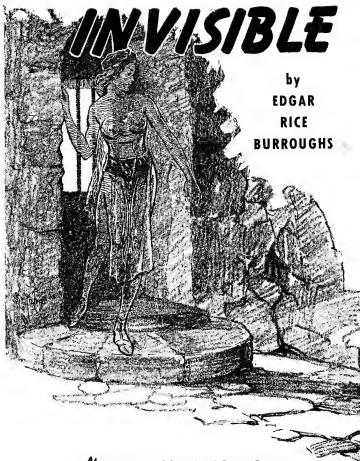


INVISIBLE

by
**EDGAR
RICE
BURROUGHS**



Nowhere on Mars had John Carter ever faced a more dangerous situation—for here were keen swords pitted against him that he could not see, because the men he fought were invisible.

MEN OF MARS

"SOON we will be in Gathol," I said to Llana of Gathol. I had brought her from captivity in the Arctic city of Pankor, stolen her from under the very nose of Hin Abtol, the self-styled Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North; and we were speeding through the thin air of dying Mars in my own fast flier toward Gathol.

"To Gathol?" asked Llana. "Nothing would make me happier than to return to my father, my mother, and my native city; but how may we hope to make a landing there while Gathol is surrounded by the warriors of Hin Abtol?"

"The Panars are a stupid, inefficient lot," I replied; "most of Hin Abtol's war-

riors are unwilling conscripts who have no heart in waging war for their tyrannical master. These poor frozen men only endure it because they know there is no escape and prefer life and consciousness to being returned to Pankor and frozen in again until Hin Abtol needs their swords for a future war."

"'Frozen men'!" ejaculated Llana; "what do you mean by that?"

"You heard nothing of them while you were a prisoner in Pankor?" I asked, surprised.

At first I saw nothing, then her shadowy form materialized



"Nothing," Llana assured me; "tell me about them."

"Just outside the walls of the hot-house city there are rows upon rows of racks in the biting cold and bitter wind of the North Polar region. On these racks, like beef in a cold storage warehouse, thousands of warriors hang by their feet, frozen solid and in a state of suspended animation. They are captives whom he has taken on numerous raids during a period of fully a hundred years. I have talked with some who had been frozen in over fifty years.

"I was in the resuscitating room when a number of them were thawed out; after a few minutes they don't seem to be any worse for their experience, but the whole idea is revolting."

"Why does he do it?" demanded Llana. "Why thousands of them?"

"Better say thousands upon thousands," I said; "one slave told me that there were at least a million. Hin Abtol dreams of conquering all of Barsoom with them."

"How grotesque!" exclaimed Llana.

"Were it not for the navy of Helium, he might go far along the road toward the goal of his grandiose ambition; and you may thank your revered ancestors, Llana, that there is a navy of Helium. After I return you to Gathol, I shall fly to Helium and organize an expedition to write finis to Hin Abtol's dreams."

"I wish that before you do that we might try to find out what has become of Pan Dan Chee and Jad-han," said Llana; "the Panars separated us shortly after we were captured."

"They may have been taken to Pankor and frozen in," I suggested.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Llana; "that would be too terrible."

"YOU are very fond of Pan Dan Chee, aren't you?" I asked.

"He has been a very good friend," she replied, a little stiffly. The stubborn minx wouldn't admit that she was in love with him—and possibly she wasn't; you never can tell anything about a woman. She had treated him abominably when they were together; but when they were separated and he was in danger, she had evinced the greatest concern for his safety.

"I don't know how we can learn anything about his fate," I said, "unless we can inquire directly of the Panars; and that might prove rather dangerous. I should like to know what has become of them and Tan Hadron of Haster as well."

"Tan Hadron of Haster? Where is he?"

"The last I saw of him, he was on board the Dusar, the Panar ship I stole from their line outside Gathol; and he was the prisoner of the mutinous crew that took it from me. There were a lot of assassins among them, and these were determined to kill Tan Hadron as soon as he had taken the ship to whatever destination they had decided upon; you see, none of the crew knew anything about navigation."

"Tan Hadron of Haster," said Llana again; "his mother was a royal princess of Gathol and Tan Hadron himself one of the greatest fighting men of Barsoom."

"A splendid officer," I added.

"Steps must be taken to save him, too."

"If it is not too late," I said; "and the only chance of saving any of them lies in my reaching Helium in time to bring a fleet to Gathol before Hin Abtol succeeds in reducing it, and then on to Pankor, if we do not find these three among Hin Abtol's prisoners at Gathol."

"Perhaps we had better fly direct to Helium," suggested Llana. "A fleet

from Helium could accomplish something, while we two, alone, might accomplish no more than getting ourselves captured again by the Panars—and it would go hard with you, John Carter, if Hin Abtol ever got his hands on you again, after what you did in Pankor today." She laughed. "I shall never forget what you did to Rab-zov, 'the strongest man in Pankor'."

"Neither will Rab-zov," I said.

"Nor Hin Abtol. And the hole you made in the glass dome covering the city, when you drove the flier right through it! I'll wager they all had chills before they got that patched up. No, Hin Abtol will never forget you."

"But he never knew who I really was," I reminded Llana; "with my disguise removed, I am no longer a red man; and he might never guess that he had once had John Carter in his power."

"The results would be the same as far as you are concerned," said Llana; "I think it would be death in either event."

BEFORE we had come far from Pankor I decided that our wisest course would be to proceed directly to Helium and enlist the aid of Tardos Mors, the jeddak. While I hold the titles of Jeddak of Jeddaks and Warlord of Barsoom, conferred upon me by the jeddaks of five nations, I have always considered them largely honorary, and have never presumed to exercise the authority implicit in them, except in times of war when even the great jeddak of Helium has graciously served under me.

Having reached the decision to fly to Helium rather than Gathol, I turned toward the southeast. Before us lay a journey half the distance around the planet, and we were absolutely without water or provisions.

Soon the towers and stately ruins of Horz were visible, reminding us both

of the circumstances under which we had met Pan Dan Chee, and I thought that Llana looked down a little sadly on that long dead city from which her lost lover had been self-exiled because of us. It was here that she had escaped from Hin Abtol, and it was here that Hin Abtol had stolen this very flier of mine that I had found and recovered in his Polar capital. Yes, Horz held many memories for both of us; and I was glad when it lay behind us.

Far ahead lay Dusar where water and provisions might be obtained, but the friendliness of Dusar was open to question. It had not been so many years since Carthoris, the Prince of Helium, had almost been done to death there by Astok, son of Nutus, the jeddak of Dusar; and there had been no intercourse between Helium and Dusar since that time. Beyond Dusar was no friendly city all the way to Helium.

I decided to give Dusar a wide berth, and in doing so we flew over country with which I was entirely unfamiliar. It was a hilly country; and in a long, deep valley I saw one of those rarest of all sights on Mars, a splendid forest. Now, to me a forest means fruits and nuts and, perhaps, game animals; and we were hungry. There would doubtless be mantalia plants too, the sap of which would quench our thirst; and so I decided to land. My better judgment told me that it was a risky thing to do, and subsequent events proved that my judgment was wholly correct.

CHAPTER II

Voices Out of Nowhere

I LANDED on level ground close to the forest, and telling Llana to remain aboard the flier ready to take off at a moment's notice, I went in search of food. The forest consisted principally

of skeel, sorapus, and sompus trees. The first two are hardwood trees bearing large, delicious nuts, while the sompus trees were loaded with a citrus-like fruit with a thin red rind. The pulp of this fruit, called somp, is not unlike grapefruit, though much sweeter. It is considered a great delicacy among Barsoomians, and is cultivated along many of the canals. I had never seen any, however, as large as these growing wild; nor had I ever seen trees on Mars of the size of many of those growing in this hidden forest.

I had gathered as much of the fruit and as many nuts as I could carry, when I heard Llana calling me. There was a note of excitement and urgency in her voice, and I dropped all that I had gathered and ran in the direction of the flier. Just before I came out of the forest I heard her scream; and as I emerged, the flier rose from the ground.

I ran toward it as fast I can run, and that is extremely fast under the conditions of lesser gravity which prevail on Mars. I took forty or fifty feet in a leap, and then I sprang fully thirty feet into the air in an effort to seize the rail of the flier. One hand touched the gunwale; but my fingers didn't quite close over the rail, and I slipped back and fell to the ground. However, I had had a glimpse of the deck of the flier, and what I saw there filled me with astonishment and, for some reason, imparted that strange sensation to my scalp as though each separate hair were standing erect—Llana lay on the deck absolutely alone, and there was no one at the controls!

"A noble endeavor," said a voice behind me; "you can certainly jump."

I wheeled about, my hand flying to the hilt of my sword. There was no one there! I looked toward the forest; there was no sign of living thing about me. From behind me came a laugh—a

taunting, provocative laugh. Again I wheeled. As far as I could see there was only the peaceful Martian landscape. Above me, the flier circled and disappeared beyond the forest—flown with no human hand at the controls by some sinister force which I could not fathom.

"Well," said a voice, again behind me, "we might as well be on our way. You realize, I presume, that you are our prisoner."

"I realize nothing of the sort," I retorted. "If you want to take me, come and get me—come out in the open like men; if you are men."

"Resistance will be futile," said the voice; "there are twenty of us and only one of you."

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"Oh, pardon me," said the voice, "I should have introduced myself. I am Pnoxus, son of Ptantus, jeddak of Invak; and whom have I had the honor of capturing?"

"You haven't had the honor of capturing me yet," I said. I didn't like that voice—it was too oily and polite.

"You are most unco-operative," said the voice named Pnoxus. "I should hate to have to adopt unpleasant methods with you." The voice was not so sweet now; there was just a faint ring of steel in it.

"I don't know where you're hiding," I said; "but if you'll come out, all twenty of you, I'll give you a taste of steel. I have had enough of this foolishness."

"And I've had enough," snapped the voice. Somehow it sounded like a bear trap to me—all the oily sweetness had gone out of it. "Take him, men!"

I LOOKED quickly around for the men, but I was still alone—just a voice and I were there. At least that is what I thought until hands seized my ankles and jerked my feet from beneath

me. I fell flat on my face, and what felt like half a dozen heavy men leaped on my back and half a dozen hands ripped my sword from my grasp and more hands relieved me of my other weapons. Then unseen hands tied my own behind my back and others fastened a rope around my neck, and the voice said:

"Get up!"

I got up. "If you come without resistance," said the voice named Pnoxus, "it will be much easier for you and for my men. Some of them are quite short tempered, and if you make it difficult for them you may not get to Invak alive."

"I will come," I said, "but where? For the rest, I can wait."

"You will be led," said Pnoxus, "and see that you follow where you're led. You've already given me enough trouble."

"You won't know what trouble is until I can see you," I retorted.

"Don't threaten; you have already stored up enough trouble for yourself."

"What became of the girl who was with me?" I demanded.

"I took a fancy to her," said Pnoxus, "and had one of my men, who can fly a ship, take her on to Invak."

I cannot tell you what an eerie experience it was being led through that forest by men that I could not see and being talked to by a voice that had no body; but when I realized that I was probably being taken to the place that Llana of Gathol had been taken, I was content, nay, anxious, to follow docilely where I was led.

I could see the rope leading from my neck out in front of me; it fell away in a gentle curve as a rule and then gradually vanished, vignette-like; sometimes it straightened out suddenly, and then I would feel a jerk at the back of my neck; but by following that ghostly rope-end as it wound among the trees

of the forest and watching the bight carefully, so as to anticipate a forthcoming jerk by the straightening of the curve, I learned to avoid trouble.

In front of me and behind I continually heard voices berating other voices: "Sense where you're going, you blundering idiot," or "Stop stepping on my heels, you fool," or "Who do you think you're bumping into, son-of-a-calot!" The voices seemed to be constantly getting in one another's way. Serious as I felt my situation might be, I could not help but be amused.

Presently I felt an arm brush against mine, or at least it felt like an arm, the warm flesh of a bare arm; it would touch me for an instant only to be taken away immediately, and then it would touch me again in a regular measured cadence, as might the arms of two men walking out of step side by side; and then a voice spoke close beside me, and I knew that a voice was walking with me.

"We are coming to a bad place," said the voice; "you had better take my arm."

I groped out with my right hand and found an arm that I could not see. I grasped what felt like an upper arm, and as I did so *my right hand disappeared!* Now, my right arm ended at the wrist, or at least it appeared to do so; but I could feel my fingers clutching that arm that I could not see. It was a most eerie sensation.

ALMOST immediately we came to an open place in the forest, where no trees grew. The ground was covered with tiny hummocks, and when I stepped on it it sank down a few inches. It was like walking on coil springs covered with turf.

"I'll guide you," said the voice at my side. "If you should get off the trail here alone you'd be swallowed up.

The worst that can happen to you now would be to get one leg in it, for I can pull you out before it gets a good hold on you."

"Thank you," I said; "it is very decent of you."

"Think nothing of it," replied the voice; "I feel sorry for you; I am always sorry for strangers whom Fate misguides into the forest of Invak. We have another name for it which, I think, better describes it—The Forest of Lost Men."

"Is it really so bad to fall into the hands of your people?" I asked.

"I am afraid that it is," replied the voice; "there is no escape."

I had heard that one before; so it didn't impress me greatly. The lesser peoples of Barsoom are great braggarts; they always have the best swordsmen, the finest cities, the most outstanding culture; and once you fall into their hands, you are always doomed to death or a life of slavery—you can never escape them.

"May I ask you a question?" I inquired.

"Certainly," said the voice.

"Are you always only a voice?"

A hand, I suppose it was his right hand, seized my arm and squeezed it with powerful, though invisible, fingers; and whatever it was that walked beside me chuckled. "Does that feel like only a voice?" it asked.

"A stentorian voice," I said. "You seem to have the physical attributes of a flesh and blood man; have you a name?"

"Most assuredly; it is Kandus; and yours?" he asked politely.

"Dotar Sojat," I told him, falling back upon my well-worn pseudonym.

We had now successfully crossed the bog, or whatever it was; and I removed my hand from Kandus's arm. Immediately I was wholly visible again, but

Kandus remained only a voice. Again I walked alone, I and a rope sticking out in front of me and apparently defying the law of gravity. Even the fact that I surmised that the other end of it was fastened to a voice did not serve to make it seem right; it was a most indecent way for a rope to behave.

"'Dotar Sojat'," repeated Kandus; "it sounds more like a green man's name."

"You are familiar with the green men?" I asked.

"Oh, yes; there is a horde which occasionally frequents the dead sea bottoms beyond the forest; but they have learned to give us a wide berth. Notwithstanding their great size and strength, we have a distinct advantage over them. As a matter of fact, I believe that they are very much afraid of us."

"I can well imagine so; it is not easy to fight voices; there is nothing one may get one's sword into."

Kandus laughed. "I suppose you would like to get your sword into me," he said.

"Absolutely not," I said; "you have been very decent to me, but I don't like that voice which calls itself Pnoxus; I wouldn't mind crossing swords with it."

"Not so loud," cautioned Kandus. "You must remember that he is the jeddak's son. We all have to be very nice to Pnoxus—no matter what we may privately think of him."

I JUDGED from that that Pnoxus was not popular. It is really amazing how quickly one may judge a person by his voice; this had never been so forcibly impressed upon me before. Now, I had disliked the Pnoxus voice from the first, even when it was soft and oily, perhaps because of that; but I had liked the voice named Kandus—it was the voice of a man's man, open

and without guile; a good voice.

"Where are you from, Dotar Sojat?" asked Kandus.

"From Virginia," I said.

"That is a city of which I have never heard. In what country is it?"

"It is in the United States of America," I replied, "but you never heard of that either."

"No," he admitted; "that must be a far country."

"It is a far country," I assured him, "some forty-three million miles from here."

"You can talk as tall as you jump," he said. "I don't mind your joking with me," he added, "but I wouldn't get funny with Pnoxus, nor with Ptantus, the jeddak, if I were you; neither one of them has a sense of humor."

"But I was not joking," I insisted. "You have seen Jasoom in the heavens at night?"

"Of course," he replied.

"Well, that is the world I come from; it is called Earth there, and Barsoom is known as Mars."

"You look and talk like an honorable man," said Kandus; "and, while I don't understand, I am inclined to believe; however, you'd better pick out some place on Barsoom as your home when anyone else in Invak questions you; and you may soon be questioned—here we are at the gates of the city now."

CHAPTER III

A City of Invisible Men

INVAK! The city in the Forest of Lost Men. At first only a gate was visible, so thickly set were the trees that hid the city wall—the trees and the vines that covered the wall.

I heard a voice challenge as we approached the gate, and I heard Pnoxus' voice reply, "It is Pnoxus, the prince,

with twenty warriors and a prisoner."

"Let one advance and give the countersign," said the voice.

I was astonished that the guard at the gate couldn't recognize the jeddak's son, nor any of the twenty warriors with him. I suppose that one of the voices advanced and whispered the countersign, for presently a voice said, "Enter, Pnoxus, with your twenty warriors and your prisoner."

Immediately the gates swung open, and beyond I saw a lighted corridor and people moving about within it; then my rope tightened and I moved forward toward the gate; and ahead of me, one by one, armed men suddenly appeared just beyond the threshold of the gateway; one after another they appeared as though materialized from thin air and continued on along the lighted corridor. I approached the gate apparently alone, but as I stepped across the threshold there was a warrior at my side where the voice of Kandus had walked.

I looked at the warrior, and my evident amazement must have been written large upon my face, for the warrior grinned. I glanced behind me and saw warrior after warrior materialize into a flesh and blood man the moment that he crossed the threshold. I had walked through the forest accompanied only by voices, but now ten warriors walked ahead of me and ten behind and one at my side.

"Are you Kandus?" I asked this one.

"Certainly," he said.

"How do you do it?" I exclaimed.

"It is very simple, but it is the secret of the Invaks," he replied. "I may tell you, however, that we are invisible in daylight, or rather when we are not illuminated by these special lamps which light our city. If you will notice the construction of the city as we proceed, you will see that we take full ad-

vantage of our only opportunity for visibility."

"Why should you care whether other people can see you or not?" I asked. "Is it not sufficient that you can see them and yourselves?"

"Unfortunately, there is the hitch," he said. "We can see you, but we can't see each other any more than you can see us."

So that accounted for the grumbling and cursing I had heard upon the march through the forest—the warriors had been getting in each other's way because they couldn't see one another any more than I could see them.

"You have certainly achieved invisibility," I said, "or are you hatched invisible from invisible eggs?"

"No," he replied, "we are quite normal people; but we have learned to make ourselves invisible."

JUST then I saw an open courtyard ahead of us, and as the warriors passed out of the lighted corridor into it they disappeared. When Kandus and I stepped out, I was walking alone again. It was most uncanny.

The city was spotted with these courtyards which gave ventilation to the city which was, otherwise, entirely roofed and artificially lighted by the amazing lights which gave complete visibility to its inhabitants. In every courtyard grew spreading trees, and upon the city's roof vines had been trained to grow; so that, built as it was in the center of the Forest of Lost Men, it was almost as invisible from either the ground or the air as were its people themselves.

Finally we halted in a large courtyard in which were many trees wherein iron rings were set with chains attached to them, and here invisible hands snapped around one of my ankles a shackle that was fastened to the end

of one of these chains.

Presently a voice whispered in my ear, "I will try to help you, for I have rather taken a liking to you—you've got to admire a man who can jump thirty feet into the air; and you've got to be interested in a man who says he comes from another world forty-three million miles from Barsoom."

It was Kandus. I felt that I was fortunate in having even the suggestion of a friend here, but I wondered what good it would do me. After all, Kandus was not the jeddak; and my fate would probably rest in the hands of Ptantus.

I could hear voices crossing and recrossing the courtyard. I could see people come down the corridors or streets and then fade into nothingness as they stepped out into the courtyard. I could see the backs of men and women appear quite as suddenly in the entrances to the streets as they left the courtyard. On several occasions voices stopped beside my tree and discussed me. They commented upon my light skin and grey eyes. One voice mentioned the great leap into the air that one of my captors had recounted.

Once a delicate perfume stopped near me, and a sweet voice said, "The poor man, and he is so handsome!"

"Don't be a fool, Rojas," growled a masculine voice. "He is an enemy, and anyway he's not very good-looking."

"I think he is very good-looking," insisted the sweet voice, "and how do you know he's an enemy?"

"I was not an enemy when I brought my ship down beside the forest," I said, "but the treatment I have received is fast making one of me."

"There, you see," said the sweet voice; "he was not an enemy. What is your name, poor man?"

"My name is Dotar Sojat, but I am not a 'poor man,'" I replied with a laugh.

"That may be what you think," said the masculine voice. "Come on, Rojas, before you make any bigger fool of yourself."

"If you'll give me a sword and come out of your cowardly invisibility, I'll make a fool of you, calot," I said.

An invisible, but very material, toe kicked me in the groin. "Keep your place, slave!" growled the voice.

I LUNGED forward and, by chance, got my hands on the fellow; and then I held him by his harness for just long enough to feel for his face, and when I had located it I handed him a right upper-cut that must have knocked him half way across the courtyard.

"That," I said, "will teach you not to kick a man who can't see you."

"Did Motus kick you?" cried the sweet voice, only it wasn't so sweet now; it was an angry voice, a shocked voice. "You looked as though you were hitting him—I hope you did."

"I did," I said, "and you had better see if there is a doctor in the house."

"Where are you, Motus?" cried the girl.

There was no response; Motus must have gone out like a light. Pretty soon I heard some lurid profanity, and a man's voice saying, "Who are you, lying around here in the courtyard?" Some voice had evidently stumbled over Motus.

"That must be Motus," I said in the general direction from which the girl's voice had last come. "You'd better have him carried in."

"He can lie there until he rots, for all I care," replied the voice as it trailed away. Almost immediately I saw the slim figure of a girl materialize in the entrance to one of the streets. I could tell from her back that she was an angry girl, and if her back were any criterion she was a beautiful girl—any-

way, she had had a beautiful voice and a good heart. Perhaps these Invaks weren't such bad people after all.

CHAPTER IV

An Old Friend

"THAT was a beauty that you handed Motus," said a voice behind me

I wasn't going to bother even to turn around. What was the use of turning around and seeing no one there? But when the voice said, "I'll bet he's out for a week, the dirty Invak calot," I did turn around, for I knew no Invak had made a remark like that.

Chained to a tree near me, I saw another red man (it is strange that I should always think of myself as a red man here on Barsoom; and yet, perhaps, not so strange after all. Except for my color, I *am* a red man—a red man in thought and feeling to the marrow of my bones. I no longer ever think of myself as a Virginian, so ingrained has become my love for this world of my adoption).

"Well, where did *you* come from?" I demanded. "Are you one of the invisibles?"

"I am not," replied the man. "I have been here all along. When you were first brought I must have been asleep behind my tree, but the people stopping to comment on you awoke me. I heard you tell the girl that your name is Dotar Sojat. That is a strange name for a red man. Mine is Ptor Fak; I am from Zodanga."

Ptor Fak! I recalled him now; he was one of the three Ptor brothers who had befriended me that time that I had wished to enter Zodanga in search of Dejah Thoris. At first I hesitated to tell him who I really was; but then, knowing him to be an honorable man, I was about to when he suddenly ex-

claimed, "By the mother of the nearer moon! Those eyes, that skin!"

"S-h-h!" I cautioned. "I don't know the nature of these people yet, and so I thought it wiser to be Dotar Sojat."

"If you're not Dotar Sojat, who are you?" demanded a voice at my elbow. That's the trouble with this invisibility business—a man can sneak up on you and eavesdrop, and you haven't the slightest idea that there is anyone near you.

"I am the Sultan of Swat," I said, that being the first name that popped into my head.

"What's a sultan?" demanded the voice.

"A jeddak of jeddaks," I replied.

"In what country?"

"In Swat."

"I never heard of Swat," said the voice.

"Well, now that it's out, you had better tell your jeddak that he's got a sultan chained up here in his back yard."

THE voice must have gone away, for I heard it no more. Ptor Fak was laughing. "I can see that things are going to brighten up a bit now that you are here," he said; "my deepest reverence for whichever one of your ancestors gave you a sense of humor. This is the first laugh I have had since they got me."

"How long have you been here?"

"Several months. I was trying out a new motor that we have developed in Zodanga and was trying to establish a record for a circumnavigation of Barsoom at the Equator, and of course this place had to be on the Equator and right under me when my motor quit. How did you get here?"

"I had just escaped from Pankor with Llana, daughter of Gahan of Gathol, and we were on our way to Helium to bring back a fleet to teach

Hin Abtol a lesson. We had neither food nor water on our flier; so I landed beside this forest to get some. While I was in the forest, one of these Invaks, invisible of course to Llana, climbed aboard the flier and took off with her; and twenty more of them jumped on me and took me prisoner."

"A girl was with you! That is too bad. They may kill us, but they'll keep her."

"Pnoxus said that he had taken a fancy to her," I said, bitterly.

"Pnoxus is a calot and the son of a calot and the grandson of a calot," said Ptor Fak, illuminatingly. Nothing could have evaluated Pnoxus more concisely.

"What will they do with us?" I asked. "Will we have any opportunity to escape that might also give me an opportunity to take Llana away?"

"Well, as long as they keep you chained to a tree, you can't escape; and that's what they've done with me ever since I've been here. I think they intended to use us in some sort of Games, but just what they are I don't know. Look!" he exclaimed, pointing and laughing.

I looked in the direction he indicated and saw two men carrying the limp form of a third down one of the streets.

"That must be Motus," said Ptor Fak. "I am afraid that may get you into trouble," he added, suddenly sobered.

"Whatever trouble it gets me into, it was worth it," I said. "Think of kicking a blind man, and that's what it amounted to. The girl was as mad about it as I; she must be a good sort. Rojas—that's rather a pretty name."

"The name of a noblewoman," said Ptor Fak.

"You know her?" I asked.

"No, but you can tell by the endings of their names whether or not they are

noble and by the beginnings and endings of their names if they're royal. The names of the noblemen end in us and the names of noblewomen in as. The names of royalty end the same way but always begin with two consonants, like Pnoxus and Ptantus."

"Then Motus is a nobleman," I said.

"Yes; that is what is going to make it bad for you."

"TELL me," I said; "how do they make themselves invisible?"

"They have developed something that gives them invisibility for perhaps a day; it is something they take internally—a large pill. I understand that they take one every morning, so as to be sure that they will be invisible if they have to go outside the city. You see it takes about an hour for the stuff to work, and if the city were attacked by an enemy they'd be in a bad way if they had to go out and fight while visible. They are also working on a mechanical way to make themselves invisible, to eliminate the waiting period while the pills take effect."

"What enemies can they have around here?" I asked. "Kandus told me that even the green men are afraid of them."

"There is another city in the forest inhabited by an offshoot of this tribe," explained Ptor Fak; "it is called Onvak, and its people also possess the secret of invisibility. Occasionally the Onvaks come and attack Invak, or lie in wait for the Invak hunting parties when they go out into the forest."

"I should think it might be rather difficult to fight a battle in which one could see neither foe nor friend," I suggested.

"Yes; I understand that there's never very much damage done, though occasionally they capture a prisoner. The last battle they had the Invaks took two prisoners, and when they got them

into the city they discovered that they were both their own men. They never know how many of their own people they kill; they just go slashing about them with their swords, and Issus help whoever gets in the way."

Just as Ptor Fak finished speaking I felt hands doing something to the shackles about my ankles and presently it was unlocked and removed.

"Come, slave," said the voice. Then someone took me by the arm and led me toward the entrance to one of the streets.

The moment we entered I could see a warrior at my side and there were others in front and behind me. They conducted me along this street through two other courtyards in which, of course, they immediately became invisible and I seemed to be walking alone with only the pressure of a hand upon my arm to indicate that I was not. They took me to a large room in which a number of people were standing about in front of and on either side of a desk at which there sat a scowling, fierce visaged man.

I was led up to the desk and halted there and the man behind it surveyed me in silence for several seconds. His harness was extremely elaborate, the leather being beautifully carved and studded with precious stones. The hilt of his sword which I could just see above the desk was apparently of gold and it too was studded with those rare and beautiful gems of Barsoom which defy description in words of earthly origin. Encircling his brow was a diadem of carved leather upon the front of which the Barsoomian hieroglyphs which spelled jeddak were emblazoned in precious stones.

So this man was Plantus, jeddak of Invak. I realized that Llana and I could not have fallen into much worse hands.

CHAPTER V

Ptantus, the Jeddak

PTANTUS looked at me so ferociously that I was sure he was attempting to frighten me. It seems to be a way that tyrants and bullies have of attempting to break down the morale of a victim before they destroy him; but I was not greatly impressed; and, impelled by a rather foolish desire to annoy him, I stopped looking at him. I guess that got his goat for he thumped the desk with his fist and leaned forward across it.

"Slave!" he almost roared at me, "pay attention to me."

"You haven't said anything yet," I reminded him. "When you say anything worth listening to I shall listen, but you don't have to yell at me."

He turned angrily to an officer. "Don't ever dare to bring a prisoner before me again," he said, "until he has been instructed how to behave in the presence of a jeddak."

"I know how to behave in the presence of a jeddak," I told him. "I have been in the presence of some of the greatest jeddaks on Barsoom, and I treat a jeddak just as I treat any other man—as he deserves. If he is a nobleman at heart he has my deference, if he is a poor he does not."

The inference was clear, and Ptantus colored. "Enough of your insolence," he said. "I understand that you are a troublesome fellow, that you gave Pnoxus, the prince, a great deal of trouble after your capture and that you struck and badly injured one of my nobles."

"That man may have a title," I said, "but he is no noble; he kicked me while he was invisible—it was the same as kicking a blind man."

"That is right," said a girlish voice

a little way behind me and at one side. I turned and looked. It was Rojas.

"You saw this thing done, Rojas?" demanded Ptantus.

"Yes, Motus insulted me; and this man, Dotar Sojat, berated him for it. Then Motus kicked him."

"Is this true, Motus?" asked Ptantus, turning his head and looking past me on the other side. I turned and glanced in that direction and saw Motus with his face swathed in bandages; he was a sorry looking sight.

"I gave the slave what he deserves," he growled; "he is an insolent fellow."

"I quite agree with you," said Ptantus, "and he shall die when the time comes. But I did not summon him here to conduct a trial. I, the jeddak, reach my decisions without testimony or advice. I sent for him because an officer said he could leap thirty feet into the air; and if he can do that it may be worth keeping him awhile for my amusement."

I couldn't help but smile a little at that for it had been my ability to jump that had probably preserved my life upon my advent to Barsoom so many years ago, when I had been captured by the green hordes of Thark, and Tars Tarkas had ordered me to ask for the edification of Lorquas Ptomet, the jed, and now it was going to give me at least a short reprieve from death.

"Why do you smile?" demanded Ptantus. "Do you see anything funny in that? Now jump, and be quick about it."

I looked up at the ceiling. It was only about fifteen feet from the floor.

"That would be only a hop," I said.

"Well hop then," said Ptantus.

I TURNED and looked behind me. For about twenty feet between me and the doorway men and women were crowded thickly together. Thanking

my great agility and the lesser gravity of Mars, I easily jumped completely over them. I could have made a bolt for the door then, leaped to the roof of the city and made my escape; and I should have done it had it not been that Llana of Gathol was still a prisoner here.

Exclamations of surprise filled the room at this, to them, marvelous feat of agility; and when I leaped back again there was almost a ripple of applause.

"What else can you do?" demanded Ptantus.

"I can make a fool out of Motus with a sword," I said, "as well as with my fists, if he will meet me under the lights where I can see him."

Ptantis actually laughed. "I think I shall let you do that sometime when I am through with you," he said, "for Motus will most certainly kill you. There is probably not a better swordsman on all Barsoom."

"I shall be delighted to let him try it," I said, "and I can promise you that I shall still be able to jump after I have killed Motus. But, if you really want to see some jumping," I continued, "take me and the girl who was captured with me out into the forest, and we will show you something worthwhile." If I could only get outside the gates with Llana I knew that we should be able to get away, for I could outdistance any of them even if I had to carry her.

"Take him back and lock him up," said Ptantis; "I have seen and heard enough for today!" so they took me back into the courtyard and chained me to my tree.

"Well," said Ptor Fak, after he thought the guards had left, "how did you get along?"

I told him all that had transpired in the jeddak's presence, and he said he hoped that I would get a chance to meet Motus, as Ptor Fak well knew my repu-

tation as a swordsman.

After dark that night, a voice came out and sat down beside me. It was Kandus.

"It's a good thing you jumped for Ptantis today," he said, "the old devil thought Pnoxus had been lying to him and after it had been demonstrated that you could not jump Ptantis was going to have you destroyed immediately in a very unpleasant way he has of dealing with those who have aroused his anger or resentment."

"I hope I can keep on amusing him for a while," I said.

"The end will be the same eventually," said Kandus, "but if there is anything I can do to make your captivity easier for you I shall be glad to do it."

"It would relieve my mind if you could tell me what has become of the girl who was captured at the same time that I was."

"SHE is confined in the quarters of the female slaves. It's over on that side of the city beyond the palace," and he nodded in that direction.

"What do you think is going to happen to her?" I asked.

"Ptantis and Pnoxus are quarreling about her," he replied; "they are always quarreling about something; they hate each other. Because Pnoxus wants her Ptantis doesn't want him to have her; and so, for the time being at least, she is safe. I must go now," he added a moment later, and I could tell from the direction of his voice that he had arisen. "If there is anything I can do for you be sure to let me know."

"If you could bring me a piece of wire," I said, "I would appreciate it."

"What do you want of wire?" he asked.

"Just to pass the time," I said; "I bend them around in different shapes and make little figures of them to amuse

myself. I am not accustomed to being chained to a tree, and time is going to hang very heavily on my hands."

"Certainly," he said, "I'll be glad to bring you a piece of wire; I'll be back with it in just a moment, and until then goodbye."

"You are fortunate to have made a friend here," said Ptor Fak; "I've been here several months and I haven't made one."

"I think it was my jumping," I said; "it has served me in good stead before and in many ways."

It was not long before Kandus returned with the wire. I thanked him and he left immediately.

It was night now and both moons were in the sky. Their soft light illuminated the courtyard, while the swift flight of Thuria across the vault of heaven swept the shadows of the trees into constantly changing movement across the scarlet sward, turned purple now in the moonlight.

Ptor Fak's chain and mine were sufficiently long to just permit us to sit side by side, and I could see that his curiosity was aroused by my request for a piece of wire by the fact that he kept watching it in my hand. Finally he could contain himself no longer. "What are you going to do with that wire?" he asked.

"You'd be surprised," I said; and then I paused for I felt a presence near me, "at the clever things one may do with a piece of wire."

CHAPTER VI

Rojas Makes An Offer

WERE I to live here in Invak the rest of my life I am sure I could never accustom myself to these uncanny presences, or to the knowledge that someone might always be standing close

to me listening to everything that I said to Ptor Fak.

Presently I felt a soft hand upon my arm, and then that same sweet voice that I had heard before said, "It is Rojas."

"I am glad that you came," I said, "I wished an opportunity to thank you for the testimony you gave in my behalf before Ptantus today."

"I'm afraid it didn't do you much good," she replied; "Ptantus doesn't like me."

"Why should he dislike you?" I asked.

"Pnoxus wanted me as his mate and I refused him; so, though Ptantus doesn't like Pnoxus, his pride was hurt, and he has been venting his spleen on my family ever since." She moved closer to me, I could feel the warmth of her arm against mine as she leaned against me. "Dotar Sojat," she said, "I wish that you were an Invak so that you might remain here forever in safety."

"That is very sweet of you, Rojas," I said, "but I am afraid that Fate has ordained it otherwise."

The soft arm stole up around my shoulders. The delicate perfume which had first announced her presence to me that afternoon, filled my nostrils and I could feel her warm breath upon my cheek. "Would you like to stay here, Dotar Sojat," she paused, "—with me?"

The situation was becoming embarrassing. Even Ptor Fak was embarrassed and there were no soft invisible arms about his neck. I knew that he was embarrassed because he had moved away from us the full length of his chain. Of course he couldn't see Rojas any more than I could but he must have heard her words; and, being a gentleman, he had removed himself as far as possible; and now he sat there with his back toward us. Being made

love to by a beautiful girl in a moonlit garden may be romantic, but if the girl is wholly invisible it is like being made love to by a ghost; though I can assure you that Rojas didn't feel like a ghost at all.

"You have not answered me, Dotar Sojat," she said.

I have never loved but one woman—my incomparable Dejah Thoris; nor do I, like some men, run around pretending love for other women. So, as you say in America, I was on a spot. They say that all is fair in love and war; and as far as I was concerned, I, personally, was definitely at war with Invak. Here was an enemy girl whose loyalty I could win or whose bitter hatred I could incur by my reply. Had I had only myself to consider I should not have hesitated, but the fate of Llana of Gathol outweighed all other considerations, and so I temporized.

"No matter how much I should like to be with you always, Rojas," I said, "I know that is impossible. I shall be here only subject to the whims of your jeddak and then death will separate us forever."

"Oh, no, Dotar Sojat," she cried, drawing my cheek close to hers, "you must not die—for I love you."

"But Rojas," I expostulated, "how can you love a man whom you have known for only a few hours and seen but for a few minutes?"

"I knew that I loved you the moment that I set eyes upon you," she replied, "and I've seen you for a great many more than a few minutes. I have been almost constantly in the courtyard since I first saw you, watching you. I know every changing expression of your face. I have seen the light of anger, and of humor, and of friendship in your eyes. Had I known you all my life I could not know you better. Kiss me, Dotar Sojat," she concluded. And, then I

did something for which I shall probably always be ashamed. I took Rojas in my arms and kissed her.

DID you ever hold a ghost in your arms and kiss her? It humiliates me to admit that it was not an unpleasant experience. But Rojas clung to me so tightly and for so long that I was covered with confusion and embarrassment.

"Oh, that we could be always thus," sighed Rojas.

Personally I thought that however pleasant it might be a little inconvenient. However, I said, "Perhaps you will come often, Rojas, before I die."

"Oh, don't speak of death," she cried.

"But you know yourself that Ptantus will have me killed—unless I escape!"

"Escape!" She scarcely breathed the word.

"But I suppose there will be no escape for me," I added, and I tried not to sound too hopeful.

"Escape," she said again, "Escape! ah if I could but go with you."

"Why not?" I asked. I had gone this far and I felt that I might as well go all the way if by so doing I could release Llana of Gathol from captivity.

"Yes, why not?" repeated Rojas, "but how?"

"If I could become invisible," I suggested.

She thought that over for a moment and then said, "It would be treason. It would mean death, a horrible death, were I apprehended."

"I couldn't ask that of you," I said, and I felt like a hypocrite for that I knew that I could ask it of her if I thought that she would do it. I would willingly have sacrificed the life of every person in Invak, including my own, if

thereby I could have liberated Llana of Gathol. I was desperate, and when a man is desperate he will resort to any means to win his point.

"I am most unhappy here," said Rojas, in a quite natural and human attempt at self-justification. "Of course, if we were successful," continued Rojas, "it wouldn't make any difference who knew what I had done because they could never find us again. We would both be invisible, and together we could make our way to your country." She was planning it all out splendidly.

"Do you know where the flier is that brought the girl prisoner?" I asked.

"Yes, it was landed on the roof of the city."

"That will simplify matters greatly," I said. "If we all become invisible we can reach it and escape with ease."

"What do you mean 'all'?" she demanded.

"Why I want to take Ptor Fak with me," I said, "and Llana of Gathol who was captured the same time I was."

Rojas froze instantly and her arms dropped from about me. "Not the girl," she said.

"But, Rojas, I must save her," I insisted. There was no reply. I waited a moment and then I said, "Rojas!" but she did not answer, and a moment later I saw her slim back materialize in the entrance to one of the streets opposite me. A slim back surmounted by a defiantly held head. That back radiated feminine fury.

CHAPTER VII

Result of Rojas' Fury

AFTER Rojas left I was plunged almost into the depths of despair. Had she but waited I could have explained everything, and the four of us

might have escaped. I will admit that I have never been able to fathom the ways of women, but I felt that Rojas would never return. I presume that my conviction was influenced by those lines from *The Mourning Bride*, "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

However, I did not give up hope entirely—I never do. Instead of repining, I went to work on the lock of my shackle with the bit of wire that Kandus had brought me. Ptor Fak moved over to watch me. I sat facing my tree, close to it, and bending over my work, and Ptor Fak leaned close and bent over it too. We were trying to bide from preying eyes the thing that I was attempting to do; and as it was now late at night, we hoped that there would be no one in the courtyard other than ourselves.

At last I found the combination, and after that it took me only a few seconds to unlock Ptor Fak's shackle. Then a voice behind us spoke.

"What are you two doing?" it demanded; "why are you not asleep?"

"How can we sleep with people constantly annoying us?" I asked, hiding the wire beneath me.

"Stand up," said the voice, and as we stood up the shackles fell away from our ankles.

"I thought so," said the voice. Then I saw the piece of wire rise from the ground and disappear. "You are very clever, but I don't think Ptantus will appreciate your cleverness when he hears about this. I shall set a guard to watch you two constantly hereafter."

"Everything is going wrong," I said to Ptor Fak, a moment later, after I saw a warrior enter one of the streets, hoping that it was he who had spoken to us and that there were no others around.

"It seems hopeless, doesn't it?" said Ptor Fak.

"No," I snapped, "not while I still live."

The following afternoon Kandus' voice came and sat down beside me. "How goes it?" he asked.

"Terrible," I said.

"How is that?" he asked.

"I can't tell you," I said, "because there is probably a guard standing right here listening to everything that I say."

"There is no one here but us," said Kandus.

"How do you know? I asked; "your people are as invisible to you as they are to me."

"We learn to sense the presence of others," he explained; "just how I can't tell you."

"How you do it is immaterial," I said, "as long as you are sure there is no one here listening to us. I will be perfectly frank with you, I succeeded in removing Ptor Fak's shackle and my own. Someone caught me at it and took the piece of wire away from me." I did not tell Kandus that I had broken the wire he had given me in two and that I still had the other half of it in my pocket pouch. There is no use in telling even a friend everything that you know.

"How in the world could you have hoped to escape even if you could remove your shackles?" he asked.

"It was only the first step," I told him. "We really had no plan, but we knew that we certainly could not escape as long as we were shackled."

Kandus laughed. "There is something in that," he said, and then he was silent for a moment. "The girl who was captured with you," he said presently.

"What of her?" I asked.

"Plantus has given her to Motus," he replied; "it was all done very suddenly. Why, no one seems to know, because Plantus hasn't any particular love for Motus."

IF Kandus didn't know why, I thought that I did. I saw Rojas' hand and a green-eyed devil in it—jealously is a heartless monster. "Will you do something more for me, Kandus?" I asked.

"Gladly, if I can," he replied.

"It may seem like a very silly request," I said, "but please don't ask me to explain. I want you to go to Rojas and tell her that Llana of Gathol, the girl that Plantus has given to Motus, is the daughter of my daughter."*

"Of course I don't understand," said Kandus, "but I'll do what you ask."

"And now another favor," I said. "Plantus half promised me that he would let me duel with Motus and he assured me that Motus would kill me. Is there any possible way of arranging for that duel to be fought today?"

"He will kill you," said Kandus.

"That is not what I asked," I said.

"I don't know how it could be done," said Kandus.

"Now if Plantus has any sporting blood," I suggested, "and likes to lay a wager now and then, you bet him that if Motu will fight me while Motus is still visible, that he can not kill me but that I can kill him whenever I choose."

"But you can't do it," said Kandus. "Motus is the best swordsman on Barsoom. You would be killed and I should lose my money."

"How can I convince you," I said.

*It may seem strange to denizens of Earth that Rojas could have become infatuated with a granddaughter, but we must remember that Mars is not Earth and that John Carter is unlike all other Earth-men. He does not know how old he is. He recalls no childhood. It seems to him that he looks now as he did when he fought with the Confederate army during the Civil War—a man of about thirty. And on Barsoom, where the natural span of life is around a thousands years and people do not commence to show the ravages of old age until just shortly before dissolution, differences in age do not count. You might fall in love with a beautiful girl upon Barsoom; and, as far as appearances were concerned, she might be seventeen or she might be seven hundred.—Ed.

"I know that I can kill Motus in a fair fight. If I had anything of value, I would give it to you as security for your wager."

"I have something of value," said Ptor Fak, "and I would wager it and everything that I could scrape together on Dotar Sojat." He reached into his pocket pouch and drew forth a gorgeous jewelled medallion. "This," he said to Kandus, "is worth a jeddak's ransom—take it as security and place its value on Dotar Sojat."

A second later the medallion disappeared in thin air, and we knew that Kandus had taken it.

"I'll have to go inside and examine it," said Kandus' voice, "for of course I cannot see it now that it has become invisible. I'll not be gone long."

"That is very decent of you, Ptor Fak," I said; "that medallion must be almost invaluable."

"One of my remote ancestors was a jeddak," explained Ptor Fak; "that medallion belonged to him, and it has been in the family for thousands of years."

"You must be quite certain of my swordsmanship," I said.

"I am," he replied; "but even had I been less certain, I should have done the same."

"That is friendship," I said, "and I appreciate it."

"It is priceless," said a voice at my side, and I knew that Kandus had returned. "I will go at once and see what can be done about the duel."

"Don't forget what I asked you to tell Rojas," I reminded him.

CHAPTER VIII

The Duel Is Arranged

AFTER Kandus left us, time dragged heavily. The afternoon wore on

and it became so late that I was positive that he had failed in his mission. I was sitting dejectedly thinking of the fate that was so soon to overtake Llana of Gathol. I knew that she would destroy herself, and I was helpless to avert the tragedy. And, while I was thus sunk in the depths of despair, a hand was placed on mine. A soft hand; and a voice said, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't give me a chance," I said; "you just ran out on me without giving me a chance to explain."

"I am sorry," said the voice, "and I am sorry for the harm I have done Llana of Gathol; and now I have condemned you to death."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ptantus has commanded Motus to fight you and kill you."

I threw my arms around Rojas and kissed her. I couldn't help it, I was so happy. "Good!" I exclaimed, "though neither of us realized it at the time, you have done me a great favor."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"You have given me the chance to meet Motus in a fair fight; and now I know that Llana of Gathol will be safe—as far as Motus is concerned."

"Motus will kill you," insisted Rojas.

"Will you be there to see the duel?" I asked.

"I do not wish to see you killed," she said, and clung to me tightly.

"You haven't a thing to worry about, I shall not be killed; and Motus will never have Llana of Gathol or any other woman."

"You can tell his friends to start digging his grave immediately," said Ptor Fak.

"You are that sure?" said Rojas.

"We have the princess," said Ptor Fak, which is the same as saying in America, "It is in the bag." The ex-



Men's light gravity made my leap to the rooftop an easy matter

pression derives from the Barsoomian chess game, jetan, in which the taking of a princess decides the winner and ends the game.

"I hope you are right," said Rojas; "at least you have encouraged me to believe, and it is not so difficult to believe anything of Dotar Sojat."

"Do you know when I am to fight Motus?" I asked.

"This evening," replied Rojas, "before the whole Court in the throne room of the palace."

"And after I have killed him?" I asked.

"That is to be feared, too," said Rojas, "for Ptantus will be furious. He will not only have lost a fighting man but all the money he has wagered on the duel. But it will soon be time," she added, "and I must go now." I saw her open my pocket pouch and drop something into it, and then she was gone.

I KNEW from the surreptitious manner in which she had done it that she did not wish anyone to know what she had put in my pocket pouch, or in fact that she had put anything into it; and so I did not investigate immediately, fearing that someone may have been watching and had their suspicions aroused. The constant strain of feeling that unseen eyes may be upon you, and that unseen ears may be listening to your every word was commencing to tell upon me; and I was becoming as nervous as a cat with seven kittens.

After a long silence Ptor Fak said, "What are you going to do with her?"

I knew what he meant; because the same question had been worrying me. "If we succeed in getting out of this," I said, "I am going to take her back to Helium with me and let Dejah Thoris convince her that there are a great many more charming men than I there." I

had had other women fall in love with me and this would not be the first time that Dejah Thoris had unscrambled things for me. For she knew that no matter how many women loved me, she was the only woman whom I loved.

"You are a brave man," said Ptor Fak.

"You say that because you do not know Dejah Thoris," I replied; "it is not that I am a brave man, it is that she is a wise woman."

That started me off again thinking about her. Although I must confess that she is seldom absent from my thoughts. I could picture her now in our marble palace in Helium, surrounded by the brilliant men and women who crowd her salons. I could feel her hand in mine as we trod the stately Barsoomian dances she loved so well. I could see her as though she were standing before me this minute, and I could see Thuvia of Ptarth, and Arthoris, and Tara of Helium, and Gahan of Gathol. That magnificent coterie of handsome men and beautiful women bound together by ties of love and marriage. What memories they evoked!

A soft hand caressed my cheek and a voice, tense with nervousness said, "Live! Live for me! I shall return at midnight and you must be here"; then she was gone.

For some reason or other which I cannot explain, her words quieted my nerves. They gave me confidence that at midnight I should be free. Her presence reminded me that she had dropped something into my pocket pouch and I opened it casually and put my hand into it. My fingers came in contact with a number of spheres, about the size of marbles, and I knew that the secret of invisibility was mine. I moved close to Ptor Fak; and once again with the remaining bit of wire I

picked the lock of his shackle, and then I handed him one of the spheres that Rojas had given me.

I leaned very close to his ear. "Take this," I whispered; "in an hour you will be invisible. Go to the far end of the courtyard and wait. When I return, I too, shall be invisible and when I whistle thus, answer me." I whistled a few of the opening notes of the national anthem of Helium, a signal that Dejah Thoris and I had often used.

"I understand," said Ptor Fak.

"What do you understand," demanded a voice.

Doggonit! there was that invisibility nemesis again and now all our plans might be knocked into a cocked hat. How much had the fellow heard? What had he seen? Then I felt hands at my ankle and saw my shackle open.

"Well," repeated the voice peremptorily, "what was it that you understood?"

"I was just telling Ptor Fak," I said, "how I was going to kill Motus, and he said he understood perfectly."

"So you think you are going to kill Motus, do you?" demanded the voice. "Well you are going to be very much surprised for a few minutes, and after that you will be dead. Come along the duel is about to take place."

I breathed a sigh of relief. The fellow had evidently seen or heard nothing of any importance.

"I'll see you later, Ptor Fak," I said.

"Goodby and good luck," he replied. Accompanied by the warrior, I entered a city street on my way to the throne room of Ptantus, jeddak of Invak.

CHAPTER IX

Into the Palace

"SO you think you're pretty good with the sword," said the warrior walk-

ing at my side and who was now visible to me.

"Yes," I replied.

"Well, you're going to get a lesson in swordsmanship tonight. Of course, it won't do you much good because after it is all over you will be dead."

"You are very encouraging," I said, "but if you are fond of Motus, I suggest that you save your encouragement for him. He is going to need it."

"I am not fond of Motus," said the warrior; "no one is fond of Motus. He is a calot and I apologize to calots for the comparison. I hope that you kill him, but of course, you won't. He always kills his man, but he is tricky. Watch out for that."

"You mean he doesn't fight fair?" I asked.

"No one ever taught him the word," said the warrior.

"Well, thank you for warning me," I said; "I hope you stay to see the fight; maybe you will be surprised."

"I shall certainly stay to see it," he said; "I wouldn't miss it for the world. But I am not going to be surprised; I know just what will happen. He will play with you for about five minutes and then he'll run you through; and that won't please Ptantus for he likes a long, drawn out duel."

"Oh, he does, does he?" I said; "well he shall have it." That fitted in perfectly with my plans. I had swallowed one of the invisibility spheres just before the warrior unshackled me, and I knew that it would take about an hour for it to effect perfect invisibility. It might be difficult to drag the duel out for an hour, but I hoped to gain a little time by stalling up to the moment that we crossed swords. And I accomplished it now by walking slowly to kill as much time as possible, and twice I stopped to tighten the fasteners of my sandals.

"What's the matter?" demanded the warrior. "Why do you walk so slow. Are you afraid?"

"Terrified," I replied. "Everyone has told me how easily Motus is going to kill me. Do you think that a man wants to run to his death?"

"Well, I don't blame you much," said the warrior, "and I won't hurry you."

"A lot of you Invaks are pretty good fellows," I remarked.

"Of course we are," he said. "What made you think anything different?"

"Phoxus, Motus, and Ptantus," I replied.

The warrior grinned, "I guess you are a pretty shrewd fellow," he said, "to have sized them up this quickly."

"Everybody seems to hate them," I said; "why don't you get rid of them? I'll start you off by getting rid of Motus tonight."

"You may be a good swordsman," said the warrior, "but you are bragging too much; I never knew a braggart yet who could 'take the princess'."

"I am not bragging," I said; "I only state facts."

AS a matter of fact I often realize that in speaking of my swordsmanship, it may sound to others as though I were bragging but really I do not feel that I am bragging. I know that I am the greatest swordsman of two worlds. It would be foolish for me to simper, and suck my finger, and to say that I was not. I am, and everyone who has seen me fight, knows that I am. Is it braggadocio to state a simple fact? As a matter of fact, it has saved a number of lives. For it has kept no end of brash young men from challenging me.

Fighting has been, you might say, my life's work. There is not a lethal weapon in the use of which I do not excel, but the sword is my favorite. I love a good blade and I love a good fight

and I hoped that tonight I should have them both. I hoped that Motus was all that they thought him. The thought might have obtruded on the consciousness of some men that perhaps he was, but no such idea ever entered my head. They say that overconfidence often leads to defeat but I do not think that I am ever overconfident. I am merely wholly confident, and I maintain that there is all the difference in the world there.

At last we came to the throne room. It was not the same room in which I had first seen Ptantus; it was a much larger room, a more ornate room; and at one side of it was a raised dais on which were two glass-enclosed thrones. They were empty now, for the jeddak and the jeddara had not yet appeared. The floor of the room was crowded with notables and their women. Along three sides of the room were several tiers of benches, temporary affairs, which had evidently been brought in for the occasion. They were covered with gay cloths and cushions; but they were still empty, for, of course, no one could sit until the jeddak came and was seated.

As I was brought into the room, a number of people called attention to me and soon many eyes were upon me.

In my well-worn fighting harness, I looked rather drab in the midst of this brilliant company with their carved leather harness studded with jewels. The Invaks, like most of the red nations of Barsoom, are a handsome people and those in the throne room of this tiny nation, hidden away in the Forest of Lost Men, made a brave appearance beneath the strange and beautiful lights which gave them visibility.

I heard many comments concerning me. One woman said, "He does not look like a Barsoomian at all."

"He is very handsome," said a sweet voice, which I immediately recognized;

and for the first time I looked Rojas in the face. As our eyes met I could see her tremble. She was a beautiful girl, by far the most beautiful of all the women in the room, I am sure.

"Let's talk with him," she said to a woman and two men standing with her.

"That would be interesting," said the woman, and the four of them walked toward me.

ROJAS looked me square in the eye.

"What is your name?" she asked, without a flicker of recognition.

"Dotar Sojat," I replied.

"The Sultan of Swat," said one of the men, "whatever a sultan is and wherever Swat may be." I could scarcely repress a smile.

"Where is Swat?" inquired the woman.

"In India," I replied.

"I think the fellow is trying to make fools of us," snapped one of the men. "He is just making up those names. There are no such places on Barsoom."

"I didn't say they were on Barsoom," I retorted.

"If they're not on Barsoom, where are they," demanded the man.

"On Jasoom," I replied.

"Come," said the man, "I have had enough of this slave's insolence."

"I find him very interesting," said the woman.

"So do I," said Rojas.

"Well enjoy it while you may," said the man, "for in a few minutes he will be dead."

"Have you laid a wager on that?" I asked.

"I couldn't find anyone to bet against Motus," he growled. "Kandus was the only fool to do that and the jeddak covered his entire wager."

"That is too bad," I said; "someone is losing an opportunity to make some money."

"Do you think you will win?" asked Rojas, trying to conceal the eagerness in her voice.

"Of course I shall win," I replied. "I always do. You look like a very intelligent girl," I said, "if I may speak to you alone I will tell you a little secret."

She saw that I had something that I wished to say to her in private, but I will admit that I had put her in rather an embarrassing position. However, the other woman helped me out.

"Go ahead, Rojas," she urged, "I think it would be fun to hear what he has to say."

Thus encouraged Rojas took me to one side. "What is it?" she asked.

"Llana of Gathol," I said. "How are we to get her?"

She caught her breath. "I never thought of that," she said.

"Could you get one of those invisibility spheres to her right away?" I asked.

"For you, yes," she said. "For you I would do anything."

"Good; and tell her to come out into the courtyard by the quarters of the slave women. A little after midnight she will hear me whistle. She will recognize the air. She must answer and then wait for me. Will you do that for me, Rojas?"

"Yes, but what excuse am I to make for leaving my friends?"

"Tell them you are going to get some money to wager on me," I said.

Rojas smiled. "That is a splendid idea," she said. And a moment later she had made her explanations to her friends and left the throne room.

CHAPTER X

The Duel at Last

THE crowd was growing restless waiting for the jeddak, but I was

more than pleased by this delay as it would shorten the time that I would have to wait before I could achieve invisibility.

It seemed now that everything had been nicely arranged; and when I saw Rojas return to the throne room and she gave me a quick fleeting smile, I was convinced that almost the last of my worries were over. There was really only one doubt remaining in my mind, and that was as to what might happen to me after I had killed Motus. I had no doubt but that Ptantus would be furious; and being a tyrant with the reactions of a tyrant, he might order my immediate death. Anticipating this, however, I had decided to make a run for the nearest courtyard; and if sufficient time had elapsed since I had taken the invisibility sphere, I would only have to step out into the open to elude them. And, once in one of the courtyards, and invisible, I knew that I could escape.

Suddenly trumpets blared and the people fell back to each side of the throne room. Then, preceded by the trumpeters, Ptantus and his jeddara entered the throne room accompanied by a band of gorgeously trapped courtiers.

I glanced at the great clock on the wall. It was exactly the 8th zode, which is the equivalent of 10:48 P.M., Earth time. By midnight Llana of Gathol would have achieved invisibility—if Rojas had given her the sphere. That was the question. Yet I felt that Rojas had not failed me. I firmly believed that she had done her part.

The royal pair made their way slowly across the room to the dais and seated themselves upon their thrones, whereat the nobles and their women found their places on the benches.

From somewhere Motus had appeared; and he, and a noble who accompanied him, and I, and my warrior

guard, were alone upon the floor. Motus wore a strange glass helmet and on his back was a tank and other gadgets. I guess it was the new invisibility apparatus. A fifth man then appeared whom I later discovered was what you might call a referee, or umpire. He summoned me, and the five of us advanced and stopped before the throne.

"I bring you the noble Motus," he said, addressing Ptantus, "and Dotar Sojat, the Sultan of Swat, who are to duel to the death with long-swords."

The jeddak nodded. "Let them fight," he said, "and see that you fight fair," he added, glaring directly at me.

"And, I suppose that Motus does not have to fight fair," I said; "but that is immaterial to me. I shall kill him however he fights."

The referee was almost beside himself with embarrassment. "Silence, slave," he whispered. He carried an extra sword which he handed to me and then motioned us to cross swords.

Instead of adhering to this honorable custom, Motus lunged for my heart.

"That was unwise, Motus," I said, as I parried the thrust; "I am going to make you suffer a little more for that."

"Silence, slave," said the referee.

"Silence yourself, calot," I replied, "and get out of my way. I am not supposed to be fighting two men," I pricked Motus on the right breast and brought blood, "but I shall be glad to if you will draw."

Motus came at me again, but he was wary and he was a good swordsman.

"Your face is all black and swollen, Motus," I said; "it looks as if someone had hit you, for that is what a son-of-a-calot is apt to get when he kicks a blind man."

"Silence," screamed the referee.

I FOUGHT on the defensive at first with one eye on the great clock. It

had been over half an hour since I had taken the invisibility sphere, and I planned on letting Motus live another half hour so as to be quite sure that I had gained potential invisibility before I finished him off.

By fighting on the defensive, I compelled Motus to do all the work; and by repeatedly side-stepping his most vicious lunges, letting them slip off my blade so that he had to leap quickly back, I subjected him to considerable nervous as well as physical strain, so that presently the sweat was streaming down his body. And, now I commenced to touch him here and there; and blood mixed with the sweat until he was a sorry-looking spectacle, although nowhere had he received a severe wound.

The crowd was all on Motus' side; that is, all who are vocal. I knew of two at least who hoped that I would win, and I guess that there were many others who disliked Motus but who dared not cheer on an alien and a slave.

"You are tiring, Motus," I said to him; "hadn't you better finish me off now before you become exhausted?"

"I'll finish you off all right, slave," he came back, "if you'll stand still and fight."

"It is not time to kill you yet, Motus," I said, glancing up at the clock, "when the hand points to eleven xats past the 8th zode, I shall kill you."

"Silence," screeched the referee.

"What is the slave saying?" demanded Ptantus in stentorian tones.

"I said," I shouted back at him, "that I should kill Motus at exactly 8 zodes, 11 xats. Watch the clock, Ptantus, for at that instant you are going to lose your wager, and Motus his life."

"Silence," commanded the jeddak.

"Now, Motus," I whispered, "I am going to show you how easily I can kill you when the time comes," and with that I disarmed him and sent his

sword clattering across the floor.

A mighty gasp arose from the audience, for now under the rules of a duel of this nature, I was at liberty to run Motus through the heart; but instead I rested my point upon the floor and turned to the referee.

"Go and fetch Motus' sword," I said, "and return it to him."

Motus was trembling a little. I could see his knees shake though almost imperceptibly. I knew then what I had suspected before—Motus was yellow.

While the referee was retrieving Motus' sword, a little ripple of applause ran through the stands. But Ptantus only sat and scowled more fiercely; I fear that Ptantus did not like me.

When Motus' sword was returned to him, he came for me furiously, and I knew perfectly well what was in his mind; he was going to finish me off immediately. I disarmed him again; and again I lowered my point, while the referee without waiting to be told ran after the blade.

NOW Motus was more wary. I could see that he was trying to work me around to some position in which he wished to have me. I noticed presently that the referee was not within my range of vision, and a quick glance told me he was standing directly behind me; it was not intuition that told me why, for I had seen that trick played before by crooked swordsmen with an accomplice. I heard a few groans from the stands; and then I knew that I was right, for no honorable person could witness such a thing without voicing his disapproval.

When Motus next lunged, hoping to force me back, the referee would "accidentally" be close behind me; I would bump into him, and Motus would have me at his mercy. It is a despicable trick; and Ptantus must have seen it

coming, but he made no move to prevent it.

I watched Motus' eyes and they telegraphed his intention to me an instant before he lunged, throwing all his weight behind it. I had slightly crouched in anticipation of this; and my earthly muscles carried me to one side, and Motus' sword drove to the hilt through the body of the referee.

For a moment pandemonium reigned in the throne room. The entire audience stood up in the stands and there were cheers and groans, and something told me that the cheers were for me and the groans for Motus and the referee.

Motus was a terribly unstrung and rattled man as he jerked his blade from the body of the dead man, but now I gave him no respite. I went after him in earnest, though not yet for the kill. I cut a deep gash across his breast. "You will not make a good-looking corpse now, Motus," I said, "and before I am through with you, you are going to look a great deal worse."

"Calot!" he snapped, and then he rushed me, cutting and thrusting violently. I parried every cut and thrust and wove a net of steel around him, and every time he missed I brought blood from some new spot on his body.

"You have three xats to live, Motus," I said; "you had better make the best of them."

He rushed at me like a madman; but I sidestepped him and as he turned I took off one of his ears as neatly as a surgeon could have done it—I thought he was going to faint, for his knees seemed to give beneath him and he staggered about for a moment.

I WAITED for him to recover control of himself, and then I went to work on him again. I tried to carve my initials on his breast, but by this time

there was not a whole place large enough; from the waist up he looked like a plate of raw hamburger.

The floor was covered with his blood by now; and as he rushed me again furiously, he slipped and fell. He lay there for a moment glaring at me, for I am sure he expected that I would finish him off then; but instead I said, "You have a xat and a half to live yet, Motus."

He staggered to his feet and tried to throw himself upon me, screaming imprecations as he came. I think that by this time Motus had gone quite mad from pain and terror. I felt no sympathy for him—he was a rat; and now he was fighting like a cornered rat.

"The floor is too slippery here," I said to him; "let's go over by the jeddak's throne—I am sure that he would like to see the finish."

I maneuvered him around into position and backed him across the floor until we stood directly in front of Ptantus.

It is seldom that I have ever punished a man as I punished Motus; but I felt that he deserved it, and I was the plaintiff, prosecuting attorney, jury, and judge; I was also the executioner.

Motus was gibbering now and making futile passes at me with his blade. Ptantus was glaring at me, and the audience was tense with breathless expectancy. I saw many an eye glance quickly at the clock.

"One more tal, Motus," I said. A tal is about eight tenths of an earthly second.

With that I drove my blade through Motus' body below the left shoulder blade at exactly 11 xats past the 8th zode. As he fell, his glass helmet smashed and gas hissed from the pierced hose on the tank at his back. Motus would never finish his invisibility apparatus.

CHAPTER XI

A Moment for Escape

I TURNED and bowed to Ptantus, now having no sword with which to salute him. He should have acknowledged this customary courtesy but he did nothing of the sort; he merely glared at me and stood up. The jed-dara arose too; and, with the trumpeters before them and the courtiers behind, the two stalked out of the throne room, making a wide detour to avoid the blood and the two corpses.

After they had left, the warrior who had brought me from the courtyard came and touched me on the arm. "Come," he said. "All you get out of this is to be chained to your tree again."

"I got a great deal more than that out of it," I replied, as I accompanied him across the throne room; "I had the satisfaction of avenging a cowardly kick."

As we crossed towards the doorway, someone started cheering and then practically the entire audience took it up. "That is an unusual demonstration," said the warrior, "but you deserve it. No one on Barsoom ever saw such sword play as you showed us tonight—and I thought you were boasting!" He laughed.

I KNEW that it would be necessary for us to cross a couple of courtyards before we reached the one in which I had been confined; and I realized that if I suddenly disappeared before the warrior's eyes, he would know that I had obtained invisibility spheres; and while, of course, he couldn't have found me, it would certainly have started an investigation and would have upset our plans for escape. If they knew that I were at large and invisible, one of the first things that they would

most naturally have done would have been to have placed a guard over my flier.

If, however, they merely thought that I had escaped, and was not invisible, they would feel that they need only search for me to find me very quickly. Of course, they might still place a guard over the flier; but such a guard would not be so on the alert, and we still might board the ship and get away before they were aware of our presence.

As we approached the first courtyard, I suddenly broke away from my guard and ran ahead with all my earthly speed. The warrior shouted for me to halt, and broke into a run. As I reached the entrance to the courtyard I pretended to dodge around the corner, which would of course have hidden me from him.

I must confess that in that short sprint my heart had been in my mouth, for, of course, I could not know whether or not I should become invisible.

However, the moment that I left the lighted corridor I absolutely disappeared; I could not see any part of my body—it was the strangest sensation that I have ever experienced.

I had made my plans, and now I ran to the far end of the courtyard and leaped lightly to the roof of the city.

I could hear the warrior guard rushing about calling to me; my disappearance must certainly have mystified him, for having no idea that I could become invisible, there was really no way in which he could account for it except on the theory that I had run into the entrance to another street. However, he was probably confident that I did not have time to do this.

Well, I did not bother much about him or what he was thinking; instead I took off across the roof in search of the courtyard where Ptor Fak was

awaiting me and where I expected to meet Rojas at midnight; and it was pretty close to what we call midnight then, the Barsoomian midnight occurring twenty-five xats after the eighth zode.*

I had no difficulty in finding the courtyard in which I had been confined; and when I reached it I whistled, and Ptor Fak answered. I dropped down into it and whistled again, and when Ptor Fak answered I groped around until I bumped into him.

"How well you look," he said, and we both laughed. "It took you much longer to dispose of Motus than I had anticipated," he continued.

"I had to drag it out so that I would be sure to be invisible when I had returned here," I explained.

"And now what?" asked Ptor Fak.

I found his head and placed my lips close to one of his ears. "After Rojas comes," I whispered, "we'll cross the roof to the quarters of the slave women and get Llana of Gathol. In the meantime, you climb this tree which overhangs the roof and wait for us up there."

"Whistle when you come up," he said, and left me.

INVISIBILITY I discovered was most disconcerting; I could see no part of my body; I was only a voice without substance—a voice standing in

an apparently deserted courtyard which might be filled with enemies, as far as I knew. I couldn't even have heard them had there been any there, for the Invaks have taken the precaution of covering all the metal parts of their accouterments so that there is not the usual clank of metal upon metal when they move about.

Knowing as I did that a search for me must have been instituted, I left positive that there must be Invak warriors in the courtyard, notwithstanding the fact that I neither heard nor saw anyone.

As I waited for Rojas, I took the precaution of not moving about lest I inadvertently bump into someone who might require me to identify myself; but I could not prevent someone from bumping into me, and that is exactly what happened. Hands were laid upon me and a gruff voice demanded, "Who are you?"

Here was a pretty kettle of fish. What was I to do? I doubted that I could pass myself off as an Invak—I knew too little about them to do that successfully; so, I did the next best thing that occurred to me.

"I am the ghost of Motus," I said, in a sepulchral voice. "I am searching for the man who killed me, but he is not here."

The hands relinquished their hold upon me. I could almost feel the fellow shrink away from me, and then another voice said, "Ghost of Motus nothing—I recognize that voice—it is the voice of the slave who killed Motus. Seize him!"

I jumped to one side but I jumped into the arms of another voice, and it seized me. "I have him!" cried the voice. "How did you achieve the secrets of invisibility, slave?"

With my left hand I groped for the hilt of the fellow's sword, and when I

* A Martian day is divided into ten zodes, there being four tals to a xat, or two hundred to a zode. The dials of their clocks are marked with four concentric circles; between the inner circle and the next outer one the zodes are marked from one to ten; in the next circle, the xats are marked from one to fifty between each two zodes; and in the outer circle two hundred tals are marked between the radii which pass through the zode numbers and extend to the outer periphery of the dial. Their clock has three different colored and different length hands, one indicating the zode, the second one the xat, and the longest one the tal.—Ed.

found it, I said, "You have made a mistake," and drove his sword through the heart of the voice.

There was a single piercing scream, and I was free. Holding my sword point breast high, I turned and ran for the tree by which Ptor Fak had mounted to the roof. One of my shoulders brushed a body, but I reached the tree in safety.

As I climbed carefully to a lower branch so as not to reveal my presence by the shaking of the foliage, I heard a low whistle. It was Rojas.

"Who whistled?" demanded a voice somewhere in the courtyard. There was no reply.

Rojas could not have come at a worse time; I did not answer her; I did not know what to do, but Ptor Fak evidently thought that he did, for he answered the whistle. He must have thought that it was I who was signalling to him.

"They're on the roof!" cried a voice. "Quick! Up that tree!"

NOW the only tree that overhung the roof was the one that I was in, and if I remained there I was sure to be discovered. There was only one thing for me to do and that was to go up on the roof myself, and I did so as quickly as I could.

I hadn't taken half a dozen steps after I arrived, before I bumped into someone. "Zodanga?" I whispered. I didn't wish to speak Ptor Fak's name, but I knew that he would understand if I spoke the name of the country from which he came.

"Yes," he replied.

"Find the flier and stay near it until I come." He pressed my arm to show that he understood, and was gone.

I could see the tree up which I had come shaking violently; so I knew that a number of warriors were climbing

up in pursuit of me, though how in the world they expected to find me, I don't know.

It was a most amazing situation; there must have been at least a dozen men on the roof and possibly still others down in the courtyard where I knew Rojas to be, yet both the roof and the courtyard were apparently deserted—neither the eye nor the ear could perceive any living thing; only when someone spoke was the illusion dispelled, and presently I heard a voice a short distance away: "He has probably gone this way—the city wall lies nearest in this direction. Spread out and comb the roof right to the city wall."

"It's a waste of time," said another voice. "If someone has given him the secret of invisibility, we can never find him."

"I do not think it was he, anyway," said a third voice; "there is no way in which he could have become invisible—it was unquestionably the ghost of Motus that spoke."

By this time the voices were dwindling in the distance, and I felt that it was safe to assume that all the warriors had gone in search of me; so I walked to the edge of the roof and jumped down into the courtyard. I stood there a moment concentrating all my mental powers in an endeavor to sense the presence of others near me, as Kandus had said that he was able to do, but I got no reaction. This might mean either that I failed to sense the presence of others or that there was no one there—at least near me; so I took the chance and whistled again. An answer came from the other side of the courtyard. I waited. Presently I heard a low whistle much nearer, and I replied—a moment later Rojas' hand touched mine.

I did not speak again for fear of attracting other pursuers, but I led her

to the tree and helped her to clamber to the roof.

"Where is my flier?" I whispered.

She took me by the arm and led me in a direction at right angles to that which my pursuers had taken. The outlook appeared brighter immediately.

Rojas and I walked hand in hand so as not to lose one another. Presently I saw my flier standing there in the light of the farther moon, and it certainly looked good to me.

"The quarters of the slave women are near by, are they not?" I asked in a whisper.

"Right there," she said, and I suppose she pointed; then she led me to the edge of the roof overlooking a courtyard.

CHAPTER XII

Llana Again

ROJAS and I stood hand in hand at the edge of the roof looking down into a seemingly deserted courtyard. "You gave Llana of Gathol the invisibility sphere?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Rojas, "and she must be invisible by this time." She pressed my hand. "You fought magnificently," she whispered. "Everyone knew that you could have killed Motus whenever you wished; but only I guessed why you did not kill him sooner. Ptantus is furious; he has ordered that you be destroyed immediately."

"Rojas," I said, "don't you think that you should reconsider your decision to come with me? All of your friends and relatives are here in Invak, and you might be lonesome and unhappy among my people."

"Wherever you are, I shall be happy," she said. "If you do not take me with you I shall kill myself."

So that was that. I had involved my-

self in a triangle which bid fair to prove exceedingly embarrassing and perhaps tragic. I felt sorry for Rojas, and I was annoyed and humiliated by the part that I was forced to play. However, there had been no other way; it had been a question of Rojas' happiness or of Llana's life, and the lives of Ptor Fak and myself. I knew that I had chosen wisely, but I was still most unhappy.

Motivated by the habits of a lifetime, I strained my eyes in search of Llana of Gathol, who perhaps was down there somewhere in the courtyard; and then, realizing the futility of looking for her, I whistled. There was an immediate response from below and I sprang down from the roof. It did not take us long to locate one another; and as we were not challenged, I assumed that we were fortunate enough to be alone.

Llana touched my hand. "I thought that you would never come," she said. "Rojas told me about the duel that you were to fight; and while I had no doubts about your swordsmanship, I realized that there is always the danger of an accident or trickery. But at last you are here; how strange it is not to be able to see you. I was really quite frightened when I stepped out here into the courtyard and discovered that I could not even see myself."

"It is the miracle of invisibility that will save us," I said, "and only a miracle could have saved us. Now I must get you to the roof."

There was no overhanging tree in this courtyard, and the roof was fifteen feet above the ground. "You are about to have an experience, Llana," I said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I am going to toss you up onto the roof," I told her, "and I hope you land on your feet."

"I am ready," she said.

I COULD see the roof all right, but I couldn't see Llana; all I could do was pray that my aim would be true. "Keep your whole body perfectly rigid," I said, "until I release you; then draw your feet up beneath you and relax. You may get a bad fall, but I don't think that it can hurt you much; the roof is heavily padded with vines."

"Let's get it over," said Llana.

I grasped one of her legs at the knee with my right hand and cradled her body on my left forearm; then I swung her back and forth a couple of times and tossed her high into the air.

Llana of Gathol may have been invisible, but she was also definitely corporeal. I heard her land on the roof with anything but an invisible thud, and I breathed a sigh of relief. To spring lightly after her was nothing for my earthly muscles, and soon a low whistle brought the three of us together. I cautioned the girls to silence, and we walked hand in hand in the direction of the flier.

This was the moment that aroused my greatest apprehension, as I realized that the flier might be surrounded by invisible warriors; and, as far as I knew, the only sword among us was the one I had taken from the warrior I had killed in the courtyard; but perhaps Rojas had one.

"Have you a sword, Rojas?" I whispered.

"Yes," she said; "I brought one."

"Can you use it?" I asked.

"I never have used one," she replied.

"Then give it to Llana of Gathol; she can use it if necessary, and very effectively, too."

We approached to within about a hundred feet of the flier and stopped. This was the crucial moment; I was almost afraid to whistle, but I did. There was an immediate answer from the vicinity of the flier. I listened a

moment for voices that might betray the presence of the enemy, but there were none.

We advanced quickly then, and I helped the girls over the rail. "Where are you, Ptor Fak?" I asked.

"On deck," he said, "and I don't think there is anyone around."

"All the warriors of Invak could be here now," I said, as I reached the controls and started the motor.

A moment later the little ship rose gracefully into the air, and almost immediately from below us, we heard shouts and imprecations. The Invaks had seen the ship, but too late to prevent our escape. We were safe. We had accomplished what a few hours before would have seemed impossible, for then Ptor Fak and I were chained to trees and Llana of Gathol was a captive in another part of the city.

"We owe Rojas a great debt of gratitude," I said.

"A debt," she replied, "which it will be very easy, and I hope pleasant, for you to repay."

I winced at that; I saw a bad time ahead for me. I would rather face a dozen men with my sword than one infuriated or heartbroken woman. Before we reached Helium, I would have to tell her, but I decided to wait until we had regained visibility.

Perhaps it would have been easier to tell her while we were both invisible, but it seemed a cowardly way to me.

"You are going on to Helium, John Carter?" asked Llana.

"Yes," I said.

"What will they think of a flier coming in by itself with no one on board?" she asked.

"We will have to wait until we become visible before we approach the city," I replied. "We must not take any more of the invisibility spheres."

"Who is John Carter?" asked Rojas. "Is there another here of whom I did not know?"

"I am John Carter," I replied. "Dostar Sojat is merely a name that I assumed temporarily."

"Then you are not the Sultan of Swat?" demanded Rojas.

"No," I replied, "I am not."

"You have deceived me."

"I AM sorry, Rojas," I said; "I was not trying to deceive you . . . about my name; as a matter of fact I never told you I was the Sultan of Swat; I told some warrior who questioned me." If she were angry about my deceiving her concerning my name and status, how was she going to take the fact that I did not love her, and that I already had a mate! I was as unhappy as a live eel in a frying pan; then of a sudden I decided to take the bull by the horns and get the whole thing over with. "Rojas," I began, "though I did not deceive you about my name, I did deceive you in a much more important matter."

"What is that?" she asked.

"I used your — ah — friendship to gain freedom for Llana of Gathol. I pretended to love you when I did not; I already have a mate."

I waited for the explosion, but no explosion came; instead there was a faint, tinkling little laugh. I continued to wait; no one spoke; the silence became oppressive. Momentarily I expected a dagger to be slipped into me; or that Rojas would leap overboard; but neither of these things occurred, and I sat there at the controls wondering about that laugh. Perhaps the shock of my avowal had unbalanced Rojas' mind. I wished that I could see her, and at the same time I was glad that I could not—and I was certainly glad that no one could see me,

for I felt like a fool.

I couldn't think of anything to say, and I thought the silence was going to last forever, but finally Llana of Gathol broke it. "How long will we remain invisible?" she asked.

"A little more than ten zodes from the time you took the sphere," said Rojas. "I shall become visible first, and then probably either John Carter or Ptor Fak, as I imagine that they took the spheres about the same time; you will be the last to regain visibility." Her voice was perfectly normal; there was no trace of nervousness nor bitterness in it. I couldn't make the girl out.

Perhaps she was the type that would bide its time until it could wreak some terrible revenge. I'll tell you that I had plenty to think about on that trip to Helium.

CHAPTER XIII

Out of invisibility

SHORTLY after dawn, I saw a most amazing phenomenon—I saw just a suggestion of the outline of a shadowy form beside me; it took shape slowly: Rojas was materializing! The effects of the invisibility compound were disappearing, and as they disappeared Rojas appeared. There she sat gazing out across the Martian landscape, the shadow of a happy smile upon her lips; somehow she reminded me of a cat which had just swallowed a canary.

"Kaori!" I said, which is the Barsoomian equivalent of Good Morning, Hello, or How-do-you-do?—in other words, it is a Barsoomian greeting.

Rojas looked in my direction but of course she could not see me.

"Kaor," she replied, smiling. "You must be very tired, John Carter; you

have had no sleep all night."

"When Llana of Gathol awakens, I shall sleep," I replied; "she can handle the controls quite as well as I."

"I have never been beyond the forests of Invak before," said Rojas "What a drab, lonely world this is."

"You will find the twin cities of Helium very beautiful," I said. "I hope that you will like it there, Rojas."

"I am sure that I shall," she said; "I am looking forward to being in Helium with you, John Carter."

I wondered what she meant by that. The girl was an enigma; and I gave up trying to find a solution of her, and when Llana of Gathol spoke a moment later, and I knew that she was awake, I asked her to take the controls.

"We will cruise around outside of Helium," I said, "until we have all regained visibility," and then I lay down and fell asleep.

It was late that night before we had all regained visibility, and the next morning I approached Helium. A patrol boat came up to meet us, and recognizing my flier, it came along side. The officer in command, and, in fact, the whole crew were overjoyed to see both Llana of Gathol and myself, alive and safe. The patrol boat escorted us to the hangar on the roof of my palace, where we received a tremendous welcome, as we had both been given up for dead long since.

Ptor Fak, Llana, and Rojas were behind me when I took Dejah Thoris in my arms; then I turned and presented Rojas and Ptor Fak to her.

"Had it not been for Rojas," I told Dejah Thoris, "none of us would have been here," and then I told her very briefly of our capture and incarceration in Invak.

I watched Rojas very closely as Dejah Thoris took both her hands in hers and kissed her on the forehead;

and then, to my surprise, Rojas threw her arms about her and kissed her squarely on the mouth; the girl was absolutely bewildering.

AFTER we had all breakfasted together, Dejah Thoris asked me what my plans were now. "I shall see Tardos Mors immediately," I replied, "and after I have arranged for the dispatch of a fleet for Gathol, I shall fly there myself, alone, to reconnoiter."

"Why alone?" demanded Dejah Thoris; "but why should I ask? It has always been your way to do things alone."

I saw Tardos Mors and made the necessary arrangements for the dispatch of a fleet to Gathol; and then I returned to my palace to bid Dejah Thoris good-bye, and as I passed through the garden, I saw Rojas sitting there alone.

"Come here a moment, John Carter," she said; "I have something to say to you."

Here it comes, I thought; well, it would have to be gotten over sooner or later, and it would be a relief to get it over at once.

"You deceived me, John Carter," she said.

"I know I did," I replied.

"I am so glad that you did," she said, "for I deceived you. I admired you, John Carter, tremendously; but I never loved you. I knew that you had come to Invak in a flier; and I knew that if you could be helped to escape in it, you might be persuaded to take me with you. I hate Invak; I was most unhappy there; I would have sold my very soul to have escaped, and so I tried to make you love me so that you would take me away. I thought I had succeeded, and I was very much ashamed of myself. You can never know how relieved I was

when I found that I had failed, for I admired you too much to wish to bring unhappiness to you."

"But why did you pretend to be so jealous of Llana of Gathol?" I asked.

"To make my love seem more realistic," she said.

"You have lifted a great weight from my conscience, Rojas. I hope that you will like it here and that you will be very happy."

"I shall love it," she said, "for I already love Dejah Thoris, and she has asked me to stay here with her."

"Now I know that you will be happy here," I told her.

"I am sure of it, John Carter—I have seen some very handsome men here already, and they can't all have mates."

The flight to Gathol was uneventful. I had taken an invisibility sphere some time before leaving Helium, and before I reached Gathol I had completely disappeared.

AS I approached the city, I could see Hin Abtol's army drawn up around it; there were many more than there had been when I escaped in the Dugar; and on the line from which I had stolen the ship were at least a hundred more fliers, many of them large fighting ships, with some transports.

Presently several patrol boats rose to meet me. I was flying no colors, and when they hailed me I made no response. A couple of them ranged alongside me, and I could hear the exclamations of astonishment when they discovered that there was no one aboard the ship and no pilot at the controls.

I think they were rather frightened, for no one attempted to board me; and they let me fly on without interfering.

I dropped down to the Panar line,

and set my flier down beside the last ship in it. One of the patrol ships landed also, and was soon surrounded by a crowd of officers and warriors, who soon approached my ship with every sign of curiosity written on their faces.

"This ship is piloted by Death," I said in a loud voice; "it is death to approach too close or to try to board it."

The men stopped then, and most of them fell back. I dropped to the ground and wandered about at will, my purpose being to gather what information I could from conversations among the officers. These men, however, were so interested in my ship that I gained no information from them; and so I wandered away and walked down the line to the flagship, which I boarded, passing the sentry at the foot of the ladder and the watch on deck. It seemed strange to walk there among the enemy, unseen; all that I had to do was to avoid contact with any of them, and I was safe from detection.

I went to the cabin of the commander of the fleet. He was sitting there with several high ranking officers, to whom he was giving instructions.

"As soon as Hin Abtol arrives from Pankor," he was saying, "we are to take up several thousand men equipped with equilibrators and drop them directly into the city; and then, with Gathol as a base, we shall move on Helium with fully a million men."

"When will Hin Abtol arrive?" asked one of the officers.

"Tonight or tomorrow morning," replied the commander. "He is coming with a large fleet."

Well, at last I had learned something; and my plans were formulated instantly. I left the flagship and returned to my flier, which was being

examined by a considerable number of officers and men, but from a safe distance.

I had difficulty in finding an opening through which I could pass without touching any of them; but at last I succeeded, and I was soon at the controls of my flier.

As it rose from the ground apparently without human guidance, exclamations of awe and astonishment followed it. "It is Death," I heard a man cry; "Death is at the controls."

I circled low above them. "Yes, it is Death at the controls," I called down to them; "Death, who has come to take all who attack Gathol;" then I zoomed swiftly aloft and turned the nose of my ship toward Pankor.

I only went far enough from Gathol to be out of sight of Hin Abtol's forces; and then I flew in wide circles at considerable altitudes, waiting for Hin Abtol's fleet.

At long last I saw it in the distance. With it was the man who, with the enormous number of his conscripts, would surely take Gathol and sack it, were he not stopped.

I spotted Hin Abtol's flagship immediately and dropped down alongside it. My little flier evoked no alarm, as it would have been helpless in the midst of this great fleet; but when those aboard the flagship saw that the flier was maneuvering without human control, their curiosity knew no bounds, and they crowded to the rail to have a better look.

I circled the ship, drawing nearer and nearer. I could see Hin Abtol on the bridge with a number of officers, and I saw that they were as much intrigued as were the warriors on deck.

Hin Abtol was leaning far out over the rail to have a better look at me; I moved in closer; the side of the flier

touched the bridge lightly.

Hin Abtol was peering down at the deck and into the little control room. "There is no one aboard this ship," he said; "some one has discovered the means of flying it by remote control."

I had set the wheel to hold the flier tightly against the bridge; then I sprang across the deck, seized Hin Abtol by his harness, and dragged him over the rail onto the deck of the flier. An instant later, still holding Hin Abtol, I was at the controls; the flier nosed down and dove beneath the flagship at full speed. I heard shouts of astonishment mingled with cries of rage and fear.

A number of small craft took after me; but I knew that they could not overtake me, and that they would not dare fire on me for fear of killing Hin Abtol.

Hin Abtol lay trembling at my side, almost paralyzed with terror. "What are you?" he finally managed to stammer. "What are you going to do with me?"

I did not reply; I thought that that would terrify him the more; and I know that it did, for after a while he implored me to speak.

We flew back, high over Gathol, which was now safe from attack. Early the next morning I saw a great fleet coming from the southeast—it was the fleet from Helium that Tardos Mors was bringing to relieve Gathol.

As I was approaching it, the effects of the invisibility sphere diminished rapidly; and I materialized before the astounded gaze of Hin Abtol.

"Who are you? What are you?" he demanded.

"I am the man whose flier you stole at Horz," I replied. "I am the man who took it from beneath your nose in Pankor, and with it Lana of Gathol—I am John Carter, Prince of Helium; have

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masqueraded. They emerged as thin, small creatures whose bodies seemed unsubstantial, and when they touched, there was no contact but a seeming merging of the bodies. They were wraithlike even in their movements, hovering over the ground without limbs, moving like smoke in the empty hall.

Now the six shadowy creatures flitted out of the hall and came into the gloomy out-of-doors. There was not a sound nor was there anything to be seen. It seemed as though a curse hovered in the moist and fetid air.

"Nevertheless, you are wrong," said Lito. "They understood us, and they took our vial. Our story was too convincing, and the element of religion was too powerful for them to fight. They will empty the vial into the sea, and their storehouses will be ours."

Murra sneered again.

"Our mighty science," he laughed thinly. "We should have spent our time conquering the plague that overcame our meat animals. Maybe we could have done something that way."

"No," said Kora-san. "Even in the day of Tallu, our meat animals were dying. There was no way; we had to break through to another world, and our plan was great. We are too shaken

by the things we have seen. Our loved ones have starved all around us, and death has clouded our minds. We are the last, but we will survive."

It was dusk. The dark sun was fast falling behind the horizon, and the hot wind that blew from the swamps that were on all sides was scattering the frail bodies of the Quennians.

"Perhaps," said Kora-san, "we should pray. Let us not be ashamed to pray. It comforted the ancients."

"To whom shall we pray?" said Pyteles, angrily.

"To our unknown ancestor," said Kora-san. "He who, in the dark ages past, was the first meat-eater."

The six creatures were silent. At length, Murra said,

"No. If we are to pray, let our prayer be to Tallu. It was he who knew of this other world, and who left us the plan to conquer it. And perhaps we will conquer it, and all its billions of people will form the ladder for a new world of Quenna." He paused a moment, then said, "There is nothing to do now but wait. Soon the vial will work, and we will cross the divider to our new world. We must wait."

"Yes," said he who had acted as the High Priest. "Let us wait—"

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you ever heard of me?"

Nearing the fleet, I broke out my colors—the colors of the Prince of Helium; and a great cheer rose from the deck of every ship that could distinguish them.

The rest is history now—how Helium's great fleet destroyed Hin Abtol's fleet, and the army of Helium routed the forces which had for so long invested Gathol. When that brief war was over, we set free nearly a million of the

frozen men of Panar; and I returned to Helium and Dejah Thoris, from whom I hope never to be separated again.

I had brought with me Jad-han and Pan Dan Chee, whom we had found among the prisoners of the Panars; and though I was not present at the meeting between Pan Dan Chee and Llana of Gathol, Dejah Thoris has assured me that the dangers and vicissitudes he had suffered for love of the fair Gatholian had not been in vain.