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## THE MESSENGER FROM KHARTOON

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "Dr. Jack," "Dr. Jack's Wife," "Miss Caprice," Etc., Etc.

"Say rather accursed, my friend, since it is marked by the blood of a brave man. I'll take the same blade Lord Carmorgan handed. Since a Briton failed to teach the Russian bear a lesson with it, we'll see what Brother Jonathan can do. Hold it for me, Mr. Grimes."

No one makes any remark, though secretly the baron is fuming, while both Mr. Grimes and Sandy chuckle at the words of the traveller. It is patent that Mynheer Joe has gauged the make-up of his antagonist to a dot, and will be able to take care of him.

Both principals in the contemplated affair proceed to business. Coats and vests are removed. Joe arranges his attire just as in the gymnasium, placing the footle over his shoes, tightening a belt around his waist and fastening up both sleeves.

The baron observes his movements with a curiosity that shows itself upon his face. He discovers that his American antagonist knows more than he gave him credit for and perhaps for the first time the startling thought flashes through his brain that this man may be a revelation to him.

His practical eye takes in the wonderful wrist of Mynheer Joe and the superb forearm. These points give promise of astonishing suppleness and play in the possession of a master.

The baron feels concern—something that never bothered him before when about to enter a little affair of this kind, for the duello has been a pastime to the Russian, feeling that he was a sure winner from the start.

Both are now ready. Their seconds place them, and as there is really no advantage in the ground, this requires little effort.

"One moment before we begin! It is Mr. Grimes who speaks, and all eyes are at once turned upon him. "Let us understand the conditions of this affair. Will the gentlemen's honor be satisfied with the first blood, or is it to be a duel to the death?"

The baron opens his mouth to declare for the latter, remembering the disgrace put upon him when the wine was dashed into his face. Just then his eyes rest upon the countenance of the American. What is it in Mynheer Joe's looks that causes a spasm to pass through the frame of the duelist? He hardly knows himself, save that for perhaps the first time in his life he has had an undeniable twinge of fear.

"The first disabling wound will satisfy me," says the baron coldly, secretly meaning that when he himself gives this it shall be the coup de grace through his foe's heart.

Mynheer Joe inclines his head. "What the Russian says suits me. I am ready for any conditions," he remarks.

"It is understood, gentlemen, a disabling wound brings the little affair to a termination, and we, the seconds, are to be the judges. Are you ready for business?" calls Mr. Grimes.

Both swordsmen assume favorite positions and make affirmative responses. Mr. Grimes nods his head to the Frenchman.

"Begin!" calls that worthy, sharply. Hardly had the word left his lips than the sword blades kiss with a ringing sound, and the extraordinary duel among the hills of Mokkatam has begun. It is the baron who assaults; he is eager to discover the mettle of his antagonist, and throws some fire into his attacks, though not forgetting to keep his guard intact, and retain some reserve.

The spectators group around, and prepare to witness one of the most astonishing scenes that ever took place upon the bank of the historical Nile. It does not take an experienced swordsman long to learn that he has met a foe worthy of his steel, and ere they have been at it ten seconds the Russian allows a look of surprise to be seen upon his face.

This is succeeded by an expression of terrible ferocity. He has discovered the calibre of his antagonist, and is more than ever determined to kill him then and there. Fortunately, the object of this solicitude has something to say about this matter himself, and he speaks with no uncertain sound.

For perhaps a minute or so, the swords meet and writhe and twist like gleaming snakes. Then the agile baron springs back beyond reach. He has failed in his first attempt. What will he endeavor to accomplish now?

He knows better than to display any signs of alarm. On the contrary, he forces a sneer upon his lips and appears unconcerned.

Again he advances, to adopt an entirely new system of tactics, which the American meets as becomes the favorite pupil of Monsieur Duval, the famous swordsman of all Paris.

The baron is amazed to find that each of his little tricks is met in rapid order. He gains no advantage. If Joe were surrounded by a wall of steel he could not be more secure apparently from the onslaught of his antagonist.

On his part, the American admits that never has he met one who could wield the blade with such power and skill as this Russian duelist. He is kept busy repelling attacks, and when he finds an opportunity to make a lunge on his own account it is met and parried by the clever work of the baron.

Mr. Grimes looks on and smiles; he thinks he can afford to, knowing well that a surprise will yet come upon the Russian. As for the French captain, he rubs his hands together in great glee; such a spectacle as this appears to everything that is martial in his composition. He forgets that two men are

battling for life, and only sees the marvelous skill brought to bear in manipulating the swords. All the while his exclamations escape him, as if he cannot keep his feelings under control; he is like a kettle of boiling water when the heat reaches a certain stage he bubbles over.

"Sacre! Look at that lunge! Magnificent! And that return! Charmant! It is worth losing a night's sleep to gaze upon such lovely play. Mon ami, observe the blades kiss and twine about each other. My friend has met a noble adversary. Mon Dieu! Such coolness, such wonderful arms, I have not seen in all my life. I am proud the Americans are the friends of the French. But it is one great pity—he must go down. The baron tires them all out—his arm is made of steel. I trust it will only be a flesh wound. Parbleu! I should hate to see that brave man die."

Thus he mutters, and exclaims in starts, as he watches the fierce engagement. Mr. Grimes hears him. Mr. Grimes does not share his apprehension one iota. He simply utters in the Frenchman's ear, the one word: "Wait!"

Meanwhile the second bout between the two men has proven as fruitless as the first. As if through mutual consent they spring back to recover themselves.

"Time!" says the Frenchman. They rest upon their swords, and during this brief interval keen eyes are upon them. The French captain contrasts the two. He has declared that the baron, in the past, has won more than one victory because of his wonderful endurance, which has enabled him to wear his antagonist out. To his surprise, he now discovers that the Russian has put forth such tremendous force in the attempt to beat down Joe's guard, that he shows more signs of exhaustion than his antagonist.

What does Mynheer Joe do, as if to show his contempt for the man against whom he is pitted, but take a cigar and place it, unlighted, between his teeth. The baron's eyes flash lightnings when he sees this act. He realizes that the mistake of his life has come upon him. When Mynheer Joe entered Cairo the Russian's star began to decline. It is now going down with a rush.

"Ready!" he cries, raising his sword. The American meets him half way, and for the third time the weapons clash together. Now the baron exhausts his repertory of curious strokes and tricks, hoping to discover some weak point about the other's defense. In this he signally fails.

As yet he has felt no twinge of fear, trusting in his own skill to defend himself. If it comes to the worst, the duel can be called a draw, and by such a course he keeps a close watch for the opening he still hopes to discover.

A new phase in the duel is about to take place, what Mr. Grimes has been so anxiously awaiting. He wonders why Mynheer Joe delays so long, and can only lay it to that strange feeling of fine humor which causes a cut to play with a mousetrap.

It comes at last. Joe springs back a pace, passes his sword from his right hand to his left, and it at the Russian like a tiger. His trenchant blade flashes before the baron's eyes, and a cry of wonder and dismay is forced from the latter's lips, when he realizes a sudden and unexpected change in the situation. The baron's attack must now be met in a different manner than before, since it proceeds from the left shoulder.

Mr. Grimes hears a groan beside him. It is the French officer, who realizes that the day is lost to his cause. The baron is gone. He battles desperately the shallow line that has crept over the man's face, and he knows the duel is already decided. For the first time perhaps in his life, the Russian feels the cold clutch of fear at his heart. Once a man allows this feeling to come over him in a duel, his chances are gone. At the same time, eyes converge in just about a line between the two. The only sane course is a line between, cautious and wide-awake, ready to do his best and leave the rest.

It becomes apparent that the baron weakens. His defense is no longer the marvelous one he put up with Mynheer Joe continued the right hand movement. These flashes from the south side dazzle him. He has never been drilled to meet the attack of a left-handed swordsman, and finds his brain unable to successfully cope with the new problems thus suddenly presented for solution.

The baron is lost. He might still save himself by springing back and suddenly refusing to continue the engagement with a man who has such a wonderful advantage over him, in that his left arm is as dextrous as his right.

Perhaps such a thought flashes into the mind of the Russian; he is human, and life is sweet to him; but he does not take advantage of the idea. Pride rises against it. He comes from a race that would meet death rather than appear a coward.

So he battles on, doing his best to longer hopes to assault in turn—his arm is too tired for that. He suffers excruciating pain every time he makes a move. More than once can Mynheer Joe, if he chooses, drive his blade through the body of his foe. He lets the chances slip by; perhaps the time may come when he will regret this mercy, but he does not like to have the blood of a white man on his hands.



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At last the opportunity he looks for comes; there is a quick movement, a sudden cry, and the sword of the American protrudes through the right arm of the baron at the shoulder. Lord Carmorgan has been avenged with the weapon he handled in vain!

### CHAPTER XV.

With another quick movement the American withdraws his sword and steps back a pace to avoid any punishment, but the baron is in no condition to deal such. He sinks back, and only that the French captain springs forward and catches the baron in his arms he must fall in a heap.

There is no sign of fainting, only exhaustion. He stands there, sustained in part by his second, looking at the first man in all the world who has proved his master, and the gleam of those eyes can be termed nothing less than diabolical.

Mynheer Joe leans on his sword and coolly surveys his antagonist. Then he calls for a match and applies it to the cigar which he has held between his lips all this while. It is evident that he has no fear of the future. The tableau remains unbroken for perhaps a full minute.

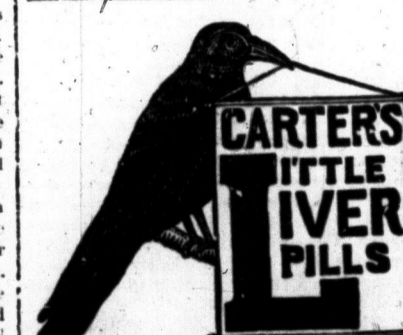
"Time!" says Mr. Grimes, clearly. Mynheer Joe, still smoking calmly, elevates his sword. The plucky baron makes a move to follow suit, when his second, the French captain, throws himself between.

"Mon Dieu! You would not finish this affair with murder, comrades? It was agreed that a disabling wound would end it. What served him so well is now almost as useless as a dead mallet. You will call it quits, or I shall offer myself his substitute!" he cries with commendable enthusiasm and pluck, since he knows he is no match for the Yankee.

"On one condition," returns Mr. Grimes, who also produces and lights a cigar, while the irrepressible Sandy is scribbling away for dear life in shorthand at the rate of a thousand words a minute, more or less.

"Name it, monsieur." "The baron provoked this duel by an insulting allusion to the American flag. To be Continued.

The thinker can die intestate, his heritage is never lost. Nobody loves darkness, but many of us prefer twilight to high noon. To know our ignorance is already a light in our darkness. The pedant talks to a child as if he were a man, to a man as if he were a child.



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