to the rest."

"Well, I'll listen," replied Garcia, with an inflection which implied that listening would be all.

The door opened and clanged shut, and the quartet ascended the stairs and disappeared from view.

**D**AWN crept into the rocky vault while the prisoners eagerly questioned the new sentry, Novallo. The burden of his regretful answers was that the Spanish Army would soon be pushed into the Mediterranean, and that he was taking pains not to be pushed with it. A moody silence followed his startling disclosures. When a figure in a cowled *djellaba* padded down the steps, everybody crowded forward in rapt anticipation of Garcia's message.

The native was alone, however, and he bore something which no one fully saw until he had affixed it to the wall alongside the lamp. Then they gazed in horror at Garcia's severed head, impaled on a bayonet and still dripping blood.

Eyes gleamed in the silence that followed. The cloaked tribesman leered through the bars for a moment, and then shuffled up the stairs in his bare feet. Here and there in the obscurity sounded a low exclamation of fury, while Novallo gravitated to the opposite side of the door from the staring head and stood as if undecided in which direction to bolt.

Suddenly there was a piercing shriek, followed by a series of dull thumps. Kirkland's thirsting hands had reached through the bars and fastened around Novallo's neck.

"Pass it in!" grated the American. "Pass it in!"

There was a thud as Novallo slumped to the floor, and Kirkland flitted to the rear of the cell with the bayoneted rifle.

"Get his belt! Get his belt!" rose a murmur of voices. There was a rush to the door, which receded quietly a few moments later, and invisible hands hooked the ammunition belt around Kirkland's waist.

Somebody was coming down the steps  
—Sergeant Wheary.

He halted with an oath, whipping out his revolver, at sight of Novallo floundering to his knees. At the same instant Kirkland's rifle roared, a clang coming from one of the bars in the door at the impact of the splintering bullet.

Wheary was in front of the door now, his revolver raised.

"Give me that rifle!" he commanded.

At the roar of his revolver, the crowd surged madly, Kirkland trying to get to the front and everybody else fighting toward the rear.

"Out with that rifle!" insisted Wheary, his command punctuated by another shot from his revolver.

There was a moan from somebody in the crowd, and Kirkland's rifle spat fire again. Wheary's revolver clattered on

the stone floor. For a moment he doubled over, his right hand gripped between his knees, his left groping vainly for the revolver. As the rifle spoke again he reeled upright, clasped Novallo to his breast and scrambled up the stairs.

Two more shots Kirkland loosed blindly in the gloom before the retreating pair disappeared around the corner of the stairway. Immediately there was a rush for the revolver, which was raked within reach by the bayoneted rifle and received with riotous acclamation. Then Kirkland gave up his bayonet to another man, and the captives whooped with delight over their three weapons.

As they fell silent, listening for indications of a rush down the stairs, there came a vague sound which caused them to look questioningly at one another.

"Airplane!" shouted somebody, and the cell went wild with joy.

At the door stood Kirkland, lean old Hernandez beside him with the revolver. A couple of men crouched in front of them, ready to toss a possible grenade back up the stairway. From the yard came the sound of pattering feet as the airplane drew nearer, and suddenly there was a rush of hobnails on the top steps.

"This is Schanz, fellows," called an excited voice. "I'm coming to help you."

"Come on," invited Kirkland, his rifle pointed at the turn of the stairway.

Schanz hurried around the corner into the light, his arms laden with two rifles, several bandoliers of ammunition and a crowbar.

"If this isn't the worst mess I ever saw!" he grated, handing the extra rifle and the crowbar through the door. "I'm out of it, believe me. Tear that door down, and hurry up. Give Baron Rittwagen the crowbar. They won't attack us until the airplane gets out of sight."

"What's up?" asked Kirkland, wel-

coming one of the bandoliers, while from the hinge side of the door came the crunch of steel on stone as the crowbar was levered by the short, powerful arms of Rittwagen.

"I think Wheary made a complete water-haul," confessed Schanz, crouching with ready rifle at the other side of the door. "They worked him for a sucker until they got control of the fort, and now he's finding out he's a small banana."

"Control of the fort!" echoed Kirkland.

"Sure. The place is lousy with Riffians."

"Why, don't they know they can't hold Bab Taouna, as close as it is to Melilla?"

"Oh, they're not going to try. They're going to gut the place and blow it up, before a relief column can get here. They want to wipe the position off the map, so they can have free access across the river and through the canyon into peaceful territory. They also want the movable material, and they'd rather have a gun than a volunteer *with* a gun. They're even going to take our uniforms, and they've got a pile of native flea-traps up there in the sallyport for us to put on. The soldier of fortune business is a washout in the Riff, I'll tell the wobbly world."

For a moment they listened breathlessly, while the hum of the airplane steadily increased.

"Wheary got in wrong by kicking about the way they did Garcia," resumed Schanz. "The little tenor gave the sheik some patriotic sass, and they spread-eagled him the same as you would a pig. They'll do us the same way, if they get a good chance. Shake it up, Baron, if you want to see the Bohmerwald again."

"I'll have the whole place caved in soon," grunted Rittwagen, amid the crunch of his crowbar. "I guess I can get

this hinge out then. Get hold here, Rufini, you old garlic-inhaler."

"That guy'll bomb hell out of them," remarked Kirkland, as the airplane roared ever nearer.

Schanz shook his head.

"He won't see them. They all took cover. Our fellows are in the barracks, and scared to death. Wheary and a couple of others are on guard over the gate. You fellows hurt Wheary down here, but I don't know how bad. He had his hand stuffed into his tunic, which was all bloody. He told me you had Novallo's rifle, and that you had taken a couple of shots at Novallo and him."

"Well," said Kirkland, as the men with the crowbar got the upper hinge loose and attacked the lower, "let's hope those fellows at the gate get wise to themselves and rifle their machine-gun over that mob when it comes out."

"No chance," declared Schanz. "Not with Wheary up there. He's in too deep. He engineered the whole thing. He had big-talking natives in here a couple of times, when he had the guard all set. Some of them were here night before last, and filled us full of kraut. They said thousands of Germans were in the *barka*, and that other thousands were——"

"Listen to that!" crowed Hernandez, as the airplane swept thunderously across the yard. "If that aviator sees——"

Running feet clattered into the passage above, stumbling pellmell down the steps as the door sagged outward. Rittwagen squeezed through and ranged himself with his crowbar alongside Schanz. Kirkland followed, his rifle ready. The next moment there was a crash at the turn of the stairs, and fat Maurras of the Medical Detachment rolled into their midst with waving arms.

"Stay where you are!" he cried to the crowd boiling out of the cell. "This is the safest place in the fort!"

KIRKLAND was already turning the corner of the stairs. He meant to get some sort of signal to the aviator, if such a thing were possible. His eyes were blinking across the white-hot yard, his head aching from the sudden glare, when an unmistakable clatter of machine-gun fire broke out toward the gate. An instant later, while feet thudded up the stairs behind him, his head popped through the outside doorway and his eyes bulged in amazement.

A big bombardment airplane was swooping low beyond the front wall, the observer in the rear cockpit avidly scanning the fort. The only sign of life below was a *djellaba*-clad tribesman at the hammering machine-gun over the sally-port. Though the airplane was hopelessly above its field of fire, the gun was elevated as high as possible and slicing the air with a stream of futile bullets.

From various hiding-places leaped a score of shrieking tribesmen, firing up at the airplane with their rifles as it banked and climbed with a deafening roar of its racing engine. Abruptly it turned and roared back over the fort on an arrow-like course. Beneath it Kirkland saw a flash of silver streak earthward. The next instant a section of the yard bloomed in a fiery mushroom of dust and massive stones and human bodies.

Blown down the stairs with an avalanche of sand and gravel, Kirkland fought his way below with his arms full of stumbling men.

"Get back!" he cried frantically. "Get back!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the whole mountain rocked to another thunderous explosion. Fragments of stone pattered in the yard and ricocheted down the steps. Again arose the clatter of the machine-gun.

"Guns in front, fellows!" directed Kirkland, and quickly the armed men

surged ahead of their companions. "Hold to what we've got. That aviator's wise to something."

There was a tremendous explosion in the neighborhood of the gate, dying out in a medley of shrieks and a rumble of falling masonry. A whirlwind of sand gushed down the stairs, sucked back again, and the Legionaries swayed in its path.

A rush of bare feet approached the doorway. A wave of cloaked and hooded figures appeared at the head of the steps, and recoiled blindly as the Legionaries' weapons roared. Another resounding crash rang out in the yard, a drove of feet pattered out of hearing, and an ominous silence settled over the fort.

"Himmel!" gasped Schanz ruefully. "He's liable to dent all of us, if he puts one in about the right place."

The next bomb came closer than ever, the walls of the dungeon quaking as though about to tumble in and a gust of sand and stones whirling over the crouching Legionaries.

"Let's get out of here," suggested Hernandez, and a murmur of approval ran through the crowd. "I'd rather be blown apart than buried alive."

"Hold everything," advised Kirkland, as a thundering crash came from beyond the gate. "Wait till the barrage is over. Then we'll mop up."

Grimly they waited. When the next bomb exploded far down the trail toward the river, Kirkland led the cautious advance up the stairs.

"Let 'em have it!" he yelled, as a flurry of spattering bullets greeted their appearance.

Out they swept in a determined charge, a tumultuous shout upon their bearded lips. Their feet pounded and their few rifles blazed toward the smoking bomb craters, where a crowd of entrenched

Riffians arose to meet the ill-armed but smashing assault.

Mad battle raged over the bomb-churned yard. Stones and bullets flew in a murderous hailstorm. Bright blades flashed in the dazzling sunlight. Rifle-butts thudded against hooded, shaven heads. Legion blood and Riffian brains splotched the shattered earth, and the acrid scent of burnt powder and mangled flesh was gulped into struggling lungs.

Kirkland's astonished eyes saw Novallo, re-armed, fighting desperately beside him; saw him leap forward and skewer a howling tribesman with his bayonet. Another mutineer, Lopez, he glimpsed and lost in the milling tangle. Unarmed Legionaries ducked under whirling simitars and grappled to the death. Triumphant shouts rang out as they wrenched weapons from the enemy at the risk of life and limb.

Rifles roared all around the compass. A deadly cross-fire whipped in from every direction.

"Look out for the mutineers!" rang the warning cry, as the Legionaries blotted themselves out among the tumbled masonry near the sallyport.

In a little while the airplane came back, nosed down and sprayed a stream of tracers across the yard. A fringe of tribesmen sprang up, charged forward and died gamely at the sallyport. An unidentified Legionary on the signal tower, another on the roof of the barracks, were firing toward the center of the yard, and Kirkland's men spared them on probation.

The man on the roof, whom they now recognized as Erhardt of the mutineers, arose and waved his cap in frantic delight.

"*Viva la Legion!*" he shrieked, and the cry was vociferously echoed from the barracks.

With victorious shouts, Kirkland and his companions swarmed over the yard. A barrage of steeljackets from the barrack windows preceded them, brushing the enfiladed enemy from the craters. Frenzied tribesmen went down with blazing rifles. Spanish steel and Riffian slithered and clashed. The barracks spewed forth an oblique rush of the mutineers, and trapped but pugnacious Riffians crumpled before the tumultuous assault from two directions.

The fusillade ceased for want of targets. Ex-mutineers tearfully embraced the men who had not wavered. Sentries were posted on the walls. Maurras and Rufini moved the water-cart into the yard and established a dressing-station in the cool shed. The man in the signal tower reported the Riffians decamping across the river. Beyond the river the airplane was circling and dipping, its wings flashing in the morning sun, the muffled detonation of bomb after bomb floating up on the searing desert wind. Bab Taouna settled itself in the renewed grip of the Legion.

**A** HAPPY throng gathered at the water-cart. Bloody heads and gasping mouths succeeded one another under the streaming spigot. Amid their sighs of satisfaction there was a great splashing above them, and Trumpeter Charro emerged from the manhole in the water-cart. Soaked to his neck, shivering in the broiling African sun, he climbed down and stretched himself on the hot ground. His bedraggled appearance, coupled with the gargantuan joke upon themselves, wrung howls of laughter from the Legionaries, and a hilarious dance of joy swirled around his trembling form.

The merriment was cut short by a cry from one of the sentries. In the wreckage of the sallyport, wrapped in a hooded

*djellaba*, he had discovered Sergeant Wheary. Tattered and unconscious the sergeant was, but still alive, and a twinge of pity surged through Kirkland at sight of the splintered bones of the hand which his own bullet had crippled.

"All of a man, just the same," pronounced Hernandez, while Rufini and Maurras carried the bloody form to the water shed and the airplane swooped over the scene. "I'm sorry for him, poor lousy exile."

"So am I," echoed Rittwagen, raising his hand in answer to the waving men in the airplane. "He wasn't such a bad skate, except for this dumb spree."

"Wasn't, hell!" called Rufini, who had been a surgeon in the Italian army. "This fellow isn't dead, or anywhere near it."

"A fat lot of consolation that is," said Kirkland bitterly. "The first officer to get hold of him will detail a blotto squad."

The airplane, which had circled the fort a couple of times, suddenly straightened out across the yard. A message container streamed earthward on its fluttering ribbon, and was quickly brought to Kirkland, who extracted the message and read:

Immediate vicinity now clear of Riffians. Large body beyond Kudia Adrar. Tenth Squadron will be here in two hours, to mount guard until a ground column can arrive. Prepare to embark wounded in hospital plane, which will land at river bank. *Viva la Legion!*

ORTEGA, AIR CORPS.

"We're going to have some excitement in this neighborhood," remarked Rittwagen, as the airplane dwindled away toward Melilla. "Who's that they've got?"

He started hurriedly across the yard, and the group hastened after him to where Schanz and Maurras were laying a groaning Legionary in the shadow of the wall. The man was Morin, one of the mutineers, limp and deathly pale, but full of talk.

"Sergeant Wheary did it," he panted,

between groans. "When the airplane showed up, he sent Erhardt to spread the garrison flag on the roof of the barracks, right over the dungeon, so that in case of hostilities the aviator wouldn't bomb that part of the fort. Then he slipped down and got a *djellaba* from the pile in the sallyport.

"'Morin,' he said to me, putting on the *djellaba*, 'I've got us all into this trap, and I'm going to get us out of it. Take this key down to Schanz and tell him to unlock the door to the dungeon, but to keep everybody down there for a minute.'

"Wondering what was up, I didn't move fast enough. The airplane was circling toward the front. As it passed the gate, Wheary let go with a whole belt, shooting a mile under it. The Riffians immediately came out and joined in with their rifles. I tried to run them, but I was too late. The wind from the first bomb knocked me over. Another landed squarely over the gate, dumping a car-load of stones on me and stretching me cold. But I can testify, *caballeros*, that Sergeant Wheary went west over a golden bridge."

"He's telling the truth," said Kirkland slowly. "I saw that stunt. I thought Wheary was a Riffian who didn't know anything about a machine-gun. Fellows, he was deliberately drawing the airplane's fire. Do you realize what that means?"

"*Santissima!*" murmured Hernandez. "It means that he was sacrificing himself for us."

"Exactly," breathed Kirkland, then added miserably: "I, for one, hate to have to say anything against that sort of man. It isn't because he's my countryman——"

"Well, suppose we don't," suggested Rittwagen, lighting his porcelain pipe, which was somehow still intact. "Let's do some tall lying about the Riffians storming the fort. Wheary has a wonderful reputation with the officers, so it ought to pass. What do you say, fellows?"

"Sure, sure," responded the crowd avidly. "It's the best for all of us. We're all anxious to do anything in our power to square things."

"Well, who's a good liar?" asked Kirkland. "Don't all speak at once."

"Schanz is the only non-com," chuckled Rittwagen, his blue eyes twinkling. "Perhaps he——"

"The nomination is accepted," laughed Schanz happily. "If you fellows are good enough to give me a chance to lie for my life, I know I can tell one that will pass. In fact, I'm gambling my neck that I get Sergeant Wheary another medal."

Over in the water shed, where Rufini and Maurras were working on him, Sergeant Wheary's voice rose in a raucous cry:

"Whisky!"

---

Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,  
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one knows,  
But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,  
And many a Garden by the Water blows.

And David's lips are lockt; but in divine  
High-piping Pehleví, with "Wine! Wine! Wine!  
Red Wine!"—the Nightingale cries to the Rose  
That sallow cheek of hers t' incarnadine.

—*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam.*

# The Vengeance of Sa'ik

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

*A stirring tale of the Arab revolt against Turkey during the World War—a story of the desert and the unleashed blood-lust of a fierce race of warriors*

“**N**O NEED to waste your perfectly good Arabic on me, Mr. Frank Bidwell,” said the single remaining patron of the tiny coffee shop in which I had temporarily become Abdullah, hewer of Latakia, drawer of coffee, and pipe-bearer for the individuals of assorted color and nationality who infested the port of Jidda. “Your accent and your make-up are both top-hole, but I have the means of learning things.”

I glanced sharply at the tall, broad-shouldered man, whose cloak, head-cloth, swarthy features and grizzled beard seemed to proclaim him a Bedouin of middle age, out who spoke English with a British accent.

“What then?” I asked, raking the embers of the fire more closely beneath the bubbling copper pot, and trying to look unconcerned.

“Simply this. I can offer you employment which you will find both interesting and lucrative. You love adventure, and you work for your living. What do you say?”

Studying the man covertly, I plodded about in leisurely native fashion, replacing *shishas* and cleansing cups left by departed patrons. The business would have something to do with the war, of course. The attempt of the Arabs to wrest Medina from the Turks had failed miserably—due to lack of modern rifles and artillery, according to popular report. And after the troops of the revolting Feisal had been driven back with heavy losses, a characteristic Turkish revenge had been taken on the helpless inhab-

itants of the Awali suburb—butchery, rape and the torch. It was my business as a war correspondent to learn and report these things, and one can learn much in a coffee shop if he keeps his eyes and ears open, although the pay is small and the work drudgery.

“Perhaps,” continued the pseudo-sheik, after puffing reflectively at his *shisha* for some time, “you fear that I am on the wrong side.”

“Hardly,” I replied, “since you have a decided insular accent, and the United States fights shoulder to shoulder with Great Britain in a common cause. I was merely wondering who you are and just how much you know about me.”

“Know Reginald Graves?” he asked suddenly.

The name called up a vision of a table at Shepheard's in Cairo some few weeks before, and of confidences exchanged with a brother war correspondent from London during an evening which had been pleasantly punctuated by the disappearance of tall empty bottles instantly replaced by tall full ones, well chilled.

“So Graves told you about me. Is he here?”

“He—er—was here. In fact he visited this very shop yesterday and recognized you, but did not dare make himself known because of the presence of several men he suspected of being Turkish spies. He left here this morning—I may not say for where—but the mission was a dangerous one; such a mission as he led me to believe you might enjoy.”



"Perhaps he misinformed you," I replied, "and perhaps not. My calling leads me to mingle with many people, yet I have always made it a rule to inquire into the antecedents of men I call comrades. In this particular you have a decided advantage over me."

"Quite right," he said, thoughtfully fingering his coffee cup. "I hope that I may be able to satisfy you. I have purposely let you know that I am an Englishman. Only a few men in high places know my real name. Would it suffice if I were to tell you that I am a British patriot, and am he whom the Arabs call 'Sa'ik'?"

Sa'ik, the Striker—the Thunderbolt of Al Yaman. The name loomed big in my mind. Many were the tales I had heard of the daring and valor of this man, presumably a desert Arab of the Banu Asadin, fighting on the side of the revolutionists—a thorn in the side of the Turks whom he worried and raided constantly, fearlessly and relentlessly. Sometimes he worked alone—sometimes with a few companions, and sometimes as commander of a small army, usually composed of hand-picked cutthroats and desperadoes. As soon as he spoke the name Sa'ik I recognized him from numerous descriptions.

"Your past performances are sufficient recommendation," I said.

"Now as to your pay," he went on, "I can promise you——"

"Forget the pay," I interrupted. "All I ask is food, shelter, means of transportation, and one chance in ten to get back with my copy."

"Which will not be detrimental to our cause?"

"Of course not."

"I trust you. To tell the truth, I have only come to you because you are the one properly qualified man in this city in whom I can place any trust, and I need a good lieutenant."

"Are we to go it alone?"

"No. I only wish we might. The band of scurvy ruffians I have been forced to employ because time presses and there are no others available, will need much watching, and unfortunately I find it necessary to sleep now and then, despite native tradition to the contrary."

"Interesting," I commented. "When do we start?"

"Tonight at eleven. Meet me at the Khan of Ibrahim before seven if possible."

**P**RIMPTLY at seven — having quitted Hassan ben Mohammed, my employer, after a lengthy argument over my wages—I casually strolled into the courtyard of the Khan of Ibrahim. Wending my way among calm, kneeling dromedaries, and stamping, fly-tormented donkeys, I presently found Sa'ik, unconcernedly smoking a cigarette near the entrance.

"On time, I see," he said in Arabic after we had exchanged the customary Moslem greeting of peace. "Follow me."

He led me to the curtained alcove which was his private sleeping-room, and there decked me in the full regalia of a Bedouin, including a *jambiyah*, or curved knife, a long, heavy simitar, and a pair of

beautiful, pearl-handled forty-five caliber Colt revolvers. I was delighted when I saw the latter weapons, with which I had become fairly proficient in the West.

"Graves told me you had a preference for Colt six-shooters," he said. "Personally I have always favored Luger automatics, but every man to his taste."

"Thoughtful of you," I replied. "Thanks, a lot."

"Don't mention it. I've an eye to efficiency, that's all. If you're ready, we'll go down and inspect the troops."

Having quitted the inn we made our way through crowded bazars and narrow streets to the docks. In addition to the usual quota of *dhows*, fishing-boats, and coastwise vessels, I noticed that two British gunboats rode at anchor in the harbor. Only a short distance from us a British merchantman was unloading a number of bales into *sambuks*, which were bringing them ashore to where a file of Egyptian soldiers stood guard.

As we strolled along the waterfront, Sa'ik nodded toward the bales.

"Merchandise for our caravan," he said. "My men are late, which is to be expected. They will be along presently."

We came up to where the bales were being piled, and the Egyptian guards eyed us suspiciously until Sa'ik presented a paper to the commanding officer. Then, while I waited on shore, he went out to the ship in one of the *sambuks* to exchange certain papers with the master. I noticed that the bales were of two sizes, one small and nearly square, the other over five feet long and coffin-shaped. I observed, also, that the perspiring porters struggled under the weight of the smaller bales as if they had been filled with lead.

Scarcely had my companion got back from the ship ere a small caravan approached, consisting of some thirty armed men, mounted on dromedaries and leading about fifty pack camels. Five of these

were loaded, but the others bore empty pack-saddles. Behind them came two boys, each of whom led a magnificent saddle animal.

"What do you think of my troops?" my companion asked, nodding toward the approaching caravan.

I scrutinized the mounted men, and for a moment felt rather sorry I had quit my comparatively healthful job with Hassan. They were, without question, the toughest-looking bunch of unhung gallows-birds I had ever seen—and they were to be my traveling companions!

"They look hard," I said in answer to the question of Sa'ik.

"Rather," he replied. "There are perhaps three men in the lot who wouldn't slit our throat for an ounce of *tumbak*, or even for the pleasure of it."

"Three out of thirty," I mused. "There's the ten-to-one chance I asked for."

"Right. I'll point out the three later, but don't put too much trust even in them."

He took command of the party instantly, brought order out of confusion in five minutes, and the loading of the kneeling, protesting pack camels went forward with speed and precision.

When all was in order we mounted and rode forth from the city into the gathering dusk, Sa'ik leading the procession, I bringing up the rear.

As we rode beneath the sky, now beginning to glitter with stars, I considered the situation in which I found myself. There was no doubt that it was desperate. Here we were, with arms and ammunition—for such I had guessed our bales to contain—destined for the Arab revolutionary army which had just been defeated. We would have to pass through

enemy-controlled country, and were in constant danger from the Turks, but worst of all, we were by no means sure that we were not in worse danger from the men of our own party. To a man, Sa'ik had told me, their chief consideration had been gold rather than patriotism. Even the three less-to-be-suspected ones he had presented to me before he left—although he said they had made themselves known to him as full-fledged revolutionists by certain signs—were more concerned about wages than national freedom.

Personally, I had not been more favorably impressed with these three than any of the other ruffians in the group. There was Hamed ibn Yusuf, the one-eyed, whose black patch only added to the ferocity of his hawk-like face covered with a short growth of grizzled beard.

Then there was Silat, the giant negro, with hideous pock-marked features that gave him a ferocious expression—Silat the Demon, whose favorite weapon was the *yatagan*, the terrible double-curved sword, and who displayed two of them, pommel to pommel, in his sash, in addition to his *jambiyah* and pistol.

The third man of the partly-to-be-trusted group was Abu Makarish, whose bushy beard flamed from copious applications of henna, whose garments were resplendent as the rainbow, and whose breath, at starting, had smelt strongly of *fazikh* despite the prohibitory teachings of the Koran with regard to intoxicating liquors.

I was surprised and amused when we stopped for rest, smokes and prayers, and this old red-bearded hypocrite acted as *Imam* and led our evening devotions. But, I reasoned, as we remounted and rode on, he was perhaps more pious at heart than a certain deacon I had known at home—a man who could pray loud and long on Sunday, but spent the rest of

the week defrauding honest men and women under the cover of his sanctimoniousness.

As the first gray light of dawn began to blot out the stars we came to a small grove of date-palms and sycamores in the midst of which was a brick-walled well. Here we halted, pitched our tents, spread our rugs, baked bread and made coffee.

Having breakfasted, I was strolling about the place smoking my *chibuk* when I noticed Abu Makarish in earnest conversation with two of the men. They stood apart from the others in the thickest part of the grove, and I noticed that our red-bearded *Imam* did most of the talking while the other two listened and nodded as if in approbation. Perhaps, I thought, the old reprobate was exhorting them to greater piety—or mayhap, what was more probable—they were the custodians of a bottle or two of *fazikh*.

Returning to the tent which I shared with Sa'ik a few minutes later, I noticed that he appeared agitated. His usually steady hand shook as he raised a cigarette to his lips.

"I will stand first watch," he said in Arabic. "Get some sleep until I call you."

I bowed, entered the tent, and was soon fast asleep, having been awake for some twenty-six hours.

I DO not know how long I slept, nor just what it was that awakened me. I have no memory of having heard a sound, yet something had caused me to become wide awake in an instant. The first thing I saw was a muscular brown fist gripping a *jambiyah* and poised just above my breast. I was lying on my right side, facing the tent wall, my head pillowed on my right arm. There was no time to seize a weapon, nor indeed to do anything but that which I did. Grasping the descending wrist with my left hand, I flung myself backward. The keen blade

slashed my left forearm and cutting through the rug on which I had been lying, buried itself in the hard earth. The pain of the wound caused me to release my hold on the wrist of my unseen assailant, whereupon the arm and *jambiyah* disappeared beneath the tent wall, and I heard the sound of running feet.

I sprang erect, seeing red both literally and figuratively, as my cut arm was bleeding profusely. Whipping out both pistols, I dashed out of the tent, only to run plump into Sa'ik.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"An assassin!" I flung at him, as I hurried around the tent with six-shooters ready for action.

The thin growth of trees at that point could scarcely have concealed a man, yet there was no one in sight. Sa'ik came up, and we looked behind every tree and scanned the broad plain beyond. The result was negative.

I holstered my six-shooters and we returned to the tent, where Sa'ik examined the hole cut in his rug. After copiously dressing my wounded arm with iodine taken from his medicine chest, he bound it up.

"You had a close call," he said, "and the sneaking, would-be murderer was undoubtedly one of our men. Do you think you could recognize that hand and arm again?"

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "The hand was brown, as are the hands of all of our men except Silat. As for the *jambiyah*, I had no time to notice its outstanding features, if indeed it had any."

"What about clothing?"

"There was a brown sleeve——"

"Of course. Most of the men have brown *jellabas*. It is patent that there is no evidence on which we can act, as yet. But take heart. Time may reveal the culprit."

"Small comfort," I muttered, "when

he is sure to stab me in the back at the first opportunity."

"Did I not warn you that we were on a dangerous mission—that my men were not trustworthy?" he asked.

"You did," I replied, "and I spoke hastily. Guess my nerves are rather jumpy."

"Don't blame you a bit. Most any one—"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of one of the camel-men.

"Two camels are missing, Sidi," he said, "the mounts of Humayd and Kasim."

"Have they been notified?" inquired Sa'ik, springing to his feet.

"They are not in their tents or anywhere in the camp," was the reply.

Sa'ik's brow contracted, and he strode outside the tent without a word. Then I heard him thundering orders in his perfect Arabic:

"Rouse all the men. Break camp at once."

I followed him out of the tent, and saw that his orders were being carried out, but with surly looks and considerable grumbling.

He turned to me with a grim smile.

"You will guard our rear as before, Abdullah," he said. "We must do half of tonight's marching today, else those two traitors who have escaped will have the Turkish jackals picking our bones in short order."

There came a sudden uproar from the men who were striking the tents. A knot of these suddenly gathered before one of them, and through the group came two figures, carrying the limp form of a third.

Sa'ik and I hurried to the spot where Hamed the One-Eyed and the black Silat were bending over the prostrate figure of Abu Makarish. The eyes of the *Imam* were closed, and the end of his bushy red beard was bound against his throat by the

thick folds of an *aakal* or head-rope which was tightly knotted around his neck.

Hamed whipped out his *jambiyah* and cut the knotted rope. Then he held his ear to the breast of the strangled man. Looking up in a moment, he sheathed his *jambiyah* and said:

"He is received into the mercy of Allah."

"And we have an added reason to make keen our weapons against the traitors, Humayd and Kasim," said Sa'ik. "But we have no time for mourning now. If we remain here overlong we may be even as our departed comrade, Abu Makarish—may Allah grant him clemency. Make haste, men. And do you, Hamed and Silat, strip the body and pile stones over it. The dead can make no use of weapons or clothing, but they are useful to the living."

Hamed and Silat remained behind to complete the work of burial, after which they were to rejoin us, for their saddle animals could easily overtake our slower and more heavily laden pack camels.

As we moved away, I glanced at the prostrate form of Abu Makarish, and could have sworn that I saw his breast rising and falling as if he were breathing. But Hamed, at this moment, stepped into my line of vision, and I did not look again, putting it down as a hallucination, due to overwrought nerves.

After we had covered several miles, Sa'ik temporarily placed a man at the head of the caravan, and halting his beast at one side, reviewed our line. When I had come opposite him, he rode up beside me so closely that the equipage of our two mounts rubbed together.

"There is a plot—I am not sure but that there are two," he said, "to get possession of the bales. Hamed and Silat are probably in the pay of the Turks, as was Abu Makarish. The latter would have

sent for a Turkish force to come and surround us, and bribed Humayd and Kasim for the purpose. These two, being loyal neither to the Ottoman throne nor the Sharif of Mecca, but *harami*, common thieves and robbers who fatten themselves on the misfortunes of both sides, strangled him, and have gone to organize a group of their fellow cutthroats to attack us. It is probable that Hamed and Silat will not return, but will hasten to the nearest Turkish garrison, believing that I suspect them. If they do return, watch them like a hawk, and shoot to kill at the first suspicion of treason. We are two against many, but with resource and valor we can win through to the lines of Feisal."

## 3

As we rode on through the afternoon the heat waxed and waned, but the dust and biting flies were constant and persistent tormenters. About six we halted in a dry wady for coffee, food and rest. We were lolling on the side of a hummock which overlooked the caravan, smoking our *chibuks* and discussing our plans, when Zantut, a lean, hawk-nosed camel-driver of chocolate-brown complexion, sidled up to us, casting fearful glances behind him from time to time, as if afraid of being seen in our company. He addressed himself to Sa'ik.

"I have made a discovery, *Sidi*, of tremendous importance to our cause," he said. "If thou wilt grant me a word in private——"

"Speak on," admonished Sa'ik. "My lieutenant is loyal."

"Six weeks ago," he said, "I was in the village of Umm al Arif, when the Turkish army marched through it. As the village had been hostile, the Ottoman dogs were given their way with the people. You, *Sidi*, would know the result. Men tortured and butchered. Women and

children violated and murdered. Everywhere looting and wanton destruction.

"I was armed, but my arms were useless against so many, so I hid in the ruins of a house which had burned some weeks before. No one paid any attention to the old ruins, so I was reasonably safe.

"As I watched the many outrages against my people my blood boiled, and more than once I was on the point of rushing out and fighting these fiends until killed—but a voice whispered to me: 'Not yet. The time for vengeance has not arrived.' So I held my hand and remained hidden.

"From my place of concealment I saw the Turkish commander with his staff, laughing and chatting as their horses stepped over the bodies of the slain. With the commander was a tall young fellow in the spiked helmet and uniform of a German officer.

"While they were talking, a young woman was dragged before them. She was the youngest wife of the headman of the village. When her *yashmak* was stripped from her face, I saw that she was beautiful. So did the German officer, who asked the Turkish commander to give her to him. He consented.

"The German, who appeared to be far gone in drunkenness, got down from his horse and tossed his reins to a soldier. The Turkish commander rode on with his staff, seeking new amusements, but the German remained, talking to the girl. Presently he tried to embrace her, but she slapped his face. He cursed her and seized her by the left arm, but with her right she drew a dagger from her bosom to stab him. The dog of a *Ferringhi* was too quick and too strong for her. Seizing her wrist with his left hand, he twisted it until she cried out in pain and the dagger clattered to the pavement. Then he called three Turkish soldiers to follow him, and dragged her into the house

across the way from where I was hidden.

"The army passed on, company after company, but still no one emerged from that house across the way. At times I fancied I heard shrieks from the young woman, but of this I could not be certain, as people were being killed and tortured all around me, and their cries, together with the shouts of soldiers and officers and the tramping of men and horses, made hearing difficult. Presently, when the vanguard of the army had passed, the German came out, mounted his horse, and galloped forward. Behind him came the three Turkish soldiers, laughing uproariously.

"Leaving my hiding-place, I followed these three and the man who had held the German's horse. Coming up behind them, I killed three with my pistols before they realized a living enemy was behind them. The fourth dropped his rifle and surrendered. At first I was minded to shoot him on the spot, but decided to take him back and kill him in the presence of the wife of the head man if she were yet alive. Accordingly I made him march back with me to the house he had just quitted.

"As soon as we entered the place I saw the girl, but not alive. With only a few bloody shreds of clothing remaining on her shapely body she was crucified against the thick wooden panels of the *Bab al Harim*. A bayonet had been driven through each of her hands and another through her feet. The handle of a fourth projected from the alabaster skin of her abdomen, and I saw that, had she lived, she had ere long born her lord a child.

"Having witnessed this sight, I was so filled with rage that I would instantly have killed the Turk who cowered before me, but I remembered that there was a fifth party to this horrible crime whose name I did not know. Accordingly, I wrung from him the name of the German

O. S.—4

who was chiefly responsible for the crime, before I killed him."

"What was the name?" asked Sa'ik, who had paled with anger as the story went on.

"He was the man who had caused more deaths and suffering in Arabia than the most bloodthirsty of the Ottoman commanders. Speaking Arabic perfectly, and a past master in disguising himself, he breaks bread and eats salt with us, and the Turk acts on the information we innocently impart to him. He is the spy, Hans Ubers."

"You have told a long and harrowing tale, Zantut, but I fear I do not catch the moral. Or was the tale merely told as a means of diversion during our hour of rest?"

"There is, perhaps, no moral to the tale, *Sidi*," replied Zantut, "but in it lies a sequel and a warning. The voice of this spy took on a peculiar quavering sound when he became agitated. I noted this sound when he dragged the young woman into the house, calling the Turkish soldiers to follow him."

"Yes?"

"Today, when Abu Makarish was found strangled in his tent, I was standing at some distance loading my camel, yet I swear that I heard, for a moment, those same quavering tones, that identical voice, which I shall never forget. *Sidi*, I am positive that the terrible Hans Ubers is among us in disguise."

"And whom do you suspect?"

"No one and every one—that is with the exception of my lord and his trusted lieutenant, Abdullah. None of the men with whom we ride have I met before. At least a dozen of them could be Hans Ubers in disguise. I have watched these, and when the opportunity permitted, engaged them in conversation, but so far Allah has not seen fit to reveal my enemy to me."

"And when he does?"

Zantut tapped the hilt of his *jambiyah* significantly.

"You have my permission, and welcome," said Sa'ik, rising. "We must to the march now, but keep a sharp lookout, and report to me any man of whom you have the slightest suspicion."

## 4

**A**T MIDNIGHT we made camp in a grove of stunted trees which surrounded a pond of brackish water.

While we were eating, Hamed the One-Eyed and Silat the Pock-Marked rode in on a single camel. They dismounted stiffly, and came at once to Sa'ik to report.

"What means this tardiness, and where is the other beast?" thundered our leader.

"The she-camel is dead," replied Hamed, "or will be ere the night has passed unless the jackals grow soft-hearted and spare her. The clumsy mother of calamities stepped into a crevice and snapped her leg, so that the splintered bone came through the skin. As the mount of Silat was thus forced to bear a double burden, our speed was cut in half; hence we are tardy."

"What have you done with the trappings and saddle bags, and with the weapons and clothing of Abu Makarish?"

"Fearing that we might not be able to overtake you if our beast were too heavily laden, we cached these under a pile of stones in a place where it will not be noticed from the road, planning to get them on our return."

"Who told you we would return this way?"

"We only surmised it, but——"

"Enough! We may or may not return this way—or any other. However, I will overlook your disobedience this once. Go get your ill-earned food and rest, bunglers."

Having finished our meal, we lit our *chibuks* and smoked for some time in silence. Then Sa'ik rose, shook the ashes from his *chibuk* and said, *sotto voce*:

"I will now shatter native tradition by sleeping during the first watch. Be alert for danger from within the camp as well as from without. Our own sentries may usher an enemy in on us at any minute. Call me at dawn so that you can get your six hours before we leave. You'll need them. Good-night."

"Pleasant dreams," I replied, speaking as softly as he, lest our English should be overheard.

Before I had half finished my second pipe all of our men but the four doing sentry duty had retired, and the midnight stillness of the desert had settled over the camp.

This silence seemed to grow more intense during the early morning hours, so that each trifling sound, the pop of an ember in the dying fire, the occasional grunt or sigh of a camel, the buzz of some night-flying insect, seemed magnified to enormous proportions.

At the first hint of dawn, I rekindled the fire before our tent in order that I might prepare my breakfast of dates cooked in clarified butter. The mimosa branches we had gathered for fuel were none too dry, so I bent over and blew on them to make them blaze up. My patience was presently rewarded by a tongue of flame, then several others, and the fire crackled merrily, lighting up my surroundings for several feet.

I was about to straighten up when suddenly, from the darkness at my left, I saw the flash and heard the crack of a rifle. A bullet cut through the back of my head-cloth, barely grazing my neck. Acting more through instinct than reason, I toppled forward and slightly to one side, to avoid the fire that had made me an easy mark for my unseen enemy, and lay per-

feebly still. Another shot rang out, then two more in quick succession, but no bullet struck near me. Evidently my assailant had drawn the fire of one of our sentries and had replied.

This was my cue to get out of the circle of firelight, which I accomplished by rolling over and over on the ground.

When I arose the camp was in an uproar. Sa'ik came rushing out of the tent, rifle in hand, and close behind me pressed Silat and several others, similarly armed, followed a moment later by Hamed the One-Eyed. I drew my pistols, and we deployed in the direction from which the bullet had come.

The enemy, we soon learned, had disappeared, much to the mystification of the two sentries, who had rushed at him from opposite directions. The one who had been nearest him, and with whom he had exchanged shots, averred that he must be a *jinni*, and swore that he had melted into the ground before his eyes.

"The dawn is not far off," said Sa'ik. "We shall then see what manner of tracks a *jinni* leaves in the sand."

By the time I had my breakfast cooked and eaten it was light enough to see quite distinctly. Sa'ik and I accordingly went to look for the spoor of my assailant.

The record written in the sand was plain enough. He had come from among the tents, circled our end of the camp, and squatted on the ground until I had made my fire sufficiently bright for him to sight his rifle without much fear of missing. After firing his second shot to check the attack of the sentry, he had evidently swung his rifle across his back, dropped on all fours, scuttled around behind our tent, and joined the men who came up behind me with their rifles. We were most mystified, however, by the size of his tracks. They were at least two inches longer than those of the giant Silat, and an inch wider.

This mystery was partly solved by Sa'ik a short time after, as he was preparing his breakfast. I was about to enter the tent, preparatory to retiring, when he signed to me to come over by the fire which I had kindled some time before. He pointed to a crescent-shaped object which he had raked from the embers with a stick. It was the charred tip of an enormous shoe.

"Your would-be assassin is a clever fellow," he said. "First he uses huge boots to disguise his tracks. Then he burns them in your own fire, that no evidence may be found upon him."

"And persistent," I replied. "Having failed with the dagger, he tries a bullet. What next?"

Sa'ik shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows? The *aakal*, perhaps. But get your needed rest. There is no fear of his attacking you in daylight while I watch the tent."

I did—about half of it, I should judge. Then my slumbers were rudely interrupted by several loud shouts and much excited talking outside.

Hastily arising, I hurried to the scene of excitement, which was near the center of the camp, only to find a scene quite similar to the one which I had witnessed some twenty-odd hours before. But this time it was Zantut, the sworn enemy of Hans Ubers, who had met death at the hands of the strangler. At sight of his protruding, blue-white tongue, and staring, glassy eyes, I turned away sickened with horror, smitten with the realization that a similar fate might overtake me before another twenty-four hours had passed.

**S**CARCELY had we resumed our march when a cry rang out from the front of the line:

"Back to the water-hole! We are surrounded by Turks!"

For the next few moments all was panic. Loads were dashed against trees, several girths were bursted and riders unseated.

Once more Hamed the One-Eyed proved himself a most able lieutenant. Having made his own camel kneel in the shallow basin which skirted the brackish pond, he dismounted and darted here and there among the men, tugging at lead-ropes, dragging in fallen pack-saddles, and calling words of help and encouragement to his companions.

It was due to his efforts that we had every camel out of sight and our men posted at intervals around the rim of the basin with their rifles ready, before the first enemy bullets began singing among the trees.

The Turks charged, and from my position on the basin's rim I could see that they numbered about a hundred horse, and fifty mounted on dromedaries.

For a few moments we had the advantage, shooting them down as they charged across the open desert. The advantage swung to their side, however, as soon as they dismounted and charged us among the trees, for they had outnumbered us more than five to one at the outset, and we had not been able to pot more than two dozen of them during the charge.

The hand-to-hand fighting that followed was furious and bloody. Discarding my rifle, I fired my two Colts until they were empty, then resorted to my simitar. Although I can use a saber fairly well, the extreme curve of the blade of the weapon with which Sa'ik had armed me was confusing, and my first close antagonist succeeded in getting past my guard with a deflected head-cut which sheared through my *aakal* and head-cloth, and parted my hair and scalp. Momentarily dazed by the blow, and confused

by the blood which ran down in my eyes, I firmly believed that moment would have been my last had it not been for Silat. The giant negro, swinging his two double-curved *yatagans* with terrible effect, happened to be at my side and noticed my plight. With a quick side-sweep of the weapon in his left hand he dealt my adversary a neck-cut that draped him over the edge of the basin, lifeless.

Weakened by my wound and the loss of blood, I tottered drunkenly for a moment, wiping the blood from my eyes with the sleeve of my *jellaba*. For the first time I noticed that Sa'ik had gone from my side, nor could I see him anywhere in the basin, either among the living or among the dead.

A Turk struck at me with his clubbed rifle. I evaded him, and cut him down.

We were reduced to five men now, completely surrounded by enemies who dared not shoot for fear of killing each other, but who were sure to slaughter us in the end if only by sheer force of numbers.

Suddenly I saw Sa'ik. He was standing beside a gorgeously uniformed Turkish officer, and watching the affray.

He said something to the officer, who smiled. Then he shouted to us:

"Surrender, you fools, as I have done. You can not hope to win, and the bales and camels are already taken."

"May the sun pour no blessing upon you, O traitor," responded Hamed the One-Eyed, stabbing a Turk in the throat. "We prefer to die fighting like true Banu Asadin—sons of the lion in valor as well as in name."

"On your head and eyes be it," replied Sa'ik, shrugging his shoulders and turning again to the Turkish officer.

Another man went down, then another, and we were reduced to three—Hamed, Silat and myself. While we fought off a dozen Turks the rest were engaged in

looting our caravan and complacently cutting the throats and stripping the corpses of our fallen comrades.

Having given up all hope of life, I had succeeded in banishing fear. My sole sensation was one of terrific, overpowering anger at the menacing, cutting, thrusting forms that confronted me, and I remember that I cursed them—ripping out Arabic abuse and American oaths alternately. Hamed the One-Eyed laughed as he fought, but Silat the Demon, twisting his thick blubber lips into horrible sneers, bragged of his own prowess and taunted his adversaries, calling them women and weaklings.

The swing of a clubbed rifle caught me on the thigh and I went down, still conscious, but unable to rise. Expecting my quietus at any moment, I lay there with the huge, sneering Silat standing over me, still taunting his foes, still cutting them down; while Hamed, standing back to back with him, continued to laugh and to wield simitar and *jambiyah*.

As all gunfire had ceased I was amazed to suddenly hear a terrific volley—then a shout: "The Arabs are upon us! A thousand Arabs are charging! To cover! To cover!"

"*Allaho akbar!*" cried Silat. "Allah is almighty!"

"*Alhamdolillah!*" responded Hamed. "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Three Worlds!"

THE thunder of thousands of hoofs mingled with the crackling of rifles, the whining of bullets, the shouts of the living and shrieks of the dying.

The Turks who had menaced my two remaining companions suddenly turned and fled, followed by the terrible and insatiable Silat. Hamed the One-Eyed stood and laughed at him for a moment; then he wiped his bloody simitar on the clothing of a fallen Turk, sheathed it with a

flourish, and dragged me down to the water's edge. I bathed my face and drank from my cupped hands, and he bound my head. The leg, he assured me after examination, was not broken but only temporarily paralyzed by the blow, and he advised me to attempt to stand on it.

Despite the fact that it was painful, the result was gratifying.

The Turks, although not as hopelessly outnumbered as we had been, surrendered after less than five minutes of fighting. While they were being disarmed and herded together outside the oasis, a huge fellow with a fiery red beard came shouldering through the crowd toward us. With a gasp of astonishment I recognized Abu Makarish, whom I had thought dead and buried. He embraced each of us in turn, calling down the peace and blessing of Allah, and I noticed that his breath smelt, if possible, more strongly of *fazikh* than on the day I had first met him.

"*Bismillah!*" he exclaimed to Hamed. "I could recite the Fatihah forward and backward for joy of finding you alive, *Sidi*."

I was astounded. "*Sidi*," the equivalent of "My Lord," or "Master," was a new designation for the ragged old monocular.

Before I could recover from my astonishment, Silat came up, accompanied by a small, wizened man with piercing black eyes, a thin mustache, and a scanty black beard. Behind them came two Badawin whom I recognized as Humayd and Kasim, our two deserters, dragging Sa'ik, whose hands were bound behind his back.

"We have captured the pestilent malefactor alive, *Sidi*," said Silat, bowing before Hamed. "Will you slay this ignoble strangler of true believers, or may I have the honor and pleasure?"

Ignoring the question of Silat, Hamed

turned to the little man who had come up with him.

"You are the Sharif Ali ben Suwayd, headman of the village of Umm al Arif, are you not?" he asked.

The little man answered in the affirmative.

"When I sent Humayd and Kasim to you for aid, and later Abu Makarish, it was with the promise that I would wreak vengeance on a certain dog who violated your *barim* and tortured and slew your wife and unborn child."

"Yes, by Allah! Where is the spawn of a disease, the *kafr* who masquerades as a true believer and slays women and children? By the life of my head and the tombs of my forefathers, I will strike off his head and hang his skull over the gate of our village, as a warning to whoso will be warned."

"There he stands," said Hamed, pointing to Sa'ik, whose features instantly paled beneath their coat of tan. "Don't you know me yet, Hans Ubers, the German, alias Reginald Graves, the Englishman, alias Sa'ik, the Arab? Don't you recognize me—the real Sa'ik, whose name and papers you stole that you might seize the weapons consigned to Feisal?"

He ripped the patch from his eye, and it was plain that it had merely served as a disguise. Then he stood erect, shoulders no longer drooping, tall and straight as a young pine.

"You thought you had me permanently cornered in the cave in the Wady al Ward, when you left two men to guard me and made off with my camel and saddle bags. But the old fox outwitted them—the thunderbolt struck them, and their bodies went to feed the jackals. My disguise fooled you when I went to you for employment, even as your disguise deceived the others, all save Humayd, Kasim, Silat, Abu Makarish, whom you thought you had strangled to death, and

me. It amused me to let you perform the work which I had intended doing myself—to watch you, and to thwart you."

He towered above the prisoner, looking down at him with a disdainful smile. Then he suddenly reached out and swept off the pseudo Sa'ik's head-cloth. With it there went a black wig which revealed a shock of bristling, closely cropped blond hair. The heavy beard did not come off so easily, but it came, disclosing skin of a much lighter shade than that which was artificially tanned above it.

"*Gott in Himmel!* Don't give me to this murderer! Take me back to Jidda, a prisoner of war!" The tones were high-pitched—quavering.

"How cooling is this to my heart and liver," said the Sharif, drawing his simitar. "O, mad dog and mangy wolf, know that your end is at hand."

"A moment, *Sidi*." The hand of the real Sa'ik fell on the upraised arm of the Sharif. "How goodly is the saying: 'Haste is often the father of regret.' "

"What foolery is this?" demanded the Sharif, his eyes flashing. "Is this filth out of *Ferringbistan*, then to be spared?"

"I promised to wreak vengeance, *Sidi*," replied Sa'ik, calmly. "The word of Sa'ik is his bond."

"Allah grant me the power of patience," muttered the bereaved man, sheathing his simitar.

"Take the prisoner into my tent, and guard him well," ordered Sa'ik. Then he waved his hand to Silat and Abu Makarish, who immediately caused two heavily loaded pack camels to rise, and led them away.

"Come to my tent for pipes and coffee, *Sidi*," invited Sa'ik, "and you too, Abdulla Effendi."

We sat in silence on a magnificent camel's hair Hamadan before the tent of our host, while he kindled a fire and prepared coffee. Presently he passed us live

coals for our *chibuks*, and later served the beverage, thick, black and very hot.

As out of a clear sky, Sa'ik suddenly addressed me.

"I praise Allah, to whom belong might and majesty, who caused me to miss you with both knife and bullet—for I seldom miss. I took you for a Turk in disguise, and the confidant of Hans Ubers, until I saw you fight and heard you curse in American today. Then I knew you must be loyal to our cause."

"Allah is all-seeing and all-knowing," I replied.

We sat in silence for some time. Presently Abu Makarish came up, combing his red beard with his fingers and looking highly pleased about something.

"All is in readiness, *Sidi*," he said, addressing Sa'ik.

The latter arose and said: "I ask your

indulgence for but a few moments. I have a trifling duty to perform. I will return shortly."

He went out, but Abu Makarish remained.

The stillness was suddenly rent by a single, piercing shriek of agony—quavering—blood-curdling—unearthly.

Then, above the gasps of wonder and exclamations of horror from the assembled men, there rose the clear, sing-song tones of the red-bearded *imam*:

"*Alhamdolillah!* Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Three Worlds! The Thunderer has thundered! The Striker has struck! Bear witness to that which you have heard this day, for it marks the vengeance of Sa'ik!"

"The Dragoman's Revenge," a fascinating tale of Hamed the Attar, by the author of the above story, will be published in our next issue.

# THE ROSE

*By HUNG LONG TOM*

My love is a rose  
That speaks to me in perfume.  
When I walk through the paths of the garden  
She sways gently toward me.

Ofttimes when the moon  
Glowes down from the great blue silence  
I press the soft petals to my lips  
And the dew, cool and lush, is like wine,  
Causing my emotions to vibrate  
Like lute strings.

When the wind blows gently through the garden  
It carries the fragrant voice of my dear one to me.

To have loved a woman is much,  
But naught compared to the love  
Of a perfect flower.

# The China Kid

By FRANK OWEN

*Yih Yoh's protestations of meekness masked the cruel heart of a tiger—a tale of the China Sea*

THEY had thrown him off the ship at Shanghai for habitual drunkenness. He had signed on as common sailor at San Francisco and then proceeded at once to "sign off" as far as any dependable work was concerned. The *Valido* was a tramp steamer that had plowed her way for years through the China Seas. All sorts and conditions of men had made up her various crews, but this particular one was a riddle. Despite his youth he was a lazy, good-for-nothing derelict. He had brought a quantity of liquor on board and bunked it in various parts of the ship. Then when he needed a drink, he did not have to depend on the philanthropy of his shipmates. Aside from liquor, the only thing he brought on board with him was a volume of Arthur Symon's poems. But it was only a single poem that appeared to hold any interest for him.

"Give me a long white road  
And the gray, wide path of the sea—

Drunk or sober, he used to sit for hours meditating over the couplet.

"The sea," he used to murmur in a maudlin voice, as he lay on the deck in the still of the night, "the sea promises everything, but it's like a faithless woman, giving nothing in return. When one tries to embrace her, to grasp her in one's arms, one finds but death. And even in death there is no rest. Sharks poking their horrible jaws among one's ribs to nibble off a bit of flesh. Life is a shark and death is the ocean in which it swims."

And then he would shriek with drunk-

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en laughter until one of the other members of the crew would empty a bucket of water over his face to drown the discord.

By the time the vessel reached Shanghai, his doom was sealed as far as continuing as a seaman aboard the *Valido* was concerned. Captain Yersen was a big, blunt man, who made his own laws and lived within them. The derelict was through. The night before the *Valido* left Shanghai he was, as usual, hilariously drunk. It was quite easy to dispose of him. His inert form was cast upon a shipment of rice on the wharf. When he awakened his ship was far at sea.

He shrugged his shoulders. It didn't matter. Life was a nuisance anyway. One could be equally as gloomy in Shanghai as in any other part of the world. Besides, he was tired of San Francisco. It had been a horrible disappointment to him. In life every man is an experiment of the Divine Chemist, and he was one of the failures.

Reluctantly he turned away from the wharf. A great rat scurried across his foot. He envied it.

"Lucky rat," he mused, "nobody expects anything from you, just a greedy, carnivorous scavenger. You never disappoint. Must be rather nice to live always along the river's edge."

Shanghai is one of the finest commercial cities in the world. With its fine avenues, lofty buildings, splendid shops, spacious hotels, it might well be compared with any Occidental city. It contains the most valuable street in all Asia, the Bund, which is the Fifth Avenue of

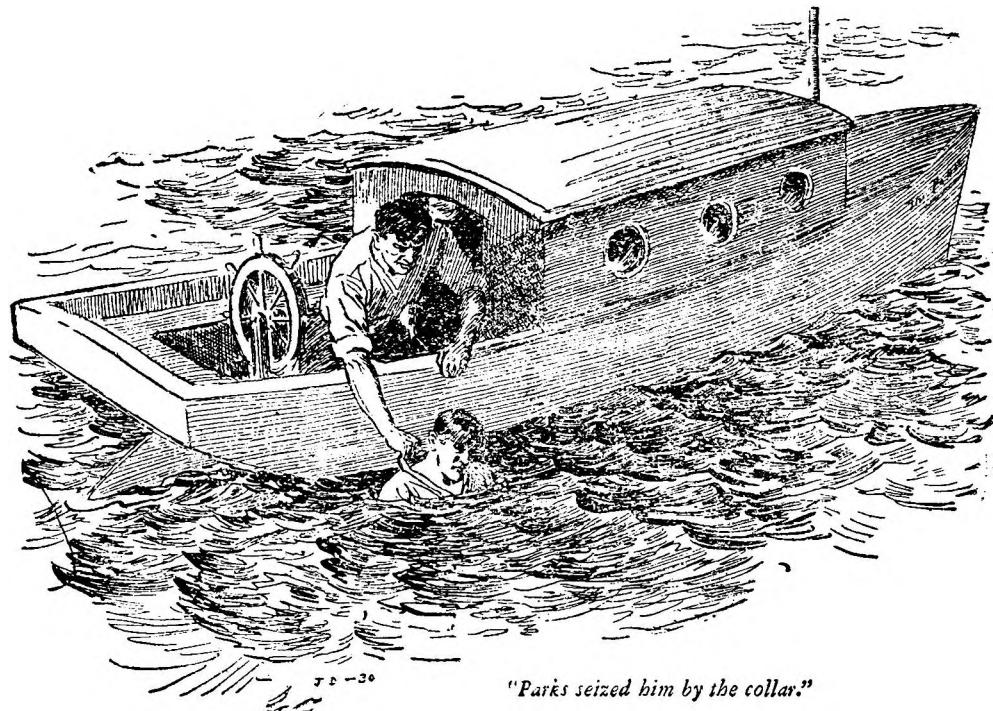
the East. An address on the Bund is almost a business guarantee of integrity. One scarcely needs any other rating.

But the beautiful avenues of Shanghai held no allure for the derelict, not even the Nanking Road, upon which it is said the whole world walks. There is a legend that to meet any one who lives it is only necessary to loiter upon the Nanking Road. Sooner or later he will come along. The Chinese are infinitely patient. They are content to wait. Time, calendars, days mean nothing to them. A week more or less, what matter? Indolence is in the blood, indolence and good-humor. For the peace of the world it is well that China, the most prolific of nations, has never been war-like. Conquering other countries never appealed to her.

THE derelict walked quickly through the city. He hated the pomp and splendor of government buildings. He walked and walked and walked on a road

that seemed endless, trying to shake the stain of civilization, which he hated, from his feet. How long it took to get out of the beautiful city and into the real Chinese Shanghai he did not know or care. Time meant nothing. He simply plodded dully on. Chinese Shanghai is immensely old. There was a village there when old Cathay first burst into bloom. In the wealth of the world it has never been important but in legend and dream it is of inestimable value. Here in the gloomy, shadowy, odoriferous alleys it was quite easy to find forgetfulness. Drugs, liquor, women, opium surreptitiously bartered—all were here for the asking. It is a section of disease and filth and superb mystery.

As the air became crowded with strange smells, the derelict breathed more freely. Here life was closer to that of the wharf-rats. Here men were automata, no personalities, no souls, merely gaunt ghosts waiting for some vagrant



breeze to carry their cramped mist-forms away. The derelict uttered a curse of happiness. No sham here, nothing but stark, bleak reality. No chance to be disillusioned. A man slunk by with a face so evil that it was unutterably repulsive. Half the nose was gone.

The derelict made his way to a filthy tea-house, where liquor and food were sold. Its lighting was of the sketchiest. It was hard to make out the grim, wasted forms that were hunched over the tables. In a far corner an aged crone was playing miserably on a lute. The notes seemed to screech with discordant laughter. There was no other laughter in this dive. The men murmured and groaned softly, an unintelligible gibberish. The derelict slunk into a seat near a spluttering lantern. As he did so, a tall, ragged fellow sat down opposite him.

"Evenin', pardner," he said huskily, drawing his shaky hand across his thin, cruel-looking lips.

"Pardner?" snapped the derelict. "Pardner of what?"

"Why, o' whatever you've got," was the frank reply.

"At least," chuckled the derelict, "you're no hypocrite. You're the first guy I ever met that wasn't a lying hypocrite. I'll share life with you. God, I wish I could give it to you all! Why is it necessary for an individual to eke out an existence that is distasteful to him, simply because through some faulty biological error he came into being? If only I could find some living thing in life that has an existence superior to that of a river rat! A rat is always sincere. It hates all things. It lives to pillage and destroy. It has long since solved the riddle of destiny."

"Wal," said the other, "you're sure a funny guy. My name is Parks, Gol Parks. I came to China 'bout thirty years ago to be a bookkeeper in a bank.

But somehow or other I decided I'd take a bit o' vacation before I commenced. And I just sort o' vacationed ever since. Don't know whether or not they're still holdin' that job. What's your name?"

"Who cares?"

"Well, I gotta call you sumpin'."

"Why?"

Gol Parks smiled. "Dunno," he confessed. "But you can't get along without a name. Couldn't get no letters."

"Who wants letters?"

"Lots o' people seem to, at times," said Gol Parks, a trifle wistfully. "They gets lonesome. That's the only thing I got to complain about in this yere life. No letters. Hell, I hate to pass a post-office. Sometimes I'd like to hear from the wife and kids again."

"If you miss your wife," drawled the derelict, "why don't you go home?"

"Nothin' doin'," said Gol Parks quickly. "I'd hate to ever have to take up with her again. Awful woman. Ran the house like it were a jail. China is freedom. I wouldn't mind an occasional letter providin' the ol' gal didn't come out here herself. How she'd hate this part o' Shanghai! She'd want to start house-cleanin' right off. Nope, reckon I'm better off here alone, forgotten, in China. . . . But you haven't tol' me your name yet, so I guess I'll just give you one myself. Guess I'll call you 'the China Kid.' Sounds kind of swanky and refined like, don't it? Now how about a drink?"

"That," declared the derelict, "is the first sensible thing you've said since you've been in here."

FOR the next hour or so they drank nauseating liquor from glasses that were none too clean. After awhile they got very chummy. They vowed they'd never separate. They kept their promise for the night at least. When they awak-

ened they were lying on the floor in a room in back of the tea-house. A score or so of other inert forms were huddled in grotesque positions on the floor about them.

Gol Parks awakened first. His head was spinning around, not so much from the effects of the liquor as from the foul odor all about him, the stench of unwashed yellow bodies, cheap liquor, vile tobacco and the rather nauseating smell of cooking food.

He leaned over and shook the sodden form of the China Kid.

"Wake up!" he cried. "Wake up! For the first time in my life I got a urge to see a sunrise."

The China Kid opened his eyes and gazed blearily about him. "Why worry about sunrise?" he drawled. "It always does."

"Anyway," persisted Gol Parks, "let's get out. My mouth tastes as though I'd been eating a pagoda without even scraping off the paint."

"All right," agreed the China Kid reluctantly, "I'll give in to you this once, but if you're going to begin getting temperamental and arty, craving for perfumed air and pink dawns, then you and me are going to bust up. Come to think of it, why should I go with you, anyhow? You got a mean-looking face. Like a weasel."

Gol Parks spat his contempt. "You're no Buddha yourself," he said. "Did you ever get a flash of your pan in a mirror?"

"Certainly, and it's not bad either when it's washed. Of course there's a scar and a dent here and there, but taken all in all it's quite a good map. I let my beard grow so that women won't be influenced by my beauty."

Gol Parks shook his head mournfully. "You're not the man I thought you were," he said. "However, most folks is disappointing."

When they emerged from the tea-

house it was still dark. There was no sign of the sun. From a building across the way came the singsong, monotonous chant of music. Occasionally there were guttural snatches of song. It is well said that China never sleeps, nor for that matter does she ever really wake up. Forever she remains in a drowsy, listless state.

"Let's go along to the waterfront," suggested the China Kid. "It's the only place that ever interests me. Do you know, I've always thought just as that poet guy wrote, that somewhere there is a long white road for every man that leads to some measure at least of contentment. In my own case, I sort of feel that my particular road is on the gray wide path of the sea. Poetry is a funny thing, makes you feel sort of strange, different, as though maybe life is more than the hopeless, helpless jumble that it appears to 'most every one. Of course it isn't worth a damn, but poetry gives a luster to it that it don't possess."

"Say," broke in Gol Parks, as they walked along, "what ever turned a rather decent chap like you into a bum? I'd think as how the world could use you in some better way."

"Bosh!" exclaimed the China Kid. "The world wanted to use me for a football. Never got any breaks. Just kicked around. Did you ever stop to think how much pleasure the football itself gets out of a swell game? I know. 'Cause I'm one. . During the War, I wanted to enlist. Was too young. Wouldn't take me. Finally I did break in. Actually got to France. Two days later Armistice signed. Great disappointment. Should have been illegal to spoil a good war that way. I lingered around Europe for awhile. Had to. It seems they must have lost our regiment. Forgot where it was. Finally it occurred to somebody that we ought to be sent home. So they

gave us tickets back, deloused us, shrunk our clothes and set us adrift. When I got back to Illinois I found my girl had set me adrift also. She was engaged to be married to a chap who escaped the draft because he had scruples and flat feet. She introduced us, said she wanted us to be friends. Well, I got a bit temperamental, stuck out my paw and socked him on the beak. While they were clearing away the wreckage I lit out. That night I got drunk and I don't think I've ever really been sober since. The Chinese have the right idea about women. Beat 'em up occasionally. It keeps them in their place. A guy's an awful fool to go wild 'bout a girl. None of 'em are worth it. They tease you along, wreck everything for you, and laugh. If woman is God's greatest creation he ought to be ashamed of himself. Where the hell's the sun? Is it tonight, tomorrow night or what night is it?"

They hailed a ricksha, against which a coolie was sleeping. He was perhaps one of the thousands of homeless wanderers in China who sleep at night by the roadside wherever they happen to be. Gol Parks understood Chinese and could talk it fluently, so he had no trouble in making it understood that they wished to be taken to the nearest waterfront.

"This," he said, as he climbed into the ricksha, is one of the few times when I am truly happy. Every man likes to look down on some one who's in a lower station than himself. That's why I look down on that poor toiling coolie and gloat. Folks is funny. More than ninety per cent cantankerous and only about one-tenth of one per cent charitable. The average man when he gives a nickel to charity wants the donation to be bestowed in a glaring arc-light and in front of a movie camera. If only unselfish people were permitted to remain alive, reckon

there wouldn't be many left outside o' me."

"Aw shut up!" snorted the China Kid. "You don't talk, you just drivel."

"All right," replied Gol Parks affably. "I'm shut. Just sort o' closed for repairs. Will reopen shortly with the same talent."

The rest of the trip was passed in silence as far as Gol Parks was concerned, but there was plenty of noise about them, the incessant, droning voice of China. The patter of feet upon the roads through which they passed, the barking of dogs that looked as wild as any mountain lion, the chatter, chatter, chatter of the throngs that surged about them. Gol Parks enjoyed the scene immensely. For a moment he was king. To be sure he did not have coin enough to pay for the ricksha hire but he had utter faith in the China Kid. The kid seemed to have money; why then should he want for friends?

Meanwhile the China Kid sat sullenly in the ricksha, his eyes half closed. He seemed to be either sleeping or thinking deeply.

**A**T LAST they arrived at the waterfront. The shrieking of whistles drowned every other noise. It seemed as though the great vessels lying at anchor in the yellow, loess-dyed waters were having an argument.

"What is there in the air of China," muttered the China Kid, "that makes every one so talkative, that makes even steamers jabber? If they don't shut up I'll go mad. Quietude is the really only supreme thing in life, quietude and forgetfulness."

He climbed out of the ricksha and paid the coolie; then he turned once more to his companion.

"Do you know, Mr. Parks," he said, "life owes us a huge debt. We've worked for her for years and what have we got

in return? Nothing. Now she's got to pay us something on account, or tell us the reason why. I'll be a fool no longer. No man has a right to own any more than his share of the earth, and somebody else has got mine. Why is it that I who love the sea have never even owned an oar of my own? It isn't right. Look at that beautiful little boat over there, tied to the dock so forlorn-like, deserted by everybody. It isn't right. What do you say, we steal her? Don't let your conscience give you any twinges, because it wouldn't really be stealing. The world owes us a boat and maybe that's the one."

"It listens all right to me," agreed Gol Parks. "Once I was wrongly imprisoned for being a thief. They sent me away for a spell for stealing a horse. An' say, it was only a mule I took. An' I didn't take him far at that. Only a short distance, because he leaned against a tree and refused to go. Then a policeman come along and invited me to be a guest of the town. This was when I still lived in the United States. I took a peek at the mule and followed his example. I leaned against the tree and refused to go, but the cop had a taking way with him. Upshot was they sent me to the hoosegow for quite a spell. It was injustice. I was falsely accused. The world owes me something for that wasted period of my life. I didn't get anything for it, not even the mule. Now it can pay me. I'll take yon little boat with you."

It was quite a modern-looking launch, despite the fact that it seemed in need of paint. It was about thirty feet long and had a bit of a cabin.

"Now," said Gol Parks as he leaped aboard, "we can dash out to see an' watch the sunrise. Sort of looks pinkish like as though the sun's about to pop up. Lucky I understand how to handle an engine like this. I know pretty near everything. Purty remarkable chap."

The China Kid untied the rope that bound the launch to the pier and stepped aboard. Then Gol Parks started the engine, and amidst many formidable chugs, with the China Kid at the wheel, the tiny craft sped through the maze of ships out through the yellow muddy waters toward the open sea.

"Did you get a slant at the name of our vessel?" asked the China Kid at last.

"Yes," was the reply, "*The Pekie*."

"Well," chuckled the China Kid, "she sure is a classy little bark. Where shall we head for?"

"Who cares? I've never been to Africa."

"Africa's lucky. Now China's always in wrong. She's in the direct path of all the typhoons. All the human flotsam, driftwood and wreckage float to her shore."

Gol Parks spat his contempt. "Gee, but you're rotten. If ever I have a yen to turn murderer, I'll begin practising on you. Life's treated you shabby because she didn't like you. I'd a done the same thing in her place. The world's teeming with swell pals for a guy and I draw you."

"Shut up! Here comes the sun!"

Now they were well out past the maze of boats, and the first glow of dawn on the peculiar yellow waters, a yellowness caused by the tons and tons of rich, alluvial soil swept down from the mightiest river system of China, the Yangtze Kiang, that makes the waters about Shanghai stranger in appearance than any other waters of the world. For more than fifty miles out to sea the water is of a decidedly golden hue. Yellow sea, yellow sky, yellow men and golden girls, no wonder there is so much alluring mystery enveloping that queerest of all countries.

Gol Parks stopped the engine and let *The Pekie* drift. The air was cool, the breeze fragrant. There was scarcely a

sound except the rippling water lapping gently against the sides of the launch.

"Here," said Gol Parks, "is your quietude at last."

"Yes," murmured the China Kid thoughtfully, "and sunrise. Strange combination. Odd thing, quietude. Sort of turns a guy inside out and dutes him off. If some one could dope out some method of doing away with all the dreadful noises that ruin nerves completely, there wouldn't be half as much crime. And now we've got an opportunity to watch the sunrise. It's sure a dangerous proposition. When dawn comes up like thunder and the gold of the sea is tipped with pink and purple, it makes one almost want to die. God, to plunge into that golden water and drown deliciously in the fragrance of the dawn! Poets are murderers. Their fragile poems are poison which they administer to addicts in small doses."

He stood up in the bow of the launch and gazed toward the East. He extended his arms and breathed deeply of the morning air. Death, peace was beckoning to him from the gently lapping golden waters. He seemed to sway slightly.

"Death," he muttered harshly. "An ideal moment for an ideal death. The stage is set. Though I lived a thousand years I might never find so perfect a setting for a glorious passing. To disappear beneath the golden waters in the coral dawn. The wind will play a threnody for me. Yes, I think I shall avail myself of so splendid an opportunity."

He uttered a short, harsh laugh as he spoke and plunged headlong into the sea. Gol Parks started the engine at once. He waited for the body of the China Kid to come up again to the surface. He was poised, every nerve alert to go overboard if necessary. He slackened the engine to a snail's pace. Then as the head of the China Kid appeared above the surface,

Gol Parks seized him by the collar. Fortunately he reappeared right alongside the launch. Gol Parks uttered oath after oath. As he hoisted the struggling form into the boat, he cursed in four different languages.

"I should permit you to drown!" he cried, "and I would, too, if it wouldn't be such an affront to the fish. They're particular what they eat. Not very, but a little. An' anyway, don't forget that me an' you has took up together. We're pals but I don't know why. An' where you go, I gotta toddle too. An' I don't want to hop overboard. Can't commit suicide that way, 'cause I can't swim. Pick out some nice respectable form of popping off an' I'll give the idea consideration. But no bustin' out without consulting me. We're like a hook and eye. You're hook and I'm eye. Not much good without each other. An' damn little use together!"

As Gol Parks finished speaking he pushed the China Kid so hard that he fell in a heap down the tiny flight of steps that led to the cabin. And there he lay and laughed hilariously.

"You fool! You fool!" he cried. "You've spoilt my death."

"If you don't stop that hullabaloo," snapped Mr. Parks, "I'll spoil your face for you; that is if it's possible to make it any worse."

"Come ahead, Gunha Din," challenged the China Kid, "if you think you are a better man than I."

"O. K. I accept the challenge. But come up here where there's more room, so's I can swing further when I hit. And believe me, eyes will be floating around loose like before I'm through."

"You're right," declared the China Kid as he swaggered up the steps, water dripping from him as he walked. "I'll tell the world you're right. Remember, you said yourself I'm Hook. Well, me

full name's Left Hook. And you are Eye. And believe me, one Eye at least is certainly going to be floating around shortly loose like. Now, Mr. Parks, please stop the engine so that the music of the blows may not be interfered with."

Mr. Parks complied with his request and the fight began. Just then the sun loomed full into sight to watch it. They went after each other with an enthusiasm that was colossal. They were both still a bit groggy from their drinking-bout of the night before. Neither of them had more than a hazy idea what the fight was all about. But that did not prevent them from throwing everything they had into it.

"You would commit suicide!" cried Gol Parks as he ducked in with a wicked right to the chin. He had never been trained as a prizefighter so he did not miss. The China Kid went down with a thud not so much from the force of the blow as from the fact that he was standing in a pool of water, which made everything slippery. In a moment he was on his feet again, and with a roar he came at Gol Parks with eyes blazing. He could see red. It wasn't very hard because he had crashed his fist into Gol Parks' face, split his lip slightly and badly bruised his nose until the blood came. This didn't add to Mr. Parks' good-humor. He started to curse and his arms shot about like flails mowing down everything that stood in the way. And the thing usually was the China Kid, who commenced hitting the deck as many times as a "set-up." In a few moments he had an eye that was closed for repairs and a cut ear. Despite the fact that he was far the younger of the two he was being worsted. On his last trip down he spied an oar. In an instant, he had seized it and tapped Gol Parks gently over the head with it. Mr. Parks went

down and the great champion bout for the crown of the China seas was over.

FOR awhile Gol Parks lay in a semi-daze. He felt as though the roof of the world had fallen in. The sky had swerved down to crush him. His throat was dry and parched. Finally he raised his head and gazed stupidly about him. Gradually his senses returned. He looked at the China Kid and grinned broadly as his hand passed over his bleeding lip.

"It seems," he muttered, "as though 'Hook and Eye' have not been faring so well lately. We're getting the breaks all right, but they are the wrong kind."

"My eye," snarled the China Kid, "is hotter than Aladdin's lamp."

"It glows almost as brightly," declared Mr. Parks dryly. "How come, you ain't been committing suicide nor nothing while I been having my dizzy spells?"

"Not worth while," was the reply. "Death no longer appeals to me. I might find it almost as disappointing as life. When one can not stand life, one can die. But what does one do if one does not like death?"

Gol Parks rose unsteadily to his feet. He picked up the oar upon which the China Kid had played the swan song. He gazed at it for a moment; then he flung it into the sea.

"If you want to be a cracksman," he said, "be a gentleman cracksman. Confining yourself to safes, not skulls."

The China Kid looked at him and smiled broadly. "You're sure a swell sight," he said, "standing there all covered with blood and gory. You look exactly like a disaster going somewhere to happen."

"Do you think you look like May Day?" asked Mr. Parks. "Cut out the wise stuff or Aladdin will have two lamps."

"If," drawled the China Kid, "you'll cut out being such a wise guy for a while, I'll acquaint you with a fact that may prove of vast importance in your future life, when and if any."

"O. K.," said Mr. Parks meekly, "spill it."

"The engine has stopped dead. It won't go any more."

"Maybe it committed suicide."

"Perhaps. The result is the same, anyway. It's dead."

"Leave it to me," said Gol Parks pompously. "I'll fix it. Don't think you know a darn thing about engines."

"Don't want to. More power to you if you can get the darn thing to start. At least, more power to the engine."

Gol Parks went down into the cabin in the front of which was the engine room. He tinkered and cursed and hammered and tinkered. He made a frightful din.

"If you are trying to impress me with the fact that you're working," said the China Kid, "I'm impressed. Now if you could impress the engine with your importance, we might get somewhere."

Gol Parks looked up blankly. "It won't go," he said.

"I discovered that a half-hour ago. You certainly ought to join a union. You're so incompetent, they'd probably make you secretary."

Mr. Parks threw down his hammer with an oath. Belligerently he strode up the few steps that led from the cabin. In very bad humor, he went and sat in the stern.

"Now," said he, "what are we going to do?"

"You're an engineer, you know, Mr. Parks. So I suggest you tell us. I make a motion that you be made captain of the gallant vessel, *Pekie*. If your old woman

only knew that her good man had finally gone to the dogs, wouldn't she shriek, though?"

ALL during that day *The Pekie* drifted aimlessly on the breast of the China Sea. The sky was like burnished copper, the water like gold. And all was solitude, not a sign of a ship, not a sound, not even a bird circling about above their heads. The solitude was so intense it was awe-inspiring.

"The air seems full of whispers," said Gol Parks slowly.

"There isn't anything quite as awful as silence," declared the China Kid moodily. "For in the silence all your thoughts and broken dreams come tumbling out all about you. In silence there is misery unless your soul is at peace. That is, assuming one's soul is not a myth. Anyway the misery is real. And silence is frightful."

"You're right," agreed Gol Parks, "silence gives you a funny feeling. It seems to dwarf you. Take us, floating along on this silent golden sea. We're exactly like a couple of helpless hunks of driftwood. We don't know where we are goin'. I bet God don't either. What do we amount to compared to the power of the sea? You can't give the sea a black eye. It's relentless. It's alive. It's an octopus, smacking its lips, waiting for us to surrender and plunge into its ruthless jaws. Wish to hell I'd stayed in Shanghai."

"What are you kicking about? You've got plenty of food and water. *The Pekie* is well stocked up. What's wrong with the sea? It holds terror, I admit, but there's something fine about it, too. If we only could learn to understand that silence, to eat it, absorb it, have it sink into our bodies, I feel that it is worth studying. There's something marvelous about 'the gray wide path of the sea.' If

it's a golden path, what matter? Mr. Parks, perhaps we are facing one of the great adventures of our lives. I don't think I've really ever been sober before this year. But on *The Pekie* we've got to be sober. There isn't a speck of booze aboard. Plenty of water to drink, plenty of tea, but not an ounce of liquor. Funny, the thing we want most we've got least of. And I want to see, Mr. Parks, if we can live through a period of being sober. If so, for how long? Wouldn't it be odd if we lost our taste for the stuff? After all, what does it matter? We've swapped Shanghai with its noise and women and liquor, for the sea and eternal silence."

"Personally," mused Gol Parks glumly, "I think we've been done. Me, I got no use for this silence stuff. It might make you loony but it can't make you drunk. I'm sorry I ever met you."

"Same here. I'm not busting out into sobs of joy over it. Look at that eye. You've darn near ruined me. I never looked like much and now I look like much less. Still we're here, I might say very still, so what's the use of growling? We've only got each other to talk to, so go on and talk. Your mouth always wagged loose enough before."

"All right, I'll talk," declared Mr. Parks, "but first of all I gotta curse a little to get myself in trim. And of course I'm going to do most of my cursing at you."

"You'll get no opposition from me," replied the China Kid blandly. "There's nothing you can call me that I haven't already been called, so have a good time. Meanwhile I'll curl up here in the corner and bat off forty winks. It's frightfully hot."

As he spoke he threw himself down in a heap and promptly went to sleep.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. *The Pekie* hung listlessly in the water as

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though she were at anchor. She scarcely moved at all. Utter lassitude had descended over everything. Even the slight sound caused by the lapping of the water against the sides of the launch ceased. The yellow haze intensified. The heat grew stifling. It was as though air and sky and sea had all merged into one molten mass. The air was so utterly lifeless it was sinister. It was as though it had paused to await some onrushing disaster.

They ate a bit of food but the heat was so intense that they were not hungry. After a while they even ceased to converse. They sat together in the stern, each a prey to his own thoughts. They were both plunged in deepest gloom. The haze sapped all energy from their bodies. They almost gasped for breath.

And then abruptly the air began to stir. The haze darkened and became denser. The breeze sighed as though it were consumed by sorrow. Then it commenced to moan. At once the water about the boat started lapping noisily against the sides. At least it was a break in the deadly monotony.

Gol Parks sprang to his feet. "There's a storm coming," he cried, "and believe me it'll probably be a humdinger. The China seas are the place to be if you really want to see a real storm. We'd better pop down into the cabin and make sure that all the portholes are shut. It'll be a miracle if *The Pekie* can ride the storm. Still she's built low and she may be able to sneak through."

As he spoke he sprang down the few steps into the cabin, followed by the China Kid. They secured the few portholes that peeped out on either side. The two windows in the front were already closed and locked. Next Mr. Parks carried the loose ropes and pails which lay about the stern inside the cabin. There was little else they could do.

Now the golden haze had grown so dark, it was like a night fog. The golden lights had died. The glow of the sea had been blotted out by the mist. A more sinister sight could not be imagined. In no matter what direction they looked, they could only peer a few yards ahead. The moaning in the wind continued. It grew to shrieks in intensity.

"We'd better get into the cabin before the typhoon strikes!" cried Gol Parks. He had to shout to make himself heard above the wail of the wind.

Fortunately, the China Kid heeded his advice at once and they went below, nor were they a moment too soon; for even as they fastened down the hatchway, the storm struck with such violence they could not keep their feet. *The Pekie* rolled over at such a perilous angle she nearly capsized. Gol Parks fell headlong on his face. The China Kid slid against the wall and was only able to regain his feet by gripping the side of one of the bunks. Gol Parks made no effort to regain his feet. It would not have been much use. He sat up with his back against the engine. The China Kid sat down beside him.

"This is a broth of a storm!" he cried. "Wish I could stay outside."

But Gol Parks could not hear him, so great was the pandemonium of the wind and the crashing seas.

"Perhaps," chuckled the China Kid, "this launch will prove to be our coffin. If so, at least we'll be buried with all the discomforts of home."

Then as suddenly as the storm hit them, it passed. The wind died down. The sea grew calm and they were able to go outside again.

Now the mist had vanished. The sun was setting over a copper sea. The air had freshened. It felt good to their overheated faces.

Not far away, so close in fact that it seemed they could almost touch it, was a small sailing-vessel, motionless, still. There was no sign of life aboard her.

Gol Parks shouted, "Hullo, there!" But there was no answering shout.

Again and again he called. But there was no response.

"Guess everybody's gone to bed," chuckled the China Kid.

"This is no laughing matter," growled Gol Parks. "Perhaps this is our sole chance of being saved."

"From what?" asked the China Kid curtly. "And why do you want to be saved?"

Gol Parks jumped to the railing of the launch. "I'm going to swim to that ship," he said. "When I get aboard, you follow me. Can you swim?"

"Like a sardine."

"Good," said Gol Parks as he dived into the water. A few strong swift strokes brought him to the vessel. As he scrambled up a rope ladder that hung over the side, he waved to his companion. The China Kid promptly jumped into the water and swam to the ship also. A few moments later they were both on deck. But still there was no sign of human life, still no one came to see what all the commotion was about.

"Hullo," cried the China Kid, "where is everybody?"

But there was no answer.

"Nice quiet little joint, anyway," commented Gol Parks as he gazed about him. "Decent and refined like. But uninteresting. Let's have a look about."

"Might as well," agreed the China Kid. "If Mahomet won't come to the mountains, the mountains will have to go to Mahomet."

"Who's Mahomet?" spat out Gol Parks.

"Oh," said the China Kid airily, "just an old schoolmate of mine."

While they were talking, they had walked along the deck. But now they paused. For hunched lazily over the wheel was a huge animal-like man who looked like a gorilla.

Gol Parks stepped forward and touched the man on the arm. As he did so the monster-man crashed to the deck. The China Kid bent quickly over him. The face was cold, the fingers stiff. The man was dead, had evidently been dead for some time. The China Kid surveyed the huge, strong face. It was not repulsive, but brutal. It was the face of a huge animal. The man was not Chinese even though there were traces of Mongolian extraction in the high cheekbones. He appeared more like a Russian, probably one of the men of mongrel extraction so often to be found on the Siberian frontier.

"Gosh!" muttered Gol Parks. "I must be purty strong if that wee poke killed him."

"Don't be a fool! He's been dead a long time. Wonder if there is any one at all alive aboard this sinister ship."

"We'd better keep looking."

So they went, rather slowly, down a flight of steps that led into a sort of cabin, what on other schooners would be termed the forecastle. But this boat was not like ordinary schooners. For one thing it was far too clean. There was a neatness, a tidiness about it that almost suggested a private yacht. The railings and woodwork had been newly painted. All the ropes and masts were in excellent condition.

At the foot of the staircase there was a door. The China Kid paused for a moment, then he pushed it open. He gasped with surprize at the elegance of the room which was disclosed before him. It might have been a room in some rich gentleman's home in Shanghai. Heavy purple velvet carpet was upon the

floor. Comfortable chairs were disposed carelessly about. On one side of the room was a huge bookcase and several curio cabinets. It was quite easy to see about, for a large yellow lantern hung directly above a teakwood desk at which a well-groomed Chinaman was seated. The man was attired in a cloak of black satin with a border of rich orange and green brocade about it. His hair was close-cropped and brushed sleekly against his head in Occidental fashion. He looked up as they stood in the doorway, smiling, affable. He was truly handsome. His eyes were shrewd and penetrating, his nose far more aquiline than is usually found in the Chinese. His lips were thin. When he smiled, his expression was extremely disarming.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you both surprise me and make me deeply grateful to you. It is always pleasing to shelter the chance passer-by, and when friends meet on the highroads of the sea, the pleasure is multiplied. Will you not be seated? Consider yourselves my guests. In the meantime I trust you have not been victims of shipwreck. We have just had a rather frightful storm despite its brief duration. All of my crew were swept overboard. It was a most provoking occurrence. It is a pity, too, because I had hoped to have most of them thrown into prison upon our arrival at Hongkong. They actually mutinied and seized the ship several days ago. But though they far outnumbered me, they lacked the necessary requisite for leadership. In gentle manner I argued with them, tried to show them the error of their ways. They heeded me. They were not bad fellows at heart. Of course I gave in to some of their demands, distributing liquor and tobacco to all. In appreciation they restored me to power on the ship. I held no rancor against them. My disposition is one of peace. I have infinite forbear-

ance. Then came the storm and my entire crew were lost. I can not account for their disappearance. It seems that the Dragon of the Sea who is in charge of storms was displeased with them. I was of a forgiving nature. But he was far more harsh. He exacted retribution. And perhaps it is as well to keep the law of the sea operative. But tell me, are you not hungry? I have plenty of food on board. You will not suffer from hunger or thirst."

"We're not particularly hungry," said Gol Parks. "We left Shanghai a number of hours ago on our launch, *The Pekie*, and were unfortunate inasmuch as we had engine trouble. The engine wouldn't go. We were in a quandary when the storm came along. When the storm had passed we found that this schooner was only a short distance from us. We reasoned that we might receive help from you. We called but there was no response. Then we decided to swim over to the schooner. This we did. Even then we couldn't rouse anybody with our shouts. We started inspecting the boat. We found a huge man at the wheel. When I touched him easy-like he fell over in a bunch. He was dead. Couldn't account for it."

The China Kid imagined that he noticed a cruel smile on the lips of the Chinaman but it was only of a second's duration. It was, however, indescribably cruel.

"Poor Buffo," he said slowly. "The storm must have got him too."

He shook his head sadly from side to side. Then once more, he repeated, "Poor Buffo. He was the most intelligent of all my crew. It was he who led the revolt. He deserved his final extinction. Yet so gentle is my fragile nature I find myself sorrowing for him. It shows weakness of spirit, and that I despise. I must make an effort to be se-

vere. In this world only the cruel and harsh survive. If a man rob me of a bag of rice, I must secure two bags from him to pay for it. There is no better rule upon which to fashion one's mode of living. It was the philosophy which my father handed down to me. The father of poor Buffo was in the employ of my father, whose fame as a trader had been blown far by the winds of the seven seas. And by a peculiar coincidence, he met a violent death similar to Buffo, his son. Coincidence is a pretty thing to muse over. Just now you told me how your launch, *The Pekie*, had had engine trouble and become helpless. Once more coincidence stalks across the page of our lives, for this schooner, too, is called *The Pekie!*"

Again it seemed to the China Kid that the cruel smile played about the lips of the Chinaman. He was not to be frightened by grotesque faces, nor was he particularly averse to speaking his mind freely.

"I choose to see a threat buried in your words," he said crossly.

"For that I am sorry," the Chinaman hastened to say. "To intimidate a guest is a grievous fault. Nothing is farther from my thoughts. I am a man of peace. I love flowers and sunsets. Strife, mutiny, anything harsh, saddens me. Even to view the ravages of nature is not pleasant. Flowers drawing life from the soil and the sun, insects despoiling the flowers, birds devouring the insects, animals destroying the birds, men slaughtering the animals. And who is there left to destroy the man? Who but himself? Progress is measured by destruction. If I do not despoil and destroy my fellows, they will despoil and destroy me. But of this enough. We must have a bite to eat. In the next room a table has been laid for us. The fare, while not of the best, will be adequate. I am lacking in

the possession of birds'-nest soup and egg jellies. But I have plenty of young bamboo shoots, young pig and water chestnuts. And at this time I will acquaint you with my name. I am Yih Yoh, one of the humblest subjects in all of China. My vanity is less than that of the lowliest coolie on the Nanking Road. My wealth is quite adequate for my few simple needs. By profession I am a dealer in pearls. On my schooner-yacht I cruise about the various islands in the China Seas, the South Seas and the Indian Ocean. It is a quite pleasurable existence. My home is on an island the exact location of which concerns nobody but myself. The island belongs to me. Of it, I am king. And there are many subjects there, who acknowledge me as emperor, an emperor of their own choosing. But come; the light repast is ready and I do not doubt but that you are hungry and fatigued."

**H**E LED the way into a dining-room that for simple richness could not have been eclipsed. In the center of the room stood a table heavily laden with numerous viands. There were no other furnishings in the room except two or three massive easy-chairs and a great divan beneath the open portholes. The carpet was rich and of immense thickness. It was of purple, as was the upholstery of the chairs and divan. A soft-toned purple lantern hung over the table. The table had been set for three people as though guests had been expected.

Yih Yoh motioned them to chairs. "Be seated," he said, "and may you find pleasure in the food."

Both Gol Parks and the China Kid were extremely hungry, hungrier than they had been for weeks. All day they had been at sea. They had not had a drink of liquor. It was a distinct novelty and the China Kid marveled that he

had no craving for it. The day had been adventurous. It had absorbed his interest. Adventure is as potent a drug as any other. Yih Yoh had aroused his interest. He did not trust him. He felt sure that during the storm the members of the crew had been done away with under the gentle auspices of Yih Yoh. What the motive was for the slaying he neither knew nor cared. Sufficient it was that the slaying was an established fact. Yih Yoh was far too insistent on his gentleness of spirit. The apparently meek had in many instances, as history showed, been monsters. He knew that his life and also that of Gol Parks was in danger as long as they stayed aboard the steamer-yacht. Yet he had no desire to leave. Curiosity consumed him. He was in the same position as a man who sits on the crater of a volcano waiting for it to erupt in order that he may enjoy the spectacle. Early that morning he had tried to commit suicide. Now perhaps he could accomplish the same result without effort. It was true that he had changed his mind and no longer wished to die. Still he was a gambler, willing to risk any stake. If the stake had to be his life, well and good. However, it was hard to visualize any reason why Yih Yoh should desire their deaths other than the fact that he evidently was the owner of the launch which they had stolen from the Shanghai waterfront that morning. But such a seizure hardly merited death. In China, where almost every crime is tolerated, that of theft surely was not a cardinal sin. The very feeling of insecurity was like a tonic to him.

Gol Parks in the meantime seemed to have no qualms of conscience nor worries of any sort. He sat and absorbed food as though he had achieved the supreme purpose of existence. Usually he had drunk his meals. To consume one completely sober was rather a novelty.

For the most part the meal progressed tranquilly. The soft tones of the lantern and purple draperies were extremely restful. There was not a sound aboard the ship anywhere. There was no sign of crew or servants to help with the numerous courses. But Yih Yoh himself waited on his guests admirably. Not the smallest dish was permitted to pass by them untasted. All the viands had been upon the table when they entered. The soup was even warm. Yih Yoh could not have set the table, for never since they had entered the room in which he had been seated, had he been out of their sight. It was as though the table of tasteful food had been set by magic. It caused the China Kid to wonder. After all, was Yih Yoh alone aboard the ship? Might there not be others in hiding for reasons known only to themselves?

Once he imagined that he caught a glimpse of a lovely girl through the doorway into the adjoining room or cabin, which stood slightly ajar. The fleeting glimpse of the olive cheeks, ebony hair, and slender body was not to be forgotten. It caused his thoughts to wander and his torpid blood to surge warmly through his veins. It was like a draft of old wine. Mechanically he glanced into the face of Yih Yoh to behold an expression so malevolent, so unspeakably cruel that he was amazed. For a moment the mask of utter meekness had become disarranged. But Yih Yoh rose to his feet, adjusting it at once. He smiled graciously as he strode across the room and closed the door that was slightly ajar.

"Drafts," he murmured, "are not good for the liver. They oftentimes are the indirect cause of death. It would grieve me greatly if any unnecessary harm were to befall my guests either through my carelessness or their own failure to guard their health."

Once more he returned to his seat at

the table. "I have some nectarines and pickled limes," he said, "which I believe you will agree are of surpassing loveliness. The fragrance of fruit is far more subtle than the fragrance of flowers."

**L**ATER that evening the China Kid sat alone in the stern of the ship. The moon was rising in yellow grandeur, buring the surface of the yellow sea. The water was calm and still. It was a night of enchantment. All trace of the storm had departed. The breeze was gentle. Not a cloud spoiled the face of the sky. The moon glowed so brightly it seemed intent on outdoing the sun in splendor. It was not a night for sane reasoning. It was a night upon which romance beckoned. And the China Kid fell under its lure. He could not submerge the memory of that slender girl whose form he had beheld for a fractional moment. And as he sat there gazing off over the golden sea, a wild idea occurred to him. He would explore the ship alone. Perhaps if luck were with him, he could find that lovely girl. The ship was practically deserted. Gol Parks was sleeping. Sleeping too, undoubtedly, was Yih Yoh, the strange master of that mystery ship. So he rose stealthily to his feet and crept along the deck. So careful he was, his footfalls were soundless. He descended the stairs into the cabins below without hindrance of any kind. He felt his way through the first room, in which was the elaborately carved teakwood desk. A tiny blue lamp burned faintly, but its pale light was sufficient to show him the way. Then he pushed open the door that led into the purple dining-room. That too was deserted. But once more a tiny blue lamp flickered faintly. And now he stood before the third door, beyond which he had caught a glimpse of the girl. His heart was beating so frightfully, he felt that it must be heard throughout the ship.

What gorgeous, alluring mystery lay hidden by that door? Several times he put out his hand, but something seemed to hold him back. Finally, summoning all his courage, he pushed open the door.

A flood of light that was dazzling greeted his eyes. The room was decorated all in yellow, yellow that was restful to the eye with here and there a touch of green, a low-burning lantern to give tone to the room. The main light was caused by a mighty yellow lantern of great brilliance. The China Kid gazed eagerly about him. In one corner was a great yellow bed, piled high with silken coverlets and cushions. But it was empty. There was no trace of the girl anywhere about. But what caused the China Kid's heart almost to stop beating was the figure of Yih Yoh seated before a table. His head was bent as he examined a trayful of pearls. He did not look up as the China Kid entered, and for a moment he wondered if his presence had been noticed. Perhaps he could escape unperceived. But even as the thought came to him, Yih Yoh spoke, but he did not glance up.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Could you not sleep? I thought I had assigned a comfortable cabin to you. But if your rest has been disturbed, I can easily change it for you."

"Not at all," the China Kid managed to reply. "As yet I have not retired. For a long time I have been sitting on deck watching the golden night. But finally I got parched for a drink and I wondered if it might not be possible to get a glass of wine from you. I imagined that I would find you down here."

"I am glad that you were not disappointed," replied Yih Yoh. He rose to his feet. "Certainly, you can have wine. And I will join you in a glass."

He led the way to the dining-room and produced a bottle and several glasses from a hidden cabinet.

"I am sure that you will find this wine up to your expectations," he said.

The China Kid drank several glasses of the wine without speaking. He realized that he was in a precarious position and ten different kinds of a fool. But the proximity of danger only served to heighten his curiosity and enthusiasm. He felt that he simply must find that slender girl. The vision of her had been sufficient to rouse him from his lethargy. It made life once more worth living.

He wondered if he was going to lose it just when he was beginning to value it once more. The last few moments of the life of a condemned man must always be the sweetest. When he has years before him he squanders time and sets no value on it. But at the last he struggles colossally for his few remaining gasps.

However, his peril might have been more imagined than real. There was a slim chance that Yih Yoh believed his story. But the chance was very thin. A man who was sufficiently crafty to murder an entire crew during a storm without hindrance could scarcely be one to accept threadbare explanations without question. The eyes of Yih Yoh were so keen they seemed to read one's very thoughts. Still there was nothing to do but try to bluff it out. There is an old saying of the Chinese that it is easy to prescribe a thousand remedies but hard to effect a cure. It is likewise easy to invent a thousand stories but hard to fashion one plausible enough to be accepted without question.

"The wine is excellent," observed the China Kid, "and now if you do not object I shall return once more to the deck to meditate awhile before retiring."

"Of course I do not object," replied Yih Yoh, "nor do I blame you for your decision. The night is far too glorious to be squandered in sleep. Were it not for the fact that I am busily engaged sorting pearls, I would go outside and rest with

you. But then I suppose you would prefer to be left alone with your dreams. Truly it seems that man is never alone on such a night. There are voices all about one, in the sea, in the wind and in the velvet blue sweep of the skies. Were I a poet I would go down to the sea and make my songs in tune with the beat of the waves."

**A** FEW moments later the China Kid returned to the stern of the ship. He sat down on the deck and leaned against a coil of rope for support. The spell of the golden night was still upon the waters. The breeze was soft but refreshingly cool after the heat of the day. In no matter whatsoever direction he looked there was not a vestige of a ship in sight upon the horizon. The sea had been swept clean by the storm until only the schooner-yacht remained.

He had much to think about. Much had happened that day of a queer nature, much that was amazing. He was rather glad that he had taken up with Gol Parks. He knew despite their short friendship that Gol Parks was utterly dependable. He was infinitely poor, which was a blessing. When a man is rich it often becomes necessary for him to stoop to treachery and duplicity. Most of the traders and merchants of earth will sell a friend as quickly as they will sell any other commodity.

But it was of the fragile girl that the China Kid thought the most. He simply must find her. Because she was beyond his reach, desire for her became almost an obsession. He felt as though he loved her, that he could not live without her. Yet he had caught but a glimpse of her black hair and cherry-red mouth. Unlike Yih Yoh he had never learned the lesson of forbearance. He was impulsive. He was not given to logical reasoning. When he wanted a thing he dove after it, and

now he wanted that fragile China girl.

It was utterly silent. The ship scarcely moved. The sails were not set. The vessel simply drifted along. And presently he must have dozed, for the next thing he knew he had the feeling that he was falling. It was a hideous dream. He imagined that two strong arms had seized him and flung him over the rail into the water.

Then he struck the water with a splash, and as he sank below, the full horror of his position flashed upon him. It was not a dream, but real. He had been flung violently from the deck of the schooner. As he rose to the surface, choking, gasping, he struck out desperately for the ship. It was not far away, nor was the drift sufficient to carry it beyond his reason. Luckily for him he was an excellent swimmer. Since infancy he had lived in the water.

It took him but a short while to swim to the side of the ship, where the rope ladder hung easily within reach. Presently he was up on deck again. Yih Yoh was there to meet him, smiling, gracious, all concern.

"What a pity," he said, "that you fell overboard! You must have walked in your sleep. Strange that this should have happened to you."

The China Kid was in a rather surly mood. "I think not," he said curtly. "It is no more odd for a single man to find his way into the sea during a calm than it is for an entire crew to go overboard during a storm."

"True," admitted Yih Yoh, calm, unruffled, "true. After all it is only the impossible that ever happens. And only the imagined."

"At least," muttered the China Kid, "I can agree with you in that. Imagined is right, imagined by a clever mind. I think now I shall go below. The beauty of the night for me has become somewhat dissi-

pated. If I stay up any longer the sky itself may fall upon me. It is a queer coincidence that you happened on deck at the moment I fell overboard."

"It is well that I did," agreed Yih Yoh. "I am only sorry that I could not have been of more service to you."

"Do not sob over that," said the China Kid curtly. "You've been of service enough. It would indeed have been a pity if I had drowned and not had any one about to enjoy the spectacle. Although man's capacity for enjoyment is limited, he can usually enjoy the misfortunes and struggles of his less fortunate brothers."

"I trust you do not mean to infer that I would enjoy beholding the drama of your death."

"I sure do," said the China Kid emphatically, "and I think you'd be mean enough to buy peanuts to munch exactly as though you were at a circus."

Yih Yoh smiled broadly. "Of course you are jesting."

"Sure. You've been up to a few pranks too. Things would be very dull if we could not have our little joke. And perhaps the greatest of all jokes is life itself."

"You are an odd young man," declared Yih Yoh. "I fear I shall never grow to understand you."

"Is it necessary?"

"I like to study people."

"No objection to that," said the China Kid, "as long as you don't try to take me apart, cut my throat to see if it will bleed or anything like that."

THE clothes of the China Kid were dripping wet, so he decided he'd retire. Besides, he reasoned that the cabin with Gol Parks sleeping in the berth above him would be less destructive to health. It was a superb night but dangerous.

Even after he had undressed and crept into his bunk he did not sleep. He lis-

tened intently. Every creak of the ship caused him to gaze hurriedly about him. It was little use, because the cabin was almost in total darkness. Once he thought he heard whispers, voices conversing in the night. This could not be if Yih Yoh was alone on board. Though it was doubtful if he was alone. At least there was that slender yellow girl who resembled a lovely yellow flower. At the mere thought of her his senses reeled. He must find that girl if he had to die for it. To hold her in his arms for a single moment, to kiss those fragrant red lips — that would be worth dying for. His cosmos had always been chaos; now it was more chaotic than ever. Forgotten was that girl in Illinois who had failed him so despicably, forgotten was every other incident of his life. The vision of that girl had blotted out every other thing. China had claimed him. She had absorbed him into her very blood. China is a great octopus. When a man once is caught in her clutches he is unable to break free, nor does he usually try.

So he lay there in the darkness of the cabin and dreamed, half-mad dreams that were extremely fantastic. He must find that fragile girl with the pungent glowing yellow skin.

And now he imagined that he and Gol Parks were not alone in the cabin. There was some one moving stealthily about. He slipped almost noiselessly from his bunk. He listened intently. There was no sound. But he was patient and he waited. In the deep darkness he imagined he could make out a form standing bending over the lower berth. He leaped forward and clutched at the intruder. But the man evaded him and slipped away in the darkness.

He groped about the cabin with hands extended, but he could find no one. At last he crept back into his bunk.

He could not help smiling. Now that

he wanted to live to find that girl of golden dreams, all things seemed to conspire to terminate his existence. But when he had wished to die and knocked about the world, stupefied with drink most of the time, paying no attention to his safety or health, he had been preserved as by a miracle. The world was in a frightful jumble. Like China, it was a veritable topsy-turvy land.

"Guess I'll have to get a regiment of militia to watch over my sleep," he reflected. Even as the thought came to him, he commenced to grow drowsy. Despite all his efforts to remain awake, his eyes kept closing. He had a notion to wake Gol Parks, who was snoring in the bunk above, and ask him to keep watch. But Gol Parks was sleeping so soundly, he hated to awaken him. At last he slept. And no further danger stalked his footsteps that night.

When he awakened it was broad daylight. Gol Parks was already up and out on deck. It took the China Kid but a few moments to wash and slip into his clothes; then he went outside also. He found Gol Parks and Yih Yoh leaning against the rail talking amiably. They were discussing the comparative merits of Chinese and American tobacco.

"I hope you slept well," greeted Yih Yoh as the China Kid approached.

"Perfectly," was the reply. "But then I was very tired. I had a few dreams of a horrible nature, but they did not last."

"Then," said Yih Yoh, "I trust you are ready for breakfast."

After the meal was finished they returned to the deck. As on the night before, they found the table all set for them, but no sign of servant appeared throughout the meal. Nor did the China Kid catch a glimpse of the yellow girl, for the door to the adjoining room was tightly closed. He more than half suspected that

it was locked as well. The girl was a prisoner, though whether by force or choice it was hard to say.

As soon as the opportunity presented itself, the China Kid acquainted Gol Parks with the details of all that had happened on the previous night. Gol Parks listened to his narrative unconcernedly. The fact that they were in imminent danger did not bother him at all. He often used to declare that he did not care how or when he died as long as he did not die on an empty stomach.

"Too bad Yih Yoh has turned out to be such a charlatan," he mused. "He looked like a sure enough Chinese gentleman. Ranting about his meekness. Why, he's about as meek as a mamba. Too bad, though, that he is so set on killing you; not that I blame him, you are an irritating cuss, but the food was so good. I wonder is he only intent on murdering you or does he want to ferry me across the Styx too. If I thought I could depend upon his generosity, I'd desert you in a minute. You've got less personality than a clam."

"Cut out being an idiot," snapped the China Kid. "If I were you, I'd try to keep it a secret. If I were sure that I'd like being dead, I wouldn't mind dying. But it might prove a frightful bore. And besides, for the first time in months I really want to live."

He had already told Gol Parks about catching the glimpse of the beautiful girl through the slightly opened door.

"I think," said Gol Parks, mournfully, "you are falling in love."

"Perhaps I am," was the reply.

"Then you'd better let Yih Yoh kill you, because in the end you'll be far happier. A woman always wrecks a man's life. If she throws him over, he goes to the dogs. If she marries him she leads him a dog's life. A man never gets a break."

It is impossible to say how long Gol Parks would have kept up his tirade against love, had not the China Kid broken in upon his conversation.

"Look!" he cried. "There is a small boat which seems to be headed directly toward this ship."

"Yes," agreed Yih Yoh, who had approached so silently they were not aware of his presence, nor did they know how much of their conversation he had overheard. "The boat contains the members of the new crew which I sent for. When the old crew were swept overboard during the typhoon, I sent a wireless message for help and this is the result. Now it will be no longer necessary for us to lie becalmed in the yellow sea. Truly there is nothing so helpless as a deserted ship. Sometimes I think that a ship must have a soul, at least as much of a soul, as much of a personality as any man. A sailing-ship swoops out over the sun-bathed waters like an eagle flying low. Who can say how much a ship joys to go a-voyaging! If that story of the isle of lost ships that lies in the Sargasso Sea were not a myth, it would be interesting to go there just to see if one could commune with the souls of forgotten ships. The wreck of a ship has always seemed to me infinitely sadder than the wreck of a man. Man is almost useless in the majority of cases, a useless, helpless thing. When he passes, the world is scarcely cognizant of his going. Take the members of my crew. They splashed into the sea and the water purled over them, but they were not missed. And I do believe that whole cities could be wiped out in like manner, without lessening by one iota the beauty of the world. But now the crew have arrived and we can continue voyaging. *The Pekie* will be happy again to race along the horizon on numerous quests. The sea is always new, always different. He who

does not strive to understand it misses much that is entrancing."

That day passed with a tranquillity that was surprizing. No effort was made on the life of the China Kid.

"This," he confided to Gol Parks, "is almost a novelty. Without death constantly dogging my footsteps, I'm almost tempted to believe my life is my own again."

"Remember," said Gol Parks dolefully, "one is usually in the most danger when apparently the safest, leastways that's the way it's always been with me. Now perhaps Yih Yoh is concocting a grand and glorious death for this evening. Something worthy of you."

"Maybe so," agreed the China Kid, "but I'm going to try to enjoy these few hours when I've apparently been forgotten. I guess he's too busy assigning the crew to their various duties to spare much time for me."

It was good to sit in the stern, and watch *The Pekie* with all sails set skimming along before the wind. The water lapping against the sides of the ship seemed to be laughing merrily. The sails glowed yellow in the glare of the sun. It was a day of absolute beauty. The yellow tinge to the sea, the merging of sky and horizon made it appear as though they were sailing into the very skies.

And somewhere on board was that slender, fragile girl whose face for one brief moment had appeared to the China Kid to rock his world and make the future lovely to contemplate. He had not lost hope. He must find that gorgeous girl.

IN THE evening Yih Yoh came on deck with his lute and sang plaintive melodies, variations of the "Songs to the Peonies" which are beloved throughout all China. He seemed scarcely conscious of the presence of the China Kid and Gol

Parks as he crooned softly with his face turned toward the lantern moon.

Suddenly he stopped abruptly and gazed about him. He said no word but rose to his feet and left the deck. When he returned he had the glorious yellow girl with him. Even in the moonlight her cheeks and arms glowed with a golden hue. The light played entrancingly on her shimmering blue-black hair. Yih Yoh sat down again and commenced to play softly on his lute. It was weird, eery music, it contained witchery, enchantment. Softly plaintive, dream-like in its elusiveness. The fingers of Yih Yoh flittered over the strings of his lute almost as though he were caressing it. Yih Yoh was in love with music. And the China Kid was in love with that lovely golden dancer. She did not dance in the manner of the Chinese with awkward gyrations, but with a grace that would have gone well in a flower garden where roses were swaying softly in the wind.

The China Kid leaned forward. His eyes burned with the intensity of his staring. He was trying to drink in the superb glory of that dancing China girl. It was the rarest of all intoxicants. His brow was wet, his throat parched.

Now more than ever was he determined to possess this girl. Though he had to destroy the world he would have her or else be destroyed himself in a splendid effort. Her features were beautifully modelled. Her nose was classic, her tiny red mouth provocative to madness. Her thin eyebrows arched alluringly. Her high cheek-bones and almond eyes only emphasized her rare perfection. Never had he known so much jewel-radiance existed in any woman. Her lips were rubies, her eyes glowing black opals, her cheeks amber. And the fragrance of her body was like a blend of subtle spices, aloes-wood and jasmine intermingled. Who

could withstand the charm of so alluring a maiden?

At last Yih Yoh ceased playing and the girl stopped dancing. It had been odd to watch her dancing there under the yellow moon. All sails were set as the schooner flew along before the wind. They gleamed amber-white in the moonlight.

Yih Yoh laid aside his lute and rose to his feet. He walked over and stood beside the China Kid. "There are few moments of existence that can equal that which has just passed," he said. "It was the zenith of your life. I could not help but notice your rapt expression, nor can I blame you. You are young, impulsive. Where there is youth there must be love. Of course love is a myth which we Orientals are well cognizant of. We do not worship women. They are merely fit for the bearing of children. When we choose friends, we choose men. We are therefore seldom disappointed. But you, I can see, worship yon pretty dancer. She is like a thousand other girls to be found throughout the world. A jewel, perhaps, a plaything. You are very young and I can not bear the thought of depriving you of a longed-for toy. As I have told you on a past occasion, I am consumed with meekness. I sometimes think I am far too gentle. But there is no other sure way, it seems to me, of attaining happiness. I have watched your face and I know you cherish the little dancer. I believe she reciprocates in like manner, from what I have gleaned from numerous sources. It would be a pity to separate two persons enmeshed in a fragrant dream. Therefore I have decided to place you both in an open boat and set you adrift at sea. Your companion, Gol Parks, will be permitted to make the third party in your boat. And there you may feast on love in a manner purely poetical. I will give you neither food nor drink, nor will it be necessary. You may feast on love. I am far too

gentle in my decisions, but do not think the less of me. There is only one stipulation I will make. You must not touch at any shore. If you do the little dancer will cease to be yours. However, I doubt if you will ever make port again, since I do not intend to supply your love-boat with oars. They would be out of place on such a trip. And in order that my decision shall be carried out and my order obeyed, this schooner-yacht will ride always in your wake that I may watch the progress of your wooing."

"You mean," broke in Gol Parks, "that you intend to set us adrift to die."

"Why, no," was the soft reply, "not to die but to live, to love. Have not many of your greatest writers proclaimed that love is greater than death? Surely your companion who has been touched by a divine flame can surmount with his vast affection such a crude, mundane thing as death."

The China Kid smiled. "I wish to compliment you on your meekness," he said. "You have become an adept at the gentle art of living. Since it is useless to protest, I accept the future."

Secretly he was glad of the opportunity of being set adrift in the boat with the girl of his dreams. What matter that death might claim them, if for one brief interlude they were together? A day by her side would be better than a hundred years in the cold bleak desert of life.

**Y**IH YOH summoned several of the crew, and a small boat was lowered into the water. Then Gol Parks was directed to climb down the ladder of rope. The little dancer followed. The China Kid brought up the rear.

The China Kid sat in the bow of the boat and the girl came and nestled in his arms. The scent of her hair made him drowsy. What matter that they were help-

less in a rowboat on the open sea, without food or drink? At least they were together. The girl was in his arms. Impulsively he leaned down and kissed her fragrant lips. What matter death? It would be a glorious ending. He would die far more magnificently than he had ever lived.

Meanwhile the boat was drifting farther and farther away from the schooner. But Yih Yoh did not permit it to get very far. *The Pekie* bore down upon them, keeping them ever in its path.

The moon climbed higher and higher in the sky. The very breeze seemed to sweeten and grow more crisp. It was a veritable night of romance, a night of love.

Gol Parks lay sprawled in the stern facing them. "This," he growled, "is a pretty kettle of fish, though without any kettle and without any fish and not even pretty. I don't know where we are going, nor do I care. But it is too damn bad we couldn't get a through boat. Every time I get settled down comfortable-like we gotta make a change. Anyway there's no use losing sleep over it. While you two coo, I'll just snore a bit. You're nothing but a jinx, and the next time I meet you in Shanghai I'm not going to bother with you."

The China Kid made no reply. He was scarcely aware that Gol Parks had spoken. His head was in a whirl. All that was beautiful in life was within his grasp. "On the gray wide path of the sea" he had found this amber girl. Let the sky fall in now, what matter? The girl of the fragrant body was in his arms. Even the sky seemed to exude a perfume. Let tomorrow come with its starvation and horror. There would always be the memory of this night, to lessen the final agony of death.

So the rowboat drifted along, and always in her wake kept stalking the schooner-yacht with sails looming out strangely white against the soft blue sky.

Thus the night passed and morning came. The sun burst into being over a yellow sea. Once more a sultry gold mist hung over the waters. There was no horizon. Sky and sea, because of the great heat, had melted into one. The air shone and glistened with moisture. It was like heavy curtains that it seemed possible to rend asunder. The sun glared down mercilessly. It dried their bodies, it baked their tongues. They were too dried-up to perspire. They lay sprawled in the boat gasping for breath. The air was so heavy it was an effort to breathe.

Of the three, the girl seemed to suffer the least. She lay with closed eyes, half dozing. Her gentle breast rose and fell evenly. The Chinese are used to hardship. They can suffer the greatest pain and sorrow with fortitude. And the little dancer was true to her race. She made no complaint, just lay there like a wilting flower, ground under the merciless heel of the sun. Occasionally she opened her eyes and smiled, and her smile seemed to make the air fragrant for a fleeting moment.

Gol Parks grunted and groaned and complained continuously.

"If this keeps up," he snorted, "we'll be burned to ashes. Hanged if I want to be fuel for the sun."

"There doesn't seem to be any escape," mused the China Kid. "Still there must be one. We got ourselves into this jam, and we've got to think our way out, for the girl's sake. It would be a frightful death for her, a death from thirst."

He lapsed into silence, and for hours he thought the matter over. Gradually a plan formed in his mind, a rather fantastic plan, but one that seemed possible of accomplishment. Finally he explained it to Gol Parks, who was so disgusted with his present predicament that he was willing to agree to anything.

AT LAST the day dragged through and the sun sank into the molten horizon. Night fell, bringing with it a bit of a breeze which blew like balm upon their fevered brows.

The next few hours were very trying for the China Kid, a period of waiting that was irritating to his nature. Still he knew that success in his undertaking depended on striking at the proper time. From time to time he stroked the beautiful hair of the little dancer. Occasionally he kissed her lips. Trying as the day had been, despite the heat and discomfort, he had found out one thing. The China girl loved him. East may be East and West may be West, but here the twain had met in mutual happiness. At least this Eastern girl would prove far more true than that ultra-civilized Western girl who was absolutely without loyalty.

Toward midnight, the China Kid gently released the girl and slipped silently over the boat's edge. He scarcely made a ripple as his body cut into the water. Then carefully, rather slowly, he swam toward the schooner-yacht. It was plainly discernible in the moonlight, and fortunately it was no great distance away. He hoped there were no sharks in those waters. He was not sufficient of a naturalist to know whether they were habitants of the yellow-orange sea. Nevertheless the risk had to be taken. He swam on, with careful long strokes, nor was he molested in any way.

At last he reached the rope ladder which always hung carelessly over the ship's side. Cautiously he climbed aboard. There was no one in sight. He made his way slowly along the deck. For a moment he paused to listen, but all aboard was still. Most of the new crew were probably sleeping. Step by step he crept down

into the cabin. And there he found Yih Yoh, as usual, sorting his pearls. He sprang up as the China Kid approached. For once his mask of inscrutability slipped from his face. He fairly snarled as he leaped toward the China Kid. As he did so he drew a long thin knife from his sleeve. That was the very action that the China Kid needed. He was roaring to go. With an oath he sprang at Yih with such force that he toppled him over. The smash to the chin which he delivered helped somewhat to spoil Yih Yoh's evening. But even though he fell heavily, Yih Yoh still clutched the knife.

The China Kid stood over him, hesitating for a moment only; then he brought his heel down on Yih Yoh's hand with such force that the knife flew out of his grasp. Yih Yoh uttered a single cry, but he stifled it as though he dreaded to appear weak. He staggered to his feet and lunged toward the China Kid, but it was a futile effort. Yih Yoh was not used to fighting in the American fashion with bare fists. His fighting was done with finesse in a far more cultured fashion—a knife in the back, a sip of poison offered in friendship or some other little refined method of guaranteed extinction. He was no match for the China Kid in a battle of this sort.

The China Kid struck his opponent at will. He played a tattoo upon his face, the while taunting him with his impotence. At last he desisted as Yih Yoh fell to the floor and refused to rise. The Chinese was bruised but not badly hurt. He simply would not get to his feet because he realized the futility of it. If he rose it would be only to be battered down again. The China Kid was in a quandary. He hated to murder a man in cold blood but he did not know what to do with him.

Finally he reached down and grabbed

Yih Yoh by the throat. "Listen, you," he cried, "I'm going to give you one swell chance to live. Now get to your feet and come on deck with me. If you utter one chirp it'll be your last. I'm aching for an excuse to end your snake-like existence. Go on, get up the stairs."

Without a word Yih Yoh did as he was bid. He was trying to devise a method of escape, but even for his agile mind this was a weighty problem.

When they had reached the railing of the schooner, the China Kid wheeled Yih Yoh around. "Not so long ago," he said, "you tumbled me into the sea while I was sleeping. It was your intention to permit me to drown. And I would have done so, too, had I not been a powerful swimmer. There was no land within miles and you were going to leave me to my fate. Now the tables are reversed. It is your turn to be dropped overboard. But I am more lenient. You may swim out to the rowboat in which you so kindly cast us adrift. And when you clamber into it, you can go wherever you like. I make no restrictions. You can head for the nearest land. Of course it is unfortunate that there are no oars in the boat but that is your own fault. You attended to the equipment. If it proves inadequate you have only yourself to blame. But one thing I warn you, do not try to crawl back on *The Pekie*, because if you do it will be my proud privilege to slay you."

As the China Kid spoke he suddenly seized Yih Yoh in his arms and flung him into the sea. Yih Yoh tried to struggle, but the attack was too swift. At least it must be said in his favor that he accepted his loss of power with commendable philosophy. He, too, was a powerful swimmer, and with sure, quick strokes he set out toward the rowboat. When he had almost reached it, Gol Parks and the little

dancer dived into the water and swam rapidly toward the schooner. The China Kid waited to help them aboard.

As Gol Parks reached the deck, he asked, "When do we eat?"

"At once," replied the China Kid. "That's a swell idea."

And then he turned to the little dancer. Her silken garments clung to her slender

form, revealing every soft curve of her figure. As he stooped to kiss her, he whispered, "You are like a little golden statue. You are the loveliest thing in the world and I found you on 'the gray wide path of the sea.' Tonight before the lantern moon has set we will sail off into the very sky itself where there must be, I am sure, an 'Isle of Golden Dreams.' "

# The Green Jade God

By JOHN BRIGGS

*Three enemies—one blind, one deaf, and one tongueless—  
were forced into a strange comradeship*

AS OFTEN as I have lingered in the marketplace of Pnom Penh, the King's City by the yellow Mekong, I have always paused to watch the three old men who sit mending sandals, day after day. Now that I am informed of their history, I never cease to marvel at the strange fate which has inseparably bound them who once were foes.

Of the trio, one is continually mulling over rotten sandals with betel-stained fingers. I have watched his palsied and aimless hands, and have wondered whether they accomplish anything at all during the long periods that he sits there. Sometimes he mumbles inarticulate sounds in spells of forgetfulness. The patrons who come with their old sandals, or to buy new ones, never speak to him. Although he can hear them, they have learned that he can not answer. Once he held a high office with the king; but his years have netted him only wrinkles and uncertainty; so that he has even forgotten when men called him Ben Hammed, the Excellent. Now he is spoken of as "the Tongueless

One." He is known to have once possessed skill in making new sandals; but even that has left him, and now he only putters with strips of palm fiber, or clumsily fashions patches from bits of dried sheepskin which he has purchased from traders coming down the river from the high mountains of Bhutan. And this is Ben Hammed, accursed. Sometimes he glares with hatred at the dancing girls who slither by with laughter and prattling tongues. Too late, he has learned that words are dangerous things. For Ben Hammed has no need of this knowledge. He can never speak.

At Ben Hammed's right hand sits Singh Dar. He is shrunken and yellowed. His gray beard is matted and gnarled. Like an image in wood he squats from dawn till dark, rarely lifting his chin from his sunken chest. Each morning, following his mates, he gropes to his mat—his mat which has rotted with age. The sun rising behind the silvered palms never seems to warm his shivering body, nor does he behold its brilliance



*"Ben Hammed turned the limp body of his enemy face upward."*

glinting from the myriad pagoda spires which thrust heavenward like dazzling lances of gold. He has forgotten the porcelain, the gilt and the jade emblazoning the temples about the square. He has quit seeking consolation in the gods. He spits betel-juice with contempt, as the prayer gong sounds from the mosque. He is known simply as "the Blind One;" for as ancient as are the old women shuffling by with their baskets of yams, nodding their shaven heads over breasts bone-dry, there is none of them who can remember him as Singh Dar, chancellor to the king of a bygone age. Once I saw this Singh Dar lift his face. I gazed with horror into the hollow sockets from which all vestige of eyes had been removed.

Small wonder that this strange trio has fascinated me, and that I never forget the picture of them sitting in the market square.

Ben Hammed's other companion—he that squats at his left hand, partly facing

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him and Singh Dar—was called Cham Ra. He is a little old dried-up knot of rags and bones. His moth-eaten turban seems to repose upon his shoulders; so nearly missing is his flat face which folds up from chin to nose when he works his betel-nut between toothless gums. Yet his small eyes, sunken in folds of wrinkles, are sharp and constantly darting glances here and there; for they must pick up a little of that which his ears miss. Cham Ra's world is soundless. Of the three, he suffers least. Being a philosopher, he is relieved not to carry the burden of listening to much that is not worth hearing.

An odd trinity of misfortunes. Enough to halt the curious, of whom there are few in Cambodia. Ben Hammed, the tongueless mute; Singh Dar, the blind one; and Cham Ra, the deaf. Yet that is not all.

At times, they argue, one with another. Ben Hammed, the tongueless, can not

make his thoughts known to Singh Dar, the blind one; for although he can write and also can make expressive motions with his hands, Singh Dar is unable to see the writing or the signs. Cham Ra, the deaf one, can interpret Ben Hammed's gestures, and he can speak; so that he is able to tell Singh Dar what Ben Hammed would have him know. And yet, being deaf, he does not know what Singh Dar says in return. Ben Hammed, hearing the blind man speak, interprets his words to Cham Ra in signs. Likewise Cham Ra, the deaf, can speak to the blind man directly; but his reply must come through Ben Hammed, the tongueless, who can do nothing but gesture. And so on. Customers usually address Cham Ra, because his eyes are sharp. And Singh Dar, the blind, answers them because he can hear and speak; while Ben Hammed, the mute, having heard, conveys by signs to Cham Ra what is being said. An excellent arrangement perfected by long practise.

**A**S DISCREET as were my inquiries about these three ancient relics, I was looked upon as an unbeliever who might indulge in improper sentiment concerning the curse of the Green Jade God. Thus my skepticism was feared by "the Old Ones" who were supposed to know. To them I was always referred by the lesser in age and wisdom. Until I came upon Lakie Zang, the retired Malay pirate, who had no use for Cambodian gods, my search for the truth was futile. Lakie, the grinning old imp, toothless and hairless, saw visions in rice wine and the long pipe. He dreamed dreams of the past; whether real or fancied, you may judge.

When I had heard his tale, I smiled. Perhaps he thought that I doubted it; for he told me how I might reach the ancient shrine that stands in the jungle, near

the river—the shrine of the god, Amu Tau. Even he, pirate and unbeliever, had never found courage to molest the gold ornaments, nor to pluck out the ruby eyes of the green jade god. I, who had scoffed at its power, found it and left it untouched. It squats in the jungle, unguarded still.

Paddling north along the Mekong, from Pnom Penh, I discovered the entrance to the shrine, as Lakie had described it. There is a place at the east bank of the yellow, sluggish stream where the lianas, curtaining down from the banyans and arica palms, can be brushed aside. Thence a worn trail winds through the jungle. It is bordered by flamboyant tree trunks and steaming foliage. Overhead it is canopied by matted lianas to which strange creepers cling and form the nesting-places of brilliant birds that flash in and out among the blue shades and broken sunbeams like fluttering petals of bloom. Yet these birds are not silent, as are the mottled serpents that glide and wriggle and hang from the creepers. With raucous clamor, they screech and cackle defiance at the foraging black-faced apes and at every creature that happens to disturb their primordial solitude.

At the end of the trail, rising from the center of a small clearing, is the pagoda of a single, pinnacled roof. Beneath it squats, on its carved pedestal of stone, the green jade image. Grotesque and motionless, it stares out of ruby eyes that flame lambent in the dim light. Inseminate, cold, it looks out of the ages that have been, into the ages yet to come.

The earth surrounding and upon which the pagoda stands is flagged with square blocks of gray sandstone. The stone is greatly worn in places. It has been kept polished by the bare feet, the hands and the bodies of the worshippers who still prostrate themselves before the image of

Amu Tau—avenger of personal wrongs.

With a cold chill creeping upon me as I gazed at that obscene, life-like creature of jade, I could no longer believe that Lakie's tale had been spun from a fabric of dreams. As in a spell, it came over me; the scene, the actors in that grim drama of years ago. It was Ben Hammed who first appeared, coming along the jungle trail with the alert tread of a preying beast. A young man, his body divested of all raiment save a loin clout. The dismal drip of congealing vapor splashed on his oiled shoulders. It was evening; for the thickening gloom enhanced the gleam of a strangely designed knife thrust in his clout. It was a kris, ground down to a delicate, needle-pointed sliver of steel.

At the edge of the clearing, Ben Hammed paused, elevated his arms to heaven, then lowered them, five times. The sun's last murky ray lit the four golden tips of the pagoda's pinnacled roof. After performing his devotional exercise to all the gods of heaven and earth, Ben Hammed slithered across the stone flags upon his belly. He arose and prostrated himself seven times in the shadowy interior of the pagoda, while twin points of red flare glinted upon him from the eyes of the green jade god. From his loin clout, he removed a leather flask of pig's blood and five red-tipped sticks of incense. He poured the blood into the brass bowl held between the claws of the jade god. The incense he lighted at the pedestal's base. As the fumes wreathed up around the distorted image, Ben Hammed threw himself down upon the stone blocks. His voice intoned a supplicating chant.

"O, Amu Tau, god avenger of the seven times seven cursed descendants of Brabh—Amu Tau, powerful above all earthly beings, I implore the deliverance of mine enemy, Singh Dar, into my hands. I am disgraced unjustly, O Amu

Tau, because of this man who has sought to elevate himself into my place. His eyes were ever spying upon me, until in a moment of indiscretion, to which all flesh is heir, his envious eyes beheld me. Now I have come to poverty, O Amu Tau, compassionate of man's wrongs. I beseech thee, O mighty Amu Tau, that thou deliver Singh Dar into my hands, that I may pluck out his offending eyes in my just revenge; that he may spend his suffering days hereafter harmless to repeat the wrong upon others. May his punishment, O Amu Tau, be by mine own hands, for it is my karma, and no other man's."

His voice droning on, Ben Hammed lifted himself to his knees and began kowtowing himself repeatedly to earth. The shadows of the jungle deepened. The chatter and screech of day life was hushed, until in the distance could be heard the occasional cry of a night-prowling beast.

PRESENTLY another dark human form broke from the secret trail into the clearing. It reached the rim of the stone square and prostrated itself, as Ben Hammed had done. This second supplicant was Singh Dar, appearing as if in direct answer to Ben Hammed's prayers. But the nebulous glow cast by the burning sticks of incense was not sufficient for him to recognize the worshipper who had preceded him.

Singh Dar also had a wrong to avenge. He in turn delivered his blood-sacrifice and lit his offering of incense. He prostrated himself, and his plaint bore a close resemblance to Ben Hammed's, except that he named a certain Cham Ra as the man who had wronged him. And Cham Ra's offense had been that of eavesdropping. Of Amu Tau, he sought the power to destroy his enemy's ears.

Meanwhile Ben Hammed, whose eyes

were accustomed to the dim light, recognized the enemy whom he sought and knew that the god had favored him. Yet he continued his devotional mumbling. Covertly he watched, alert and waiting. At Singh Dar's waist, also, he caught the glitter of bright steel.

Now Ben Hammed's muscles tautened more and more with each of his genuflections. As Singh Dar prostrated himself in prayer, he leaped from all fours like a leopard, landing astride his victim's neck with a stunning impact. Before the prostrated figure could squirm, Ben Hammed had delivered the cunning blow to the cords of the neck, inducing unconsciousness. Singh Dar flattened beneath him without a sound. Immediately Ben Hammed turned the limp body of his enemy face upward. With two deft movements of his kris, he gouged out Singh Dar's eyes completely.

Yet even in the moment when he had completed his revenge, and while his victim's body convulsed instinctively, a third nearly nude figure had entered the pagoda of the green jade god. Blinking to see through the obscurity, and aided by the dull red glow of the incense sticks, the third supplicant beheld the two writhing human shapes.

The god had answered the second worshipper's prayer a trifle too late; for this latest seeder was indeed Cham Ra, whose eavesdropping ears Singh Dar had wished to destroy. Singh Dar had lost forever the power to see his enemy. And yet Cham Ra had also arrived in quest of vengeance. In the uppermost of the two writhing figures he recognized Ben Hammed—Ben Hammed, whose prattling tongue had done him injury. Exultantly he observed his enemy in a defenseless position. His wish was already granted, even before he invoked the green jade god.

He sprang at the back of Ben Hammed, who, still flushed in his revenge, was taken wholly by surprize. Yet being in an exalted state of activity, Ben Hammed's defense became ferocious.

As the two struggled, Singh Dar, blinded, returned to consciousness. In an agony of pain and wonder, he cried out on the god, Amu Tau, to avenge him for this new wrong.

Hearing him, the third man answered him, gasping that he could revenge himself by helping him conquer Ben Hammed, to whom his blindness was due.

In the voice that answered him, Singh Dar recognized Cham Ra, the enemy for whose inducement into his hands he had just been imploring the god. But now, crazed by his more recent injury, he groped his way feeling for the wrestling pair, that he might get his hands upon their common foe. His fingers clawed at a contorting, oiled back.

"Whose body do I touch?" he cried.

"Not mine—Ben Hammed's!" panted Cham Ra.

Singh Dar's fumbling claws sought Ben Hammed's neck, and bit into it, choking their prey down until he sank limp on the stone flags.

"Ah-ha!" gasped the third man. "Do thou hold him thus while I take my vengeance upon him. Ill his fate that he just now gave thee cause to render me this worthy assistance. It is his lying tongue that hath injured me—"

Thus speaking, Cham Ra drew his knife, and running his hand into his victim's mouth, he entered the blade and severed the tongue at its base.

"Release him," he directed the blind man. "Our revenge is complete."

Taking his victim's tongue, he placed it in the brass bowl of the green jade god, and he poured his pig's blood over it, as an offering of victory. Then he

lighted his incense and prepared to make his devotions of thanksgiving.

**W**HILE Cham Ra was busied thus, Ben Hammed, the tongueless, stirred himself groaningly. And Singh Dar, blinded, remembered that he had not yet been avenged of his foe whom he had come hither seeking revenge upon; so he controlled his tortures and whispered into the ear of Ben Hammed, the tongueless man.

"The man who has just taken revenge upon you is Cham Ra, whose eavesdropping ears have wronged me. Now that he has injured you, Amu Tau has granted you sufficient cause to aid me in my purpose. Ben Hammed, let us together overpower Cham Ra, our common foe. Canst thou see him?"

But Ben Hammed could not answer the blind man, being tongueless. And he could not even respond in signs, for Singh Dar could not see him. Still he was only too willing to perform a service for this one who had so recently been his enemy, and though agonized by pain, he waited prone and apparently still unconscious until he saw Cham Ra prostrating himself before the squat figure of Amu Tau.

Then in a terrible throe of agony and ferocity he bounded to his feet and pounced upon the last worshipper. Forgetting his inability to speak, and trying to call the blind man to his aid, he made inarticulate sounds in his throat, which nevertheless served to attract the other to the place where they struggled. And his grip, rigidified by his awful torment, was so remorseless that he held Cham Ra almost motionless while the blind man groped about for his victim's ears and entered the needle point of his knife in the drum of each, piercing it till the blood flowed out; while now the many burning incense sticks set up a wraith-like glow against the gathering darkness, and the

jade god's ruby eyes flamed in their green sockets like two uncovered sparks of hate.

Ben Hammed and Singh Dar then released Cham Ra, and each of the three had had his prayer answered and his revenge on the other. Ben Hammed had collected the eyes of Singh Dar; which had given Singh Dar sufficient cause to aid Cham Ra in removing the tongue of Ben Hammed. This had given Ben Hammed reason enough to help Singh Dar, his former enemy, in piercing the eardrums of Cham Ra. Now they all were suffering alike and each bethought himself to leave the place and to seek what comfort he could in whatever he might have left of a home.

But as though sensing that the others were about to depart, leaving him with no means of finding his way, the blind man cried out to Cham Ra, on whom he had just revenged himself, to aid him in the direction of his steps.

But Cham Ra could not hear him, now, and he turned to the tongueless man.

"I see that Singh Dar speaks to me," he said, "but I can not hear him. I beg of you to make known to me what it is that he says."

Then Ben Hammed, because he could not speak—nor could Cham Ra have heard him, even had he been able to speak—indicated by pointing to Singh Dar's eyeless sockets, and then to the black opening of the jungle path, that the blind man had sought his aid in directing his sightless steps.

Cham Ra then became angry, and turning to the blind man, asked: "Why should I help one who has just robbed me of my hearing?"

And Singh Dar responded: "Did I not aid you in removing the tongue of your enemy, Ben Hammed? In return for the help I gave you, I now seek your assistance."

Querulously Cham Ra besought Ben

Hammed to signify the meaning of Singh Dar's words.

By gestures, the speechless man then interpreted to the deaf man the significance of the blind man's speech. By pointing to his own tongueless mouth, to Singh Dar's sightless sockets, and to Cham Ra's deaf ears, he demonstrated that, since each had been obliged to participate in the other's revenge, now each was obliged to rely on the other for aid.

"Yes, that is so," agreed the deaf man, speaking so that he might interpret in words to the blind man what the tongueless man had conveyed to him in gestures; "each of us in seeking his revenge has suffered the revenge of the other, and now we are each one dependent upon the other. We have none of us to blame. It was granted thus by Amu Tau. It is the

god's fault! He himself has taken his revenge, for granting us all our desires. He has bound us to remain together hereafter; since it seems that none of us can get along without the others."

Thus philosophically spoke Cham Ra, twin streams of blood trickling from his ears, as he observed the gory faces of his companions.

And so the three of them together made their painful way out of the jungle, and getting all into one sampan they floated down the river to Pnom Penh, where until this day they have busied themselves in the marketplace making sandals, each dependent on the other.

Meanwhile in the jungle the green jade god squats on its pedestal of carved stone; serene, unaltered, immobile, gazing out of red eyes, unblinkingly, into the far reaches of ages yet to be.

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## The Scourge of Mektoub

By PAUL ERNST

*African magic aided the Rose of Meknes against the dreadful torture devised for her by the Sheik Lakhdar*

**A**S LIEUTENANT to the great Mektoub, the Sheik Lakhdar was a powerful man in west North Africa. He was not so powerful as the mild but mighty Echamachi. He was, in comparison to that other aid of the leader, as the left hand is to the right. Echamachi ranked him, as they say in America. But for all that, as left hand of the rebel chieftain, Mektoub, Lakhdar was a power in the region from Tangiers south to the Congo, and from Touggourt west to the sea.

Many men censured Mektoub for giving so high a position to such a character as Lakhdar. Many men, otherwise in sympathy with the intelligent outlaw who was such a thorn in the side of Spain, France and the French colonies, shook their heads over his choice of a left-hand man. Lakhdar, they said, was not a man; he was a monster of cruelty. Why should so wise and altruistic a leader as Mektoub blind his eyes to the atrocities committed by his second highest subordinate?

A few surmised that the rebel leader



*"Bind her wrists," was the curt order.*

had deliberately chosen so sadistic an individual for certain ends. In every rebellion there is need of occasional acts of intimidation to keep the natives from turning traitor and handing the rebels over to the authorities. There is need of that powerful ally—fear. And a few declared that Mektoub used Lakhdar as his scourge, deplored the necessity of his use, but taking advantage, for his own advancement, of the sheik's innate love of torturing his fellow men.

However, for whatever reason Lakhdar had been raised to power by Mektoub—whose name in Arabic means: It is written—the fact remains that raised to power he was. And he used that power to indulge himself frequently in the orgies of blood-letting and torture that his warped soul craved.

He was on his way, on this glaringly bright morning, to appease this ferocious craving with an especially delightful program that was to take place in a Bedouin encampment far south and west of Touggourt.

Seen from afar, Lakhdar's band made a picturesque sight. Over the mountainous, dazzling dunes they filed on their lurching camels, a moving bas-relief against the turquoise of the sky. Red and blue and white were their garments, bold colors worn by even bolder men, that contrasted savagely with the dun hue of the camels. But viewed from a nearer point they became less romantic in appearance.

The riffraff of the rebel army went to Lakhdar. These men he had chosen for the planned atrocity were typical. There were a few renegade Senegalese, several

traitorous Spaniards from the slums of Tangiers, and outcast Arabs from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Stalwart, scarred ruffians, these, who obeyed their more polished but far more callous leader to the death.

Lakhdar himself, riding in the lead on a white camel, looked at first to be a much different sort of man than he really was. He was spare and tall, with a sparse beard sprinkled over his chin, and a snow-white turban the immaculacy of which was his particular pride. His hands were slender and finely shaped, with tapering artistic fingers. His nose was aquiline and handsome. But his eyes and mouth gave him away. His eyes were the narrowed, steely slits of a panther. His mouth was granite-hard; a thin slit of cruelty. Dressed in a burnoose of the finest blue French broad-cloth, and a gondurah of sheerest gossamer wool, he was a dagger in a velvet sheath—a vial of poison in a rose-scented case.

"How much farther to this Bedouin hovel?" he inquired in Arabic of the man riding a little behind him.

"A little less than two hours' ride, illustrious one," the swarthy, shifty-eyed Arab made answer.

Lakhdar nodded, and settled back to pleasant thoughts of the play that was to come.

When an arrogant, egotistic man is scorned by a woman he is, naturally, furious. When the woman further falls into the arms of that man's hated rival, he becomes even more furious. And when she goes on to send him a defiant, contemptuous message—a message in which she states that were he the last male human on earth, and she the last female, still would she loathe him and flee from him—it becomes a matter for bitter vengeance!

Such had recently happened to Lakhdar. The woman—or girl, for she was

just turned fifteen—was Fahtma, known as the Rose of Meknes; and the rival was Echamachi, right hand of Mektoub.

On one of his clandestine visits to Meknes, where he was in danger from the French authorities during every second of his stay, he had met the Rose in the home of a friend. He had committed the crime of entering her apartment by stealth when she was unveiled; and had immediately succumbed to her loveliness. He had killed the friend and taken the girl and her servant, a twisted, ancient jungle woman from east of Dakhar, to his camp. There, while he was preparing leisurely for the conquest of the tigerish little cat he had borne off by force, the detested Echamachi had chanced to visit him with a message from Mektoub.

It was the Evil One's own luck that Echamachi should have chanced to come at that moment. For he was, as has been said, mild though mighty, humane and kindly though a rebel chieftain's highest subordinate.

He had calmly taken the Rose under his protection, and carried her with him back to his own camp. There he had offered to convey her to whatever place of sanctuary she desired. And—she had desired to stay with him! Lakhdar had got that piece of infuriating news from one of the spies he kept in his rival's camp. She had begged him to keep her beside him in peace and in war. Echamachi, being no less human than the rest of mankind, had promised to keep her—the luscious Rose of Lakhdar's desire—with him in peace.

Now it was war. Echamachi was leading a raiding party a thousand kilometers south and west of Lakhdar's camp. He was out of the way for days to come. And he had left Fahtma with a humble Bedouin in whom he had little enough trust, but to whose fear of his power he looked for the Rose's safekeeping.

Lakhdar grinned evilly and unconsciously urged his mount to greater speed. Echamachi had apparently never dreamed that Mektoub's left hand would dare open action against his right. It had never occurred to him that the scourge of the rebel army would risk his open displeasure. Otherwise, surely, he wouldn't have ridden off a thousand kilometers leaving his darling in a mangy Bedouin encampment that boasted less than twenty able-bodied men. Ah, he would regret that carelessness! And Fahtma — she would regret that she had ever been born!

**A**HEAD showed the cluster of squat black tents of the Bedouins, beside a tiny, almost non-existent oasis. Lakhdar and his band swept up to it. Going into the biggest tent, Lakhdar prepared to take command of the miserable, temporary village.

At his approach a woman with faded blue tattoo marks on her forehead scuttled away; and a tall, ancient man whose somewhat stupid eyes gleamed with alarm at this visit of Mektoub's left hand, rose deferentially from a filthy straw mat.

This was a great honor, he mumbled toothlessly. Would not the illustrious Lakhdar deign to rest himself and partake of his poor hospitality? Lakhdar would.

Not for several hours did he come to the point of his visit. Meanwhile he savored the terror the girl, Fahtma, must be feeling. Somewhere, in one of the tents, she was cowering fearfully, wondering at the call of the man she had so rashly scorned, and yet knowing in her heart why he had come—knowing, with her lover so far away, that she was helpless in Lakhdar's hands.

"Thou hast a girl here I have come for," he said at last to the old Bedouin. "She is Fahtma, Rose of Meknes. She is

a traitress to our cause. I have come to punish her."

The old man stirred restlessly and for an instant a glint of opposition appeared in his eyes.

"A traitress? Surely thou art mistaken, great one."

"I have made no mistake. She is proven guilty." Lakhdar sought for a plausible lie. "She led the French to the hiding-place of a trusted man of mine. They executed the man, and came into possession of valuable dispatches he was carrying from Mektoub himself. For that she is to die. Slowly."

"But surely the wise Echamachi would have known of this if it were true."

Lakhdar rose to his straight, lean height and glared down at the Bedouin.

"Thou durst to tell me I lie, son of a mangy she-dog? I say she is marked for punishment, and I am the instrument sent to work her well-deserved death."

For a time the ancient one was silent, with a palpable debate showing in his eyes. Echamachi had charged him with the girl's safety. But Lakhdar was here, and Echamachi was not. And Lakhdar was—the Scourge.

His mind was suddenly made up for him. Lakhdar stepped to the flap of the tent and snapped an order. His men were to search the place till Fahtma was found. Then they were to station themselves, two to each tent, and disarm the Bedouins as they came in from grazing their livestock.

He stared at the old man, who shrank involuntarily away from him. "I have need of this tent," he said. "Go."

The Bedouin went, with a fatalistic glance toward the heavens. "I am old and feeble," that glance said. "It is the will of Allah that this girl die in spite of Echamachi's wish. Who am I to oppose the will of Allah?"

**H**ARDLY had he left when there was a disturbance outside the tent. The flap was lifted and Fahtma was thrust, struggling, before the man who had desired her and who now hated her with a hatred so great that he was risking his position with the great Mektoub, his very life, in pursuit of revenge.

Panting, glaring hatred and defiance at him, she crouched in the center of the odorous, bare tent. And Lakhdar stared back at her, his eyes narrowed to steely slits and his mouth a thin line above his sparse beard.

She was a beautiful thing, this Fahtma. Great, lustrous dark eyes peered from their thickets of lashes, their luster brightened by the kohl that masked her eyelids. Delicate and ivory-colored gleamed her bare ankles under her baggy harem trousers. Her arms were like animated masterpieces carved in old ivory. And the flesh of her throat maddened the lips with its allure. Very nearly Lakhdar forgot his bloody purpose when he gazed at her. Very nearly, but not quite.

"Ah, the traitress," he purred. "She who was clever enough to blind the keen Echamachi to her treason. But not clever enough to blind *me*. No. I have knowledge of her crime, and I have come to punish in the name of Mektoub."

"Treason?" repeated Fahtma, trying desperately for calm. "I am no traitress! I am as loyal as the mighty one himself!"

"It is proven," Lakhdar cut in suavely, his eyes icily cool in their stare. "The messenger, Mohamed, was betrayed to the French by thee. So am I, the second power in the land, sent to deal with thee fitly."

"Thou liest!" panted Fahtma. "Twice thou liest! Once when thou sayest I have betrayed any of the Leader's men—and once when thou sayest thou art the second power. Thou art third. And far art thou beneath my beloved Echamachi!"

"We shall see who is second, Echamachi or myself. We shall see if Echamachi arrives in time to stop the course of justice."

He dropped his contemptuously informal tone, and his voice became stern and judicial.

"Thou hast been tried and found guilty. I have determined thy punishment.

"The soles of thy feet shall be cut off and thou shalt be made to walk upon the desert's burning sands. Thou shalt be slowly flayed alive with light scourges. Then shalt thou be buried to the chin in the sand, and left to await the mercy of Allah. Thy punishment will commence with the rising of the sun tomorrow. It is my command."

The girl's face blanched as the terrible words rolled out. Her lips quivered like the lips of a terrified child, then were proudly still. She drew a deep breath and stood straight before him, a regal little figure in the dingy tent.

"Everything thou dost to me—shall also be done to thee," she promised quietly. "My beloved can not return in time to stop this awful thing. But some day, in Allah's own good time, he will come here for me. And then—thy days will be numbered, oh great and benevolent Lakhdar."

A vein writhed in Lakhdar's forehead. He spat at the girl.

"Bah! Offspring of a sow and a diseased goat! I say this is Mektoub's own judgment come upon thee. And Echamachi will be powerless. Go now, to the tent behind this, and prepare for thine ordeal of the morrow."

Proudly, erectly, the girl went out, to be seized at the entrance flap by two of Lakhdar's stalwart desperadoes and dragged roughly to the indicated tent.

LAKHDAR frowned a little as he pondered over the words of the Rose. Echamachi was, after all, his superior. And he loved Fahtma. . . .

He summoned the old Bedouin. "A word in the ear of the wise, ancient one," he said briskly. "It is Mektoub's desire that no whisper of this just execution reach his trusted right hand, Echamachi. The Leader knows Echamachi's infatuation for Fahtma. It will be best if he never learns what has befallen her."

The Bedouin stared resignedly at him. "Dost understand, misbegotten one?" Lakhdar snarled.

"I understand," sighed the old man. "It is well thou dost. For if any word is ever whispered to Echamachi, all in thy camp shall die. And for thee—shall be reserved the death of impalement."

The man shuddered at the threat. Impalement! That death wherein a man dies for three or four days of a pointed stake pressing upward through his vitals.

"I have said I understood, illustrious one," he mumbled, his hands shaking as though in an attack of palsy. He turned and went, his leaving resembling panic-stricken flight.

The frown left Lakhdar's face. All was now complete. He had the girl. Echamachi was over six hundred English miles away. And Fahtma's fate would never be revealed. All the world would ever know was that she had somehow disappeared from the Bedouin village where she had been left for safekeeping.

A FEW yards away the Rose of Meknes lay huddled in terror and despair on her mat. Out of sight of her captor she gave herself up to the paralyzing fear his sentence had instilled in her. To tread the desert on feet from which the soles had been sliced! To be slowly flayed alive and buried to the chin! She moaned, and rocked back and forth in misery.

Squatted a few feet away from her and looking at her with the dumb sympathy that a faithful animal might show, was the wrinkled old savage who served her.

She seemed hardly human, this misshapen black who had been torn from her jungle village in her youth and brought north as a slave. Her kinky hair was long and ragged, and hung like a frowsy white fringe down over her face. She peered from behind this like a wary, small beast in ambush. She was so old and wasted that she seemed nothing but a bundle of bones insecurely held together by parchment-like skin and corded sinews. Yet there was an inexplicable air of power about her; as though it were not a part of her, but an extraneous thing that surrounded her like a borrowed cloak. In her village, long ago, strange tales had been told of her mother, who was held in a reverence that the jungle peoples, little better than the animals among which they lived, seldom gave their women.

"M'golo," moaned the Rose. "Oh, M'golo. . . ."

The aged black crept to her side and was enfolded in Fahtma's young arms. The girl clung to her, shaken with sobs.

"M'golo, can nothing be done? Is this indeed the will of Allah?"

"I know not thine Allah," mumbled the slave woman in the mongrel Arabic she had picked up during her years of servitude. "I know only the devil-devils of my own race. And I know they would not desert thee thus."

"Then canst not thou summon——" For an instant the Rose faltered and stopped. She was of the true *faï'h*. Allah is Allah. But women are usually more practical than men in the crises of religion; and the doom in store for her overcame her scruples swiftly enough. "Canst thou not summon thy—thy devil-

devils to aid me now? Thou hast heard what Lakhdar intends."

The expression on the aged face changed. The wrinkled lips drew back in an animalistic snarl that revealed a few remnants of teeth that had once been filed to needle points.

"I have heard," she replied after a moment.

"And thou wouldest allow such a thing to happen to thy Rose, whom thou hast mothered from infancy? Surely not if it were in thy power to prevent it, oh M'golo?"

The wild black eyes gleamed somberly behind the strings of hair. The withered, claw-like hands trembled a little.

"I know not if it be in my power to prevent this," she muttered doubtfully. "I have been long from my land and from my devil-devils. But perhaps . . . perhaps . . ."

"Perhaps what?" begged the Rose piteously. "Canst thou really summon——"

"Hush," commanded the wrinkled slave. Into her bastard Arabic a new note crept—an imperious note. The odd power, that appeared to surround her and invest her feebleness with unlooked-for strength, seemed to increase till it was an almost tangible aura. "I know not if anything can be done. But I could try. Now, sleep, my dove."

"Sleep!" exclaimed Fahtma. "Thinnest thou I could sleep? With such a fate waiting for me in the morning?"

"Even so," said the black. "I shall lead thee to slumber. Come. Lay thyself comfortably on the mat. So."

Fahtma's lithe body was tense as rock. Her eyelids fluttered open and shut, and her breathing was convulsive. Yet, even as she had promised, the slave woman led her to slumber.

Her cracked old voice crooned a melody, wild, monotonous, with a few oft-

repeated syllables in the clicking, guttural dialect of her tribe. Her claw-like hands passed softly over Fahtma's forehead and down her throat, hesitating at the base of that slender column and pressing there. Gradually the girl's body relaxed. In half an hour she was breathing regularly, sleeping as heavily as though in a hypnotic trance.

**A**FTERNOON faded to twilight while she slept. Dusk deepened to night. And then M'golo began to busy herself in a strange business.

With three straws of the lean, desert grass, she made a three-legged frame like a miniature artist's easel. Over this she draped several hairs from her head.

At Lakhdar's orders her knife had been taken away from her. Stepping now to the door and accosting the guard, she asked if he would let her use his dagger for a moment. Suspicious, he refused; until she assured him that he could retain his hold on it if he wished. Then he drew it out, and watched in stupid perplexity as she pressed her arm firmly against the point.

Leaving him, she went back into the tent. From the cut she squeezed several drops of blood, which she let drip over the hairs that hung from the tiny straw frame.

Next she secured a few chips of camel dung. This was saturated with a musky-smelling, dark, thick liquid which she poured from a small phial produced from somewhere in the voluminous folds of her garments.

On the soaked dung she set up the straws and the blood-soaked hairs. Then, laboriously she set fire to the lot, striking primitive flint and steel till at last the chips caught. A tiny, clear blue flame leaped into being. This endured for far longer than it would seem to have a right to. Almost an hour it burned;

while, squatting over it with her eyes rolled up to reveal their muddy, rheumy whites, M'golo muttered and mumbled.

When the fire had finally flickered out, leaving nothing but a pinch of whitish ash, M'golo stopped her mumbling. She moistened her fingertips and placed them in the ashes, most of which adhered to her fingers.

She rose and walked to the sleeping girl. An instant she hovered over her, an aged, bat-like figure with outstretched, skinny hands. Then she stooped and lightly smeared the ashes on her forehead, over her heart, and on the soles of her feet.

Fahtma stirred restlessly in her deep slumber. Her slim body writhed and twisted as though in sudden agony. Sharp exclamations rose to her lips; and her hands pressed against her breast as if something within were beating wild wings in an effort to burst out to freedom.

Through it all, however, her sleep held. And gradually her movements subsided till once more she was immobile. As her tossing and turning dwindled, M'golo's activities reached a climax. Her hands had been weaving mystic patterns in the air. Now they were raised above her head, and she shrieked, once, like a soul in torment.

In alarm the Arab at the entrance pressed his ear to the flap. There was no further outcry, and he could hear the breathing of the Rose, sound in slumber. He grunted and relaxed.

Lakhdar, sleeping fitfully a few yards away in the old Bedouin's tent, moved sharply and groaned. Then he sank back into oblivion and was still.

After her cry M'golo was silent. She remained motionless, her skinny arms upraised, her bright old eyes boring down at the body of Fahtma. Breathlessly she waited.

In the darkness of the tent something

veil-like and tenuous seemed to shimmer for an instant over the Rose's body. It might have been a reflected glint of the moon through a rift in the rough woolen tent-top. It might have been—nothing but the imagination of an old jungle woman.

It disappeared, M'golo noted, seeming to float toward the tent wall that abutted against the tent in which Lakhdar slept.

Tensely she peered at the wall through which the thing had melted. Then it reappeared—assuming "it" had reality at all. It hovered over the sleeping girl, seeming to have been enlarged slightly and to be wavering reluctantly in opposition to some driving force. Like a collapsing shred of mist it sank into the beautifully molded body.

M'golo sighed deeply, and her arms slowly lowered to her sides. As one dead, she tumbled forward on her face and lay unconscious.

**T**HE sun, a great red ball of fire, thrust the tip of its rim over the rolling dunes of the eastern horizon. The darkness fled toward the west, leaving the desert bathed in pink and gold. Lakhdar, Scourge of Mektoub, sighed and woke up.

A feeling of extreme well-being possessed him; and for a moment he could not understand why. Then comprehension came to him.

Fahtma, the Rose of Meknes, she who had thought the love of the great Lakhdar a thing to be scorned—she was to be dealt with, bitterly, lingeringly, on this day! That was why he felt so exultant. He recalled the sentence he had passed on her the day before, and his breath came faster.

There are men whose pleasure lies almost wholly in the pain they can inflict on others. Lakhdar was such a man. The torturing of others, at any time, was a delight to him. And, on an occasion like

this, where the pain to be inflicted was not only wanton torment but also in the nature of a vengeance—

He stretched and sat up with a smile on his lips. Fahtma, through the long sleepless night, must have suffered a hundred times the agony of her approaching terrible death.

A slanting ray of the rising sun penetrated the entrance flap. He smiled again. Time for the amusement to begin. He'd show the Rose who was master! And when Echamachi returned and asked for her—

His pleasant thoughts broke abruptly into a confusion of bewilderment. He stared at his ankles, blinked his eyes to clear them of the impossible vision they saw, and stared again.

His eyes were trying to tell him that he had on baggy harem trousers such as women wore. And that under them, between turn-toed shoes and trouser fabric, gleamed delicate, ivory-colored bare ankles.

They were the ankles of a girl. Of a young, beautiful girl. They were not his ankles. What in the name of all the fiends were they doing attached to his legs? Or were they?

Blinking his eyes again, he moved his legs. With the movement the baggy trousers moved, and the slim ankles drew up under him. He reached out a hand to touch them, trembling suddenly in the grip of a freezing, superstitious horror.

His eyes, starting out of their sockets, saw his hand as a girl's hand. Small, it was, with hennaed fingertips. And on its third finger was a small silver ring whose ownership—in the name of Allah!—was only too well known to him!

He stared insanely around the tent. It was not the tent in which he had gone to sleep. It was a smaller tent, less pretentious and well kept—

Here, attracted by the sound of a slight movement behind him, he turned his head and saw an aged black woman squatting on her haunches and regarding him. Her beady black eyes peered at him fixedly from behind a ragged fringe of white hair. Her face was as expressionless as an ugly mask carved in wood. The Rose's servant. What was she doing beside him!

Lakhdar began to pant like a trapped animal that has waked from a serene sleep in accustomed surroundings to find itself staring between cage bars into hideous, unknowable territory. Sweat formed on his forehead, and he felt as though unseen fingers were strangling him to suffocation.

An unaccustomed weight made him move his head involuntarily. With the move he felt something tingle against his throat. His hand, going up to investigate, felt long, silky hair. A girl's hair!

Lakhdar sprang to his feet with a shout. At least it was meant to be a shout. Actually it came from his lips as a shrill, womanish scream.

One of his men pushed aside the tent flap and stared in.

"Allah be with thee, Rose of Meknes," said the man, leering at Lakhdar and bowing low in mock servility. "Thy chances might have been improved hadst thou slept in another tent than this, accompanied by other than thy black servant, here. Perhaps our leader might have been constrained to change his mind about thy sentence."

Lakhdar swayed drunkenly from side to side. "Fool! Idiot!" he tried to shout. "I am thy leader! Having eyes, canst thou not see—"

Only a thin, piercing shriek came from his mouth. He clapped his hand—that delicate, strangely girlish hand—over his soft red lips. The man leered again, and withdrew.

Close after his disappearance a tall, lithe figure strode in. It was clad in a burnoose of blue, French broadcloth, under which was a gondurah of sheer, gossamer wool. Lakhdar found himself gazing up into the narrowed eyes and vulpine face of—himself.

"The sun has risen, oh Rose of Meknes," were the words that came from the thin, cruel lips. "Art thou ready for the sentence—the wise, most just sentence—I imposed on thee yesterday?"

Lakhdar, his reason tottering, gazed up at the relentless, fierce eyes.

"Mercy," he sobbed. "Mercy! Thou knowest what dread thing has happened in the night. I can see in thine eyes that thou knowest. For the love of Allah, mercy!"

The one in the blue burnoose pondered a moment, with mock gravity. Then: "Thou hast a reason to present as to why thy fate should be changed? Thou hast a plea to make?"

"Reason enough," whimpered Lakhdar, in the thin sweet voice that would not be lowered to his own deep tone. "Reason enough! And a plea to move Allah himself. Thou knowest, I tell thee. Thou art me, and I am—I am thee——"

"Thy words are those of one without mind, beautiful Rose," the tall one made answer. "Come. It is time——"

"No, no, no!" Lakhdar shrieked, tearing at the soft woman's body of him. "I am *not* the Rose! I am Lakhdar, the Scourge of Mektoub! I tell thee——"

"Bind her hands," was the curt order.

Lakhdar felt his wrists seized in hands that completely encircled them. He struggled hysterically but found that his strength had diminished till he was helpless as a child.

"Thou knowest me," he pleaded, glancing up from one to another of the in-

different faces. "I am Lakhdar! And he—she"—he pointed—"is the Rose!"

The men looked at each other and shrugged. "Mad," was the verdict Lakhdar read in their eyes.

Into the blazing sun he was dragged. One of his men drew a simitar, razor-sharp. They laid him flat on the sand, and the simitar was poised above his feet.

"For the last time," screamed the lovely, writhing captive, "I tell thee I am Lakhdar! There has been devil's work——"

The words melted into a shriek of agony as the blade, directed with surgical precision, descended on the slim white feet. . . .

**T**HE Scourge of Mektoub's rebel army has changed as completely as though he were another person, people say. Lakhdar is no longer the monster of cruelty he was. His power is used wisely and tolerantly; and when, as is inevitable some day, he falls into the hands of the French, there will be many to mourn his death.

In another way, too, he has changed. Where once he was the bitter, secret foe of the mild but mighty Echamachi, he is now that man's closest friend, and attends him as faithfully as his shadow. Which is strange, remembering his one-time vindictive hate.

Stranger still is the gentle solicitude with which he treats the slave woman who served the Rose of Meknes—before the Rose disappeared, no man knows whither. Lakhdar's men can not understand the attachment he has formed for the aged M'golo. They saw the ferocity with which he went through with the Rose's torment that day in the Bedouin camp. Why, now, should he be so kind to the Rose's servant? Ah, well, Allah alone knows the why of the mysteries that transpire on His earth.

# THE VEILED LEOPARD

By G. G. PENDARVES

*A half-breed Arab chief whom the Touaregs called the Leopard was leader of the slave trade which the French government was doing its best to wipe out—a red-blooded tale*

**T**HE Veiled Leopard!" I protested; "don't bring up that name again! Every one in Algiers has been dinnin' it into my ears for the past month."

Emil Borg smiled; he had a trick of using that enigmatical smile of his as a sort of weapon to fence with any difficult situation. I hated that smile—it emphasized the fact that I was an impulsive young American, new to the country, and, in Borg's eyes at least, a mere tourist. My research work, my recent book on archeology, the fact that I was a member of the Carthage Club, and my very serious purpose in coming out to Algiers—all these things were brushed aside by Borg as excess of futile energy on my part.

"You're using this Leopard of Ghrôl as a sort of bogey to frighten me off," I persisted, my irritation rising as my companion continued to regard Algiers harbor with an air of detached amusement. The terrace of the *Hotel l'Oasis* was an ideally quiet place for this intimate talk with Borg for which I had schemed, but I was getting no further with him.

"Unfortunately the Leopard is no bogey," answered Borg. "He's a very real and serious menace to the caravan trade, and the French government would give its eye-teeth to be rid of him."

"I know! I know also that this expedition of yours to Ghrôl is not only countenanced, but encouraged by the government. Why not let me come along? It may be years before such a chance comes my way again. Ghrôl is right off the track of the ordinary tourist

route, and you are going straight to the place. With your experience and knowledge of the Arab tribes and the desert routes there's as little risk as possible. It's the chance of a lifetime for me! You could smuggle me along with your *garâfa* [caravan] and nothing would be said."

"Your presence would hamper me very seriously. Ruin my plans, in fact," was Borg's reply.

"But why?" I persisted. "I could go in disguise if you like! You don't guess what this means to me. For five years I've been planning and contriving to get over here—to see the Temple and rock-carvings at Ghrôl! That German chap who went in 1830 was the only white man who has ever reached the place."

"And never returned," countered Borg.

"No! But the notes he left prove that Ghrôl is older than history—the most mysterious, the most marvelous ruin in the world. I'd give my last dime to see it. You don't know what it means to my career as an antiquarian."

"There are other things that mean more to me," was the dry response. Borg's black unfathomable eyes looked calmly into my face.

"I wouldn't interfere—I'd follow out your orders as if I were one of your servants."

"Impossible! I regret, but it is altogether impossible."

"Unless you have a private and personal reason," I said, my hands gripping the arms of my wicker chair in the effort



*"With a swift movement he tore away his veil."*

to assume his calm, "I don't see why it can't be done."

"That is because you do not understand the undercurrents. These raids in the Pass of Ghröl are the outcome of things which lie far beneath the surface," replied Borg, his oracular manner more pronounced than ever. "A great deal of ancient history, of which you are ignorant, is involved. The Hoggar and Kelowi tribes have always been at daggers drawn, and lately the former have been exasperated by losing eighty of their finest *mehari* [riding-camels] to their enemies. The Hoggars are out for blood, and all the reparations they can obtain from the Kelowis—or any one else. Their favorite game, at present, is to raid the caravans as they go through the Pass of Ghröl, on their way north

from Timbuktoo, Sokoto, Kano, and Air."

"The Leopard is the Hoggar chief?"

"Yes—that's the only fact that is known about this Veiled Unknown of the Sahara," replied Borg. "The natives call him *Nimmr*, which is Arabic for Leopard, of course, but no one knows his real name; no one seems to have seen his face without the *litram* [Touaregg veil].

"And you are going to visit the Leopard in his lair?"

"Exactly," agreed Borg. "The big annual *garfia* from Kano is on its way north, and should the Hoggars make a successful raid on that, it would cause a sort of commercial crisis. It's one of the largest caravans that ever left Kano—about fifteen thousand camels, as well as

donkeys, goats, and sheep. About a million dollars' worth of animals and goods! I must bring the Leopard to see reason before that caravan falls into his hands, at all costs."

"The government has chosen you to make negotiations?"

"That is how it stands," assented Borg.

Something in the gesture of his lifted chin reminded me of the rumor that had reached my ears that Borg had Arab blood in him—if so, the fact might account for his evident confidence in his ability to deal with this Hoggar chief! However, it was only a rumor—no one had ever dared to tax Borg with it.

"You absolutely refuse to let me accompany you, then?" I said slowly.

"I am sorry you are making a personal matter of it," replied Borg courteously. "Really I have no choice but to exclude you from my plans. They are secret, and involve more than you are in a position to realize."

"Well, I guess you're right. I certainly don't realize what's to prevent you taking me along in some capacity or other. However, if you won't, you won't," and I got to my feet.

"Can't, you mean," said Borg, rising also, and holding out his hand. "Believe me, I much regret my inability to help you. Any other place than Ghrôl, and any other Arab than the Leopard!"

"There is no other place except Ghrôl for me," I replied gloomily, taking his slender nervous hand in a reluctant grip.

"Once more—a thousand regrets," said Borg, making me a stiff bow from the hips. "But for you, Ghrôl is utterly impossible!"

"All the same, I am going to Ghrôl, despite Borg, and the government, and the Hoggars and the Leopard, and the whole bang-shoot!" I muttered between

my teeth, as I walked across the terrace to the steps, and thence down to the street below.

## 2

**A** RED moon hung low over the desert, as the long line of camels moved steadily south: the scruff-scruff of their feet, the creaking of leather, the gurgling protest of some badly laden *jemal* [baggage-camel] or the guttural cry of a driver emphasized the vast loneliness and stillness of the wilderness.

A mile or so behind me, I knew that Emil Borg rode his big white *mehari* in the rearguard of the long *garfla*, and, ahead, far ahead among the sand-dunes, Omar the guide, mounted on a valiant little donkey, led the caravan south.

Luck, the possession of a long purse, and the friendship of an influential merchant of Algiers, who was a personal enemy of Borg's, and more than willing to thwart him whenever possible—all these things conspired to put me where I was: on my way to the Temple of Ghrôl.

I chuckled inwardly to think that I was going under the protection and with the caravan of Borg after all. Here I was marching in the dust of his camels' feet, my skin stained to a desert swarthiness, and clothed in the native *baik* and *kortebbas*, my features hidden beneath the customary *littram*, or blue veil, of the Touaregg tribe.

As Hamil, a poor deaf-mute, I was travelling south with my uncle Zedr to join my uncle's people, the Kelowis, in Air.

It had been a tough ordeal to carry off my disguise at first, especially when I, with every member of the caravan, was summoned to pass Borg's inspection, before the *garfla* set out from Algeria.

But as Zedr—my supposed uncle—was well known as a trusty camel-driver; and as his nephew, Hamil, was also well

known, and often accompanied old Zedr in his desert journeys, I was accepted almost unquestioningly, and treated with surprizing consideration by the majority.

I felt secure, and chuckled again as I trod briskly in the wake of my mount.

Zedr gave a grunt of disapproval as he walked at my side.

"Put a rein on thy eagerness, and remember that thou art Hamil, the son of my sister!" The whispered words were in French, which Zedr had acquired perforce during his youth in Algerian schools.

I checked my swinging stride hastily, and, glancing apprehensively over my shoulder, I saw the one man I feared in the whole caravan was watching me closely, his eyes glinting in his pock-marked ugly face.

It was Mahmud, whose wrath Zedr and I had incurred the first day of our voyage, when Zedr's *naga* [female camel] had made, in passing, a vicious thrust at Mahmud, and given him a nasty bite in the shoulder. Since then, Mahmud had gone out of his way to annoy and irritate us on every occasion, and watched us so closely that I was in constant terror of his discovering my disguise.

"*Ugurra!*" he snarled now, drawing abreast of us as we tramped along, and looking suspiciously at me. "Thy nephew is in haste to reach his journey's end."

"He is afflicted by Allah, the poor one!" answered Zedr mournfully. "He knows not where he goes—nor why!"

"By Allah, then, I marvel that he should walk like a young warrior to his first battle! Truly the All-Merciful hath not afflicted his legs!"

"Life of Allah! Thou wouldst not have him a cripple!" was old Zedr's indignant exclamation.

Other drivers drew near as the disputants' voices rose in anger, and in the childish wrangle which ensued I was for-

gotten. After a few minutes, Mahmud retreated in discomfiture, completely routed, but he cast a vicious look at me as he went, and for the remainder of that march I walked slowly enough, for my apprehensions grew heavier every mile of the way.

We reached the *fonduk* [caravanserai] of El Aju at midnight, and great noise and dust and confusion arose. The drivers yelled and cursed at the beasts, as the latter struggled together and jammed at the single narrow entrance to the *fonduk*. Loads were ripped open and their contents trampled under foot, camels roared and bellowed in their impatient eagerness to be rid of their heavy burdens, men ran to and fro shouting orders and directions, and native dogs joined their barkings and howlings to the general confusion.

Zedr and I modestly retired to the farthest and darkest corner of the walled enclosure and presently the heavy doors were closed and barred against marauders.

"*Akbs!* Be thou wary!" came a low-breathed warning. "Thou art spied upon."

Sure enough, there was Mahmud's evil pock-marked face a few feet away, his eyes gleaming across the big wooden bowl of kous-kous round which he and a few others were squatting. He was whispering and nudging his companions, and all of them turned to stare at me as I scrubbed away industriously at the saddle I was scouring with sand.

I grew more and more uneasy, for in the whole crowded *fonduk* none would stand by me if I was betrayed, save the faithful Zedr; and he was an additional worry, for he would pay for avuncular adoption of me with heavy punishment—perhaps even death. Borg's dealings with the Arabs would not include forgiveness of any deception, I felt sure.

THE charcoal fires died out, the last cups of mint-tea were emptied, and the men, including Mahmud and his cut-throat friends, rolled themselves in their blankets and prepared for sleep.

All was still and silent, save for the occasional gulp of a camel swallowing, or the shrill chirp of a cricket; while outside the heavy walls, the feathered tops of the date-palms swayed gently in the night breeze.

My eyes were closing and sleep was ousting my fears, when I realized that Mahmud had crept round close to Zedr and myself, and was lying like a huge cocoon not six feet away.

I lay very still and waited, but he made no sign, and the quiet night wore on. Then, as I was once more dropping off to sleep, I heard Mahmud's voice raised in shrill alarm:

"Hamil! Hamil! The snake—see by thy foot! Ah, thou art bitten, by Allah!"

I leapt up and clear of my blanket, looking wildly round for the snake. But although the *fonduk* was bright as day, and every inch of the ground was exposed to the full moonlight, there was no sign of a snake. I looked across at Mahmud to see his face puckered into a thousand malicious cunning lines.

"*Gibani!* By what miracle hath my voice opened thy ears, O deaf one?"

We stood there glaring at each other, and he turned to rouse his companions and denounce me, when a low cry from outside the walls roused the dogs. A chorus of barkings and yappings broke out on all sides; the keeper looked through his little peephole and then opened the door to another caravan.

The first camels came in with such a rush that the whole *fonduk* seethed like a boiling cauldron, and the little drama staged by Mahmud for my undoing was wiped out as writing on sand is erased by an incoming wave. Our corner was

flooded by a swarm of chattering indignant men, pushed and squeezed together by the incoming flood.

Mahmud's cry of "Look to this Hamil, this dog of an unbeliever! a spy, a spy!" was drowned in the general uproar. He made a grab at me as I squirmed and shoved my way through the crowd, but I caught him on the point of his chin and sent him sprawling among the ashes of the charcoal fires; and, amid roars of laughter from the easily diverted natives, I got clear away.

By the time I had gained the entrance, the last of the *garfla* was entering, and I noticed one very fine *mehari* led by a princely-looking Arab merchant.

"Yussuf!" he cried at sight of me, and thrusting the reins into my hands he strode haughtily through the gate, leaving me to lead the camel.

I drew the beast hastily into the deep shadow of the wall, praying that the merchant would not discover his mistake too soon, and waited while the last of the eager jostling crowd pushed into the *fonduk*, and the heavy gates were shut.

Cautiously I skirted the wall until I reached the southern side, where the date-palms stretched for a mile or more over the desert's dusty face.

Luck—the blind luck of fools and children—was with me, and, mounting the camel bestowed on me by Providence and the merchant, I got clear of the oasis and rode as fast as I could urge my willing beast on and on into the night.

I had no compass nor could I keep a course by the stars as did the Arabs, so I left the direction to my splendid mount. All I knew was that the *mehari* was going south toward the El War range, which had been our objective for the whole of the previous day; and the beast forged ahead as if he knew of an oasis within reasonable distance, and I let him follow his own velvety sensitive nose, trusting

that his instinct would coincide with my desire, and lead us nearer to Ghrôl.

I knew that the hill-men of El War were friendly and peaceful, and that it would not be difficult to obtain provisions and a guide with some knowledge of the French language from the tribesmen, always provided that I could locate a village amongst those endless hills.

Thoughts of the Veiled Leopard did not worry me very much. My idea was to take a detour round the Pass, join the Kano caravan, and enter Ghrôl with the great *garâfâ*. By that time, either Borg would have brought the famous Hoggar chief to see reason according to his boast; or, if there was a fight, the Leopard's forces would be too crippled to raid the huge Kano caravan, even supposing Borg was vanquished in the field.

It was late in the afternoon when I reached this conclusion, and I had ridden fast and far, not daring to halt even for a midday siesta. My *mehari* was just about at its last gasp, and I was exhausted too—my head ached from the incessant glare and my whole body seemed one aching thirst. But not until the enemy, as the Arabs call the sun, had withdrawn his spear of light and had vanished to conquer other lands, did I draw rein, and my poor weary beast and I stretched ourselves out, under the lip of a great wave of sand, and fell asleep.

IT WAS evening of my second day's mad flight into the wilderness when I saw, outlined boldly against the crimson after-glow, a black flying speck on the western horizon. The speck grew and spread into many more specks, became distinct figures, each one a man on horseback, with *burnous* flying like a great sail behind him, a long war-spear in his hand.

Many absurd and futile plans occurred to me as the horsemen drew near, but I did nothing save sit there on my camel

until I was surrounded. A dozen riders buzzed angrily around me like hornets, and I stared stupidly from one threatening face to another and shook my head in answer to the loud guttural cries which greeted me.

The warriors began to talk vociferously among themselves. I understood only their vivid gestures, but these were enough to bring my heart into my mouth more than once. Evidently one bearded ruffian was all for dispatching me there and then, and, drawing a wicked-looking knife, moved toward me. The others prevented him, and passionate arguments ensued.

It ended in the defeat of my blood-thirsty friend; and presently the whole party, myself in their midst, turned and retraced their steps to the west again.

I was only semi-conscious of my surrounding by this time, and chiefly thankful for the cool darkness of the night, as we rode on and on, until the fires and tents of a huge distant camp became visible.

When we halted at last, and my *mehari* doubled its forelegs under it, I slid precipitately forward over its long neck to the ground, and was dimly aware that some one gave me water and put a blanket around me, before I sank into sleep and deepest oblivion.

### 3

“**G**IBANI!” was the surprised exclamation, in answer to my low-breathed question in French; and a brilliant moon revealed the mournful deep-sunk eyes of the old slave, full of astonishment.

“Thou art from *Dinyâ el Jedida* [the New World]!” he continued cautiously. “Yes, I learnt of it in the schools of Algeria.” His voice stumbled a little uncertainly in the foreign tongue, but noth-

ing in this world had ever sounded so good to me before. I had all the sensations of a mariner lost at sea, who suddenly sees the friendly lights of an anchorage.

For interminable nights and days, I, in company with the rest of the slaves, had dragged over the burning sands. We were part of a big caravan; the majority of it appeared to be fighting-men, but up to the present I knew nothing of the tribe which had captured me, nor of our destination.

We slaves were fastened in tens and twenties, our heads shoved through holes cut every few feet in long wooden yokes; and when one of us failed, too exhausted and feeble to take another step, he hung by the neck, trailing limply, while his weight was added to the tortures of those of us fastened in the same yoke.

The drivers had a short and easy method of dealing with those who fell thus by the way. Not troubling to unfasten the yoke, they simply decapitated the unfortunate wretch; and I had reached the stage of feeling nothing but envy for those who had escaped further suffering.

The slave whom I had ventured to address was huddled with me under the lee of a camel for warmth, our thin blankets being quite inadequate to keep out the piercing night wind. The cold white light of a full moon mocked our misery, and the long-drawn howls of jackals, on the slopes of distant hills, echoed it.

"Tell me one thing," I whispered. "Who is the chief of this caravan?"

"The Veiled Leopard!"

"What!"

"H-s-s-t! Some evil *djinn* will carry thy voice to the Leopard himself, if thou hast not a guard upon thy tongue."

"Where are we going?" I murmured. "It can not be the Leopard!"

"Before Allah's face, it is the truth,"

replied my companion. "These are the Hoggar people—the Leopard's cubs, as his warriors are called—and we go to Ghröl to make a raid on the great caravan from Kano."

"And you?" I asked. "Why are you here? Who are you?"

"*Inshalla!* I, and these other slaves, are all merchants from the north," he replied. "We were taking our goods—sugar and tea, woolen and cotton cloths, drugs and other things—to exchange for gold-dust and skins and ostrich feathers in the markets of Sokoto. The Hoggars met our caravan as they crossed the desert to Ghröl and captured us and our goods."

"What will they do with us later?"

"Those of us who yet live will return with the tribe to the Hoggar mountains, after the raid at Ghröl. We shall be put to work under the women . . . may Allah mercifully send a speedy death to end our sufferings."

As the days dragged on, I began to think more and more of Borg, with hope and pleasurable anticipation which I had never expected to connect with him! The Leopard was not going to have it all his own way.

If only Borg and his *garfla*, would turn up before these Hoggars entrenched themselves in the hills above the Pass. But no welcome cloud of dust broke the monotony of the desert horizon, and day after day we toiled on, and my consuming desire to see Ghröl was changed into an equally consuming desire to see Borg and his *garfla* loom up on that vast sea of sand.

As my body grew weaker, my hope grew stronger and became an obsession at last. The whole blinding scorching world seemed filled with the mental image of Borg.

The remembrance of his last look of hate became more and more obscure in my mind. After all, supposing the rumor

of his mixed blood were true, he was half white by birth, and wholly so by education and environment. Certainly he would never leave me—a white man—at the mercy of these savage Hoggars.

Meanwhile the trail of our caravan was marked more and more frequently with headless bodies, and the vultures which circled overhead grew daily bolder, while the jackals yapped almost at our heels as we dragged along in the dust of the warriors.

At last the gray-white desert sky showed a jagged line of peaks on the horizon ahead, and I could hardly wait to question my Arab friend.

"Yes—the Pass of Ghrôl," he replied, as we lay cautiously whispering that night. "Tomorrow we shall camp in the hills there, to await the caravan from Kano."

"Don't forget Borg and *his* caravan," I reminded him, for I had shared my hopes of a rescue with my companion.

"His name is a great one in the cities and among the tribes," said the Arab, "yet it is not so great as that of the Leopard! Command thyself to Allah, the All-Merciful—there is none other to give thee aid."

Twenty-four hours later we reached the place of my dreams, and I—a slave among slaves—realized to the full the irony of the situation, although by this time I was worn down to a bruised aching mass of bones and blistered skin.

From a big plateau we descended into a valley that narrowed rapidly to the celebrated Pass itself, barely fifteen feet in breadth. We slaves were unyoked, and had to push our way through brush, and over boulders, where lizards crept hastily to cover on all sides.

The huge toppling crags almost obscured the sky, and only the summits were lit with a marvelous glow as though

red wine had been spilt on their jagged peaks.

Round a sharp bend we came suddenly upon the great Temple itself, but I was prodded and driven at the point of a spear, and caught only a glimpse of the columns and friezes of the richly carved façade, flush with the rocky wall of the gorge itself.

The Temple of Ghrôl . . . and I was being driven past it like a beast! Borg himself would have felt satisfied with my punishment, could he have witnessed it, I thought.

Borg! The name buzzed in my aching head continually. Here we were at Ghrôl, and the Leopard and his cubs were ready to take up their positions and hold the Pass . . . where was Borg?

He bulked so largely on my horizon that the Leopard himself hardly interested me. As a slave in that huge Hoggar caravan, I had seen nothing of that famous—or infamous—chief, and he seemed far less real and important to me than Borg.

#### 4

THE rocky ascent at the farther end of the Pass was the climax of that ghastly journey. I was at the end of the long line of slaves, and struggled up on hands and knees for the most part, for on the whole that was less painful than to put down my cracked bleeding feet on the hot sharp rocks.

I slipped and stumbled, and at last in a frenzied endeavor to avoid the sharp prodding spear of the driver I dislodged a big stone from its bed and sent it bounding and rattling down the narrow track beneath me.

A babel of yells and curses broke out, and I saw one man stumble and sink to the ground. Something familiar in his figure and snarling voice struck me immediately. My mind sought desperately

for a clue, when, in answer to his shouts, I was dragged back to where he sat nursing his injured foot.

"*Uggura!* 'Tis thou, Kafir! Thou spy! Thou white-faced horse! May *shaitans* and *djinns* devour thee . . . may jackals gnaw thy bones . . . may thou and thy family and thy tribe be accurst and tormented forever!"

It was Mahmud, the camel-driver of Borg's *garfa*, whose suspicions had first ruined my carefully laid plans, and forced me to flight. But for him——! I ground my teeth as I realized that my last card was played. I should never live to see more of the Temple of Ghröl than I had already seen in that frightful march past its towering splendor.

I should never see Borg, or have the chance to strike a blow against my captors when the Kano caravan appeared. All the thousand chances the raid might have offered, apart from Borg's intervention, were gone—scattered to the four winds, and this evil pock-marked camel-driver was the cause.

Not fear—but fury seized me, as I looked into his shifty eyes, half buried in rolls of fat. That *his* coarse filthy hand should snuff me out like a candle! It was monstrous! Maddened by thirst and pain, I did not stop to reason or even to wonder what Mahmud was doing there. I launched myself upon him, rolling him off the track, and the two of us went down over the steep sides of the gorge. I had a death-grip on Mahmud's throat, and hung on like the wild beast I was for the moment, as we crashed over bush and pebbles to the floor of the ravine, and into the little brook which meandered there among great boulders and oleander bushes.

He was dead before any one could reach us. Unconscious from the batterings his ugly head had received in transit,

he fell face down in the running water, and I left him there.

I was bound and dragged up to the head of the Pass, hardly conscious of my new cuts and bruises. The Hoggars looked at me with something of respect in their fierce eyes, and as the red mist cleared from my vision, and my blood ran slower, I began to wonder what they would do to me.

Then suddenly I began to realize why Mahmud had been with this company of thieves and bandits—the Leopard's cubs! He it was who was the spy! He it was who had betrayed Borg to the enemy!

It grew clearer all the time to me.

Borg and his caravan must have been attacked soon after I left that *fonduk* . . . perhaps——! A further flash of illumination came to me.

That second caravan which had arrived so late! Perhaps they were the Leopard's warriors in the guise of merchants, to whom Mahmud had sent warnings and messages by the mysterious channels used in the desert.

But among all that was doubtful and unproved, one fact stood out bleakly in my mind: Borg was dead.

He was dead . . . otherwise he and his *garfa* would long ago have overtaken us.

I could not grasp it, although I repeated to myself in a dreary sort of chant—"Borg is dead . . . Borg is dead!"

What was it the Arab had said: ". . . the Leopard's name is greater still! Commend thyself to Allah—none other can give thee aid."

Well, the Arab had been right; and, standing above that vast echoing gorge, where centuries ago, priests and warriors, women and little children, slaves and camels had lived their brief lives and returned to the dust of the desert, nothing seemed of any vast importance, not even the fact that soon I was to join that

splendid company of the desert's golden age.

"*Nimmr! Nimmr!*" This word recurred over and over again in the buzz of talk about me, and I remembered the meaning of it.

*Nimmr . . . the Leopard!*

A thin, wizened old man was approaching me, but he was active and wiry in spite of his incredible leanness and the deep wrinkles age had carved on his dark face.

Again my memory gave a sort of jolt within me. This man was as familiar as Mahmud . . . this was another of Borg's men! It was . . . I puzzled for a moment, frowning at the tall skeleton-like creature before me.

"Omar!" I cried out involuntarily.

The ancient guide did not trouble to answer me, but simply gestured me to follow him, and with *burnous* flapping about his bony ankles, he strode away.

I understood why Omar had been spared. Not even the Leopard would destroy so valuable a life as this of Omar the guide. There was not his equal in the vast Sahara; he was, perhaps, the most precious thing in all Borg's costly caravan, a prize worth many loads from the rich markets of the Sudan.

Through a muttering, excited crowd, I followed Omar to the tents of the warriors, which slaves were hastily erecting. I was led to the entrance of one standing apart from the rest, a much larger one, before which a silken rug was spread on the ground, and a soft mass of cushions supported the figure of a man.

He was veiled with the blue *littram* of the Touaregg, and a mantle of heavy white silk muffled him from throat to feet. But his black eyes met mine with a cold intent scrutiny which made me shiver involuntarily.

**O**MAR swiftly withdrew, and in a moment there was no one of that vast caravan within sight or sound of us. I was facing the Leopard alone.

The Leopard of Ghrôl!

I stared dully at the splendidly clad figure, majestic notwithstanding its many wrappings. In spite of the peril in which I stood, I became acutely conscious of my own filthy ragged unshaven self.

It is strange that the mere superficial trappings of one's rank helps one to face death more calmly. To be a slave—and to look it! That certainly rankled in the moment when my enemy's eyes met mine.

My bloodshot eyes were hardly able to focus on anything, but I stared from between my red swollen lids, and tried to straighten my shoulders, bruised and bleeding from the long weight of a slave's yoke.

"I trust you are not disappointed in the Temple of Ghrôl? You have certainly been at great pains to see it." The calm voice came from behind the *littram* in excellent French, and my heart missed a beat at the sound of it.

"Yes! Mahmud told me of how he cured your deafness, O nephew of Zedr the camel-driver!" mocked the voice. "I own that I gave you my escort unwittingly on the first part of the journey. However, I was compensated for that little mistake of mine, by the pleasure of seeing you sweat and toil as my slave since you rejoined my caravan."

A great void seemed to open up under my feet; I swayed dizzily, grasping at the air as my legs gave under me, and I sank to my knees before that white-clad figure whose eyes burned into mine.

"Borg!" I whispered hoarsely, my blackened lips and leathery tongue hardly able to frame the word.

With a swift movement he tore away his veil . . . and I saw Borg's evil triumphant face smiling at my horror.

"You are the first, save those of my own tribe, to see the Leopard unveiled—the first to learn my secret! But the dead are silent . . . more silent even than Hamil, the deaf-mute!" He fastened the veil again over his mocking mouth, and swayed to and fro, laughing quietly.

"You have seen the Temple of Ghrôl! You have learnt the secret of the Leopard of Ghrôl! What more of pleasure or surprize has life to offer you? Nothing, believe me! Death is the only boon which I can now confer on one so favored of the gods as you. Yes! . . . you shall die in the moment of your triumph, before weariness and disillusion rob you of its glory."

He clapped his hands, and Hoggar slaves came running. He spoke to them in Arabic—a few deep peremptory words.

I was dragged to the center of the great space enclosed by the tents, Borg watching from the entrance of his own tent, as the slaves brought a brazier of charcoal and began to fan it to a glowing heat; while others brought ropes and iron things which they thrust through the bars of the brazier.

And Borg—the Leopard of Ghrôl—sat at his tent door and continued to stare at me.

5

DEATH by torture! I had read and heard of it often enough, and wondered how people had endured such things, and what superhuman courage had sustained them to cling to principle, honor, or faith as their life ebbed from them inch by agonizing inch. I had tried to imagine something big enough to give me courage to face such horror—and failed.

Well, there was nothing for me to recant—no person or cause for me to be-

tray! I was to die in order to satisfy the wounded pride of a half-breed. My agony was merely to provide an agreeable hour for a primitive race and their de-humanized leader.

I was tied up to a stake by two huge Hausa slaves, and Borg walked over to inspect my bonds and gloat over my helplessness.

"Half-breed!" I said hoarsely, rejoicing as I saw his eyes flash.

His hand went to his belt, and for a split second I hoped that I had goaded him into giving me a quick dispatch; but he mastered himself, gave an order, and strode back to his tent.

With a thin rod of iron, heated white-hot in the brazier, one of the slaves began slowly and thoroughly to trace a stinging fiery inscription across my chest. It was the name—Hamil—which I had borrowed from the nephew of old Zedr. The pain was bearable, I was relieved to find, owing greatly to the hardened condition of my skin after its long exposure to the sun.

The black brute who was doing it took pains to explain his work by pointing to it, and repeating the word "Hamil . . . Hamil . . . Hamil!"

Then, with a final vicious stab, he drew back and grinned, and opened wide the great cavern of his mouth.

"Hamil . . . Hamil!" he repeated, and taking his tongue between his fingers, shook his head violently.

I understood, and the most paralyzing fear took me by the throat. Hamil was dumb . . . I was to be made dumb also! My tongue . . . and then my ears . . . for Hamil was deaf! I began to shake and sweat like a man with ague, and the slaves beat their hands together and showed their white teeth in an ecstasy of amusement.

They bent over the brazier, and I shut

my eyes so that I could not see what beastly thing they pulled out next. Nothing in this life will wipe out remembrances of that moment of waiting—I lost years of youth that I can never regain.

I kept my eyes shut with the crazy thought that they would not begin their devil's work until I opened them.

The minute lengthened out . . . a strange roaring was in my ears. It reminded me of the time I had almost drowned in Lake Placid, and the hope that I was dying dawned in my mind.

The sound of a shot roused me from semi-consciousness, and I saw men running to and fro like creatures possessed.

From behind the tents on all sides came more and more men, some mounted, more on foot, all yelling and shooting and stabbing like fiends from hell.

I struggled desperately in my bonds, and in a moment a huge mounted Arab saw me and bore straight down on me.

"Shoot! Shoot!" I yelled, in a frenzy of relief to see the heavy weapon he was brandishing, forgetting that he could not understand me.

But he pulled up his horse within a foot of my stake, leaped down, slashed me free of my bonds, dragged me up on his horse in front of him, and tore madly through the mêlée, shooting with deadly accuracy at any who opposed him.

I began to laugh and could not stop myself. This was too much! Torture and then kidnapping! All exactly like a five-reel movie-show, with myself as the unwilling and very unheroic hero. I shook with painful laughter as the Arab held me in a grip of steel.

Then I caught sight of Borg, unveiled, turban and rich cloak trampled underfoot as he swung a great curved blade in his hand.

The Leopard of Ghrôl at bay . . . his claws unsheathed . . . his face a grinning mask of rage as his sword flashed and flashed again! Half-breed? No! . . . he was one of the desert-born . . . primitive son of a primitive people . . . savage and magnificent as the wild beast whose name he bore.

His terrible thrashing right arm fell as I watched, and he went down with a knife in his heart, his left hand gripping the throat of his slayer.

A few more hundred feet of the reel unwound itself. Camels, horses, sheep and goats added to the uproar and din of battle; the hills began to be littered untidily with dead and dying Hoggars, who were borne down like corn before a cyclone.

There was a brief fade-out, and the picture changed to the face of an old man . . . Zedr . . . he was trying to make me open my mouth to drink!

But I suddenly remembered that there was a very strong reason why I should not open my mouth, although I could not recollect that reason. Old Zedr's face vanished and it grew quite dark.

**T**HE explanation seemed simple, when given to me later.

Zedr had surprized Borg's double identity, and escaped from the *fonduk*. He had rounded up his tribesmen to combine with a strong force of the Foreign Legion, and by a secret and long-forgotten way had led them underground and up through the Temple to the summit of the Gorge. Thus they had been able to make their spectacular descent upon the Hoggars, and surprized the Leopard in his lair!

And the Leopard had died as a Leopard should die—savage and dangerous to the last.

# Gesture of the Gods

By GUY FLETCHER

*In the Valley of the Kings the old belief still lives: "Death shall come on swift wings to him that touches the tomb of a Pharaoh"*

**T**EDDY MAITLAND, arriving at Port Said, had taken train to Cairo only to find his friend, Bracey, who held an appointment there, was on leave in England.

Having nothing to do, he went up the Nile.

His unannounced arrival in Egypt was characteristic of him; he might just as well have turned up in China. He was blessed with money, and could drop in on his friends all over the world. They welcomed him, for he was a cheery sort.

For three years now he had done this kind of thing; neither he nor they showed a sign of the reason. He looked and behaved like a man of the world, tolerant, humorous, cynical at times. They knew as well as he did that he wandered to forget.

The infidelity of his wife with Lang Menzies had first stunned him, then filled him with an elemental jealousy and hatred and at last despair. He had divorced her and gone abroad, East, anywhere. Six months later, in India, he had learned that Menzies had not even been man enough to marry the woman he had betrayed.

Then had come to Maitland in his loneliness an emotion in which he wanted to forgive Sheila, take her back, marry her again; but the phase had passed. His life with her was over, never to be renewed.

Now for months his memory of the hell he had suffered was all but dead in him. The crash in his life might never have been but for the lines in his square-jawed face and the restlessness that kept him a nomad still.

The free and easy life of the East with its color and mystery were sedatives for his soul, but perhaps of all places he had visited the one that most soothed him was the Nile valley. Wheat sprouting green through the black sediment of the annual flood, the palms and poplars along the banks, the wells each with its donkey working, its bucket creaking, its *fellah* singing the "water song;" the Arabs, the villages, the sand horizons; history written and illustrated in a million monuments.

He had been along here so often with Bracey by rail and water up as far as Khartoum, to the confluence of the two Niles, the Blue and the White, that he knew this part of the river as far as Wady Halfa as well as he knew the Thames.

But to his annoyance, on arriving at Luxor now, he found the best hotels were full, being occupied either by tourists or by the staff of the famous Egyptologist, Sir Stephen Colliston. Damning him heartily, he strolled round the Arabic village that had once been Thebes, and found an hotel at last. It was a poor sort of place, and he ate an execrable dinner alone in the public room, waited on by an old crippled Arab.

"The desecrators in the Valley of the Kings—how long are they staying?" he asked him venomously, for the wine was dreadful.

"Who knows?" replied the waiter in broken English, and his thin fingers smoothed the tassel of his fez. "Very good for Luxor, but bad for them."

"How?"

"You know what is said. 'Death shall

come on swift wings to him that toucheth the tomb of a Pharaoh.' "

"You believe that?"

"Oh, I believe in Allah—the gods of the Pharaohs are not for me. But one he died here suddenly last week."

**M**AITLAND went early to bed, but mosquitoes and the stuffiness of his room, and tomtoms and hautboys from the native quarter prevented him from sleeping; and when at last all was quiet, he was wide awake. He stifled here, he must go out. He dressed, and was soon walking along the streets of Luxor.

Camels snarled from somewhere, and then the footsteps of a patrol echoed on the night, but without seeing them he passed through the outskirts and walked along the river. The cool air, the brilliant

Egyptian stars and moon reflected in the water, had a magic of their own. Like a ghost he sauntered up the Nile, and presently a steamer approached him. With its portholes lighted, it had the air of a phantom vessel.

It passed, and again Maitland was alone with the night. To either side of him, beyond the fields, the desert, behind him the desert of his life, in front of him what? Just what?

In an hour he sat down by the river; then he filled and lighted a pipe and contemplated the stars in the Nile. The Pharaohs had seen them, the Pharaohs with their passions and vanities and millions of slaves, the Pharaohs whose bodies had been embalmed with such care and hidden from thieves, only to be



"She held out her arms to Osiris, god of the morning."

dug up and stolen—as yet another was to be stolen now.

And he said suddenly aloud:

"Why the hell don't they leave 'em alone?"

It was tranquil here, the water rippling by; he would like old Bracey with him. And then he remembered one of the great moments of his life when his friend and he had stood at sunrise in the innermost recess of a temple a mile or so on—a temple so constructed that at a given moment, for a moment, the rising sun streamed in and filled the dark underground cavern with golden light. And he got up and strode forward, knowing a strange fervent wish to pay his respects to Osiris, god of the morning.

He walked on; the moon sank. A night-flying airplane caused a guard dog to howl in the desert. In the growing darkness he picked his way by the light of a torch. And now a wind rising scattered sand in his face, and long after he came to a great rock, and, moving along it, found the opening. He flashed his light into the cave and went down and in.

Eery, though he had been here before; but not alone. This had been a temple, carved thousands of years ago—here human beings had worshipped. His footsteps rang out. The pillars supporting the vault were legs. He lifted his torch; a huge face leered down at him. He had the feeling of being a pygmy intruding into the lair of monstrous giants, who might stretch out hands of stone and crush the life out of him.

Then he laughed, and his laughter echoed as he looked at the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the walls, the bas-reliefs: he went farther in. Three vaults, and in the last, four gods of stone, seated on the ground, still showing a trace of the colors that were theirs thousands of years ago, still waiting patiently for the coming of Osiris.

A sudden weariness overcame him; he snapped off his torch, sat down and waited too.

Odd—those figures watching him. Back there through the tunnel the stars; here blackness. Dog-tired. He leaned against the wall, and his eyes closed and his head drooped. Half asleep, half awake, he was conscious, but unable to move. It was as if his perceptions were clear, but his brain paralyzed. It had no power to command his limbs. He thought he was dreaming, but felt sure he was awake. He tried to lift his arm to prove it, but he couldn't.

Thus the phantom horses bearing the spirits of the violated Pharaohs came along the Nile toward this temple they had built; but passed by, came back, passed again overhead. The echo of hoofs thundered as if in anger. He felt they could not find the entrance and he wanted to show them where it was that they might come in and bring down curses on the desecrators of their mummies—but he could not move. He tried to shout, but could not open his mouth. . . .

Waking suddenly he looked round and then remembered why he wasn't in a bedroom of the worst hotel in Luxor. It was neither light nor dark. He could just see in the black grayness the five stone gods of the temple. Five? No, four. But there were five. Five gods of stone, one diminutive compared to the others.

He couldn't have noticed the fifth last night. He turned his coat collar up, huddled his head in his shoulders and closed his eyes again; it was awfully cold. And soon he knew the swift dawn was coming. The grayness, and then the rose; soon Osiris would stream in.

He looked up now at the huge god with blue legs—an ugly devil. The gray body was turning red. The sunrise! As he lowered his eyes a shaft of light

streamed into the cavern and filled it with gold; lighted the four gods and the fifth. The fifth!

He stared and stared.

For on her knees was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. The sun blinded her; she was all gold, holding out her arms to Osiris, god of the morning.

2

**M**AITLAND's surprize at her presence here was not the chief of his emotions, for it was winter, and at this season of the year tourists were to be found at any Egyptian monument, at almost any hour. If he was surprised that she had come in without seeing him while he was asleep, he was certainly far more surprised at her rapt attitude.

Tourists worship the sun, but not on their knees.

Breathless, he stared with intenseness at her sheer beauty—that was the wonderful thing. Her aliveness and allure in this vault among these discarded stone idols of a dead religion.

The sun blinded her and transmuted her, slid from her face; the goldness leaving it and the cavern as if an electrician in a theater were sliding a smoked slide sideways over a line. Light slipped along the tunnel, leaving a grayness behind. Osiris was gone.

And, in tune with her mood, Maitland could only wonder if her prayer would be answered and what it had been. Did she belong in soul to Egypt? For she was no Egyptian. Somehow not French. Swedish, American, English? Her hair showing under her hat had been like a flame, her mouth red and full, dark brows and lashes, and the soft beauty of pathos and appeal written on her face.

He moved accidentally; she turned her head. An intentness showed, and then a certainty that she was not alone. Then

she saw him. Her eyes widened, her mouth opened a little. He thought it better to speak.

"Don't be afraid."

"Afraid?" she said. "I'm not afraid of the living."

She trembled up, and he rose, too. Her surprize was replaced surely by an embarrassment that she had been caught doing such an intimate, such an unusual thing.

"I never saw you," she said.

"I was waiting for the sunrise—I had fallen asleep."

It was light enough in the temple now. She appraised him. And he knew she was English and saw she was in a riding-habit.

"You came here alone?" he said.

"No, with an Arab boy. He's waiting outside with the horses."

Then he remembered the echo of hoofs when he was falling asleep.

"I heard them. They were like thunder down here. Do you know in my half-consciousness what I thought they were?"

"No."

"Hoofs of ghost horses bringing the spirits of the desecrated Pharaohs——"

She gave a small cry. There was sudden fear on her face.

"What made you think that?" she asked.

"Perhaps a conversation I had with a waiter at my hotel. I was rather annoyed that the Colliston party had booked up all the good ones."

She gave him an odd look.

"He reminded me of the old Egyptian curse. 'Death shall come on swift wings to him that toucheth the tomb of a Pharaoh.' "

She swayed, and he put out a hand to save her.

"You're faint and cold. Come up into the sun."

But she did not move.

"It's weird," she said. "Oh, so weird! Your being here. Your supposing that, when I—when I—"

He asked with a curiosity that must somehow be satisfied: "What were you doing?"

"I don't know. I had to come. These excavations—they concern me. There—there was a death last week—I've come most mornings since. To—" she hesitated. "I can't explain. Just to be here. To propitiate, to show sympathy, to appease the dead Pharaohs that they might—might undo the curse."

"I understand. By Jove I do! I'm all against the rifling of graves, too. Why it's allowed beats me. It's indecent."

"I'm superstitious and afraid—terribly afraid."

"May I ask you something? You said just now it concerns you. In what way?"

"I don't know you," she said.

He smiled at her little convention.

"I'm one Edward Maitland of no importance."

"I'm of no importance either, but I'm Sir Stephen Colliston's daughter."

That took time to sink in. Somehow he had been carried away by her action here. He could have accepted it as rational coming from a disinterested stranger, for wasn't it but an intensifying of his own feelings? Then how much better could he understand now?

Her father, the brilliant Egyptologist, starting out perhaps at this very moment to rifle a grave, to bring on himself the curse which, believe it or no, seems often fulfilled. Tut-ankh-amen—most of the party dead. Already one of Colliston's.

He looked at her and said anxiously: "Have you been in the Valley of the Kings?"

"No, I won't go. I'm only in Luxor

because the man I may marry is assisting my father."

So she was engaged. Her fiancé was assisting her father, yet it seemed only for her father she had any concern.

"I'm really living in Cairo, where we've taken a house for the season," she told him as they returned along the tunnel.

"Do you know a man called Bracey at the Residency?"

"Not well. I've met him. Is he a friend of yours?"

"One of my oldest. I came to look him up, but he's in England."

She smiled and held out a hand.

"Then we're introduced."

He looked at her in the vivid morning. Her skin was so translucent, she exhaled such charm as well as possessed such beauty, that he couldn't help thinking it was a pity she was engaged to be married or wondering why they had met.

The same thing had brought them here. It seemed like fate, but all for nothing.

"I return to Cairo tomorrow," she said, "but I shall be back in a fortnight. You must come and dine with us if you're still in Luxor."

"May I?"

"Where can I find you?"

He told her.

"But I don't want my father to know where we met. As you can imagine, he's not superstitious."

They walked toward two horses; at the head of one stood her boy in white, glittering burnoose. She cried "*Au revoir*," mounted, and, waving a hand and followed by the Arab, cantered away.

The Nile flowed by, sparkling in the sunshine; out among the green wheat some peasants were already at work; along a path a boy and a donkey came

toward the water; in the distance a caravan of camels padded to the south.

Yet to Maitland, who so loved the Nile valley, nothing mattered but that girl riding away on a horse. She was to return to Cairo tomorrow, but when she came back he was to dine with her and meet her father and the man she was going to marry.

That was the idea, but he did not think he would be there, somehow.

## 3

**O**N THE roaring corridor express, on its twenty-hour journey from Luxor to the capital of Egypt, Evelyn Colliston wondered why she had never mentioned Maitland on getting back to the hotel. Perhaps because meeting him in that surprising way seemed to have changed her life. Anyhow she had since told Elm she would never marry him, but Elm had only laughed.

She hated his laughter now, though she remembered the voyage out; the hours on board she had spent with him, her father's latest "find." Elm had been so virile, so masculine that she had been fascinated. Deck flirtations—flirtations lasting on out here under the African stars.

Only when they had come to Luxor had her feelings changed; so little that she had still been attracted, so much that she had begun to criticize. Was his ardor for her any more than the innate keenness in such a man for a woman—some woman? Was his passionate interest in Egyptian relics any more than a strategy to get her father on his side that he might win her in the end?

For she had refused from the first to be definitely engaged; even at her most enthralled moments she had stood out against that. She had never trusted her

senses; they seemed to be hypnotized by Elm as is a bird by a snake.

And then poor Bettinson had died, and her superstitious fears, lulled by her environment, had leapt into new life. She had implored her father to give up his excavations; begged Elm to persuade him. But as her father had laughed, so Elm had laughed, standing there all male in a shirt open at the throat, red sand on his hands and breeches suggesting the blood of a Pharaoh. And he had looked at her as much as to say: "You're mine!"

So had he laughed and looked when she had told him this morning she would never marry him.

Yes, every one had laughed at her; they were hot on the scent of fame and fortune. Like terriers scratching up earth to get at a rabbit, they burrowed night and day to get at the embalmed corpse of a poor, wretched king.

At a moment of emotional crisis, in the temple at sunrise, she had astonishingly, wonderfully met this Maitland, and he had not laughed. He had understood. There was a sympathy, a gentleness, an imagination under his male casting. She had suggested his coming to dine when she got back to Luxor, just to snub Elm and show him she meant what she had said, but now she hoped he would come because somehow she would like to see him again.

But back in Cairo, where West has met East to such purpose that camels are acquainted with racing-cars and one may pass in the same morning through narrow Arabic streets draped with canvas to keep off the sun and lunch in the most modern, luxurious hotel, Evelyn Colliston forgot Elm and Maitland just as she forgot her superstitious fears for her father's safety.

The fulfilment of curses, thousands of years old, seemed very far removed from this gay, careless life. She never gave

them a thought until one morning, after a dance, she stood on a flat roof and watched the sunrise.

Up out of the rosy east suddenly swam Osiris, and even now was streaming into that temple in a bank of the Upper Nile, where he and she had met—he and she who seemed to have been drawn there that they might meet each other.

Making that astonishing discovery she remembered with a tingle of excitement that in a week she was returning to Luxor and she was to see him again.

But actually it was two nights later that to her amazement she saw him—in Cairo—actually here! It was night, and he was on foot, in opera hat and dress coat as if he were walking down Piccadilly. Of an impulse over which she had no control she stopped the car, and, leaning out of the window, called him.

He turned; she was amused to see the blankness on his face. Then he came toward her, recognized her, raised his hat.

"Miss Colliston!"

"I thought you were up the Nile, Mr. Maitland!"

His eyes twinkled. "I confess I got bored with it after you left."

"Then you weren't coming to dinner in Luxor—when was it to be, next week?"

He made no answer, only looked at her. She whom he had met in a simple riding-habit was now radiant in the glory of Solomon. Against the old gold upholstering of the limousine, under electric light, he saw her there in shimmering peacock silk and white furs and pearls. Yet somehow she had been even lovelier among the old stone gods.

She smiled at him; and with a sharp memory of his own hashed-up life and of her engagement, he smiled back cynically.

"Where are you off to?" she asked.

"The theater."

"Take me."

He shook his head, then, with a glance toward her English chauffeur, said in French:

"But no, *mam'selle*, what would your fiancé say?"

"I haven't one."

"You——?" His eyes brightened. "But you said you were engaged to be married."

"I don't think so. I said I might marry. But that's all off. So is the party I was going to, if you'll take me to the play."

He remembered it had seemed fate their meeting, and got in beside her.

So an acquaintance was renewed which rapidly developed into that most enticing of friendships—a provocative one between man and woman. The unordinary manner of their meeting, the affinity of their souls which had been apparent that morning and was manifest even under their banter here in Cairo, drew each to the other.

There was a challenge in their gayety.

"Did you come here hoping you would see me?"

"Do you hope I did?"

They were infinitely removed from mysticism, from unhappy memories and wistful yearnings and secret fears.

One day they explored the myriad mosques, another they roamed about the Delta Swamps to see the glittering canals, and raised banks with their friezes of camels against the sky, and water-wheels worked by blindfold bullocks. So the week slipped by, and she forgot she had been going to return to Luxor, and he did not remind her.

For he was madly in love with her now, and knew he had been in love with her ever since that morning when he had found her in the temple. He told her he had been married, and how after the divorce he had wandered about the East; and she so vividly talked of her father

and Elm that he could almost picture them. He scented a row with Elm.

The inevitable moonlight night they motored out to the Sphinx, he said as they were climbing the Pyramid of Cheops:

"If I hadn't stayed at the worst hotel in Luxor I should never have met you—I should never have gone out that night."

Then he added abruptly: "Is this fair to Elm?"

"Elm!" she echoed with contempt. "I saw through him quite suddenly, I think. Women needn't trouble to be fair to Elm." And she paraphrased: "Some men are hunters; women are their prey; they hunt them for the beauty of their skins."

He looked at the beauty of hers.

"Some men?"

"Not you. Not you," she answered.

He would have kissed her, only their Bedouin guide was near and tourists were about. But in the car he kissed her, going back to Cairo.

"I love you, too," she whispered. "I love you, too!"

Not till he had left her at her house and was walking back to his hotel did he realize they would have to let Elm and her father know. Love had come to them, love had consumed them.

Knowing where they were drifting but not knowing how far they had gone on the journey, they had rushed into love; and he who had sworn never to believe in a woman again, believed in one and loved her so utterly that he felt a glow and an ecstasy that were one with this Eastern night.

His telephone rang early in the morning.

"Have you seen the paper?" she said; and her voice was thin.

"No. Why?"

"There's been another death at Luxor!"

"My dear!"

"Fatal accident this time to a workman—fell down what they call a 'well'—a shaft leading to a lower passage. . . . That's the second. The third will be—my father!"

"Nonsense!"

"Darling, the paper quotes that thing the waiter told you. About death and swift wings."

"Sweetheart!"

"Come with me. Nothing will stop Father, but I feel I ought to be there. There's a train early this afternoon."

#### 4

**S**HORTLY before noon next day they stood in the corridor of the express within sight of Luxor. She had retired to rest last night, but had not slept well; yet she looked wonderfully fresh now. As he glimpsed slantwise through the window the familiar landmarks, he felt emotions as hot as the day—a satisfaction, a pugnacity, a savageness as primeval, perhaps, as the instincts of those long-dead people who had built the Avenue of Sphinxes at Karnak, a mile and a half away.

She was his; and he had taken her for good and all from this man, Elm.

He remembered walking along the river that night, and wondering what his future held. This. Travelling back to Luxor to tell Elm all about it. And if sportsmanship seemed lacking, well, blame the man who had messed up his life!

"Don't look so fierce, darling!"

He laughed. But, turning, she gazed through the far windows at the red hills where her father was working.

"I wish he would give it up!" she said.

"About Elm?"

"What about him?"

The train stopped. The palm trees, the

white and mud houses, the donkey-boys—he noticed them as he followed her out of the station. She went up to an old car.

"No more disasters, Brennan?"

"No, I think we've seen the last, miss."

"My father's all right?"

"And very excited because they've bored through the last 'syringe.' "

"How technical you are!"

"I hear it all day, miss. You've arrived in time for the kill."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"One gets blasé, I suppose. The sarcophagus is there, but they don't know yet whether it's full or empty. They'll know tonight."

Getting in, she said to Maitland: "I'll drop you at your hotel."

Then they drove through Luxor, Arab children gay as tulips running after them for "baksheesh" and the sun blazing down.

"He's my father's valet. Goes with him everywhere."

"Am I to come to dinner tonight?"

"Of course."

"As I said before, what about Elm?"

"He mayn't be there."

"If he is?"

She shrugged.

"I'm going to marry you," he said. "He had better be told."

"I'll tell him, Teddy."

"Or shall I?"

"No, I will."

"He'll take it badly."

"He won't believe it—he's vain. He'll laugh."

"Does he know I'm coming?"

"I wired father I was bringing you—I didn't say who you were."

"You love me and not Elm—that's all that matters. Darling, if there's a row, it's up to me."

"I'm not afraid of him." Then she said again as she had done in the temple:

"I'm not afraid of the living." And she glanced in the direction of the hills.

He pressed her hand. "Don't worry about that—it will be all right. I'll come with you if you're going across."

"I'm not," she said, "I can't do any good. Besides I'm dead-tired."

She dropped him and drove on to her hotel.

That afternoon, lying down after lunch, Maitland had a bad dream. A great bat flew out of a tomb with the face of Sir Stephen Colliston, and Evelyn was lying crumpled on the red sand. And he couldn't go to her help because he was powerless to move, just as he had been in the temple when he had heard those hoofs. Elm was running toward her, and he felt if Elm reached her—

He woke in a sweat of fear to find himself in his bedroom at the worst hotel in Luxor, almost with surprize, his dream had been so real. Elm. There was going to be trouble with Elm. What an odd name! Then he thought of the bat with Sir Stephen's face. What an odd business it all was!

## 5

**I**N THE private sitting-room of the Collistons' suite the table was laid for four. Elm was finishing his dinner; he had dined early and was to go back to the Valley to relieve Sir Stephen. Evelyn sat in a basket chair. She had just told him all about it, and concluded: "Well, now you know."

He laughed in that way that said: "You're mine!"

He was lithe, animal, bright red in the face with sunshine and health and sand; the muscles of his strong neck moving as he ate, suggested power. He finished at last, lit a cigarette, took it from his lips and laughed again.

"You think you love this bloke. Is that it?"

"I know I do."

"He's coming here to dinner?"

"He is."

"Good!" And he emptied a glass of port wine.

He was in his element. There must always be something rough in his life for him to enjoy things. He was primitive. It would be fun to constrain a reluctant Evelyn and to deal with a rival.

"You know, Eve," he said, "he's about as much hope of getting you as that old king in his box has of coming alive."

"You egotistical fool, Elm," she rejoined with spirit, "where I love, you can't stop me."

"But I can, him!"

"Sheikh stuff!" she said with derision. "Well, he's not a little fellow."

"If he's as big as Carnera, I'll fight him for you."

"Bulls do that, and cockneys and Arabs." The contempt on her face changed to frank appeal. "Elm, did I ever promise to marry you?"

"But you would have done so if you had not met this chap."

"Possibly."

"There you are!" He rose and dominated her. "You shall marry me."

"Idiot!"

"Idiot, am I? That swine's stolen you from me."

"How could he?" she asked coldly. "I was never yours to steal."

There was a knock; Brennan opened the door and announced:

"Mr. Maitland."

Elm swung round, stared at the man who had been shown in.

"This is Elm," said Evelyn awkwardly, now the moment had come.

"Elm?"

"Maitland?"

The men looked at each other.

Seeing the set of their faces and feeling the electricity in the air and hearing that barbaric music throbbing in from the bazar, Evelyn put a hand to her heart as if to stop it thumping. She wished her father were here, she wished she had never met Elm, she almost wished she were not a woman.

They said nothing, only stared. She hardly recognized her own voice.

"I've told him—about us, Teddy."

His expression was iron.

"Yes, she's told me all right," said Elm.

Nothing more; no reply. The two men facing each other across the table, on which scarlet flowers blazed in a vase. Savage, African. Against her will, was something of this Egypt rising up in her?

"He thinks you've stolen me from him, Teddy."

He spoke at last. His eyes on Elm were flames.

"I understood she was never yours. I wouldn't deliberately steal another man's woman."

Elm's knuckles were white. She couldn't bear this any more. Being here, squabbled over. She felt at any moment they might snarl and spring at each other's throats like dogs.

"I'd better leave you to have it out," she said with hot cheeks, and left the room.

Neither moved. There was no change of expression in Maitland, almost a relief in Elm.

"A damned jest of fate!" said Elm.

"L. M.," said Maitland. "Lang Menzies. I never thought of that."

Elm looked at his wrist watch.

"I've got to get back."

"And we can't talk here."

"What's there to talk about?"

"You know."

He shrugged. "All right. Better come across to the Valley after dinner, then. Brennan will bring you."

"And we'll have it out."

## 6

"**W**E'LL have it out," thought Elm, crossing the river. "We'll have it out," he thought, as he got into the carriage waiting on the other side, and was driven down a road stretching away between two converging lines of hills.

"Fate. What a damned funny jest of fate!"

Maitland. Sheila—his own passion for her dead long before the divorce. This to rise up out of the past and come between him and Evelyn—Evelyn the beautiful, the utterly desirable. She would have married him if she had not met Maitland. She had as good as said so. She might still marry him with Maitland out of the way.

His brain was in a fever. As in a dream he drove between hills of blood; blood all round him—the red sandhills in the setting sun.

The carriage stopping in the Valley of the Kings, he got out and was saluted by Egyptian police guarding the discovered tombs. And so quickly did night come out here, it was dark.

He walked through sand. A campfire glared on the night, black figures silhouetted against its flames. There was a tunnel bright with electric lights; a sentry came to attention, sloped his rifle and paced in front of the tomb.

A big man in loose clothes came out of the tunnel.

"You must have enjoyed your dinner, Elm!"

"Sorry if I'm late, sir."

"I'll be back before midnight. That chap come?"

"Yes."

"What's he like?"

He must be careful. He mustn't overdo it.

"I only saw him for a moment."

"So long, Elm. I'll lay you fifty pounds to a cigar there's a mummy in that coffin."

He watched Sir Stephen walk away toward the waiting carriage.

A moment, and then he turned to the sentry—one of the British guard supplied by the Residency.

"Sir Stephen's valet will be bringing a gentleman across. Let them through."

"Yes, sir."

And he went into the tunnel and came to the "well." He looked down the "well." That workman had been killed here a few days ago. An accident. His mind ran on accidents as he climbed down.

This shaft to the lower tunnel or "syringe" had been lined with wood—new wood; it shone in his eyes, for it was lighted from top to bottom. That had been done since the accident. They were always having accidents.

He reached the bottom where another tunnel—much enlarged—led to the tomb. Away at the far end, through a hole above a parapet, he could see into the recess. Electric light there, too, illuminated the pinkish sarcophagus it had been such a labor to reach.

Dank down here; suggestive. Dead Egyptians had burrowed where he had burrowed. Death—and accidents. Those V-shaped supports, for instance—one might trip over them—cut one's head. They would say, "Another curse fulfilled."

But he must get rid of Brennan when they came.

He began moving about under the ground, thinking of accidents.

THE moon had risen over the Valley of the Kings when Maitland arrived with Brennan; at the entrance to the tomb they were challenged—but allowed in.

And now a curious feeling came over Maitland. The fate that had sent him to that temple had sent him here. For what? That he and this man should "have it out"? Surely something more than that. He felt suddenly his life was in danger. He felt Lang Menzies meant to kill him.

"We're to go down the 'well', sir."

He looked hard at the valet. But if ever there was innocence written on a man, it was written on Brennan.

Yet Brennan's words flashed to him: "You've arrived in time for the kill." Innocent words.

"I'd better go down first, sir; I've been down before."

He smiled at this confirmation, and kneeling and putting his head over the shaft, he called down:

"Menzies! Menzies. Are you there, Menzies?"

Uncannily echo only answered: "Menzies. Menzies. Are you there, Menzies?"

"It's sixty feet or more—he wouldn't hear, sir. Let me go first."

"Don't you worry, Brennan." He climbed down.

A rope ladder, a smell of new wood, then, as he descended further, an odor—an indescribable odor—of dead things—long dead—dead to dust—came up from below. He thought of that bat with Sir Stephen's face and of the gods of the Pharaohs. And he sensed Menzies waiting, his hands ready to kill.

"Mind you don't slip, sir!"

And echo answered: "Mind you don't slip, sir!"

Looking down he saw ground.

He would be relieved somehow when he was out of this shaft; he was keyed up, prepared for anything. The last rungs he jumped, and reaching ground, looked about him in an attitude of defense. But all he saw was an empty tunnel not so big as the one above: an empty tunnel and new wood gleaming in electric lights. Then a cold air reached him, and a sense of vibration.

He thought eerily of bats, but it was only an electric fan.

"Where's Mr. Menzies, sir? Is there another shaft?"

"No, sir." The man pointed. "Why, there's the tomb."

"Menzies!" shouted Maitland.

And echo answered: "Menzies!"

"He must have gone up and the sentry never told us. Shall I go up and see?"

Maitland smiled. Was this a ruse of Elm's? Was he skulking behind that coffin?"

"He can't be here," muttered the man, proceeding along the tunnel. And he looked round. "Come and have a peep at the sarcophagus, sir, as you're down here. It's a perfect specimen."

And he went on, and, stopping, looked over the sandstone parapet into the recess. And then his voice changed.

"Good God!"

"What?"

"Good God! Look, sir! There's been an accident."

He climbed through the hole and Maitland followed.

Menzies lay there on his face, his dark hair an island in a pool of blood, the jagged pieces of a great earthen jar around it. There were other jars, not broken. The toe of one of his boots still rested on a projecting stone in the para-

pet over which he had entered and over which he had too evidently tripped.

"The curse!" said old Brennan, gray and shaking.

"He may be only stunned."

But touching him to turn him over, they knew he was past help. There was a gash in his temple, and congealed blood had formed a dark crust round it, and fragments of sand clung to his blanched cheeks.

New wood cracks—but the sound seemed to come from the coffin like the splitting of the heart of the dead king.

"We can't get him up alone, sir. This 'll upset Sir Stephen. Unless I'm mis-

taken, he'll leave the opening now to the Cairo Museum."

They returned up the shaft, along the upper tunnel, and told the sentry, who woke the guard.

Maitland praised God that Brennan had come down with him into the tomb, or things must have looked very ugly for him now. Then, as the soldiers turned out and the carriage, evidently bearing Sir Stephen and perhaps Evelyn to the Valley, showed far away on the road, Maitland thought of a girl kneeling in an old temple with the sunlight on her face, and of fate and vengeance and mysteries we don't understand.

# The Burning Sea

By RICHARD KENT

*A brief tale of the masked Tuaregs of North Africa, and of the American who did not believe in God*

"FIFTEEN hundred miles to the south, my master," said Haji-el-Kufra in his soft musical voice, "lies the great mysterious treasure-chamber of Africa, the Sudan. From this region caravans, often numbering over ten thousand camels, bring ivory, ostrich feathers and gold dust to be modernized and sold in the vast marts of the Occident. But your beautiful women of the West do not stop to consider how the ivory of which their toilet articles are made, was acquired. They do not realize that perhaps the very ostrich plumes which compose their colorful fans were cartied over a thousand miles of scorched desert sand, on a weary, toilsome march of untold hardships, which lasted more

than a year. They do not see the bones of the hundreds of camels which perished on the journey, lying strewn in bleached whiteness along the desert trail. They do not hear of the men who are mercilessly trodden down by the heat into the sand, to rise no more; or the poor cameleers who go sun-mad or blind as a result of being forced to journey over a sea of glowing heat from which there is no escape. Truly, my master, the desert always reminds me of a burning sea, containing not a single drop of moisture; and in the desert, as in the sea, one finds the bones of those who have perished. The desert exacts its toll as does the ocean."

We sat near an open window of a

café in the Arbar-Asat in Tripoli, sipping real Turkish coffee, which is the national drink of the country. All about us hung a drone of charming mystery, the constant chatter of a strangely jumbled mass of humanity; Moors, Arabs, Sudanese, Berbers and Jews, all jabbering and arguing in a dozen different tongues, while near by, camels of mystery drowsed, chewing their cuds and gurgling wearily as though longing to get back into the solitude of the silent desert.

The beauty of golden hillside and palm-fringed rivers in some sun-magnified oasis on the edge of the desert seemed more alluring to them than the gray-white, low-lying town of Tripoli, the end of the caravan route from the Sudan, with its Moorish castles, slender minarets, flat housetops, white city walls and courts of elaborately colored tiles.

As I gazed about me I wondered which was the more enticing, the enchantment of the mystery city or the charm of the silent desert.

Just beneath the window at which we sat, an old beggar woman was crooning a wild Tripolitan song. And somehow as I listened to the weird, dreamy, piercing notes, all the charm of the *Arabian Nights* seemed to creep over me. Perhaps it was the spell of the golden noon which hung over Tripoli like a blanket of whispering fire, or perchance it was the mystery of the double-barred windows on the house directly opposite, at which I imagined for a moment I beheld the eyes of a veiled woman gazing out at me. Nevertheless, whatever the cause, a longing overcame me to listen to a story.

"Haji," I said, "surely in this desert many incidents must happen which are worth recounting."

"In the desert," he replied, "every grain of sand has its story. If master wishes I will tell him the story of how a certain man who did not believe in God

was captured by the masked Tuaregs, the real rulers of the desert, and taken to Ghadames, one of their most important cities, where he was thrown into prison."

"I should like to hear the story," said I.

And then in that little café in the Arbar-Asat, as we sipped the Turkish coffee, this is the tale he told me. Over the chatter of the Berbers, Moors and Sudanese in the narrow street beneath our window, his voice rose softly as though it were the voice of the desert, unfolding a chapter of its great mystery.

"**Y**ou must know, my master," he began, "that there lives in the very heart of the desert, far back from the coast, a race of people known as the Tuaregs, who wear masks to keep the moisture from drying in their throats. They are highwaymen, plundering all caravans that refuse to pay tribute to their sheiks. The Tuaregs are as mysterious as the desert, and to Ghadames, their oasis city of white walls and date palms, few Americans have ever penetrated. It is not safe, for to meet with a band of masked Tuaregs, bent on pillage, is more dangerous than a yellow sandstorm in the desert. But Lee Carter, an American who did not believe in God, thought the stories of the viciousness of the masked Tuaregs was much exaggerated. He smiled cynically as he made known his intention of journeying down into Ghadames. The pasha tried to argue with him, but to no avail. Lee Carter was the only man in Tripoli who did not believe in the danger of the Tuaregs, and doubtlessly, my master, he was the only man in all of Tripoli who did not believe in any God. A week later he set out for Ghadames accompanied by but two Arabs and a dozen jemals or baggage camels, excluding the mahari which he rode.

"For three days all went well and the

spell of the African nights crept into his soul. But on the morning of the fourth day the little caravan met with a band of a dozen masked Tuaregs, riding snow-white horses. They demanded tribute and were refused. Again they repeated their request, but Lee Carter's only answer was a sneer. You see, my master, he was not used to the desert; he did not believe. So they seized his camels and drove his two companions out into the desert with barely enough food and water to get back to Tripoli. They asked Lee Carter his destination. He sullenly replied, 'Ghadames.' There was a touch of cynicism in the voice of the Tuareg leader, who spoke a smattering of broken English, as he declared that he would not be disappointed. Then they took him with them to Ghadames and threw him into prison.

"Five days later his two guides staggered into Tripoli, almost dead from thirst, and told their story. The pasha smiled mirthlessly as he said, 'Perhaps now Meester Carter will believe what we told him about the Tuaregs.'

"But there was one man in the crowd who did not pass over the matter so lightly. He was Dr. Loudon Meredith of the North African Mission. He listened to the idle chatter of the people, and though he said little, each word cut deeply into his thoughts. Lee Carter had declared that he did not believe in God. He had not believed in the danger from the masked Tuaregs either. But now he was convinced.

"At dawn the next morning Loudon Meredith set out for Ghadames accompanied by a single dragoman. He was bent on a quest which not a Moor, Berber or Sudanese would have attempted. He was going down into the Tuareg city of mystery, hidden in the sand, to the aid of Lee Carter who was held captive in an

old sandstone prison at Ghadames. To the people of Tripoli, had they known, his mission would have seemed utterly hopeless, and yet Loudon Meredith did not despair. The incidents occurring during his journey across the desert we will pass over. It is sufficient to say that in the course of time he reached Ghadames.

"It so happened that his dragoman was one Musa-el-Jefara, a Tuareg who had embraced Christianity. So Loudon Meredith sent the dragoman down into the city to discover if possible where Lee Carter was imprisoned. In the meantime he camped out in the desert below the city. Dressed in a white barracan, and with bronzed face, from a distance he could not have been distinguished from a true son of the desert. In the course of time, Musa-el-Jefara returned with the desired information. Lee Carter was imprisoned in a sandstone building at the extreme northern part of the city. Only a high mud wall and a palm garden separated it from the desert. His windowless cell was on the ground floor, twenty paces, 'as a man walks if he be not tired,' from the corner of the prison which pointed to Tripoli.

"That night, after the moon had set, Loudon Meredith scaled the mud wall. With the aid of a sharp knife he commenced to chip away the sandstone, after counting out the twenty steps 'as a man walks if he be not tired.' He poured vinegar upon the stone, which not only dulled the sound of the knife but helped to soften the stone. Every moment he would glance furtively over his shoulder as though expecting to see the shadow of a Tuareg standing over him.

"For four nights he continued his monotonous task, and at last he was able to creep into the cell of Lee Carter. In a few words he explained the situation to the American explorer. Then like

thieves they slunk out into the desert to where Musa-el-Jefara was waiting with the camels, sitting idly dreaming under the spell of the African night.

"Five minutes later they were speeding out into the desert as though they were pursued by half the population of Ghadames, and yet not a soul followed them. Early the next morning they ran into a yellow sandstorm. Dismounting from their camels they drew their barracans about their faces and squatted upon the sand. As the particles of molten dust circled and roared about their heads, the sand became as hot as the ashes from a furnace. They were virtually being baked alive and yet they could not sweat. All moisture had dried in their bodies, until naught but the shells of men remained. Unless you have been caught in such a sandstorm, my master, you can not imagine how intense was their suffering.

"Every half-hour they were forced to dig themselves out of a hillock of sand which had formed above their heads, almost burying them alive. And the fine particles penetrated the thick folds of their barracans, stifling them; entered their nostrils, their throats, their eyes, and even seemed to burn into the tiniest pores of the skin.

"For ten hours without abatement the storm continued, and were I blessed with the language of all the poets of the Orient, I could not describe the intensity of their sufferings. Finally the storm passed and they crawled out like dead things from the sandhills. For perhaps half an hour they lay, breathing in the cool, delicious air of the night. Finally Loudon Meredith staggered to his feet and seized one of the water-bags. It was empty.

"The events immediately following I would rather a thousand times pass over than repeat. Picture three men plunging along through the waves of liquid heat, their tongues dry and blackened, their lips cracked and broken, reeling, staggering blindly by the side of their camels, which were too weak to carry them. Perhaps they plunged along thus for days, or perhaps it was even weeks or months. To them it seemed like years. They had lost all track of time. Ever and anon oases appeared directly ahead, in which streams of delicious water flowed among sheltering date-palms. They were mirages only, retreating slowly, steadily, as they advanced, only intensifying their tortures. At last the tide of their sufferings turned; they reached an oasis. With shouts of joy which issued from their blistered lips in unintelligible croakings, they pitched headlong into the water. And there they lay, drinking and babbling foolishly, while their tired, parched, aching bodies absorbed the moisture like sponges.

"Tears streamed down their smarting, sand-scorched, blistered faces. They wept for sheer joy. They could not control their emotions. And as Lee Carter lay in the delicious cool of the water, reviewing the terrible events now past, something beautiful crept into his heart. It seemed as though he had been born anew. A few hours later as the rose tints of evening commenced to creep over the desert, and the muezzin far to the north in Tripoli was chanting the call to worship from one of the gorgeous, gold-tipped minarets of the city, three men knelt in prayer in the desert. Although they could not hear the chant of the muezzin, they heeded the call. It was the hour of prayer. Lee Carter believed at last."



# The Sacred Cannon Recoils

By POLLOK GUILER

*The Dutch shipping-agent planned to steal the opium cargo consigned to the Javanese government, but he neglected to reckon on Malay superstition*

**A**N AUTOMOBILE honked its way through the teeming, human traffic at Batavia's ancient Penang gate to the highway leading toward the docks at Tandjong Priok. In the car were two men: one gross-fleshed, phlegmatic; the other, lean, furtive. The Dutch shipping-agent lolled back in the cushions, lazily content as a sow in straw. The American mate of the coaster for which they were bound, sat forward on the edge of the seat, narrow-set eyes darting from side to side.

Outwardly these men were friends. Inwardly they were accomplices in a daring scheme that would make a half-dozen men wealthy. Yet each intended murdering the other—when the time came.

The scheme was Vanderkloop's. The flaming brain that lay unsuspected behind those dull, pig-like eyes, had been perfecting it for years. Every detail fitted like the odd-shaped pieces of a complicated mosaic, and was now, at last, ready to slip into its place. Tomorrow—next week—the government shipment of opium disposed of, this stink-hole would know him no more. And none would ever suspect that he had anything to do with it.

Suddenly the car swerved to the side of the road and glided to a stop. Both men tensed forward, exclaiming profanely.

At the irritably repeated demand, the

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Malay chauffeur withdrew his head from beneath the uplifted engine hood and spoke rapidly in his own tongue. Vanderkloop settled himself comfortably again.

"Fifteen minutes, he says," waving a pudgy hand toward the perspiring Malay. "We still have plenty of time! Let that fussy, old-woman skipper of yours stew for awhile. He'll be in a croc's belly before morning anyway!"

The mate laughed nervously. He would breathe more freely when the skipper was clear of the ship and he had the *Plevo* well clear of the harbor.

"He can't sail without these," patting the pocket wherein reposed the clearance papers, "and he'll—" He paused, hesitant. "Suppose he don't swallow that yarn about nobody being able to get clearance but him on account of the *hup!* That'd be a joke, wouldn't it?"—weakly.

Vanderkloop's eyes gleamed hard and cold. "Yes," he agreed, "but the joke, as you call it, would be on you, my friend!"

The mate recoiled from the unwinking stare. To dispose of the skipper was Vanderkloop's affair! He cursed himself for the momentary squeamishness.

"He—he'll come, all right," he assured. "The old skinflint would do anything to save a day's dock fee. I hope your men will do a good job of it!"

"They will!"

The mate sat silent for a space. His yellow soul writhed in helpless rage. If he but knew where they were to meet Kueng Chang—it might be any one of a dozen places off the Borneo coast—he would never stop off Cape Sedari to pick up this fat slob! To leave him behind would give him greater pleasure than sticking a knife in his carcass!

"What about Kueng Chang? Have you——"

The Dutchman's deep chuckle interrupted.

"Don't you worry about my end of the game. That's all arranged! As soon as your skipper is—starts back to Priok, I'll get the cable off to the chink telling him to meet us at—er"—he glanced up at the eagerly attentive mate—"telling him where to meet us. Then, when we get his money"—his tiny eyes glittered like a

snake's—"we can let him do the worrying."

The mate hastily lowered his lids to hide the gleam of hate that flashed in his eyes. The Dutchman wasn't trusting him, that was certain. But just wait! he thought, puffing a cigarette, he would——

He turned at Vanderkloop's roar of rage to see the chauffeur standing beside the car.

"This yellow cur wants something from under the seat," he interpreted angrily, shifting his huge bulk. "We'll have to get out."

Muttering profanely he descended to the glare of the late afternoon sun. The mate followed.

Standing by the roadside the American's eyes followed a lithe, native girl that slipped into a split-bamboo fenced inclosure a short distance away. Others



*"A muffled roar vibrated through the ancient metal."*

followed, one after the other, coming from different directions. His curiosity was aroused.

"What's the idea?" he asked, indicating with a gesture.

"Mariam Besar—sacred cannon," the other sneered. "Want to see it?"

The mate shrugged indifferent assent. The perspiring agent led the way toward the narrow wicket. Roughly elbowing the importuning flower-vendor aside, they entered the enclosure and stood looking down upon an ancient, flower-garlanded, bronze cannon half buried in the soil. Graceful Javanese women in filmy sarongs of hand-figured batik knelt in reverent suppliace at its breech. Soft croonings came from their rounded throats as they placed offerings of flowers along its sides. And then, the light of supreme faith suffusing their dusky countenances, they rose, one after the other, and left the enclosure.

The mate's bold eyes gazed lustfully.

"Well, what about this pile of junk?" he asked.

"These superstitious fools have the belief that another cannon is coming—the mate to this one. Then we go, leaving them free." The Dutchman laughed harshly. "Can you imagine such a thing?"

The mate couldn't.

"See that closed fist at the breech?" he continued, moving over near that end of the cannon, "the thumb protruding between the second and third fingers?"

The American nodded.

"They think that that has something to do with fertility. Those yellow wenches are praying for children!"

The mate laughed coarsely; reached down and snatched one of the pitiful bouquets and crushed it in his hand.

"Now let's see if her prayer is answered."

"Bah!" Vanderkloop spat, aiming a

contemptuous kick at the closed fist. "Too many of their filthy spawn now!"

As his heavy heel rasped across the bronze knuckles a muffled roar vibrated through the ancient metal.

The slit-nosed flower-vendor was watching from the gate. His face contorted at the sound. A cry of agonized rage burst from his lips.

A crowd of fierce, fanatical-eyed Malays seemed to spring from nowhere and press about the gateway at his cry. Serpentine-bladed knives gleamed from beneath uplifted cotton shirts. Their angry mutterings rose to shrillness as they menaced the two white men.

"Better get out of here!" Vanderkloop warned, advancing toward the only exit.

The ashen-faced mate thrust the flowers in his pocket; followed on trembling limbs.

The threatening crowd of natives grudgingly parted before Vanderkloop's bold, loud-voiced advance and permitted the two to pass through to the waiting car. After it had driven hurriedly off, sinister-faced messengers dashed away, carrying the news of the outrage to certain points in the native quarter.

**I**N THE meantime, the skipper of the *Plevo* paced anxiously about her sea-scarred upper deck. The last bit of cargo had long since been stowed in the holds and the betel-chewing stevedores had straggled ashore. The crew—a scabby lot, as one might expect—had battened down the hatches and were lolling about the top-side awaiting orders to *cast off*.

Never again, the skipper decided, would he consent to carry opium for the Dutch government or anybody else! If it hadn't been for this he would have been well on his way to Surabaya. He could have got his clearance papers at Priok, where the ship lay, instead of

sending the mate all the way to Batavia for the necessary documents!

Confound the fellow, anyway! What had become of him? He should have returned hours ago. He simply must get away from the dock before night! Suppose the crew, or Ah-Lou, that mixture of all the bloods in the Straits Settlements, who acted as a bos'n of sorts, should learn that such a quantity of opium was in the *Plevo*'s hold?

"Great God!" he gasped, "they'd stop at nothing, with the demand what it is from the Chinks in the Borneo oil fields!"

The white-haired old man was growing desperate. The only person on board whom he could trust was his cabin boy. The Cantonese he posted on the off-dock side of the ship to watch for possible pirates. The dock side, he watched himself.

Finally his vigil was rewarded. A clamor came from the native boatmen at the landing at the head of the dock, and two men strode into view, bound down the dock toward the ship.

"Vanderkloop!" he breathed, his brow furrowing. "What's he—I wonder—"

The look on the faces of the two men confirmed the skipper's worst fears. He listened in silence to the agent's profane opinion of all government officials in general and this one in particular. So vehement was the Dutchman in his denunciation that the veins in his puffy face seemed to writhe and leap like tiny, purple snakes.

"—and after waiting all afternoon for the lazy devil to return from Buitenzorg, he wouldn't listen to us. He would do business with no one but the ship's captain!"

The mate stood by nodding affirmation. "And we hurried right back," he lied glibly. "Delayed a few minutes on account of a little trouble with the motor."

The skipper turned troubled eyes from

one to the other. He was taking a chance, he knew, but anything, rather than lie alongside over night!

"Keep a sharp lookout for things, Mister!" he ordered the mate. "If the official isn't in his office——"

Vanderkloop glanced toward the mate; winked slyly. "We'll go to his house, or wherever he is, that's what we'll do!"—completing the sentence for the skipper—"and he'll sign those papers for you if I have to drag him out of bed!"

Mumbling angrily, he waddled down the gangplank. The skipper paced nervously after him.

The mate stood at the gangway watching them up the dock. He laughed inwardly and exultantly at the ease with which the old skipper had fallen into their trap. He visioned them driving wildly about Batavia on this wild-goose chase; the skipper's mounting apprehension when darkness fell and the official not yet located; his hurrying back to the ship in the agent's car; a puncture at a lonely spot along the canal; the robbers—a knife-thrust—a splash!

He smiled grimly. "And all for a hundred guilders. Yes," grudgingly, "the fat slob's got a head on him!"

He took a quick look about the topside of the *Plevo*. Everything was in readiness for sailing. Then hurrying over to the harbor master's office he got permission to haul out in the basin and ordered a pilot.

"The old man's gone up town with the agent," he told the official. "Wants to sail about eight o'clock."

After dinner that night the mate sat beneath the cabin's swinging lamp, poring over a chart spread out over the table. The pilot would be aboard shortly and he wanted to have the courses in his mind. Engaged in checking off the distances, he was attracted by a slight rustle of the swinging curtain at the cabin door.

"What are you doing in my cabin, Mister?" The skipper's usually kindly blue eyes glittered like hard ice.

The mate started up in terror. His face was ghastly in the dim light. Eyes bulging, he drew away as if a ghost confronted him, as indeed he thought it was. Curious, choking sounds came from sagging lips. He arose, clutching at the table for support.

"Well, what is the matter with you? Can't you speak?"—irritably.

The cringing American gulped; swallowed dryly; ran his tongue over his lips.

"Th—they shoved us off from the dock"—his cunning slowly emerging from his scrambled senses—"steamer coming in tonight—I was getting the courses laid out—"

The skipper's deadly manner silenced him.

"I'll lay out the courses, Mister Mate!"—icily, striding into the cabin. "You may go!"

"Impudent puppy!" rolling up the chart and placing it in the rack over his bunk after the mate had slunk out, "I'll remember this!"

"Ah-h, Master, you come back, you come back!" the cabin boy shrilled the words over and over like a happy child. "Number two, him say you no come back this side. Him say he blong number one now—"

"Shut up, you crazy old fool!" he snapped at the white-haired Cantonese. "Get out of here and bring me some supper!"

"Mate says I won't come back—he's captain now—" The skipper whispered the cabin boy's words to himself as he bent over the washbowl a little later. "Now what—"

The water in his cupped hands trickled unnoticed back into the basin. The events of the day flashed across his mind; the difficulty in getting a routine paper

signed; the agent's pathetic insistence that he return to Priok in his car; the timely interference of two Malays when a Chino, murderous knife gleaming, attacked him on the dock a few minutes before!

The skipper's jaw set grimly. Thoughtfully he folded the towel and hung it in place. Then closing the cabin door, he took a pistol from his desk drawer, made sure that the chambers were filled, and slipped it into his pocket.

**I**N HIS narrow cabin amidships, the mate trembled with impotent rage. His hate-crazed eyes darted about like a cobra's. Filthy curses tumbled from his snarling lips. Time after time he started up, steeled to finish the job that Vanderkloop had bungled, but each time he fell back, shuddering. The Dutch prison in old Batavia loomed menacingly in his mind's eye.

He crashed the half-emptied gin bottle down on his desk and strode out on deck. Hands thrust deeply in his pockets, he leaned against the rail, glared down into the black water below. A water-soaked log, barely awash, drifted into his line of vision.

Suddenly he tore his clutching hand from his pocket, cursed foully the withered flowers in his fingers; then with a vicious sweep of his arm threw far out the Malay girl's offering to the sacred cannon.

Scarcely had it touched the water when there came a sharp snap of jaws—a swirl—and the floating log sank from sight.

The mate's eyes narrowed to tiny slits. His brain worked like lightning but his yellow soul cringed. His eyes darted up and down the deck. "Ah-Lou," he breathed, heart pounding. "The very man!"

"Bime-by sail?" The mate started violently. White teeth gleamed in the dark face at his shoulder. "Captain, he

ship-side now. Boom-boom boat bring he."

So the cruiser's launch had brought the skipper out! The authorities would know that he arrived aboard safely! The mate's brain raced. And if the body were found—if the crocodiles—the Dutch destroyers would be searching for the ship within the hour!

"That damned, fat slob!" he gurgled.

The mixed breed, Ah-Lou, stood waiting, carelessly indifferent. He lighted a cigarette, puffed impudently. From up the basin toward the piers the steady chug-chug of a motor boat came to the mate's ears.

The pilot! he thought, panicky. My God!—gripping the rail behind him—he must do something, quick.

"Ah-Lou!" controlling his voice with an effort, "me play joke on captain. Tie up, sabby?—so me can take ship out. I do now before pilot come this side. When I make talkee-talk with captain, you catch! Sabby? More better you catch cabin boy too."

Ah-Lou's eyes glittered craftily. "Me sabby bellie well," he yawned, flipping the butt of his cigarette overside. "How much?"

Ah-Lou chuckled.

"Two hundred."

Ah-Lou laughed openly.

"Three hundred." There was an anxious note in the mate's voice.

The Oriental shrugged his shoulders, turned away. "You play all same joke on me, too, eh?"

Sweat trickled down the mate's face. The red and green lights showed clearly some five hundred yards away. The pilot would be alongside in a few minutes!

"Fi-five hundred!" he croaked hoarsely.

Ah-Lou turned back. He would have taken less. "Me fix Mo-Ling!"—he

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hated the cabin boy—"captain, me catch. Can do!"

The mate thrust the roll of bills into the eagerly outstretched hand. He would get it back with interest, he promised himself! "Chop-chop!" he urged.

"One—two minute," Ah-Lou promised, darting away into the shadows of the deck-house.

**T**HE mate ran silently up the deck to his room. Grasping the gin bottle he took a long pull at the fiery liquor. Outside again, he looked alertly up and down the decks. Everything looked clear for his cowardly deed. Out in the basin, an inbound steamer was heading up toward the piers. A native boat drifted in the shadows beneath the *Plevo*'s counter. The pilot boat was still some distance away. Plenty of time, he thought, if Ah-Lou hurries!

He stopped a moment outside the skipper's cabin to compose himself, then rapping boldly, threw back the door and entered.

The skipper halted in the center of the cabin, glared coldly. One hand was thrust into the side pocket of his coat. The other hovered near a heavy walking-stick lying on the table.

The mate shivered. He stood with eyes downcast, nervously fumbling his hat. He could feel those searching eyes boring into his brain. He wondered if the old fool suspected anything!

"What do you want now, Mister?" The harsh voice broke the throbbing silence.

"I—I just wanted to—to say, Captain," he stuttered, "that I—I wanted to apologize for—for coming into your cabin. I wouldn't have done it but—but—"

Was that a sound he heard?—a scuffle outside the pantry? The contrite-appearing mate cleared his throat loudly.

"I wouldn't have done it—come in here with you away—not on board, but we—we had several drinks and——" A distinct splash came to his straining ears. There goes the cabin boy, he thought, his breath coming more rapidly, which added to the effectiveness of his manner.

"——I had several drinks with the agent, and I thought I'd lay out the courses. I didn't realize——"

The mate's penitent attitude completely disarmed the skipper. The blazing eyes softened. "That's all right, my lad," he said gently. "I was a bit irritated over being detained and I acted hastily, I'm afraid."

The mate glanced from the corner of his eye toward the pantry door. Yellow eyes ablaze, Ah-Lou was creeping into the cabin with the stealth of a jungle cat.

"Well, let's forget about it." The skipper paused, listened. "Sounds like a motorboat coming alongsi——"

At that moment Ah-Lou sprang and struck. The old skipper slumped to the deck without a sound.

"Tie up—put in bunk!" the mate snarled, blowing out the lamp and groping his way to the door. "I go catch pilot!"

Greeting the pilot, he explained: "Skipper doesn't want to be disturbed. Went ashore with the agent this afternoon. Be as cross as a bear tomorrow!"

The bulky Dutchman had no interest in the mate's gabble. He piloted the ship clear of the harbor, climbed down the ladder to his boat and headed back toward the docks at Priok.

The mate heaved a deep sigh. Everything was suspicion-tight. The ship on her course, a clear ocean ahead—his heart beat high. Fifty miles—eight knots—six hours! He checked the distance and speed in his mind. That would put him at Sedari at about two o'clock in the morning. Pick up Vanderkloop——

His anger flared as the thought of the agent obtruded. "Now why in hell couldn't he have come on board in Priok?" he snarled. "It would've saved a lot of time and delay! The damned liar!"

They had discussed that, had Vanderkloop and the mate. And the agent had lied! But he was looking far ahead. He wished his friends and associates to believe that he had gone to Surabaya by train, there to arrange some personal affairs, and take the steamer for Holland. Instead of going all the way, however, he would slip from the train around midnight and board the *Plevo* off Sedari. By this clever ruse, he could in no wise be connected with the mysterious disappearance of the *Plevo* with all hands, as he had planned.

"A slick article—damn him!" the mate admitted to himself. "I'll——"

But that could wait. Just now he had more pressing things to consider. He would take them up in the order of least importance, he decided.

The unexpected return of the skipper had complicated matters. That the crew knew of his presence, he didn't doubt. And the mangy curs were loyal to him. But that was easily arranged. "Came aboard slightly ginned; turned in; found dead next morning; buried at sea! That's simple!"—cold-bloodedly.

"Now that gabbling cabin boy. I wonder if Ah-Lou——"

He caught his breath sharply. For the moment, he had forgotten the mixed breed. Staring sightlessly toward the compass binnacle, the mate could see him as he had actually, scarce an hour ago, stalking the old skipper.

"Captain I fix bellie well!" the evil jinni hissed in his ear.

"Damn you!" the mate screamed, lifting his foot, "get the hell out of here!"

The yellow eyes glowed in the darkness.

"I mean, damn it," he amended in conciliatory tones, "don't slip up on me that way, Ah-Lou. I was——"

He would have said more, but the Oriental had learned all that he wanted to know. Leering insolently at the white man, he backed out of reach, swaggered from the bridge.

How much did the yellow devil know? the mate wondered. And what had he told the crew? With the Borneo coast in sight; the crew under his control! A chill crept up and down the mate's spine. He and the Dutchman wouldn't stand a chance! Ah-Lou must be——"

He dismissed the thought from his mind. The Oriental couldn't know about the opium, it was brought aboard so secretly. He would never have known himself had it not been for the agent! He took a hasty glance at the compass and around the horizon ahead, then cautiously descending the ladder, he entered the skipper's cabin and locked the door behind him. After closing the ports and drawing the curtains tight, he dimmed the lens of his flashlight with a handkerchief and snapped it on.

The room was as he had left it. He tiptoed over to the bunk, peered down into the still face of the skipper. He growled a curse when he saw the lids closed over the eyes.

"Damn you," the mate snarled at the bound and gagged figure, "I wish to God you were safely knifed in Batavia!"

He ran a rough hand over the gray head. No stickiness nor grating of bones rewarded him. "Be all right in an hour," he growled. "But I don't think you'll be givin' me any trouble!"

He took the chart from the rack and let himself out on deck. He stood in the shadow of the bridge, gravely considering. He was in Ah-Lou's power and that must be remedied before Vanderkloop came on board. He removed his

pistol from the shoulder holster and held it gripped, in his side pocket. His cunning brain groped helplessly.

Suddenly he thought of the gin bottle. Peering alertly into the shadows, he turned quickly down the deck.

**I**N HIS cabin, the door closed, the mate snapped on the flash and stood it on end on his desk. Eager hands grasped the bottle, lifted it to his lips. Suddenly his muscles tensed. The blood seemed to drain from his body. There was another presence in the room!

"Ah-h! You come back, eh?"

The mate whirled. His hand flew to his shoulder, clutched, dropped slowly. His face turned a pasty color. The holster was empty.

Livid with fright, he watched the Oriental rise noiselessly like a snake uncoiling and glide close, pistol leveled. Ah-Lou stretched forth a dirty hand and plucked the mate's pistol from his side pocket. Then motioning the mate to a seat on the bunk near the door, Ah-Lou lighted the oil lamp, turned it low. The mate's pistol he placed on the desk.

"We make talkee-talk, now, eh?" lounging comfortably in the only chair in the cabin. "You blong captain! Me blong mate!"

A fierce anger welled up in the mate. He bit his tongue hard, lowered his eyes from the evilly smiling face.

"That's right, Ah-Lou," in a voice he never would have recognized as his own, "we'll——"

"What we do with skipper?"

The American was fighting hard to get himself in hand. He realized that he must go carefully, that one wrong move might be his last. The breed bos'n probably had the whole crew back of him!

"Skipper, he very sick man," the mate said. "Bime-by die. Mebbe so tomorrow we bury."

The Oriental took a deep drag on his cigarette, threw back his head and exhaled ceilingward. His face lighted.

"But yours will come first," the mate promised himself. He wondered if he dare risk a leap for the pistol on the desk.

As though divining his thoughts, Ah-Lou picked up the pistol and placed it in his pocket.

"Yes—bellie sad"—dreamily. "Bime-by he all same well." His yellowish eyes were fixed appraisingly on the mate. "How much you give?"

The mate stared, perplexed. His face flushed with anger.

"Wh-why, you've got all I have now, yu—yu—that five hundred was all I had! What—"

"How much my share hop?" the mixed breed snarled impatiently.

The mate tried to meet the burning eyes. Failed! He cursed inwardly. He knows all about the opium! This was no time for bargaining, he decided.

"I take one piece; you take one piece," he faltered.

The Oriental held his unblinking, hypnotic stare.

"What place sell?"

The American mopped his face. There was no use lying to the filthy scum! He would detect it; but he would say nothing of Vanderkloop! Hope flamed in his breast at the thought. The agent's coming would save the situation! He managed a smile.

"Mebbe so we catch junk off Sedari."

"Who blong?"

"Kueng-Chang"—confidentially.

Ah-Lou's eyes narrowed to glittering points. Slowly he rose from the chair and with that deadly jungle stealthiness that the mate would never forget, advanced toward him.

"Kueng-Chang?—you lie!" he hissed,

merciless as a cobra. "He blong Balik-papan side!"

The mate strained back against the bulkhead. His lips went stiff. The contorted, evil face swayed before him.

"Tonight—you fix skipper! Sabby?"—in his voice the essence of all the hate and contempt of the Orient for the white man.

Staring-eyed the mate watched him back away and open the door behind him.

Suddenly a look of wild surprize—of fear—came over Ah-Lou's face. A bright flash came from beneath his chin, then disappeared, like the dart of a snake's tongue. A gush of blood from his throat. He clawed desperately at his pocket, lunged toward the cringing mate, staggered and lay still. The pistol clattered from his hand.

For a space the mate sat frozen. His senses could not credit what his eyes conveyed. As the ship yawed, the door swung closed with a sharp bang which, to the unnerved man, sounded like a clap of thunder. His breath came back in strangled sobs. The dark pool on the deck widened.

The mate eased himself to the deck, leapt for the pistol. "I've got you now, damn you!" aiming a brutal kick at the silent form. Ah-Lou was past hearing.

He seized the gin bottle, drained it at a gulp. "A tong affair," he hazarded a little later as he deftly went through the other's pockets. "Anyway, my brave fellow, you won't—"

He caught his breath sharply. "I wonder if they were after me!"

Slipping through the door, he peered warily up and down the deck. No sign of lurking shadow met his eyes. He ducked back into the cabin, doused the lamp; then, grasping the body, he dragged it across the narrow deck space

to the rail and slipped it overboard. The splash was barely perceptible above the crash of the cross swell against the counter.

**B**ACK on the bridge, a sense of elation surged through the mate. In another hour he would raise Sedari on the starboard bow—and a week hence—His stimulated brain surmounted difficulties with the greatest of ease. The skipper? He laughed harshly. Vanderkloop could do for him. That was his job anyway!

In his mounting confidence he half decided to sweat from the agent that night the information as to the meeting-place agreed upon, and himself dicker with Kueng-Chang. He would show the damned Dutchman! Hadn't he, the mate, done everything so far? Then why should he split the tidy sum he would extract from the Chino? He would see Vanderkloop in hell first!

His mind dallied with thoughts of the method by which he would "polish off" the agent, whether by pistol or a quick thrust of the knife into his fat carcass. Thinking of a knife brought back to his mind the flash that he had seen beneath Ah-Lou's chin. Strange, he thought, how keen that gin made my mind work! He wished he had a shot. There was some down in his cabin—his heart gave a peculiar jump. Oh, well! Probably better that he lay off the liquor until they got squared away!

But thoughts of the timely accident to Ah-Lou gave him an inspiration. He must alibi himself! He strode across the bridge to the wheel; elbowed the Lascar aside.

"I'll steer," he growled. "You catch Ah-Lou, the bos'n, sabby? Bring this side, chop-chop!"

He laughed silently as the messenger disappeared down the ladder on silent, bare feet. "Now we'll see," he chuckled,

thinking over what he would say when the man returned.

Looking ahead, he could make out the faint loom of land on the bow. He changed the course to the northward; then as the ship steadied, he lashed the wheel and searched the horizon for a landmark.

"What, you can't find him?" he roared in a jargon of Malay, Dutch and 'pidgin' interspersed with foul American curses. "Keep looking for him, you swine! Break out every man in the fo'c'sl, but get him up here! I'll have none of this sleeping in on my ship!"

The Lascar left the bridge the second time. His eyes showed white against the black background of his face, but whether from fear or hate, the mate hadn't the slightest interest. He felt equal to taking on the entire crew, single-handed.

Some minutes later he was attracted by a commotion at the foot of the ladder. Pistol ready, he waited. Labored breathing and the sound of straining bodies came to his ears. Suddenly a group of swaying men burst from the head of the ladder and lunged onto the bridge.

"We ketch stranger man," one of the Chinese in the party panted. "No sabby he!"

The mate came close. "What, a stow-away?" he roared, "I'll——"

The prisoner, with an animal-like belch of rage, leapt toward him, dragging the four Orientals along the deck.

The mate snapped on his flashlight, turned it full in the struggling man's face. He backed quickly away from the frothing-mouthed slit-nosed Malay.

"My God!" he gasped. "The flower-vendor—at the sacred cannon."

He gaped in bewilderment at the struggling Malay. A thousand questions flashed through his astounded brain. Suddenly he remembered the native boat that he had glimpsed close under the

stern just before getting under way at Priok.

"Hold him fast," he ordered hoarsely. "He's dangerous!"

He approached the infuriated captive from behind, pulled from his belt a serpentine-bladed knife, the hilt sticky to the touch. Gladly would he have thrust it into the weaving back before him, but he dare not take the chance. There were too many Malays in the crew! He held the knife gingerly in his fingers—one never knew when the blades were poisoned—carried it to the end of the bridge-wing and dropped it overside.

"Irons!" he snarled. "Hand and leg. Chain him to a stanchion on the bridge—"

He stopped in mid-sentence. The irons were in the captain's cabin! He couldn't risk going in there! If the skipper didn't come out, the suspicions of the men would be aroused! Frantically he searched the ship, in his mind, for a suitable storeroom for imprisoning the murderer who had got Ah-Lou by mistake.

"The pepper hold!" the thought came to him. "The very thing! A nice, slow, agonizing death!" He grinned fiendishly as he pictured the torture, the insane struggling against suffocation from the acrid, sickening fumes deep down in the sweltering, air-tight space.

"Never mind the irons," he growled. "Put him in the after hold. Let the skipper see him in the morning!"

He followed after the heaving, panting group of men to the stern of the ship. When the hatch-cover was lifted, he kicked the Malay over the coaming.

"Now pray to your sacred cannon, damn you!" the mate called out as the writhing form went hurtling from sight into the black bowels of the ship.

**B**ACK on the bridge again, the mate's self-confidence returned. Recurring thoughts of the narrow escapes from disaster he brushed aside with a shrug. His self-sufficiency in meeting them successfully intoxicated him. Eagerly scanning the black wall ahead, he mumbled to himself the sharp, caustic words with which he would reproach the agent for his tardiness and bungling. He smiled to himself at the Dutchman's discomfiture under the lashing tongue of this new master of the *Plevo*.

He conned the ship back and forth off the headland, expecting every minute to pick up the junk. Finally, after several round trips with nothing sighted, his self-assurance began to ooze. He checked carefully the courses and distance run.

"I'm in the right place," he cursed. "Those flares that he was to show from the junk should be visible for miles!"

The time dragged. The monotonous clump-clump of the propeller jangled sharply on the mate's taut nerves. The crash of the seas was growing louder. A storm seemed to be making to shoreward. The rusty seams and butts creaked ghostily to the slight motion of the old coaster.

The mate grew apprehensive. What could have happened to Vanderkloop? He was already two hours overdue! Had he changed his plans at the last minute? —had—

A cold chill chased up and down his spine. The suspicion that had been lurking in the back of his mind leapt out clothed in certainty.

"A trap!" he gurgled, looking wildly around the horizon. "I might have known he would double-cross me. He's probably on a destroyer that's hunting for me this minute!"

He thrust the surprised Lascar aside, grasped the wheel and swung the ship to an off-shore course. Then watching fearfully in the direction of Priok, he cursed

as only an American of his type can, the Dutchman and everything connected with this wild scheme.

Finally, he realized that dawn was not far off. He must do something! His feverish brain wrestled in vain. Beach the ship! Run close in-shore and escape in a boat! Head for Balikpapan on the chance of meeting up with the opium-dealer, Kueng-Chang! A thousand wild, impossible ideas crashed through his mind. The prison in Batavia yawned abysmally. He could smell the fetid heat of the vermin-infested cells!

"The skipper—of course! The old fool would believe anything!" His derailed brain was on the tracks again. "He would lay all the blame on Ah-Lou. Himself, tied up—just got loose—recaptured the ship from the Oriental—"

He paused a moment at the head of the ladder to cast a last, hopeful look in the direction of the beach now far astern. A gurgling scream rose in his throat. His eyes widened in terror. A dense cloud of yellow smoke was rising from the after part of the ship. Darting tongues of flame lapped at the cover to the afterhold.

"That damned Malay! Why'n hell didn't I kill the—" the mate's voice sobbed.

A cry of fear rang out from down the deck. Wild yells echoed throughout the ship. Bare feet pattered as the crew rushed, panic-stricken, to the top of the deck-house where the life-boats were stowed.

The mate turned quickly to the bridge, shrieked an order. His pistol roared and the fleeing helmsman toppled from the after bridge-rail. Then jerking the annunciator to "stop," he spun the wheel hard over to bring the ship's head to wind. The engine-room telltale had not moved.

"There's nobody below!" the words burst from him. The same panic that

had gripped the crew fell on him greedily. With but one thought, he leapt to the top of the deck-house and dashed toward the struggling figures about the life-boats. The pistol in his hand spat viciously.

**T**RUSSED up in his bunk in the cabin, the helpless old skipper strained at his bonds. The appalling sound of rushing feet on the deck overhead; the creak of the davits as the boats were swung out; the sharp, spiteful crack of a pistol—all told him the worst.

"Pirates," he gasped, "after the opium!" He could visualize the whole scene. "But why the life-boats?"

The answer came in a few minutes. A trailing whiff of smoke filtered into the cabin, assailed his nostrils. Thicker it came. He rolled over, buried his face in the bed-clothing. Stark terror gripped him.

Centuries later—long after all sounds of the departing crew had ceased—he became aware of a thundering crash at the door. It must be that his reason was fleeing, he thought, as he fought for air in the strangling fog that filled the cabin. A moment later the door gave way. He could see through the thick haze, brilliant, flashing lights sweeping about the cabin. Huge, grotesque figures with bulging eyes came swaying toward him—seized upon him with violent hands. A piercing, strangling scream came to his ears. Then kindly unconsciousness came to his rescue.

Day had come when the skipper opened his eyes. He tried to rise, but firm hands pressed him back to the leather-covered transom. "Take it easy, Captain! You'll be all right in a minute," he heard a voice saying. "You're on the *Thompson Edwards*—American destroyer. We saw your bonfire and came over to investigate. Sent men aboard with

gas masks—rescue breathing-kits and so on—let go your anchors. They busted into your cabin when they found it locked! Lucky thing they did, too——"

"But the fire! Is it——"

"Oh, yes!" the smiling, chubby-faced lieutenant commander assured. "We ran alongside and turned the fire hose on it. Scorched my paint a little, but we'll fix that when we get into Batavia. Got a dozen or so of your crew, too. Here, throw this into your system," thrusting a cup of steaming coffee that a Filipino mess attendant had brought, into his hand. "Then come up on the bridge when you feel like it. We're standing by!"

The skipper took a sip or two, staggered to his feet and slowly made his way to the destroyer's bridge. The *Plevo* lay at anchor some two hundred yards ahead. The port life-boat, splintered and useless, hung suspended by one of its falls, grim evidence of a hurried attempt at launching. The starboard falls hung free. Off to one side another destroyer rolled lazily in the moderate seas.

"Looks like one of your boats got away without damage, Skipper," the naval officer ventured. "If you don't mind, we'll take a look down to windward and see if we can't pick it up. Then run you in to Batavia. Your ship's all right now! Stay there till the cows come home!"

The old skipper nodded assent. Tight-lipped, watchful, he stood on the bridge while the two destroyers coursed down wind in search of the missing life-boat. Back and forth they dashed on ever-wid-

ening courses. Keen eyes searched every square inch of the surface.

A hat was sighted. An oar! And finally in the distance, a capsized boat swallowed helplessly. The destroyer ran close aboard, slowed. The *Plevo*'s skipper recognized it as being his own.

At the naval officer's look of inquiry, the old man shook his head and staggered below to the ward-room.

**A**SHORE in Tandjong Priok a few hours later, the skipper hurried to the agent's office to arrange for a salvage tug.

"Mynheer Vanderkloop!" he asked anxiously of a clerk. "Where is he?"

The clerk picked up a morning paper, pointed to an item on the front page, and after passing it to the skipper, continued his typing.

"Another Victim to Malay Fanaticism," the headline blared. "Mynheer Vanderkloop, well-known shipping-agent for various coasting vessels, was stabbed through the throat at his apartment in Weltevreden late last night. A ticket for Surabaya, together with a large sum of money, was found in his pocket. No clues have been found, nor can any motive be ascribed for this foul act. At the time of going to press, his Malay chauffeur has not been located."

The skipper lowered the paper. His old eyes gazed for a moment through a window overlooking the harbor. Then, shaking his head in perplexity, he shuffled wearily out.

---

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd  
Of the two Worlds so wisely—they are thrust  
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn  
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

—*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

# Finger of Kali

By BERNICE T. BANNING

*A story of the Sacred Bull of Shiva the Destroyer and a dagger with strangely potent qualities*

"HERE in India," drawled Wilkins, sipping his whisky and soda, "we run into queer things, sometimes. Take this.

"Some years ago, Alfred Greenleaf brought his bride out here, honeymooning round the world. They were my guests here in Benares. My sister Edith, staying with me then, became very fond of Katherine Greenleaf, whose beauty, accomplishments and sunny nature endeared her to everyone, even the servants.

"One day, shopping in Chowk Bazar, we left the motor-car and went scouting afoot through the crowded, narrow lanes. Katherine, enchanted with everything, bought so heavily that we were later than we had intended when we struggled back to the car, hemmed in by our attendant coolies and the press of beggars.

"Greenleaf, lingering in the rear, we had somehow missed. He came finally, apologetically murmuring something about being blocked by a bull, delayed by an obstinate fellow, stopped by a hunted-looking beggar who had sold him an old dagger for three rupees, absurdly cheap.

"After dinner, Katherine, slim in her silver-green dress, sang to us, lovelier, I thought, and gentler than anyone I had ever seen. On leaving the piano, she began to chat of the day's bargains. 'Alfred,' she said suddenly, 'you haven't shown us your bargain dagger. Where is it?'

"He brought it from his room, showing it first to Edith, then to me. It looked old; the blade, interestingly shaped, although stained, was keen and

strong. The handle was a good piece of Jaipore enamel.

"'Greenleaf,' I cried, 'the man must have been *jungly* to sell this for three rupees!'

"'I told you it was a bargain,' he returned. 'I collect interesting knives, you know.'

"If he had said he collected old embroideries, I should have been less surprised; he was the last man I should have thought interested in lethal weapons.

"Holding the dagger appraisingly in his open palm, he advanced to show it to Katherine. Suddenly, as he neared her, his aspect changed; his fingers stiffened round the handle; he shivered convulsively; his kindly expression changed to one of fiendish hate.

"With a quick lift of the knife he made to plunge it into her heart. Unmoving, she stared up at him, smiling faintly, as if at a clever little drama he played for our amusement. It was Bargueloh, the butler, watching from the doorway, who sprang with a lightning leap, grappled, wrenched the knife from Greenleaf. I, now fully roused to the gravity of that bit of knife-play, held myself ready to keep it from Greenleaf at all costs. Surprisingly, he made no move to regain it; seemed, in fact, to have forgotten it. No sooner was it out of his hand than he appeared once more his urbane self, smiling at his wife, with no apparent consciousness of having nearly murdered her. The man was a consummate actor, a grim jester, or an unspeakable villain. Katherine, though shivering slightly as she drew her scarf

closer about her throat, was outwardly composed.

"Edith broke our strained, stiff silence with a nervous little laugh. 'Clever, Alfred! I confess you quite frightened me, but then, in this climate—one's nerves—really, magnificent acting!'

"'Why do you say acting?' he questioned. 'I never acted in my life.'

"His innocence! Could he possibly be ignorant of what he had done?

"'Don't you really know what you did just now, Greenleaf?' I queried, incredulous.

"He rubbed his forehead vaguely. 'I confess to a queer feeling of faintness I didn't understand. Thought for a second I was falling into a pit of blackness, but my head cleared and I saw you all again. Hope I didn't do anything odd.'

"'There would have been a serious accident,' I cried, nettled by his seemingly brazen attitude, 'if Bargueloh had not caught you and this,' waving his dagger at him.

"At sight of it, however, he gave no sign of remembering his attempted crime, but said, recollecting with difficulty, 'I remember showing it to Katherine—saw her face smile up at me as if through deep water—felt myself falling—if I had fallen toward her with that in my hand—he shivered—hurt her!'

"'You would, irremediably,' I stormed, disgusted with his sheer bravado.

"'There was real danger?' he cried. 'I owe Bargueloh a great debt.'

"His trying to carry the thing off like this convinced me that he was either a criminal or a maniac. 'Promise me,' I said coldly, 'never to touch this toy again.'

"'Gladly,' he replied calmly—insufferable I thought him—'Bargueloh, you could sell this dagger; would you like

it?' And again, when the butler had bowed his thanks and borne off his prize, 'I must do something decent for him, Wilkinson. According to what you say, he saved Katherine from grave hurt.'

"**H**E WENT off to his room, and soon afterward we glimpsed him in the hall, giving Bargueloh a sum to make him independent for life. This looked queer to me. Why should a man who had barely missed murdering his wife reward so lavishly the fellow who prevented him? Remorse? Trying to throw us off the scent until he could accomplish his crime unchecked?

"What had he said? He collected knives. The man now seemed to me a very Bluebeard. I was afraid to leave him alone with his wife. I said so to Edith, calling her into the library to speak alone with her. Could we arrange a trip for Edith and Katherine, while I took Greenleaf off hunting? This would give us time to think the problem out, to decide how we could protect her permanently.

"Edith was dubious. 'We can't possibly separate them always,' she countered. 'For instance, what of tonight?'

"'Leave it to me,' I cried zealously, 'I'll make him so excited at the thought of a *shikar*, tigers, elephants, jungle, he can't wait to start. I'll rush him into it. We've got to keep them apart. Maybe a tiger will kill him,' I added, malevolently hopeful; 'maybe she'll realize he's a monster and divorce him.'

"'She will never do anything of the sort,' Edith retorted. 'You saw how she looked at him even when he—'

"A scream broke upon the night. A woman's scream. A continuous rending scream of utter terror. It came from the moonless garden.

"'Where is she?' we whispered with one breath as we rushed out. To our

amazed relief she came out from the drawing-room, very white, calm with the dead calmness of fear.

"Where?" she faltered. At that moment, while the scream still rang out upon the night, Greenleaf, unstained, unruffled, appeared upon the veranda. We all three felt a deadly fear of him—of what he had done to the woman in the garden. Again the scream, nearer now, and a woman ran into the path of light from the doorway, sari flying, gold ornaments flashing. Edith's ayah. Behind her, a flying demon of hate, sped Bargueloh, the dagger in his hand. His turban had fallen off; his long hair, loosened, streamed out as he ran. He breathed murder. The ayah threw herself at my feet, begging protection.

"It was Greenleaf, however, who lunged at Bargueloh, tumbled him to the ground, and struck the dagger from his hand so that it went hurtling into the rose bushes. Finding himself held down by Greenleaf, Bargueloh was bewildered. All trace of his late savagery was gone; he was his usual gentle, deferential self. Beyond asking if he had been ill, he seemed to have no recollection of what he had done. Told that he had nearly killed the ayah, he was plainly distressed and unconvinced. He seemed ill, shaking as with fever. Had I not known him orthodox and therefore a teetotaler, I should have judged him drunk.

"The ayah, still cowering on the ground, stared at him searchingly while he bound up his hair and adjusted his turban. When he felt himself to be once more properly dressed, he became voluble. He remembered nothing except a sharp pain at his heart when he tried to show Ayah the dagger. He had tried to tell her of their good fortune, how they could buy a house and a garden. He would sell the dagger, offering sacri-

fices in the temple for the long life of Greenleaf Sahib and Mem Sahib. When he tried to give the dagger to Ayah, he felt a stinging pain; a whirling blackness darkened his eyes, and he knew no more until he woke to see the Sahibs looking strangely at him. He had not meant to attack his wife; he knew nothing of it; it was not his mistake. Surely the dagger was accursed, cursing Greenleaf Sahib and himself in the same way. Never would he touch the evil thing again. Prostrating himself at my feet he implored me to destroy it.

"Greenleaf interrupted, 'What does he mean, 'the dagger cursed him and me alike'? I only felt sick; I didn't—for God's sake, Wilkinson, what did I do?'

"'You tried to kill Katherine,' I said.

"He sank down on the veranda steps, bowed with shame and grief. Katherine bent over him, comforting him silently.

"Just then the doctor of the Rama-krishna Mission, whom I had asked to call that evening, was announced. I had forgotten the appointment, but it was urgent, as he was the one man who could give me special information I needed in that Afghan-Bengali tangle. He came out to the veranda, bringing the sane, healthy air of the everyday world.

"**T**HE ladies excused themselves, but I kept Greenleaf with me. Knowing that the doctor, working among all classes of men, came into touch with mysterious underground currents, I asked him if he had ever heard of a dagger's exerting a baleful influence upon men.

"'Why, yes,' he admitted surprisingly; 'there's the finger of Kali.'

"At these words, Greenleaf's face went ashy gray; he gripped the arms of his chair till his knuckles and nails went white.

"'What's that?' I asked hurriedly, to divert his attention from Greenleaf.

"'A mystery dagger,' resumed the doctor, 'with a bad record, not often seen or mentioned, but feared. The rumor is that it makes its victims murder their wives. There's a yarn of a Hindoo, who, finding his bride in the arms of an Afghan, murdered them together. Rushing, red-handed from his crime to the temple of Kali, the Murder Goddess, he gave his dagger to the priest, bribing him extravagantly to curse the weapon so that its magnetic influence would impel every man who held it near his wife to murder her. Thus Kali would avenge his wrong. The dagger lay in the temple before Kali's image. At rare intervals, mysteriously circulating, always, seemingly at the will of the Priest of Kali, it took toll of many wives, killed by husbands, willing and unwilling murderers.'

"'That's what he meant!' groaned Greenleaf. 'It's true — the finger of Kali.' He shook, in the ague of a great fear.

"'Pull yourself together, man,' I said, 'and give us an idea what you're talking about.'

"The story came out in short gasping chokes. The obstinate fellow he had met in the bazar was the Priest of Kali. He had blocked Greenleaf's way, arrogantly, menacingly, amid an excited mob of natives all half-crazed because he had struck lightly with his cane a bull who blocked his way in a narrow lane, when he was hurrying to rejoin us. He had tried reasoning with the man, and seeing that to be hopeless, had tried to force his way past, had pushed against him, knocking him aside so that his face was gashed

on a hook projecting from a booth. The crowd was strangely silent, passive, staring. The man, in a slow cold voice, had said a lot Greenleaf didn't understand, about the sacred bull of Shiva, the Destroyer, the husband, and insulting the priest of Kali, the goddess-wife, prophesying in clear English, that within seven days Greenleaf would murder his bride with his own hands guided by the finger of Kali. He had held Greenleaf with his imperious, dominating gaze, while he spoke, and Greenleaf had felt queer. The crowd parted, silent, watchful, letting him pass. At the end of the third lane out, he had been stopped by a beggar who sold him the dagger.

"**I** WENT out into the garden, retrieving the dagger from under the bush where it had flown out of Bargueloh's hand.

"'Ever see that Finger of Kali, Doctor?' I asked.

"'Years ago.'

"'Resembling this, perhaps?' laying Greenleaf's ill-starred knife in his hand.

"'It's the very one,' he replied, lowering his voice and glancing nervously over his shoulder. 'I could never mistake that handle, a rare bit of Jaipore enamel, unique in coloring and design. Get your friend out of Benares,' he whispered. 'His wife's life is not worth a pin while they stay. Mesmerized,' he muttered.

"The Greenleafs left that night for Moghal Serai, sailing from Bombay within three days.

"On my next hunting-trip, in Nepal, I broke that dagger, and buried the fragments deep in the heart of the jungle. Queer, what?"

Beneath the dome of the mosque are many things; consider then, how many more lie beneath the dome of heaven, and be wary. God is great; but he that keepeth his knife to hand is prudent.

—*Sayings of Saladin.*

(Continued from page 150)

great pleasure your note to the effect that 'another gripping Bugs Sinnat story will be published in our next issue.' Loud cheers. *The Circle of Illusion* is a clever job, and entertaining, but finally, its Oriental atmosphere is but an accessory to the plotting of a faker of antiques; still, it doubtless had its place. *The Black Camel*, *The Man Who Limped* and *Eyes of the Dead*, with *Strange Bedfellows*, were undoubtedly the most Oriental. Quotations from the Rubáiyát are O. K. Next time, try the Diwan of Hafiz. A lot of Oriental verse does not quote so well, whereas again, there is some that does. Pick out bits from Sa'adi, Jami, Firdausi, and all the rest of that hoary crew. Keep the Souk for the fans to stage their battles, but also, contrive to wedge into this mêlée a section like the squib on Lawrence . . . anything you please . . . a juicy bit of dirt just exhumed, about Prester John or the Queen of Sheba, or Nadir Shah, or Genghis Khan . . . something by way of relieving the monotony of cheering and groaning in the same old, old seasoned phrases, month after month; something to keep the Souk Oriental . . . a squib on almost anything Oriental, unostentatiously brought into the text just as you marched Lawrence onto the scene. If Turkish coffee, for instance, were mentioned, the editor could drop in a learned paragraph on the approved methods of brewing it, and comment on the merits of ambergris, or orange flower water added to the Mocha. The first issue is on the road. My best wishes for the new venture, and I trust that in a short time **ORIENTAL STORIES** will have to appear every month to keep the fans from carrying the offices by assault and putting the editorial forces to the sword."

"I but recently received my first copy of **ORIENTAL STORIES**; therefore, this congratulatory note to you," writes P. McCausland-Bratton, of Sacramento, California, in a letter to the Souk. "You have excelled all of the adventure magazines with your first effort and I would not exchange my copy for any magazine printed. I am glad to see Frank Owen is a contributor. His *The Wind That Tramps the World* is the most exquisite bit of poetic prose in the world today, if I am any judge of poetic literature, and I have written and sold poetry for a number of years. Consequently I found Hung Long Tom's explanation of Chinese poetry interesting; doubly interesting in that America thinks that it has something new and original in the *vers libre* of today, yet the symbolism and highlights that are new to America are old to China and were old to Egypt, even at the time that the Pyramid texts were written. Your best story of the issue is *The Tiger's Eye* by Pearl Norton Swet."

"Please accept my congratulations upon your opening number of **ORIENTAL STORIES**," writes Captain D. L. Wyman, of Mondovi, Wisconsin. "Continue with extracts from the Rubáiyát. Omar is my pet poet: I can very nearly quote him entire. I wish to write a 'please don't' in anticipation of a fault common to most authors who write romances of the Far East—which too often turn out most unromantically—due to some misconceived conventionality complex. If such authors will persist in creating deep love affairs between Occidental and Oriental races, then let them finish what they start. All too often we find one heart-broken lover—either sex, though usually the woman—who is left to pine away, or commit suicide or die, as suits the writer's convenience, because he or she is of another race, color, or caste. Why will authors—even good ones—introduce to us some character, extol his virtues, lead us on from page to page and chapter to chapter, until such character has, by those very

virtues, found a place in our hearts, won our deepest respect—regardless of caste or color—and then murder him—or her, as the case may be—thereby ruining an otherwise perfect romance?"

C. B. Petric, Jr., of New York City, writes to the editor: "If ORIENTAL STORIES in prospect called for congratulations, what of the reality? Is there any such term as 'super-congratulations-plus'? It is a WOW! The cover is a knockout, the layout and typography perfect, and the stories—well, I couldn't put the magazine down or write to you until I had read 'em all. If you maintain the same high interest average in future issues—and I am sure you will—it will be a matter of but a short time before a monthly, instead of a bi-monthly, schedule will be demanded, I feel sure."

Writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago: "ORIENTAL STORIES is a success. It is all you said it would be and more. The only fault I find is that it does not come out every month, but perhaps it eventually will. As for your stories, I think that *Singapore Nights*, by Frank Owen, is the best story in the October-November number. Next in order of merit are *The White Queen*, by Francis Hard, and *Strange Bedfellows*, by S. B. H. Hurst. I consider J. D. your best artist, let's see more of him."

There have been a number of inquiries as to who are the artists who are illustrating ORIENTAL STORIES. All the story illustrations in this issue are the work of Joseph Doolin. The cover, the art heading for the Souk, and the illustration for Hung Long Tom's poem in the first part of this issue, are done by Donald von Gelb. The Chinese simitars above the cover and above the table of contents are the work of C. C. Senf.

"The best story in your first issue was *Strange Bedfellows*, by S. B. H. Hurst," writes Fred Krumboldt, of Fernwood, Pennsylvania. "I see there is to be another story by this author in the next issue, so I'll be on the lookout for it. The next best is *The Black Camel* by G. G. Pendarves. If the future issues are as good as the first I am sure that your success will be a matter of but a short time. ORIENTAL STORIES and WEIRD TALES are the only two magazines on the market that I can read from cover to cover without being bored with the stories."

L. S. Landmichl, of Riverton, Wyoming, writes to the editor: "Allow me to congratulate you on the stories and general makeup of your new magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES. Frank Owen appears to be quite a writer; I greatly enjoyed his *Singapore Nights*. I also enjoyed *The White Queen* by Francis Hard; though, in fact, I think they're all pretty good yarns. Am loaning my copy of ORIENTAL STORIES out so that others can see what sort of magazine it is—hoping this will do you some good."

In our next issue we will print the first of our historical stories: *Red Blades of Black Cathay*, by Tevis Clyde Smith and Robert E. Howard. This is a story of Genghis Khan and his valiant generals, Chepe Noyon and Subotai, and the assault on the mountain kingdom of Khitai, or Black Cathay, which stood in the path of the Mongol horde's savage sweep to the south. The story lives up to its subject, for it lifts the reader up out of the humdrum life around him and transplants him bodily, as it were, into the presence of Genghis Khan and his warriors, and lets him participate in the fierce fighting at the Pass of Skulls. There has been no greater conqueror in history than Genghis Khan. There is something fine and admirable, even if a bit violent and sanguinary, about those conquerors who ever so often came riding out of High Tartary, to set up empires, plan campaigns and fight battles which made Napoleon

look like an apprentice boy in the art of warfare. Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, who was of the same race, are heroic figures. Genghis, the red-headed scourge of Asia, was a destroyer, and Tamerlane, who appeared on the scene a century or two later, was a builder, but both held the imagination and fear of the whole world.

Genghis Khan began life as a minor nomad chieftain in the desert of Gobi, and while yet a youth was forced to flee for his life from his enemies. A few years later we find him ruling all of Asia except India, from his desert city of Karakorum, and his descendants, the Mogul conquerors, conquered India also. He put to death the entire population of many of the cities he captured; and when the venerable Chinese sage who was his adviser, protested against such needless slaughter, Genghis Khan naively remarked, "What are people like these to me?" There is no more dramatic story in the history of nations than Genghis Khan's onslaught and utter destruction of the great Kharesmian empire, proud ruler of the Mohammedan world, and the pursuit and flight of its Sultan. Genghis Khan's Golden Horde utterly subjugated the Mohammedan world, overran Russia, and under one of his sons the Mongol warriors defeated the picked flower of European chivalry in the mountain passes of Austria. Only the recall of these troops at the death of Genghis Khan saved the rest of Europe from falling prey to the Mongol arms. Genghis Khan's empire was transmitted intact to his sons, and his grandson, Kubilai Khan, ruled a greater number of people and a vaster extent of territory than any monarch in all history.

So much for Genghis Khan at this time. This heroic figure will appear in truly romantic aspect in *Red Blades of Black Cathay*.

Readers, what is your favorite story in this present issue of *ORIENTAL STORIES*? As this issue goes to press, *Strange Bedfellows*, by S. B. H. Hurst, and *The Voice of El-Lil*, by Robert E. Howard, are in an exact tie for first place in the October-November number, as shown by your votes and letters.

MY FAVORITE TALES IN THE DECEMBER-JANUARY ISSUE OF  
ORIENTAL STORIES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) -----	-----
(2) -----	-----
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**A**VIVID, red-blooded tale of Genghis Khan and his intrepid generals, Chepe Noyon and Subotai—a powerful story of red battle at the Pass of Skulls—a story of the mountain kingdom that stood in the path of the Ka Khan in the sweep of the Mongol horde to the south.

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**The King of the Jerawahs**

*(Continued from page 168)*

his clothes. . . . The two crooks were staring with open mouths. Then Walters gasped brokenly:

"You . . . talk . . . English?"

"Naturally!" drawled Bugs in that language.

"But . . . but . . . who are you?"

"My name is Sinnat . . . of the secret service!" drawled Bugs.

"My God!" Harris cried. "The one man every crook in India fears!"

The day came with its usual suddenness. Walters was pointing as he shivered. Three men—three splendid Sikh policemen on horses—were cantering toward them.

Harris was babbling. He had lost his head entirely.

"Sikh police!" he gasped. "But . . . we don't want them!"

"No," answered Bugs. "But they want you! You are wanted—for murder! And you, Walters, as an accessory! Probably there are many other crimes! Stand up now. You are a couple of rotters, but try to remember that you were born white, and don't act the coward before these Sikhs!"

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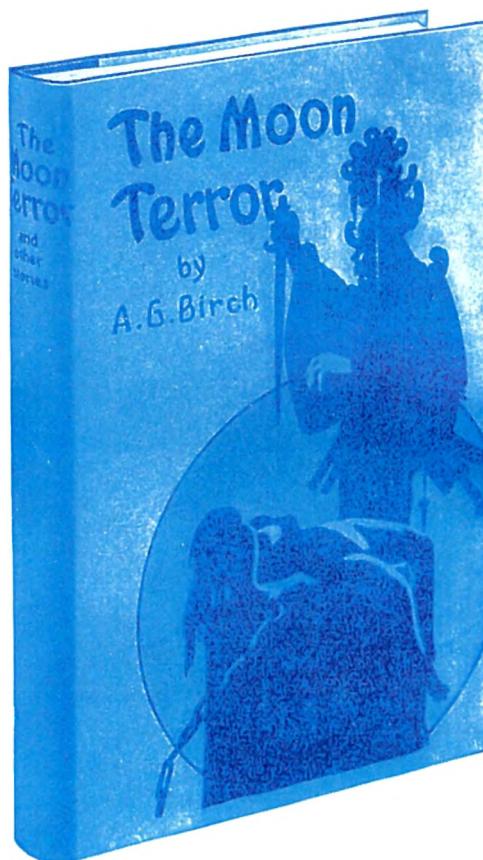
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