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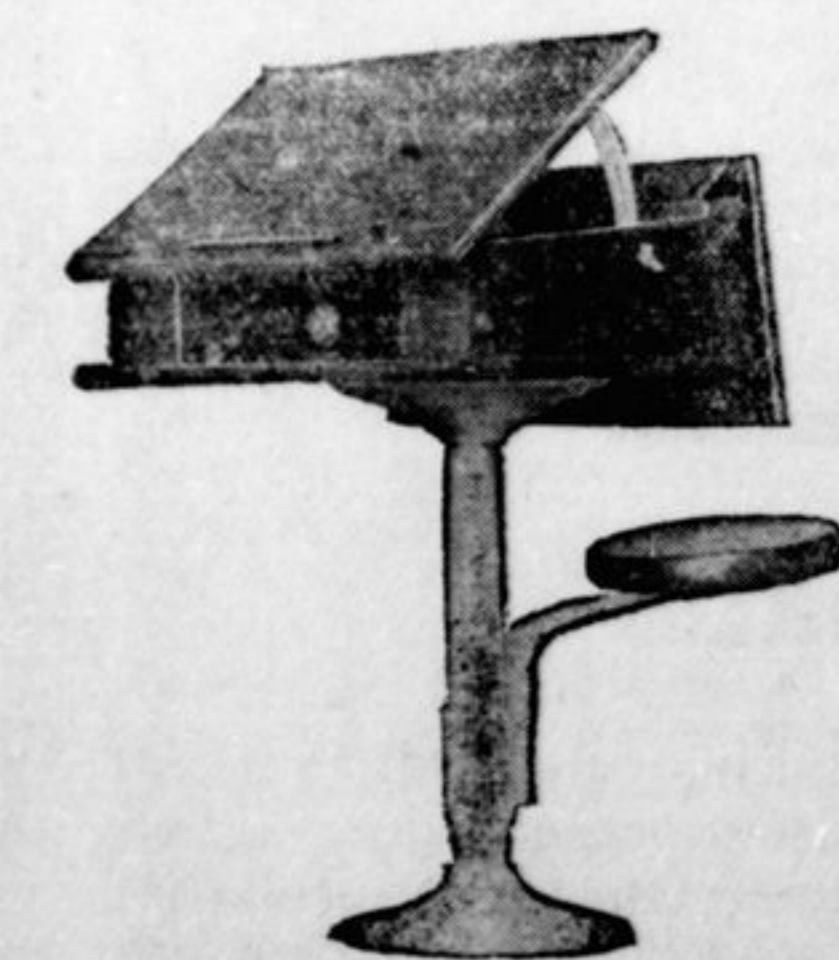
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**A SOLDIER OF COMMERCE**

By **JOHN ROE GORDON**

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[CONTINUED.]

"Zannucks," he shouted, "I am thy chief! Obey me as thou obeyed my brother, and I will make thee rich with the spoils of the caravans. We will pay no taxes to the ameer, but will give him battle in the mountains and kill his soldiers. And thou, America and Muscovite, shalt become my slaves and wait upon me in the palace I will build. I shall not be called chief, but king, and the prettiest of the girls we have rescued from the Bokharans shall be my queen."

"Nonsense!" said Harvey. "Your brother promised that we should be sent to the coast safely."

"Let my brother fulfill his promise. I am chief, and thou art now my prisoner. Obey me or thy life will go as did my brother's."

Harvey made a gesture as if to draw his pistol, and Domitan sprang upon him.

"The other! Seize the other! Bind them both!" he cried.

Alma and Koura screamed with terror as they saw their gallant lovers almost buried under the Zannucks that hurled themselves upon them. In a few minutes Harvey and Orskoff were securely bound.

"Dogs of unbelievers!" cried Domitan, shaking his fist in their faces. "Thou interfered with my plans before! Remember the cave! Now will I pay in good coin! Slaves, forever shalt thou serve me!"

Harvey did not answer. He looked at Alma. The poor girl was trembling with terror, and tears were pouring down her cheeks.

"Cheer up, my darling!" he said to her. "We will soon be out of this!"

The clatter of horses on the road could be heard, and the force Domitan had left fighting came up.

"We routed them well," said one of the captains. "What! Is Palpak killed?"

"I am thy chief!" said Domitan. "But there was treasure in the caravan! Where are the camels of the merchants?"

"Below. They fled. After them, and bring them back!"

Fifty started, and the remainder prepared to bury the dead. It was now late in the day, and Domitan was eager to get his caravan off the highway lest a returning force of Bokharans turn victory into defeat.

"We have two of the best camels of the ameer," he said. "We cannot take them up the side of the cliff. We must travel by way of the road farther up. We will arrange for the burial of the dead, foes as well as friends. Remove all trace of the fight."

The two girls were tenderly cared for, Domitan studying them carefully, as if to decide which was the more

beautiful. "There is my queen," he said, pointing to Alma. "The Georgian is beautiful, but this one, this Muscovite, suits me. I will make her my wife."

"Not much," said Harvey. "There's going to be another deal all around before that takes place."

"Dog! Pig! Be silent!" growled Domitan.

A meal was served, and the two girls were royally treated. A dozen soldiers waited upon them.

After this delay Domitan ordered his men to move, and the entire caravan, captured camels, horses and all, withdrew from the highway and made camp in the thick forest that formed the border of the pass. The horses were left upon the cliff in charge of a few men, and camp was made for the night. Plans for removing the booty to the Zannuck village could be made in the morning. Sentinels were stationed, and a guard was placed over the two girls. Harvey and Orskoff, bound, were thrust under a bush and left there.

"This is terrible!" groaned Orskoff. "We have failed, with all our planning."

"Sh-h," whispered Harvey. "Make them think we are sleeping."

"The fellow has another plan," thought Orskoff.

The hours of the night dragged wearily. The soldiers slept, and, not being accustomed in their wild life to keeping guard at night, most of the guards were asleep by midnight. Harvey and Orskoff lay close together. A wriggling motion on the part of Harvey attracted the Russian. In a moment he felt a nudge in the side. Harvey was sitting up, his hands free, industriously untying the cords around his legs and feet. With a swift slash of his knife he set the Russian free.

"Come!" he whispered.

He crawled away in the darkness, keeping in the deeper shadows of the trees. Orskoff followed. Neither spoke for many minutes. They kept working their way in the direction of the road and away from Sileo. At last, having cleared the camp, Harvey stood up straight.

"What is your plan?" whispered Orskoff breathlessly.

"I have none except to get away," said Harvey. "Free. We can do something. Let's walk along this road, and as we walk we can think."

**CHAPTER XXI.**  
**THE MONASTERY OF THE LAMAS.**

"SURELY," said Orskoff, peering in the darkness at the face of the American, "it is not your purpose to desert the girls."

"I should say not; but with our feet and hands tied and we helpless in that camp we could not assist them. It's this way: Domitan is now camping in the woods. His horses are on the cliff. According to what he said, there is a road farther up the pass by which he will take the camels to the mountains. If thatascal ever gets the girls into the Zannuck stronghold, nothing that we can do will avail. We've got to think of something to do now."

"But what? Is it to fight? I will fight to the last drop of blood!"

"No; fighting will not help us. We've got to win out by some trick."

They sat down, and Orskoff leaned his head in his hands. Harvey became intent with his thoughts.

"Hello!" said Harvey, getting to his feet quickly. "Somebody around here! Hear that noise? Sounds like a wounded man calling for aid."

"Must be one of the Zannucks or one of the ameer's men who crawled here to get out of the way."

"I'm going to see who and what it is," said Harvey. "I can't see friend or enemy suffer when helpless."

They soon discovered a man, wounded by spear and sword, lying near the side of the road.

"Art thou friends?" he whispered in the tongue of the ameer's people.

"We have reason to be enemies, but we have no wish to harm you. Is there anything we can do?"

"Canst thou bring water?"

"I could if I knew where there was any," said Harvey. "Do you know of a river or spring near by?"

"We have work to do here," broke in Orskoff. "We cannot give you the time."

"You spoke of begging monks," said Harvey. "What do they beg? How do they reach people?"

"They walk along the roads and ask alms of all they meet. It is in this way the monasteries are supported."

"What do they wear? What sort of looking?"

"You interested in monks?" interrupted Orskoff impatiently. "We have no time to think of them."

"I am thinking of them very hard just now."

Again addressing the wounded man, Harvey asked:

"What sort of garb do these monks wear?"

"Cloaks and hoods. They are humble and holy men."

"I've seen them near Lake Baikal in Siberia," said Orskoff. "They cover their heads and faces so their own grandmothers wouldn't recognize them."

"Oh, they do! And the monastery is poor, supported by alms?"

"Yes," said the soldier of the ameer. "You want to go there?"

"I would live if I could be carried there."

"If we could make a litter of some kind, we might do it."

"We could manage with our coats to make a chair in which to carry him," said Orskoff, "but we have not the time. We cannot forsake our duty to the girls for a wounded enemy."

"We are not forsaking the girls. I have an idea these monks can be of use to us. I want to see them. Help me make the chair."

Harvey's voice was imperative. Orskoff protested, but it was of no avail. He tied the sleeves of their coats together and formed what he called a Russian field chair. The wounded man was then picked up, and the three started off.

"Tell me more about these monks," said Harvey as they went along.

"They are priests of the religion of Buddha-Sakymuni. They are good and holy men."

"Have I not heard somewhere that they are supposed to be gifted with the power to foretell the future—a sort of second sight?"

"Yes, they have magic sight."

"Are the Zannucks believers in these monks?"

"Yes, all of them."

"How shall we know when we reach this monastery?"

"There is a light at the pool. If I can be bathed in the sacred pool of Batoola, I shall be cured."

"What pool is that?"

"The life giving pool of Batoola. It is just within the first gate. One who bathes in it is made holy and is given much power by the Dalai lama."

"Watch for the light. But the dawn is breaking; we shall soon be able to see for ourselves."

An hour later they saw the stone walls of the lama monastery.

"The first gate is there," said the Bokharan, who proved to be a young, handsome fellow and seemed inclined to be friendly.

shall rest upon it. If blood there is, it shall be our own."

The gleaming diamond attracted the old priest. He listened to the ticking of the watch.

"They are wonderful and beautiful. And wouldst thou give both for the use of two of these garbs?"

"Yes, gladly."

"Come with me."

Orskoff motioned to Orskoff, who followed him.

"What are you after now?" he asked.

"You and I are to become monks—old and feeble monks."

Orskoff stared in amazement. His amazement grew as he saw Harvey

bring a chair in which to carry the wounded man.

"These garments are new and have not been consecrated to our purpose," said the lama. "Take them. Remember, thou shalt shed no blood."

"We promise, and we thank thee."

With the robes and hoods they went out of the place. Harvey started at a quick pace back toward the camp. At a convenient place he stopped and said:

"As soon as I heard of those monks it seemed to me that this was the solution of the problem. We can't fight 200 men. My idea is to disguise ourselves and appear as old and feeble as possible, traveling in the same direction as Domitan's forces. We will ask a lift as far as the Batoola monastery, and if the Zannucks are believers, as the Bokharan said, they will grant what we ask. The camels bearing the girls have the lightest burdens, and it ought not to be difficult to get seats on them. Then—well, let the rest take care of itself. We can tell what to do when we get there."

"I swear by the holy crown of the great white czar," Orskoff exclaimed, "that you are the most daring and the most resourceful devil I ever knew! Did anything ever overcome you? The world is your plaything. You do what you will with all people. If I had asked that old priest for these things, he would have expelled me from the place."

"Well, you are a soldier. I've got to know how to talk or I couldn't sell windmills."

"Talk! You could convince a man that he was a horse. It takes no great amount of talk sometimes to convince him he is an ass. This is the most surprising result of your skill I have yet witnessed. Well, the thing is fascinating. We will try it."

The Russian wondered still more at the resources of the American during the process of disguising themselves. The people of the region were dark. With the bruised husks of nuts of a walnut tree he made an olive colored stain, which he daubed over their faces. With a pair of folding scissors he cut off the Russian's mustache, bringing sadness to his heart. They made themselves grimy with the soil of the road and practiced the walk of feeble old men. So well did Harvey execute this act that Orskoff said they would become play actors next.

"We are to permit ourselves to be overtaken by Domitan's army," said Harvey, "and ask to be assisted on our way. Let me do the talking. And, what you see me do, do also. I must plan as I go along, for after we join the Zannucks there will be no time."

Slowly they tramped along the road, and at last, judging themselves to be about half way between the camp and the monastery, they waited.

"Here they come," said Harvey. "Be ready and keep cool. It will be the effort of our lives."

**CHAPTER XXII.**  
**A RACE FOR LIBERTY.**

DOMITAN'S caravan came on slowly, for the men were walking. They had sent a portion of the force round another way to get the horses that had been left on the cliff.

Domitan and his captains rode ahead mounted on horses that had taken from the Bokharans. Following came the little army, straggling along in anything but military style, laughing, singing and celebrating their victory. It was Domitan's watchful eye that discovered two bowed and bent priests resting by the wayside, their great hoods concealing their faces except for the eyes.

"It is well," he said to one of his captains, "that on the first day of my chieftainship I meet with two holy men upon the way. I will give them

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"Most holy fathers, holy ones of the sun, bless me," he said, "for I am but today the chief of the Zannucks."

"I bless you," said Harvey, with a weak and trembling voice as he pocketed the gold. "We are weary, and the temple is far. Hast thou no seat for us on a camel? I see there are two with apparently but little load."

"It is well that thy presence augurs good," said Domitan in a sort of exultation. "Those camels bear the one who will be my bride and the one who will be the bride of my brother. Surely it will be well for us if the holy men ride with them. Come."

He went back to the camels and commanded them to kneel.

"Holy companions wilt thou have, my sweet ones," he said. "These holy men have blessed me, and I have made them presents. I shall win great victories."

Harvey got into the howdah by the side of Alma, and Orskoff, with apparent feebleness, climbed in with Koura. The camels rose to their feet again, and Domitan proudly led on. It was not every day that a chieftain had two lamias in his caravan.

Orskoff was fidgety. He knew that when they reached the monastery they would be expected to leave, but he had faith that Harvey would surmount the difficulty. He saw Harvey scanning the sky and mumbling and making peculiar signs. Harvey called to Domitan, and the chief rode back.

"I see mysterious signs in the heavens," said Harvey in a manner that would inspire awe. "I see but an hour's ride from this spot a band of soldiers of the ameer coming to give you battle. They are mighty men and armed. I have blessed thee, and therefore thou wilt surely win. But these tender children must not be taken into danger if thou wouldst have them for wives. Take thy fighting men and go meet the foe. We will remain here, where it is safe."

"How many of the ameer's soldiers dost thou see, holy one?"

"Ten score of horse."

"We are their equals. We will obey thee, holy one, leaving only enough to guard thee."

He appointed an officer and part of a company to remain to guard and led the remainder on to meet the foe. The caravan came to a halt. The camels laden with merchandise were brought up, and the soldiers put aside their arms to make camp.

"Now, you gallant Russian!" shouted Harvey as he turned his camel and gave it a prick with the blade of his knife. The beast flew like the very

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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