

UNDER THE MOONS OF MARS

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

CHAPTER XXII—Continued

FINALLY a lucky cut brought down a second guardman, and then, with only two opposing men, I changed my tactics and rushed them down after the fashion of my fighting that had won me many a victory. The third fell with ten seconds, and the last lay dead upon the bloody floor a few moments later.

"Who are you, Zodangar?" she whispered. "Another enemy to harass me in my misery?"

"I am a friend," I answered, "a once cherished friend."

"No friend of Helium's princess wears that metal," she replied, "and yet you have it. I have heard it before. It is not—it cannot be—no, for he is dead."

"It is, though, my princess, none other than John Carter," I said. "Do you not recognize, even through paint and strange metal, the heart of your chieftain?"

"As I came closer to her she grasped my wrists with outstretched hands, but as I reached to take her in my arms she drew back with a shudder and a little moan of misery."

"Too late," she cried, "oh, my chieftain that was, and whom I thought dead. Had you but returned one little hour before—but now it is too late—too late."

"What do you mean, Dejah Thoris?" I cried. "That you would not have promised yourself to the Zodangar prince had you known that I lived?"

"Thinking you, John Carter, that I would give my heart to you yesterday, and today to another? I thought that it lay buried with your ashes in the pits of Warhoon, and today I have promised my body to another to save my people from the curse of a victorious Zodangar army."

"But I am not dead, my princess. I have come to claim you, and all Zodanga cannot prevent it."

"It is too late, John Carter, my promise is given, and on Baroom that is final. The ceremonies which follow later are but meaningless formalities. They make the fact of marriage no more certain than does the funeral cortege of a jeddak again place the seal of death upon him. I am as good as married, John Carter. No longer may you call me your princess. No longer are you my chieftain."

"I know but little of your customs here upon Baroom, Dejah Thoris, but I do know that I love you, and if you meant the last words you spoke to me that day as the borders of Warhoon were charging down upon us, no other man shall ever claim you as his bride. You meant them then, my princess, and you mean them still. Say that it is true."

"I meant them, John Carter," she whispered. "I cannot repeat them now, for I have given myself to another."

"Ah, if you had only known our ways, my friend," she continued, half to herself, "the promise would have been yours long months ago, and you could have claimed me before all others. It might have meant the fall of Helium, but I would have given my empire for my Tharkian chief."

"Then aloud she said to me: "Do you remember the night when you offended me? You called me your princess without having asked my hand of me, and then you boasted of my beauty and fought for signs of the assassin."

"This was my opportunity, and slim as it appeared, I grasped it; for as a number of soldiers came hurrying past my hiding-place, I fell in behind them, and followed through the mazes of the palace until, in passing through a great hall, I saw the blessed light of day coming in through a series of large windows."

"Here I left my guides and, slipping to the nearest window, sought for an avenue of escape. The windows opened upon a broad balcony which overlooked one of the great avenues of Zodanga."

"The ground was about 30 feet below; and at a like distance from the building was a tall full 20 feet high, constructed of polished glass about a foot in thickness. To a red Martian escape by this path would have appeared impossible, but to me, with my earthly strength and agility, it seemed already accomplished."

"Accordingly, I searched for a hiding-place, and finally found one by accident, inside a huge hanging ornament which swung from the ceiling of the hall, and about 10 feet from the floor. Into the capacious bowl-like vase I sprang with ease, and scarcely had I settled down within it

when I heard a number of people enter the apartment.

"The group stopped beneath my hiding-place, and I could plainly overhear their every word."

"It is the work of Heliumites," said one of the men.

"Yes, O jeddak, but how had they access to the palace? I could believe that, even with the diligent care of your guardsmen, a single enemy might reach the inner chambers; but how a force of six or eight fighting men could have done so unobserved is beyond me. We shall soon know, however, for here comes the royal psychologist."

"Another man now joined the group, and, after making his formal greetings to his ruler, said:

"O mighty jeddak, it is a strange tale I read in the mind of your faithful guardsmen. They were felled by a single opponent."

"He paused to let the full weight of this announcement impress his hearers, and that his statement was accurately credited was evidenced by the impatient exclamation of incredulity which escaped the lips of Than Kosis."

"What manner of weird tale are you bringing me, Notan?" he cried.

"It is the truth, my jeddak," replied the psychologist. "In fact, the impressions were strongly marked on the brain of each of the four guardsmen, and I am sure that a very tall man, wearing the metal of one of your own guardsmen, and his fighting ability was little short of marvelous."

"Disheartened and dejected, I withdrew from the room; but I was not entirely discouraged, nor would I admit that Dejah Thoris had actually been performed."

"As I wandered along the corridors, I was as absolutely lost in the mazes of the winding passageways as I had been before I discovered Dejah Thoris' apartments."

"I knew that my only hope lay in escape from the city of Zodanga, for the matter of the four dead guardsmen would have to be explained, and as I could never reach my original post without a guide, suspicion would surely rest on me so soon as I was discovered wandering aimlessly through the palace."

"Presently I came down a spiral runway leading to a lower floor, and after a short distance I reached several stories until I reached the doorway of a large apartment in which were a number of guardsmen."

"The walls of this room were hung with transparent tapestries, behind which I saw eight fighting men could have done so unobserved is beyond me. We shall soon know, however, for here comes the royal psychologist."

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for he fought fair against the entire four, and vanquished them by his surpassing skill and superhuman strength and endurance. Though he wore the metal of Zodanga, my jeddak, such a man was never seen before in this or any other country upon Baroom.

"The mind of the Princess of Helium, whom I have examined and questioned, was a blank to me; she has perfect control, and I could not read one iota of it. She said that she witnessed a portion of the encounter, and that when she looked there was but one man engaged with the guardsmen, a man whom she did not recognize."

"Where is my erstwhile savior?" spoke another of the party, and I recognized the voice of the cousin of Than Kosis, whom I had rescued from the green warriors.

"By the metal of my first ancestor," he cried, "the description fits him to perfection, especially as to his fighting ability."

"Where is this man?" cried Than Kosis. "Have him brought to me at once. What know you of him, cousin? It seemed strange to me, now that I think upon it, that there should have been such a fighting man in Zodanga and we never have even heard his name. And his name, too, John Carter—who ever heard of such a name upon Baroom?"

"Word was soon brought that I was nowhere to be found, either in the palace or at my former quarters in the barracks of the air-scout squadron. Kantos Kan they had found and questioned, but he knew nothing of my whereabouts, and as to my past he had told me every detail of my life since he had but recently met me during our captivity among the Warhoons."

"Kantos Kan's eyes on the other one," commanded Than Kosis, and I was a stranger, and likely as not they both had from Helium and where one is we shall sooner or later find the other. Quadruple quick action and let every man and woman leave the city by air or ground be subjected to the closest scrutiny."

"Another messenger now entered with word that I was still within the palace walls."

"The likeness of every person who has entered or left the palace grounds today has been noted and recorded, and I am sure that the fellow, and none other, is approaching the likeness of this new padwar of the guards, other than that which was recorded in her program, though she is a young girl, and this was maintained throughout the evening by her modest, unaffected demeanor."

"It was a pleasure to see Miss Boston, but it was a pleasure matched by hearing her sing. She has a soprano of clarity, simplicity and uniformity of scale. The quality is singularly pure and sweet. The production is, on the whole, excellent, and the intonation devoid of defect. If some of the upper and head tones in a couple of numbers lacked a bit in volume, all of them were free from harshness and forcing. The term 'well-schooled' accurately characterizes Miss Boston's voice. The quality is singularly pure and sweet. The production is, on the whole, excellent, and the intonation devoid of defect. If some of the upper and head tones in a couple of numbers lacked a bit in volume, all of them were free from harshness and forcing. The term 'well-schooled' accurately characterizes Miss Boston's voice. The quality is singularly pure and sweet. The production is, on the whole, excellent, and the intonation devoid of defect. 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