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A Chat With the Readers

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply Direct to

WEIRD TALES

408 Holliday Building

Indianapolis, Ind.



THE SEV'N RING'D CUP

by H. Thompson
Rich

Author of "The Purple Cincture," "The Crimson Crucifix," etc.

EVERY advertisement, they say, brings at least one response. It was in this forlorn hope that Doris Lee parted with \$4.16 of her dwindling funds in order to insert the following, once, under Business Opportunities in *The Times*:

MYSTERIES SOLVED

Bring your problem to me. I will take it up in a scientific way. All inquiries regarded strictly confidential. References furnished. Satisfaction guaranteed. Call 290 W. 76th St.—Apt. 29 D.

Taking the remaining eighty-four cents of what had been a crisp and beautiful five-dollar bill, she hunted up a quiet little tea place and spent eighty of it on luncheon and a tip. Then, adding an odd penny to the four cents, she subways to 72nd street, got out and walked to 76th, turned down and entered the apartment building at 290.

The elevator boy let her off at the second floor, whereupon she proceeded along the corridor until she had passed three doors on her left, pausing outside the fourth. On it, in small nickel characters, was the number 29 D. She took a key from her silver mesh-bag and inserted it in the

lock. The door opened. She went in. It shut behind her.

Inside, Doris took off her hat and commenced tidying up the tiny living room. If anyone answered her silly ad it would probably be tomorrow—and things should look at their simple best. But very little tidying was required. The room was as neat and trim and essentially feminine and charming as its dainty occupant. It couldn't help being so, any more than she could. She was a Lee of the old Virginian stock and her surroundings, however humble, could not but carry the same air.

Fifteen minutes did all to it that could be done. Then Doris read a while. Somehow she didn't feel like writing today, even with the exchequer so short and a story contracted for from *Pilgrims' Magazine*. The truth of it was, she was sick of writing pot-boilers! She would have jumped at the chance to sit down quietly and write a novel, but these incessant stupid stories to be mingled with *Hints on Knitting* and *How to Put Up Jams and Jellies* were beginning to get on her nerves. She was tired of writing for women. She wanted to write red-blooded yarns for men to read—and she couldn't, be-

cause she hadn't had the experiences. That, and the fact that funds were low, had been the inspiration for the ad. Perhaps an adventure would come of it. At any rate, the possibility was worth the \$4.16.

PINS and needles, as a food staple, are not very nourishing, but Doris lived on them for the next twenty-four hours, principally. Then, about 2 the following afternoon, the telephone rang.

"Gentleman to see you," said the switchboard operator. "Says he's come in answer to some advertisement. Must be wrong, I guess."

"No—send him up."

How her heart was fluttering!

Presently a knock sounded on the door. She opened it, and a tall young man carrying an enormous bundle entered. He seemed surprized at finding so young and pretty a girl.

"My name is Osbourne, Henderson Osbourne," he stated, clinging to his bundle uncertainly. "I came in answer to your ad in *The Times*."

"Yes. Won't you sit down?"

She pushed forward a chair. He seated himself unasily, placing the bundle on the floor at his feet.

If only she could keep him, now that he had come!

"What is the nature of your problem?" she asked in as steady a voice as she could summon, taking a seat beside him.

He looked hesitatingly about the room, then at her. Both seemed somewhat to allay his suspicions.

"You will pardon me," he began, "if I first ask you something about yourself."

She smiled bravely.

"You have come to solve your mystery, not mine, remember."

"I know—but as this is a matter that involves several million dollars, I think I am not unreasonable in making the request. Besides, in the adver-

tisement you stated that references would be furnished."

Several million dollars! Doris scarcely concealed a gasp of surprize. Then she told him her name and produced letters to establish her family connections. These seemed to satisfy him.

"But your qualifications for such a business as you are conducting!"

"Those I shall have to ask you to decide after you have presented your case to me."

She watched him tensely.

"Well," he said at length, "I suppose I'll have to let it go at that. You are my last hope." As he spoke he began slowly unwrapping the paper from the bulky bundle at his feet.

Doris watched him fascinatedly. When the final wrapping had been removed he lifted up an antique chalice of grotesque design.

"This is the Sev'n-Ring'd Cup of Jamshyd, one-time king of the Persians." He turned it around. "Notice the seven rings. Lord only knows what they're for!"

Doris sat there as though in a dream. Dimly she saw him set the heavy chalice down. Dimly she saw him reach into his pocket and take out a letter. Then she became conscious that he was talking again.

"My father was Franklyn Osbourne, former minister to Persia. You may recall that he died some months ago, on the *Baltic*, as he was on his way home. It was of course a great blow to me—and also a great responsibility, for as I was his only son the estate came into my hands. But father was not a wealthy man, comparatively speaking, and when everything had been settled there were surprizingly few thousands left, outside of a house or two. His most valuable legacy was—the Sev'n-Ring'd Cup." He took the letter he had been holding and, after a glance at it, handed it to her. "I think if you will be

kind enough to read that letter it will save a lot of explaining."

Doris found herself holding the letter. Lowering her eyes to it, she read:

Hamadan, Persia,
April 17, 1910.

My dear Son:

Declining health forces me to give up my post here and return to the States. I really should have told you long ago of a discovery I made some years back, but had put it off until such time as I could tell you about it directly. Now, however, I feel it my duty to you to risk putting it in writing, in case the worst should happen before I can see you once more.

In brief, while excavating at my villa here, at the time I was making extensive alterations, I chanced upon a treasure that must total millions—the accumulated riches of centuries of Persian rulers, hidden by Jamshyd, fourth king of the Pishadian dynasty.

Yet in telling you, lest this letter by any chance should go astray and fall into evil hands, I have thought best to put the secret of where the treasure is hidden into a cipher, which I have cut into the side of a curious urn that reposes upon my library table here. This urn is the Sev'n-Ring'd Cup of Jamahyd. I found it with the treasure and brought it up. The rest of the ancient treasure remains intact. You, with your education and training, will easily be able to solve the cipher, in the event it becomes necessary to—and the treasure will be yours.

But, my Son, take all this as little more than a precaution. Unless some unexpected complication develops I shall reach home safely and you shall hear it all from my own lips. So do not alarm yourself about me.

Your loving father,
FRANKLYN OSBOURNE.

When she had finished, Doris looked up.

"So the precaution was well given?"

"Yes, he died on the way home."

"But the Cup—you have been to Persia already?"

"Yes. You see by the date on the letter that it was written over a year ago. I lost no time, after the funeral was over, in making the trip. I felt that he would have wanted me to. And I found the Cup, just where he

said I would, as you see. But I could not solve the cipher, nor has anyone been able to. I have employed the best detective agencies and the villa has been dug and searched thoroughly—but we have found nothing. And the worst of it is I can't get them to keep up the search. They say my father must have been insane, and refuse to waste any more time on it. They even say this Jamshyd was only a legendary king and never really existed. But I don't care what they say. I know my father knew what he was talking about. He says in that letter that he discovered a great treasure. Therefore, detectives and everyone else to the contrary notwithstanding, he did. That treasure exists. I know it! Your ad has brought me to you. Can you help me find it?"

"I can tell you nothing until I have seen the cipher."

"To be sure." Osbourne passed the heavy cup over to her.

Doris took it and, turning it around slowly, brought the following to view:

Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-Ring'd Cup where no one knows;

But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,
And many a garden by the water blows.

Now she remembered where she had heard of that Sev'n-Ring'd Cup before! It was a quatrain from the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. The letters were painstakingly scratched in the bronze surface of the cup, evidently with a pocket knife.

Under the quatrain, scratched in with the same instrument, was the cipher:

7	7-6	10-19	x	x-4	4	0-1	0-22	12-2
17	30	24-9	13	16	17	23-2	21-1	x-13
0	0	19	19	0	17	0-3	19-10	2
9	20	2	17	27	27	26	1	

Doris studied this a long time.

"Well," remarked Osbourne at length, "rather a tough one, eh?"

Doris looked up at him with an enigmatic smile.

"Supposing I should solve it, what would my reward be?"

"What is the customary charge?"

Doris breathed deep, then said it.

"Fifty per cent."

"Whew," gasped Osbourne, "your charge is certainly steep!"

"Who told you it was my charge?"

"Didn't you?"

"No—you asked me what the customary charge was. Buried treasure comes under the head of salvage—and the customary charge for salvage is one-half the value of the salvaged goods. But if you feel—"

"I'm no piker!" interrupted Osbourne. "Fifty per cent suits me."

Doris had been on the point of coming down to ten per cent!

"Naturally," she said when she had recovered herself, "I make no charge whatever until the treasure is recovered."

Osbourne noted that she said "until" and not "unless".

"How long will it take you to solve the cipher?" he asked.

"Suppose you 'phone me tomorrow." She gave him her number. "And—you'd better take along the Cup. I'll make a copy of the cipher. I needn't copy the quatrain for I have a volume of the *Rubaiyat*."

Five minutes later he took his leave. Doris was able to wait till the door had closed behind him. Then she flung herself on a little settee by the window and laughed and cried and shivered in delight by turns. What a delectable adventure! Even if nothing came of it, she would make it into a story of the red-blooded sort. And if she *should* succeed in fathoming the strange cipher—broad avenues of romance reached out before her. Over far seas they led. They did not stop short of the mystic land of Persia.

OSBOURNE telephoned the next afternoon at three.

"Well, have you made anything out of it?"

"Suppose you come right over and see!"

He lost no time in getting there.

"You don't mean to tell me you've done it?" he demanded when he had reached her apartment.

Doris smiled and handed him a strip of paper.

"This is what the cipher says."

He took it with trembling hands and read:

Dig down twenty feet from mid-point cellar square.

"Holy mackerel! How did you do it?"

"Principally by sitting up nearly all last night. I knew if I could do it at all I could do it in twenty-four hours. You see, I've studied ciphers a little. It—it's part of my business. Would you like to have me explain?"

"I certainly would!"

"Well, then come over here and sit down and I'll show you. It's really quite simple—after you see it."

She led the way to the settee, where they seated themselves side by side.

"Those numbers," she began, indicating a copy of the cipher she held in her hand, "refer to the quatrain and tell how many letters to count in for the desired letter. You will notice the cipher is divided into nine sections. Each section spells a word. For instance, take the top line of the first section. Counting in seven letters from the first line, seventeen letters from the second line and nine letters from the fourth line, you get d-i-g—*dig*. Similarly, the numbers in the second section tell how many letters to count in to get the second word, d-o-w-n—*down*. The 0 is a blank and indicates there was no w in that line. Wherever the 0 appears

you drop to the next line of the cipher for the number that indicates the corresponding letter in the quaternary. The x's are for letters missing altogether. You have to guess what they mean from the context. But that isn't hard. For example, take x, thirteen, nineteen, seventeen in section four. The other three numbers indicate letters e-e-t. And the preceding word was *twenty*. It doesn't take much guessing to supply the missing f, and you have—*feet*. Do you follow me? Naturally I don't expect you to get it in a minute, when it took me all yesterday afternoon and most all night to work it out."

Slowly and patiently she explained the cipher. But like any other cipher, it was simple when worked out and Osbourne was presently satisfied that her solution was correct.

"But now I'm puzzled about the meaning of the message," he told her.

"Why, it seems perfectly plain. It tells you just where to dig and how deep to go. I don't see what more you could want."

Osbourne took a paper and pencil and sketched a rough diagram.

"Look here. This is the ground plan of the villa. It's in the shape of an L. Now where would you say the mid-point was?"

Doris thought a bit, then pointed with a slender, neatly manicured finger directly at the angle of the base and the perpendicular.

"I'd say it would be at the intersection of the diagonals of the biggest square you could get there."

Osbourne studied the diagram in the light of this suggestion. Then he leaped to his feet. He was greatly excited.

"By George, you're right! It's as plain as day! I wish to heaven I'd come to you in the first place! Now the next question is, getting there—and that's *some* question! If it weren't such an outlandish place, I

—I'd sort of like to have you come along. Something unexpected might turn up."

Doris heard him in dismay.

"But—I'd planned on coming."

He turned and faced her, scarcely knowing whether to take her seriously or not.

"You'd planned on coming? Do you know that it takes more than two months to reach the place? That you have to travel on practically every known beast and mechanism before you get there, including trains, boats, autos, horses, camels—and maybe even that ancient means of locomotion, the human foot?"

"No, I didn't know all that—but it only makes me more determined to go."

"But you couldn't. It's ridiculous. You stay here and I'll keep you fully informed by cable."

Doris saw that stern measures were necessary. She tossed her head angrily.

"I shall do nothing of the sort! We are in this thing fifty-fifty—and we're going to see it through fifty-fifty—or else we aren't going to see it through at all!"

She didn't know what she meant, but she was talking. Osbourne didn't know either—and when a man doesn't know what a woman means, she's safe. He yielded by degrees.

"But how could you come with me? You'd have to have a chaperon. And my experience has been that it is best to hunt treasure alone. Last time I took along a valet but had to get rid of him—snoopy beast! And as for a chaperon—"

"Since when has the antique custom of chaperonage been revived?" interrupted Doris scathingly.

"You mean to say you would travel five thousand miles alone with a man you scarcely know?"

Doris smiled.

"I'll take a chance on the son of an American minister, even if he was

of the politico and not of the clergy!"

"But your parents—what will they say?"

"They won't say anything, because they've long ago given me up as beyond control. You see, one must have considerable latitude to conduct successfully such a business as this."

"So I should imagine! Then you insist on going?"

"Positively."

"Very well. I will agree on one condition."

"What is the condition?"

"That you allow me to defray all your expenses. I couldn't be put to the embarrassment of traveling with a young lady paying her own way."

Doris laughed. But she was not laughing at Osbourne's remark. She was thinking of her bank balance of \$31.63!

"All right, if you insist," she conceded. "But you must keep an account of it and deduct it from my half of the treasure."

3

HAMADAN, the summering place of

Alexander the Great, Ecbatana, Achmetha of Ezra VI, olden capital of the Medes and Persians, famed for its palaces of Darius and Xerxes and its tombs of Esther and Mordecai, lies, according to the geographies, "upon a fertile, healthful plain, sixty-one hundred feet above sea level"—but should you happen to stray there, you would find it only a stifling, dusty plateau whereon, amidst glorious ruins, a few thousand Mohammedans, Armenians and Jews eke out a squalid existence from the sun-baked soil and in devious trades. True, it is one of the largest cities of modern Persia—and is still the vacation adjunct to Teheran—but Persia itself is no longer anything but a sorry phantom of its former self.

"A rotten, filthy hole!" pronounced Osbourne when at last, after

a tedious pilgrimage, they had reached it. "I hope I never see the place again! Twice is twice too much!"

"And to think," breathed Doris, to whom every moment since they left New York had spelled Romance with a big R, "Cyrus and Antiochus once led conquering armies here."

"I'll say they did a thorough job of it!"

They had chartered one of those "tin" motor cars that, thanks to the enterprize of their American manufacturer, now invade every portion of the globe, and were making for the villa.

For half an hour they bumped and jolted over the ancient highway in all save mechanical silence. Finally Osbourne turned to his companion.

"There it is," he said.

Doris looked in the direction he indicated—and there, seemingly at the very base of a gigantic snow-capped mountain, she saw a low square mansion of massive stones, yellowish-red in color, almost Moorish in design.

"From this side it looks square," he said, "but as I explained it's really in the shape of an L. Father bought it from a British official and had it remodeled. The mountain is Mount Elwend."

Their rickety vehicle rumbled on—and at last drew up outside the villa. Osbourne got down, helped Doris to the ground, paid the driver, tipped him amply, and they started in with their luggage.

"Now what the devil," thought the driver in his native tongue, as he drove off, "would a pair of newly-weds be wanting to spend their honeymoon for in a place like that?"

Once inside, Osbourne led the way immediately to the library—and there they paused in dismay. The place had been ransacked as completely as if it had been pillaged for wages.

And not only the library, they discovered before long, but the whole villa as well, had been gone over with a fine tooth comb.

"Some of the detectives you employed have evidently been treasure-hunting on their own hook," mused Doris. "No wonder they weren't anxious to continue under your auspices!"

"Well, we might as well know the worst at once. Let's go down cellar and see if they've left anything."

So by the light of an electric torch they made their way into the dark recess underneath the villa.

"Ha!" exclaimed Osbourne. "Here are some fresh attempts at excavation."

But a careful search failed to reveal any but superficial diggings. And the point at the intersection of the diagonals of the square proved to be untouched. Considerably relieved they returned upstairs.

"Whoever they are," said Doris, "they are on the wrong trail. Do you know, I believe they have been looking for the Cup!"

"I think you're right. Lucky I took it back with me."

They had now reached the library again. Taking their luggage, Osbourne led the way upstairs.

"I'm going to give you father's room," he said. "I'll sleep down below in the library. I hope we won't be here more than a couple of nights." He looked at his watch. "It's 1 o'clock. I wonder if I could dig twenty feet before supper?"

"You could try," she smiled. "I'll come down and help you. I can at least hold the light!"

HALF an hour later Osbourne, with a pick and shovel, was hard at work. Near by sat Doris, on an up-turned box, holding an oil lantern. The moments ticked on and the hole deepened. By 4 o'clock it was ten feet below the surface it had started

from. There remained but ten feet to go. Now, however, a grave problem presented itself. How was he to get the remaining dirt from the hole?

After some pondering Doris solved the problem—and a makeshift derrick was rigged up, of a box and a coil of rope, remnants of the former enterprise.

"Last time," he explained as he toiled on, "we had several in the party and it was no trouble to dig. Besides, we didn't go so deep."

Six o'clock came and the hole was at fifteen feet.

"Five more feet to fortune!" laughed Osbourne as he clambered up the rope and out. "Let's lay off and have a bite to eat."

Supper consisted of some tinned goods they had brought with them all the way from America. Then, reinforced, they went down into the dark cellar again and Osbourne recommenced his labors.

At 9 o'clock, with the hole twenty-two feet deep, he paused and climbed slowly out.

"Well, I guess I was born to be poor. There's nothing down there but China—or whatever is under us in this Godforsaken part of the world!"

"You're sure?"

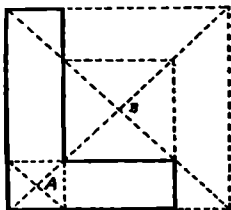
"Do you want to go down and see for yourself?"

"No thanks! But I can't understand. I couldn't have translated the cipher wrong. It was so plain."

They went upstairs and tried to figure it out.

"Say, look here!" cried Osbourne suddenly. "I see it now." He took the sketch of the villa they were pondering over and drew as he talked. The cipher said: "Dig down twenty feet from mid-point cellar square." Well, we didn't do it, don't you see? By 'cellar square' he meant the square of the continuation of the foundation lines. In other words,

imagine another L-shaped villa just like this put against it so:



The Square of Jamshyd

Don't you see? We've been digging at the intersection of the diagonals of that little square, at the point A; whereas we should have dug at the intersection of the diagonals of the big square, at B."

Doris studied the diagram.

"Yes," she admitted at length, "I think you are right. How much are you going to deduct from my fifty per cent for making such a blunder?"

Osbourne looked at her swiftly, in indignation, but saw that she was laughing. So he refrained from making a reply.

At first he was for going right out and commencing the second hole but Doris finally persuaded him that it would be best to wait till morning, when they could see what they were doing, rather than risk making a second false move.

So a few minutes later they said good-night and she went upstairs. Osbourne then composed himself on the library couch and, having performed a day's labor that would entitle any man to rest, was soon asleep.

Suddenly—it seemed he had scarcely shut his eyes—he was aroused by the high-pitched scream of a woman. Leaping up, he slipped into a dressing gown and rushed upstairs. Doris stood in the dark hallway in a lacy kimona over pink silk pajamas, holding a lighted candle. She was trembling violently.

"Someone was in my room," she explained in a voice that shook, despite her efforts to steady it. "I'm sorry I screamed—but it frightened me so."

"Could you see if it was a man or a woman?"

"It was a man. I must have heard him come in, for I woke up suddenly, and saw him searching among the papers in my suitcase. When I screamed he rushed out."

"We'll search the place thoroughly tomorrow," he assured her. "Meanwhile, if you're afraid, I'll sleep outside the door."

"Oh, thanks but—really, I'm not so afraid, now. It was the first shock that startled me. I shall be quite all right."

"Very well, then. But if you need me, just call. And if I were you I'd put a pistol under my pillow."

"I already have one there," she informed him. "And—I'm not afraid to use it if I have to!" She seemed to have quite recovered herself. "Only I'd hate to inconvenience any of your guests."

"Oh, I don't mind in the least," he laughed. "Good-night for the second time." And with that he left her.

The remainder of the night passed uneventfully, save that once Osbourne thought he heard sounds from below, in the cellar. But he decided not to investigate until morning.

DAWN finally came, as it always does even in the worst regulated countries—and Osbourne rose, stretched himself and dressed.

"May I come down?" called Doris presently.

"Come ahead—and we'll open up another can of salmon!" he called back.

After breakfast they searched every nook and corner of the villa but found no trace of the prowler, other than a litter of cigarette stubs in one of the upper rooms. Osbourne picked

up one and examined it. It was of a cheap London brand popular among the lower classes.

"I vote we let the fellow go and get down to business," he said, flinging it away.

They went outside and proceeded to measure off on the terrace embraced by the villa's two long arms, distances equal to the arms themselves. When they had done this, pacing the distances as accurately as they could, they measured the two diagonals in the same way and located the spot where they intersected. To their surprise it came exactly in the center of a small floral garden.

"It's a shame to spoil what little beauty there is about this hideous place," muttered Osbourne, when he had returned a few minutes later with pick and shovel, "but here goes!"

Doris stood by while he demolished the garden. Then, as the work proceeded, from time to time she brought him a drink of water. By noon the new hole was down ten feet. But Osbourne wouldn't stop.

"I'm going to dig this blooming thing down the full twenty feet before I quit!" he exclaimed. "Then, if the darned treasure isn't there, it can go to blazes!"

"But do have something to eat," Doris insisted.

In the end she won and he ate a few potted tongue sandwiches which she handed down to him. Then he resumed. The makeshift derrick had been rigged up again and Doris did what she could to help.

In an idle moment, turning toward the villa, she gasped in astonishment. From one of the upper windows a face was peering down at them. Pretending that she had not noticed, she bent over the hole and told Osbourne. He climbed up the rope and looked over the edge. The face vanished. But he had seen it.

"Could you make out who it was?" she whispered.

"No, it was too far away. But we'll get that bird tonight!"

With that he slid back into the hole and recommenced his labors.

At 6 o'clock he was nearing the goal—if goal there was. Suddenly there came a metallic click. Doris, hearing it, bent over.

"What was that?"

"I'm not sure—but I think we've struck it."

He dug on. Two minutes later he called softly. Doris leaned over the edge.

"Can you slide down that rope?" he asked. "I'll catch you."

She grasped the rope for answer and let herself down. He pointed to a slab of rock some three feet square, with a rusted iron ring in it. In feverish haste they brushed away the remaining earth. Using their combined weights on the pick, they slowly raised the slab and laid it back away from the opening. A flight of stone steps led down some twelve feet into a dark cavern.

Flashing the electric torch, Osbourne led the way down. Doris followed, breathless with wonder. The fabled tale of Aladdin came back to her. The world of reality faded away. She was under an enchantment.

They were now in a stone passage, narrow and damp. About everything was the fetor of great age. They advanced slowly, fearfully. Not even the presence of the supernatural could have been more awe-inspiring. They did not talk. They scarcely breathed. The passage ended, thirty feet from its inception, at a great door of solid ebony, carved marvelously and bound all about with heavy gold.

Osbourne grasped its great handle and leaned with it. A moment of terrible uncertainty—then it swung slowly open—and the bright light of

their electric torch threw into relief a spectacle that few men in all time have ever beheld. They stood on the threshold of a stupendous treasure. Great chests, of metal and stone and wood, large and small, lined a square chamber probably fifty feet on a side. They were piled one on top of another to the very ceiling. Some of them were intact. Others, through the slow corrosion of countless centuries, had partially fallen apart, sending their contents cataracting down in a shower of gold and precious stones. The floor was strewn with coins and jewels. Over in one corner a veritable pyramid of silver and gold, rubies and diamonds, sapphires and emeralds and turquoises, blinked uneasily under the brilliant flood of strange modern illumination.

ADVANCING as if into a sanctuary they were desecrating, Osbourne and Doris entered the treasure-chamber. Step by step, slowly and dazedly, they proceeded, as if under the shadow of a spell, feeling that at any moment the whole phantasmagoria might disintegrate into thin haze and waft away.

Doris, pagan in the presence of such overpowering wealth, reached down and lifted up a handful of gold and jewels, letting them fall through her fingers and tinkle to the floor. The echoes resounded queerly—and as they died away there came a dull, reverberating boom, as of a door closing a great way off.

"What was that?" As of one accord they spoke, turning to face each other. As of one accord they looked in the direction of the silent ebony sentinel to the riches of a whole dynasty of plundering kings. But the massive door was open wide on its hinges.

"The trap door at the hole!" cried Osbourne. And with a rush he dashed from the room and along the narrow stone passage to the steps. Doris,

following, saw him rush up them and fling his weight against the stone slab, which had fallen. But it would not rise.

Then Osbourne paused, as he heard an ominous sound. Doris had now joined him.

"Listen!"

She listened. At intervals dull thuds struck the upper surface of the stone slab. Someone was throwing earth upon it!

"Trapped! Buried like two dogs!" muttered Osbourne. "That fellow at the window. We should have known better."

They stood a moment more, listening, then he tried the trap door again. But the effort was futile.

Slowly they retraced their steps, and entered the treasure-room once more. There, ruefully, they surveyed the immense wealth that surrounded them.

"Well," remarked Osbourne with a wry attempt at a smile, "here we are, probably two of the richest people in the world—and what does it get us? Children, let this be an example to you. Money does not bring happiness!"

Doris laughed—but the echoes of her laugh sounded hollow and false. They were in a desperate fix and there was no getting around it.

"What a pair of fools we are!" he muttered. "This is just the chance that fellow's been waiting for, failing to find the Cup. He'll shovel enough earth back over the door to hold us, then he'll wait a few days for us to smother to death—whereupon he'll have the treasure all to himself."

But Doris wasn't listening. She had discovered something tremendously more important than what he was saying. Osbourne looked to see her kneeling in the far corner of the room, by the loose mound of money and jewels. He came over.

"It's another door, I think," she explained, working frantically with

her hands to clear away the precious debris. "There's a ring-bolt here. My foot caught in it."

He bent down and they both worked. Presently another trap door was brought to light. They lifted on the ring-bolt and it rose.

"It's our only hope," he said. "Let's go!"

They went down another flight of stone steps and then along a passage even narrower and lower than the other. At times they had to stoop.

"Heavens, it seems endless!" exclaimed Doris fifteen minutes later.

"But it must lead somewhere. They didn't waste all the energy and time required to build this thing for nothing. Hello, there's a light ahead now!" as they turned a sharp corner.

They proceeded on and the light grew brighter. But when they approached its source they saw to their dismay that it was only the tiniest crack, trickling in past a huge cube of rock that completely blocked the passage. Osbourne threw himself against it. To his surprize it yielded perceptibly. He tried it again. But though the giant rock swayed, it would not topple.

He stood off and surveyed it.

"I think," he said, "that if we both pushed we might be able to move it."

"We can only try. I'm afraid I'm not very strong."

But it is surprizing the strength the human body can summon in a crisis. On the third combined lunge against the rock, it gave way, falling outward, where it stuck at an angle. Light now poured in over the top in a broad sheet. Osbourne felt up with his hand.

"I don't know. It's a rather tight squeeze if it's a go at all, at least for me. You'll probably be able to get out all right. Suppose you try first."

W. R.—3

So Doris clambered up over the sloping rock—and slid out of sight over the edge.

"Oh, I wish you could see!" she called back. "It's an old palace."

Osbourne now made the attempt, and by the narrowest of margins managed to squeeze out. Then he looked around him. They were in the midst of a vast ruin. Great walls towered up on three sides of them, and the ground where they stood was littered with fallen blocks and columns.

Twilight was falling and the shadows that were gathering gave to the scene an aspect of somber beauty.

"What revelry those ancient kings must once have held here!" murmured Doris.

"Yes, and what revelry I'm going to hold when I get astraddle the neck of that fellow!" muttered Osbourne. "But for the fact that those old birds always had two ways out of a place, we might have spent the rest of our young lives there."

THEY started off toward the villa, which they could dimly see far over on the other side of the highway, to the left. Back of it an oriental moon was rising, the crescent tilted oddly.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to put that block back against the passage before we leave?" Doris suggested. "It has evidently hidden the secret of Jamshyd's treasure for centuries. Perhaps it can continue to do the same service for one more night."

So they returned to the massive block and by exerting all their strength were able to lift it back in place. Fortunately, fate had more or less balanced it on a pivot; otherwise ten men could not have moved it.

"There," said Osbourne, "that's done. Now let's go back to the villa. By the time we reach there it will be dark. I think we stand a

good chance of capturing our would-be jailer. Thinking us safely out of the way, he won't be at any pains to conceal himself."

Indeed, even as they turned their eyes in the direction of the villa they saw a light in one of the upper rooms.

"That's the room you found the cigarette stubs in, isn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it is. Now I tell you what we'll do. In order to run no risk of his giving us the slip, we'll come up on him from two directions. You'll go up the front stairs and I'll go up the rear. Have you your pistol with you?"

"No."

"Well, I have two. Here, you take this one—and don't hesitate to shoot. We want him—dead or alive. Preferably alive. I'd like to hear him try to tell his story to these local cops!"

Presently they reached the grounds of the villa.

"You're sure you're not afraid?" he asked her. "If you are, I'll take a chance on landing him myself."

"Oh, no, not at all," fibbed Doris.

Her heart was in her throat already. But she determined she would see it through.

So they parted and each approached the villa from a different direction.

Some minutes later they met in the upper hall, outside the door of the room with the light.

"Funny," remarked Osbourne. "We must have made some noise. He evidently hasn't heard us."

"Perhaps he isn't in the room."

"Well, we'll soon see."

Their conversation, held in whispers, ceased. Grasping the knob of the door, Osbourne opened it. They entered, pistols leveled—to pause in amazement at a most extraordinary sight. Slouched down in a deep leather chair, a clutter of empty wine bottles at his feet, sat an exceedingly

drunken man. Osbourne looked closely, saw the man's face.

"My valet!"

Returning the unneeded pistol to his pocket, he came forward and shook the man violently. Under the assault, that individual opened one bleary eye. Something that its blurred vision caught caused him to open the other in haste. Then, with both feeble orbs focusing at random, the form before him gradually took shape on his retina and was telegraphed to a foggy brain. That seemed to clarify the atmosphere like lightning. The man leaped to his feet in terror. But Osbourne shoved him firmly back into his seat. Then commenced maudlin ravings, cursings, pleadings. It was a mixture of delirium tremens and extreme fright. Doris backed away horrified.

"Please go outside," begged Osbourne. "Or—wait a minute. Fortunately father had to have a 'phone in this place, for official purposes. You will find it in the downstairs hall. Call up the police and tell them to send for this man."

Doris did as she was asked. When she returned she found the man quiet and Osbourne standing beside him nonchalantly. She never knew what had taken place between them. She didn't want to.

"I've changed my mind about this fellow," he told her. "I'm going to let him go. He's going right away. By the time the police get here he'll be gone. I've not told him he could go yet, but you just watch him when I do!" He turned to his one-time valet. "Now, my fellow citizen, your presence is no longer required. It will be very undesirable at any time in the future. You may go."

For a man who had lately been under the influence of large quantities of the best liquor, the man showed amazing speed and control in making himself scarce. He vanished from the room as if by magic, there

was a rattle of feet on the stairs, the opening and shutting of a door—and he removed himself from their lives forever.

"But what'll we say when the police come?"

"We'll say he escaped—and we'll ask official protection for our property."

Osbourne thought Doris smiled rather curiously.

"Our property?"

"Why, certainly. Didn't I promise you fifty per cent? I told you at the time I was no piker."

Thereupon Doris handed him a sheet of folded note paper. Osbourne took it and glanced at it uncertainly a moment. Then surprize and pleasure lit up his face.

"Why, it's in Dad's writing!"

"I found it down in the treasure-chamber," she explained. "It was stuck under the cover of one of the chests."

Osbourne read:

My dear Son:

You may take this for what it is worth. As you know, I am somewhat of a Persian scholar. When I first came upon this treasure, I discovered an original document in the handwriting of King Jamshyd. The

document said in part: "Should man ever chance upon this treasure of me and my dynasty, which I am forced to leave behind me (an evil spirit, Dahak, drove him from his Empire), wo be unto him and let him dread the curse of a Persian king, should he cause it to be divided."

So, my son, it behooves you to keep the treasure intact, as I have done, unless you have the fortitude to brave the wrath of Jamshyd.

God be with you—and may these riches bring you happiness.

Your loving father,

FRANKLYN OSBOURNE.

"So you see," said Doris, "the treasure is yours, not mine. I relinquish all claim to my half."

"Nonsense," laughed Osbourne. "Surely you aren't going to let a silly superstition scare you. Old King Jamshyd's been dead too long to be formidable. Doubtless he's forgotten all about his old treasure, a great while ago."

But she would not be shaken.

"Then," said Osbourne at length, "there is only one thing to do, if you insist the treasure must remain in my family."

"What?"

"You'll have to marry me!"

And she did so.