

• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

THRILLING SPY

STORIES

Vol. I, No. 1

FALL, 1939

Price 10c



A Complete Full-Length Novel

Storm Over the Americas
By CAPT. KERRY McROBERTS

When Nazi Intrigue Menaces the Panama Canal, the Eagle, U. S. Secret Agent, Swoops Down on a Spy Ring Guarding Secret Weapons of War 16

A Complete Novelet

TERROR IN KURDISTAN E. Hoffmann Price 72

In a Bandit Khan's Mountain Fastness an Englishman and an American Face Desperate Spy Peril

Other Thrilling Stories

THE CORPSE FROM G-2 G. T. Fleming-Roberts 53

Investigator Bob Roche Barges into a Fiendish Sabotage Plot

WAR PLANS DIVIDED Robert Leslie Bellem 63

It Was a Desperate Game of "Button, Button, Who's Got the Button?"

FLAME UNDER THE SEA Allan R. Bosworth 90

There's a Battle Royal when Submarine Disaster Stalks the Deep

WATERWAY DEATH Arthur W. Phillips 99

The Welland Canal Looked Like an Easy Target to Saboteurs!

and

SECRET ORDERS A Department 8

THRILLING SPY STORIES, published quarterly and copyright, 1939, by Better Publications, Inc., 23 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y. Single copies, 10 cents; yearly subscription, 40 cents. Application for entry as second class matter pending. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope, and are submitted at the author's risk. 178 Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used it is a coincidence.

Read our companion magazines: Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Adventure, Thrilling Detective, Detective Novels Magazine, Thrilling Western Stories, Thrilling Westerns, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Action Stories, Thrilling Sports, Popular Detective, Popular Love, Popular Westerns, Popular Sports Magazine, Sky Fighters, The Lone Eagle, Black Book Detective Magazine, Texas Rangers, Everyday Astrology, The Phantom Detective, G-Men, Masked Rider Western Magazine, Startling Stories, West, Strange Stories, and Range Riders.



TERROR

CHAPTER I

THE TRAILER TRAILED

THERE may have been hotter days in Bagdad, though Garrett Hale doubted it. The muddy Tigris wound across the baking plains of Iraq, toward the Persian Gulf; the wind brought the smell of dried apricots and leather and wool from barges moored along the bank.

Blinding glare crept through the jalousies that shaded the windows of the American Consulate, and camel-flavored dust sifted through, filming Hale's desk, and the heap of papers on it.

"How in the devil," he muttered, "do they figure I can find out if they ought to risk shipping calico and phonographs and sewing machines to Kirkuk on long term contracts?"

Hale was as tall as the Kurds who occasionally came down from the mountains and into Bagdad; like

A Complete Novelet of Asiatic Intrigue

In a Bandit Khan's Mountain Fastness,

IN KURDISTAN

Hale charged down the hall. "Hang on!" he shouted to Fortesque



By E. HOFFMANN PRICE
Author of "Snake Goddess," "Scourge of Allah," etc.

Englishman and Yank Face a Nazi Coup!

them, he was tanned and angular of face, and his blue eyes squinted from beneath shaggy brows. Many a Kurdish tribesman, if put in tweeds, could be taken for a hard-bitten Scot or Britisher or American. And those who forsook banditry to become oil drillers were competent workmen, unlike the Arabs of Iraq.

But for the moment, the warlike Kurds worried Hale. There was always trouble on the border that separated Persia from Iraq, and the Kurds caused most of it.

If they came down to raid Kirkuk and other towns, there would be the devil to pay. Kirkuk was the heart of the oil field that furnished the French and British navies with fuel oil. Putting that supply out of action would make it a lot nicer for Herr Hitler's impending show. And the Nazis still regretfully remembered the Berlin to Bagdad slogan, more than ever a hollow echo, now that Turkey was pro-British, and the King of Iraq plainly marked, "Manufactured in Great Britain."

"Nazi agitators could cripple two navies by setting the Kurds on the warpath," Hale reasoned.

He could send the inquiry from an exporter in the States that worried him to Washington. There was no sense in poking out his own chin. Persistent native gossip spoke of Nazi agents in Bagdad; particularly Oscar von Gabel, who called himself a scientist.

HE ROSE from his chair, put on his sun helmet, and stepped to the wide and dusty street. Most of the natives were in underground cellars, waiting for the mid-afternoon heat to subside. Hale drove his Ford toward the southern suburb, and past the broad lawn that surrounded the British offices in Bagdad, a fortress-shaped building overlooking the Tigris, whose massive brick walls, white-washed, reflected the glare. A turbaned porter admitted Hale to the dusky lobby of the Service Club.

"Is Captain Fortesque in?" Hale asked in Arabic. "I want to see him at once."

From beyond the carved screen

that guarded the lobby came the tinkle of ice, the savor of English pipe mixtures, and cigar smoke. Subdued voices blended with the whirr of ceiling fans and the murmur of servants.

Captain Eric Fortesque looked cool enough in his white uniform when he came to meet Hale. His sandy hair was unruffled and there was not a trace of worry in his ruddy face.

"Working overtime, eh?" He extended his hand. "How about a spot of whiskey?"

A barefooted Arab brought tall glasses to the table, and Hale lost no time in getting to the point.

"I'm in a jam," he said to the military attaché, when he had explained. "If I tell this exporter to keep out of Iraq and then nothing crops up, there'll be hell to pay. If I give him a go-ahead—"

Fortesque chuckled sympathetically. "What makes you think Iraq isn't as quiet as it should be?"

"Oscar von Gabel picked a hell of a time for digging up antiques," Hale said bluntly. "With things as ticklish as they are in Europe, with Algiers and Morocco muttering, with Syria and Palestine a pretty mess, Iraq can't stay quiet."

"So you think he's digging up more than Assyrian mounds?" Captain Fortesque's smile was quizzical.

"You know damn well you're watching him! How much can you tell me?"

"We watch everyone," Fortesque evaded. "After all, we can't arrest a man for planning to dig."

"Not even if he goes to Kurdistan to dig?"

"Kurdistan?" Fortesque's eyes sharpened. "I say, now, that's another matter. How much can you tell me?"

Hale frowned. "I can't prove a thing. But von Gabel was on the pan, back in the States a few years ago. There wasn't enough to convict him of sabotage or conspiracy. A few witnesses, but oddly they were drowned before anyone could find them." He leaned across the table. "See here, Fortesque! I realize there's a lot you can't discuss, but all I want

is a hint. If a Kurdish revolt is in the cards, you know about it."

"You're asking me to shoulder your responsibility," Fortesque slowly shook his head. "No game, Hale!"

"A hell of a pal you are," Hale grumbled. "Boy, get my hat! And thanks for the whiskey."

"Oh, I say, don't take it that way. Better hold up that report. Forty-eight hours won't make much difference."

"Thanks," said Hale. "Could you join me at dinner tonight?"

"Er—sorry, old fellow. Beastly lot of work. But the night after tomorrow night—"

HALE grinned and nodded. "Good hunting! And I hope you arrest the heel!"

"Ah—here, here, you misunderstood—"

But Hale had heard enough. Before he reached the street, his plan was half shaped to do some hunting of his own. An American vice-consul was not supposed to track down Nazi agitators in British-controlled Iraq, but this was an exception.

When Hale left his quarters that night, he wore a Kurdish dagger at his belt, a Kurdish tunic and boots and tall headgear; and just for luck, he wore an American revolver. . . .

In the oil fields of Mosul and Kirkuk, Hale had learned enough of the mountaineer's language to be able to thump his broad chest and say, with convincing arrogance, "*Az Icurman-jam!*"—"I am a Kurd from Kurdistan." He looked like one. And seeing his cone-shaped cap with white and red shawls wrapped about it, turban-wise, the loafers of Bagdad hastily gave ground as Hale stalked into the native quarter.

His mustache did not droop enough for a mountaineer, but that was a minor detail. Luckily, Kurds do not go out for the beards that are every Arab's ambition. Altogether, the muttered disapproval that followed him as he passed one coffee house after another flattered his make-up; and what clinched it was the furtive glances of Iraq policemen. They were glad he was not looking for trouble.

Hale had followed Captain Fortesque all the way from the new city. The military attaché wore a mustard-green civilian suit of atrocious cut; a red fez, squeaking yellow shoes, and a salmon-colored shirt. The smell of high powered *arrak* blended with the perfume that drenched his clothes.

Fortesque looked, and acted like a peculiarly worthless Turk in search of disreputable amusement. He was singing a bawdy ballad. Hale caught snatches of it: "*—fustan ala yomi—yok, baba-jcem, yok!*"

An inconspicuous car had taken an Englishman down an alley along the river front; the vehicle, emerging from the mouth of the dark stretch, had apparently gone on with its white-clad passenger. But Hale had not followed the car, and after half an hour of patient waiting, he had seen and heard the supposed Turk lurch from a doorway. Fortesque!

Hal had followed. It looked as if Fortesque were making a routine call on some native informer who kept the attaché posted on bazaar gossip. Fortesque reeled along toward *Khansi-Ajam*, a *caravanserai* frequented by river men and camel drivers.

Inside the gate of the tavern mules and camels were bedded down. Bales and boxes rose in dark heaps, and here and there, small fires winked. Bearded Arabs squatted about them drinking coffee. Others were already snoring in the verminous cubby holes that lined one wall.

There were more pretentious quarters along the balcony that overshadowed the back of the courtyard. Fortesque went up the creaking stairs, no longer singing. Hale caught the wavering light of a tallow dip. Its glow danced on the dirty whitewash of the wall at the head of the stairs.

When Fortesque reached the upper gallery he stood waiting. This was plain from the shadow he cast. Someone had picked up the candle and come to the door of one of the cubicles.

In another moment, Hale was stealthily going up the stairway. Halfway up, he heard a guarded exchange of greetings.

"Praise Allah!" an Arab said.

"And I trust your lordship's health is good."

A hinge creaked, and there was no more glow in the gallery. But Hale readily identified the cubicle into which Fortesque and the Arab had stepped, for there was a thin thread of light beneath the panel. In the passageway Hale listened. Inside, a *narghileh* bubbled, and the savory fumes of Ajami tobacco filtered out.

"Von Gabel," the Arab spat, "is all that you think, *sahib*. A maker of trouble, and a sower of swords. There be many cases of implements for digging. But these will be filled with guns smuggled across the desert."

Hale was not surprised. It would be simple enough to have tools shipped by rail from Basra, after clearing the customs, and then have arms substituted for them. No wonder Fortesque did not care to be frank about details! For the chances were that von Gabel, an international pest, would not be arrested. His disappearance would be laid to bandits.

"Where are the guns?" Fortesque's voice was low and tense.

"There are two lots—"

The pipe gurgled, *glub-glub-glub*. Hale silently cursed. The Arab was stalling to make an impressive build-up for his story. Because, of course, the more importance he gave his spying, the higher his reward.

"It is possible that there is a third caravan," he went on. "Each lot to be picked up as it was on the way up the Tigris."

Down in the courtyard, several merchants finished their long-winded exchanges of compliments and announced they needed sleep. The stairs creaked, and soft soled shoes slipped up the worn treads. One of the approaching tenants had a light, and further listening was out of the question.

Hale had time only to hear Fortesque asking: "Where's the first batch, Hassan? And where's he? Still in town?"

And the Arab's answer, ignoring the important first query: "He left an hour ago, *sahib*. By Allah, I was afraid to look for you. I am suspected already. *Wallah*, they would slay me!"

CHAPTER II

A DICTATED NOTE



ARRETT HALE hastily stepped away from the door. He was several paces down the hall when the candle bearer reached the head of the stairs. Feigning drunkenness, when he reached a loose plank in the floor, the vice-consul

stumbled and lurched headlong, rolling against the wall.

Five Arabs were coming down the hall. They seemed unaware of the Kurd's presence. Keys scraped at locks, hasps clicked.

Then Hale heard the creak of a hinge, an exclamation, and a wrathful cry. A fist popped, and a man smashed against the wall. Fortesque lurched into the hall, with an Arab clinging to one arm.

"Back, you beggars!" the British attaché growled as he sidestepped, and squared off to floor another.

If he had a pistol, he had no chance to use it in that stampede of robbed Arabs. Perhaps he did not realize what Hale now plainly saw—that they were conspirators with Hassan. For even as Fortesque yelled at the oncoming Arabs, Hassan jostled the attaché off balance. Like so many of his kind, the informer was a traitor to the man who paid him.

Hale charged down the hall, but did not draw his revolver. In that confusion of cloaks and bobbing turbans, a shot would as easily drill Fortesque as any of his assailants. So Hale lunged at the group, scattering them right and left.

"Hang on!" he shouted to Fortesque.

Two of the gang surged back, straddling Hale's back. He rolled over, and launched a kick, tying another into a knot. Then, by the light that came from the cubicle, he saw the blood which splashed the attaché's face. Fortesque was out. A blow on his scalp had stunned him.

The wiry Arabs, including Hassan,

seized Hale's wrist just as he got his Colt out of his belt. His blast threw a slug into the wall, but a savage wrench forced the weapon from Hale's hand. Pain weakened him; weight crushed him to the floor. But though he still might have escaped, he could not abandon the unconscious attaché.

A tall man came running toward the skirmish with a flashlight.

"Drop that knife, you fool!" he commanded. "Bring them both! Kurd, eh? It's the *Amerikani* consul!"

Several camel drivers were at the big man's heels. They jerked Hale to his feet, and the attaché who was just coming to his senses. One glimpse of the leader of the gang identified him; Hale recognized Oscar von Gabel's prominent nose, high forehead, and square chin. The spy wore an Arab's cloak and headcloth, but his voice and that momentary glimpse of his face were enough.

As they hustled Hale down into the courtyard, he knew that neither the scuffle nor the single shot had carried beyond the *caravanseraï*. The courtyard was filled with von Gabel's allies. Muleteers were booting their saddled beasts into line, and camels were grunting under their loads.

"Well done!" the Nazi agent said to Hassan. "Gag them and stuff them in the packs!"

Greasy turban cloths muffled Hale's face and lashed his hands and wrists. While the caravan men bundled him into a camel pannier, others loaded Fortesque into the opposite container.

Scarcely ten minutes after the trapping of the attaché, a long line of camels and mules filed into the sweltering darkness of Bagdad. A brazen moon gilded the dome and minarets of the Kademain Mosque. Somewhere along the river front, bargemen chanted as they plied their poles, slowly bringing a raft load of wool and apricots toward the bank. Above the tolling of camel bells, Hale heard the cry of a sentry reporting that all was well on his post.

THERE was nothing secret about von Gabel's caravan. He had caged the two who suspected him, and

now he was making the long, weary march along the Tigris and into the mountains, supposedly to dig at whatever site he chose.

Hale wondered why he and the attaché were still alive. Von Gabel could have murdered them and dumped their bodies into the Tigris. That he had not done so was certainly not because of conscientious scruples!

After an hour's march across the sweltering plain, the caravan halted. Hale and Fortesque were taken from their stifling panniers, and von Gabel had their gags removed.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, and bowed formally. "This is a pleasure I did not expect, Vice-consul Hale."

"Kidnaping or murder," Fortesque cut in, "you know very well we'll be missed."

Von Gabel chuckled, and smoothed his flowing *aba*. "I've arranged for that. Just as I sent Hassan to Bagdad, six months ago. And when you began muttering about Nazi plots and my archeology, Hassan found it easy to offer you some striking news." He gestured toward the camels. "Now you and your friend and some other jackasses are going with me into the mountains, while the camels pick up the guns hidden along the river between here and Mosul."

"To Kurdistan?"

"Exactly. Considering that crack on the head and a stifling ride, Captain Fortesque, you are sharp-witted—about an hour too late. Now, before we ride out of this annoying heat, I'd like to have you write a letter."

Fortesque was puzzled. "To whom?"

"To the *sardar*, in Bagdad. Tell him and Colonel Aswad that you are making an unexpected trip to Mosul. Then a report to your home office, explaining your reasons for this sudden investigation in the north. I'll give you excellent ones. And you, also, Hale; a report to the Consul General."

Hassan, the treacherous Arab, was digging into a mule's pack. He brought out a portable typewriter, and a briefcase with stationery. Fortesque's face changed when he saw

the gilt initials on the leather, and recognized the typewriter.

"Don't be amazed at German thoroughness," von Gabel blandly explained. "I thought of everything, including your personal kit, and office supplies."

"I won't write a word, and I won't sign," Fortesque declared.

"These Arabs," von Gabel airily observed, "can make you wish you had."

"They can't more than kill me," Fortesque retorted. "I refuse to draw up a false official statement."

Some of the Arabs fingered the hafts of their daggers.

"These boys aren't going to cut bread or cheese with those knives," Hale said.

Fortesque regarded Hale with a little more contempt than he had von Gabel. "You are quite welcome to write, Hale. You won't live much longer if you do, and you won't end any more pleasantly, I dare say."

Hale was not backing down as easily as it looked though. But the plan the portable typewriter suggested to his mind was one that could not be explained before an audience. How to put it across to Fortesque, however, was a problem.

Von Gabel's eyes narrowed.

YOU don't seem to understand that I have too much at stake for trifling," he snapped at Fortesque. "But liquidating an attaché is rather painfully conspicuous."

"You've begun to realize that?"

"So," von Gabel continued placidly, "your absence must be accounted for. Otherwise, there would be planes scouting all over the country, troops would comb the hills, and I would not be able to do my duty."

"I won't sign!" Fortesque flatly repeated. "An officer in His Majesty's army is not quite as yellow as you are!"

"*Schweinhund!*" Von Gabel's face darkened, and he drew his gun.

"Hold it!" Hale cried. The gallant Britisher must not vainly sacrifice his life. "You're rubbing him the wrong way! Let me talk to him."

"So?" Von Gabel slowly holstered

the pistol. "Maybe you can convince him?"

He shrugged, and turned away. Letting his captives ponder ought to do the trick, since one had already weakened.

"Do as he says," Hale whispered to Fortesque. "We'll get a breathing spell, and there's always a chance of a comeback later. I've got something up my sleeve that fathead wouldn't suspect in a lifetime. Let me type at your dictation. Claim your left hand is hurt. I can't explain now, but—"

Fortesque was puzzled, but he nodded. Hale raised his voice then, to say argumentatively: "Don't be a chump! You're worth more alive than dead."

"Ah—er—sometimes one might think so," Fortesque conceded. "Though this scoundrel may kill us as soon—"

Von Gabel had overheard just enough to make him confident.

"I am merely doing my duty, Captain," he said suavely. "Also, since you will be writing daily reports until my work is done, be assured that I'll not murder you."

Fortesque appeared to give in reluctantly.

"Very well, I'll sign, but someone else will have to type. My left wrist is badly sprained."

"I'll do it," Hale cut in cheerfully. "Dictate the story."

He fumbled with the typewriter, began to tap off:

The quick brown fox—

"What sort of nonsense is that?" von Gabel demanded.

"Fingers are cramped," Hale explained. "I'll tell you when to dictate, but don't talk too fast!"

He slipped in another sheet of paper, and picked away for a moment, gradually increasing in speed and smoothness. This sheet he jerked out, then looked up.

"All through with good men coming to the aid of the party, and the brown fox is done jumping," he said. "Lead off, you fathead, and some day I'll push your face in!"

The German squinted at a penciled memorandum, and read slowly. Bit

by bit, an official report developed under Hale's fingers.

"By Jove!" Fortesque murmured, "sounds as if I'd worded it myself."

Von Gabel smiled smugly. "Of course. I know more about your files than you do yourself, Captain Fortesque. Now be pleased to shut up for a moment."

He read on, and finally Hale presented the sheet to the attaché for a signature. Von Gabel read the typing, and nodded.

"Very good. Now your own report, Vice-consul Hale."

This did not take long. Inside of half an hour, one of the caravan men was riding upstream, toward the post-office.

"You see how it goes, with methodical routine?" von Gabel said, when Fortesque and Hale had their ankles unbound, so that they could be set astride mules for the march into the foothills of the Zagros Range. "Nothing forgotten, everything anticipated. And soon you shall see what it gives in Sulaimania and in the Kirkuk oil fields."

CHAPTER III

CARAVAN PRISONERS



OR a time, as the mule train settled down to dusty plodding away from the broad Tigris, Fortesque managed to get his mount alongside of Hale's.

"What's the trick, old man?" he whispered.

Dust enveloped them. The muleteers in charge of the pack animals were behind, and others were in front. The captives would have had no chance of flight, for there was no cover, and merciless moonlight would make them easy targets.

"I set the typewriter for cutting a stencil," Hale explained.

"But what of it?"

"The keys didn't hit the ribbon. Now, that quick-brown-fox stuff got them clean, not a smudge of ink left.

I scrapped that sheet, and slipped in another, supposedly for more about the fox, only I wrote that we were in a nice jam."

"Oh, I say—you mean, with no ink on the keys, you chopped words into the blank paper?"

"Right. And that is the sheet I finally slipped back into the typewriter when I actually wrote the message he dictated. By candlelight, he never noticed the impressions that are between the lines of writing."

Fortesque's eyes twinkled, though his face remained blank and solemn.

"Ah," he murmured. "I fancy I begin to understand what you mean by a fathead. A sort of person—"

"Like von Gabel. He had the answers in front of him, and he was too sure of himself to look! By daylight, the indentations will be plainer."

But there was one hitch to be considered. The trains between Mosul and Bagdad did not run on schedule, and not every train picked up what little mail did accumulate in hell-holes like Samarra and Tikrit. Moreover, Iraqi postmasters sorted mail whenever the spirit moved them, and whenever work did not interfere with siestas.

"So," Hale said, "before the message between the lines starts from Bagdad, the hills may be full of revolt. This Nazi's men will blow up the pumping station at Kirkuk, and not a drop of oil can reach the coast for weeks, maybe months. And once that pumping station is out of action, you can bet on war in Europe. British navy short of fuel, French navy ditto, and submarines having lots of fun!"

Fortesque's jaw sagged. "And you were asking me questions—just this afternoon!"

"I've just been putting two and two together," Hale explained, "ever since trying to listen in on you and Hassan. After all, what I've said is only my guess."

"I'm afraid your guess is all too right," Fortesque somberly observed. "What'll we be doing while we're waiting?"

"Riding mules," Hale said cheerfully. "Writing letters. And keeping our eyes open."

Several days later, the mule caravan was well into the mountains of Kurkistan, and across the Persian frontier; though in that land of nomads borders meant little. The mountaineers acknowledged no rule save that of their own chiefs, and neither Turk nor Persian nor Arab caliph had ever tamed them.

From time to time, bullets kicked up dirt and rock for, hidden on rugged hillsides, guardians of the passes kept watch, day and night. Whenever the caravan halted at such a signal, horsemen rode from cover and questioned von Gabel.

They wore massive turbans wrapped about cone-shaped felt caps, which exaggerated the height of the tall riders; thin, rangy men with bony faces, bleak blue eyes and trailing mustaches. Some had red hair, some yellow. And all were as wild as the colors of their baggy trousers and their silver embroidered vests.

NO words were wasted. Each chief listened to von Gabel while rifles and pistols covered the dusty pack train. Then a gesture, and the ascent was resumed. A moment later, not a trace of the watchers was to be seen, not a glint of bandolier or dagger.

"Got to hand it to von Gabel," Hale said, after one such encounter. "He's paved his way. Otherwise that treasure chest of his wouldn't last ten seconds—not if he had a regiment of cavalry to guard it."

He gestured toward a mule with a saddle weighted with two small boxes, locked and sealed. Their weight made the muleteers grunt when they loaded up of a morning. Even if the men had not talked about it being gold, Hale would have guessed the nature of the cargo.

No guard still was necessary for the prisoners either day or night. Now that the Kurds knew of their presence they could not have ridden or run for an hour without being recaptured. Nor would any muleteer dare seize the treasure. The whole caravan was under the protection of Uthman Khan, prince of the powerful Hakkiari tribe.

"Uthman Khan," Fortesque ob-

served, "could jolly well take the war chest and settle the whole party."

But the attaché did not know the Kurds as well as he knew the tricky natives of Bagdad. Garrett Hale did.

"The khan's a gentleman, after his own lights," he said. "His family claims Saladin as an ancestor. These fellows have as much of a sporting tradition as you Britishers."

"Aside from such trifles as murder, loot, sabotage," Fortesque said wryly. "And if there is a cash payoff for Uthman Khan in those boxes, just fancy our returning to tell about it!"

Hale licked his dusty lips. "That typewriter gag may save the pipe line, but all the planes in Asia can't find us in these mountains. I'll admit our personal chances aren't too bright."

Fortesque eyed the gray bulwarks of the mountains, the winding trail, the far-off green of a mountain meadow. This was no country for fugitives, either on horse or foot.

"We wouldn't get far if we did make a break," he said tightly.

An hour later, they met Uthman Khan himself. First the zing of warning bullets glancing from the rocky trail; the pop of hidden rifles, and then armed riders with crossed bandoliers gleaming from their chests.

Their leader wore a tunic of honey-colored silk, a short jacket of gold embroidery, red boots, and the largest turban Hale had ever seen. Likewise, he had the hardest face between Luristan and Bitlis. Little gray eyes bored out from beneath shaggy brows; an enormous blond mustache all but hid his mouth, accenting the craggy chin and jaw. Twenty riflemen, two grooms, several couriers, and a pipe bearer followed him, but the entire pack looked mild beside Uthman Khan.

He reined in his Turkish horse, and sat there, eating a cucumber taken from the basket a mounted attendant offered him. Ignoring von Gabel, the Kurd chief drew an oversized dagger, and peeled another cucumber. Finally he said to one of his men:

"Get the chests of gold."

The Nazi agent's face had reddened at Uthman Khan's insulting indiffer-

ence to his presence. Then the flush slowly receded, and von Gabel's stomach seemed to be troubling him.

"You agreed to do the work before you got payment," he reminded, prodding his mule toward the towering khan.

The Kurd wiped his lips, eying the Nazi spy.

"Silence, pig!" he rumbled. "If you were a man, you'd do your own fighting! Because you are paying me, does that make me a servant?"

THE muleteers were fervently saying their prayers. Plainly all they expected was a systematic massacre.

"Judging from what he thinks of von Gabel," Fortesque muttered, "I begin to think Uthman Khan is a gentleman."

A pair of six-foot Kurds brought the chests to the prince. A farrier took his hammer and knocked the locks off. One of the riders dismounted and dug into the boxes, brought out bags of golden sovereigns, and held them up.

"By Allah, he has it!" he gloated.

Uthman Khan dismounted and inspected the treasure.

"This is the proper amount," he finally said to von Gabel. "As I agreed, I shall not take it until the work is done. But to prevent disputes, I am putting my own seal on the chests."

He took off his ring, touched matches to a stick of wax, stamped his signet on the hasps that secured the lids. He saw no need of putting on new locks—not in his own territory. The Kurds, bandits by profession and taste, steal only from strangers.

"You will go to Halabja to my headquarters," the khan ordered. "Not to Sulaimania. There you will wait until we have done what is to be done."

Two of Uthman Khan's escort led the caravan; the rest of the party took a side trail. But not a hint had been given of when the nomads would swoop down on Kirkuk's oil wells and pumping station.

"The khan sure has made certain of being paid," Hale muttered wryly. "Breaking those seals is worth a

man's life, and trying to sneak anything out of the country with Uthman Khan's signet on it is plain suicide."

Both he and the British attaché well knew that getting into Kurdistan was always simpler than getting out. The clannish mountaineers trusted no one, took no chances. Europe was nothing to them, and neither was Kirkuk. A bandit could not carry an oil well away so to make a raid on the town worth while, von Gabel had to pay.

The following afternoon, the trail wound over a crest, and down into a valley. Snow-whitened peaks rose fifteen thousand feet; cold streams rushed down to the meadows, and dark brown sheep grazed on the slopes. On every prominent crag, armed men kept watch, for this was the heart of the Hakkari country which no conqueror had ever tamed.

The town that loomed in sight—Halabja—was an insignificant huddle of cubical houses made of mud and unsquared stone. A few, two stories high, were fortresses, equipped with loopholes for riflemen, the parapets were notched so that the defenders could shoot down into the plain without offering themselves as targets. Halabja, in fact, was merely the court and headquarters of Uthman Khan, for most of his people lived in dugouts on the hillsides, scattered for miles in every direction.

A mosque lifted its dirty gray minaret above the housetops. Tall women, shapely, handsome and unveiled, moved along the narrow main street. They eyed the foreigners curiously, shrugged, and tossed their heads in contemptuous indifference. Whatever came from beyond Uthman Khan's country was either evil or else not worth noticing.

Robbery, of course, was the principle industry of the khan's domain, but not the only one. Jackasses trotted down the street with bales of rugs from Sinna and Hamadan. Wool, hides and tallow, and goatskin bags of butter were on their way to the warehouse where produce was stored until a caravan could take it down to the Tigris and to Bagdad.

Crude booths, some with awnings, some with brush roofs, lined the square on two sides. In the center was a well where gaudily clad women chattered as they waited their turn to fill earthen jars. And every man clanked from the weapons he carried.

Von Gabel's pack train was herded into a building where the roof had collapsed. Rather than repair the old warehouse, the natives had built a new one, jamming it up against the remains of the first. Across the street was Uthman Khan's fortress.

"I am a guest!" the Nazi agent protested to his escort. "What do you mean putting me in with mule drivers and prisoners?"

The guards howled with laughter. "A guest, is he? Allah, he's a coward who hires fighting men!"

But they brought barley cakes, butter, cucumbers, rocklike cheese, and freshly butchered mutton to the improvised *serai*.

"Feed those fellows and then tie their hands and feet!" von Gabel ordered the muleteers who unloaded Hale and Fortesque.

"I guess we'd run away, huh?" Hale scoffed.

"Silence, pig!"

Von Gabel uncorked a punch that knocked Hale into a corner. He was passing Uthman Khan's contempt for himself on to the prisoners. For good measure, von Gabel booted a few mule drivers. Having established order, he went to where his tent and camp cot had been set up, got into a gray uniform, a sabre, polished boots, and all his decorations.

"I could do with a shave!" Fortesque said to Hale. "That blighter might have included a razor among all the things he brought along from my quarters."

"You're going to be too busy for shaving," Hale said. "We're checking out."

"You're crazy! How far would we get? And if you're counting on that trick letter—"

"I'm not," Hale cut in. "It might save Kirkuk, but not us. I wrote that we were bound for Sulaimania, not Halabja!" He nodded, glancing

quickly around. "Listen! This warehouse and the one next door has possibilities. Look at those loopholes, in the second story wall of the new one."

CHAPTER IV

ROCKY GOLD



THAT night, Uthman Khan returned to Halabja. Hale heard the shouts that welcomed the Kurd prince. Then armed men came to call von Gabel to a conference with the men who were to raid Kirkuk. Such an enter-

prise needed careful direction, for ordinary mountaineer tactics would not suffice. Looting a town or a caravan was one thing; putting an oil field and the largest pumping station in Asia out of commission was something else.

But the clamor had subsided, and a cold wind whined through the ruined building when Hale and Fortesque finally worked themselves loose from the rather carelessly tied cords that bound them. Von Gabel was still at Uthman's house, and the muleteers were wrapped up in their woolen cloaks, folds muffling their heads. Hassan and a companion watched the tent.

Leading the way, Hale crept toward the crumbling wall. His plan was to scale the steep slope of the wall, and crawl through the second story loophole that opened into the new warehouse. They would be safe in such a hiding place, the last that von Gabel and the khan would think of, until the searchers decided that the fugitives had performed the incredible feat of riding out of Kurdistan without being waylaid and killed.

When Uthman Khan's tribesmen had mobilized and swooped down on Kirkuk and Halabja and the mountain passes were emptied of their fighting population, the lurkers might steal horses and try to outrace the column to warn the town. It was a suicide play, but too much was at

stake to wait, trusting that the trick letters would give the alarm.

The moon reached down through holes in the roof, making great white patches on the dirt floor. Inch by inch, Hale skirted them until he was in line with the archway that faced the plaza, where saddled horses huddled against each other in the biting wind.

Only a few more yards to go. If no dislodged rocks slid from the crumbling wall the Arab guards and muleteers would be none the wiser until morning.

And then von Gabel stepped through the ruined archway. He had not come directly from the khan's palace, across the plaza, or Hale would have seen him. The Nazi must have rounded the square, and skirted the ruin.

"*Verdammt esel!*" he was muttering.

There must have been a clash of Teutonic and Kurdish stubbornness, or he would not have been walking out so soon. Hale froze, but Fortesque made the mistake of trying to flatten to the ground, and made a visible blur in the shadows.

Cursing, von Gabel drew his Luger. "Oh, all right!" Hale said. "You would have to butt in, just when I had a chance at those horses."

"So, *Schweinhund*, you think you can escape?" the Nazi snarled. "Get up!"

Hale and Fortesque arose, raising their hands.

"I ought to flog you as well as those sleepy Arabs!" von Gabel growled. "Hassan, Hassan, you pig!"

And in that instant as the Nazi's head moved slightly to call, Hale's up-lifted hands slashed down as he leaped forward.

"Grab a horse, Fortesque!" he shouted.

The edge of Hale's hand crippled von Gabel's wrist, but muscular contraction jerked the trigger. A shot cracked loose. Then Fortesque closed in with a caulking maul fist. Von Gabel's yell was cut short. The Arabs were leaping from their blankets, but in the gloom they could not see what was happening.

Horses squealed and snorted. Men dashed out of the palace, met the yelling Arabs at the archway. There was more than enough noise to conceal Hale's and Fortesque's scramble up the breach in the wall.

BEFORE Uthman Khan arrived the two fugitives were through the small window of the second floor of the warehouse.

"The *Feringhi* said to grab a horse and ride!" a deep-voiced Kurd shouted.

Men were mounting. Signal shots were fired to notify the outposts that hell was popping.

"Lucky that a couple horses bolted at that shot," Hale whispered to Fortesque grimly.

The tribesmen were riding hell-bent after the fast fading clatter of hoofs.

"You have to catch them!" von Gabel was shouting. "If they get away, everything is ruined!"

Every man in town was turning out. Von Gabel mounted, and so did ten of his muleteers, taking Kurdish horses. As they pounded out of town, and the drumming of hoofs subsided, Fortesque whispered:

"See here, I have an idea. We'll get a couple of nags and ride east, instead of toward Kirkuk. They won't expect that, and if we get far enough into Persia, we'll reach a town and telegraph the alarm."

Hale shook his head. "Afraid we couldn't make it in time. If it were just a matter of saving our necks, we'd maybe have a Chinaman's chance. But von Gabel's play is the opener for war in Europe, and I'm not too sure anyone will notice that concealed typing in time to save Kirkuk and the pumping station."

Through the window that faced von Gabel's tent in the rambling ruin they heard two men muttering in Arabic.

"There's only two of them," Hale whispered. "Guarding the gold. The others all followed von Gabel."

"We could sneak up and tap them with a rock," Fortesque whispered back, plainly impatient to be moving. "Take their guns!"

Hale nodded, listened for a minute or two.

"Two, all right. I can see their cigarettes. In von Gabel's tent. But we're not riding tonight. I have a better idea. Let's nail them, but for hell's sweet sake, don't conk anyone with a rock, don't kill or cripple either of them. Slug 'em and choke 'em."

That puzzled Fortesque. "What in—"

"Let's go!" snapped Hale. "Got to work fast, before Uthman Khan decides he can hunt us better by daylight."

"But what—" repeated Fortesque, bewildered.

"That gold. Our best weapon. And now's the time, while those two lads are too interested in the hullabaloo to be watchful."

"Gold—of course. Bribery, eh?"

"Not in the way you think, pal," Hale whispered, as he let himself over the sill. "And for God's sake, don't get excited enough to kill anyone, or we're sunk."

There was no time for him to explain further. Too much must be done before Uthman Khan and von Gabel returned.

Hale and Fortesque could hear the muttered surmises of the two Arabs guarding the chests in the Nazi's tent as they crept closer.

"*Wallah*, they're crazy!" That was Hassan's voice. "They can't get to Kirkuk. The Khan's outposts wouldn't let a mouse creep through."

"*Ayawah*," the other guard agreed. "But infidels are stupid. This pig we are serving—if he hadn't caught the consul and the captain, we could have sold his plans to them."

"If these accursed chests weren't so heavy," Hassan complained, "anyone could slip through with them."

Hale nudged Fortesque.

"Take the one on the right, but wait for my move," he breathed in the attaché's ear. "Can't have any hollering."

"A mule load of gold and not a chance to steal it!" Hassan groaned. "O Walid, is there no way?"

Walid sighed gustily. "We might break the seals and take a few hands-

ful, and who would know what happened to it?"

"Breaking Uthman Khan's seal—he'd skin us alive! Peace upon you, Walid, but there is no help for this thing. But we can sell von Gabel to the police, before he gets out of *Iraq*. *Ayawah*—"

HALE lunged and landed, knocking the breath out of Hassan. Walid gasped, but had no time to yell as Fortesque cracked down on his turban with a rock the size of a small melon, flattening him.

"One-two," Hale panted, as he finished gagging Hassan with his own turban cloth.

He passed Fortesque the Arab's pistol, and drew the fellow's heavy-bladed dagger. Then with von Gabel's flashlight, he played the beam on the two chests of gold. He nicked the wax and deftly peeled the signet from the metal; hardly a flake of the seal itself was lost. The four detached wafers of wax were laid on the Nazi's cot, and in a moment, the lids of the treasure boxes were open.

"Fill the bottom with rocks, while I dump the gold into the well," Hale said to Fortesque.

The moon behind the squatty mosque buried the well in dense shadows. It was late, and the women, accustomed to sudden alarms, were not sitting up waiting for the horsemen to return. There was little chance of being observed, but Hale's heart was hammering when he emerged from the ruin and strode toward the well. His life hung on the chance gaze of any restless resident.

One at a time, he let the bags drop down the shaft.

When he had made four such trips, it took only a few minutes to replace in the treasure box the top layer of bags which he had set aside. Then came the business of replacing the seals.

Heating the dagger in the coals Hale laid the red-hot steel against an iron hasp. Then he set each wafer of wax back into place and as it softened he chilled it with a wet cloth. With the hot knife blade he welded the wax to the wood and metal.

"Perfect!" he breathed, as the last seal was put in place. "Now you get back to the warehouse while I talk to these lads. I'm wearing the right clothes to make them believe I'm a Kurd mountaineer."

The two guards were muttering and mumbling as their scattered wits returned. Hale shook Hassan and the Arab's cry, muffled behind his gag, indicated that he feared the worst.

"O brother of several dogs," Hale said in the broken Arabic that a Kurdish mountaineer would use, "I spared your life because you are under Uthman Khan's protection. And seeing our lord's seal on the gold, I spare it also. But by the four companions of the holy prophet, I'll cut your throat if you ever say a word about this. Is this agreed, or do I kill you and trust that Uthman Khan won't know who dealt with you as a lying Arab should be dealt by?"

Hassan groaned something behind his gag. Hale knew that he had put a fear into the fellow's heart that would blot out any other fear. That the khan's safe conduct had saved his life, Hassan could not for a moment doubt. That was the way of these hard bitten mountaineers, and he thanked Allah that the prowler had not decided to slay, loot, and then run from his tribe, an outlaw.

Hale loosened the gag.

"Allah loves the merciful!" Hassan mumbled. "On my head and eyes, I do not know you. How could I speak of this?"

Hale continued, "You are wise," growled Hale. "What if your infidel master knew that you planned to betray him to the soldiers when he goes back into Iraq?"

That finished Hassan. Hale hurried away, and as he climbed silently up the breach of the further wall, he heard hoofbeats drumming in the distance. Uthman Khan was returning. He was certain that no strangers could get out of his territory, and while they might lurk for a few hours the outposts would detect their first move.

Hale wriggled through the loophole that opened in to the second floor of the warehouse. Fortesque,

crouching inside, gave him a hand.

"You might tell me what sort of an insane idea that was, breaking and replacing the seals and throwing away perfectly good sovereigns!" the British attaché whispered.

"It's a gamble," Hale answered. "You can imagine how Uthman Khan would feel about finding that his pay-off is eighty percent rock."

"He'd be bloody well annoyed at von Gabel. Probably flay the beggar alive. But that isn't saving the pumping station at Kirkuk. You seem to forget that Uthman Khan isn't getting paid until after the raid is successfully completed."

"I've not forgotten a thing, old fellow. All I have to do now is tell Uthman Khan that he's dumb, making a raid for a load of rocks."

FORTESQUE choked. "The khan would chop you up in bits! You're balmy! You're off your chump. If—listen, I'll do that—"

Hale sighed. "You're a nervy guy, Captain, but you don't know your Kurds. I do, having traded with them before I was simple enough to take a job as vice-consul. Besides, in the clothes you're wearing, you'd look like hell, addressing a gathering of all the khans and assistants in the districts. They'll all be here all right, getting orders about the raid."

"But you're crazy—thinking you can walk in and tell Uthman there is no money."

"Wait and see," Hale answered. "Right now, I'm wondering if we can find anything to eat or drink in this loft."

Touch and smell identified bales of wool, bundles of rawhide, bags of gum tragacanth. There were rugs from Sinna and Hamadan, the last reeking of camel hair. But finally, Hale found dried apricots.

He tore off a strip of the leathery sheet of fruit paste, and handed it to Fortesque.

"Sour as hell, but it's grub. And I heard of a fellow going five days without water. Sorry you'll have to get along without your tea, too, old top."

He went to the grating, just under

the eaves which overlooked the moonlit plaza. Uthman Khan and his tribesmen were filing into town. Well, the die was cast. And a lot depended on the fears of those two treacherous Arabs down below.

CHAPTER V

PEACE IN THE MOUNTAINS



BY DAWN the next morning, Hale and Fortesque were crouched at the loophole as Kurdish horsemen, from parties of four and five to troops of a hundred, straggled into Halabja, each contingent in command of a local chief, Uthman

Khan had called, and they came, ready for pillage and plunder.

Toward noon, camels filed across the square. Their drivers were Arabs and they were escorted by Kurdish cavalry.

"The smuggled machine guns and P.N.T. von Gabel's boys picked up along the river," Hale said.

The meadows were dotted with black tents. And that evening, cooking fires winked all over the valley floor. The breeze was savory with the smell of bread baking on hot rocks, and mutton stew cooking in blackened pots. Fortesque licked his dry lips and stared at the well, only fifty yard away, but utterly inaccessible.

"Shouldn't have watched those girls filling their water jugs," he muttered.

Hale shrugged and turned back to the small window. Kurdish chiefs, their rank apparent from their silver-mounted weapons, were riding into the square. Each came from his encampment with grooms, and pipe bearers. Already, the space in front of Uthman Khan's palace was crowded with saddle mounts. Then von Gabel emerged from the ruin where he still camped.

When there were no more chieftains riding into the gloomy square, Hale turned to slip out of his hiding place. Fortesque offered him the cap-

tured Luger, but Hale shook his head.

"Gun's no good where I'm going. Keep it yourself, in case I slip. Sit tight!"

When Hale stalked grandly across the plaza his only weapon was the knife he had taken from Hassan. That kept him from looking conspicuously out of character. He went into the gloomy reception room, where resinous torches flamed along the massive walls.

Uthman Khan squatted on a scarlet rug spread on a stone platform at the head of the spacious hall. The leading chieftains sat on his right and left, according to rank; less important leaders had rugs spread on the floor. Nearer the door, scattered about in clusters, were grooms, pipe bearers, and other attendants of the tribal dignitaries. They were too busy smoking to pay any attention to Hale.

There was no order, no ceremony, no routine; no concession to rank, other than the seating arrangement. This was the last word in democracy, Hale realized, as he squatted there, against the wall; free men, paid to serve a dictator's needs.

"How do we know this infidel will pay us?" a graybeard demanded, jabbing a gnarled forefinger almost in von Gabel's face.

"I've counted the money and sealed it with my own seal, O Karim," Uthman answered. "And since this man is under safe conduct, we do not take his gold until we have earned it."

"*Wallah*, that is just," one of the elders conceded. "But when do we start? The guns are here, the powder too."

Uthman Khan turned to von Gabel. "Tell them. I will translate your dialect."

Gradually, talking ceased. Men leaned forward, listening. But there were interruptions, brusque and abrupt. Several times, von Gabel reddened with indignation, for he was used to deference.

"Not the oil derricks—not those tall towers," Uthman explained. "But the big tanks. Take the guards by surprise, for the place is well guarded—then blast holes in those on hill-

tops, and set the oil on fire. That will be done when the pumping station is blown up. All at once—a surprise attack on the garrison, outside of Kirkuk—a raid on the town—explosion—and burning oil rushing down. Then mount and ride.”

BIT by bit Hale had edged toward the circle of chiefs. The flickering overhead lights kept the shadow of his bulky turban dancing over his face. But when he arose, he had to look squarely into the torches and at the men who sat in front of them. For a moment, his heart thumped so heavily that he choked for breath; his legs were a little limp, and he did not know what to do with his hands.

He looked like a Kurd, but every chieftain knows every man of his band. The grooms and retainers had assumed, naturally, that he must be attached to some other master. But now every khan's eye would be on him, every ear ready to note whether he spoke as a Hakkari, and not like a member of some other tribe.

Hale was not sure, during those first few steps, whether his feet really did touch the stone paved floor. He stumbled over a mutton bone, cursed and kicked it aside. Then, his tongue loosened, he began.

“Uthman,” he said boldly, and extended his arm, “you and your men are fools, dealing with that lying infidel. He's cheating you.”

“Who's this fellow?” half a dozen chiefs muttered.

Von Gabel leaped to his feet. “That's my prisoner!” he shouted. “He's a spy!”

Uthman Khan started as he recognized Hale, but the disguised vice-consul only took another step forward. He could have reached out and plucked Uthman's drooping mustaches.

“Von Gabel makes a fool of you!” he shouted. “Count the money and you will see!”

The Nazi reached for his Luger. Hale flung himself forward, catching Uthman Khan's silken tunic.

“I am under your protection!” he cried.

That swift move, and the chiefs

who elbowed von Gabel from all sides combined to cheat the Nazi's wrath. And no Kurdish prince could refuse protection to a man who openly claimed it. Spy or stranger, this man's life was on the khan's head. The honor of a mountaineer demanded it.

“How do I know the truth of what you say?” Uthman Khan asked, raising a hand for silence.

“Count the money and see,” Hale repeated.

“You can't rob me that way!” Von Gabel cut in, dark with fury. “I'm under your protection, Uthman Khan. So is my money!”

Uthman Khan's bitter blue eyes shifted from one infidel to the other.

“Who has robbed you, man of little honor? We rob only those we meet on the highways of Allah.”

The Nazi gulped and forced a smile, realizing that his outburst had not helped him.

“Pardon me, Your Excellency. But I was surprised that you listened to my prisoner.”

Men went to get the gold.

“Better get a horse and ride while you have a chance,” Hale said to von Gabel. “What do you think the khan would do to you if he found you'd short changed him, after he'd counted the money?”

Sudden sweat gleamed on von Gabel's forehead.

“You—you— Is that what you've done, hiding around here instead of running away last night?”

“Try telling the khan I stole it,” Hale mocked.

The boldness of the accusation shook the Nazi, as had Hale's voluntary appearance at the meeting. Something was about to happen, but he did not know exactly what it would be.

“If you tricked Hassan and Walid,” von Gabel said in English, “the khan will hold you accountable!”

“Nuts!” Hale chuckled, turned to Uthman Khan, who was watching four men bring in the treasure. “Look at this fellow's face. He's worried sick already, Uthman Khan!”

The Kurd saw von Gabel's expression, and Hale's grin. There was

but one conclusion he could draw, weighing the two men.

"Father of several dogs, I think you did try to rob me," he mumbled to the German spy. "Your thief's heart chokes you."

"Maybe Hassan stole from you, von Gabel," Hale said in English. "If he betrayed Fortesque, wouldn't he do as much for you?"

Von Gabel was cracking. There would be the devil to pay when the loss was discovered, and the man with the guiltiest face would fare the worst.

The two heavy chests were set at the foot of the stone platform. All the retainers had crowded forward in a half circle. "Look!" someone cried. "That seal—it's been meddled with!"

The khan saw, straightened up, and stepped back a pace. The tall Kurd's mustaches twitched.

"O thou eater of carrion!" he thundered at von Gabel. "Not a man of the Hakkari would dare break my seal, and these have been removed and replaced!"

The Khan's men had not yet earned the treasure; but the violation of a prince's seal was an outrage and an affront. Yet von Gabel was under his protection, so Uthman Kahn drew neither sword nor pistol. He stood there, white with wrath.

"He did it!" von Gabel croaked, gesturing at Hale. "That's why he stayed here last night when we thought he had run away! Get my guards! Ask them!"

"This man has not the bearing of a thief," the khan said.

The tone of his voice was the Nazi's sentence. Von Gabel forgot that he was under a prince's protection, that Kurdish honor guarded his life. Wrath and disappointment crazed him. Without even having seen what was in the chest, he drew his Luger, and before Uthman Khan could shout or leap, the pistol covered Hale and crackled.

Hale had lunged toward the shelter of the ledge but the slug raked him, paralyzing him from shoulder to hip.

Then, before any of the surprised Kurds could get a weapon into line,

there was a second shot, almost blending with the Nazi's blast. He doubled up, clutching his stomach, and his Luger clattered to the platform. Blood drooled from his mouth, and from under his body.

There was a yell from the outside of the half circle of men.

"Here he is! A Turk! He shot the infidel!"

The crowd parted, and half a dozen Kurds pushed through, dragging Fortesque. One of them held a freshly fired Luger, and all stared at the man whose red fez and European clothing made him look like their sworn enemy, a Turk.

Then someone recognized him as von Gabel's prisoner.

"He shot a man who was under your protection, O Khan!" a crusty old chief said, and half drew his sword. "Kill the dog!"

Uthman Khan scowled, but Hale said quickly:

"This man was von Gabel's prisoner, and is it on your head if a man is killed by one of his own men?"

"By Allah, that is right!" the khan shouted. "Now open the chest."

When it was emptied, the tall Kurd was still scowling at the rocks that had been exposed, but his main attention was on the top layer of gold bags. "We will divide this," he said to his chiefs, "and there is no raid. I treated him honorably, and he tried to pilfer."

He dismissed the tribal leaders. As they drew back, he eyed Hale and Fortesque.

"I know who you are," he said, "and why you were brought here. But why did you run this risk?"

"Being free men like yourself," Hale answered, "we tried to keep you from serving a slave-master. Von Gabel is the servant of a man who has put half of Europe in bondage. He was trying to put the yoke on the half that still is free."

HE went on to explain it all in terms that an illiterate mountaineer could understand.

"By Allah, it is clear now!" Uthman Khan cut in. "Verily, we did not know. We are honorable rob-

bers, as our fathers have always been before us, but we are the slaves of no man."

"Have we your permission to leave?" Hale asked.

"At your pleasure, and under my protection. But before you do, tell me how you knew that this man planned to rob me? Since gold is heavy, how could he have taken it back, secretly?"

"It is possible that the treasure was thrown into a well, to be reclaimed later. Now that the spy is dead, the gold belongs to whoever finds it."

The Khan's eyes twinkled, and his fierce face twisted in a smile. "You have made it easy for honor," he said. "No man of mine harmed him. Go in peace, and when your people come to trade in Kurdistan, they are under my protection." Again he smiled. "My scouts have reported that soldiers search for you, even now, on the road to Sulaimania. You may meet them."

Hale grinned and glanced meaningfully at Fortesque. So his stenciled message had been received and read between the lines, but there was no need for a rescue party now.

That night, Fortesque and Hale were Uthman Khan's guests. In the morning, when they started out of the mountains, Hale said to his companion: "The next time I ask you for a bit of information, maybe you won't put me to the trouble of tailing you all over Bagdad!"

The attaché grinned. "The next time I'm barging into trouble, I hope you're along. And I dare say when you make that overdue report to your correspondent in the States you'll have a lot more to write than if you'd stayed in town."

"That's where you're wrong," Hale said. "All I'm saying is, no disturbances and no Nazis in Kurdistan."