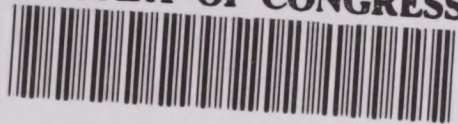


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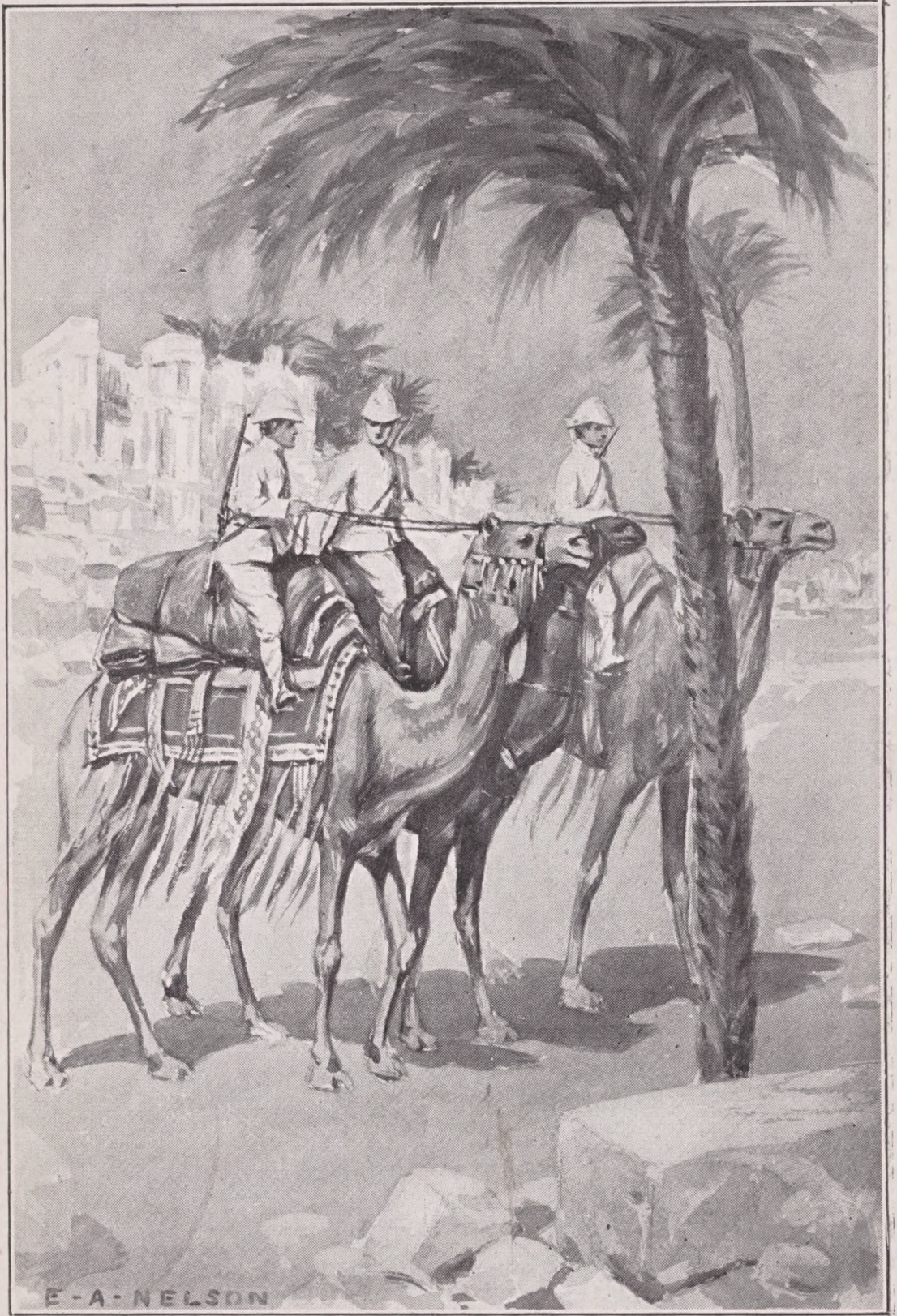
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The Boy
Fortune Hunters
In Egypt



Ships of the desert.

The Boy
Fortune Hunters
in Egypt

By
FLOYD AKERS

Author of
"The Boy Fortune Hunters in Panama," etc.



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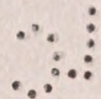
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CHAPTER I.

THE RUNAWAY.

I was standing on the deck of the *Seagull*, looking over the rail and peering into the moonlight that flooded the bay where we lay at anchor, when the soft dip of an oar caught my ear.

It was the softest dip in the world, stealthy as that of an Indian, and in the silence that reigned aboard ship I stood motionless, listening for a repetition of the sound.

It came presently—the mere rustle of the drops as they slid off the oar's blade—and a small boat stole from the shadows astern and crept to our side.

I glanced along the rail and saw, a few paces away, the dim form of the watch, alert and vigilant; but the man knew I was there, and forbore to hail the mysterious craft below.

At a snail's pace the boat glided along our side until it was just beneath me, when I could see a

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blot in the moonlight that resembled a human form. Then a voice, so gentle that it scarce rose above the breeze, called out:

“Ahoy, mate!”

Now I ought to explain that all this was surprising; we were a simple, honest American merchant ship, lying in home waters and without an element of mystery in our entire outfit. On the neighboring shore of the harbor could be seen the skids from which the *Seagull* had been launched a month before, and every man and boy in Chelsea knew our history nearly as well as we did ourselves.

But our midnight visitor had chosen to steal upon us in a manner as unaccountable as it was mysterious, and his hail I left unanswered while I walked to the landing steps and descended them until I stood upon the platform that hung just over the boat.

And now I perceived that the tub—for it was little else—was more than half full of water, and that the gunwale rode scarce an inch above the smooth surface of the bay. The miserable thing was waterlogged and about to sink, yet its occu-

The Runaway

pant sat half submerged in his little pool, as quiet and unconcerned as if no danger threatened.

“What’s up?” I demanded, speaking rather sternly.

The form half rose, the tub tipped and filled, and with a gentle splash both disappeared from view and left me staring at the eddies. I was about to call for help when the form bobbed up again and a hand shot out and grasped a rope dangling from the landing stage. I leaned over to assist, and the fellow scrambled up the line with remarkable agility until I was able to seize his collar and drag him, limp and dripping, to a place beside me.

At this time I was just eighteen years of age and, I must confess, not so large in size as I longed to be; but the slender, bent form of the youth whom I had rescued was even of less stature than my own. As he faced me in the moonlight and gave a gasp to clear the water from his throat, I noted the thin, pinched features and the pair of large, dark eyes that gazed with pleading earnestness into my own.

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“For Heaven’s sake, what are you up to?” I asked, impatiently; “and how came you to be afloat in that miserable tub? It’s a wonder you didn’t sink long before you reached our side.”

“So it is,” he replied in a low voice. “Are you—are you Sam Steele, sir?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! I hoped it would be you. Can I go aboard, sir? I want to talk to you.”

I could not well have refused, unless I consigned the fellow to the waters of the bay again. Moreover, there was a touching and eager appeal in the lad’s tones that I could not resist. I turned and climbed to the deck, and he followed me as silently as a shadow. Then, leaning against the rail, I inquired somewhat testily:

“Couldn’t you wait until morning to pay me a visit? And hadn’t you enough sense to know that old dinghy wouldn’t float?”

“But it did float, sir, until I got here; and that answered my purpose very well,” he replied. “I had to come at night to keep from being discovered and recaptured.”

The Runaway

“Oh! You’re a criminal, then. Eh?”

“In a way, sir. I’m an escaped cabin-boy.”

That made me laugh. I began to understand, and the knowledge served to relieve the strain and dissolve the uncanny effect of the incident. An escaped cabin-boy! Well, that was nothing very wonderful.

“Here, come to my room and get some dry togs,” I said, turning abruptly to the gangway. The lad followed and we passed silently through the after-cabin, past the door of Uncle Naboth’s quarters—whence issued a series of stentorian snores—and so into my own spacious stateroom, where I lighted a lamp and carefully closed the door.

“Now, then,” I exclaimed, pulling some of my old clothes from a locker, “slip on this toggery at once, so your teeth will stop chattering.”

He discarded his dripping garments and replaced them with my dry flannel shirt and blue trousers, my thick socks and low shoes. I picked up his own ragged clothes and with a snort of contempt for their bedraggled and threadbare

The Boy Fortune Hunters

condition tossed them out of the window into the sea.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, and clutched at his breast.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Nothing. I thought at first you had thrown away mother’s picture; but it’s here, all right,” and he patted his breast tenderly.

“Hungry?” I inquired.

“Yes, sir.” He gave a shiver, as if he had just remembered this condition; and I brought some biscuits and a tin of sardines from my cupboard and placed them before him.

The boy ate ravenously, washing down the food with a draught of water from the bottle in the rack. I waited for him to finish before I questioned him. Then, motioning him to a seat on my bunk, for he seemed weak and still trembled a bit, I said:

“Now, tell me your story.”

“I’m a Texan,” he replied, slowly, “and used to live in Galveston. My folks are dead and an uncle took care of me until a year ago, when he was shot in a riot. I didn’t mind that; he was

The Runaway

never very good to me; but when he was gone I had no home at all. So I shipped as a cabin-boy aboard the *Gonzales*, a tobacco sloop plying between Galveston and Key West, for I always loved the sea and this was the best berth I could get. The Captain, Jose Marrow, is half Mexican and the cruelest man in the world. He whipped me when he was drunk, and abused and cuffed me when sober, and many a time I hoped he would kill me instead of keeping up the tortures I suffered. Finally he came up here with a cargo, and day before yesterday, just as he had unloaded and was about to sail again, he sent me ashore on an errand. Of course I skipped. I ran along the bay and hid in a lumber shed, from the top of which I could watch the *Gonzales*. She didn't sail, because old Marrow was bound to have me back, I guess; so I had to lay low, and all the time I was sure he'd find me in the end and get me back. The sloop's in the bay yet, sir, only about a quarter of a mile away."

"Well?"

"Well, last evening a couple of men came to

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sort some of the timbers, and I lay hid on top the pile and listened to their talk. They spoke of the *Seagull*, and how it was to sail far away into the Mediterranean, and was the best built ship that ever left this port."

"That's true enough, my lad."

"And they said Cap'n Steele was the best man to work for in the merchant service, and his son, Sam Steele—that's you, sir—was bound to make as good a sailor as his dad, and had been in some queer adventures already, and was sure to find more of them before he was much older."

I had to smile at that evident "taffy," and my smile left the boy embarrassed. He hesitated a moment, and then continued:

"To a poor devil like me, sir, such a tale made me believe this ship a floating paradise. I've heard of captains who are not as cruel as old Marrow; so when the men had gone I decided to get to you in some way and beg you to take me aboard. You see, the Mexican is waiting to hunt me down, and I'd die sooner than go back to his terrible ship. If you'll take me with you, Mr. Steele, I'll be faithful and true, and work

The Runaway

like a nigger for you. If you won't, why, just say the word, and I'll jump overboard again."

"Can you swim?"

"No."

I thought a moment.

"What's your name?" I asked, finally.

"Joe Herring."

"Well, Joe, you're asking something unusual, I must say. I'm not the captain of the *Seagull*, but merely purser, or to be more exact the secretary to Mr. Perkins, the supercargo. I own a share in the ship, to be sure, and purchased it with money I made myself; but that fact doesn't count when we're at sea, and Captain Steele is the last man in the world to harbor a runaway member of the crew of a friendly ship. Indeed, your old master came aboard us this morning, to inquire about you, and I heard my father say that if he set eyes on you anywhere he'd let Captain Marrow know. As he never breaks his word this promise is to be depended upon. Do you see, now, what a fix you're in?"

"I do, sir."

His voice was low and despondent and he

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seemed to shrink back in his seat into an attitude hopeless and helpless.

I looked at the boy more closely, and the appeal in his pinched features, that had struck me at the first glance on the landing stage, became more impressive than ever.

“How old are you, Joe?”

“Fifteen, sir.”

He was tall, but miserably thin. His brown hair, now wet and clinging about his face, curled naturally and was thick and of fine texture, while his dark eyes were handsome enough to be set in the face of a girl. This, with a certain manly dignity that shone through his pitiful expression, decided me to befriend the lad, and I had an inspiration even in that first hour of meeting that Joe Herring would prove a loyal follower and a faithful friend.

“We sail at ten o’clock, and it’s now past midnight,” I remarked, thoughtfully

“Yes, sir; I’ll go any time you say.”

“But you can’t swim, Joe.”

“Never mind. Don’t let me be a bother to you. You’ll want to turn in,” casting a wistful look

The Runaway

around my pleasant room, "and so I'll find my way on deck and you needn't give me another thought."

"Very good," said I, nodding. "I think I'll turn in this minute."

He rose up, slowly.

"Just climb into that upper berth, Joe, and go to sleep. There'll be work for you tomorrow, and you'll need to get rested."

He stared into my smiling face a moment with a startled look that soon became radiant. Then he broke down and cried like a baby.

"Here, no snivelling!" I growled, savagely. "Pile into that berth; but see you get your shoes off, first."

He obeyed, still blubbering but evidently struggling to restrain his sobs. Indeed, his privations of the past two days, half starved and hunted like a dog, had completely unnerved the poor fellow. When he had tumbled into the berth I locked the door, put out the light, and rolled myself in my own blanket.

A few moments later I heard Joe stirring. He leaned over the edge of the bunk and murmured:

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“God bless you, Sam Steele! I’ll never forget, sir, the way you——”

“Oh, shut up and go to sleep, Joe,” I cried. “You’ve kept me awake long enough already.”

“Yes, sir.” And after that he was silent.

CHAPTER II.

OUR VENTURE.

Those who were present at the launching of our beautiful new *Seagull* were unanimous in declaring her the trimmest, daintiest, most graceful craft that had ever yet floated in the waters of old Chelsea bay. Her color was pure white, her brass work brilliant as gold. She was yacht built, on the lines of the fast express boats, and no expense had been spared in her construction or fittings.

My father, Captain Steele, one of the ablest and best known sailors on the Atlantic coast, had personally supervised the building of the *Seagull* and watched every step of progress and inspected every bit of timber, steel, or brass, so that nothing might be slighted in any way. She was one hundred and eighty-seven feet in length, with a thirty-six foot beam and a depth of twenty-one feet, and her net tonnage was close to fourteen

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hundred. We had her schooner rigged, because Captain Steele believed in sailing and had designed his ship for a merchantman of the highest class, but of the old school.

Uncle Naboth and I, who were also part owners of the ship—the firm being Steele, Perkins & Steele—had begged earnestly to convert her into a modern steamer; but my father angrily resented the suggestion.

“Her name’s the *Seagull*,” he declared, “an’ a seagull without wings ’ud be a doggone jack-rabbit; so wings she mus’ have, my lads, ef Dick Steele’s goin’ to sail her.”

We had really put a fortune into the craft, and Uncle Naboth—a shrewd old trader who marked the world as it moved and tried to keep pace with it—was as anxious to have the ship modern in every respect as I was. So we stood stubbornly side by side and argued with the Captain until he finally granted a partial concession to our wishes and consented to our installing an auxiliary equipment of a screw propeller driven by powerful engines, with the express understanding that they must only be used in case of emergency.

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“It’s a rank waste o’ money, an’ takes up vallyble room,” he growled; “but ef so be you ain’t satisfied with decent spars an’ riggin,’ why, git your blarsted ol’ machinery aboard—an’ be hanged to ye both!”

This consent was obtained soon after my return from Panama, but Uncle Naboth and I had ordered the engines months previously, having been determined to install them from the day the *Seagull* was first planned; so no time was lost in getting them placed.

You will know the *Seagull* more intimately as my story progresses, so I will avoid a detailed description of it just now, merely adding that the ship was at once the envy and admiration of all beholders and the pride and joy of her three owners.

My father had sailed for forty years and had at one time lost his right leg in a shipwreck, so that he stumped around with a cork substitute. But he was as energetic and active as in his youth, and his vast experience fully justified his reputation as one of the ablest and shrewdest seamen in the merchant service. Indeed, Captain Steele was

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universally known and respected, and I had good reason to be proud of the bluff old salt who owned me as his son. He had prejudices, it is true, acquired through many strange adventures at sea and in foreign parts; but his heart was simple and frank as that of a child, and we who knew him best and loved him well had little fear of his stubborn temperament.

Naboth Perkins, my dead mother's brother, was also a remarkable man in his way. He knew the sea as well as did my father, but prided himself on the fact that he "couldn't navigate a ferry-boat," having always sailed as supercargo and devoted his talents to trading. He had been one of my earliest and most faithful friends, and although I was still a mere boy at the time the *Seagull* was launched, I had encountered some unusual adventures in company with quaint, honest Uncle Naboth, and won certain bits of prize money that had proved the foundation of our fortunes.

These prize-winnings, converted into hard cash, had furnished the funds for building our new ship, in which we purposed beginning a con-

Our Venture

servative, staid career as American merchantmen, leaving adventures behind us and confining ourselves to carrying from port to port such merchandise as might be consigned to our care. You will hear how well our modest intention was fulfilled.

The huge proportions and staunch construction of the *Seagull* would enable her to sail in any known sea with perfect safety, and long before she was completed we were besieged with proposals from shippers anxious to secure our services.

Uncle Naboth, who handled all such matters for our firm, finally contracted with a big Germantown manufacturer of "Oriental" rugs to carry a load of bales to Syria, consigned to merchants there who would distribute them throughout Persia, Turkey and Egypt, to be sold to American and European tourists and carried to their homes as treasures of Oriental looms.

It was not so much the liberal payment we received as the fact that the long voyage to the Syrian port would give us an opportunity of testing the performances of the *Seagull* that induced

The Boy Fortune

Mr. Perkins to accept the contract and make the lengthy voyage.

"If she skims the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean all right," said he, "the better than any sea on earth; so we may as well find out at the start what she's good for. 'Sides that, we're gittin' a thunderin' price fer cartin' them rags to Syria, an' so the deal seems a good one all 'round."

My father gravely approved the transaction. He also was eager to test the powers of our beautiful new ship, and this would not be his first voyage to the Orient, by any means. So the papers were made out and signed and as soon as our last fittings and furnishings were installed and our crew aboard we were to voyage down the coast in sunny September weather and anchor in the Chesapeake, there to load our cargo.

Our ship's company had been carefully selected, for the fame of my father's new vessel and the popularity of the Captain himself attracted to us the best seamen available; so we had the satisfaction of signing a splendid company of experienced men. In addition to these

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sailors we shipped a first and second engineer, two clever young fellows that became instantly unpopular with my father, who glared at the poor "mechanics" as if he considered them interlopers, if not rank traitors. Some of the seamen, it was arranged, would act as stokers if the engines were called into requisition, so with the addition of a couple of oilers who were also carpenter's assistants we were satisfied we might at any time steam or sail, as the occasion demanded.

I am sure Captain Steele had already acknowledged in his heart that we were justified in equipping the *Seagull* with engines, since any old salt fully realizes the horror of being becalmed and knows the loss such a misfortune is sure to entail in time, wages, and grub. But he would not admit it. Instead, he persisted in playing the part of a much injured and greatly scandalized seaman. It would be time enough to "take water" when the value of the propeller was fully proved.

Ned Britton was Captain's Mate, of course. Ned had sailed with my father for years; he had also sailed two exciting voyages with Uncle Na-

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both and me, and we all admired and respected this strong, gallant fellow as much as we had come to trust in his ability.

Two other curious characters were established fixtures of any craft that the firm of Steele, Perkins & Steele might own. These were two stalwart black men named Nux and Bryonia, South Sea Islanders whom Uncle Naboth had rescued from death years before and attached to his service. Since then they had become my own trusted friends, and more than once had I owed my life to their intelligence and faithfulness. Bryonia, or Bry, as we called him, was a famous cook, and always had charge of our ship's galley. With Bry aboard we were never in want of a substantial, well cooked meal; for, as Uncle Naboth was wont to declare: "Thet Bry could take a rope's end an' a bit o' tarpaulin an' make a Paris tubble-de-hoot out'n 'em."

Nux was cabin steward and looked after our comforts aft with a deftness and skill that were wholly admirable. These blacks were both of them shrewd, loyal, and brave, and we knew we might always depend upon their fidelity.

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On the morning following my adoption of Joe Herring I left the runaway locked up in my stateroom and went on deck to watch the final preparations for our departure. A fair breeze swept down the bay, so at ten o'clock we hoisted anchor, spread our main and foresails and, slowly gathering way, the *Seagull* slipped through the water on her maiden trip amid the shouts of hundreds who stood on the shore to watch and bid us God speed.

We fired a shot from our small howitzer as a parting salute to our friends, dipped our pennants in gallant fashion, showed our heels, and sped away so swiftly that the harbor was soon left far behind.

We passed the old *Gonzales* soon after leaving our anchorage. It was still waiting to recapture its absconding cabin-boy, though why Captain Marrow should attach so much importance to the youth I could not then understand.

As soon as we were well at sea I liberated Joe and told him he was to be my special servant and assistant, but must also help Nux to look after the cabin during his spare time—which was likely

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to be plentiful enough. Knowing that the sooner I established the lad's footing aboard the easier it would be for us both, I sent him on an errand that would take him past my father's station on the deck. His sharp eye encountered the boy at once, as I had expected, and he promptly roared out an order for him to halt.

Joe stopped and saluted respectfully. He was looking cheery and bright this morning; indeed, a different boy from the one I had pulled from the sinking dinghy the night before. Life bore a new aspect for Joe and his heart was light as a feather. He looked honest and wholesome enough in the fresh blue suit I had given him, and he had been duly warned that his only remaining danger lay in not winning the countenance of the skipper.

"Who are you? 'N' where 'n' thunder 'd you come from?" demanded Captain Steele.

"Joe Herring, sir. Master Sam's assistant, sir," answered the boy, in his quiet tones.

"Assistant! Bung an' barnacles! Assistant to Sam! What doin'? Loafin' an' a-killin' time?"

"I beg to refer you to Master Sam, sir," was

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the composed answer, although from where I watched the scene I could see that Joe was badly frightened.

“What Sam needs is suthin’ to do, more ’n a grub-devourin’ assistant,” pursued my father, sternly. “Look here; did my son lug you aboard?”

“He did, sir,” replied Joe, truthfully.

“Send him to me, then,” ordered my father.

I stepped forward at once, saluting the Captain with my usual deference. When we were at sea I had been taught to put by the fact that this was my father, bearing in mind only the immediate fact that he was my commander. Still, in my capacity as secretary to Uncle Naboth I was in a measure independent of ship’s discipline.

“What tricks are you up to now, Sam?” demanded the Captain, scowling at me.

“Father, this boy was the runaway from the *Gonzales*, whom Captain Marrow has been seeking so earnestly. He was so abused by the dirty Mexican that he would rather die than return to his slavery. So he threw himself on my mercy, and knowing he would surely be retaken if I left

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him ashore, I brought the lad with us. Don't blame him, sir. I'll take all the responsibility."

The Captain stared at me a moment.

"See that you do, then," he grumbled. "Sam, it's a illegal an' unperfessional act to harbor a runaway."

"Yes, sir."

"Usually no good ever comes of it."

"He's an honest lad, sir."

The Captain eyed him closely.

"It's no affair o' mine," he muttered, half turning away. "The boy belongs now to the Perkins outfit, mind you. I'll have no runaways ner stowaways in my crew."

I knew then the battle was won, and that my father would refuse to surrender Joe to his old captain under any circumstances. The "Perkins outfit," so sneeringly referred to, meant Uncle Naboth and myself, and although it was evident the mission of the *Seagull* was dependent on the "Perkins outfit" to manage and arrange its commerce in a profitable manner, it pleased my father to denominate us landlubbers and consider us of "no 'count" in the sailing of the ship.

Our Venture

Uncle Naboth wasn't aboard yet. He had gone by rail some days before to Philadelphia to attend to the business of our cargo, and it was not until we anchored in the placid waters of the Chesapeake that my uncle appeared, smiling and cheery as ever.

Mr. Perkins was short and stout, with a round, chubby face, smoothly shaven, and a circle of iron-gray locks around his bald head. His eyes were small, light blue and twinkling; his expression simple and childlike; his speech inelegant and with a humorous twist that rendered him an agreeable companion. But as a trader Naboth Perkins was famed far and wide; his shrewdness was proverbial; his talent for bargaining fairly marvelous; his honesty undisputed. I have heard merchants say it was a pleasure to pay Mr. Perkins his demands, even though they could procure the same service elsewhere at less cost. For he was square as a die, faithful to the smallest detail, and his word was absolutely to be relied upon. The little old gentleman was known as a money-maker, and had been the part-

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ner of my father, his brother-in-law, for many years.

Such a character could not fail to be eccentric, and Uncle Naboth's ways were at time puzzling; but I knew he was devoted to me, since he had proved this quality many times; and I naturally regarded my whimsical uncle with great affection.

When Mr. Perkins came aboard he announced that the bales of rugs were all on the dock and ready to load without delay. I was much interested in our queer cargo, for it seemed strange to me that Americans should ship "Oriental" rugs to the Orient, to be purchased there by Americans and brought back home again. But Uncle Naboth, who had been through the mills at Germantown, explained the matter very clearly.

"You see," he said, "there ain't enough genooine Oriental rugs left to supply the demand, now thet they've got to be sich a fad with rich people. When the Orient was fust diskivered there was a good many rugs there, but it had took years to make each one of 'em, an' some was so old they had holes wore in 'em; but that made

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'em the more vallyble 'cause it proved they was antiques. They picked 'em up fast, an' the Orientals was glad to sell 'em an' say nothin'. Ev'ry tourist thet goes to the East wants to buy rugs to send home, an' he'll pay 'most any price that's asked fer rare ol' patterns an' dim, washed-out colors. Ef there's a few holes, badly mended, so much the better, fer they proves the rugs is old. So the clever Easterners an' the cleverer Yankees hit on a scheme to supply the demand, an' here in Germantown they makes thousands of rare ol' Oriental rugs every year. They buy a few genooine ones to copy the patterns from, an' they weave 'em by machinery. Then the new rugs is put into a machine that beats dust an' dirt into 'em an' beats it out again, till the new, fresh colors gits old an' faded. After this they're run through a rubbin' machine that wears 'em down some an' makes a few holes, here an' there; an' then the menders take 'em an' darn the holes. In about a day's time one o' them rugs goes through about as much wear an' tear by machinery as it would get in centuries of use; an' fer my part I can't tell the diff'rence atween a genooine Ori-

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ental an' a imitation one. We've got a whole cargo to take to Syria, an' in a few months they'll mostly come back agin, an' be laid on the floors of our millionaires. Queer traffic, ain't it, Sam? But if you stops to think, there's been enough Oriental rugs carted out'n the Orient, in the last hundred years, to carpet most of Asia an' Africa with; so it stands to reason they ain't all the real thing. If it wasn't fer Yankee ingenooity an' Oriental trickery the supply 'd been exhausted years ago, an' our people 'd hev to carpet their floors with honest, fresh rugs instead o' these machine worn imitations. That would break their hearts, wouldn't it?"

But Uncle Naboth had arranged also to carry another queer line of merchandise on our voyage, consisting of several large cases consigned by a Connecticut manufacturer. These contained imitations of ancient Egyptian scarabs (a sort of mud beetle considered sacred by the old sun-worshippers), and a collection of funeral figures, tiny household gods and other articles supposed to be found only in the tombs of the primitive kings and nobles of Egypt.

Our Venture

“The Egyptian gov'ment,” explained Uncle Naboth, “won't let any more genooine relics be taken out'n the country, 'cause they wants 'em all fer the Cairo Museum; so the Yankees hev come to the front agin, an' made mud relics by the bushel, so's the eager tourists can buy what they wants to bring home an' prove they've been there. These cases o' goods is consigned to merchants in Luxor, a little town up the Nile, an' I've agreed to run over to Alexandria, after we've unloaded our Syrian rugs, an' dump the rubbish on the dock there. There ain't many cases of it, but the profits is so big that we get well paid for the job.”

“But how did these wares get to Philadelphia from Connecticut?” asked my father.

“Oh, I've been correspondin' with ol' Ackley, the Yankee that makes 'em, fer some time,” said my uncle, “but I couldn't tell how much room the rugs would take up until I got here. When I found I could stow the Egyptian rubbish, I telegraphed to Ackley an' the consignment got here by freight yesterday. But that ain't the worst of it, partners.”

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“What is the worst?” I inquired.

“Why, the Yankee manufacturer has sent me his beloved son, with a letter askin’ me to carry him with us to Egypt, so’s he can study the country an’ find out what ancient relics they need supplied in large quantities, an’ collect from the dealers fer this first batch.”

“We don’t take passengers,” said my father, sharply.

“So I said; but the young duffer is here, an’ won’t take no fer an answer. He says he’s willin to pay fer his passage, an’ his dad wants him to keep an eye on them precious modern antiquities as we’re to carry. So I’ve put the case up to you, an’ you can decide it.”

“It’s none o’ my business, Naboth,” said my father, turning away with a frown; “I don’t like passengers, but you an’ Sam can do as you please. Only, if you take him, keep him out o’ my way.”

Uncle winked at me, and I knew the passenger would be booked.

Work of loading the cargo progressed rapidly, and in two days the bales of rugs were all aboard and carefully stowed in our dry and ample hold.

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Then the Yankee antiques for Egypt appeared for loading, and with them came a youth whose appearance caused me to smile involuntarily.

“Archibald Ackley, Jr., Middletown, Conn.,” his cards read. He was a stocky, well built fellow about seventeen years of age, although he evidently wished to appear much older. He had sharp gray eyes, lanky hair of light tow color, immense hands and feet, a swaggering gait, and a style of dress gay enough to rival the plumage of a bird-of-paradise.

Archibald's features might have been handsome originally, but a swiftly pitched base-ball had once ruthlessly pushed his generous nose against his left cheek, and there it had remained.

The youth sported a heavy watchchain that was palpably plated, a big “diamond” on his cravat that perhaps came from the famous “Barrios mines,” of New York, and his fingers were loaded with rings of vast proportions set with doubtful gems. It may be Mr. Ackley, Jr., imagined himself an exquisite, and sought to impress people by a display of wealth that may have cost him or his father several dollars; but, as I said,

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my first glimpse of his gorgeous person caused me to smile—an impertinence I quickly tried to repress.

Mr. Perkins and I considered carefully the young man's request for a passage to Egypt, and as we had ample accommodations we decided to take him along; but when he came for his answer and I caught sight of him for the first time, I almost regretted our decision.

Uncle Naboth, however, seemed not to be disagreeably impressed. He shook the boy's hand—it was a "flipper," all right—with cordial greeting and said to him:

"Very good, Archie, my lad; we've talked it over an' you can go 'long ef so be you want to. But remember this is a merchantman, an' no passenger ship, an' make up your mind to abide by Cap'n Steele's rules an' reggleations."

"That's fair," said the boy, evidently pleased. "I'm not likely to bother any one. All I want is a berth to sleep in and three square meals a day. How's the feed?"

"Why, we have hearty appetites, ourselves, my lad, an' there's no call for you to starve as I

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knows on," with a wink at me. "You'll eat at our table an' have the best the ship affords."

"That's what I want," said Archie, nodding his bullet head; "there's nothing too good for me. What's the price for the passage?"

I told him.

"That's a pretty steep figure," he rejoined, uneasily. "I can take an ocean liner for about the same cost."

"It is your privilege, sir," I said, stiffly. "We don't want passengers; so we don't want you. But Mr. Perkins is disposed to accommodate you because your father is one of our shippers. Go or stay, as you like; but make up your mind quickly, for we sail at seven."

He scowled first at me and then at uncle; but presently he grinned.

"I haven't a choice," said he, carelessly. "Pop's paying the shot, for he wants me to keep an eye on the scarabs and things and see the goods safe landed and the money collected for them. They're shipped to a lot of dirty Arabs who can't be trusted. So here's your money, and I'll mail the receipt for the passage to Pop before we skate

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away, so he'll know it's you who are robbing him instead of me."

I felt like punching the cad's nose, but Uncle Naboth laughed good naturedly and nodded approval.

"That's businesslike an' to the point," said he. "Take the money, Sam, and give our passenger the proper receipt."

I did so, and Archibald Ackley, Jr., stalked away down the dock to fetch his baggage from the hotel.

To my surprise the *Gonzales* made the harbor that afternoon and anchored alongside us. I promptly hid the trembling Joe in my cabin and locked him up; it proved a wise action because Captain Marrow lost no time in boarding us and asking for an interview with Captain Steele.

This made me nervous, for I knew my father would not lie under any circumstances, and I dreaded the result of the ugly Mexican's visit. So I stood beside my father to make every possible endeavor to save my protege from recapture.

"Cap'n Steele, sir, where's my cabin-boy?"

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asked Marrow, gruffly, as he came up and touched his cap.

My father looked him over with grave attention.

“Cap’n Marrow,” he replied, sternly, “where’s that calf that broke out’n my ten-acre lot three year ago come next Sunday?”

Marrow muttered a curse and glared at us evilly.

“I happen to know, Steele, that my boy Joe, who was tryin’ to vamoose, stole a rotten dinghy an’ rowed out to the *Seagull* the night afore you sailed. Ain’t thet so?”

“Mebbe,” said my father.

“Then I demand him in the name o’ the law, an’ I’ll hold you here in the bay till you give me back the stolen goods,” continued Marrow, savagely.

“Ned,” said my father, turning quietly to his brawny mate, “show Cap’n Marrow over the side, an’ if he’s too slow in goin’, toss him overboard.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” returned Ned, pleasantly.

“I’ll hev the law, remember! You can’t sail

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from the harbor till you've given up my property!" roared the exasperated Mexican.

"Mebbe," repeated my father, again, as he turned indifferently away.

But I saw trouble brewing and resolved to head it off.

"Captain Marrow," I said, politely, with a motion to Ned to delay his intention, for the mate's hand was lifted to seize the fellow in his terrible grip, "please allow me to explain this case. A boy—perhaps it was your runaway—did indeed board us at Chelsea, as you say; but my father, Captain Steele, did not discover his presence until we were at sea. Then we were obliged to carry him on here, where he was put upon the dock. I assure you I saw him bolt for the land as fast as he could go."

This was true in fact, as I had sent Joe on an errand. I did not relate, of course, that the boy had quickly returned, but my tale seemed to impress Marrow and explain why Captain Steele had so recklessly sneered at his demands, as if wilfully defying the marine law. "If you make haste, sir," I continued, very courteously, "you

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may still be able to lay hands on the boy, who I am sure has no money to take him any distance from Philadelphia.”

Marrow looked at me shrewdly.

“Did Joe say anything about me, or about money?” he asked.

“Not a word, sir,” answering the last question. “But I advise you to make haste. And you must forgive Captain Steele for his abrupt answers, caused by what he considered the insolence of your demand and the knowledge that you are in the wrong in threatening to hold his ship. You know, sir, it would cost you heavily to do this, when the court found you were unable to prove your case.”

This argument decided the man. He swore a nasty oath and stamped his foot in futile rage; but he at once left the ship to be rowed ashore, and that was the last we saw of him.

Still I wondered at his interest in the miserable, half starved boy he had so wickedly abused; and I wondered at his strange question about money. There must be some mystery about Joe.

At seven o'clock, all being snugly stowed and

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the last of our fresh provisions taken aboard, we hoisted anchor and headed out toward the mouth of the bay. Our passenger had settled himself in a spare cabin an hour before, having brought with him two huge "telescopes" that appeared to contain all his belongings.

I did not let Joe out of his confinement until about midnight, and when from the swish of the water against our sides I knew we had reached the open sea.

CHAPTER III.

AN OBSTINATE PASSENGER.

It is useless to relate the unimportant incidents of our voyage to Gibraltar and up the Mediterranean. The *Seagull* behaved beautifully in both good and bad weather, amply fulfilling our most ardent expectations. It is true the voyage was unnecessarily long, since with our powerful engines we could have cut down our time to less than one-half; but we were obliged to concede this to Captain Steele's prejudice in favor of sailing, and the breeze held so steady and persistent that we cut the waves like a clipper and made a most remarkable sailing record for the voyage.

It was not until we passed Sicily that the *Seagull* was required to prove her staunchness. The waves at the lower end of the Mediterranean were wilder than any I had ever before encountered, but our beauty rode them like a swan and

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never a seam spread nor a beam so much as creaked.

The voyage, however, served to make us better acquainted with both our boy passenger and my boy assistant—the rich man's son and the runaway Joseph—though this acquaintance was not ripened without some interesting experiences.

A more willing or grateful follower no one could have than Joe Herring. The kindly treatment accorded him was in such sharp contrast to the dog's life he had led aboard the *Gonzales* that he was anxious to show his appreciation on every possible occasion. His dark eyes followed me affectionately wherever I went, and he would leap quickly to anticipate my every order. Also he liked to serve Uncle Naboth and my father, and proved so considerate of their wishes and comforts that he soon won their hearts completely. Nor was Joe so frail as he seemed at first glance. His muscles were hard as iron and on occasion his thin frame developed remarkable strength. This he proved conclusively within the first week of the voyage, as you shall hear.

Our young passenger, whose imposing name

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we had quickly shortened to plain "Archie," seemed likely to cause us unsuspected trouble. He at once developed two bad habits. The first was to sit on deck, lolling in a folding deck chair he had brought aboard, and play distressing tunes upon a harmonica—which he termed a "mouth-organ." The lad must have had a most powerful inherent love for music to enable him to listen to his own awful strains; but it was clear his musical talent was not developed, or at least not properly educated to any artistic degree.

The first morning out the Captain, forced to listen to this "music," scowled and muttered under his breath but forbore to interfere with the passenger's evident enjoyment of his own performance. The second morning he yelled at Archie to "shut up!" but the boy calmly disregarded the order. The third morning my father stumped over to where I sat and ordered me to take away Archie's "blamed ol' jew's-harp" and fling it overboard.

I had myself been considerably annoyed by the wretched music, so I obeyed so far as to stroll

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over to our passenger and ask him to kindly discontinue his performance.

He looked up resentfully.

"This is the passenger's deck, ain't it?" he demanded.

"We have no passenger's deck; but we allow you to sit here," I replied.

"Then leave me alone, and mind your own business," he retorted. "I'm a free born American citizen, and I've paid my passage and can do as I please."

"But you can't annoy everybody with that beastly music while you're aboard the *Seagull*," I answered, rather nettled at his attitude. "We also have rights, sir, and they must be considered."

"I've paid for mine," he said. "You get out, Sam Steele. I know what I'm doing," and he commenced to play again.

I looked at him reflectively. Just how to handle such a situation puzzled me. But Joe stood just behind and had heard all. With a bound of amazing quickness he was upon the unprepared Archie, seized the mouth-organ from

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his grasp and flung the instrument of torture far over the side.

"Beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure," he said, with a grin.

Archie whistled softly and looked his assailant over. He rose slowly from his chair and, still whistling, began to unbutton his coat and take it off. He folded it neatly, laid it in the chair, removed his linen cuffs and placed them beside his coat, and proceeded deliberately to roll up his sleeves.

The youth's intentions were so obvious that I was about to order Joe to go below, as his slight figure seemed no match for the burly Archie, when a pleading look in the boy's eyes restrained me.

Uncle Naboth and Ned Britton, who had been promenading the deck near, had noted the incident and now paused to see its outcome. Some of the sailors also were interested, from their distant posts, while my father stood on the bridge and looked at our little group with an amused smile lighting his rugged face.

Altogether it would not do to retreat in face

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of the coming fray, or to interfere with the logical outcome of Joe's rash act. The Yankee boy's face was white and set, and his soft whistle only rendered his bull-headed determination to exact revenge the more impressive.

Having rolled up his sleeves, doubled his great fists and swung his arms once or twice to ease his muscles, Archie advanced steadily upon poor Joe, who stood listlessly with his hands thrust in his coat pockets and his head and shoulders bent slightly forward, in his accustomed pose.

"That mouth-organ cost two dollars," said Archie, grimly, "and you don't look as if you're worth two cents. So I'll just take it out o' your hide, my son, to teach you a lesson."

With that he paused and swung his right fist upward, and Joe, roused to action at last, gave a sudden bound. My eye could scarcely follow him as he leapt at Archie, embracing him and clinging to his antagonist like a vise. To my astonishment, the bulky Yankee swung around, tottered and fell heavily upon his back, with Joe kneeling triumphant upon his breast.

We all gave an admiring cheer, for we could

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not help it, and at the sound Joe arose and stood in his place again, meekly as before.

Archie got up more slowly, feeling the back of his head, which had whacked against the deck. He made a sudden rush and a lunge with his fist that might have settled Joe had he not dodged and closed again on his adversary with the same lightning tactics he had at first employed. They fell in a heap, and although Archie tried to keep Joe hugged to his breast the latter slid away like an eel and a moment after was on his feet and had assumed his careless, waiting pose.

When the Yankee got up this time he was again softly whistling. Without a glance at his late antagonist he deliberately rolled down his sleeves, attached his cuffs and resumed his coat. Then he walked over to Joe and with a smile that showed more good nature than chagrin he held out his bulky hand.

“Shake, sonny,” said he. “You’re good stuff, and I forgive you everything. Let’s be chums, Joe. If I could have landed on your jaw I’d have mashed you like a turnip; but you wouldn’t let me, and so I’m bound to give in gracefully.”

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That speech was the best thing the boy had done, and my original dislike for him began to evaporate. Joe shook the proffered hand cordially, and my father, who had come down to join our group, gave Archie an admiring buffet on the shoulder and said: "You'll do, my lad."

But after all Joe was the hero of the occasion, and we all loved him for the clever and skillful fight he had put up. Archie was an expert boxer, as we afterward discovered, but Joe's talent for wrestling gave him a decided advantage in a rough-and-tumble encounter.

At luncheon we were all in a hearty good humor, but imagine my dismay to hear shortly afterward the strains of a mouth-organ coming from the deck! I ran up at once, and there sat Master Archie in his chair, blowing furiously into an instrument fully three inches longer than the one Joe had tossed overboard.

I laughed; I could not help it; and even my father's face wore an amused smile. Joe looked at me inquiringly, but I shook my head and retreated to my cabin. Such a queer condition of mutiny deserved careful thought.

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But, as I said, Archie had another bad habit. He smoked cigarettes in his stateroom, which was against our most positive rules. The first time we observed from the deck thin smoke curling through the open window of Archie's cabin, a hasty investigation was made and the cause speedily discovered. The boy was lying in his berth, reading a novel and coolly puffing his cigarette.

Uncle Naboth sent for the passenger and gravely informed him he'd have to quit smoking cigarettes in his cabin.

"On deck it don't matter so much," added my uncle, "though a decent pipe is a more manly smoke, to my notion. But we've put a furtun' into our new ship, an' can't afford to take chances of burnin' her up on the first voyage. Cigarettes are dangerous. If you throw a lighted stub into a corner we may go up in smoke and perhaps lose many vallyble human lives. So we can't allow it, young man. Smoke yer paper cigars on deck, ef ye want to; but don't light another in yer cabin."

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Archie made no promise. He listened to my uncle's lecture, and walked away without a word.

An hour later I saw smoke coming through the window again, and peering through the aperture discovered Archie lying in his bunk, calmly smoking. The boy was exasperatingly stubborn. I called black Nux and gave him an order. With a pleased grin the South Sea Islander brought a length of fire hose, attached it to a plug in the scrappers and carried the nozzle to Archie's window. Presently we heard a yell as the powerful stream struck the smoker and completely deluged him. He leapt from his berth, only to be struck full in the face by the water from the hose, which sent him reeling against the door. I shut off the water, and Nux, kneeling at the low window, looked down on the discomfitted Archie and exclaimed:

"Goodness sake, Mars Ackley! were dat on'y you-uns? Thought it were a fire, sure thing. Beg pard'n, Mars Ackley!"

After the boy changed his drenched clothing for dry he came on deck and stalked around in silent anger while Nux went to the cabin and

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cleared it of the water and wet bedding. I wondered if the lesson would be effective, but could not judge a nature that was so unlike any I had ever before encountered.

Bye-and-bye Archie calmed down sufficiently to drop into his deck chair and begin playing his mouth-organ. He wailed out the most distressing attempts at tunes for an entire hour, eyeing defiantly any who chanced to look toward him; but we took care not to pay the slightest attention to his impertinence. Joe came to me once with a pleading look in his eye, but I shook my head sternly. The sailors were evidently amused by our little comedy forward, for I could see them exchanging smiles now and then when a screech more blood-curdling than usual came from the mouth-organ.

Archie tired himself out in time and went below. He closed and locked his window and began again to smoke in his cabin. In half an hour the smoke was so thick in the little room that we could see nothing but its gray clouds through the thick pane.

The set frown upon my father's face told me

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trouble was brewing for our passenger, but as yet the Captain forbore to interfere. Uncle Naboth came to me indignant and angry and demanded to know what should be done to the "young pig" whose actions were so insolent and annoying.

"Let me think," I replied, gravely. "We must certainly conquer young Ackley in some way, even if we have to toss him overboard; but I hope it will not come to that."

"Then think quick an' to the point, Sam," rejoined my uncle; "for I'm jest achin' to wollop the fool wi' a cat-o'-nine-tails."

At dinner Archie joined our table, silent but with a sneering and triumphant look upon his face. He was not handsome at any time, but just now his damaged face was positively disagreeable to behold. It occurred to me that the trouble with the young fellow was that he had not been taught to obey, and doubtless he imagined we were his enemies because we were endeavoring to prevent him from doing exactly what he wanted to. His idea of being a "free-born American citizen" was to be able to override the rights and privileges of others, and the sooner he got that

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notion out of his head the better it would be for him.

Archie was a deliberate eater and remained at the table with a sort of bravado because we took not the slightest notice of him. So I left him finishing his meal when I went on deck.

A few minutes afterward, however, he came bounding up the companionway with a white face and rushed up to where Uncle Naboth and I were standing.

"I've been robbed!" he cried, shaking his big fist at me. "My cabin's been entered by a thief, and I'll have the law on you all if you don't restore my property!"

"What have you lost?" I inquired.

"You know well enough, Sam Steele. I've lost all my cigarettes—ev'ry box of 'em!—and my four mouth-organs, too. They picked the lock on my door, and opened my telescopes, and stole my property."

"How's this, Sam?" inquired Uncle Naboth, his eyes twinkling.

"I don't know, sir," I answered, greatly surprised. "There are no duplicate keys to the cabin

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doors, and Ackley had his in his pocket, I suppose."

"They picked the lock, I tell you, and the locks on both my traveling cases," declared the boy, in a rage; "and you must be a fine bunch of practiced thieves, because they were all locked again after the goods were stolen."

"How about your window?" I asked.

"I left it bolted on the inside. No one could enter that way."

"Did you lose anything except the cigarettes and the mouth-organs?" I continued, beginning to be greatly amused.

"No; but those things are my property, and you or your people have stolen them. Look here, Sam Steele," he added, coming close and shaking his fist threateningly; "either you return my property in double quick time or I'll take it out of your hide. Just make your choice, for I mean business."

I think he saw that I was not afraid of him, but I chose to ignore his challenge. I was neither as clever a wrestler as Joe Herring nor as expert with my fists as Archie Ackley; so it would be

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folly for me to undertake a personal encounter. But I said, quietly enough:

“You are getting insolent, my lad, and insolence I will not stand for. Unless you control your temper I will order you to the ship’s lockup, and there you shall stay until we drop anchor again.”

He gazed into my face long and steadily, and then began to whistle softly as he turned and walked away. But a few moments later he returned and said:

“Who’s going to make good my loss?”

“Send me your bill,” replied Uncle Naboth. “I’ll pay it.”

“I think Joe stole the things,” continued Archie.

I called Joe to us.

“Did you enter Ackley’s cabin and take his cigarettes and mouth-organs?” Uncle Naboth inquired.

“No,” said Joe, looking at Archie and laughing at his angry expression.

“Do you know who did it?” persisted my Uncle.

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"No," said Joe, again.

"He's lying!" cried Archie, indignantly.

"Are you lying, Joe?" I asked, gently.

"Yes, sir," returned Joe, touching his cap.

"Then tell the truth," said I.

"I won't, sir," replied the boy, firmly. "If you question me, I'm bound to lie; so it will be better to let me alone."

This answer surprised and annoyed me, but Uncle Naboth laughed aloud, and to my astonishment Archie frankly joined him, without a trace of his recent ill-nature.

"Just as I thought," he observed. "You're a slick one, Joe."

"I try to do my duty," answered Joe, modestly.

"Bring me your bill, young feller," said Uncle Naboth, "and I'll cash it in a jiffy—an' with joy, too. I don't see jest how Joe managed the affair, but he's saved us all a lot of trouble, an' I'm much obleeged to him, fer my part." And the old gentleman walked away with a cheerful nod.

"Uncle's right," I said to Archie. "You wouldn't be reasonable, you know, and we were simply obliged to maintain our ship's discipline."

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So, if your offending goods hadn't been abstracted so cleverly, there would have been open war by another day and our side was the strongest."

Archie nodded forgivingly toward Joe.

"Perhaps it was best," he admitted, with more generosity than I had expected from him. "You see, Steele, I won't be bulldozed or browbeaten by a lot of cheap skates who happen to own a ship, for I'm an independent American citizen. So I had to hold out as long as I could."

"You were wrong in that," I remarked.

"Right or wrong, I'll hold my own."

"That's a bad philosophy, Archie. When you took passage aboard this ship you made yourself subject to our rules and regulations, and in all honesty you're bound to abide by them. A true American shows his independence best by upholding the laws of his country."

"That's rot," growled Archie, but Joe and I both laughed at him because he could find nothing better to say. When he returned to his deck chair the passenger's face bore its normal expression of placid good nature. It was evident he

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prided himself on the fact that he had not "given in" of his own accord, and perhaps he was glad that the force of circumstances alone had conquered his stubborn temper.

CHAPTER IV.

A RIOT AND A RESCUE.

After that we had little trouble with Archie Ackley, although in many ways the stubborn nature of the boy was unpleasantly evident. In his better moods he was an agreeable companion, but neither Joe nor I, the only two other boys aboard, sought his society more than was necessary. My uncle and the Captain both declared there was a heap of good in the lad, and a few such lessons as the one he had received would make a man of him.

Joe I found a treasure in many ways, and always a faithful friend. Since that first night when he had come aboard he had nothing to tell of his past history or experiences; but his nature was quick and observant and I could see he had picked up somewhere a considerable fund of worldly knowledge which he could draw upon as occasion offered.

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My father, Uncle Naboth, and I were all three delighted with the *Seagull's* sailing performances, though secretly I longed to discover how she would behave under steam, since her propeller had never been in use since the day it was given a brief trial test in Chelsea Bay. Tomlinson, the engineer, assured me we could make from sixteen to eighteen knots when the engines were working, and the man was naturally as impatient as I was to test their full powers. Still, we realized that we must wait, and Captain Steele was so delighted with the superb sailing qualities of the ship that even I had not the heart to suggest supplanting his white wings with black smoke from our funnels.

In due time we crossed the stormy Mediterranean and reached in safety our Syrian port, where we unloaded the rugs and delivered them in good condition to the consignees. We sailed along the coast, past Port Said, and finally came to the Bay of Alexandria, where we were to unload Ackley's cases of "modern antiques" and get rid of our passenger.

It was a new experience to me to find myself on

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the historic shores of Egypt, anchored before the famous city founded by Alexander the Great. I begged Uncle Naboth to take me ashore; overhearing my request Archie Ackley invited us all—with an air of great condescension—to dine with him at the Royal Khedivial Hotel.

My father refused. He was too fond of the *Seagull* to leave her alone in a foreign port; but Ned Britton took his place, and the four of us—Archie, Uncle Naboth, the Mate and I—followed by our faithful blacks, Nux and Bryonia, disembarked on the quay and walked up the long, foreign-looking streets to the big hotel.

It was a queer sensation to find ourselves moving amidst a throng of long-robed turbaned Arabs; fez-topped Turks, with Frenchmen, and Syrians; gray-bearded, stooping Jews; blind beggars; red-coated English soldiers, and shrinking, veiled Moslem women.

“What a mess of foreigners,” cried Archie, and Uncle Naboth, with a laugh, reminded him that we were the foreigners and this curiously mixed crowd, the natives.

We dined in sumptuous style at the handsome

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hotel, for Archie proved a liberal host and feasted us royally. It was late at night when we retraced our steps toward the quay; but the streets of the city were still thronged with people, many of whom were sitting at little tables placed on the sidewalks, where they smoked and drank Turkish coffee and chatted together in a very babel of tongues.

As we left the heart of Alexandria and drew near to the water-front the streets became more deserted and the lights were fewer and dimmer. There were still straggling groups here and there, and suddenly, as we turned a corner, we observed a commotion just ahead of us and heard a terrified voice cry out:

“Help—Americans—help!”

Ned Britton gave a bound and was in the thick of the *melée* at once. Archie was only a step behind him and I saw his big fists swinging right and left in fast and furious fashion, while Joe ducked his head and tossed a tall Arab over his shoulder with marvelous ease. Nux and Bryonia took a hand, and while none of our party was armed, the free use of their terrible fists wrought

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such havoc among the long-gowned Arabs that the result of the skirmish was not long in doubt. Like a mist they faded away and escaped into the night, leaving a little man wriggling and moaning upon the ground as if in deathly agony. I held fast to my left arm, which had been slashed by a knife and was bleeding profusely, while I stared around in surprise at our easy victory. Uncle Naboth had not taken part in the fray, but now appeared seated calmly upon the prostrate form of the Arab whom Joe had vanquished, and his two hundred and odd pounds rendered the prisoner fairly secure.

Our blacks raised the little man to his feet, where he ceased squirming but stood weakly leaning against Nux and trembling like a leaf.

“Are you hurt, sir?” asked Ned.

The stranger shook his head. It was so dark in this spot that we could not distinguish his features very clearly.

“I—I think not,” he gasped. “But they nearly had me, that time. If you hadn’t come up as you did, I—I——”

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He broke off abruptly and leaned over to peer at the Arab Uncle Naboth was sitting upon.

“That’s him! That’s Abdul Hashim himself! Kill him—kill him quick, some one!” he yelled, in a sudden frenzy.

The cry seemed to rouse the Arab to life. Like an eel he twisted, and Uncle Naboth slid off his back and bumped upon the sidewalk. The next moment we Americans were alone, for Abdul Hashim had saved his bacon by vanishing instantly.

“Oh, why—*why* did you let him go?” wailed the little man, covering his face with his hands. “He’ll get me again, some day—he’s sure to get me again!”

“Never mind that,” said Ned, gruffly, for we were all disgusted at this exhibition of the fellow’s unmanly weakness. “You can thank God you’re out of his clutches this time.”

“I do, sir—I do, indeed!” was the reply. “But don’t leave me just now, I beg of you.”

We looked at Uncle Naboth for advice. Bry had slit my sleeve with his pocketknife and was binding a handkerchief tightly around my wound,

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for he was something of a surgeon as well as a cook.

“We’re going aboard our ship,” said my uncle, shortly. “You’re welcome to come along, my man, an’ stay till mornin’.”

The stranger accepted the invitation with alacrity and we started again for the quay, which was reached without farther incident. Our boat was waiting and we were soon rowed where the *Seagull* was anchored and climbed aboard.

Under the clear light of the cabin lamp we looked at the person we had rescued with natural curiosity, to find a slender man, with stooping shoulders, a red Van Dyke beard, bald head and small eyes covered with big spectacles. He was about forty years of age, wore European clothes somewhat threadbare and faded in color, and his general appearance was one of seedy respectability.

“Gentlemen,” said he, sitting in an easy chair and facing the attentive group before him, “I am Professor Peter Pericles Van Dorn, of the University of Milwaukee.”

I had never heard of such a university; but

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then, Milwaukee is a good way inland. Neither had any of us before heard the name so unctuously announced; though we were too polite to say so, and merely nodded.

"It will please me," continued the Professor, "to be informed of your station and the business that has brought you to Egypt."

My uncle laughed and looked at me quizzically, as if inviting me to satisfy the stranger. Captain Steele scowled, resenting the implied impertinence. The only others present were Archie and Ned Britton.

I told Van Dorn we were a merchant ship from Boston, and had casually touched at the port of Alexandria to unload some wares belonging to Mr. Ackley, who was going to ship his property to Luxor and deliver it to merchants there.

"What sort of wares?" demanded the stranger.

"Scarabs, funeral figures, and copies of antique jewelry," replied Archie, a bit uneasily.

"The curse of the country," snapped the little man, scornfully. "There ought to be a law to prevent such rubbish being shipped into Egypt—except," pausing to continue with a touch of bit-

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terness, "that there are too many laws in this beastly country already."

"The poor tourists must have scarabs to take home with them," said Archie, with a grin. "About fifteen thousand travelers come to Egypt every year, and your Khedive won't let any genuine scarabs leave Egypt."

"Don't call him *my* Khedive, sir!" cried the little professor. "I detest—I *hate* the government here, and everything connected with it. But you are not interested in that. Gentlemen," assuming a pompous tone, "I am glad to meet you. You have arrived in the very nick of time to save me from assassination, or at least from utter failure in my great work. I am sure it was an All-wise Providence that directed you to stop at Alexandria."

"Disguised as old Ackley's mud scarabs," added my uncle, dryly.

"And what are your future plans?" inquired the Professor, eagerly.

"To return to America at once," I replied.

"No! A thousand times no!" shouted little Van Dorn, banging his fist on the table. "I char-

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ter you from this minute. I engage this ship—at your own price—to transport me and my treasure to New York!”

“Treasure!” we exclaimed, incredulously.

The Professor glanced around and lowered his voice.

“The greatest treasure, gentlemen, that has ever been discovered in Egypt. I have found the place where the priests of Karnak and Luxor hid their vast wealth at the invasion of Cambyses the Persian.”

He paused impressively. My father looked at his watch and Uncle Naboth yawned. For myself, I should have liked to hear more, but my wound was paining me and Bry awaited my coming to dress it properly. So I said to our guest:

“If you please, Professor, we will hear your story in the morning. It is now late, and we are all longing for our berths. So we will bid you good-night and wish you pleasant dreams.”

He glared at me indignantly.

“Can you sleep after what I have told you?” he demanded.

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"I hope so, sir," I replied, and turned away to call Joe to show the man to his room. He made no farther protest, but going away and looking rather thoughtful.

Bry found that the knife had merely inflicted a flesh wound on my arm, and promised it would give me little trouble. The bleeding had stopped, so my black surgeon washed the cut thoroughly, bandaged and plastered it quite professionally, and sent me to bed to sleep soundly until morning.

Really, I forgot all about the Professor, who looked the part of a savant much better than he acted it, it seemed to me.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSOR'S SECRET.

At breakfast Professor Van Dorn was silent and preoccupied, and as soon as the meal was over asked for a private interview with the person in authority aboard the *Seagull*. We went to the Captain's room, a large cabin where all could be comfortably seated. None of us had much confidence in the stranger's romantic assertions of the night before, but we were all curious to know what tale the man had to relate, and were disposed to listen. Archie's eyes bugged out so far from his round face that I took pity on the boy and asked him to join us. Ned Britton came, too, for he had been present at Van Dorn's rescue and we trusted him implicitly.

When we were seated and the Professor had assured himself we could not be overheard, he at once asked permission to relate the business that had brought him to Egypt and the strange

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experiences he had encountered here. We told him to fire away and we would hear his story.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “you must know that I hold the honorable chair of Egyptology in my university. Since my youth I have studied arduously the history of this most ancient people, from whom sprung the modern civilization of which we boast today.” He spoke pedantically, and I began to think he might be a real professor, after all. “To perfect my studies my college generously sent me here, three years ago, and soon after my arrival I became acquainted with Professor John Lovelace, whose famous works on ancient Egypt you have doubtless read.”

We had not read them, but we let the assertion pass.

“Over here,” continued the narrator, “he was usually called Lovelace Pasha, but he was not entitled to the distinction except in the imagination of the natives, who had a high respect for his intelligence and industry. At the time we met Lovelace he was searching diligently but secretly for a vast treasure, and he took me into his confidence and engaged me to assist him,

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You must know that in the sixth century before Christ Egypt was at its height of wealth and greatness; and the most important treasures were at that time in the possession of the priests of the great temple of Karnak. They consisted of wonderful gems, countless jewels and ornaments of gold and silver and, above all, a library of papyrus rolls relating the history of Egypt during that now unknown period between the sixth and twelfth dynasties.

“At this time, when the Egyptians had grown as proud and insolent as they were wealthy, that terrible Persian, Cambyses, invaded the country with a conquering host and steadily advanced up the Nile toward Karnak and Thebes, laying waste the country as he came and despoiling the temples of their wealth. The legends say that the priests of Karnak, terror stricken, threw all their treasure into the Sacred Lake which adjoins their temple, in order to keep it from falling into the hands of the invader; and, as the lake is bottomless, the treasure has never yet been recovered.

“Now, sirs, Professor Lovelace, a shrewd and

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far-seeing man, doubted the truth of this story. It was an undeniable fact that the great treasure of Karnak was hidden somewhere by the priests, and that Cambyses put all the holy men to the sword because they would not reveal their secret. Also it is historical that the treasure has not since been discovered, and that the conqueror was unable to lay hands upon it after all his efforts to do so. During the centuries that have passed the Sacred Lake has been dragged many times, with the hope of finding the immense wealth of Karnak; but it is now known that the quicksands at the bottom of the lake would have swallowed it up instantly, so naturally all these attempts have proved absolute failures.

“My friend Lovelace, pondering on this queer story, came to believe that the wily priests had never thrown their treasure into the lake at all. No one knew better than they that to place it there was to lose it forever; furthermore, the most valuable part of the treasure consisted of the historic papyri—the bark rolls on which the ancient Egyptians inscribed their records. To place these in water would be to destroy them;

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thus the falsity of the tale was evident. It was clear, my friend decided, that the priests had hidden the treasure somewhere in the desert, near Karnak, where the shifting sands would leave no evidence of the place to betray it to the keen eyes of the Persian. But they spread the report that it had been cast into the lake, so if any traitor might be among the people the truth would not be revealed.

“Since Cambyses put every priest of Karnak to death, in his unreasoning anger, there was none to recover the treasure when the Persian was gone home again, from which Professor Lovelace conjectured that it still lay secure in its original hiding-place.

“But where was that hiding place? That was the question to be solved. For years he sought in the desert without success but with rare patience, and at just about the time I arrived in Egypt he obtained a clue to guide him.

“On one of the ruined temple walls, hidden away in an unimportant corner, is carved a diagram which to an ordinary observer appeared to mean nothing at all. But Lovelace studied it

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and came to the conclusion that the diagram described the spot where the treasure was hidden. There was a picture of a high arch, called in Egypt a pylon; and through this picture, from one corner diagonally across to another corner, a line was chiseled. This line extended far beyond the pylon, past a group of three pictured palm trees, and then ended in a cross. Do you follow me, gentlemen?" with an eager, nervous glance into our faces.

Uncle Naboth nodded, but he looked bewildered. Archie's face wore a perfectly blank expression. My father was smoking placidly and looking out of the cabin window. Said I:

"We are not very familiar with Egyptian history, Professor; but I think we catch the drift of your story. Pay out the cable, sir, and we'll grasp what we can of it."

He seemed relieved, saying:

"Very well, my boy. Egyptian history is very fascinating, but this is neither the time nor the place for me to instruct you in it. Still, it is necessary that you understand something of the importance of the proposition I am going to

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make you, and I will be as clear as possible in my descriptions. The arch, or pylon, referred to in the picture, had three square towers, to distinguish it from many others, and after searching long among the ruins of Karnak, which cover many acres, Lovelace Pasha and I found one which, though partly demolished, still had one of the characteristic towers left, with traces of the others. Taking these as our guide we drew an imaginary line from corner to corner, as in the diagram, and taking our compass we started out to follow this imaginary line across the desert. Three miles away we found, to our great joy, the group of palms, very ancient, without doubt, but still standing, and near to these was a small oasis watered by a tiny spring.

“The question now remaining was, how far beyond the three palms was the point marked on the diagram by the cross—the point where the treasure had been buried? We were obliged to work very cautiously, for at this oasis lived a small but fierce tribe of desert Arabs having for their shiek, or ruler, one Abdul Hashim—the same devil who nearly murdered me last night.

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The Arabs were curious to know what we were after, for they are great thieves and often steal the contents of an ancient tomb after some lucky excavator has discovered it. So we kept our secret from them, until finally they became so angry that they would have driven us away from their neighborhood had not Professor Lovelace secured an order from the Khedive granting him the privilege of excavating and exploring in certain sections of the desert for relics of Egypt's ancient civilization. The Khedive will always grant these licenses, permitting the explorer to work at his own expense in the interests of science; but when a discovery has been made the laws oblige us to give or sell everything to the National Museum at Cairo, where they pay only the most insignificant prices because there is no other legal way in which one may dispose of ancient treasure or relics.

“But that absurd law did not concern us at the time; what we were eager for was to discover the hidden treasure of Karnak, and to avoid the hostile Arabs we worked mostly during the clear moonlit nights, when all the tribe were asleep.

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We had sand-augers made, with which we burrowed into the sand to the foundation of rock underneath, striving to find some obstruction to indicate where the treasure was buried. By means of our compass we were enabled to follow a straight line, and we worked slowly and carefully for a distance of five miles beyond the oasis, and then back again, without any definite result. Sometimes we would strike an obstruction and dig down only to find a point of rock or a loose boulder, and the task seemed to me, after a few months, to be endless and impracticable. But Lovelace would not give up. He was positive he was on the right track, and when I declared I had had enough of the job and was going back to Cairo, he became suspicious of me, and threatened to kill me if I deserted him.

“This was my first suspicion that his mind had become unbalanced.

“‘You know too much, Van Dorn, to be permitted to go away and blab my secrets to others,’ he said. I assured him I should keep a closed mouth, but the fellow was so crazy over his idea that he would not trust me. He was a

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big man, determined and masterful, and I had to obey him whether I wanted to or not. I stuck to the search, though I became afraid of my companion.

“Well, sirs, not to bother you with details which are to you unimportant, I will say that finally, after more than two years of patient search, we chanced upon the treasure. My auger one day stuck in the sand and could not be withdrawn. Digging down we found that the point had plunged into a bronze ring and become fast. Lovelace gave a howl of joy at sight of the ring, for he knew then that our search was ended.

“It was after midnight, with bright stars shining down to light us as we worked. We cleared away the sand to the depth of more than four feet, and found the ring, duly attached to a large block of granite that rested on the rock foundation.”

“Is there a layer of rock under the desert sands, then?” I inquired.

“Yes; in this section of the country,” was the answer. “Archeologists will tell you that origin-

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ally the earth was covered by a vast table-land of solid rock such as we now call sandstone. The erosion of wind and weather caused bits of this rock to crumble. The simoons caught them and whirled them around, breaking off other particles of rock and crumbling them into sand. As ages passed the sand increased in volume, until now the desert is covered with it to a depth of from two to six feet, and sometimes even more. Often the winds blow this sand into billows, leaving the bare table-land of rock to be seen stretching for miles and miles.

“But to return to my story. The block of granite was heavy, measuring three by six feet on the surface and being more than two feet in thickness. Three bronze rings were imbedded in it, but pry and lift as we would we could not budge the huge stone an inch. It was evident that we must have help, so we covered up the stone again, marked the spot carefully, and went back to the Arab village.

“Next morning Lovelace bargained with the sheik, Abdul Hashim, for the use of two of his men to assist us. Also we were obliged to send

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to Luxor for four stout staves to use as levers. You may well imagine that all this excited the wonder of the Arabs, and I doubted if Lovelace would be able to keep his secret from them. However, he appeared to attach no importance to this danger, and the next evening we set out for our buried stone, accompanied by our assistants bearing the oaken staves. We quickly dug away the sand and cleared the stone, and then we four used the levers together and by straining our muscles to the utmost managed to lift the huge slab of granite until it stood on edge.

“Underneath was a rock cavity, carefully chiseled out by hand, and at first we saw only a mass of dried reeds brought from the Nile bank. Removing these we came upon heavy layers of rotted cloth, of the kind that was once used in Egypt for wrapping mummies. But after this padding was dragged away the treasure became visible and Lovelace's hands shook with excitement while he examined it. First there were many rolls of papyrus, carefully swathed in bandages; then several Canopic jars of pure gold, each containing quarts of wonderful pearls,

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rubies and emeralds; and finally a vast collection of wrought jewelry, gold and silver ornaments, some packed in rude wooden boxes which were old and falling to decay and others scattered loosely over them and filling every crevice.

“Lovelace said not a word while we were examining this vast treasure, the most remarkable collection that has come down to us from antiquity. His face was white and set and except for the trembling of his hands he kept himself under perfect control. The eyes of the Arabs, however, glittered with cupidity, and I caught them exchanging significant glances.

“The Professor took a couple of handfuls of rubies and pearls and thrust them carelessly into his pockets. He selected a few golden ornaments of exquisite workmanship, and replaced all the rest of the treasure, with its padding, in the rock cavity. When this had been done he commanded us to replace the granite slab, which we did, tipping it forward so that it again covered the orifice. Our next task was to fill in the sand, and as a light breeze was blowing we knew that in an hour the desert would show no marks of the

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excavation we had so recently made. The levers we left lying beside the granite slab, buried deep in the sand.

“Lovelace now motioned the Arabs to return toward their village, and they set out eagerly enough, we following close behind them. But after we had proceeded a few hundred yards Lovelace Pasha drew his revolver and calmly shot both men dead.

“‘Now, Van Dorn,’ he said to me, ‘help me to bury this carrion.’

“Horrorified as I was at the murderous act I hastened to obey, for there was something strange about the Professor that night—a steely, cruel gleam in his usually kindly eyes—that recalled my former suspicions and made me fear that his great discovery had actually driven him mad.

“Silently we dug away the sand where the men had fallen and covered them up, smoothing the surface afterward as well as we were able. We proceeded to the village.

“‘Where are my children?’ demanded the sheik, sternly.

“‘Gone away on a far errand,’ said Lovelace,

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“It was true enough, but Abdul Hashim was dissatisfied and suspicious. We slept late the next morning, and meantime the sheik had sent spies upon our trail. The jackals had dug up the bodies of the murdered Arabs and had half devoured them when their comrades reached the spot.

“It was open war between the tribe and us. We occupied a small stone house at the edge of the village. It had but one door and no windows, being merely a bare room thatched with palm leaves. When we heard the tribe running toward us with wild cries we knew the climax had arrived. Lovelace stood in the doorway and kept the Arabs at bay with his revolvers, but he did not know how long he would be able to hold out. He gave me the gems and gold ornaments and told me to escape and make my way to Luxor for help. I was instructed to put the treasure into the bank, gather a rescue party, and return as speedily as possible. Luxor was distant only four miles across the desert.

“While the Arabs were watching in front of the house I stood on the Professor’s shoulders, broke through the thatch at the rear, and dropped

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from the top of the stone wall to the sands beneath. While he returned to the entrance to distract their attention by a shot, I darted away toward Luxor and was soon safe from pursuit, even had I chanced to be observed.

“I performed my errand quickly and returned with a detachment of mounted police lent me by the governor of the city, for Professor Lovelace was a well-known explorer and under the protection of the Khedive. We arrived too late. I found only the Professor's dead body, terribly mutilated by the knives of the Arabs. They had tricked him in some way during my absence, and so obtained their revenge.

“Abdul Hashim calmly told the officers that Lovelace Pasha had gone mad, and was slain by them in self-defense. He pointed to two dead men and several wounded to prove the truth of his assertion. I told another story, as you may imagine, but with no hint of the treasure. Shortly afterward I had the satisfaction of inducing the governor to raze Abdul Hashim's village to the ground, so that not one of the rude stones

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remained upon another, while the tribe was driven farther into the desert to seek new quarters.

“Fortunately I had not banked the sample treasure we had taken, not wishing to delay my friend’s rescue, so that now I found myself the sole possessor of any knowledge relating to the great discovery. It has remained my personal secret until this hour, when I have confided it to you, gentlemen, in order to induce you to assist me.”

He paused, as if the tale was ended, and for a time we, his listeners, remained silent and thoughtful. The story had impressed me, for one, greatly, and it had seemed to ring true until he came to that row with the Arabs. There were some unlikely statements about the death of Lovelace and Van Dorn’s peculiar escape from the village, but I reflected that my ignorance of the ways of this people might well account for any seeming improbabilities that lurked in the story.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TREASURE OF THE ANCIENTS.

Uncle Naboth was the first to speak.

“Tell me, sir,” said he, “why you have selected us to receive your confidence.”

“I had two reasons,” replied Van Dorn. “One is that I am afraid. “I left Luxor and traveled to Cairo, trying to think of a way to secure the treasure for myself. At Cairo I was shot at from a window and narrowly escaped death. I came on here to Alexandria, as secretly as I could. Last night I was set upon by a band of Arabs, among whom I recognized the terrible Abdul Hashim. Had you not appeared at the same instant I would certainly have been killed. It seems as if Providence had decreed that we should meet. You have a swift vessel, bound for America, and I have a great treasure to be secured and transported home. Assist me in this emergency and

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your reward shall be greater than you could gain from a dozen voyages.”

“This treasure,” said my father, slowly and reflectively, belongs to the Egyptian government, accordin’ to your own say-so.”

“Oh, no!” cried Van Dorn.

“I take it that way, from your statement.”

“I said the present laws of Egypt, enacted a few years ago, forbade any relic of the old civilization to be taken out of the country. The Museum will buy all my treasure, and give me an insignificant sum not at all commensurate with its value; but what right has the Khedive to claim what I have worked so hard to secure? In America the gems alone will sell for millions.”

“But this is an Egyptian treasure,” I said. “The laws seem to me to be just. What right have you, a foreigner, to remove this great wealth from the country?”

“The right of discovery,” retorted the little Professor, promptly, with an energetic bob of his head. “Who is the Khedive of Egypt? A Turk. A foreigner like myself, if you please, who rules here as a dependant of Turkey, and pays the

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Sultan eleven millions a year in tribute—a sum he wrings from the remnant of the true Egyptians, and from the Arab and other native population, by means of excessive taxes. This treasure once belonged to Egypt, we will admit, and it was buried by the Egyptian priests to save it from just such invaders as these Turks. But Egyptians no longer rule Egypt, nor ever will again; so that in simple justice this treasure belongs solely to its discoverer rather than to the usurper in the land where it lies buried.”

“Still,” said Uncle Naboth, “we have this government to reckon with. Morally, you may be entitled to the treasure, but legally the decrees of the Khedive are inviolable. Eh? If we attempt to run away with this ’ere treasure, an’ get caught, we can be punished as common thieves.”

“But we shall not be caught!” cried the Professor. “Mark you, no one in Egypt suspects the existence of this treasure, so to take it will be robbing no one—not even the Khedive.”

“Doesn’t Abdul Hashim suspect it?” I inquired.

“Yes; perhaps I should make an exception of Abdul Hashim; but his information is at present

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confined to mere guessing, and he is too wily and covetous ever to tell his suspicions to a government official. What he wants is to get the treasure for himself, and the real battle, if we meet opposition, will be between Abdul Hashim and us. We ought to have killed him last night, when we had the chance; but unfortunately the dog made his escape."

"He's a dangerous enemy," observed Ned Britton.

"Only to the unarmed and helpless," quickly replied the Professor. "A half dozen Americans could defy his entire tribe. And it is possible we shall get a chance to kill him before he makes more trouble."

"You speak of murder very easily," said my father.

"It is not murder to kill an Arab," protested the Professor. "They are but heathen men, wicked and cruel, and so numerous that a few of them sent to perdition will never be missed. The English here have no more hesitation in killing an Arab than in scotching a poisonous snake, and the authorities seldom inquire into the manner of

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his death. As long as the government remains in ignorance of my secret we are safe from interference, except through this wild and worthless tribe led by Abdul Hashim, and brave Americans have no cause to fear him. Moreover, there is the treasure itself to be considered. Is it not worth while to risk something to secure an immense fortune?"

"What proof have you," asked Uncle Naboth, "of the existence of this treasure?"

Van Dorn hesitated a moment, then unbuttoned his vest and took from around his waist a leathern belt. This he laid carefully upon the table, and opening its folds drew out a number of brilliant rubies.

"Here is my proof," said he, offering the gems for inspection. "They are a part of the treasure Lovelace took on that terrible night I have described to you."

We examined them. They were large and brilliant, but cut into squares and oblongs, triangles and octagons, with smooth flat surfaces.

"These may be glass," remarked Uncle Naboth, musingly.

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"I am a lapidary," said the Professor, his voice slightly trembling with indignation. "I assure you they are the most splendid rubies in the known world. Here are pearls. Even your ignorance will acknowledge their genuineness."

He produced, as he spoke, several superb pearls, as large as peas and tinted in exquisite rose colors.

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Perkins, "I know pearls, all right; for I have traded for years with the Philippine pearl fishers. You are a strange man, Professor Van Dorn, to wish to risk your life for more of this plunder. Here is a fortune in itself."

Van Dorn shrugged his stooped shoulders, his red beard bristling with scorn.

"Would you, then, advise me to allow the treasure of Karnak to remain another two thousand years buried in the sands of the desert?" he asked. "Are your big speculators in America satisfied to acquire a million, or do they every one labor like slaves to make their million into a billion? Men are satisfied with many things in this age, but never are they satisfied with wealth. The more we have the more we strive to obtain."

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But here—look at these ornaments. Can modern goldsmiths match them?”

He drew out a golden necklace of magnificent workmanship, quaint in design and wrought with a delicacy and skill that were wonderful. A bracelet, two rings, and a diadem set with amethysts were also exhibited to our admiring eyes.

“These,” said the Professor, “you must admit are both antique and valuable; yet they are a mere sample of the immense treasure I have discovered. There is enough, as I have told you, to make us all wealthy, and I am willing to divide liberally in order to obtain your assistance. But I shall not urge you. If you are too stupid or cowardly to accept my offer, keep my secret and go about your business. No harm is done. There will be thousands willing to undertake the adventure.”

He put the jewels and ornaments back into the belt and buckled it around his waist, hiding it again underneath his vest. He leaned back in his chair, lighted a cigarette, and glanced at our grave faces inquiringly.

“Be good enough to go on deck for a time,



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Professor," said my father. "We will talk the matter over among ourselves before venturing to give you an answer."

He rose without protest and retired, and at once we began an earnest discussion of the proposal. The first point to settle was the legality of the thing, and it seemed to us the Professor was right in his contention that the present powers in Egypt, which had acquired the country by wars of conquest, had no more moral right to claim the buried treasure of the ancient priests of Karnak than had its recent discoverers. The old religion based on the worship of Isis and Osiris had disappeared from the earth and its votaries were long since dead or dispersed. The hidden treasure, formerly the property of this religious body, had now no legal claimants and belonged to whomsoever had the fortune to find it and the courage to seize and hold it. That the Khedive had made laws forbidding anyone to remove ancient treasure from Egypt did not affect us in the least. We were free Americans and in no way under the dominion of the Turks who had conquered Egypt. They might exact

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tribute from this land and establish the claim of might to whatever wealth the country contained; but it was our privilege to evade this might if we chose to. There are true Egyptians yet living in Egypt, but they are poor-spirited folk and are largely outnumbered by the Arabs, Turks and other foreigners, so that the control of their native land is doubtless lost to them forever.

Having thus satisfied our consciences that we were justified in undertaking an adventure to secure this wealth, we faced the consequences of failure or discovery. There was nothing to demand our immediate return to America, and the time required by the undertaking was therefore available. But the *Seagull* represented a fortune to us, and we hesitated to jeopardize her safety. According to international treaty we were not safe from seizure in case the ship violated the laws of Egypt; but there was a strong probability that the worst fate liable to overtake us, if discovered, would be the confiscation of the treasure. The Khedive would hesitate to involve his country in a dispute with the United States by resorting to extreme measures. We were taking a chance,

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of course; but the game seemed well worth the chance, and none can expect to win who hesitates to risk a stake.

Having disposed of governmental interference we faced the question of a war with Abdul Hashim and his tribe, and decided to contest the Arab's claim—which was not in any way equal to that of the Professor, according to the story he had told us. We had before this encountered some desperate adventures in strange lands and were not disposed to shrink from a skirmish with these lawless Arabs, if they forced it upon us. There remained, then, but two points to be settled: the best way to get the treasure aboard ship, and our share in the division, once we had safely transported it to America.

We recalled the Professor and asked him for his plans and proposals. He was a queer little fellow, this Van Dorn; half coward and half bully; but there was no doubt the man possessed a share of shrewd intelligence.

“If we undertake to go up the Nile, past Cairo and Assuit,” he said, “and try to bring the treasure back to Alexandria, the chances are that

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we should never succeed. This is the most populous portion of Egypt, and government spies and the mounted police are everywhere. Had this been my plan I should not have appealed to you to assist me. Your claim to become my allies lies in the fact that you have a swift ship unknown in these waters, a brave crew, and the American love for adventure. But the ship is the most important possession of all."

"You don't expect us to sail up the Nile, do you?" I asked, impatiently.

"No, that is impossible," was his quiet reply. "From here to Luxor is seven hundred miles; but the Arabian Gulf, in the Red Sea, is only ninety miles from where the treasure is hidden. You will take your ship to Port Said, through the Suez Canal, and so down the Gulf to the small and unimportant town of Koser, where there is a good harbor. Here we shall hire camels which will take us in four days across the Arabian desert to the treasure, which we shall load upon the camels and bring back with us to the ship. We shall not appear at Karnak or Luxor at all, you see, and shall encounter only the desert Bedouins,

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who are quite friendly to Europeans. Nor need we even approach the ruins of Abdul Hashim's village. I know how to find the spot where the treasure lies, and in that lonely place there will be none to spy upon us."

"But how shall we find our way across the desert?" asked Uncle Naboth.

"Why, there still exists an ancient caravan route from Koser to Luxor," the Professor returned, "and we shall be able to secure guides who know every step of the way. It will be a tedious journey; four days to go and four to return; but, as I have said, the reward will be ample for such insignificant hardships."

"Your plan seems safe and practical," observed my uncle. "I like the idea. But now, Van Dorn, we must come to the most important point of all. What do you offer us in return for the use of our ship, for our services and for the expenses of the undertaking?"

"I will give you ten rubies and ten pearls," said he. "They are of such size and purity that you can easily sell them for ten thousand dollars. That is an ample reward, it seems to me."

The Treasure of the Ancients

I laughed, and the others—even to Archie—smiled as if amused. The little Professor had spoken with an air of great condescension, as if conferring upon us a rare favor.

“How much treasure is there?” asked my father.

“That will not matter to you,” retorted Van Dorn. “I will give you the pearls and the rubies now, before we start. They shall be your wage. Afterward, all the treasure we secure shall be my own exclusive property.”

Uncle Naboth yawned—it was a habit he had when bored—and my father slowly arose and stumped from the room.

“When will you go ashore, Professor?” I asked.

“What do you mean by that question?” he demanded, his face nearly as red as his beard.

“Only that we intend to sail on our return voyage at sundown, and probably you are not quite ready to go to America in our company. One of the boats will land you on the quay whenever you please to go.”

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He looked at me intently, his face now turned chalky white.

"Come, Archie," said I, cheerily, "let's go and see about unloading your boxes."

"Stay!" cried Van Dorn, suddenly. "What do you people demand?"

"We? Oh, sir, we make no demands at all. Your proposition was, as you doubtless well knew, one it would be impossible for us to accept. But we shall keep your secret, never fear, and the best proof is that we are off for America. You are at liberty to go ashore and negotiate with others."

"And be murdered by Abdul Hashim," he added, bitterly.

"Ah; that is your affair," I replied, indifferently.

I went on deck with Archie and directed the men in getting the Ackley cases hoisted from the hold and swung aboard a small lighter, which landed them safely on the quay. I intended to send the boy's two big telescopes with the goods, but Archie objected.

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"Wait a bit," he whispered to me, soberly. "I haven't yet decided to go ashore."

"Not to deliver your father's goods to the merchants at Luxor?" I asked, with a smile.

"No. See here, Sam; I'm in on this deal," he announced, earnestly. "If you fellows go fortune-hunting you must take me along."

"Oh, you want a share, do you?" I said, sarcastically.

"I won't refuse a small slice, Sam; but for the most I'm after is the fun. This is the biggest deal I ever heard of, and it promises a lot of sport before you're through with it. Let me in, will you?" he added, pleadingly.

"I'm willing, Archie. But it's likely we can't come to terms with the Professor. He don't want to divvy fair, you see."

The little man was now walking disconsolately about the deck. Apparently he was in a state of deep dejection.

I went with Archie to the quay, where he paid the import duties on his father's wares and arranged to have them forwarded by the railway to Luxor, where they were consigned to himself.

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“You see, we don’t know these Greek and Syrian merchants,” he explained, “and we can’t trust dealers in humbug goods. That’s why father wanted me to come along. I’m to collect for the stuff when I deliver it, and also take orders for anything more they want us to manufacture.”

“But don’t you intend to travel with the goods?” I asked.

“No. They can wait at Luxor for me until we’ve decided what to do about the Professor’s treasure. According to his story it lies buried only a few miles from Luxor, so I may be able to attend to both errands at the same time.”

Ah; if we only knew what this plan was destined to cost us!

CHAPTER VII.

A GREAT UNDERTAKING.

As Archie and I returned along the quay from the custom house, to regain our boat, I noticed standing upon the edge of the dock the solitary but impressive figure of an Arab.

He was fully six feet tall and splendidly formed. His dirty white burnous was wrapped around him in a way to emphasize the dignity of his pose, and his handsome countenance was calm and impassive. From beneath the ample folds of a black and yellow turban two wide dark eyes were set on a point of vision across the bay, and following his gaze I saw that it was directed toward the *Seagull* lying at her anchorage. These eyes, accustomed to the distances of the desert, might be stronger than my own, yet I myself found that I could discern dark forms moving about upon our deck, and one in especial—was it

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the Professor?—was leaning quietly over the side nearest the quay.

The Arab did not notice Archie or me, so I had a chance to examine him critically. He was not old—perhaps thirty-five—and his unshaven face was a light tan in color. As we rowed out to the ship his eyes at last fell upon us, and I thought that he watched us intently until we were well aboard. From the deck I could still see his stalwart, motionless figure standing erect in the same position; and perhaps the Professor saw him, too, for he came toward me with an uneasy expression upon his face and requested another interview with my father, Uncle Naboth, and myself.

I summoned Ned Britton, Archie, and Joe, as well, and presently we all assembled in my father's cabin.

“I have been thinking over this proposal,” began Van Dorn, “and have concluded that my first offer was not liberal enough, in the circumstances. To be frank with you,” his little, ferret eyes were anything but frank, just then, “the treasure is useless to me without your assistance in obtaining and transporting it to a place of

A Great Undertaking

safety. So I am willing to meet your views in the matter of a division of the spoils."

We regarded him silently, and after a moment he added: "What do you think would be just, or satisfactory?"

My uncle answered. He was an experienced trader.

"According to your own story, sir," said he, "you are not the original discoverer of this treasure. Professor Lovelace worked several years in tracing it, and finally succeeded because he had found an obscure diagram engraved on the ruined walls of a temple. He hired you to assist him. Tell us, then, what share of the plunder did he promise you?"

The Professor hesitated, but thinking to deceive us, though his manner assured us he was lying, he said boldly:

"I was to have one-half. But of course after Lovelace was murdered the whole belonged to me."

"Was there any compact to that effect?" I asked.

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“Not exactly. But it is reasonable and just, is it not?”

“Had Lovelace no heirs—no family?”

“None whatever.”

Said Uncle Naboth, with his usual deliberation:

“If you were to receive one-half the treasure from Lovelace, in return for your assistance, we will make the same contract with you in return for ours. Lovelace seemed to think it was worth that much, and we will abide by his judgment.”

Van Dorn turned red. There was no escape from the toils he had cast about himself by his foolish statement. He looked thoughtfully out of the window, and following his gaze I saw the solitary Arab still standing on the quay with his face set in our direction.

A scarcely perceptible tremor seemed to pass over the Professor's slight frame. He turned to us with a new animation in his face.

“Professor Lovelace reserved for himself the collection of papyrus rolls,” said he, in a brisk tone. “I will do the same. These writings would be of no value to you, in any event. All of the jewels, ornaments, or other treasure than the

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papyri, I will agree to divide with you equally.”

“Very good,” said Uncle Naboth, with a nod. “It is our agreement. Write it down, Sam, and all these witnesses shall sign the document.”

I brought paper and pens and began to draw up the agreement. Presently I paused.

“In case of your death, Professor, I suppose you are willing all the treasure should belong to us, since that was your own claim when Lovelace died?”

He grew a little pale as he answered: “Do you want to put that in the paper?”

“Yes, if you please.”

“Will you agree, on your part, to protect me from harm in all possible ways, to guard my life as completely as you do your own lives?”

“Certainly.”

“Then include it in the contract. It would be a terrible thing to die just when all this treasure is fairly in my grasp; but if I lose my life in the venture there is no one to inherit my possessions.”

As I resumed my writing Uncle Naboth remarked:

“We’ll look after you, sir, never fear. Sam

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only means to cover any possible mishaps, and I guess he's right. But we'll be satisfied with a fair division, and intend to do our duty by you if it costs us our lives to protect you."

When the contract was ready the Professor signed it without a word of protest, and after the witnesses had attached their signatures the little man went on deck and left us alone.

"He means treachery," remarked my father, coolly.

Uncle nodded.

"Quite possible, Dick; but it will be our business to watch him. His story is true, because he has the evidence to prove it, and I've no doubt he'll lead us straight to the treasure. But what his game is afterwards, I can't imagine."

After that we sat silent for a time.

"Uncle," said I, happening to think of the thing, "Archie wants to go along with us."

Mr. Perkins scratched his head reflectively.

"What share does he want?" he asked.

I turned to Archie for the reply.

"If I'm any help to you, you can give me whatever you please," said the boy. "I want to see

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the fun, mostly; but I'll not refuse any reward I'm able to earn."

"That's fair and square," said Uncle Naboth. "You're welcome to come along."

"Now, then," proclaimed my father, "we've got to talk to the men. That's your job, Sam—you've got the gift of palaver. The enterprise is irreg'lar an' some dangerous, an' our lads must be told jest what they're expected to do."

We went on deck and piped all hands aft for a conference.

As clearly as I was able I related to the crew the story Van Dorn had told us, and his proposal to us to assist him in getting the treasure. The only points I concealed were the location of the hoard and its probable value.

"If you will join us in this adventure," I added, "we promise every man three times his regular pay, and in case we get the treasure one-tenth of our share also be divided equally among you. We don't expect much trouble, yet there may be a scrimmage or so with the Arabs before we get done. Any of you who fear this danger or don't like the job we've undertaken, will be left

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at Port Said until we return, and we shall think none the worse of those men, who will simply forfeit their prize money. Now, lads, what do you say?"

There wasn't a dissenting voice among them. They were Americans. Many had sailed with us before, and all were picked men who had proved themselves honest and trustworthy. My father had indeed chosen his crew with care and judgment, and I think we were not much surprised that from Ned Britton down to the meanest sailor all were eager to undertake the venture.

We cleared the port, sailed down to Port Said, and paid our fee to be passed through the Suez Canal to the Gulf of Arabia—no insignificant sum, by the way, but an incidental expense of the enterprise. The Professor had sadly informed us that he had no ready money to meet any of these emergencies; therefore we undertook to pay all expenses.

Our last view of the quay at Alexandria showed the strange Arab still at his post, motionless and staring calmly after us. I noticed that Van Dorn heaved a sigh of relief when we drew

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away from the harbor and the solitary watcher had faded slowly from our sight.

We were obliged to lie for four days at Port Said before our turn came to enter the canal, for several big liners of the East India Company and many packets of many nations were before us. Having our own engines we did not require a tug, and after a seemingly interminable period, although the distance is only one hundred miles, we emerged from the canal at Suez and Port Ibrahim and found the broad waters of the Red Sea lying before us.

Heading southward we found fair breezes that wafted us at a good speed along the two hundred and fifty miles of barren coast between Suez and Koser. The Arabian desert, bleak and covered in places with bare mountains, was in sight on our right all the way, and the few small villages we passed did not seem inviting.

At length, on the evening of the 12th of February, we anchored in the little harbor of Koser, and although the natives came flocking around us in their miserable fishing boats, offering fruit for sale and doubtless wondering what

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chance had led so strange and trim a craft as the *Seagull* to their forsaken port, we made no attempt to land or communicate with them until the next morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

GEGE-MERAK.

After breakfast Uncle Naboth, the Professor, and I rowed ashore and landed on the primitive wooden quay, whence we proceeded to the town—a group of mud dwellings, palm thatched, standing on a small eminence near the bay. At the left of the town were several large store-houses belonging to the government, where tithes of grain were kept.

A silent but observant group of natives met us on shore and accompanied us up the path to one of the principal houses, where Van Dorn, who understood Arabic, informed us the sheik and *cadi* awaited our coming.

After a brief delay we were ushered into a low but spacious room where the light was so dim that at first I could see nothing. Presently, however, my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom and I made out a big, whiskered Arab sitting

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cross-legged on a mat and surrounded by a group of friends and advisors.

To my relief they spoke English; brokenly, yet sufficiently well to be understood; and the sheik in most polite phrases begged to know why we had honored his poor village by a visit.

The Professor explained that our vessel was bound for India, but that some of our party had an errand at Luxor and we wished to secure a guide, an armed escort, and some good camels, to form a caravan to cross the desert and return. The ship would wait in the harbor until we had accomplished our journey.

They listened to this story respectfully. We were Americans, they judged. Only Americans in Egypt were credited with doing unusual things. An Englishman or other foreigner would have taken the railway to Luxor by way of Cairo.

But they had no desire to grumble at our strange whim. To keep the ship in their harbor a week longer would mean more or less patronage of the village bazar as well as harbor fees for the sheik. The caravan across the desert would mean

Gege-Merak

good earnings for many worthy citizens, no doubt.

But just here they seemed to scent difficulties. The Arabs talked together earnestly in their own language, and the Professor explained to us in an anxious voice that guides were scarce in Koser just then. The best, a famous Arab Bedouin, had gone west to the mines on a three weeks' journey. Another had just departed to take a party to Kift. The third and last one available was lying ill with a fever. There was no trouble about camels; the sheik had himself several superior animals to offer, and a neighbor chief of the Bega Bedouins owned a splendid drove and could furnish any number required. But the guide was lacking, and a guide was absolutely necessary; for the desert was trackless and infested by *haramyeh*, or robbers.

That seemed to settle the matter, to the great grief of the sheik; but the little Professor protested most vigorously that he had to go, and that a way must be found to secure for us a competent guide. Extra money would be available in the emergency, he added, and the hint set the

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dirty bearded Arabs conferring again. They talked in Arabic, and I heard the name of Gege-Merak* mentioned several times. The Professor, listening intently, told me this was the Bega chief who owned the camels. Gege-Merak had once been the most famous guide on the desert, but he was now old, and had retired from active life years ago. Still, if there was plenty of money to tempt him, he might be induced personally to lead us to Luxor and back.

The discussion resulted in a messenger being dispatched to Gege-Merak, who lived a day's journey in the desert, to propose our offer and bring back the chief's reply. There would be nine of our own party, and we desired an escort of six armed natives, besides the guide.

The delay was inevitable, and we waited as patiently as we could for the messenger's return. That evening we entertained the sheik and his chief men at dinner aboard the ship, and before they returned to the shore they vowed undying friendship for us all, including Nux and Bryonia.

*Pronounced "Gay-gay Maw-rock."

Gege-Merak

My father's cork leg especially won their admiration and respect, and they declared he must be a very great and famous Captain in his own country to be entrusted with the command of so noble and so beautiful a ship. We told them he was. The Professor added that next to the President himself all Americans revered Captain Steele, who had won many battles fighting against his country's enemies. I was amused at this absurd description, but it afterward served us a good turn, and perhaps preserved our lives.

The next day we visited the bazar, where unimportant articles were offered for sale, and as the sheik was himself the principal owner we purchased considerable rubbish that we had no use for, just to keep the rascals good natured.

On the third day, at about sunset, the messenger returned, and to our surprise he was accompanied by a train of fifteen camels—all fine, strong specimens of these desert steeds.

He had brought bad news for the sheik, though. Gege-Merak had consented to guide the strangers in person, but he would supply all the camels, tents, and blankets himself, and receive all the hire

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for them. Moreover, the armed escort must be all from his own tribe; no dog of an Arab should have anything to do with his caravan.

The sheik frowned, cursed the impudent Bega, and swore he would not allow his dear friends, the Americans, to fall into Gege-Merak's power.

Uncle Naboth and I went out and examined the escort. They were handsome, well-formed fellows, with good features and dark, bronze hued complexions. Their limbs were slender and almost delicately formed, yet promised strength and agility. I decided at once that these men looked less like robbers than the stealthy-eyed, sly-moving Arabs of the village.

The Ababdeh—for the Bega warriors belonged to this caste—sat their camels stolidly and in silence, awaiting the acceptance or rejection of the offer of their chieftain. They were dressed in coarse woolen robes colored in brilliant native hues, but they wore no head covering except their luxuriant, bushy hair, which formed a perfect cloud around their faces and seemed to me nearly a foot in thickness. In their girdles were short knives and each man carried slung across his back

Gege-Merak

a long, slender rifle with an elaborately engraved silver stock.

My uncle agreed with me that the escort looked manly and brave. We concluded there was a way to satisfy the sheik, so we went back to him and offered to pay a liberal sum for his permission to engage Gege-Merak. He graciously consented, although he warned us that the desert Bega were not the safest people in the world to intrust with our lives and that only the fear of consequences would prevent the Ababdeh chief from murdering us and rifling our bodies.

The Professor, however, had no such fears. He confided to us his opinion that we were fortunate in having no Arabs in our party. In case we chanced to encounter Abdul Hashim, the Bega would be more likely to prove faithful than would the Koser Arabs. All Arabs hate Christians in their hearts, added the Professor, and most of the desert tribes, who had existed in Egypt long before the Arabs overran the country, hated the Mussulmans as much as the latter hated the Christians. The Ababdeh tribes were natural thieves; he could not deny that; but he had reason

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to hope for our safe return from our adventure.

For my part I pinned my faith to our stalwart escort of American sailors, thinking in my pride and ignorance that any one of them would be worth six Bega or Arabs if it came to a fight, and forgetting that the desert is a prison to those who do not know its trackless wilds.

Desiring as little delay as possible we loaded the camels that evening with provisions from our ship and the light baggage, taking no more of the latter than was absolutely necessary. Bryonia, who was going with the party, insisted on carrying certain pots and pans with which to provide proper meals while en route, and these the Bega looked upon with absolute disdain. But I was glad to see our cook's provision for our comfort, since we were to be gone eight or nine days at the least.

Next morning we mounted the camels and set out. After some careful figuring we had organized our party as follows: The Professor first, of course; then Uncle Naboth, Archie Ackley, Joe, and myself. My father made some objection to three boys joining the party, but it was an ad-

Gege-Merak

venture in which any boy would be eager to participate, and Joe begged so hard to go along and was so devoted to me personally that I argued the matter until Captain Steele gave in and consented. My father thought he could not ride a camel in comfort because of his cork leg, so he remained aboard to look after the ship. He let Ned Britton join us, though, and three sailors, all loyal fellows and splendid specimens of American manhood. This completed our party of nine. We were all armed with revolvers and repeating rifles, and felt that in case of attack or interference we could give a good account of ourselves.

The weather was warm at this season, but when we started, soon after dawn, a gentle breeze was coming over the desert and we set out in good spirits in spite of the fact that the motion of the camels caused us to sway awkwardly in our tall saddles. We should get used to this motion in time, the Professor assured us; but at first it jolted us terribly.

It seemed as if the entire population of the village had assembled to see us start, and from their looks they evidently considered us little less

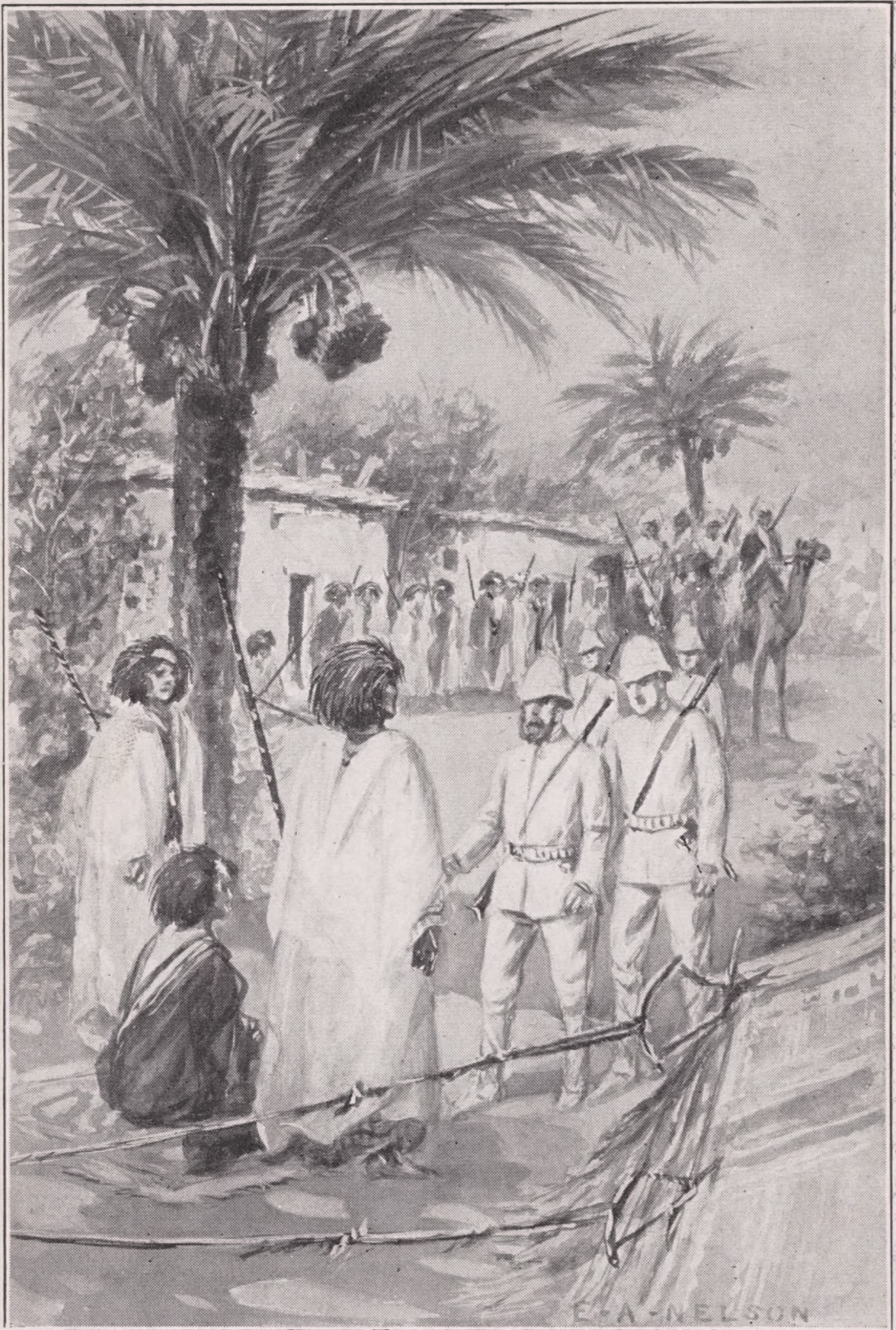
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than madmen. The sheik wished us a safe journey and promised in the hearing of the Bega to avenge us in case we met with treachery; but at the same time, he told the Professor privately, he refused to guarantee our savage escort in any particular.

Bidding my father and the crew of the *Seagull* a cheery farewell, we left Koser and began our journey across the desert.

The Ababdeh were silent fellows, but when I questioned them I found that at least two of their number understood and spoke English fairly well. They did not waste words in expressing themselves, but seemed intelligent and respectful in their demeanor toward us.

Our progress the first day was slow, for the way was across heavy sands that tired the camels to walk upon. We made a halt for luncheon and at about sundown reached the encampment of the Bega chief, Gege-Merak. It was situated on a tiny oasis of the desert, which boasted a well of good water and a group of a dozen tall spreading date-palms. Under the palms were set the chief houses of the village, made of mud and thatched



The village in the oasis.

Gege-Merak

with palm leaves; but the huts of the people extended also out upon the desert, on all sides of the oasis. These mainly consisted of low walls of mud roofed with squares of canvas, and none save the house of the chieftain was high enough for a man to stand upright within it.

I was surprised at the number of this isolated tribe of Bega, and it was a wonder to me how they all managed to subsist. They had many goats and camels and a small herd of buffalocows—too many, seemingly, to crop the scant herbage of the oasis; but there was no attempt at agriculture that I could discover.

We halted before the house of the chief, and after conferring together our escort conducted my uncle, the Professor, and myself into the building. We found ourselves in a large, cool room, lighted and aired by open spaces between the top of the walls and the roof. At the rear was a dark passage, doubtless leading into other apartments, but the appearance of the interior was extremely primitive and unattractive.

Upon a rush mat at one side of the room sat a young girl, her slender form graceful and upright,

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her dark eyes fixed curiously upon us. She seemed about fifteen years of age, but may have been two or three years younger, for the women of these desert gypsies mature early in life. Her hair, unlike that of the other Bega we had seen, was not bushy and cloudlike, but its luxuriant tresses were heavily plaited into several braids, two hanging in front over either shoulder and two others dropping behind her back. On her arms or ankles were broad bands or bracelets of silver, some of them set with odd stones of strange colors and shapes. Golden bangles—perhaps Persian or Arabian coins—were strung together on wires and woven into the braids of her hair. She wore a robe of some thin, strong material which was striped in alternate bands of scarlet and green—a robe more becoming than its description sounds, I think—and across her rounded shoulders was folded a Syrian scarf covered with rich embroidery.

The girl was undeniably handsome. She would have been conspicuous by reason of her beauty in any civilized community. Here, surrounded by

Gege-Merak

a barbaric desert tribe, she seemed a veritable daughter of Venus.

I could not stare long at this gracious sight, for beside the girl sat, or rather squatted, a personage whose powerful individuality compelled attention.

Gege-Merak—for I did not doubt I beheld the chief—was a withered, wrinkled old man scarce five feet in height when standing upright, a veritable dwarf among his handsome, well formed subjects. One eye—the right one—was gone, and across the sightless cavity and reaching from his cheek to his forehead, was a broad, livid scar as from the slash of a knife or a sword-cut. The other eye, small and glittering, regarded us with a glare as disconcerting as that of a snake, it being set in his face deep amid the folds of wrinkled flesh. His chin protruded and his thin lips were closed together in a straight line, while his bushy hair was snow-white in color, denoting great age.

I own I was amazed to find the famous chief so different from his people; and when I realized that we had voluntarily put our lives into the

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keeping of this old, evil-featured Bega, I began to suspect there was a foundation for the Arab sheik's persistent croak of danger. Still, as Gege-Merak sat huddled upon his mat, motionless save for that roving, terrible eye, it occurred to me that he was too old and feeble to lead the caravan himself, as he had sent word to us that he would do, and without doubt would delegate the task to some other.

At our entrance the warriors knelt to their chief and crouched subserviently their foreheads to the mate; but afterward they stood erect in a group at one side. They neither saluted nor appeared to notice the girl at all.

"So," said Gege-Merak, in a quiet voice and speaking excellent English. "Here are the travelers who wish to be led to Luxor. What is your errand there?"

He looked from one to another of us, and I took upon myself to answer him, as the Professor seemed to hesitate.

"Sir, that is our business alone," I declared, stiffly. "All that we require from you is your camels, your warriors to guard us, and a guide."

Gege-Merak

“I am rebuked, Effendi,” said he, fixing his small eye upon me with a penetrating gaze, but exhibiting no humility in his tones. After a slight pause: “Do you agree to my price in return for the service you require?”

“Yes; you are to receive one hundred English pounds.”

“In advance,” he added, softly.

“One-half in advance,” said I. “The remainder when we have returned in safety.”

“Let me see the money.”

I produced a bag containing fifty gold pounds, and stooping down counted them out upon the mat before him. He watched me silently.

“Now I will see the other fifty,” he said.

I began to dislike the chief; but now the Professor said, somewhat to my surprise.

“Pay him the full amount, Mr. Steele; it will be better that way.”

“Why?” I asked, turning to him rather angrily.

“Because the great chief is suspicious of our honesty, and we want him to believe we are honest. Also because Gege-Merak’s word is sacred,

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and he will be faithful when he is paid. For a third reason, it will be just as well for you not to carry that gold across the desert and back again, when the chief is able to put it away in a safe place before we begin the journey.”

Gege-Merak listened carefully and it was evident he approved this argument. But he said nothing and merely looked at me inquiringly.

Of course, if the natives would prove faithful, the Professor's plan of advance payment was best. After a look toward Uncle Naboth, which he answered with a nod, I drew out another fifty pounds and counted it upon the mat beside the first.

“Now, Gege-Merak,” said I, “you are paid in full.”

CHAPTER IX.

ACROSS THE BLACK MOUNTAINS.

The cruel little eye of the chief twinkled brightly at sight of all this golden display, but he made no motion to gather it up. Instead, he turned his keen glance first upon me and then upon the others of our party, as if striving to gauge our thoughts and read our secret characters.

“I will see the other Americans,” he finally said.

The Professor summoned Ned Britton, Archie, Joe, Bry, and the sailors, and soon they all stood wonderingly before the Bega chief. He examined each one with silent interest, down to the smallest item of attire. He nodded and asked them to again withdraw.

“Effendi,” said he, addressing me when the others were gone, “you are deceiving me in regard to your errand. Your party is strong and

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heavily armed. You ask me for brave warriors to assist you, and for my own services as guide. All this is not usual with peaceful traders or travelers who wish to cross the desert to Luxor on an errand of simple business. Another thing. You willingly pay me a big price—more than my service is really worth. Again, you ask for two extra camels, bearing empty saddle-bags. Therefore you have a secret intention you do not reveal to me. The little red-beard's eyes are bright with fever. You all expect trouble. You may get me mixed with your trouble, so that the authorities will imprison me and scatter my tribe. I am a good subject of the mighty Sultan and our father the Khedive. Therefore I refuse the compact. Take your gold, Effendi, and return to Koser."

This speech of the wily chief fairly took away my breath. Uncle Naboth seemed disappointed, and the Professor trembled nervously. I am sure our various emotions were clearly apparent to Gege-Merak, for his roving eye bore an expression of grim amusement.

It was the Professor who finally answered,

Across the Black Mountains

He knew the covert disposition of these strange people better than we did.

“See, then, my brother, how much we trust in your friendship and honesty,” said he. “Our errand is indeed twofold, as you have wisely suspected. One part is to permit the young effendi, Archie Ackley, whom you have just seen, to collect pay for his wares from certain merchants in Luxor. The second part of our errand is to permit me to secure some property belonging to me which I left concealed in a part of the desert near Karnak. Our bargain with you is to guide and escort us safely to these places and enable us to bring back to our ship at Koser the property I have mentioned and young Ackley’s payments from the merchants. For our purpose of transportation the two extra camels will be sufficient. But we shall have no trouble with the authorities, because we intend to commit no crime and break no law of the land. I will not conceal from you the fact that I am at enmity with a miserable Arab sheik named Abdul Hashim, who lives upon the desert near Luxor and who might try to prevent me from securing

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my property if he knew I had come for it. He does not suspect my journey at present, and I hope to avoid him altogether, since he is just now under the displeasure of the Khedive's police, which has destroyed his village and scattered his lawless band. But we must go armed in case the Arab dares to molest us, and part of your liberal payment is to fight well for us if there should be need. Also, bands of robbers infest the desert, and we do not wish to be robbed on our journey. So we take all needful precautions. Is the great and wise chief, my brother, now satisfied?"

Gege-Merak was silent for a time, thoughtfully studying the mat at his feet. Then he replied:

"I know Abdul Hashim. He is a jackal. I know the police have destroyed his village, as you truly say; but he is rebuilding it. Abdul Hashim has powerful friends, and he will fight his foes in spite of our father the Khedive. If I accept your offer I may lose many camels and men. Also I make a foe forever of Abdul

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Hashim and his tribe. No; I will not consent; the hundred gold pounds is not enough.”

He had caught us fairly. I saw plainly enough that we must either abandon the adventure altogether or consent to be robbed at the start by this grasping Bega. The Professor asked permission for us to withdraw and consult together, and we went into the open air to hold a conference.

Uncle Naboth asked the Professor how much he judged the treasure to be worth. We had already invested a considerable sum in the speculation and were about to risk our lives as well.

Van Dorn could only estimate the amount of the treasure, of which he had obtained merely a glimpse. But he thought its total value could not possibly equal less than five hundred thousand pounds, or two and a half million dollars in American money. It was well worth doubling the chief's bribe, he urged, and we all were loth to retreat on the eve of our adventure. We decided to win Gege-Merak's support at all hazards, and presently stood again in the presence of the chief.

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He sat just as we had left him, with the beautiful, statuesque girl at his side, and the money still spread before him on the mat.

“Brother,” said the Professor, “we have counselled together and decided that your demands are not unfriendly. For your powerful support, for the risk you take and the assurance that you will stand by us bravely and faithfully, we will double the price first agreed upon. Twenty pounds more we will give you now. It is all the remaining money we brought with us. But upon our return to the ship we will give you eighty pounds in addition, making two hundred pounds in all. Does this satisfy you?”

“No,” was the quiet answer. “Give me the twenty pounds and your writing to pay me one hundred and eighty pounds more on our return to the ship and I shall be content. If any of my men are killed in fighting I will say nothing. If any of your party is killed you shall not blame me in any way. Make a writing as I have said and I will be true to you. This is my last word.”

I groaned in spirit at the necessity, but I tore a leaf from my notebook and with my fountain

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pen wrote the agreement. Uncle Naboth and the Professor added their signatures to mine. It was a great sum in Egypt, this fifteen hundred dollars, and we had promised not to hold Gege-Merak responsible if any of us lost our lives in the venture. But the Professor assured us we had won a powerful ally and that the investment was warranted by our necessity.

I gave the Bega chief the paper, which I felt sure he could not read, and counted out our remaining twenty pounds upon the mat. Thereupon he spoke to the girl in his native tongue, for the Bega have a language of their own, although they usually speak a hybrid Arabic. She leaned forward, calmly gathered up the money in her scarf, arose and left the room by the dark passage. She was tall for her age and moved with grace and dignity.

“At daybreak,” said Gege-Merak, “the caravan will be ready to start. I shall go with you. To-night my brothers will sleep in a house prepared for you. Ketti will lead you to it.”

The young warrior who had guided us to the village from Koser now came forward and bowed

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to us respectfully. We nodded farewell to the chief and followed Ketti to a large house of one bare room, where our entire party shortly assembled. Bry had already brought out his pots and pans and soon a good supper was ready for us. Appetites are keen upon the desert, and the evening was already well advanced when we had finished the repast. Soon after, tired by our first day of camel riding, we rolled ourselves in our blankets and fell asleep.

I was roused even before daybreak by the noise and shouting in the village. Every inhabitant seemed astir and in a state of wild excitement, yet there was nothing for our party to do but fold our blankets and eat the breakfast our black cook quickly served us. At first we stumbled around blindly in the gloom, but gradually the sky grew lighter, until suddenly the first red beams of the sun shot over the edge of the desert. Beside the well and just in front of the chief's house the camels were assembled, all bridled and saddled and ready for the journey. We took the beasts assigned us and mounted to our places while the obedient creatures knelt to

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receive their burdens. The entire population of the village stood around, silent now, but observant, to watch the start.

When we were ready I noticed that two of the camels still knelt awaiting their riders. They bore gorgeous trappings, the saddles being studded with brass and silver ornaments. The delay was brief, for soon the little old chief came from his house, followed by the girl we had seen the night before.

I had wondered how Gege-Merak, who had seemed to be nothing more than a withered, dried-up mummy, could by any possibility be able to lead the caravan in person; but now, to my surprise, he advanced with swift steps, agile and light as the tread of a panther, and seated himself upon his kneeling camel. His one bright eye roved over the assembled villagers, who all prostrated themselves an instant before resuming their former upright positions. The chief was clad in the same bright colored burnous he had worn the night before. An old-fashioned pistol was stuck in his sash and at his side hung a Turkish cimetar with a jeweled handle. When his

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camel had risen to its feet Gage-Merak made a brief speech to the villagers and gave the signal to start.

The girl, meantime, had quietly mounted the other camel and taken her place beside the chief. No one saluted her or seemed to notice her presence, yet to me she was scarcely less interesting than her aged companion. The Bega women were numerous in the village, were generally good looking and bold in their demeanor, yet the warriors seemed to make a point of disregarding them altogether, as if the sex was wholly unworthy of masculine attention. It seemed to be a Bega characteristic and partly explained why the chief's companion was so generally ignored, but I was curious to know something of the girl who was to accompany us. So as we rode slowly away from the oasis I asked Ketti, who was near me, who she was.

"Gege-Merak's grandchild," was the answer, and I thought the young warrior's eyes rested for an instant upon the young girl with a gleam of admiration.

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“Will she succeed the chief, when he dies?” I inquired.

“No, Effendi. Iva is but a woman. Only a man becomes chief of a Bega tribe.”

“I see. In our country, Ketti, a woman is considered equal to a man.”

He made no reply to the observation and after a moment I continued:

“Tell me, then, why does Iva ride with us on this journey?”

He frowned, glancing around sharply to see that we were not overheard. But we had ridden quite out of earshot.

“Effendi, we speak little of such matters, but it is the superstition of Gege-Merak. He believes that he will live as long as his grandchild lives, but no longer. If she dies, then he will die. Allah has decreed it. For this reason the chief does not dare to leave her behind, lest some harm happen to her.”

I laughed at this explanation, but the warrior's face was grave. He was by far the handsomest and most intelligent of our escort, and his

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dignified and straightforward expression attracted me toward him.

“Always the chief does not treat Iva well,” he added, as if to himself, as he glanced again to where the oddly mated couple rode at the head of the caravan. “Her health he guards, because he is selfish; but he makes the girl his slave.”

It occurred to me I had been right in guessing that the young man entertained a tender feeling toward Iva. But I could scarcely blame him. She was very attractive—for a Bega.

We made toward a dim ridge of mountains that showed at the southeast and during the day drew gradually nearer to them. At night we encamped in the foothills. The rocks were bare and of a black color, and the surrounding landscape was wholly uninviting. Just beyond us the hills grew to mountains, which formed a seemingly endless range.

“Do we climb those peaks?” I asked the chief, as our followers prepared the camp.

“There are passes between them, which we follow for two days,” he answered, briefly. Ketti told me they were the Hammemat

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Mountains, composed of a hard, dark stone called breccia, and that the ancient Egyptians had quarries here, using the stone to form their statues from.

From this first night the native and American camps were separate. The Begas pitched low tents for our use, but on their side only one tent, for the use of Iva, was set up. The men, including the aged chief, when they slept simply rolled themselves in their *abayeh* or ragged blankets and lay down upon the sand.

Bryonia, having brought a couple of sacks of charcoal from Koser to use for fuel, managed to cook us a good supper. The Bega did no cooking, but satisfied their hunger with hard bread and dried goat's flesh, washed down with a swallow or two of tepid water. We invited Gege-Merak and Iva to join us at our meal, but the chief curtly refused.

"I eat with my people," he said.

This action seemed to worry the Professor and his face grew anxious and thoughtful.

"If Gege-Merak had broken bread with us, or eaten of our salt," he remarked, "we might

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have depended upon his faithfulness at all times. It is a rather suspicious circumstance, to my mind, that he refuses to join us."

"I don't trust him at all," said I.

"Nor do I," added Uncle Naboth. "Seemed to me, first time I spotted the rascal, that he was playin' a deep game. Don't you think it was foolish, Professor, to pay him all that money?"

"Not at all. If we had refused to pay it he might have robbed us of it on the journey. Now he knows he can get nothing more from us until we return to the ship. That will be our salvation, I imagine. To get the balance of his payment he'll be sure to return."

"But he doesn't agree to bring us all back with him," observed Archie, musingly. "He'll be entitled to the money, just the same, if a few of us are killed."

"That matter," said Ned Britton, grimly, "we must attend to ourselves. There are nine o' us to six o' them copperheads, for the girl don't count. So I guess they'll think twice afore they attacks us."

"I don't fear any open rupture," replied

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Van Dorn, with a moody glance toward the Bega camp. "What we must guard against is treachery. If the chief had eaten with us I should have feared nothing; but I know the ways of these Begas, and it will be best for us to set a guard every night while we sleep."

"Why, there's nothing to murder us for at present," I objected. "When we get the treasure, if we ever do, it will be another matter. Just now—

"Jest now," interrupted Uncle Naboth, "we'll keep on the safe side and take the Perfessor's hint. Snakes is snakes, an' you can't tell when they're a-goin' to strike. Let's set a watch nights, from now on."

The suggestion was a reasonable one, and we determined to follow it.

CHAPTER X.

DEEP IN THE DESERT SANDS.

The second day's journey was through wild passes of the Hammemat, among which we might easily have become bewildered and lost our way had not Gege-Merak's knowledge of the mountains enabled him to guide us accurately. We passed an old Egyptian mine and, soon after, the quarries which they had abandoned centuries ago, and at evening came to the famous well of Bir-Hammemat, the curb of which is sixteen feet in diameter. Here we made our camp, and so wild was the spot that we kept a constant though secret watch throughout the night. The Bega, however, seemed to harbor no thoughts of treachery, and although they made their camp on the opposite side of the well from our own they neither by look nor action gave us cause to suspect their loyalty.

We emerged among the foothills on the third

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day, and before noon passed a landmark in the way of an old Roman well, now dry and abandoned. It had once been a large cavity, walled up with huge layers of stone, and I imagined it must originally have been very deep, too, for even yet the rubbish in its bottom was a good fifteen feet from the curb. I glanced at the place carelessly enough as we passed, never dreaming of the tragedy soon to be enacted there.

Pushing on at excellent speed we mounted more rocky hills, here composed of yellow and red Nubian sandstone and granite. Just at sundown we reached the Pass of Mutrok without incident.

The Professor was excellently satisfied with our progress.

“Four hours across the desert from here,” he told us at supper, “lies the small village of Laketa, which is but four hours more from Luxor. The treasure lies some two hours’ journey from Laketa, toward Karnak, and my plan is to halt at the village, when we reach it, and leave our native escort there. I can

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guide you myself from Laketa, so only the Americans shall go to the place where the treasure lies hid. We shall take with us the two extra camels, and when we rejoin the Bega we must keep these camels constantly with our party, and refuse to tell the chief or any of his followers what load they bear. This is a necessary precaution, I assure you. So far our journey has been uneventful, but once we have secured the treasure we must exercise exceptional caution and vigilance until we get it safely aboard the ship."

This was good and timely advice, we well knew, and Van Dorn's plan seemed practical enough. Before leaving the ship our sailmaker had prepared several large canvas bags for holding the treasure, and the Professor had brought along a supply of sealing-wax with which to seal up the treasure in the bags until it was delivered on board the ship and could be appraised and divided between us. According to his recollection of the cavity and its size Van Dorn judged that two camels would be ample to transport all its contents.

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During this third day the Bega had seemed to regard us with less friendly glances than before, and just as we dismounted at the camp an unpleasant incident occurred that for a time promised open rupture between us.

One of the camels having gone lame during the afternoon, Iva had been transferred from her own beast to that of the chief, riding behind whom she finished the journey in no very comfortable manner. The girl, proud and reserved, speaking seldom and then only in monosyllables, seemed wholly out of place in this caravan of men, and we realized that the chief's absurd superstition about her was responsible for much of her sullen behavior.

Iva had ridden in a cramped position until her limbs were numbed, and as she slid off the kneeling camel she stumbled and fell awkwardly against the chief. In sudden rage Gege-Merak turned and struck her a blow on the side of her head, and the next instant he found himself tumbling headlong to the earth. For Archie had happened to stand near, and seeing the out-

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rageous act had bowled over the great Gege-Merak as coolly as if he had been a school-boy.

Even before the chief could rise the Bega had sprung at us with drawn knives and leveled pistols; but Gege-Merak, hearing their shout of rage, rolled over and held up an arm in warning. They slunk back, then, while Ketti assisted the ancient chief to his feet. He was unhurt, for his mummified little form was tough as leather. Neither had Iva been much injured by the blow she had received, for she stood by quiet and submissive to all appearances. But I had caught a fierce gleam in her dark eyes that proved she secretly resented her brutal treatment. The sharp edge of one of her clumsy ear ornaments had cut her cheek, and two or three tiny drops of blood trickled down her face; but this was unimportant. She well knew Gege-Merak would take good care not to seriously endanger her health or life, even in a fit of temper, as long as his superstition regarding her held sway. But a kick, a blow, or a bitter epithet was often her portion.

This was not the end of the incident. After

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supper and during the brief Egyptian twilight Ketti came to us with a message from the chief. He asked us to kill Archie before morning and expose his body to be torn and devoured by the jackals, that the insult to Gege-Merak's dignity be avenged.

We greeted the request with a roar of laughter, and Archie declared he would run across and punch the old fellow's nose for his impudence. Ketti, who was less a barbarian than any of his tribe, in our opinion, was still too dense to understand our answer until we said frankly that we fully approved what Archie had done and had no intention of punishing him.

"Then," said the messenger, "you must deliver him to our chief, who will satisfy his vengeance according to our customs."

"See here, Ketti," I replied; "you're a good fellow, and I'll explain to you our position. The poorest American is of higher rank than the most important Bega that lives, and your Gege-Merak is merely our servant, having accepted our pay. Aside from that, we Americans won't allow any woman of any race to be abused in our presence,

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and you might tell your wicked old chief that if he dares to touch the girl again while in our company, we'll tie him up and horsewhip him."

Ketti listened to this speech with keen interest. Perhaps he secretly approved our stand, for his expression was thoughtful rather than angry.

"Do not send this message by me, Effendi," said he, in a low voice. "It will mean to fight, and that must not be—for we are friends."

"Are we, Ketti?" I inquired, doubtfully.

"I am your friend," answered the warrior, evasively. "But our chief is proud, for he is the father of all the Bega of Egypt, our tribe being the head tribe of our people, and the Arabs and Turks have taught us that the whites are but dogs, and have no rank. It will make danger for you to defy Gege-Merak tonight. Tell him you will punish the Archie-boy when you reach your ship, in your own way, which is to cut him in pieces and feed him to the fishes; once we knew a ship-sailor who did that and the promise will make Gege-Merak content."

"Very well, Ketti," broke in the Professor, nervously; "deliver that or any other message

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you like, and we'll remember your friendship when we get back to Koser. Say anything to your chief that will restore peace between us, for we must remain friends."

Ketti nodded understandingly and returned to his people. Doubtless he promised the old ruffian that we would take ample vengeance upon our companion, for we could hear his voice declaiming loudly our reply before all the tribesmen. Gege-Merak's dignity was thus restored at little expense to us, and we heard no more of the matter. The incident, however, showed us that we stood in a delicate position and that our protective escort might at any moment become our most vindictive enemy.

Next morning we slept late and resumed our journey at leisure. The Professor told the chief that we should not require his escort beyond the village of Laketa. He might remain there with his band and rest until we were ready to begin the return journey, probably upon the following day. Gege-Merak listened quietly and made no comment beyond saying that his people were our servants and that to hear was to obey—

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an Oriental figure of speech that meant nothing at all.

After leaving the mountains a series of low bleak hills had been encountered, and about the middle of this forenoon we reached the ruins of the old Roman hydrauma, or caravan station, long since abandoned. Three miles farther brought us within sight of Laketa, a small group of mud huts occupying an oasis which boasted two small wells and five palm trees.

We were at the village before noon, and found ourselves greeted by a dozen Bisharin, men, women, and children. They were small, skinny people, naked except for a loin cloth, and having bushy hair saturated with foul smelling grease. The Bisharin claim kinship to the Bega nation, but are much inferior in physique or intelligence to the Ababdeh who formed our escort. They are great thieves, as are all these gypsy Bedouins, but, too cowardly to fight in the open, they prefer to creep upon their victims unobserved and stick a knife or short spear into their backs.

These natives of Laketa, however, lived so near to Luxor and civilization that they had lost

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much of their native fierceness and were a cowed and humble group. They welcomed Gege-Merak joyously, knowing him as a great chief; but they stood more in awe of us than they did of their visiting allies. The Professor assured us that we had nothing to fear from them. He had often been to this village with Lovelace, during the time they were engaged upon their tedious search for the treasure, and the Bisharin knew him and treated the little "red-beard" with profound respect.

We made our camp beside one of the wells, while our escort encamped beside the other, situated on the opposite side of the group of huts. During the afternoon we rested from the fatigue of our journey and perfected our plans, canvassing all matters of detail in the presence of our entire party, so that every man, even to black Bry, might understand exactly what our intentions were and what work would probably be required of them.

We informed Gege-Merak that we should ride that evening to a place near Luxor, where the Professor would gather his belongings and pack

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them on the two extra camels. Most of us would return during the night or at daybreak; all would again be assembled at the oasis by noon, when the return journey would be begun. We should camp the next night at our old station in the mountain pass, which could easily be reached before dark.

It was all simple and easily understood, and the chief appeared to be satisfied with the arrangement. We had an early supper and at sundown our band of Americans departed, taking the direction of Luxor and using as a landmark the low hill called Tel-Ambra, lying southward of the village. The Bega gathered in a silent group to watch us move slowly over the desert, but night soon fell and they must have shortly lost sight of us in the gloom.

The Professor knew this territory by heart. There was no moon, and even the stars lacked their usual brilliance because of fleecy clouds that moved swiftly across the sky—an unusual sight in Egypt. Such clouds, when they appear, contain no moisture, but are what are called “smoke clouds.” There was plenty of light to

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guide us, however, so the Professor was sure of his route.

In an hour and a half we passed around the base of Tel-Ambra, which is a barren rock cropping out of the desert, some twenty feet in its highest part and about half a mile in circumference. Skirting this rock we turned abruptly to the north, altering our course decidedly, for our first direction was only undertaken to deceive the Bega.

Thirty minutes of this northerly course brought us in sight of a group of three straggling palms which showed like black streaks against the sky; but now the Professor called a sudden halt, and I could hear him storming and cursing in low but tense tones as he sat his camel and glanced around him observantly.

“What’s wrong, sir?” I asked, coming to his side.

“That scoundrelly Arab, Abdul Hashim, has rebuilt his village,” he answered, with evident chagrin. “The police tore down every wall and scattered the stones far and wide; but here they

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are piled up again to form houses, and even the roofs of some are newly thatched.”

He pointed away to the left, and the stars being bright at the time I had no trouble in perceiving that we had halted a few hundred yards from a native village. But it was black and seemed deserted.

“What does it matter?” I asked, impatiently. “We can surely keep away from Abdul Hashim and his people until morning, and by that time we ought to have gained possession of the treasure.”

The Professor shook his head, doubtfully; but he gave the command to march and we hurried away from this dangerous vicinity and approached the group of palms. The feet of the camels made no noise on the desert sands and our people were all too anxious and intent upon the adventure to speak unnecessarily; so like shadows we passed through the shifting and ghostly light that reached us from the stars, and soon gained our destination.

I had often wondered, in thinking upon the subject, how the Professor would be again

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enabled to locate with any degree of accuracy the buried treasure, situated as it was in a barren spot where the sand drove over it with every breeze. So now I watched him curiously as he dismounted at the palms and, drawing a line from one of the trees to another, seemed to pick out a star straight ahead to guide him and began pacing his way regularly over the desert. He gained an absolute regularity of pace in an amusing and ingenious, yet simple manner, attaching a cord from one of his ankles to the other, after carefully measuring its length. Consequently all his paces were mathematically equal, or could vary but slightly.

The rest of us followed him silently. I tried at first to count the number of paces, but from my high seat presently lost track of the count. But I had no idea it would matter to us; we should never be likely to visit this weird spot a second time.

At last the Professor came to a sudden halt and held up his hand. We leaped from our camels without waiting for them to kneel and two of our sailors promptly produced shovels

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from their panniers and began to dig in the spot the Professor indicated. They worked with steady industry, you may be sure, and we took turns relieving them at the task, for shoveling sand is by no means an easy job.

After going a certain depth without finding the granite slab we began making our pit wider, and within an hour a shovel wielded by Bryonia bounded back with a metallic sound that told us the search had finally been successful.

While the men quickly cleared away the remaining sand, disclosing three bronze rings imbedded in an oblong slab of granite, I could not help marveling at the Professor's cleverness in locating the spot so accurately after several weeks of absence.

"It is a matter of simple mathematics," he explained, while he watched the sand fly with eager eyes. "The only thing that could interfere with my calculations would be the removal of the palm trees. But I did not fear that, as they are centuries old."

The big stone was now cleared of sand. The three sailors and Ned Britton stooped and put

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their shoulders to the slab, raising the ponderous weight slowly but surely until it stood upright on its edge. Then the Professor knelt down and with nervous haste threw out the padding of dried rushes and the thick layers of rotted mummy cloth that covered the contents of the vault.

Now, more gently, he began removing a number of bandaged cylinders, something like eighteen inches long and six inches in diameter. These, I supposed, were the rolls of papyrus bark that told the history of that dark period of Egypt between the Sixth and Twelfth Dynasties. From the tenderness with which Van Dorn handled these rolls—which he rewrapped in new canvas, sealed securely and then handed to Ned to be placed in one of the panniers—I had no doubt he considered them the most valuable and important part of the treasure. There were sixteen rolls; all of them, according to our bargain, Van Dorn's personal property. After these had been cared for the Professor threw aside another layer of bandages and then, at last, the more

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tangible wealth of the powerful priests of Karnak was revealed to our wondering eyes.

Under the dim stars we could see the sparkle of many rich jewels and the gleam of a vast store of golden vases, exquisitely worked; of many chains, bracelets and other ornaments; of pearls and precious stones. Indeed, the pit seemed full of the queer and valuable things.

Van Dorn did not pause an instant to admire this gorgeous sight. He took one of the canvas sacks which Ned handed him and began filling it with the jewels. It was difficult to see just what they were, but the Professor took all that came to his hand and soon had filled the sack. He tied its mouth securely and brought out his sealing wax. When he lighted a match to melt the wax its rays illumined the pit, and I drew a deep breath of wonder at the splendor that met my eyes.

“Ah; treasure!” said a soft voice beside me.

Startled, we all sprang up at the words and found squatting beside the pit the form of the withered Bega chief, Gege-Merak.

CHAPTER XI.

TAKING CHANCES.

The Professor gave a cry of positive terror, and before it was well out of his throat Ned Britton had made a leap and pinioned the chief to the ground with the weight of his huge form.

We were all greatly startled; and dismayed, as well, for it seemed that in spite of all our precautions Gege-Merak had spied upon us and the secret of the treasure now extended to him—the most uncomfortable confederate, from our standpoint, we could possibly have gained. Already an enemy, and more powerful in this country, his own, than we were; animated by the unscrupulous cupidity of his race and reckless—as his people are—of any consequences that follow lawless acts, Gege-Merak was the last person we would have chosen to share our important secret. The worst feature of the whole matter was that we ourselves were defying the

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laws of Egypt in stealthily removing this vast hoard, hidden by Egyptian priests long before the present rulers had ever set foot in the land. If the government suspected our act we should all be summarily imprisoned.

No doubt the Bega chief knew very well our predicament, and that we could not appeal to the authorities whatever injury he might inflict upon us; so he would be inclined to fight us for the possession of the treasure, if any dependence could be placed upon the native character. If we tried to compromise, then a large share of our find must go to Gege-Merak; but he was not likely to be satisfied with a little.

These thoughts doubtless flashed across every mind in the pause that followed Ned's capture of the spy. I know, anyway, that they passed rapidly through my own mind, and appalled me.

Two of the sailors had sprung forward to assist the mate, and now they produced several lengths of cord from their pockets—every sailor carries such things—and the chief was soon fast bound and laid upon the sand a few paces away. One

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of the sailors was left sitting beside him as a guard.

While the Professor nervously continued to fill the canvas bags from the pit and to seal each one securely, we counselled together in whispers as to the best method of dealing with Gege-Merak. The sailors and Bryonia loaded the sacks into the panniers of the camels, which were strongly woven of rushes, as fast as they were filled and sealed, and still the pit seemed to contain as many jewels and precious stones as had been removed. We began to tremble with a realization of the hugeness of the treasure, and to understand that in spite of our ample provision to carry it, some must be left behind. But that meant turning it over to the chief, who now knew its location, unless——

“Gege-Merak must die!” growled the little Professor, through his teeth. His face was pale and his eyes were glittering with excitement.

Some of us breathed deeply; but none made reply in words. I dreaded the necessity as much as any one could, but saw clearly that the chief's death was inevitable. It meant not only our

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protection, but perhaps our salvation. We were now burdened with too vast a store of wealth to be safe on the desert for a single moment, if Gege-Merak was to be at large to dog our steps.

We now implored the Professor to return the papyrus rolls to the cavity and take instead more of the treasure; but Van Dorn obstinately refused.

"It is my own share, and you have agreed I should take it," said he. "There are millions in gold and precious gems, besides; isn't that enough to satisfy you?"

"But this may be our last chance at the treasure," replied Uncle Naboth, anxiously.

The Professor gave him a queer look. It seemed defiant and half threatening, but a moment later he dropped his head to resume his work.

"That's nonsense," he snapped, wrathfully. "The stuff has lain here for ages, and what we now leave will remain in safety until we can come again—unless we give Gege-Merak a chance to grab it. We mustn't do that, gentlemen. If the chief lives he will never allow us to reach the ship again; you may be sure of that. We've

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had evidence already of his grasping disposition. It's our lives against his, now, and we must not hesitate to save ourselves."

"Bring the chief here, Cunningham," called Uncle Naboth, peering through the gloom where our sailor sat upon the sand guarding his prisoner.

Cunningham did not move, and Uncle Naboth called again. Then Joe ran across to him, bent over, and gave a cry that raised us all to our feet in an instant.

"The man's dead!" he shouted. "Gege-Merak is gone!"

It was true enough. The wily chief had managed to slip his bonds and plunge a knife to the heart of his unsuspecting guard before he crawled away into the night and escaped.

We were horrified at the disaster. Our fears had now become realities, and as we looked gravely into one another's eyes under the dim stars we realized that our lives were in deadly peril.

"You're a lot of clods—of duffers—of fools!" screamed the Professor, stamping the ground in furious rage. "You deserve to die for being

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so clumsy; you deserve to lose the treasure you are not clever enough to guard! Bah! to think I have leagued myself with idiots!"

Archie grabbed him by the shoulder and gave him a good shaking.

"Shut up, you red-whiskered ape!" he said, menacingly. "Keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll skin you alive!"

We were all irritated and unnerved, and I tried to quiet both Archie and Van Dorn, and to bring them to a more reasonable frame of mind.

"It's no use crying over spilt milk," said I. "Let's face the peril like men, and do our best to get the treasure safely to the ship. Even if Gege-Merak gets the rest, we have a fortune already."

"He'll get that, too," groaned the Professor. "The chief has more cunning than the whole crowd of you."

The two camels were now heavily loaded with the sealed canvas sacks containing the treasure and the library of historic papyri. We next strapped the four panniers to the two beasts—one on either side of each camel—and Van Dorn

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with the remainder of his wax smeared the buckles so that if the panniers were opened or tampered with we should speedily know the fact. He did not trust us wholly, it seemed, nor did we fully trust him. The man had been acting ugly of late, and the fact that we had no chance to examine any of the treasure we had so quickly thrust into the sacks made it necessary that the seals remain intact until we could open them in safety and in each other's presence.

Having now secured all of the ancient deposit of wealth that we could carry, we held a solemn conference to determine our future movements. The Professor, who had calmed down somewhat but was still sullen, admitted that with proper caution we might find our way back to Koser over the same route by which we had come. The only puzzling part of the trail was that which lay through the intricate passes of the Hammet mountains, and we were willing to chance finding the right path because we had no option but to undertake the risk. From being our guide Gege-Merak had now become our most dreaded foe. We were better armed than the chief's

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band, and outnumbered it, although three of our party were only boys. Aside from an ambush or an unexpected addition to the chief's party we might hope to hold our own against him in a declared warfare.

If we could have started at once on our return journey our chances of reaching the *Seagull* in safety might have been better; but it was necessary for Archie to visit Luxor and deliver his father's goods to the merchants who had ordered them, and to receive payment on delivery. This necessitated a delay which could not be avoided even under the present trying circumstances.

Van Dorn assured us that by morning we could plainly see the outlines of Karnak and Luxor across the desert, and he said the journey could be made in three hours. If Archie started at daybreak he could reach Luxor in time for breakfast and by concluding his business as soon as possible ought to be able to rejoin our party by noon.

But Archie did not relish going alone upon this mission, and I had grown to like the young

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fellow so well that I offered to accompany him. It was decided all of us should move around the base of Tel-Ambra, after concealing every trace of our visit to the pit, and there encamp to await our return from Luxor.

We had to bury poor Cunningham in the sand; but we dug him a deep grave and wrapped him in two blankets in lieu of a proper coffin. The stone having been dropped to cover the cavity and the sand piled in and smoothed above it, we marched across to Tel-Ambra and came to a halt well on the other side of it. Here we speedily made camp and appointed Bryonia and Ned Britton to watch while we lay down to sleep.

I was so excited by the occurrences of the night that I could not compose myself to slumber for some time, but lay awake and watched Van Dorn, who, also restless, paced up and down in the sands apparently in deep thought. He had grown moody and unsociable, and since his violent exhibition of temper I had come to dislike him more than ever.

When dawn came creeping over the desert I sprang up and aroused Archie. The others

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were mostly awake, I found, and while we munched a little food Joe came to me and begged to travel to Luxor in our company.

Ned Britton, who had now assumed military command of our party, thought there would be no greater danger to the others and more safety to Archie and me if Joe accompanied us; so Uncle Naboth's consent was obtained and we three mounted our camels and set off at a brisk pace toward Luxor, the outlines of which city the Professor pointed out.

The morning air of the desert was crisp and invigorating, and so fresh were our camels that in two and a half hours we reached the Karnak road and soon after clattered into the streets of Luxor.

It is an odd town, a mingling of the modern and ancient. On the bank of the Nile stands the ruin of the great temple so famous in history, its many rows of lotus-capped columns rising toward the sky in magnificent array. Beside the monster temple is a litter of mud huts; across the way is the wall surrounding the fine modern Hotel Luxor, and against this wall on all sides

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are rows of booths occupied by the Greek, Syrian, and Arab merchants as bazars.

When we arrived and inquired for the merchants with whom Archie was to deal, we found their shops still closed; so we entered the grounds of the hotel, left our camels at the stables, hired a dray to fetch Archie's boxes from the railway station, and then treated ourselves to a good breakfast served in civilized fashion. By the time it was finished the boxes were waiting in a cart outside, and the merchants, we found, had arrived at their shops and were anxious to examine the goods.

We realized the necessity of making haste and so accepted the invitation of a Syrian dealer to open our boxes in a big vacant room back of his bazar. We admitted only the two men who had ordered the goods, although a group of curious natives wished to enter with us, and soon Archie, Joe, and I had the cases open and the goods spread out for examination.

The Syrian and his fellow merchant, a gray-bearded Greek, gravely inspected and approved the clever imitations of ancient scarabs, charms,

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figures, urns, and the like, that had been "made in America" to deceive American tourists in Egypt; but when Archie demanded to be paid the price agreed upon they both demurred, claiming the trinkets were not worth the sum asked.

Archie was indignant and threatened to box up the goods again and ship them to Cairo; and then began the inevitable bargaining that is so tedious but necessary in dealing with the Egyptians.

While my friend, who proved no unskillful bargainer, was engaged in this occupation I chanced to glance toward the one dirty window in the place and saw a man standing outside who instantly riveted my attention. He was tall and stately, with a calm, handsome face and steady eyes, and while he gazed in upon us it suddenly flashed across me that I had seen this Arab before—standing on the quay at Alexandria and staring at the *Seagull* as we had sailed out of the harbor.

Yes; it was indeed Abdul Hashim, the Professor's most bitter enemy; and as this fact was revealed to me I remembered the peril of our

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friends awaiting us on the desert and turned impatiently to Archie to ask him to hasten.

As I spoke the eyes of the Arab outside turned toward mine and, perhaps seeing my glance of recognition, he turned and disappeared.

“Archie,” I said in a low voice, “for heaven’s sake end this squabbling. Too much depends on our prompt return to quarrel over a few beastly piasters.”

He seemed to realize this, for he quickly closed with the offers of the merchants and they paid him the sum he had agreed to take in English bank notes and gold. While the money was being counted out I saw Abdul Hashim again at the window, his greedy eyes feasting upon the money; and this made me more nervous than before. I quickly made my way outside and moved around to the window, but the Arab had disappeared and I failed to find him in any of the neighboring streets.

I told Archie and Joe of my discovery, and that Abdul Hashim had seen us receive the money. The tale alarmed my friends, but after a moment’s thought Archie decided what to do.

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We went at once to Cook's banking office, which was in the hotel building, and there Archie exchanged his gold and notes for a draft on the bank's American correspondents, for the full amount. The paper he placed in his stocking, flat on the sole of his foot, and then he drew on his boot with a sigh of relief.

"If it is stolen," said he, "no one can cash it but my father; but I'd like to see the Arab or Bega clever enough to find the draft where I've hidden it. Come on, boys; we're free now; so let's hurry back to our party and the treasure."

The camels had been watered and fed by the hotel attendants, and we hastened to mount them and start on our return journey. As we left the town it was a little after eleven o'clock, for much valuable time had been consumed in settling Archie's business.

"But it's what I came to Egypt for," said he, "and father would be wild if I neglected the business he sent me on, even to get a share of that treasure. As it is I'm afraid he'll think me a poor

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hand at a bargain, to take less than was agreed upon."

"There's no trusting to the word of these native merchants," I remarked, as we sped away over the sands. "How much did you manage to get for that rubbish, Archie?"

"About twenty-five hundred dollars. But I ought to have had three thousand."

"And what did it cost to make the stuff?" I inquired, curiously.

"Oh, the material is mostly mud, you know; but the molds and the workmanship are expensive. With the freight and my own expenses added, the finished product cost us nearly nine hundred dollars."

"Not a bad deal, then," said I, with a laugh. "Your father will find himself a bit richer, anyhow."

"But think of what those rascally merchants will make!" he exclaimed indignantly. "The scarabs, which cost them about half a cent each, they'll sell for twenty piasters—and that's a whole dollar!"

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“Say, boys,” observed Joe, quietly, “we’re being followed.”

We turned quickly in our saddles at this startling news, and a glance told us Joe was right. Coming toward us in a cloud of dust, from the direction of Luxor, were several camels and donkeys. Already they were near enough for us to see that they were ridden by a band of Arabs, who were urging the animals to their best speed.

We pricked up our camels with the sharpened sticks provided for that purpose, and with groans of protest the supple beasts threw out their hoofs and fairly flew over the sands.

CHAPTER XII.

ABDUL HASHIM EXPLAINS.

Far ahead we could see the outlines of Tel-Ambra standing clear against the blue sky, and toward this we headed, for our friends would be there awaiting us.

Our pursuers also redoubled their pace, and it became a set race in which only the endurance of our animals was of importance. The camels we rode were among the best of Gege-Merak's herd, and we saw with satisfaction that they could easily keep the distance between ourselves and the Arabs.

Gradually the mound grew nearer and we strained our eyes to discover Uncle Naboth and his party, who should be near its base. Perhaps they were on the other side, and had not observed our approach. The quick pace was beginning to tell on our camels, which all breathed heavily;

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but on we dashed at full speed, for the remaining distance was short.

We reached the base of the hill, skirted it without slacking rein, and then with a sense of dismay realized that we were alone upon the desert—save for that grim and relentless band following in our wake.

Uncle Naboth, the Professor, Ned Britton, the sailors and Bry—even the camels with the treasure—had all been swallowed up by the myterious waste of sands.

And now we three boys, left to our fate, must show the mettle we were made of. We halted our panting camels, backed them against a rocky cliff of Tel-Ambra, and hastily unslung our repeating rifles.

“Don’t let us be captured without a struggle, boys,” I exclaimed.

“We’ll fight while there’s a bullet left or a breath in us,” responded Archie, promptly.

“All right, fellows, if you say so,” said Joe, strapping on his cartridge belt; “but it seems to me you’re making a mistake.”

“How so?” I asked, rather indignantly.

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“Look at them,” said Joe. The Arabs had halted just out of range, but we could count their numbers now. “There are about twenty of the rascals, and they’re all armed. We can’t hope to beat them in a fight. We can kill a few, of course, but they’ll down us in the end. And what then? Why, they’ll be mad as hornets, and want revenge. It’s natural. But as it now stands we are not the enemies of these heathens, as I can see, having had no dealings with them. I understand they want to rob us, for they think we’ve got the money those merchants paid Archie—that beast Abdul Hashim is at the head of them. But if we submit quietly to being searched they won’t find any money and they’ll scarcely dare kill us for disappointing them.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Archie, eyeing the foe fiercely. “I’ve heard Van Dorn say these Arabs will kill a Christian as calmly as they’ll eat a dinner. They think a good Mahomedan will gain paradise by killing an infidel dog. And besides that, if they try to rob us and then let us go our ways, they’ll be afraid we will make trouble for them with the police. No, Joe; it’s

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robbery they mean first, and murder afterward; you can rely upon that."

"Maybe so, sir," answered Joe. "But I was just looking for our one chance. To fight means sure death; to give in quietly means a hope for life—not a great hope, sir, but one just big enough to hang your hat on. If you say fight, I'm with you. If you say be foxy and try diplomacy, I'll like it better."

"Humph!" said I, partly convinced. "Perhaps Joe's right."

"I'm sure he is," responded Archie, frankly. "But I hate to see those beggars down us so easily."

"Discretion is the better part of valor," I quoted, pompously; yet I longed to fight, too.

"We aren't giving in, fellows," declared Joe; "we're just playing our best cards in the game, and it isn't our fault if we don't hold all trumps. Come on; don't let's act like cowards, or even whipped curs. Let's go to meet them—and, say, put up your rifles. We won't show any force, but try to smile and look pleasant."

The Arabs had been conversing together,

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evidently trying to decide how to attack us. They knew if they came within range of our rifles some of them would be shot down, and since they now had us safely snared they might take time to figure out the problem.

Had there been any hope of our overtaking our friends I should have advised keeping the Arabs at bay as long as possible. But as far as the eye could reach, in every direction, the desert was deserted save by the two groups at Tel-Ambra. What, I questioned, anxiously, could have induced my uncle and Ned Britton to desert us? Such an act was wholly unlike them, and there must indeed have been a powerful reason behind it. At present it was all a profound mystery to us, and we had no time to make an attempt to unravel the web.

Thinking Joe's counsel good, in the circumstances, we started our camels and advanced leisurely toward the Arabs. They were startled at first, expecting a fight; then, as they saw our rifles slung over our shoulders, they became puzzled by our audacity and amazed at our boldness. But they stood in a motionless group

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awaiting our approach, and as we drew near to them I, being slightly in advance of the other two, said in a voice which I strove to render calm:

“Good day, gentlemen. Can you tell us the way to the village of Laketa? I’m afraid we’ve missed the trail.”

The Arabs looked at us stupidly a moment, and then Abdul Hashim spurred his donkey—a strong, thin limbed beast—toward me and touched his turban. His gesture indicated respect, but his steady eyes were as unfathomable as a pool at midnight.

“The blessing of Allah be thine, Effendi,” said he. “What is your errand at Laketa?”

“To rejoin the rest of our party,” I answered confidently.

“Ah, yes; your party from the ship, with the red-bearded jackal Van Dorn at their head,” he said, with a flash of resentment as he mentioned the Professor.

“You are wrong in one thing,” said I, calmly. “Naboth Perkins, my uncle, heads the party.”

“Why try to deceive us, Effendi?” asked Abdul Hashim, in a sterner tone. “You take

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me for a fool, it seems; and a fool I am not. You would not be here—you could not be here—unless led by the red-beard, who is a dog and a traitor to his masters.”

“I don’t answer for Van Dorn,” I replied, with a shrug. “It seems you know the Professor, and don’t like him; but I’m sure that is none of our business. All we ask of you is the favor of a courteous direction to Laketa. If you will not give this, we must proceed without it, and find the place the best way we can.”

I had observed that as we conversed the band of Arabs had crept around our group, slowly encircling us in all directions, so that now they fairly hemmed us in. Also their long rifles were in their hands and their belts were stuck full of pistols and knives. The party had been formed for warfare, without a doubt.

Although noting all this I endeavored to appear unconcerned as I awaited the sheik’s reply.

The latter smiled rather grimly and said:

“We will indeed be your guides, young sirs; but not to Laketa. Forgive me if I ask for your

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companionship until you have told us all I wish to know."

"And what is that, Abdul Hashim?" I asked boldly.

"You know my name?"

"Of course. We knocked you down that evening we rescued Van Dorn from your clutches in Alexandria, and he told us your history. The Professor wanted us to kill you; but we refused. Perhaps you remember that?"

"I remember that I owe my life to my own skill, and not to your mercy." He expressed himself in excellent English, for an Arab. But the English have occupied Egypt for so long that nearly all the natives have learned to speak or at least understand our language.

"You have not told me what it is that you wish to know," I said, impatiently.

He looked me over with a thoughtful expression and proceeded to examine each of my comrades, in turn. Then he said, abruptly:

"You will come to my village."

At once the Arabs began to move forward, and we, being surrounded, were forced to accompany

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them. They were an evil appearing lot, dirty and hungry looking, and I did not doubt that any one of them would murder us with much satisfaction, merely for the pleasure of killing.

As for Abdul Hashim himself, I began to perceive he was a character, and one worth studying in other circumstances. Never have I seen more handsome features on any man, but they were as immobile as if carved from marble. Any expression you might read showed in his eyes, which he could not control so well as he did his face. Usually they were calm as those of the sphinx, but at times they flashed evilly—nay, even with a gleam of madness in them—and always they were cruel and terrible in their aspect. In civilized countries a man like this would be greatly dreaded; here he was an insignificant sheik, with a handful of followers too degraded to be of any importance.

We passed around Tel-Ambra to the left and headed for the small group of rude stone huts which the Professor had sighted the night before and had aroused in him such violent emotions. The place was not far distant from the three

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ancient palms, and as we rode along I glanced over the desert to try to discover the spot where the treasure was hid; but the endless, undulating sands refused to reveal their secret. Indeed, the brisk morning breeze appeared to have smoothed away every trace of our night's work.

Abdul Hashim said little until we reached his village, which had hastily been rebuilt after the police had demolished it. Even before then it must have been a miserable affair; now it was scarce worthy the name of village, or suitable for mortal habitation. Doubtless the only object of a settlement at this place was to waylay travelers who crossed the desert from the Red Sea, and I could conjecture without much chance of going wrong that robbery had been the only means of livelihood for its inhabitants.

Entering a narrow street we were told to dismount in front of the most important hovel the place contained. We obeyed because we could not well do otherwise. Abdul Hashim personally ushered us into the dwelling, and as we entered the Arabs slyly cut the straps of our rifles and took the weapons from us. We dared not resent

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this insult, but though we made no protest in words we were angry enough when we turned to face the sheik, who alone had entered with us.

The room consisted of four bare stone walls of uneven height, only a portion of the inclosed space being roofed or thatched with palm branches. Slabs and blocks of stone lay around in all directions, as if the work of restoring the walls was still incomplete. In one corner a black goat with a white spot over one eye lay asleep in the shade, and a rude bed of palm leaves stood underneath the thatch.

“Now,” began our captor, in a brusque tone, “let us come to an understanding, if you will. You *gidân* * must tell me all that I wish to know, or I will put you to sleep forever. But first I will tell you what I already know. It is this: The red-bearded jackal you call Van Dorn was formerly the slave of a wise explorer named Lovelace Pasha, who was my friend. Lovelace Pasha sought for buried treasure in the desert, and I gave him my assistance in return for his

*Boys—young men.

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promise to give me and my people a share of the treasure, if he found where it lay. This Lovelace was a real *effendi*—a gentleman—and always to Abdul Hashim a true friend.

“One night he found the treasure, and with him at the time were two of my tribe—one being my own brother—and the slave Van Dorn. Lovelace Pasha took a few jewels and started to return to my village, but the discovery had driven Van Horn mad. He shot my men and killed them, and would have shot Lovelace Pasha had he not caught and held the red-beard and wrenched the pistol from his grasp. So my friend bound Van Dorn with ropes and brought him to my village, with the sad news of the crime he had committed. Also Lovelace Pasha showed me the jewels which he had taken, and said there was much treasure to divide and that I should have my share according to the compact, as I had been faithful to him.

“My people, *gidân*, do not take vengeance upon those whom Allah has smitten with madness; so we did no harm to Van Dorn. Lovelace Pasha declared the fellow was without mind or reason,

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but offered to care for him until the morning, as he did not fear him. So he took him into his house and my village went to sleep.

“In the morning we found that another great crime had been committed. Van Dorn had broken his bonds, stabbed Lovelace Pasha to the heart, robbed him of the jewels, and escaped to Luxor. With him he carried the secret of where the treasure lay hid, and too late we gained the knowledge that the red-beard was not mad, as one without reason, but merely mad to gain all the treasure for himself and willing to kill and defy all who stood in the way of his gaining the vast store his master had discovered. For, mark the cunning of the miserable thief, Effendi: this Van Dorn told the police that I and my people had murdered the great Lovelace Pasha, and the governor, believing him, sent a strong force to my village and destroyed it, declaring me and all my tribe outlaws.

“Thus did the jackal add to his crimes and prove he was not afflicted of Allah, but by the devil of the Christians. And, tell me, would a Christian, even, love him after this?

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“I followed him secretly to Alexandria and with some friends to assist me was about to capture Van Dorn and make him lead us where the treasure is hid, when he cried out in fear and your party came to his rescue. Again he escaped me, for you took him aboard your ship and sailed away. I watched you, and feared that my revenge and the secret of the treasure were both lost to me. Then I remembered the jackal’s slyness, and knew that some time he would return to secure the wealth that was hid in the sands near to my village. So I came home to watch for him, yet I did not expect him to act so soon. In Luxor I saw you and recognized the fact that you belonged to the ship in which Van Dorn had sailed away. They told me you had ridden your camels in from the desert, therefore I knew you had followed the trail from the Red Sea. It was all plain enough, with a little thought. I got my men together and followed you, as you know.”

The sheik paused. He had spoken earnestly and well, and his story bewildered us because we had until now believed in the plausible tale

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the Professor had told us. If Abdul Hashim's relation was true the little Professor was indeed a diabolical scoundrel; and I had a secret conviction that a part of it, at least, was to be believed rather than Van Dorn's version. But was not Abdul Hashim also a scoundrel and thief? You had but to look at the fellow to doubt that there was an honest hair in his head. Privately I decided that neither was entitled to any share of Lovelace's find; but however the original discoverer had been done to death a bitter feud had undoubtedly sprung up between Van Dorn and the Arab—both eager to profit by Lovelace Pasha's murder.

“Tell me,” resumed the sheik, abruptly, “where is your ship—at Koser?”

I nodded.

“And you came over the caravan route through the mountains?”

I nodded again.

“Perhaps, then, yon know when the jackal will try to secure the treasure?” the sheik continued, eyeing me intently.

I decided there was little harm in being frank

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with the man. He knew there was a treasure and that Van Dorn was after it and would not rest till he got it. So it would avail us nothing to lie, and I hoped our final safety might result from being frank and truthful.

"Van Dorn has already secured the treasure," I answered.

For the first time the passionate heart of the man conquered his impassive frame. He gave a start of dismay and his face was for an instant contorted with fear and anger. But presently he controlled himself with a great effort and asked:

"When was this, Effendi?"

"Last night."

"Were you with him?"

"Yes."

"Where, then, is the robber now?"

"I do not know. We went to Luxor on business and our party was to wait for us at Tel-Ambra. When we arrived they were gone."

I had reminded him of something. He looked at Archie and said:

"You received some money at Luxor. This

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is a dangerous place, so I will myself take care of your money until you are in safety, or rejoin your friends. Give it to me."

Archie grinned.

"Why, you're as big a thief as Van Dorn," he answered, easily. "But I've fooled you, my good Arab. The money is now in Cook's bank at Luxor, and I don't believe they'll give it up if you go and ask them."

The Arab frowned; but perhaps he remembered there was more important game to be bagged, for he said no more about Archie's money, to the boy's great relief.

"Did the jackal secure much treasure?" he inquired, turning to me with a trace of eagerness in his voice.

"Quite a lot. Enough to load two camels," I replied.

"And did any remain after that?"

"Plenty, as far as I could judge."

"Where is the place?"

"I could not find it again if I tried; nor could my companions. Van Dorn did not tell us how

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to get to it. He led us there at night, and it is still his secret as far as we are concerned."

After this Abdul Hashim began to pace nervously up and down the room, the floor of which was hard earth. Suddenly he paused.

"How many people came with you from Koser?" he demanded.

I was glad he asked the question that way, for it gave me an opportunity to answer truthfully and still mislead him.

"Gege-Merak, who guided us, had an escort of six Bega warriors; in our party were nine—fifteen in all," said I.

"Gege-Merak!" he exclaimed, in an annoyed tone, and resumed his pacing. Evidently the news did not please him.

I acknowledge that I hardly knew how to conduct myself in so strange an emergency. The question was whether to try to make an ally of the sheik or to defy him. It naturally worried me to be separated from my uncle and his party of Americans, of whose fate I now stood in doubt. The treasure I believed to be seriously threatened by Gege-Merak, who had so inop-

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portunately discovered our secret, and the chief would have no hesitation in murdering us all if he found an opportunity. With Abdul Hashim on our side we might successfully defy Gege-Merak, yet to set the Arab on the trail meant sure death to the Professor and a loss of much of the treasure, since the sheik would be sure to put forward his claim for a division, under the alleged compact existing between himself and Lovelace.

Truly we Americans were in double peril, from the Bega chief on one side and the Arab sheik on the other; and how we might extricate ourselves from the difficulties that beset us was a difficult problem. If we three boys were again with Ned and Uncle Naboth we could assist them to fight it out, but our loss must have weakened them greatly, and alone we three were well nigh powerless.

"Fifteen," repeated Abdul Hashim, musingly; "fifteen. Are you Americans true men?" he then inquired, with an appearance of earnestness,

"True as steel," I said.

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“Will they deliver Van Dorn to my vengeance?”

The question amused me.

“No, sheik; they will be true to Van Dorn, who has been true to them. They do not know the story you have just told me, and have no grievance against the man.”

“But when they learn the truth will they deliver him up?” he persisted.

“I think not. My uncle would take an American’s word in preference to that of an Arab.”

“I must fight,” said Abdul Hashim, as if to himself. “But not openly. I must meet treachery with treachery. Very good.”

He stopped and looked at us with composure, as if he had settled all difficulties in his own mind and outlined a plan of action.

“I shall yet secure my treasure and my revenge,” he continued, and then bowed low to us and left the room. The bow was a mockery, and we felt less assurance in the sheik’s absence than when we faced him.

But here we were, prisoners of an unscrupu-

Abdul Hashim Explains

lous and lawless Arab, and realizing that any present attempt to escape would be useless, we sat down upon the palm branches to await the next act in the drama.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRISONERS.

The situation was not long in developing. A tall, dirty Arab came in with some coarse food, which we ate because it was now the middle of the afternoon and our long ride had made us hungry.

Scarcely had we finished the meal when more Arabs came to lead us from our quarters. We found six camels saddled and kneeling in the village street. Three were our own, and with them were three others that seemed equally good—doubtless the pick of Abdul Hashim's animals.

The sheik and two stalwart Arabs stood beside the beasts and, as we approached, Abdul Hashim tersely commanded us to mount. We obeyed, selecting our own camels; I ventured to ask if we could not have our rifles, which I saw the sheik and his two men holding. The result was that he not only refused my request, but

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ordered us carefully searched, and so our knives and revolvers were taken away. These the three coolly appropriated and we were compelled to mount.

Slowly we rode away from the village toward the spot where the three aged palms reared their fronded heads above the sands. Somewhere near their roots there must have been moisture, which welled up from below, but never reached the surface of the desert. It is the only way to account for the life of these trees amid the sandy waste, whereon nothing else was able to grow. Often you meet with such phenomena in tropical climes—vegetation existing seemingly without moisture—but there must be a rational explanation of these remarkable occurrences.

Abdul Hashim seemed moody, and a frown darkened his handsome bronzed features. When we arrived at the palms he turned to us and said:

“I have decided to give you a full hour in which to discover the location of the treasure. To deny that you know where it lies is useless, for if you fail to find it you will all three die

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here. I will not be burdened with prisoners, and I dare not set you free; so you may preserve your lives but in one way, by finding the treasure."

This foolish speech made me very indignant with the fellow and discovered the sheik in an altogether new character.

"You must think we are a bunch of idiots!" I exclaimed, angrily. "If you dare not set us at liberty now, you surely would not dare do so after we had found the treasure for you."

"You may as well kill us now, without farther trouble," added Archie, gloomily.

"But that would be awkward for Abdul Hashim," observed Joe, with a quiet smile. "Have we not warned the Cadi* at Luxor that we saw the sheik at the window of the bazar, and that we feared mischief at his hands? And did not the Cadi promise us that if harm came to us he would take vengeance on Abdul Hashim?"

I looked at Joe admiringly. It was all pure

*Judge of the court.

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invention, but I could see that the remark impressed the sheik and caused him to waver in his purpose.

“The death of Abdul Hashim won’t help us after we are murdered,” remarked Archie, with a grin of appreciation.

“But it will be a satisfaction, nevertheless, to our friends,” I added, attempting indifference.

Now, the desert Arab is perhaps the most lawless creature on earth, except the desert Bega; but also he has a most wholesome fear of the authorities. The Egyptian mounted police is considered the finest and ablest body of the kind in existence, and its officers are merciless in hunting down the offenders of the law. So the Arab covers his crimes as much as possible, not being wholly deterred from them by the police, but striving in stealthy ways to escape discovery. Joe’s argument was, therefore, the most forcible one we could have advanced to safeguard our lives, and we were glad to see that it made our captor thoughtful. It might not serve, after all, if the sheik saw any particular object in killing

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us off, but until he did the thought of punishment evidently deterred him from harming us.

He tried another argument.

“Come,” said he, assuming a soft, caressing tone, “there is much treasure left, you say, and we will divide it equally. Or we will make it in quarters—I am not greedy, and a quarter is enough for one poor Arab like me, who only wants money to rebuild his village. And afterward I will escort you and your prize safely to Koser, or to Cairo, as you may prefer. All will be well with us, and we shall part friends. Is it agreed, then?”

He was not at all clever, this big and handsome bandit. No wonder the Professor found it easy to fool him.

For answer I shook my head.

“What you ask is impossible,” I said, truly. “Van Dorn has guarded his secret well, for only he knows where to unearth the treasure.”

“Then,” declared the sheik, with an abrupt change in tone, “I must have Van Dorn. Come; let us ride on.”

“Do you expect to capture Van Dorn’s party

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with three men?" inquired Archie, maliciously.

"No; I will tell you my plan. I intend to make a compact with Gege-Merak, if I can overtake him," was the calm answer. "Together we will get the treasure that has been already taken and what still remains. We have only to wrest the secret from the red-bearded jackal, and kill him. Then we will divide the spoils and each go our own way. It is simple and easy enough to do, is it not?"

It seemed to me rather difficult, but I said nothing. Knowing more of the situation than Abdul Hashim did, I realized that the Bega chief was already our secret enemy and would doubtless be glad to form an alliance with the Arab, although the Bega professed to despise the Bedouins who shared the desert with them. I pinned my faith to Ned Britton, our stalwart sailors, and Bry, and to the cleverness of the Professor. Abdul Hashim would find some opposition in carrying out his "easy and simple" plans.

The camels were now sent forward at a swift pace and soon we reached the miserable oasis

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of Laketa. There we learned that all the men of the village—some half dozen—had joined Gege-Merak's party and gone into the mountains. The party of Americans had followed in pursuit an hour later, said an old woman who spoke English imperfectly.

"Why pursuit?" I asked in wonder, when the sheik, at this information, turned to me with a triumphant leer.

That, however, the ignorant creature could not explain, either in her native dialect or in English. We only knew that friends and foes had disappeared into the foothills several hours before, and it puzzled me greatly to understand why Uncle Naboth had left us three boys to our fate and started in pursuit of the Bega chief. The only plausible explanation was that the Professor wanted to kill Gege-Merak before he could betray the secret of the treasure and set the authorities at Koser upon us; but even then it was unlikely that my uncle would consent to abandon me and my companions for the sake of the treasure or to obey Van Dorn's whim. It was not

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like the faithful old fellow, who had stood by me in many a former emergency.

Abdul Hashim did not delay at the village, but pushed on hastily, late as it was. We three boys were ordered to ride ahead, and our captors followed with rifles ready to shoot if we dared swerve from the path. Neither could we outdistance them, for their camels were as swift as our own and more obedient to their control. So we were as much prisoners as if bound and manacled.

The twilight is brief in Egypt, so soon after the setting of the sun we were obliged to make a halt. We had now reached the old abandoned well of the Romans, and beside it we made our camp.

First of all the Arabs tethered the camels; then calmly proceeded to bind us in an original manner. Our legs were tied from ankles to knees, and a rope was placed around each of our necks, looping us together and connecting us in one string with the most powerful of the two Arabs who accompanied the sheik. We were given food and a swallow of tepid water

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each, and afterward our wrists were firmly tied behind us. Trussed up like so many mummies, we were commanded to lie down and sleep!

Strange to say, we did sleep—not comfortably, perhaps, but from extreme fatigue; for the hard riding of the day had thoroughly exhausted us.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WELL OF THE SCORPIONS.

Next morning I awoke at early dawn to see Abdul Hashim standing by the curb of the abandoned well and looking into its depths thoughtfully. His men joined him a moment later, and they conversed together in low tones in Arabic. Several times I heard the word "akareb" mentioned, which I knew to signify scorpions, and at times they would cast a pebble into the well and then peer after it curiously.

At first I could not imagine what the fellows were up to. I knew scorpions were thick in these foothills, and remembered that my friend Ketti had warned me of them as we passed through; but why should the Arabs be so interested in the fact that there were numbers of these vermin at the bottom of the abandoned well?

The sheik soon solved the mystery, to my great

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horror. He came to us and kicked us in turn, bidding us harshly to rise.

Something in the man's eyes warned me of grave danger. His mood had changed over night and instead of the thin mask of friendliness there was now a wicked look on his finely cut features that I was positive meant our imminent destruction—if he could accomplish it.

I slowly and with effort struggled to my feet, as did Archie and Joe. I braced myself for the final struggle.

"If I am to reach Gege-Merak I can carry you with me no longer," announced the sheik, in a surly tone. "Therefore you will have the misfortune to fall into the well here, and if your bones are ever found no one can blame me for your death."

"The well is full of scorpions, boys," I said to my companions. "The sheik means to murder us."

Archie shuddered, Joe remaining strangely silent.

"It isn't a pleasant fate, Abdul Hashim," I continued, turning to face the scowling Arab.

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“Why don’t you shoot us down, and make an end of it?”

“Ah, I fear your friend, the Cadi,” he responded, with a guttural laugh. “My plan is safe for me, and as sure for yourselves. There shall be no bullet holes in your flesh to trap me; there shall be no bonds around you to prove foul play if you are discovered in the well before the scorpions have picked your bones clean. Now, then, Hassan—get to work!” he added, turning with a gesture of command to his tall follower.

Hassan proceeded to free Joe from his bonds—he was first at hand—and the others at the same time began to untie our cords.

“I will give you a chance to fight the scorpions,” said the sheik, grimly; but that was the biggest mistake he ever made. He should not have risked loosening our bonds. He took us for mere boys, but forgot that even a boy, if he is an American and desperate, will fight to the last for life and liberty.

The tall one pushed Joe toward the edge of the well and was about to thrust him over the

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brink when the boy, who had seemed dazed and inert, suddenly stooped and grasped the Arab's legs. It was the old trick that had once before astonished us. There was a brief struggle and then the man rose into the air, his arms extended and swinging in space, and plunged head foremost into the pit. His cry of terror, as he fell, was bloodcurdling, and Abdul Hashim gave an answering yell and sprang toward Joe with a knife glittering in his upraised hand.

Swift as an arrow the boy darted under his arm and ran where a rifle leaned against the rock. I saw him swing around and fire point blank at the sheik, who was not three paces away—but I had business of my own to attend to. For the burly Arab who had partly unfastened my bonds now clutched me by the throat and threw me to the ground, where he knelt on my chest and drew his pistol from his belt. Just as he fired the weapon was thrust aside and Archie's big fist crashed into the fellow's face and knocked him flat beside me.

"All right, Sam; you can get up now," said the Yankee, cheerfully. "The war's over."



The fight at the scorpion pit.

The Well of the Scorpions

He cut my remaining bonds with a knife; half conscious of what had happened, I sat up and looked around.

Joe was seated on a rock bandaging his leg with a handkerchief.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Only a scratch,” he replied. “Abdul Hashim’s knife grazed me as he fell.”

The sheik was lying motionless upon his face. Archie turned him over and the dark eyes stared steadfastly at the sun, without blinking. I found myself trembling as with an ague.

“It’s dreadful, boys!” I gasped, appalled by what we had done.

“So it is,” answered Joe, nodding; “but it was our lives against theirs, Sam, and——”

He paused abruptly, glaring at something behind me. Archie screamed a warning and I sprang to my feet to find that the third Arab had recovered consciousness and was about to plunge a knife into my back.

I caught his wrist and struggled to hold the keen blade away from me, but the fellow was strong as an ox and mad with rage. Archie

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came to the rescue and dealt him a couple of stinging blows, so that he dropped the knife and caught us both in a fierce embrace, crushing the two of us against his breast while he dragged us nearer to the well.

I realized his intention and screamed and struggled without avail. Nearer and nearer to the scorpion pit we were dragged until all three of us, a writhing mass of flesh and muscle, were tottering on the brink.

Suddenly a pistol shot cracked—seemingly close to my ear—and the Arab's head dropped. He gave us one final, spasmodic hug, and partly relaxed his grasp. I felt that we were all three reeling into the awful depths below, when my hair was clutched and I was torn from that terrible embrace and hurled to the earth. It was Joe who had saved me, and from where I lay I saw him straining to save Archie also from falling into the well. The Arab was either dead or desperately wounded, but with his final instinct of enmity he clung to Archie on one side while Joe dragged at him from the other.

The Arab's body, however, was hanging over

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the pit, and its weight would soon draw my struggling, desperate friends after it unless prompt help was rendered them. I again leaped up and, half dazed as I was, clung frantically to Joe, and my added weight gave us the victory. For the Arab's grasp slackened and his body slowly collapsed and fell with a thud to the bottom of the pit, while we three, clinging together and panting from our efforts, staggered away to sink weakly upon the ground.

It had all happened in half the time it takes to tell it, and for a moment the sudden revulsion from impending death to absolute freedom was more than we could comprehend. A little time ago we were being dragged by our terrible captors to the scorpion pit, there to meet a frightful death, and now two of our assailants were themselves in the pit, while the third lay motionless before us!

"How did it happen?" I asked myself, greatly bewildered; and then I remembered how Joe's trick at wrestling had tumbled the first man into the well; how Joe had seized the rifle and shot Abdul Hashim; how Joe had vanquished the last

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'Arab by a pistol shot as Archie and I struggled with him for dear life.

Joe? Yes; Joe had done all this. The quiet, slender lad I had once befriended through pity had now saved us all three from an awful fate, and by his extraordinary pluck and quick wit had proved himself a hero indeed.

Joe sat before me in an inert heap, breathing fast after his amazing efforts. Silently I reached out and grasped both his hands in mine, pressing them with gratitude too deep for words. Archie awoke from his stupefied abstraction and shook our deliverer's hands warmly in his big paws. But he too forbore to speak. Words are poor things, and—Joe understood, I'm sure.

Finally we grew calm enough to resume conversation and to inquire what it was best we should do next. I was for taking the three best camels and pushing on toward Koser, hoping to find the pass through the mountains and regain the ship. My friends thought the plan as safe and practical as any. So I arose, rather unsteadily, for my nerves were still on edge, and searched the saddle-bags for food, having had

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no breakfast. I found plenty of dates, banyans and dried goat's flesh, and we each took a portion of these and began to eat.

Presently Archie crawled to the edge of the well and leaning over looked in. I saw his face blanch and a look of horror come to his eyes, but neither Joe nor I asked a single question as our comrade hastily drew back and came to our side. Nor have I questioned him since. Whatever the Yankee boy saw in that gloomy pit he has never cared to speak of.

We were about to mount our animals, having recovered our rifles and some of our other weapons, when the quick tread of approaching camels reached our ears. Unnerved by our recent experience, our first impulse was to grasp our rifles and leap behind a sheltering rock, from which refuge we might determine whether friends or foes were drawing near.

CHAPTER XV.

VAN DORN TURNS TRAITOR.

The tread of the camels sounded ahead of us from up the trail, and soon we were reassured by a loud voice speaking in hearty American fashion. Shortly after there moved into our line of vision Uncle Naboth and Ned Britton, riding side by side, while after them came Bryonia and the sailors from the *Seagull*.

With a shout of joy, we leaped from our concealment, and my uncle fairly tumbled off his tall camel in his eagerness to embrace me. It was indeed a joyful reunion, and for a while no questions were asked on either side, the satisfaction of knowing we were all safe and reunited being enough for us.

But soon the silent form of Abdul Hashim stretched upon the ground attracted attention, and Uncle Naboth leaned over it and asked in a hushed voice:

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"Who killed him, Sam?"

"Joe, uncle; and by killing him saved all our lives." As quickly and in as few words as possible, I related the tragic scene just enacted.

But the relation of Abdul Hashim's enmity reminded me to ask a question, in turn.

"Where is the Professor, uncle?"

"And where's the treasure?" demanded Archie, almost in the same breath.

Uncle Naboth frowned and looked glum, and Ned swore a deep oath in sailor fashion.

"The Perfessor, Sam, is a infernal scoundrel!" my uncle answered.

I glanced at the dead Arab. Was his story indeed true, I wondered, and had Van Dorn wronged Abdul Hashim even as the sheik had declared? If so, much might be forgiven the Arab.

"Let us admit the Professor is a scoundrel," I remarked, "for such a statement does not surprise me. But that does not account for his absence."

"Yes; it does," retorted Uncle Naboth; "an' it 'counts for our runnin' away and leavin' you

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boys in the lurch. Almost it accounts for your all bein' killed—which you would 'a' been, lads, if it hadn't been fer Joe." Here he glanced affectionately at our hero, who grew red and embarrassed.

"True enough, uncle," I said. "Tell us about it, please."

"It were this way, Sam," he began, seating himself upon a stone and mopping his brow with his red silk handkerchief, for it was hot up here among the rocks and Mr. Perkins was round and chubby. "You boys hadn't more'n started for Luxor yesterday mornin' before that blasted Gege-Merak come a-ridin' up with his band an' all the scoundrelly niggers in the village. They halted a little way off, for we showed fight an' they was summat afraid of us. But that little dried-up one-eyed chief was game to come on alone, an' as soon as he was in speakin' distance he begun jabberin' away in Arabia to the Professor. Van Dorn answered back, for he can talk Arabia well enough himself, an' so they jabbered together for a time. I asked 'em to speak so's we could understand, for ol' Gege

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can talk English if he wants to, as you know; but the Perfessor told me not to interfere.

“‘You leave me to deal with him,’ says he, ‘an’ I’ll negotiate this business all right. P’raps,’ says he, ‘the Bega will keep our secret, after all, an’ not want a share o’ the plunder, either. He ain’t lookin’ for trouble,’ says the Perfessor.

“‘So I said nothin’ more, an’ they talked an’ jabbered a long while. Then on a suddint Van Dorn turns an’ says: ‘The chief thinks some o’ you understan’ Arabia, the langwidge as we’re speakin’, an’ he suspicions we’re a-trappin’ him.’

“‘We’re all honest English,’ says I, ‘an’ I’m glad to say we don’t know a word of Arabia. What does he want, anyhow?’

“‘The Perfessor looked hard at Gege, but ol’ one-eye wouldn’t talk English. ‘Come,’ says the Perfessor, ‘state your terms.’ But still Gege was silent as a clam.

“‘I guess,’ says the Perfessor, ‘you all better draw aside an’ leave me to dicker with the chief. Draw back a little,’ says he, motionin’ to us.

“‘Well, you know, Sam, we’d come to rely a good deal on Van Dorn. He’d led us straight

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to the treasure, as he'd said he would, an' he'd sealed it all up accordin' to agreement until we could get it aboard ship an' divide it proper. An' we knew we'd have a hard time gettin' back to Koser if we had to fight Gege an' his niggers all the way. So we thought if Van Dorn could settle the trouble in his own fashion we'd give him every chance to do so. Leastwise, that's what I thought, for I told the boys to ride off a little way, out o' earshot. We did that, leavin' the Perfessor an' the chief together, and leavin'—that's where we blundered, my lad—leavin' the two camels with the treasure with 'em. But we hadn't a thought of treachery until ol' Gege raised his arm an' the whole troop o' niggers come rushin' forward. They surrounded the Perfessor an' the camels, fired a few shots at us, an' then turned an' rode as fast as they could for the village.

“Ned an' I didn't know what to do for a minute. The Perfessor was escapin' as lively as the rest, leadin' one treasure camel, while ol' Gege led the other; so we knew well enough

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he'd put up the job on us an' made a dicker with Gege to rob us of our share.

"'The boys won't be back till afternoon, so let's foller the thieves an' fight it out,' says Ned. That struck me as sensible, so after 'em we went, not meanin' at the time to desert you, but tryin' to save the treasure we had earned an' to balk the plans of that dum-sizzled Perfessor."

"You did quite right, uncle," said I. "I don't blame you a bit. Well?"

"Well, lad, they didn't stop at the village, as we expected, but kep' right on. Also we kep' right on. Whenever we got too close they'd turn an' shoot at us, but they never hit anything, an' we didn't dare shoot much ourselves for fear o' killin' the girl, who was ridin' her camel jest beside the chief an' the Perfessor."

"Iva?"

"Yes. She's a pretty girl, Sam, and ain't to blame in this matter, as I can see; so we hated to harm her. Another thing, we ain't so used to shootin' folks for a bit o' money as these Arabs is. So all day we chased ol' Gege through the hills, an' towards dark we were a long way

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ahead o' here, past the next stretch o' desert beyond, and well into the black mountains. Then, to our surprise, instead o' keepin' in the trail, the chief and his party turned aside into a narrer path an' rode plumb into a blind ravine, where they made camp.

"I couldn't understan' the whys an' wherefores of this, at first, but Ned an' I figgered out that the foxey ol' chief, or the Perfessor, or both, didn't care to get any nearer to Koser with that treasure while we were hot on their track. They mean to stop in that canyon until they can get rid o' us, some way or 'nuther; for to let us chase 'em into the settlement, or to get there first an' warn the police, would mean that they'd have to give up the boodle, sure thing, an' p'raps render an account for killin' poor Cunningham.

"We watched the mouth of that ravine all night, but couldn't get any nearer the thieves 'cause one man, well armed, can stand in that narrer place between the rocks an' keep off an army. This mornin' we decided we'd go back an' find you boys, for you've been on my mind

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a good deal an' I've worried about you. So I'm mighty glad to find you so soon, safe an' well."

This story was as perplexing as it was interesting. I tried to understand the policy of the Professor's strange desertion.

"Why, uncle, do you think Van Dorn preferred to deal with the Bega chief rather than remain faithful to us?"

"There's several things to explain it, Sam. Ol' Gege knew the secret, first an' foremost, an' the Perfessor reckoned we could never get to Koser alive an' with the treasure as long as the chief was agin us an' hankerin' to get his fists on them jewels an' things. Van Dorn had agreed to give us half of all the treasure, exceptin' the rolls of writin', an' if he stuck to his bargain with us ol' Gege might capture the outfit, bein' stronger than we are an' knowin' the country better. On the contrary, if Van Dorn deserted an' went over to the chief, he could make the same terms with him an' stand a better chance of gettin' out safe. Mebbe he's got a plan to return for the rest of the treasure,

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an' mebbe his idea is to take it to Luxor, so's to keep out of our way. Anyhow, the Perfessor's a low-down villain, Sam, an' he's tryin' to feather his own nest at our expense. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's plottin' right now how to kill us all, so's to make himself safe. You see, he an' Gege has that paper, signed by us, sayin' we don't hold anyone responsible if we're killed in this adventure. That was a great mistake, Sam; we hadn't ought to 'a' signed it, at all."

"But Van Dorn wouldn't dare go to the ship and face my father," said I.

"Of course not. His plan would be to find some other vessel to carry his plunder away from Egypt. He's cunning as a weasel, that Perfessor, an' vile as a skunk."

I thought it a good time to relate to our friends the story of Van Dorn's treachery to Lovelace Pasha, as told us by the Arab sheik; and they all agreed that Abdul Hashim's version was likely to be true, and that the "red-beard" had been a scoundrel from the beginning of his connection with the affair, plotting to get

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the treasure away from both the explorer and the sheik, in case it was discovered. We were sorry Abdul Hashim had been killed, but his cold-blooded attempt to murder us had led to his own undoing, and he was now out of the running for good and all. The Arab might have possessed some manly instincts, and perhaps was a better man than Van Dorn, if the two could be compared; but his hatred of the white infidels made him as dangerous as the other, and we felt that one desperate enemy, at least, had been removed from our path.

"I wish he could have lived long enough to meet the Professor once more," said I, with a sigh; "but fate has robbed the poor devil of even his revenge."

We buried him among the rocks, to keep the jackals from preying upon his body, and mounted our camels to ride toward the place where Gege-Merak was encamped.

There was little need of haste now. The chief did not wish to escape us, it seemed, any more than we wished him to escape. The treasure was a magnet that drew both parties toward

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it irresistibly, and in order to possess it we must isolate ourselves in these mountains until we had fought the matter out and one side or the other became the victor.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAD CAMEL.

Beyond the old Roman well, which had this morning witnessed so strange a tragedy, there lay, as you will remember, a stretch of sandy desert some five miles in extent, beyond which rose the black breccia cliffs of the Hammemat Mountains. It was in a rift of these cliffs that Gege-Merak had established himself.

We were proceeding leisurely across the sands and had come near enough to the edge of the mountain to note well its defiles, when our attention was arrested by a strange occurrence. A camel came racing at full speed from the hill path and dashed out upon the flat desert where we rode. For a short distance the beast made straight toward us, and we could see a rider clinging to its back—a huddled up figure dressed in a green and scarlet robe.

“It’s Iva!” cried Archie, astonished; and at

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the same moment the dress also enabled me to recognize the chief's granddaughter.

Even as my friend spoke, the camel swerved and commenced running in a circle, scattering the sand in clouds as it bounded along in great leaps. The girl huddled lower, clinging desperately to her seat as the seemingly infuriated beast continued on its wild career.

"Why, the camel's mad!" I exclaimed, remembering the tales of mad camels I had heard related, and seeing in the animal's erratic actions the solution of the mystery.

There was no doubt of it now. The huge beast ran here and there in an aimless manner, never slacking its terrific speed, but darting first this way and then that, and finally renewing the circular course that was the clearest proof of its crazed condition.

Our party had halted involuntarily to watch the strange scene, but I felt that the girl was in serious danger and urged my camel forward without any clear idea of how I could render her assistance. In a moment I found that Archie and Joe had both joined me; pricking our ani-

The Mad Camel

mals to a faster pace we rode straight for the place where the mad camel was performing his capricious pranks.

Suddenly the beast stopped—so abruptly that Iva flew over its head and landed in the sand twenty feet or more away. She seemed unhurt by the fall, for instantly she was on her feet and, picking up her skirt, ran toward us with the speed of a deer. At the same time the mad brute's eye caught the flash of her gaudy robe and, with a loud bellow, he darted after her flying figure.

For a second my heart was in my throat. Then I jabbed the pointed stick into the flank of my camel and shouted:

“Quick, boys—keep close together and run the beast down!”

It was a desperate act, but Iva's peril was imminent. Even the lion in his jungle is not more terrible to face than a mad camel, and in a few moments the girl might have been trampled into a shapeless mass by the feet of the frenzied animal.

Riding so close together that the flanks of the

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three camels touched, we dashed swiftly on. Iva saw us, and, almost as we were upon her, turned and darted to one side. Her camel had also marked us, but with elevated head and flashing eyes, its hoofs spreading in the air as it bounded along, it made no attempt to pause. Next moment we came together and struck with the force of a catapult, the impact being so great that I sailed skyward and alighted—fortunately on my feet—several yards away. Archie and Joe also took croppers, and as soon as we recovered ourselves we looked toward the camels. They were all in a bunch at first. The mad one was down, and also one of the others, while the remaining two were stamping on them with terrific blows from their powerful feet.

It was a camel fight then, sure enough, for it is the instinct of these creatures to destroy one of its kind if it becomes crazed and runs amuck; and Archie's camel, having tumbled down, would have suffered severely from the indiscriminate attack of its companions had it not found a chance to rise and join them against the real offender.

The Mad Camel

When, finally, the mad one lay crushed and motionless upon the sands, the others quieted down and stood meekly awaiting us to come and remount them.

Meantime Ned Britton, who followed close behind us, had leaped down and caught up the terrified girl, and when I looked to see what had become of her I found her seated upon Ned's steed with our big mate beside her, while he strove to quiet her fears and agitation by smoothing her hair with his rough hand.

Heretofore Iva had been sullen and silent, keeping by the side of the old chief, her grandfather, like a shadow and seeming to lack any interest in her surroundings. But now, as we gathered around her with sympathetic faces, she became animated and frank, thanking us very sweetly and with evident gratitude for coming to her rescue.

"But how did it happen, Iva?" I asked. "Why did you leave Gege-Merak?"

She drew back with a sober look; then, impulsively, she said:

"I will tell you all, for Ketti says you are

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honest and good, and I know my grandfather to be cruel and wicked."

The speech astonished us, but the girl continued, quickly:

"Ketti has quarreled with his chief, and he is in disgrace—Ketti, who will be chief after my grandfather dies!"

"Will he, Iva?" I asked. "Is Ketti to be the next chief?"

"Yes; it is his right," she answered, proudly; "and that is why Gege-Merak hates him. But Ketti is good, and when he is chief I am to marry him."

"Bravo, Iva!" cried Archie. "Ketti is the best fellow in your gang, to my notion."

"I think so, too," said I. "But go on with your story, Iva."

"The red-beard offered to give our chief half the treasure he has found if Gege-Merak will kill you all. My grandfather has promised to do so, but the men we brought from Laketa are cowards and do not dare to kill the Americans, and we have not enough men to be sure we will beat you in a fight. So the chief sent me back

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to our village to get all of the fighting men of our tribe and bring them to join him in yonder valley."

"A very pretty plan," remarked Uncle Naboth.

"That was why Ketti quarreled," said the girl. "He said you must not be killed, for if we injured you the whole tribe would suffer, and perhaps be destroyed. Ketti does not care for treasure; he says it makes our people thieves and jackals; and he wants to live honestly and in peace, as our forefathers did. There was another thing, too, Effendi. The chief also plots to kill Red-beard, now that he is in our power, and to keep to himself all the treasure. Ketti told my grandfather that was not right, for we had given Red-beard our word, and the word of a Bega chief should be an honest word, and never false."

"It won't hurt the Perfessor to kill him," observed Uncle Naboth reflectively. "The dum-sizzled scoundrel deserves several kinds of deaths, as a matter of justice."

Iva did not know how to take this speech,

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but, after looking at my uncle in grave protest, she continued:

“So Ketti was disgraced—he, the bravest of our tribe!—and the chief, my grandfather, commanded me to ride to the village for our warriors, because I could not fight if you attacked him, and I knew well the way. He made me take Sekkat, our swiftest camel, although Sekkat has been acting strangely for two days. There is Sekkat,” she continued, pointing to the crushed remains of the beast that had so nearly destroyed her. “No sooner had I ridden out of the valley where the camp is than I understood that Sekkat was mad. I tried to turn him, and he rushed down the path and out upon the desert. The rest of my story you know, Effendi, and I thank you again for saving my life. Ketti also will thank you,” she continued, with a proud look at us.

“But Ketti is disgraced,” I said, smiling.

Her eyes flashed at this and her brow grew dark and fierce.

“Not for long will Ketti bow to any man’s anger!” she cried. Looking about us with an

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air imperious as that of any queen, she added: "Come with me, brave Amêrikâni! I will show you how to save both Ketti and yourselves, even as you have saved me. More; you shall save Red-beard and his treasure, too."

That last promise was not necessary, but we accepted it with the rest, and that right joyously, as you may imagine.

"What is your plan, Iva?" I asked, as we once more put our camels in motion and rode toward the black cliffs of the mountain.

"Wait; you will see," she replied, setting her lips firmly together. So much were we impressed by this girl's courage and frankly avowed friendship that we followed her lead blindly, questioning her no more.

CHAPTER XVII.

IVA.

It soon became evident to us that Iva knew this country intimately. She abandoned the clearly outlined entrance to the pass through which we had come on our way from Koser, and led us around to the less promising cliffs at the left. An hour's ride brought us to a ravine we had not before noticed, and silently we entered this and rode among boulders and loose stones until the steep rocky sides closed in on us and we could proceed no farther. Then we dismounted and picketed our camels. Taking only our rifles and ammunition with us, we followed the Bega girl up a dizzy and difficult path that one would have judged, at first sight, it was impossible to scale. But Iva, mounting light as an antelope, seemed sure of her way, and where she went we could not well hesitate to follow.

Iva

The perilous climb brought us to the top of the cliff—a rocky ridge, narrow and uneven, with peaks here and there that shot their points still farther toward the sky. Presently the girl paused and looked over the edge, and dropped lightly into a pocket-like hollow of the inner cliff—a place that reminded me of an upper box in a theatre.

Here, quite protected from observation, we could look down upon the ravine in which Gege-Merak and his men were encamped. Just beyond the pass we could see the two tall warriors who were guarding its entrance, so we had approached the ravine from the rear.

The cunning old chief had chosen his retreat well. On all sides were smooth walls of black breccia, where not even a mountain goat could have found a foothold. Only at the entrance was there any cleft that allowed one to enter or leave the place. The camels stood grouped at one end, and the four panniers containing the treasure of the priests of Karnak had been piled upon a rocky table and were guarded by one of Gege-Merak's own men. The ravine was per-

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haps eighty feet wide by some three hundred feet long, and several of the low, spreading Bedouin tents had been pitched just underneath the hollow wherein we lay.

The chief and all his company, except the guards I have mentioned, must have been congregated under these tents when we arrived at our point of observation, and for more than an hour we lay there patiently attentive without seeing any evidence of life in the camp below. We supposed that Iva's adventure was unknown to them, shut in as they were, and doubtless the chief believed her even then to be speeding toward his village to bring back reinforcements of fighting men.

But Gege-Merak had no intention of remaining idle in the meantime, as we were soon to observe. For at last the Bega began to stream out of the chief's tent, and among them came Van Dorn, his arms bound close to his sides and a big warrior now leading, now pushing him along.

The Professor seemed weak and unnerved, for he stumbled among the loose stones that littered

Iva

the way and would have fallen more than once had not his guard steadied him. His head was bare and his clothing torn in many places. Doubtless the fellow had struggled desperately before he had finally been secured.

They led Van Dorn to the end of the ravine opposite us and placed him with his back against the rock. The Bega and the Bisharin from Laketa, all animated and talking eagerly in their native tongue, formed a group fifty yards away. Prominent amongst them we could see the dwarfed, withered form of the aged chief, and the stalwart, towering figure of Ketti.

Gege-Merak gave an order and a man stepped forward and leveled his rifle at the Professor. Before he could fire, Van Dorn shrieked in terror and dropped to the ground. They raised him again, cuffing and shaking him until once more he stood upright. Yet he trembled visibly. Again the Bega warrior raised his rifle, but, answering the victim's pitiful screams, Ketti now sprang before the man and wrenched away his weapon, protesting so loudly that his voice

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reached even to our high nest on the cliff against the deed the chief had ordered.

Gege-Merak fairly danced with rage at this defiance. He gave a command which at first his men seemed reluctant to execute, but finally two of them approached Ketti, seized him and drew him away, binding his arms to his sides. Iva was frantic at this act, and we had to warn her several times to be quiet or we should surely be discovered by those below.

It was while I was busy soothing Iva that I heard a shot and a cry of agony, and turned in time to see Van Dorn fall flat upon his face. Poor fellow, the treasure had cost him his life. However treacherous he had been in his dealings with Lovelace, with Abdul Hashim and with us, his final alliance with old Gege-Merak had brought him into contact with a nature as unscrupulous as his own, and the barbaric chief had evened up all scores by robbing the man of his ill-gotten wealth and his life at once.

But it seemed that Gege-Merak's vengeance was not yet complete, and we could see from the tense and strained attitudes of the warriors

Iva

that Van Dorn's death was but an incident in the drama. If, indeed, the chief had cause to hate Ketti, that young man's rash interference with his commands had given Gege-Merak the chance, perhaps long desired, to punish him. It may be he lived in fear of the handsome fellow who was destined to succeed him at his death, for Ketti's popularity with the tribe was indisputable. Anyway, his orders, now given in a firm, loud voice, seemed instantly to seal the fate of Iva's lover.

Bound and helpless as he was, the young man was led to the spot where Van Dorn had stood and set with his back against the wall of rock. But there was no craven spirit in the victim this time. Proudly the warrior stood facing his chief, his pose erect, his dark eyes calmly regarding his destroyer and a slight smile of scorn curling his lips.

Gege-Merak shouted his commands, but not a tribesman moved to obey. Softly Iva reached out her hand and grasped my repeating rifle, and I let her take it. She knelt before me, her brown face rigid, her eyes dark with horror, and

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rested the barrel on the ledge of rock before her. I saw Uncle Naboth and Ned glance at each other significantly; but they made no move to interfere.

Again and again the chief shouted his orders, waving his arms imperiously and stamping his foot in rage; but the Bega stood stolid and unyielding, and their Bisharin allies shrank back and huddled in a frightened group in the rear.

Gege-Merak himself snatched a rifle from a warrior's hand and swinging around leveled it full at Ketti. At the same instant Iva's rifle cracked beside me and I saw the aged chief totter, drop his weapon and sink slowly to the earth. A shout went up from the assembled group below, and with one impulse they turned their eyes toward us.

And now the girl sprang upon the dizzy ledge and stood where all might see her figure clearly outlined against the sky. High above her head she held the rifle that had slain her wicked grand-sire, and as the Bega recognized her they shouted again—joyfully this time—and waved their hands to her in full approval of her act.

Iva

I own I was horrified for a moment, remembering the ties of blood between Iva and Gege-Merak; but she was a wild, half-civilized child of the desert, and to her simple mind her lover's life must be preserved at any cost.

All was eager animation in the ravine. Ketti's bonds were quickly removed, and the big fellow waved his thanks to the sweetheart whose courage had saved him.

"Come," said Iva, calmly, as she stepped down to a safer position beside us. "There are only friends in Ketti's tribe now; let us go to him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

KETTI PROVES A FRIEND.

As hastily as might be we groped our way down the dangerous pathway to the ground below the cliffs. There we regained our camels and made for the desert, around the spur of the mountain, and so up the regular trail to the mouth of the ravine.

Ketti was eagerly awaiting us, and as she saw him Iva quickly rode forward and threw herself from her camel to crouch with bowed head before the new chief.

Coming to her side, Ketti raised her gently and, while we watched with curiosity from one side and the assembled Bega watched from the other, the young warrior gravely placed one hand beneath Iva's chin, palm upward, and the other hand upon her head, palm down.

This, we learned afterward, was the betrothal ceremony of the Bega. When a young man

Ketti Proves a Friend

chose his bride he went to her and took her chin and head between his palms, and thus made claim to her for all time. None other dared afterward make advances to the girl, under penalty of incurring her affianced youth's anger. Indeed, I was told this was frequently the only ceremony performed at all, whether of betrothal or marriage, by many of the tribes, although there was a form of native wedding that included various and lengthy rites and involved much feasting and dancing.

The girl, it seems to me, has not a fair chance in this custom, for she is not allowed to refuse a man who so salutes her. It is true a brother or father may challenge a presumptuous warrior and fight him to the death, but the girl herself is helpless.

I am sure Ketti and Iva had an elaborate wedding ceremony thereafter; but that is not a part of my story, from which I fear I have digressed.

Feeling quite safe with the friendly Ketti, we had no hesitation in following him and his band into the ravine, where we dismounted and went

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at once to examine the body of Van Dorn. He was quite dead, having been shot through the heart, and Ned Britton lifted him and bore him to one of the low tents, of which Ketti willingly gave us the use. Gege-Merak's body still lay upon its face where it had fallen, and to my surprise none of the natives touched it or even so much as glanced toward it, so far as I could see.

In the tent, Ned and one of the sailors searched Van Dorn's clothing and removed from it the leathern belt, his rings and watch and a small note-book. Last they found, sewn into the lining of his well-worn coat, a package, rather bulky, though flat, covered with goat-skin, tied and sewn securely and carefully sealed. These things I took possession of, and Uncle Naboth and I went to see Ketti to get permission to bury the body.

We found the young chief seated on a rock beside Iva, with whom he was conversing most earnestly. He smiled at us as we came up, and said:

Ketti Proves a Friend

"We have made changes, Effendi. I am now chief."

"So I understand, Ketti," I answered, "and I'm glad of it. We are friends with the Bega now, are we not?"

"We are friends," he announced, gravely. "Gege-Merak was bad, and had no love for you. He loved treasure better, and killed the Red-beard to get it all. But Ketti does not want his brothers' wealth. It is enough that you have paid the Bega to guide and protect you."

"Do you mean that you will return to us the treasure?" I asked, striving to conceal my astonishment.

"It is not Ketti's. It was not Gege-Merak's. It is yours," he said, simply. "My tribe shall not rob, nor shall they slay their friends. While I am chief, the Bega who call me master must be honest and good, and keep the laws the great Khedive has made. Is it not so, Iva?"

"It is the only way for our tribe to prosper and grow in strength," she answered, soberly. "Under our great and good Chief Ketti we will

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be rich and strong, and our father the Khedive will call us good children."

"You shall say, when you return to Koser," continued Ketti, regarding us earnestly, "that my tribe was true and honest, and touched not one jewel of your treasure. You will say that we guided you straight and protected you from enemies and thieves and earned your money well. Is it so, Effendi?"

"We will say that, Ketti," I replied.

"But there are also things which you will not say, Effendi," he continued, with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"And what are they, my friend?"

"You will not say my people killed the Red-beard; for you do not know what killed him. You will not say where he is gone, for that you do not know. Is not the land broad for men to wander in? And if any asks you about Gege-Merak you will be sorrowful and tell how he died in the desert, being old and feeble, and you will say that Ketti succeeded him as chief of the tribe. Then you will mount the great ship that awaits you and sail away."

Ketti Proves a Friend

I began to understand. Ketti intended to make a bargain with us. He feared the consequences of the murder of Van Dorn and did not want the fact that Iva had shot her grandfather known. If we would promise to be discreet in these matters he would restore to us the treasure, which he considered another element of danger to him, not realizing that we were slyly removing it in defiance of the Khedive's orders. Had he known that—but, fortunately, he did not know it.

“It shall be as you say, Chief Ketti,” I returned; “for we wish you and Iva only happiness, and to tell some things might cause you trouble. If your father the Khedive asks us of your service, we will say you are a good chief, and faithful.”

That pleased him greatly.

“The treasure is untouched,” said he. “Not a seal is broken. It awaits your orders, Effendi.”

Willingly he gave us permission to bury the Professor among the rocks, which we did during the afternoon. When we returned to the ravine from this labor we were surprised to notice that in our absence the natives had gathered

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several heaps of stones, which were piled in the form of a wide circle around Gege-Merak's body. But the body itself had not been disturbed, and the Bega were now lounging in various parts of the ravine and conversing together in their customary indifferent manner.

Ketti came to us with the information that we should start at dawn next morning for Koser, which he hoped to reach in two days' fast riding.

"But what will you do with Gege-Merak?" I inquired.

"His ceremony of entombment will be held this evening, Effendi. Your people will be welcome to watch the solemn rites," he added.

We had supper and awaited with curiosity to witness the proposed ceremony; but the natives were in no hurry, and showed no activity until the stars were bright in the sky.

At a word from Ketti, every Bega and Bisharin sprang up and stood in a circle around the dead chief's body. Beginning a low chant they now commenced to move slowly around Gege-Merak, keeping step to the chant and bending in lithe, rhythmic attitudes characteristic of the

Ketti Proves a Friend

Eastern dances. And ever the chorus grew louder and faster until it became a roar and at last a wild shout. Also the excitement of the warriors increased until presently they were dancing with frenzied leaps.

Suddenly, as they circled round just beside the piles of rock, each man seized a stone from the nearest heap and hurled it at the dead body. From the next pile he grabbed another stone, until the missiles were raining upon Gege-Merak's prostrate form from every direction. As the dance reached its climax of animation and the shower of rock continued, the old chief's body began to disappear from sight, until he was covered up entirely and entombed in a mound of stone several feet in height.

It was a shocking sight, and seemed to us extremely brutal; but Iva, who stood by our side, calmly declared it was the custom of her people, and that a chief was highly honored who was thus buried by his people where he fell or expired. The chant, she told us, was a relation of his virtues and his mighty deeds on earth.

If a chief dies or is killed on the desert, his

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people cast sand upon him, in like manner, and afterward weight the mound with rocks; and, as his body is never moved from the spot where he expired, they take down his tent or house after the funeral and set up the habitation in another place, leaving his burial mound stationary.

The wild chant rang in my ears long after the grim ceremony was completed and the camp had become quiet for the night. We Americans slept uneasily through the next few hours and at dawn awoke to eat a hasty breakfast and mount our camels.

The panniers were replaced on the two extra animals by Ned and Bryonia, who now took charge of the treasure. We were pleased to observe the truth of Ketti's statement that the wax upon the buckles of the panniers had not been tampered with and was still intact.

The Bisharin left us here and went away to their village, and without incident we traversed the trail back to Koser, which we reached, weary by exultant, at the close of the second day.

My father and a number of sailors, apprised

Ketti Proves a Friend

by a swift messenger of our coming, were at the wooden dock to meet us, and we unstrapped the four treasure-laden panniers from the saddles of the camels and sent them on board by a boat commanded by Ned in person.

Captain Steel produced the hundred and eighty pounds due to Ketti for his services, according to the contract we had made with Gege-Merak, and I asked that an extra gold piece be given to each of the Bega warriors, which was willingly agreed to since we had been successful in our quest. It made the simple fellows very happy indeed.

After consulting with Uncle Naboth and gaining his consent, I opened the Professor's leathern belt and took from it the prettiest jewel it contained, a diadem of yellow gold set with clusters of pearls and sapphires. This I presented to Iva as a wedding present from her American friends, and the beautiful girl was proud indeed of the gift, as well she might be. Once, perhaps, it had adorned the brow of some famous Egyptian queen, and though it might now appear incongruous upon the person of a poor

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Bega woman, we were so grateful to Iva for the service she had rendered us that we thought it none too good to express our appreciation.

We parted from Ketti and his people in the mostly friendly manner, and he returned that night to his village in the desert.

It was not so easy to get rid of the bearded Arab sheik of Koser, who was curious to know what we had brought from Luxor and what adventures we had met on the way. It was strange, he added, that the Bega had brought us safe back again; it was not like that clever, evil old Gege-Merak. Fortunately no one had told him of the old chief's death, or he would have been still more curious.

But we refused to satisfy the fellow's desire to gossip and kept our mouths fast shut when he was around. Also we refused his polite offers of entertainment and to his disgust hoisted sail early the next morning and head up the gulf toward Port Ibrahim.

Now that we had the treasure safe aboard, every moment we delayed was fraught with danger, and the doubtful friendship of this sheik of Koser was no longer of any value to us.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVELACE PASHA.

The treasure was taken from the panniers and, still snugly packed in the canvas sacks which Van Dorn had so carefully sealed, carried to my stateroom and dumped unceremoniously into a huge chest.

After a brief conference we had decided to leave it untouched until after we had passed through the Suez Canal and, free from the shores of Egypt, were safe on the broad waters of the Mediterranean. Then we would open the sacks, sort and examine the treasure, and divide it in ways still to be agreed upon. Our contract with Van Dorn, you will remember, gave us his share in case of his death.

And now, while we sailed up the long branch of the Red Sea which is called the Arabian Gulf, I examined with some curiosity the things Ned had taken from the Professor's dead body.

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His note book had been a sort of diary, but from it several leaves had been torn, as if he had recorded events which he afterward feared might compromise him, and had thus destroyed their written evidence. From what remained I gathered that the man was no "professor" at all, but a wandering adventurer attracted to Egypt by the recent valuable discoveries there. Falling in with Lovelace, he had hired his services to that savant to assist his search, and from scattered notations in the book I formed the shrewd conclusion that the fellow had never possessed the shadow of a claim to Lovelace's discovery. Abdul Hashim had read his character fairly well, and it seemed that Van Dorn had played a desperate and murderous game to win the treasure for himself and rob, incidentally, the real discoverer and any others who might lay claim to a portion of the buried wealth.

Turning from the note book, I cut the stitches of the goatskin cover of the parcel which Van Dorn had so cleverly concealed in the lining of his coat, and proceeded to break the seals, which I observed bore the monogram "J. L.," sur-

Lovelace Pasha

mounted by a winged sphinx. This was not Van Dorn's seal, but that of Lovelace Pasha, and I judged that after the owner had sewn and sealed the packet it had in some way come into the possession of Van Dorn, who had never yet ventured to open it.

At this time all of those most interested were gathered with me in the Captain's room: Uncle Naboth, Ned, Archie and Joe, as well as my father. When I removed the covering a small locket dropped out, and this I opened to glance at a sweet, womanly face that met my gaze.

Over my shoulder came a sob and a cry and Joe seized the locket from my hands.

"My mother!" he said, softly, as he devoured the miniature with eager, loving eyes.

We looked at the boy in astonishment.

"Your mother, Joe?" I questioned, stupidly.

He swiftly drew from beneath his clothing the slender chain which I had often observed he wore around his neck, and showed us a similar locket attached to it. Opening this with trembling fingers, the boy laid the lockets side by

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side, and we saw that the portraits were nearly identical.

"Father and I each had one," he said, in an awed whisper; "mother has often told me that."

"Did you ever know what became of your father, Joe?" I inquired.

"No; he went away when I was a baby, and we never heard of him again. For that reason mother was sure he was dead, for she said he loved her and would not otherwise have deserted her."

"Then," said I, softly, "you are about to discover your father, Joe; for the man who wrote this and owned the locket could be none other."

"Wrote what?" asked Uncle Naboth.

I had been hastily examining a flat book which accompanied the locket. It had leaves of coarse paper closely covered with writing in a fine, scholarly hand.

"Here is a manuscript which I believe I will read aloud," said I. "It may be interesting to us, in view of our recent adventure, and I am sure it will tell Joe something about his father."

As I spoke I turned over the pages to the end,

Lovelace Pasha

and Uncle Naboth, peering over my shoulder, exclaimed:

“Why, it’s signed by John Lovelace. That must be the same Lovelace Pasha who discovered the treasure.”

“He was not a Pasha,” I returned, “although he was called so. He was not even entitled to the name of Lovelace, for here he tells us who he really was—John Herring.”

Joe was staring intently, first at the lockets and then at me. His face was pale and his dark eyes glowed with nervous excitement.

“Sit down, uncle,” I said, “and let me read what is here written.”

All now assumed attentive attitudes while I proceeded to read as follows:

“This shall be, to any who reads it after my death, my last testament and my final behest. For some weeks I, John Herring, have feared treachery and sudden death, although I cannot discover from what direction the danger threatens. So I am determined to explain herein my position in Egypt, for, being reserved by nature, I know that at present I am a mystery to all with

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whom I have come into contact in this ancient and romantic land.

“I am an American, a native of Galveston, and a graduate of Harvard. Soon after I left college my father, who was reputed a wealthy man, died without estate, and I was thrown upon my own resources. Being little fitted for a business career I gained scant success, except that I took a wife to share my poverty—a gentle natured woman who gave me devotion and love but was unable to further my fortunes because her nature was weaker than my own.

“I was led into an illegitimate venture by a friend named José Marrow, an enterprising Mexican who owned a sloop and proposed that I join him in smuggling laces and cigars from Mexico into the United States. We succeeded for a time and I made considerable money. But at length I was discovered, as was inevitable, and only saved myself from imprisonment by sudden escape. Marrow managed to get me aboard a vessel bound for Gibraltar and I was obliged to leave my wife and baby boy without the comfort of a farewell, although I sent them all the money

Lovelace Pasha

I had and my friend Marrow promised to see they were provided for in case I was unable to send them more before it was gone. But I thank God I have been able to supply their wants, and each year I have sent a substantial remittance to them through Marrow, who by good fortune was never suspected of being implicated in the smuggling.' ”

“But we never got a dollar!” broke in Joe, indignantly. “Old Marrow must have kept every penny of the money.”

Without replying to this I continued to read:

“Twelve years ago I made my way to Egypt, and having been a student of Egyptology in my college days, I became much interested in the excavations being made to secure ancient relics. Soon I was myself successfully engaged in this search, and I have had the good fortune to discover several important tombs of the Twenty-fourth Dynasty.

“This success finally led to my undertaking a queer and seemingly impossible search—for the treasure hidden by the High Priest Amana of Karnak at the time of Cambyses' invasion. I

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conceived the idea that the treasure had been buried in the sands of the desert, instead of in the Sacred Lake, according to popular tradition. For several years I searched the desert around Karnak without result, and just as I was beginning to despair I came upon an inscription graven upon an angle of the ruined walls of the temple of Seti, which described—although not accurately—the place where the treasure had been hidden.

“I must explain that this treasure of Karnak is mainly a library of papyri recounting the history of the Egyptians during the period between the Sixth and Twelfth Dynasties. As no other records of this period exist our historians have been in the dark concerning this broad epoch, although we know from inscriptions found at Abydos and Edfu that the papyrus rolls hidden by the priest of Karnak gave a full account of that portion of Egyptian history which we have hitherto been unable to account for. So the discovery of this library means fame and riches to one fortunate enough to find it, and it is supposed that a store of gold and precious jewels

Lovelace Pasha

was buried by the priests at the same time, which should further enrich the discoverer.

“ ‘I have an explorer’s and excavator’s license granted me by the Khedive under the name of John Lovelace, which name I assumed on coming to Egypt, although, as I have said, my real name is John Herring. It was necessary to cover my identity in this way to avoid extradition in case the American customs officers discovered my retreat. But my crime was not an important one and I believe it has long since been forgotten.

“ ‘The finding of the Karnak treasure is now merely a question of time, since I know by the secret inscription where to search for it. But I found that I needed help, and engaged a man named Van Dorn, who has at one time been a foreman at the workings of the Italian excavators in the Tombs of the Kings at Thebes, to assist me. He has now been with me nearly three years, receiving 400 piasters a month, which is equal to about 20 American dollars. He is a faithful worker, but has a covetous and dishonest mind, so that I suspect he will not be trustworthy in case I discover the treasure. Unfortunately

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I have been obliged to intrust him with knowledge nearly equal to my own, and the misgivings I have expressed at the beginning of this testament are mostly due to this man's connection with my search. I fear the day when the treasure is at last unearthed.

“ ‘Besides Peter Van Dorn, who is to receive one thousand dollars, in addition to his wage, if the treasure is found, I have employed members of an Arab desert tribe led by one Abdul Hashim, which inhabits a village near Tel-Ambra. For his services the sheik Abdul Hashim is also to receive one thousand dollars when I find the treasure, but nothing if I am unsuccessful. My contract with the sheik, to be exact, is for 200 pounds Egyptian. My permit from the Khedive obliges me to sell the papyri to the Cairo Museum for a sum not less than the total of my expenses during the search for them, and should there be other treasure of gold or jewels, one-half belongs to the Khedive and the other half to me. This I write plainly to explain all just claims against the treasure, should I succeed in finding it.’ ”

Lovelace Pasha

Here the writing halted, but under date of January 11, 190—, it continued as follows:

“‘At last the search for the treasure of Karnak has been successful. Last night Van Dorn and I located a granite slab in which are set three bronze rings—evidence indisputable that here lies the wealth hidden centuries ago to escape the rapacity of Cambyses. To-night we are to take two Arabs of Abdul Hashim’s tribe to assist us in lifting the slab, which Van Dorn and I were unable to do alone. I am eager to see what lies beneath it. Van Dorn has been acting more suspiciously than ever this morning, and is in a state of wild excitement. Perhaps that is natural, and I do not see how he can rob me of either the honor of the discovery or of the treasure itself; but I shall watch him closely.

“‘Some months ago I wrote to José Marrow, my friend in Galveston, who now commands a trading ship, stating that I expected shortly to find a large treasure, and that if I succeeded I would send all of my share to him to be applied to the education and advancement in life of my son, who is now nearly fifteen years of age.

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Marrow has written me that my wife is ill and needs more money than I have sent; but I am now sure of being able to provide generously for my family.

“ ‘If anything happens to me to prevent my carrying out this plan, I implore whoever may come into possession of this writing as a matter of simple humanity and justice to fulfill my wishes and send my share of the proceeds of the treasure to Capt. José Marrow, at Galveston, Texas, U. S. A., to be applied by him for the sole welfare of my wife and son. And I ask his Gracious Highness, the Khedive, if by chance this should come to his notice, to order my estate disposed of as I have said above.

“ ‘I shall seal and otherwise protect this manuscript from prying eyes, and it may be that my fears are fanciful and unfounded, and that I shall myself have the delight of enriching my dear ones in person. I wish nothing for myself. The honor to my name as the discoverer of the historic papyri of Karnak will be a sufficient reward.

“ ‘JOHN LOVELACE.’ ”

Lovelace Pasha

“Humph!” said Uncle Naboth; “is that all?”

“That is all, sir,” I answered, closing the book. “But it explains a lot that we did not know, and transfers the ownership of the treasure from us to Joe.”

They all sat thoughtfully considering this for a time. Then Joe said:

“I may have a sort of claim to my father’s share, although that is not quite clear. But the half that was to go to the Khedive you people are now fully entitled to.”

“That’s a sure thing,” observed Archie, whose keen Yankee wit had grasped the situation quicker than mine did. “But let’s consider another thing, my friends. We agreed long ago that the hidden treasure of those old priests belonged by right to whoever was lucky enough to grab it. It isn’t the Khedive’s, and never has been. Lovelace—or Joe’s father—may have made a deal with the Khedive to insure his own safety, but Lovelace did nothing more than to locate the place where the treasure lay. He never got his fists on it. Neither did Abdul Hashim, nor Van Dorn, nor old Gege-Merak,

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although any one of 'em would have seized it if he could and held on to it like grim death to a grasshopper. The fact is, we got possession of the treasure ourselves, at considerable risk, and it belongs to us except for the liens Joe's father had on it. In my opinion we needn't consider the Khedive any more than the Shah of Persia or any other hungry shark."

"You're right," said Uncle Naboth. "We'll keep half an' give Joe half. That's fair, I guess."

"But first," said I, "let's get safely away from Egypt," and I left them and went on deck to find we had just sighted Suez.

CHAPTER XX.

THE KHEDIVE TAKES THE LAST TRICK—BUT ONE.

We reached Port Said without interruption at five o'clock on a gloomy afternoon, and my father managed to get his papers signed so he could clear the port an hour later.

We had used our steam to make the journey through the Canal, and so we determined to steam for the next twelve hours, at least, in order to show our heel to Egypt as soon as possible.

Heading slowly down the harbor we were surprised at being hailed by a small government launch flying the Egyptian flag, which pressed close to our side, while an officer in uniform stood up and gesticulated wildly toward us.

"What's wanted?" asked Captain Steele, leaning over the rail.

"Stop! Wait!" cried the fat officer, brokenly. "I must come on board."

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"Hike along, then," called my father, but made no signal to stop the engines.

We were moving very slowly, for we had to steer clear of the numerous craft anchored in the harbor, so the launch grappled our side and Ned let down a ladder which the official clutched and swarmed overboard with surprising agility.

"Stop! Go back!" he shouted, as soon as he reached the deck. "This ship is the ship *Seagull*; it is arrest—you are all arrest!"

"What for?" demanded the Captain.

"I have instruction from his Excellency the Minister of Finance to stop you. You must not leave Egypt, he say. You have treasure on board—treasure contraband to the Egyptian Government."

We stared at one another aghast. How in the world had this information come to the ears of the government? and what should we do—what *could* we do—in this emergency? Arrest and confiscation first, and a legal battle to follow! We shuddered even to contemplate such a difficulty.

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“Crowd on full steam, Tomlinson,” said Captain Steele to the Chief Engineer, who stood beside him. The man saluted with a smile and retired to obey.

“As for you,” continued my father, turning to the officer, “I advise you to get back to your boat in double quick time. We’ve got our papers, in reg’lar fashion, and we’re free American citizens. You can’t arrest us a single minute—you or your whole blamed Egyptian outfit.”

“But I command! You are under my arrest! You are criminal!” screamed the fat man, stubbornly. “In the name of——”

“In the name of Sam Hill, throw the cuss overboard!” roared the Captain, losing all patience.

To my horror Ned promptly obeyed and the pompous official tumbled over the rail head first and disappeared with a splash in the water below.

Those in the launch shouted excitedly and let go our side to rescue their superior. He bobbed up a minute later and they grabbed him with a boat-hook and drew him, dripping and gasping, aboard their boat.

But it was too late for them to board us again.

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Our propeller was by this time whirling rapidly and churning the water into a creamy streak in our wake. Slowly we drew away from the government boat, which puffed after us at its best gait, the inmates shaking their fists at us threateningly but in vain. Presently we lost sight of them altogether in the gloom, for twilight was fast falling.

Out into the blue waters of the great Mediterranean we sped and I for one greeted the expanse gratefully. We had narrowly escaped a serious disaster, for if the Khedive had once gripped our hard-won treasure we should never have set eyes on it again. Also we might have found ourselves and our ship hopelessly compromised in the meshes of Egyptian law.

We headed for the southwest point of the island of Sicily, for we dared not undertake to pass the straits of Messina. This way would also bring us sooner to Gibraltar, and we determined to head our course between Tunis and Sicily, out of the beaten path of ships, and to keep away from any port until we were afloat on the broad Atlantic.

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All night our engines throbbed powerfully and we sped swiftly on our course. By morning we began to feel we were out of danger, and at breakfast I decided that during the forenoon we would open the canvas sacks and take a good look at our treasure. But while we still sat at table the mate came down with a grave face to report that a man-o'-war had just been sighted and was bearing down on us.

We rushed eagerly on deck to inspect the boat through our glasses and made her out easily enough. She was a big armored cruiser, heavily armed, and seemed intent on heading us off.

“But we may be more scared than hurt,” remarked my father, calmly. “All nations have men-o'-war in these waters, and it ain't a bit strange we should run across one. Like as not she won't mind us at all.”

“But the course she's headed won't take her to any port in creation,” observed Ned, shaking his head dolefully. “She's after the *Seagull*, sure enough.”

It really looked that way, and we stood with bated breath and watched the huge hulk come on.

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It would be folly to try to run away; still we did not pause an instant.

In an hour she was less than a mile to leeward, and soon we saw a puff of smoke followed by a shot that flew singing across our bow. At the same time she hoisted her flag peak and Ned took a look at it through his glass.

"Egypt," he said, laconically, and my heart sank like a chunk of lead.

"The jig's up, fellows," I said, mournfully. "Joe, my lad, you've been rich for nearly a whole day. To-night you'll be a pauper again."

Joe grinned, but not with a pleasant expression, and turned away to vanish below deck. I was really sorry for the poor chap—and sorry for ourselves, too.

"Never mind," said Archie, consolingly; "we've had a lot of fun, anyhow. The Khedive can't rob us of that."

As Captain Steele hesitated to obey the first shot a second one quickly followed, and this came so near to piercing the hull of his beloved *Seagull* that my father uttered a gruff explanation and ordered Ned to lay to. The engines were stopped

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and slowly we lost way and floated quietly upon the sea, which was smooth as a mill-pond. The sky was overcast with a mantle of solid gray and not a breath of wind was stirring.

Had we not been so preoccupied with other matters I am sure we would ere this have been speculating on the queer atmospheric conditions that prevailed, and wondering what they might portend.

The cruiser slowed up near by and lowered a gig, which was speedily manned. Then, being rowed with admirable precision, it shot across the space which separated us and came alongside. We threw out a boarding ladder and two officers climbed it and a minute later stood upon our deck, where they inquired courteously for the Captain. They were fine-looking fellows, middle-aged and with an air of breeding. Their duty, whatever it might be, would doubtless be performed in a gentlemanly manner.

My father advanced to announce that he commanded the *Seagull* and would be glad to know by what authority he was arrested on the high seas.

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Said the elder of the two: "You resisted an officer of the Egyptian government in the harbor of Port Said, and escaped. We consider you still our prisoner, although you have fled into neutral waters."

"My papers are regular, sir, and you have no right to arrest me or to fire upon my ship," returned my father, boldly. "If you persist in your illegal and high-handed course, sir, you will make this an international affair," he added.

"There is little danger of that, Captain Steele," answered the officer, with a smile. "It may be we have exceeded our authority in arresting you here; but kindly permit me to state our case. In Egypt you dug up a treasure—an important treasure—which you are now carrying away in defiance of our laws. We should not have permitted your ship to clear our port, I admit, but unfortunately we did not receive the news of your misdemeanor in time to prevent by force your escape. However, we do not intend to be robbed. Our instructions from the Minister of War at Cairo are positive. We are told to recover the treasure or send your ship to the

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bottom of the sea—or to do both, at our discretion. The matter of legality we will not discuss. We have the power to take this treasure if you refuse to give it up cheerfully, and I assure you we will do so. That is all. I await your decision, Captain.”

Well, there was nothing for us to do but give up the treasure. If we tried to withhold it we would lose both the treasure and the *Seagull*. We held a short conference, however, Uncle Naboth, Ned and Archie being present besides my father and myself. Joe was also an interested partner, but was not on deck and we had no time to hunt him up.

We decided there was but one way out of our difficulty. The American government would scarcely support us in a claim for damages, under such peculiar circumstances; and this the clever Turks knew as well as we did.

The thing that most amazed us was the accuracy of their information, and we wondered who could have revealed to the government the fact that we had secured the treasure. Abdul Hashim was dead, but some of his tribe might have

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learned our secret and reported it to the authorities in order to obtain vengeance for their shiek's death. Or the villagers of Laketa, who had seen the treasure in Gege-Merak's possession, might have disclosed the information. We did not suspect Ketti for a moment.

Anyway, the mischief was out and it only remained for us to give up the treasure and make our way homeward somewhat the poorer for our unsuccessful enterprise.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, if I ask you to make haste," said one of the Turkish officers, stepping to our side. "The simoon is threatening both our ships, so we are anxious to finish our errand and be gone."

Indeed, the day had grown suddenly darker and the sea sighed audibly, although it was perfectly still. My father looked anxiously at his bare rigging and hurried away to give an order for additional security. Ned followed him, and Uncle Naboth turned to me and said, with almost a groan:

"Give 'em the treasure, Sam, an' let's be done with the blamed Egyptians forever."

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I bowed to the officer.

“If you will come below you shall have it,” I said; “but you’d better get a couple of your men to help carry it.”

He went to the side and shouted an order, and two of the men from the gig sprang on deck. I took them to my stateroom, threw open the lid of the great chest and said:

“There, gentlemen, is the entire treasure, including the rolls of papyrus. If you doubt that it is all here, you are welcome to search the ship.”

They lugged it all away and I sighed to think we had never obtained so much as one good view of the plunder we had been at so much pains to gain. The canvas sacks still bore the original seals which Van Dorn had placed upon them in the desert beside the pit.

When the last sack was in the boat they did delay to search the ship, to my extreme disgust. But their search was hasty and perfunctory, and after visiting the other cabins and peering into the forecabin and galley—as if we would keep treasure hidden in such places!—they finally got

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into the gig to return to their ship. I demanded a receipt, but they refused to give one, mumbling that the threatening simoon was likely to strike us any minute.

And then they cast off and rowed away toward their own vessel, making such speed as they could; but unfortunately they had delayed too long. The simoon struck us like a blow and the *Seagull* keeled over at a dangerous angle and trembled through every beam.

As I clung desperately to the rail my eyes followed the Turkish gig, and I saw its prow rise from the water as the whirling cloud of mingled wind and sand caught it, and dump its occupants—officers, men and all—into the now seething flood. Yes, the treasure went, too—the priceless historic papyri, the golden ornaments and splendid jewels of the great priests of Karnak—all, all were swallowed up by the waters and vanished forever from the sight of men!

The wrecked gig was only a mass of splinters. They shot life-lines from the deck of the cruiser and these were clutched by those of the boat's

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crew who rose again to the surface. But I cannot say how many of those ill-fated Turks were finally rescued. For we had our own ship's safety to look after, and when the dreadful simoon had subsided, which it did as suddenly as it had appeared, but after several hours of terror, the Khedive's man-o'-war was but a dim speck upon the horizon, and soon we had lost sight of her altogether.

When, the strain being at last over, we met together in the main cabin for supper, it was a dismal enough lot of faces that surrounded the table. Except Joe. Joe did not seem dismal at all. He smiled upon us most cheerfully, until we all hated the boy for his good nature under such trying circumstances.

No one, however, cared to mention our great loss—which was in everyone's mind—except Archie, who growled out:

“Why in thunder couldn't the simoon have arrived an hour or so earlier, before we were robbed?”

But we chose not to heed the wail. Fate has her own way of ordaining things.

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I rose abruptly and passed into my cabin, and to my surprise Joe followed. As he lighted my lamp and turned up the wick so that it illumined the room brightly, I heard him whistling softly to himself.

The boy annoyed me, and I turned upon him rather savagely.

“You seem quite content to have lost your inheritance,” said I; “but the rest of us are not so well satisfied. Can’t you try to respect our feelings?”

He grinned at me most provokingly.

“Strikes me we’ve got something yet to be thankful for, sir,” he replied. “The Turks didn’t bag so much treasure as they thought they did.”

I stared at him with sudden interest.

“What do you mean, Joe?”

He stepped to my bunk and drew back the curtains. Then he threw aside the blanket and disclosed the berth heaped full with glittering jewels and golden ornaments that sparkled brightly under the clear rays of the lamp.

My cry brought the others running hastily into the room, but as their gaze followed my

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own and fell upon the mass of treasure they stood mute and still, filled with a wonder that fairly dulled their senses.

At last Uncle Naboth tumbled into a chair and began mopping his forehead with his red silk handkerchief, and I awoke far enough to ask, in an awed whisper:

“How did it happen, Joe?”

“Why, it was dead easy, Sam,” he replied with a laugh. “As soon as that infernal gun-boat fired at us I knew something had to be done to save the treasure. So I ran down here and ripped open the seams at the bottom of all those canvas sacks, and dumped about three-quarters of the contents of each one of ’em into your berth. I left some of the stuff in the ends of the sacks that were tied and sealed, so if the Egyptians opened any of ’em they’d think they were still loaded all the way down with jewelry. Then I had to fill up the spaces, and that was harder than you’d think. I first chucked in all the old bits of iron and brass I could find in the junk-chest; but that wasn’t near enough. So I ran to the galley and got Bry to give me

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a lot of potatoes and a bag of beans. With these I filled up the treasure sacks and then sewed up all the seams again. It took some time to do this, and the only way I could hide the treasure was to cover it up with this blanket and draw the curtains. Mebbe I wasn't scared stiff when the officers came down here! But they never thought to search the bunk in this cabin, though they went through all the others. I'm sorry, sir, I didn't empty the bags entirely, for they never opened any of 'em; but I thought it was best not to take too many chances, and I guess we've saved about two-thirds of all the treasure we brought from the desert—except, of course, the rolls of writing, and those we didn't care so much for, anyhow."

By the time the boy had finished this speech he was the focus of all our admiring eyes.

"Don't worry about what's lost, Joe," said Uncle Naboth, earnestly. "There's enough left to make us all rich; an' we owe it to your pluck and wit—an' to nothin' else."

"Three cheers for Joe!" yelled Archie, joyously.

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“Pshaw!” said Joe, flushing red, “what else was there to do?”

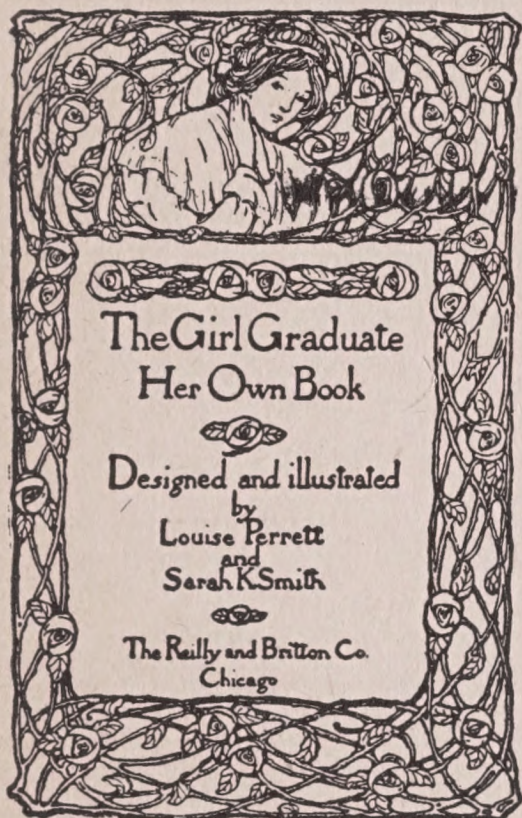
Three weeks after we anchored safely in Boston harbor, and before many days had passed Uncle Naboth's prediction was amply fulfilled. The proceeds of the treasure made us all, in our humble stations, “rich,” and Joe's share, being so much the largest, made him very rich indeed.

THE END.

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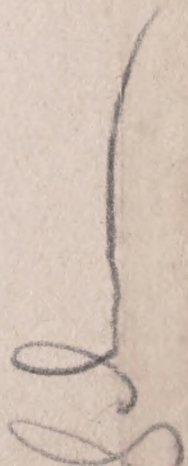
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