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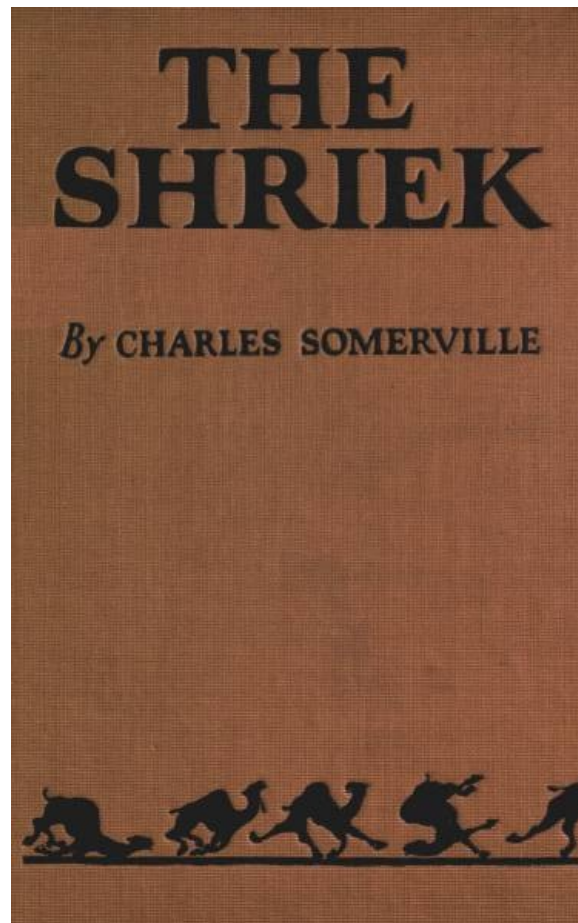
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHRIEK: A SATIRICAL BURLESQUE ***



THE SHRIEK
By CHARLES SOMERVILLE



**MISS VERBEENA MAYONNAISE IN ALL HER WONDROUS BOYISH
GRACE AND BEAUTY.**

THE SHRIEK

A Satirical Burlesque

BY
CHARLES SOMERVILLE

With illustrations
BY THE AUTHOR



NEW YORK
W. J. WATT & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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THE SHRIEK

CHAPTER I

“**A**RE you comin’ to the dawncin’, Lady Speedway?” asked the American in his best transatlantic liner accent.

“Most decidedly not!”

Mind you, this answer from Lady Speedway meant red lights ahead.

At the Hotel Biscuit she had the authority of a traffic policeman as to whom were who as well as what was what regarding the foreign colony tirelessly wasting its time on the verge of the tawny Sahara.

She was the Field Marshal of the Front Porch Knitting Needle Hussars, nicknamed “Hussies.”

Her approbation was olive oil; her discountenance prickly heat.

“Of course,” she added, “while recognizing that expatiation does not include brevity, one may not stand as I do now—in the soft light of the balcony and well off the main scene, I hope you observe—without declaring one’s self aggressively out of sympathy with the maddeningly awful expedition of which this dance is the insolubly idiotic inauguration.

“To give my opinion concisely, plainly, briefly, without ratiocinations, fulminations, obscurations, diversions, digressions or nuances, I go on record as saying that this flapper, Verbeena Mayonnaise,—the absurd chit—is impossible!”

“O, me lady!”

“Yes, I am. And that’s more than Verbeena Mayonnaise will find herself if she insists on carrying on in this matter.

“A lone girl, crossing the desert with only native camel drivers and servants in attendance! Chaperoned only by her hand luggage! The idea is rhapsodically rancid!

“The rash creature is simply throwing her good name to the American Sunday supplements and Margot Asquith at ‘ome.”

The American trembled.

"Not," said Lady Speedway letting out a few buckles in her necklace, "that I'll need to take any sleeping powders over that feature of the affair. But its effect on the Continent! The puncture it is bound to give British prestige!



LADY SPEEDWAY, WHO HAD THE AUTHORITY OF A TRAFFIC POLICEMAN AS TO SOCIAL MATTERS AT THE HOTEL BISCUIT.

"We English cannot be too careful of our 'h's' and this mad girl picks the Sahara!

"I think only of what *La Vie Parisienne* will have to say about it and I blush all over. In this gown you will, I think, be able to see most of it."

"O, come, Lady Speedway!"

"Where to?"

"I mean it's not quite as bad as all that! In planning this lone desert trip Verbeena may be doing something on the brink of the very-very, but," said the American stoutly, "one has to consider the jolly queer childhood circumstances of the ripping little rotter."

"My dear man, unless I've had a crack of amnesia don't you suppose I know positively that the entire Mayonnaise outfit was designed as dressing for a nut salad?"

"Indeed?"

"Rather! But mark my words, if she persists in this scandalous venture she'd best make her explanations in Arabic when she gets back. Her story will sound a bit garish in English I fancy! A single gel—a flapper—amid a flock of males Orientally disposed! Why——"

Drawing her wrap around her as far as it would go, Lady Speedway shook her dependent chins vigorously and departed.

"Oh, my word and tosh!" exclaimed the American. "Old scandal sprinkler!"

"Good heavens!" cried his phlegmatic British companion, "isn't it true how one misses one's opportunities? Here I've known Verbeena Mayonnaise all her life and never a breath of scandal has touched her!"

"In the first place, you know, Verbeena isn't a mere human girl. She had an uncle who was an old pig, her father was a balmy bloater and her brother is an ass!"

"O, I say, really?" asked the American, fingering the English tailor's label on his clothing and looking sharply into the ballroom. "Whereas she herself was clearly meant for a boy and was changed at the last moment. She looks like a boy in skirts, a damned pretty boy—and a damned haughty one."

"I falter," said the Englishman courteously, "at an attempt to think of a boy no matter how damned pretty he might be, looking haughty in skirts. But have it your own way, old dear. However, please remember the handicap that Lady Speedway has taken on me and don't interrupt in the matter of these Mayonnaises. Why, I was brought up right next to 'em, as it were, and——"

"An odd streak in the family?"

"Streak? A psychopathic rainbow, old dear!

"Her father, Sir John Mayonnaise and his wife were so passionately devoted that they had two children born nineteen years apart.

"The first was Lord Tawdry. You've seen him?"

"O, quite."

"There was discouragement for a devoted couple if you like!

"Then when Verbeena was born her mother died immediately.

"Ten seconds later Sir John grasped a big pistol and blew his brains somewhere or other. Nobody criticized the act of Sir John save as to the size of the pistol. Least of all he who is now Lord Tawdry."

"There was no suicide clause in Sir John's insurance policy, I take it?"

"What a sharp devil you are! Exactly. And one doesn't blame Tawd really for what followed regarding Verbeena. That is to say, he turned down about fifty female advisers and decided to bring Verbeena up as a Johnny instead of a Mildred. Can you conceive?"

"Not easily."

"It was less trouble—it wouldn't, you know, take up so much of his time. He needed all that for training up on bridge and American poker in order to conserve the old patrimony thing."

"Brought her up just as a boy?"

"Like a bally nipper! Quite. Ridin', wrestlin', boxin', boatin', fightin'—wherever she might be duly confident of victory—jumpin', runnin', skatin', skeepin', golfin', gamblin'—er—"

"No sex at all?"

"Had she any the little dear must have wrestled with it long ago and lost."

"Ah," said the American, "that would account for her sang Freud."

"O, indeed, I assure you, cold as a fish."

"She probably feels the void?"

"Sir?"

"Figures the hot sands of the desert may warm her up a bit."

"Frapjous! And yet you see, she goes alone! What in the world her idea is I'm sure I—*look*—there's young Butternut after her now! A good lad but not, I think, quite clear above. Really you know he can't be. For surely must he know that all Verbeena inherited from her father was the pistol Sir John shot himself with. Although, of course, she shares with her brother, Tawdry, the same damned haughty luck at bridge. These two things and a sterling uppercut is all she owns and yet he would marry her!"

"You'd think he'd have a Butternut," said the American shamelessly, although, after due explanation, the Englishman broke into hilarious laughter.

"You mean, he hadn't best? I quite agree with you."

They stood with looks of mild intelligence on their cosmopolitanly caustic countenances at Lord Tawdry and his sister, Verbeena, as they sat predominantly on the platform of the ballroom acting as host and hostess with tremendous *haute monde de flair*.

Lord Tawdry was six feet two in height, though seated, and half a foot wide and he wore an eight-pound black mustache to show that regardless of Verbeena's curiously trained character, there was nothing ambisexual about himself.

His courtesy was so inbred that he kept looking the company over as if he wished they'd all go home and let him go to bed. His sleek head would drop forward sleepily from time to time but always bob up like the balloon it possibly perhaps was maybe.

The distinguished nobleman was, moreover, an awful tramp at wearing a monocle. It was dropping out of his eye every few minutes keeping six servants busy catching it and putting it back. Frequently they took a mean advantage and slapped it back.

Verbeena, you betcher, was different from her brother despite all that had otherwise been done for and to her. Anybody could see she was violently alive, that she had verve to the crescendo of the fluorescent.



LORD TAWDRY, FROM A PORTRAIT BY HEVVINS IN THE ANCESTRAL CASTLE AT MAYONNAISE-ON-LETTY'S.

Strangely enough, she was smaller than her brother. But she had a pair of shoulders did Verbeena and her ball gown revealed the ripple of the steel muscles on her young arms.

Straddling her chair on the platform she kicked up her heels in her boyish, athletic manner and snapped a smoking cigarette into the air every once in a while, catching it by the lighted end in her firm, proud, scornful, obstinate, determined, appealing, impulsive, unsatisfied sweet mouth.

Twice she missed and set fire to her skirt, but what did this boyish, lovely creature care about a skirt?

Her eyes were marvelous. They were crossed between a sea green and a pond blue but her black eyebrows were obviously alike and offered strange contrast to the loose, red, bobbed curls she wore, clubbed about her ears.

In the course of training her Lord Tawdry had always attended to the style in which she wore her hair.

In the company at the Hotel Biscuit dance all the men dropped their partners, even if they weren't their wives, and trooped toward Verbeena, an international galaxy of adorers comprising Scotch, Irish, Spanish, Scandinavians, Malays, Canadians, Moabites and—well, that will be about enough—but toward all of them who pleaded, some with twanging guitars, others with ukeleles and one with a harmonica for a chance to clasp her boyish beauty in the ardor of a kicky dance, Miss Mayonnaise had but one insouciant, petulant reply:

"Aw, g'wan. Fade!"

Young Butternut stood nearby with his heart in his eyes. He was nodding joyfully and murmuring softly for her ear alone:

"Attaboy!"

"I say, chappie, what are you cooing about?" finally demanded Miss Mayonnaise.

"Please, old thing, a word alone out on the balcony," Butternut abjectly amplified.

"You've a jolly cheek," retorted Verbeena lighting another cigarette. "And yet?" she suddenly arose and knocked the pleasing young man for a few feet with a merry clap on the ear. "I'll take you on. I like you, Butternut. You remind me so much of your sister."

She pulled out a guinea and started matching him as they passed from the ballroom and out upon the balcony under the ambient, silver light of the romantic moon which was, indeed, shining.

Two minutes later and from the direction of this same window out of which they had passed—you remember, harmlessly matching guineas—sounded a wild, prolonged and subtly syncopated ladylike screech.

A hush came over the crowded room. Regular ladies huddled fearsomely against shaky-kneed, cosmopolitan daredevils while craven waiters went out to see what the trouble was. Somebody tore the hotel doctor away from his absinthe drip and rushed him out too.

A solemn procession returned.

Frightened faces drew apart to let it pass. Frightened eyes gazed upon a white stretcher borne in the center of it. On it was the prone figure of a person whose face was also white.

The figure recumbent was boyish.

But it was not that of Verbeena Mayonnaise. The white face showed the delicate, feminine profile of Bertie Butternut!

In the frame of the balcony window stood another boyish figure. Sure enough this was Verbeena in all her laddie-like grace and poised with a seeming boyish indifference.

But it could be seen by those who knew her at all that Miss Mayonnaise was perturbed. For at one grab she had emptied the contents of her slim gold case and was moodily smoking six cigarettes at once.

Verbeena returned to her rooms and undressed herself.

She couldn't keep a maid. They always ended by calling her "Sir."

At this connecting point or juncture, there came a knock on the door and Verbeena called in her fresh, young baritone:

"Who the dickens is this and what do you want at this hour?"

"A note for you, monsieur—pardon, mademoiselle."

"O, stick it under the door," she replied.

But when she had looked at the note she gurgled:

"Zingo! But this will put Tawdry in a bait! He will be furious at me! As if I should worry! He forgets I'm twenty-one and my punch is getting better every day."

She nodded stoutly.

"Brother Tawd has clubbed my curls about my ears for the last time. And I had no heart for this scheme of his! But the other stunt—the desert, freedom, kicking along the old Sahara man enough for any emergency and my own little notion of what may come of it—those things for Verbeena!"

She looked again at the note in her hand.

"God bless Butternut," said Verbeena Mayonnaise.

She ran to the balcony, leaned far over and kicked up her heels and burst into wild and rippling laughter at certain thoughts of Tawdry and of Butternut which flooded beneath her carmine cap of hair, until Lord Tawdry looking through the adjoining lattice said sternly:

"See here, young fellow, me lad, cut that!"

"O, cut your throat, you big mooch," she replied haughtily. "I'm an icicle myself but I know a grand moon when I see one!"

But she wasn't looking at the moon at all. She was leaning out as far as she could and peering on the balcony below where she thought she had seen a sign of white drapery. But when she looked again it was gone.

Had she only known!

If she had she'd have known it was Lady Speedway stretching her ear to try and find out why a messenger was going at so late an hour to the room of a single girl like Miss Mayonnaise.

But as it was, Verbeena squatted on the balcony rail lighting cigarette after cigarette as she looked out into the market place where the moon and her nostrils told her was the caravan she had engaged from Musty Ale for her wild, mad adventure.

If Butternut had acted differently—but Butternut hadn't!

Dear little Butternut, sweet little Butternut!

She had his note to prove it conclusively to Lord Tawdry. To-morrow would see her plunging forth into the yellow wilderness, the vast places, the majestic silences, the—

Verbeena felt a sudden, mad boyish temptation to shoot her cigarette stump into the eye of a native sleeping at the foot of the verandah. But, very unusual with her in such cases, she refrained. It might start some trouble and she didn't want that to happen now.

Nothing must prevent her journey upon the desert!

From her window she looked out toward it, so wonderful, so superb, so exquisite, weird and beautiful.

Exactly, she told herself, like a big, black smudge.

But she cuddled in bed with one knee up to her neck in cute boyish fashion, laughing softly at the remembrance of another time when she had popped a cigarette stump into the eye of a London bobby from the top of a 'bus.

And such a merry fight as she had put up when he had yanked her down!

She was wearing her usual boy's clothes and when she had given her real name at the station, the policeman wouldn't believe it of her and the matron had resigned rather than carry the investigation further.

Verbeena gave her boyish head a twist or two on the pillow and then she slept. Two weird sounds were in her ears as she dropped off. One was a queer, wild, melancholy song. The other was the snores of Lord Tawdry, equally weird, equally melancholy, equally wild.

Yet she slept.

But an hour later awoke.

Verbeena untied her long, knotted eyelashes and peered about.

Had—she seen something?

The moon was all there, the famous, well-known Biscuit moon, lighting the room riotously.

Yet she saw nothing. She took a sharp peek around. As her state of consciousness emerged from the nebulous condition of soft pitch and congealed to the concrete of a highway, Verbeena said softly to herself:

"I could kick myself for a goal if I didn't see somp'n. Mystic it was, white, thrilling, strange——"

"Meow!"

Verbeena rushed for the balcony but the cat took the rail in a streak.

"Bally thing!"

Again on the still white night she heard that weird song with its slurred but insistent staccato *expressione*, ancient as the days of the Pharaohs, the melancholy, passionate Katsbemerri.

But there would be no cats in the desert. Only nice, gentle, cute little, wriggly sandworms. No big boob brother, Tawdry. No Knitting Needle Hussars.

Out there, beyond, swallowed up in that dear black smudge she had seen from the balcony her soul would wave its Stars and Stripes of freedom and move grandly in the palpitant sunlight upon the yellow linoleum of the mighty desert!

And she would have for company kickin', bitin' horses and daredevil men, magnificent, virile, strenuous nomads of the wild silences and the silver moons!

Only under no circumstances were they—any one of them—to be allowed to go too far!

Camaraderie—yes, in her boyish way she would offer them that. But beyond that——

"Remember, Verbie," she told herself. "As regards such bally things you are an icicle—an icicle."

She shivered.

"An icicle!"

She drew the covers swiftly up to her chin—up to the loose, red curls that brother Tawdry so loved to club about her ears.

CHAPTER II

THE promised send-off of Verbeena from the Biscuit Hotel had been enthusiastic.

"Very much so," had said Lady Speedway, the mean thing.

At dawn Musty Ale sent ahead the procession of baggage bearers, the lumbering camels, all of them Verbeena thought showing great facial resemblance to Lady Speedway and hoped some day to tell her so.

But otherwise she just adored them.

"See," said she to Lord Tawdry who had surprised her by getting up, "the darling camels how they chew and chew and chew and are never satisfied!"

At dawn also on many of the private balconies of the Biscuit Hotel were seen veiled faces. They were veiled

by lattices and lace curtains—each with one eye out.

It was the espionage of the Knitting Needle Hussars.

“There she goes, the bold minx,” murmured Mrs. the Honorable General the Earl Dumpydale.

“She means to do it—to cross the desert alone! O, shameless!” openly cried the Duchess Pyllboxe-Beauchamp.

“She’d better keep her fingers crossed at the same time!”

This from that old Lady Speedway, of course.

“Ah,” murmured in the next balcony the Hon. Maude Tetherington, a cute spinster of sixty who would remember you in her will if you told her she didn’t look it, “Ah!” and it was as if she were murmuring to herself.

“Once I dreamed of riding in the desert and of a great, handsome Arab pursuing me and——” it was, as stated, as if she were speaking to herself but you bet Lady Speedway got it.

“And what?” Lady Speedway demanded with a cold look in her eye.

“There was no offense to the proprieties,” said the Hon. Maude with trembling accents. “I assure you I woke up in time.”

The Hon. Maude drew her head within and snapped the lattices of her window shut.

But a little later as she stood at her mirror tacking on her front curls she paused, hammer in hand, to stare back in the direction she had last seen Lady Speedway.

“But there have been times when I have greatly wished I hadn’t—so there!”

And she stuck out her tongue, nor’, nor’west due east toward Speedway.

Thus amid a magnificent display of good-wishes, Verbeena Mayonnaise set out to satisfy her soul longings upon the somewhat dusty Sahara, under the capable guidance of Musty Ale and his equally musty camels and his mustard colored men.

Lord Tawdry had stood in his balcony shaking his finger at Verbeena and declaring if she dared set out he would be down directly and cane her severely, but she answered pertly:

“Rot, old chap!”

As Verbeena rode ahead with Musty Ale, Lord Tawdry started in pursuit on a camel which, however, refused to hump itself worthily, and although Lord Tawdry kept crying out to Verbeena: “O, I say now—it won’t do! Do you hear me? Really this sort of thing simply isn’t done!” it was not until Musty Ale’s caravan arrived at Oasis No. 1 that Lord Tawdry was able to catch up.

But as soon as he had fallen off his camel and readjusted his monocle, he picked up a riding whip and chased Verbeena up a palm tree.

“You sickening ass!” our laddiebuck—I mean heroine called to him, “you just drop that whip and I’ll come down and show you who’s who in Sahara!”

Action wasn’t Lord Tawdry’s strong point anyway except with a good deck of cards.

“Verbeena,” he said, “come down peacefully and we’ll have it out in talk.”

“O, you Hergesheimer!” smiled she, leaping to the ground, lighting a cigarette in her descent.

“Now look here, Tawdry, what’s the idea of your trailing me this way? My mind’s made up. You’ll have simply missed a whole day at bridge and you know you can’t afford it. I’m going to put in a month—a full month on the Sahara. I’ve the sand so why shouldn’t I?”

Verbeena drew herself up and shot a cigarette snag squarely into a lizard’s eye. Pardon—I forgot to mention the lizard was twisting in the brilliant sunshine on a nearby opalescent rock.

“Kid,” said Lord Tawdry, not unkindly, “cut the proud boyish beauty stuff for half a shake, if you please. One must get down to brass tacks once in a while and just now the situation is such that I feel as if I were sitting on the points of a million.”

“Talk reasonably,” said Miss Mayonnaise almost effeminately, “and I will do what little I can to understand you.”

“Well then, why this sudden interruption in our plans? The idea was that I was to chuck myself to America and go to Newport or some other nearby spot like Los Angeles and pluck for myself a wife somewhere between twenty to forty in age and forty to sixty in millions of American—er—buckoes—I think the bounders call ‘em.”

“And I,” nodded Verbeena, “was to go along and subtly instruct the victim that it wasn’t necessary in good society to perform so many fancy tricks as Americans do with their forks and that in acquiring an English accent one didn’t say fawncy for fancy. And I was to tell her how sensitive you were about money—about ever

being left without any."

"Bright chap, you are, Verbeena! It was a jolly plan. But when Butternut and his five thousand pun' a year came along I was willing to sacrifice myself, was I not?"

"I was willing," said Lord Tawdry, "to postpone America and stick to bridge until you'd a chance to snap the bally, wedding manacles on the pretty youth. And everything seemed moving perfectly until late last night. His eyes were then shining like a pair of motor car lamps with love for you.

"I saw him beg you to go out upon the balcony.

"And next a scream!

"Butternut is carried in on a stretcher and you stroll back looking like an incense burner.

"I seek to see Butternut. I cannot. I seek explanation from you——"

"If only you hadn't begun with that usual stuff of clubbing my curls, Tawdry!—I just made up my mind to let you remain in suspense a while. But now I'll tell all!

"I tried to play fair, Tawdry, tried to play fair," said Verbeena earnestly, "like the square little fellow I am."

"Did Butternut ask you to marry him out there on the balcony last night?"

"He did."

"Well then?"

"Tawdry, old chap, I overplayed my hand. I threw myself into his arms cooing 'Bertie, dearest Bertie' in as ladylike a manner as my bringing up allows. And then he hugged me. And to show him I really loved him, don't you know, I hugged him back. I just let myself go, old dear!"

"To be sure—quite right—under the circumstances."

"Stupid! I broke three of his ribs."

"My Gawd!"

"Not so amazing after all," said Verbeena with a glint of boyish pride.

"And he—since—he——?"

"At three-thirty one and a half by my wrist watch—the only piece of jewelry, by the way, you've left me—I received, Lord Tawdry, this communication from the hospital cot of the Honorable Bertram Butternut!"

Out of the hip pocket of her smart riding breeches, Verbeena flashed a paper on her brother.



THE HONORABLE BERTIE BUTTERNUT, WHOSE PASSION WAS CRUSHED WITH HIS RIBS.

As he read it, he clutched wildly at his long black mustaches for support.

"Dear old Verb,' the Hon. Bertie had written, 'I think you will be too much of a good fellow to hold me to my rash words of last night.

"The mater and I talked it over at my bedside while the plastercasts were being fashioned.

"Though the tears blot this letter yet through their splashes, I cannot but see that mamma's advice is good. Better, the mater says, a broken heart than a succession of fractured ribs!

“And myself looking into the future I cannot bear to think of my children beholding a father who is nothing but a cracked and shattered pulp.

“Mother begs you to be generous and says she is more than willing to be generous in her turn, desiring me to say she will be most glad amply to finance your contemplated trip into the desert. And even beyond.

“I hope, dear, we may ever remain pals. After all it will be nicer when we meet—will it not—just to shake hands?

“Brokenly,

“BERTIE.”

“O, but I say, you know,” said Lord Tawdry, “this could be patched up.”

“Only Bertie.”

“Rot. You could hold him.”

“Not if he saw me coming. The boy is the best sprinter at Oxford. Anyway—”

Verbeena regarded her brother through the sweeping black lashes of her impenetrably palpable orbs, considering carefully that the fulminations between them had reached a clangorous climax of the neurotically nepotic.

This was, indeed, the sort of look she gave him and she was a long while at it.

He tried to stare back at her with the intolerability of the inhumanly inoculated. But he found it fundamentally difficult and dropped his eye-glass fifty-four times in the course of the construction of this cryptic attitude.

Verbeena laughed. She would put the skids under him. It was time—high time. Had he not already set his face, such as it was, against the aspirations of her innermost urge? Hadn't he, because of ignorance of the illuminative interior expansiveness of her reason for desiring to hit forth into the Sahara sided with Old Hen Speedway and that whole crew of clacking character assassins and killjoys?

And after himself training her to be a roughneck too?

Now he would seek to discourage her thrilling *tour de hopoff* into the Sahara!

Without knowing her very good reason for wanting to do it!

Pretending concern in her, had he not really joined the camp of her enemies and detractors, the *volte face* thing!

Of course, if the Ole Walrus knew! If she were to confide the ultimate purpose of her crystal soul and stalactitic heart to him, spill the beans of what was on her mind—it would be different. He'd cling to her very stirrup and hop along clamoring for his piece of the pickings.

But she could see he was passé, declassé, a prune pit in every way.

The perfumed gold mines of Newport and Palm Beach were his best berry-picking grounds.

To take him with her—impossible! It would not only confuse the issue but crab the act. Absolutely. She knew that in the romantic but in conclusion pre-eminently profitable rumble she had in mind, Lord Tawdry could only prove a hang-nail, that is to say a detriment to the scheme.

She saw him readjust his monocle twelve times and yawn six and knew he was going to say something. Not much—he never did. But—

“Blast it, Verbeena, you little rotter, what the deuce I say, you know, is all this bally, bloomin', sand-eatin' desert journey about anyway? I say, my dear chappie, what *is* the idea?”

“None of your damned biznai, old thing. And there you have it.”

“But I should really so like to know.”

“Tosh!”

“But all the Mollie Jawags back at the Biscuit will jazz me awf'ly about permitting you to tack off alone this way with—” Lord Tawdry waved his hand toward Musty Ale and his turbaned crew.

“As if it would really worry you,” said Miss Mayonnaise with a very unboyish giggle.

“It doesn't, I confess, since Bertie Butternut's mother is financing you. And yet—no, I can't allow it. I couldn't face it. I couldn't lift me head if anything—er—anything, let us say, Oriental happened.”

“Well, you are seldom able to lift your head after ten in the morning anyway,” said Verbeena. “Let us waste no more time, my beloved brother. Get into mental condition with yourself quickly and know that for the next month a kid of the desert am I. Ain't I twenty-one now? Got a vote that's just as good as yours at 'ome, and a punch that I think is better.

“Nothing stops me—Tawd, nothing, old top. So take a spin for yourself back to the Biscuit. And whatever thinking you do you can start all over again from there.”

Verbeena paused, astonished at herself.

She hadn't lighted a cigarette for forty seconds!

She got one going immediately and as she puffed voraciously at her fag watched with keen pleasure the furrows gather on her brother's small patch of sun-kissed brow.

Within two minutes, quite suddenly for him, Lord Tawdry drew a revolver.

"Not to—to hint nothin', Verbie," he said "but you are to come back to the hotel with me directly. Directly, do you hear?"

He looked at her impressively and shot at a camel. He hit a palm tree.

"I say you know!" he said and stared at his weapon stupidly. "I never——"

He shot again. This time at the palm tree. But the camel neatly ducked.

Verbeena smiled and started another cigarette. She went over to the camel, rubbed its clever nose, brought out her gold-lined case and fed the camel a ciggy too.

Then she turned toward her brother—turned with boyish abandon and hauteur, of course—and spoke. Speaking she said:

"That will be about all from you, Tawd. Pack your gat."

Montrose, her brother's valet, an unexpectedly, entirely unusual perfect servant, came along the Sahara bearing two plates of soup. It was the appointed dining hour for Lord Tawdry. Regardless of what he might do as to debts, he insisted on prompt feeding.

"Drop that soup," said Verbeena sternly. "Your master isn't staying to dinner and the soup will not stain the sand.

"Instead, Montrose," continued Verbeena, "get out the fine comb, for this day finds your master with more sand than soup in his hanging gardens.

"Afterwards tie his shoes and put on his sunbonnet for Lord Tawdry is going day-day."

"Yes, miss, thank you, miss."

"Back to the Biscuit, you understand, Montrose."

"Yes, miss; thank God, miss."

"Verbeena!"

Again Lord Tawdry clutched his pistol.

"Aw-blooeey," said Verbeena. "As long as you aim it at men I don't in the least mind. To horse, Lord Tawdry! This is my camp and you just keep out of it, do you hear?"

As her brother rode dejectedly away, his long, black mustaches of Spanish moss effect mingling with the turf on his charger's ginger-colored hump, Verbeena lit a bunch of cigarettes in his honor and let go a devilish wink at Musty Ale.

Musty's palms went up toward the heavens.

"O, Allah, witness," he chanted, his chin also pointing at the azure African sky, "be she, he or it—SOME kid!"

CHAPTER III

WHEN the last floating ends of Lord Tawdry's face-banners had disappeared over the horizon, Musty Ale made bold to appear before Verbeena, who with eyes crossed was dipping deeply into a highball of Scotch which tended to denature the Sahara.

"Mademoiselle, it is time that we left, by Allah," he said.

"It isn't by my watch," she replied, frowning. "Also, Musty, I am no longer to be called mademoiselle. After this mention me as Queen."

"Sultana?"

"I don't like that fruit-cracker word either, my good man. *Queen!* And don't forget it. And don't look cross at me in your mysterious Oriental way. You might as well get used to it. Perhaps I'm not a queen yet but," as she filled her three slim gold cigarette cases, "I soon will be. *Queen.* Understand?"

"%—&&&&*&*(*)#***#*# — —!!!!." muttered Musty in his native tongue. (A darned barefaced queen in

britches! May the Prophet part me from my whiskers!)”

“What, sirrah?”

“Allah witness, I said nothing.”

“Keep right on doing that,” said Verbeena.

Her words came in a tone of authority which added to the fact that she accurately snapped a live fag end at his right eye, caused Musty to sink through his jelab or Sahara overcoat.

But after he had dug himself a shell hole in the desert, he said from deeply beneath his head wrappings:

“O, Queen, if we don’t start soon we are sure to miss perhaps some of the most select outgoing caravans. By the fringe of the Prophet—but we surely will!”

“The noise you are now making is entirely different,” commented Verbeena.

She arose and clicked her fingers over her left shoulder, a trick she had learned from a French officer from Alabama while trilling the cubes. “Let’s go!”

At last she was out on the desert on her very own! Out on the desert with her wild heart, her strangely stirring impulses, her uncharted passions, the mad caprices of her swift reactions from pants to skirts, from skirts to pants, though nothing like vice-versa had even touched her.

Free—*free*—FREE!

Of everything but Musty Ale, sixty-two mounted Sahara Siwashes at 9 centimes a day, eight exquisitely fragrant camels, the bright, tangible odor of garlic from the broiling meats of the camp fire and her faithful aura of mauve fag smoke wreathing her pruned, red locks, an aura that was kept going by the plumes which ever shot from the wide flanges of her flaming nostrils in symbolism of the fire seething beneath the icicles draping her ruby heart.

As a boy she was interesting.

But as a girl—Time would tell, for Time is no gentleman.

She thought of her purity and dug the spurs viciously into her indignant horse.

She remembered Bertie Butternut without a qualm. When his arms had been about her it had stirred no instinct in her but that to fight back. She perfectly understood that as to love and its languors, its high spots, its dumps, she was a mere unbaked bun.

She realized that she knew nothing of the other sex beyond the men’s underclothing advertisements.

And they had never impressed her.

She had better muscles herself than any the artists seemed able to draw.

Indeed, were these the pictures of men?

She remembered the sums she had received from time to time to pose for posters of young gentlemen wearing new style collars.

“Pooey!” exclaimed Verbeena. And lit her 18,462nd pill or cigarette.

But these Arabs! Ah, there was something to them! She felt that they had something more than bridge-whist, golf and billiards under their turbans, something more than mere hop-Scotches of the heart.

They smoked as many cigarettes as herself—nearly.

They glowered like devils and jammed their horses around and kicked the camels about with a refreshing brutality.

They scratched themselves so fearlessly!

They breathed garlic gloriously!

And they sang—always. And always the same tune to the *simp-simp-simp* of their two string ukeleles with the palm twig picks. It was beautiful to Verbeena that same, same tune, grateful to her ear that liquid, languorous *simp-simp-simp*, an ear as exquisitely tone deaf as that of any good, up-to-date composer.

Then suddenly black specks danced before her eyes!

Was it liver?

No!

By Jove, it was a caravan on the horizon of the jolly old Sahara!

As it finally came right up close the vim of Verbeena’s interest grew somewhat vitiated. There were twenty camels and a big bunch of horsemen, and proximity proved that they were bathed in sunlight alone. Several of the camels halted and knelt and a dozen figures jounced down from the palanquins whose curtains hadn’t been changed that Spring. The figures she knew to be those of Sahara ladies.

"How about this outfit, Queen?" asked Musty Ale.

"Nope—don't care about 'em."

"Good as any other, your majesty."

"That's what I get for paying you a flat rate for this job!" cried Verbeena fiercely, truculently. "You want to have it over as quickly as possible. Why, that caravan is going straight back to Biscuit! You know very well that it's a month for me in the desert or nothing. I went all over it with you about six thousand times. Nothing under a month will do and it will not be until we have traveled six days deep on this old sandcarpet, Musty, you brass-faced blurb, before I'll begin looking about for more permanent arrangements. What a ninny I was to have paid you two dollars in advance!"

O'er the swart features of the under Shereef shot a spasm of anger. But he dodged a cigarette butt with fine skill and masked his feelings under glinting eyes.

"Give my compliments to that grimy-looking outfit," said Verbeena tartly, "and let's step along."



MUSTY ALE, A LOW, UNSCRUPULOUS FELLOW.

"#%&) \$''''&&%***'!!!!" (Chesty Redhead!) murmured Musty Ale when he was well out of range.

Suddenly a white figure, big as a circus tent and looking the same, detached itself from the other roughriders, whirled up to Musty and the black whiskers of this new demon parted widely showing a very superior set of sharply pointed white fangs.

"Hollerwoller, hippolo, jazzamarabi zop zing!"

"I wouldn't care if you did," replied Musty promptly. "How much?"

"Eighty-six beans!" said the big feller. And before the other's eyes he bobbed a large goatskin purse which jingled.

"Marks or francs?"

"O, my well-known Allah! Better'n 'nat! American pennies! How's that hippolohit yer?"

"Gimme that bag! She's yours."

Musty Ale shoved the coin of treachery next to a half loaf of bread under his sandy jelab.

As the other wheeled his magnificent charger to spur it to a violent gallop, Musty suddenly called:

"Hup!" (Halt!)

"What?"

"She likes to be called 'Queen.'"

"And who is she that I—but thanks for the tip. Allah keep the fleas off you, me lad."

"Thanks yourself," answered Musty, "although he never has yet."

But the white circus tent on the plunging black beastie was already far away.

CHAPTER IV

VERBEENA had thought when Musty Ale held back to have a talk with the large gentleman in the white wrappings her sulky retainer was doubtless obeying her order to tell the person who seemed to be the Admiral Beattie of the desert ships, that in the matter of her joining his particular caravan there would be nothing the whatsoever doing.

She was very much annoyed therefore to discover that this man in the prominently large turban had evidently refused to take Musty's word for it and meant to talk the matter over with her in person. It would seem so. His black horse—Verbie could see it was no dog—was doing about 1,59-1/2 in her direction.

There might be a whole lot that Verbeena did not know about the other sex.

But she was fully cognizant what Arabic bargaining meant. Starting to dicker at one in the afternoon of a perfect day in June one continued to the following Shrove Tuesday.

They always had as much to say about a shilling purchase as Joseph Conrad did about Lord Jim.

We who have witnessed the scene of tragic treachery against her on the part of Musty Ale in conspiracy with the hard rider now abaft the oasis in the rapidly diminishing offing, must tremble now for Verbeena Mayonnaise. Although even we cannot as yet suspect the half of what is coming to her.

And of all persons Verbeena!

So unprepared, untrained and sure to be boyishly baffled at finding herself the object and victim of a large consignment of fiery, wild, untamed, hectic and rrrrrred-hot desert passion now being swiftly shipped to her on horseback.

The sun was beating relentlessly on the roof of Verbeena's white helmet and she did not propose to wait and let this big goof attempt to sell her any fake rugs, bangles, beads or poor caravan accommodations.

She gave the spurs, therefore, right heartily to her beloved steed and he proceeded to cut down a large section of the Sahara ahead.

Let Musty and his gang follow. Unquestionably this person on his way toward her would have sufficient Oriental subtlety to take the hint. He would doubtless rein up his horse and save oats.

But—there was a loud crack of a whip behind her.

Verbeena was very much astonished when her noble Berb, Al Dobbin, stopped nearly dead in his tracks, stood up on his hind legs and did some waltz steps.

During the whirl she noticed that the big white chap was still coming toward her.

She gave Al Dobbin the spurs again and once more he moved into a fast gallop over the dunes.

Again the whip cracked behind her! And again! (Two cracks.)

Al Dobbin stood on his hind legs neatly and pawed gracefully.

Plainly he was bidding for a lump of sugar.

And all she could possibly have offered him was a cigarette!

Once more Verbeena spurred him to a start.

"A blooming circus creature," she gasped, "and in pursuit must be his trainer. And where the deuce is Musty? He must have stolen this fancy ballet horse from the husky white ulster now so rapidly approaching! The rotter! I suspected Musty from the first but didn't care to mention it to Tawdry. Wisht I had! Still, when one adventures, why—"

Crack! Crack! Crack! (Three cracks.)

Immediately Al Dobbin knelt to pray.

Verbeena, not knowing the signals, smacked her helmet hard against the desert of Sahara, matted her curls and stretched motionless, a lighted cigarette in her hand.

One could read a symbol in its curling smoke of the fiery spirit yet existent in the lithe, young, prone, boyish body as well as the indubitable indication of an unbreakable habit.

But there was so little time for reading anything, although it must be admitted that the light was excellent for even an Edison cannot vie with that real thing which you get on the Sahara.

But to get back to Verbeena. And high time too!

For the big, brown devil had her! Right in his arms. Across his horse! And wrapped up in his great, long white cloak. Not any too white either.

She—already she was beginning to feel she was she—Verbeena Mayonnaise, was caught, trapped, trussed up in the folds of that white cloak of his, utterly helpless and like a week's wash!

It was horrible, awful, terrible and very uncomfortable.

Moreover, the humiliation of it was meticulously genuine.

And what could she do? Jiu jitsu she had but it wasn't worth a jitney to a person in a cocoon! By the same token all her gymnasium and other athletic perfections which had trained her fit to give Georges Carpentier or Jacques Dempsey a stiff battle now went blah.

Additionally, this big heap Arab chief that had snared her she knew—thrillingly knew—was hefty.

He was managing his fiery steed one-handed, beautifully, better than any stableyard virtuoso she had ever known at 'ome.

His other arm about her was like a hoop of steel.

Or a lobster's claw.

She felt pinched. And, in truth, she was. She was in the hands of the Shereef.

She tried to scream. But when she did so she only succeeded in eating a section of his flowing white robe.

She tried to think. But she might as well have been her brother, Tawdry.

She tried to smoke. And that was worst of all. Her arms were so encumbered she couldn't get at any of her cigarette cases.

Not that she was left entirely without tobacco. The Sahara lady-snatcher's garments rang with the odor of it.

To add to her agony, her snippy little nose smarted keenly and she knew it must be red as a beet from sunburn. And she was helpless to get out her powder puff.

Despite her manly training, the powder-puff habit was one which she had always practiced in common with all the other Cambridge girls and fellows.

Cumulatively upon these conditions of despair, she began to wonder what the deuce this bally coot meant to do with her!

One thing certain was that he was seriously, perhaps permanently upsetting her scheme, her plan, her idea for junketing forth by her lonely into the desert. Such a perfectly good plan! One that would forever end her being dependent on Lord Tawdry's luck at bridge and forever relieve her of the necessity of getting Americans at the foreign hotels to stake her at games of stud poker.

Ah—it had been no idle journey—no mere whimsy! It had been designed to bring her wealth, fame, and a glory the most transcendent of her times.

The marriage of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks had suggested it.

For had she not the pulchritude of Mary?

And girlishness could be acquired.

And had she not the athletic prowess to cut the didoes of Doug?

Thus she could go into the movies—if she could get in—like a sort of one-person band.

She could double in sex.

Perhaps draw two salaries of \$1,500,000 a week each! One lady and one gentleman salary.

How to get in? That was the question Verbeena had demanded of herself to answer. And answer it she had.

She would disappear into the desert. She would pick up with some nice caravan at a fair rate for board and mileage and stick along with it indefinitely.

She had been careful to announce all around the Biscuit that she would be gone exactly one month.

When the month was up and no Verbeena she could depend on the Knitting Needle Dearies to start their jaws awagging concerning her and run away and leave them.

The foreign correspondents would soon get going on the cable regarding the missing young, daring, delightful, ingenuous, adventurous, amazing, remarkable, willful, bewitching bobbed haired beauty of Mayfair who had recklessly essayed to navigate the Sahara without a male rudder of her own, to journey far and alone save for an escort of wicked and lowering Arabs!

As the days passed and the mystery deepened how the columns and columns would accumulate in the dailies and weeklies and on the timely topics movie films! The American papers particularly would rave.

Lord Northcliffe would begin by offering a good camera to any person finding trace of her and end by setting up a reward of 1,000,000 pun. No question of it. Hearst would offer the pick of his newspapers to any reporter who could rescue her.

But if any reporters got around her caravan it would be so easy to disguise herself. She would not even have to take off her ridin' britches. Just slip a lady jelab around her and bring one end of it up over her nose and get by.

Or if the hue and cry got the French Government so all-fired distrait that they ordered a ruthless search of the caravan harems, she had only to show up in her usual ridin' pants, paste a little blackberry jam on her lip and chin for a glossy black Oriental beard and fool 'em all.

Perhaps it would be wise to mix camel hair with the jam.

But that would be a matter to be decided upon when the emergency arose.

Of course, there might be no jam in the caravan commissary. But surely there would never be a lack of gum Arabic.

And when she, Verbeena, had thus vaulted into the top skies of notoriety, she would communicate secretly with the largest of the movie concerns.

What would they bid to star the "mystery girl of the Sahara" in a magnitudinous thriller with her own company of devil-riding, thrilling, stirring, fierce, wild, startling, arousing Arabs?

She saw herself getting a flood of checks from these sources blank of everything but signatures.

Or a procession of 2000 camels laden with the gold of the Americas if she preferred to do business that way.

"Just name your price, girlie," would inevitably be the message.

And here was this Arab rotter grabbing her around the girdle and taking her somewhere west of Suez!

And what for?

What was the idea?

Not till then did it occur to Verbeena that it might be because she was a woman. Naturally, this notion filled her with astonishment and disgust. And rage, touched most lightly with the erotic.

She got madder and madder!

Indeed, Verbeena became virtuously vibrant with a revolt virginally volcanic. Her eyes shone virescent with hatred and the tiny blue veins on her white forehead under the tawny clubbed curls became varicose.

Besides, she was getting kind of scared.

There was a nifty strangle hold she knew which, could she ever get free of that tail end of his Arabian wrapper, she would love to try out on this rough bird. Her fingers, her small, lithe, delicate, steel-like fingers, tingled at the thought.

Even if her nose was red, she determined to try and poke it out into the air. She would gather new strength and see what the chances were for coming out further. Cautiously she screwed her bobbed head about and finally, poor little snail, managed to thrust her face forward and out of the folds that were stifling her. She opened her mouth wide. She took in great gulps of air.

Ah, it was good!

But next she took in several deep gulps of sand as it arose from the flying hoofs of her captor's single footer.

Ah, not so good!

She became aware of a big, glaring face above her. How terribly it frowned!

"Duckmong, Kid, duckmong!" her captor said sternly and pushed her head back as though she was an India rubber doll.

Such was the awful strength of the man!

And then he squeezed her to him till she feared that Bertie Butternut's fate would be her own. She felt crushed to the consistency of malted milk.

Who could he be, this demon? Certainly nothing less than the local Zabysko of Biscuit. And it was marvelous the way he managed at the same time his great, big horse and herself as if she were the smallest pony of a ballet.

She didn't faint. You'd never catch Verbeena Mayonnaise doing that. But really she felt an awful lot like it!

He changed her position again. This time he hung her head down.

She looked up into his eyes. (There was no help for it.) The monster laughed at her—laughed!

He was now, she saw, not only driving the horse with one hand and holding her upside down with the other, but had inserted a cigarette into an eighteen-inch amber holder clinched in his teeth.

And then, just to show her his class, he bent low until the end of his cigarette touched the tip of her fiery little sunburned nose, lighted the cigarette and all over again he laughed at her.

“You —, —!” she cried to him with a rush of words Brother Tawdry himself, could not have excelled.

“By Allah!” he smiled back at her, “what a game little divvle!”

Not being able to get a look at her wrist watch, Verbeena then lost all sense of time. She knew only that the sun was still up and burning her nose ingloriously. But she would resist to the last pulsation of her strong, young heart this desert creature of the strangely, burning passionate orbs. They were rather nice eyes but, he would find resistance to the last recalcitrant tissue of her turbulent nature.

He might use her as a cigar lighter.

But just let him try anything else and—

CHAPTER V

THE mad, passionate ride was over about supper-time.

The next thing Verbeena’s intelligence became immersed in she was standing within a big tent brilliantly lighted by respectable old candles inside of two hanging lamps.

But she didn’t have much chance to look over these things. They hung too high.

What was solely in her mind, to faithfully reproduce its own process accurately was the thought:

“Where’s that sapadillo that brought me here?”

Right in front of her was he standing and she got a good, unfurtive look at him. Sure enough he was as big as he felt when he had her grabbed to him on horseback.

The thing that struck her immediately, stirred her curiously amidst her emotions of hitherto unknown fear and would there be a place in the tent to wash-up properly, was that his hair didn’t match. His whiskers were black, his face was really red, not brown as she saw because he had brushed some of the dust off, whilst his head hair was some kind of color or other.

Just what she couldn’t tell.

It wasn’t red and it wasn’t yellow.

Was it as of the cornflower in tassel?

She caught her breath. This was no time to become romantic. She was an icicle, she told herself, and must continue to recall that fact.

He was looking at her with burning eyes. No wonder. Her own were burning as savagely as her nose. The sand does it.

But besides he had a curiously mad and giddy gaze.

It was as if he’d caught her in bathing with her clothes on a hickory limb. And wouldn’t have the gentlemanliness, the decency to go away.

She liked it not a little bit and was so nervous she didn’t know whether to throw off her coat and start for him or button it up. She buttoned it up. She wondered why. But, of course, it was the way he was looking at her and kept looking at her. She wished she had more buttons on her coat. And that her clothing generally was fastened more firmly. His malevolent eyes had such a dismantling expression.

Certainly the burly wretch wasn’t showing any false smoke-stacks.

She could see he meant business.

And such a business!

Verbeena steadied herself on a cigarette.

“Frapjous ass!” she said yet well-knowing that her old boyish nonchalance had gone fazizz. “Who are you?”

“I am—”

Ah, the organ tones of his voice! A little gritty on account of the desert sands perhaps, but deep, thrilling, throbbing. It tickled the very roots of her clubbed curls.

Verbeena vibrated.

"I am the Sheik Amut Ben Butler!"

The name conveyed nothing to her.

She had never heard of Ben Butler.

He turned the full force of his fifty-two candle power passionut glance upon her.

"The notion of this game is," he said in his deep, devilish voice, "'Give and Take.' You give or I take!"

Verbeena immediately gave a shriek!

And she'd never done anything like that before in her life!

"Did you hear that?" she demanded tensely.

"And that!" and shrieked again.

"That's what you look like to me! A Shriek, Amut Ben Butler—it's what you are too! And a pretty loud and silly one!"

"You let me right out of here! When my big brother hears of this, he'll be out this way and kick the fol de rolls out of you! That's what'll happen. The nerve of you with your banana-skinned face and black licorice whiskers! Stand back, miscreant, I would pass!"

"May Allah bust eggs on my turban!" hissed the Sheik Amut Ben Butler, "but this is a saucy baggage!"

With that he threw off his magnificent, flowing white cloak and he hopped her.

He had her in a mad, palpitant chancery but Verbeena put up some great infighting. She gave it to him good—right and left into the *kish-kish* (ringside and Yiddish for breadbasket) and now and again sought the point of the chin with a left uppercut that had hitherto always served her well. It had beautifully in that fight with the policeman.

But in all the many other bouts in which Verbeena had been engaged, kissing was strictly foul. It was sometimes permitted at the ringsides, she had observed, at the end of a fight, but never in the mix-ups.

Unsportsmanlike brute!

For as she let go a wild, desperate uppercut it shot harmlessly past an adroitly lowered chin and the next instant he had smacked her full upon the mouth.

A terrific, scorching smack!

It knocked Verbeena wuffy.

She could almost hear a referee, a misty, intangible wraith-like referee, giving her the full count, for the hot mouth pressed against hers was superlatively soporific, nicotinically, garliciously narcotic.

"First fall!" grinned the Sheik Amut Ben Butler the while he chucked the giddy girl through some heavy curtains upon a stack of soft yellow, pink, red (dark and light) gold, silver green and mauve cushions.

Yet Verbeena, remember, had verve!

Besides, she well knew the ha-ha the world ever handed a fallen champ or lady who claimed to have been drugged.

Realizing she was up against a losing fight, yet she arose for more trouble. Yep, up she came defiant if saggy. Nobody had ever put her in such a bait before! She would go on with it—on—on—on with it!

She'd get him yet!

Yet only too well she knew that one more fragrant kiss like that which she had just put over and she must go whiff-whaff.

It had been a soul-numbing smack. And she felt her knees knockier than she ever had known them.

Also she seemed to have had just then a glimpse of her moral stamina and the vision was as of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in a high wind.

Her face ached, her left ear ached and more awfully than either her peculiar temperament ached.

Her face showed pain in every lineament.

"I ask you," said the Sheik Amut in his slow, awful drawl, twirling the tassel of his magenta sash, "what's the idea of kicking up all this shindy? Aw—take off your necktie! Do you expect me to be your valet as well as lover?"

"You——" she began in crashing opposition to any tomfoolery of a dark, questionable nature.

"*Spaghetti!*" snapped the Sheik.

She observed that he looked over her shoulder. She turned. She saw then a little fat man behind her just as he was answering reverently:

"Aye—aye, Monseigneur!"

"The—," the Sheik nodded fiercely at the little man.

She hadn't a chance. She knew it.

She saw the arm of Spaghetti only as it was descending. The hand held a canvas jacket of the size and shapely proportions of a corpulent bologna. And it was stuffed with Sahara.

"See here!" cried Verbeena. "This is rotten. It's not cricket. I—"

"Not cricket perhaps, but quite clubby," said Amut Ben Butler with his brutal smile.

The blow fell.

Verbeena vertigoed.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Verbeena came to she was the only one present. Outside she could hear the Sheik's horses whinnying among their oats and the incessant chaffing of his men. They swarmed outside there. And inside were other swarms. These were of flies and sandfleas. She was more or less grateful to them. They kept her for some little time from thinking of anything else.

But, of course, eventually she had to begin to draw a few conclusions. The design of these proved cubistic and the coloring all to the palpitant pink, Gaugin green and yammering yellow.

She sought pushing herself around on the divan trying to get away from herself, but always returned.

Finally she sat up with her chin between her knees and her arms around her ears in a posture known to her blithesome boyish days as the "caterpillar crouch."

But by no mental arrangement could she devise for herself a dittology regarding the cataclysmic cropper attendant upon her career and felt herself, therefore, thoroughly unmanned as well as fatally deladyized.

She knew she'd never be able to look anybody in the face again. Especially a camel. Camels always had such nasty, disdainful expressions.

From thought of camels she passed to that of Lady Speedway, and this caused Verbeena to do a full pinwheel on the cushions.

If this affair ever got out wouldn't it just be pickled walnuts for old putty-faced, jabberwocking Speedway! O God! What a position she was placed in! O, gosh!

She gave one of her old time boyish leaps from the couch and seized the small object she saw on a nearby tabaret.

The object was the stump of a cigarette—a pretty long one. Thank heavens, indeed, that it hadn't burned itself to naught in the night!

She remembered sticking it down there when she began the first round of her terrific battle with Amut Ben Butler. She remembered, too, that it had been her last fag.

But fate had been good to her.

Apparently the ciggy had gone out the same time she did.

She scuffled her britches for a match. She lighted up. She took a deep inhale. It was tonic. She filled her lungs again.

A "V" now formed between her black eyebrows.

Verbeena was coming back!

She hopped into her pants. She began to stir about looking for other things to put on. Just then a swarthy, black-haired young creature, a slip of a girl about six feet tall, entered.

"Look here—" began Verbeena.

"Ay bane Hulda, the maid," said this little Arab girl. "You could have a wash for yourself back of that curtain over there. It's a bath in it. And your trunks bane come."

"Three cheers for both those things at least," murmured Verbeena. And soon she had tossed her clothes back

through the curtain and was splashing about in her usual vigorous fashion.

When a little later she thrust her head through the curtain she saw that Hulda had neatly arranged her riding britches and jacket, her military brushes and her cigarette cases out upon the divan and was digging deep in one of the satchels that was part of Verbeena's luggage regarding which it would seem Sheik Amut Ben Butler must have sent a retrieving party to grab it back from Musty Ale.

"What are you doing in that satchel?" asked Verbeena sharply.

"Ay bane looking for your razor, kiddo," said Hulda deferentially.

Verbeena laughed bitterly.

"My girl," she said, "don't you know there's no safety in this awful place?"

By this time Hulda had a trunk open. It contained the pretty dresses Verbeena had brought along for girlish evenings on the Sahara. Girlish evenings! She choked back a sob.

Aw, gee! Why couldn't she have been let alone to swagger about always in her cute boyish britches!

Hulda looked again and studied Miss Mayonnaise's head and shoulders as they stuck before the curtain.

She stared more closely.

"Oho," cried Hulda, "Allah bane knock me dead for a dumbkopf! I git it now what is it you is. Wait—I git a Turkish towel—we got lots of 'em, we have—and I give you a Swedish massage."

"Hulda, my desert child, I thank you," said Verbeena gratefully.

By the way, all this time they had been talking French as they did later when Hulda was arranging Verbeena's clothing anew.



HULDA, AN AFRICAN MAID.

She looked up at her mistress, her big black Swedish eyes puzzled as she asked:

"*Homme* or *femme* this morning?"

"*Homme*," said Verbeena decidedly, "excepting that after I've got my long boots on and everything, you can go into that third trunk to the right and pass me a hatpin."

"There!" said Verbeena stamping into one boot heartily. "There," said she stamping into the other. "Now, Hulda the hatpin."

She saw that Hulda watched her suspiciously as she handed up the weapon.

"That will be all," said Verbeena.

But Hulda held on.

"Out you go," said the proud captive brusquely.

"But—" Hulda still watched to see what disposition Verbeena meant to make of the hatpin.

"Off with you," repeated Verbeena. "What? Now, then, will you go!"

The distraught girl used the hatpin lavishly on Hulda.

"Yumping Yiminy Allah!" shrieked the Arab girl and hit the desert with abandon.

Verbeena was rummaging her luggage for cigarettes when a soft voice sounded behind her:

"Madame is doubtless ready for lunch?"

The voice was pleasant, indeed, operatic and even before she turned to face him Verbeena knew she was about to get her second view of the villain, Spaghetti.

"Don't you call me Madame," she said fiercely, "you cowardly sandbag specialist. Don't you call me anything less than Sheika Verbeena. There's going to be a wedding around here as soon as I lay my hands on that unprincipled hoo-hoo of a Sheik of yours. And don't you forget it."

With lithe, strong fingers she proceeded to put a Grecian bend in Spaghetti's Roman nose.

"Do you hear?"

She followed up with a little hatpin treatment while the faithful fellow let forth a coloraturo lyrico outburst for the intervention of from twelve to fifteen hundred saints.

"Hop about and get me about fifty boxes of cigarettes, one hundred each, long, fat ones, do you hear? What's that? Remember, once for all, Spaghetti, I want none of your sauce."

Outside the tent Spaghetti kissed his fingers with a fierce smack, made a noise like a buzz saw through his teeth while drawing a forefinger across his throat.

It was the high sign that in matters of terrible vengeance the Black Hand never muffs.

"Gott in Himmel!" he snarled under his breath. "Joost wait teel da padrone, da boss, de beega da fel' geet back! You catcha sometang. See like maybe you, sapristi, don't!"

Despite his feelings, however, he hot-footed a return with the cigarettes and it was to be noticed that when he bowed low and handed them to her he said:

"Here, Queen."

Well aware was he that he would remember that hatpin at meals for days to come and, expert chef that he was, he regarded with horror the idea of a future in which he would figure as Spaghetti enbrochette.

But—aha! let the big fellow handle her! The padrone, the grand demon, him, the goldo fellow, Monseigneur, he'd mighty quick show her who was the real frito misto of that establishment!

Though why in the world the boss wanted to dally with a *donna* that looked and acted more like *wallyo*, presented a mystery Spaghetti sadly admitted to himself was too much for him to un-ravioli. So he stirred himself in her behalf for the nonce and fetched her some *cous cous* into which he let go the red pepper with a lavish, fine Italian hand.

For if she strangled to death he could always pretend he had got mixed and thought it was the cinnamon.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT Spaghetti was wishing for Verbeena was wondering concerning. Whereabouts now was this bold devil, Amut? And when would he be home? To be sure, Spaghetti had said, she sort of remembered, that the Sheik would be home for dinner and that he ate at eight. But he might come in any old time and surprise her. For, cogently considered, wouldn't that be just like him? That he was a nasty feller, how could she doubt it? Of the Machiavellian character of the black-whiskered, tow-headed mazib hadn't she right then sufficient evidence to swing any jury?

"Boo-hoo, Boo-hoo!" sobbed Verbeena entirely in the feminine gender.

But six or seven cigarettes, the knowledge of the hatpin stick beneath the left breast of her Norfolk jacket with the right hand fully informed about it and something else that she had up her sleeve (I can't tell you yet—no, really, honest, I can't, for it wouldn't be fair to Verbeena—might give her away in a critical moment) something else that she had up her sleeve reassured her mightily.

And if I could only tell you what she was thinking about doing just then! "Durn it!" your heart would surely go out to the cute bantam! Gaw, bless her!

Remembering as well that Britains never shall be slaves!

And that, moreover, if you are not that kind of a girl and are truly indignant why then, my dear, your ship of Fate gathers no moral barnacles.

Although, of course, in the matter of just what kind of a girl Verbeena was, if any, a palpable ambiguousness veers to the verge of anguish.

But while this juncture is pending in which passion is scheduled to bridle and burst into tongues of flame high as a gas tank in eruption, gave Verbeena a chance.

That is to look around Sheik Amut Ben Butler's wicked desert diggin's.

Huh—not that they were so much!

Some Oriental hangings showed up as if they were embroidered by blacksmiths and colored by accident and chewed by rats.

There were two silver inlaid Moorish stools that would hold you if you were careful. There was a fine-looking, hand-carved chest, big and impressive, that Verbeena peeked into thinking it would reveal perhaps, wondrous stores of Bagdad lace curtains or—heaven alone could tell!—perhaps the corpse of his former victim!

She opened it and then shut it in a hurry. A person may fairly be curious. But not about somebody else's old shoes.

However, a splendid collection of ivory and silver and ivory and gold and ivory and brass and ivory and tin and ivory and goodness-knew-what cigarette cases, hit Verbeena right in the eye. She selected about sixteen she thought she might like and put them aside in one of her trunks to be called for later.

Should Amut miss 'em.

Although according to her designs, even if he did—even if he did——

Excuse me, for holding off a bit longer. No fault of the author truly.

He's coming is Amut. But you see he is doing a Sheridan on a flashing steed and is as yet several miles away. Two at least.

Just let him gallop a few minutes because Verbeena has started examining his book case and that if anything should tell her what kind of a bibliophile, Francophile or Swissoup this strong-armed philanderer was.

It was a surprise to Verbeena to find there this case of books for she had always thought that all to be expected of the Sahara was volumes of dates.

However, she stood corrected so she scanned the titles. At the very first she drew back with a shudder having read: "Poems of Passion" by Ring Lardner.

Then "The Children's Hour" by Ghee de Maupassant.

Pshaw, she'd read that!

Kraft-Ebing also was old stuff.

And she passed over without interest a corpulent tome entitled "Der Vaw; Vhy Ve Dit Id Bad" by Ludendorff.

Then she came upon "Manly Beauty, Its Dangers and Temptations," by Irvin Cobb and Paul Swan.

Two other titles, however, fascinated her. One was "Florinda of the Furnished Rooms" by Robert W. Chalmers, and the other "Maurice of the Monkey Glands" by Elinor Flynn in collaboration with the author of "Arzan of the Apes."

"Eeny, meeny, minee, mo—" began Verbeena when another title clattered against her vision. "The Passion Worm of the Sahara, an Account of its Discovery," by Robert S. Hitchings.

At first she derived about ten degrees of comfort from the discovery that Amut wasn't exactly a raw native, that he was probably half-baked at least. She felt that it would be logically safe to presuppose that she was mixed up with a king of the desert, who might be found to be superficially coated with a veneer of civilization that was tenuous.

And yet dared she find comfort in that? Might it not make him the more horrible, sinister, intolerable, cheekier and fresher than ever, this desert devil in whom passion dictated the methods of a chiropractitioner?

"O, hum!" screamed the distraught and fearful Verbeena doing a backfall among the cushions.

There was one good thing she could say for him anyway—his cigarettes were smokable. They were, she had seen by the boxes, of the famous brand of Bull Camel.

Of one thing she was convinced. There would be no sandbagging this evening.



SPAGHETTI.

She had reduced Spaghetti to where she had only to show him the hat pin and he would run right out and sit in the sand. She had made him produce the sand-bag too, had ripped it open and poured the contents back into the desert.

Also she had asked Spaghetti numerous questions about the Sheik Amut and as far as she could make out his chief business was that of a breeder, trainer and trapper of horses of a high-class character.

Nothing in the trucking way but mostly for society and circus uses. The business of *femme-snatching*, her informant had assured her, was totally new to him.

Did he have a harem?

No, Spaghetti thought not. It was very hard to keep one these days. Especially when your business had you out on the desert running an ambling horse farm. You were so likely to return to Biscuit or Orange or Ammonia and find the harem had run out on you, bobbed its hair and got jobs as manicure girls in Constantinople.

"That will be all," then had remarked Verbeena and had further taken a tuck in Amut's devoted servant by saying:

"It is absurd; don't you think, for you to call yourself Spaghetti? You're much too fat. Macaroni would be infinitely more suitable."

"Aw, Queena Verbeena!" protested Spaghetti.

"That will do. You may go, Mac."

He had backed out as becomes one departing from royalty and a hat pin.

Hulda she had entirely won over during the afternoon. She had given the little six-foot thing one of her old evening gowns, yet a modest garment withal, hanging well below Hulda's shoulder blades.

Dependably Verbeena was to be suspected of having something other than sawdust under those clubbed curls of hers!

She was just wondering if she could go so far as to appoint Hulda policewoman of the tent and entrust her with a sand-club when there came loud yells without of "Hip hoy, hip hoy, hip, hip, hip! Allah, Allah, Allah! AMUT!"

Three more "Allahs" were being heartily given still yet without when the Sheik Amut Ben Butler strode haughtily into the tent, threw off his creamy cloak and with a careless motion tossed his bejeweled classy turban among the old gold and silver cushions, thus displaying his shock of Sahara colored hair above his stick licorice black chin muff.

Verbeena savagely and swiftly lighted nine cigarettes and faced him peagreen with pyromania.

He touched off a cigarette himself.

"I hope Spaghetti didn't lay down on his job," said the Sheik. "Do you know what we're going to have for dinner?"

He pushed Verbeena out of the way and stretched himself on the divan.

His cold manner was like a dash of water of the same temperature against her face. Verbeena broke into a watery perspiration, her eyes got watery with rage and her mouth watered to bite him the more so that she could see, despite the nonchalant manner in which he was looking at her, he was yet significantly appraising

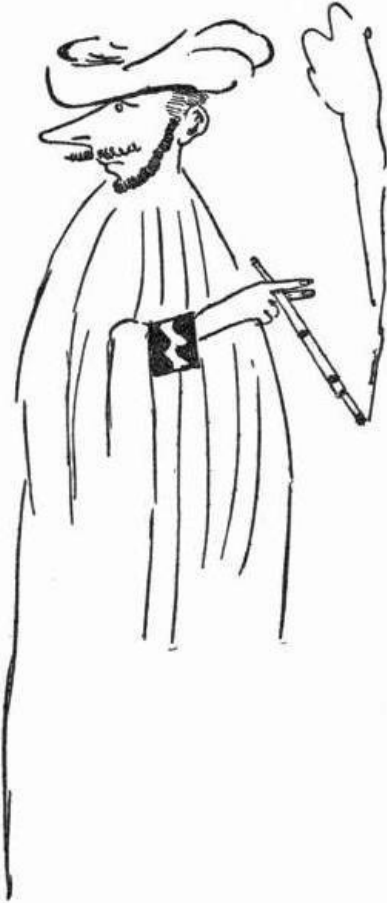
this outburst as a valuable asset on any desert.

His presence was an offense and she would concede no amelioration of it due to the nature of his occupation among horses. She wished with passionate fierceness that she could dye his hair to match his whiskers or his whiskers to match his hair. And the dreadful, cool way he was lying there staring at her, the princely thing! My—such airs!

"You seem to think everything's nicely settled," said Verbeena icily. "But when King and Lloyd George hear of this, they'll put such a flea in the ear of the French Government, they'll be after you with a hoop-la and a full set of gendarmerie armed with guillotines!"

"A pea for the French Government! And holler-woller for the Georges, King and Lloyd."

"You seem very confident of immunity."



SHEIK AMUT BEN BUTLER, THE TERROR OF THE SANDS.

"Of a certainty," said the Sheik. "I'm depending on Queen Mary. She's an awful stiff one for the proprieties, you know, and when she hears the way you defied conventions and went journeying out into the desert without so much as a chaperon, if I know Mary, she'll say it served you jolly well right. Anyway, what's one of those countries you speak of got to do with it?"

He gave her the point of a finger—slightly cigarette stained, but very stern.

"You forget, hussy,—I am the Sheik Amut Ben Butler. I'm the Grand Monarch, the Monseigneur of this entire sand-patch—put that in a cigarette paper and smoke it!

"There's another Sheik in these parts, one Abraham O'Mara who goes around as if he cuts some didoes until he hears I'm in the neighborhood and then, Allah behold him bolt for his simoon cellar!"

"Besides, he'll soon be going back to Ireland or Palestine now and I'll be taking over all his sandlots as well. So you can see for yourself what a grass-cutter I am.

"Don't stand there shaking your sassy red curls at me or I'll get up to you, do you understand?"

Verbeena gulped grandiloquently.

The Sheik sneered at her violently.

"See here," he said, "you'd have made a fine chorus boy but it was not as a chorus boy or any other kind I saw you in Biscuit. So shake those Reginald fixings and get yourself into something with fancy trimmings, something decolleté and dashy. I'm surprised to find you so prone to forget that you are a lady."

"In Biscuit—in Biscuit? You saw me in Biscuit, you underbred loafer?" gasped Verbeena.

"That cat you chased off the balcony fell on a brand new, very natty turban I was wearing as I passed the

hotel.”

“It was then that I first saw you, cutey! And when I heard you were going to make a desert hike alone—well, here you are, little one, *mon chit*, hale and hearty if a bit high-strung, my sweet ukelele.”

“Love—love! You speak of love! ’Twas for a ransom you rifled me of my liberty and what not, you big, hulking rotter!”

He regarded her scornfully.

“As a man who gave up eighty-six cents American cash to Musty Ale for your possession—and this I did—shall you accuse me of kidnapping you for ransom?”

“Then why—why—O, gosh, if only your hair and whiskers matched! But I know Spaghetti lied.”

“Bout what?”

“He said he didn’t know of your ever having any other girl but me.”

“Well, naturally,” the Sheik frowned dangerously, “Spaghetti knows better than to do any gossipin’ while I’m gone. Still it is true, Verbie, that you are the first one I have ever taken caravaning. As for the others——”

“The others! O, golly, golly me!” she sobbed. “Listen to him—the way he says it—the others—the others! Just like that!”

“Why, of course,” he said with a light insouciance that was paramountedly the pinnacle of intense impropriety. “Let’s see—there have been Ayah and Beeyah, Ceeyah and Deeyah, Eeyah, Effa, Geeyah, Aicha, Aihyah, Jayah, Kayah, Ella, Emma, Ennapeayah, Queahra, Essatee, Dubla, Exa, little Whyzee and,” the Sheik Amut sent a thin stream of supercilious, insolent cigarette smoke at the trembling Verbeena, “so forth. But you notice there was a ‘V’ missing from the collection.”

“And so you——”

“Partly—partly. But there was another, by Allah, a deeper reason.”

“What?”

He gave her a look that was awful sneery.

“That’s something I’m keeping under my turban just now, Verbie. The way you go ’round here asking questions you’d think we were really married you know.”

“And are we not to be?”

“Har-har!” laughed the Sheik Amut Ben Butler.

His manner of laughter was ingrainedly and corruscatedly ironic.

“Har-har!” he laughed anew.

Evidently without even so much of the savor of intention that might take a favorable skid in the direction of the morganic!

Again with flaring teeth—two touched with gold—he laughed:

“*Har-Har!*”

CHAPTER VIII

NEVER was any girl in all her life so grateful for a good, stiff boyish training as in that moment found herself Verbeena Mayonnaise!

She thought of all the swimmin’, rowin’, ridin’, boxin’, runnin’, fightin’, wrestlin’ she had done in the past with exultation. She even conjured up the long, sad face of Lord Tawdry with its sable curtains and experienced a wave of gratitude. In the nomenclature of Fate she felt that at this moment she had come Seven. Had not her life been one long, mystically symmetrical training for such a situation, such an emergency as this?

So he sat there lawffing at her, did he? He sat there making nasty eyes at her expecting her to quiescently quiver—that soon he would have her where he would be feeding her cigarettes from his hand.

She’d show this Shreik Amut with the molasses taffy hair and licorice whiskers a thing or two!



THE BIG SCENE IN WHICH VERBEENA WITH SPURS AND HATPIN TRIUMPHS OVER THE AWFUL SHEIK.

Yes, and three and four and five!

Perhaps six.

Seven, eight, nine and ten!

And that counts "Out!"

"Allah, O, Allah., HEY, Allah!" suddenly shrieked Amut Ben Butler. *"What in the name of the howling hoptoads of Heligoland is—is—OW!"*

You will recall I hope there was hereinbefore mentioned that Verbeena had something up her sleeve? Well, I really wasn't in a position for Verbeena's sake to give the real information then. As a matter of fact she had it in one of the patch pockets of her dashing little riding jacket. It was the *cous cous* that had been so overloaded with red pepper by the vengeful Spaghetti. She hadn't eaten a speck of it. She'd saved it all for Amut.

When he would have staggered blindly up from the cushions she was on him with a whirlwind of left and right hand hooks. Then came jabs, swings, swats, wallops, biffs and bangs! And hammerlocks, half Nelsons, strangle and toe-holds! This way and that!

All Tawd and the other fellows had ever taught her she was using. She wouldn't leave enough of him to crawl through a rat-hole.

A vamp of violence and vengeance working at top form was then Verbeena Mayonnaise!

"Spaghetti!" squealed the Sheik Amut ardently.

His faithful servant's pallid face appeared in the flapway.

Only to see his august, beloved chieftain on all fours with Verbeena just mounting his back.

"O, mamma! O, polpetteenies!" gasped Spaghetti.

"You keep out of this, Mac, or you'll get yours!" warned the fightin' flapper with flashing eyes which shone from her face.

"Sapristi, Queena Verbeena! Escusa! I come only to maka aska what you lika for eata? What da nica, sweeta lady she lika for deener, eh?"

"*Duck!*" said Verbeena.

Silently, swiftly the perfect servant withdrew.

The while Verbeena had not for an instant paused in massaging Sheik Amut. She was all dressed, you remember, for riding and when she got on the back of the once proud devil of the desert she gave him the spurs.

And then the hat-pin.

His screams to Allah could have been heard in Mecca. His wild horses strained at their tethers, neighing piteously at the frightful cries arising from the canvas abattoir that had once been the happy bachelor apartments of the Sheik Amut Ben Butler.

The humps of the camels grew pale with fright and misery.

The swash-buckling horde of Amut's men, after getting what strings of information they could from the

gasping Spaghetti, took to the palm trees from whence they tried to make it plain to Allah that their beloved master had gone up against a *sheitana*, which the same is a lady devil of the first water, and that really something should be done to save him but that nothing—nothing short of heaven could really avail.

Meanwhile, the proud Verbeena just roweled that lofty, haughty boy to rags.

And ever, ever, ever, ever, always the hatpin! The more he reared to plunge the fairer the mark.

Truly now had he become what first she had called him—a Shriek. But as not less than a thousand shrieks sounded the plentifully punctured passionut of the Sahara!

Besides ordinary damage his proud soul goosefleshed with horror.

His hauteur became hiatic.

And yet—and yet how wonderful she was!

What a marvelously active Verbie!

He felt the stirrings in his heart of a love, ponderose, grandiose, glamorous, stupendous!

It was indeed very dominant in his veins just about the time she slammed him back on the cushions and slapped his face for him good.

Her vibrant tones in spite of the inner cries of protest of his desiccated manhood he found adorable as to him then she said:

“You multi-colored, flashy, hieroglyphic son of a spavined grandsire, you stalking, frowning, sneering, swaggering imitation of something that is which amounts to something, you that are nothing whatsoever at all! Rotter, bounder, boob—you blurb, blip, you—don’t you dare to answer me back or I’ll set fire to your whiskers, you flea-bitten—why, what in the world’s happened to ’em? Amut, where’s your whiskers?”

“Over there on the floor, back of you, my Queen,” said the Sheik in strange, shivered accents due to swollen lips.

“I don’t seem to remember pulling them out.”

“O, I’m quite sure you didn’t. You see——”

“Good God,” said Verbeena, “more treachery! Even his whiskers are false!

“Tosh—I might have known—Lillian Russell top hair and Trotsky chin trimmings!

“What was the idea of this face screen anyway? So’s I wouldn’t be able to identify you I suppose after you’d squeezed me dry and threw me over at Orange with all the rest of your amorous alphabet? Was that it, hey?”

“No, by Allah, no,” he sobbed, his haughty head tumbled among the silver, black, green, blue, pink and twilight yellow cushions.

She drew forth the hatpin which is so much deadlier than the scarfpin of the species.

“I swear! No—no, Queenie, no!”

“Then why the Hawkshaws?”

“Allah defend me—I cannot tell you—not if you kill me, my sweet wand of affliction!”

“I don’t know what I’ll do later,” said Verbeena. “But anyway, I’m going to make you marry me first.

“Mac!” she called. “Hulda!”

They came humbly.

“Listen to this, both of you!”

“Yea, O Queen,” they answered.

“Sheik Amut Ben Butler, you say you are king of this tail-end of the desert?”

“With your kind permission, Verbeena, the First.”

“And Parliament and everything?”

“Yes’m.”

“Well, Amut, old thing, right now you are in session. Pass a common law.”

“I—I——”

“Stupid—like they have in America. A common law for marriage. If a man and woman agree to live together as husband and wife—that settles it. It goes, hook, line, sinker and breakfast cereals. But it is made all the more binding when there is a written agreement between them.

“All in favor,” she said with her eyes firmly on the passion-purged orbs of Amut, the non-abductor, “will say ‘Aye!’”

“Aye!” said the Sheik Amut Ben Butler in a loud, firm voice.

But biting the while a quivering underlip, he soon burst into tears.

Immediately Verbeena whipped out a paper from the breast of her Norfolk jacket and laid it before him. (That girl had just thought of everything! She even had a fountain pen right ready for him!)

"Sign," she said simply.

The red pepper wasn't all out his eyes by any means, but the broken, quivering creature was able to read:

"I, Sheik Amut Ben Butler of Oasis No. 4 Sahara, and I, Verbeena Mayonnaise of London and lots of other places, on this day do take each other unto each other as man and wife, the party of the first part and the party of the second agreeing not to part unless through the intervention of an undertaker or a divorce judge in which latter case alimony to the tune of fifty horses, ten camels and seventeen tons of dates a month shall be promptly and persistently paid unto the party of the second part together with fifty-fifty on the proceeds of any caravan holdups hereinafter possibly to occur."

"You will see that it's dated yesterday," said Verbeena, "but that's only a technicality."

The Sheik Amut signed. She signed. Spaghetti signed. Hulda hurled her mark on the document.

"There," said Verbeena, "that's that! I'd like to see Lady Speedway open her ole fish-mouth when our caravan pulls into Biscuit again, hey, Amut?"

"Har-har-har!" exclaimed the Sheik with well-timed, impromptu heartiness.

"Spaghetti," next said Verbeena, "you can serve dinner now. And go light on the use of the Italian national flower in your cooking or you'll hear from me.

"Hulda, rip down that bunch of moth-eaten hangings. They're an eyesore. I'll get some decent chintz curtains as soon as we get to town. And pick up all those revolvers and daggers and such truck and throw them into the store tent."

She turned again to the Sheik.

"You'll have to get up and get out early to-morrow, Mutty, dear, because I shall simply have to start housecleaning first thing in the morning."

"As Allah wills, my love."

"Nonsense. I'm sick of this stuff of putting everything up to Allah. You'll just get up and do it on your own account, do you hear?"

"You betcher," said Sheik Amut Ben Butler right on the dot.

"May I have another cigarette, Verbie?" came the honeyed accents of the Sheik Amut as, dinner finished, coffee was being served.

"Just one. Too much smoking will affect the steadiness of your hand in horse-training. I must look into the condition of the herd myself to-morrow."

"Yes, do," he assented. "I'm afraid I've been pretty slack but you know how a bachelor is—sporting around a good deal, he is likely to forget business."

She reached for her handbag and got out a tin of candied violet leaves.

She fed him about ten which he chewed as delicately as he might—much more delicately, Verbeena noticed, than the camels chewed gum.

Verbeena was pleased.

"Under the extraordinary circumstances," she finally stated, "and the legal steps having been duly taken and perfected, there is not in so far as I can see, any valid reason why marital relations may not with perfect propriety eventuate."

"Allah, oh, Allah!" sobbed the Sheik softly beating his turban profusely.

CHAPTER IX

"**A** month. A little more than a month! Thirty-one days to be exact! O, Allah, it seems a life time!" sobbed the Sheik Amut Ben Butler. "A month since I grabbed her hot off the Biscuit! Would that then I had developed butter fingers! And yet!"

He buried his face deep in the cushions and ate at them. He didn't cry out. It wouldn't have done the least good.

Nobody would have answered. His horses, camels and men were all scared positively puerile and near to death of Verbeena. Whenever they saw her coming they hurried like the deuce in every other direction.

And yet!

Hypothetically considered, the situation was not extraneously alarming. But otherwise it was vicariously vazink.

The Sheik tossed and tossed around and around.

She was certainly the hottest penny he'd ever picked up in his life, this little red-head.

"The first thing you know," he told himself, "you'll be falling in love with this athletic young squidge. And then won't you be ashamed of yourself!"

Because if he did really he should.

The way she bossed him!

Dawn couldn't begin on the desert without the Sheik Amut being turned out with a slim cup of coffee to break horses. Or direct the currying of camels. And camels require infinite currying. If you want to live around the same oasis with them it has long been decided that this is quite essential.

And in all his former experiences he had never known that a camel could laugh. But now he knew they all did whenever he passed by.

Besides he was losing money, for in breaking horses he'd acquired a habit of killing them while thinking of Verbeena.

And yet!

O, Allah, she had such a fascinating way of displaying romantic womanhood when he most expected the hatpin!

But still he knew his men were beginning to call him "Tame Turban" and "Shakes" instead of Sheik.

The incumbrance of their pitying glances was getting his cosmic lizard.

He never, these days, slung on his flowing, dashing, romantic white cloak without feeling like a whipped cream.

Conjurically he considered himself a storm-tossed palm branch hopelessly missing its dates.

He didn't have a pillow he felt he had a right to pile on.

He'd been in the habit of sprawling around on his cushions whenever he blamed felt like it. But not so no more! Verbeena could become so exceedingly vituperish and so conspicuously arousing. So different was she, he considered, than varinol.

Hashish had given him some relief but his stock of that was gone and Verbeena hadn't.

The way she wound Spaghetti around her little finger was utterly farnicaceous. And Hulda was eating out of the hollow of her cute, steel-like fingers.

He could only draw comfort from knowing that he and Verbeena had the cigarette habit intolerably.

"Shades of memory, O, Allah, those days when I was cock of the walk!"

He squirmed bitterly to recall the fact.

He fumbled about among the pillows well-knowing that not a tail feather remained. In plain words, of his masculine dominance he realized he was hirsutically tweezered.

There was nothing left for him to Sheik but escape.

Verbeena, he saw, was fast asleep and for this he gave several still, small praises unto Allah.

There among the cushions he kicked himself softly for never having thought things clearly out before.

But now—aha! His horse, Sunstroke, would stand by him! That is to say run with him as he must if it was to do any good. And pretty fast, too, he conjectured, Sunstroke must.

Sheik Amut Ben Butler made just about then a cold sneak from the side of Verbeena. Toes and finger tips were clammy with apprehension.

At this time, deep down, his torn and tortured pride was crying to the astral heights:

"O, Allah, Allah, Allah, is it never going to end? Am I ever going to get away from her?"

And things like that.

He had, as a matter of verity, long felt that he should take to the woods, but how could he on the Sahara!

Either Oasis No. 3 or 5 was a heck of a distance.

Yet—

Verbeena stirred.

That decided him.

Swiftly he filtered through the flap in the tent and out under the stars.

He stepped carefully over Spaghetti but Spaghetti was so nervous these times he awakened very easily.

"Shush, not a word!" quavered the Sheik.

Pathetically Spaghetti ostriched and *donna-mobilay*.

With stupendous caution Amut stalked among the steeds. His ego was so inherently erased that he touched the nose of Sunstroke apologetically, fearsome that even his own horse might say him nay.

But Sunstroke laughed good-naturedly. A horse laugh, to be sure, yet nevertheless nothing nasty in it. Sunstroke was only a kid and full of larks. He was all for the notion of churning the desert in the small hours of the night and whizzled his tail gayly to indicate it.

For that, the Sheik kissed him.

He was so very grateful to meet one in whom the urge of travel was prevalent.

Taking the saddle like a lamb, Sunstroke nevertheless hopped forth as of a piece of cyclone.

On the Sahara even a horse is granted rubber heels.

Noiseless the departure.

"Fare well, well, well, Verbeena!" shunted the Sheik Amut softly to the handsome stars.

The stars are really very handsome on the Sahara. And so close. One feels like picking them. On some kinds of drinks one often tries.

But Sheik Amut Ben Butler knew that he must not linger to become so engaged.

With Allah quiescently concurring, Sheik Amut hoped ere morn to pull Sunstroke up, lathered with foam necessarily, in Tipzaza or perhaps Tlemcen although in a vague way he dreamed of Fez because there was a big, stone wall around that, and gladsomely he killed many miles of the desert but—

Alas! Allah would have appeared to have quit him altogether.

His dreams of freedom were due to detonated dispersal.

There was the crack of a pistol!

Sunstroke sat down ultimately.

From the sandpile where Amut found himself sitting on a troubled head the Sheik began to reason that Verbeena was arrived.

Counsel couldn't help him he very well knew.

It was positively she. Because he heard her voice demanding:

"How dare you? What do you mean by it? Answer me this instant! Who were you making off to see—Ayah or Beeyah or—"

"Aw, what the dickens," said the Sheik Amut, with a half show of spirit. "All you caught me was a horse!"

She slung him across her saddle as even once he had slung her and she frequently held him head down on the journey for as she said to him, this sends the blood to the head and he could the better therefore think of the atrocity he had planned. Now and then she would dip his head in the sand to brush up his repentance.

That same night at home, the Sheik made a harrowing error. His diplomacy proved catastrophic. For he dug up a treasure bag and out of it drew a necklace of gorgeous, pallid greenstones, and dangled them before her eyes.

"After all," said he, "it is you only I can ever love, Verbeena! Ah, Verbeena! You fascinating baby mine! Here—take it—this small token of the burning regard of my Sahara disposition!"

Instead of graciously accepting she nearly drove his turban through the north wall of the tent. His head was in the turban.

"I get your Oriental subtlety, you wild Eastern oaf!" cried Verbeena her red curls straightening and standing upright. "You think I'm a jade, do you?"

On the Sahara has passed into song and story the family simoon which then blew across, in, out, about, over and under tent of Amut Ben Butler.

CHAPTER X

Cous cous had given way to good old English bacon and eggs and marmalade on the breakfast table of the Sheik Amut Ben Butler.

"Chief," said the Sheik half-heartedly to Verbeena, slipping a piece of bacon to his big, dangerous Persian hound that Verbeena was in the habit of kicking around so freely, "would you mind if I had a friend come and stay for a bit?"

"What kind of a character may this be?" demanded Verbeena.

"A literary light, one nearly as large as a moon. He sells an awful lot of books."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Queen Verbeena readily inducting the atmosphere.

"Robert," the Sheik paused because he was very sure of his grounds, "Hitchings."

"Literary men," said Verbeena, "are usually terrible loafers and like late breakfasts but as to Mr. Hitchings I am agreeable. I am fully confident as regards Mr. Hitchings, I don't mind saying. He is always interesting. I think it was reading his works which started me on this trip."

"It rejoices me to have you so inclined," said the Sheik. "And Bob will be pleased."

"That's up to him," smiled Verbeena, taking a heavy smash at the marmalade. "Although I have every confidence that he will give little trouble. From his tales of passion I am certain he is well-behaved. But in view of the event I think, Amut, we should really move to a larger oasis. It's possible he carries his adjectives with him."

"Wonderfully thoughtful," murmured the Sheik.

"What did you say?" asked Verbeena.

"I said, 'Hello, kid!'"

"Hello," said Verbeena.

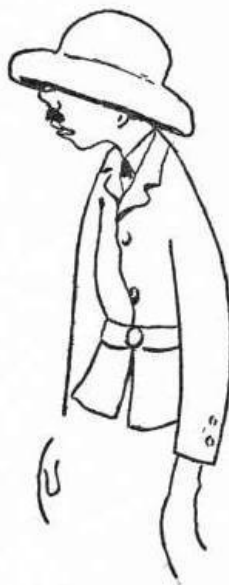
To the Sheik her affability was immeasurably amazing.

The Ben Butlers had moved to Oasis No. 12. This was a suburb of Oudjda from whence, if you were out of things, you could always get breakfast at Guercif.

For three days Mr. Hitchings had been taking his meals and notes with the Ben Butlers.

His observations of the Sheik and Verbeena had moved his heart to pity. So that he had very little left when the Sheik was carried in by two men. A horse had refused to be trained and the Sheik A. Ben Butler was therefore invested with six broken ribs.

He breathed like a dice-box in full cry.



THE ALLEGED MR. HITCHINGS.

Verbeena prodded the Sheik somewhat and, deciding that he wouldn't die, came into the outer tent and caused Mr. Hitchings to pause in the taking of his notes by pulling his chair from under him.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" said Mr. Hitchings under the chair and circumstances.

"A little, Robert. Who, you know, after all, is he?"

"You mean Sheik Amut?"

"I certainly," said Verbeena, "am not discussing Velasquez, Amerigo Vespucci or Jack Dempsey. The yellow hair and the black whiskers are noticeably incompatible, don't you think?"

"To be sure," assented Mr. Hitchings. "Well then——" and he got red in the face. "I'll tell you. It was this way:

"In the first place he hates the English."

"I hadn't noticed that," said Verbeena.

"But he does—really. And why?"

Verbeena lifted her clubbed curls well off her ears.

"Why?"

For some reason or other she saw that Mr. Hitchings looked greatly distressed.

"Because—well, you see, his father was the Earl of Glucose but not a sticker for the proprieties. I might even say he drank freely. That was not a habit clearly to take into the Sahara. And when thus bedizened he sometimes failed in courtesy. Especially toward his wife. She was Spanish but unquestionably all her life long had walked normally. She was a bit of a Moor too. But new to sand-dunes. One evening the Earl of Glucose feeling like kicking about a bit selected his wife. He busied himself thus for some time.

"Then it would seem he kicked her so far that he couldn't find her nor could she find herself and thus it was she happened upon the suburban oasis of Sheik Ben Butler, senior.

"A boy was born. Kicking just like his father.

"The Sheik did not send her to his harem but kept the Spanish lady with him hanging right around his neck until she died in his arms. Not promptly but nearly so.

"The truth now," said the distinguished novelist, "is on the point of bursting forth!

"Amut is that woman's son!"

"Mr. Hitchings!"

"I don't wonder that you are surprised. Amut was too when he heard it. We all were! You see my father was in America at the time and the Sheik was in China and so they met. By the same chain of circumstances, Amut and I were both educated in Siberia. You understand? But even if you don't, I don't either. Still it is explanatory, is it not?"

"Mr. Hitchings!"

"Beg pardon."

"Let me get you a fresh green carnation."

She pinned it on him. They grow freely in the desert.

But she said emphatically:

"The story, sir, is wholly unworthy of you."

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Hitchings in ineffable alarm. "This isn't my stuff! How could you think it? How ridiculous of me to have permitted myself to be persuaded by Amut to try and put this over! I regret the attempt abysmally. Right now, hear me, fair lady: I wash my hands of the Hull thing!"

"Friendship may excuse this conduct of yours," said Verbeena coldly. "But how, if you are also English, is it that Amut makes a friend of you?"

"Now, there's something else again, isn't it? Just as if a rebellious Sheik around here for an instant would make a bosom friend of a Frenchman. It's a desperately silly story all the way through and I surely apologize and—O—what?"

Verbeena had seized both hands and just wouldn't let go.

"Forget it," she was saying. "I've something much more important."

Her eyes flamed.

"Will you—O, will you, my dear Mr. Hitchings, do a moving picture for me?"

"I most certainly will," replied Mr. Hitchings, "immediately—of a man packing his grip."

"But I beg of you, who is he? For God's sake, listen to a woman's plea! Solve this mystery of me lord's true identity!"

By this time, however, Mr. Hitchings had engaged the drawing room of a camel and was navigating the Sahara by means of the good, old, honorable North Star.

CHAPTER XI

MR. Hitchings was in such a hurry hurtling off the Sahara with a broken climax that he left some things behind.

There were two collar buttons, a large piece of dignity and a newspaper clipping.

The collar buttons Verbeena knew she would be able to use, she kicked the lost dignity aside but stood interested in the newspaper clipping.

Logically too. It was about her.

"MISS MAYONNAISE MUCHLY MISSING."

Such was the headline in the Biscuit *Bismallah*.

And the article went on to say:

"The world is in stupendous alarm over the disappearance of Miss Verbeena Mayonnaise who left the Hotel Biscuit here without her bacon and eggs more than a month ago or giving the clerk her forwarding address. She even forgot to pay her bill.

"Her intention was to take a jaunty junket into the far wild places of the Sahara and it would appear that she has.

"Not a squeak has been heard from Miss Mayonnaise since.

"Miss Mayonnaise, indeed, is as thoroughly missing as sauce Neuburg from American life.

"She was a grand girl in a gentlemanly way and things really don't look so good as to her fate.

"It is deplorable that the sands of the desert carry no wireless and the palm trees in this regard are also imperturbable.

"The terribly alarmed world has spoken to the British authorities demanding an immediate search but the discouraging reply has been: 'What can we do? The Sahara is so much larger than Scotland Yard!'

"Lord Tawdry, the magnificently-mustached brother of Miss Mayonnaise, is concerned to distraction.

"He stopped playing bridge long enough to say so.

"A hotel porter of the Biscuit whom she forgot to tip, it is understood, has instituted a search for her but found no trace of the daring young adventurer in a seventy-mile trip out on the desert beyond 86,000 cigarette stumps.

"And some scattered Arabs running around the Sahara asking Allah to alleviate their condition in the matter of a she-demon who is banging a great and well-known Sheik about haphazardly.

"They have given her the name of 'Jinny.'

"Although this clue is, of course, unpromising it was learned by cable late last night that Sherlock Holmes has telephoned Doctor Watson to come on over to Baker street, he's got something interesting on.

"Confidence has been hopefully and freely expressed that if Mr. Holmes doesn't find Miss Mayonnaise he will, at any rate, lose Watson."

Verbeena's hopes and aims went vaunting in a very triumphant manner on the reading of this clipping.

It was mean, however, she thought of Mr. Hitchings not to have shown it to her.

Yet leaving it behind may have been one of his subtleties.

Anyway, hooray!

Obviously she sensed palpably that it was all highly intriguing.

Mad emotions stirred the Sheik to follow her with an admiring eye when to show how pleased she was she went forth on the newly leased oasis and threw herself among the tops of the palm trees indiscriminately.

In swift palpitation that made his heart beat the Sheik hugged his bandaged ribs and watched her.

She moved gracefully among the tree tops snapping branches off heartlessly. She radiated, also, he saw, mercilessly among the verbiage.

In spite of a week's notice, for Verbeena meant to can Spaghetti, the faithful fellow had drawn up to the Sheik's side and Amut turning wonderingly toward him asked wildly:

"Are they the Willies she's got or what?"

"O, Monseigneur, merely angelically acrobatic," said Spaghetti with a touch of reverence that was reverberating.

Suddenly Verbeena vamoosed from the palm trees, fell thirty feet with a happy turn which landed her directly on the shampoo bandage which was the Sheik's native headgear.

"My dear, your exuberance fascinates as well as flattens me," said the august Amut in his fall. "May I ask the cause? Mind you, I do not insist. You well know, I am too proud to fight."

"You will learn in time, my dear," laughed Verbeena airily, her thoughts running ragingly in the line of movie contracts, of a day soon when she would excel the gilded harvestings of Queen Mary herself.

"Aw—please, O, clashing cadence of my soul's innermost adoration, let your Sheiky know what gives you such happiness divine!"

"Nix-nix!" said Verbeena with excessive laughter, "my conquering devil! Have you fed the camels yet? If not, spill that toga and hump yourself!"

"Immediately, O, exquisite creature of Allah's greatest favor! And yet, if you'll pardon me, this night I had planned taking a smack at my old enemy, Sheik Abraham O'Mara. He's been cutting into the borders of our sandpile considerable lately. E'er this, Queenie, he has always been scared of me. But now he rides about the wide places, the narrow and the circumambient without fear or dread of Amut Ben Butler.

"Once his goat was mine but now he thinks nothing of grabbing my horses and camels any old time."

"Go right over and attend to him this evening," said Verbeena. "You have my full permission. If he gets giddy with you just tell him I'll be over myself. I've heard too that he is uncommonly cussed among the women. And him a black Sheik at that—the old Ace of Spades! Tell him——"



**THE SHEIK ABRAHAM O'MARA, WHO BEAT IT FOR DEAR LIFE
ACROSS THE SAHARA AT SIGHT OF VERBEENA.**

"Tee-hee-hee!" chuckled the lordly Amut.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded his thoroughly acknowledged wife—(in writing, you remember).

"Just look over on the horizon, my dear."

"At whom?"

"Those now to be seen scoting out of sight across it. The distance is great but I recognize the leading figure clearly as the Sheik Abraham O'Mara. See how fat! And how fast he travels! And yet it has always been said of him there was danger ever when that fiend was abroad. But, it seems he saw us first."

"Aha, afeard of you, my Amut?"

"Of me," he chuckled again and again.

For the first time in months the Sheik permitted himself a little bold laughter.

"Of me!"

Once home in the tent the Sheik Amut Ben Butler dared to put his arms out to her. He was no ordinary man to succumb to the fascinations of a woman. You had to hit him first.

But having experienced the metallic obstinacy of Verbeena Mayonnaise, the inflexibility of her character and seeing, as he ecstatically had, the flight of his powerful and avowed enemy, Abraham O'Mara, he was fraught with the realization that love had become a force in his life which might drive him to anything where Verbeena was concerned, predominantly and irresistibly.

He'd be trimming her curls for her next.

Amut's arms ached for her and always ached worse after he had tried to hold her.

He permitted his mind to careen woefully regarding the secret Verbeena was withholding. Something had made her very happy and as he felt nothing to boast of in this regard he wondered incontinently. But in his growing emotion concerning one who could not only chase him but his greatest enemy at the very sight of her, the Sheik allowed himself a sharp, sobbing intake of breath.

At the same time no other sign escaped him of the hell he was enduring. She might not like it.

But he couldn't keep his mind off Verbeena for the distant howlings of jackals came closer and closer.

Still, as between the two, he certainly liked her best.

And what was this secret that had sent her gamboling high among the palm trees?

He had asked her and she wouldn't tell. His soul, his mind and heart hammered, stirred, tintinnabulated and undulated to find out.

Little he knew then that vouchsafement as to this might have been regarded generally as pretty closely to hand.

CHAPTER XII

IT was a Monday morning about two months later and the Sheik was helping Hulda hang out the wash in the back of the Big Tent, his soul pondering in trepidation, even worry as one might say, regarding what Verbeena was contemplating, what she was ruminating with such open evidences of liking it, in her masterful, little, red-capped noodle.

Fear suddenly clutched him clamorously by the heart.

It rang in his brain—ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling-a-ling!

They were now stopping at the Sahara Golf club oasis which is really a mere suburb of Orange, very popular because the golf club oasis was the wettest on the desert. So near Orange! She could, she would—

"Allah save my skin," whispered the Sheik as best he could on account of the clothes-pins in his mouth as he was spearing Verbeena's B.V.D.'s to the line hanging low between the stately palms.

From time to time as the reversal of the rôle he played in her life came to his quivering lips in cries of "Allah, O, Allah, let up on me!" he had managed to steal a horse-whip or two and bury it in the sand until nearly all of them had disappeared. It was not consideration for the horses which had led to those depredations. And now the thought had come to him that they were so near Orange she might ride in herself or send forth a blindly obedient equerry thence to fetch a new supply of first quality, sturdy horsehide lashes.

"O," cried Sheik Amut fervently, "Allah, have a heart!"

But just about then other things happened to make his heart tick harder—like a grandfather's clock.

He and Hulda dropped the wash to rush to the front of the tent where had arrived a messenger. Sure, on horseback.

"From Orange!" said the carrier dismounting.

"A communication for me?" asked the Sheik in his soft, mild tones.

"For you?" laughed the messenger, scornfully unloading two big bags. "You! By Allah, stand aside and don't make the sandworms laugh! Where's Queen Verbeena?"

"By the same Allah," returned the Sheik with a show of spirit, "unless your business is of prime importance I would not disturb her now. She is at her daily exercise within and cares never then to be interrupted."

"Why doesn't she exercise with a horse?"

"Idiot, forbear lest she overhear. Besides, it's not that sort of exercise at all. For three hours each morning she now spends her time making faces in the looking glass. For what purpose when I ask her of it, she orders me back into the open as being none of my Oriental damned business. What's in the bags?"

"Letters—letters—thousands—all for her."

"Yet, by Allah, it is not Valentine's day."

"True."

"No, but by Allah, it's near the first month. I wonder what bills she's been running up!" faltered the Sheik.

Now the letters—there is no use keeping a person's readers waiting—were in reality, in response to an advertisement she had secretly placed in several theatrical newspapers. It had read:

"Famous Lost Lady on Sahara Open for Moving Picture Engagement. No triflers. Address P. Oasis Box No. 17 via Orange."

The messenger was now bearing to Mrs. The Sheik Amut Ben Butler thirty thousand and forty-six communications from all the choicest open-air murder colonies in the country.

But true enterprise, real enterprise, enterprise in the magnificent, was incarnated in the person of the celebrated Mr. Cyril Gristmille for on that very instant he descended grandly in person in an aeroplane. Slightly on his ear but soon readjusted himself. He had faced this small accident without turning a hair. He hadn't any.

"See here," cried the Sheik Amut, "what the hellah do you mean by swooping down this way on these grounds? Don't you see what you've done? You've scared the horses and camels and scattered them all over the desert! And, may Allah's curses crack your skull, you've knocked down the week's wash and if you knew my wife——"

Mr. Gristmille gracefully drew a slender cigarette case from a lower waistcoat pocket—yep, he had the habit too—and said:

"Well, then, don't stand there like a fathead looking at them run away, my man. You and your other ragbags get busy and catch 'em again. I may need 'em shortly."

"Need 'em? What do you want?"

"My business is not with you. But unless I am improperly informed this tent harbors the famous lost English desert girl, Miss Verbeena Mayonnaise?"

"That was," said Sheik Amut sticking up his nose at this haughty stranger. "She's my wife now."



CYRIL GRISTMILLE, THE GREAT WOMAN TAMER.

"Go in the tent then and tell her to come out to me—Mr. Cyril Gristmille—immediately. I would do business with her."

"You would?"

"Hasten. Go right in and tell her to come out promptly."

"Go in and tell her yourself," said Amut. "I'm tired trying to tell her to do anything."

"Very well," said Mr. Gristmille and stalked toward the main tent.

Sheik Amut and Spaghetti who was being given another trial by Verbeena after his complete surrender of his garlic supply, and the Sheik's other two pals, Yusef and Hamandaigs, looked one another keenly in the eyes and began openly holding their ribs.

But to their surprise no pistol reports or manly howls for help arose from within the tent.

Instead the elegant, pallid-faced Mr. Gristmille who had changed from his aeroplane cap into a high hat

before entering the tent—instead then of Mr. Gristmille emerging with a scimitar wrapped around his neck or his hat jammed down over his eyes—instead of this, O, Allah, his haughty intrusion into the tent of the doughty little Sheik tamer passed off in most perfect quiet and presently—hands up to Allah again!—he emerged with Verbeena—with Verbeena!—why they hardly recognized her! the way she was acting!

Her sturdy, cocky boyish nonchalance was gone, no longer did she swagger and scowl, the little roughneck. Instead she had become as feminine as a powder puff!

A mincing, smiling, trusting-eyed little red-headed dear!

She was looking up into the cameo profile of the illustrious and bill-postered countenance of Cyril Gristmille as one might gaze into the eye of a golden idol or a \$10,000,000 check.

Every little trick of ingenuous girlhood was in everything that little Verbeena did and the wondering Amut, Spaghetti and Hulda and Yusef and Hamandaigs ran around telling the tribe about it. And they all agreed they just simply couldn't believe it was Verbeena.

They all said it was if it were some female member of her family.

But had these innocents ever seen Mary Pickford they would have known where Verbeena was getting her stuff. Little did they know she'd been practicing up on it this many a day.

And the while in accents as honeyed as her glances she was saying:

"O, Mister—Mister Gristmille, it has been so good of you to come! With all that money!

"And do you really think you can make an actress of me? Really?"

"I?—Why I," said Mr. Cyril Gristmille, "could make an actress of a doughboy to say nothing of so perfect a little gentleman as you."

"How adorable! What do I do first?"

"The first thing you do," he said, and suddenly took her by the shoulder and shook her thoroughly, "is to understand that you do every little damn thing I tell you without making any fuss or faces about it. Do you get me?"

He shook her again till her curls rattled.

Verbeena listened breathlessly and breathless isn't much of a word for it. Her heart wobbled.

"You are always to remember *I—I* am boss.

"And don't you try to carry out any notions of your own while you are acting around me.

"You are to look, walk, talk, eat, weep, whimper, smile, sob, stalk, twirl, mince, mope, wriggle, squirm, turn, stand, run, race, limp, love, lallygag, or any old other darn thing I mention and demand just as you hear me give the orders to do it or I'll take you and your movie aspirations and bury them for once and all ten thousand feet deep right in here in the sands of the Sahara!

"Once again," he fixed her with his piercing eye, "I ask—do you get me?"

What Verbeena got was very hot under her boyish Eton collar and meant to answer him scornfully but she felt her heart beating as if it meant to beat it altogether.

However, the Movie Maharajah was not paying the slightest attention to how she took it at all. He was giving his attention to a flock of camera men, actors and such like arriving in 2,000 aeroplanes that left for the Sahara that morning from Los Angeles.

She could not fight down the thrill that came at the study she then began somewhat surreptitiously to make of the commanding figure of the Movie Monarch among his men. The way he talked to them was a shame. The way they took it, cringing, cowering, fawning yet with adoration in their eyes, was a wonder.

He seemed suddenly to remember her.

"What are you standing there goofing for and staring that way at me? Don't you know that you are to be a girl in the first reel?"

"I—I," hot shame mantled Verbeena's cheek. Why was it she did not step straight forward and punch him in the nose? But somehow, he made her so acutely conscious of her sex, or, rather, of what sex he wanted of her.

"You are to be a girl in this first reel I tell you. Get back into your tent and take that football suit off and put on something close, clinging, and when you get it on work up a good, hippy walk—hippy and a bit slouchy. Go on instantly, and get *him* off and put *her* on."

The man was simply terrible. With dragging feet she retreated to her tent and for the boy's clothes that somehow made her feel good and tough and ready to take chances with both hands, she submergedly substituted a frock that she was fiercely angry with herself to find herself, indubitably she herself, hoping would please him.

And it didn't—no chance.

Not with that movie mahout.

"In the name of all that's horrible!" he cried at her. "Is that the best thing you've got to offer in clothes? It doesn't fit you—it flops! Here—that skirt wants shortening and it wants tightening too, and you can only see the half of the small of your back. Away with that flock of rags! Got any others—in heaven's name, answer!"

"Yes—yes, sir."

"Go in and put another one on then and for the love of Pete, try to pick something that looks like something above a dollar ninety-eight on a bargain counter. Take that off—quick! Must I be your dressmaker as well as your director?"

"O, sir," sobbed Verbeena Mayonnaise.

"And hurry up about it," came his slow but icy tones as she hurried tentwards to hurry up just as fast as she hasten well could.

"Let's see," he conceded on his second sight of her, "that's awful as the other but—O well—come here then—here is him whom is to be your leading man in this heart-stirring and world-thrilling romance of my forthcoming creation. He is to be your leading man, but I will attend in all respects as to where he will lead you."

Verbeena saw as she was introduced to this young man that he was exquisitely handsome, his face only saved from effeminacy by a firm chin. He was tall, lithe, slender as a wand. Although she had never been introduced to him before she recognized him instantly for it was Fatty Arbuckle!

CHAPTER XIII

THE Mighty Gristmille gave her no time to recover but plunged right ahead with his ethological processes concerning herself.

"The story of this picture which I am about to make in order that it may ring down the ages is soul-grasping and spirit stirring," said the director to Verbeena in a greatly animated manner, "and that's all you need to know about it in order to know about what you are doing. In fact, there's no particular reason that you should know what you are doing. But," he grasped her chin sharply and threw her head back with an artistic touch that jarred her teeth, "it is important that you do what I say. And don't you try to do anything else unless you are ambitious to end your life as a canned chicken."

"But——" stammered Verbeena who was beginning to suspect deep down after all she perhaps was really a girl.

"But nothing—and throw away that cigarette butt too. I'm not against cigarettes. All heroes and vamps smoke yards of 'em on orders. But in this scene you're a sweet thing—just a sweet thing—though God knows if I'll be able to prove it to the camera eye or anybody else.

"Here—take this rose—smell it."

"It doesn't smell at all," said Verbeena.

"They don't when made of paper," said the great Gristmille. And for some reason she saw that he suddenly gently smiled. He regarded Verbeena with a new light in his eye—one nearly of approval. "Just about the right intelligence," he was murmuring to himself, "out of which to mold a great star. I'll show Dave Belasco where he stands yet."

But his terrifying eyes blazed anew at Verbeena Mayonnaise.

"Now—here don't hold that flower like it was a flagpole in a Suffragette parade! Turn your wrist a bit, give a flaunting yet a timorous grace to it and now you step over—lots of hip work-hip-hip-hippy—O, for God's sake, hippy! The boyish beauty's off the map in the scene—hip work now—hip work—rotten—rotten—rotten—hip work, hip, hip, hippy—and you give the flower to our hero."

"Why am I giving him the flower?"

"None of your damned business! Give it to him—that's all you have to do. I'm doing all the knowing why for this outfit.

"Heaven save the day, I didn't tell you to hit him with it! Give it to him—timidly—timidly—you are afraid of him."

There was just a flash of the old dear, boyish Verbeena.

"I don't care who he is, I'm not afraid of him," she declared stoutly.

"Is that so?" said the director severely. "But remember you are afraid of *me*! And don't try to tell me you are not!"

"I—"

"Don't ever open your mouth like that when speaking! You are a heroine—not a walrus! Now then—the tender scene—giving the flower to Rinaldo—shush, I didn't mean to let that much out as to the story but—well, you might as well know right now that the hero is Rinaldo Ringrose—that's Mr. Arbuckle's name in the picture.

"Now then, advance—hip, hip, hip—that's better—a little better—except that you still look like a boy in skirts, one of those damn pretty ones and a damn silly one at that."

Verbeena gasped. Through her thick lashes she regarded this man of the gyratory wealth of gestures whose dominating spirit it was manifest was to be seen. She feared—began to fear—almost started to be afraid that the Verbeena of old was dead or nearly corpsical. Her old doughty self, she grovelingly began to consider, was starting to decline. Her fighting stamina she felt would soon be selling for date seeds on the Sahara Exchange.

And yet how noble he was!

His manner of using a cigarette case was so much more graceful than her own.

And he seemed to know everything. Certainly he thought he did.

And all his men gave him such blind obedience. He had a trick of flashing the sun in their eyes from his cigarette case that probably caused them to do this, she deduced.

Two days passed before he finally decided she had given the hero the rose properly. That, doubtless, was why they used artificial roses. A real one couldn't last out a rehearsal.

But somehow, in the depths of her harrowed, deeply embittered, astonished young soul, she was humbly glad that at last she had given the hero the rose properly.

"That's that," said the High Mandarin of the Movies, "and although worse than bad eggs, in other things you may stand a chance of realizing my genius for me in the soul-stirring, magnificent, marvelous, magnitudinous work of art I am on the brink of creating. Come—come—a little loud and prolonged applause—everybody please. I thank you.

"The next scene will call for you saying a tender farewell—keep remembering your sex, madame—with your lover under a tree. An apple tree in full bloom."

"There aren't apple trees on the desert," Verbeena with simply idiotic indiscretion observed.

The director flung his hat on the sand, kicked it in the air, ran around the desert on all fours for a mile, then arose majestically.

"How dare you! Can't you see that under one of those tall palm trees the shadows wouldn't fall right on the picture? No blossoming apple trees on the desert, eh? I guess you don't know *me!* Billy, an apple tree, full blossom!"

The man addressed obeyed swiftly. In a jiffy he had brought one from the property aeroplane and raised it in place.

"O, Good Lord," again and again reverberated in the ears of Verbeena, "you squint so with that snub-nosed face of yours! You—gently—gently, gently into his arms. You're not wrestling him—you're loving him—you—not that sidelong glance—a big look into his eyes and now then—remember although we've only begun here, this is the end of the picture—the final close-up—now, extend lips in full, both—stick 'em way out—that's it—now then, kiss—kiss—hold that—hold it—kiss, kiss, kiiiiiiiiisssssssss!"

"You know nothing of kissing! Nothing! And you're supposed to have had Oriental training too! Here—come here—like *THIS! Kiss—kiss—LIKE THIS!!*"

A gleam of anger shot into Verbeena's tired eyes but she was powerless. The compelling quality of this terrible creature, the force with which he held her, the exultant, horrible, heavy, hot, and, she could feel, relentless, half savagely cruel, indifferent way he was doing it to her!



**WHEREIN THE MOVIE MAHOUT INFORMS VERBEENA SHE WILL
NEXT BE REQUIRED TO BE SHOT OUT OF A PALM TREE BY HER
LOVER IN MISTAKE FOR A SQUIRREL.**

She dropped to her knees at the end of it begging for mercy.

He laughed at her coldly.

"You must get the idea of it—the sooner the better," he said with a hauteur that made her cringe back into her old caterpillar crouch.

"Now the next scene—and we must hurry up or the light will be bad—is where you are shot out of the top of a palm tree by your lover in mistake for a squirrel.

"Come now—action—Cameras!—Cameras train on that palm tree over there. The tallest one, of course. Remember, Mrs. Amut, you fall dead—a dead fall—right straight out of the tree on your face. What's that? Dangerous? Nonsense! And what if it is? What do you suppose we are paying you for? What's a cracked nose for art's sake! No more nonsense, no more words—up you go!"

Verbeena climbed.

Sometime later on being restored to consciousness wherein she knew what was going on around her, she heard the great Gristmille saying:

"Very well, hop up there, leading woman! All ready for the next scene."

"What—what is it?" faltered Verbeena.

"How dare you ask questions? Your instructions will all come in due time. And now's the time!

"In the next scene you fall from your horse—you're shot or something, perhaps struck in the back with a lance—I haven't quite made up my mind—and then you will be run over by a herd of wild Arabian horses with Mr. Arbuckle pursuing in the hope of rescue borne by eleven camels, one for the hope and ten for Mr. Arbuckle.

"Come now—quick—and remember you are not to look frightened as the horses—about two thousand of them—rush over you. As a heroine you are calm-eyed in the face of certain death. If you do we'll have to keep repeating the scene and I don't want to give too much time to it.

"Come on now—there must be no delay—the horses are ready—at great expense—they are ready and now—*hey, Billy, Jim, Grady, Bert—quick—how dare she!—quick—catch that girl!*"

But Verbeena's early education when she used to beat all the Harrow boys at sprinting served her well.

She covered the three miles back to her own Oasis leaving all pursuers in the ruck. *Time 42-1/2 seconds, but*

CHAPTER XIV

VERBEENA floundered wild-eyed, wide-mouthed, panting into the tent of the Sheik Amut Ben Butler.

She fled into the arms of Amut. She clung there girlishly trembling, so tired she was exhausted.

"O, dash it all, dash it all—that man—that man—that *terrible* man! Save—save me! I'm all for you and Allah hereafter, Amut, save—save me—save me from that *terrible man!*"

He held her as he had never held her before—as he never had been able to hold her before.

He regarded the pitiful, gasping little figure which tried to kneel at his feet, and, once more a deep and splendid chestiness came upon Amut Ben Butler.

He—in spite of all—Allah, and by Jove, he loved her!

He had long wrestled with himself concerning it because it was preferable than trying to wrestle with Verbeena.

Ah, the dear head now drooping that once so proudly poised with its jaunty clubbed curls.

A lion's heart grew under the jelab of the old-time Boss of Oasis Nos. 4, 5, 12 and 16.

There was the sound of horsery and the clangor and click of camera men without.

"Save me, O God, save me!" gasped Verbeena anew. "That man—that *terrible* man!"

Amut Ben Butler strode proudly to the flap of his tent and looked out.

"You just go away from here, every one of you, do you hear? Yes, I mean you too—you big stiff with the silver cigarette case! I think it's phoney anyway. My wife doesn't care to have anything to do with you and I don't either. So back to your aeroplanes and flooey!"

In horror, in abject dread Verbeena's clubbed curls were buried in the cushions. But in a little while her distraught, white face was lifted.

"Amut," she ventured, "Amut—has he gone?"

Amut Ben Butler carefully flicked a sandworm off his silver and black girdle.

"Sure, darling," he answered. "I just went out and sent that whole moving picture outfit reeling, Kingpin and all!"

She crept closely to him. Her strong young arms went about him.

"Amut, my love," she pleaded, "will you promise not to run away from me any more?"

"May Allah cross my eyes and crack my teeth, if ever again I think of it, my vibrant Verbie. I wouldn't want—ever—the way you act to me now—so nice—so loving—just like a regular girlie."

He kissed her otherwise clubbed curls.

They snuggled close.

Ooooooh, awful close!

Throbs palpitant and passionate passed from one to the other—strong, vertiginous, terrific, as of an aching tooth.

"Tell me, Amut," she said more softly than she ever knew she could, "who after all the dickens are you?"

His blue eyes sparkling like opals in their ardor, looked down upon her with a tenderness too ineffable to matriculate. But he sighed and was silent.

"And—and why do you hate the English?"

"Hate the English? With you in my arms, sweet Verbie? Hate the English! Only I used to, Verbeena mine—used to. But—"

"Who—who are you? Amut, as you love me speak!"

"I—"

"You—"

"Am—"

"Are——"

"I—I can hold the secret back from you no longer, throbbing jewel of my passion. I——"

"You——"

"Am——" He doffed his turban and stood erect. He glanced fixedly into her uplifted eyes. "The Crown Prince!"

"Crown Prince! Amut. Crown Prince of—of——"

"Of Chermany!"

"Mine Gott!" gasped Verbeena!

"That partnership has been dissolved, Verbeena lieber. But as soon as Popper schnapps the manacles of Holland off him, a new and splendid project will be put in operation by us ever magnificent and glorious Hohenzollerns. New and great fortunes await us—here on the desert, Verbeenalina! You bet your life on that! What do you think? We intend to establish a chain of Imperial Breweries on the Sahara where everybody is always so thirsty. Isn't that great, Verbie? How's that for high?"

"Great—but I—I am English!"

"Aw—the war's over! Aw—come on, be a good little feller—I mean sweetheart. Stick along."

"But your princess!"

"The Sahara is a wide-spot and there ain't many princesses got the fare to Reno these days, Verbeenagaborden. And, besides, didn't you draw up a fine Saharatic marriage contract? In lots of desert love affairs in the novels they jolly well—how do you like my English so swell spoken to please you?—don't never get so far as a scrap of paper between them. Nothing between them—just nothing but——"

Verbeena looked at him demurely.

"True for you, Goldielocks," said she, adding with a courage that was easily tantamount to bravery, "I'd rather be respectable than a best seller any day!"

"But—who in the world are these people around you? Spaghetti—who is he?"

"The only ferdombt Italian who stuck when the treaty busted. Popper was going to make him King of Rome or something good like that only for what happened."

"And Hulda?"

"Sh—the Grand Duchess Hautenglautenschlitzenburg! She's hiding!"

"From what?"

"That name."

"But Mr. Hitchings—however did you come to have him for a friend?"

"Verbeenaheimer," laughed the Crown Prince, "that wasn't Mr. Hitchings. It's Charlie of Austria. He expects to organize a circus troupe and enter Vienna with a large company of desert men, himself disguised as a dancing girl. Then some night they will burst from the tent and Charlie will pull his crown from under his skirts and—there you are! He'll be king again—for a minute.

"But me and popper and the chain of breweries——"

"Ah!"

"Yah!"

She snuggled to him closer and closer and closer and closer and closer than that. Her magnificent long black lashes dusted off his cheek. She smoothed back the fair hair that had been so strange to her in company with the jet whiskers that once he had worn. She thought of Cyril Gristmille and then she clung to him like a little leech—only, you know, a warm leech.

"My prince—my prince—my Sheik Amut Never Ben King," she sighed gustfully.

Entranced he grasped her to him fiercely his lips against her lips! Their eyes were blazing, their veins throbbing, their bodies writhing as he whispered tensely, tickling her under the chin:

"Tweetsy, tweetsy, Verbeena mine!"

Beyond the tent flap they saw the silver shaft of the magic moon and caught glimpses of the stately palms where the dates clustered into the years and to their ears came the sweet, silvery, insistent, impassioned twillipping of the sandworms, the neighing of the beloved horses, the music of the mules and the vibrant sweet cough of the camels.

In delicious hectic harmony their pulses beat mutually at 110.



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