



CHAPTER XI—Continued

Pharaoh was trying to find me, stealing this way and that. He had only to brush against me, touch me with the tips of his fingers, and I should be caught. His deadly swiftness of action would see to that. Any moment this might happen. Any moment the roar of his pistol might make the last sound I should hear. He might be but three feet off—now. In another instant I might feel his breath on my cheek. . . .

I began to tremble; my knees felt suddenly loose; my cousin's words came leering into my mind, "I never liked blindman's bluff. . . . It was the remembrance of Helena that put to shame my fear. I had heard her whip Pharaoh—here, in this very room; whip him before his fellows; cut him across the face, and the whip she had used was my courage. "You fear him . . . you fear his hand." For an instant I thought upon her and strangely enough remembered the way she had pushed her hair from her temples, as though by that pretty gesture to banish care. Then I turned refreshed to my duty, which was to take Pharaoh's life.

At once I set out to find him, with my left hand stretched before me and my pistol all ready.

I truly believe that my action saved my life, for Pharaoh passed me in the darkness and came upon Rush. I knew this was so, for he fired upon the body, supposing it to be me, and the flame that leaped from his pistol gave me a mark to aim at, instead of lighting my face.

In a flash I had fired and had drawn his fire, for before I could think, a bullet had flicked the sleeve of my pistol-arm.

This showed me, once for all, that so far as snap shots were concerned, I stood no chance whatever against such a man. As I whipped to one side, I made up my mind I must not fire again until I knew for certain that my bullet was going to kill. In a word, if I was to win, I must come to close quarters with Pharaoh, if not to grips.

I had now come back to the table, and, as I edged my way round it, I thought of the knee-hole below.

I think it will be admitted that in making you way to and fro in a room that is dark, your tendency is to skirt the furniture which you encounter, keeping in touch with its edge, because, I suppose, you like to be able to feel your way. After all, this is natural: blind men move by the wall. If, then, I entered the knee-hole and let Pharaoh move to and fro, sooner or later, he would skirt the pedestal table, and though I should not hear him, I had put out my hands, and I should feel the slack of his trousers as he went by.

An instant later I was crouching beneath the archway, with my pis-



My Pistol on the Carpet Before Me.

tol on the carpet before me and my empty hands outstretched upon either side.

I had not long to wait. When I did not return his fire, I fancy the man was uncertain whether or not I was dead. He, therefore, sought the spot from which I had fired and, finding nobody there, turned and came to the table exactly as I had done.

And exactly as I had done, he began to edge his way round it. . . . The slack of his trousers brushed my hand.

In a flash I had him by the ankles and, ripping his feet from beneath him had brought him down

on his side. Then I snatched my pistol, thrust it into his stomach and pressed the trigger—in vain.

The magazine was empty. Slowly to the last, Rush had never troubled to replenish his clip.

Pharaoh had fallen on his right and so on his pistol arm. While this was taking his weight, he could not aim, and though in a flash he had thrown his weight to the left, in that instant my fingers had caught the wrist of his pistol-hand. For a moment he fought for his freedom; then he let himself fall on his back; but now my wits were working and before it could reach his pocket, I had hold of his other wrist.

And in that instant the room was flooded with light. . . .

For a moment I thought that someone had entered the chamber. And then I guessed that Pharaoh had turned the switches when first he came into the room, and the switchboard itself might report the repair of the damage which he had done.

So far the first time that night I saw my enemy's face.

I think he must have known that I was his assailant, but the sight of me seemed to send him out of his mind. He fought no more like a serpent, but like the madman he looked, his face convulsed with passion and his eyes staring out of his head.

At last, to my relief, the tempest blew itself out, and he lay back, spent and panting, to take his rest; but, before I could think of moving, he had lifted his head once more and was staring into my eyes.

I looked back, grimly enough. He did not struggle; he simply gazed upon me, as though he would brand my image upon his memory. Then the fellow spat in my face.

So a madman made a madman. If he resisted, I knew not, but I used him as a lay figure from that time on.

I dashed his hand on the massive plinth of the table, to break his wrist, and when his pistol had fallen I brought his hands together and got to my knees. And then I was clear of the table and had jerked him up to his feet.

I let his broken wrist go, whipped out his second pistol and pitched it across the room.

Then I seized his throat with both hands, turned him back to the table, bent him across its corner and broke his back on the oak.

Sitting on the bench by the fireplace, I wiped my face and my hands on Helena's black silk scarf. This had been wrung and creased, and I had no doubt that Pharaoh had used it to gag her, before he had carried her off.

Now that the business was over, I found it hard to believe. I looked at my watch.

The time was twenty minutes past twelve. Not an hour had gone by since Pharaoh had "talked" from the ramparts and Dewdrop had read his message to Rush and Bugle and me. And now they were all four dead, but I was alive.

The reflection brought me up to my feet.

Alive, if you please; but I was shut in a chamber from which I could see no way out. . . .

For twenty minutes I sought that secret door. I shouted and beat upon the woodwork, using Helena's name—all in vain.

Helena was locked in the turret—my hand in my pocket fingered her master key; which I had taken from Rush, but the turret, no doubt, had embrasures, and she would be found and released so soon as she could make herself heard. She had, of course, heard the firing, but if the thieves were fighting what did that matter to her? Let Pharaoh revenge her escape upon Bugle and Rush; or seek to blast his way out of the secret room. (Here perhaps I should say that though Helena heard the firing, the sound was so muffled that she could not be sure what it was, while, so thick were the walls of Yorick, that nobody else in the castle heard it at all.)

Now when Helena's release was effected and Geoffrey and the warden were found, the three would take counsel together upon her report. The position would be considered—but not for long.

The thing was clear. To open the room would be madness. The council would surely decide that Pharaoh and his companions must be left to die where they were.

Somewhat dazedly I surveyed my surroundings.

No windows, no doors. How did one get out of chambers that had neither windows nor doors?

It was then that I thought of the fireplace.

A grate must have a chimney; and if the chimney was wide. . . .

I must have climbed forty feet when my hand encountered a ridge and I felt a current of air. And then I came to a fireplace.

As I crawled out of that fireplace, I knew where I was. I had come to Helena's bedroom.

Roughly I washed the filth from my head and my hands, but though I did what I could to wipe the soot from my shoes, I very soon saw that until I could change my clothing, I should not be fit to move in a furnished room. And what clothes I had were at Plumage. . . .

At once to get to the farm became my burning desire.

Before I did so, I must set Helena free. That was simple enough. I had her master key, and there was her private stair to bring me down to the hall. And yet I dreaded the duty. I did not want to see her—at least, not now. I dreaded the explanations which I should be forced to give. I did not want her to know that I had been there, in that room; that I had seen Pharaoh break her, that I had heard her purchase my safety for ten thousand pounds a year.

I heard the whine of a dog and then the scratch of claws on the floor that led to the ramparts. In a moment I had it open, and there to my joy was Sabre.

I afterwards learned that, perceiving the bustle above him, the dog had declared, by barking, that he was down in the moat. His rescue was effected.

The great dog seemed pleased to see me, but none too pleased to see that I was alone.

"Come and find her, Sabre," I said. "I know where she is."

The Alsatian started and stared. Then he bounded toward me, put his great paws on my shoulders and licked my face.

One minute later we stood in the little hall.

With the master key in my hand, I turned to the turret door. For a moment I hesitated. Then I took a deep breath, fitted the key to the lock and pushed open the oak.

Helena was not to be seen. Neither, for that matter, was Sabre. He had gone to join his mistress at the head of the turret stair.

I was wondering whether to follow or whether to wait where I was, when I suddenly saw that my duty to the lady was done.

The appearance of Sabre would show her that she was released. The way to her bedroom was open, and she had no need of escort, because the terror was laid.

With trembling fingers, I whipped the key from the lock of the turret door. Then I opened the door which gave to the winding staircase, passed through and locked it behind me with all dispatch. Five minutes later I crossed the moat by the foot-bridge and entered the tunnel which would bring me into the woods.

As I walked to Plumage, I remembered those terrible moments—how in her pride she had flung my puny efforts in Pharaoh's face and how in her fear and trembling she had sought to buy my safety by committing a breach of trust. No queen could have done more for the king she loved.

Although I had come to regard with increasing apprehension the opening of Helena's eyes—to the truth, of course, that it was I and not Bugle that had stood in the secret chamber and listened to all she said—it had never occurred to me that, if only I held my tongue, neither she nor anyone else need ever suspect that I had entered the castle that Friday night. Yet before my cousin had spoken a dozen words, I saw that, if I was careful, my secret would keep itself.

He found me finishing breakfast in his room at The Reaping Hook.

"Well, you have missed something," he said. "Let that be your punishment for deceiving three simple souls. Not that I blame you—this time. My lady had no right to treat you like that. I told her as much in the coupe. But she wouldn't listen to me. But that's by the way. You've missed—in a way you've missed the most astounding show that ever was seen."

Lady Helena saw a good bit—more than enough, I'm afraid. "Upon my soul, I don't know where to begin."

"What do you know?" I said.

"I feel sure," said my cousin, "that you will be glad to hear that your failure to arrive at the castle knocked the three of us flat. We couldn't assimilate the fact that simple, honest John Spencer had laid himself out to deceive us—and done it so devilish well. You certainly got your own back. Lady Helena was wild. 'I'd never have believed it of him,' she raged."

"Well, now that she was safe in the castle, I was only too glad of an excuse to get out, and so I announced that Barley and I would seek you without delay. She insisted that we should take Sabre and gave the dog his orders before we left. It's right you should know that she was extremely worried."

My cousin paused, to frown on his finger-tips.

"I hope, in the merciful course of time, to forget the way we employed the next two hours. We used Sabre exactly according to the instructions on the box. Should the dog display emotion, release him at once. Remain exactly where you were when he left you, until he returns. Then take hold of his collar and he will lead you to John."

a began to shake with laughter.

"Quite so," said Geoffrey. "Quite so. After about an hour the dog displayed emotion and was released. After another hour Barley and I displayed much more emotion and withdrew to survey the mouth of the entrance drive. . . .

"We hadn't been there ten minutes when we heard the Carlotta coming—coming from the castle all out. By the use of our torches we stopped her, to find that she was manned by a flying squad. Watchmen, porters, grooms—all of them armed to the teeth. They were going to compass Yorick, traveling east; and the coupe was coming after, to travel west. The Countess Helena had been kidnapped. Yorick was plunged into darkness and my lady was gone. Let down in a sheet from the ramparts. Her handkerchief had been found on the drawbridge and Sabre had been found in the moat."

I felt that it was time to say something.

"But how," I began. . . .

"Don't interrupt," said my cousin. "Listen to me. Well, I let the Carlotta go, deciding that Barley and I would do better on foot. I

sent him east and ran west—yes, ran, with my heart in my mouth. The idea was to find the Rolls. . . . If the Rolls had not gone.

"I found her at a quarter to one, up a little track—and very near cried with relief. You see, that meant that my lady was yet in the park."

"I rushed off and stopped the coupe, which was lapping for the twentieth time, told the chauffeur to go on patrolling, but to send me reinforcements and tell everybody he met. Then I went back to lay my ambush. I soon had plenty of men and I did the job well. Pharaoh simply hadn't an earthly. Though he didn't know it, that track had become the scaffold on which he and his little friends were going to die."

"At a quarter of two a wallah comes pelting with a message—we very nearly killed him, of course. But by the time he'd said his piece he was nearer death than before. The Countess Helena's compliments, and will Mr. Bohun come back to the castle at once."

My cousin covered his face.

"I don't think I've ever felt such a blasted fool. But blasted. . . . 'Well, I took the Rolls and drove back—to hear Lady Helena's tale. 'She was lying down on her bed when a gag was clapped over her mouth. Pharaoh, of course; but he very soon had his way. He bound her wrists and ankles and took her master key. Then he carried her down her private staircase and into a secret room—the ante-chamber, in fact, to the cellar where lies the gold.'

"I'm afraid there's no doubt that she suffered; but, except that Pharaoh put it across her, she simply leaves that bit out. But he must have been pretty ruthless, for in the end she opened the secret panel concealing the cellar steps."

"Well, Pharaoh and Dewdrop went down, to view the gold; but Rush and Bugle remained in the chamber on guard. I ought to have said that her hands and her feet had been freed. Still, she hadn't much chance, for they kept a torch on her face."

"I shall never understand why Pharaoh employed two such washouts as Bugle and Rush. The first thing those two bright lads did was, between them, to drop the torch. By the time they'd found it again their prisoner was gone. The door to the secret room is a secret door. It cannot be opened from within. It was, therefore, standing open. In a flash my lady was out and had shut the door."

"Well, though she was safe, she wasn't clear of the wood. She was locked in a staircase-turret, and Rush had her master key. She called from the embrasures, but, as the castle was empty, there weren't any ears to hear. Then, after a while she found Sabre standing beside her, licking her hand."

I felt that such a statement demanded some sort of expression of disbelief.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Potatoes 2,000 Years Ago

Potatoes were first grown in Peru more than 2,000 years ago.

Oriental Are Experts in the Art of Starving Selves

Recently a Yogi ascetic entombed himself in Rishi Kesh, a holy place in the northwest United Provinces of India. After 45 days those without were to listen for the sacred word "Om," whereupon he was to be released and given fruit juice. On the forty-fifth day they heard a faint "Om" and carried out the instructions. During all that time the ascetic had taken neither food nor water.

Oriental seem to be experts in this art of starving. Jatindranath Das, one of sixteen persons arrested in 1929 in the Lahore conspiracy, died in prison after a hunger strike of sixty-one days. Taha Hussein, who tried to assassinate the Egyptian prime minister, Siki Pasha, and was condemned to seven years' hard labor, died in 1932, after fasting fifty days.

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A Gag Was Clapped Over Her Mouth.

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Don't Guess But Know

Whether the "Pain" Remedy You Use is SAFE?

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