

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 26

CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER, 1935

Number 5

Cover Design	M. Brundage
<i>Illustrating a scene in "Shadows in Zamboula"</i>	
Shadows in Zamboula	Robert E. Howard 530
<i>Stark horror stalked in the sinister house of Aram Baksh</i>	
In Thessaly	Clark Ashton Smith 551
<i>Verse</i>	
The Consuming Flame	Paul Ernst 552
<i>Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal, spreads icy terror in Detroit</i>	
The Hand of Wrath	E. Hoffmann Price 572
<i>Strange doom was in that shriveled hand severed from the fierce old Sultan's arm</i>	
Ghost of the Lava	Katharine Buoy 586
<i>Verse</i>	
The Way Home	Paul Frederick Stern 587
<i>Who was this man, who groped in blind terror through the pouring rain?</i>	
The Carnival of Death (part 3)	Arlton Eadie 597
<i>A novel of ghastly adventures with a Golden Mummy, and strange death that walked by night</i>	
When the Flame-Flowers Blossomed	Leslie F. Stone 618
<i>A bizarre fantasy about strange life found on Venus by two explorers from Earth</i>	
Top of the World	Tarleton Collier 627
<i>Would you like to be able to foresee the future? Then read this tale</i>	
Mr. Berbeck Had a Dream	August W. Derleth 630
<i>A strange little tale about an eery revenge</i>	
Weird Story Reprint:	
William Wilson	Edgar Allan Poe 634
<i>A psychological story by the first great writer of weird tales</i>	
The Eyrie	650
<i>The readers of this magazine express their opinions</i>	

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States. English office: Charles Laved, 13, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Copyright 1935, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPIRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

•W. T.—1

529

The Hand of Wrath

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

A weird orientale, about a shriveled hand that was severed from the fierce old Sultan's arm—and the strange doom that animated it

IT IS a tale they tell of the old days, Sidi, long before the land was infested with British Residents, and Russian agents, and other infidel dogs—saving your honor's presence! It is a tale of the great wrath of Zahireddin Mahmud, whose vengeance even death could not thwart.

"But first you must know that the remote ancestor of Zahireddin was Timur, who succeeded in all that he attempted; and though thinned by time, the blood of Genghis Khan's successor still ran fierce in the veins of Zahireddin. Yet greatness was not written on his forehead, and his only fortune was a stout heart. His mother's brother and his tall, bearded cousin pursued him from the scant remainder of his heritage; and his troops had forsaken him, since it is profitless to follow an unlucky captain."

Feughana was in flames, a red, vengeful glow in the yawning blackness of midnight. The drumming of pursuing hoofs had died out to a faint mutter; but few and halting and broken were those who still kept faith enough to persist in flight.

Zahireddin reined in his foaming, winded horse, wheeled about, drew his stained, nicked blade, and faced those few whose hearts were stout as his own. The treachery of kinsmen, having corroded him but for a day, had not yet made his mouth grim, but the drooping black mustaches hinted at its final direction. His nose was straight, and not the commanding beak of the conqueror. Only

the implacable resolution of his slightly slanted eyes bespoke the iron heritage of that young man whose chain-mail and spiked helmet had all that night turned aside the weapons of former friends.

All was gone—so Zahireddin could laugh, and sit erect in his blood-splashed saddle. His men slouched, and their beasts hung weary heads. For a long moment the captain of that battered remnant of the guard confronted his chief, eye to eye.

"We can not clear the pass, my lord," he said at last. "We are weary and wounded, and our horses are sinking beneath us. Our bowstrings are soggy, and our arrows are nearly gone. Our armor is ragged as the cloak of a darwish, and the sword's haft turns in our frozen hands."

The captain's eyes and the eyes of his men shifted as the steel-hard, narrowed eyes of Zahireddin measured them, man by man. The silence finally cried for words, so the captain spoke.

"Where would you go, *ya amir?*" he muttered. "The world and the Uzbeks are your enemy. The mountains and the night are your slayers."

Zahireddin knew that his men had pronounced a doom. There was a shifting of uneasy horses, and a stirring of haggard men, the sodden jingling of curb chains and mail, scabbard, and quiver. But the captain had not yet wheeled his horse about.

"My head is worth a helmet full of Uzbek gold," mocked Zahireddin. The



"A hand was shaping out of the satanic glamor."

mockery of his voice lay in its softness, and the friendliness that was a reminder of past comradeship. "Take it with you. The Uzbeks will pay . . . and my cousin will pay them."

The battered captain neither paled nor flushed in that bitter moonlight. His head dropped lower, and his red spurs sank into the frozen sweat that caked the flanks of his horse. The beast lurched left, as though something of wood had been scourged to sluggish life by one of the Tartar devil-doctors of the north.

"Allah is thy protector," mumbled the captain. And as an apologetic after-

thought, a touch of Persian courtesy to smooth the path of desertion, he added, "We return to hold the pass of Koh-i-Zend—to cover your escape toward Samarcand."

The captain's horse stretched weary legs to overtake the retreating guard. The iron bitterness of Zahireddin's heart crackled in a metallic laugh. He lifted his blade in salute, whipped it sharply to its scabbard, and turned to the slender, muffled figure that bestrode the horse at his side.

He saw that the slant-eyed Tartar girl was smiling. He called her Jauhara be-

cause her name was beyond the limit of a tongue attuned only to Turki and Persian. He remembered the Tartar blood of Timur, his remote ancestor, and smiled back at the long-lashed eyes and golden skin of Jauhara. And then the bitterness returned a hundredfold. Zahireddin shook his head and said to the night, "The blood of the Last Conqueror is thinned by time . . . those whipped dogs would have followed him to the uttermost, slaying until they were hacked to pieces. Me they desert."

"Twenty to one, my lord, and yet they feared to take your head for Uzbek gold," said the Tartar girl. "All is not lost. There is still vengeance. And vengeance waits at the head of the pass."

VENGEANCE. The thought flamed in his weary brain. Zahireddin was young, and it was his favorite cousin who led the pursuit. He saw that Jauhara's smile was carmine in the frosty moonlight, and that there was neither fear nor doubt in her eyes. He dropped the frozen reins. His lips moved soundlessly as he counted on his fingers, "Ahmad Shah . . . Mirza Abbas Khan . . . Nadir Ali the Lion . . ."

When he completed the tale of traitors, he saw that Jauhara no longer smiled, but regarded him as though she were a bewildered child. He wondered if he had spoken aloud. Then he wondered what she had seen in the darkness to make her smooth golden features suddenly become so grave, and her wide eyes stare so far beyond the shroud of darkness. It seemed for an instant that the girl saw more than he possibly could see; and he forgot for a moment that he was Zahireddin Mahmud, Amir of Ferghana, and asked, "Which way?"

Jauhara started, smiled, and gestured toward the ominous red glow far to the rear, the red glow of looted Ferghana.

"From there, in any direction," she replied. He laughed grimly at the gallant gesture.

"Vengeance?" he wondered.

"Vengeance," she affirmed.

Zahireddin gathered his weary horse, and they began the ascent into the black, frosty desolation of the impassable saber-slash that pierced the mountains and led at last toward the gates of Samarcand—golden Samarcand, where Timur, the last conqueror, had once reigned.

"But even though we conquer the pass," reflected Zahireddin, "death waits in Samarcand, where Uzbeks guard the gates . . ."

But Zahireddin was weary of slaughter and futile flight. He was past pondering, and it relieved the surging, roaring fires of his brain to follow for a while, since he had vainly led. There is nothing more futile than a captain whose stout heart has cracked. It made little difference where Jauhara led. The Amir remembered that Tartar women are versed in charms and spells, but he knew that no magic could deflect the hungry blades that lurked along the road. He wondered again what Jauhara had seen in the darkness to give her the faith to speak of vengeance; and then he dismissed all queries.

THE trail became strange, and difficult beyond measure. Zahireddin's horse floundered, sank, struggled to his feet, then fell, not to struggle again. The Amir disengaged himself, shouldered his Boukharan saddle-bags, and seized Jauhara's stirrup, to stumble along as best he could.

Zahireddin, who would saddle a horse to ride a hundred paces, marched on foot. He laughed bitterly and said aloud, "How much lower can the race of Timur sink?"

The girl did not for a moment answer. Then she roused herself, sat erect in the saddle, shuddered from the cold that bit

like Turki arrows, and said in a low voice, "Vengeance will be your next horse, Zahireddin. And vengeance is not sweet save it be dredged from dregs. Therefore walk, Zahireddin, so that you will never forget."

Zahireddin understood. In his weariness of heart and from the battering of his soul Zahireddin's consciousness had expanded, so that he saw that it was fitting for him to walk rather than to double the load which weighted the Tartar girl's exhausted horse. It was even fitting that Zahireddin the Amir should walk while a woman rode.

Jauhara was now strangely silent. Zahireddin again wondered what she saw in the blackness that crowded to the edge of the narrow trail. Once she shuddered, and swayed in the saddle. But the night had become a madness, and Zahireddin feared to touch the Tartar girl. She had promised vengeance out of the dregs of defeat, and it was not fitting that Zahireddin should lay hands on one who had become possessed. A thought burned in his brain for an instant, and he was afraid. Then Jauhara recovered, sat erect again, and murmured in a low, strained voice, "Walk yet awhile, Zahireddin. Vengeance burns around the corner."

It was as she said. From the darkness came a feeble, reddish glow as of a fire smoldering behind a rock. And then from the frosty granite and its mantle of implacable snow he saw the irregular, low-arched mouth of a cavern and wondered what enemy awaited within.

The Tartar girl, however, seemed to know. She slid lightly from the long-limbed horse that had followed Zahireddin's black stallion through that hacking, arrow-riddled rear-guard action. She strode to the mouth of the cavern and saluted an old man who squatted beside the dull red glow of coals. She spoke, and he answered in the language of the

far-off Tartar tribes. Zahireddin understood but dimly. It was scarcely worth understanding.

Fierce, narrow eyes at last shifted from the girl's face and regarded Zahireddin, who saw that the cave-dweller was seamed and wrinkled and leathery, with a scanty, straggling wisp of a beard; skin like smoky parchment was stretched over high cheek-bones; and his nose was wide and flat. A devil-doctor, a *shaman* from High Asia—but it made little difference to Zahireddin, until the hermit began to speak, and pronounced a word that aroused the Amir.

"I will give you vengeance, young man. One by one you will overtake them, flay them alive, and impale them in the public square. All, that is, save one."

Zahireddin was not grasping; yet he could not but wonder which that one might be, and what would be his fate.

"That one," said the hermit, "you must die to slay. You have your choice. But is vengeance worth the cost?"

"Mir Abbas Khan . . . Nadir Ali the Lion . . ." And thus he named them, one by one completing the tale of wrath; but he paused at the name of his cousin, Ahmad Shah.

"Neither steel nor fire can touch you until vengeance is complete," the old man said. "No pomp and no power can be denied you, neither the arms to smite nor the men to overwhelm them, one by one. You who have walked tonight will ride tomorrow. But the last vengeance you will not live to see."

Zahireddin had believed Jauhara—why doubt the hermit? In that abyss of despair nothing seemed more incredible than that the descendant of Timur should walk. And then Zahireddin saw a compromise, and reckoning swiftly to himself, he thought, "Flay all but that one, then hold my hand until old age overtake me . . . and the last vengeance will

be none the worse for being deferred . . . it will give a purpose to my life, and be a monument at my death . . . ay, *wallah*, I will cherish that last vengeance. . . ."

It may be that the hermit read the silently moving lips, or perhaps the very thought of the Amir. He smiled craftily; and for a moment Zahireddin trembled. It seemed that shapes and presences were lurking in the shadows beyond the fire; and the fumes of that red smoldering had become acrid and stifling, dizzying and overwhelming. Yet through the reeling of his senses Zahireddin saw that it would be foolish to die so that the last traitor's hide would be nailed to the gate of some city perhaps not yet finished. To die slaying him, hand to hand—that would be only the day's work of any man; but there was something unspeakably evil and uncanny in that old man's promise, so that it seemed rather a threat. It savored of a trick. Like all else it was a madness and a mockery. The weariness of his body and the ache of his wounds and the batterings that his spirit had endured that day made all save oblivion seem vanity; and to make the choice that the hermit demanded was too much for one who again stood before a warm fire, and was once more sheltered from the Turki arrows that had rattled like hail against his armor.

ZAHIREDIN's eyes shifted to catch the eyes of the Tartar girl. Whether it was Tartar magic, or woman's intuition, she had led him far from the pass that the pursuit would follow, and had cheated someone of a bag of Uzbek gold. He saw that her golden skin had become pale, and that her face was tense, and her lips a thin line. And even as he regarded her, she swayed, and but for his supporting arm would have collapsed. Zahireddin then noted what he had not thus far suspected: he knew now what Jauhara

had seen in that darkness into which his last troop of horse had retreated. Jauhara had seen death. She had mocked the arrow that had drunk her life, and had led the way to vengeance before that red froth which now trickled from her lips surged forth once too often and choked her.

For an instant the slanted Tartar eyes focused clearly on Zahireddin, and she smiled as she had in those pleasant gardens of Ferghana. The turquoise and jade pendants of her head-dress mocked the pallor of her cheeks. The too-red lips murmured, "Vengeance, Zahireddin. The old man will tell you the way. He is one of that brotherhood of adepts from High Asia. Do as he bids—"

Her voice was clear and unfaltering to the last abrupt stop. Then as Zahireddin knew that Jauhara was dead, he turned to the leather-faced hermit and made his choice: "To the end and to the uttermost, old man. My uncle's son, Ahmad Shah, led the pursuit. It was one of his archers—"

The old man smiled bleakly and nodded. Perhaps Jauhara had told him whose archers had aimed so well.

"Bury her in that clearing some dozen paces from the entrance. There are loose rocks not yet sunk in snow. Then return, Zahireddin, and I will make you Lord of Vengeance, Lord of the Conquering Wrath."

The red lights that flickered in the old man's narrowed eyes burned into Zahireddin, and for an instant frost raced through his veins, and thunder muttered in his ears, and he trembled at facing the knowledge that he had met destiny at the crossroads. He had learned how fearful it is to hold fate in one's hand, to know that one can bind or loose, slay or spare, master of destiny, and writer of doom.

It was still his to accept or reject. Fi-
W. T.—3

nally he forced his fascinated eyes aside and saw the Tartar girl; and seeing, he no longer dared fear. He stooped, gathered Jauhara in his arms, and stalked into the bitter night.

Presently Zahireddin returned, empty-handed and lonely, incredulous, and corroded by the last poisonous drops of treachery. Far down in the pass he had seen a long line of blackness against the snow, heard the clank of steel and the mutter of troops on the march. They were pursuing along the road they were certain he must have taken.

"I am here with my choice," he said to the hermit. "Therefore do that which is to be done before I ride on the road of vengeance, to overtake the forgotten of God!"

"IT IS written how Zahireddin, single-handed, by craft and by stealth and mountain-madness looted a caravan; how, single-handed, with gold and steel he beguiled and slew until at his back he had a troop of men who knew that that iron-hearted lad would ride far. That much is written, and more also, concerning the cities he plundered and the thrones he took—and then there is that which my grandfather's father told me of the wrath of Zahireddin Mahmud, whose vengeance not even death could thwart."

One by one he rode them down, those kinsmen of his, until Zahireddin became the very self of vengeance. Mir Abbas Khan's still live body stirred most of that first day it lay redly in the rubbish heap not far from the gate to which the soldiers had nailed his hide; but Nadir Ali the Lion they did not flay, for in fighting with the savagery of his race there remained unbroken not enough skin to be worth the stripping. . . .

But Zahireddin devised fittingly to account for that exception; and those who

saw contend that the doomed man must have envied his predecessors.

One by one he rode them down, and with each hunting the power of Zahireddin increased; but there was one who evaded him. That one was Ahmad Shah. At first Zahireddin raged and redoubled his efforts; then, bit by bit, the memories of that night of despair and that old hermit's juggling, jingling words returned to the Amir, and he began to doubt that those contradictions could have meaning. And pomp and power at last seemed good; so that in the end Zahireddin let vengeance slumber, and saw no reason why a middle-aged ruler should rack his brain about the hide of his one surviving renegade kinsman.

And when wrath at times did reawaken, Zahireddin recollected what the hermit had whispered into his ear, and his weather-beaten, sharp features lengthened perceptibly. Keep that last vengeance as a goal. . . .

Zahireddin's hair was now white, and so likewise his scanty, straggling beard. The skin that stretched in a hollow curve from his high cheek-bones to the craggy line of his jaw was like the leather of an old saddle. His fingers, from gripping of reins and buckler, sword-haft and bow-string, mace and wine flagon, had become talons that could no longer entirely straighten; and since he limped from an arrow-shattered ankle that had healed awry, all eyes were averted when he hobbled from his throne to the saddle in which from force of habit he still spent most of his waking and many of his sleeping moments.

There was much that Zahireddin had learned in these fierce years, and much that he had forgotten; yet there was also that which he remembered. In town or in camp, there was always at his side a Tartar girl whose turquoise and jade pendants tinkled as she patted her tall coiffure and

looked up to smile at that fierce old man whose one remaining eye still burned with undimmed fire. The girl's name was Jauhara. She was the last of a succession of Tartar girls, each of a certain age, and each of whom Zahireddin had for a while called Jauhara, which in the language of the Koran means "*a jewel*", but to Zahireddin had come to signify "*vengeance*".

The years had blown away the ashes of burnt-out desires, and the redness of ancient wrath glowed bright again; for Jauhara reminded him of what an aging Sultan might otherwise have forgotten. He questioned her incessantly concerning the lore of her people, for Tartar women are versed in charms and spells.

Yet in the end it seemed that Zahireddin must have learned things that no Tartar girl, and certainly not Jauhara, could have taught him: and it befell as the old hermit had said.

THE end came with the reawakening of drowsy vengeance. Ahmad Shah still lived, and the white-haired traitor spoke of friendship. Zahireddin took the field; and golden-skinned, oblique-eyed Jauhara accompanied him, even as, years ago, another Jauhara had left pleasant gardens to ride at his side. The vast, closed curve of time was doubling back upon itself, and despite the forty-two great scars that seamed Zahireddin's leathery skin, it seemed that his memories had prevailed over his age.

One day's march separated him, finally, from Ahmad Shah; and then camp fire and guard fire marked that day's end. Swift as the falcon's stroke—swift as the cheetah's lunge—and Ahmad Shah was trapped. Nothing but the morrow's battle remained; and that would start long before dawn, and be a rout at sunrise. Ahmad Shah could neither withdraw nor push through.

"Vengeance and the day of Vengeance,

O Lord of Vengeance. . . ." The slant-eyed girl sang one of the hundred verses that Zahireddin had composed in Persian to the great wrath. Then she paused for breath, and drained a flagon of Shirazi wine at a single draft, as was the old Tartar custom: and Zahireddin drained two.

It is exceedingly doubtful that the wine was poisoned, or the savory stew, or the lamb grilled over a bed of coals; but the pastries drenched with honey, or the apples, may have contained the bitter crystals that froze Zahireddin's muscles into rigid cords, so that his fists clenched and his face set in a hideous grin. His back arched like a bow, as if in the end his heels might touch the back of his head.

Zahireddin knew the symptoms, and so also did Jauhara: and the physicians were not vain enough to speak of antidotes. The sultan had swallowed a doom; and from afar came the pulsing of drums that mimicked the pounding heart of Zahireddin.

The poisoner's art is such that no man knows who struck him; yet Zahireddin had knowledge that comes from more than the senses, and he was certain that Ahmad Shah, hunted for forty years, had at last struck back; that some spy had achieved what the traitor's maneuvering could not.

"There is neither might nor majesty save in Allah, the Great, the Glorious," intoned Zahireddin in an interval between the convulsions that racked his lean old body. He knew that it would be hours before he died; he knew that there was no doubt that he would die; and the drums that muttered reviled him from afar.

Vengeance had deserted Zahireddin. Fear stalked through the encampment. The great captain's illness was a guarded secret; yet within the hour that exultant army was muttering of retreat rather

than of loot. And all the while Zahiredin's mind remained crystal-clear in the paralyzing grip of that poison. Not one shade of perception was dulled by anguish. He began to envy those whom his red vengeance had utterly destroyed; and he wondered at the misery in Jauhara's eyes until he realized that it was but the shadow of that which was tormenting him.

"Mirza Abbas Khan . . . Nadir Ali the Lion . . ." He counted them on his fingers, one by one, as a thousand deaths closed in upon him, span by span. Jauhara at his side and all those other Jauharas had become one with that first Tartar girl who had fled with him from Ferghana.

She seemed again to smile at him from the shadows, and murmur something which at first Zahireddin could not quite understand, despite the clarity of his senses. He listened, straining his ears, so that finally in the intensity of concentration he shut out the thunder of distant drums and the surging of his own roaring pulse. And then at last he heard.

Zahireddin heard, and understood. . . .

Then as in a blaze of light he saw that only the last Jauhara was beside him, and that the grizzled, fierce old man beside the fire was no hermit but Temuchin, his favorite captain of the guard; and that he, Zahireddin, was in a silken pavilion and not a smoky cavern.

Zahireddin was fully alive and aware again. He knew what must happen before he died and won freedom from all vengeance. And yet the poison had come upon him so swiftly, and the convulsions had ravaged him so fiercely, that thus far he had not been able to speak of the ultimate retribution. He no longer dared move, lest the least exertion bring the terrific spasmodic contractions back again; but finally he forced his lips to take soundless forms, and shape words with-

out disturbing the delicate balance of poisoned nerves and poisoned body.

The most trivial gesture reacts to affect every other nerve and tendon and muscle; and when the balance has been upset, the lift of an eyelash could start the deadly convulsions anew. But Zahireddin conquered.

JAUHARA and the old captain watched and read the silent command. Temuchin muttered and shook his head.

"He can't mean that! He's out of his head——"

But Jauhara knew otherwise. She knew that one so close to death must be wise and sane and gifted beyond those about to mourn him. Thus she drew the crescent-bladed simitar from its tattered, shabby scabbard. It was an old blade without a single jewel to grace its haft of carved bone; and endless honing had narrowed it, and almost obliterated the line of Kufic script that ran from guard to point. Temuchin's incredulous eyes sought the haggard eyes of his chief, and read affirmation. He accepted the ancient blade, tested its balance—then flung it ringing against the rocks that cropped up in a corner of the pavilion.

"No, by Allah!"

"Then I will," declared the Tartar girl as she retrieved the simitar. It was marvelously light for the slaughter it had wrought. It was a thin, warped moonbeam, remorseless, and hard as that old man who in the face of death still drove his will toward vengeance.

Zahireddin's lips twitched, perhaps from poison, perhaps from striving to smile. Then he forced them to articulate.

"Let her strike, Temuchin. And obey her as you would me—she knows."

As he spoke, he extended that slender, corded arm, worn by strife and age to bone and sinew and leathery skin. The talon-fingers were clenched for an instant.

Zahireddin forced them to open. Then the deadly tetanic convulsions seized him.

"Strike!" he cried in a great voice. Only that, and no more. His face froze in a hideous grin, and corded muscles struggled to burst through the parchment skin. Zahireddin's tense body was arching, like a crescent standing on its two horns; and he lay there on his heels and the nape of his neck, rigid and frozen. Yet by some wonder of will, that right hand resisted that terrific contraction.

Time had ceased in that silken pavilion. Jauhara swayed for an instant. Old Temuchin wondered if her Tartar courage could fail as his own had. The Boukhariot hangings still trembled from Zahireddin's last command. The girl's crimson lips were now a thin, straight streak, and her cream-hued hands had become white. . . .

And then the slender body made a single fluent motion. That curved sliver of steel for an instant seemed a part of her rippling swiftness; shearing so fast that its gleam was untinged by the blood that followed the severed right hand of Zahireddin to the Herati carpet. . . .

ZAHIREDDIN was dead, and his face was not good to see. His lips were set in a grin that made the Tartar girl and the grizzled captain wonder if the Sultan truly was dead. No living thing could be so malignant of expression. For a long time the gray-bearded Temuchin and golden-skinned Jauhara regarded each other.

"Why?" he at last demanded. "Was that some . . . some old magic?"

He could offer no other reason. He hoped that there was some other; and he knew that madness was not the answer.

"No, Uncle," said Jauhara. Her eyes seemed permanently to have widened, and at times she glanced curiously at her hands as if she still wondered whether

they could indeed have severed Zahireddin's wrist.

"Then why?"

"Because he wished it;" then, after a long silence: "And maybe he was planning a sending. He used to question me, hours at a time, about the magic of my people. But what could I know of the *true* magic? And he died just before he expressed—something which none of us can ever know. Had he lived only another moment, he might have told me. I could not have heard, but I could have watched his lips."

"But you struck?" said Temuchin.

"Yes. You heard his voice. It was like a war trumpet. It was more important for me to strike than to know. He had but few words left in him. And you disobeyed his first command, and wasted a word," she reproached. "But I knew that a doom was on him—so I struck."

Temuchin nodded. He was abashed at the reproof. Then his face became stern.

"Nevertheless there is this matter of vengeance. Ahmad Shah, may Allah not bless him, surely poisoned the master. Those drums prove it—prove that he knows that he is saved. And there is no one to avenge Zahireddin. In the morning, this army will be a flying rabble. And in the evening, what will remain of the splendor of Zahireddin?"

"What of yourself, Uncle?" wondered the girl. "And those others who have risen with him?"

"Too old for vengeance," he said. "We have outlived our days. For us there is no retreat. Ahmad Shah will hunt us down, for the sake of his kinsmen whom Zahireddin tracked to their death. So we will thwart him by holding the rear-guard, and dyeing our beards in blood while the others ride toward the border."

"It will be a rout?" wondered Jauhara.

thinking of the brave show of that army at sunset.

"What else could it be? They will miss Zahireddin's voice. He will not be raising his voice above the ring of steel and the braying of horns and the rumble of hoofs. They will wonder why he fails to lead them into the red mist of the morning—and so of course there will be a rout when the *bimbashis* lead their troops to the attack."

Jauhara's glance shifted to the grinning terror that lay on its heap of rugs. That one eye was glassy, and mocking as the distorted face. It challenged her to divine what Zahireddin would have ordered, had he lived but a moment longer, and what reason he would have given for striking off that right hand.

"It seems," she mused, "that that sword-stroke was more important than anything else. It is as though he knew that that done, all else would follow. And his last thought was of vengeance. . . . Temuchin, his friend, will die in the morning—and that will leave—"

Jauhara knew what the answer was, but she dared not pronounce it, lest its weight crush her slender body.

"Get me a horse, Temuchin," she finally said, "and a safe-conduct out of our lines. Ahmad Shah will sit on a throne tomorrow. I will be the only one left. So I will find vengeance. I will take that severed hand with me, and in the end I will know."

As she waited, Jauhara wrapped Zahireddin's hand in a silken scarf.

"Years ago," the Tartar girl said to the silence of the pavilion, "this one-eyed slayer was a handsome boy. He must have loved that first Jauhara. Maybe I reminded him of her. And it seems only fitting that I should finish what she began. . . ."

JAUHARA escaped. And the following morning, secure in the hills, she watched the rout of the army that once was Zahireddin's pride. Then for a while she watched a copper kettle suspended over a bed of coals. She had a plan which required that the hand of Zahireddin be preserved until the day of vengeance; and racial memories, and old legends, and lore gathered among the people of the hills combined to tell her what to put into the copper kettle so that her memento of the lord of vengeance would in the end serve its purpose.

When at last she descended to the lowlands, she learned that the capital had of course been sacked, the leading merchants strangled and their goods confiscated, and the outstanding adherents of the dead Sultan impaled; and that done, Ahmad Shah did his best to appear accustomed to the throne he had won at the wrong end of his life.

"Bring me the head of Zahireddin," he commanded. "Ay, *wallab!* Bring me his entire body, and I will buy it, weight for weight, gold coin against that unclean carcass. His carcass, all or any part of it—publish the orders at once, Ulugh Bek!"

And it was so published.

But the piecemeal clause caused certain woe. Ahmad Shah was suspicious when he noted that the severed left leg submitted for inspection was that of a man much younger and more swarthy than Zahireddin; and when by unhappy coincidence a second left leg was brought into the Presence, and also offered as that of the late Sultan, Ahmad Shah suspected fraud, and impartially crucified both claimants.

"Change that order, Ulugh Bek!" he ordered, catching the eye of his chief *wazir*. "The entire carcass, and I will buy it, weight for weight, in silver bars."

And that, forthwith proclaimed, became law.

Before three days had passed, a squad of Uzbeks had found and looted the grave in which Zahireddin had been buried that disastrous night, and dragged their gruesome plunder into the presence of Ahmad Shah to have it weighed and redeemed in silver. All was well until the Sultan noted that one hand was missing.

"Dogs, and fathers of many pigs!" he protested. "What fraud is this?"

"Protector of the poor, this is the very body of Zahireddin," the Uzbeks declared.

"But not *all* of it. Read them the law, Ulugh Bek."

And thus, since a hand was missing, the executioners began erecting in the public square a stake for each culprit, and one, loftier than the others, for the body of Zahireddin. For while Ahmad Shah quibbled about the lack of a hand, he could see no good reason for failing to defile the body of his cousin by surrounding it with a handful of grave-looters. But before either the Uzbeks or the corpse were impaled, a woman demanded audience of the new Sultan. She was unveiled, after the Tartar custom; she was uncommonly lovely; and, though Ahmad Shah did not know it, she was Jauhara, vengeance-bent.

"My lord," she said, "those Uzbeks are innocent of any offense. They had the hand of Zahireddin, but it dropped from the bundle before they reached their destination. I picked it up."

It seemed auspicious to Jauhara that she should arrive at a moment so suited to furthering her device. In the several days that had followed the death of Zahireddin, Jauhara had pondered, and out of her intentness she had at last shaped a portion of the words that Zahireddin had failed to speak; and seeing how the hap-

less Uzbeks had paved the way for her approach, she was certain that her search would not be vain.

"But how," wondered Ahmad Shah, regarding the parcel which Jauhara was unwrapping, "did the hand of Zahireddin come to be swathed in silk?"

"Allah," responded that dark-eyed girl, "is most knowing."

"Praised be His name!" intoned Ahmad Shah, grateful for the poisoning of his cousin. The several Uzbeks hopefully echoed the sentiment. But when Ahmad Shah scrutinized the severed hand, the expression of his wrinkled, crafty face became severe and dubious.

"This," he asserted sourly, "is not the hand of a man as old as Zahireddin."

His contention seemed painfully in order. There was a murmur of regret from those about the throne. It was exceedingly unhappy that a girl as attractive as Jauhara should be impaled. And the Uzbeks squirmed in unpleasant anticipation. Jauhara, however, was not perturbed; for she saw that a blind, unwitting current was surely leading her toward vengeance, and she knew that Zahireddin had truly known.

"Allah upon you, O King! But this is indeed the hand of Zahireddin. Look how the callouses and markings of the palm most perfectly fit the markings of the haft of Zahireddin's simitar, which I perceive those Uzbeks brought in with the body."

Ahmad Shah saw that the girl was right. It never occurred to him to wonder at such acute observation; and Jauhara knew that stupidity was the advance-guard of doom. Zahireddin in the agony of death had foreseen.

The Sultan signaled to the executioners to desist from their preparations, then frowned, and for an instant closed his eyes.

"But how can this thing be?" he final-

ly demanded. "One hand lean and shriveled, the other fresh and plump, as of a young man."

"That is more easily demonstrated than explained," said Jauhara. "And so that no one can learn the secret by hearing my explanation——"

She handed a folded slip of paper to a *wazir* to offer to Ahmad Shah. Court etiquette did not permit her to offer it direct; and thus the jade-hafted daggers whose slim blades were thrust as pins through Jauhara's high-heaped blue-black hair could not yet reach Ahmad Shah. But Jauhara knew that the few lines written in Persian were piercing as Turki arrows:

"Someone, my lord, has made preparations for the ritual known as the Breaker of Seals, whereby hidden treasures are revealed, and the dead are commanded to speak; and this severed hand is essential to the ritual, and serves in a peculiar fashion, being fuel for an unholy fire, and affording light for the reading of certain words that cause the revealing of revelations and the appearing of apparitions: and the late Sultan's hand is peculiarly efficacious in compelling him to expose his own concealed treasure. Which is an ancient tradition, and one which I learned from my father's grandfather. . . ."

VENGEANCE wears many masks; and Jauhara's plan changed a dozen times in as many hours. But she knelt, at last, on the sand-strewn floor of an inner room of the palace that once had been Zahireddin's, seeking with flint and steel to strike light to a pinch of tinder. Barred arches high above the floor cleft the massive walls and let sift into the solemn darkness a thin shaft of moonlight; and against the wall, squatting cross-legged, crouched Ahmad Shah, eager, and covetously watching the beginning of the ritual that required flame uncontaminated by any previous use.

The preparations were being made in secret, lest following the revelation of wealth come its enforced division among the captains who had exalted the usurper. Ahmad Shah was not yet certain enough of his throne to risk refusal, and he was too grasping to postpone the ritual of the Breaker of Seals. And thus the nearest sentry was several barred doors beyond the inner room; but as she fanned the tinder to a yellow, aspiring thread of flame it seemed that Jauhara had been thwarted from the beginning. It had been so subtly done that she could not know whether it was by design or hazard that during the hours in which she awaited Ahmad Shah's leisure her slender, jade-hafted daggers had disappeared: so that she knelt there, empty-handed—and beside her, the severed hand of Zahireddin.

Jauhara felt terribly alone in that vaulted room whose sculptured cornices leered down at her. Even hope was gone, and only that poisoner, that father of treachery, remained.

"By Allah, if this gray-bearded dog escapes me," she said to herself, "the very hand of Zahireddin will throttle the breath from my body. And that first Jauhara will revile me—that first Jauhara who mocked death until her work was done—and done in vain, if I fail the Lord of Vengeance."

Then she unwrapped the silken scarf, and took the curiously prepared hand and set it upright in a small vase so that the pottery embraced the stump of a wrist, and the five outstretched fingers were as the branches of a candelabrum. The fingers of Zahireddin were now transparent and plump, and Ahmad Shah marveled anew; but Jauhara, who knew what embalming waxes and gums and spices caused that filling out of tissue felt no wonder, but only despair. Nevertheless she plucked a brand from the brazier and touched it to

Zahireddin's fingers, one by one; and each finger-tip exhaled an answering flame, unquivering, and spectral blue. The gums and essences which had preserved the hand of Zahireddin made grotesque corpse-candles of the fingers: and then Jauhara dropped sand into the brazier, extinguishing the fire she had kindled, so that only the blue tongues of flame illuminated the vaulted chamber.

And the mockery had to continue. She had made promises, and she could not outlive her failure. Some thieving slave-girl had taken her jade-hafted daggers—and so Jauhara and vengeance would perish at one move. The poisoner was now patient and credulous: yet he would soon be disappointed and wrathful. Had she promised less, she might in the end have done more.

But there must yet be a way. Zahireddin, she knew, had had the clairvoyance of the dying. He had known that his severed hand would bring its bearer into the presence of Ahmad Shah: and knew that with that much done, vengeance could find its way. Jauhara for a moment forgot her despair, and the certainty of doom no longer oppressed her. Ahmad Shah had become wan and futile in that hideous blue glow; and curious, deathly highlights marked his nose and cheek-bones, and made his lips seem like something which has long been decaying. Jauhara shuddered, but she was no longer afraid of that poisonous old man; and in the darkness she was less alone.

AHMAD SHAH's eyes were widening as he stared at the bluish-flaming finger-tips. It seemed that he had forgotten that he waited for her to begin reading from that old parchment she still clutched in one hand, intoning those words which would open seals, and reveal the hidden, and compel the apparition of whoever had buried treasure—and then came en-

lightenment which consoled Jauhara for the lack even of the slenderest sliver of steel. Ahmad Shah was stupidly gaping, hunched forward in fascinated eagerness. Jauhara remembered then the weapon which she had forgotten; she remembered that her hair was long and heavy, and that a running noose—

"Vengeance and the Day of Vengeance, O Lord of Vengeance," she murmured as she unfastened that high, blue-black coiffure, and divested it of its massive ornaments and pendants, and twisted a long serpent-strand. . . . Not strength now, but deftness. . . .

The flames were now fringed with bluish, half-luminous fumes that ascended in tall, conical miters of transparent smoke. A cloying, spicy sweetness made the untroubled air first heavy and then stifling. Despite the fascination of his staring eyes, Ahmad Shah yawned, gulped eagerly of the air as though he had not breathed for a long time. Jauhara saw him shudder, and glance over his shoulder as though someone had touched an icy blade to the nape of his neck. She was certain that he had forgotten her.

She was no longer lonely. Her heart was pounding like the drums that had throbbed from afar as Zahireddin had fought death; she knew now that Zahireddin's last command had not been vain, and that the severing of his hand had been wisdom, and the foresight of the wrath that conquers. She did not yet quite understand, but she was dimly sensing what Zahireddin had sought to tell. Not strength, but deftness—and a running noose, swiftly slipped beneath the chin—he would strangle before he could fling her aside.

Jauhara shivered as she felt the chill touch of something which made her skin tingle and her blood race wildly. Something had stroked her elbow as if to urge her forward, then had restrained her

shoulder as if afterthought had found that the moment was not yet ripe. A third presence had entered the trebly barred vault; and a vortex of power was centering about the grisly blue flames which rose from the dead fingers of Zahireddin. It seemed that immeasurable time had elapsed since Jauhara had struck flint and steel; yet the blazing finger-tips were not perceptibly consumed. The fumes were now poison-sweet and dense; and the face of Ahmad Shah was as though viewed through many veils of gauze. Mists seemed to be swirling and writhing in strange vortices, and serpentes that possessed more than borrowed life. . . .

Zahireddin had entered into the sapphire glamor to make it live with his force, and his will which even death could not thwart. Zahireddin's self had returned; and Jauhara's fear equaled her exaltation. She could no longer doubt that a running noose drawn swiftly tight was what Zahireddin had planned; for wonder was past.

But Jauhara's advance ceased before it had fairly begun. Something was drinking the power and the wrath and the exultation from her blood, and the tense, lithe muscles of her slender body became limp as the silken scarf that had enfolded the hand of Zahireddin. And Ahmad Shah's eyes, wide and staring, jerked suddenly away from their fixed contemplation of the blue-flaming hand of wrath, to center on the running noose of blue-black hair.

She knew that Ahmad Shah could not see in that spectral vagueness what she had shaped with her hand; and yet his trenchant stare had in an instant made a blue hell of that haunted vault. Her lips were too dry to cry out, and her limbs were too limp for motion: and then she saw that Ahmad Shah's eyes were focused

short of her, and knew what had drunk the strength from her body.

The shimmering mists had become sentient, pulsing whorls that were gathering into masses of light and shadow. Jauhara herself had become a part of that which was materializing there in that trebly guarded chamber; and yet not all of her identity entered into that swiftly shaping vortex, for at the same time she could watch it as from without.

A hand was shaping out of the satanic glamor; a lean, hungry, wrathful hand that was calloused from years of gripping the haft of a simitar—and yet strangely, it wore an unmistakable signet, as though it was at once and unaccountably both left hand and right. It was reaching from a luminous center that came from beyond space, co-existent with and yet separate from the unyielding bulk of that curved wall.

Ahmad Shah's face moved as though he were crying out, but he made no sound. And then it seemed that he was gasping horribly for breath. Jauhara heard a crunching and a crackling. For an instant her ears had robbed her eyes—and when she saw again, she perceived that that monstrous hand had encircled Ahmad Shah's entire body rather than only the throat, as in the beginning. Time had unaccountably ceased. Jauhara knew that if that wrathful crushing did not end, she could never again regain the vital force which had been stolen from her body. . . .

JAUHARA awoke lying on the sand. Shining full in her face was the warped crescent patch of moonlight, striped by the bars of the high-arched window. The blue glamor was gone, and only a lingering, pungent poison-sweetness remained—that, and something whose shapelessness was all the more hid-

eous because it was neither quite revealed nor utterly concealed. Jauhara knew that that was what remained of Ahmad Shah; and as she bound her hair, she turned away from that shadow in the blackness. She was amazed for a moment that that which had borrowed her vital forces had been able to return enough, unexpended, to let her pass the first barred door, and the second . . . and the sentry at the third, when he saw her disheveled hair, would know well indeed that Ahmad Shah would not care to be disturbed. . . .

"Thus it was in the old days, Sidi, long before the land was infested with British Residents and Russian agents, and other infidel dogs—saving your honor's presence! Zabireddin Mahmud had learned that an amulet shaped like a hand

is a symbol of power: and how much more so would his own hand be, that member which most truly divides man from beast. And he knew also, Sidi, that that Tartar girl, bearing his severed hand, would center all the will and the wrath of Zabireddin on whatsoever her own will centered. Then finally, he knew that if once he could cross the Border, he could steal from her strong, young body sufficient of the elemental substance, possessed by all creatures, to form the band of wrath and reach from the shadows for vengeance. For it made little difference what that old hermit told him in that mountain cave, so that the will were strong and the wrath enduring: and thus spake my grandfather's father, who told me of Zabireddin Mahmud."
