

By REX BEACH Author of "The Iron Trail," "The Spoiler," "Effort of the Sun," "Eid"

(Continued from Page 1)

CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

"Gratefully. And they say nothing." "Your pardon, my colonel. They came back in a cold sweat, and they spent the night on their knees. The woman was there again. You saw her face as it glowed in the dark. Well, her face was as good as life, they said. They heard the clanking of chains, looting and the sound of hammer, coming from the very bowels of the earth. It is all plain enough, when you know the story. But it is terrifying."

"This is indeed amazing," Cobo acknowledged, "but of course there is some simple explanation. Spirits, if indeed there are such things, are made of nothing—they are like thin air. How, then, could they rattle chains? You probably saw some wretched palefaces in search of food and imagined the rest."

"Indeed! Then what did I hear with these very ears? Whispers, murmurs, groans, and the clinky-click of old chains—everything!"

"Good! I shall visit the place," he said. "I shall see the man who was crucified there."

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of starvation, and yet, strangely enough, the thought of food was distasteful to him. He devotedly washed it down, but not eating it. That he had again, for he feared he would not have the strength to descend it.

Luckily for the sake of the secret, he was not alone in the cave. He was searching for food, while Anastasio lay babbling on his bed, too ill to notice the peculiar actions of his companions.

It was with a strange, highminded feeling of uneasiness that the trio dragged themselves upward to the ruined mine, where darkness finally came. They no longer talked, for conversation was a drain upon their powers, and the reaction from the day's exertion had set in. O'Reilly lurched as he walked, his limbs were heavy, and his liveliest sensation was one of dread at the hard work in store for him. The forcing of that door assumed the proportions of a Herculean task.

But once he was at the bottom of the well and beheld the handwork of the men, the stone he had thrown fell, it is his sense of relief returned and with it a certain measure of determination. Inasmuch as he had made no visible impression upon the men, by his direct attack, he changed his tactics now and undertook to loosen the stone of the mine. It was wedged into the rock at top and bottom, and a desperate struggle he succeeded in loosening the entire structure so that it could wobble and be pushed enough to squeeze his body through.

"I have it," he cried to Rosa, seizing the cable, he thrust it into the opening. He bobbed and he had expected to find a small cavern or grove which had evidently been pierced during the digging of the well. So he could appreciate now how simple had been the task of sealing it up so as to hamper discovery. Rosa, poised above him, scarcely breathed until he straightened himself, and then he turned to stare at the man.

He tried to speak, but voiced nothing more than a hoarse croak; the candle in his hand described erratic figures.

"What do you see?" the girl cried in an agony of suspense.

"It's here! B-boxes, chests, cages—everything!"

"God be praised! My father's fortune at last!"

Beneath the papers there were numerous leather bags. These had rotted; they came apart easily in O'Reilly's hands. He thrust his hand into one of them, and he found a mass of small, round, smooth stones, such as are used for shot. He looked at them for a moment, and then he threw them away. "You are right," he said. "What am I thinking about? There must be no noise. Caramba! A pretty business that would be worth it. With my men running up here to see what it was all about. No! No gunshots, no disturbances of any kind. You understand what I mean, eh?"

He faced toward to a grin as he tossed the revolver aside, then he took to drink a sip from the open bottle. "No noise!" he repeated, "No noise whatever."

O'Reilly stepped by the hidden passage, and he found himself in a cavernous structure, stunned by the certain knowledge that Rosa, alone, was in the fact that this man intended to bring him where he stood. In a hectic heartbeat he looked about him, thinking to flash a dagger in the treasure-cave, but that dagger was closed in his hand, and he had no time to open it before the stone he was holding slipped through his fingers. He was like a rat in a trap, and he was in a trap of a most peculiar kind.

Rosa drew back from her precarious position, but she had grown limp. She was weak and her head was whirling. As she rose to her feet she brushed something, somebody, some flesh-and-blood being. She had a momentary glimpse of her. Involuntarily she recoiled, toppling upon the very brink of the pit, whereupon a heavy hand reached forth and she fell.

"What do you see?" she asked.

"It's here! B-boxes, chests, cages—everything!"

"God be praised! My father's fortune at last!"

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