

## 14. Turk and Tatar

The Tatars had arrived, swiftly and noiselessly, and a dozen of the warriors, still mounted, were surrounding him.

His helpless condition aroused their curiosity, and while some of them hastily cut away his bonds and raised him to his feet, other plied him with questions in their own language. Rob shook his head to indicate that he could not understand; so they led him to the chief--an immense, bearded representative of the tribe of Kara-Khitai, the terrible and relentless Black Tatars of Thibet. The huge frame of this fellow was clothed in flowing robes of cloth-of-gold, braided with jewels, and he sat majestically upon the back of a jet-black camel.

Under ordinary circumstances the stern features and flashing black eyes of this redoubtable warrior would have struck a chill of fear to the boy's heart; but now under the influence of the crushing misfortunes he had experienced, he was able to gaze with indifference upon the terrible visage of the desert chief.

The Tatar seemed not to consider Rob an enemy. Instead, he looked upon him as an ally, since the Turks had bound and robbed him.

Finding it impossible to converse with the chief, Rob took refuge in the sign language. He turned his pockets wrong side out, showed the red welts left upon his wrists by the tight cord, and then shook his fists angrily in the direction of the town.

In return the Tatar nodded gravely and issued an order to his men.

By this time the warriors were busily pitching tents before the walls of Yarkand and making preparations for a formal siege. In obedience to the chieftain's orders, Rob was given a place within one of the tents nearest the wall and supplied with a brace of brass-mounted pistols and a dagger with a sharp, zigzag edge. These were evidently to assist the boy in fighting the Turks, and he was well pleased to have them. His spirits rose considerably when he found he had fallen among friends, although most of his new comrades had such evil faces that it was unnecessary to put on the Character Markers to judge their natures with a fair degree of accuracy.

"I can't be very particular about the company I keep," he thought, "and this gang hasn't tried to murder me, as the rascally Turks did. So for the present I'll stand in with the scowling chief and try to get a shot at the thieves who robbed me. If our side wins I may get a chance to recover some of my property. It's a slim chance, of course, but it's the only hope I have left."

That very evening an opportunity occurred for Rob to win glory in the eyes of his new friends. Just before sundown the gates of the city flew open and a swarm of Turks, mounted upon fleet horses and camels, issued forth and fell upon their enemies. The Tatars, who did not expect the sally, were scarcely able to form an opposing rank when they found themselves engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict, fighting desperately for their lives. In such a battle, however, the Turks were at a disadvantage, for the active Tatars slipped beneath their horses and disabled them, bringing both the animals and their riders to the earth.

At the first onslaught Rob shot his pistol at a Turk and wounded him so severely that he fell from his horse. Instantly the boy seized the bridle and sprang upon the steed's back, and the next moment he had dashed into the thickest part of the fray. Bullets and blows rained upon him from all sides, but the Garment of Repulsion saved him from a single scratch.

When his pistols had been discharged he caught up the broken handle of a spear, and used it as a club, galloping into the ranks of the Turks and belaboring them as hard as he could. The Tatars cheered and followed him, and the Turks were so amazed at his miraculous escape from their bullets that they became terrified, thinking he bore a charmed life and was protected by unseen powers.

This terror helped turn the tide of battle, and before long the enemy was pressed back to the walls and retreated through the gates, which were hastily fastened behind them.

In order to prevent a repetition of this sally the Tatars at once invested the gates, so that if the Turks should open them they were as likely to let their foes in as to oppose them.

While the tents were being moved up Rob had an opportunity to search the battlefield for the bodies of the three Turks who had robbed him, but they were not among the fallen.

"Those fellows were too cowardly to take part in a fair fight," declared the boy; but he was much disappointed, nevertheless, as he felt very helpless without the electric tube or the traveling machine.

The Tatar chief now called Rob to his tent and presented him with a beautiful ring set with a glowing pigeon's-blood ruby, in acknowledgment of his services. This gift made the boy feel very proud, and he said to the chief:

"You're all right, old man, even if you do look like a pirate. If you can manage to capture that city, so I can get my electrical devices back, I'll consider you a trump as long as I live."

The chief thought this speech was intended to express Rob's gratitude, so he bowed solemnly in return.

During the night that followed upon the first engagement of the Turks and Tatars, the boy lay awake trying to devise some plan to capture the city. The walls seemed too high and thick to be either scaled or broken by the Tatars, who had no artillery whatever; and within the walls lay all the fertile part of the oasis, giving the besieged a good supply of water and provisions, while the besiegers were obliged to subsist on what water and food they had brought with them.

Just before dawn Rob left his tent and went out to look at the great wall. The stars gave plenty of light, but the boy was worried to find that, according to Eastern custom, no sentries or guards whatever had been posted and all the Tatars were slumbering soundly.

The city was likewise wrapped in profound silence, but just as Rob was turning away he saw a head project stealthily over the edge of the wall before him, and recognized in the features one of the Turks who had robbed him.

Finding no one awake except the boy the fellow sat upon the edge of the wall, with his feet dangling downward, and grinned wickedly at his former victim. Rob watched him with almost breathless eagerness.

After making many motions that conveyed no meaning whatever, the Turk drew the electric tube from his pocket and pointed his finger first at the boy and then at the instrument, as if inquiring what it was used for. Rob shook his head. The Turk turned the tube over several times and

examined it carefully, after which he also shook his head, seeming greatly puzzled.

By this time the boy was fairly trembling with excitement. He longed to recover this valuable weapon, and feared that at any moment the curious Turk would discover its use. He held out his hand toward the tube, and tried to say, by motions, that he would show the fellow how to use it. The man seemed to understand, but he would not let the glittering instrument out of his possession.

Rob was almost in despair, when he happened to notice upon his hand the ruby ring given him by the chief. Drawing the jewel from his finger he made offer, by signs, that he would exchange it for the tube.

The Turk was much pleased with the idea, and nodded his head repeatedly, holding out his hand for the ring. Rob had little confidence in the man's honor, but he was so eager to regain the tube that he decided to trust him. So he threw the ring to the top of the wall, where the Turk caught it skilfully; but when Rob held out his hand for the tube the scoundrel only laughed at him and began to scramble to his feet in order to beat a retreat. Chance, however, foiled this disgraceful treachery, for in his hurry the Turk allowed the tube to slip from his grasp, and it rolled off the wall and fell upon the sand at Rob's very feet.

The robber turned to watch its fall and, filled with sudden anger, the boy grabbed the weapon, pointed it at his enemy, and pressed the button. Down tumbled the Turk, without a cry, and lay motionless at the foot of the wall.

Rob's first thought was to search the pockets of his captive, and to his delight he found and recovered his box of food tablets. The Record of Events and the traveling machine were doubtless in the possession of the other robbers, but Rob did not despair of recovering them, now that he had the tube to aid him.

Day was now breaking, and several of the Tatars appeared and examined the body of the Turk with grunts of surprise, for there was no mark upon him to show how he had been slain. Supposing him to be dead, they tossed him aside and forgot all about him.

Rob had secured his ruby ring again, and going to the chief's tent he showed the jewel to the guard and was at once admitted. The black-

bearded chieftain was still reclining upon his pillows, but Rob bowed before him, and by means of signs managed to ask for a band of warriors to assist him in assaulting the town. The chieftain appeared to doubt the wisdom of the enterprise, not being able to understand how the boy could expect to succeed; but he graciously issued the required order, and by the time Rob reached the city gate he found a large group of Tatars gathered to support him, while the entire camp, roused to interest in the proceedings, stood looking on.

Rob cared little for the quarrel between the Turks and Tatars, and under ordinary circumstances would have refused to side with one or the other; but he knew he could not hope to recover his electrical machines unless the city was taken by the band of warriors who had befriended him, so he determined to force an entrance for them.

Without hesitation he walked close to the great gate and shattered its fastenings with the force of the electric current directed upon them from the tube. Then, shouting to his friends the Tatars for assistance, they rushed in a body upon the gate and dashed it open.

The Turks had expected trouble when they heard the fastenings of the huge gate splinter and fall apart, so they had assembled in force before the opening. As the Tatars poured through the gateway in a compact mass they were met by a hail of bullets, spears and arrows, which did fearful execution among them. Many were killed outright, while others fell wounded to be trampled upon by those who pressed on from the rear.

Rob maintained his position in the front rank, but escaped all injury through the possession of the Garment of Repulsion. But he took an active part in the fight and pressed the button of the electric tube again and again, tumbling the enemy into heaps on every side, even the horses and camels falling helplessly before the resistless current of electricity.

The Tatars shouted joyfully as they witnessed this marvelous feat and rushed forward to assist in the slaughter; but the boy motioned them all back. He did not wish any more bloodshed than was necessary, and knew that the heaps of unconscious Turks around him would soon recover.

So he stood alone and faced the enemy, calmly knocking them over as fast as they came near. Two of the Turks managed to creep up behind the boy, and one of them, who wielded an immense simitar with a two-

edged blade as sharp as a razor, swung the weapon fiercely to cut off Rob's head. But the repulsive force aroused in the Garment was so terrific that it sent the weapon flying backwards with redoubled swiftness, so that it caught the second Turk at the waist and cut him fairly in two.

Thereafter they all avoided coming near the boy, and in a surprisingly short time the Turkish forces were entirely conquered, all having been reduced to unconsciousness except a few cowards who had run away and hidden in the cellars or garrets of the houses.

The Tatars entered the city with shouts of triumph, and the chief was so delighted that he threw his arms around Rob's neck and embraced him warmly.

Then began the sack of Yarkand, the fierce Tatars plundering the bazaars and houses, stripping them of everything of value they could find.

Rob searched anxiously among the bodies of the unconscious Turks for the two men who had robbed him, but neither could be found. He was more successful later, for in running through the streets he came upon a band of Tatars leading a man with a rope around his neck, whom Rob quickly recognized as one of the thieves he was hunting for. The Tatars willingly allowed him to search the fellow, and in one of his pockets Rob found the Record of Events.

He had now recovered all his property, except the traveling machine, the one thing that was absolutely necessary to enable him to escape from this barbarous country.

He continued his search persistently, and an hour later found the dead body of the third robber lying in the square in the center of the city. But the traveling machine was not on his person, and for the first time the boy began to give way to despair.

In the distance he heard loud shouts and sound of renewed strife, warning him that the Turks were recovering consciousness and engaging the Tatars with great fierceness. The latter had scattered throughout the town, thinking themselves perfectly secure, so that not only were they unprepared to fight, but they became panic-stricken at seeing their foes return, as it seemed, from death to life. Their usual courage forsook

them, and they ran, terrified, in every direction, only to be cut down by the revengeful Turkish simitars.

Rob was sitting upon the edge of a marble fountain in the center of the square when a crowd of victorious Turks appeared and quickly surrounded him. The boy paid no attention to their gestures and the Turks feared to approach him nearly, so they stood a short distance away and fired volleys at him from their rifles and pistols.

Rob glared at them scornfully, and seeing they could not injure him the Turks desisted; but they still surrounded him, and the crowd grew thicker every moment.

Women now came creeping from their hiding places and mingled with the ranks of the men, and Rob guessed, from their joyous chattering, that the Turks had regained the city and driven out or killed the Tatar warriors. He reflected, gloomily, that this did not affect his own position in any way, since he could not escape from the oasis.

Suddenly, on glancing at the crowd, Rob saw something that arrested his attention. A young girl was fastening some article to the wrist of a burly, villainous-looking Turk. The boy saw a glitter that reminded him of the traveling machine, but immediately afterward the man and the girl bent their heads over the fellow's wrist in such a way that Rob could see nothing more.

While the couple were apparently examining the strange device, Rob started to his feet and walked toward them. The crowd fell back at his approach, but the man and the girl were so interested that they did not notice him. He was still several paces away when the girl put out her finger and touched the indicator on the dial.

To Rob's horror and consternation the big Turk began to rise slowly into the air, while a howl of fear burst from the crowd. But the boy made a mighty spring and caught the Turk by his foot, clinging to it with desperate tenacity, while they both mounted steadily upward until they were far above the city of the desert.

The big Turk screamed pitifully at first, and then actually fainted away from fright. Rob was much frightened, on his part, for he knew if his hands slipped from their hold he would fall to his death. Indeed, one hand was slipping already, so he made a frantic clutch and caught firmly

hold of the Turk's baggy trousers. Then, slowly and carefully, he drew himself up and seized the leather belt that encircled the man's waist. This firm grip gave him new confidence, and he began to breathe more freely.

He now clung to the body of the Turk with both legs entwined, in the way he was accustomed to cling to a tree-trunk when he climbed after cherries at home. He had conquered his fear of falling, and took time to recover his wits and his strength.

They had now reached such a tremendous height that the city looked like a speck on the desert beneath them. Knowing he must act quickly, Rob seized the dangling left arm of the unconscious Turk and raised it until he could reach the dial of the traveling machine. He feared to unclasp the machine just then, for two reasons: if it slipped from his grasp they would both plunge downward to their death; and he was not sure the machine would work at all if in any other position than fastened to the left wrist.

Rob determined to take no chances, so he left the machine attached to the Turk and turned the indicator to zero and then to "East," for he did not wish to rejoin either his enemies the Turks or his equally undesirable friends the Tatars.

After traveling eastward a few minutes he lost sight of the city altogether; so, still clinging to the body of the Turk, he again turned the indicator and began to descend. When, at last, they landed gently upon a rocky eminence of the Kuen-Lun mountains, the boy's strength was almost exhausted, and his limbs ached with the strain of clinging to the Turk's body.

His first act was to transfer the traveling machine to his own wrist and to see that his other electrical devices were safely bestowed in his pockets. Then he sat upon the rock to rest until the Turk recovered consciousness.

Presently the fellow moved uneasily, rolled over, and then sat up and stared at his surroundings. Perhaps he thought he had been dreaming, for he rubbed his eyes and looked again with mingled surprise and alarm. Then, seeing Rob, he uttered a savage shout and drew his dagger.