

The Wheel o' Fortune

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hands, and we are loyal too. It was you, I now believe, who snatched me from misery, almost from despair. Have no fear, therefore, that I shall desert you."

"You have taken a load from my heart," she answered softly. "You're the only man on board in whom I have any real confidence. I fear that my grandfather has been misled, willfully and shamefully misled, but I am unable to prevent it for lack of proof. To-night, after dinner, I chanced to overhear a conversation with reference to you which redoubled the doubts I have felt ever since this expedition was decided on. I feel that I trust you. Baron von Kerber distrusts you because you are a gentleman. He fears you will act on your honor. And to-day since your letter arrived—"

"Yes, ma'am," they heard Captain Stump shout from the bridge. "Miss Fenshawe is forrad, with Mr. Roysen. You'll find it a very pretty sight goin' through the canal on a night like this."

And Mrs. Haxton, hunting the ship for Irene—not to speak of Roysen and herself when in calmer mood—may have wondered why Stump should trumpet forth his information as though he wished all on board to hear it. Perhaps it was, as Dick already well knew, that the stout skipper had good eyesight, as well as a kind heart.

CHAPTER VI.

At the Portal.

"Why in the world did you hide yourself in this part of the ship, Tagg?" cried Mrs. Haxton, advancing with a rapidity that was in marked contrast to her usual languid movements. "I have been searching for you everywhere."

"I have not hidden myself, and you must have missed a rather large section out of your everywhere," said the girl, with a coolness that Roysen found admirable.

"But Mr. Fenshawe wants you. He has been vainly awaiting his partner at the bridge table during the past twenty minutes."

"I would never have believed grand-ther could be so callous. Play cards here! Where every prospect pleases and only bridge is vile! Let me bring him forth at once. Good night, Mr. Roysen! Thank you so much for a nice talk. I think I shall be able now to pass an examination in the history and geography of the Suez Canal."

Dick lifted his cap, silently thanking Providence that women were more lenient than men. Mrs. Haxton seemed to take no notice of him. Indeed, she had scarcely spoken a word to him since they met at Marseilles, and, were he a vain man, such studied neglect on the part of the woman might have supplied food for thought. Yet it is possible that Mrs. Haxton herself would confess to a certain chagrin that she realized how small a place she occupied in his mind as he followed her along the deck. Irene flitted in front, light-limbed and agile, humming gaily a verse of some song, but breaking off in the midst to ask Captain Stump not to be very angry if she brought a party of invaders to his domain. She was young enough to feel flattered by the knowledge that Mrs. Haxton had broken in on somewhat dangerous interchange of confidences. She knew that she wanted a friend—some one less opinionative than Mr. Fenshawe—to whom she could appeal for help and guidance when difficulties arose. Roysen was already a hero in her eyes, and that more natural than that she should turn to him, especially under the circumstances which had come to her knowledge that evening? As for Dick, he fancied that the Suez Canal was one of the roads to heaven.

Before he climbed into his bunk, however, he re-read Mr. Forbes letter, and noticed that it bore signs of interference, while von Kerber, if he had not opened it, must have jumped to the conclusion that it came from London solely because the stamp was an English one. Added to Irene's warning that all was not well on board, this apparent tampering with his correspondence bore an ugly look. It almost suggested that the Baron feared he was what the London agent had asked him to be—namely the paid spy of Alferi. He considered what hold the Italian had on the man. Now that he was able to examine recent events in retrospect, he saw that von Kerber had traveled alone from London with the hope of throwing off his track any one who was watching him—and had failed. It was evident, too, that neither Mr. Fenshawe nor his grandfather, nor Mrs. Haxton for that matter, took pains to keep their whereabouts unknown, because Dick had an announcement of the Aphrodite's cruise in a London newspaper brought on board by the pilot. Von Kerber's name was not mentioned,

but the others were described briefly, the reference to Mrs. Haxton being that she was "a persona grata in Anglo-Egyptian society." Why, then, did the Austrian demand such secrecy from the yacht's crew, and be so perturbed by the advent of a letter addressed to one of them? But Roysen's disposition was far too happy-go-lucky to permit of serious ponderings on other people's business. He laughed and reddened a little when his mind swung round to the more pleasing memory of the girl's frank sympathy, and he told himself, with deep and convincing earnestness, that next time they met he must guard his unruly tongue, else it might run away with him again, and find her in less receptive mood.

Then he fell asleep, and slept soundly, too, in blissful ignorance of a conversation then taking place in the chart-house, though it had the most direct bearing on his own future.

For von Kerber had seized the opportunity, when Mr. Fenshawe and the two ladies went below, to draw Stump into private conference.

"We reach Suez to-morrow, captain," he said, and that will be our last chance of getting rid of any of the crew whom you think unsuitable."

"That's so," agreed Stump, "but I can't say I've blacklisted any of 'em. The only fault I find with 'em is that there's too many hands for the work."

"Ah, you regard them as dependable, yes?"

"Good for any game you like to put before 'em," was the brisk summary.

"That is what I want. But tell me, captain, will you be able to replace Mr. Roysen? I believe he is useful when it comes to sailing a yacht, yet I have no doubt you can dispense with him?"

Stump was shrewd in a limited way. He caught the drift of von Kerber's comment, and it did not help to further the scheme which the latter had in mind.

"Mr. Roysen?" came the quick growl. "What of him? Next to Tagg he's the best man in the crowd."

"Possibly, but I have reason to believe that he wishes to return to England."

"He hasn't said so."

"Not to you, perhaps, but I know it is so, and I do not wish to detain him when our numbers are already ample for all purposes. I am awkwardly placed in the matter, as Mr. Fenshawe feels under a slight obligation to him, so I shall be glad if you will pay him off to-morrow, on a generous basis, of course, with every allowance for the expenses of the homeward passage."

"Wot?" said Stump, moving restlessly under von Kerber's gaze. "D'ye mean it, mister?"

"I do, most certainly."

"Then you'd better fix the business yourself. You engaged him like the rest of us. I like the lad, and I'd take it ill to be axed to fire him. No sir. That ain't in my department this trip. It'd be a bird of another color if he was no good. But he's a first-rater, an' I, for one, will be sorry to lose him. If you don't take my word for it, ax Tagg. He knows a man when he sees him, does Tagg, an' he hasn't forgotten that upper cut Mr. Roysen gave a land shark in Marseilles when the crowd set about you."

Stump was profoundly moved, or he would not have made such a long speech, and von Kerber knew that his flank attack had failed. Indeed, the gruff sailor has as good as charged him with rank ingratitude.

"Oh, if you think that way about it," said he coolly, "we can let the project drop for the present. I was only considering Mr. Roysen's own interests. Whether he goes or stays it does not concern me in the least. Have a cigarette? Ah, you prefer a pipe, yes? Well, good night, captain. We shall not be rocked to sleep by the wild waves to-night, I imagine."

Stump joined Tagg on the bridge. He jerked a thumb after the Baron's retreating figure.

"That German swab wants me to boot Roysen," he muttered.

"Boot Roysen? The idee! Wot for?"

"He piled it on thick about wot he called Roysen's own interests, but I knew better'n that. It don't suit his book for our dandy second mate to be sparkin' the owner's daughter abt the lantern. You take my tip, Tagg, that other woman, Mrs. Haxton, is as mean as sin, an' she blew the gaff to-night when she dropped on 'em after supper."

"I've always thought her a bit of a cat," agreed Tagg.

"An' wot did you say?"

"Say, I tole 'im to do his dirty work himself. Mark my words, Tagg, he'll not tackle the job for fear it won't be the gal's ears. You watch him close up like an oyster."

Stump was a prophet worthy of

honor, though Dick did not appreciate the Baron's friendly solicitude about his affairs until long afterwards. But he did learn by chance how amply justified Irene was in her fear that he might be asked to leave the ship. The Aphrodite was spinning down the Gulf of Suez late next day, under all her snowy spread of sail, when Roysen went aloft to assure himself that a stiff puley on the fore yard was in good working order. He found that it needed a slight readjustment, and the alteration was troublesome owing to the strain of a steady breeze. He persevered, put matters right, and was climbing down to the deck when, through the foresail, he heard voices discussing none other than himself.

Mrs. Haxton and von Kerber had strolled forward, and were leaning over the side of the ship, never dreaming that the man they were talking of was within a few feet of them above their heads, though hidden by the sail.

"I was exceedingly surprised to find that he was not sent ashore with the pilot at Suez," the lady was saying. "No matter what his present position may be, he is a baronet's nephew and prospective heir it would seem. It is sheer madness on your part to keep a man like him on board."

"But I tell you that I asked Stump to discharge him, and met with a blank refusal," replied the Baron irritably.

"That is even more amazing. Are not these men your servants?"

"Yes, in a sense. Try to understand me, Maud. I had to select men of good character, or they might fail me in the hour of need. If you hire pirates you must expect them to act as pirates, yes? Stump favors Roysen, so he pointed out that as I had engaged him I must dismiss him. And you know quite well, if you would only be reasonable, that any such action on my part could hardly fail to arouse some measure of doubt in Fenshawe's mind, which is the very thing we wish to avoid."

"I think you are wrong, nevertheless."

"You should not say that if you are not prepared to tell me how I can arrange an awkward business better. And what are you afraid of? He is as keen as any of us for the adventure, and he will be well paid if it succeeds."

"You are a poor conspirator, my dear Franz," laughed Mrs. Haxton disagreeably. "If you were really the clever person you think yourself to be you would know that such a man may leave the whole crew with his ideas of honor. And, when the pressure comes, he will have an excellent helper in that girl. She, too, should have been left at home. Oh, nonsense! Had you given me the ordering of affairs neither she nor this young down-at-heels aristocrat would be here to-day. I am not saying this merely to annoy you, as you seem to believe, but to warn you. Be on your guard, Frank. Things are not going smoothly. No great fortune was ever yet won without a hitch or two on the road, and we are not far from the Five Hills now."

They moved away. Dick went back to his pulley, surveyed the deck over the fore yard, and deferred his descent until "Franz" and "Maud" were at the other end of the vessel. Since they came on board they had been "Baron von Kerber" and "Mrs. Haxton" in the presence of others. What desperate game were these playing that demanded these small deceptions—what hazard of fortune was this that gave rise to the woman's Cassandra-like forebodings? Von Kerber had been candid enough in the statement he put forward voluntarily at Marseilles. Any one could guess the uncertainties of a quest depending on a document two thousand years old, while its dangers were manifest. Mr. Fenshawe and Irene must be cognizant of the open risks, and it was idle to suppose that they did not appreciate the unobtrusive way in which the yacht was being hurried to her destination. Why, then, should von Kerber and Mrs. Haxton share some secret understanding, the outcome of which was doubtful, and, above all else, why should they fear the influence that a young man might exercise on the crew?

"Egypt is the land of riddles," mused Dick, as he gazed at the russet and purple hills which spring up so suddenly to guard the strange sea thrust by nature into the bosom of fiery land. "My best course is to adopt the attitude of the Sphinx. I shall keep my eyes open and say nothing."

He forgot, however, that the chief characteristic of the Sphinx is an enduring patience, and he chafed at the colorless monotony of the next few days. The Aphrodite crept under sail five hundred miles to the south, until the wind died of sheer exhaustion. Then the engines took their turn, and the yacht exchanged the steady roll of a topsail schooner for the quivering uneasiness of a steam-driven ship. But sail or steam, the pace was slow, and the passage of the Red Sea left its record on the smart little vessel in the shape of blistering paint, gaping seams, and planks from which the sweated pitch was no sooner holly-stoned than it oozed forth again to smear their purity. Though stout awnings defied the direct fury of the sun they could not shut out its glare and furnace heat. And the human barometer showed the stress of life. Stump was a caldron in himself, Tagg a bewhiskered malediction in damp linen. The tempest of the crew stif-

ing in crowded quarters, suggested that they were suffering from a plague of boils. As a mere pastime, there was an occasional fight in the fore-castle. Unhappily for the disputants, Stump had a ready ear for these frays and he would rush in to settle them with a vigor that left the pugilists prostrate. Then he would recover his caustic humor for half an hour, and regale Roysen with yarns of things wot happened when the Red Sea was really hot. This weather was only warm. Why, once when he was aboard the Ocean Queen, her bunker got' out six hours north of Perim, but he whipped the awn's off, an' the sun kep' up a head o' steam in the boilers until she ran into port.

The saloon party found existence more endurable. They had adjustable window-shades, and electric fans, and there was a sheltered deck over their heads. So they dozed away the hot hours placidly until the memorable day dawned when Stump, after much close scrutiny of charts, ventured to leave the safe channel down the centre of the Red Sea and stand in toward the African coast.

"Massowah" was on every tongue, and the general listlessness vanished. Soon a dim land-line appeared. It grew into a range of barren mountains broken by narrow, precipice-guarded valleys. Then a thin strip of flat fore-shore became visible. It deepened into a flat island, barely two miles long, and assumed a habitable aspect. A lighthouse marked a fine harbor. A custom-house, a fort, several jetties, and a town of fairly tall buildings stood clear from a scattered gathering of coral-built Arab houses and hundreds of grass and mat huts. In a word, man had conquered the wilderness, and a busy community had sprung into being between the silent sea and the arid earth.

While the Aphrodite was picking her way cautiously to the anchorage ground, Dick, who was on the bridge with the captain, heard some broken talk between Mr. Fenshawe and the Baron. The latter, with subdued energy, was urging some point which the older man refused to yield. The discussion was keen, and the millionaire betrayed a polite resentment of his companion's views.

"I am sure the Italian authorities will place no obstacle in our way," he declared at last. "When all is said and done, the interest of our ship is mainly archeological. Why should you hold this absurd notion that we may be refused official sanction?"

He spoke emphatically, with unyielding impetuosity. Dick could not make out the Austrian's reply, but Mr. Fenshawe's next words showed that, whatever the matter in dispute, he had a will of his own, and meant to exercise it.

"It is useless to try to convince me on that head," he exclaimed. "I would turn back this instant rather than act in the way you suggest. You must allow me to follow my original plan. We shall obtain a valid permit from the Governor. If, contrary to my expectations, he refers the final decision to the Italian Foreign Department, we shall await cable instructions. Our ambassador at Rome can vouch for us. He is an old friend of mine, and I only regret that I did not obey my first impulse and write to him before I left London."

Von Kerber asserted that there was some danger of Somali Arabs becoming excited if they heard of the expedition. Mr. Fenshawe laughed.

"Arabs!" he cried. "How long has that been buzzed in your bonnet. The only lawless tribes in this country are far away in the interior. And even there they are apt to think many times before they offer active resistance to the passing of a strong and well-intentioned kafilah. Besides, my dear fellow, we must purchase some portion of our equipment here. It is secrecy, not candor, that would endanger our mission. Believe me, you are suffering from Red Sea spleen. It distorts your normal vision. You certainly took a different view of the situation when we determined its main features in London."

Roysen was careful not to look at the speakers. Between him and them was seated Mrs. Haxton, and he knew that she, too, was an attentive listener. Von Kerber began to explain the reasons which lay behind his change of opinion, but Stump's voice suddenly recalled Dick to his duties.

"Stand by the anchor, Mr. Roysen," he said, "and see that everything is clear when I tell you to let go."

Irene heard the order.

"I want to watch the anchor flop overboard," she announced, springing up from a deck chair. "I think I shall accompany you, Mr. Roysen."

Dick held out his hand to help her down the short companionway. They had not exchanged many words since that memorable night in the canal, and the penetrating look in the girl's eyes warned Roysen now that she was about to say something not meant for others to hear.

"You have not forgotten?" she murmured.

"No," he answered.

"When we go ashore you must come with us."

"How can I make sure of that?"

"Ask Captain Stump to send you in charge of the boat. Do you know that an attempt was made to get rid of you at Suez?"

"Yes."

"It failed."

"Yes, I know that, too."

"Who told you?"

"I overheard a conversation. I could not help it."

"Well, once we are ashore I may have a chance of explaining things fully. If necessary, tell Captain Stump I wish you to escort us."

They could say no more. The telegraph rang from "Slow" to "Stop hex." Two sailors were waiting in the bows, and had already cleared the anchor from his checks. Irene leaned against the rail. She wore a pith hat, and was dressed in white muslin for shore-going, while a pink-lined parasol helped to dispel a pallor which was the natural result of an exhausting voyage. Dick thought he had never seen a woman with a face and figure to match hers, and it is to be feared that his mind wandered a little until he was roused by a bellow from the bridge.

"Stand by, forward. Let go-o-o!"

Luckily Dick's office was a sinecure. The men knew what to do, and did it. With a roar and a rattle the chain cable rushed through the hawse-pipe, and the Aphrodite rested motionless on the green waters of the roadstead.

The yacht's arrival created some stir on shore. Several boats put off, their swarthy crews contending strenuously which should have the valuable privilege of landing the expected passengers. Stump bustled down from the bridge with the important air of a man who had achieved something, and thus gave Roysen an unforeseen opportunity of asking him about the boat. The skipper swung himself back to the upper deck, and approached Mr. Fenshawe.

"Are you goin' ashore at once, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes, the sooner the better, or the Government Offices will be closed for the day."

"Mr. Roysen," shouted Stump, "pipe the crew of the jolly-boat, an' lower away."

"An Arab boat will be much speedier and more roomy," broke in Mrs. Haxton, quick to observe that von Kerber was not paying heed to the captain's preparations.

"You can land in one of those weird-looking craft if you like," said Irene, "but I am sure Mr. Fenshawe and I would prefer our own state barge. It is much more dignified, too, and I really think we ought to impress the natives. Don't you agree with me, Baron von Kerber?"

There was nothing more to be said. The boat was lowered so smartly that Dick was seated at the tiller, and four ash blades were driving her rapidly shoreward, before the leading crew of the panting Somalis reached the ship's side. They secured two passengers, however. Mrs. Haxton, who had declined a seat in the jolly-boat on score of the intense heat, changed her mind, and the captain elected to go with her.

"I want to cable my missus," he announced, "an' Massowah is likely to be our last port for some time. If she don't hear from me once a month, she frets. That's where Tagg has the pull. He's an orfin."

Mrs. Haxton smiled delightedly. She was watching the distant jolly-boat, and something seemed to please her.

"Your second mate has not visited Massowah before?" she said.

"No, ma'am."

"We shall be ashore first, after all. He is heading for the Government jete, where a sentry will warn him off."

"Oh, you know the ropes here, then?" said Stump. "Not many English ladies have coasted in these waters."

Mrs. Haxton thought, perhaps, that she had aired her knowledge unnecessarily, but she explained that when her husband was alive she had accompanied him during a long cruise in the Red Sea.

"He was interested in cable construction," she said, "and we visited Massowah when it was first taken in hand by the Italians."

"Excuse me, ma'am, but have you bin long a widow?"

"Nearly five years."

"By gad," said Stump admiringly, "you must ha' bin a small slip of a gal when you was married!"

She laughed, with the quiet assurance of a beautiful and well-dressed woman. Mrs. Haxton could be charming when she chose, and she wanted Stump to act exactly in accord with her own plans when they reached the town. By this time the two boats were nearly level, but separated by a hundred yards or more. The captain had half risen to hail Dick when Mrs. Haxton stopped him.

"Let them go on," she cried. "They would not take my advice. Now they will find that we have beaten them by a good five minutes."

Stump knew quite well, of course, that a broad-beamed English boat could not compete with the long, slim Somali craft, but he was aware also that Miss Fenshawe and Roysen wished to land in company. So he grinned and sat down again.

The outcome of these cross purposes was curious in many ways. As Mrs. Haxton foresaw, the jolly-boat was forbidden to land at the main wharf, and Roysen discovered that the Austrian did not understand Italian. It was Irene who translated the orders shouted at them by a brigandiah-looking soldier, and they had to pull off in the direction of a smaller pier where Mrs. Haxton and Captain Stump had already disembarked in the midst of a crowd of jabbering natives.

"Now, captain," said Mrs. Haxton, with her sweetest smile, pointing to a white building in the distance, "that is the telegraph-office. We need not

both remain here until our friends arrive. Suppose you go and send your cablegram in peace. By the time you have written it we shall be close behind you. Pray don't wait on my account. You see I want to crow over Miss Fenshawe."

"Just as you like, ma'am," said Stump, lifting his hat awkwardly. He went at the noisy crowd like a battering-ram. "Sheer off, you black-an'-tan mongrels!" he roared at them. "Go an' ax some one to play on you with a hose-pipe. Jow, you scors! D'ye think the lady likes to be pisened?"

He cleared a space, and rolled away towards the town. Hence, he did not notice a gaunt Arab, whose flowing burnous and distinguished air singled him out from the mixed gathering of nondescripts at the landing-place, who bided his time until Mrs. Haxton looked in his direction. Then he advanced, with a courtly blend of deference and hauteur, and she beckoned him instantly.

"You are Sheikh Abdullah?" she asked in French.

"Yes, madam," he replied, in the same language.

"You know the town well?"

"I have been waiting here two months."

"Then two more hours will not weary you. Von Kerber Effendi, or I, or both of us, will meet you outside the Elephant Mosque at five o'clock. Nevertheless, should there be others with us, do not speak unless we address you."

"Who is he, the red ox?" demanded the Arab, gazing after the broad figure of Captain Stump.

"He is the captain of our ship, a man of no importance. The Hakim Effendi is in the approaching boat. With him is Fenshawe Effendi, the old, gray-haired man. There is a tall young ship's officer there, too. His name is Roysen—you will not forget?—Roysen. He is dangerous. Regard him well. He might prove troublesome, or useful—I hardly know which at present. Fenshawe Effendi speaks French and Arabic, Roysen Effendi French only. That is all, for the present. Leave me now."

"Adieu, madame. A cinq heures!"

Drawing back from the mob of natives, who were pressing nearer in their eagerness to offer themselves for hire to the European boat, Abdullah shaded his swarthy face under a fold of his burnous. Roysen leaped ashore in order to assist Irene to land. She, with school-girl glee at emancipation from the narrow decks of the Aphrodite, sprang on to the low pier at the same instant, and laughed at his surprise at finding her standing at his side. They both extended a hand to Mr. Fenshawe, who refused their aid, saying that the first breath of dry air made him feel as young as ever.

"There is no tonic like it," he said. "Look at Mrs. Haxton if you want proof. She was a lily in London—now she is a rose."

Excitement, or the prospect of success, had certainly given the lady's complexion a fine tint. Her dainty profile offered a striking contrast to the motley crew of negroid Arabs who surrounded her. And she came to meet them in a buoyant spirit, though the fierce sun was scorching her delicate skin through the thin fabric of her dress.

"I ought to have made a wager with you, Mr. Roysen," she cried, pronouncing his name very distinctly. "Our English-built craft cannot hold its own against the Somali, you see."

Knowing nothing of the difference of opinion on board the yacht, Dick could not fathom this sudden graciousness on her part. Before Dick could answer von Kerber's highly-pitched voice broke in.

"Why did Captain Stump come ashore with you?" he asked.

"To send Mrs. Stump a cablegram, I believe," replied Mrs. Haxton carelessly.

"He ought to have asked my permission first."

The petulant words drew a protest from Mr. Fenshawe.

"My dear Baron," he said "why should not the poor man make known his safe arrival to his wife? You are not yourself to-day. What is it—liver? or anxiety?"

"I have no special reason for anxiety," cried von Kerber, almost hysterically. Roysen came to his relief by asking for orders about the boat, but the Austrian was so unnerved, for no visible reason, that he hesitated, and Irene answered for him.

"We have arranged to dine on shore, at the Hotel Grande del Universo," she said. "Mr. Fenshawe wishes you and Captain Stump to join us, so the boat may go back to the yacht and come for us at eight o'clock."

"Excellent!" agreed her grandfather, who now heard of the "arrangement" for the first time. "Really, Irene, you put things so admirably that I hardly recognize my own crude thoughts. Well, as that is settled, let us go straight to the Governor's house. One of these black gentlemen will pilot us."

While Fenshawe was airing his Arabic in selecting a guide from fifty volunteers, Dick gave instructions to the boat's crew. Mrs. Haxton, seeing that Irene was all eyes for her new and strange surroundings, read von Kerber a much-needed lecture.

"For goodness' sake gather your wits," she murmured. "You will arouse suspicion by your foolish precautions. Now listen. Before five o'clock let us gather at the hotel for

tea. Slip away on some pretext, and go instantly to the Elephant Mosque. It is in the main street, three hundred yards to the left of the hotel. I shall join you there if possible, but in any event, you'll meet Abdullah. And, whatever you do, stop this nonsense about proceeding in secret. Ah, yes, Irene, your grandfather has his hands full. But he knows how to manage natives. You will see him in his element when we come to collect a kafilah."

"So, smiling and soft-tongued, Mrs. Haxton turned in response to some delighted exclamation from the girl. They made their way inland in the wake of a swaggering negro, and, as Roysen passed with the others, Abdullah, the Arab, appraised him with critical eye.

"By the Holy Kaaba," said he, "there goes a man! I have seen few like him, even at Khartoum, where the gajours swarmed in thousands. But he is young, and his flesh is soft. The desert will thin his blood. And that little bull, who went before—he, too, should feel the sap dry in his bones. Tomb of my father! if the Hakim Effendi has brought such men as these in his train, there will be deeds done at the foot of the Five Hills, and I, Abdullah the Spear-thrower, shall be there to witness them."

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Haxton Receives a Shock.

Mr. Fenshawe, renewing his acquaintance with Arabic gutturals, and von Kerber, walking apart with Mrs. Haxton, in order to learn how and when she had received tidings of Abdullah, had eyes or ears for naught else. Irene and Dick were thus given a few moments free from listeners, and the girl was quick enough to grasp the chance.

"You know why we have come here?" she asked in a low tone, halting to look back at the belt of tiny islets which secluded Massowah's larger island from the open sea.

"Baron von Kerber told us at Marseilles," said Dick, wondering what new development had chanced from the girl's face the smiling interest of a moment ago.

"Us?" she demanded, almost sharply.

"I should have said Captain Stump, Mr. Tagg, and myself."

"What did he tell you?"

"The remarkable history of a Roman expedition against the Sabaeans, of a storm, a shipwreck, the burial of a vast treasure, and the ultimate discovery of its hiding-place by means of a Greek papyrus found in a tomb."

"That is what irritates me," said she, in a sudden gust of anger. "His behavior is faultless, yet I am certain that he is acting in an underhand way. I had ventured to say as much to my grandfather, but I cannot obtain a shred of actual fact to justify my suspicions. Indeed Baron von Kerber is candor itself where the genuineness of the papyrus is concerned. Did he endeavor to explain Mrs. Haxton's presence, or mine?"

"When Captain Stump protested—before he had seen you, remember—against ladies accompanying us, the Baron said that without you the expedition could not proceed."

"Exactly. That is another bit of unconvincing accuracy. Mrs. Haxton has always been an essential part of the scheme. I am here solely because I did not think Mr. Fenshawe should be allowed to go alone—alone in the sense that these people were strangers to him, while he was spending thousands of pounds for their very great benefit. There, again, I find myself in a sort of verbal cul de sac. Under other circumstances I should be delighted to take part in an adventure of this kind. Grandad promised me two years ago that we should pass the present winter in Upper Egypt. Unhappily Mrs. Haxton introduced von Kerber to him at a place in the Highlands where we were invited for the shooting. The instant he heard of the legend on that wretched scrap of paper all his old enthusiasm for exploration work revived, and he has followed their plans blindly ever since."

"I hope you will forgive me if I express a somewhat contrary opinion, Miss Fenshawe," said Roysen. "Your grandfather did not hesitate to run counter to the Baron's wishes to-day, for instance."

"Oh, that is nothing. Of course, with his experience of Egypt, he takes the lead in such matters. What I want you to believe is this: Mrs. Haxton, and not von Kerber, found that papyrus, or it came into her hands by some means. She is the originator of the scheme. She sought to be included in our friend's party at Glengarloch with the set object of meeting grandad, whose interest in archeology is known to all the world. She did not come across von Kerber by accident, but produced him at the right moment. He is not a casual friend, met in Cairo, as she pretends, but a man whom she has known for years. And, last in a list of guessings which I know to be true, they both fear some discovery, or interruption, or danger not revealed to us, which may prevent them from obtaining the wealth they hope to gain. They are desperately poor, Mr. Roysen. They have mortgaged their credit to its utmost extent to enable them to keep up appearances, and they dread some catastrophe which will interfere with our search, though the only authority we have for the existence of the Roman legion's loot is a scrap of scarcely

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